

## ACTEA Librarians eNews #10, September 2004

The mission of ACTEA is to promote quality evangelical theological education in Africa by providing supporting services, facilitating academic recognition, and fostering continental and inter-continental cooperation.

Greetings Librarians and Information Workers! I trust that your year so far has been busy and productive and that you are still happy in your various libraries.

In this issue of the ACTEA Librarians eNews:

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### 1. Melville Dewey

Many of us use the Dewey Decimal Classification system. First published in 1876 it is the most popular classification system, used in 135 countries of the world, and is still going strong. I thought it would be interesting to provide a few details about the man himself.

The information below has largely been gleaned from the book "Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melville Dewey" by Wayne A Wiegand (American Library Association, 1996).

Melville Louise Kossuth Dewey (1851-1931) is often referred to as the "Father of modern librarianship". He came from an impoverished background but rose above his circumstances and moulded himself into a great leader. His was a visionary and a go-getter, an inventor, educationist, a great librarian and a forceful administrator, who displayed great business acumen.

Among his great works, he founded library education in the USA, helped the establishment of the American Library Association, and started the Library Journal as its founding editor. He foresaw public libraries as a force in adult education long before adult education became popular.

A great educationist, he had an uncanny business sense, founding the Library Bureau, a company to sell library furniture and equipment, and later building a huge estate in the form of the Lake Placid Education Foundation. Who said librarians like the quiet life away from the rat race?!

Dewey encouraged women into librarianship and recruited them in his library and admitted them into his library school, thereby flouting the Columbia University rules. He also gifted women students with bicycles!

Dewey was a great philanthropist, possessing the missionary zeal of a reformer and the visionary insight of a seer. So much for the laudable side of Dewey's character, what of the more "shadowy elements"?

Unfortunately Dewey was dictatorial in his attitude and was sometimes unkind to his subordinates. Through fairly "religious" he was a hypocrite who suppressed truth for personal gains. Childhood poverty made him parsimonious. Out of this character trait emerged the "Efficiency Society", his advocacy of the metric system, and his zest for simplified spellings. He wore cufflinks marked "r" for short and even initially shortened his surname to "Dui". He has also been charged with racism, anti-Semitic feelings, and making inappropriate overtures to women colleagues.

Who said books on founding librarians must of necessity be dull and boring? Dewey's positive

traits spur us on to look at our own personalities as librarians. Are we forward thinking reformers like Dewey or do we fit into the popular mould of the diffident-introvert librarian? Let's break the mould!

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## 2. Orientation of new students to the library

What constitutes an effective Library Orientation Programme? Stephanie W Brown ("An innovative first-year instruction program at Hampshire College" in "College & Research Libraries" November 2001, pp 21-22) suggests the following:

1. An ongoing commitment to experimental, individualised instruction and interdisciplinary learning, with librarians being very much a part of the academic life of the college.
2. From the beginning, students should be required to do original, independent research. This emphasis on non-course-based curriculum should require that students have sophisticated library skills early in their first semester.
3. Rather than submitting papers on preassigned topics, students should work closely with their professors to build a bibliography, find current research and evaluate the work of scholars in the field before writing papers on the subject of their course.
4. Librarians should focus resources and energies on teaching and work extensively with individual students.
5. Small groups tours and large group information sessions are largely ineffectual - for various reasons.
6. In-class instruction, focused on a very specific topic is more successful.
7. The emphasis should be on individualised orientation.
8. Work with the college's orientation committee to integrate library training into the general orientation schedule.
9. Meet with new students individually, if possible, and tailor library orientation to the student's area of study.

Brown says that this personalised approach to library orientation produces positive results. "After a librarian had spent several hours with a student, the student told him that she had been planning to withdraw from Hampshire, but after working with him she was persuaded to give the college another try" (Brown, p 22). Wow, that is some success story!

Another positive result was that "students now understand more clearly that librarians are an important part of their success at Hampshire and also that research skills are not the same as Internet skills." If librarians as a breed die out, it is because we have not defined our skills to our user base and have not marketed them properly!

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## 3. What is information seeking?

According to Johannes G Nel ("The Information seeking process: Is there a sixth sense" in "Mousaion" 19:2 [2001]) understanding the information-seeking process and developing systems and strategies for supporting it are central goals of providing an information service.

Information seeking is a process in which humans engage to purposefully change their state of knowledge (Nel, p 25). The process is essentially interactive as we shall see below.

Very basically, humans search for information in the following way (the Ellis Model of Information Seeking - see the J G Nel article, p 26).

1. Starting. Identify initial materials to search and select starting points for the search. This could be done with the help of the librarian or a subject specialist.
2. Chaining. Following leads from one source to referential connections to other sources that contribute new sources of information. Chaining may be backward (e.g., going to an article mentioned in the initial sources bibliography) or forward (e.g., using a citation index to find other sources that refer to the initial source).
3. Browsing. Looking for information in areas of interest, e.g., tables of contents, lists of titles, DDC classification system.
4. Differentiating. Selecting among the known sources by noting the distinctions of characteristics and value of the information. This process is heavily dependent on

the individual's previous or initial experiences with the source or by recommendations from colleagues or reviews.

