

**FAMILIES, TECHNOLOGY AND LIBRARY EDUCATION FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIANS:  
PROMOTING USE, PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING ACROSS INTERNATIONAL  
BOUNDARIES**

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**Abstract**

A wide variety of LIS program organizations and cultures exist internationally, yet the idea of empowering the library user by addressing the information need is common to all. Dr. Abdullahi (1996) wrote that a broad resource base for LIS education develops the attributes needed by the 21st century library professional: “technological adaptability, growth, creativity, productivity, professional and high performance” and the LIS instructor can bring global understanding and responsibility to the classroom to achieve cultural balance. Nowhere are the attributes of professionalism more transparent than in public librarianship because information needs move across such a wide spectrum of library users. Because public librarians serve families, they can engage with the idea of a broader set of conceptions about librarianship as it is practiced in the Asia-Pacific region and internationally. Continuing education and lifelong learning are competencies related to the attributes of public librarianship. They are related to the management of knowledge and are as much a part of the infrastructure as buildings and digital libraries. What students bring to the LIS classroom in terms of their cultural identities and how the curriculum and the discipline itself can be interpreted through family identity is perhaps the most meaningful contribution to promoting use and promoting understanding of public libraries in the region. Preparing LIS graduates for informational collaboration in Asia and the Pacific means preparing LIS graduates around the globe for library promotion resulting in permanent library service improvement, contributions to professional literature and outstanding service to their organization. Despite the vast differences found in LIS education in North America and that found in other parts of the world, to support the profession as a whole, exploratory research into the contributions public librarians make to their communities is warranted, wherever public library communities exist.

## **Problems in Education for Public Librarianship**

In the article *Trends and Issues of LIS Education in Asia*, Dr. Makiko Miwa (2006) wrote of themes which emerged from a content analysis of presentation and discussion sessions in the A-LIEP Conference in 2006. The eight issues mentioned were:

- elimination of the word “library” from the names of LIS programs in order to attract students,
- shift in the educational level from undergraduate to graduate
- changes in core subject areas from an emphasis on manual-based collection development to ICT-based information/knowledge management
- depreciation of LIS education for school librarians (except in Thailand),
- decreasing opportunities for new employment in library markets due to over production of LIS graduates and economic recession
- low interest among well-educated graduates in seeking employment opportunities in the public library market, (characterized as offering relatively low social status and wage levels compared to national and academic libraries)
- lack of understanding among employers to accept LIS graduates as capable knowledge workers, and
- increase in the number of faculty with doctoral degrees, who prefer to teach cutting-edge courses rather than traditional library oriented courses. (Miwa, 2006).

## **The Problem of Low Salaries Affecting Recruitment**

Although all of these issues are complex and the extent to which they prevail might be measured by country or region, the problem of low interest among well-educated graduates in seeking employment opportunities in the public library market, (which is characterized as offering relatively low social status and wage levels compared to national and academic libraries) is significant. Low salaries clearly hamper recruitment efforts because everyone wants to earn a living wage. National and academic libraries may provide better salaries for qualified information specialists and bestow higher faculty status; however, those drawn to public librarianship may value working with a highly divergent clientele which includes young adults and children, known for their low societal status. Over twenty years ago in the United States, Barbara Immroth (1987) wrote that work with adolescents, like work with children, ranks last among the

rank arrangement of librarians by position titles and average maximum salary. Academic librarians ranked highest. It is not clear if low interest affect salaries or low salaries determine limited interest. Suffice it to say that even twenty years later, a lack of qualified personnel is a significant problem in the development of public library programs and a self-fulfilling prophecy may be operating. In the past few years, Japan has built a curriculum for professional librarianship based on participant surveys, focus groups and expert recommendations. Dr. Miwa (2006) brought attention to historical and philosophical foundations of librarianship by country. Examining the foundations of public library service with a realistic view of the limitations of technology is important, primarily because despite the vast and increasing amount of information available on the Internet, public libraries as places housing information continue to play a vital role in communities.

