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CHAPTER

1

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND VALUES OF THE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

From Past-Present to Future-Perfect

A Tribute
to

CHARLES A. BUNGE

and
the Challenges
of Contemporary
Reference Service

Chris D. Ferguson • Editor

This chapter is excerpted from

From Past-Present to Future-Perfect:

*A Tribute to Charles A. Bunge and the Challenges of
Contemporary Reference Service, 1st Edition*

Edited by Chris D. Ferguson



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BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND VALUES OF THE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

CHARLES A. BUNGE

Excerpted from *From Past-Present to Future-Perfect*

I am very happy and pleased to be invited to give the Beta Phi Mu lecture here at Michigan. I have a great deal of respect for the Library School at the University of Michigan. I think it ranks second perhaps only to another one in the Upper Midwest that I know well. I am especially respectful of your dean, Russ Bidlack, your assistant dean Ken Vance, and the rest of your fine faculty.

I would like to dedicate my talk today to Wallace Bonk, a friend and colleague, missed by all who knew him. Those of you who knew Wally and his feelings about reference librarianship may think it inappropriate that a talk on attitudes, beliefs, and values of reference librarians should be dedicated to a person who believed so strongly that the important thing for a reference librarian to have is thorough knowledge of reference materials, rather than a lot of training in reference process, the reference interview, attitudes, etc. In fact, Wally got himself engaged in a kind of silly confrontation in the literature on whether you needed to know materials or you needed to know process and the like. Wally came down on the side of materials. Thus, as I say, you may think it inappropriate to dedicate such a talk to his memory. And yet, Wally's articulate emphasis on the importance of reference materials in reference training challenged those of us who are interested in other aspects of reference training to be as substantive as possible and to make sure that our teaching about the reference process really contributes to the effectiveness of our students as reference librarians. And since this talk resulted from my own reflection and response to that challenge of Wally's, I think it is a fitting tribute to him and his ideas. I hope that you will agree.

As I was thinking about what I might do for the Beta Phi Mu talk today, and about what might be most valuable to the audience (as well as to myself), I thought I should do something in the area of reference services, because that is the area in which I have practiced, about which I feel I know the most, and which I might be able to share with you most meaningfully. I also thought that it might be useful for me to reflect and study a little bit on some of the things that had interested me with regard to reference service, but that I had not had time to pursue because of administrative duties or because I had not been able to get around to them in my teaching responsibility. So what you are going to get today is the result of my reflection and study on a couple of things that have interested me and that I hope will interest you.

I define reference service as personal assistance provided to someone who needs information-assistance in overcoming the various barriers that exist between that person and the information he or she needs. I think one of the key parts of that

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definition is the “personal assistance” that is provided. As I have thought about this personal service over the past several months, or even years, I have been interested in two strands of thinking and research and the implications they have for reference service. One of these I will characterize as the concept of “helping relationships.” You have probably heard counseling, social work, and other fields referred to as “helping professions,” and I am interested in that concept and the relationship it might have to reference service. The other strand of thinking that I have been interested in I will characterize as “communication” or “communications research,” and the new ideas coming from such research that are of relevance to reference service.

Taking the last first, just to give you a little more of an idea of what I have in mind, communications researchers have recently been telling us some very interesting things about people’s use of information. Researchers like Brenda Dervin, for example, tell us that people are very individualistic about their information needs and uses. Indeed, our librarian’s habit of categorizing people and information sources in order to make matches between them can become one of those barriers that I mentioned. Reference librarians, it seems, need to understand users in terms of the users’ perceptions of the situation they are in - very individual situations - in order to know how they will use the information sought and in order to find appropriate information. Also, under this general rubric of communications and my interest in it, I have been increasingly aware of the importance of non-verbal communication in human interactions such as the reference encounter. We know, for example, that people take a great deal of meaning from non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and voice tone, and that these cues can even contradict and undercut our verbal messages. Sometimes, I suppose often, this can happen without our even knowing it. So that is the sort of area of communication that has interested me, and on which I have wanted to follow up.

To elaborate a little bit on the concept of helping relationships, you are probably aware of the number of books that have come out in the ‘70’s, even back into the ‘60’s, that have explored the common elements of professions such as teaching, counseling, social work, and others. Often these are referred to as the helping professions, and the human interactions involved in them are characterized as “helping relationships.” This is related to the so-called “client-centered” counseling, “client-centered” teaching, and the like, which draws heavily on some of Carl Rogers’ ideas. Two things that have struck me as I have pursued some of this literature are that, first, the helping relationship is seen as a cooperative

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relationship, not one of “I, the professional, doing something for or to you, the client,” but rather one of our cooperating to find a way for you to cope with your situation as you want to. Second, the technical skills and knowledge of the helping professional seem less important to effective practice than are the beliefs and attitudes held by the professional. This comes through in the literature often when you read about the successful helping professional.

As I was thinking, then, about what sort of talk I might prepare for the Beta Phi Mu lecture today, it occurred to me, “Why not explore the implications of these two areas of thinking, communications and helping relationships, to the practice of reference librarianship?” The more I studied the complexity of information needs and uses and the necessity for reference librarians to understand the unique situation and perceptions of each individual user, and the more I tried to understand how reference librarians can make their verbal and non-verbal cues reinforce each other, and the more I pondered how reference service can be built on effective helping relationships, the more I came to the conclusion that the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the reference librarian are of key importance. What then, I thought, are some of the beliefs, attitudes, and values that reference librarians should develop and cultivate, in order to enhance their effectiveness in assisting those who need information to overcome the barriers that exist between them and the information they need? I think it is useful to group these beliefs, attitudes, and values that are important for reference service into three categories: those concerning our job, those concerning the people we serve, and those concerning ourselves. I want to talk then about each of these groups in turn.

First, though, I should define very briefly what I mean by beliefs, attitudes, and values. A *belief* is a simple perception or proposition that one holds about an object or a situation. One may hold that something is true or false or that something is good or bad. For example, we may believe that smoking marijuana is harmful to health. We may believe that smoking marijuana leads to loss of motivation and loss of effectiveness as a student or a worker. Beliefs are based on what we perceive to be true or false, and beliefs can be changed by our getting more information or coming to hold a different view of what is true or false.

An *attitude* is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation which predisposes one to respond in some preferential manner. In other words, various things that we believe about something are organized together in a rather enduring pattern to cause us to be predisposed to act either positively

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toward it or negatively toward it. To carry my example about smoking marijuana further, various things we believe about smoking it become organized into a relatively enduring predisposition toward it and perhaps toward the people who engage in it. Attitudes can be changed by changing the beliefs upon which they are based or of which they consist. A *value* is a type of belief, a belief that is centrally located within one's total belief system, about some end state of existence. Such an end state of existence might be good health, or long life, or productivity. Our positive feeling toward health, or long life, or productivity, for example, will be associated with our attitude toward smoking marijuana. Values are deep-seated and difficult to change, except gradually and as we become aware of them and their relationship to each other and to our perceptions and beliefs about reality.

Going back then, I said that reference librarians need to develop certain beliefs, attitudes, and values about their jobs, the people they serve, and themselves. I want to talk quickly about beliefs and attitudes about our jobs that are important for reference librarians. First of all, we should believe that the job we are doing is important and worthwhile. If we feel our job as a reference librarian is trivial or of no importance to society, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to do well at it. Now you are probably thinking to yourselves that reference librarians should have no difficulty cultivating such a belief, the way we are bombarded these days with writings about the importance of information in the so-called post-industrial society, and I will agree with you. On the other hand, sometimes when you have spent the whole day answering puzzle questions and responding to questions you feel never should have arisen in the first place - people wanting you to do their term papers for them and the like - sometimes you need convincing that the job is of importance. So I think it is very important to reflect on, to think about, and to continue to believe in the importance and worthwhileness of your job.

I think, also, that a belief in the importance of our job can be enhanced by reflection on some of the basic values of librarianship as a profession and by relating reference service to these basic values of librarianship as a profession. We as librarians hold that being informed is the appropriate state of being. Being informed is a positive value for us, a positive professional value. We hold, or should hold, as a central belief that being informed is better than being ignorant. We hold that a fuller, richer life is based on education, information, and life-long learning, reading, and experience. Likewise, we hold that everyone has a right to the information he or she needs, and that the proper state of a democratic society is

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one where information flows freely and where access to it is equitable.

We reference librarians should believe firmly, then, that our job is very important to helping people be informed and to making access to information equitable. As a matter of fact, it is a firm belief of mine that one of the key functions of reference librarianship in the scheme of librarianship is to help guarantee this equitable access to information, which for various reasons is less than equitable, depending on the person's situation.

