

The Washington Library
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Allki



Libraries and Education

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Up Front

By Brian Soneda

“Don’t want to be an American idiot”

—The noted American philosopher, Billie Joe Armstrong

I personally do not know anyone who works in a library who would not agree that libraries are in the education business. Library staff members of all stripes might differ in degree in their thinking about the education mission of the library, from “it’s the most important thing about libraries” to “yup, education happens in the library,” but no library employee says “Education? Shoot, libraries are about _____, if you want education, go back to school.”

For me, the phrase “libraries and education” is a natural, a given. It always has been, but in a time when school funding is under extreme duress, and therefore the future quality education of our children is at severe risk, how much more important are libraries as educational institutions? Answer: Lots more. That’s a lot of pressure, but we are up to it, because we have to be. Education is the key and we in the library world have and will continue to play our role. The future depends on our playing our role.

One facet of that role comes under the overused but accurate label of Early Learning. All libraries support Early Learning, whether they call it that or not. Doing what we can to help infants grow into learners who then become successful school students who become successful parts of the work force who become good citizens—it all follows and it all matters. Many public libraries have joined the Early Learning Public Library Partnership (ELPLP). Those of you who know me at all know that I can be kind of a snarly-dog advocate for ELPLP and for Early Learning. No apologies for that; the future is worth barking for.

The future includes playing our role in helping individuals and communities deal with the loss of jobs or loss of hours or decrease in pay rate, all products of the stubborn economic crisis. For while Wall Street seems to have recovered, down at real street level, lots of people are still hurting. Libraries, some aided by much appreciated LSTA funding (in the Renew Washington grant cycles), have helped displaced workers learn new skills, apply for other jobs, reach out for new opportunities. Libraries need to continue to aggressively be this kind of educating institution as well. I’m preaching to the choir, I know, but this is too important not to keep talking about; again, the future, our future, is worth



Brian Soneda

“For me, the phrase ‘libraries and education’ is a natural, a given.”

barking for.


It also follows that if you work in a library, are a library trustee, or are a member of a library foundation or friends group, you don’t just care about education as a laudable societal good; you care as well about your own personal and ongoing education. There is a fantastic educational opportunity happening for all of us next month, April 18–20, at the Tulalip Casino Resort. The 2012 Washington Library Association Conference will have something for everyone, from nuts-and-bolts sessions, to a great slate

of pre-conferences and special guest speakers. (Name any state library conference you have ever been to that can top a lineup of Nancy Pearl, Dan Savage and Sam Reed—can’t, can you?)

Conference Coordinator Kristin Piepho and her committee have

done great work in putting together this phenomenal educational opportunity. I urge all who read this column who have not already registered for the 2012 WLA Conference to do so without delay.

Finally, defining education in a very broad sense as that which enlightens and makes our lives cheerier and more fulfilling, I again invite everyone who does attend the Tulalip Conference to look beyond the confines of the Conference Center in furthering your education. The Hibulb Cultural Center highlights the legacy of the Tulalip people, and a special tour and reception at the Cultural Center is an optional Thursday evening event at the Conference. In my neck of the woods just to the north of Tulalip, La Conner teems with history and charm (and shopping). The Conference occurs at the same time as the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival, when the fields are alive with blindingly bright and beautiful tulips.

Libraries and education. Let’s play our role, barking when we have to, but let’s not forget to keep learning as individuals. See you at the Tulalip Conference Center in April. 

Brian M. Soneda

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"Alki," a Native American word meaning "bye and bye," was suggested by Nancy Pryor, Special Collections at Washington State Library, as the title for the Washington Library Association's journal. "Alki" is also the state motto, signifying a focus on the future.

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Alki's purpose is to communicate philosophical and substantive analyses of current and enduring issues for and about Washington libraries, personnel, and advocates, and to facilitate the exchange of research, opinion, and information.

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Alki is designed by Tammy Reniche, Director of Publications for Melby Cameron & Anderson.

Cover photo: Chuck Pratt provides personal instruction to patrons through Sno-Isle Libraries' Book-a-Librarian program. See article on page 6.



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From the Editor

by Bo Kinney



Bo Kinney

When the Trustees of the Boston Public Library penned their now-famous report in 1852, calling for the establishment of this country's first free public library, they argued that the library was needed as a public institution for the "farther progress of education, in which each one must be mainly his own teacher." The Trustees conceived of the library as an extension of the public school system, which would help individuals "carry on their education and bring it to practical results by private study."¹

Over the years, the idea of the public library as a place for the pursuit of self-education has undergone many variations and evolutions. Libraries have taken a wide range of stances on the appropriate level of involvement in the education of their patrons, from the American Library Association's determination of the necessity of information literacy in education in the 1980s to the hands-off "Give 'Em What They Want" philosophy of service and collection development advocated by Charlie Robinson in the 1990s.²

This issue of *Alki* explores some exciting educational initiatives undertaken by all types of libraries in Washington. For example, Fred Nollan describes a successful collaboration between Seattle Central Community College and several local libraries and archives (p. 7), and Julie Miller looks at the broad range of services university library curriculum centers offer, as well as the challenges they face (p. 11).

In addition to the educational function of libraries themselves, libraries must address the related question of education for the people who work in them. In this issue, Kate Skinner asks whether library education is adequately preparing rural librarians (p. 14), and Tami Robinson compiles the thoughts of several recent library school graduates about their educational experiences (p. 17).

I want to note that some of the topics addressed in this issue might be considered controversial. Sarah Lynch (p. 5) and Kate Laughlin (p. 29) confront the always difficult issue of pornography and Internet filtering in public libraries. In addition, Tony Wilson (p. 20) and David Wright (p. 31) offer contrasting views of the educational role of the readers' advisor. I am happy that *Alki* offers space for these diverse viewpoints, and I hope you will find these pieces provocative. We intend the utmost respect for *Alki's* readership and for the difficult decisions that all library workers face with regard to these issues. Please contact me at

“Over the years, the idea of the public library as a place for the pursuit of self-education has undergone many variations and evolutions.”

Alkieditor@wla.org with your reactions and I will try to keep the conversation going.

Finally, I am pleased to welcome Cadi Russell-Sauvé as *Alki's* newest editorial committee member. Cadi fills the spot left vacant by Sue Anderson's departure, and I am excited to have her on board.

Thanks for reading, as always. I look forward to seeing you in Tulalip! 📖

Notes

1. Benjamin Seaver, et al., *Upon the Objects to be Attained by the Establishment of a Public Library: Report of the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston* (Boston: City Printer, 1852), http://www.mcmillanlibrary.org/history/report_of_trustees.html.
2. American Library Association, *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: American Library Association, 1989), <http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential>; Baltimore County Public Library, *Give 'Em What They Want!: Managing the Public's Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1992).

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The Washington Library Association includes some of the best and brightest members of the Washington library community.

We are united by our care for the well-being of Washington libraries. For more information visit our website at wla.org. Explore the site and make our business your business.

Membership information is at wla.org/membership.

Bo Kinney is a librarian in the Special Collections department of the Seattle Public Library.

Pornography is Popular! Libraries and Porn in the Headlines

by Sarah Lynch

It's time, yet again, for the great debate of public libraries and pornography. The *Los Angeles Times* recently published an editorial about how libraries should be doing more to protect people from pornography.¹ According to the *Seattle PI*, a mother filed a complaint about her child inadvertently seeing something she deemed offensive on a computer at the Lake City branch of Seattle Public Library.² As these events gain public attention, many are concerned about protecting children from pornography. I have drafted some guidelines which may be adopted by libraries to ensure Internet safety for all. Feel free to modify or adopt for your particular branch.

1. Require children be leashed to their parents at all times.

This would gently encourage parents to keep an eye on their children while they are in a public place. Leashes could be available at the information desk. If parents are uncomfortable with their children being inside, they could tie them up outside. The library could even provide water as a courtesy.

2. Purchase new computers to be solely designed for pornography.

They can be labeled as such, and kept in isolated, private chambers, with shades and soundproofing. It would be crucial to have a print pornography collection nearby, in case of Internet connectivity problems.

3. Conduct background checks on all people before they enter the library.

This will ensure that all rapists, child molesters, and murderers are not allowed access into our public buildings. On that note, we should probably prohibit anyone who has been arrested for shoplifting, to cut back on theft of library materials.

4. Inform patrons of the dangers of pornography and its ill effects on health and our society.

Pamphlets could be included in welcoming literature explaining fines, loan periods, et cetera. Librarians could collaborate with local religious organizations to get the most current facts and statistics on how damaging pornography can be to society.

These are just starting points.

There are lots of issues in libraries that I wish could be fixed without infringing on individual liberties. Some days it feels like no one has any manners or common sense. Ideally, all our patrons would always be on their best behavior. In my perfect library world, all books would be returned on time, people would say "please" and "thank you," and no one would do drugs in the stacks. And people would not look at porn in public. But that's not reality in my world.


I can definitely sympathize with parents wanting to protect their children.

What parent doesn't? Many of my friends with small children are always amazed when I tell stories of pornography in the library. I remind them to think of a public library similar to a bus station. Anyone and everyone are welcome to use the facilities, but you should probably keep aware of your surroundings. Watch your purse, your laptop, and your children.

This issue is not new. It is the timeless censorship debate. And it's not going away anytime soon. What can libraries do? What does protecting patrons look like? What does pornography look like? How do we make society safe without infringing on civil liberties or taking away access to information?

tion?

My ideas presented above obviously are not intended for real implementation. However, I did find myself self-censoring when writing this column, not wanting to offend, not wanting anyone to feel uncomfortable. How boring is that?

How has your library handled these issues? Start a discussion at ifig@wla.org 

Notes

1. "Libraries walk a tightrope on porn," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2012.
2. Vanessa Ho, "Seattle libraries: No sleeping or eating allowed, but porn-watching OK," *SeattlePI.com*, February 2, 2012.



Sarah Lynch



Book-a-Librarian for Learning New Skills

by Diane Cowles

If you could hear Sno-Isle Libraries' Terry Beck tell it, you'd swear this recipe for success would be as easy as pie to create and serve. The finished dish would be "Book-a-Librarian," a personalized, face-to-face session with library staff, and the lucky diners would be library patrons from 21 to 80 years old, feasting on new skills and information. Sno-Isle has had this project in place since 2008. Terry, who is the Coordinator of Reference and Reader's Advisory Services and Electronic Resources, chairs the Reference Services Committee, where Book-a-Librarian's shape began to emerge. In trying to figure out how to increase attendance at computer classes, the committee began to hear from staff that perhaps helping patrons individually for a half hour at a time might be even better. From that impetus came these sessions, first beta-tested in five of the larger community libraries in the system, then expanded to twelve libraries staffed with librarians, and now available even in the smallest branches with tech liaisons on staff. Ninety percent of the sessions tend to be technologically related and average out to two to three per week in the larger branches.

Staff have embraced the sessions. Each community library in the system makes its own decisions about how it would work best within its building's staffing and hours. Staff work as a team and plan their schedules as a group. They book sessions during their off-desk time, which is usually planned a week in advance. "The customer is the driver," Terry says proudly. If a customer has to have a session during the time that a building is closed, the branch will find a way to make it happen. People in fact show up for the appointments at a higher rate than classes, not wanting to disappoint the library staff they spoke to initially. After the session the bond is complete and "you become their librarian," says Terry of this indelible and valuable connection.

The successes are just as imprinted on staff memories. One customer, who would always ask staff to help her log in to Craigslist, went through three 30–45 minute Book-a-Librarian sessions—one week after another. At the fourth week, she announced, "I think I've got it now!" No more log-in help needed, ever. Other success stories that melt your heart come from the job seekers, who come back to announce that they got the job, or the genealo-



Book-a-Librarian in action

“Other success stories that melt your heart come from the job seekers, who come back to announce that they got the job, or the genealogist, who waves her work, saying, ‘Look what I found!’ ”

gist, who waves her work, saying, “Look what I found!”

