

Teacher librarians in Australia

Margaret Chapple provides a national perspective, introducing a series of articles on aspects of school library developments

In this issue of *inCite*, the ALIA School Libraries Section has been asked to identify some of the issues confronting teacher librarians and to examine some of the achievements and current practices in our schools.

I recently became the president of the National Section for School Libraries, with office bearers drawn from the four states represented, conducting meetings by teleconference during 1994. The need for a national perspective on many issues concerning school libraries is particularly obvious in an educational climate which is engaged in compiling national curriculum statements and profiles; identifying key competencies (including information-based ones); examining learning processes and outcomes, teacher appraisal and professional development.

'Australian education has acknowledged the challenge that students face as learners in an age of information. It is a world leader in recognising that well-resourced library resource centres are central to the development of information-literate students, and also in affirming that access to resources and information technologies, and the skills to make effective use of them, are matters of equity and social justice.'

This positive reassuring statement is from the recent publication by the Australian School Library Association and ALIA, *Learning for the future: Developing information services in Australian Schools*. This document distributed by Curriculum Corporation, marks the culmination of a significant cooperative venture. It is intended as a guide for educational administrators and planners, for school management teams and teacher librarians, for teachers, their educators and students. More than 2500 copies have already been sold.

The authors highlight the importance of developing information literate teachers and students. Our ongoing challenge is to ensure that resource based learning opportunities occur across the curriculum. Quantitative and

qualitative guidelines are provided in the document for the physical environment of library resource centres, resource collections, access systems and staffing levels.

Many of the issues which confront teacher librarians are the same as those which occupy their colleagues in other libraries.

We promote the use of technology to enable students and teachers to access information within the school environment and beyond. Remote schools and those with limited access to physical resources have most to gain. Access to external databases through electronic networking using *Nexus*, *AARNet* and *Internet* is now available in many school libraries and the associated problems of equity of access, user education and costs are being addressed. The value of access to up-to-date information and the application of the data is being realised by teachers and students in many curriculum areas. Students are also using electronic mail facilities and bulletin boards. Recreational use may present further problems!

The range of audiovisual and electronic resources is continually expanding. Computer terminals for OPAC and on-line searches, CD-ROM access, as well as word processing, desktop publishing and graphics are now commonplace. The costs and benefits of providing automated library systems, multimedia equipment and software, networking and other multi user possibilities are further issues of concern.

Teacher librarians have had to become skilful negotiators and responsible managers to ensure that budgetary requirements are met by the school authorities. Ancillary staff members are having to become skilled in the operation and maintenance of equipment. There is a growing demand for the employment of qualified library technicians in schools. Despite these changes, automation still remains a dream for some resource centres which have minimal resources and inadequate staff.

We must acknowledge the



Margaret Chapple

range and quality of school library provision within Australia. We must address the problems of pre-primary, primary and secondary school libraries, split campuses, metropolitan, rural and remote centres, government and non-government schools, and the cultural and social diversity within our school communities.

Another issue for teacher librarians is their identity. We must hold recognised qualifications in both teaching and librarianship. We must be eligible for membership of ALIA. However, many teacher librarians do not seek membership of the association. We must combine a knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and learning styles with a knowledge of resources and information access systems.

Do teachers really accept us as teachers and do librarians see us as true librarians? Our section is currently working on a national role statement for teacher librarians. A number of states have produced statements and *Learning for the future* has included a detailed account of our responsibilities. The national statement will be used for lobbying politicians, government ministers and educational administrators, and publicising our role within schools and the community.

Perhaps this issue of *inCite* will help other library professionals understand the goals and objectives of teacher librarians, give an insight into current problems and practices in schools and pave the way for better communication and cooperation in the provision of information services to school students. ■