In addition to believing that our jobs are important, it is important that we hold certain beliefs about the purpose of our jobs as reference librarians. We must believe that the purpose of reference librarianship is to help people. This seems obvious, surely. And yet, over the weeks and months and years of day-to-day reference practice, there is an insidious tendency for us to come to believe that the real purpose of our task is to serve our own needs or those of the library. Rules and regulations, reference statistics, neatness and order become more important than individual people and their information needs in individual situations. We need to guard against the tendency that creeps in by which we think reference service really is for the purposes of the library and the library staff and to satisfy rules and regulations.

We must believe, furthermore, that the purpose of our service is to help the client realize his or her *own* goals, rather than what we think *should* be his or her goals. We should believe that our purpose is one of freeing and facilitating, rather than controlling or manipulating. How easy it is, and yet how detrimental to good service it is, to think we know what people really need. How tempting it is to take a question and turn it into one we can answer, rather than exploring what is really needed. We need to guard against that. In summary, then, we need to believe that our job as reference librarian is important and valuable, and we should believe that the needs and situations of the patrons are the touchstone of our service.

So, central to effective reference service are the clients we serve, and that is the second area of the three that I want to talk about. What are some of the beliefs, attitudes, and values about people that can enhance our effectiveness as reference librarians?

First of all, again to start with the obvious, we should like people and be interested in their well-being. If a reference librarian is not genuinely interested in people and does not like them, he or she should change jobs. (And probably should change jobs right out of librarianship!) Now it is easy to say that people should like

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people in order to be reference librarians, but what can we say about more specific bases for working with people effectively? First, I think we need to go back again to some of these central beliefs I defined as values. We need to hold a central and deep-seated commitment to the dignity of persons and their rights as individuals, for example, in the reference area, their right to privacy and confidentiality in relationships with the librarian and with information sources. Associated with this value of the dignity of persons and their rights as individuals are various beliefs and attitudes that can be strengthened in a reciprocal relationship with it. I want to talk about those briefly.

Reference librarians should believe that each person is a unique individual with his or her own goals and needs. One of the things I think is most detrimental to good library service, and to good reference service particularly, is thinking of people in stereotypes, of allowing ourselves to place people in boxes. We sometimes can even go so far as to come to think of people as just interruptions to the flow of the day, or interruptions to our task of selecting books or scheduling student assistants for desk duty or various other kinds of things that reference librarians have to do as the day progresses. Actually, there is a real dilemma here for reference librarians that one constantly has to work to mediate. On the one hand, it is very important that we treat people as individuals and avoid stereotyping. On the other hand, fundamental to the reference process is the matching of certain categories of users with certain categories of information sources; otherwise, we could make no sense at all of our task. To mediate between this task of treating persons as individuals on the one hand and trying to arrive at some judgment of categories and matching patterns between users and information systems on the other hand is one of the challenges of reference librarianship, day to day and hour to hour.

We need to be open to the differences among persons, especially the differences from ourselves. Another thing I think is very characteristic of human beings - of all of us - is to wish that everyone was like us. Then we could understand their talk, understand their values, and we could relate to them more easily. And yet, this kind of thinking is another form of stereotyping, of approaching people not as unique individuals, but wishing they were something other than they are, of wishing to change them, to change them in ways we think would be better for them, or better for society, or better for whatever. Rather than that, we need to be accepting of them as distinct persons and to seek to change them only in ways they themselves wish to change. We should seek to facilitate their changing their lot in ways they

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perceive are valuable rather than in ways we think would be helpful to them, or to society at large, or whatever.

The reference librarian needs to believe the client is capable of recognizing his or her own information need and of knowing when useful information has been found to serve it. One of the key concepts of client-centered helping, of the helping professions, is that the professional approaches the client as competent and able, rather than as incompetent and needing manipulation. I think that often we reference librarians get in the position of thinking we need to manipulate people, that when someone comes in with a reference question we have to go through a reference interview that tricks the client into telling us what is really wanted. Or that we have to go through a process that convinces them the information we have given them is what they want and is what is useful to them. This, it seems to me, undercuts the positive helping relationship we want to establish. The reference librarian needs to believe, then, that the client is capable of recognizing his or her information need and that our job is cooperatively exploring, articulating and bringing out that need. Then the information we find can be related to the client's perception and recognition of what is valuable to the client's situation.

Our attitude should not be one of judging or evaluating our clients and their information needs, but rather of seeking to understand them and to accept them. I think many of us who have practiced reference librarianship have had the experience of having someone ask a question and of thinking, "Oh-h-h, he wants to know about tha-a-at?!" Or someone asks a question and you have the attitude of "Why should he want to know about *that*?" This, also, is detrimental to effective reference service. In summary then, in this area of our attitudes toward persons and the clients we serve, an open, positive, supportive, and empathetic approach is the basis for the cooperation that is essential to the helping relationship and for coming to understand the unique information needs of each person we serve.

And what of our beliefs and attitudes toward the other half of the helping relationship, ourselves? You have heard the saying, almost a cliché by now, that you can't love others until you love yourself. Those who have studied human relationships know this to be true. We need to be basically happy and pleased with ourselves in order to interact with others effectively. I think there are several bases for such a feeling of self-worth. First of all, we must *know* ourselves. The reference librarian needs to know herself or himself as a unique individual, just as we need to approach our clients as unique individuals, with differences from others, with

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likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and all the rest. We should reflect on and know what we believe about other people, what values we hold, what attitudes we have about others, and the various kinds of things that I talked about earlier. We should know our strengths and weaknesses with regard to our knowledge of information sources and skills as reference librarians. So, the first step, I think, is to know ourselves.

Following from and building on such knowledge of ourselves, we need to be honest - honest with ourselves, and honest with others. If we honestly recognize our prejudices and biases, for example, we can deal with them, rather than denying and repressing them and having them manifest themselves in ways we cannot control. One of the faults, I think, that we sometimes make when we teach reference services, and especially when we teach collection development, is that we ask librarians to pretend they have no biases, that they are completely neutral. It seems to me a better approach is to ask librarians to explore, to reflect on, and to recognize their biases and then to take account of them in proper and appropriate ways in collection development and reference work. Those of you who have practiced reference service or have had other human interactions will find sometimes that you are accusing the people with whom you interact of having precisely the faults that you feel in yourself, or that you would rather you did not have yourself. This is what psychologists call 'scapegoating,' and it can happen in reference as it happens everywhere else. One of the ways to avoid this is to know your own biases, weaknesses, and things with which you are not satisfied in yourself, in order to keep from projecting them onto others. If we honestly reflect on our values, beliefs, and attitudes and on our strengths and weaknesses as reference librarians, we can change, strengthen, and develop them through learning and practice. You will recall that I said that the way to change beliefs is to learn more, to come to have a different perception of what is true and false, of what is a fact and what is not a fact. So, one way to change our beliefs and attitudes toward others, one way to change our strengths and weaknesses as reference librarians, is to become aware of them and then to set out to change those that need changing.

In addition to knowing ourselves and being honest about ourselves, we need to be confident in ourselves. We must believe we have knowledge and skills to offer, that we can be of help, that we can be effective as reference librarians. First of all, on the way to our feeling of confidence, is to be as competent as we can be. We should know as much as we can about information and information sources.

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Certainly, it seems to me, we cannot really feel proud of ourselves as competent reference librarians unless we are doing as much as we can in continuing to learn about information sources and information. We need to keep learning about people, their diversity, their individual uniqueness, and their information needs. We should be pleased and proud of the knowledge and skills we have. We should believe that we undoubtedly know more about information and its sources than does our client, and that we have skills that will be helpful in bringing together the client and the information that he or she needs. Oftentimes, we find this difficult in reference librarianship. As reference librarians we deal with a broad spectrum of people, and we sometimes find ourselves dealing in a subject area with someone who is a recognized scholar or expert. Sometimes we feel, "What do I have to offer?" in this situation, or "How can I be of help to someone who knows so much in this field?" I think often it is helpful to reflect on the fact that even though this person knows the subject field much better than we could, we probably know the literature of that field, or the literature structure of that field, or we know something about bibliographic structure or bibliography in general, that that person does not know and that can be helpful. We have skills in helping that person articulate and recognize an information need and then finding the information to serve it, skills that the person has never had the time to develop, or does not care to develop. So it seems to me that by reflecting on the skills we have and the knowledge we have, we can remain confident in our own competence. Certainly, we can if we continue to develop that competence.

