Can We Get There From Here?

ABSTRACT

To evaluate libraries' public services and public services personnel, the library profession as a whole must agree about the purpose and role of public services. The most problematic service is reference service, especially in academic libraries. The bibliographic instruction movement is examined as a factor that puts reference service in academic libraries out of step with other types of libraries. The flaws in the premises of the BI movement are examined, especially in light of changes being wrought by automation and opportunities presented by the emerging concept of information literacy. These are impelling reference service in all types of libraries towards information delivery rather than instruction in document identification and retrieval. Once consensus forms around this idea, a method or cluster of methods for evaluating services can be devised. Desiderata for the method(s) are stated.

INTRODUCTION

[Author's note: My apologies to the late Walker Percy, a genius whose work can well withstand the occasional frivolous expropriation such as the following introduction. In Percy's Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971), the central character, Dr. Thomas More, invents More's Qualitative-Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer, "the stethoscope of the spirit," (p. 62) to measure "angelism, abstraction of the self from itself, and . . . the Lucifer syndrome" (p. 236) in individuals—in short, a one-stop, simple device for measuring
an individual's mental, spiritual, and moral well-being. A more refined version created in the course of the events related in the novel permits a physician to use the lapsometer not just for diagnostic work, but also to adjust ion levels and correct the patient's angelism, etc.]

The author is pleased to announce that he has here in hand the solution to the problem set forth at this conference! This instrument renders the rest of these Proceedings superfluous; instead of discussing the issue of evaluation of public services and public services personnel, conferees can spend their time enjoying the late October air and taking in the pleasures of Allerton Park [the Monticello, Illinois location of the conference]! This is the Qualitative-Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer (model MCTK), the instrument that with just one easy reading measures and evaluates all aspects of public service and personnel. Its use is so self-evident that few users will ever remove the manual from its shrinkwrap. It will tell if a librarian fully understands and comprehends a library user's need, if the librarian selects the appropriate information sources and employs the most effective strategies to satisfy that need, if the staff member treats the patron with proper courtesy and care, and if the user is fully satisfied with the results of the encounter. By simply extending the antenna and pointing it in the direction of the library staff member and the patron, not only can a researcher or supervisor measure each of these things, but can also receive a diagnostic printout that assigns numeric values to each of these areas and recommends strategies for improvement. A more advanced model of the lapsometer that will be available in the near future is fitted with two RJ-11 jacks for input and output so that it can be plugged into a telecommunications line and measure these same variables in encounters between library staff and patrons conducted over the telephone or through electronic mail.

The lapsometer has been tested in a variety of libraries of all types and sizes; these tests have unequivocally demonstrated the validity of its measurements, its diagnostic capabilities, and its reliability in recommending remedial measures. Whenever staff members have conscientiously followed these recommendations, they have in all subsequent tests registered perfect scores in all areas, including the patron's satisfaction level. The read-out of these measures is not unlike that of a slot machine. When the lapsometer's LCD window simultaneously registers the harmonic convergence of the ions for the right staff member, the right information source, the right patron, and the right time, then one knows that the public service encounter measured has attained the state of perfection. Work is underway on a much more compact model that can be worn inconspicuously under a library employee's clothing. This ultracompact model will, through continuous subliminal tactile electromagnetic ethereal feedback, provide
staff members with information on their performance during an
encounter with a patron rather than after the encounter’s conclusion
as with the present MCTK model. This should assure a perfect score
in every instance, since the staff member will know immediately whether
or not he or she is performing properly to meet a library user’s needs.
Given the proven capabilities of this instrument, there is really nothing
left for anyone else to say about the why and how of evaluating public
services and public services personnel in libraries. The lapsometer asks
all the right questions, gives all the right answers, and provides all
the needed solutions. This author recommends, therefore, that readers
abandon the rest of these Proceedings and place orders for as many
Qualitative-Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer model MCTK
instruments as their libraries need.

EVALUATION: WHY, HOW, AND TO WHAT PURPOSE

Would that it were so easy! Alas, it is not, and that is why we
librarians are involved in the worthy, challenging endeavor of exploring
the questions of why and how and to what purpose we should evaluate
library public services and public services personnel.

Why evaluate these things? The saying attributed to Socrates about
the unexamined life not being worth living might in itself be reason
enough. But that implies that the public service function of libraries
is a matter of importance only to librarians. That is a very narrow,
unconstructive view of the matter. We need to evaluate public services
and public services personnel because these services also matter to the
people who use and who, not just incidentally, support libraries through
taxes, tuition payments, or philanthropy. If these services did not matter
to these people, they would not use nor would they support them. They
deserve good service; librarians have an obligation to deliver it.

The title of this paper poses the question, “Can we get there from
here?” “Get where?” one must wonder, and from what “here”? Everyone
is familiar with the quintessential bit of American folklore about a
traveler lost in a strange place who asks a local for directions and receives
the perplexing, unhelpful reply, “You can’t get there from here.” These
Proceedings are unlikely to provide clear answers to all of the questions,
explicit and implicit, about evaluation of public services and public
services personnel, but even answers posed provisionally will be more
helpful than that of the local’s reply. But before we can reach our hoped-
for destination, that is, before we can say how public services and public
services personnel ought to be evaluated, we need to agree on what
it is that is to be evaluated and what its purpose is. For only if we
know that can we judge whether or not it achieves its purpose.
The existence of public services and public services personnel in libraries in the United States is a given, something taken for granted by librarians and library users. It has not always been so, as Rothstein (1955) has chronicled in his history of reference service’s first six or seven decades, a very brief span in a history of institutions that proudly trace their roots back to Alexandria. The role and purpose of public services in libraries can be summarized by a century-old definition of just one aspect of public services, that part of it known as reference service. In 1891, William B. Child of the Columbia University reference department defined reference as “the assistance given by a librarian to readers in acquainting them with the intricacies of the catalogues, in answering questions, and, in short, doing anything and everything in his power to facilitate access to the resources of the library” (Child, 1891, p. 298). This definition, although it rarely peeks out from the pages of the Library Journal, remains as valid today as it was then. The problem is that the phrase, “doing anything and everything . . . to facilitate access to the resources of the library,” includes some “weasel” words open to interpretation.

