



ALIA WA Library Technicians Conference Grant

Introduction

The 12th ALIA National Library Technicians Conference was held on 9 - 12 September at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers in Brisbane. The theme of the conference was *Bridging services - embracing reality*. Each day had its own sub-theme, with registration day being 'the pier' (the starting point, the foundation), day one 'the arch' (spanning the information gap), day two was 'the girder' (strength and support for the bridge) and day three 'rivets, nuts and bolts' (holding it all together).

The body of this report is in the form of a diary of personal experiences. This was the first conference I have attended and it exceeded my expectations. I was anticipating some of the sessions to be overly technical or even tedious but this assumption was completely wrong. The excellent program meant I was often torn between wanting to hear two or three papers at the one time. The social events were spectacular.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ALIA WA Library Technicians group (WALTS) and Curtin University of Technology for their support in enabling me to attend this educational, enlightening and, above all, exciting conference.

Day One

Keynote address

Doing the unnatural act... how to maintain focus and energy in rapidly changing times

Bruce Sullivan, director, Pace Learning.

This was an enjoyable, inspirational talk. Bruce discussed the way in which having a 'reason why' gives us the energy to do. He talked about things in life which are facts and can't be changed and that energy is wasted in trying to do so. The unnatural act is the things we do to make an impression. For example, on a first date, we might put more effort into appearance, laugh at unfunny jokes or exaggerate our abilities.

An extremely interesting part was the concept of learning described below:

Unconscious incompetence (don't know what we don't know)

Conscious incompetence (aware that we don't know)

Conscious competence (requires thought to carry out)

Unconscious competence (can do the task without thinking about it)

Bruce gave us all something to think about by asking 'What could you achieve if you had the energy of a four year old almost every day?' He ended his address with a



slide show of his beautiful daughter, who has Downs syndrome. I found this presentation touching and inspirational. It has encouraged me to look for the reason why, to accept those things I can not change and to remember that the extra effort always gives the best results.

Plenary session

Developments in the library labour market

Collette Ormonde for Phil Teece, Advisor, industrial relations and employment, ALIA.

This session was extremely enlightening as Collette discussed the position of library workers in the labour market and presented some statistics that were both revealing and worrying.

There is a significant trend towards casual and part-time work for library technicians. Only 44.6 per cent of technicians are in full-time employment, compared to 71.45 per cent of librarians. However, the number of technician jobs has grown strongly in the past five years, whilst that for librarians has reduced. Another interesting statistic was that more than half of the librarians and library technicians working in Australia are over fifty. This is a concern in that many of these people will soon be retiring and taking a huge amount of knowledge and skill with them.

There was a number of statistics shown including type of employment, employment growth, employment regulation, working hours, earnings increase, workplace training costs and hours of training.

The information provided on library technicians' attitudes to work and satisfaction levels was very positive. More worrying was the national average wage of \$34 286. After a review in NSW, the wages there range from around \$39 000 (level 1, year 1) to \$59 000 (level 2, year 4). Hopefully, WA will soon follow this example!

This session made me more aware of the position of library technicians in the work market and the fact that more and more, technicians are being hired in place of librarians - to do the same work at a cheaper price.

This presentation is available at <http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/slideshows/>

Paper session

Library architecture and interior design for the 21st century

Timothy Hill, director, Donovan Hill (Architects).

After hearing the talk by Lea Giles-Peters regarding the re-development of the State Library of Queensland, I was interested in this paper by the architect who is undertaking this project. It was an extremely popular session, with the room being absolutely packed and with good reason, it was very interesting.

Timothy talked about, and showed slides of, his tour of 26 libraries across the world and the development of the six spheres for the new State Library.



An accessible place eg. group study, simple subject divisions, targeting audiences (such as a Teen Space), characters for each level, easy to get to, recognisable, accessible staff.

A constantly transforming place eg. reading rooms with electronic access, expansion of the physical building, projects, joining with other institutions, transforming procedures.