Knowledge of ourselves, honesty with ourselves and others, and confidence in our ability to help will provide the basis for success in two important aspects of the reference relationship. On the one hand, this honesty with ourselves, knowledge of ourselves, and confidence in our ability will give us the personal strength to enter into relationships with others with empathy and sensitivity. We will be able to identify with our clients, their goals, and their information needs. Psychologists tell us that people who can enter most effectively into human interactions are those who have the most confidence in themselves. In order to offer yourself to someone else you need to be confident in yourself. On the other hand, such positive feelings about ourselves will help us maintain our own identity and keep us from being overwhelmed by our clients' problems. It will help us maintain the objectivity that is so important to the professional relationship. Here again, I think, is one of the dilemmas the reference librarian faces. On the one hand, you need to be empathetic, sympathetic, and sensitive to your clients, their information needs, and

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their problems, in order to understand them and to gain the confidence of the client in working them out. On the other hand, you need to maintain the proper kind of professional distance and objectivity in order to keep your own professional skills and judgments from being overwhelmed by your empathy and your relating to the client. To maintain that line between sensitivity and empathy on the one hand, and objectivity on the other hand is one of the important tasks of the professional in the helping relationship.

In summary, then, the reference librarian will be more effective if he or she has positive and accepting beliefs and attitudes toward reference librarianship as a job, toward the persons who are served, and toward himself or herself. How can we connect this with those two strands of thinking that I mentioned at the beginning of my talk? Well, if it is true, and I believe it is, that people will only use information they perceive to be relevant to their own situations, then the only way we are going to be able to find information for people that they will use and understand will be to understand each user's perception of his or her own situation to go quite beyond knowing such things as the subject of the question, the age and status of the user, and other such categories. Surely, the only way we can do this is through effective interpersonal communication and interaction. This requires that the user perceive us as supportive, empathetic, competent, and accepting of him or her as a worthwhile and capable individual. Such crucial perceptions by the client will be based on clues we give in our verbal and especially our nonverbal communication, clues that will spring from our beliefs, attitudes, and values. As I pondered on this matter of how a reference librarian can make sure his or her non-verbal cues are supportive to the verbal cues, it seemed obvious to me that our nonverbal communication is most often subconscious. We do it without thinking about it, and it springs from or is based on our beliefs, attitudes, and values. To the extent that the beliefs, attitudes, and values we hold are similar to the ones we are trying to verbalize, the non-verbal cues and the verbal cues will be consistent and supportive; to the extent that they are contradictory, the cues are going to be contradictory. It follows then, at least for me, that the way the reference librarian can best help those who need information to find and use that information is to approach them with empathy, sensitivity, openness, and authenticity. This is an approach in which the user shares his or her perceptions of the information need and the information situation and the reference librarian shares knowledge of information and its sources and skills in their exploitation, all aimed at helping the client achieve his or her own goals and aspirations. This

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cooperative relationship, as I understand it, is the essence of what is called the helping relationship.

Running through all of this is the importance of the individual. You will recall that I started by defining reference service as an individual person helping an individual person. I would like to close my talk today with a story I think emphasizes this idea of personal service and service to the individual nicely.

You may be familiar with the anthropologist, essayist, and philosopher, Loran Eiseley. Loran Eiseley has a story in his book, *The Unexpected Universe*, called “The Star Thrower.” I want to share it with you. For our purposes here, I am changing the ending a little, to make it more explicit, but I do not think Eiseley would object.

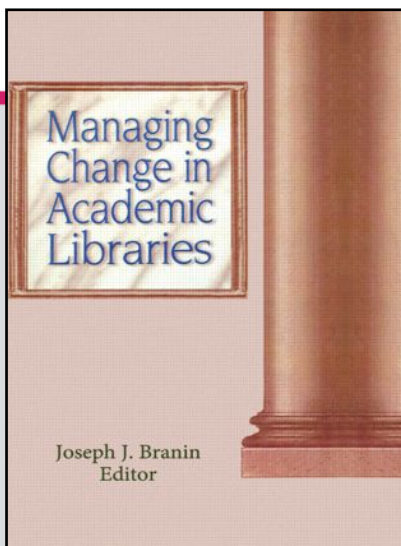
The author of our story is walking on the beach one day and he discerns the figure of another man on the beach. As he comes closer, the author sees the man is bending down, picking something up, and throwing it into the ocean, again and again. The author becomes intrigued, and he asks the man, when he comes closer, what he is doing. The man says, “You see all these starfish here? They have been washed up by the ocean, and each time they seem to be about to be washed back down, a wave comes in and throws them farther up on the sand. They are going to stay up there, and when the sun comes out, it will bake them and kill them. I’m throwing them back into the ocean to save their lives, so they can continue to live.” The author of our story becomes very agitated. He says, “Look at this beach. It’s covered with starfish. The sun is going to kill hundreds, even thousands, of starfish. Your throwing back a few can’t make any difference. Why do you do it? Why do you bother?” The man said, as he held up a single starfish, “It’ll make a difference to this one!” and he threw it into the sea.



CHAPTER

2

CHANGING ROLES FOR REFERENCE LIBRARIANS



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by Joseph Branin.

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CHANGING ROLES FOR REFERENCE LIBRARIANS

JULIA KELLY AND KATHRYN ROBBINS

Excerpted from *Managing Change in Academic Libraries*

What will library reference services of the future be like? Will the reference desk disappear? Will a computer take its place, and will it be able to answer every question? Each day we are bombarded with more to learn in order to do our jobs, and it is sometimes difficult to take a moment and reflect on where we might be headed. Fortunately, there are visionary librarians among us who are providing signposts, and their insight should help us to have a clearer idea of what the future will bring for reference librarians. Whether in the form of a "report" from the year 2000 (Myers 1994) or a more philosophical essay, they help to focus our vision.

REASONS TO BE OPTIMISTIC

Although technology and other unseen forces may cause problems for librarians of the future, there are many positive points to keep in mind about our profession and where we are headed. First of all, computers will certainly play an important role, but no one will ask us to become programmers in order to keep our jobs. More and more libraries may have computer personnel on their staffs, but it is unlikely that they will completely take over the tasks of collecting, organizing, disseminating and teaching about information.

If new technologies are developed that do not seem to fill either our needs or those of our users, they will probably not overtake our world. Microforms serve as an example. Many current fears center around users bypassing the library and finding information through other channels. Librarians are concerned about users receiving incomplete or incorrect information as well as preserving their jobs. Users may be paying for services that are available free to them at the library. While the issue of bypassing the library should not be ignored, it may be reassuring to note that this has always happened to some degree and probably always will. Lastly, although the profession may undergo major shifts, librarians have always been counted on to have both flexibility and good communication skills. Those qualities should serve us well no matter what the future brings.

TECHNOLOGY AS THE SOURCE OF CHANGE

Technology, or more specifically computers and the connections between them, has changed reference services forever. Some of the differences, both today and in the future, are purely technological, while others are outgrowths of the machines themselves. Those may include less isolation for librarians, a greater focus on

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users, and financial and personnel shifts.

Euster notes that until the explosion of computers in libraries, not much had changed in reference in many decades, with the possible exception of bibliographic instruction (Euster 1993). Those who have so far benefitted the most from the computerization in libraries may not be library users, but those who work in libraries, especially those in technical services (King 1987). King sees the focus in the future shifting from streamlining internal processes to making the users' lives easier.

What form will the technological changes take? One writer envisions all scholarly knowledge residing in one huge database (Smith 1990), while others see an information universe with hundreds if not thousands of individual databases. Hawkins predicts the advent of a national electronic library which is run as a non-profit organization and is maintained in part by work done at individual institutions (Hawkins 1994).

IMPACT OF THE INTERNET

The Internet and its descendants are sure to play a large role in libraries of the future, especially as more libraries become connected and the capacity to transmit multimedia materials expands. Current examples of Internet use by reference departments include accepting and answering reference questions via electronic mail, using Internet resources to answer questions, providing access to the Internet at public workstations, and mounting a Gopher or World Wide Web server for patron use. A number of academic libraries, including those at the University of Texas at Austin and the Norris Medical Library at the University of Southern California, have taken a leadership role in Internet training on campus (Chiang 1993).

As libraries become more dependent on the Internet, the question of reliability arises. Since it is a fluid system run partly by the cooperation of the institutions that use it, there is no 800 number to call if service is slow or unavailable, and little recourse if a resource your library has canceled is suddenly unavailable via the net.

