

LETTERS

The 'Kuring-gai' experiment

I was pleased to note in a recent issue of *InCite* (21 August 1982, p14) a review by Doreen Goodman of *School Libraries and Technology: A Sourcebook*, compiled by Dagmar Schmidmaier and Marianne Broadbent. However, the review shows evidence of a misconception of a number of articles and a misrepresentation of the authors' position in relation to major school library cataloguing projects which ought to be corrected.

Firstly, the review concludes that the 'Kuring-gai experiment' provides 'conclusive evidence of the effective use of microcomputers for information dissemination and library co-operation'. Lest I be inundated by librarians wanting to know when, where and how it must be said that the work being reviewed neither attempted to gather such evi-

dence nor provides a basis for reaching such a conclusion. In fact one reading specifically comments:

Library files are relatively large and almost all applications require sophisticated information retrieval software to access these files. In general, these criteria are beyond the immediate capabilities of microcomputers, however specialised functions can be implemented both at local and regional level . . . If any library system is too automated the school librarian must be confident that the computerised system will provide at least the same level of service as the previous system plus some additional benefits. (p40)

Caution is urged concerning unrealistic expectations for library applications of the *current* microcomputer figurations available in many schools.

The KWIC/KWOC programs referred to in the book were developed initially as teaching tools using the KCAE mini computer. Participants in the 'School libraries and information needs: a systems approach' courses found the KWIC/KWOC data entry, manipulation and format valuable in 'demys-

tifying' the technology. Some have chosen to use this form of index for local, district and regional purposes. The KWOC programs and sample output referred to in *School Libraries and Technology* now run on KCAE's Prime mini computer. However, we are aware that a number of librarians and programmers have adapted, or are in the process of adapting this KWOC format for various applications on microcomputers.

It is worth adding that the major purpose of the courses was to encourage people to think through what was appropriate to their circumstances and to take some responsibility for determining policies and procedures to meet those circumstances. In this sense the courses were oriented very much towards participants taking a 'systems approach' rather than advocacy of a particular system.

Secondly, it is difficult to comprehend the reviewer's comments that Robert Broadbent 'overlooks' the utility of the ASCIS/SAERIS tapes since the paragraph following the quoted in the review reads:

Adaptation of the valuable SAERIS and ASCIS files should be examined to enable their utilisation in a variety of ways for supporting the sharing of resources and information and network participation by schools and in the wider community. (p85)

This paper was presented on 23 April 1980. In it, Robert Broadbent laments the fact that the harnessing of computer and communications technology for schools did not place a high priority on the ability to record and manipulate location information.

Both SAERIS and ASCIS are, in 1982, undergoing a re-examination of their priorities in this area. ASCIS is now seeking to use the feature to which I referred in May 1980 and which is mentioned on p56 of *School Libraries and Technology*:

(SAERIS and ASCIS) . . . were not designed for the inclusion of location information — though features of the card request system could be enhanced to indicate users who had requested card sets for particular items.

Readers who have heard or read Broadbent, Broadbent or Schmidmaier on the above points would concur that we have consistently maintained that the SAERIS data base could and should be used in a variety of ways. Like your reviewer, we are pleased that this is now beginning to happen.

School Libraries and Technology: A Sourcebook was produced because we could not meet the demand for the courses referred to above, particularly when part of the team decided to move south early in 1981. We hope that librarians and library educators will use the material in the book to suit their own purposes. For our part the major focus has been and is to encourage school librarians to develop more confidence in their own abilities and perceptions, and to take more decision-making responsibility for the ways in which technology is used to meet the information needs of teachers and students.

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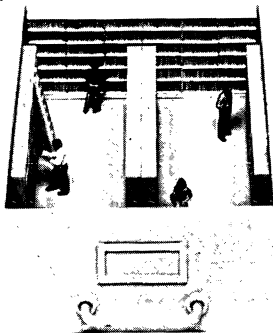
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