The road less travelled
Reflections on a journey north...

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At the end of 1998, the door of the library at Deakin University, Geelong closed behind me as I headed north for sunnier climes in Toowoomba, Queensland.

A major interstate relocation is never easy, but to add to my apprehension I was changing employment from a university library to a school library.

At Deakin University, Geelong I had been working in Resource Delivery under Tony Cavanagh. I was part of a busy and dynamic team of thirteen which included off-campus, inter-campus and inter-library loan staff.

Deakin University, Geelong is one campus of a six campus university library with a collection size of approximately 1 469 704 books.

The pace of the university's resource delivery section was frantic, with hundreds of requests for books, journal articles and subject searches every day. Daily, weekly and monthly statistics were calculated to measure performance.

Resource delivery was an excellent training ground in team work and customer service. Two attributes which were crucial in another door opening for me.

The door that opened was at St Ursula's College, Toowoomba, a Catholic girls' secondary school of approximately 780 students run by the Ursuline Order of Nuns. I was in a single campus library with two colleagues and a collection of 44 040 resources. In January 1999 there was only one computer in the school connected to the internet.

My professional life at St Ursula's alternated between the shelving trolley and the back room, covering, pasting and stitching.

At a more leisurely pace I was able to observe my new work environment and establish a role for myself utilising the reference skills gained at Deakin University. The customers identified as needing service were the staff. We promoted the idea that we were a library without walls. Our motto was nothing was too difficult to locate and obtain.

By the middle of 1999, the school became fully networked. Endless possibilities opened up to move the library forward. At about the same time the University of Queensland library began notifying schools of their Cyberschools Outreach Program. Here was a university offering schools access to the electronic database Expanded Academic Index at an affordable price. Not only did they attend to the procedural details, but they offered phone and e-mail contact and in-service training as well.

By introducing something that is so commonplace in a tertiary setting into a newly-networked school community and demonstrating how easy it was to access current quality information saved me from the shelving trolley and the back room.

By 2001, the school's 780 students had access to 110 fully-networked computers in three laboratories and the library. In addition an innovative classroom design for the teaching of social science which combines a traditional teaching area with a mini-computer laboratory of fifteen computers has enabled me to join forces with the social science co-ordinator Kathy Janovsky in undertaking a research project.

Here was another opportunity to utilise some of my past skills to facilitate change. My part in the project is to investigate whether the Learning Technologies Prototype Classroom enhances student's acquisition of lifelong information literacy skills.

The project consists of control groups timetabled in conventional classrooms and study groups timetabled in the Learning Technologies Prototype Classroom. All staff and students involved completed an information literacy skills audit in February. Study classes are now receiving information literacy skills lessons as research tasks are carried out. Participants will be post-tested at the end of the year.

My time at St Ursula's College has provided me with professional opportunities that I did not foresee back in January 1999 when I took the first tentative step through its open door. ∎