Costs associated with use of the Internet could also become an issue for libraries. At present, the costs for access, equipment purchase and maintenance, and other support activities are usually borne by the library's parent institution. If access to

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the Internet or the next generation of global networks is controlled by commercial enterprises, libraries may no longer be able to look to their parent institutions to provide a connection to the electronic information highway at no cost. Whether the costs of access will be a flat fee, metered, or some other arrangement is also unknown, and the method of charging could greatly influence the types of access libraries are able to provide to their patrons as well as their staff.

Even regular users may find the Internet something of a maze. While Gopher and the World Wide Web have made navigation much easier, locating all of the relevant resources on a particular topic may be time-consuming, and the searcher can never be sure they have located everything. While the search tools which are currently available, such as Veronica, Archie, and the Web crawler are helpful, they currently do not allow complex search statements or the combining of sets. Librarians are beginning to look at ways to organize the scholarly resources on the Internet. In the future, they may use their skills in both organization of information and sensitivity to user needs to work on the development of more powerful navigation tools, such as intelligent browsers, gateways, catalogs of resources, or other tools yet to be developed.

DEFINING THE VIRTUAL LIBRARY

The term "virtual library" is used a great deal in referring to the future, but its meaning is often not clearly defined. Saunders says it is "a system by which the user may connect transparently to remote libraries and databases using the local library's OPAC or a university or network computer as a gateway" (Saunders 1992). By this definition, many virtual libraries exist today, although the current number and variety of remote databases will probably seem paltry compared to those available in the future. Some would refine Saunders' definition of virtual libraries to note that they contain value-added elements and not simply connections to remote sites. These elements may be as basic as a good organizational scheme to present the links to other resources, annotations to the items available at a given site or a thesaurus that may be used with various resources.

RETHINKING REFERENCE

Several authors have recently written about a radical change or disappearance of the reference desk, some as a theoretical concept and others as a report of their

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real life experiences . One example of a major shift in the reference desk is at Brandeis University, where graduate students work at an information desk answering short questions, and patrons make appointments with librarians for help with in depth questions (Massey-Burzio 1992).

One proposal for the future of reference services is based on the model of the college health service. Clients are always greeted by a receptionist, but they either wait in line or make an appointment to see a professional (Beck 1992). Molholt suggests an environment where much of the work of reference is done by e-mail and reference librarians could do their desk shifts from home (Molholt 1990). Along the same lines, one author calls on librarians to no longer see reference services as constrained by a physical location (Simmons-Welburn 1993). As more of the commonly-used reference tools become available in electronic forms, the reference desk could migrate to any location where users have access to the librarian and he or she has access to a terminal. Perhaps reference departments exist only because other areas of the library have failed. Willis suggests this idea, and challenges librarians to look carefully at how to help users before they ever get to the desk (Willis 1992).

Not everyone agrees with the idea of seriously revamping the reference desk immediately. It may just be another attempt by librarians to try and behave more like other professionals (Ring 1993). Ring suggests that if librarians are burned out, it is because they will not let go of mundane, clerical tasks, and not because their shifts at the reference desk are so exhausting. Ring also comments that the work that is done by librarians at the desk is still needed and useful to library users. In the same vein, students may not need the virtual library, but could instead use some personal guidance and a few basic instructions about how libraries and information are organized (DeVinney 1994).

Relieving reference librarians of nonprofessional tasks is one of the things that Lewis feels must happen to allow reference departments to respond to changes and move comfortably into the future (Lewis 1994). He also advocates giving reference librarians responsibilities for tasks traditionally done at higher levels, such as budgetary and programmatic authority, flattening the organizational hierarchy, putting planning for public service into the hands of reference librarians, and taking librarians out of small, isolated departments.

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OUT OF THE LIBRARY AND INTO THE STREETS

Hallman says that "libraries used to be the doorways to internal collections, now they are the windows on the world's knowledge" (Hallman 1990). Whether the reference desk exists or not, a number of authors see much less isolation for librarians as one outgrowth of technology. Librarians will be more involved with the computer specialists and the support staff, and also more active in outreach to users, who will no longer be obligated to come to the library to use its resources. Teaching, both formally and informally, may be more of an emphasis for librarians of the future. Patrons who intend to use the library's resources remotely may come to the library for some initial instruction, or to learn the basics of a new system. After that most of their needs may be met through remote access.

Distance education, where students make use of videoconferencing, the Internet, individual study, fax, mail, along with visits to campus, is becoming more popular. Librarians are just beginning to look at the information needs of these students. Any new technologies that become available to deliver courses to these students may also be utilized to deliver information.

Changes in the curriculum may impact librarians' teaching responsibilities outside the library. Problem-based learning, which emphasizes small group work and patient-oriented questions, has been introduced at a number of medical schools around the country. In many cases, librarians are part of the teaching team, and students are asked to look at information resources in new ways (Rankin 1992). This has also prompted more librarians to become active on curriculum committees.

Librarians are already making more of an effort to advertise their skills and strengths, and some larger libraries have a marketing or public relations person on their staff. As more users are given the opportunity to access library resources remotely, getting information to them about what the library has to offer is becoming a different challenge.

ASKING USERS ABOUT THEIR NEEDS

In their efforts to reach out more, some see librarians shifting their focus more to the needs of their users. Consumer analysis is one of the three new roles that Campbell predicts for librarians, along with access engineering and knowledge cartography (Campbell 1992). This consumer analysis may include focus groups,

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surveys, or other tools to gather and analyze information about users. Marketing consultant Sue Silk suggests that librarians quit asking themselves what users want and start asking the users themselves (Silk 1994).

One thing that users do report is that they want small amounts of relevant information. In the library of the not-so-distant future, technology may facilitate this by allowing customized navigation tools and personalized printed serials. Patrons also have noted that they like to have items delivered to them, which should be easier to accomplish as network capabilities expand and electronic versions of books and journals become available.

STANDARDIZATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

One key to making life easier for library users is some sort of consistency in computerized information. This may be achieved through standardization or intelligent gateways. One major step some libraries have taken in this direction is to adopt Z39.50, the NISO (National Information Standards Organization) standard for information retrieval using client/server architecture. A Z39.50 environment allows users at a local OPAC to connect to remote databases that are Z39.50 compliant and have them appear just like their local OPAC. Screens will have a similar appearance, and search and navigation methods will be the same. As more vendors of OPACs begin offering Z39.50 compatibility, both reference librarians and library users will be relieved of the challenge of switching gears each time they switch database.

While there is hope for standardization, it is not necessarily right around the corner in all areas of library work. Librarians have been searching computerized bibliographic databases since the late 1960s, and there still continues to be little overlap in search syntax between the major database vendors, although there have been ANSI standards in this area for a number of years.

Artificial intelligence, which encompasses robotics and expert systems as well as the recognition of natural language, voice and optical characters, has some applications in reference service today. Westlaw's WIN system of natural language searching allows users to submit requests in sentence form, and software which not only recognizes voice requests but also vocalizes ASCII text have made libraries more accessible for visually impaired users. Although these technologies may not play a prominent role at present and there have been problems with user

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acceptance, many feel that its use in libraries will grow much larger in the future (Roesler and Hawkins 1994, Travis 1989).

Producing artificial intelligence applications currently requires specialized knowledge in addition to a sizable investment of time and money. Better development tools will change all of those factors and allow librarians to design and produce useful applications on their own. Alberico and Micco envision database front ends, pathfinders on specific subjects and teaching tools to be among the first products that librarians will develop (Alberico and Micco 1990). While these may mimic traditional print products developed by librarians, they may have added features such as on-screen help, presentation of ideas in multiple formats or media, and feedback mechanisms that are able to interpret how well the user is understanding the material. They also may be available 24 hours a day from remote locations. Others imagine "robo librarians" that answer frequently asked questions and knowledge navigators that will lead users through the mazes of electronic resources (Unsworth 1993).

THE FINANCIAL FUTURE

Unfortunately, no one is predicting large influxes of money for libraries. Certain changes such as commercialization of the Internet or major shifts in the publishing industry or copyright laws could have a sizable impact on the financial situation in libraries. The debate about access versus ownership has financial as well as service implications for reference librarians. If larger portions of collections budgets continue to go to pay for access, mechanisms should be in place to insure that information is not only archived but also remains readily available. The questions of if and when to charge users for services is also looming on the horizon. As more and more users enter the library remotely, it may be harder to define a library's primary clientele, and thus more problematic to charge different fees to different patron groups.

PERSONNEL MATTERS

In the personnel arena, many see the blurring of lines between traditional areas such as reference, technical services and collection development, and more teams of librarians working together on special projects as well as routine tasks. Many

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institutions have staff other than reference librarians working at the reference desk. They may be professional or paraprofessional staff from other areas of the library who bring expertise in areas such as cataloging, serials, access, or systems. Reference librarians and library users may benefit from the specialized knowledge of others, and seeing firsthand what patrons request and how materials are used may enhance the perspectives of those who are based in other areas of the library.

