

The librarian in me

Linda Langford, St Philips College, Alice Springs

My first qualification is as a science teacher. Why did I choose to upgrade my qualifications to teacher-librarianship? Because, in my view, the teacher-librarian is one of the most valuable members of staff for any school.

While I was teaching science I became very frustrated at not having someone in the school library who understood and was able to assist with the planning of my resource-based teaching units. I wanted support and assistance with my more able students, to ensure that their time as independent learners was fruitful. I wanted reassurance that the staff in the library were aware and capable of actively teaching or reinforcing in my students the information process that was so important in their cognitive development. My experience affirmed in me the necessity of staffing school libraries with professionals who were part of the teaching fraternity, who understood and acknowledged the importance of learning styles and were actively engaged in education.

What can I, as a practising teacher-librarian, offer to a school that a teacher or a librarian or an ancillary staff member cannot offer? Nothing! Well, nothing discernible to the eye that prepares to view libraries as inactive depositories of resources. If this is the case then a well-trained librarian who knows how to review, purchase, catalogue, field reference and loan requests, and budget can quite capably and admirably run the library. However, the real reason for a library within a school must be more than to merely function at a technical level. It must be a centre whose staff is actively involved in the learning activities of the



Linda Langford (second from right, back row) with other ALIA members in Alice Springs. This photo was taken during a 'Lobby for libraries' seminar run by Virginia Walsh

students, and can work co-operatively with teachers to develop units of work that satisfy learning outcomes through well-devised research strategies. It is this partnership that puts the teacher into librarianship.

In the school libraries of my youth there was never much enthusiasm for my learning needs nor input into teaching me how to research. I was expected to be independent, but how can a student be an independent learner without being educated towards this ultimate goal? I seldom used a library during my schooling. If I needed assistance I went back to my teacher — I was missing the hands-on learning that I did not get in my school library. By university I was only just beginning to understand the process of research.

Young people cannot wait until they grow up to understand that they must actively learn information skills. They need to know how to access more than just a book's index. Learning methods have been refined, and catering for individual differences must be acknowledged in schools seeking quality education. The

teacher in the school library must be there to guide, facilitate, and *teach* those skills. School administrators must ensure that their libraries are not on a 'maintaining' level but are staffed with the right mix of technical, clerical and teaching staff.

As a teacher-librarian, I have often asked myself why I feel so strongly about staffing school libraries with a library assistant or technician *and* an experienced teacher who has librarianship qualifications. I hold great stock in my training and experience as a teacher and as a librarian. Why? Because I can anticipate my students' needs and facilitate their learning experience. I am aware of the skills needed and I am well aware of individual learning styles, and I tailor my teaching strategies towards facilitating their research. I will ignore my librarian duties in order to be with the staff or the students. That is what my job demands. What about the library duties? I have been known to creep back after hours or on weekends to tidy up some pressing cataloguing or ordering.

The librarian in me gives an overview on how best to manage information, process and promote resources for which I hope my colleagues are truly grateful — I put considerable energy into sourcing, organising and promoting resources that tie directly to a teaching unit. Experience as a teacher, who understands the specific information and research needs of the student, linked with a shared responsibility towards the learning attitudes of students, convinces me that my role as a qualified teacher-librarian is essential for my students' active learning. ■

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