A virtual place eg. joining of virtual and physical paths, staff having a 'real' job and a virtual one, association with individuals (such as their own library page).

A place of interactions eg. other facilities in the library building, large groups in the library, bringing children to the library, teen spaces, meeting rooms, the library as a venue.

A place with atmosphere eg. information is universal, library has character, staff participation towards atmosphere, light, setting, intimacy.

A voice in its place eg. an active collection, multimedia, community thoughts and expectations.

This session could easily have continued through the afternoon. The ideas presented will lead to a library that is an enjoyable place to be, where people can meet, learn or relax.

I would love to be able to integrate these concepts into my own workplace. Some are limited by budget, such as the physical building but I can personally work towards the accessibility, interaction and atmosphere objectives.

Day Two

ALIA president's address

ALIA - What it can do for you

Christine Mackenzie, ALIA president and library manager, Brisbane City Council Libraries.

Christine's address covered a brief history of ALIA since 1937 through to the vision for 2010 as 'an association that information professionals want to join'. She discussed reasons why library staff should join ALIA, such as friendships, networking, new skills, mentoring and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program.

Christine then went on to describe some of the projects currently being undertaken by ALIA including the web-accessible membership database (members-only section of the website) and REAP - research, exchange and partnership, consisting so far of a listserv and an e-print repository.

I am always interested in reasons to join ALIA as many people I work with are not members and I am trying to encourage them to be.



Keynote address

'Human doing and human being: the bridge to where?'

Jean Bailey.

This keynote address was celebrated as the first keynote to be presented by a library technician. It was highly valuable in creating a sense of self-value and of my place as a library technician.

Jean discussed the way in which dignity in the workplace is closely associated with a sense of self and how it is important to connect professional with personal qualities. She quoted Watkins (1995) 'library technicians have specialist expertise beyond the capacity of professional librarians'.

This address has helped me to value my position as a library technician and encouraged me to promote library technicians in my own workplace and the wider community.

Plenary session

Shake my hand: networking for survival

Janine Schmidt, university librarian, University of Queensland.

As this was my first conference, I felt it was important to learn how to 'network'. This session provided me with plenty of reasons to network and techniques for doing so.

Janine defined a network as an 'extended group of people with similar interests' and suggested that networking now also includes relationship marketing - marketing for mutual interests, longer term marketing that emphasises customer satisfaction.

The question of 'why network?' was answered with friendship, increased skills, promotion, reach goals, build morale, new clients, market research, new ideas and opportunities and to understand client needs.

Good networkers are made, not born! Janine stressed the need to get over shyness, to know yourself and not to fear rejection. Good networking skills are formed through practice, imitation, maintenance of current networks, study, reading and looking the part. Networks can be formed with people employed in the same field, vendors and clients.

How to network? Janine discussed strategies such as taking people for coffee or lunch, wearing a name badge or giving out business cards, publicising successes and dropping a few names. It is important to show interest in others, to observe and ask questions, to research beforehand and to communicate clearly.

A few more pointers included being honest, being yourself, smiling and making eye contact, taking risks, being direct and respecting cultural differences.

This session was very useful to me in that I am just starting out in my career as a library technician and will be trying to make new contacts in the library field and beyond.



The conference itself has been an excellent opportunity to try out the skills learnt in this session!

Dunn & Wilson oration

A comparison of the education and training opportunities for library technicians in the UK, USA, NZ and Australia

Kerrie Blyth, TAFE Tasmania, Devonport Campus.

Kerrie was the 2001 Dunn & Wilson Scholarship winner. She travelled the world researching the training and education available for library technicians and presented her results as a website located at <http://www.alia.org.au/~kblyth/index.htm>.

This session was excellent. The website is well designed and easy to navigate and the information contained within it fascinating.

Kerrie's aims as scholarship winner were two-fold. First, to examine education and training for library technicians in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and secondly, to establish an international network for library technicians.

For each country, she sets the scene and discusses the history of library technicians in that area. She then went on to compare different courses available. The Global Network has also been set up by Kerrie in order to connect technicians from across the world.