Some reference departments also employ graduate students and undergraduates to work at the desk

It has been suggested that one of the advantages of e-mail reference is the ability to quickly forward questions to the person most appropriate to answer them, whether or not they are on the core reference team.

Developing a mission statement has been used by some libraries to focus on user needs as well as emphasize the interrelationship of all departments. One author who has seen a library through major changes stresses the importance of all those in the library knowing how they contribute to the overall mission (Painter 1993).

Working in the library of the future will require new job skills and new responsibilities. Ann Lipow, in a futuristic library position announcement, includes job responsibilities such as working on both local and national teledesks and helping system developers with the design of databases (Lipow 1993).

In the future, how will we know we are doing a good job? Libraries may soon be judged not only by the size and quality of their collections, but also on their ability to provide access (Woodsworth et al. 1989), or by the service we deliver instead of the what we own (Penniman 1994).

CONCLUSION

Although the library landscape may shift a great deal, librarians will still be in the business of negotiating with users and helping them find what they need. The electronic environment may cause a shift in the tools librarians use and the speed in which they change, it may also allow us to look more closely at our users' needs and deliver what they request more quickly and in a wider variety of forms. According to one author, "the business we are in is consultation, facilitation, and organization," although the tools and products may change over time (Trombatore 1990).



CHAPTER

3

THE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN'S CRITICAL SKILL: CRITICAL THINKING AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE



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THE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN'S CRITICAL SKILL

THREASA L. WESLEY

Excerpted from *The Reference Librarian*

SUMMARY. What is the most critical ability that a new librarian should cultivate in preparation for a reference career? Some would claim communication skills are vital; some would advise concentration on extensive knowledge of reference sources; others might state a case for computer literacy skills. This article argues that the single most important skill for a reference librarian to possess is the ability to think critically about the use of reference materials. Illustrations are given to demonstrate the primacy of this proficiency in all areas of reference responsibility and suggestions are made concerning the need for increased focus on critical thinking in education and training programs.

What is a reference librarian's most critical skill? A great variety of proficiencies are presented in library schools and in library science journals. Students in graduate programs encounter courses designed to teach competence in areas such as management techniques, online searching, use of specialized reference tools, and communication skills. Skimming through library journals one finds articles on fund raising efforts, policy writing procedures, staff supervision issues, resource sharing goals, and literally hundreds of other activities that a reference librarian will probably encounter while working in the field. Indeed, in a career requiring abilities in so many diverse areas, how can one prepare adequately to enter the profession? Must one divide the brief time in a graduate program into small fragments to gain instruction in the many responsibilities tied to reference work? Or is it possible to establish a core of primary skills which will form a more integrated preparation? If it is possible to determine a focused nucleus, these critical skills must be defined clearly in order to prepare these new professionals for successful careers.

THE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

Perhaps the nature of these core skills can be defined best by stepping back from the surface perspective of the individual responsibilities a reference librarian holds—reference assistance, collection development, bibliographic instruction, public relations, etc. —to get a broader view. This broader examination helps to clarify the role that a reference librarian is attempting to fulfill through these multitudinous activities. That professional role is to serve his or her community as

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an information-use consultant. Explicitly, this means that, on behalf of library patrons, the librarian should make informed choices among information sources based on analysis of individual needs and a critical knowledge of reference sources. Some theorists argue strongly against this interventionist view of the librarian's role in information use, claiming that the patrons should have full freedom to select information sources for themselves. If this philosophy is followed, the librarian's role is then limited to a directional one, merely facilitating access to the full range of information available. However, when evaluating the contribution that reference librarians can make to society, the emphasis rightly belongs on the verb "choose." The responsibility each reference librarian faces at the reference desk, whether in a public, school, special or academic library is to assist patrons to choose the best sources of information for their particular information need. As professionals, librarians cannot justify being passive channels of information. James Rice wrote in "The Hidden Role of Librarians," that one would not go to a doctor with an ailment and expect to be offered a list of drugs that could possibly be taken for the problem. Patients expect the physician to use his or her professional knowledge to make a selection.¹ Similarly, in our information producing culture, each patron has a wide variety of information sources "to take" for an information need. Rarely will a library user be faced with difficulty in locating citations for information on a topic. This is particularly true with the ever growing numbers of computer-produced access tools covering increasingly greater numbers of information sources. Even in smaller libraries with traditionally limited sources, such as school and special libraries, reference staffs are finding that with computer access they can affordably offer their patrons large databases of information through online commercial products and shared union catalogs. In all but the career-long research endeavors, the volume of cited information on almost any subject can no longer be digested and effectively used by a single individual.

A second difficulty has developed for users trying to use libraries independently. Perhaps also as a result of the development of computer-assisted bibliographic techniques, producers of research guides are favoring the development of all-encompassing indexes and bibliographies rather than selective, critical listings. Obviously, users require more active research assistance to select source materials from these extensive, non-evaluative listings.

With this understanding of current research materials and practices, reference librarians have a professional responsibility to use their expertise and act as information consultants, providing a critical selection of sources, making

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evaluations and choices for the patron, and assisting the patron in making connections between the sources and his or her individual information requirements.

PREPARATION FOR A PROFESSIONAL ROLE

With the role of expert consultant defined for the reference librarian, it becomes clear that the most valuable skill a reference librarian can cultivate is an ability to think critically about the use of information sources. This analytical thought is the one thread that runs through all quality reference services, connecting efforts to form the best information service for library patrons. A reference librarian's ability in the critical use of reference materials will have obvious implications for all of his or her functions - in-person reference assistance, teaching library use skills to patrons, collection development, online searching, etc. For more than a decade educators in all academic fields have been actively studying the part critical thinking skills can play in preparation for a career. Attributes of graduates who have acquired these conceptual, evaluative skills include the ability to think creatively, adapt to new environments, integrate broad ranges of experiences into problem solving, develop innovative approaches to problem solving, recognize long-term effects of one's actions and have a sense of social responsibility. Certainly, a list of qualities such as these seems tailor-made for a successful reference career. Librarians are needed who can analyze the information problems of our field and create solutions. These problems include those presented by individual reference questions as well as more complex situations such as a lack of adequate information sources in an area of research, the need to choose for purchase among competing publications, or the expressed need for new or improved reference services. The decisions and choices involved in all these areas of reference service require just these thoughtful, analytical, evaluative approaches to the use of reference materials.

ESTABLISHED EXPERIENCES WITH CRITICAL THINKING IN REFERENCE WORK

Perhaps the one area where the need for critical, evaluative thinking about reference sources is most explicitly recognized in library science education and

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training programs is reference collection development. Certainly, discussions take place concerning the need for effective decision-making and selection as well as the criteria for these decisions such as relevancy, accuracy, perspective, and bias. Library science students learn to use evaluative tools such as reviewing sources and critical bibliographies. Hopefully they are also encouraged to evaluate the reviewers as they become more proficient critical users of information.

Since collection development work has a long history founded on critical decision-making, perhaps a more appropriate model for the development of a philosophy of critical thinking in all areas of reference work can be seen in the specific field of bibliographic instruction. In the early stages, efforts to instruct library users were concentrated on facility tours and the mechanics of using specific reference sources, i.e., citation guides, descriptions of indexes in an encyclopedia set, discussions of how call numbers are assigned, etc. This instructional approach corresponds directly to the librarian who limits his or her assistance at the reference desk to giving "tours" of how to use certain reference books. Later, concern in the instructional field turned to concentrating on research strategies in presentations to users. The strategies were standard, intended to be applicable to all subjects. This stage in the development of bibliographic instruction theory can be seen as analogous to the approach of reference librarians who make some suggestions concerning the types of reference materials that could serve a particular information request. However, most librarians stop short of recommending specific titles. Recognition of the need to individualize research methods began to be considered in this type of instruction as researchers were asked to select specific reference materials to plug into each step of the research plan. Nevertheless, the strategies often appeared to students as straight-forward, simplistic processes. The true intellectual demands and complexities of library research were not adequately conveyed. Today, bibliographic instructional librarians are teaching researchers the critical thinking skills necessary for them to effectively devise individualized research strategies through analysis of their own information needs. Moreover, librarians are now teaching the evaluation and selection of sources which fulfill those strategies, asking patrons to question the authority, bias, and perspective of the information they read and hear before choosing source.