Here are the key ingredients to Book-a-Librarian success:

It starts with patrons making contact with library staff at each community library through the website, a phone call, or an in-person appointment. Flyers, posters, word of mouth, direct invitation by library staff, online inquiries, and especially the website presence advertise the service.

Sessions are tailor-made to meet the specific need expressed. It could be technical assistance like obtaining an email account, downloading e-books, searching genealogy, or filing job applications. If a staff member with expertise in the customer's area of interest is not available, Sno-Isle will find a staff member in another community library to help.

Customers can bring in their own laptops or ask to use one of the library's computer stations. Customers' confidentiality is handled as delicately as any reference

transaction. The sessions are all conducted in the midst of a busy branch.


Keeping a pulse on neighborhood trends is a given. In Snohomish County, for example, there are signs of slow economic recovery and a growing aging population, not unlike the rest of the country—all pointing toward everybody needing and trying to keep up with technology.

All staff, at all levels, in every size building are conversant about this program in the Sno-Isle System. They've embraced it and shared in its successes. They're collaborative and flexible, and they help each other out. It's a point of honor to say, "I've got a Book-a-Librarian session to do today."

Add in soaring customer interest for personalized service in a cookie-cutter world.

Mix in lots of dedication to meeting customers' immediate needs. Serve warmly.

The public will be back for more.

Email Terry Beck at tbeck@sno-isle.org for more information. 

Diane Cowles is a children's librarian at the Beacon Hill Branch of The Seattle Public Library.

Using Primary Documents and Local Archives to Teach the Research Paper

by Fred Nollan

I have been teaching research paper writing at Seattle Central Community College for over ten years. Several years ago, weary of reading about the same subjects—you know the type, Legalizing Marijuana, Pros and Cons of Abortion, Cloning and Genetic Modifications—and weary as well of the increasing use of the Internet for research, I began looking around for another approach to the research paper—one that might stimulate my students' imagination and arouse their interest in ways my standard approach just wasn't accomplishing. The approach I came up with—using primary documents and local archives to develop research subjects—has more than fulfilled what I was looking for. Not only are my students now more engaged, passionate, and curious about their research and the subjects they develop, but I, too, am much more energized and excited in the classroom.

Using Primary Sources

Most community college students are unfamiliar with primary sources and documents. However, when they first encounter primary documents they immediately become curious, interested, and engaged in ways I don't see when they encounter typical secondary or Internet sources. In my course this encounter occurs at the beginning of each quarter when my guest speakers—I invite four speakers from four local archives and libraries—bring with them copies of these documents from their respective collections. For students, handling sources that were created, often by hand, from individuals and agencies at the time of an event creates an aura of excitement that can't be replicated with secondary sources.

I recently worked with a student who was researching the first ascent of Mt. Rainier. Through the help of the librarians at the University of Washington (UW) Special

Collections he was able to read and work with the original, handwritten journals of the three men who accomplished this feat in 1870. His joy and excitement at being allowed access to these journals not only was evident when I spoke with him, but also shone through in the pages of his excellent research paper. Another student, researching the development and construction of the Hanford Nuclear Facility in Eastern Washington (a facility designed and quickly built to develop nuclear material for the atomic bomb during WWII) was ebullient when he discovered, at the Seattle location of the National Archives, documents only recently declassified and still bearing the government Top Secret markings. Again, the enthusiasm he exhibited researching these documents carried through to an engaging, highly interesting research report.

I also encourage the use of secondary sources, but I find it really helps stimulate student interest if I begin the course with the focus on primary

documents, since once the students begin to find these documents on their own, their individual research projects become much more meaningful and interesting to them. Once they are familiar with primary documents I can introduce secondary sources, not just as a source in their own right but as a route to locating more primary sources (through bibliographies and endnotes). With this focus on original sources, students often begin to realize they are creating research papers on subjects that have never been written about before. The end result is that students tend to take ownership of their projects in ways one doesn't often encounter in the more typical, web-based research assignments.

How Archivists Can Help

Librarians and archivists can greatly assist this curriculum in two significant ways. First, archivist visits to the classroom are invaluable for encouraging students—who may have never visited an archive or special collection before—to feel comfortable about making that first visit. When a student, entering an archive for the first time, spots a speaker he or she remembers from the class—a speaker who has encouraged this visit and offered to help the student when he or she arrives, this barrier is quickly broken down. In addition, archivist classroom visits can be used to introduce primary documents to students who have often never encountered these

sorts of research sources previously. The archivists who visit my classrooms usually bring copies of primary documents and use them in group discussions. I'm always amazed by the interest and curiosity my students always exhibit as soon as they get their hands on letters, photos, reports, and maps produced in the near or distant past.

Second, archivists offer invaluable advice when the student visits the

archives. An archivist—in particular, an archivist acquainted with an instructor's curriculum—can help a student narrow a topic to a particular focus, perhaps a focus researchable through that archive's collection. Archivists, as well, have intimate knowledge of their collections and can suggest and locate sources that may not be available through any search engine. In my experience, curriculum collaboration between the archivist and the instructor results in a deeper, more relevant experience for all involved.

I and the local archivists operate as a team: they know my course requirements and objectives and welcome my students when they visit. In addition, these archivists all have specialized knowledge concerning the resources in their collections and can offer specific research advice and help locate specific documents. Not only that, but the archivists are more than happy to see my students and work with them. After all, this is what

“For students, handling sources that were created, often by hand, from individuals and agencies at the time of the event creates an aura of excitement that can't be replicated with secondary sources.”

Fred Nollan is an English instructor at Seattle Central Community College. His curriculum won the 2011 Dan Evans Award for innovation in Pedagogy.

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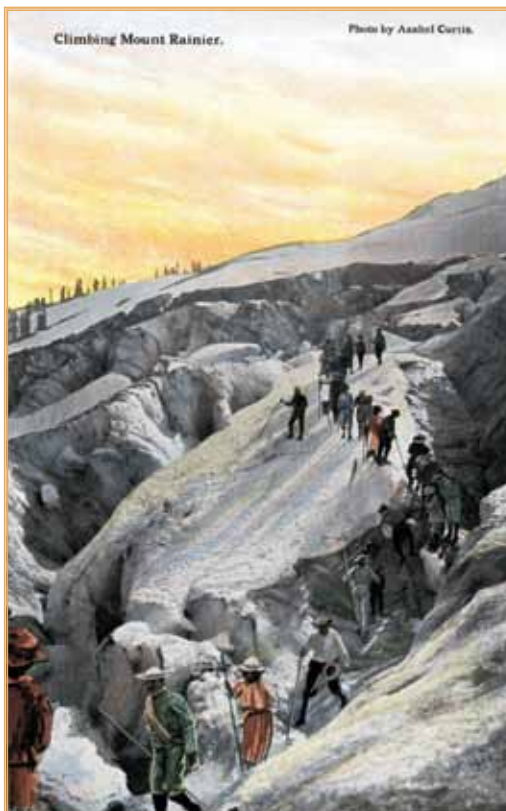
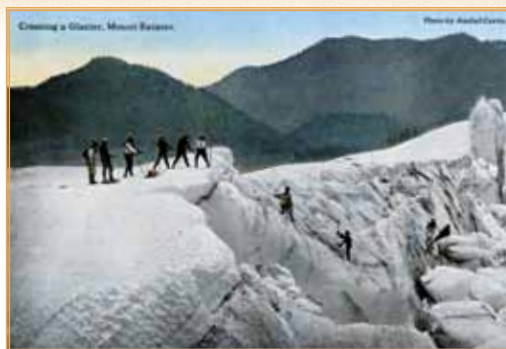
they love to do, and every term I hear from various archivists how much they enjoy this relationship. And, of course, my students become energized and more passionate about their subjects when they encounter professionals so willing to help them with their research. The result is that everyone gains.

Engaging Diversity

Over the years, the student population at the community college where I teach has grown increasingly international in character. It turns out my curriculum works well to engage international students. Most ethnic groups have roots and a history in Seattle (or any other community in the U.S. for that matter) and I have had Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese students all create research projects that explored their respective local histories. Furthermore, particular ethnic groups often have their own archives, newspapers, and original documents that illustrate their emergence as a community, and international students often warm easily to these subjects. In addition, often their own family members are repositories of community history and serve well as interview subjects for this sort of research. Finally, engaging students in local, community-based research naturally focuses them on their own relationship to the world. I had a student several quarters ago who, anxious and a little fearful over a city-sanctioned homeless encampment coming near her home, chose to research the history of the city's response to homelessness over the last two decades. At the end of her research—much of it at the Seattle Municipal Archives—she even interviewed a resident of the homeless camp near her home. The result for this student was a new understanding of homeless people and her relationship to them. Another student, conducting research in the Seattle Public Library's Seattle Room on the history of a local park and the man for whom the park and surrounding neighborhood were named, discovered that the park contained nothing that commemorated this individual. Seattle Room staff helped her track down a living descendant of the pioneer, and as a result, the student contacted the city parks department and became instrumental in helping design and create a commemorative plaque. Clearly, for both of these students a new appreciation and understanding for the community and people they lived among was born.

Impact on Learning

Whereas many typical research projects are forgotten soon after completion, the projects students



Early 20th Century renderings of climbers on Mount Rainier.



Seattle Post-Intelligencer article on Japanese evacuation during World War Two.

accomplish through this curriculum remain with them—and with me—long after they have left my class. In addition, students learn from, and engage with, librarians and archivists at some of the most prestigious research facilities in the country, including the UW Libraries Special Collections and the regional location of the National Archives.

These are archives many students won't become acquainted with until graduate school—if then. The confidence these interactions confer on my students in their ability to perform serious academic and intellectual research is immeasurable. Furthermore—and this is something students continually report to me—they learn about their local community, its history, sociology, and politics in ways they never imagined, and this changes the way they see themselves in relationship to their community. Finally, now that I have been using this curriculum for several years and developed relationships with the local archivists, they report they frequently see my students return—long after the class has ended.

One of the joys in using this curriculum is working with students on the unique subjects they continue to originate. I am constantly learning new things and discovering new local archives and resources right along with my students. In addition, as my students continue to discover new sources and subjects I meet new archivists, who in turn become part of my team. The result is that with each new term I become more knowledgeable about local subjects and sources and can pass this knowledge on to my students. And although some initial effort is required to create relationships among instructors, librarians, and archivists, once those relationships are in place, you'll have a team of regional experts, knowledgeable about students' curriculum and more than willing to help students develop unique, interesting, and exciting research subjects. Once you do this, I wager you'll never go back to the old model. I certainly won't. 📖

Courtesy of the Seattle Public Library, id. no. 2226125
Courtesy of the Seattle Public Library, id. no. 211624

Shhhh! Don't Tell Them It's Science!

by Chelsea Leachman

Why would teens want to come to the library after school for an educational science program? Teens are in school over six hours a day, five days a week, 36 weeks a year, but it is well established that learning is not restricted to this schedule.¹ Teens are learning all the time, and libraries can ensure that science and mathematics are part of a fun after-school experience through partnerships and programming.

One may be tempted to wonder why there is a need for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activities in our libraries when they are a prominent part of everyday coursework. As a recent article in *Scientific American* points out, “[y]oung children think like researchers but lose the feel for the scientific method as they age.”² Bridging the gap between STEM in the classroom and everyday experiences remains a significant challenge. Overcoming this challenge has never been more important; the National Academies of Science and Engineering have identified a growing need for scientists and engineers that will lead to significant problems with the bulk of the workforce approaching retirement.³ Regardless of a teen’s future career plans, science activities are a natural part of human development.

Programming that has been developed at Whitman County Library (WCL) encourages youth to consider science not only as an academic requirement, but as a fun recreational hobby.

As the Teen Librarian for WCL I work with 14 rural branches and



Kids make slime during a WCL science program

“Through hands-on science programming we have been able to reach students that might otherwise not come to the library on a regular basis.”

communities. Each community has different demographics and students, but through hands-on science programming we have been able to reach students that might otherwise not come to the library on a regular basis. For example, at the branch where I primarily work, I was trying after-school programs around the topics of holidays or general crafts. However, after promoting science-themed after-school programs at schools and throughout the community, attendance jumped from 4 to 18 youths. Over the course of the past year I have continued to do science programming after school, and although attendance depends on the topic we are covering it continues to be higher when the subject is science-related.

