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## Introduction

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MARGARET STIEG (1992) BEGINS HER BOOK *Change and Challenge in Library and Information Science Education* with the observation that “every generation needs to examine the big questions” (p. 1). I myself have always been interested in big questions and have used them as an opportunity for increasing self-awareness. One of the biggest questions I have faced as a library educator, and would undoubtedly face were I to return to professional practice, concerns the obfuscated nature of library work: who does what, and what does one call them?

Out of this mind set came the idea for an Association for Library and Information Science Education conference session. The idea for “Library Work” as a topic was developed in tandem with a Curriculum SIG session, co-convened by Marcella Genz and me, at the 1995 ALISE conference. Our abstract in the conference program appeared as follows:

Many students arrive at Schools of Library and Information Science because they have previously worked or are working as paraprofessionals in libraries and find that they enjoy the work. Many of these same students, after completion of their degrees, profess that the knowledge gained from their course of study was insignificant in comparison to what they had already gleaned from their jobs as paraprofessionals. At the same time, a professional degree in library and information science is often perceived as a promotional stepping stone rather than a degree for an occupation requiring different skill sets. Thus, we ask the question “What can a professional do that a paraprofessional cannot?” and in particular, what effect does the blurring of traditional distinctions between work roles and the encroachment of technology on traditional boundaries have on the objectives of professional education?

While you will have to wait for future discussions for the answer to this burning question, the eight articles you are about to read offer several points of departure, six by authors affiliated with graduate level institutions and two with community colleges.

I chose renowned sociologist, Andrew Abbott's "Professionalism and the Future of Librarianship" as the flagship article for this issue, since he among us manages Stieg's sort of "big question" with greatest deftness. I first heard Abbott speak at the 1993 American Library Association conference in New Orleans and was immediately struck with his finely honed sense of perspective. My favorite thinkers are those who bring unusual flair to the world of ideas, and Abbott was clearly accustomed to doing so on a large scale. I immediately purchased both the audiotape of his talk and the book, *The System of Professions* (Abbott, 1988), on which it was based, and my lessons began.

The next article shifts the focus inward. Regular readers of Tom Froehlich's work will already be familiar with his ability to cut to the bottom line of an intellectual issue, and his article "Ethical Considerations Regarding Library Nonprofessionals: Competing Perspectives and Values" is no exception. If Abbott is a trend setter in librarianship, Froehlich is a no nonsense scholar, wading through previous thinking and going straight to the heart of the matter to lay bare the intricacies of conscience, choice, and action.

Tony Wilson and Bob Hermanson provide a thorough thought-provoking overview of professional and paraprofessional education in the United States, both historically and conceptually. I must confess that I have never met either of them—in fact, I stumbled upon their Web site quite by accident. It says something that I know, by name if not by introduction, practically every faculty member at the master's level (on either side of the Canadian/U.S. border), but when it comes to library technician programs, I am not only at a complete loss but also, it is suspected, in good company. It was while reading "Educating and Training Library Practitioners" that I was struck with the realization that those who teach library technicians have master's degrees and often doctorates; the term "para-educator" crossed my mind more than once, as did the uncomfortable thought that I myself may have been guilty of such discrimination.

I have known Marcella Genz since our doctoral student days at Berkeley (a school I doubt either of us would recognize today!). A history-of-the-book scholar, she has taught extensively in the area of reference service over the course of her academic career. "Working the Reference Desk" is considered the evolution of a public service ideal, from reader assistance to information consultant, and issues a clear challenge to the field—grow or die.

It is pure coincidence that the final four articles are by Canadians. Unlike Genz, Lynne Howarth develops her argument from the inside out through a series of particularly cogent insights. Howarth has had extensive experience teaching both professional librarians and library technicians, and "The Role of the Paraprofessional in Technical Services in Libraries" is a fitting testament to both her proficiency in that role and in the mastery of her craft.

Frances Davidson-Arnott and Deborah Kay base "Library Technician Programs: Skills-Oriented Paraprofessional Education" on an exploration of their own curriculum from which, in turn, they draw a number of issues, both emergent and longstanding. Of the eight articles, theirs is the most functional as well as the most direct.

We have almost come full circle. Roma Harris and Victoria Marshall's "Reorganizing Canadian Libraries: A Giant Step Back From the Front" unwittingly echoes many of Froehlich's ethical considerations. Front line librarians, middle managers, and senior administrators each were asked to share their views on organizational change, in particular regarding the role of new technologies. Their findings, while not surprising in the aggregate, reveal disturbing aberrations in strategy, precedent, and attitude.

The final article is mine. "It's Not Who We are but Where We are" is typical Easun fare. I assemble a stable of authors willing and able to put a new spin on a tired topic, comb the resulting manuscripts for interesting parallels and discrepancies, interpret them metaphorically, then send us all off on a completely different tangent. Consider it my tribute to the trends among the trends.

As I began this introduction, so shall I end it. Stieg (1992) concludes *Change and Challenge* as follows:

For some years, there has been a strong move back to basics. It is time to affirm the truism: professional education is education for the profession. It is time to reaffirm the values and goals of the professions. In the final analysis, there is really only one question: what is in the best interests of the professions and the clientele they serve. (p. 177)

If my introduction has served its purpose, you will be moved to read each article in turn, if only to see for yourself whether these "best interests" have been properly addressed (or even acknowledged). As you proceed, ask yourself whether the worlds of professional and paraprofessional education are in any way aligned, and whether the "values and goals" implicit in each argument have characteristics in common (or even should).

## REFERENCES

- Abbott, A. (1988). *The system of professions: An essay on the division of expert labor*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Stieg, M. (1992). *Change and challenge in library and information science education*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.