Enthusiasms and challenges: Teacher-Librarianship education at QUT

What professional enthusiasms and challenges are teacher-librarians currently experiencing…and how are tertiary educators enabling teacher-librarians to embrace them?

Insights into the dynamic professional lives of teacher-librarians (TLs) can be gained through professional journals such as *Access* and *inCite* and the lively e-lists OZTL-NET, QLDTL and alia-Schools. In addition, teacher-librarianship educators keep in touch through conversations with current students and TL practitioners, consultation with employing and professional organisations, and research.

Teacher-librarian perspectives

The MLI (Teacher-Librarianship) team at QUT note that TLs generally relish the multiple aspects of their role as resource managers, reading promoters, curriculum developers, collaborative teaching partners. TLs are willing - and often very able - to respond to current and emerging technologies. Indeed, TLs often lead the way with technology in their schools. Yet this can come at the price of being swamped with ICT responsibilities that hinder their other core activities. The impact of the Government's Digital Revolution, with the roll-out of computers to schools, poses promises and challenges. The latest hardware is generally welcome, especially for schools in more disadvantaged areas. However, with limited accompanying funding for technical and learning support, TLs expect to find themselves further stretched.

The prospective and experienced TLs that the QUT team encounter are often excited by the learning potential of web 2.0 and social networking, both for their teaching and for their professional learning. Teacher-librarianship students and practitioners are usually aware of the responsibilities that come with the freedoms of the online society. They value and seek to promote information literacy in their learning and teaching. They enable their students and colleagues to widen their online horizons. What's more, by fostering critical and ethical approaches to using information, they offer individuals the means to guard against internet scams, cyberbullying and plagiarism.

Professional education for TLs at QUT

MLI students engage with contemporary trends and professional issues throughout the course. Core units include: *Cyberlearning, Designing Spaces for Learning, Information Organisation,* and *Youth, Popular Culture and Texts.* In addition, this year we offer a redeveloped foundation unit *Knowledge Hubs* and a new core unit entitled *Information-Learning Nexus. Knowledge Hubs* focuses on professional issues relating to the changing school library-learning environment and the multiple roles of TLs. *Information-Learning Nexus* concentrates on information literacy with an inquiry-based learning approach.

Looking ahead to 2009, in addition to the Teacher-Librarianship Masters we will introduce a new course: *Master of Education (Information-Learning Connections)* (pending QUT approval). This new course is designed to support ongoing professional learning for qualified TLs, information professionals, information literacy educators, experienced teachers and trainers. It explores concepts and learning approaches for changing information-learning environments.

The QUT Teacher-Librarianship teaching team

Dr Mandy Lupton joined the MLI (TL) teaching team at the start of the year. Mandy brings rich experience as teacher-librarian, music teacher and academic to the course. Her latest book entitled *Information literacy and learning* is hot off the press (2008, Auslib Press). Mandy is currently designing an interview-based research study investigating teacher-librarians' experiences of inquiry-based learning.

As for the rest of the MLI(TL) team, Ms Raylee Elliott Burns moved on from full-time employment at QUT at the end of 2007, to further her research, professional and personal interests. Raylee made an invaluable and lasting contribution to teacher-librarianship education at QUT as lecturer and as course coordinator. Happily, she continues her association with the course as lecturer for the unit *CLN603 Designing Spaces for Learning.* Professor Kerry Mallan continues to coordinate and teach the unit *CLN647 Youth, Popular Culture and Texts.* She also engages in extensive research and writing activities. Kerry's latest book, co-authored with Clare Bradford, John Stephens, and Robyn McCallum is *New world orders in contemporary children's literature: utopian transformations* (Palgrave, 2008). Hilary Hughes coordinates the course and teaches the *Cyberlearning* unit. She is also collaborating with Dr Helen Partridge in the redevelopment of the Information Organisation unit.

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Industry placement is an opportunity to share your passion!

Industry placement or vocational placement is an integral part of the learning process for students undertaking any level of study in the library field.

The Swinburne Library Studies Program offers two industry placements to students studying the Diploma of Library Information Services. The first placement is often the first time the student has seen library operations firsthand and they can perform a variety of base level tasks. Industry Placement also introduces them to the expectations of the workplace such as punctuality and workplace standards. The second placement, at the end of the Diploma is at a higher level and students can perform customer service/desk duties and technical work such as cataloguing.

The students learn a huge amount from their workplace experience and they can find it inspiring and exciting. It gives the boost they need to continue their studies and gives meaning to their learning. We do rely on the goodwill and expertise of the supervisors to supervise the student and I would like to stress that TAFE courses attract a wide range of candidates of varying abilities. Some students require more help than others but this in itself can be rewarding as you can see a student's expertise develop.

A source of anxiety for supervisors is determining what sort of work the student can do? We provide a list of tasks for IP 1 which are basic tasks and observations of the workplace. IP 2 students are expected to complete a project and do general library duties. For example, the project can be weeding the collection, stocktaking, creating reading lists, displays, brochures and cataloguing. Customer service experience is important at this stage and the student is generally ready for this.

OH&S is also included in the Industry Placement 2 cluster of competencies and the student is required to make observations of the workplace and investigate the host organisation's OH&S policies.

Please cast your mind back to your training and study and reflect on your placement experience. Think about sharing some of your knowledge to enthusiastic newcomers. Taking students on placement also gives you a 'free look' at potential staff for your library and many students are offered work after their placement.

Some suggested tasks for students on placement are listed below but are of course subject to your own library operations and the student's abilities. The student really gains an insight into library work when they have an opportunity to experience a broad range of tasks.

When you next receive a phone call requesting a placement consider it as a compliment and an opportunity to share your knowledge, skills and above all your passion!

Some suggestions for student tasks:

- shelving
- ILL requests and reservations
- shelf reading
- locating missing items
- assisting clients
- basic bibliographic verification
- 'shadowing' library staff
- cataloguing

- processing
- setting up displays
- reading lists
- producing basic publicity materials
- signage
- organising pamphlets
- basic reference enquiries.

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Work experience placements for VC students

Victoria University Library has entered into an agreement with VU's Library and Cultural Studies Unit to guarantee work experience placements for their students. The first group of students will commence late August 2008. At present the Library and Cultural Studies Unit have approximately 60 students to place in a range of information agency types. Given that some students might prefer to obtain experience in special libraries, public libraries or school libraries etc., VU library has committed to take up to 20 students per year. This figure may vary depending on Library and Cultural Studies' ability to meet the commitment (enrolments and student preferences will obviously factor highly in how many placements will actually be needed).

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Library and Cultural Studies students are required to complete two industry placements: 80 hours (10 days) for Industry Placement 1 and 120 hours (15 days) for Industry Placement 2.

VU Library is also committed to supporting the placement of students studying to become professional librarians at RMIT, Ballarat University and Charles Sturt University.

With VU Library and Cultural Studies students there are no set assignments for students to complete when placed. Wide and varied experience is considered the best option. Industry Placement students may have personal skill gaps that they would like to fill. The students are encouraged to negotiate with their supervisor when placed in regard to tasks to develop these skills.

VU Library Campus libraries and sections will commit to taking on at least one student per year. This could be an Industry Placement 1 student for one day per week for one semester; or an Industry Placement 2 student for one day per week for two semesters.

Placements of students from RMIT, Ballarat University and Charles Sturt University will be negotiated as required. An induction to the library will be held for all work experience students.

The benefits of this arrangement include:

- VU Library fulfilling its commitment to the University's 'Learning in the Workplace initiative'
- VU Library developing a stronger working relationship with the Library and Cultural Studies Unit
- Access to skilled graduates and a potential pool of casual workers.

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