

Continuing Education- Myth and Reality

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I will assume that nobody in this room needs to be convinced of the desirability of continuing education programs. Continuing education has assumed the mantle of being self-evidently good and wholesome.

The risk in our readiness to embrace the virtue of continuing education is that we will convince ourselves that we really have such a program in the library profession. In a talk at the 1983 ALA conference in Los Angeles, one speaker indicated that our pretense to having a continuing education activity was really a fraud. I won't go quite that far, because fraud implies an attempt to deceive, and self-deception is rarely malicious. I prefer to label continuing education in the library profession as a mirage.

I will have more to say a little later about why C.E., as we practice it, doesn't work very well. I will state at this point only that C.E. does not work because it is left totally to individual options and individual initiative. You do it, if you do it, because you are self-motivated to that decision to learn and improve, and not because you are self-motivated to that decision to learn and improve, and not because of anything you will either receive in return or because of any real or implied threat. There are some, including some of my faculty colleagues, who would argue that this self-motivation is the best and most valid of all motivations, and I would not disagree.

However, the number of individuals willing to give up a Thursday night when IU is playing (or even if Purdue is playing), drive twenty miles, stay up until midnight, do homework on the weekend, and pay for the privilege will be small in this profession, as in any other, if the only reward is self-gratification.

We have built some incentives into the obtaining of the MLS, and particularly the accredited MLS. Most specifically, many jobs are simply foreclosed to those who don't have it. We have had students, particularly older students, who took their MLS degree quite resentfully, convinced at least initially that there was nothing we could possibly teach them that they didn't already know. I would hope that we were able to convince them to the contrary, but the point is that they came even though they didn't want to come.

The MLS, like many professional degrees, is frequently labeled as a terminal degree. Not because you die from it, but because it is the only education you will ever be required to have, for the next 40 or 50 years if you work that long. The degree is called a union card, because that is exactly what it has become.

I doubt that I need to spend a great deal of time telling this audience why continuing education is essential to any professional, and certainly to a library professional. Education, no matter how well provided, is fixed in time. Teachers in the 1960s could hardly lecture about AACR-II and shared bibliographic utilities, microcomputers or file downloading, because there were no such things. Education is fixed in time, but technology changes, systems approaches change, and needs change. Students sometimes insist that they don't really need to learn about budgeting. Sometimes, after two years they still insist that this information is irrelevant. After five years, when they have achieved their first management post, they complain that we didn't tell them enough. The obvious answer would have been for them to come back for that piece of education as it began to loom important. Why they didn't is the crux of what we need to discuss.

The problem is not with the provision of educational opportunities. There are plenty, and if there were demand for more there would be more. The problem is that there is hardly any demand for what is offered. Is that because librarians are more close-minded than others? I don't think so.

We offer a post-masters specialist degree program which allows a remarkable versatility to structure an interdisciplinary curriculum specifically suited to the student's interests. I am pleased to note that one of the graduates of this program is on this panel, but it is still nevertheless true that we have never had more than four or five graduates of the specialist degree program in any one year. It can

hardly be argued that the Specialist Degree meets a major professional need. Our experience is not unique, other library schools report the same experience. All but two of the continuing education courses scheduled for last fall's MFLA meeting had to be cancelled. That's two classes, with perhaps a total of 40 attendees is that many, for the librarians of a multi-state area. ACRL, which has a major program of course offerings with regard to both ALA and bi-annual ACRL meetings, reaches perhaps 5 percent, probably fewer, of the academic librarians whom it might seek to reach, and that only with one program each. The perhaps most aggressive and successful of the professional associations in this area, the Special Libraries Association, held 24 courses for its 1983 annual conference. At an average attendance of 20, they enrolled 480 students assuming each took one course. Related to the membership of the Special Libraries Association, it means that less than 4 percent of the members took one course, 96 percent got nothing at all at least through this mechanism.

