

L'Internationale, or 'Holding hands across the Tasman'

From the desk of the Library Provocateur



After slaving all year over a hot laptop (must be time for another battery recall) in some of the world's seediest airport lounges (Los Angeles, Lagos, Canberra), it was a thrill to check gmail and see that October's missive had finally generated some controversy.

If I have a regret though, it is that the October article neglected to mention the encouraging work of the Re-conceptualising and re-positioning *Australian Library And Information Science Education For The Twenty-First Century Project* (<http://www.liseducation.org.au/>).

This timely and potentially significant study acknowledges that "the current approach to LIS education in Australia lacks cohesion and sustainability". The result is that Australian LIS education "ultimately fails to effectively or efficiently provide a diverse supply of graduates with the attributes required for professional practice in the rapidly changing twenty-first century." No arguments there.

The Re-Conceptualising And Re-Positioning Project seeks to address this problem by providing "guidance on how best to re-position and re-shape Australian LIS education to ensure it remains dynamic, responsive and sustainable to the evolving information age".

With such a worthy goal in mind, it is disappointing that the project appears to lack influential sponsors within the government and higher education sectors, and its intended outcomes give no clear indication as to whom or what will do the spade work of implementation.

Perhaps the promised framework and accompanying action plan for "sustainable LIS education in Australia" will be sufficient catalyst for peak bodies like ALIA to engage with government and universities, individually and collectively, to facilitate meaningful change. Time will tell but I hope pre-emptive action is taken before the economics of higher education intrude.

By way of contrast, as I write this column, our colleagues in New Zealand are putting the final touches to their Centennial Conference in Dunedin. LIANZA's milestone is to be warmly celebrated on both sides of the Tasman.

In the hundred years since LIANZA was formed, we in Australia have learned much from the library profession in New Zealand, and they (I hope) from us. In my case, it was the disturbing claim by the National Library of New Zealand colleagues that pavlova was invented in Wellington in the 1920s. Personally, I see nothing to be gained from arguing the toss. I'm with food writer Matthew Evans: "People have been doing meringue with cream for a long time; I don't think Australia or New Zealand were the first to think of doing that".

Even if the origins of pavlova are still debatable, it is true that the sharing of ideas and expertise between our two nations has served the profession in each country very well. In fact, the interplay has been so great and so positive for so long it is often difficult to perceive any boundaries between the two.

Perhaps for the same reason the idea of a shared Australian and New Zealand currency won't go away, we should be using LIANZA's centennial year as the time to reconsider a closer union between the profession here and across the Tasman.

If you consider that idea too far-fetched, think again. If the debate around anthropogenic global warming has done nothing else for humanity over the past twenty years, it has demonstrated the degree to which professional interests trump nationalism. Even the traditionally jingoistic French have shown

uncharacteristic altruism and cooperation in pursuit of global scientific consensus on the issue of climate change.

In this respect, the library profession has much in common with its scientific colleagues. Long before social media introduced us to a bewildering global jamboree of 'peeps', librarians have talked and worked across national borders – sharing resources, ideas and support.

As a start, the formation of an Australasian Association of Library and Information Professionals (AALIP) would increase diversity and economies of scale in professional development. Since the departure of CAVAL from the library training scene in late 2008, the underlying lack of choice, cohesion and direction in library professional development, principally in Australia, has become sadly evident. Minor players are opportunistically tinkering at the margins, sometimes in tandem with ALIA, but the overall effect is inchoate – there is no evidence of anyone having a grand plan or vision, let alone the business acumen to get something happening.

Since 2007, LIANZA has embraced compulsory professional development for members through its Professional Registration Scheme. While the transition to professional registration has not been without its problems and critics, its implementation is proceeding and will be to the long term advantage of the profession in New Zealand. A merger might provide Australian colleagues with the same opportunities and advantages.

A merger would also provide the perfect opportunity to reorganise and reposition the business of our two professional associations by relocating the new joint head office from the rarefied atmospheres of Canberra and Wellington to somewhere more accessible for members – like Port Moresby for example.

What better time too for us to overhaul membership categories and reinvigorate engagement with members, particularly mid and late career colleagues who have become largely disenfranchised from ALIA – renewing their 'associate' membership each year (if they renew) out of a misplaced sense of duty, rather than any genuine appreciation for the Association.

Finally, moving to an Australasian Association (Society/Institute) of Library and Information Professionals would create an international organisation in the South-West Pacific with more capacity to influence state and national governments, and work with aid organisations such as AusAid to the betterment of the profession and communities across the region. In this respect, LIANZA's work in Fiji and other Pacific nations serves as a model for providing greater practical assistance to colleagues in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

New Zealand historian Matthew Wright believes his country came within a whisker of becoming the seventh state of Australia in 1901 (*Fantastic Pasts: Imaginary Adventures in New Zealand History*).

Perhaps, 110 years on, it is now time for the library profession to show the way and 'bridge the ditch'. If there's pavlova and professional development in it, I'll be there!

library.provocateur@gmail.com

The opinions expressed in *On the Edge* do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Library and Information Association. *On the Edge* aims to promote discussion, engagement, and interest in the monthly theme.