

Technological change in school libraries

Margaret Strickland, Woodlands CEGGS, SA, reviews some exciting prospects

It is difficult for me to imagine a school without its own library. The school library is so tied up with my concerns that students learn to manage the information explosion; that children develop skills in resource-based learning; that learning becomes less concerned with memorising facts and more concerned with developing processes to use information to cope with change. These concerns could be broadly grouped under the heading of 'information literacy'. It is an area that crosses traditional curriculum boundaries and requires all teachers—even reluctant Maths teachers!—to consider the priorities for student learning in 1994 and beyond.

The teacher provides the link between traditional curriculum areas and resource-based learning. The word 'resource' is well chosen because school libraries have much less dependence on books now: their resources include audio, video, computer software, CD-ROM online databases e.g. Nexus, which gives access to the Internet, the AAP news service and specialist school educational services. The school library may have computers, printers, television, video recorders, CD and cassette players, CD-ROM drives.

To keep up with the latest resources one useful, free publication is *Upgrade/Education for the Interactive World*, which promotes a range of educational software including CD-ROMS. Most of the resources in this publication have been produced overseas, but the Board of Studies in NSW is providing information about Australian software. Multimedia CD-ROMS, particularly encyclopaedias, which combine text, video, photographs and sound to stimulate the senses, are excellent with young children.

CD-ROM technology has revolutionised the storage, management and manipulation of information in schools. It is now possible to establish a sophisticated CD-ROM network throughout a school with fibre optic cabling. Students can access a CD-ROM information bank through terminals in the library or in their classroom or through their laptop computers. Any number of students can access the same information at the same time. By using modems, students will also be able to access the CD-ROM information bank from home or any other remote location. The release of interactive compact disc players will allow CD-ROM based multimedia

packages to be connected to a television set or hi-fi system at school or in the home.

Few school libraries have achieved this state-of-the-art. 'A select survey of school library resource centres in Australia' (September, 1992), published as a part of the research process for 'Learning for the future' (1993) found that 14% of schools had CD-ROM facilities and 10% of schools had access to online information services. Some teacher-librarians had much more modest demands—a telephone was on the top of their wish list! Obviously, school libraries are at varied points along the road to technological sophistication. Only 38% of schools had an automated library system for cataloguing, circulation and searching. There is a great variety of software specifically marketed to schools for these systems. Public access terminals provide fast, friendly access to resources through keyword and Boolean searching.

The Schools Cataloguing and Information Service (SCIS) is a National cataloguing service specifically set up for schools. It is possible to download data from SCIS onto the school library's own computer system, saving repetitious cataloguing. SCIS is one of the great achievements of school libraries in Australia.

One of our great concerns should be about equity of access to information. The disadvantage of disadvantaged schools increases as the information technology becomes more sophisticated and more expensive. The Ozline database from the Australian National Library is an example of a resource which would be of great use to secondary schools, yet few schools subscribe because of the costs involved. The poor level of technical and clerical staffing in many school libraries is also of concern. Teacher-librarians spend endless hours on non-professional tasks, depriving our students of professional guidance in the use of these new technologies.

I believe that school library staff are generally coping well with the changes in technology and on a recent visit to the School of the Future in Adelaide I was heartened to hear the manager confirm this belief. He commented that, while many teachers were still wary of the upheavals brought about in schools by technology, teacher-librarians welcomed the changes and were keen to move ahead. ■

School libraries eager for the green light

Pru Mitchell, La Salle College (School Libraries Section, WA Group) has news of online developments

Schools have got plenty of mileage out of the two major online information services developed for their use several years ago, and are now eagerly awaiting developments promised by both SCIS and NEXUS.

The SCIS (Schools Cataloguing Information Service) database, which fuels the catalogues of Australia's school libraries, has been available online for bibliographic and some curriculum information since 1987. Users are extremely grateful for the data available, but the slow 1200 baud journey and the lack of signposts when searching became frustrating. New accessories now available include a 3rd edition of the SCIS Subject

Headings list (available from DW Thorpe), and a disk version of the subject headings plus cross references (\$300 from Curriculum Corporation). The complete SCIS database on CD-ROM is under discussion and so, hopefully, is the luxury of downloading bibliographic records.

In NEXUS (a South Australian electronic service) schools throughout Australia have access to a wealth of electronic mail, bulletin board and database services. The AAP newswire service, SAGE and guidelines Periodical Indexes, and Australian Bureau of Statistics formation are some of its major features. Schools find the running costs of NEXUS very attractive,

and because it is custom-made for them, NEXUS is an ideal vehicle in which to teach students and teachers to drive online information services. Students are travelling around Australia learning from each other through e-mail based curriculum projects such as Austour, and now that NEXUS gives schools a pathway to the Internet e-mail service, our students can see the world.

Having travelled this far, schools libraries and their users are eager to get on the highway, preferably through a familiar gateway. NEXUS offers some hope that schools will proceed soon to full Internet access, but at this stage we wait for the light to go green. ■