

# Pro-fusion: Fusing school and public library professionals

ALIA Children's Youth Services Group, QLD

Queensland branch of ALIA's Children's Youth Services Section (CYSS) has a mission to promote interaction between all library and information specialists who work with young people in Queensland. In 1997, the Queensland branch was started by an enthusiastic group of librarians from the public, school and state spheres, in order to encourage cross fertilisation of ideas; promote professional development through networking; provide practical training opportunities, and learn from successful library programs.

With the recent restructuring of ALIA came the opportunity to reaffirm the group's mission and goals. Previously CYSS had tended to latch onto other events, for example, Children's Book Week and value-add by running complimentary events. However, these events were not particularly well attended partly because they were duplicating existing activities, but also because public and teacher-librarians have different timetables. Public librarians are often able to attend library related events during the working week, whilst teacher-librarians are often only available to attend work related events after school, on the weekend or during the holidays.

For the group to continue to evolve we realised we needed to generate new content and reconsider meeting possibilities. So the executive committee (all two of us) put out a call through teacher and public librarian networks for interested librarians to participate in the dialogue. There was a whole-hearted response from both sectors. The group was clearly valued. Representatives from both sectors met, and suggestions about content areas that librarians would be interested in exploring, were discussed enthusiastically.

We came to a critical agreement that we should go for one or two big annual events, rather than lots of small ones that everybody found difficult to attend. A one-day conference format was decided on. We looked for existing expertise within the group to provide speakers in areas on which librarians had indicated they wanted more information.

Teacher and public librarians often have very different skills, areas of expertise and knowledge. To kick-start meaningful information exchange a conference was planned for July 2001. It was called *Pro-fusion* and was about fusing

school and public library professionals' ideas, skills, networks and knowledge about services for young people. Topics that interested public librarians included visual literacy and booktalking. Teacher-librarians had indicated an interest in public library collections for teenagers, display ideas and storytelling. The whole group was interested in being debriefed on recent conferences that they had been unable to attend.

We were very lucky that a significant amount of talent existed within the group. Experts in their field such as Lyn Linning (lecturer, Early Childhood Education, QUT) and Jo Jensen (author/storyteller) gave freely of their time to attend and present at the conference.

The whole day would not have been possible without the staffing and financial assistance of the Public Libraries Division of the State Library of Queensland. Keen to encourage cross-sectoral information exchange, Robert Pestell, director of the Public Libraries Division provided the venue, catering and staff for the event. A number of the presenters at the conference hailed from the Public Libraries Division — storyteller, Bernadette Franzoni, and Laney Robinson and Denise O'Connor contributed to a booktalking session.

Sixty-seven library students, teachers, teacher aids, public and teacher librarians attended the conference. The feedback not only indicated what librarians and teachers found of interest, but also indicated what they would like to see at future professional development days. Areas of future interest include teenage reading, boys and books, reading promotion strategies, *advanced* booktalking, workshops on children's writing and computer literacy (for girls). I think people most enjoyed the variety of content and the opportunity to network cross-sectorally. It is clearly apparent that the *Pro-fusion* conference reached its niche audience and as a consequence was endorsed as being of real value to literacy professionals in all fields.

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## Food for thought at APSIG lunch

A most stimulating lunch-time seminar was held for Professor Subbiah Arunachalam, Distinguished Fellow, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India. Arun spoke on a number of initiatives that are currently being undertaken by his institution. These include:

- development of a e-print archives for biology and agriculture;
- development of a project with an international group to publish Indian journals in electronic format; and
- a project called the Village Knowledge Centers. These ITC centres are used to enhance the work undertaken by the local villagers and to assist local school teachers.

More information on the work undertaken at this institution is available in the following articles: 'Information technology: Equalizer or separator of developing countries?' by Subbiah Arunachalam <http://horizon.unc.edu/TS/default.asp?show=article&id=74>; and 'Information technology in developing countries: Obstacles and opportunities', Elizabeth Knight, University of Washington <http://www.slais.ubc.ca/news/slaisconference/knight.html>.

*Jeanette Regan, APSIG convenor*