Reference librarians should be using these same critical thinking techniques as they evaluate and use their reference collections in service to their patrons. Truly, librarians engaged in bibliographic instruction have progressed from serving

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simply as guides to buildings to being teachers of critical research skills. Isn't it time this professional-approach was extended to the mainstay of reference work-individual reference assistance? The following description of the critical use of reference materials in the standard practices of reference assistance will demonstrate how an evolution similar to that which has taken place in bibliographic instruction could significantly improve general reference assistance.

COLLECTION ANALYSIS

The process of recommending information sources to patrons in reference service begins with an evaluative examination of materials available in the current collection. Although critical examination of potential purchases for a reference collection is often practiced, the critical analysis of owned sources is less frequently undertaken. Basic questions concerning scope, purpose, and quality need to be considered to evaluate the potential relevance of the source. Is this information source selective or comprehensive for the field? What were the criteria for any selections made by the editor? Is this work intended to support advanced or elementary research? Is this a summary, factual source or a representation of the varying viewpoints in this field? What biases - political, social, temporal, etc. - are evident? Is the research still timely? Is the source successful in presenting the information as it claims? This type of examination which relates directly to the content of the source carries far greater import for reference service than does any preparation concentrating on the mechanics of using a source, i.e., interpreting citation format, locating indexes, etc. Phyllis Reich wrote that the tools of library research, i.e., reference materials, are "much like a piece of laboratory equipment whose operation requires some special skills and knowledge, but is incidental to the main purpose." While the *Science Citation Index* appears unconquerable to a new reference librarian, manipulation of any "equipment" comes rather easily with time. The librarian's time spent learning reference sources would be best spent evaluating the appropriateness of the source's content.

DIRECT REFERENCE ASSISTANCE

The critical thinking librarian then uses this foundation of an in depth knowledge of his or her collection's strengths to build a specific search strategy and choose relevant sources in response to individual requests for reference assistance.

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Appropriate sources are thoughtfully selected. The individual who asks for *Readers' Guide* is not merely asked if he or she "understands how the index works." Rather, the critical thinking librarian discusses with the patron the subject of the research to determine if this or other sources should be used. Nor should the patron who requests information on gun control be bombarded with every general news report found through a newspaper index, from liberal editorial pieces to legal treatises on the constitutionality of these laws. This approach constitutes a limited service and is a non-professional approach. Rather the critical thinking librarian spends time in the reference interview gathering details about the patron's intended use for the material and the patron's level of experience with the topic. Is he or she gathering varying perspectives for making a voting decision? Is the patron writing the text for a speech to a support group for bereaved individuals who have lost family members through violence involving guns? Is this a student who has already decided to oppose gun control because of one book he/she has read, but needs at least ten sources for a class project? Does this patron have the experience to effectively use a comprehensive, uncritical bibliography? Would a highly selective source serve better?

Armed with these details about the patron and the intended use of the information, the critical thinking librarian can then outline a strategy for retrieving appropriate information. The parameters of the subject focus and the level of investigation planned combine with the librarian's experience with his or her resources to form a specific research plan. Relevant sources are chosen and effective access points are discovered. In addition, the critical thinking librarian estimates the quantity and level of information required. In some cases, suggestions are even made to encourage use of sources that present information or concerns that the patron may be overlooking. Indeed, the responsibility to choose, select and advise patrons regarding appropriate information sources should never be taken as a license to censor points of view at odds with the librarian's values.

It is in consulting services such as these that the reference librarian plays a truly professional role. As the critical expert on information sources, the librarian is the person who can and should contribute knowledge concerning a source's bias, determine the most appropriate subject headings, and have the perspective necessary to anticipate the variety of information needed for the research.

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WHY REFERENCE LIBRARIANS ARE NOT UNDER TAKING THIS RESPONSIBILITY

Few would disagree that the previous discussion illustrates the value of the critical use of information sources in reference desk assistance. This is but one example of the impact this working focus can make in the professional activities of reference librarians. Novices in the field should be prepared to undertake the full range of critical decision-making and thus serve their community effectively as information consultants. Many library educators claim that this thoughtful analytical approach to reference service is exactly what they are teaching in their graduate programs. If true, this educational background is not always translated into practice. Why do we see articles in professional journals recommending sources such as *InfoTrac* CD indexes based solely upon the popularity of its mechanical aspects while ignoring the questionable quality of the indexing in the source?" How else can we explain the habitual responses of reference librarians who simply tell a patron that a requested source is not owned rather than discussing the subject of the request that might be covered by other sources? How many times is someone led to *World Book* without first investigating the information needed? Why do bibliographic instruction handouts offer exhaustive listings of sources often too long and tangential for the intended audience to absorb? Why aren't the reviews written by librarians more evaluative than descriptive? With so much of this non-evaluative work going on in our field, library educators and reference supervisors must re-evaluate the focus of their work with new librarians. Obviously, a stronger, more explicit emphasis needs to be stated in the education and training programs. Indeed, the nucleus of these efforts should be the critical use of reference materials in all phases of reference work.

HOW WE CAN ENCOURAGE REFERENCE LIBRARIANS TO OFFER CRITICAL SERVICE

All members of the library profession's community bear responsibility for encouraging librarians to think critically. As a starting point, library science students and professionals need to be regularly confronted, through course work and library science literature, with the requirements of professional reference services. A clear, explicit emphasis on critical thinking skills sensitizes librarians to their full role as information consultants. Beyond this philosophical grounding in their critical role, library science students need practice in making qualitative

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decisions and choices regarding reference sources and services. Course content should emphasize communication, learning, and behavioral theories as an appropriate base for these future decisions rather than presenting mechanical skills such as A-V production as a foundation. Emphasis should be placed on the many resources we have for critically judging reference materials - evaluative bibliographies, reviewing sources, ranking of journals, guides to subject area literatures, etc.

Library science courses, as is true with any academic study, can suffer from over-abstraction. Students should have opportunities to apply theories and struggle over real-life decisions realizing that one standard policy does not fit all situations. Critical decision making activities should be a major portion of each course. For example, students in reference courses could be asked to review and select certain sources for study rather than merely following a prescribed list from the instructor. Assignments could help students analyze various levels of service in different types of libraries and for patrons with differing levels of experience. Investigations should be undertaken into the effects differing communication styles can have on the success of instructional presentations for specific types of audiences. In short, the focus of all coursework should be that individual decisions, requiring critical thinking on the part of the librarian, need to be made in each aspect of reference work. Perhaps potential library science students should even be encouraged to take electives or concentrate their undergraduate work in liberal studies where thinking/decision-making skills can be polished.

Once librarians are working in a reference position, they need conditions supportive of the time required to fulfill their role as information-use consultants. Library administrators need to recognize the labor-intensive nature of this type of professional work. Staffing and procedures need to be developed to allow adequate time for in-depth analysis of reference sources and extensive contact with patrons in reference interviews.

Reference librarians, themselves, can pave the way for acceptance of their role as information-use advisors by working with target groups of patrons prior to the actual requests for information. For example, an academic librarian can set up informational programs for faculty on designing assignments that REQUIRE critical use of information sources. Business librarians can alert patrons to new evaluative bibliographies in specific areas of interest. Public librarians can send recommendations to their business patrons concerning end-user sources most

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valuable for their work. In this way the librarian is actually moving beyond his or her primary goal of critically selecting information for specific requests to a larger societal role of educating members of the community concerning the importance of being critical consumers of information themselves.

CONCLUSION

Reference librarians daily face a complex challenge in choosing among a vast array of information sources for very specific, individual information needs. The best preparation new professionals in the field can receive to prepare for this challenge is to obtain a sound grounding in the primacy of this evaluative role as a selector/consultant and have opportunities to develop the critical thinking skills required to make these evaluations. Those in our field responsible for education and training will serve these new librarians well by focusing their efforts on developing these critical thinking abilities, preparing them to both accept and succeed in their role as information-use consultants.



CHAPTER

4

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF REFERENCE LIBRARIANS:

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH, PUBLICATION, AND SERVICE



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THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF REFERENCE LIBRARIANS

GARY W. WHITE

Excerpted from *The Reference Librarian*

Professional development is a concept that has long been espoused by the library profession and its professional associations. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) of the American Library Association (ALA) lists that its number one goal is to “provide development opportunities for academic and research librarians and other library personnel that enhance their ability to deliver superior services and resources” (American Library Association, 1997). In addition, the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), also of ALA, recognizes the importance of professional development for reference librarians and lists two of its specific responsibilities as the “conduct of activities and projects within the association’s areas of responsibility” [primarily the delivery of reference/information services] and “encouragement of the development of librarians engaged in these activities” (American Library Association, 1997). A number of other professional associations, including the American Medical Association (AMA) and the National Education Association (NEA), contain similar statements (American Medical Association, 1999; National Education Association, 1999).

