

Information literacy: The professional issue

Subjects addressed at the Third National Australian Conference

by Hannelore B. Rader

On December 8–9, 1997, the University of South Australia Library in association with the Australian Library and Information Literacy Taskforce sponsored the Third National Australian Conference on Information Literacy at the Canberra Institute of Technology in Canberra, Australia. The theme of the conference dealt with information literacy in the professions and featured keynote speakers who addressed information literacy in the context of various types of learning.

The key competency for lifelong learning

Mark Latham, federal shadow minister for education and youth affairs, addressed information literacy as the foundation of skills and knowledge required for lifelong learners in professions and industry. He stressed the importance of being information-wise for all citizens and quoted President Clinton's goal to help all citizens in the United States gain technological and information skills to become productive citizens in the 21st century.

Repairing the plane in flight

Philip Candy, deputy vice chancellor at the University of Ballarat, discussed developing information literacy in professional practice in detail. Candy's extensive education and training in adult education helped him to

place information literacy in the area of lifelong learning practice. His extensive research on self-directed learning and his work as principal investigator for a Higher Education Council project on *Developing Lifelong Learners Through Undergraduate Education* (1994), has influenced Australia and other countries in the debates on the purpose of higher education and its relationship to other areas of education and training. Candy used his expertise to elaborate on the importance of information literacy and the role of librarians in this major debate occurring in higher education.

Information literacy and the workplace

Christine Bruce, lecturer at the School of Information Science at Queensland University of Technology, talked about her research regarding information literacy in the workplace. She provided details about her doctoral research regarding educators' perceptions of student learning and information literacy. Bruce explained that information literacy is experienced in seven qualitatively different ways by people who rely on effective use of information to practice their chosen profession.

Technology convergence and information literacy

Barbara Lepani, executive director of the

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Australian Center for Innovation and International Competitiveness at the University of Sidney, discussed her research to assist individuals and organizations to develop learning strategies to meet the opportunities and challenges arising from social and technological change. Her experience and knowledge in the area of education, industry, and urban futures provided a challenging and creative contribution to the conference.

The conference also featured a panel session on Professional Associations and Industry with representatives from computing, nursing, adult and community education, and National Training for the Cultural Industries. Each representative elaborated on the need for information and technological skills in their particular profession and industry.

Another panel addressed information literacy and the professions from the international perspective. Speakers on the panel were:

- Hannelore B. Rader, who discussed information skills in terms of business and industry needs, professional needs, and accrediting mandates within the United States;
- Celia Walter from South Africa, who spoke about the difficult realities of education in South Africa after apartheid;
- Elizabeth Jones from New Zealand, who spoke about the need for better development of information skills in the country and the fact that the country's curriculum framework required eight essential skills including information skills; and

• Bonnie Cheuk from Singapore who discussed her research on information use in the workplace where she is studying members of the Internal Auditors profession in terms of their need for and use of information skills.

Two discussion sessions helped the 75 participants address information literacy training for library personnel and information literacy training for members of other professions.

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This successful conference was most enlightening in an area of information literacy not yet well explored—the professions. It was apparent that the issues facing librarians regarding information literacy are global and should be shared for future success.

Conference proceedings will be published in the near future and will be available from Library Publications, University of South Australia; fax: 08-8302-6756.

During the conference, a new publication was also introduced, Christine Bruce's *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy* (Adelaide, Australia: Auslib Press) 1997. ■

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