

Essential connections: connecting school and public library professionals

A seminar presented by the State Library of Queensland and ALIA Children's Youth Services (QLD)

The seminar *Essential connections*, held on 5 July 2002, explored ways in which public librarians and teacher librarians can work together to provide a comprehensive information service for young people in their communities.

The seminar, which brought together fifty-four teacher and public librarians from around South East Queensland, comprised a keynote address by Dr Alan Bundy, whose paper *Essential connections: school and public libraries for lifelong learning* [<http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/papers/#ab>] inspired the format and content for the seminar.

Following on from Dr Bundy's address, small groups of teacher and public librarians were asked to focus on scenarios which addressed some of the librarians' major concerns and issues, and develop positive strategies to deal with them. This article will focus on these scenarios and the librarians' responses to them.

Scenario one

Teacher librarians often possess in-depth knowledge of current fiction trends and homework requirements but resources in school libraries can be limited. Public libraries generally offer a wider range of materials, but the librarians may not be as familiar with the young people's collections. How can we work together to exploit these strengths and address these weaknesses?

Future scenario

Teacher librarians and public librarians collaborate in the interests of students to gain and maintain skills, and promote and share literature resources.

Strategies to reach future scenario

Collaboration is the key for public librarians to take advantage of the in-depth knowledge and expertise that teacher librarians often possess. Teacher and public librarians can:

- form network groups and share basic information;
- explore funding (grants) to hold joint seminars for parents, professionals, and students, for example, sharing author visits; and
- jointly promote resources in both locations.

Scenario two

As a general rule public libraries are not set up to support homework and assign-

ment enquiries. What strategies could public and school libraries implement to help meet young people's information needs?

Future scenario

School and public libraries will endeavour to help support homework and assignment enquiries through greater communication.

Strategies to reach future scenario

All stake-holders to work together to establish effective homework and assignment help mechanisms:

- information literacy sessions for parents and young people.
- develop pathfinders, for example, what to read after Harry Potter.
- homework help clubs/centres.
- free photocopying/printing of reference materials.
- establish a database of people with special expertise.
- older students to mentor younger students.
- school libraries to lobby local councils for money for public libraries.
- use the same terminology, for example, schools using ILPO to make sure their public libraries are aware of the ILPO terms.
- public libraries to keep lists of popular assignment topics and when they will be in demand.
- public libraries to reserve books on popular topics and/or place lending limits.
- school libraries to make public libraries aware of changes in curriculum.
- public libraries to make extra staff available at busy times.

Scenario three

School and public libraries have a shared vision of young users as information literate, independent lifelong learners. How can we successfully collaborate to ensure that:

- young people are information users?
- we provide access to a wide range of current resources?
- we motivate young people to successfully use library materials?

Future scenario

Collaboration will lead to successful use of public and school libraries and motivate young people to use the wide range of resources available to them in the community.

Strategies to reach future scenario

- combined regional network meetings to establish and implement partnerships.
- continued contact via phone contact or e-mail groups.
- provide documents and information to public librarians that are used in schools for assignments.

Scenario four

In Norway co-operation between school and public libraries is mandatory. How much greater would co-operation between school and public libraries in Australia be if it were mandated and what benefits are likely to emerge? What key elements would be necessary to bring this about?

Future scenario

Establish formal and informal networks between public libraries and school library staff. These networks will develop the frameworks to approach governing bodies in relation to funding and staff support.

Strategies to reach future scenario

- formal and informal networks to be set up on a regional basis.
- determine what levels of government to lobby.
- organisational commitment, for example, relief staff provided for teacher and public librarians to attend meetings.
- determine best times and places for teacher and public librarians to meet.

It was noted that there is at least one instance where this kind of co-operation is mandated — incorporated in the young peoples services' librarians position description in Townsville.

