

## **Public education in NSW is under attack**

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### **Devolution**

The wildfire of Thatcher's "devolution" model has burned through academies in the UK, charter schools in the US, public schools in Victoria, Tasmania, the ACT and Western Australia and now threatens Queensland and NSW.

The slogans are seductive: "local decision-making," "avoidance of bureaucracy," "flexibility and choice." Yet behind these slogans, waits the reality of budget cuts, casualization of an inexperienced workforce, and the replacement of specialist teachers such as teacher librarians with cheaper options.

While principals may want to order their own photocopiers and rid poor performers on their staffs, local empowerment of staffing will break the statewide transfer system which fills positions in remote rural schools, corrode teacher collaboration, force principals to master marketing instead of lead learning, further disadvantage disadvantaged school communities, and lead to increased privatization of public schools with sponsors calling the shots.

### **How do we know this? And what can we do to stop it?**

We know from the Victorian example which NSW hopes to emulate.

"Between 1992 and 1999 the Victorian state devolved 93 per cent of the state government's public education budget to individual schools. In what ranks as one of the largest processes of educational restructuring, the Kennett Government amalgamated or closed over 600 schools, designated four and a half thousand teachers in 'excess of need' and privatised school cleaning. At the same time that the Victorian teacher workforce was downsized, it was also restructured via a new industrial relations system, new performance requirements and new teacher career paths (the Professional Recognition Program). In all over eight thousand teachers (20 per cent of the teaching force) accepted voluntary redundancy packages" (Fitzgerald and Rainnie, 2011).

Great savings have been made at the expense of the disadvantaged. One of the main effects of decentralisation and marketisation of schooling in Victoria has been the accelerated growth of middle and high socioeconomic status (SES) government schools which rapidly expanded in student numbers once school zones were deregulated. At the same time schools serving low SES areas have 'tended to wither and decay, shedding numbers at a vast rate' (Lamb 2007:2 in Fitzgerald and Rainnie, 2011.)

NSW governments have tried to bring in increased devolution since the 1980s.

Yet, there is no evidence that local empowerment improves learning outcomes. On the contrary, eventual reduced funding and staffing, especially for low SES schools, leaves them to decline, while principals get the blame.

Cluey parents take their students to the “better” schools, where parents and principals are most successful at fund-raising, where the more experienced teachers apply for the jobs, where teacher librarians and other specialist staff are able to be employed. Principals try to ensure their schools rate highly in MySchool-based league tables, and have a positive image, to attract sponsors and attract better students.

### **Boston Consulting Group**

State governments step neatly out of the line of fire under devolution. And the cost savings to governments are in the millions. The previous NSW government had already commissioned a cost saving review by the Boston Consulting Group. The resulting [\*Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training \(DET\)\*](#) was leaked to the media a week prior to the state election on March 26 2011.

As the NSWTF (2011) states, “this expenditure review confirmed the [National Partnerships] trial is designed to reduce spending, rather than improve the quality of education: The review states:

The “Current trial involves additional costs that will need to be phased out ...”

The “Current trial tests the concept but more work is required to build in the efficiency savings before any rollout.

“• NSW schools currently operate with a centralised authority and accountability framework and a complex, program-based funding model with resource allocation undertaken by the central body.

“• Preliminary benchmarking has shown the lowest cost jurisdiction to have a devolved model ....” which I think means a devolved model has the lowest costs. (Boston Consulting Group, 2010)

The NSWTF goes on to say, “This trial is part of a cost cutting strategy that aims to undermine and dismantle the existing formula-based approach to determining school staffing entitlements” [including the staffing of TLs]. “The long term aim is to have the size of the school’s staffing budget determine the number and mix of staff, rather than a government guaranteed staffing formula that ensures equitable provision for all students. Under this approach, governments would be able to reduce school staffing budgets and expect school principals as ‘local managers’ to field the criticism and blame for staff shortfalls and cuts.”

“The devolution trial is allowing schools to trade off positions to meet some other school need that should be funded by government. This occurred in the first days of the trial, when a school traded off a teacher-librarian position for some other priority. Devolution puts the onus on schools to ‘free up’ funding to pay for a locally identified priority. Schools are given the ‘flexibility’ to change the mix of staff by not filling

specialist teacher, classroom teacher and executive positions and to use that resource for other purposes” ( NSWTF, 2011).

“It is clearly unacceptable,” Federation continues, “that any school should be allowed to trade off a teaching colleague’s career in this way and in so doing, undermine educational equity and quality for students.”