In the spring of 1983 Professor Daniel Callison of our faculty, who is a recognized expert in the field of media programming, developed a workshop on this topic, because we had been told that this was an area of great need and importance. We planned two sessions, because he felt that 20 enrollees were as many as he could handle in any one group. The charge was \$80, including the cost of materials, equipment, film, processing and recording tape, for 20 contact hours. That's \$4/hour. Try getting a plumber for that. We ended up with one class, with 7 students. We really should have cancelled the program, but I felt a commitment both to the students and to Professor Callison, who had developed the material. That's enough examples. Continuing education? What continuing education?

There are a variety of ways in which continuing education can be provided. In a survey which doctoral student Marion Paris and I have just completed, we examined not only library administrator reactions to the present curriculum, but also to the various options for education and training outside the MLS degree program. There are at least five techniques for continuing education which we identified: 1) Education or training on the job, as provided possibly by more senior members of the library staff or at least in the library and on library time. 2) Education and training provided by vendors and other commercial services. Vendor training is frequently free or unnaturally cheap, but it is obviously also specifically directed at what they want to teach you. They are not likely to disclose competitor options. 3) Opportunities provided by professional societies and associations, at the national, state, and local level. 4) Education and training provided by and through government agencies. 5) Services provided by educational institutions, either with or without academic credit.

Our survey response, from close to 400 library administrators, was not aimed at continuing education except as part of the overall strategy spectrum. However, it disclosed some interesting answers. There was a professed willingness, particularly among larger libraries, to assume a greater responsibility for in-house training, but no clear understanding of what they were prepared and capable to teach. There was very little enthusiasm for education as provided by vendors or by government agency programs. The preference was for approaches as provided through professional societies and associations (and I think that would include such structures as the ALSAs) and as offered by educational institutions.

Two problems in the implementation immediately emerged, and it is these problems with which we must deal if we are to have meaningful continuing education programs. The first is the question of willingness to pay for such programs. Answers to what one professional 8-hour long program might be worth ranged from \$10 to \$500, but half of the respondents positioned themselves at the \$50 level or below it. That means that anyone offering a full day program and charging \$50 will automatically miss half of the potential audience, and that is a grave risk in a small profession. The Special Libraries Association charges \$75 for a 6-hour course, and of course they miss people. However, their courses are designed to recover costs, including payment for the instructor and administrative costs of the program, and they meet that objective. A reluctance to pay more than \$30, or even \$10, is understandable, but it is totally unrealistic in the framework of a continuing education program. Continuing education has a cost, and we will not be able to decide what to do about that cost until we accept the fact that an 8 hour program including lunch for \$10 has to be subsidized by somebody, even if ultimately the presenter.

It is not difficult to understand why someone earning \$13,000 per year might be reluctant to invest \$50 of her own money, on her own time, on a continuing education experience for which she got no credit from her management or her Board. And this brings me to the second problem.

Programs for continuing education lack a motivational basis, except for the self-motivation to learn simply for the sake of learning. That will spur some, but relatively few. As part of our survey of library administrators, Marion Paris and I sought reactions, in addition to the financial judgment already mentioned, with regard to continuing education. We found a great deal of what I have to call passive support. Managers are pleased to see their subordinates engage in continuing education, many of them encourage it through release time, some even pay partial or complete travel expenses and conference fees. Not all, by a long shot. But even this, I would argue, is not enough. Continuing education takes work and effort, from

individuals who already put in a full day on the job, who have home responsibilities, and who also have outside interests. What is missing is what I would call the carrot and stick approach. The carrot means that if you participate in continuing education, something good will happen as a result of it. The stick means that unless you participate in continuing education, something bad will happen.

