My Reflective Journal

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LI801XO Foundations of Information Transfer

November 30, 2010

Introduction

This is my journal created as a class assignment for LI801 to reflect on what we are learning in class, and to explore on our own various issues and current events relating to librarianship. These entries include thoughts on academic articles I have read on various topics, comments on class discussions, as well as thoughts on newspaper articles pertaining to different area libraries and current library issues I have come across throughout the semester.

8-23-10 – Libraries serving the local community needs

One of the issues that frequently appear in the reading for this first class have been the importance that the library reflect the interests of the community which it serves. For the past fourteen months I have been a part of an ongoing project at the Forest Grove Public Library to process and integrate a donated collection for public research. This collection contains newspaper clippings, obituaries, and research materials all relating to the town of Forest Grove, Oregon and Washington County. This project is being completed in order to fulfill a need for this community, which may not have as much relevance to the people from another area. This can be related to another goal of librarians in that “LIS professionals serve the public good by bringing people in contact with knowledge” (Rubin p105).

While processing the collection and preparing it for public use, those in charge of managing the collection must consider the best policies to use regarding the handling of the material. This relates directly to the issues we have read about regarding the goals of the library, and librarians working to serve the public and its needs. Public needs in this example could include open access to materials and usability to the public. In his work explaining the parts of the infrastructure of the library, Rubin (2010) says that his list of issues that arise from creation of an infosphere “when addressed together, reveal how well their libraries continue to reflect the public interest and meet their missions” (p. 29).

8/30/10 – The Future of Libraries

As a student embarking on the journey of library school, an issue I noticed even before I began was the perception of libraries and their usefulness in the future. At least once between the time I began the application process and when I started school someone asked me, “Do you really think there are going to continue to be uses for physical libraries, and therefore librarians in the future?”. I responded that although the landscape might change, and the “library” as we know it today might look very different in the future, there will always be a need for professionals with the knowledge and skills one gets from an MLS program to organize and manage information for people to use, no matter what form the information may take.

From our first class discussion and readings, we focused on not only the history of libraries, but how the library might change to meet the needs of future patrons. I decided to go on the internet to see what I could find about what directions libraries might take in order to stay relevant in a changing technological society. One article I found was one from 2009 titled “The ‘library of the future’ begins to emerge” by Sue Dremann. In this article Dremann and others discuss how “The vast majority of people with specific ‘information needs’ no longer visit libraries”. What libraries must do then is to invent new models to keep people coming to the library. That could involve bringing the library to the patron. Such ideas could include creating online branches, or “digital museums” to serve the community and meet their needs. However, regardless of how digital the libraries go to meet the needs of patrons, there will always be needs for the library building. It could happen that those buildings change from the traditional reference service and community institution to that of more of a cultural center that reflects the heart and history of the community. The article also points out that in a down economy libraries play a big part in filling the gaps. In a time when funding for school libraries are cut, and people are choosing to get rid of home services like as internet in order to pay for necessities such as food and electricity, public libraries are able to fill in those gaps with the services they provide.

9-1-10 – Libraries in the News

When glancing though today’s Oregonian, a short article on the front page of the Metro section caught my eye. The title read “Library was a bit overdue in renewing website” (Metro Section of September 1, 2010 Oregonian, pB1). The day before, the Multnomah County Library website, [www.multcolib.org](http://www.multcolib.org), went from the location where people could access the library’s online databases and catalog, and use a variety of services offered by the library, to a generic website with no information whatsoever about the library.

It turns out that while the company that the library registers with to keep its domain name, Register.com, sent email reminders about the upcoming expiration date, the people who received those notices were all no longer working at the library, and therefore no one was there to read the warnings. While the article goes on to say that the problem has been fixed, steps will be taken to ensure that something like this won’t happen again. This is an example of how as libraries move into the digital age and people come to rely on their everyday online services, protocols and rules need to be adjusted to make sure someone always knows what is going on. As technology services allow libraries to reach larger amounts of people each day (in Multnomah’s case 14,000 daily), those in charge of keeping the library running need to be sure that rules are followed so that something like a domain name fee doesn’t fall through the cracks.