“The Boston Consulting Group,” states Federation, “looked to the example of the Victorian state government which now spends 12% less than NSW per student. The Group calculated this could equate [in NSW] to a loss of 7500 teachers and 1500 support staff, with another \$100 million to be saved by cuts to special education and disadvantaged programs. Altogether, including cuts to TAFE, non-government schools, regional and central support services, some \$500-\$700 million could be saved in recurrent costs and \$800-1,000 million in one-off benefits” (NSWTF, 2011).

“Devolution of some responsibilities to schools and simplifying the school funding model could drive efficiency by reducing the number of central support staff required (potentially worth \$15-\$25m).” Of course, the work of state and regions would still have to be done, but by teachers and school support staff whose workload would continue to increase.

It is important to note that as recently as the 2011 election the Liberal opposition spoke out against such cuts. “Labor’s blueprint for education cuts will not be part of a Liberal & Nationals Government... We utterly reject this disgraceful report and call on Kristina Keneally to explain why Labor was drawing up secret plans to cut schools and teachers across NSW” (Media release, March 19, 2011).

We have every right to question the breaking of this election promise, and must.

### **Where did the economic policy of devolution start: Thatcher**

The very beginning of devolution was shown to be a matter of breaking staffing formulas, union power and the cost of public education. Margaret Thatcher’s Secretary of Education, Lord Baker, spoke freely to Nick Davies, a journalist from *The Guardian*, in 1999. “According to Davies, Baker laughingly admitted in the interview that the SMS [self-managed schools] policy (and its close relatives, standardised assessment, league tables, national curriculum, parental choice, and the Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted]), were all developed for entirely political reasons: the ‘real agenda was to punish the teacher unions and to kill off the local educational authorities; secretly the big master plan was to wipe out comprehensive schools by stealth’ (Nick Davies, “Political Coup Bred Educational Disaster,” *The Guardian*, September 16, 1999, P. 1 in Smyth, 2011).”

## **How is this agenda justified?**

### **PISA 2009 At a Glance**

Governments try to justify devolution by stating that learning outcomes improve. This is simply not so. No evidence exists to show that student learning outcomes are improved as a result of devolved staffing and budgeting. One study referred to is the [PISA 2009 At a Glance Report](#).

These findings seem to have been deliberately misinterpreted. “While the PISA report found that overall there is no clear relationship between the degree of autonomy in allocating resources and a school system’s overall performance, it did find that school autonomy over design of curricula and assessment is a key characteristic of successful school systems.” (Queensland Government, 2011, p.34).

### **Risks not Assessed**

Regarding the WA Department’s move to “Independent Public Schools,” the WA Auditor General’s Performance Audit in 2011 concluded, that “The Department’s failure to address risks could eventually result in unfilled vacancies as well as disadvantaging some schools and teachers by ‘making them uncompetitive in the open market’; for example, schools which struggle to find teaching staff now may be faced with serious teacher shortages, meaning the quality of education for students at these schools will suffer.” Such are the risks of school autonomy in hiring.

### **Evidence of Negative Impact of Devolution**

Not only is there no evidence of improved outcomes, evidence does exist of diminished outcomes for student learning. “Much of the research shows that many school systems go into steep decline and the achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged communities widen” (Mulheron, 2011).

As early as 2002, Queensland academics Lingard, Hayes and Mills stated, “There is almost no evidence that student outcomes improve with SBM, indeed inequality increases.” While we know what does improve outcomes: authentic learning experiences, project based, problem-solving, constructivist learning, all pedagogical changes associated with excellence in resourcing and the teaching of learning and information literacy scaffolds, the area of expertise of the teacher librarian – and the highest of selection and training of teachers to the Masters level, as in Finland, a qualification already in place for teacher librarians. These have been shown repeatedly to improve outcomes, as have increased staffing and funding of school libraries.

As Victorian academic, John Smyth (2011), states, “Measures that have made schools self-managing (choice, ... league tables, naming and shaming, national assessment) are starting to become unravelled through the social polarisation produced as a consequence of some schools attracting bright students and funding, and the rest being left behind in struggling circumstances” .

“What is staggering,” says Smyth, “ is the absence of any evidence showing that dismantling public schools, in the manner that has occurred in ... [England, Australia, USA, Canada], actually produces any better learning for students” (p.109).

