

IN THE PROPER CONTEXT: LIBRARIANS AS EDUCATORS

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Abstract: Purpose - In the current dialog regarding our mission, librarians would be self-defeating *not* to focus on the core of our practice: teaching. Given that we are in fact educators, we are obliged to adopt teaching practices, concepts, and language already employed by our peers in the classrooms and laboratories.

Design/Approach – Currently, the library profession is reassessing its mission and practices, which reassessment supposedly has been necessitated by the computerization of information and educational materials, proliferation of vendors who control access to those materials, and most recently, gargantuan digitization projects that augur sweeping change in the ways academic libraries operate. But these changes are only in the procedures of librarianship, *not* in its mission. The true causal motive underlying our perceived need to reassess our mission is our own continuing failure as librarians to embrace and promote our fundamental role as educators.

Findings - University administrators, faculty, students, and even librarians themselves, do not fully realize that libraries are places in which teaching and learning occur almost continuously. More to the point, few realize that librarians are themselves teachers and educators despite abundant evidence that the mental processes librarians employ daily in the practice of their profession are highly comparable to the teaching strategies followed by instructional faculty.

Practical implications - We must adopt new library assessment methods equivalent to those of instructional academic departments. Furthermore, if we profess to be educators, we must acquire academic credentials comparable to those of our peers in academe. Beyond that, we must engage in scholarship as do our esteemed colleagues.

Keywords: Librarianship, Library Assessment, Library Mission, Library Education, Librarians as Educators

Article Type: General review

Academic Library Mission

Around the world, academic library professionals are reassessing not only their job duties, but also the fundamental practices and even the mission of librarianship.

These deliberations and considerations are taking place in the context of sweeping change in the information industry, which includes the massive computerization of knowledge and educational resources, radical alterations to the processes of scholarly communication, the proliferation of vendors who want to control the access to these

resources (Dunmore, 2006), and gargantuan online digitization projects that could conceivably displace libraries as academic and social institutions. Furthermore, we are surrounded by numerous emerging technologies, many of which will no doubt prove to be disruptive. We cannot, however, presently distinguish the sustaining technologies from the disruptive ones, even though the latter may eventually lead to the disappearance of academic libraries (Lafferty and Edwards, 2004). All of these conditions are exerting pressure on us, but they are not exactly fundamental to the profession, and so do not constitute the proper context for deliberating the future of librarianship. Yet many among us are focusing on these conditions exclusively.

The current debates over librarianship need a context shift that will bring us to the crucial issue of the profession: Are we educators or are we something else? University administrators, faculty, students, and even librarians themselves do not fully realize that libraries are places in which teaching and learning occur almost continuously. More to the point, few realize that librarians are in fact teachers and educators despite abundant evidence that the intellectual and organizational processes librarians employ daily in the practice of their profession are quite comparable to the teaching strategies followed by instructional faculty. These processes of teaching constitute the genuine context from which to steer librarianship into the future. We are certainly not simply caretakers of resources; nor are we merely support service providers for teaching faculty. We are educators.

According to Piaget (1971), the guiding principles and operational strategies—sometimes called the *deep structures*—of any enduring social institution are only dimly perceived under normal circumstances. These structures, however, become most

discernable when an institution is in a state of *disadaptation*. Also, during a disadaptation, *transformations* that have emerged in the institution over time as a response to internal or external factors are made more easily apparent because they may be less intrinsic to the institution's health in times of stress. Perhaps such transformations have even become liabilities to the institution as conditions have changed over time. Librarianship is, and has been for some time, in a state of disadaptation. As a consequence, the library profession has become divided from the real purpose of library service: teaching.

Librarians as Educators

In simplistic, non-structuralist terms, we need to get down to the basic business of librarianship—teaching, and teaching better than ever before. In my 30-year dual-career as a university instructor and librarian, I have observed that the duties librarians perform daily in their professional practice are indeed comparable to teaching methods used by instructional faculty. I started teaching at the college level before I started working in libraries. Over the years, I developed courses, wrote dozens of syllabi, composed and administered hundreds of exams, devised countless assignments and reading lists, all of which were intended to give my students, undergraduates and graduates, a solid breadth and depth of the various subjects I taught them, which included literature, English composition, research writing, interdisciplinary humanities, anthropology, and business communications. Librarians, like teaching faculty, regularly design learning outcomes for students, devise teaching strategies, and assess their own effectiveness in teaching library users how to find, evaluate, and utilize information and knowledge successfully, usually in the subject areas of the users' chosen fields of study.