9/7/10 – The Library and Technology

As I think about my career as a future librarian I am really interested in how changing technology will impact the library and how it will operate in the future. The reading we did for the first class touched on this in the article titled “The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Reference Service and Bibliographic Information”. The author discussed many ways technology may affect libraries in the future and how it will change how we perform our jobs in terms of protocols we follow, services we offer, and how we integrate new technologies as they come along. The need for using new technology is very relevant for libraries as they strive to stay current with society and be viewed as useful to the public in a world that is very internet centered. One of these emerging technologies is the eBook. According to Ross Duncan’s article “EBooks and Beyond: The Challenge for Public Libraries”, “The recent improvements to the Kindle, the release of Apple's iPad, and the growing number and capabilities of many other mobile devices, mean that all libraries must assess the impacts of such technology on the services they offer,” (44). EBooks are viewed mostly as competition for libraries as they offer readers an alternative to books with many qualities people value including convenience, ease of reading, and portability (Duncan 51).

The use and exploration of new technology in the area of eBooks and portable readers is something that will continue to expand as time goes on, and will provide challenges to libraries as they try to stay current in a changing technological climate. I’m sure this is a topic which will come up in discussions many times as I work through the Emporia program, and it will be interesting to observe how libraries evolve to adapt to these changing technologies.

9/9/10 – Finding other funding solutions for libraries

Another issue that has been touched on in the reading and in class discussion is that of library funding. Rubin discussed this issue in the introduction of our class text when he discussed how the complexity of the current economic environment will require libraries and other publicly funded institutions to evaluate the services they provide, the types and number of employees they retain, and continuing training that will be required to keep their library running efficiently (Rubin 3, 4). As a senior undergraduate I participated in an internship investigating different sources of educational funding by way of foundations which supported higher education institutions. This made me curious to see if there was something similar available for libraries. After doing some searching on the internet I came across the website <http://librarygrants.blogspot.com/>. Here readers can find a blog that offers current information about grant funding opportunities for various projects and services. There are also links where searchers can find information regarding how to apply for the listed grants. Knowing that these types of resources are available can come in handy once we are in the workplace and looking to fund projects within our libraries.

Another way for libraries to get additional help without the cost is with volunteer programs. In the library I volunteer for, volunteers help to empty book drops and sort interlibrary loan materials, shelve and repair books, and help ready a donated collection of materials to be integrated into the library system for patron research purposes. The benefits are mutual to both parties. Not only do volunteers learn new skills and support the libraries they love, the library staff receive the additional help they need to make the library run as smoothly as possible. As long as the program is designed to assist, and not replace, staff positions, volunteer programs can be very successful for everyone involved.

9/22/2010 Special Libraries

Today when paging through the Oregonian, an article on the front page of the Metro section caught my eye: “A library full of guest stars”. The article told about the Portland Heathman Hotel’s special library, “4,000 volumes, all signed by the authors and most of them first editions” (Hall B1). In order for a book to be placed in the collection, the author must have spent a night in the hotel. Examples of authors found in the library include Jimmy Carter, Stephen King, Art Spiegelman, and James Patterson. An average of five authors a week stay at the hotel, so the collection is constantly growing. The hotel guests are allowed to check out almost any book in the collection, provided they leave the (substantial) required deposit.

Until recently, the hotel didn’t have a way to tell exactly what was in the collection. Staff then hired 20-year-old Sophie Soprani, and English major at Portland State, to build an inventory database for them. This is just one example of a local special library, and of a job opportunity I certainly never really thought about, being a librarian in a large hotel. When I saw this article, I thought, that’s a job I would want!

9/27/10 – Copyright in the Digital Age

One issue I had not gotten to take a look at yet was the idea of how copyrights are affected in the digital era in which we live. A good article I found when searching online is titled “Libraries in Today’s Digital Age: The Copyright Controversy”. In the article, the author highlights the legal issues that are battled over between the copyright holders, such as the publishing and entertainment industries, and those who wish to access their materials, including libraries, educational, and public interest communities (Russell 2001). The author discusses how copies have become even easier to create than before with digital technology which doesn’t even require a physical copy to be made, only an electronic file. The three areas that have been most affected by this are library lending, collection development, and preservation.

