

# Teachers Union Health Future of Teaching Bursary 2021

## Collegial connections and the importance of literacy

**Hannah Brennan-Silwood is a committed IEU member, secondary English teacher and an aspiring Teacher Librarian, who creates dynamic learning opportunities for her students and instils in them a love of literature.**

In 2021, Hannah was the recipient of the annual Teacher's Union Health (TUH) Future of Teaching Bursary, which gives an IEU-QNT and TUH member the opportunity to apply for a \$5000 grant.

Hannah said she was shocked when she opened an email to learn she had been awarded the TUH Bursary.

"It was wonderful to be able to share the exciting news with my incredibly supportive colleagues, who encouraged me to apply," Hannah said.

The grant was established in 2020 to recognise and support educators who deliver innovative solutions that can benefit their careers and communities in the world of learning.

The funds may be spent on a single professional development course, a set of professional learning activities or to fund research into innovative learning solutions.

Hannah is using the Bursary funds to undertake further study in a Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship), a specialised degree which she is currently studying through Charles Sturt University, while balancing full-time work as an English teacher at St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School in Corinda.

### **Strengthening students' love of literacy**

"A few years ago, I first discovered the role of teacher librarian," Hannah said.

"Looking to strengthen my own skillset in literacy beyond that of my knowledge as an English teacher, I began to research further into the role.

"I remember being so excited at how the role was so multi-dimensional and focused on championing the importance of literacy and encouraging collaboration among teacher practitioners to strengthen teaching and learning.

"I was inspired by this and thought that it would be wonderful to transition into a role that focused on creating dynamic learning opportunities while also promoting learners to adopt a love of literature."

Hannah said it has been interesting to engage in an area of study that complements her role as an English teacher.

"I am thoroughly enjoying the challenge of considering different perspectives and exploring how, as integral members of educational communities, teacher librarians serve to act as agents of innovation and advocates of agency.

"They equip practitioners with the knowledge base to underpin their teaching with literacy and research programs," Hannah said.

"I love how engaging with further study, and being exposed to new perspectives and ideas, encourage us

to pause and consider new ways of presenting ideas or concepts within our pedagogy.

"Undertaking further study to be a teacher librarian, particularly in research acquisition and curriculum, has helped me to reflect on how I utilise texts to support student learning.

"Engaging with different platforms to identify and explore various texts has allowed me to discover some remarkable new platforms and programs that I have been able to implement in my curriculum planning.

"Each week I'm learning something new and finding connections I can embed within my classroom practice."

### **Library staff are integral**

Hannah said qualified teacher librarians and library staff are critical to the effective functioning of school communities.

"For many, the library is a space of discovery and nurture – a sanctuary where learners and teachers can seek solace to explore new texts, connect with peers or look to satisfy their curiosity by asking questions and searching for answers – yet the impact of teacher librarians serves to influence far beyond these four walls," she said.

"Their expertise in ensuring learning is accessible, relevant and engaging not only serves to benefit learners but teachers, as they seek to foster dynamic learning opportunities for all.

"Teacher librarians are integral to educational communities as their knowledge of research helps educators to underpin their curriculum with contemporary, appropriate, and engaging sources to peak interest, challenge perspectives and foster curiosity.

"Teacher librarians help educational communities manoeuvre in the digital landscape and work with traditional text types.

"As we shift into adopting new methods of sourcing texts, this knowledge is important to ensure teachers are including a diverse range of resources and recognising the value they each hold."

### **Connecting with early career teachers**

In her bursary application, Hannah described her plan to develop a strategy-based literacy blog to assist early career teachers embed a greater focus on critical literacy across all subjects.

"By starting a blog and establishing an online network for early career teachers to engage with, I can introduce a broad 'online' community where, despite distance, we can connect, reflect and discuss our triumphs and challenges in the classroom," Hannah said.

"Literacy is a cornerstone in education and, as such, I would love to create a resource that can help early career teachers to seek advice, strategies, and suggestions for how, within their own subject area, they can embed this priority in everyday activities.

"My hope is to create an online interactive space where early career teachers can connect with other like-minded professionals, contributing their own suggestions, perspectives and experiences as we all look to work together to champion literacy in schools.

"Early in my career, I found that collaboration with other teachers offered the opportunity for us to see how, despite teaching various subjects, we could embed similar activities to focus on literacy.

"The discussions proved to be invaluable, especially when it came to establishing continuity for students requiring additional support across the curriculum.

"Specific strategies could be applied across all subjects and most activities (as opposed to literacy simply being a focus in the English space).

"It was here that I began to see the power of connection within communities which is exactly what I hope to achieve through creating a literacy blog," she said.

### **Innovation essential to education**

Hannah believes it is important for teachers to consider innovative solutions to tackle problems faced in modern education contexts.



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"If we consider the impact that technology has had on our global world, it would be remiss of us not to look to the future as to how innovative approaches will help to further change the education landscape," she said.

"We must consider how we can adopt solutions that will serve to strengthen our knowledge base as teachers and encourage us to create purposeful learning opportunities to spark student interest and capture their curiosity."

Hannah understands the power of collegial connection and the importance of being an IEU member, and believes it makes a real difference to the teaching profession.

"Union membership offers integral support and advocacy, especially in providing professional and industrial strength.

"As an early career teacher, it is incredibly comforting to know that I can connect with my union anytime to seek advice and access up-to-date information that may impact me."

Hannah said she is glad to have taken a risk by submitting her TUH Bursary application last year and encourages other IEU members who are TUH members to apply for future bursaries.

"Like I say to my students: 'you'll never know if you never try,'" Hannah said.

"The process of reflecting on both my practice and passion for education in the application, in addition my experiences so far in undertaking my further study, has affirmed my ambition to be the best educator I can be and to make a positive difference in the lives of young people."