

REFLECTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL TRAINING: A POST-AURORAN VIEW

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I was fortunate to be selected to attend the 2nd Auroran Institute at Thredbo in February 1997. I was one of eleven New Zealand participants. Similar numbers of New Zealander's attended the first and the third institutes. The value of attending the Institute has been reinforced many times over the last three years and the content of the week long programme continues to be highly relevant to my work. This I feel is in stark contrast to my initial professional education.

I received my formal library education in 1988 at Victoria University of Wellington. At the time I felt that although some parts were of the curriculum were interesting other parts were definitely not. Library school was seen by many of us as being a rite of passage into the professional domain of librarianship. It is questionable whether the education we received prepared us adequately for the workforce. I remember thinking when I started my first professional position that I did not really know enough. Any doubts that I had about the durability of the qualification I obtained have been borne out over time as I have moved further from being a practicing librarian to being a library manager.

While I was at library school in 1988 the impact that information technology would have on our profession over the next decade had not been conceptualized by those that were lecturing us. Database application and automation were taught for 4 hours per week for the first term (about 12 weeks). The University library was not automated and the number of libraries in New Zealand at that time that were fully automated were low, so there was probably just cause at the time for the limited content. However as a manager in the 1990s/new century I became aware that the electronic knowledge and application of fresh graduates still continue to be relatively limited. Why this is I am not so sure ! But it obviously warrants further attention.

MANAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP SKILLS

In my role as a manager and a leader in a constantly changing environment, new challenges present themselves each day.

Formal library education never prepared me for the role that I must play as a counselor, dispute resolution facilitator, marketing and public relations wizard, expert negotiator, change agent, financial manager/magician, strategic planning clairvoyant, etc.

Most of my management skills have been obtained through on the job training, participation in Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) activities or through short course management programmes run by the New Zealand Institute of Management or AIMA.

Most of our new managers come from within the ranks and are often not properly prepared to take on their new responsibilities. The support of other managers and superiors are vital. Role models have had a profound influence on the development of my management knowledge, skills and experience. Learning from your own and others experience is crucial. The role of the poor performer has also played an influential part in the development of my skills. Learning from others mismanagement practices is a salutary experience that will hopefully ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated.

Mentoring unfortunately has not made an enormous impact in New Zealand library and information circles. The benefits of the mentoring- mentoree relationships formed at Aurora have convinced me that this route needs to be pursued more rigorously in New Zealand.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Having criticised the influence of formal library education on my career I thought it would be prudent to offer some thoughts on the range of skills, attributes and qualities of those graduating this century.

Firstly I would expect them to have an enhanced knowledge on the application of information technology within the library and information environment and preferably with an advanced knowledge of its usage in one area, e.g. information services, cataloguing etc.

With the increased focus on information literacy and information skills development I would also expect there to be an emphasis on the development of teaching competencies and oral presentation and/or communication skills.

Political skills are another area that need to be developed. Graduates need to know how to lobby effectively, market themselves and library services to key stakeholders. I am conscious that within my own library system that there are staff that don't understand the reporting structure within the library let alone how the library interacts with other sectors of the university. Failure to understand the basics does not permit staff to promote the value of, and the range of library services to key client groups and funders.

It is fair to assume that those studying at the postgraduate level are more likely to rise to the top of the profession as leaders and managers. It is therefore essential that there is more emphasis on the range of management skills that they are going to require to succeed. Even if they do not step into these roles in the first instance the seeds would have been planted and at least they will understand some of the fundamentals of management science . It will also help them to understand why we do what we do rather than being bewildered. These skills will of course be enhanced further within the workplace, participation within professional association activities and management training programmes.

Finally one must spare a thought for those that are not on a management track. Not everyone has aspirations or ambitions to climb the greasy pole of management or leadership. The profession still requires those who wish to specialise in a particular subject or service area. Unfortunately it seems that most continuing education opportunities offered for librarians and information managers tend to be focused on web applications or management topics. There needs to be more opportunities created for those that do not see these activities as their main focus.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibility for the continued development of our professionals must be shared amongst the library and information studies schools, professional associations, training consultants and us as the experienced professionals, managers and leaders of the profession. It will take the collective effort of all to ensure that the skills required for the future are developed today.

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