Breaking the hearing barrier

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In the Centre, instruction and information charts are displayed on the walls above the computers so that the children and teachers can consult them when engaging in the communication activities. Large maps of Australia and other countries, showing the towns where our computer pals live, are displayed on classroom walls together with charts and drawings expressing the children’s impressions of how the system works. Print-outs of letters from our friends are on view for everyone to read.

At the beginning of the Project the Centre possessed one Amstrad and an Apple computer and printer, which we had used with a variety of software for two years. In April 1987 another Amstrad computer, a printer, a modem and interface, and an additional phone line into the Centre were donated to us. Since then additional purchases have made it possible to have an Amstrad stationed in each classroom and one devoted to the telecommunications link.

The computers have become learning centres in the classrooms - one activity among many others available. The computers are used for activities other than communication. However, this aspect plays a very big role in our curriculum.

We use an integrated approach in learning language. Speaking, listening, writing and reading are interwoven in our language activities. We believe that language learning takes place throughout every area of the curriculum. As we learn language we learn about language and we learn through language. Communicating through the computer fits into this approach very well.

This year other CHICs in South Australia have followed our example and are establishing telecommunication programmes. Two hearing impaired children who are mainstreamed in their home schools in our region and are visited by teachers of

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BRENDA McCONCHIE describes a new library system that’s winning hearts and minds

Rewards beginning to flow

ACT SCHOOLS AUTHORITY LIBRARY AUTOMATED USING ASCIS

by Brenda McConchie, Executive Officer Library and Information Services

The Library and Information Services Unit of the ACT Schools Authority has recently automated its catalogue and loans systems using the DOBIS/LIBIS software available through its membership of ASCIS (Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service). As with projects of a similar nature the automation process has been slow and tedious but the operational rewards are starting to be realised as many of the more labour intensive library tasks are integrated into the software routines and the benefits of an online database are realised.

For a number of years, the Unit has contributed information to the ASCIS database using the cataloguing module of the software. We then decided to take up the other modules to automate associated routine library tasks such as the loans system. Access and input to the database is via a multiple point 4800 BPS dedicated service to the ACT’s Austplex node in Melbourne where the software and telecommunications are managed with the direct involvement of both ASCIS and Authority staff.

The aim of using the ASCIS system to automate the library was to take advantage of being part of a national education information network. In this way the Authority could combine its commitment to providing information about school resources, the library’s collection, curriculum developments at the national and local level and other education related information on one system. Electronic mail is also part of the software package and any sites connected online to the system can communicate using this method if they wish.

By using the ASCIS database, (which is contributed to by the other government and non-government education systems) as its prime source of cataloguing information, Library and Information Services identified which items it had available for loan or wanted to become unique to the ACT component of the ASCIS database and added any other information wanted for users.

A particular aspect of value is the capacity of the software to allow the addition of extra information to the standard database record such as summaries of films and videos. This in turn enables users of the system such as teachers to search for an item by individual words or combinations of words and phrases using the ‘free text’ facility as well as the usual author or title or subject approach. The flexibility of access to locate an item caters for both beginners and more sophisticated information retrieval system users. It is anticipated that this facility will improve the capacity for classroom teachers to access information and resources that will enhance the quality of their performance.

A sophisticated statistics reporting package within the overall software will generate statistics on a range of levels. One aspect that will be of significance provides details of the items that have been loaned and their subject area. This in turn will provide valuable information for the selection and purchasing of resources for the library. Other statistics such as the number of loans and composition of the database will facilitate better decision making and accountability for the management of the Unit.

ASCIS ONLINE TO ALL SCHOOLS

Currently the total ASCIS system is available online in the Authority’s Library at the O’Connell Education Centre or by using the ASCIS dial-up service. As well as the online connection a microfiche has been provided to each of the Authority’s schools and various office sites. The microfiche contains all the information about the library’s collection as well as various curriculum related networks that are also part of the ASCIS service such as ACIN (Australian Curriculum Information Network) and NSCU (National Software Coordination Unit).

By the start of the 1989 school year all ACT government schools will have access to ASCIS and therefore the Library and Information Services system online through the Authority’s computer network using a gateway or host to host connection between this network and that of ACI in Melbourne. The use of the ASCIS package has enabled the Authority to create its own service . . .

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Rewards beginning to flow

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...tailored to its unique situation. When using the system it is possible for a teacher in the ACT to access a range of information including details about resources needed in the classroom and their availability in the library, as well as look up a description or review of a particular software package and its use as part of a curriculum project in another state. The synergy of the components of the ASCIS database also has enabled access to reviews of various educational resources, education policy documents and projects in progress throughout the country.

The ACT Schools Authority has been part of ASCIS since it was first mooted as a shared cataloguing and information system for schools some fourteen years ago. The choice of software and the need to have a low cost, efficient information service for Australian education has meant that small systems like the ACT can maximise the benefits of belonging to a large scale organisation and further develop the principle of ‘one-stop-shopping’ for education information for its schools.

Further information about ASCIS and the ACT Schools Authority’s use of its products and services can be obtained from: Executive Officer, Library and Information Services, ACT Schools Authority, PO Box 20 Civic Square, ACT 2608 or Executive Director, ASCIS, 325 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Vic 3124