After originally starting the program at my branch it has developed into a traveling science program due to the popularity. This past fall I featured two different programs focusing on chemistry and engineering design, through which youth develop critical thinking skills by observing, predicting, and creating. Most of our science programs are directly after school and allow participants to come directly to the library. Upon their arrival, youths settle into the space where I have materials available for them to experience while waiting for the program to start. These materials usually do not need supervision, such as bottles that

have oil and water or blocks to build with. To incorporate science literacy into the program I read a story related to the program and provide books for participants to check out for home. After the story, and depending on the space, I have the kids move to a table or floor space for them to work. First I demonstrate the activity and have kids help me remember the steps of the process by asking questions such as “Now what do I do? Does anyone remember?” At the end of the program the kids usually have

Chelsea Leachman is the Teen Librarian for the Whitman County Rural Library District.

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something to take home with them, for example, an airplane they designed or slime they made.

As a result of having the youths ask questions and make creations during the program many are very excited to share the process with their families. Or when making slime, like play dough, youths usually are inclined to comment “Ewww, that’s gross!” or “Cool, do we get to take it home?” While explanations of the science are useful, some youths may just be interested in playing around and experimenting.⁴ Rather than trying to explain all the scientific knowledge behind the activity, adults can encourage youths to figure out what is happening with the activity on their own. Through this exploration of the activities youths are allowed to come to their own conclusions and adults can then step in to correct any that might be misguided.

Collaborations


Don’t have a background in science? Not to worry! Librarians can work with community partners to make science programming easy and fun for participants. WCL has partnered with two different community partners to make science programming available.

Our first partnership was with Washington State University this past summer to provide a liquid nitrogen demonstration from a professor of mechanical and materials engineering. The National Science Foundation provides financial incentives for professors and students to bring science into the community—especially predominantly rural and minority communities. Contact your local universities to inquire about these programs.

In addition to the partnership with the university, WCL has had the local science center provide science-based education programs for libraries. While programs through the science center do entail a cost, many individual branches are able to support the programs through library Friends donations. During summer reading the Palouse Branch of WCL collaborated with the Palouse Discovery Science Center to bring a program to the rural community for a onetime event.




When collaborating with outside organizations it is important to communicate the program length, facilities, and age group that the program is intended for and to inquire if the presenters have worked with youth before. Safety is the next thing that comes to mind during science presentations. Some of the most interesting STEM programs, like the liquid nitrogen program, come with some small safety risks, and it is important to make sure that the presenters and patrons are informed and prepared.

Without quality programming, our libraries are little more than buildings with books. Libraries throughout Washington and across the county currently offer high-quality programming, but the challenge is to reach outside the traditional box and get youth excited about STEM learning. At WCL we have done this through science programs after school, but it can come in a variety of ways—through school outreach, book clubs, and more. I take inspiration from Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future,” and with that I will continue to challenge my programming to best serve the youth of tomorrow. 

Notes

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3. National Research Council, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2007).
4. Pat Murphy, Ellen Klages, and Linda Shore, *The Science Explorer* (New York: Owl Books, 1996).



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Rising to the Challenge: Curriculum Centers in Transition

by Julie Miller

Two disarticulated skeletons. A rehearsal space equipped with a laptop, LCD projector, document camera, and Smart Board. Children's literature—in print, on CD or available for download, or even preloaded onto iPods for checkout—ranging from *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Textbooks in all subjects and grade levels. Databases for kids, teens, and teachers. A knowledgeable librarian who helps to pull together resources for a lesson plan on immigration for sixth graders or counting objects for kindergartners.

What do these resources have in common? They represent the resources and services available in the Curriculum Center at Eastern Washington University Libraries, a special library-within-a-library that provides resources and services to support the pre-kindergarten through secondary (P–12) teacher education curriculum.

This article provides a snapshot of the current challenges facing curriculum centers. It draws liberally on *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers: Legacies from the Past, Visions of the Future*, published in January 2012 by ACRL Publications.¹ As the P–12 education environment changes—due to evolving educational standards and policy, changes in instructional technologies and information resources, and research in learning theory and practice—curriculum centers are under pressure to evolve to meet the changing needs of 21st-century educators.

In the mid- to late-1800s, state governments and the general public recognized the need for teacher training programs. As these teacher preparation institutions, called “normal schools,” developed, so did the collections that supported the teacher preparation curriculum.² Sometimes known as the “curriculum materials center (CMC),” “learning resource center,” or even “curriculum laboratory,” the curriculum center’s specialized collections and services were—and remain—essential to helping teachers-in-training become the best educators they can be.

Challenges for Curriculum Centers

One of the challenges for curriculum centers lies in serving multiple constituencies with competing priorities: the academic library and the education department. Although more than eighty percent of curriculum centers report administratively to the academic library, their primary user groups (and key collaborators) are in the education program.³ According to Penny Beile, director of the Curriculum Materials Center at University of Central Florida, “[h]aving stakeholders who are divided between the



Courtesy of Archives & Special Collections,
EWU Libraries, negative number 90.

The Cheney State Normal School Library in 1915.

college [of education] and the library can make it challenging to explain decisions that support the college to library stakeholders, and vice versa.”⁴ This duality may affect policies on everything from preferred technologies (e.g., Apple versus PC platforms) to classification schemes (e.g., Dewey Decimal classification for some or all of the center’s collections, while the other library collections use Library of Congress). This challenge requires the center’s staff to be well informed of standards of practice in both academic librarianship and P–12 education, to keep the lines of communication open with colleagues and administrators in both the library and the education program, and to identify opportunities for mutual benefit.

Beyond new library technologies, new and developing instructional technologies have been a great driver of change for curriculum centers. Imagine being a student teacher on your first day in front of twenty-five sixth-graders—and not being able to get your laptop to communicate to the LCD projector. The curriculum center is the place where student teachers can practice using instructional technologies in the effective development and delivery of instructional content. Instructional technologies available for use in today’s curriculum center (or for checkout) include laptop and tablet computers, document cameras (today’s equivalent of the old “opaque projector”), digital cameras (still and video), digital audio recorders, geocaching equipment, videogaming equipment and games, LCD projectors, Smart Boards (whiteboards that digitize and capture information written or drawn on them), and even personal response systems (aka “clickers”) that allow instructors to poll students in real time. The staff of the curriculum center needs to have both the technical

Julie Miller is a free-range librarian living in Spokane. With Nadean Meyer, she is co-author of “The Value of the Curriculum Center’s Mission Statement: Meeting the Needs of Evolving Teacher Education,” in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers: Legacies from the Past, Visions of the Future*.

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and pedagogical proficiency to model appropriate use of these technologies.⁵

Given the current budgetary environment in higher education, collection development is a challenge for curriculum centers. According to the ACRL *Guidelines for Curriculum Materials Centers*, the center “should collect materials in both print and electronic formats, including, but not limited to, textbooks, curriculum guides, children’s literature, professional literature, reference materials, education periodicals, media materials, educational tests and measures, and digital content” with a budget “adequate to ensure compliance with state department of education and other accrediting bodies’ standards.”⁶ Methods of determining the funding levels for the curriculum center include enrollment-based allocation (i.e., a formula using enrollment data for education majors), circulation-based allocation, and allocation based on comparison with peer institutions. In addition to vendor discounts and approval plans as effective strategies for acquisitions on a budget, curriculum center staff are often very savvy about low-cost and alternative collection development strategies, including use of review books and publishers’ copies (especially of textbooks); cooperative collection development (as part of a consortium); external funding (e.g., grants, or a percentage of institutional grant overhead funds); or use of free web resources integrated into the center’s collection (e.g., International Children’s Digital Library).⁷

As the education curriculum evolves, the services provided by the curriculum center must also evolve to meet the needs of faculty and students. Library instruction is an essential service offered by the curriculum center. As Shonda Brisco, a librarian in Oklahoma State University’s Curriculum Materials Library, argues, “[t]oday’s CMC must meet the needs of preservice teachers by providing the services of a knowledgeable education librarian who understands the current methods of instruction and is capable of modeling the various collaboration methods for information literacy instruction.”⁸ One of the biggest challenges for curriculum center librarians is including information literacy and library instruction into an already full education curriculum. Strategic collaboration with education faculty is essential in integrating this service into course assignments.⁹

This challenge can be even greater for education programs delivered through distance learning (e.g., web-based, web-enhanced, and/or videoconference courses). The ACRL Guidelines for Curriculum Materials Centers state that “[i]nstruction may take place within the CMC, in the classroom, or in a virtual environment” and “[i]nstruction, both in person and virtual, should in-



Photograph by Jelleen Miller, Eastern Washington University Libraries

The Curriculum Center at Eastern Washington University today. College students interact with Robert Reid Laboratory School students at the El día de los niños celebration, April 2008.

clude all appropriate techniques.”¹⁰ In order to serve faculty and students in distance programs, the curriculum center needs to have a robust virtual presence, and the education librarian must develop alternate strategies of delivering library instruction, which may include Web-based guides and tutorials, videoconference sessions, and reference assistance using instant messaging or Skype.

Each of the challenges listed here has implications for staffing the curriculum center. “Staying current in once-traditional content areas such as curriculum guides, textbooks, or children’s literature can no longer be the primary function of the CMC librarian.”¹¹ Curriculum center librarians need expertise in administration and supervision of personnel, collection development, reference and instruction, resource allocation, and assessment. They also need to be knowledgeable about state P–12 education requirements, the current education curriculum, lesson plan development, and best practices in teaching and learning. They need to be proficient in the use of instruction technologies and in marketing and promotion techniques. Most of all, they need to have excellent communication skills and the ability to develop professional collaborations. Challenging? Yes—but what a great opportunity to have a profound impact on future educators!

The Future of Curriculum Centers

Curriculum centers are evolving. In the past, they have been defined by their physical collections and physical spaces. Today

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they are better defined as partners in developing excellent teachers. The people who work in curriculum centers are passionate about this role:

"The future of CMCs will be determined by the ability to frame...[curriculum centers] as the vital component of teacher education that they are." –Kathy Yoder, education librarian, Bowling Green State University¹²

"Perhaps at no other time in the history of education has the CMC been more important to preservice educators." –Shonda Brisco, librarian at the Mary L. Williams Curriculum Materials Library at Oklahoma State University¹³

"A healthy and vital CMC is the result of caring staff members who have adopted it as an extension of themselves." –Linda Scott, the library liaison to the Department of Education at the University of Mount Union who oversaw the 2009 establishment of her library's new curriculum center¹⁴

These testimonials demonstrate a commitment on the part of curriculum center staff to rise to future challenges of teacher education, whatever they may be. 📖

Notes

1. Rita Kohrman, ed., *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers: Legacies from the Past, Visions of the Future* (Chicago: ACRL Publications, 2012). Full disclosure: I am a co-author for one chapter of the book, and I'm in heady company. Edited by Rita Kohrman, education resources librarian at Grand Valley State University, the book includes chapters by Nancy O'Brien,

Penny Beile, and JoAnn Carr, all recipients of the ACRL/EBSS Distinguished Education and Behavioral Sciences Librarian Award.

2. Rita Korhman, "From Collections to Laboratories to Centers Development of the Curriculum Materials Collections or Centers to 1940," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, 3–21.

3. Jo Ann Carr with Anna K. Lewis, "Curriculum Access and Creation in the CMC of the Future," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, 231.

4. Penny Beile, "Voices and Visions from CMCs: Importance and Theoretical Basis for Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, v.

5. Shonda Brisco, "Staying Relevant: Re-engineering for the Future," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, 203–204.

6. Association of College & Research Libraries, "Guidelines for Curriculum Materials Centers," <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinescurriculum>.

7. Nadean Meyer, "Collection Development and Budgets: Methods to Keep the Curriculum Center Current," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, 75–100.

