

Library education and the year 2001

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Library education in this country must in one sense depend on and in another prepare for the future of libraries and of librarianship in this country. That future may be a little obscured at the moment by the current economic recession and the bleak short-term outlook. But it is essential we take a long-term view and think of the future of our libraries in terms of what they will be like in twenty to twenty-five years and pattern our library education on those expectations. That future will naturally be dependent on how society changes, and that change it will in the next quarter-century as it has in the last twenty-five years is inevitable. If we think back to New Zealand society in 1950 and to libraries in 1950 we can see many changes; we must be prepared for just as many by the year 2001.

New Zealand is today a more diversified, a more sophisticated and a culturally richer society than it was in 1950; it is perhaps marginally less homogeneous, but not when compared to other western societies. On the other hand racial tension, overt or embryonic, has grown to a major social concern. Our growth is now less than it was, but as population projections are revised downwards after successive censuses the proportions in urban areas, particularly the major ones, keep growing. Education has developed strongly in the past quarter-century, but now seems half-poised for a future of new directions. Educational opportunity has widened considerably in the tertiary and continuing education fields, and will clearly continue to do so.

The implications of this for libraries are all-important. The sorts of development in libraries that we may expect to see are of two principal kinds. The first is the technological; however unpromising its future may seem in the current economic climate, the use of computer-assisted technology is going to become widespread in libraries both in their purely internal systems (e.g. circulation control, catalogue form) and in the development of information services for their users. We may be thankful we have been spared the first-generation computer experiments in libraries, so many of which were expensive failures

especially in North America. The current generation of developments however are clearly working (e.g. OCLC) and are on a scale which is large enough to make them economically viable. The scale of operation in New Zealand if we all—with our traditional sense of co-operation in librarianship—get in together should also be sufficient to make it practicable. Twenty-five years ago each library functioned, as it still does, as a totally separate unit; in the next 25 we will be developing a library network and it is for this that library education must, in part, be preparing.

The second kind of development is in the social and educational background in which libraries will be working. I believe we will see continued development and diversification in post-secondary education, both formal and informal; the coming of regional local government (I do not regard the present step back from the brink likely to halt the momentum built up over the past decade) will strongly develop public library services, allied with S A T I S or whatever develops from it; the place of libraries in schools will at last be recognised; the number and range of special libraries will grow. This growth and development in libraries will be rooted in the changes in New Zealand society which will continue. It is for these that education for librarianship must also prepare.

These two developments—the technological and the sociological—must form a vital part of the “core” of any graduate professional course of library education in New Zealand. I attach great importance to professional librarians’ having a basic understanding of the social and educational structure and process in this country and of the place of libraries in them. Not every university degree course, the accepted requirement for entry to professional courses here and overseas, will give this to its graduand. Together the two developments must form the foundation of library education in the future.

The present proposals for the future of library education in this country, on which Mr Alan Richardson drawing on his recent Canadian experience has written in this issue, are both a development from our past and a preparation for our future. However much we may look to overseas models, we must develop our own pattern for our own country. If in 1950 looking at the then state of the library school and of libraries I felt the school should stay where it is was it is not surprising; but 25 years have passed, and much has happened in that time, not least to the school itself which has become progressively more involved with the Certificate Course, and not least to the educational institutions in which education for librarianship may have a future home.

The fundamental weakness of the existing arrangements is that the school is divorced from an educational institution and enmeshed in the public service. From this it must be rescued. I believe the present proposals represent a workable solution and they have been supported by the NZLA Council. Mr Richardson has some reservations and doubts; this is not the place to answer him in any detail. There are,

however, two comments. First, the place of the NZLA Certificate. As a course of training for persons already working in libraries it is not, in my view, comparable to full-time library technician courses in North America. Recalling its roots, it is important to stress that it was seen from the beginning as a course of training in New Zealand conditions for librarians, not technicians; maybe it does not fit in with the preconceptions of the ALA statement (with all its verbiage) Mr Richardson quotes but it does fit New Zealand. Again, it is capable of change and development as time and circumstances alter.

The second comment is that in looking at the diploma course and the certificate course alongside each other, one major difference is the educational standard required for entry, and this runs through to the requirements for ANZLA. To do the graduate course you must have a degree: a tertiary, not a secondary qualification, and it is this general educational background and attainment that we must recognise as well as any formal qualification in librarianship. I am of course well aware that a growing number of certificate course students have degrees.

The advantages in the graduate course at the university will lie in the development of the course (and it is in development where a large part of the expected "improvement" will come) to produce librarians who are alive to and ready to meet the challenges of librarianship in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The course might well at some stage have to be extended in time beyond a year, as is increasingly the case in the accredited North American schools; but it is also a fundamental point of the proposals that a Master's course beyond the diploma will be developed. The opportunities for developing some real and continuing library research in this country will also be there, and this is another vital and overdue development. The 1969 working party gave both these future developments some prominence, and all the discussions and negotiations since have sought to secure these objectives. Development beyond what we have now and a library education attuned to the future of libraries and librarianship in New Zealand, not just the present, is the promise of the new order.