



# MOVE AHEAD WITH MENTORING

**M**entoring – either as the mentor or the mentee – can help you to broaden your professional development. All involved can benefit, even in unintended ways, as RANI MCLENNAN and ANITA MCMILLAN report.

**RANI:**

In September 2013, I made the leap from public to school libraries when I took up a position as Library Technician and Textbook Coordinator at West Moreton Anglican College in Ipswich, Queensland. From the start I could share experiences with my supervisor, Anita McMillan, the Knowledge and Learning Resources Manager, who also began her library career at Logan City Council Libraries. We knew the same people, bonded over similar night terrors involving regular patrons with hygiene issues and, most importantly, we were trained in the same structured, procedural environment.

I turned, informally at first, to Anita for trusted

Rani McLennan (left) and Anita McMillan

advice, but upon the completion of my information studies degree, I began taking notes on the advice I'd received both formally and by observation. The following lists the three most useful lessons I've gathered from my time with Anita:

**1. Save position descriptions.**

Keep an eye on job postings – those within your reach and those you want to aim for. Let the key selection criteria direct your professional learning.

**2. Say yes.**

When you say yes to requests for additional duties – even those outside your scope – there is no end to the wealth of opportunities that will flow your way. Anita and I work in a team of four across four locations. Ensuring that even two of us are together at one time can be difficult – especially when organising events. In 2015, we said yes to hosting one of two school sessions for StoryArts Festival Ipswich. This huge event went so well that we are the only school hosting a session this year.

**3. Make it work.**

Each year we share the National Simultaneous Storytime (NSS) book with our Prep to Year 6 students. As you can imagine, gathering over 400 students and staff in one location can be almost impossible. To make it work, we trialed a live feed in 2015 in which we broadcast Anita reading the NSS book into each

classroom via their interactive whiteboard. After dealing with some issues with software and staff confidence, we decided to try another option. In 2016, we pre-recorded, edited and uploaded the book reading during a student-free day so that teachers and students could watch the event in the classroom at a time during the day that suited them best. We also used Snapchat and its associated filters to complete a reading of *My Dog Bigsy* by Alison Lester – the Preps loved it.

We sometimes forget that both mentor and mentee can benefit from a partnership.

#### ANITA:

This is my 22nd year in the library and information industry. I spent the first 17 years of my professional practice in the public libraries of Logan, Somerset and Ipswich and am now enjoying my fifth year as the Knowledge and Learning Resources Manager at West Moreton Anglican College in Ipswich. I have also written units and tutored students for the Diploma of Library and Information Services.

My professional areas of interest include service delivery, digital-age services, elearning and the positioning of the school library sector within our broader industries of libraries and education. Working with Rani has helped shape my interests and strategy, as she is an operationally focused and digitally savvy professional.

With both of us transitioning across from public to school libraries, we've intentionally ramped up our own professional learning, both formally and informally.

These are my tips for learning forward:

#### 1. Prepare yourself

If you are moving to another sector, research the one you are entering and get to know the governing frameworks, strategy and policy. In transitioning to the school library area, we both familiarised ourselves with the Australian Curriculum – which is very important.

I immediately joined numerous school library networks – in my area and online – to get to know other professionals in the region.

#### 2. Challenge yourself

Be on the radar of your senior managers and other decision-makers; align your library services policy and operations with your school's corporate or strategic policy. Make everything you do meaningful in the broader context of the organisation you work for and the clients you serve. Trial everything! Both Rani and I sign up for as many trial sites and programs as we can. We explore them separately but discuss our findings and make recommendations together.

#### 3. Teach yourself

You are a lifelong learner. Practice what you preach. If we expect our students to be digital citizens and perform

quality research, we must do the same. Don't know how to do something? Work it out or find out. And don't wait for your employer to offer you formal professional development opportunities; there is plenty of professional learning you can do online or by getting to know your local networks and attending activities on weekends.

I taught myself a range of digital tools that would be of benefit to teachers in the classroom, with the objective of assisting teachers and students with their digital literacy skills. I'm continually working to overcome the myth that so-called digital natives have truly mastered technology.

In discussing the transitions of these librarians, Catherine Ryan, Teacher Librarian, Westbourne Grammar School in Truganina, Victoria, and ALIA Schools Committee Member, said professional learning must be relevant to your situation but enable you to be ahead of the journey your clients are taking, whichever sector you are in.

'One of the main changes from the public sector to the school sector was the budget. In schools you need to do more with less and provide diverse programs with limited staff.

'Some things are the same between sectors. Quality, client-focused service is key in both environments. Where technical functions are identical, such as cataloguing and acquisitions, the main difference is the pace. In a school, it's intense and urgent. The competing demands of teachers and students are immediate. If you can handle the pace, you are duly rewarded by the holidays.'

Anita and Rani both recommend moving sectors. They have embraced challenges but have also embraced learning the nuances of a different sector and the new learning journey this has taken them on. 🌱

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