

Building influence as teacher-librarians

Margaret Strickland, South Australian and National School Libraries section

ALIA School Libraries Section (SA Group) in conjunction with our umbrella group the Council of School Library Associations of SA (CoSLA) represents the professional interests of teacher-librarians in South Australia. As is the case with many other professional, educational associations in South Australia, we are now the main provider of professional development activities for our members. Neither the Department for Education, Training and Employment nor the Independent Schools Board nor the Catholic Education Office provide support to school library curriculum in this state. Over the last eighteen months we have made a conscious decision to bring several international educators to South Australia to assist in our professional development program.

In February 1999 we brought Jamie McKenzie (USA) to Adelaide for the first time. He returned to us again in November 1999 in response to demand for his services. We wanted to learn about his big picture approach to student-centred learning methodologies and communications and information technologies — both of which are at the heart of the information literacy/resource-based learning programs which we offer in our schools. His experience as a teacher and an educational administrator allowed him to give unqualified support to the high-quality school library programs which our members have developed in South Australia. He provided affirmation and encouragement and new perspectives for the work which teacher-librarians do. He introduced us to the outstanding 'Inspiration' software, which complements so well the thrust of our programs. Since then he has returned to South Australia on several occasions. It is heartening to hear that teachers from a variety of educational backgrounds have attended his seminars at the School of the Future and in individual schools for whole-school staff development.

In March of this year we brought Gary Hartzell, Professor of Educational Administration, University of Nebraska to Adelaide to conduct a full-day seminar on building influence and developing effective working relationships with school management. While the audience was made up of teacher-librarians, the exploration of influence is useful to all librarians.

Gary's presentation was an enjoyable mix of personal experience (including that of a principal), anecdotes and research findings. Teacher-librarians need to back their claims for developing resource-based learning programs with recent research. It is not always easy for teacher-librarians to find research findings from Australia to support our programs, so we were impressed with some of Gary's American findings. For example a study of 221 schools in Colorado found that:

- students at schools with better-funded libraries tend to achieve higher average reading scores, whether their schools and communities are rich or poor and whether adults in the community are well or poorly educated;
- the size of the library's total staff and the size and variety of its collection are important characteristics of library media programs that intervene between expenditures and test performance. Students must be offered a large variety of materials in a variety of formats and must have staff who can guide them through the materials and their interpretation; and
- students in schools where the library media co-ordinator played an instructional role achieve higher test scores. [Lance, KC, Welborn, L, and Hamilton-Pennell, C (1993). *The impact of school library media centers on academic achievement*. Castle Rock, CO: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.]

Just the sort of support we need!

Gary gave us extensive handouts and many practical strategies to ensure that we are professionally valued and appreciated, for example:

- teacher-librarians read 'teacher-librarian-type' journals but do principals read them? If they don't is it any wonder that principals do not always understand from where we are coming? Principals need to be on the distribution list for our professional journals such as *Orana*, *Access* and *Scan*. They need to see our professional concerns in print for national circulation. Then we need to follow up those principals with discussion about articles pertinent to our school's curriculum.
- teacher-librarians almost always write for their own publications and

present papers at their own conferences or at librarianship conferences. Teacher-librarians need to write for the publications which administrators read and present papers at administrators' conferences.

Gary gave us additional readings, web-sites and references to look up. For example, *Getting things done when you are not in charge: how to succeed from a support position* GM Bellman Berrett-Koehler, 1992; *Working with emotional intelligence* D Goleman Bantam, 1998.

He spelled out for us the attributes of influential people:

- Likeability;
- Expertise;
- Integrity;
- Energised, focussed effort;
- Sensitivity; and
- Controlled ego.

He challenged us to consider whether we wanted to pay the price for influence:

We could have more impact on:

- how decisions are made
- defining school priorities
- enhancing our contribution
- meeting personal goals

If we are prepared to:

- engage in political behaviour
- change our long-held attitudes
- learn new roles
- be more visible and subject to scrutiny
- deal with more conflict
- have more responsibility.

Quite an awesome range of unnatural behaviours for many librarians! 'Deal with more conflict' is something which particularly challenges me. Can I really handle any more conflict in my life? I might just have to!

We are not bringing any more American presenters to Adelaide this year, but we are bringing James Herring from Edinburgh, Scotland to Adelaide in November. Check out CoSLA's web-site [<http://www.cosla.asn.au>] for details. ■