One of the undeniable strengths of this definition is its breadth and its ability to accommodate functions and techniques that Child could not possibly have imagined a century ago. Surely the creation of a catalog is one of the things librarians do to facilitate access to libraries’ resources. Provision of remote access to these catalogs via telecommunications systems is another, but not one Child could have imagined. Open stacks and classification of materials are also means by which librarians facilitate access to library resources. Perhaps the most popular thing librarians do to facilitate access to resources is loan those resources to individual library users. So fundamental and so important is this service that it eventually expanded to permit the users of one library to borrow the resources of another library either through reciprocal borrowing agreements or through interlibrary loan. Some of the services libraries provide to their publics are much less ambiguous than others. Circulation, although always the subject of mild controversy because some users or groups of users want more generous policies, is probably the least ambiguous service; patrons borrow books and they return them.

Probably the most ambiguous service, and therefore the most difficult to evaluate, is reference service. Just what is it that a reference librarian ought to do? Just what is encompassed by “anything and everything” in the effort to “facilitate access to the resources of the library”? “Anything and everything” is admittedly an ideal, and that perhaps explains why Child’s definition never became a standard; ideals, after all, are hard to live up to. Furthermore, the library world is not a monolith, as demonstrated by the existence of its various special-
interest associations. Some types of libraries have more difficulty defining for themselves (and, therefore, for their unwitting users) what they mean by reference service. Special libraries, it appears, have the least difficulty in establishing the scope of their reference services; their practices show that they have embraced Child's definition and have little trouble accepting anything and everything that a situation calls for in order to find the information a client in the parent organization needs. Public libraries seem to have little doubt about what their reference services should do. Whereas librarians in the public library community have not resolved the controversy about whether the collections, particularly the fiction collections, they build should widely represent various genre, periods, nations, and styles or should be "give-'em-what-they-want" collections similar to an airport newsstand's paperback rack, they do not appear to have deep conflicts among themselves about the function of reference services, at least not for adults. Public libraries attempt to answer adult patrons' questions. The situation regarding students is murkier. Sometimes, the service children receive is indistinguishable from the service adults receive; sometimes, it is more similar to a mode of service most frequently found in academic libraries: the instructional mode.

It is in academic libraries that one finds the greatest ambiguity about reference service and the way in which it should be carried out. Representative statements from the past decade illustrate the problem. On the one hand are statements such as those from the Bibliographic Instruction Think Tank of the Association of College and Research Libraries. This group of six librarians from universities met in July 1981 and "rejected the traditional notion of the academic library as a mere adjunct to the education program, which led to the establishment of a type of reference service borrowed almost unconsciously from the public library model" (Think Tank, 1981, p. 394). This group "further rejected the notion of bibliographic instruction as a secondary activity of library reference departments, and instead viewed it as the very heart of the reference process" (p. 395). On the other hand, Joanne Bessler (1990) has recently argued that "it's time for librarians to stop trying to teach patrons and to focus more on listening" and declared that "it is time for librarians to raise a new banner. Service, not instruction, should be the hallmark of the profession" (p. 77).

These two views could hardly be more different, yet they describe the "here" where public services in academic libraries stand and demonstrate a division in the ranks of academic librarians; some see the raison d'etre of public services as service (meaning fulfilling clients' information needs) and others see it as bibliographic instruction.

The term bibliographic instruction has not always been with us. Before it came into vogue, library instruction was an important buzzword
among academic librarians. This is a point well worth keeping in mind, for library instruction or, more properly, the term library use instruction, lest one think institutions or even buildings were being taught, is more accurately descriptive of instructional efforts during the past several decades than the fuzzier bibliographic instruction.

Library use instruction has been promoted vigorously, especially during the past two decades, as a response to some very real problems. The basic problem that it has addressed, whatever its professed aims, has been that of physical access to library materials. North American academic libraries’ prevalent open stacks arrangement provides great convenience to users; once they have identified an item they want, they can retrieve it immediately and begin using it. Combined with the practice of classifying materials and shelving them by classification numbers, open stacks also permit browsing, a not-infrequently useful information search-and-retrieval technique that ought not be scorned. Open stacks also undeniably serve libraries’ convenience since they do not have to hire pages to retrieve books for patrons. But before a library user can retrieve anything from open stacks, he or she first has to identify the item(s) to be retrieved.

The principal tool for identifying items is the library’s catalog. However, because the students on whom library use instruction has been concentrated—freshmen and sophomores—do not have a strong knowledge base nor a strong bibliographic base in whatever discipline they need library resources for, periodical indexes are equally important. Taking these factors into consideration, library use instruction has devised a template for successful library use for students to follow.