### **Impact on TL staffing**

The impact of School Based Management or devolution or school autonomy, now included in National Partnership Agreements, has meant that:

- In Tasmania, after the CRESAP Report, schools became more self-managing as the Education Department increasingly devolved responsibility to the schools. In 1991, as a direct result, secondary school teacher librarians lost their separate staffing entitlement (primary school teachers suffered this fate some years earlier). Only 23% of K-10 schools in Tasmania now have qualified teacher librarians
- In Queensland’s version of SBM, Focus on Schools (1990), central office was restructured with staff reduced by 50% by the end of 1992. Support for SBM continues to affect school staffing. At present ten high schools on the Gold Coast have no teacher librarians in charge of their libraries. It is estimated that 10-15% of schools do not have qualified teacher librarians in charge of their libraries in Qld.
- In Victoria, since *Schools of the Future* (1993), Kennett’s version of SBM, at least 87% of qualified teacher librarians (TLs) have been lost.
- In the ACT, School Based Management began about 1997. TLs have been lost in many schools since then. Now 50% of primary schools in the ACT are not staffed with qualified teacher librarians.
- The Northern Territory has 13 qualified teacher librarians in 151 government schools or 8.6%.
- And in Western Australia, the Independent Public Schools government initiative is expanding and teacher librarians are being sacrificed. (Note primary schools have never had a TL staffing formula).
- Now, in NSW, Minister of Education, Piccoli, has announced pursuit of the policy of autonomous schools. Already teacher librarians are not being replaced upon retirement.

### **Why, then, are we so easily gulled?**

Maurie Mulheron suggests it has to do with an almost Orwellian use of terms which can’t be argued with. Who would argue against “empowerment,” against “flexibility and choice”? Yet who would want the flexibility of a technician instead of a TL? Of principals forced to concentrate on marketing over leading learning? The choice of larger class sizes? Of empowerment to compete for funds? The choice of lowered outcomes?

As teacher librarians, we have had no informed leadership to oppose these changes, other than the unions. In NSW we have a parents and citizens association which is itself in some disarray. We have a national school library association which shows too little leadership. We have had, until recently, a state school library association suffering from disunity and internal conflicts. (Fortunately, this latter is changing.)

## The Hub

In the face of this lack of leadership, is it any wonder that a rogue coterie of concerned educators took things in their own hands to bring the decline in our profession to the public's attention? The rise of The Hub in 2007 was a new and much needed voice. Through your support in signing our petition presented to then Education Minister, Julia Gillard, through our local member, Sharon Bird, a federal inquiry was launched, highlighting the effects of devolution on school library training and staffing around Australia.

State governments no longer require central advisory services (1 or 2 are left). They no longer have staffing formulas for specialist teachers. As principals found they didn't have adequate funds to hire TLs, they no longer need 15 tertiary TL training programs,

Eleven recommendations were made. Some are commendable: reduced cost of data bases (Education Resources Australia recently did do a survey on needs) and the need to collect workforce data (The Productivity Commission has just evaluated submissions and responses on this.). Unfortunately, no recommendations for national guidelines and training scholarships have been recommended by the Inquiry. The House committee niggled around the edges of resourcing, of the role of TLs in information literacy and literacy, passing the buck to states – saying they would raise the issues with MCEECDYA (the Council of all education ministers) but promising little, for, as we have been told since the beginning of our campaign, “staffing is a state responsibility.” Well, now it is becoming a school responsibility!

You must be asking was all that effort you put in to getting an inquiry, writing submissions, going to hearings, lobbying for a response, worth it?

I will tell you this. It was a vital first step

1. You know now united action can get results.
2. The evidence is now out in the open of the decline of TLs.
3. The role of TLs in literacy and learning has been highlighted.
4. We have an excellent document with which to initiate staff and principal and parent and political discussions
5. And we have a treasure trove of information and evidence of who our supporters are in the 387 submissions.

We are armed and we are no longer invisible and we are not alone.

Even Nicole Calnan mentioned TLs in a WIN news grab recently ☺

Who can we work with? NSWTF is very aware of the TL issue.

AEU is writing a joint statement with ASLA on TLs.

The Australian Primary Principals Association wrote a very supportive submission (#386, 2010) for the Inquiry. Some points to note:

“APPA notes the support expressed by the Chair of the Inquiry for the value of teacher librarians. APPA endorses this view. The Association regards it as essential that all schools have access to trained and qualified staff to undertake both the broad educational roles of the library and to deliver administrative and management functions “ (p. 2).

“APPA’s starting point, however, is that if all schools have (or ought to have) a functioning library, then all schools need qualified staff to ensure that the library performs the educational and social roles for which it is established. This should not be subject to staffing negotiation or trade-offs, any more than an allocation of literacy specialists would be traded off against other needs. A functioning library is at the heart of a school’s core business” (p.3).