### **General Confusion Over Core Knowledge Required of Public Librarians**

When writing of the Australian workforce for public librarians, Gilliam Hallam stated that there was general confusion over the core knowledge, skills and attributes of public librarianship which continue to haunt recruitment efforts. Harvey and Higgins (2003) wrote that part of this confusion is related to the fact that “LIS Educators feel they are walking a tightrope as they attempt to accommodate the demands of the profession with their perceptions of what content is needed in the curriculum – theoretical underpinnings and exploration of new specialist subject areas such as leadership, knowledge management, digital libraries and information literacy.” (Harvey & Higgins, 2003). Curriculum studies for school librarians often stress the professional dispositions required of them: the use of information and ideas, collaborative teaching and learning, leadership and program administration. The American Library Association’s Draft Statement of Core Competences of Librarianship (2005) includes professional ethics, resource building, knowledge organization, technological knowledge, and knowledge dissemination: service as competencies for every type of librarian. Librarians can recognize and respond to diversity in user needs and preferences for resources and services. Even if as Dr. Rehman (2000) pointed out, there is no one right way to reshape LIS education, faculty intuition is that LIS education must be consistent and reflective of the students served and the employment infrastructure available.

## **Problems of Perception**

Public librarians choose to serve families, knowing that like the teachers who serve children, problems of low status are problems of perception. Such problems can be linked to the status of children in society worldwide. This is why the idea of literacy is a concept germane to public libraries. Literacy takes the idea of librarianship for the 21st century a step further, because what is invisible to the librarian serving families is that families in turn share their knowledge. For example, the social networking practiced in “wired” public libraries is certainly “cutting edge” as is the idea and provision of gaming technology, which links literacy and gaming. Informal communities are formed constantly through the popular use of blogs and online reviewing sources available on bookseller’s websites. However, the library is also a place which must be managed. The broad aim of LIS Education is to produce personnel with socially relevant competencies. Ironically, librarians who perform competently in serving families are those most likely to be promoted out of the specialty and into administration. Often, this is the only path to promotion. Subsequently, consideration of public library users needs as related to improved collection strength or access may not be addressed. If marketing of services is the key to a successful library program, public librarians can emphasize just how the public library contributes to the community and offer justification for its existence to their funding bodies.

## ***The Idea of Emancipatory Literacy***

The foundation of public libraries as institutions dedicated to the education and recreation of the family requires an understanding of the mission statements of public libraries and a commitment to public service. Education for public librarianship must fit the description students have for themselves: ‘a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking’ (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 101 as quoted by J. Soraker in the article *The Moral Status of Information and Information Technologies*). “A life worth living” is perhaps why so many arguments exist for including the subject of diversity and education for values in LIS curriculums. A public librarian is expected to develop organizational and global thinking. The ability to analyze the library community and provide appropriate resources is a vital competency. And of course, the development of political acumen is equally important so that effective information policy can be written. These are skills of what Dr. Andes (2008) calls “emancipatory literacy”. Emancipatory literacy refers to the premise that

learners' ideas develop and evolve as they think about their lives in society. "The very act of reading is so interwoven with thinking that one cannot read without being influenced or transformed in some way." (Andes, 2008).

### ***The Idea of Information Artisan***

The term "information artisan" was a term coined by O'Day and Jeffries in 1993 and defined as new artifacts created by the user who in turn passes them on to others in collaborative settings is an aspect of emancipatory literacy. The O'Day and Jeffries (1993) found that "regular users of libraries acted themselves as intermediaries, sharing information they had received from library searches with others in their work settings." What was expected to happen from the information sharing was that these regular users became "information artisans". They created new artifacts by transforming and enhancing their search results and passing them onto others. In an article entitled Information Sharing between Different Groups: a Qualitative Study of Information Service to Business in Japanese Public Libraries, Shunsaku Tamura et al (2007) wrote that the Japanese government expects public libraries to help people start businesses and by doing so will participate in the government's plan to revitalize Japanese business and industry. They suggest that the term Information Artisan is appropriate to grow businesses. To help budding business entrepreneurs, public librarians are often called upon to help launch businesses or receive consulting services. A culture of innovation and support is generated through technology because blogs, alerts, profiles and lists are driven by the business community itself. Business toolkits available in public libraries offer a wide range of how-to articles, business forms, free business software, online training, self-assessment exercises, quizzes, and resources to help entrepreneurs, business owners, and managers start, finance, formalize, and grow their businesses.