This template, promoted as a one-process-fits-every-discipline tool, guides the student to a general-purpose encyclopedia or a subject-specific encyclopedia as a first step. The purpose of this step is to compensate for the student’s lack of knowledge on the topic he or she has chosen to write about. The next step guides the student to the Library of Congress Subject Headings and then to the catalog to identify books on the topic. The next step guides the student to a periodical index to identify recent journal articles on the topic. This strategy culminates with a trip to the stacks to retrieve the books and articles identified in its various steps. In other words, it was designed largely to enable students to take advantage of the convenience the open stacks arrangement offers all users regardless of their level of sophistication.

This basic approach remains the foundation of bibliographic instruction (BI) programs in countless academic libraries. The pattern is repeated and promoted in classroom lectures, audiovisual programs, workbooks, and computer software. For example, the user’s manual for Research Assistant (Bevilacqua, 1989), a bibliographic instruction program for the Macintosh computer, includes a generic “Library
Research Flow Chart” that suggests checking a subject encyclopedia for a general overview, checking the catalog for books, checking periodical indexes, and consulting other reference books such as almanacs and dictionaries (p. 3). This is also essentially the model promoted by Gemma DeVinney (1987, pp. 13-23).

Yet this template is seriously flawed, especially when one examines the claims and justifications often made on its behalf by BI advocates. BI has been promoted by some for its promise to turn callow, ignorant freshmen into independent lifelong learners. Nobody can argue that it is not one of the ideals of a college education, including the role the library plays in it, to teach students to become independent lifelong learners. The question then becomes, how can the library best play its role in that noble effort? BI as it has been practiced at most institutions has yet to prove that it has a significant contribution to make.

A truly independent lifelong learner must be able to make independent judgments about the value, the truth, and the accuracy of information regardless of how that person came into possession of that information. This applies to all types of information—to the editorial in the morning newspaper delivered to one’s doorstep, to the articles in a magazine one subscribes to, to the direct mail appeals delivered to one’s mailbox, to the news bulletin one hears on the car radio while driving to work, to correspondence one receives from a business associate, and to the diagnosis of an illness made by one’s physician, as well as to books one borrows from a library. BI programs, especially those promoting a universally applicable search strategy, have been very weak instruments for instilling the critical thinking skills needed to judge all of these forms of information. Their emphasis, sadly, has been on the mechanics of retrieving documents. This is a necessary skill, but not one that makes those who possess it independent lifelong learners. Miriam Drake (1989) has noted that “Librarians continue to be more concerned with delivery of documents and have not focused on delivery of content or the data and information contained in the documents” (p. 523). This is a serious shortcoming.

Theoretical discussions of the purpose of BI and its foundations have for many years transcended the document retrieval level. However, the programs as practiced, by and large, have not transcended it. Instead, they have been judged successful if students in them have demonstrated mastery of the behavioral objectives of being able to find a citation in an index and retrieve the cited article or to identify a book through the catalog and retrieve that book from the stacks. This is far too little to settle for in return for all of the fiscal resources, time, effort, and energy librarians have invested in these programs. Furthermore, given the vagaries of organization and architectural design in libraries, it is
questionable how transferrable these skills are from one library to another. Unless they can be transferred in toto, they make little or no contribution to independent lifelong learning skills.

Because many in the BI movement—and the BI Think Tank of 1981 declared itself "a political movement within academic librarianship"—(Think Tank, 1981, p. 395) have cited as one of its goals the development of independent lifelong learners, BI has been promoted as vital to every college student (Association of College and Research Libraries, 1987, p. 257). As a result, a favored structure has been to incorporate a library use instruction component in freshman English courses. These courses have been targeted because in the cafeteria-style curricula of American universities in recent decades, English composition has often been the only course every student takes. When these courses have taken as their purpose the teaching of writing skills, the library component has been largely superfluous. When these courses have taken as a part of their purpose teaching students how to write a research paper, the library component has been able to resonate sympathetically with the courses' broader purposes. If properly designed and taught, these composition courses have focused on critical thinking skills and the ways in which students can judge the validity of a text and its use of logic, its presentation of evidence, its rhetorical devices, etc. In comparison to this, instruction in the mechanics of document retrieval is insignificant in the long run. At their worst, these courses focus on the mechanics of a style manual and proper forms for citing documents. In comparison to this dull stuff, instruction in the mechanics of document retrieval is simply one more incentive for students to daydream or cut class. Perhaps one of the reasons the BI movement has not succeeded in carrying out its 1981 manifesto is that it has made poor choices in seeking political allies. Within any university, one can hardly think of a less politically powerful group than English composition teachers, frequently an assortment of a few junior, nontenured faculty; several adjunct instructors; and many graduate teaching assistants. That does not, however, explain the failure of the BI movement to make reference librarians the equals of faculty in shaping and carrying out the university's academic mission. The shortcomings of the bread-and-butter approach employed by most BI programs give a fuller explanation.

The universal search strategy is inherently flawed and its limitations have been made evident towards the conclusion of many a BI session when a student has asked a librarian what subject heading to search in the catalog or what specialized encyclopedia to consult for information on a topic that made headlines in that day's newspaper. Since reference works such as specialized encyclopedias are late products of the process by which knowledge is generated and spreads, they are useless as sources
of information for some topics. This model assumes that students are seeking information on a topic that is well-established and has, therefore, become equally well-established in the bibliographic chain. But topic selections and needs are simply too individual for the cookie-cutter search strategy to work for every student in a class, much less for every freshman in every course.