8. Brisco, "Staying Relevant," 202.

9. Pat Farthing and Margaret N. Gregor, "Promoting Library Instruction for Education Students: A Model for CMC/Faculty Collaboration," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, 60–61.

10. ACRL, "Guidelines for Curriculum Materials Centers."

11. Brisco, "Staying Relevant," 200.

12. Kathy Yoder and Linda Scott, "A Look to the Future of Curriculum Materials Centers," in *Curriculum Materials Collections and Centers*, 246.

13. Shonda Brisco, "Staying Relevant," 200.

14. Yoder and Scott, "A Look to the Future," 265.

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Mixing it Up with Strange Birds: Thoughts on Education for Rural Public Librarianship

by Kate Skinner

“You’ll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. You’ll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go.”

–*Dr. Seuss*, *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*

Recently a fellow library worker on the frontlines of a public library somewhere in rural USA posted the following Facebook status update :

**Things They Don’t Teach You In Library School #47.
Spent 10 minutes chasing a loose chicken around the parking lot.
Brought her into the library, where she was a big hit (she was very tame).
God I love my job!**

Obviously this is not the first time the topic of what one doesn’t learn in library school has come up, but it does prompt this question: Is education for librarianship successful, and is it equipping us adequately to serve rural public library communities?

In good US style, I begin with a disclaimer: I do not have the answers and perhaps, in pondering the topic for this article, I have just raised more questions.

In 1886, in an address entitled “Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women,” Melvil Dewey advocated for college education for librarianship for a variety of reasons. He felt that library school would expose candidates to a broader perspective than an apprenticeship in a single library and also, of course, graduates with specific qualifications in the field could hope to earn better salaries. Dewey put a great deal of energy and rhetoric behind his campaign to educate for librarianship, indicating perhaps that there was some doubt in the general populace as to the need for tertiary-level education for library work. Dewey put the same persuasive forces behind the argument for women as suitable candidates for librarianship training, for some less-than-comfortable reasons: because (he opined) women are best suited to routine (read boring) work. But let’s not go there right now.¹

Has much changed in the intervening 125 years? While there are exceptions to the rule, librarianship is still generally not a sexy “that’s what I want to be when I grow up” field attracting candidates amongst the pre-school set in the way superhero, astronaut, fireman, teacher, or nurse do. How often, come late October, do we see a mass of librarian costumes at the kindergarten dress-up day?

The value of the graduate qualification for librarianship often comes under scrutiny. Recently a contemporary blogger, the Wikiman, put his questioning and call for all of us to take responsibility on record, in a post entitled “The LIS Masters is a Qualification of Conve-

nience.” He asks, “why are we all of us complicit in a system that is so obviously unsatisfactory? Employers, employees, CILIP [the UK professional association for librarianship], and library schools.”²

As this blogger points out, most often librarianship is a second-choice career. Many of the librarians I encounter have first done teaching qualifications and then, for myriad reasons, that doesn’t work out. Librarianship is the next choice.

Others stumble into librarianship almost accidentally. They have been casting about for what to do with themselves, their lives, their brain, their (often, though not always, liberal arts or social science) education, their love of books and learning. They take a library job and it dawns on them that this is where their passion lies. Or someone they encounter within the profession inspires and mentors them, lights their fire.

So they go on to do the graduate qualifications because that is the way to turn a job into a career, the way to climb the ladder, and often the only doorway to leadership. Thanks to Melvil Dewey and the library schools he championed so passionately, these neophyte librarians can bite the bullet, find a library school, and join the profession.

It is no secret that librarianship is a hugely multifaceted field and a one-size-fits-all graduate course cannot hope to do a perfect job. Public librarianship has its own special demands. A quick, informal poll of public librarian friends came up with variations of the “people person” answer to the question of what type of skills would they would look for in a successful public librarian: adaptability, flexibility, communication, empathy, humor, passion, passion, passion. You have to love people.

Looking at these responses alongside a pile of (equally informally polled) responses wherein a random selection of people within and outside of the profession came up strongly in favor of librarianship being a career for introverts, I am led to question whether we are placing enough emphasis on the applied social science aspect of public librarianship.

Some things are determined by personality type and cannot be trained into a candidate. Some talents and techniques can be developed. Would a broad qualification in social sciences not be a good requisite starting point when one is thinking specifically about public libraries? Some days, when the moon is full, or school is out, I think that the best training for frontline services in a public library might just be theatre. Improv 101. At least. Anyone who has ever worked with the public will know what I mean. We have crazy days. No other way to describe it.

Kate Skinner works for Libraries of Stevens County where she is the manager of Chewelah Public Library.

Continued on next page

“Some days, when the moon is full, or school is out, I think that the best training for frontline services in a public library might just be theatre. Improv 101. At least.”



As a profession we are hugely subject to stereotype and prejudice, which distort the view from without, hence all those introvert responses, maybe. This then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: because of this perception we draw certain personality types to work in the field. My next question then would be, are we drawing the best candidates for the profession? When someone tells me that he wants to work in a library because he wants a quiet, peaceful, low-stress job working with books, I try to steer him in a different direction. Researcher, maybe, but public librarian, no.

A few years ago I was honored to have a bit part in making a lifelong dream come true for a very talented library school candidate's graduate school application. The process to get into certain prestigious library schools is highly competitive. She satisfied round one of the complex game. The time came around for her interviews. Returning from one far campus, she was disconsolate. "I felt like a flamingo amongst penguins," she commented on the experience. Flamingos and penguins both have their place in the natural order of things. The flamingo of my story, who incidentally was accepted by all three library schools she applied to, is a natural-born people person, ideal front line public librarian material with strong leadership aptitudes. I do hope that some of those other successful penguins she found herself amongst on interview day were planning to go into technical services or specialized libraries. Or that they are secretly flamingos assuming that the penguin guise is required for graduate school interviews.

Krista Ohrtman, branch manager of Libraries of Stevens County's Colville Public Library, and winner the 2011 WLA bursary for her studies at the University of Washington iSchool, makes the important point that the responsibility for growing future librarians does not rest completely with library schools: "We all have a responsibil-

ity for mentorship to MLIS students. Many students know that it is important to make connections with professionals in the field, but feel intimidated. Our education would be greatly enhanced by meaningful, ongoing relationships with experienced (or at least practicing) librarians, and it is as much the responsibility of the mentor as it is the student to foster these relationships."

Mentorship comes with the territory of being an elder within the profession and is unquestionably our duty. In the imaginary perfect world where all other things are equal I would like to see neophyte librarians choosing whom to apprentice themselves to for practical experience, as well as which library school to attend. Sadly, the reality is often that expediency makes those choices for us.

The mentor relationship is also a two-way process. I have recently been given the gift of a digital native to mentor as she takes her first steps into her chosen profession. With a career which has spanned 32 years and 3 continents, and which has embraced profound changes in library routines from the old analog systems of brown cards to automated just about everything (except the personal human touch), I am a real old grey-hair now. The things I learn from the digital native are unexpected and inspiring, and they strengthen my ability to respond to my community's needs, but above all they keep me professionally youthful, supple, and fresh.

Our education for librarianship never stops. Just because we have obtained a certificate from a college does not mean that we are done. My most significant single formal professional development experience after graduation from library school was a 4-month, self-driven Web 2.0 training course in 2008. I could have chosen not to do this course. It was not mandatory. It took up personal time and often nudged me beyond my comfort zones, especially in the beginning.

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It cost me money—not the least because I had to install high-speed wireless in my home. But I honestly believe that had I not been exposed to that course and its visionary designer I would have become professionally stagnant. I probably would not be practicing as a librarian today. Social media then were an edgy fearful topic nudging at the horizon of our awareness. Now, half a heartbeat later, they change the world, and they are an everyday part of our librarian arsenal of superpowers.

In South Africa, land of my birth, we have a saying, “n Boer maak ’n plan” which translates roughly as “a farmer makes a plan” and implies that the individual under discussion has the resources of body and mind to respond to anything that comes at her. This can be applied to a crucial requirement for rural public librarianship. Resourcefulness is the trump card in rural life. In addition to this, as Ohrtman puts it, we need to be training generalists, not specialists: “In rural public librarianship, library systems don’t usually have the staff to have ‘experts’ in every area. To be successful, rural librarians really need to know a little bit of everything so having a well balanced diet of coursework is important. Rural librarianship really calls to ‘generalists’ rather than specialists in a particular area.”

Can this profile be taught? Trained? Mentored? What does it take for success in rural areas? While I see value in philosophical and theoretical education, for the practical requirements for successful

public librarians in rural areas, participation in County Fair royalty pageants and 4-H leadership programs might certainly be as good a training ground for successful public library work.

The theory, however—the “why” of what we do—will always be necessary. So yes, I have to conclude that I would like to see some graduate work for librarians. To be most useful as qualifications for public libraries, however, within that curriculum, I suggest there should be more choices toward specific training for work in a particular library type offered. Since librarianship is such a marriage of practice and theory, successful internships should be a graduation requirement.

Anyone up for doing another round with that chicken in the parking lot now? 📖

Notes

1. Melvil Dewey. *Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women: An Address Delivered before the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, on March 13, 1886* (Boston: Library Bureau, 1886).
2. Ned Potter, “The LIS Masters is a Qualification of Convenience,” *The Wikiman*, September 3, 2010, <http://thewikiman.org/blog/?p=925>.

SNAPSHOT:

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Young Washington Librarians and the Library Education that Prepared Them

by Tami Echavarria Robinson, with Amy C. Rice, Amanda C.R. Clark, and Jason Stuart

Introduction

I remember getting my first real full-time job in a major university library over 25 years ago. It was a huge library with a sizable staff and many librarians who had years of experience and expertise. I learned from them, worked alongside them, and over time watched as they left to retire or go to other libraries. Eventually I too moved on, meeting new colleagues and learning from them. Libraries are like that—a place of learning for those who staff them as well as those who come to them seeking knowledge. Having worked in libraries for nearly three decades, I now find myself sharing what I know with younger colleagues coming into the profession, while they also bring new things to teach me. I observe a transition occurring in libraries as the greying baby boomers are moving on to retirement and a younger cohort of librarians is learning to take over. According to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, a large number of librarians are expected to retire in the coming years.¹ It is an exciting time because, just as it happened 25 years ago, one generation of librarians is passing on what we have mastered to the next.

I asked several of my younger colleagues to share in their own words how well their professional education prepared them to take on careers that are moving libraries forward in the 21st century. They went to different graduate programs in different regions of the United States, and are now here in Spokane, Washington. Their current jobs range from not yet having a first professional position, to working part time professionally, to having gone from a first to a second professional full time position in the first years following graduation from library school.

The Questions

1. How long ago did you get your library degree? Was it from an on-campus or online library school program, or a combination of both?

Jason: I finished my program about four weeks ago. The program was technically an on-campus one, though a significant number of online courses are offered. At least half of the courses I took were online. The degree is from Kent State University.

Amy: While working full-time, I started graduate classes at Simmons College in Boston. This was a mostly on-campus program.

Though Simmons had a partnership with another university to offer online courses, I did not take an online class while I was attending. I attended two classes a week in the evening, and commuted to and from home. I began courses in 2005 and graduated in 2007.

Amanda: I received my MLIS degree in 2007, immediately followed by enrollment in a doctoral program, which I will complete in 2013 in Communication and Information Sciences with a focus in library studies, both at The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. I did my coursework at the physical flagship campus; students in this program were also allowed to participate in courses offered through the online program, but online-only students had priority in registering for these courses.

2. How long have you worked in libraries?

Jason: I have never been paid to work in a library. As a student I worked in a practicum position totaling over 100 hours over two to three months. Before becoming a student, I volunteered at four different libraries.

