



It is very sobering, visiting other places. Hot on the heels of experiencing the wonderful, well-established libraries in Finland, I was invited to speak at the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) annual conference in Durban. I couldn't help but contrast the issues and situation of our South African colleagues in comparison to Australia and the Nordic countries.

That is not to say that the library scene in South Africa is dull or worrying. LIASA is a vibrant, exciting, and progressive association with big issues and an even bigger determination to develop their libraries as the cornerstone of learning and literacy in their fledgling country. I was humbled by the work that they do, the vision that they have for the future of their country, and the role of libraries in the social and economic fabric of South Africa. It was also humbling to hear the members speak of the difficulties they experienced fifteen years ago in bringing together disparate associations under one banner to speak with one voice for libraries – black, white, and coloured – and how this was achieved through open, honest communication and the building of trust between them all.

How wonderful it was to hear members of LIASA openly express their pride in their profession and in their Association. This is something that we seem to have lost in Australia, and it is something that we need to rekindle quickly in the face of the many challenges that libraries and ALIA are facing at the moment.

There are some observations for the conference that I would like to share with you. In contrast to our approach to professional library standards in Australia, the South African Minister for Culture announced at the conference that legislation is to be introduced into the Parliament that will ban anyone calling themselves a librarian who has not completed an appropriate higher education qualification. This reinforces the importance given to the library profession by the South African government and underscores the vital role that the government sees libraries playing in the large task of creating a fully literate population. Do we think as ALIA members that our national government see us in the same vein as our South African counterparts? I think not.

The issues of copyright and e-books also dominated the conference agenda. This suggests to me that ALIA and other associations in first world countries have a responsibility to not only negotiate acceptable outcomes for our own nations, but also include librarians and the needs of library users in emerging nations in our deliberations.

Finally, I feel must share with you the fact that many tens of thousands of schools in South Africa can

only dream of having a library. They 'make do' with a trolley of books for the whole school and don't even contemplate having access to the internet. In contrast, in Australia some of our principals are closing their school libraries down. To say that the South African librarians were perplexed at such action is an understatement.

If you get a chance, do read *Teacher Librarians could soon be left on the funding shelf* by Anna Fienberg in the Sydney Morning Herald, Monday October 12 2012, Opinion p9. Ms Fienberg has certainly got a great understanding of the need for school libraries and librarians – something that some of our principals and parents should know and understand.

Thank you to all ALIA members who have contributed to the *Dumb Idea* campaign in support of our Queensland Government library colleagues. Please be ready as the ALIA Board and staff roll out further advocacy and promotional campaigns designed to focus attention on the great things about a range of library sectors. The ALIA Board is adopting a flexible, proactive approach to advocacy on your behalf, but such initiatives are only as successful as the members who take the time to participate. Do keep an eye on the ALIA website for developments in our advocacy program – and be prepared to act!

Vanessa Little
ALIA President
vanessa.little@alia.org.au

INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

500 of the best

The InformationWeek 500 for 2012 list has been announced, with ProQuest named among the 500 most innovative users of business technology in the US. www.informationweek.com/1343

A lesson in school library funding

Findings from Softlink's annual Australian School Library Survey have revealed a positive link between literacy results and school library resourcing levels. Low NAPLAN scores correlated to low funding levels, with the relationship's significance increasing from primary to secondary school. www2.softlinkint.com/?au/softlink-australian-schools-survey

Could libraries become precinct hubs?

Architects are catching on, releasing plans for the \$45 million Geelong Library and Heritage Centre that complement nearby heritage buildings, creating a cultural hub in Geelong. designbuildsource.com.au/libraries-modern-precinct-centre