While working at reference desks, in cataloging, in collection development, and in bibliographic instruction, my intentions were the same as those I held when I was teaching in the classroom: to make certain that my students—in the classroom and the library—acquired the learning necessary to find the information and knowledge they needed in their respective fields of study. In other words, my teaching objective was not specifically to make my students good library users, but to make them expert in their academic fields. Librarians address problem-based learning needs of students in all disciplines all the time, and library learning is *not* ancillary learning. Librarians provide highly individualized outcomes-oriented instruction focused on students' academic needs.

Librarians, however, do not normally use the language of teaching and learning that classroom instructors often use. Instead of *critical thinking*, librarians speak of *information literacy* (Emmons and Martin 2002). Instead of *teaching strategies*, librarians refer to *reference interviews* and *consultations*. Instead of creating *learning objects*, librarians develop *collections*—print, digital, archival, etc. Whereas instructional faculty prepare their courses in terms of *learning outcomes* designed to assure the fluency of students in their disciplines, librarians think in terms of resources that have adequate *scope, breadth, and depth* to meet the peculiar needs of all library users. Terminology aside, librarians have clear ideas of what library users need to learn from them in order to find, evaluate, and properly utilize in their exposition and practice the specific information and knowledge they need and seek. Those clear ideas are the librarian's intended learning outcomes for the users, and the librarian's guidance of users into the library's resources constitutes highly individualized teaching strategies for each user.

This level of individual guidance rarely occurs in the classroom. Yet it is a brand of one-on-one teaching and learning that can be crucial for student success in the classroom.

Even librarians who do not deal directly with users have learning outcomes and teaching strategies in mind. For instance, collection development librarians and other types of selectors build library collections by locating books, journals, and other resources to acquire for use by students and faculty in the subjects taught in their universities. Just as instructional faculty must make sure their students learn every necessary aspect of their disciplines, including sub-disciplines, conflicting opinions within the field, disciplinary methodologies, etc., bibliographers in similar fashion seek library materials that cover a subject fully, with all its controversies, variant approaches, seminal works and minor ones, historical treatises and the most current research in the field. Essentially, book selectors conduct instructional activities much like those of educational faculty when they create new courses, compose syllabi, design exams and assignments, and compile reading lists. As a result, a library collection is a dynamic, complex learning tool. It mirrors the growth and the culture of its university, the teaching and learning that occur in the departments and faculties, the breadth and depth of the academic programs, and the commitment of its educators to their respective disciplines and to education overall. A collection developed by professional librarians is itself a grand source of learning for users even if they choose not to approach librarians.

In their own unique way, catalogers likewise use teaching strategies when they create their descriptions for new library resources with author, title, and other headings that serve as recognizable links from the catalog to relevant materials in the student's field of study. Catalogers also assign new materials to their proper subject classifications.

Using complex classification schedules, catalogers position books on similar subjects in physical and topical proximity to each other, not simply for user convenience, of course, but to facilitate the users' broad acquisition of knowledge on their given subjects.

Conceptually simple, library cataloging nevertheless requires the librarian's very close attention to subject matter, the author's level of detail or generality, the fine points of the work in hand, the author's scholarly intention and critical approach, and numerous other features. Systematic classification is a fundamental activity of scientific inquiry, and classification systems are essential to scientific analysis, investigation, observation, comparison, and discovery. Learning how to use a library's classification system to find books is often a student's first encounter with scientific differentiation. As such, a library's classification system is itself a tool for teaching users analytical reasoning. I have said elsewhere (Webb 2000) that librarianship is more an act of faith than a science, but the rigorous methodologies of library classification might well be the most scientific aspect of the library profession.

Self-Study

Given, then, that librarians are educators, we would be self-defeating if we did *not* focus on that core of our practice—teaching. Education is our field and our mission. Every adoption of technology and every adaptation we make to sustain our profession must link to that platform. This is an essential strategy because even though many college and university instructional faculty work well with librarians as educators and are delighted to engage them for library instruction to their students, the large majority of faculty still see librarians as second-class citizens in academe who cannot quite measure

up to the intellectual rigor and teaching skills of instructional faculty. That has never been the case, and the error of such thinking is becoming much more clear on two counts: first, librarians are engaging in more teaching activities than ever before, and are becoming more adept at their craft; second, a good many instructional faculty are, quite frankly, awful teachers. To reverse the view that we are non-educators, we are obliged first of all to translate our actions into the language of teaching and learning, and not simply by aping terms such as *learning objectives*, *problem-based learning*, *teaching strategies*, *outcomes-based learning*, etc., but by reinvigorating ourselves with the ambition to engage fully in our customary processes of teaching, which we can honestly describe in the terminology of teaching and learning, but seldom utilize.

