

Fostering interaction and growth: The SLAV mentor program

By Joy Whiteside

Snapshot

Joy Whiteside, the coordinator of the SLAV Mentor / Mentee Program describes the wonderful progress of this important initiative outlining the benefits of the program to all involved.

The SLAV Mentor / Mentee Program has been running successfully for a number of years and

SLAV Mentor / Mentee Program

the number of partnerships has been growing steadily. The aim of the program is to match participants so that the knowledge, skill and experience of members of the association is shared with those seeking support, collegiality and advice. SLAV members who would like to be involved in the program complete an online form expressing an interest in being partnered with a mentor or mentee. The program coordinator works with applicants to set up partnerships, and make introductions.

Participants seek mentoring for a number of reasons. These include:

- Being new to a role and seeking expertise and support
- Seeking support with a specific aspect of their role
- Looking to develop a support partnership for a sole practitioner
- Looking for assistance with a specific goal or direction

Participation in the program varies from a couple of meetings, to ongoing meetings depending on the availability, skills or needs of participants. Meetings can vary from phone calls, online meetings using a conferencing program such as Zoom, Teams or Webex, email, a catch-up over coffee, or a school visit. Participants set their own parameters to meet the needs and availability of the mentor / mentee partnership.



From time to time feedback is sought from program participants. This feedback demonstrates the benefits and diversity of the program. While some partnerships are ongoing, some partnerships meet a specific need for a mentee. An example of this was shared by one less-experienced mentee who recognised the benefit of having a mentor to assist with the Premiers' Reading Challenge program. She stated that 'I have only been in the library two years. It was great having a mentor to talk me through the Premier's reading challenge.' Another participant stated that her mentor 'had been very helpful as a guide and sounding board for ideas as she had been out of the library for a number of years and so much has changed'.

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One of the program mentors stated that she enjoyed hearing about the success of her mentee in obtaining a permanent position in a school library. Another participant who was new to her role and working as the only library practitioner in her school, stated that 'having a mentor was beneficial for asking questions rather than waiting for branch meetings where there is a group environment'. The needs of mentees vary greatly, and the flexibility of the program is one of its strengths. Having the availability of a mentor is enabling and empowering.

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Feedback from one of the program mentors Daniel Micallef, has been affirming of the benefits of the experience for a

mentor. Daniel stated:

'I've found being a mentor to be a great experience. Whilst it's nice to be able to provide support and advice to others, I've also found that it helps me to examine my own work practices when my mentee asks for advice. It makes you look at what you're doing with fresh eyes and consider ways you can improve things.'

As additional feedback Daniel summed up the benefits of being a mentor perfectly stating:

'I have also found that the support and advice was not just going one way. I turned to my mentee at times when I needed a hand. I think it's good to have professional connections outside of your own school, who you can turn to for advice, regardless of how experienced you may or may not be.'

From time to time partnerships do not work out for the mentor or mentee. When this happens, we attempt to assist with establishing a new partnership. Sometimes the mentee is feeling more established and confident and no longer requires a mentor. This becomes an opportunity for the mentor to work with another SLAV member requesting assistance. As the current program coordinator, I recall how much I benefitted from mentoring many years ago and I value this program greatly. I would like to thank all program participants, particularly mentors, who give so generously of their time, skills and expertise.

If you would like to be part of the SLAV Mentor / Mentee program, please complete the registration form on the SLAV website located under the opportunities tab. As per your request, you will be contacted with the details of a mentor or mentee. At times there may not be mentors available and there may be a delay in establishing a partnership.

Joy Whiteside is a Teacher Librarian and the SLAV Mentor /Mentee program coordinator. She is also a member of SLAV State Council and a convenor for the Geelong Branch of the association.