The APPA submission goes on to recommend adequate funding, national guidelines, central support services, good quality resource support for teaching the Australian Curriculum through staffing of trained TLs, and “the Inquiry should recommend the establishment of a further major Commonwealth initiative to enhance and strengthen Australian school libraries to ensure that they can play their proper role in the implementation of 21st century education” (p.9).

Publishers and booksellers and authors are very supportive, and will be behind any campaign we organize.

Libby Gleeson: “Literacy is far more than a simple ability to decode words and to perform well at a functional level. A teacher librarian, with a well stocked library of quality material can infuse students with a love of literature. By passing on works of fiction and non-fiction the teacher librarian leads the student towards more complex and more layered works that stimulate and develop the mind well beyond simple understanding. Through books, students mature and develop interests that may go well beyond their classroom learning. The teacher librarian is crucial to this” (Inquiry Submission 364, p. 4).

Some teacher educators are including information in their subjects on the collaborative role of TLs in designing, implementing and evaluating curriculum. (Alyson Simpson at Sydney University is one example. A website to use and contribute to is <http://www.connect2tls.info/> )

Now it is time to connect with parents. They must understand once devolution is brought in there is no turning back. Disadvantaged schools will increase their disadvantage. So-called “better schools” will attract parents who are better at fund-raising, where more experienced teachers apply for the jobs, where TLs are able to be employed. (Use MySchool Library <http://myschoollibrary.wordpress.com/> )

The gap is already increasing.....

### **Australian literacy rates are low**

According to the [2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey](#), nearly half of all

Australians (46%) don't have the literacy skills they need to cope with the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy (ABS, 2010).

Also, recent (2009) PISA (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment) results indicate that reading literacy performance in Australia shows a considerable gap between students with higher levels of socioeconomic status of the equivalent of nearly three years of schooling above that of students from lower levels of socioeconomic status. This issue of providing fiction and non-fiction and research resources is therefore of particular relevance to equity in Australia's schools.

PISA also has shown that "The reading literacy of Australian 15-year-old students has fallen sharply over the past decade" (ACER media release, 2010). Between 2000 and 2009, Australia's performance has declined significantly, especially in Tasmania and South Australia with fewer top performers. This is true also of WA and the ACT. Higher achieving students are not doing as well. "Enjoyment of reading was found to have a strong relationship with performance; however, one-third of Australian students reported that they did not read for enjoyment" (Thompson et. al., 2011, p. 21). Could there be a correlation here with the decline in school library budgets and staffing over the same period? Or in the emergence of reliance on on-line resources and digital, hyper-linked documents? Such reading is apposite to mastering sustained attention to sustained narrative!

### **Students need books**

US reading expert, Stephen Krashen, has found that "it has been firmly established that more reading leads to better reading (and writing, spelling, vocabulary and grammar), and that more access to books results in more reading" (Krashen, Lee and McQuillan, 2010, introduction). Krashen has advocated for access to plenty of books as a key to developing literacy. "Reluctant readers" often are those who don't have books in the home and don't have access to quality school and public libraries.

"Children with no books of their own are less likely to be sending emails, reading websites or engaging with their peers through the written word on social networking sites. Children who grow up without books and without positive associations around reading are at a disadvantage in the modern world" (Clark and Poulton, p. 16).

As TL supporter, Libby Gleeson, stated in her Inquiry submission "it is absolutely crucial that teachers and students in our hard-pressed public schools retain the skills and support of trained teacher-librarians and access to well-stocked school libraries. All teachers are involved in teaching the necessary skills but the teacher librarian and the wealth of resources in a school library are crucial to student success, particularly for students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have access to either books or internet technology anywhere else."

### **TLs build literacy**

Softlink has shown us the correlation between library staffing and budgeting and NAPLAN literacy test results. (We hope as many TLs as possible will continue to contribute annually to their survey.) We know that when it comes to literacy and academic outcomes TLs make a difference. We have the evidence of over 60 international and Australian studies.

As the Australian Society of Authors submission to the Inquiry (#106, 2010) stated, “Studies in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK indicate that school libraries with certified teacher librarians can have a positive impact on student literacy and learning (Jones 2007, Lance 2000, 2002, etc., Small 2008, Todd 2003, and others): ‘Student reading scores increase. Students read more. Students say they enjoy reading more. Students are provided with “materials that present more diverse points of view and that better support the curriculum.” Students score higher in (US) English Language Arts tests. Students have increased cultural identity. Collections of print and digital resources to support teaching and learning are more dynamic. Students value teacher librarians as teachers, when they are helped to become independent critical information seekers.’” (See Appendix for more details.)

