

'Information elite' of the future

THE IDEA OF Space Invader-type machines in libraries has certainly had an effect. (*Incite* no6, 17 April). Since that issue was published, our phones have been running hot, readers are writing letters, various newspapers covered the story, and now we hear that some municipal councils are showing an interest in the idea.

Judging from the responses we've received, both by telephone calls and letters, it appears that although some librarians would definitely welcome electronic games machines in their libraries, others are of the opinion that such machines are 'little toys with little or no educational value' and could not see them being installed in their library.

But those of you who believe that the library is a place for such machines – be heartened.

The *Los Angeles Business Review* (April 20, 1981) ran an interview with Jack Nilles, a computer scientist who directs the University

of Southern California's Interdisciplinary Program and Richard Byrne a communications expert who is acting dean of USC's Annenberg School of Communications.

Nilles and Byrne believe that world populations soon may be divided into the 'information elite' and the 'information ignorant'. Based on their access to information and their ability to use it, people may be considered 'information haves' or 'information have-nots'. The people most likely to become information 'haves' are those exposed to computer technology at early ages, the two experts say.

Nilles reports that anecdotal evidence suggests that children who use personal computers, for instance, become literate.

The information 'have-nots' will not include just people who can't afford access to information systems. Some may remain 'information ignorant' because of what Byrne

calls an attitudinal gap – the belief that all technology is bad.

Others stay 'information ignorant' he says, because they suffer from a learning gap. 'They don't learn as quickly as kids, and they have to "unlearn" some of their preconceived ideas about computer technology. Adults and kids tend to view computers in entirely different ways', Byrne says.

Adults worry about 'messing up', kids on the other hand regard a computer more like a jungle gym. Instead of saying 'What will I do wrong?' they ask 'What can I do next?'

Byrne and Nilles suggest some way to close the information gap. One way is to introduce entertaining and informational materials into schools, helping youngsters learn about computerised information in an enjoyable familiar format.

Another is to make computers more accessible through library and school programs.

VIEWPOINT

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE specifically for school libraries since your election?' was a question put to me recently by a member. My answer, which was, 'Nothing specifically', somewhat shocked her. In case other members also need shocking, it occurs to me that I should use this column to emphasise a philosophic point of view.

Proud as I am of my school library associations and conscious of a good deal of support from those who work in them, I strongly suggest that the type of library in which we work must not be the basis of our judgement of libraries or library personnel.

All libraries are sources of information and its dissemination. All library personnel have responsibility for assisting in the free flow of that information. No library can be self sufficient and must rely on other libraries (and types of library) for satisfaction of clients' needs.

In my statement of professional concerns prior to my election I spoke of the need for understanding relationships between libraries and my conviction that isolating libraries and library personnel is contrary to the spirit of the profession and to the benefit of the community. Those convictions still apply.

When I think of people who have served our profession well I am encouraged by the realisation that their interest and involvement have been on the broad spectrum. They have encouraged co-operation and communication by themselves participating in activities of the wider library community – even in those few cases where their whole working life has been spent in one type of library.

I am also aware of a number of members who, from time to time, vary their additional Section or Special Interest Group membership in the interests of gaining a better understanding of the Association and the profession generally. These people show, to me at least, that they are true professionals; their understanding of their professional colleagues must be enhanced; their capacity to serve clients must be improved.

The *type* of librarians we are is important only when 'type' refers to our professional competence, integrity and delivery of service.

Jim Dwyer LAA President

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