

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to Janette Wright's Opinion piece in the November 2012 (Volume 33, issue 11) issue. First, I would like to acknowledge her and the other initiators of the Status of Women in Librarianship special interest group. The earlier decades of what is often called the Second Wave of Feminism could be pretty turbulent times. Too many women were badly treated and I am really sorry that Janette had to encounter occasions which, as she says, appear trivial but, as those of us who have had similar experience know, were so corrosive. At the same time it does need to be acknowledged that the primary driver for improvements in women's roles and remuneration in the work place is

ideological – it does have its genesis in feminist thought and practice as it has developed since the late 1960s.

The status of women or the status of the feminised professions is a political issue. It really is. The rectification of problems associated with it may well lie within the economic, social, and cultural spheres, but the problem itself is political. And where you have politics, you will encounter strongly held ideologies. Pay equity, although on the face of it just about equity in the workplace, is in fact a highly political and politicised issue. The status of women in the public sector and within the library profession itself is still problematic. Pay equity is still a worthy goal for the profession. Momentum has certainly been lost,

but if there is evidence that it would be a good thing for the profession then a – *carefully named* special interest group centred on that must still be a possibility. But one shouldn't kid oneself; pay equity for librarians is about addressing discriminatory practices within a predominantly female profession in employment. At heart it will be a political battle.

So actually are three of the other issues on which Janette, quite rightly, queries our advocacy: libraries, reading, and literacy. In a more homogeneous time one knew what was meant by a library, by reading and by literacy. But now? What for example is meant by reading? Is it something different from knowing how to read? Once, the primary institutional responsibility for literacy and reading was school-based. It seems to me, from my reading and speaking to other librarians, that many are looking for a professional

raison d'être and I would suggest that it is in reading and literacy that we could find it. But for that to happen there needs to be a sea-change in our philosophy and in our practice.

Janette speaks of a need to tie advocacy to the evidence in professional literature. I would put it another way by saying the advocacy needs to be backed by evidence. But advocacy also needs more than that – it needs an on-going commitment to work towards the goal. You don't need a lot of people working for the change, but you do need committed people, and some of them need to be strongly committed, and you do need to remain goal-focused. Hard to do when having to fight to not have the goal hijacked, I know. There must be evidence that the change is needed. The analysis of the evidence needs to be a lot more thoughtful and critical than currently seems to be the general practice. But more than that, the intellectual component of librarianship needs to be acknowledged and fostered. The value of research and scholarship within the profession is being constantly undermined by the language and practices of the market place which, with its reductive consumerist focus, work to turn us into mere economic resources, rather than deeply knowledgeable professionals able to make meaningful contributions to public and social policy as well as cultural development.

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