The literature of every discipline has its own structure. Freshmen and sophomores generally take courses in many different disciplines simultaneously. To offer them one approach and to suggest that it will be equally useful in all courses in all disciplines is a gross oversimplification of the way information is stored in documents and can be retrieved. As Tom Eadie (1990) recently summarized it, "Information gathering made simple is information gathering made superficial" (p. 45). Furthermore, as Stephen K. Stoan (1984) has argued, efforts to introduce students to the library in the first two years are probably premature, for as Linda K. Rambler (1982) has shown, even in a research university, less than 10 percent of the courses require heavy library use and more than half require none. Furthermore, Rambler demonstrated that requirements for library use are lightest in introductory courses and most intense in graduate courses. Many courses in Rambler's study relied on lectures and textbooks to impart information to students. Some courses augmented these with reserve readings; few did much more. In most courses, then, even the minimal document retrieval skills conveyed in bibliographic instruction are not needed. And those students introduced to the search strategy model who remember it long enough to apply it when they begin upper-division courses in their major may be using a tool better suited to some other discipline. Why, then, attempt to instruct every student in library use techniques? And why, furthermore, focus those very labor-intensive efforts on lower division students whose need for library resources is minimal or less?

The model has run into additional problems in recent years with the introduction of nonprint information retrieval systems. So long as this process was something carried on online and carrying unpredictable costs, BI librarians could largely ignore it and omit it from the model since it was done not by the users but by the librarians. However, the introduction of optical disk information products with predictable fixed costs and software intended for use by the general public challenged that. Some librarians, so confirmed were they in their belief in the validity of the search strategy model, responded to these new systems, particularly those easiest to use, by rejecting them. They chose not to introduce "an attractive and easy-to-use, but limited, searching tool into an undergraduate environment" (even though students "were eager to use the automated system") rather than suffer
the sight of "the undergraduate user who prints out whatever results from the search term [entered], circles the journals cited, finds the journals left on the shelves, and thinks that the topic has been fully researched" (Van Arsdale & Ostrye, p. 515). One cannot help but think of Macaulay's statement that "the Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators" (1899, Vol. 1, p. 159). Some librarians rejected InfoTrac not because it was initially ridiculously overpriced, but because it made the process of identifying relevant documents easy. However, a deeper problem indicated by the statement quoted above is that some librarians have equated research and the tried-but-not-always-true model search strategy.

Stoan (1984) has convincingly drawn the distinction between these two activities. Library use can be a part of the research process, but it is not the same as the research process. The way in which a researcher identifies library materials has little to do with the search strategy model. Yet nobody can deny that scholars are, if nothing else, independent lifelong learners. How, then, have these scholars managed to become independent lifelong learners and yet not use the library as outlined by the model search strategy? They succeed because they have developed a deep knowledge base of their discipline through extensive exploration of its literature. In the process, they have also developed a deep knowledge base of the discipline's bibliographic structure. That literature, as Stoan points out, indexes itself very effectively through citation chains. These, far more than secondary reference sources, enable scholars to identify documents relevant to their work. The search strategy model has thrived because its proponents have failed to understand that research is not the same as a prescribed pattern for library use; indeed, research thrives without following this pattern.

Another reason the goals of the BI manifesto have not been realized is that the agenda BI librarians have had for library users has not been the agenda these users have for themselves. As Robert Taylor observed in 1957, "Most librarians approach the library by way of the book (form) while the user, often unconsciously, approaches the library by way of information (content)" (p. 303). For the most part, BI programs have emphasized form over content and document retrieval over document use. People, whether they are faculty members, students, business people, homemakers, etc., approach the library looking for answers to questions, not for lessons in retrieving those documents that might answer their questions. Instruction in library use would unquestionably be a valid approach if all patrons used their library as many hours each week as librarians work in it. This is not the case (especially in academic libraries between semesters); library use by most people is intermittent.
BI programs have been an attempt to solve problems some librarians in academic libraries have perceived but have failed to convince library users they (i.e., the users) have.

All of these are reasons why the BI movement has been misdirected. However, two reasons stand out. The first is that its practice, in spite of BI’s rhetoric and its theoretical discussions about teaching critical thinking skills and the like, has not progressed significantly beyond the teaching of a simple strategy to students who may or may not have any immediate or even long-term use for it. The second is that it is not what people want when they seek library service.

To get answers to questions from documents stored in libraries and organized for (relatively) easy retrieval, one must know how to identify those documents and how to find them in their storage locations. From this undeniable basic need sprung bibliographic instruction programs. Wedded to a simple model search strategy and a limited set of behavioral objectives, the practice has not changed dramatically even though the literature and discussions about BI have grown increasingly sophisticated.

Earlier, BI was likened to puritanism. There is, it seems, a strong streak of puritanism in some reference librarians, at least among some in academic libraries. Puritanism strongly distrusts personal freedom and individual judgment. It seeks, therefore, to impose uniform behavior on all members of a society so that all will conform to standards that the society’s leaders have judged to be the best. Nothing illustrates this streak more dramatically than the strong reaction to and rejection of InfoTrac because it allegedly made the process of identifying documents too easy. Stoan (1984) notes that “the logic of using . . . access and synthetic sources seems so evident to librarians that they are alternately critical, bemused, or amused when they observe that faculty members fail to use them consistently” (p. 100). And Bessler (1990) notes that “while Katz claims that ‘the user should have the option to learn how to use the library or not and still expect an answer,’ many practicing librarians resent choosers of the second option” (p. 77). The effort to teach every student the model search strategy and the claims sometimes made for the model strategy’s adaptability to any and every discipline are nothing less than a puritanical attempt to control behavior. The crucial question for evaluation of reference services and any other library public service is: Who judges? A puritanical approach says that only the librarians may judge, for only they know what is best for others. One of the things that is good for library users is conformity in their approach to library resources; hence the importance of bibliographic instruction programs designed “to build better users” (Bessler, 1990, p. 77). In contrast, a democratic or laissez-faire approach says that each individual user may judge for herself or himself. Applied to reference
service, this means that not only can patrons choose whether to be instructed in library use or to have their questions answered, but also that they can decide how much information is enough for their purposes and which documents identified in a search are relevant and useful to them. Indeed, these are decisions that ultimately only the patron can make for himself or herself. This latter model emphasizes document use rather than document retrieval.