Amy: My adventures in librarianship began in high school, when I decided to become a librarian. I did my homework, found out what kind of degrees and training I would need, and set off for college with a plan. Throughout my college career, I worked in two academic libraries and a public library (a total of 2.75 years). Shortly before my last semester of courses at Simmons began, I moved from the faculty office of a law school to the law school library, working as an Interlibrary Loan Assistant and Evening Circulation Supervisor for one year. I spent two years at my first professional position, Instruction/Catalog Librarian at a private liberal arts university, and I am halfway through my second year at Whitworth University as Coordinator of Technical Services & Systems.

Amanda: I began my work in libraries as a student employee with limited hours. From 1998 to 2005 I worked in the Architecture & Allied Arts Library at the University of Oregon (UO), Eugene; from there I moved to the UO Visual Resources Collection, where I later served as a graduate intern in Asian resources; and, finally, I worked in the UO Knight Library book preservation lab. I was employed as a paraprofessional in 2006 at the Tuscaloosa Public Library, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. As a librarian I have served refer-

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Tami Echavarria Robinson is Coordinator of Instructional Services, Whitworth University. Amy C. Rice is Coordinator of Technical Services and Systems, Whitworth University. Amanda C.R. Clark is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Alabama. Jason Stuart is a recent MLIS graduate currently seeking employment.

ence needs from 2010 to 2011 at the Spokane Falls Community College Library and the Whitworth University Library, both in Spokane, Washington. Thus, my total working time in libraries is roughly ten years.

3. Before library work and library school, did you have any other work experience that prepared you for “real world” librarianship?

Jason: No.

Amy: After obtaining my undergraduate degree, I spent two years as a temporary employee providing administrative support at various companies. In one job, I served as the middle person helping corporate bank customers open accounts in other countries. In another, I learned the complexities of a state’s education department budget as I requested funds and reimbursement for various events that I assisted in planning and facilitating. Perhaps more important, I untangled the formatting quirks of long and complicated Microsoft Word documents, a surefire way to learn a multitude of tricks that I still use today, and far better than any training a person can offer. Finally, I began my first permanent post-undergraduate job as an administrative assistant at a law school, providing a full range of administrative tasks to a faculty numbering thirty-five.

Amanda: My previous experience working in retail assisted in my understanding of so-called difficult patrons; my previous experience working in a market research firm acquainted me with a wide variety of standard office equipment. Both of these skill sets proved to be valuable as I began work in a library context in 1998.

4. What work experience do you think people should have before entering into a professional librarian position?

Jason: As much as possible. Ideally a student would spend as much time in practice as they would in classroom learning.

Amy: In some ways, circulation is the heart of the library, and it is often the first place people come for help, so knowledge of circulation, I believe, should be a skill every librarian possesses. The reference desk at the law school library was only twenty feet from the circulation desk, but sometimes it seemed to be twenty miles, because the reference librarians were not well-versed in basic circulation policies and activities.

Amanda: This is an extremely difficult question. The drawback of both my graduate library internship and my work as a paraprofessional in a public library lay in that I had very little power, even within the areas of duties assigned to me. Furthermore, as an academic librarian tasks such as working on an article or conference

presentation could be pursued during work hours. As an intern, paraprofessional, or adjunct academic librarian, these tasks are not licit during the workday. The consequence is an employee who may feel both powerless and undervalued. That said, it seems wise that any profession (whether it be doctor, architect, or librarian) should include some period of internship or pre-professional work.

5. What is one indispensable thing library school taught you?

Jason: It taught me that current library students critique the profession on essentially the same points, which gives me hope for the future.

Amy: There were two classes that I think were really critical to what I do now. The first class is Cataloging. It is in the core curriculum, and for good reason. Being able to use the catalog is fostered by knowing how the catalog and cataloging principles operate. My knowledge of cataloging has certainly helped my work at the reference desk, and it also helped me land my first professional job as an Instruction and Catalog Librarian. The second class was Digital Information Services and Providers which was instrumental in honing my database searching skills.

Amanda: That the secret of an excellent reference experience lies in the success of the reference interview.

6. In what areas did library school fail to prepare you for employment?

Amanda: Technology moves faster than many library schools can account for—which raises the question of if they should attempt to teach differently. Perhaps technology training should happen primarily on the job. Moreover, youthful librarians, even with comprehensive library training, often embrace a “Google mentality” and seek expedient means of conducting research. Even when complex systems are taught, youthful librarians often eschew using them.

7. What is your library school experience with online learning?

Jason: Seven of the courses I took while in library school were online.

Amy: Simmons required a certain degree of technological competency to graduate, and it used a Course Management System to facilitate activities and readings in some classes. I became adept at navigating the system from the end-user perspective.

Amanda: I was both a Teaching Assistant for, and student user of, Wimba online learning classrooms. Regardless of my positive experience with online learning, I believe firmly that it cannot

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replace physical classroom experience and achieve equal results. It was a nice “bonus” to my program, but I could not recommend it as a surrogate.

8. Based upon your experience, what classes do you think should be a mandatory part of the core library school curriculum?

Jason: I think it is wise to include courses on introductory cataloging, information technology, and management in a core curriculum. Beyond that I think it may be worthwhile to establish core or essential courses for sub-tracks (e.g., reference, cataloging, archives, technical services, etc.).

Amy: In addition to Cataloging and Digital Information Services and Providers classes (see answer to Question 5), I believe Reference, especially when integrated with a more interactive component than I had, and Research Methods are also important courses.

Amanda: Certainly there should be a core curriculum, if for no other reason than it creates a common atmosphere among each cohort of students—who will then later be colleagues. What that course should be is another question. In this changing world of library work it seems apropos that one core course should be on the philosophy of librarianship—how do we work and think, and why—since the reasons and motivations behind our profession will persist as long as there is a profession to speak of.

9. Is library school in part an acculturation process to the world of libraries?

Jason: Librarianship certainly has a distinct set of values, and part of the educational process is attempting to instill those values. The actuality of how one implements those values is a different story. It is a bit like a parent-child relationship: the students come to either find the professors as people to emulate in their particular practices or as examples of what to avoid. Reading the literature is a similar process. I would say that the majority of interactions lean on the “to avoid” side of the scale, sadly.

Amy: My acculturation to the world of libraries occurred outside of library school. I learned foundational skills on the job as a student assistant and as a paraprofessional. More important than either library school or job experience, I viewed all librarians and library staff as my mentors. They, knowing I aspired to be a librarian, enthusiastically mentored me and inspired me to mentor others.

Amanda: In library school graduate students are both being trained in applicable skills while also being attuned and acculturated to the philosophy behind the profession: students are being socialized

into a way of thinking about the profession; they are being armed as information superheroes. It would be a shame, however, if a costly graduate degree served only as an acculturation process without more rigorous expectations. I would like to see our library degree programs demand more intellectually of their students, not simply demand more in terms of workload. These intellectual choices will, I believe, make or break the future of our profession.

Conclusion

Although technology has changed substantially in the last 25 years, those qualities that are important in preparation for librarianship are not that different than they were for the cohort of classmates with whom I graduated from San Jose State University in the 1980s. Most of us worked as paraprofessionals in libraries where we could try concepts out as we learned them. We despaired then that technology changed faster than our library schools could keep up with, and we continued to learn subsequent technology on the job throughout our careers. Then, as now, core courses build the foundation that library school students need to become good practicing librarians. And although online learning is part of today’s library school curriculum, it is just an additional alternative mode of learning that can especially help students studying remotely. These young librarians each found different things in their education and experience that were most meaningful to them. They all agree that some practical experience working in a library is a critical component of their preparation. Maybe some things haven’t changed all that much.

Libraries have always provided education, and those who work in libraries must have an education to help provide one. How well prepared young librarians feel as they enter librarianship has always been a very important matter to new librarians, the libraries that employ them, and the patrons they serve. Younger librarians will build on the foundation of their previous experience working and volunteering in libraries and their more formal library school education, as previous generations of librarians before them did. 📖

Notes

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook 2011–2012*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2011), 272, 273.

What George Should Read: The Poor Man's University Meets Readers' Advisory

by Tony Wilson



George asked me what he should read. Despite some niggles about professional standards for readers' advisory, I told him what he should read. I sought feedback from a few readers' advisory practitioners and reviewed some of the standard readers' advisory literature, including Joyce Saricks, Moyer and Stover, and some Nancy Pearl.¹ A strict reading of Saricks, feedback from those who echo her, and my own musings convince me that our sense of professional practice could use some expansion. In particular, it is in our educational function that I think we could put some emphasis. The library as the poor man's university is a fond image for most of us. Neither a rigid approach to readers' advisory nor traditional reference will take the user to that home-schooled PhD of our dreams.² An expansion of our service notions has great potential. Let's look at what I gave George.

What George Should Read Explanatory Notes

George is a real person, an in-law. He is in his mid to late sixties, retired from a military/diplomatic career. He makes beautiful craftsman-style furniture and stained glass. He reads military history. Now, however, he's just read *Moby Dick* and, knowing I'm a librarian, asks me what he should read. Knowing only that much, I can make several assumptions about appropriate readers' advisory. It is not easy to articulate those assumptions, but they have something to do with a relevant filling-in. By relevant, I mean something that allows him to walk around in Spokane glad that he has read

some new things that are somehow meaningful in his life as it is now.

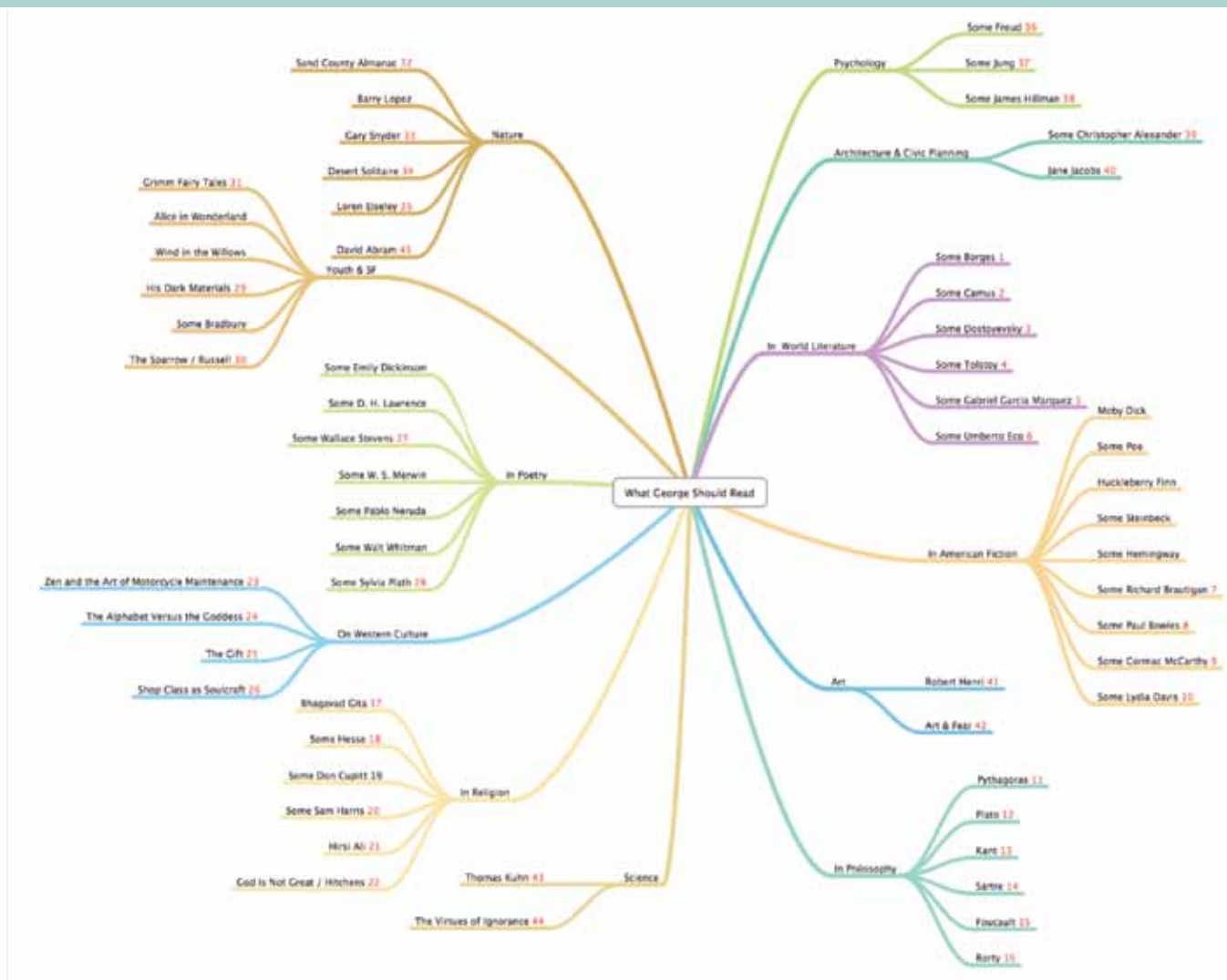
He has read *Moby Dick*, which takes a little commitment these days. I believe George found the effort worthwhile. I don't think that I should assume that he needs similar books or that he wants a grounding in the history of the American novel. Even though I was an English major, and remember Dreiser and Henry James, I have yet to find that memory useful in the way that other literary experiences have been. If you are walking down a path in the woods, are you going to feel better for reading these historically important authors? I don't think they'll help anything much. Not there, not in a bar, not home with the family.