What does “professional development” entail? Julia Gelfand, former chair of RUSA’s Committee on Professional Development, states that it “is commonly defined as activity to enhance one’s ability to perform work-related functions” (Gelfand, 1985). She goes on to give such examples as attending relevant workshops and seminars at local, national, or international meetings; participating in continuing education courses and programs; enrolling in academic courses; and “availing oneself of professional literature.”

Irene F. Rockman gives a broader list of activities, including “active involvement with association work; presentation of papers; publication of books, articles, reviews, abstracts, and bibliographies; grant writing; consulting; research and study leaves; staff exchanges; and other contributions which enable one to perform at a higher level of proficiency” (Rockman, 1989). She goes on to explain that these types of professional development activities are increasing in importance among academic librarians who are “now expected to engage in scholarly pursuits to gain reappointment, tenure, and/or promotion.” An article by G. Charles Newman, Amy L. Dibartolo, and Levirn Hill (1991) agrees with Rockman’s lists of activities, stating that professional development programs could consist of “several components, including advanced degrees in a subject discipline, personal research, numerous short-term courses, seminars, workshops, and extended programs.” Therefore, it appears that there is some variation in defining professional development, with

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some librarians viewing it as encompassing specific training/educational opportunities and others looking at professional development as activities which are requirements, or aid in the attainment, of specific academic or faculty rank.

This paper will outline professional development activities as they relate to the reference librarian, with a special focus on research, publication and service. Included will be a discussion of the positive impacts of these areas and practical strategies for reference librarians wishing to become more involved in these professional development activities. Attendance and participation in conferences, which can fall under the research or service categories, will also be addressed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the literature on professional development for librarians is quite abundant, there is little written especially for the reference librarian. Johannah Sherrer (1996), in an article outlining the competencies needed by contemporary reference librarians, writes that “library schools need to impart to their graduates that responsibility for continued professional growth and development is as much a personal responsibility as an institutional one. The importance of self-directed learning and the ability to grow and evolve in the practice of reference work are the distinguishing characteristics that mark successful reference librarianship.”

Other studies look at the professional development of reference librarians from the perspective of continuing education. Leslie M. Kong (1996) states, “Reference librarians should avail themselves of continuing education opportunities, especially those focused on electronic resources.” She also encourages reference librarians to develop their critical thinking skills as these are required for the “continuing process of evaluating information resources in the provision of effective reference services.” Gary E. Strong (1996) advocates educational opportunities for training reference librarians for the library of the future, adding that managers must allocate resources for this function.

Most studies of professional development are of academic librarians, and are not limited to reference librarians per se. W. Michael Havener and Wilbur A. Stolt (1994) study the impact of institutional support on professional development activities of academic librarians. By correlating institutional support measures, including release time and financial support, with successful professional development activities, such as publication activity, professional meetings

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attended, workshops, professional association involvement, and reading of professional literature, the authors find that a “supportive organizational climate has a major positive impact on a librarian’s professional development activities,” a sentiment the authors found expressed in an earlier article by Grace Saw (1989).

Dennis K. Grumling and Carolyn A. Sheehy (1993) describe the professional development program developed and implemented at Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. This cooperative program is designed to “address concerns about integrating younger, newer professional staff members into the complex structure of large research libraries and about encouraging them to look broadly at the issues facing these libraries.” Librarians with less than seven years of service were selected to participate in programs which consisted of a series of seminars led by experienced librarians. Surveys of program participants and program administrators indicate that the program achieved its goal of integrating newer professional staff into the research library structure.

The integration of new library professionals into large academic libraries was also the focus of a series of case studies published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (Clemens and Trevvett, 1991). The Council on Library Resources offered grants to a number of large research libraries, including Columbia University, Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Georgia, and the University of Missouri-Columbia. Each of these articles outlines the institution’s program, its participants, evaluation methods, and conclusions. Each program differed in its offerings, but most offered some form of mentoring and seminar structure. All of the participating institutions reported that they viewed the programs as successful. Peer-coaching is the focus of an article by Levene and Frank (1993) on professional development programs. The authors examine peer coaching as a tool for professional development and growth among instruction librarians. Peer coaching differs from mentoring in that the “participants are at the same hierarchical level.”

Professional development as reflected through participation in library associations is outlined by Donald J. Kenney and GailMcMillan (1992). They surveyed all fifty state library associations to gather information on the professional development and continuing education of their members. Forty out of forty-one responding libraries offer continuing education and professional development opportunities and all reported offering “skill-enhancement” workshops.

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An article by Darrell L. Jenkins, M. Kathleen Cook, and Mary Anne Fox (1981) looks at development in the other major area for academic librarians, research and publication. They acknowledge the increased number of academic librarians with faculty status or tenure requirements and the resulting increased pressure to conduct research and publish. The authors recommend a professional development program consisting of such items as graduate assistants and release time.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFERENCE LIBRARIANS

The literature on professional development strongly indicates that these activities are useful to the individual and, ultimately, to the profession. Albritton (1990) writes, "In order to function effectively as a professional, one must have continuing learning experiences to reinforce his or her formal education. Due to rapid growth in new knowledge and technology, it is estimated that within 10 to 12 years of receiving their formal professional education, most librarians will become approximately half as competent as they were upon graduation to meet the needs of their profession." While this may be difficult to substantiate quantitatively, the sentiment that professional development is necessary is apparent.

An important issue, however, is whether professional development activities are the responsibility of the individual or of the institution to which the reference librarian belongs. Clearly, there has to be some individual initiative for successful professional development. However, there must also be encouragement and support at the institutional level to motivate employees to seek such opportunities. The Association of Research Libraries (1982), writes that "current evidence suggests that libraries and their parent institutions are assuming greater responsibility for planning, encouraging, and facilitating (professional development) programs." ARL suggests that increased pressures for productivity as well as organizational and operational changes are reasons for this change. Newman, Dibartolo, and Hill (1991) agree, stating, "The profession has begun to assume greater responsibility for the provision of adequate programs of continuing education for its members."

For academic librarians, the importance of professional development activities, especially those of research, publication, and service, are implicitly tied to performance and success factors related to faculty status, reappointment, and promotion and tenure. A study by Emily Werrell and Laura Sullivan (1987) states that 79 percent of academics have some form of faculty status and, therefore, must

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pursue activities such as research, publication, and professional service. A more recent survey of research, doctoral and master's level institutions shows that 54.3 percent have tenure-track librarians (Mitchell and Reichel, 1999). The literature is abundant with articles on issues related to publishing and tenure, including Janet Swan Hill's article on librarians as faculty members (1994); W. Bede Mitchell and L. Stanislava Swieszkowski's article on publication requirements and tenure approval rates (1985); Robert Boice, Jordan M. Scepanski and Wayne Wilson's publication on coping with pressures to publish (1987); and Bradigan and Mularski's analysis of publication requirements for tenure and promotion (1996). In another vein, Lynne E. Gamble (1989) has written on the importance and value of university service for academic librarians. John N. Olsgaard (1984) looked at "success" among academic librarians, including such items as publications, professional activities and participation in service organization.

For public and other non-academic librarians, there is usually not as strong a mandate, if any, to participate in such activities in order to retain employment or professional status. In addition, there is often not as much institutional support for such activities. Also, as mentioned earlier, the types of activities considered to fall under the umbrella of professional development tend to consist of continuing education programs or workshops. As indicated above, these activities undoubtedly can be very useful in terms of gaining new skills and knowledge. However, as this paper attempts to show, participation in other activities, which are typically conducted primarily by academic librarians, can also yield great benefits to the non-academic librarian.

POSITIVE IMPACT OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

In academic libraries, the growth of faculty status over the years has yielded a number of positive benefits. First, librarians in many institutions have achieved the position as members of the faculty, allowing librarians to serve on governing bodies and to participate in the same educational activities as their teaching counterparts. The increased publication output in the field of librarianship, primarily accomplished by academic librarians, provides a second benefit of increased visibility among all disciplines in the academic arena and an increased sharing of knowledge throughout the library profession. The increased status that comes with sharing the same rank as teaching faculty heightens the reputation of the library profession and the importance of scholarship in the field. The benefits

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of research and publication are not limited to academic librarians. Research and publication increases the professional reputation of the author and fosters an acknowledgement of subject expertise among professional colleagues. Subsequently, it also increases the reputation of the institution to which the author belongs, as well as the author's status within the organization. Publication constitutes a contribution to the scholarly discipline of librarianship, an endeavor in which all professional librarians should participate. Other personal benefits to the author include an increased understanding of trends and research in the field; an opportunity to develop further research projects; and increased marketability if seeking a promotion or new position elsewhere.