While one way of thinking says that libraries must own material before they can lend it to their patrons, people must also consider how the accepted practice of Interlibrary Loan allows patrons of one library to borrow a book their library does not own from a different institution. As libraries progress into the digital age, issues such as copyright enforcement and what constitutes a particular library’s collection will have to be further examined. I’m sure this is a debate which will go on for many years.

10/4/10—Analysis of the Movie “The Mummy”

I chose to view and analyze “The Mummy” to fulfill the journal requirement in the syllabus. Right from the start, I saw the connection to the library in that one of the main characters, Edith, is a librarian. It was interesting to see the dynamics between Edith and the male library director pictured in the film, as it reminded me of Rubin’s discussion on gender and the view of past librarians. “Women were perceived as more delicate and unable to tolerate the rigors of administration” (Rubin 2010). This role of the delicate, and sometimes clumsy, female librarian was especially illustrated when Edith tried to reach across the stacks to deposit a book, and created a domino effect of falling bookshelves.

In some of our readings, there have been discussions on the connection between reading, knowledge, and power. For example, in his paper titled “The Pursuit of Knowledge”, Robert Rich quotes Bacon as arguing, “knowledge is the very root of all power” (Rich 1979). This was one of the themes I noted when connecting this movie to our readings. In the film, The Book of the Dead is referred to as a treasure. There are also lines which convey that there is a power, and also a danger, to the contents of the book in question. At one point the characters are warned “Do not read from the book”. At another time, the characters scoff at the idea of a book being dangerous, “No harm every came from reading a book”, when in fact, real danger does exist when people try to use the knowledge from the book without understanding the implications that may follow. Also, the movie illustrates how parts of knowledge can be passed along without providing the full context of the original meaning. This, then, can cause problems, as observed by what the characters in the movie experience.

10-20-10 OCLC and Library Automation Systems

In an article written in the first half of 2009, Marshall Breeding discussed OCLC’s announcement that “it will extend WorldCat Local, first positioned primarily as a discovery tool, to provide a complete suite of services for the automation of libraries,” (Breeding 2009). The extended services in WorldCat Local are said to include circulation, resource fulfillment, acquisitions, and license management. This will create an extreme workload for this service, as OCLC estimated that the system would need to support a combined 1.2 million libraries worldwide performing an average of 5,000 circulation transactions per second (Breeding 2009).

One will have to pay attention to future developments concerning this idea to see if libraries will eventually have a way to all be connected so they can work together to provide people with the information they seek. It also makes one wonder if libraries will eventually become so connected through their systems that patrons who don’t have access to local libraries will be able to work with other institutions further away to receive similar services.

11-2-2010 The Next Generation of Library Catalogues

Another topic I am interested in learning more about is cataloging and the organization of information. Everyone who uses the library is probably familiar with the electronic catalogues in use today. I wanted to see if there had been any discussion related to updating the traditional online catalogue as libraries struggle to hold onto their patrons in the digital age of Amazon and Google. According to Jenny Emanuel, author of “Next Generation Catalogs: What do they do and Why Should We Care?”, although libraries have begun to digitize their collections for accessibility at a distance, and have built websites to incorporate resources, tutorials, and social media to attract customers, the online catalog has not changed.

There have recently been discussions of what has been referred to as “nextgen” catalogs. These catalogs allow the library to have a system separate from the rest of the library operations with the ability to make customizations to the interface, allowing for more user friendly searching. There have been other solutions as well, but most have been designed for libraries to purchase on top of their current system, adding to the financial strain of libraries already on a tight budget.

I see having a search tool that is easy to operate and user friendly for the public as being one of the important issues for libraries today. As online search engines such as Amazon and Google continue to attract users, librarians will have to consider how to keep patrons using the library by making the search experience user friendly and convenient. This may need to be done by upgrading their tools to better meet the needs of the user. If we continue using the same formats as libraries of the past when other companies on the internet are providing bigger and better platforms, patrons will look elsewhere for their information needs.

11-5 New “Library Express” in the face of budget shortfalls

In a recent article published online in the Wall Street Journal, the writer examined a new kind of library; one without librarians. Rather than a brick-and-mortar institution with reading rooms, book stacks, reference librarians and children’s story time, those living in the St. Paul suburb of Hugo go to the “Library Express Pickup”, a bank of digitally locked metal lockers where citizens order books and DVDs online and pick them up at the locker a few days later.

