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L524: Information Sources and Services
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Bibliography Project

1. Agre, Phil. "The End of Information and the Future of Libraries."
       Progressive Librarian 12/13 (1997). Accessed online 4/9/01.
       http://www.libr.org/PL/12-13_Agre.html
       The author posits that old paradigms of "information" as either
industrial material to be processed, technological tool that will transform our
lives, or stuff to be stored and retrieved, miss the mark when it comes to the
ways in which people use and interact with published materials. Agre suggests
that this interaction is a conversation, a dialog between people about ideas, that
builds communities of interests. Treating this dialog as an information retrieval
problem overlooks the social dynamics of knowledge exchange. The author
proposes the alternative term "genres", defined as "stable, expectable forms of
communication that are well-fitted to certain roles in the life of some particular
communities" (4). He believes that librarians have "a bigger job" of "reaching
out to support the creation, circulation, and transformation of particular genres
of materials" (ibid.). The librarian, therefore, is a "communitarian". Agre
outlines a few suggestions as to how this altered concept of the librarian's role
might be worked out in practice, "to build … the interconnected pluralistic
society that we so badly need" (5).
       This is an intriguing concept, and Agre's point is well taken regarding
the communicative, interactive nature of materials produced in response to an
idea or development with a particular audience in mind. The explosion of
online newsgroups (which he does not specifically cite) only reinforces this
idea of information communities, where people turn for person-to-person
answers to questions requiring particular expertise. What Agre appears to be
missing in his argument here, however, is the fact that many times people
really are looking for specific answers—or information—when they have a
question about how leukemia is treated, for instance, or when Abraham
Lincoln was born. While it may help the librarian better serve library users to
think in terms of genres and community, the need for reference service in the
form of effective information storage and retrieval has not disappeared.

2. Armstrong, Annie Laurie, Catherine Lord, and Judith Zeiter. "Information
       Needs of Low-Income Residents in South King County." Public Libraries
       39.6 (2000): 330-335.
       This article reflects the results of a study conducted by the King County
Library System (KCLS) of Washington State in 1999. The library began by
wanting to know how effectively they were meeting the needs of low-income
residents in their service area, the population of which has grown and
diversified radically in recent years with the influx both of the relatively
wealthy (employees of dot-com and software-development companies and their
families) and the disadvantaged (refugees and immigrants primarily from
Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Africa). KCLS quickly realized,
however, that before they could determine how well they were meeting the
information needs of low-income residents, they needed to know what those
needs really were and how those residents went about seeking information. To
find out, they turned to a consulting firm to develop this study.

They learned that what the low-income residents in King County wanted most was practical materials (career search, job advancement, Internet skills; laws and policies that differ from their home countries', news from home, assistance in locating family members), especially materials and aids translated into their own languages. The survey also revealed that most low-income residents did not think of the library as a source of that kind of information, but turned first to family members and friends. Most considered the library a good place for children, but either had encountered barriers in using the library themselves (primarily language- and fees-related) or hadn't considered it as an option.

As a result of this study, KCLS not only formulated recommendations and strategies for better meeting the needs of low-income residents, but formed ties with area agencies and organizations already serving those residents, building partnerships for the future. Specific actions taken include the development of career centers in several branches, including computers with career search software and basic computer skills tutorials, and the firming of relations with service agencies to keep the word out about services available at the library and to coordinate joint programs.

3. Childers, Thomas A. "Using Public Library Reference Collections and
        Staff." Library Quarterly 67.2 (1997): 155-174.
        This study delves into how people use the library and library staff to obtain answers to their questions. Interviews with patrons who had been observed obtaining information at the library form the basis of the study. Interviews took place primarily at the Santa Monica Public Library in California (with a better-off patron group of mostly European Americans), supplemented by interviews among Hispanic and Vietnamese patrons at the Fullerton Public Library and the Linda vista branch of the San Diego Public Library.

The researcher was particularly interested in how users pursued answers on their own, without assistance from staff, and in how satisfied they were with the results. Research questions included "What did they seek?" "How often did they seek staff help?" "When they sought help, what did they receive?" and "How complete were their searches?" The study found that many of the people interviewed did not see a need to ask for reference help, either because they already knew (or thought they knew) where to look, or because they were able to find sufficient answers using available tools or following signs. It also found that most staff contacts were at a low level, receiving directional assistance to locate a resource or section of the library. The study makes several analyses of the data collected, correlating search strategies with adequacy of results and with levels of interaction with staff.

