# Public Libraries and Information Society

Mei-hwa Yang, Ph.D.

Professor and Director

Graduate Institute of Library and Information Science

National Chengchi University

## I. Public Libraries and NII

**Enhancing the Role of Public Libraries in the National Information Infrastructure**

*1. Public Access to the Information superhighway through the Nation's Libraries*

It is our great hope that all public libraries should plug into the NII, serving as nodes, switching centers and access points for information and knowledge. For most rural public libraries the single most important barrier hindering Internet access is obtaining an affordable telecommunications link. While there is "send e-mail to elementary school," would it be possible to "send NII to county library" as well?

*2. Changing governmental priorities make it necessary for public librarians to adopt a more proactive role.*

It is clear that government support is needed to translate our vision into a reality. We must be plugged into the world's information network and make efforts to contribute to the global network.

*3. From Universal Access to Universal Service*

The ultimate goal of public libraries is the creation of a "virtual library", "virtual information center". Having a connection to Internet does not necessarily equate to having the ability to provide a range of Internet services and resources. We need to transform library services from now on.

*4. An adaptive public library system is urgently needed.*

Is it possible for us to have "Neighborhood Library"? A publicity program must be launched to revitalize the image of public libraries. We should all strive for this aim. We need to address "Information power", "Library power"! There must be a concerted effort to ask the questions and to inventory the challenge and to come up with the best answers.

## II . The Roles of Public Libraries in the Information Society

**The vision of the library of the future is to continuously expand the nation's capacity to learn through a national network of libraries.**

In 1961, Shera stated that "[1]The responsibility of the librarian is to maximize the flow of communication across the barriers of time, space, language, and patterns of thought." The new role of the library is a community-based resource center providing a range of Internet services and training for both the information haves and have-nots.

In short, the roles of public libraries in the information society include the following:[2]

    1.Network literacy center

    2.Global electronic information center

    3.Liaison for government information

    4.Center for electronic life-long education

    5.Public access center

    6.Community information organizer and provider

    7.Economic development center

      Symbiotic linkages with business and community, provide job/career information and skill assessments.

Our vision for the future:

*1. Promote Information Literacy through libraries*

We believe that public libraries should be positioned as an integral part of our national system actively supporting Taiwan as a "Learning Society". Jim Haas, previous president of the Council on Library Resources, pointed out that the function of librarianship is to promote and continuously improve the ability of society, and of each individual, to make use if what has been previously learned or created.[3] We should speak loudly that public libraries help to educate our citizens to their maximum potential and throughout life.

*2. From information services to knowledge services*

The challenge is to learn how all the information stored, processed in the public libraries can be delivered as knowledge that is of use to humans. How can we add value to the information ?.The strategic goal should focus on content as well as channels. Are we delivering knowledge instead of information?

*3. The mission of the public library is the elimination of ignorance*

Kenneth E. Dowlin, from San Francisco Public Library, once said that "The Neographic Library is librarian-designed, but is access-oriented and user-driven."

---

[1] *Jesse H. Shera, "The Librarian and the Machine," Library Journal (June 15, 1961)*

[2] *Charles R. McClure, John Carlo Bertot, and John C. Beachboard, "Enhancing the Role of Public Libraries in the National Information Infrastructure," Public Libraries (July/August 1996): 232-238.*

[3] *Warren J. Haas, "Improving the Quality of Library Schools in Research Universities", published as "Library Schools in Research Universities," in Council on Library Resources Program Reports (Washington, D.C.:CLR,1990): 47.*

And "Ignorance kills, the purpose of libraries is to stamp out ignorance."[4]
Information for rural development deserves our attention.


## III. How to promote the Information Literacy
**Empowering individuals by training or retraining them in uses of new information technologies**

*1.Restructuring the learning experience that build a lifelong habit of library use.*

As "Library 2000" has stated: "The future belongs to countries whose people make the most productive use of information, knowledge and technology",[5]Education programs therefore should be designed to educate people on the value of information and the importance of the library.

*2.Understanding Information Seeking Behavior*

The hierarchy of information needs is coping information-> helping information-> enlightening information-> enriching information-> edifying information.

*3.The Information Literacy*

The Information Literacy means:

(1) Knowing when they have a need for information

(2) Identifying information needed to address a given problem or issue

(3) Finding needed information

(4) Evaluating the information

(5) Organizing the information

(6) Using the information effectively to address the problem or issue at hand

Namely, a literate person in the twenty-first century should have the ability to find, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and communicate information and ideas.

*4.Customized Service*

In "Into the Information Age", A. D. Little refers to three eras of information services.　Era I consisted of discipline-based services designed to help solve the subject-oriented question.　Era II was of mission-oriented services for helping accomplish a mission, such as getting a man on the moon.　Era III was problem-oriented services to help solve problems, such as pollution.　Toni Carbo Bearman believed Era IV should be individually-oriented services, customized for the individual. In the networked environment, we should turn the electronic challenge into our own electronic opportunity. Hopefully this seminar experience is　"One

---

[4]　*Kenneth E. Dowlin, "The Neographic Library: A 30-Year Perspective on Public Libraries."　In Libraries and the Future: Essays on the Library in the Twenty-First Century (New York: The Haworth, 1993)*

[5]　*Library 2000: Investing in a Learning Nation, Report of the Library 2000 Review Committee, 1994*

small step, one Giant Leap"!

*5.New Skills*

The skills of New Age Librarians include:

(1) subject specialist knowledge

(2) extensive knowledge of information sources

(3) knowledge of new information technology

(4). information seeking behavior

(5) customer care

(6) marketing services

Librarians have to be more imaginative, more willing to experiment, more open-minded.

*6.Strategic Alliance*

We should take actions with constituents, the community, and policymakers in areas of appropriate concern. We need Multilateral Support. In conjunction with library/information science schools, public librarians can gain knowledge and facilitate the use of electronic information resources and technologies. Finally, the establishment of a clearinghouse to provide an electronic meeting place for librarians to give and receive information, ideas, strategies, tools, policies, cost assessments, and information resources on the Internet can be considered

In conclusion, what public libraries might look like 20 years from now? The new information technology can be viewed as offering either a threat to the library profession or an opportunity for that profession to make its services more valuable to the community of potential users than they have ever been before.

Two major questions will be explored in this presentation: First, What are the needs to be met? Second, How will the needs be met?

Reference:

1. Information Literacy and Education for the 21st Century: Toward an Agenda for Action, 14-16 April 1989, Leesburg, Virginia.   A symposium sponsored by the NCLIS and ALA.

2. Libraries and the Future: Essays on the Library in the Twenty-First Century, ed. by F. W. Lancaster (New York: The Haworth Pr, 1993).

3. McClure, C. R., Bertot, J. C., and Zweizig, D. L. Public Libraries and the Internet: Study Results, Policy Issues, and Recommendations.   Washington, D. C.: U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1994.