For the 2004 self-study of the Library at California State University, Sacramento, (CSUS) I persuaded the library staff to use for the first time the same obligatory outline used for the self-studies conducted by all the academic departments. This would allow us to use the same terminology, logic, headings, and reporting structures as the instructional faculty to demonstrate clearly that the Library was indeed a teaching and learning environment, and that librarians and other library staff are bona fide educators. In that self-study we described our services and functions as the Library's *academic programs* in accordance with the self-study outline, and selected three programs that would be familiar to the faculty and administrators who would be reading and evaluating our self-study.

The three Library programs we selected for the self-study were Library Collections and Information Organization (acquisitions, cataloging), Library Instruction and Information Use (information literacy instruction), and Reference Service and

Information Access (reference, circulation). The self-study outline required us to provide an overview of each of the three programs, namely, the mission and goals of the program; major state and national trends in our discipline and how our curriculum structure and course offerings compared to those of similar programs in our discipline; what response to changes in the discipline our department was planning and/or implementing.

More specific details were also required of each program, e.g., describing learning expectations for each program; how the expectations are communicated to students; how our curriculum is structured; creating a matrix to display learning expectations and how courses contribute to achieving the expectations; teaching strategies we found particularly effective in helping students achieve our learning expectations; describing how our department maintains consistency in multiple sections of courses; and discussing changes needed to enhance or improve the effectiveness of our program outcomes.

These are questions not normally asked and answered as part of a library assessment, and they required a great deal of thought for us to translate the Library's academic programs to fit into the outline neatly. But in the end, we were happily surprised how well the Library's programs meshed with the standard self-study instrument for instructional departments. The process forced us to use the concepts and language of teaching and learning to describe for faculty and administrators the teaching and learning components of the Library. The self-study review panel of six instructional faculty from different departments applauded our self-study, although they, too, were unaccustomed to thinking about the Library as having academic programs, or about librarians as educators. With the data before them, however, they were happy to announce that the self-study was a success. University administrators were equally

congratulatory about our ambitious effort to describe the Library in terms of teaching and learning. We opened some eyes and minds both inside and outside the Library.

Meaningful Library Assessment

Portions of the self-study outline were problematic for us, however. These were the sections about assessment and measuring the effectiveness of our programs. Although we had plenty of data from many sources regarding library activity levels, including numerous surveys, circulation statistics, information literacy instructional sessions, etc., a major finding of our self-study was that the data from these instruments could not substantiate any measurable positive effect of the Library's academic programs on the overall academic performance of the students who participated in our programs. While instructional departments have ample quantitative data to validate their teaching effectiveness by assessing the learning of their students, the Library could not put forward any real data that demonstrated the effect of our programs on student learning.

As a result, for the next self-study in 2010 we committed ourselves to develop methods that demonstrate empirically the effect of the Library's academic programs on 1) the overall performance of CSUS students, and 2) the goals and effectiveness of the University. After the 2004 self-study, we began collaborating with the CSUS Office of Institutional Research to compare the GPAs of senior students who were frequent library users with the GPAs of students who were infrequent library users. We gathered some initial data from student samples, but they were too small to derive a valid correlation. The results, however, suggested that there was a positive relationship.

The self-study showed us that academic libraries must devise meaningful new library assessment methods equivalent to those used by instructional academic departments to measure the real effect libraries and librarians have on student academic performance. I think we all believe intuitively the idea that a student will perform better if he or she uses a library than if he or she does not, or its corollary—students who use a library will perform better academically than those who do not. These beliefs would certainly enhance a university's effectiveness to the degree that is true. But where is the proof? Customary library assessment practices of simply recording the rising numbers of new books in the collection, book circulations, reference questions answered, etc., fall short in evaluating a library's positive effect on student learning, and do not allow for any meaningful assessment of a library's contribution to the university's effectiveness. Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, and the like, can be illuminating, but they remain anecdotal and imprecise. Comparisons of a library's characteristics with those of its peer institutions can tell us something about the organizations themselves, but say little about product quality. And these days, reporting students' information literacy quotients derived from library instruction programs are becoming increasingly popular. But while measures of information literacy are quantitative, they generally remain isolated data, and are not normally correlated with the students' overall academic success or to university effectiveness.