Opinion on this new system varies. According to the president of the Public Library Association, the lockers are a way of reaching people after hours, and an answer to the squeeze of government budget cuts. Others such as James Lund, director of the Red Wing Public Library in Red Wing Minnesota, feel that this is just another step in which the public library fades from existence.

I see this trend as a very dangerous one for the libraries and librarians around the country. We are at a time in the profession where we have to defend ourselves as professionals and actively promote our library and the importance for continued community funding. By allowing the services of a public library to be replaced by these machines, are we not telling people that the personal interaction one receives at a library isn’t important anymore? To me this system reduces the library to little more of an Amazon.com type of business using a barrowing system, rather than purchasing. This is just another example of how librarians must promote themselves as providing a necessary service to our customers which one cannot find by using a system that functions more like on online marketplace.

11/15/10 Methods of Archival Arrangement

I am interested in learning more about the archives discipline as I continue through school. I have always enjoyed working with special collections of material, and like the detailed work of organizing and cataloging. This was the reason I chose to volunteer as a History Collection Assistant at Forest Grove. When looking through the reading list for Archives I picked out an article by Oliver W. Holmes titled “Archival Arrangement-Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels”. Although I have yet to take a beginning archives class, I was interested in seeing if any of what I was doing through my volunteer work matched up with what the article talked about. Although the article discussed how there are many different styles of arranging archives which will vary by organization, some of the ideas expressed in the article were familiar. These included breaking up material into manageable segments, which we have done by limiting the number of pages allowed to be in each file folder. This ensures the papers will be less likely to be damaging both in storage and during handling. The article also talks about proper labeling and boxing, so that each item can be found when someone wishes to review the physical documents. For example, in the history archive I am helping to create, each item in the collection will be identified with a box, folder, and item number. These numbers will be used in the finding aids to allow people to move easily from viewing information on a spreadsheet to examining the physical artifacts themselves. It was also of interest how keeping the original order of the records is important, but there are times things can be moved as long as it keeps the original integrity of the files (Holmes 35). This is an idea we have maintained while processing the Eric Stewart Collection, with the only time we have changed the order of papers placed by the creator is when it is clear that the items were intended for a different arrangement (such as when page numbers are already written on the items, but have been misfiled).

The more I read about archiving the more I believe it would be a great career for me to pursue. I look forward to learning more about archiving in future classes.

11/23/10 Recognition for single district librarian

While browsing online articles, I came across a pair about a librarian at West Orient Middle School in Gresham, Oregon. The school’s librarian, Erin Fitzpatrick-Bjorn, was recognized on November 8th by the American Association of School Librarians as having one of the best public school libraries in the country. In addition, the Oregon Association of School Librarians named her the 2009 Secondary School Librarian of the Year.

While it is great that a local librarian is bring recognized with this honor, the articles also highlight the disturbing statistics for school librarians. According to the article’s author, in 1980 there was one librarian for every 500 kids. By 2008, the number had fallen to one for every 1500. Even for schools that have librarians, they aren’t always available when the students are around. Erin’s position was recently cut from four to three days a week. This leaves even less time to reach students to help them with their projects and teach in the classroom.

In this first semester of library school, we have focused on perceptions of librarians and how librarians can help students and patrons in their research and other academic pursuits. But kids can only be reached early and be taught how to use the library and librarian as resources if schools support them. They have the potential of assisting teachers with student learning on how to go about completing school projects, and educating everyone on how librarians can help with a variety of tasks. By advocating for school librarians, schools can help create future library patrons who recognize the importance of librarians and their institutions.

11/23 “The Backroad Librarian: Generation Next”

I thought this article on rural librarians was interesting because it not only hit on the issues faced by libraries in rural areas, but also gave issues to consider for the librarians wanting to work in rural libraries. I was surprised when I read that “…a Master’s degree in library and information science (an “MLS”) is the prerequisite for an entry-level professional position. Yet earning an MLS actually takes you out of contention for many rural library jobs…” because those are typically filled by retired teachers or community members with other sources of income. The article goes on to say that according to The National Center for Education Statistics, only about 1 in 10 rural libraries have a degreed librarian on staff. Part of the reason for this could be that some libraries are not open enough hours to employ full time librarians. This makes it hard for librarians to get jobs that provide benefits. I know the Forest Grove Public Library employs many librarians, but several of those do not work full time. This means many librarians need to work two different part time jobs in order to make ends meet. This situation could be a result of the limited financial resources and open hours of these libraries. In order for small libraries to attract new librarians, those in charge of funding and staffing will have to provide a livable wage and enough hours for librarians to support themselves.