I was particularly interested in hearing about the different terms used to describe library technicians across the world. These included information assistant, library assistant, resource assistant, information officer, learning resource assistant, library officer, assistant librarian, library support staff and library technical assistant.

This presentation was very good and could easily have gone on over the allocated hour. I enjoyed hearing about different courses, particularly as I am still studying myself. Upon my return to Perth, I was eager to explore the website and put my details down for the Global Network. I encourage others to do the same. This session has also made me think I might like to apply for the Dunn & Wilson scholarship myself, one day.

Day three

Plenary session

'Back to the future - acquiring customer service skills

Jenny Hale, Resource Options.

This session focused on the skills required for quality customer service. Jenny spoke about the expectations that clients might have of customer service staff, such as being friendly, attentive, efficient, diligent, well-researched, etc. She then asked 'do you meet these expectations?'



In order to provide quality service, staff need to focus on the following five areas:

Self esteem - confident in abilities, enjoy job, successful

Professionalism - knowledge of subject, technical ability, research skills

Empowerment - be responsible, learn from mistakes

Service delivery - listen, don't anticipate, exceed expectations

Communication

This session was very useful to me and applicable to my work. I am always looking for ways to provide better service and to exceed client expectations, encouraging them to return.

Paper session

The Pound Collection: acquisition and cataloguing of a major collection

Mary Azzarito, State Library of Victoria.

This paper was one of my favourites for two reasons. Firstly, I am employed in the acquisitions and cataloguing section of a library and like hearing about different procedures and new ideas for accomplishing these tasks. Second, I love Australian childrens books and that is what the Pound Collection consists of.

Ken Pound collected more than 30 000 items over a 30 year period. His aim was to hold every edition and reprint of all Australian children's books. He must have had an amazing memory because he could be scouring a garage sale or swap meet and would recall if the copy of a book he had found was even slightly different to those he had previously collected!

In 1992, Ken Pound contacted tertiary institutions to purchase his collection. He was referred to the State Library of Victoria who put together a funding proposal. These funds came from the Community Support Fund, which is actually money raised through gambling.

The State Library of Victoria holds a children's literature research collection of approximately 80 000 items. This meant that the Pound Collection was highly suitable for this library and the acquisition of the collection commenced in 1995. Staff were employed for cataloguing including a consultant bibliographer to identify the different editions.

The cataloguing of these books held some challenges. Bibliographies were used to find publication dates for those items which did not have this information recorded on the book. 590 MARC tags were added for different copies of the same book, for example if one was red and the other yellow, a note was made that can be seen in the library's catalogue.



The processing of these books was also more complex than normal. Some books required conservation treatment, such as being placed in an acid free box. In order not to damage or mark the books, an acid free slip was added to each with the call number and barcode.

After these explanations, Mary showed slides of some of the 'treasure highlights'. These included 95 copies of *Seven Little Australians*, a personal favourite, and first editions dating back to 1904. There are also many beautiful May Gibbs books and a large collection of picture books. Ken Pound collected a large number of annuals and adventure books and also other non-book items such as games, a money box, etc.

This paper illustrated the considerations that must be made when purchasing and cataloguing rare books, including the preservation of the physical items. I would love to visit the rare books collection at the State Library of Victoria and see the Ken Pound collection for myself. I am sure I could spend many hours browsing the shelves and looking at the beautiful illustrations in these old and precious items.

Reflections and conclusion

When I first arrived at the Sheraton for registration, I had no idea what to expect. I was given my receipts and satchel and shown where to meet in the morning. I felt quite young, inexperienced and nervous. But, by the end of the week, I felt very professional and confident.

I had many opportunities to practice the networking skills I had learnt and met lots of interesting people.

Attending this conference has resulted in my learning many new skills and ideas to take back to my workplace. These include improved communication skills and many techniques to provide quality customer service.

I am also more aware now of the position of the library technician within an organisation. We are not lesser than librarians but part of a team with our own expertise and abilities. I have learned self-value and will encourage this among other members of staff at my work.