

# Partners in the educational enterprise

Beth McLaren, Sydney Institute of Technology

As the choreographer, our job will be to ensure seamless access. However the choice of different formats for different resources assumes a clientele with a level of knowledge to cope with them. By knowledge I mean the information literacy skills — not simply the computer competency in handling electronic formats. To follow this line of thought one can then ponder how our clientele will gain these skills.' Helen Mandl's comment on the Information Online and Ondisc Conference 1997, featured on the front cover of the February issue of the *Australian Library Journal*, echoed ideas first raised by staff from the Sydney Institute of Technology library at the end of 1995.

The Sydney Institute of Technology library is made up of six campus libraries ranging in size from Eora (1.2 library staff) to Ultimo (48.4 library staff). At the end of each year the institute library holds an annual conference at which we have the opportunity to consider our future directions. The keynote speaker in 1995 was Mike Eisenberg, professor, School of Information Studies and Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology, Syracuse University. Mike reminded us that 'librarians are uniquely situated to collaborate with faculty to implement the information literacy agenda; that they live the information problem solving process ... have an overview of the courses, and already work closely with many faculty and students.'

A number of other factors indicated that the time was ripe to make a strategic shift in our role moving away from being the 'handmaidens' of the teaching and learning process to becoming partners with teachers in the educational enterprise.

An important contributor to this opportunity was the identification by the Meyer Committee of key competencies required by all workers. The acceptance of these competencies has impacted on TAFE curriculum. The learning outcomes of new courses now often include two competencies related directly to the use of information. These are: collecting, analysing and organising ideas and information; and communicating ideas and information

Students can, and will, be taught information skills in the classroom. However librarians at the Sydney Institute of Technology now promote themselves as

specialists in information management with expertise which can directly contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes related to the use of information. The information resources, both print and electronic, available in the Institute's libraries provide a rich environment in which students can develop sophisticated skills in information use.

Increasing demand for training provided at the times and locations convenient to students and the workplace, as well as a more market oriented approach by vocational education and training providers, has led to an increasing number of flexibly delivered courses. This trend is likely to continue. Success in such courses will be more likely if students have developed independent learning skills including information skills. Again library staff see this as an opportunity for them to contribute to the development of student skills.

We were further encouraged in our approach by the publication, at the end of 1995, of national guidelines for TAFE libraries. Titled *Focus on learning*, these were developed as a national project and clearly indicated a stronger educational role for libraries. For example the guidelines state that a key role for TAFE libraries is to actively encourage, guide and empower students and staff to acquire lifelong learning skills through the provision of information literacy and learning skills programs

*Information literacy: not another name for reader education*, the title of Janet Burstall's session at the ALIA TAFE National conference (25–26 August), aptly illustrates that the Sydney Institute of Technology Library's approach to teaching information literacy is an important break from the programs offered by the library in the past. We do not view information literacy as simply another form of computer literacy. Computer literacy is becoming increasingly important in an age of electronic information but so too are the conceptual skills required to locate, select, organise and present information. Library staff are working to build partnerships with teachers which will result in opportunities for students to develop information skills rather than reacting to teacher requests for library education tours or workshops.

There are two principles that have underpinned the Institute's information

literacy program. The first is that students learn skills best when they are taught in a meaningful context: a demonstration of the library catalogue at the beginning of a course is less effective than showing students how to use the catalogue to find information for a specific assignment.

The second principle is that information skills can be taught as a process. The model we have adopted is based on that taught in New South Wales government schools. Its six steps are: Defining, Locating, Selecting, Processing, Presenting and Evaluating. We have identified that our more traditional reader education sessions were targeted at the locating step of this process with little emphasis on the other five steps.

Our new approach emphasises the importance of all steps but gives particular emphasis to the first step, defining the task. Research in schools by Ross Todd from the University of Technology, Sydney has suggested that although this is often the most neglected step it is the step most likely to assist student success.

We have run staff development seminars in curriculum analysis to give library staff an understanding of educational issues so that they are able to promote opportunities to teach information skills. At these seminars library staff are given skills in identifying which sections of curriculum documents are relevant to the library program both in terms of collection development and the need for students to have opportunities to develop information literacy skills. Understanding curriculum documents gives librarians a common language with teachers and is crucial to developing a successful partnership in which the expertise of both professionals is valued.

Sydney Institute of Technology competes with private providers of vocational education and training for funds and students. Our library is one of a number of factors which we believe gives Sydney Institute of Technology an edge in the more competitive environment. Many other providers have neither the collection of learning resources to support the curriculum, nor the professional staff with understanding and knowledge of the information needs of students which are currently available in every TAFE library. Our value-added program designed to achieve educational outcomes associated with the use of information strengthens this edge. ■