Allow me to share with you responses to our questionnaire designed specifically to elicit reactions in this area. In response to the question: "Would completion of additional academic programs or courses lead to a promotion or raise?" the positive responses ranged from a high of 22 percent for middle sized academic libraries down to 8 percent for larger and middle sized public libraries. The response to the question of whether or not a commitment to continuing education was required to qualify for further promotion, the positive responses ranged from a high of 13 percent to a low of 3 percent, the high again for medium sized academic libraries. Finally, for what I consider the most interesting stick-type question "Would your library insist that professionals engage in continuing education to keep their present jobs," responses ranged from an academic library high of 7 percent (probably tied to the tenure process) all the way down to a flat zero.

This is not true in all fields. In primary and secondary education, for example, the completion of continuing education is tied directly to salary increases, and those of us at Indiana University are used to seeing the horde of school teachers back in the summer for more courses. I am certain that at least some of them would come anyway, even without incentives, but how many? Even in our present plans for continuing education activities at SLIS, we find a sharp differentiation in attitudes. Some potential students are simply interested in learning the material, some will not attend unless they can receive IU academic credit, even though this process invariably increases the price. In librarianship we dutifully grant CE units, but I am not sure what the going value of a CE unit is. For continuing education to work, first of all somebody has to pay for it. We have exhibited a strange unwillingness to even want to find out, because we might not like the answers we get. However, it is not that difficult to approximate.

Professional societies such as SLA, MLA, ACRL, and ASIS, have pretty well determined that a one day 6- to 8-hour course or seminar must bring in about \$2000. That's \$50 each if you have 40 registrants, more if you have fewer. Probably \$75 or \$80 is a safer figure, because then you can break even with 25 registrants, and might not have to cancel if you have only 20. If you think that's expensive, check out the course fees for the American Medical Association or the American Management Association. And yet we know that the great majority of our responding library managers

thought that \$75 was too much (although some thought \$500 was OK). The range is tremendous, and finding a common denominator is difficult if not impossible. And remember, we weren't even asking them what they considered a reasonable cost from their own check-books.

It seems clear to me that continuing education isn't going to work very well unless we provide either incentives or threat (and certainly incentives are better) and some sort of realistic financial base. Expecting continuing education to work by simply preying on the good nature of desired instructors is too narrow a ground, and provides no real philosophical planning base. It provides only targets of opportunity. So and so is going to be in town. Let's grab him. In addition to being too narrow, such an approach is unfair and unprofessional. It also seems clear to me that expecting librarians to pay for continuing education, when their salaries are low and when, unlike teachers, they get nothing in return, is also impractical. That leaves two sources - employers and government agencies. Both, I think, are appropriate.

Continuing education for professional staff members should be a normal part of any library's budget. That it is not, and there really has never been a concerted effort to try in so many libraries, surprises me. Certainly the doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who comprise many of the public library boards know this is a reasonable cost of having professionals in their own fields. The fact that it doesn't happen in libraries may in fact help them to wonder whether librarianship is professional after all. There are basically two approaches, and only two. The employer can pay for continuing education either as a fringe or as an investment, and corporations do this on a routine basis. If not this, then the employee can pay, and be rewarded with a clearly and contractually defined promotion or pay increase when he or she is through. That is the educational model.

Alternatively, government can underwrite part or all of the cost. It is a logical extension, particularly at the state level. Government pays for all of primary and secondary education, and about 60 percent of the cost of a public university education. Is that the place to stop? Not if we know anything about the continuing nature of the educational process. Some states, such as Wisconsin, have a long history of support for alternative and continuing education. Some, such as Indiana, have virtually none.

In addition to payment for the continuing experience, we must look for ways to implement the carrot and the stick, because they are realistically part of the same motivation. Academic has the tenure process, which tends to work pretty well as a motivator for at least the first seven years. The academic educational literature is full of articles which discuss the dilemma of how to continue to motivate people who already have tenure, and who therefore don't

really have to do anything.

