



## Opening address – Australian Library and Information Association Biennial Conference

### Education and Arts in Queensland Challenging Culture and Tradition

*Hon. Anna Bligh Minister For Education And The Arts*

#### Acknowledgements:

- Hon. Peter Beattie, Premier of Queensland
- Traditional owner of the land, Graham Dillon, Kombumerri elder
- Imogen Garner, National President, Australian Library and Information Association
- Kay Raseroka, Director, University of Botswana Library Services and President, International Federation of Library Associations
- Janine Schmidt, Conference Chair and University Librarian, University of Queensland
- All conference delegates – particularly those who made the trip to Queensland

#### Introduction

- I'm delighted to be here today to talk to you about *Challenging Ideas* – the theme of your conference.
- I would especially like to extend a warm welcome to the international and interstate delegates in attendance.
- As Queensland's Minister for Education and the Arts, I have a keen interest in today's theme: challenging culture and tradition.
- I can promise you, the old adage, 'because that's the way we've always done things', won't be uttered by anyone standing behind this podium during the course of the conference.
- This is a forum where anything 'old hat' will be fervently challenged.
- This is a forum where the value of knowledge and information will be fully recognised, not only as a contributor to our country's labour market success, but also as a prerequisite for our social success.
- But most importantly, this is a forum where the vital role of libraries and librarians — as keepers and protectors of knowledge and facilitators of learning—will be acknowledged and examined.

#### A Changing Society

- In today's knowledge-based economy, the new source of wealth is not natural resources or capital or even technology itself. The new source of wealth is the skills acquired through education throughout life.
- Lifelong learning is not just a buzz phrase; it is a major shift in the way we define and deliver education—no longer an institution for the young; now, a fundamental principle for life.
- High-level qualifications are the currency of today's global economy and rapidly changing job markets.
- National and international research shows that completing Year 12 or its equivalent gives young people greater opportunities in further education and employment.
- Today's businesses are looking for employees who can adapt to changing needs, juggle multiple responsibilities and make decisions on their own.
- The future of young Australians therefore depends on their achieving high-level qualifications, gaining a strong hold on emerging technologies, and continuing to learn and update their skills throughout their lives.
- Knowledge is power, unquestionably, and our acquisition, use and trading of information is critical to our global and economic standing.
- How we store this knowledge and information is continuing to evolve as advancements in technology make it easier to compress and store vast amounts of information.
- Instead of carrying around books, students of today are armed with Pocket PCs, MP3 players and mobile phones which can store an incredible amount of data which can be accessed at the touch of a button.
- What role then does the library occupy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and how has it changed to meet the demands of the information economy?
- Ironically while some may have predicted that the advent of hi-tech access to information and knowledge from anywhere at anytime would bring with it a decline in library use, it's plain that our shift from dependence on print-based texts has done nothing to dampen our appetite for libraries.
- If anything, the opposite has prevailed and libraries are now more central than ever to our endeavours.
- I'm sure many of you read the recent article in *The Weekend Australian* about the role of librarians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- The article - *Navigator for Info Highway* – sheds light on the changing nature and face of the very important public institution of the library.
- Anne Armstrong, research librarian at Monash Public Library Service described the features of the modern library.

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- “Libraries today are vibrant places,” she said.
- “Do you want to email a friend, check out the news online, research a topic, listen to an author speak, uncover your family history or simply be in a community place which asks nothing of you” – This is the modern library.
- A very different place to the one I, and many of my generation remember as children and young adults.
- In a decentralised state like Queensland our libraries are charting a new information frontier.
- The provision of online magazines, books and encyclopaedias means that people can access information when they want it, where they want it without having to physically visit a library – which in some parts of Queensland simply isn’t possible.
- I know our own State Library here in Queensland is constantly striving to develop new digital services that will make its collections and resources more accessible and relevant to the public.
- The Library is providing an online voice for all Queenslanders, including regional and isolated communities, through the provision of web-based training and the chance to develop Queensland focused web pages that are hosted free of charge.
- It is also using the tools of the present to preserve the voices and pictures of the past which are unique to Queensland.
- Technology has freed information from its traditional home in the pages of books to become almost airborne ready to be plucked out of cyberspace by anyone, anywhere with access to a computer.
- Librarians – as described by *The Weekend Australian* article– are not only the keepers and protectors of past knowledge and history, they are also the “navigators” of the new information highways, guiding new or lost travellers through vast cyber plains to their final destination – the right information.
- But today’s librarians are more than just navigators or guides – they decipher, analyse and interpret the mountains of information which are now accessible at the click of a mouse.
- You are now information manager, teacher, web navigator and manager and content writer.
- As students’ learning options continue to expand, as partnerships between schools, colleges, universities, employers and communities grow, and as technology advances, so too will your level of technical expertise.
- In Queensland, for instance, the State Government’s significant investment in information and communication technology within our schools is providing librarians with the opportunity to take leadership roles in the development of their school’s information systems.
- Librarians are lifelong learners by nature and by profession. Your career has always demanded that you keep abreast of change, but never before has the level of change been so great.
- Now, distance education, flexible learning, mobile learning and e- learning are part of a library’s service delivery.
- This demands that you take full advantage of professional development opportunities— opportunities like this national conference.
- I would like to acknowledge The Australian Library and Information Association for empowering the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services over the past 66 years.
- Today’s conference will cover issues of importance to you over

the next decade—the extension of the traditional services libraries offer, the changing roles of librarians, and strategies contributing to lifelong learning.

- This sort of professional education provides you with the skills to promote and defend the ethics and importance of library and information services to the community, especially the values of access, equity, objectivity and privacy.
- Today is also my opportunity to commend Queensland librarians for their work and particularly school librarians for their significant role in the Government’s education and training reforms.
- Some local government libraries are acting as bases for alternative education provision for students at risk of leaving school early, allowing them to access information and communication technologies that they would otherwise not have access to because of their social and educational disengagement.
- Increasingly it is being demonstrated that libraries do make a difference to student learning.
- Research has confirmed the important link between student achievement and the school library.

## Relationship Between School Libraries and Student Achievement

- A 2003 ACER report, *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement*, found a strong library program can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of adults in the community.
- The report also found that:
  - a strong computer network connecting the library’s resources to the classroom and laboratories has an impact on student achievement
  - collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and school librarians have a significant impact on learning, particularly in relation to planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers
  - and a print-rich environment leads to more reading, and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability and style
- The role of the librarian in schools is becoming increasingly important as schooling changes to meet the demands of the knowledge economy and the expectations of employers.
- I hope all delegates here today, understand the important contribution you are making to the knowledge-base of your own community and to the global society you belong to.
- I urge you to continue to challenge the status quo and to embrace and lead change.

## Conclusion

- It’s been 20 years since this conference was held in Brisbane.
- In this time we’ve witnessed such dramatic advances in technology and information dissemination, and in the role of libraries and the skills needed by information staff, that those old conference notes would be positively archaic, and certainly not available on PowerPoint!
- I just hope Brisbane enjoys the privilege of hosting this conference again, well before 2024.
- I hope you enjoy the next three days and gain a renewed enthusiasm for the vital role you play in education and the 21<sup>st</sup> century.