The author notes that patrons may come away satisfied from their searches without knowing that they have missed significant materials or have obtained mediocre materials. He makes recommendations for improving staff interventions, such as staff follow-through, greater use of referrals, and offering inter-library loan. He concludes that patron use of reference resources is "a

fluid process—a search that often moves through several stages, reforms itself at each stage, and uses library services in both mediated and unmediated modes" (169).

4. Dewdney, Patrica, Joanne G. Marshall, and Muta Tiamiyu. "A Comparison of Legal and Health Information Services in Public Libraries." RQ 31.2 (1991): 185-196. Katz299.

    This statistical study, based on surveys of public librarians, found that librarians faced greater difficulties dealing with legal materials, which consisted of statutes and case records with little interpretation, than with health materials, which included more guides aimed at laymen (for the same reason, they also had more problems with health materials "disappearing" than with legal materials). While more guides to the law are now available on a lay level, the imbalance between legal and health materials that are easily grasped and applied remains. A major obstacle, both then and now, is the reference interview, since the patron is often unwilling to disclose targeting details about a personal issue that prompts the legal or medical question. Librarians reported that patrons often preferred materials that aid self-help to asking the librarian a question.

5. Drumm, John E., and Frank M. Groom. "Teaching Information Skills to Disadvantaged Children." Computers in Libraries 19.4 (1999): 48-51.

    This article profiles a pilot program at the Muncie Public Library to help at-risk children develop computer and Internet skills—and stimulating a general interest in learning along the way. The researchers developed a six-week, twelve-session course that guided the children through an orientation to computer and Internet basics, researching information online, writing reports on what was learned (using templates designed for the program to assist in putting ideas into words, as well as to teach word processing skills), and then HTML and basic graphics skills for designing their own web pages (using a web editor such as Microsoft Internet Assistant or program Hot Dog). The children involved ranged in age from six to thirteen. The authors set out with clear objectives, and tailored the program to the interests of the students (in this case, research in African American history). Recommendations for other, similar programs include keeping class sessions short, to about thirty minutes each: the children did better with a greater number of shorter sessions than longer sessions (attentions wander; information overloads).

    The Muncie Public Library will be continuing skills courses for children both in their main library and with their Cybermobile, bringing computers and Internet access right into the children's neighborhoods. To quote the authors: "Our goal is that by engaging these children with attractive, Web-based information and a structured learning experience, we will enrich their lives, increase their writing skills, and prevent their isolation from mainstream American life" (51).

6. Fialkoff, Francine. "In Reference We Trust?" <u>Library Journal</u> 120.1 (1995): 58. Katz249

Fialkoff discusses the implications of an expose of editorial dishonesty in the <u>Encyclopedia of Homosexuality</u>. This work was received warmly in the library press when the first edition was published in 1990, judged a "best reference" by many standard-bearers (including <u>Library Journal</u>). However, in 1995 the <u>Chronicle of Higher Education</u> published a report of the deceptive use of a pseudonym by the editors (which had been rumored for several years but not published officially), attributing twentysix articles to one "Evelyn Gettone" (out of a total of 800) when they had in fact been written by two of the male editors of the Encyclopedia, Wayne R. Dynes and Warren Johansson. This was apparently done to make the Encyclopedia appear more inclusive, since the majority of articles focused on male homosexuality, from a male perspective.

Fialkoff reports that Garland (the Encyclopedia's publisher) was already planning the second edition of the <u>Encyclopedia of Homosexuality</u> when the scandal broke, to be published in two volumes: one for male homosexuality, the other for lesbian studies (to be edited by a woman, Bonnie Zimmerman). Fialkoff observes that while "gender masquerade" is a long tradition in literature, such pseudonyms in scholarly works are an abuse of academic integrity as well as of the good faith of the reader. The first edition of the <u>Encyclopedia of Homosexuality</u> remains a valuable, ground-breaking resource, but the controversy regarding the deception by its editors provides, as Fialkoff puts it, "a wake-up call to reference publishers to take more in-house control over the credentials of contributors".

7. Gomez, Louis M., Carol C. Lochbaum, and Thomas K. Landauer. "All the Right Words: Finding What You Want as a Function of Richness of Indexing Vocabulary." <u>Journal of the American Society for Information Science</u> 41.8 (1990): 547-559. Katz153.