On the other hand, all else being equal (hard to imagine that), I'd rather converse with someone who has read *Moby Dick* than with someone who hasn't. What else can I recommend that, having read it, one would find walking around in the world in 2012 more satisfying and find oneself more articulate with others and more assured of some kind of verbal and mental grasp of the world?

I did give George a summary of Nancy Pearl's gateways (story, setting, character, language) for mood matching and her age-based formula for rejecting provisional reads (read at least 50 pages minus your age if over 50). He also has access to Wikipedia and Amazon

Tony Wilson is retired from Highline Community College where he trained prospective library employees for forty years. He was WLA president 1981–1983. Currently he is president of the Des Moines/Woodmont Library Advisory Board (KCLS) and an emeritus member of WLA.

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for guidance. The substantive chart is above.

Footnotes to *What George Should Read*

1. Borges: Mostly the short stories. *Ficciones*.
2. Camus: Existential novelist. *The Plague*.
3. Dostoyevsky: *Notes From the Underground*.
4. Tolstoy: *Death of Ivan Illych*.
5. Marquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
6. Eco: *Foucault's Pendulum*; *The Name of the Rose*.
7. Brautigan: Provides the hippie ambiance.
8. Bowles: *The Sheltering Sky*, or any collection of short pieces. A good author to read a little about.
9. McCarthy: *Blood Meridian* is the central work. *All the Pretty Horses* is more comforting (if he ever can be). *No Country for Old Men* or *The Road* are strong experiences
10. Davis: Wonderful, strange little stories. Women's viewpoint?
11. Pythagoras: You can get to the drama of mathematic theory with *Pythagorean Crimes* by Tefros Michaelides.

12. Plato: And read Volume One of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* by Karl Popper to see Plato's approach as very bad.

13. Kant: Need to find something about the Categorical Imperative.

14. Sartre: Reverses Plato: existence precedes essence.

15. Foucault: Read about his ideas. Truth and power and the shifting societal substrate as related to prisons, illness, insanity, etc.

16. Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Undercuts the Platonic view of truth and language.

17. *Gita*: One of the world's oldest religious texts. A soldier talks to God.

18. Hesse: Read *Steppenwolf*, or if you are more ambitious, *Magister Ludi* or *The Glass Bead Game*.

19. Cupitt: Anglican theologian holding that "All this is all there is" and still feels a religious gratitude.

20. Harris: *The End of Faith*, or *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Articulate and tightly reasoned for what he addresses.

21. Hirsi Ali: *Infidel* or *Caged Virgin*. Islamic leaders want her killed.

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22. Hitchens: Detailed critique of the religious spectrum.
23. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig: A one-volume substitute for a liberal education.
24. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess* by Leonard Shlain: Shows that over the history of the world, literacy leads to war and violence against women.
25. *The Gift* by Lewis Hyde: From tribal potlatch to copyright, Hyde shows the place and function of a gift economy.
26. *Shop Class as Soulcraft* by Matthew Crawford: Thinking vs. doing, by a philosopher who chooses to run a motorcycle repair shop.
27. Wallace Stevens: Try "The Man with the Blue Guitar."
28. Sylvia Plath: A famous suicide; the new edition of *Ariel* removes her husband's self-protective edits.
29. *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman: An exciting adult read though written for the young. Shows that fantasy/science fiction, even at the YA level, can have significant intellectual content.
30. *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell: Sympathetic treatment of a Jesuit priest traveling to another planet and value clashes with an alien culture.
31. Grimm: My favorite selection is the Lucy Crane translation of 1886, *Household Stories by the Brothers Grimm*.
32. Aldo Leopold. His ecological ideas may be dated, but the *Almanac* is a great and inspiring read.
33. Gary Snyder. Although he is famous as a poet, the prose fits well here. A good selection is his *Practice of the Wild*.
34. Edward Abbey. A park ranger's view of the wilderness and encroaching humanity.
35. Loren Eiseley. Read his fiction and autobiographical material first. Then the poetry. I think of him as what happens to a human mind that really grasps geologic time frames.
36. *Civilization and its Discontents*, *The Future of an Illusion*, or a good single volume anthology.
37. *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, or browse the *Portable Jung*.
38. A good selection is *A Blue Fire* edited by Thomas Moore.
39. Read *The Timeless Way of Building* and *A Pattern Language*. Humanistic, inspirational, and widely applicable.
40. Read *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. A book that makes clear to this farm boy what those townies are and can be doing to each other.
41. Henri taught art in the early twentieth century. He makes moving distinctions between technique, imitation, propaganda, and art that satisfies.
42. *Art and Fear* by Bayles and Orland is a good explanation of why you are not making art and maybe how to get to where you can.
43. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is the book that brought the notion of paradigm shift into popular conversation. A bit of a rough slog but worth reading in the original. There is a lot of science and scholarly flavor that is lost in bumper sticker summaries.
44. *The Virtues of Ignorance: Complexity, Sustainability, and the*

Limits of Knowledge, edited by Vitek and Jackson, is a needed corrective to the arrogance of science.

45. David Abram. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than Human World*, and *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. Both books deal with getting beyond the language- and technology-inspired rift between knowledge and the physical world.

Implications and Argument

I think what I have given George is a good thing but it is not subject reference. Neither is it leisure reading in the sense laid out by Saricks and adopted as a model for much readers' advisory activity. In that model, reader's preferences, either as patron-enunciated or as drawn out by interviews and questionnaires, are the dictating factors. Such an approach cries out for a Boolean search such as provided by NoveList or, with human intermediaries, the reader profile mechanism at the Williamsburg Regional Library (<http://www.wrl.org/books-and-reading/adults/looking-good-book>).

Those who speak from within the Saricks readers' advisory ethic and technique critique what I have given George on the basis of how it models our relationship with the reader. (Some also point out missing branches on the chart—history and science, for example—and I'd expect anyone else to shift the list of books and authors.) What I'm down to here, however, are those objections that have service implications. The first objection is that I have no business telling George what he *should* read. Rather, I should lay out an array of *suggestions* that George might enjoy. The second objection is that I have not profiled George's reading tastes and moods.

In readers' advisory mode I could ask if George enjoyed *Moby Dick*. Ask if he likes big books with long sentences, books about whiteness, difficult sea adventures, whaling, evil, ocean ecology, and so on. Actually, NoveList recommends *The Life of Pi* as a *Moby Dick* read-alike. In context, however, I don't think that whether George liked *Moby Dick* is at all relevant to his question, which was, "what should I read?" Nor are whale tales and ocean-based stories.

What I think George is asking has to do with what a grown-up man needs to read to acquire a spectrum of literary experience such that he does not run into a sense of something missing that is applicable to his own life. The relevant question is not whether George enjoyed *Moby Dick*; it is whether, in retrospect, George found his time reading it well spent.

I am suggesting that George's question is the exact sort we should be seeking most excitedly and also something that cannot be answered within technical readers' advisory service. I really admire the effort and knowledge possessed by those who are good at readers' advisory. I'm glad I can go to one of those librarians and get good *suggestions* when I need some detective novels to take on

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a trip and have finished all the Van De Wetering books. I am also glad for the postmodern collapse of authority, where the librarian is no longer expected to dispense the properly vetted truth of *Britannica* and its properly vetted kindred. (I do miss Hoffman's *Reader's Advisor*, now out of print, but I think George will get from me something easier to negotiate forward from.)

Despite my very real and deep respect for good readers' advisory, it is useful here to take a critical look. The Saricks approach, totally accepting of readers preferences, is an essential corrective to the presumptive, didactic, and authoritarian approach she describes as common to the first half of the twentieth century. But readers' advisory based purely on reader preference and assumedly continued preference is a sustenance operation that can be handled in bulk by technicians in our bibliographic kitchens. Imagine a nursing home waitress: "Now dear, you liked the ice cream yesterday, would you like to try the Jello or the yogurt today?" while imagining brandy and chocolate for herself. Or, the readers' advisory technician: "You've been enjoying a lot of standard romance novels, would you like [to upgrade to] some with a vampire component?"³


Pure technically delivered readers' advisory can be really good service, and I'm glad to get that, say for an unexpected airport layover (before owning an iPad). Electronic readers' advisory tools such as NoveList, Fiction Connection, and Amazon are getting better and better at predicting what I would like. Good enough, in fact, that adding a service person can be a detriment. I recently needed a *Black's Law Dictionary* and couldn't find one at a nearby branch. At the desk, the attendant found a *Black's Veterinary Dictionary* and suggested a book on dogs.

To reduce the Saricks mindset to something automated or otherwise independent of the person delivering the service and based only on reader preferences is McService, not our highest calling. Most of what I read about the potentially positive future of libraries has to do with collaboration and the generation of ideas, not shoveling a few genres of grain to those whose intentions are to remain unchanged. Even with the skilled use of librarian tools I'd expect better results to my query on what detective thriller novelist to read next if I asked someone I knew, whose literary tastes I trusted, than to ask a machine. (I'd like a detective thriller whose reviewers are likely to cite Kierkegaard or Pythagoras.)

Someone suggested that I needed to explain why I put those specific authors or titles on the list for George. Starting with George, who I know personally, I'm happy to admit that the list is totally subjective. While I'd make some or many changes for someone else, the list is a self-exposure of titles I've often been glad to have in my experience while navigating the world. They are titles that I think George would find useful. He can estimate their usefulness quickly by checking Wikipedia or Amazon—the equivalent of movie trail-

ers for reading purposes.

Now that we are all "living in the library," everyone thinks they know how to use it. We librarians can quit that silly business of teaching people how to use the card catalog. We can have time for other things. Combining readers' advisory and reference we have the skills to help someone do their home-schooled PhD in any subject area.

To answer George, there is no specific subject. There may be a concept of The Work, which, as I remember it, arises from monastic practice, that asserts that the world is made better by an adequate and informed thinking through of the meaning of the world and our perception thereof. Our slogan, "be all you can be, read," fits better in this ballpark than does the bulk reading of romance novels. We all have our own starting place, weave our own path, and but rarely leave any tracks. Librarians can access the best of those few tracks left by others and, imperfectly at best, transmit those in their purview to the traveler. We can't do that by technique alone. We must, where appropriate, allow our person into it. We have to get down in the mud with the reader and, if only briefly, collaborate as individual human persons. Since George is an in-law, my relationship is ongoing. My list is an invitation to discuss, argue, or go on from any of the recommendations. A rotating staff and professional technique precluding the personal knowing of the patron precludes also the best interaction for the gap between reference and readers' leisure advisory. 

