Learning and Working in Libraries

Han Roes
Deputy Librarian, Tilburg University, Library

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Deputy Librarian, Tilburg University, Library, The Netherlands

> *'Libraries must be part of the fabric of the new electronic infrastructure that is emerging. Access to the content, the services, and the organization of information is essential to teaching, learning, and inquiry at all levels of the educational systems, as well as to society at large' [1]*

INTRODUCTION

Since a couple of years, the Dutch SURF foundation organises each year a trip to the American Educause conference. These trips are organised in thematic groups which prepare the visit, decide which presentations they want to attend and report on, and write a general impression about developments in their subject in which the American situation in e-learning is compared with the Dutch situation. In 2001, I was asked to head a group of Dutch librarians. This article is the result of the work of this group. It starts out by summarising the Dutch situation with regard to libraries and their possible roles in education. Next these impressions are compared with those gathered at the 2001 Educause conference. The article finishes with some general advice for policy makers in higher education institutions.

THE ACTUAL SITUATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

The actual situation in the Netherlands, with regard to the possible contribution of libraries to educational innovation can be summarised in the following items:

- Although there are some exceptions, most libraries are still struggling with the question how their specific expertise can make a significant contribution to educational innovation.
- At the same time one can see the beginning of a rediscovery of the possibilities of libraries. This rediscovery focuses at the moment mainly and still on traditional library tasks such as: selection and quality control of information carriers; indexing and managing (digital) content for learning environments.
- The discussion about the possible role of libraries in educational innovation is very scattered and incidental, and taking place on all kinds of organisational levels. In many institutions one can see cooperation, but there is no clear structure yet. There are only a few institutions which have a clear link between educational strategy and library strategy. Also, there is no clear vision yet on the development of the library profession in relation to educational innovation.

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[1] This is a translated and slightly adapted version of chapter 7 of 'Educause 2001: an EDU Odyssey. ICT en hoger onderwijs in de Verenigde Staten' ('Educause 2001: an EDU Odyssey. Information Technology and Higher Education in the USA'), a report on the 2001 Educause Conference, published by SURF (2002).

- There is a growing awareness of the specific legal aspects of digital educational materials. Although (consortium) licenses are negotiated with content suppliers, educational materials produced by institutions themselves are also in need of adequate legal protection. With regard to this development there are thoughts about developing digital rights management systems. These systems should ensure that the use of educational materials is in accordance with the rules set by the owner and also manage the financial aspects of this use. Sometimes, digital rights managements systems are linked with content management systems. At the same time, institutions need to develop policies to regulate the use of scarce infrastructural resources. These policies lay down which use of facilities is permitted, but rules here can be in conflict with privacy regulations. Policy development in this area is only just starting and there is no general overview of the developments.

- Integration of different kinds of systems - library systems, managed learning environments, administrative systems - at the level of teaching staff and student, through portals will be a prominent item in the coming years. This development offers the opportunity for an integral approach of educational development and library strategy.

- In situations where students are confronted with access to a wealth of heterogeneous information resources, library instruction needs to evolve in the direction of more general training in information literacy, integrated with actual learning processes. Information literate students recognise when information is needed to solve a problem, can translate this need into an effective search strategy and the selection of adequate sources, are able to assess the results of their searches and can apply new information successfully to solve the problem at hand.

EXPERIENCES AT EDUCAUSE 2001

The general impression we gathered from Educause 2001 is that the characteristics described in the last paragraph are also highly typical of the American situation. The fact that for the first year the conference had a separate libraries track illustrates that the Americans are also rediscovering the merits of libraries in education and educational innovation. Prior to this conference, library subjects were covered in the more general information systems track. Another illustration of this early stage of rediscovery is the highly technical nature of most presentations in the libraries track. The idea that technology needs to be used to realise strategic and educational goals has not really registered yet.

An interesting example in this respect is the University of Richmond [2] where plans for a new library building are clearly embedded in the university strategy. The new library building should serve as the intellectual and social point of gravity on the campus. This view is in accordance with ideas on the development of open learning centres. At the same time, the University of Richmond has a vision of the future which is highly dominated by technology. In a video presented at the conference to illustrate this vision, an omnipotent gadget, called 'The Connector', was the dominant factor.