11-26 Possible Applications for Artificial Intelligent Agents in Libraries

While exploring Human-Computer Interaction in libraries for possible presentation topics in our 802 class, I researched possible applications for the use of AI, or Artificial Intelligence technology. I found one article by Victoria Rubin and Yimin Chen published in 2010 which explored the current development of conversational agents for use in libraries in Canada.

The article makes a case that Natural Language Interaction (NLI) systems could be used in libraries to provide tutorials to help patrons in some aspects of using the library. While these systems wouldn’t be designed to replace reference librarians, researchers say they have the potential to assist in ways where help isn’t available. For example, a program could be designed to help patrons navigate the virtual offerings and website abilities such as reviewing materials online, ordering interlibrary loans, or searching databases for needed materials (Rubin, Chen, 2010). These offerings have been tested with the use of a Chatbot, a “virtual librarian” which provides information about the library services and offerings using Amazon.com and OCLC (Chatbots.org, 2006).

Research into the effective use of these agents and their eventual implementation could provide libraries with additional opportunities to reach people. For example, applications such as the use of sign language or virtual storytelling could bring library services to those who are deaf or have limited mobility. However, as when creating and implementing any new technology, these new applications must be seen as enhancing library services, not as a threat of creating human replacements.

11-26 eBooks and the Library

One of our assignments in the 513 Technology Skills for Graduates course was to write a research paper on one of the emerging technologies in the library world. I chose to explore the eBook. EBooks have become very popular with the public in the wake of the latest eReaders including, but not limited to, Amazon’s Kindle and Barnes & Noble’s Nook. As the traditional library strives to stay relevant in an increasingly technology centered world, libraries are investigating ways to integrate this new, popular technology into their systems. EBooks offer many advantages to the library, including easy access to content, on-demand availability, and no physical space requirements (Connaway, 2003).

This new information format brings with it new challenges related to acquisition and collection development, publisher relations, and preservation. Questions related to each of these issues include the following: How does one manage the distribution of the electronic material? How are copyright contracts and permission clearance enforced in a digital environment? And how will metadata preservation work to ensure the material will be around for years to come? These are just some of the issues which organizations will need to deal with when integrating this new technology into the public library system.

11-27 Learning in the Age of the Internet

I enjoyed reading the article by Larry Sanger, co-founder of Wikipedia, titled “Individual Knowledge in the Internet Age”. In it the author examines how learning in the age of the Internet has changed the idea of how the education system works. The Internet, which provides people with a constant source of information at their fingertips, allows people to have their knowledge stored in another place, rather than in their memory banks.

In this Emporia program, heavy emphasis is placed on collaborative learning through group projects, in-class discussions, and online discussions using the discussion board. The author calls this “social learning” which is “based on the premise that our understanding of content is socially constructed through conversations about the content and through grounded interactions, especially with others, around problems or actions” (Sanger 2010). In reading this article I could see many connections to how our Emporia classes are run, especially the use of discussion boards. This is significantly different to previous views of education which emphasized memorization of facts as the only way to really know something. However, the author also points out knowing how to learn and work in a collaborative environment is more reflective of today’s work surroundings. Wherever we work, including in libraries, we will have to collaborate and work on projects together in order to get our jobs done. Therefore the way we are learning to learn is more reflective of ‘real life’ learning.

Coming into Emporia, I had, of course, been used to working in groups to complete team projects together. This time, though, there is an added challenge because not only do we not meet as a group between the time our project is assigned and when it is time to present, but most of us live far enough away that meeting in person between classes is just not feasible. This will require that most of our project work be completed and organized while communicating through online tools. While this may seem tricky at first, I’m sure it is something we will have to do in our professional worlds after completing school. In a world of Web 2.0 tools and limited resources, I’m sure as librarians we will be required in the professional field to collaborate and exchange information the same way we are learning to do as MLS graduate students.