It was relatively easy to impose a single approach on users when all resources and all finding tools were paper-based. But the situation is changing. Several forces are (or at least should be) impelling academic librarianship towards a reassessment of the role and purpose of reference service and user instruction. The first is automation. Most academic libraries today have implemented or are on the brink of implementing an online catalog. In the wake of this, some have been able to go beyond closing their card catalogs to removing them. A common result of the implementation of an online catalog is an increase in circulation. While no OPAC (many given a variety of local "-CAT" names) is perfect and none is as user-friendly as one's own dog, all make it easy to identify cataloged documents.

In one library, circulation of its Dewey books, none of which initially were in the OPAC database, dropped dramatically after the OPAC was implemented while circulation of its LC books, most of which were initially in the database, soared. This correlated with the librarians’ observations that use of the card catalog had dropped almost to none, whereas use of OPAC terminals was nearly constant. The patrons of that library used the OPAC because it was easier to use than the divided card catalog; the increase in circulation, greater than that which was expected as a part of a perennial trend, indicated that, through the OPAC, users were identifying more books than they had identified through the card catalog and were, therefore, borrowing more. (Incidentally, when records for the Dewey books were eventually loaded into the OPAC's database en masse, circulation of those books increased.)

One observation often heard from interlibrary loan librarians after InfoTrac was introduced was that it increased the number of interlibrary loan requests. At the same time, these librarians rightly complained about the lack of inclusive pagination in InfoTrac citations. The significant point, however, is that, thanks to the ease with which patrons were able to identify documents, they sought to use a greater number of documents. Whether or not these documents were the best possible for the users' various purposes is mostly a moot consideration; these users had judged them to be good enough.

Although they are more user-friendly than their printed counterparts, OPACs and CD-ROM systems have a long way to go before they are truly user-friendly. To be truly so, the next generation of these systems
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needs to develop hypermedia user interfaces that are conversational in nature. These need to offer users options and explain, perhaps even model, the implications of the options and then allow each user to choose the path he or she judges best. Advances in telecommunications necessitate progress in this direction. When OPACs were first installed in libraries, access to their contents was available only from dedicated terminals in the libraries. Users who needed assistance could always turn to a library staff member for personal help. OPACs are now accessible from outside the libraries. This means that conversational interfaces and help devices are badly needed to compensate for the absence of the library staff. The ideal would emulate a system that reportedly is already in service at Disney World. A Disney World visitor can turn to a computerized information system for advice on restaurants, lodging, or other area attractions. If the user asks the system questions that it cannot answer, it switches to real-time video to link the user to a real human for a real, face-to-face conversation.

Meanwhile, however, we have the systems we have and users are using them, often without formal training, to identify more documents than they identified when they had to rely exclusively on manual systems and laborious manual transcription of citations. These systems increasingly are stealing the thunder of the typical BI program. When the process of identifying a document has been simplified through automation, when keyword search capabilities in OPACs and CD-ROM databases make it easy to find some things, even if not the best things, there is no need for students to be taught the model search strategy process. When libraries mount additional databases searchable through their OPACs, there is even less reason to teach this process.

Students do, however, need to learn the very skills that the literature of BI has promoted but that its practice has rarely imparted—critical thinking and how to judge a document's validity and relevance. The experiment OCLC has announced for enhancing bibliographic records by including tables of contents of monographs illustrates the need to emphasize critical thinking skills rather than document retrieval skills. An ever-increasing number of libraries are offering access to additional bibliographic databases through the software used to drive their OPACs. Projects like this will give library users more access to more information; and they must make judgments about all of it lest, in the words of T. S. Eliot (1963), they be left to ask:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? (p. 147)

Furthermore, as more and more users search OPACs and other databases from outside the library, pressure will build for document delivery systems more convenient than a trip by the user to the library. As these
systems become common, the document retrieval skills emphasized in BI programs will become completely irrelevant. If the Leviathan automated book retrieval system scheduled to go into service at California State University at Northridge in 1991 is a success, document retrieval will be reduced to issuing a command from the same terminal or PC used to search the OPAC (Hirsch, 1990). If the Northridge installation is a success, it will be imitated widely and BI designed to teach students to retrieve books will be reduced to one tap on a function key. Progress in library automation is one of the forces necessitating a welcome reassessment of reference service.

Another is the development of computer-based information systems marketed directly to consumers, some of whom, of course, are students and faculty. While every computer system, like the organization of any library, makes demands upon its users to conform to certain protocols, there is no sign that system and software developers intend to arrest or reverse the trend towards making the use of their products more intuitively self-evident. The almost rabid loyalty of Macintosh microcomputer users to their machines and the Mac's graphic interface—despite, until October 1990, the machine's relatively high price—indicates how important these features are to people. Vendors promote systems such as PRODIGY as "your personal one-stop source for information" (personal communication, September 1990). Relatively few people in the country use these systems thus far, and none of them can offer access to the many information riches stored in libraries' vast collections of printed documents, but their convenience and increasing ease of use will gradually change library users' perceptions of how libraries ought to deliver their information services. If libraries ignore this, then users may well decide to make these systems their one-stop sources. In using these systems, of course, critical thinking skills and the ability to evaluate and make judgments, to find knowledge in information, are just as important as with any library system, automated or manual.