An example of distance learning using the idea of students as information artisans may be a required PowerPoint assignment (uploaded to Live Classroom) which discusses chapters in the assigned text, or a wiki created by LIS students to address a group project in Collection Development. The wiki can also assist the group with the task of creating an information policy to act as a model for the workplace. Public librarians cannot forget the role of the library in the lives of the youngest users. Story time presentations and a sound collection of picture books are traditional provisions of public libraries. Librarians, the majority of whom are women, have always been drawn to the profession because it is a

helping profession. As Johnny Hartz Soraker and Philip Brey wrote in the article “Ambient Intelligence and Problems with Inferring Desires from Behaviour”, there are limitations with the technology, just as there are limitations of the reference interview and limitations of print. If the limitations of the technology used in public libraries are not sufficiently recognized, the technology is likely to be insufficiently successful in supporting the needs and desires of human users. User adaptive interfaces are currently being promoted, but they must be promoted to someone. The Internet is widely used in public libraries but since personal information seeking is the most important kind of information seeking, a caring disposition may be the best asset a librarian can bring to the table. In the article entitled *Women and the Public Library: Using Technology, Using the Library*, Dolores Fidishun (2007) reported on the results of a survey examining the use of the public library. She wrote: “When men’s answers were compared with those of the women, men also wanted to get books, but the response was not as overwhelming as female patrons. Very few men mentioned children’s materials or programs as a reason for visiting the library. Finally, men came to the library to study or to read newspapers and magazines more often than women. Other reasons tended to reflect the same strength of response as with the women who responded to the survey.” (Fidishun, 2007) Edward D’Angelo (2006) commented that the rise of consumerism has led to the decline of the original mission of public libraries to sustain and promote democracy through civic education. At one time, democracy and capitalism were believed to depend upon the moral and political education that public libraries provided. Mr. D’Angelo stated that the postmodern consumerism has replaced democracy and education with entertainment. If public libraries strengthen the public’s desire for opportunities to address issues that are salient to the community, it is time to move to a quality of life issue.

### **A Quality of Life Issue**

L. Suyistyo-Basuki (2007) noted that the lack of teaching materials and the obsolescence of teaching materials have added to the lack of understanding of the principles and practices of librarianship unique to Indonesia. He encouraged professors to act as their own Information Artisans by writing case histories of the development of a subject in their respective regions. Because LIS educators and the professional librarians they teach are aware of their responsibilities to add to the literature of the field, the idea of a common textbook can be linked to the idea of literacy as a concept germane to public libraries. It takes the idea of international librarianship a step further, because what is invisible to the librarian serving

families is that families in turn share their knowledge. For example, social networking now practiced by the Information Artisans in public libraries is certainly “cutting edge” as is the idea and provision of gaming technology, which links literacy and gaming. Informal communities are formed constantly through the popular use of blogs and are hosted on booksellers’ websites. Public libraries serve a function of stabilizing economic resources in the communities they serve.

**Conclusion:**

Katherine Cveljo (2004) wrote: “It is logical to conclude that if information professionals both in America and worldwide are going to participate in international data flow and exchanges, it will require a greater degree of international knowledge and professional sophistication” (Cveljo, p. 2). International knowledge and professional sophistication will lead to enhanced recruitment and dynamic careers. It is clear that students need to be assisted in the paradigm shift to digital resources, and that “international programs may propel them towards a global arena in which different cultures are not only recognized, but respected.” (Dixon & Tammaro, p. 95). This literature review has come to conclusion that public libraries serve the function of promoting the individual and the individual’s family and by their educational and humanistic nature may clash with the materialistic realities of the Digital Age, just as they did with the Industrial Age. (Braverman, 1979). Nevertheless, the benefit that qualified public librarians bring to their communities is immeasurable. The dignity which professional education can bring to the individual is also immeasurable. The manifestations of educational and economic policy and other society underpinnings of library service to families can be addressed within public librarianship. Access to technology is a quality of life issue. As Abdus Chaudhry noted (2007), “Digital media requires that LIS faculties look for new teaching methodologies and learning styles and introduce new modes of assessment suitable for collaborative learning”. The opportunity for collaborative learning between students, faculty, institutions of higher education and nations has never been greater. The curriculum for library and information science education for public librarianship will find strength by incorporating perspectives from global librarianship. The related subjects such as public policy, ethics, regional studies, urban planning, and communication can all be used to enhance instructional design. Resource provision to families continues to be of utmost importance on the forefront of global consciousness particularly as technology takes a front seat. Professionalism when dealing with families and the implementation of services addressing needs and wants

can counteract low status and low salaries of public librarians. Professionalism is part of discovering the knowledge base of public librarianship, and leadership and research skills as required competencies of public librarianship. Educators might ask, what is the meaning of information science in the students' lives? What can we learn from graduates regarding their preparation for working in public libraries? Informal responses indicate that most are happy working in this rewarding profession. They note that salaries are not the main motivator for professional work; that the opportunity to be educated, creative and rewarded in one's workplace is. Contributing to a civil society is its own reward.

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