Notes

1. Joyce G. Saricks, *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 2005); Jessica E. Moyer and Kaite Mediatore Stover, *The Readers' Advisory Handbook* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010).
2. A lot of techies and techie employers have little use for higher education, or, specifically for degrees. According to a recent *New Yorker* profile, Peter Thiel (George Packer, "No Death, No Taxes," Nov 26, 2011, 44–55), a PayPal founder who made \$55 million on its sale to eBay, sees universities as comparable to sub-prime mortgage lenders and their "debt-saddled graduates [as] the last indentured workers in the developed world." His prescription is to drop out and find a venture capitalist. Education is the next bubble in the US economy. Could this be a wide-open opportunity for libraries?
3. This would stereotypically apply to a range of female readers. Guys may have to upgrade from manga to porn sites.



WLA Confirms Commitment to Developing New Librarians

by John George

The ovation Susan Madden received at last year's WLA conference tells the story: WLA supports the development of the next generation of librarians and library leaders.

Susan took the opportunity of the annual luncheon and awards presentation to call for WLA to reinvigorate its scholarship program. For too many years, the proceeds from sales at her conference vendor booth had been the only money flowing into the program. She stepped to the microphone and challenged the board—and the members—to step up. Create a task force. Make the fund sustainable. Help library students.

Her motion was passed by a voice vote and was heeded by the Board and President Brian Soneda, who established a four-member scholarship task force as one of the first actions of his term. He asked the group to provide advice on how WLA can maintain and grow its commitment to providing financial support to library science students in Washington State.

Brian tapped four individuals for the task force, Susan Madden, Mary Ross, John Sheller, and myself. Together, this group boasts decades of fundraising experience, has shown long-term commitment to WLA and has special interest in seeing the scholarship program flourish. We conferred throughout the summer and fall, devising a plan in December for stabilizing the scholarship program and making it sustainable going forward.

The multi-faceted approach we presented at the December Board meeting is designed to expand fundraising from the modest, heartfelt effort that Madden makes selling crafts at each conference into a coordinated campaign that includes special events, individual giving, strategic partnerships, and grants. The group recognized that WLA's strength is in its members, who understand the impact that the degree can make not only on the person earning it, but on the patrons and in the community that the future librarian will serve.

Meanwhile, Mary was doing double duty. As chair of the Scholarship Committee she is building on the solid foundation laid by the previous chair and committee members. In December, she also presented recommendations to the WLA Board, including:


- Testing a new scholarship program which would make awards of up to \$1,000 for individuals seeking ALA-APA Library Support

“The multi-faceted approach is designed to expand fundraising from the modest, heartfelt effort that Madden makes selling crafts at each conference into a coordinated campaign that includes special events, individual giving, strategic partnerships, and grants.”

Staff Certification. The committee will evaluate the program after two years and make a recommendation to WLA Board about continuation;

- Rotating the scholarship committee on a biennial basis, as called for in the WLA bylaws. Committee members will now serve two-year terms, with half of the members changing each year. The goal of this practice is to seek broad diversity in terms of geography, type of library and library service (public, academic, rural/urban, youth services, etc.), and culture/ethnicity; and
- Supporting WLA's interest groups in the distribution of conference attendance grants, strengthening the IGs as communities of practice, and creating a grass-roots means for engaging and rewarding active members of WLA.

Ross expects few changes in the application process itself. It will remain a winter cycle of applications and interviews, culminating in awarding scholarships at the April WLA Conference. The number and amount of the scholarships will depend on the success of fundraising efforts. She plans to experiment with online interviews using WLA's Elluminate system. Using online interviews will save travel time and expense for committee members as well as for the applicants themselves.

With about \$16,000 currently in the scholarship fund, WLA has two years to institute the fundraising campaign and make the program sustainable. Judging by the applause Susan Madden received last April, the campaign is sure to be successful. 

John George is chair of WLA's Scholarship Task Force

Seven More Reasons to Attend the 2012 WLA Conference

by Jeanne Fondrie

This past year I wanted to give back to Washington's library community, and what better way than to help plan the WLA 2012 Conference? There were an amazing number of conference program proposals and we tried to incorporate as many as we could into conference programs as well as table-talk sessions and displays. We are confident you will be able to find something to catch your attention this year!

Seven MORE Reasons to Attend the 2012 WLA Conference

- 1. Programs highlighting Washington's Native American tribes and libraries:** Interested in making connections with one of Washington's tribal libraries? Looking for contemporary, unbiased resources about Pacific Northwest Native Americans for teachers, students, and homeschoolers? How about a guided tour of the new Hibulb Cultural Center and Natural History Preserve of the Tulalip Tribes? There will be programs for you!
- 2. Pre-conference programs:** The recent Continuing Education Needs Assessment by the Washington State Library and WLA demonstrated the need for help with e-books and other technologies as well as supervisory issues. Volunteers came through with programs on e-books and mobile apps, digital storytelling, personnel law, and interest-based problem solving!
- 3. Conference programs on current issues and trends:** Collaborating with other libraries; doing more with less; incorporating effective use of technologies in advocacy, training, and services to library users will all be covered in this year's conference programs.
- 4. Table-talk sessions:** Informal small-group discussions will provide an opportunity to share ideas, programs, and best-practices on a variety of current topics, such as e-books and e-readers in libraries, collaborating, marketing and library advocacy, youth services, and effective internal library communication.
- 5. NEW! Interest Group luncheon:** What better way to meet others in your "community of practice"? Meetings, networking, and food. Try out more than one—IG speed-dating, anyone?
- 6. Meet and Greet reception:** Meet new library friends and relax with colleagues before the conference.
- 7. Location:** Did we mention the beautiful artwork and comfortable conference facilities at the Tulalip Resort?

The WLA 2012 Conference is April 18–20, 2012. Join us at the Tulalip Resort for the entire conference or for just one day. We are confident you will be able to find something to catch your attention this year! 📖

Jeanne Fondrie, Learning Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System, is the 2012 WLA Conference Program Chair.



What Would Dewey Do?

by Kirsten Edwards



Public libraries are justly famous for being accessible places. Librarians (public or otherwise) are well known—perhaps too well-known—for their pleasantly helpful ways. Yet within the heart of every mild-mannered librarian beats a Dewey. Not Mr. Melvil Dewey: The *Mallville* Dewey.¹



As the authors of *Unshelved* admit, “when confronted with rude or crazy customers, [Dewey] says the things we’d like to say, but we don’t because it would get us fired.” Just ask yourself, what do you wish you could say (or do) when confronted with a particular pet peeve across the reference desk? *What would Dewey do?*

There’s the quietly sullen sort of uncommunicative patron who’ll ask (for example) “Can you help me find something?” The cheery librarian responds, “Certainly!” only to wait as the fellow merely stands there, silent. What we all do, of course, is prompt the man: “...and is there anything you can tell me about what you’d like me to help you find?”

Secretly, in my heart of hearts, I’ve always wanted to reach across the desk, splay my fingers across his face and intone: “*My mind to your mind! My thoughts to your thoughts...*” Maybe two decades from now, after I’ve filed my retirement paperwork.

Then there’s the hapless tween who demands, “Can I see the phone?” Of course, what we say is, “The library phones are for li-

brary business only.” The nicer sort might add, “...but if you need to call your parents for a ride, you can give me the number and I’ll call them for you.” On the other hand, it’s awfully tempting to just hold up the phone and say, “Sure: have a look,” smile, and put it back.

Used with permission.

Admit it: Who wouldn’t love to tell the gal spending 20 minutes with you at the copy machine insisting you hold her hand throughout the entire arduous procedure: “You’re over 18. You’re under 60. Are you seriously telling me that you, a grown woman, have never seen a copier before in your life?”

Then there’s the group that slides in 5 minutes before closing who all want to know if they can “just” pick up their holds, check their e-mail, and pay for a lost book. And

no, they don’t have their library cards with them. Wouldn’t you just love to say, with a straight face: “I’m sorry, in two minutes we release the guard dogs. They haven’t been fed today.”

And when the nice lady, upon seeing the signage for “Westerns” comes up to the desk and asks, “Where are the Easterns?” Just once it would be fun to walk her over to the 895s. “Here you go, ma’am: *Four Classical Asian Plays!*”

Of course we don’t, but it can be fun to imagine. Just as kids love *Captain Underpants* and tweens love the *Wimpy Kid*, librarians can get a vicarious kick out of Dewey’s misbehavior. The daily comic strip can be found online at unshelved.com, while the books can be acquired at bookstores fine libraries near you! 📖

Notes

1. Several of these stories were pulled from the amused_library community and librarian peers. The names have been redacted to protect the guilty. Who may or may not include your humble correspondent.

Kirsten Edwards, when not squashing her Inner Dewey and cos-playing impossibly obscure Phineas and Ferb characters, manages to pay the bills by working as a young adult services librarian for three small branches of the King County Library System.

WLA Communiqué

People and Places

Spokane County Library District Executive Director **Mike Wirt** retired on February 24, 2012, after 40 years with the District. Named Director in 1979, Wirt is the senior library director in Washington State. Wirt was hired as the Institutional Services Librarian in 1972, where his professionalism and commitment earned him the Director position by 1979. During his tenure, Wirt oversaw SCLD's conversion to an automated system for materials circulation, led a number of successful ballot initiatives, including four levy lid lifts, two District-wide capital facilities bonds, and an LCFA bond.



Mike Wirt

In partnership with the Puget Sound Genealogical Society, **Kitsap Regional Library** has opened a Genealogy Center at KRL's Sylvan Way Branch. The society brings more than 8,000 reference books, articles, and CDs on genealogy plus a roster of nearly 50 volunteers to operate the center to the partnership. KRL is providing space for the center, administrative space for the society and operational support. A grand opening was celebrated on Jan. 25.

The first two installments of KOUW's "Refugees in Puget Sound" series offer a well researched glimpse into the lives of patrons living near Foster and Valley View branches of the **King County Library System**. The area referred to as the heart of Little Mogadishu, at the intersection of Tukwila International Boulevard and Military Road, is adjacent to the site of the future **Tukwila Library**. Staff at these libraries have long been aware of their communities' unique gateway-to-the-USA status. ESL, citizenship, and homework help programs have all been popular with immigrant patrons, and Somali is fourth of the top five languages spoken at home by area students.

Whatcom County Library System Teen Services Coordinator **Aubri Keleman** and the Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) School's Book Club were awarded a Peace Builder award for actively contributing "to the creation of a peaceful community" at the Whatcom Dispute Resolution's award gala in November. For five mornings each month WCLS staff visit with teens at the JDC School to read aloud together and discuss a book. WCLS also recently presented its annual Golden Apple award to JDC School staff **Suzanne Harris** and **Lani Brogan** to honor their work building connections between books and young people.



Lani Brogan receives Whatcom County Library System's Golden Apple Award, presented by Aubri Keleman

Fife Pierce County Library was the place to be on December 3. 780 people crowded and clamored to get in and check out the first library in the City of Fife at the grand opening. Nearly 20 community leaders were on hand to cut the ribbon and welcome people to their library. Fife Library is the first library in Pierce County and one of the first libraries in the state designed entirely as a browsing library. Spanish-speaking staff members are available to serve customers in this diverse community during most open hours. People express amazement that this lovely library is a modular building.

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WLA Communiqué

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Ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Fife Library

Kitsap Regional Library offered a Facebook Challenge January 19, encouraging patrons to come to the KRL Facebook page to get reading recommendations. Digital Branch Manager **Sharon Grant** and five other librarians went on Facebook live for two hours that afternoon to respond to readers who posted the names of books they'd enjoyed reading. In the two hours, 267 people asked for reading recommendations. KRL staff worked over the following five days to respond to every Facebook request. Participants were very positive about the experience, which happened on a day all the libraries were closed because of snow. KRL received 231 new Facebook fans that week, and measured 3,859 hits on its Facebook page.



Sorensen Cellars' Library Re(a)d


This past fall, the **Port Townsend Public Library** and **Jefferson County Library** benefited from an unusual fundraiser—the sale of red wine. The inaugural vintage, Library Re(a)d, a limited edition Cabernet Sauvignon, was bottled and sold by local vintner Sorensen Cellars, expressly to support the libraries of Jefferson County. Richard Sorensen donated an entire barrel of his 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon and sold it directly from his tasting room in Port Townsend.