While automation is both enabling and forcing librarians to rethink the purpose of reference service, a relatively new concept may offer libraries an opportunity to revamp hollow instructional programs. In its search for a name for itself, the phenomenon now most commonly known as bibliographic instruction once flirted with the label library literacy. Fortunately, this did not catch on, for if it had there would almost certainly be confusion between library literacy and the newer, much more meaningful term information literacy. The American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989) defined information-literate people as people:

who have learned how to learn. They know how knowledge is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that
others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand. (p. 1)

It is significant that this definition says the information literate "know how knowledge is organized," not that they know how libraries are organized. In other words, this is a quantum leap from the typical behavioral objectives of BI programs, objectives made increasingly obsolete by automation.

Miriam Drake (1989) has explained the implications of this:

When dealing with students, we have a large agenda that goes beyond traditional courses in library usage. We need to extend our programs to develop information awareness and instill the practices of information finding and lifelong learning. . . . While bibliographic instruction has helped students find books and articles for term papers, it has not increased information awareness or significantly changed general information skills. (p. 527)

Like Bessler, Drake calls upon academic libraries to shift their focus from teaching skills whose importance is being diminished by automation; she says they must begin by "shifting emphasis from product (book, journal, etc.) to process and from access to the provision of information" (p. 529). Until one has information in hand, it is impossible to judge its value. This is when one needs to apply critical thinking skills, the very skills used constantly by researchers in their information searches even though they rarely use the reference tools promoted in the search strategy model.

Despite prognostications, this is not a paperless society, although more and more information is becoming available in electronic media, some of it exclusively so. Automation efforts take time and involve transitional periods. Library users will still need to use some manual processes to identify documents. For example, a reference librarian responding to Bessler's call for a shift from the BI paradigm to a service paradigm for academic reference librarianship, while agreeing with her basic argument, notes:

I would love to have a self-explanatory serials list. But I don't, so I explain it over and over again; I teach it every chance I get, despite the fact that I have yet to find a way to make it the least bit interesting. My serials list is a public service problem that begs for a technical services solution. (Lewis, 1990, p. 80)

Unfortunately, not all reference librarians see it this way. Some see automation as merely another cause or reason to teach patrons the mechanics of various processes. Clark N. Hallman (1990), discussing reference librarians' need to master new computer hardware and software, says that

new and ever-changing information technologies . . . make it paramount that students, faculty, and staff, and others are taught to cope with the
information environment. . . .It is not enough for reference librarians to passively respond to specific inquiries. Instead they must actively teach information skills and techniques. (p. 206)

And Rebecca Martin (1990), attempting to formulate librarians' proper response to the proliferation of information and information systems, says "we place a high priority in reference interactions on providing patrons not with the answers, but with the tools they will require to find the answers themselves" (p. 25). A final example comes from a discussion carried on during September 1990 by members of the BI-L ad hoc electronic community that gathers online thanks to the agency of Martin Raisch and a computer at the State University of New York at Binghamton. The question being discussed was how to teach OPAC users to search subjects by Library of Congress Subject Headings rather than by keyword. One participant, speaking of OPAC users, said, "Without the concepts of descriptors and controlled vocabularies, they cannot conceive of the need to search first for the right way to describe the topic they are interested in" (personal communication, September 1990). Puritanism lives! The discussion eventually included many explanations of how various librarians have tried to teach this. What was sadly lacking was any suggestion that, rather than building better users, what is really needed are better integrated systems that include the LC Subject Headings and all of their cross references or, better yet, systems that will translate a user's natural language command made in English into LC Subject Headings! (It is, after all, what library patrons use to communicate.)

It goes without saying that some users in many libraries use a language other than English. To the degree possible, these users ought to be accommodated just as are the speakers of English. The capability of the VTLS integrated system, for example, to display help screens in languages other than English is a promising sign. If librarians continue to think in old ways, new ways will not evolve and information literacy will become a meaningless term. The worst fate that could befall it would be a continuation of the old BI programs, renamed information literacy programs. The new wine of information literacy ought not to be put into the old skins of BI.

While it may be necessary to continue to teach dull, user-hostile serials lists until such time as these are integrated into local OPACs, it is no longer necessary to promote bibliographic instruction as it has been. Bessler's and Drake's calls for a shift from instruction to information provision is also a call for an end to puritanical programs that insist that users conform to a single way of seeking information. Automation offers both ease and options; the most important thing is that users be critical of the information they retrieve and make sound judgments when choosing among options. They must be the ones to
make these judgments. But first, librarians have to help them get information. The concept of information literacy holds the promise of unifying reference service, for the skills of information literacy are the skills needed by users of every type of library if they are to make intelligent use of library resources. Reference service, regardless of type of library, can take as its unifying purpose the provision of the information people need so that they can judge its value regardless of how it was gathered.

