ABSTRACT

Background. This paper will explore the strategies required to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the Library and Information Profession into the future. It discusses those concepts and ideas which scaffold, construct, sustain and future proof the information profession so that it remains an active and vibrant sector. It reflects on potential influences and factors which can contribute to professional citizenship and promote active membership of a professional community in students and new graduates.

Objectives. To identify effective strategies for educating future LIS professional.

Methods. Referencing recent research into passion-based learning, the concept of ‘learning to be’, ‘professional citizenship’, and ‘communities of practice’ this paper will examine the concepts of ‘attitude’ and ‘aptitude and passion based learning in relation to establishing positive outcomes for LIS students and new graduates.

Contributions. Applying concepts of passion based learning to the LIS sector provides a model for the provision of education in generic skills identified in the literature as essential for the sustainability of the LIS profession.

BACKGROUND

The last decades of the 20th century presented the Library and Information (LIS) sector internationally with a variety of challenges for the new century ahead. These challenges included rapid, and at times overwhelming, changes in technology; shifts in the knowledge and skill sets required for work; a convergence of the museum, archives and library sectors; and a broadening of the range of industries in which graduates were preparing to be employed. Underpinning these changes was a questioning of the future of libraries, the profession and LIS education, and how the education sector could best meet these challenges to sustain its future. The challenges, and the questions raised by
them about the future of profession and the institutions in which information professionals work, led to a raft of research and reports into what lay ahead for the sector and the skills and knowledge sets needed to take it further into the 21st century (ALIA, 2014; Davey, A., 2013; IFLA, 2014). A reframing of education emerged which emphasised not only knowledge and skills but the need to ‘balance aptitude with attitude’ (Bertot, Sarin, Percell, 2015, p.12). While the skills and knowledge required for work in the information professions is fluid and open to debate the issue of ‘attitude’ is something which provides an immense challenge for the delivery of education for the future. How do we graduate professionals with the combination both the skills and attitudes to sustain and enhance the profession?

**Educating for the Future**

The reports published at the start of the 21st century identified requisite future skills or ‘aptitudes’ and knowledge in areas such digital literacy (Davey, 2013, p.9), digital archiving and documentation (Kendrick, 2013), cultural and community competence, information and data management, (Bertot, Sarin, Percell, 2015), leadership, project management, information retrieval, metadata, technology languages, and information literacy (Howard et al., 2016, pp.7-8). These were believed to be amongst the critical knowledge and skill sets needed for the future. Aligned to these so called ‘hard skills’ was an increasing emphasis on ‘generic’ or ‘soft skills’, less easy to quantify and more difficult to capture in the LIS curriculum. The concept of generic, soft skills, or ‘attitudes’, was characterised in the 2015 investigation *Re-Envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues and Considerations* as the need to be ‘outgoing, innovative, creative, and adaptable’ (Bertot, Sarin, Percell, 2015, p.6), and in being a ‘change agent’ and ‘committed to public service’ (Bertot, Sarin, Percell, 2015 p.12). Howard et al (2016), claimed a sense of ethical and social responsibility and a commitment to lifelong learning as being essential (2016, pp7-8); Weatherburn and Harvey saw radical thought and action as critical for the information professional of the future (2016, p.257); while Reynolds, Carroll and Welch believed ‘learning to be’ and ‘professional citizenship’ to be fundamental to the formation of future LIS professionals (2016, p.2). These desirable, or even requisite, attitudes or attributes as defined in the research, and their place in the educational context, provide LIS educators with both the challenge and direction to provide education which develops these attitudes in order to define and sustain the profession into the future. This requires educators to re-think
the delivery of education and, in the words of Harvey and Weatherburn, ‘find and form the bold and the fearless’ future LIS professional (2016, p.251). The question is how will this be achieved and what shift in education is required to achieve this?

**Professional Citizenship**

Reynolds, Carroll and Welch (2016) believe that this can be achieved through building a culture of professional and organisational citizenship in which educators, practitioners, employing organisations and professional associations all have a responsibility to the future professional. Working collaboratively and with a common aim these key players aim to engage the student and new professional in an ongoing cycle of development and professional growth connectedness and investment in the future of the profession and to foster an attitude of professional citizenship. Professional citizenship is defined in this context as having ‘a sense of responsibility and loyalty to and guardianship of the profession, other professionals, local community and society’ (Reynolds, Carroll and Welch 2016 p. 9). Educators can foster this through the application of John Seeley Brown’s concept of passion-based learning (2005) to the LIS curriculum. Common concepts associated with passion-based learning include students engaging with ideas that are relevant and important, connection to real-world problems and projects, student-driven learning, and the need for enrichment and connection.