It is teacher librarians who are qualified to work and support quality teaching with a collection of selected appropriate and attractive fiction and narrative non-fiction and poetry and essays and graphic novels and magazines and newspapers and blogs and learning objects and wikis and writing of all sorts to engage our students in reading and learning with pen or keyboard. Their skills and knowledge and services form an essential part of the whole school learning and teaching program.

If, as the tests show, literacy is declining in this country, school libraries with qualified teacher librarians, not devolution in budgeting and staffing, can make a significant difference.

In this National Year of Reading, we have the opportunity to promote the role of the TL in literacy and critical thinking. The media is ready and waiting for our message.

Contact them at every opportunity to show the TL’s role in literacy and learning. Write letters to the editor. Get to know the education journos and their deadlines. (ISLA should have a media officer. There should be a write up on today’s issues for the *Advertiser*, with a photo!) Publish articles in principal and teacher journals. Work with teacher educators.

## **The Message**

TLs are teachers with library training, two qualifications.

LSLD results in the loss of specialist staff

This includes TLs.

LSLD does not improve learning outcomes.

Qualified teacher librarians do.

We must educate pre-service teachers in the value of collaborating with teacher librarians. We must ensure principals understand how TLs and well-resourced libraries improve literacy. We must develop and implement collaborative units with teachers. We must encourage tertiary institutions to revive TL courses and the government to offer scholarships to increase numbers of graduates. We must ensure we have national guidelines and literacy policies which include the role of teacher librarians and libraries. Through whatever avenue you can, get the message out – TLs make a difference.

### **So where to from here?**

SLANSW is giving leadership. President, Bill Sommerville, is committed to this. Your ISLA president, Di Ridley, is giving leadership. Together, we have visited Cabinet Minister Pru Goward to raise the issue of the effect of LSLD on TL staffing and school library funding. While, as a Liberal, she will not oppose LSLD, she has made our concerns known to the Minister of Education. As a Liberal, she also picked up on the need for tax deductibility for donations to individual public schools.

Di and I have visited Labor MP for Keira, Ryan Park, who was very supportive and, as a former student at Dapto HS, connected strongly with Di. He has made a submission on our behalf to the Minister and will raise Questions on Notice.

We have a date with Noreen Hay, are negotiating a date with Lee Evans and will organize a date asap with Anna Watson, and then Adrian Piccoli himself.

While we do this, a persistent and loud voice is needed from our school communities, and especially parents, that we do not believe LSLD is beneficial to our students. Emails, phone calls and visits to MPs are needed en masse.

It was out of the Illawarra and the Hub that the federal inquiry grew.

It is out of the Illawarra that our current NSWTF president comes.

ISLA has been a model for other TL associations in making submissions and contacting MPs.

Let a campaign begin in the Illawarra to save TLs as part of strident opposition to Local Schools, Local Decisions.

Work with your union. Work with SLANSW and ISLA. Work with parents, authors, publishers, booksellers, principals and politicians. Quench the wildfire of autonomy with a tsunami of protest before it is too late. Once this policy is implemented it can not be reversed. Together we can halt its spread in NSW and for our students and Australia's future, we must.

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## Appendix

**Iowa:** Reading test scores rise with the development of school library programs. The relationship between library program development and test scores is not explained away by other school or community conditions at the elementary level (Rodney, Lance and Hamilton-Pennell, 2002).

**Michigan:** Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) reading test scores rise with the extent to which the state's school library programs are headed by certified library media specialists [teacher librarians] (Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennell, 2003).  
**Minnesota:** Twice as many schools with above-average scores had full-time library media specialists (Baxter and Smalley, 2003).

**Oregon:** Whatever the current level of development of a school's library program, these findings indicate that incremental improvements in its staffing, collections, and budget will yield incremental increases in reading scores (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell, 2001).

**Pennsylvania:** For all three tested grades, the relationship between adequate school library staffing and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) reading scores is both positive and statistically significant (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell, 2000).

**Ontario, Canada:** Schools with professionally trained school library staff could be expected to have reading achievement scores that were approximately 5.5 percentage points higher than average in grade 6 EQAO results (Klinger, 2006).

**Illinois:** Increased library staffing is linked to higher reading performance for all grade levels (Lance, Rodney and Hamilton-Pennell, 2005).

(These seven examples taken from *School Libraries Work!*, 2008.)