School Library Resource Centres and the New Information Technology: The International Perspective

by Tom Rich

One thing that anyone who deals with technology knows is that jargon is king. Thus, an explanation of mine. The short title of this paper is really – SLRC and the NIT. I am using the British term "school library, resource centre" (SLRC) for what we still have trouble naming – library, resource centre, learning centre, etc. Secondly, with a bit of discomfort, I am using the term "new information technology" (NIT) now currently in vogue. This encompasses the use of computers and television and the various combinations of the two with an emphasis on the computer aspect.

The very act of gathering and putting together information on this subject involved technology and illustrates some of the changes we all have faced in the past several years. Just a few years ago researching a subject involved hours in the library searching through reference sources and more hours copying the information by hand and using a typewriter. Gathering information for this article was different. My literature search of SLRC and LBA was conducted on-line using a computer. Those items I wanted that were not in the local library were acquired through inter-library loan accessed using an electronic message network. All of the actual writing was done at a word processor, my abominable spelling checked by a spell check program. The equipment involved to do all this can cost as little as $1500 in total.

Yet, for all this, I found little in the literature to help me understand the impact of the NIT on the SLRC. Certainly, there is a plethora of articles extolling the virtues of computers and the changes they may cause in the library resource centres (Ross, 1984; Craver, 1984; Roberts, 1982; Sawson, 1982; to name a few). However, little information exists on exactly what the impact is to date. In fact, one is left with the impression that, outside of one or two small areas, the average school library resource centre is largely untouched by the impact of computers and affected by television in no more dramatic fashion than by the introduction of films to education more than 40 years ago. Although the majority of articles we were able to find concerned Canada or the U.S., the evidence is that this situation prevails internationally as well as in North America.

My initial impressions regarding what is really happening were mostly based on information gathered at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) "International Conference on Education and the New Information Technologies" which took place in Paris in July 1984 and on the multitude of background papers prepared for that conference. Regrettably, although I will quote from several of them, I do not believe they have been publicly released. The lack of international information we found in the publications we had access to led us to gather additional information by surveying a number of countries. Finally, my thoughts were crystallized by a British publication I highly recommend, Information Technology and the School Library Resource Centre, published by the Council for Educational Technology (Gillman, 1983). A large part of the question regarding the impact of the NIT on the SLRC focuses on the fundamental question of the use of computers in education. Without a doubt, the primary impact of computers on education to date is in the emphasis on what has come to be called computer literacy. Although much has been written and said about the potential for the actual process of education being changed by the NIT, in no country has this come about in any widespread sense. Rather, the computer has become a subject of study and skills training. This in no way changes the role or process of education. It simply introduces a new subject of study.

It is useful to quickly review the international situation relating to the use of the NIT in the school. The CERI (1984) paper "The Introduction of the New Information Technologies in Education: Policy Trends and Developments in Member Countries" reviews the current status and trends for the future in the DECD countries. The area receiving the most emphasis has been the teaching about computers particularly as it relates to the skills needed for work. However, the amount and the specific approach (awareness, literacy, computer science, vocational approaches) vary considerably.

While the introduction of the NIT is well under way in most developed countries, the speed with which it is being done differs. In general, only the earliest stage of use has been reached although in many countries a sizeable investment in both time and money has been made (CERI, 1984). In their review of the situation, the CERI Secretary suggested, "Looking at the vast amount of problems waiting for solution at all the levels from policy formulation to classroom practices it is difficult to avoid the feeling that if more has indeed been done, much more is still needed to complete the task" (p. 23). They further suggest that much more educational experience and knowledge relating to the NIT is needed before appropriate decisions can be made.

No one country has an overall solution to the use of NIT in education. However, as reported in CERI's (1984) review of policy trends in this area, France and the United Kingdom would appear to be the most advanced by virtue of their unitary approaches. Both have attempted to coordinate the entire process of the introduction of computers to education with a national policy while still leaving room for local initiatives. Both programs also place heavy emphasis on providing equipment to schools, curriculum development and teacher training.

Where do the library resource centres stand in this process? For most countries this is extremely difficult to determine. Some of it relates to the difficulty in finding English language literature on the subject. But it would also appear to relate to a different role for SLRCs in some countries and a virtual absence of SLRCs...
In order to get a grasp on the specific impact of the NIT on SLRC the need for more data became obvious. It was hoped that in some of the regions where computers were in use, that some of the data which had been collected in previous surveys could be updated. Some of the data that had been collected was of a general nature and did not reflect the specific use of computers in the teaching-learning process. It was hoped that such data could be used to complement the information gathered in the current survey.

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In many other countries all resource centres are located in the classroom. In some cases these are supervised by the classroom teacher. In other cases there are special resource centres or public libraries to fill the gap. It is entirely possible for regional resource centres to set up at museums or exhibitions. However, this service; none mentioned libraries. In a few instances the school board library resource centres or public librarians were mentioned.

In many instances the school board library resource centres or public librarians were mentioned. As might be expected, the level of training of personnel reflected the existence, or lack of, a well-developed SLRC program. In most countries, responding, the SLRC personnel had teacher education plus some level of additional training in library technology, although there was no direct relationship to computer use. Some countries had already computer-based bibliographic databases in their library systems. In Ireland and South Australia, computers were used, to some extent, to access on-line databases. The network of schools, linking the schools to the central administration, is being used in at least some schools. Denmark and South Australia mentioned experimental uses of such systems.

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The need for new library resources and production of materials. In addition, involvement in previewing/reviewing print and AV materials was listed by South Australia, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Because of the small number of SLRCs with computers, the use of computers was obviously still developing. In South Australia, Denmark and Belgium the primary use appears to be for administrative purposes. However, in South Australia and Belgium local computer-based bibliographic databases are being developed while in the U.K. and Belgium computers are used, to some extent, to access on-line databases. In Ireland and South Australia, computers were used, to some extent, to access on-line databases. The network of schools, linking the schools to the central administration, is being used in at least some schools. Denmark and South Australia mentioned experimental uses of such systems.

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The answers were somewhat more varied when asked what additional training SLRC staff felt was needed. In South Australia, teachers were asked to access information. Ireland, South Australia, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Because of the small number of SLRCs with computers, the use of computers was obviously still developing. In South Australia, Denmark and Belgium the primary use appears to be for administrative purposes. However, in South Australia and Belgium local computer-based bibliographic databases are being developed while in the U.K. and Belgium computers are used, to some extent, to access on-line databases. In Ireland and South Australia, computers were used, to some extent, to access on-line databases. The network of schools, linking the schools to the central administration, is being used in at least some schools. Denmark and South Australia mentioned experimental uses of such systems.

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The use of NIT in education, the answers took two general forms. The U.K. and Germany's introduction of the new technologies is the use of NIT to education, the answers provided the most useful for a computer for the library. In countries where the school library resource centre, the extension of the work of those personnel. As outlined in the CERI (Gwyn, 1983) in a context of the classroom. This matters the SLRC are important in the future (p. 71).

Academically, the school library resource centre has the following role.

- It is the basic food of the collection, or the faster delivery of information overload and to know that "human beings must still be recognized and respected as the orchestrators and controllers of that information" (Jane Anne Hannigan, "School Media Standards", Library Trends, Summer 1982, 107, 1055-1059).

The development of new standards offers a new opportunity to examine the essential role that the school librarians and SLRC personnel play in providing a forum for a Canadian view. It is the basic food of the collection, or the faster delivery of important tangible sources of information for a forum for a Canadian view.

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