



Cheers to Katie

Cheers to Katie Blake who, in 'Undercurrents' (*InCite*, 24 June) focused on the future of our traditional identity — as librarians, rather than as 'information managers'.

The use of the word 'librarians' to describe us has been an issue for a long time: I remember writing a letter about it to the *Australian Library Journal (ALJ)* almost a decade ago; overseas, the distinction in identity between librarians and 'information scientists' has been an issue for decades longer. I must confess that I'd always thought that Katie was an information manager who probably preferred machines to people. I can't tell you how pleased I am that she is a librarian, like me and all the others who have been working for a long time to give librarianship an updated, modern, but human face.

But now I am confused. Fifteen years ago I was taught that librarians acquired and organised documents, while information scientists manipulated content, getting useful information to a client regardless of the method of its acquisition and usually after evaluation and review by themselves ie information scientists were 'smart' librarians, subject specialists with a service orientation. Katie, on the other hand, suggests this evaluative role for the librarian, who gets information 'to the right person at the right time', and introduces a third category, the information manager, who measures performance in terms of the number of bytes delivered.

There is a fascinating paradox here. In the long-established librarian/information scientist distinction, the information scientists claim that they evaluate content, while librarians' work can be measured in terms of items ie documents. Now the pendulum has swung the other way, with the librarian/information manager distinction suggesting that librarians evaluate content, while information manager's work can be measured in terms of items ie bytes. Which group really does have an evaluative role, and is it really necessary, anyway for specialist groups to distinguish themselves — by rather dubious reasoning — from librarians?

Perhaps the answer lies in the service role which all three groups play. Special librarians (information scientists) best serve their clientele with specific, targeted information. Other librarians offer their clientele a more general information service which is of necessity broadly based, being designed to service needs not easily specified beforehand. Information managers manage information systems for a client, usually one company, often requiring detailed knowledge of a particular computer and specified software. They usually deal, as Katie points out, only with information generated within the company (but there is no reason why they might not have subsystems which go beyond this). In any given situation, they might be considered as 'company specific, hardware specific' librarians. They serve by providing appropriate information in an appropriate format. But underlying this analysis are the elements

which unite us all in our profession. the theory and practice of information organisation and retrieval, management skills and service orientation. None of the three groups will be successful unless they acquire, organise and manage information in such a way as to meet clients' needs.

This is not a trivial issue; it 'floats' about amongst us continually. Two weeks ago, in a conversation with a colleague who teaches information management in a computing department, I discovered that he was surprised and pleased to find that we had a lot in common. He suggested that his students would find my brand of information retrieval not only appropriate but 'fun'. I know that his lack of knowledge is typical of attitudes on other campuses across Australia. Business and computing faculties sometimes make it obvious that they have little respect for us. This doesn't mean that librarianship is not worthwhile in a computerised world; it means that librarians need to point out commonalities, while encouraging specialist groups to adopt a service-oriented approach. We probably have the best overview and we are certainly very much in sympathy with what they are trying to achieve. Katie deserves congratulations for pinpointing this issue in such a clear and entertaining way.

Meanwhile, I intend to crawl away and hide, in order to nurse my next identity crisis. This week, while reading Gabriela Stephenson's interesting article 'Bridging the gap' in *ALJ* (May, 1988 issue), I discovered that by training I am a 'scientist — information specialist'. I usually call myself a library-educator-who-also-teaches-information-management.

Kate Beattie

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Funding in Utopia

Richard C. Yeates' letter entitled 'Who needs Friends' (*InCite*, 24 June) has motivated me to write to you. I am a member of a 'Friends of the Library' Group at the community school which my two boys attend. I am bewildered at the content of the letter particularly when coming from the professional body which we 'Friends' seek to assist.

Personally, several of the statements in the letter are quite untrue. I have a Diploma in Education with majors in librarianship sub-

jects. For several years I struggled but finally passed your association's examination so I am now an Associate of the LAA. Since my marriage, having spent 15 years in paid employment, (eight years as a teacher-librarian) I have chosen to assist the local school in a voluntary capacity in several different areas and 'Friends of the Library' is one such area. So although not at present employed in librarianship I still receive various professional literature, hence my reading of the latest edition of *InCite*.

Mr Yeates' assertion about 'Friends' being voluntary labour for book covering and shelving while in part true, disregards the much more valuable role of 'Friends' who assist with author visits, Book Week activities and holiday programs. Just now our 'Friends' Group is helping the library staff set-up a computer based recording system, and what better way is there to become familiar with the functioning of a library than to be involved in its various activities.

I see 'Friends of the Library' are going to have a useful role to play in the library service until in Utopia there is sufficient funding provided for adequate staffing to cope with the increasingly growing library service to our communities.

Chris Parker.

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