11/28 – The Continuing Importance of Libraries

At the beginning of the term when starting this project, I wrote on why I thought libraries and Information Professionals would continue to be needed and valued in an increasingly internet centered culture of instant access. While I knew then that there would always be people who would continue to need the library and its services, I now have new ways in which to talk about it, and am better able to describe the situation. One issue that comes most to my mind is “digital divide”. While it is typical for most of America to have access to a computer and internet at home, there will always be those, especially in a struggling economy, who cannot afford to have such amenities as internet, or the ability to buy books from a store. This is where libraries come in. Leonard Kniffle discusses this and more in his article “Libraries now more than ever”. According to Kniffle, “Those who think libraries are unnecessary are those who regard them as book storage facilities and nothing more,” (Kniffle, 2010). Not only are the library materials resources in themselves, but the librarians are there to help people whenever they need it. From answering questions on how to create a resume, where to look for information for a school project, even on how to use a computer, librarians are there to assist patrons with their information needs. Libraries have needed to change to adapt to people’s needs, but in this way they have managed to stay relevant. Libraries all over have created an online presence that allows them to reach more people and remain as easily accessible as any website found on Google or Yahoo. I’ve enjoyed reading articles such as this one, as well as the class discussions throughout the semester as I now have even better answers than I had in August to the question, “Will an MLS be necessary in the future?”

11-29 iReference: A Case Study

This article by Hamby and Stubbs gives an example of a library integrating new technology while expanding their reference services to better assist patrons. The Florence County Library System decided to try out roving reference librarians by supplying staff with mobile PCs they could carry beyond the desk to reach patrons in the stacks where their questions originate. Like any new program, it required some trial and error. For example, heavy, awkward laptop computers were not able to be handled long-term by staff, and had the potential to be stolen. When the new iPad Touch was released, they were seen as the solution which allowed for web access in a device small which was light enough to allow librarians to retrieve a book without putting the device down.

While use of these new services did not take off as fast as some librarians had expected them to, it was one more way to reach the public and “make the iPod an information tool that provides a mobile alternative to the desktop, rather than just another thing to keep up with in a world that refuses to slow down,” (Hamby; Stubbs 2010). This is a great example of using new technology to enhance services to our patrons rather than seeing technology as a threat to our usefulness.

11/30 Review of my Interview at the Oregon Historical Society

In September I interviewed the library manger, Geoff Wexler, at the Oregon Historical Society in downtown Portland. I wanted to end the semester with a few closing thoughts on what I learned. One of the issues he talked about was the lack of support they are able to employ. Even though the library supports the entire state of Oregon, they are now operating on a minimal library budget. They went from having a staff of fifteen in 2002 to a current staff of four, including the manager.

Also during the interview our discussion touched on the importance that the library can provide proof of ownership of the materials in their collection. The deed of gift is very important for a library to get for each item or collection that is donated. Without this proof that the property indeed belongs to the library, a patron could come along and find something that their relative donated and say they want it back. Without proof that the item was donated to the library, legally the historical society would have to return the items to the family. I’m sure this is something that we will learn about in our archives classes through Emporia.

The staffing situation with the Oregon Historical Society enforces what we have been hearing all semester. As librarians we will constantly have to defend not only our profession but provide compelling reasons we should receive the funding we need to run a smooth operation. This will be true no matter what type of library we work in, or where we are located.

11/30 Final Thoughts on the First Semester of Library School

As my first semester of library school comes to a close I realize how much I have learned in my classes, and how much I have to think about as I move forward with the program. In having the majority of our reading assignments from this class be taken from individual articles rather than textbooks, I feel we have received a nice survey on different issues and areas of librarianship to get us started thinking about what we would like to pursue.

I appreciated the chance we got to hear from alumni of the program talk about their journeys and careers in the library field. It makes one realize how many paths there really are that are open to us. Coming into grad school, I felt as if I had finally found a career path that was right for me. I was also exposed to some new ideas of specific paths I might be interested in that I hadn’t thought of before. Right now, in addition to still being interested in the archives discipline, I would also like to pursue classes related to database creation and information retrieval systems. I’m sure my path will continue to change as I learn about the library and information field, and I look forward to the journey ahead.

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