Where we librarians are now, the “here” from which we need to proceed to “there,” is in a position of confusion and disagreement about the purpose of reference service and the role of reference librarians. Until this is resolved, we won’t know what it is that needs to be evaluated. The discussion has become tedious. It is time to recognize the opportunities information technology and the concept of information literacy offer and to give patrons what they want rather than what librarians have decided they should want. This vision is not new. Rothstein (1955) points out that in 1897,

W. T. Harris, [United States] Commissioner of Education, had in mind the employment of a whole corps of subject specialists at the Library of Congress, a group of experts who would not only select the materials for their departments but would be competent to furnish information on a scale going well beyond the simple answering of factual inquiries and the indication of possible sources. (p. 31)

The vision is not new, but the opportunity to realize the vision is.

In fact, the Library of Congress today has just such a service: the Congressional Research Service (CRS). However, instead of serving the nation in the way Harris dreamed, it serves only the Congress. Nevertheless, the CRS offers a model for what reference service could be, given sufficient resources in every library. William Robinson, its deputy director, says that “The role of the Service is to inform the decision-making process, not to make the choice or to press for one set of values over another” (Dalrymple, 1990, p. 321). That statement can stand as a model for reference service in any type of library; it presupposes a commitment to information service rather than bibliographic instruction and it recognizes the importance of information-literate users, the ones who must make the decisions about the value of a piece of information.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1956) wrote:

Upon this gifted age...  
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower  
Of facts... they lie unquestioned, uncombined.  
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill  
Is daily spun; but there exists no loom  
To weave it into fabric. (p. 697)
Not so. Every information-literate person is a loom who can weave fact and theory into knowledge. Facts and discussions of theories can be found in the myriad resources available in and through libraries; it is up to libraries to provide these resources to information-literate persons and to help others become information-literate. Not only must librarians be careful not to equate information literacy with bibliographic instruction, they also must not take entirely upon themselves the burden for producing information-literate adults. That is a responsibility of the entire educational system. However, because teachers at every level and librarians in every type of library have an equal stake in the development of information-literate people, all reference librarians have a common ground. They need to recognize that common ground in information services and the information literacy skills necessary to judge the information delivered by those services.

If all libraries would emphasize the provision of information services rather than bibliographic instruction that serves very limited purposes and that is not the response patrons expect or desire when they seek information—if, in other words, all libraries defined reference service’s purpose in the same way as do special libraries—then a universal approach to evaluating public services would be easier to find. Before we librarians can get to the "there" we hope to arrive at, that is, to an agreed-upon system of evaluating library public services and public services personnel, we have to reach the intermediate station of an agreed-upon definition of the purpose and role of those services. Since it seems that the only service in dispute is reference service, the sooner everyone accepts Child's definition (with the modernizing modification that it include the entire network of libraries beyond one's own), the better; the sooner everyone sees the purpose of public services as the delivery of information, the better. Given a clear understanding of the purpose of the various public services libraries offer, ways can be devised to evaluate their success in fulfilling that purpose. At their annual meeting in October 1990, the directors of the member libraries of the Association of Research Libraries discussed “the changing nature of public services in research libraries in the context of advanced technology” (Public Services Focus, 1990, p. 2). It is hoped that these library directors will provide leadership in redefining public services as information delivery with as much concern for content as for form.

Others in these Proceedings know much more about the various methods and techniques that have been developed to evaluate various aspects of library service, and can analyze these and point out each method's strengths and weaknesses. What is clear is that no single method has yet been devised that adequately measures and assesses all aspects
of library public services; perhaps one cannot be devised. While considering the various methods and what they can contribute, these methods should be examined for certain desiderata.

Since it is the individual user of information who ultimately judges the value of information, it follows that users must have a significant role in judging the service that provides that information to them. Giving users a role in evaluating library services is not without its pitfalls. Surveys that simply ask users their opinion of the quality of library service, Herbert White (1985) has pointed out, “pose no particular threat, because they always come out complimentary and positive, regardless of the level of library service provided” (p. 70). If they pose no threat, then neither do they offer much value. Nevertheless, the consumers of library services must be participants in the evaluation process.

This need to include users in evaluation of services is another reason why it is imperative that our society develop information-literate adults. The critical thinking skills needed to assess information can also be used to assess information services. There is no question that courteous treatment of library users is one of the expectations every library manager should have of every staff member who deals with the public. The danger of involving users in evaluation is that they may weight this consideration too heavily. In an unobtrusive test of services at the University of Minnesota libraries, Geraldine King and Rachel Berry (1973) discovered that 90 percent of the test’s proxy patrons, even though they had received incorrect answers to their questions 40 percent of the time, expressed a willingness to use the service again. The pleasant conduct of the library staff who so often failed them was an overriding consideration, apparently blinding the proxies to the service’s failure to fulfill its purpose. Information-literate adults will be able to judge the value of the service received, not just the manner in which it is rendered. Because public services involve interpersonal communication skills, any successful evaluation method will also assess these in the service provider. Both the form and the content of the service are important and need to be evaluated.

Not only are both important, they are inseparable. Any successful evaluation method will be able to assess not only the product of a service but also the process by which that product is derived. Inadequacy in the product results from inadequacy in one or more components of the process. The evaluation method should identify the source of the problem.