**Learning to be and Learning do**

Brown combines the theory of Jean Lave’s situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Etienne Wenger’s concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to link education with professional practice and enculturation (Reynolds, Carroll and Welch, 2016, p. 4). Through engagement with actual practice and practitioners students experience ‘learning to be’ as well as ‘learning to do’ (Brown & Adler, 2008). Brown’s idea of professional education aimed at ‘learning to be’ in conjunction with ‘learning to do’ offers a way forward for LIS education, both in the academy and as part of lifelong learning for practitioners, as it contributes to the development of the attitudes required to sustain the profession. The responsibility of academics and academic programs to inspire future professionals and to aid in the ‘learning to be’ (as well as teaching how ‘to do’) needs continue with new practitioners by linking closely to their experiences through a critical partnership formed between the educators, researchers, practitioners, professional association and the workplace at all stages of the education...
process, in and beyond the academy. A conceptual model of this relationship in the ‘learning to be’ of new professional is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. A conceptual model of ‘Learning to Be’](image)

Supporting and developing the emergent professional should be viewed holistically, with academics, employers and the profession working collaboratively with research responding to the needs of the profession and informing practice. Educators can contribute by modelling in the academy communities of practice and facilitating opportunities for students to participate in practitioner-based communities of practice and engage with practitioners. Bringing practitioners into the classroom and lecture theatre, involving students in research, encouraging activities and assessments which promote engagement with the profession or encourage professional participation are all strategies to facilitate the ongoing development of ‘learning to be’. Professional associations encourage students and new professionals through opportunities to participate and contribute to the ongoing activities and agendas of the association. Examples such as the Australian Library and Information Association’s (ALIA) New Librarians’ Symposiums (NLS), led and organised by students and new graduates and the ALIA Students and New Graduates Group (SNGG) are excellent examples of how
associations can contribute to the ongoing development and engagement of students and new professionals.

Employers also need to play their part in supporting and accommodating professional engagement by identifying and facilitating opportunities for new professionals to become part of the workplace, encouraging and rewarding ongoing participation in such opportunities and facilitating membership of the professional association and involvement with it.

Research can be better informed as to the requirements of the profession if it is a collaboration between practitioners and academics. Practitioners are often keen to report their activities and ideas as formal research but may lack the skills or time to conduct research in the workplace. Academics are usually mandated to research and publish or present at conferences and can support practice-based research by working with practitioners who can provide the necessary data. This can commence in the academy by academics not only educating LIS students in how to research and write-up research but also working with them, as a mentor or joint author, to develop assignments with the potential for publication.

**Conclusion**

Ensuring LIS has graduates who have both the necessary attributes and attitudes to move into the future is a responsibility resting with all sectors of the profession. By working with, and engaging in, collaborative practices the sector will provide a model for professional citizenship. Integrating practice, research and association into the learning experience can provide the necessary balance between practice and theory and create future practitioners who have both the skills and knowledge, attributes and attitudes which are needed in profession for the future. The Academy needs to be fully engaged with the industry look outwards as well as contributing to the body of knowledge underpinning the industry through research. Practically the Academy can contribute by ensuring through their continued engagement with industry opportunities for professional growth are identifies and are able to be met both within and outside the academy. Academic programmes need to ensure that their students have the strategies in place, not just ‘to do’ but have the characteristics and attitudes which will allow them to sustain a rich and rewarding professional life into the future and contribute to the future profession. Implementing educational strategies which provide scaffolds for ‘learning to be’ is critical to the growth of professional citizenship.
Employers, practitioners and professional association can enable professional growth and engagement by identifying and facilitating opportunities for new professionals and encouraging ongoing participation in such opportunities. Working in partnership with academic programmes, participating in education and supporting students and new professionals in their journey by providing models of practice and professional citizenship are all essential elements of the community of practice needed to forge a ‘bold and the fearless’ future for the LIS profession.

REFERENCES