The libraries covered the cost for the label design, production and some advertising. Total sales generated approximately \$7,000 with all proceeds going directly to the two libraries.

Eastern Washington University Libraries recently hired **Joanne Percy** as a Library & Archives Paraprofessional 5, Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Specialist, and **Pauline Smith** as a Library & Archives Paraprofessional 6. Joanne has worked in libraries for over 10 years in public, school, academic and corporate settings. She is originally from England and lived on the East Coast for 10 years before moving to Spokane in August 2011. Pauline was born and raised in Hong Kong and for the past twelve years worked for Southwestern Oregon Community College as a Technical Services Librarian.

Zoe Fisher is the new Reference Librarian at **Lower Columbia College**. Zoe earned her BA in Art History from Oberlin College in 2007 and completed her MLS from Emporia State University in 2010. She lives in Portland where she serves on the board of the Oregon Special Libraries Association and volunteers as a literacy tutor for Portland Community College.

Bellingham Public Library, Whatcom County Library System, and every academic library in Whatcom County were recently awarded a \$7,500 grant from Humanities Washington to present Whatcom READS! 2012. Local mystery author Elizabeth George's book *In the Presence of the Enemy* is the featured title. Events include several author presentations; a writing contest; a mystery-writers' panel; presentations by Bellingham Police Department's K9 unit and crime scene investigators; and a letterboxing-style contest where readers follow clues to find rebus pieces hidden in library books, then solve the rebus to find out "who done it."

Lynne Iglitzin, a speaker for the Speakers Bureau program of Humanities Washington, presented "Trailblazing Photojournalist: Margaret Bourke-White" at Spokane Valley Library, North Spokane Library, Ellensburg Public Library, and Richland Public Library in November 2011. Iglitzin's program, which draws on Bourke-White's autobiography, letters, and biographical information to tell the story of the pioneering female photojournalist, was featured in the November/December 2011 issue of *Humanities*. 

The Learning Curve

Excellent Customer Service: **Nature *and* Nurture**

by Kate Laughlin

During the many years when I worked within different levels of library service, I marveled at how few of us were required to have any basic training in providing effective customer service. In the work I do with libraries statewide, I see that this is a common disconnect. For example, not every library intentionally targets service excellence in its recruitment process. It is as if there is an assumed mastery of service by anyone looking to work within libraries. And while I do think a high percentage of people are drawn to libraries by their service-oriented natures, that percentage is by no means 100%, nor does nature equate to a mastery of skills. Nature must be nurtured.

Continuing education is plentiful in our libraries, even in these tight economic times. The excellent resources available through the Washington State Library, including the invaluable subscription to WebJunction, make training of all kinds accessible for most libraries. Some

libraries are able to offer internal training in topics such as safety, intellectual freedom, or reference services. By combining internal and external training, a library can plot a fairly comprehensive and effective program for most staff.

But these topics and many others rest on a foundation of basic customer service understanding and skills that are not being systematically nurtured. Even topics at the supervisory or administrative level, such as diversity training, sexual harassment avoidance, or staff recruitment often assume basic customer service skills that in some cases simply do not exist.

Offering optional customer service training, or training for just some library staff, will rarely target those who truly need it. Taking service excellence on as an organization, and requiring it of every staff member, can lead to an actual culture shift (think Nordstrom, Disney, or even Les Schwab).



Kate Laughlin

“Just like that, the two
had partnered up and it was
no longer ‘us and them’,
but just us.”

Most of us can think of colleagues past or present who falsely believed that they were providing excellent customer service. We have all worked with “that person,” usually well-meaning and completely unaware of how his or her actions result in unintended consequences. Maybe it’s an associate who never wants to “bother” the patrons about their fines, thereby setting them up for worse news later on. Or that one librarian who always wants to get involved on the committees but whose judgmental tone puts everyone on edge. Or even that fair-minded administrator who

treats policies as strictly black and white to the point of being inflexible during situations that require more creative thinking.

During my years in staff training and library management, I can recall many instances when staff/patron or staff/staff interactions went awry for reasons attributed to such things as a lapse in safety, a lack of racial or gender sensitivity,

or a too-strict interpretation of procedure. In some cases, however, a closer examination exposed a basic service gaffe as the actual culprit. ‘For’ instance, there are times when a patron can become angry and behave in a way that necessitates asking them to leave the premises. This is clearly a safety issue, but at its root, there are sometimes opportunities for more responsive customer service to influence those same interactions such that they at least deflate and at best are fully resolved.

One prime example of where excellent customer service can have immense impact on the outcome is in the area of intellectual freedom. The principles of intellectual freedom are essential to libraries, but they are complex and sometimes difficult for even the most experienced staff to fully understand, let alone to articulate.

In almost any intellectual freedom challenge, such as a request for the removal of a title from the shelves, the patron is likely to be

Kate Laughlin is the WLA program coordinator.

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in a highly emotional or upset state. If a staff person does little or nothing to address that patron's state of mind, attempting only to address the larger intellectual freedom issue, then the incident can easily escalate. The patron may not feel heard, or perhaps is left with the impression that nothing can be done and he or she has no recourse. While it may often be true that a library cannot do what the upset patron asks for, there is never "nothing" that can be done. For example, a patron may be asking for the immediate removal of particular materials from the collection, and staff may instead assist the patron in filling out a written challenge to be passed on for formal review. Or a patron asking that a particular group be banned from using a meeting room may instead be offered assistance in reserving a room to hold a meeting on the opposing viewpoint.


I recall a prime example of this from when I was the assistant manager of an urban branch library. A very flustered patron approached a staff member to say that she saw graphic sexual images on a computer as she and her kids were leaving the children's area. I was within earshot and heard my colleague offer a sympathetic tone, leaning in toward the woman saying, "I am so sorry you had to see the uglier side of our First Amendment rights. I'm a mom, too, so I can imagine that was upsetting." She then asked if the patron was feeling ok enough to discuss it a little further, or if she would prefer to have the library manager follow up with her later. I could literally see the patron's shoulders lower as she felt herself being acknowledged and her concerns taken seriously. She blushed and stammered that she thought she would be ok to keep talking, and that it had just been a bit of a shock. By then, I had moved in to take my colleague's growing line of patrons to another terminal for check out, while staying acutely aware of the tough situation she was handling, and ready to back her up further if needed.

Offering to let the patron set down her bags behind the desk, she continued, "Well if you're sure you're up for it, I would appreciate getting a little more information from you." Just like that, the two had partnered up and it was no longer "us and them," but just us. My colleague chatted with her a little longer, then helped get her items checked out and even escorted her to the door carrying one of her bags. When she returned I learned that my colleague used that time to let the patron know what would happen next, while also being honest about the library's non-filtering policy and the reasons behind it. Luckily the patron understood the concept of the "slippery slope," but she was glad to know the matter would still be reviewed.

In this particular case, that review led to determining that the computer in question had been placed in such a way that as one was leaving the children's area, one was exposed to the screen for a short time. By simply having that computer changed to catalog-only while converting a distant catalog-only machine to full Internet access, the sometimes competing values of intellectual freedom and personal comfort were reconciled. The patron was contacted about the outcome, and was supplied with the library's full intellectual freedom policy at that time.

This positive conclusion is not always a given. The above example could have gone in a very different direction if instead of the patron's distressed state being carefully met with a customer service-focused response, my colleague had instead started spouting intellectual freedom policy. Not only that, but by skillfully handling that situation, my colleague enabled us to uncover a fixable placement issue that then averted future inadvertent viewings.

Many of my colleagues within WLA's WA Library Trainers interest group work for libraries that have tried and continue trying to offer some kind of customer service training for their staff, but the success rate has been hit and miss, with the ability to offer something consistently in the long term being a central issue for most. And among those, few have taken an all-staff approach to customer service. Every single person working in the libraries is serving someone, either patrons or staff and often both. If we recognize that more serious issues and misunderstandings can be averted within our libraries through the basic act of being responsive to the particular needs of each person we are serving, then I believe more libraries would give all-staff customer service training the consistent priority it deserves.

One of our unfortunate current realities is that most libraries' training budgets have been steadily declining over the last several years, and competition for training dollars is only growing fiercer. But if we continue trying to nurture the other skills that rest on that absent foundation of basic customer service, it's only a matter of time before the cards collapse. With what your library has to work with, what can you do to improve customer service training opportunities for your staff or co-workers? 

I'd Rather Be Reading

Readers' Advisory and Education

by David Wright

In library literature, readers' advisory and education are often seen as being at odds. In a bygone day (we read) advisors were more educative, drawing up reading plans purposely aligned with what would later come to be called Lifelong Learning. There was scant room in this scheme for popular literary fiction, never mind dime novels and pulp, which were, in the views of many, the problem that readers' advisory was here to solve by moving readers up to the "higher realms" of literature as speedily and efficiently as possible. Librarians were literary nutritionists, weaning the public away from the "flabby mental nutriment" of "trashy fiction."¹

In contrast, the current school of thought in the field of reader services is deeply populist, born of a growing awareness that regardless of what we presume to be our function in society, the public is interested in supporting libraries that serve their needs and wants, including popular reading and bestsellers. Once frowned upon as a necessary evil, now genre fiction is freely embraced as part of what keeps our doors open. Large crowds at library conferences now flock to hear the latest about comics, thrillers or urban fantasy, and wonkish debates revolve around such terms as "chick lit" and "street fiction." Our motto is "never apologize for your reading tastes," and our favorite quote is G.K. Chesterton's (from "A Defense of Penny Dreadfuls"): "Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity."

This approach, which downplays or simply ignores the advisor's role as educator, has flourished in many libraries, including mine. There are apt to be some highbrows—especially in academia—who feel that because of this, readers' advisory has somehow undermined its bona fides as a public good, becoming mere boosterism for endless variations of mass-produced culture. Determined lowbrows fire back with charges of fuddy-duddism; that it is just such idle entertainments that our patrons desire and demand, and that our libraries and our futures are in the public's hands. They also point out—and rightly so—that much popular fiction has depths and complexities unsuspected by those who never deign to read it.

These ready distinctions between education and entertainment obscure the more complicated truth. There are many truly frivolous guilty pleasures to be found in highbrow culture, while readers

have always derived much education from the most inarguable fluff. The moral certitudes of formula fiction are every bit as instructive to our questing hearts and minds as the most opaque and open-ended classics, though they may operate at a different level, perhaps a deeper, more existential one. Horror and fantasy call into question the primacy of reason, working on the imaginative wisdom of our unconscious minds. Mystery peers deep within the human psyche while demanding critical thinking. Romance explores our deepest longings and most important attachments.

I know for a fact that popular fiction saves minds and lives. Literally. I have heard firsthand from readers who found a way to cope with dire challenges through the pages of *Flowers in the Attic* or *The Hunger Games*. A soldier who picked up a paperback copy of Charles Frazier's *Thirteen Moons* at the PDX, and affected by the narrator's sense of regret over lost chances, left the army and changed her whole life's path. I have heard of suicides averted thanks to Stephen King, S.E. Hinton, and Sylvia Plath. Once, at a family gathering, we decided to go around the table and each share some moment or experience that we each felt had changed our life forever and made us who we are. It wound up being a discussion of novels—*The Giver*, *Atlas Shrugged*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *A Stranger in a Strange Land*.

We all know, or should, that there is far more to education than formal curriculum. Just as the literary canons teem with works that were once somebody's guilty pleasure, so the anonymous ranks of popular fiction are rich with life lessons. None of them are assigned reading. It is hard to predict just when or how the right book will find its reader at the right time, but every time a good advisor helps a reader identify and feed her own personal literary hunger, we are helping to educate our readers. 📖

Notes

1. Herbert Putnam, "Fiction in Libraries," *Library Journal* 15/9 (September 1890): 264.



David Wright

David Wright is a reader services librarian at The Seattle Public Library's Central Library, is a regular contributor to many library publications, and teaches readers' advisory at the University of Washington iSchool.

Alki

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