Every profession should police and evaluate itself because no one knows more about it than its own members. Librarians’ assessments of the quality of library services need to be considered just as seriously as users’ assessments. Standards for services do not exist. The closest approximation to standards available are stated in the ALA Reference
and Adult Services Division’s (RASD) recently adopted *Information Services for Information Consumers: Guidelines for Providers* (1990). These guidelines, in part the product of the political processes of ALA, state that a “library should provide instruction in the effective use of its resources” (p. 263). When viewed in the context of the rest of the guidelines and their consistent promotion of information provision as the ideal for services, this must be viewed, at most, as a tepid endorsement of BI. These guidelines, bearing as they do the imprimatur of RASD, come as close as any statement to defining librarians’ expectations of the services they offer. Librarians need to consider the guidelines in any assessment of their services. Furthermore, both users’ and librarians’ assessments need to be integrated. The work Charles Bunge and Marjorie Murfin (1984) have done demonstrates the value of this.

Any successful method or combination of methods must address the whole of a service, not just one aspect of it. One evaluation method, unobtrusive testing of reference, has been faulted for not doing this. Unobtrusive tests have focused on fact and bibliographic information questions. Jo Bell Whitlatch (1989) has pointed out that in academic libraries, more than two-thirds of all reference questions are “requests for locating references on a subject and/or assistance in how to use library reference sources” (p. 182); both types of questions have been poorly represented in unobtrusive tests.

In addressing the whole, no service presents as complex a challenge as reference service. Just to break reference down in the grossest manner yields these areas for assessment: the librarian’s ability to conduct an effective reference interview, the librarian’s knowledge of print and nonprint sources, the librarian’s ability to retrieve information from these sources, the librarian’s manner in interacting with patrons, and the adequacy of local and accessible remote resources to meet users’ information needs. All of these must be assessed to get an adequate picture of the quality of a reference librarian’s performance and a reference department’s adequacy.

Because library public services are inherently labor-intensive operations, it follows that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the quality of performance of the personnel providing a service and the quality of performance of the service as a whole. Methods must be found whereby this relationship can be verified. These methods must allow managers to trace weaknesses or failures of the service to the individuals responsible for those weaknesses or failures. If, of course, a problem is systemic (e.g., a policy that makes good service difficult or impossible), then the personnel are every bit as much the victims as are the ill-served users of the service. In such cases, it doesn’t matter
who does what in their service role; their failure is guaranteed. However, when the service is established on a sound foundation, there needs to be a way to improve the service by improving individual performance.

Personnel evaluation is not a favorite activity of either supervisors or the supervised. It is viewed as a necessity for salary reviews and, since these generally come but once a year, personnel evaluation generally comes but once a year. Personnel work throughout the year and offer library services throughout the year. Ways must be found to make evaluation of both personnel and the services they offer an ongoing process, nearly as much a part of the work routine as unlocking the front door in the morning or turning off the lights in the evening. This is not to say that, from time to time, intensive measures of service cannot be taken; rather, assessing the quality of a service needs to become an integral part of the service. This will be challenging. Circulation desk work, for example, does not lend itself as readily to a day-end assessment as a stockbroker’s advice to clients which can be measured in dollars lost or earned at the sound of the market’s closing bell.

A successful method of evaluation of services and personnel will be one that is easy to apply. Considerable research has been conducted in search of valid methods. Many of these efforts have required time-consuming preparatory design work and equally time-consuming data collection and analysis. Perhaps practitioners would have done more than they have in developing evaluation methods were they not so busy and were existing methods not so demanding on a staff’s time. In-house evaluations have tended to be impressionistic and anecdotal, more folk wisdom than science. Much of the work on more rigorous methods has been done by faculty in library schools. The Murfin-Bunge collaboration is important because it combines a library school researcher’s detachment from the problem with the perspective of a practitioner who must deal with the problem day in and day out. Charles R. McClure and Peter Hernon (1983, p. 21), Marcia Myers (1983, p. 21), and Jassim M. Jirjees (1983, p. 172) have had practitioners verify the representative nature of the questions they have used in unobtrusive tests of reference accuracy. More collaboration between library school faculty and practitioners can be beneficial.

Library school faculty generally know more than most practitioners about testing methods. The overcrowded library school curriculum does not guarantee production of graduates who will be “research literate,” in other words, librarians who can read statistical and other types of research reports and draw conclusions from them, much less librarians capable of designing or replicating research studies and producing such reports. Library school faculty working alone could overestimate practitioners' overall ability and/or willingness to deal with various instruments. Collaboration between these two groups within the
profession should assure that any method devised will not only be one validated by research, but will also enjoy ease of use and receive use in the field rather than just lip-service.

It may prove that no single evaluation method can accommodate all of these desiderata. Hypertext and hypermedia information products are still in their infancy, yet they offer a useful analog for the sort of method needed to evaluate library public services. Like a hypermedia product, the method or cluster of interacting methods developed needs to show the relationships between all aspects of service and the ways in which change in one aspect affects others.

In Walker Percy’s (1971) Love Among the Ruins, Dr. More’s Qualitative-Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer is initially merely a diagnostic instrument. After linking the theory behind the instrument with an earlier discovery, More is able to modify it so that it can correct a patient’s emotional and psychological state. It is too much to ask of an evaluation method that it not only identify problems but also prescribe solutions. Life is too complex for a Qualitative-Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer to exist in anything but fiction. Library public services are probably too complex for any method to be able to both find and fix problems. A method that is an effective tool for diagnosing strengths and weaknesses will surely be enough, at least initially.

The question of how best to evaluate library public services and the personnel who provide them is not an easy one to answer. Perhaps the answer will begin to emerge at this conference. This author regrets that he is not able to offer the reader a very concrete answer to the question, ideally in the form of a functioning, reliable Qualitative-Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer (model MCTK or any other). But, like any worthwhile endeavor in the library profession, this answer will be arrived at only through collective effort.

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