5. Monitoring. Keeping up-to-date on a topic by regularly following specific sources.
6. Extracting. Methodically analysing sources to identify materials of interest.
7. Verifying. Where accuracy of the information is checked.
8. Ending. Concludes the Information Seeking process by building final summaries and organising notes.

Have you ever thought about the emotional aspects experienced during the information seeking process? Emotional aspects can effect the success or otherwise of information seeking behaviour. Is the borrower intimidated by your online system, frustrated when the system does not respond as he/she thinks it should, elated when he/she gets unexpected results, relieved when he/she gets enough information to answer their question?

Information gathering in the library involves emotion; we are human beings after all. There is an underlying motivational energy provided by the searcher's basic intent in seeking information or their intended use of the search results (Nel, p 31). The successful librarian/information worker will take into account both the cognitive (intellect) and affective (feeling) aspects in information gathering behaviour and arrange the information centre and its systems accordingly. The librarian's attitude (affective realm) directly affects the borrower's use of the information centre (see "Student anxiety in library use", no. 7 below), as does his/her level of expertise (cognitive).

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#### 4. Spelling errors in the database

I guess most of us think, from time to time, about those typos (inadvertently made) and the detrimental effect they might have on information retrieval. The solo librarian is pressed for time as it is, without having to re-check the database periodically for typing errors.

Take heart! Barbara N Randall ("Spelling Errors in the Database: Shadow or Substance?" in "Library Resources and Technical Services" July 1999, pp 161-169) studied the catalogues of four American university libraries and came to the conclusion that most misspellings are unavoidable due to the way most catalogues are built. She also, more importantly, came to the conclusion that these errors are rarely an impediment to information retrieval.

This was a thoroughly scientific study using scientific instruments for collection of data on spelling errors and their effect on retrieval.

Randall's conclusion was that "while perfection in both humans and databases is a worthwhile goal, the reality is that it is also impossible. Most spelling errors are redundant errors and thus, do not prevent users from finding the needed record" (Randall, p 168).

Some universities (e.g., Adelphi University) have made concerted efforts, costing both time and money, to audit their databases for errors. Such large scale audits are (without voluntary help) not a realistic goal for most libraries. Randall suggests an "as-needed or by-product of other enhancement projects" approach to error correction.

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#### 5. Library security

Security is not just about fancy locks, motion detectors, fire alarms, etc. It is a state of mind that should permeate the information centre's operations. All the fancy devices in the world will serve little if the policies, procedures, and activities of the information centre are lax and present a "devil may care" attitude to researchers.

(Gregor Trinkaus-Randall in "Management of Library and Archival Security: From the Outside looking In"). Just something to think about before the next issue of ACTEA Librarian's eNews where security will be discussed in more depth!

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#### 6. Collection management in the 21st century

A useful book edited by G E Gorman and Ruth H Miller, "Collection Management for the 21st Century: A Handbook for Librarians" (Greenwood Press, 1997), suggests that in the future we will focus more on the management of intellectual content than with the management of their carriers, the artefacts. Developing collection policies for electronic resources asks for a new paradigm, "information" rather than "document" management. What is the role of librarians in this process? We will still be needed to make informed judgements and intelligent management decisions! Please write in and give your ideas about how technology will change our libraries in the future and how we as librarians/information workers will have to change the way we work. I have my own ideas, but let's hear from you!

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## 7. Student anxiety in library use

As librarians we should be concerned that the resources we offer are used to their maximum. We can have the best library system in the world, but if students are afraid to approach the librarian for help the information capabilities of the system are lost.

Studies indicate the student anxiety in the library is more widespread than one would expect. (I glanced at a couple of articles in professional journals but have mislaid bibliographic details.) How often have you seen students darting backwards and forwards amongst the shelves looking furtively for some lead in their search for information? Some reasons for the student not approaching the librarian for help might be:

1. Unfriendly librarian.
2. Bad past experiences where the librarian was less than helpful.
3. Not wanting to appear "stupid".
4. Cannot relate to printed media and thinks that these are the only resources the library has.
5. The librarian does not spend any time "on the floor" amongst the shelves but is sequestered in his/her office all the time. As with a shop one needs to be out there mixing with the browsers, proffering help where it seems appropriate.
6. Students may simply be shy or introverted. The librarian has a role here in drawing out such students in a gentle friendly manner. One positive experience and they will be back.
7. The student Library Orientation programme was inadequate and the student feels the librarian would not be much help and that the library has little to offer in terms of search strategies and techniques.
8. The librarian has not taken the time to educate himself/herself in research techniques or theology. This may become evident when the student asks for help and the librarian simply says, "I don't know." We certainly do not always have answers to questions, but we should know how and where to look.
9. Fear of using new technology.

The Library Orientation Programme at the beginning of every year should lay the groundwork for allaying any fears students may have about using the library (information resource centre). Ongoing interaction between librarian and students in the library is also essential. The need for the librarian to constantly educate her/himself cannot be overstressed.

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Well that's all for now. I trust that you have found something of interest and helpful in this newsletter. I'd like to hear your thoughts!

God bless.

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This page last modified: 9/28/2004 11:16:42 AM

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