

# FRONT



Averill Edwards President, ALIA

**R**ecent events started me pondering again the puzzle of school libraries. Why is it that the library in a school is seen not as essential, but rather as a luxury — a good place to have a board meeting or to show to visitors, but not a necessary part of the teaching role of the school?

School libraries often seem to be regarded as the icing on the cake and, in an era where restraints on spending are being applied, an item on the school agenda that can be reduced without fundamental effect on the school and its educational purpose. Recently, in New South Wales, some of the staff of the Library Services Section were removed, with subsequent loss of vital professional services to the school libraries in the NSW departmental network.

In some primary schools the

teacher-librarian has been asked to act as a relief teacher for an hour a week — a loss of work conditions for teacher-librarians. Such actions would be of concern if only confined to New South Wales, but this is not the case. The past 5 years have seen decreases in the provision of central school library services, in particular in Western Australia and South Australia. After a halcyon period, when all States and Territories had strong central advisory services for teacher-librarians, we now have a situation where those services have been substantially reduced. Consequently, so is the support they provide to teacher-librarians.

Of equal concern are the changes that have been made recently to ASCIS. An excellent cataloguing system designed specifically for Australian school libraries has been combined with the Commonwealth's Curriculum Development Centre. We await with interest the news of who is to head this service, so valuable to school libraries. It is to be hoped that New South Wales is able to arrive at a satisfactory resolution of the problem of its membership of the new Cooperative Curriculum Corporation of Australia, to ensure that NSW school libraries continue to participate in this important cooperative cataloguing venture.

The puzzle for me is this — why are school libraries not seen to be worthy of support? Why are teacher-librarians not recognised for their key role in the educational process? The essential nature of the school library at both the primary and secondary level, for both educational and recreational purposes, is not recognised

by those who make the decisions on staffing and funding. School libraries are the place where children are given the keys to life-long learning, the skills that will unlock the doors to information and to knowledge.

In a society that continues to undergo rapid change, and where students can expect in their lifetime to undergo two or three periods of re-training, the need to know how to find out is critical. School libraries have a central role in demonstrating, in association with classroom teachers, how these skills work, and in helping students to acquire them. Increasingly teacher-librarians are working hand in hand with classroom teachers in cooperative teaching, so that in learning about a subject the skills of finding out are inculcated at the same time.

Why is it, then, that educational administrators, politicians and members of the community do not understand and support the existence of the school library, staffed by trained teacher-librarians, as an equally essential part of the education of children as that of having a trained classroom teacher?

School libraries are part of the nation's network of library and information resources, but this aspect of their work has been ignored until quite recently. It was heartening to find that at the Australian Libraries Summit the role of school libraries as part of that Australian library network was affirmed. Implicit in this recognition is that the cuts that are taking place should be of concern to all librarians — it is not just an issue for concern by the schools'

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**Major conference**

Dr Weckert has been instrumental in planning a conference on the use of computer expert systems to improve library operations, to be held at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, 22-24 July 1990. It is believed that this will be the first major Australian conference on the topic. It will provide a forum for ongoing interest in the rapidly evolving computer technology for systems developers from all over Australia.

Negotiations are underway with leading researchers from the United States and the United Kingdom, who are actively involved in the development of expert systems for libraries and who have published extensively in this area, to deliver keynote addresses. A workshop in conjunction with the conference will provide a hands-on introduction to expert systems and their library applications. A trade display will also be staged.

Calls are now being made for expressions of interest in the conference, including indication of willingness to present papers. Indications of interest from the trade would also be welcome. Please contact Dr John Weckert, School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt

University, PO Box 588, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650.

**Progressive Library**

Construction work is progressing at the T.L. Robertson Library, Curtin University of Technology, Perth. It is expected that the new extension will be completed in October 1990 and will be fully operational by the beginning of the first semester in 1991.

The extension includes approximately 2500 square metres (or 40%) of space for library use and 3700 square metres for general teaching facilities. It will permit an increase in library seating space from the present level of 1000 seats to approximately 1500. With Curtin University enrolments for 1990 projected at 15 000 students, the library will retain a student-to-seat ratio of 10:1.

Visitors to the ALIA 1990 Conference will have an opportunity to view our progress.

sector. The lack of resources and support for teacher-librarians and for their students will rebound on the tertiary and the public sectors. They will have to cope with the increased demands for resources, as well as deal with people less able to use a library or to deal with the demands of tertiary education.

All Branches should be aware of, and be monitoring, the situation of the central school library services in their State or Territory, and should be prepared to take action to support their colleagues when necessary. ALIA must do all it can to ensure that school libraries have the resources they need to train the new generation to use libraries and information resources — not just now, but throughout life.

Averill Edwards  
President, ALIA



**"I believe that at least half of the currently available, white authored, 'historical' accounts of what is termed Australian settlement and analysis of contemporary Australia, is fiction."**

Sykes, 1988 (in 'Connections')

*"Since (this) book is authored by Aboriginal people, who speak for themselves and do not make sweeping statements about 'history', it may be seen as a personalised counterbalance to both popular myths and academic analysis of Black-White contact history"*

Hercus & Sutton, 1986 (in 'This is what happened')

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