In librarianship we have almost nothing beyond the demand for the MLS, particularly the accredited MLS, and as you know, even that is under constant attack. The Medical Library Association, in what I consider a courageous and forward looking step, has imposed its own review of certification for medical librarians on the heretofore automatic union card, but it remains to be seen whether or not the employers of medical librarians will be prepared, legally or morally, to fire people who haven't kept up with their professional society's injunctions.

In the public library sector which many Indiana librarians represent, we know that only stringent enforcement of ground rules describing educational qualifications for those holding posts in certain classes of libraries has protected us at all. This is a battle we have not always won, as in the needed qualifications for school librarians, and I think it is unfortunate for the state that school librarian qualifications are largely determined by educators who have never understood very much about libraries, and who suffer from the additional handicap of being deluded into thinking that they do. Without state-wide rules, many library boards would hire or promote individuals without library degrees—in part because it is simpler, in part because it is cheaper, and in part because they can't really see what difference it makes to the operation to the library. And, of course, that difference is not automatic. Some librarians function as clerks, and some clerks operate on professional levels. We know that, and it is a continuing problem we need to address. But it is certainly not a reason for us to abdicate our insistence on professional education for professional posts.

What I am suggesting, then, is that to strengthen the continuing educational process we must insist on it, and place it on a realistic platform of professional expectation, cost recognition, and financial reward for its participants. There is no doubt that the provision of continuing educational opportunities will follow the development of such models, and we must then devise mechanisms for a qualitative assessment of what is being offered. However, first things first. It appears to me the wrong priority to concentrate on structure of monitoring when we have so little to monitor, and so little cohesiveness.

My suggestions place a heavy responsibility on all Indiana professional librarians to safeguard and enhance their profession, but probably most directly on the State Library. After all, I am suggesting both that the State Library take the initiative in demanding state funds for continuing education, and that it also seek to implement standards of professional certification for continuing education.

Is this a good time for such initiatives? An understanding of management communications tells us that resources are never offer-

ed, and that the excuse of poverty is always made, whether or not it is reasonable. In other words, during times of largesse normal funding, or of disastrous financial constraints, we will always be told that there is no money. It is the job of the subordinate to sift the truth from the rhetoric, to demand what he or she really needs, and to point out what will happen if this doesn't occur. Former Governor Otis Bowen, speaking to the State Library Conference which preceded the White House conference, gave us some very good advice, but I am not sure we were listening. He told us that we had been ineffective in rallying political support, because politicians reacted to promises of reward and threats of retribution, in terms of their own political hopes and expectations. We have not really been successful in doing either, and for this reason have not been able to share in the largesse which has suddenly befallen this state.

Is this a good time to get money in the state of Indiana? It is a superb time, and its like may not come again for many years. There are two reasons. First of all, this state has a surplus and projected further surplus so large as to be embarrassing. One alternative is of course to return it as a tax cut, and that possibility exists. However, that is not the preferred approach, because tax cuts followed by tax increases followed by further cuts and increases tend to anger the electorate. They have already accepted the tax increase, it is better to find innovative ways for spending the money.

The second reason is the groundwork which our colleagues in the field of education have already laid for us. They have succeeded in convincing a basically conservative administrative leadership that spending more state money to upgrade the quality of education—to upgrade the preparation of teachers—is both good sense and good politics. Politicians have not made the connection between upgrading the quality of teachers and upgrading the quality of librarians, and the educators have not made the connection for us. Why should they? However, we should be able to make that connection ourselves, and get some money while there still is some.

I began with the assumption that continuing education is crucial to our profession, and I assume that you agree with that. There is always some question as to what constitutes education and what constitutes training, and how much should be acquired in school, how much on the job, and how much later. These are serious and complex questions, which defy easy and simplistic answers, but they don't have to stop our progress. What I am suggesting is that if we believe in continuing education we had better approach it pragmatically and realistically, and develop a game plan which meets the needs of all of the participants. I think that up to now we have not only failed to do this, but also refused to acknowledge the need for this step. That acknowledgement is only the first basic small step, but that is how we must begin.