

ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEL gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at maclean.lesa@gmail.com

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR LIFE-LONG EDUCATION



Library and information professionals and the issues that concern us exist on the edge of a fast-changing society marked by the unprecedented development and proliferation of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Our profession must change as our society changes, or risk being overwhelmed – we cannot afford to remain in stasis.

At no time has the need for swift reaction and constant innovation been more important than now, in the age of Google, tablets, smartphones, cloud technology and ebooks. ALIA's Professional Development (PD) Scheme offers hope for our profession in Australia. Only through the completion of a comprehensive PD scheme can we ensure that library professionals have the knowledge, skills, and attitude required to react appropriately to the constantly changing environment we operate in. The promotion of life-long learning through continuing professional development is our most powerful weapon in this struggle. Our future depends on the constant education of all industry practitioners.

However, there is one obstacle we must overcome – and we can potentially overcome this obstacle by promoting ALIA's PD scheme. The problem, our obstacle, is that not all forms of professional development are equal. In our current unregulated state, much of what passes for PD is incomplete or simply not up to standard and, indeed, may end up doing more harm than good. The obvious solution to the perpetual crisis of looming irrelevancy is to mobilise our profession into a state of totaler Krieg, to ensure that, if nothing else, the call to keep up with emerging ICTs is promoted strongly and with consistency. However, this strategy has had unintended and harmful consequences. When PD is not approached in a comprehensive manner, problems arise. Intricate developments and ideas in the scholarship of the profession are diluted to the point of a few simple slogans, and the knowledge of these slogans is seen

as 'good enough' by many employers and practitioners. We, as practitioners, are often led to believe we must adapt to something, even if we know very little about it, even if it runs counterintuitive to what we understand our role to be. As life-long learners and professionals, we should never be OK with changing the way we practice without understanding the reasons behind this change.

A library professional who subscribes to the current 'give technology or give

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me death' line, lacks a sophisticated understanding of what ICTs can and can't do within the library context, and may cause more damage to an institution than a shamelessly Luddite librarian. Knowing only that they must adapt to new technologies may lead a practitioner to overestimate the utility of these technologies, ignoring the reality of the situation. A teacher-librarian, for example, who does not understand the current limitations of the digital medium, may decide to cull all the atlases, and remove the picture books in order to make way for computer terminals. They no doubt understand the role of the library, and no doubt want what is best for the community they serve, but their misguided understanding of the role of technology may override their better judgement. In the LIS profession, it is not a case of 'a little bit of education is better than no education at all' – PD must not

be delivered through the passing down of slogans – it must be comprehensive and dedicated to fostering an attitude of life-long learning.

Despite these issues, the future remains bright. LIS educators and ALIA are committed to fostering a culture of life-long education. With its comprehensive framework, ALIA's PD Scheme is designed to ensure practitioners come away with a complete education, up to date on

all the current trends within the profession. Participating in the scheme will equip you with a deep understanding of your field, and an appreciation of the importance of maintaining a deep understanding of your profession and its current pressing issues. While it may be impossible to motivate the small minority who are simply

not interested in changing; providing all practitioners with the opportunity to complete a comprehensive and structured PD Scheme is likely to do wonders. If it were up to me, the completion of ALIA's PD Scheme would be compulsory and, indeed, things seem to be moving in that direction for health librarians. But until Australia follows the United Kingdom and New Zealand in introducing compulsory PD, I urge all library professionals to strongly consider joining the scheme.

Robin Pelenyi is a library and information science student at QUT, and is still deciding where he wants to go with his career. He is enthusiastic about his own professional development and is currently volunteering on the experience sub-committee for the 6th New Librarian's Symposium (NLS6). He believes NLS6 is a great professional development opportunity that is not to be missed.