The authors devised a simple database test to determine the comparative effectiveness of different indexing strategies—particularly, the technique of experts assigning a limited set of defining words to an item, vs. including variations on accepted "correct" terms as well as terms used more commonly in colloquial reference to the topic. The authors state that "the real issue is what works best for users" (548). Their study showed that what works best for users is a system that includes as many variants and common definitions as possible, and that the addition of many terms did not slow performance of the search. The study's validity is not hindered by the passing of the years: the principles demonstrated here remain sound, with points well taken for the ongoing design of databases and their interfaces.

8. Joyce, Steven. "Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Library Service: A Review of the Literature." <u>Public Libraries</u> 39.5 (2000): 270-276.

Joyce argues that the traditional "neutrality" of the librarian has led to a reinforcement of the status quo of silence when it comes to including gay-related materials in the library and offering services to gay patrons. The

explosion of published materials about homosexuality and aimed at a gay audience is not reflected in the majority of public libraries, and librarians are for the most part not taking advantage of available guides to the literature. The article includes a history of treatment of gay materials in librarianship, with special attention paid to Library of Congress Subject Headings and the fight to dissociate gay subjects from headings related to disease and criminality. Joyce also surveys studies that have been done of gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/trans-gendered people's use of the library, and discusses the problem of the librarian's social responsibility versus professional neutrality. The article is meant to be provocative, but also provides useful summaries of research into "LGB" people and library services and materials.

9. Olszewski, Lawrence J. "Madonna, Brahms, and President Clinton: Reference Use of the OCLC Authority File." RQ 33.3 (1994): 395-403. Katz115.
     The author promotes the use of the OCLC Authority File as a first stop for many ready-reference questions, since it provides biographical and geographical data that often answer the patron's question on the first try, as well as including sources that serve as references for further reading—with the added benefit of being a free service. Even if further digging is necessary after accessing the Authority File, a reliable tool has been used at no charge to make further searching (in more costly resources) more effective. Everybody wins. To quote the author: "Although authority files are traditionally viewed as technical services tools, the two basic reasons for creating authority files—to gather and to record information about authorized headings and to provide enhanced access to those headings—benefit all users, patrons and librarians alike" (396).
     A well-written, well-presented article that uses reference examples to its advantage. Excerpts from the Authority File effectively demonstrate the points made regarding this overlooked resource.

10. Stam, Deirdre C. "What Reference Librarians Need to Know." The Bookmark 50.2 (1992): 173-179. Katz31.
     Stam interviewed a diverse group of reference librarians to find out what they considered to be the defining duties and essential skills for their profession—and where they had acquired those skills. This was done as a means of evaluating MLS training programs. The librarians listed knowledge of local collections, general knowledge of reference materials and online resources, and knowledge of local services, but also strongly stressed the need for skills related to bibliographic instruction and teaching techniques. Management skills were also emphasized, for leadership, personnel, writing ability and analytical techniques (many had been startled when beginning the job by the number of data analysis reports required by management). Overwhelmingly, the librarians reported that they had not acquired their most essential skills in library school, but on the job. Most also expressed a desire for more support from their employers for continued professional development, especially time and financial allowance for attendance of workshops and

professional meetings. Although almost ten years old, Stam's thoughtful study can still be taken to heart.

Additional Citations

1. McCombs, Gillian. "Access Services: The Convergence of Reference and Technical Services." <u>The Reference Librarian</u> 34 (1991). Katz88. *This journal is on order for IUB-SLIS. EBSCO's Academic Search Elite indexes this journal, but only after 1/1/95 and not in full text.*

2. Ross, Catherine Sheldrick, and Kirsti Nilsen. "Has the Internet Changed Anything in Reference?" <u>Reference & User Services Quarterly</u> 40.2 (Winter 2000): 147-154.

3. Tenant, Roy. "Avoiding Unintended Consequences." <u>Library Journal</u> 126.1 (Jan. 2001): 38.

4. Weissman, Sara. "The Shape of E-Reference." <u>Library Journal</u> 126.2 (Feb. 1, 2001): 46-50.

5. Wertsmann, Vladimir. "Reference Sources and American Ethnic Groups." <u>The Acquisitions Librarian</u> 9/10 (1993). Katz250 (no p. numbers given) *This journal is held at IUPUI. It is on order for the IUB-Main Library.*