STRATEGIES FOR BEGINNING RESEARCH

There are many strategies that reference librarians, particularly beginning librarians, can adopt to embark on a research project. Probably most important is to read the professional literature in librarianship. Most research projects are in areas that have previously been covered; they build in some way on past research. Reading and analyzing current studies can often prompt researchers into thinking of a research project which builds on the study. Reading the guidelines for author submissions to professional journals provides the scope of the journal, the types of articles that are accepted, and formal procedures to follow.

Another important area is mentoring. Golian and Galbraith (1996) give two definitions of mentors, including "someone senior to you in the field who actively works for your advancement, or anyone who enhances, enriches, and encourages the professional development of another member of the profession." Beginning researchers should seek the advice and assistance of experienced researchers who can provide assistance and recommendations. Mentors can also assist with data collection; provide information on appropriate journals for submission; and proofread and critique writings. Mentors do not necessarily have to belong to the same institutions; some could be professional colleagues located elsewhere. Beginning researchers can also team up with a mentor on a research project. Collaborating with an experienced researcher will make the research and publication process less intimidating.

Listening to patrons and colleagues, especially in the provision of reference service, is also a tool to develop research ideas. Daily interactions and discussions

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can yield extremely valuable and interesting research questions. Ideas can also be generated by attending conferences and listening to presentations, or just by interacting with colleagues from other institutions. Subscribing to relevant discussion lists can also produce ideas. What information are your colleagues looking for? Chances are if one person wants some type of information, then there are also many others who are seeking the same thing.

Reading the professional literature in other fields can also produce ideas. Librarians can take a research project in another discipline and apply it to libraries, or they can look for related types of studies such as citation studies or studies of journal rankings. The methodology used in these studies can sometimes easily be adapted for librarianship. Another area is to look for publishing opportunities such as calls for papers or for conference presentations. These “calls” will provide information on the subject matter the editor or organizer is looking for. Beginning librarians may find it useful to develop papers or projects from their library school program. Finally, many reference librarians write about innovations that they have developed in their own libraries. Writing about such projects, and discussing their context in the literature of librarianship, is a good place to start for beginning researchers. A useful tool to use is simply to keep a list of possible research topics as the activities above are performed. This listing acts as a prompting device so that the researcher is on the alert for new ideas and will remember ideas previously generated.

Those who are not familiar with research methods and tools for data analysis will want to familiarize themselves with this information. Depending on whether it is totally new subject matter or simply a refresher, librarians can take a course or workshop or simply obtain a research methods book for reference. Also, writing, like most things, becomes easier the more it is done. Finally, rejected publications, while disappointing, can also be very useful. Reading the reviewer comments can point out methodological errors and provide tips for producing higher quality work for revisions and for future works.

POSITIVE IMPACT OF CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE AND PRESENTATIONS

Professional conferences can be one of the most intellectually stimulating activities available. Conference presentations typically cover the most cutting-edge topics and research that have not yet been published. Attending a conference has

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many positive aspects. It is probably the best way to learn about innovative practices, new resources, and new research areas. Attending conferences provides a forum for interaction with colleagues, and can serve as a place to develop new ideas for research and for new programs and practices.

Presenting a paper at a conference provides many of the same benefits as publishing a journal article. It increases visibility of authors and promotes their professional reputation and that of their institution. Paper presentations are a great method to present research findings in a timely fashion and to gain immediate feedback from the audience. Information garnered from audience interaction can prove to be useful information when preparing a manuscript for publication. These questions can also serve as a springboard for further, related research. Finally, many conferences publish proceedings, which is another avenue for publication for prospective authors.

STRATEGIES FOR CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE AND PRESENTATIONS

Attending conferences can often be quite expensive. Registration costs, travel, lodging, and meals can make conference attendance prohibitively expensive. Prospective attendees should seek out funding opportunities from their institutions. If this is not possible, grants or awards are given by some organizations, especially for those still in a library graduate program. Attending local or state events is not usually as expensive and can provide many of the same benefits as attending a national conference. Many institutions will, however, fund the cost of conferences if a paper is being presented.

Beginning presenters may wish to pair up with a mentor, preferably an experienced conference presenter. This is a valuable method for properly preparing a presentation and coping with other potential problems such as stage fright. Generating ideas for conference papers is probably best done through reading the call for proposals. Most conference organizers initially require an abstract and title; if the paper is accepted, the author is expected to prepare a paper for presentation. Prospective presenters should not be too hesitant since proposals are not too lengthy and should not take an inordinate amount of time to prepare. Also, the worst thing that can happen is that the proposal is rejected.

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POSITIVE IMPACT OF SERVICE

Service in librarianship usually refers to service on local, state or national committees, usually those related to the profession. Serving on local committees, such as institutional or regional committees, allows the reference librarian to have a direct voice and impact on local operations in their own community. As with research and conferences, service also increases the visibility and status of librarians and library-related issues. Reference librarians interact with many different constituents in the community and therefore may be in the very unique position of being aware of different facets of local issues. This knowledge makes reference librarians valuable assets as committee members.

State and national organizations allow librarians to have a broader impact on the profession. Committees at the state and national levels often engage in educational activities and programs to benefit members, and committee members influence what is offered. Service on committees at these levels also provides increased professional status and visibility and allows for the interaction with colleagues from other institutions. These professional linkages continually prove to be useful for a variety of purposes, such as learning about new resources, programs, potential research, or for use as a professional reference. Membership in professional associations provides voting privileges and, subsequently, a voice in how the organization operates.

STRATEGIES FOR BEGINNING SERVICE ACTIVITIES

The best advice for becoming involved with service activities is to volunteer. There are many opportunities for reference librarians to become involved and many committees are searching for members. At the local level, it is probably best to attend meetings as a visitor and to participate if possible. If appropriate, visitors can also place relevant items on the agenda for discussion. Contacting the committee chair, or talking with him before or after a meeting, to volunteer services, is a method that is usually quite successful. Attending meetings is also a valuable experience for those who do not have previous committee experience. Watching the proceedings, listening to the interactions, and learning parliamentary procedure will prove beneficial. Volunteering at the state or national level can be more involved. First, it usually involves some kind of time commitment, often for two years or more. Potential volunteers should make sure they have the proper

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authorization from their parent institutions for the time commitment and the financial means to attend the meetings. An extremely useful technique, and similar to that described for local committees, is to investigate ahead of time what the committee does, and to attend the meeting as a visitor. For example, the American Library Association publishes the annual *ALA Handbook of Organization*, which describes all of the committees and lists the current members. Potential volunteers can identify committees that interest them and contact the committee chair for further information or to find out whether there are volunteer opportunities. Another technique is to attend executive committee meetings as a visitor. In addition to gaining valuable information about how the organization works, visitors also get to know the leaders and can learn of possible volunteer opportunities.

Newer librarians, or those still in graduate school, should investigate opportunities such as the American Library Association's New Members Round Table. This committee has the mission to "help those new to the library profession and those who have been association members for less than ten years to become actively involved in the association and the profession." Many other committees will allow inexperienced committee members or current students to serve as interns. Another valuable resource are experienced librarians at the same, or nearby, institutions. These librarians will often provide advice and give recommendations for committee membership.

CONCLUSION

Professional development can take the form of many different activities, including continuing education courses, workshops, research and publication, and service. There is a consensus within the library profession that professional development activities are beneficial and desirable. However, there is some disparity as to whether the responsibility falls to the individual or the institution. Research suggests that there is a greater institutional responsibility and commitment for professional development activities, at least among academic libraries.

Research, publication, and service are three activities that are of particular importance to librarians, especially those in academic libraries with faculty status or tenure. However, the benefits of these activities can prove equally useful for librarians from non-academic institutions. The benefits are multifaceted and bring

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rewards to the individual reference librarian, the parent institution, and the library profession as a whole. Personally, reference librarians who engage in these professional development activities will gain a more prestigious position within the profession. Also, these activities assist in the performance of reference activities because they facilitate an increased awareness and knowledge of new, innovative resources and services. The strategies for becoming involved in these activities will vary by the individual reference librarian's interests, needs, and organizational commitment and support. Perhaps if administrators at institutions not providing professional development support can be convinced of their utility and potential benefit to the organization, reference librarians at these institutions may be able to broaden their involvement in professional development activities.