Scenario five

Zobec contends that a minimum of three years is needed for co-operative patterns to be established. Are we tempted to dismiss co-operation as too time consuming and costly, particularly given the high turnover in staff in both sectors? Can you suggest realistic ways in which these barriers can be overcome?

Future scenario

A collaborative approach should be taken with any future projects, thus utilising combined resources, skills and facilities to the maximum benefit of the community.

Strategies to reach future scenario

Partnerships between public library and

schools need to be given a higher public profile:

- teacher librarians to visit public libraries and vice versa.
- public librarians to attend teacher librarian network meetings — locations to alternate between sectors.
- run joint projects — Bookweek, author visits.
- public library to be used as a venue for school and community literary functions.
- on-line discussion groups.

Scenario six

Seventy-one per cent of public librarians assessed their knowledge of school library issues as low; sixty-three per cent of teacher librarians assess their knowledge of public libraries issues as low. Issues of funding, time, attitude and access seem to be the major constraints on co-operation between the two sectors. Is it fair to conclude that these reflect professional narrowness and/or self-satisfaction?

Future scenario

All librarians will have the time and the financial support and training to enable them to network with the other library professionals.

Strategies to reach future scenario

- development of all kinds of networks

— people and online.

- staff visits and exchanges.
- sharing resources — flexible lending policies, online catalogues.

Scenario seven

An aim of librarians working with young people is to get the right resource into the right hand at the right time. As public and teacher librarians, what steps can we take to ensure that this outcome is achieved?

Future scenario

All students/young people have physical and intellectual access to the resources they need.

Strategies to reach future scenario

- establish needs by conducting client research on a regular basis to determine who are our clients and what are their needs.
- determine skills needed to access information.
- physical access to information is provided via community catalogue and interlibrary loans.
- sufficient budgets, well-administered according to needs/trends.

Feedback

Feedback from the seminar also provided further insight into the importance of networking between public and teacher

librarians. Some of the delegates comments follow:

'An excellent opportunity to meet with library professionals from the public sector. The workshop was great — our group generated lots of ideas — on task, off task.'

'Thought provoking and has inspired me to create better partnerships/relationships with all the teacher librarians who are near me.'

'As a teacher it was very interesting to hear the concerns, issues and developments of public and teacher librarians.'

'The only way we can grow is to talk with each other.'

'Will return to the isolation of my library, with lots of new ideas, revived enthusiasm and a commitment to better communication with teacher librarians.'

'Please have more days like this — I love the chance to meet people and get new ideas/challenges. I don't get enough professional development opportunities now and crave more as a teacher librarian.'

Anne Spelman, ALIA QLD Children's Youth Services convenor, consultant, Young Peoples Services, State Library of Queensland

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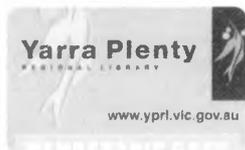
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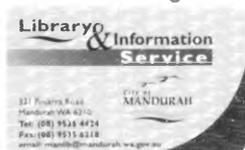
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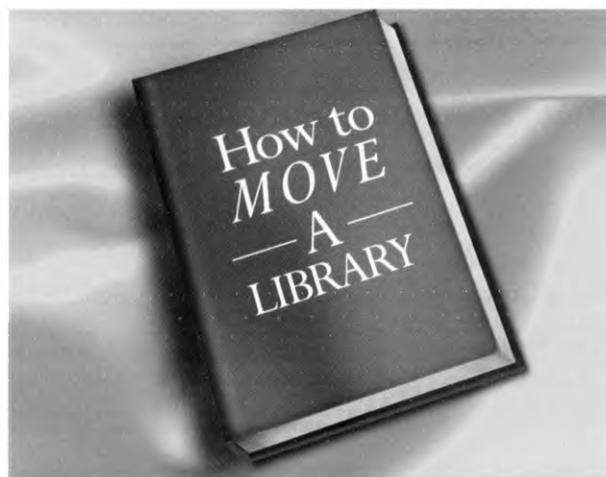


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