A clear trend is growing competition for libraries from commercial suppliers: vendors of e-books like Questia, companies that offer standard digital learning environments like WebCT that also start to offer content through licenses with content suppliers. This competition is now entering Europe via the UK en will reach undoubtedly the main land of Europe in 2002. The

challenge for libraries (and librarians) is to start thinking in terms of services and customers' needs rather than collections. Also, it should be noticed that libraries are not always involved in the development of content management systems, an example in case is Merlot [3], an openly accessible collection of digital learning materials. That libraries can be involved in developments like this and make a valuable contribution is shown by GEM, the Gateway to Educational Materials [4]. We could not find examples of digital rights management systems at the conference. Developments in this area seem yet to be restricted to the entertainment industry.

More inspiration for libraries can be found in a remark John Seely Brown made in his closing lecture [5]. Brown, until recently director of Xerox PARC, stresses the role of libraries in supporting learning communities. In his vision. libraries combine the best aspects from both virtual and real worlds: 'Libraries are the meeting place for teachers and students outside class.'

New developments can mainly be found in the areas of information literacy, digital portfolio's and e-books. Libraries in the United States are at the frontline in defining competencies in the area of information literacy and are trying to connect these competencies with formal accreditation processes. In this way, information literacy is becoming a compulsory part in curricula. At the same time, there is still a lot of discussion on the scope of the subject of information literacy and the question how to integrate information literacy training at the course level.

There were actual examples of digital portfolio's at the conference. These examples mainly point to the use of digital portfolio's as an assessment instrument for teachers and students to manage the development of competencies. Portfolio's are also used in job applications, this gives employers a much richer view of the competencies of a prospective employee. Little thought has been given yet to a more broader use of (parts of) digital portfolio's in the context of learning organisations. In this view, students can build on (parts of) portfolio's of their predecessors in the process of knowledge acquisition and construction. Digital portfolio's, in this view, are instruments for knowledge management within educational institutions. We should note though that this particular view of portfolio's, as well as the possible role for libraries in this respect, needs to be discussed yet.

E-books are expected to reach the European market in the spring of 2002. It should be stressed that this market is clearly not stable yet: there are hardly standards, which implies that e-book readers cannot yet be used for other educational materials like syllabus and reader; available content for e-books is still marginal and above all expensive, mostly because of reluctance on the part of publishers; students seem to prefer paper books; there are as of yet no examples of projects which demonstrate the added value of e-books in educational processes.

Much attention was being paid to portals which are intended to integrate many services at the level of teachers and students. These services include both desktops and handheld computers. This integration can only be successful if parts of the organisations of higher education institutions start working together instead of working independently, as is now often the case. This requires that the information needs of teachers and students become the starting point, instead of stressing the separate functions of individual systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on the educational strategy of institutions, libraries need to be challenged to contribute to the development of innovative learning environments, both physical and virtual. This implies that policy makers formulate ambitious goals with regard to the integration of processes, standards and library functions. Strategies should capitalise on the heavy investments in the past ten years in the area of digital libraries.
- Stimulate cooperation between various experts in and between institutions. Technological, administrative, educational and library expertise needs to be combined in order to achieve the ambitious goals mentioned above. This cooperation should not build on classic organisational structures, but should take the strategic goals with respect to educational innovation as its starting point. Only in this way will it be possible to create portals that integrate heterogeneous information systems.
- More attention needs to be given to policy and legal aspects of the use of managed learning environments, the allocation of scarce infrastructure, access to licensed commercial content, and the protection of educational materials developed by institutions themselves. A first step in this direction would be to bring together information and expertise in this area. The example of ACUPA, the Association of College and University Policy Administrators [6] can be of help here.

REFERENCES

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[2] James Rettig en Ellen J. Waite-Franzen, It's 2011: Do You Know Where Your Information Is?? - report (in Dutch) by Hans Roes, http://www.edusite.nl/edutrip2001/overig/9582; - report (in Dutch) by an anonymous author, http://www.edusite.nl/edutrip2001/overig/9609.

[3] Zie http://www.merlot.org/.

[4] Zie http://www.thegateway.org/.

[5] John Seely Brown, The Social Life of Information - Learning in the Digital Age, http://www.educause.edu/asp/doclib/abstract.asp?ID=EDU0145.

[6] Zie http://www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Committees/Assoc/ACUPA/.