None of these methods can substantiate the effect of a library's academic programs on student learning, which leaves significant doubts about the effect library programs have on the educational mission of their institutions. This must change if academic libraries are to remain relevant in academe. Libraries need a way to show

mathematically, or at least inferentially via a reliable correlation factor, that library usage does, after all, contribute positively to student performance and, thereby, to the university's effectiveness. To the degree that libraries cannot do that, I believe they are at risk in these increasingly unfriendly budget times, and with so many commercial competitors in the information marketplace. Like any other university department, a library has an obligation to measure its effectiveness in terms of its direct contribution to the university's overall success in teaching students. The university chooses its performance objectives. The library then must devise ways to contribute demonstrably to those objectives by quantitatively assessing its contribution, and then increasing it.

The Library of Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) is ready to begin where the CSUS project ended: we intend to compare the levels of library usage among large samples of our students with their GPAs, which we will extract from the Academic Registry's system. Our initial study will match students' library book circulation data to their cumulative GPAs at graduation for the last four years. We hope to find a reliable correlation strong enough to confirm that our library does contribute to student academic success. This project is a tangible and very focused example of Wiegand's (2005) observation that "we have to look much more at the library in the life of our users (and conversely, nonusers) in order to deepen our understanding of the many roles it plays (or could play) in their everyday lives."

In addition to book circulation data, the Library also tracks student library usage in other ways: entering the Library; using group study rooms; accessing our online databases; interlibrary loans; PC Lab usage; and participation in the Library's information literacy classes. Data from the HKBU Academic Registry can allow us to

study the effects of student library usage on academic performance across different departments and faculties. With AR data, we can also correlate the effect of library usage on students' timely progress to their graduation. It also is possible to conduct long-term longitudinal studies to assess the Library's effectiveness over several years, and cohort studies can measure the Library's effectiveness on special student groups.

Of course, the variables affecting student learning and academic performance are countless. Our aim is to isolate, as much as possible, one variable that we assume affects student learning in a positive way—library usage. If a meaningful, reliable quantitative correlation can be established and confirmed, we will use the correlation as a baseline to improve the Library's services and collections.

I sincerely hope that if we find a correlation it will not be a negative one. In any case, once we have gathered the data and calculated a correlation between our students' library usage and their success in the University, we will devise ways to strengthen the correlation by improving and expanding Library programs and services according to what the data will tell us.

Although librarians are educators, it is not necessary for us to give examinations, homework, or research assignments, nor need we necessarily assign grades to the students we teach in our information literacy classes. Let the classroom instructors give grades as they always have. If we librarians are correctly doing our jobs as educators, the results of our work should be reflected in the grades of the students who receive our instruction. And if we cannot link student library usage to overall student academic performance as reflected in their grades, librarianship will remain an act of faith and not a science of teaching.

Librarian Education

Finally, as educators we must obtain the same level of academic credentials held by instructional faculty. Three years ago, a debate began in the United States when the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) began offering fellowships to non-librarians with PhDs in the humanities to fill the shortage of subject specialists in American academic libraries. The CLIR program provides the fellows a short-course approach to library methods while giving them on-the-job training in university libraries around the country. This is intended to turn these non-librarians into “information professionals and scholars” without ever completing library school.

Crowley (2004) labels this project “shortsighted and self-abasing,” and warns that “these apprenticeships are likely to undermine further the academic librarian’s already unstable place within higher education.” He argues that the fellowships could “create an alternative, even superior, class of librarians who will be superbly positioned by university standards and custom to challenge more conventionally educated [sic] colleagues for dominance in the contemporary academic library.” Crowley knows well that the culture of academe tends to leave librarians out of the central functions of higher education, and he advises library leaders to “enhance effective service by embedding librarians in the center of the academic enterprise.”

In other words, Crowley is saying that a large part of our strategy as educators is to integrate library academic programs more fully into the processes of teaching, learning, and research in our universities and colleges. Like Crowley, I reject CLIR’s idea of short-course library training for non-librarians, despite their subject doctorates. As the CLIR

program stands, it is demeaning to library education. In reality, the program is selling-out MLS-bearing librarians, who should rightly be the recipients of any resources made available for the purpose of increasing the number of PhD librarians.

