

Editor,

I was surprised to see the latest *inCite* devoted to reading. Some years ago when I was working for the Queensland Dept of Primary Industries I wrote a paper on the reading habits of Extension Officers. At the time a DPI manager said I was in the wrong culture, and a university professor criticised my paper for its lack of a statistical survey, perhaps unaware of qualitative surveys. It was a time when ALIA was adjusting to the impact of computer science, and I thought the psychology of reading was overlooked, to say nothing of the matter of literacy.

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PS: I've been waiting 25 years to write that.

PPS: I think the idea that Library and Information science research must include mandatory statistical surveys is flawed, as I'm sure Einstein didn't use any sort of survey to conclude  $E=mc^2$ .

## Should Councils charge for library loans - ALIA President Jan Richards asks?

Dear Editor

I'd just typed an email along these lines to President Jan Richards in response to an ALIAPubNews Broadcast that flicked past my eyes, and was encouraged by a colleague to submit my thoughts as a letter to *inCite*.

Our reasons for NOT charging for loans in our public (and other) libraries are vested in the notions of public good, public education and democratic freedom – to name a few. They are quite high minded and in these days of economic rationalism – yes it is still with us – don't wash with many politicians. And I am beginning to wonder if there is a shift in community appreciation of our public libraries and the fact that access to their collections of

all types remains free? I wonder if the economic issue is taking over? The reason that I mention this latter aspect is because in my class of 40+ internal students yesterday, I asked the class if economic reasons were the main reasons that they considered working? 100% said: yes. Not one (and I asked a supplementary question) would admit that they might work because (a) they liked it; or (b) they felt they might be making a contribution to society. I then asked if any had belonged to community groups? One hand went up!

Our reasons for free public access remain very relevant. They are 'feel good' and if readers have been keeping up with some of the stuff coming out of the US recently, some of their public libraries are being threatened with closure to save money. One thing I loved about the Americans (I've lived there) was their respect for education and intellectual stimulation and public good. After all, they don't have the equivalent of Crown copyright: government information is supposed to be freely available for the public good.

On a broader scale, we are having huge and underlying issues in WA, i.e. little to no recognition of the worthiness of the heritage of our state: built, recorded, and biodiverse, by politicians of any persuasion, and the time has come to work on this and seriously. How? I am still thinking about it, but there is a groundswell among archivists, historians, my greenie mates, and not too many librarians that I can see. Where are the librarians? Good question. I'm looking and can find little active and demonstrated interest in such matters.

Where does ALIA fit? Well we do the surveys and find out that not so recently now, people have appreciated their public library; we get the gate counts from ABS and see the number of visitors. But what impact is this having on the politicians? Not much it seems? I liked the idea of the Library Ambassadors, but how much are we using this and similar concepts?

The draft *National Framework for Australian Public Libraries* link was on the same ALIAPubNews e-bulletin. The proposed vision is:

Australia's public libraries, united behind common goals and ambitions, sharing best practice, contributing to strong communities, valued by people and government, continuing to provide universal free access to information, knowledge and ideas, and confirming the importance of their role for future generations (p. 4).

This might be OUR vision, but is it the one of all politicians? It should be. NSLA is doing some interesting stuff – but how much of this does the great unwashed Australian public know about? We know about it, but do they? And on a related issue, Bidy Fisher is the new CILIP President and is challenging the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown to have a teacher librarian in every school. Go Bidy! This sounds catchy, but it is things like this, with professional and political support behind them, that might just work. And might just bring the profession back onto the radar screen?

For what it is worth and typed in great haste as I really should be getting on with something else.

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Deadline for letters is available on the website and they should be no longer than 250 words. Please include your name and postal address as anonymous correspondence will not be reproduced.