NEW SKILLS REQUIRED FOR INNOVATIVE 21ST CENTURY LIBRARIES: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

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CORPORATE DILEMMA

WHAT IF WE TRAIN THEM AND THEY LEAVE?

WHAT IF WE DON'T... AND THEY STAY?

INVESTING IN EMPLOYEES
Name this object… 1
Name this object...2
Name this object...
Name this object... 4
Are things still what they are?

The traditional?

The modern?
Is the library still what it is / was?

"I caught him watching tv, surfing the net, and playing video games ... book him!"

Sir, this is a library. If you want a book, go to a bookstore...
Desired outcomes?
Spirit of librarianship?

We take late returns very seriously at this library Mr Wilson!

Get a move on, woman—I don’t want to pay for an overdue book at the library!
AGENDA

- The library as an interface
  - Towards a systematic interface
- The role of libraries and librarians
- The impact of technology
  - The usefulness of technology
- The 21st century library
- Competencies and skills
- Conclusion
The traditional library model

The library as interface
The modern library and its challenges

The library as interface

- Library Interface
- Library Administration
- Recorded Information
- Other Recorded Information
- Non Library Users
- Library Users

Other interfaces, e.g., the publishing trade, invisible colleges, mass media, social media, etc.
The library as an interface

- People generate knowledge verbally and in recorded form
- The library is an interface between people and generated knowledge mostly in recorded form
- However, the library is but one of many interfaces between people and knowledge
The library as an interface…2

- Other interfaces include: the publishing trade, mass media, “invisible colleges”, social media, etc.
- The importance of the library depends on how well it performs its agency or interface role
Towards a systematic interface

- The library can be a systematic interface providing communication lines through time, across geographical distance, across language barriers
- It can only do this if it functions properly
The role of libraries and librarians

- Libraries & librarians cannot expect to be important unless they contribute in a meaningful way towards the uniqueness of the library as systematic interface
So what do all of these mean?
The impact of technology…

- Are the Internet and other digital media the salvation of society?
- Does technology create digital divides and inequity?
- Is there a weakening of support for books, libraries and librarians?
- Are book and library budgets cut back as a result of new technologies?
- Are librarians the only ones who have the skills needed to access information from these new technologies?
The impact of technology...2

Jamie McKenzie (2000) – Some concerns:

- an Age of Info- Glut, Info- Garbage and Info- Tactics
- information available for free over the Web suffers from serious problems
- a failure to meet the high standards educators would normally apply to the purchase of [e.g.] books for the school library or even supplemental learning resources
A new plagiarism – an electronic version of illiteracy - e-illiteracy, makes it easy to copy and paste other people’s work

With the shift toward electronic media and information, the challenge of knowing and comprehending is complicated by a movement toward superficial and plastic coverage

Deep thinking, deep reading and deep commentary are replaced in many quarters by Sound Bites, Mind Bites and Eye Candy
The impact of technology…4

- “Sound Bites are brief (15 to 30 second) media spots - the medium is more important than the message. Ideas are condensed in simple, highly compact terms

- Mind Bites are related to sound bites but tend to show up in traditional print media as they attempt to keep pace with their electronic relatives, e.g. newspapers replacing solid news with scandals and stories based on hearsay and innuendo”
“Eye Candy is a term first applied to the enticing format of programs such as MTV...dazzling displays of graphic virtuosity with fast moving video and musical elements that grab the viewer's attention forcefully and intensely...packaging may be more important than content”
The impact of technology…6

• “In many cases, the mountains of information combine to obscure meaning and delay the search for understanding”

McKenzie offers the following:

“Without a dramatic commitment to the teaching (and practice) of information literacy skills in school, [and universities?] our students [patrons] will be ill prepared to find their way”
The usefulness of technology

- Despite these negative aspects, Budd (2008) posits that the application of technology is vital for the common good.
- Electronic sources albeit not intrinsically good, can have value, i.e. enabling librarians to retrieve useful information.
- Librarians should have the skills to use technology to inform not to impede access.
The 21st century library…1

- Libraries of the 21st century can and should emphasize the importance of deep reading and deep thinking.
- This may enable students to:
  - make up their own minds
  - work well in teams
  - solve problems with independence and ingenuity
  - speak, present and write persuasively
The 21st century library...2

- Libraries need to be people oriented
- People are as important as knowledge and recorded information which is generated by people for people
- Can the library however cope with everything that is needed by everybody?
- i.e. Can the library be everything to everybody all the time?
- Or can the library only be everything to somebody some of the time?
The 21st century library...3

- In trying to answer these questions the following factors need to be considered:
  - Space
  - Staff
  - Funds

- Librarians have to make decisions regarding these factors:
  - Comply with the “needs” of the people and abandon accountability for what is in the library
  - Make a rational choice along the lines of materials which are best suited to the particular library & which are the best available; which would close existing gaps in the collection
What about the librarian?

- A librarian who abandons accountability – is s/he a professional? A specialist to society?
- Librarians should know who and what people are
- Why do people behave the way they do?
- The librarian must have some knowledge of people’s relationships to and needs in respect of knowledge, i.e. an epistemology of librarianship
- People as well as knowledge & the relationship between the two **must** be understood
What about the librarian?...2

- Librarians should be aware of theoretical issues otherwise carrying out practical library work becomes senseless, i.e. Practice vs Praxis
- Theory gives essential and necessary direction
- There is a need for an understanding of purpose (*telos*) and ontology (*true nature*) of librarianship
- Both of these define a curriculum of Library and Information Science and vice versa
- Librarians therefore need university training
Characteristics of 21st century librarians

Gardner and Shulman (2005) offer the following for any profession:

- a commitment to serve in the interests of clients
- a body of theory and knowledge with its own set of principles
- a set of professional skills, practices and performances unique to the profession
- the development of capacity to render judgements with integrity
- growing new knowledge from the contexts of practice
- the development of a professional community responsible for the oversight and monitoring of quality in both practice and professional education
Competencies and skills

- Competencies and skills invariably imply education and training
- A major concern is a perceived, if not an actual disconnect between LIS programmes and the profession of librarianship (Budd 2008:5)
- It is therefore important to collectively identify core professional competencies based on a collective knowledge base
- New skills need to be instilled and adopted
- There is a constant articulation of knowledge on power and power on knowledge (Foucault, 1980: 51)
Competencies are a combination of skills, knowledge and behaviours important for organisational success (Wood 2007: 1)

Competencies may be acquired through programmes of education, training and other vocational learning or experiential activities

Life long learning and continuous professional development are therefore important
Competencies and skills: useful models for the 21st century librarian

Expected Communication Competencies

Skills/Sensitivity  
$r = .314, r^2 = .098$

Skills/Knowledge  
$r = .575, r^2 = .33$

Sensitivity

Values/Sensitivity  
$r = .661, r^2 = .436$

Values/Skills  
$r = .471, r^2 = .221$

Knowledge

Skills

Values

Creativity

Reliability

Adaptability

Stress resistance

Sociability

Diplomacy

Reliable

Responsible

Punctual

Diligent

Versatile

College degree

Professional standards

Foreign languages

Psychology

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Competencies and skills: useful models for the 21st century librarian...
Conclusion or not?

Librarians must:

- adopt a human–centered view of information processing
- regard technology as a means to an end
- be service oriented
- have social responsibility
- place accountability to patrons before anyone else
- address moral and ethical questions raised by the diverse applications and growing technological sophistication of computers
THANK YOU / DANKIE / ENKOSI /