Shame on CLIR and the American Library Association (ALA) for failing to mandate doctorates as the terminal degree for academic librarians, and for not asserting unequivocally the teaching role of librarians. These two failures—mid-level terminal degrees and inadequate preparation in pedagogical methods—have promulgated the schism and the dual standards between teaching faculty and librarians. A second master's degree in a subject area simply won't do for dispelling the notion in higher education that librarians are not competent as academics. To become the equals of instructional faculty, librarians must attain the highest levels of intellectual accomplishment, and refine the teaching methods they use in their libraries, perhaps in some of the ways suggested in this paper.

The debate raised by CLIR over doctorates in librarianship is not a new one, but it shows again that our own profession has created the severe division between instructional faculty and librarians, and that the leaders of our profession, including those in the graduate library schools, are side-stepping the obvious solutions: MLS graduates should either earn subject doctorates or pursue ALA-accredited doctorates in library science or closely related fields after the MLS.

Even beyond that, librarians then must seek faculty status at their institutions equal to that of instructional faculty, actively pursue promotion and tenure, and engage in research and publication. Holders of doctorates are expected by their committees and their peers to produce new knowledge. This expectation comes with the degree and is

part of faculty and tenure processes. And more so than the instructional faculty, we must emphasize our role as educators, and dispel the trite notion that librarians are merely “the stewards of knowledge,” as per CLIR.

Conclusions

At the present time, librarians are desperately trying to maintain a strong claim on their academic presence and importance. Our lack of commonly recognized academic terminal degrees, our failure to acknowledge and promote our teaching skills, and our comparative reluctance to conduct and publish research all detract from our efforts to be viewed as legitimate peers of instructional faculty. It’s like being underdressed at the opera, and the situation won’t change until the profession lives up to the same high levels of performance as those practiced by faculty and researchers.

CLIR stated that its fellowship program is “designed to challenge [the fellows] to think broadly about the changes under way in research methodologies, the creation of new scholarly resources, and the demands these changes place on critical academic institutions such as universities, libraries and archives. CLIR believes that the deep subject knowledge PhDs offer, combined with their experiences in the classroom and with research trends, can be invaluable to the development of pedagogically-sound scholarly resources.” CLIR pits “the traditional work [sic] performed by librarians” against the learning of advanced scholar-professionals “whose abilities span the areas of subject specialization, pedagogy, technology, and new media research.”

If these expectations of advanced education, excellence in teaching, and ongoing scholarship had been the tuition of librarians a few generations ago, our profession would

not now be wondering where we fit in academe. If CLIR, ALA, and all their associated committees, work groups, roundtables, etc., are not willing or able to raise librarianship to the level of a full academic discipline by focusing on teaching excellence, doctoral-level academic preparation, scholarship and research, and full faculty status, the future of the profession is bleak.

There may be hope, however. As I recall, many librarians I knew in the early 1980s joined the profession primarily because they were bibliophiles (Pearson and Webb 1988). They were service-oriented and provided good reading and learning opportunities for their users. Later in the 1980s, when automation was becoming pervasive in the profession, many of the bibliophiles could not easily make the transition into computerized operations. Many of them were not what I call “machine people,” persons who could easily learn the logic and employ the potential of digital technology. After a few years, however, a new breed of librarian began to emerge from the library schools. They were not only skilled in the technology, but they could creatively exploit and adapt the strengths of the new systems. With these individuals, librarianship turned an important corner that raised the stature and effectiveness of the profession and also raised the levels of teaching and learning in libraries.

In the last several years, I think I have seen the beginning of another transformation of librarianship in the young professionals who are coming out of the library schools and beginning their careers. In addition to excellent digital understanding, many of these young people are more interested than their predecessors in research and publication; more determined to provide service to users in the form of excellent teaching and learning strategies; more intent on deep involvement in the governing of their

institutions; more eager for a voice in the workings of the faculty; and more inclined to advance their own academic preparations beyond the master's level. How much better it would be to provide fellowships to these very intelligent and devoted librarians as motivation for earning the doctorates CLIR is seeking.

This attitudinal shift in the rising library professionals bodes well, and with a clear and concerted vision of the teaching role of librarians among the leaders and organizations of the library profession and the courage to make the needed changes in library education, perhaps we will not become extinct any time soon.

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