The Making of a Reference Librarian

SAMUEL ROTHSTEIN

ALTHOUGH IT IS STILL a matter of dispute whether reference librarians can be "made" at all,[1] in fact a considerable enterprise—almost a small industry—has been devoted for nearly one hundred years to that purpose. In this article both the developments themselves (e.g., library school courses and teaching methods, continuing education, in-service training) and the views promulgated about such developments, actual and desired, from the 1880s through 1981, will be reviewed. The coverage is almost entirely limited to the United States and Canada and the emphasis is on education for reference work in conventional libraries as opposed to education for information services in the information science context. The separation is admittedly illogical but utililitarian; the latter aspect has too large a literature to be adequately treated in the space available and in any case it has already been well covered in a number of reviews.[2]

Education for Reference Work in Library Schools: The First Ninety Years

The subject is worth pushing back to its very beginnings, if only because a persistent criticism of education for reference work has been that it is slavishly adherent to its past. Thus Andrew Osborn complained that "the pattern for teaching reference work was established in the first library schools and we are still operating on the basis of the methods of those days."[3]

Samuel Rothstein is Professor, School of Librarianship, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Those very beginnings, in the sense of schooling as differentiated from merely learning on the job, go back to the training classes (1884-86) which Melvil Dewey operated at Columbia College Library as a kind of rehearsal for the establishment of the library school itself in 1887. The concept of reference work as a distinctive and appropriate library function had only recently emerged.[4] Dewey, who was one of the leaders in developing this concept and who was probably the first person to employ reference librarians formally titled as such,[5] did not fail to include reference work among the "Subjects of Study" listed in the first *Circular of Information* (1884) issued by the School of Library Economy, though not under that name. In the curious mélange of some two dozen topics that the School proposed to teach is to be found "Aids to readers," the common designation of the time for what came to be called reference work.[6] One may also infer that the topic of "Practical bibliography," listed next to it in the *Circular,* was closely related to "Aids."

If reference work had thus succeeded in gaining a seat at the library school table, that seat was, initially at least, far below the salt. Mary Wright Plummer, a student in the first "official" library school class (Columbia, 1887) reported on her experience at the American Library Conference of 1887. Listing the subjects of study in the (diminishing) order of their importance, she indicated that number five was: "Filling up odd moments: cyclostyling, Hammond typewriter, reference work."[7] In 1900, when the ALA's Committee on Library Schools examined all the (by then four) schools, it found that cataloging and classification occupied by far the largest share of time in the programs. Reference work was not specifically mentioned at all but was presumably included in the group of "all other topics."[8] Nevertheless, that same committee had reported in 1896 that "reference" (admittedly last in order of topics mentioned) was within the nucleus for the programs.[9] At the end of the 19th century, the place of reference work in library education was evidently small but secure.

Over the next two decades the scope and importance of reference work within the library school program steadily increased. The Albany School, the pacesetter and model for the others, had added a course in "advanced reference work" by 1905 and by 1912 had ventured into the field of "subject" or specialized reference work with its course in "law or legislative reference work."[10] By 1920-21, as reported in Williamson's authoritative survey, reference work was solidly established as one of the four subjects which Williamson considered the "heart of the curriculum," (though still ranking well behind cataloging in the amount of time devoted to it). Courses in "subject bibliography" and "trade bibliography" were also being offered.[11]

Williamson also gives us a description of the teaching methods used in the basic reference course, methods which had evidently become pretty well standardized by that time. The course strongly emphasized knowledge of a specified group of reference books, this knowledge being principally conveyed by the instructors' lectures. In addition, "lists of questions made up from practical experience...[were] given, and the method of finding the answers discussed in the class." Some time was given as well—by inference not much—to discussion of "problems in the selection of reference books" and "to methods of handling of books" (meaning the use of indexes, tables of contents and the like).[12]

Wyer, Singleton and Osborn add some revealing details to Williamson's picture. James Ingersoll Wyer, himself a graduate of the Albany School (1898) and subsequently director there, recalled that the early teaching of reference stressed knowing the contents of dictionaries, encyclopedias and other "reference books," and that reference work itself, as visualized in these courses, was "no more than the effort to answer questions asked at the information desk by consulting these particular books."[13] In other words, the course could be equated with what would now be termed "ready reference." Singleton and Osborn go further and identify the published guides to reference books as dominating the reference courses. Alice Kroeger's *Guide to the Study and Use of Reference Books* (the predecessor of editions by Mudge, Winchell and Sheehy) appeared in 1901 and became in effect the textbook for reference courses. The prestige of Kroeger's *Guide* and its successors, according to this view, dictated a pattern of reference studies that meant amassing detailed knowledge of the individual titles described in the guides.[14]

Whatever the limitations of reference course contents and teaching methods, the next forty years brought forth no great challenges to them. Thus the highly influential Williamson Report, while noting the concern of college and university libraries at the "failure of the library schools to provide adequate or appropriate training for special reference and research work of a scholarly character," thought that these needs would have to be take care of in a second year.[15] For the first year of basic studies, Williamson accepted "the curriculum as it stands as statisfactorily representing the demands of the profession."[16] The core of the curriculum which included, of course, the introductory course in reference work.

Williamson's views on the appropriate core were accepted and implemented by the Board of Education for Librarianship, when it selected reference work (along with cataloging, classification, and book selection) as the only subjects in the suggested curriculum of accredited library schools to be studied in both semesters.[17] And with only minor

exceptions, similar acceptance of the essential place and character of reference work in the library school program was evident in the many surveys and reviews of library education that were conducted over the two generations following Williamson. To give only a few examples: Joseph Wheeler, in 1946, considered reference work among "the most essential subjects" and was glad to see it generally included as a required course. He was also pleased to note "a substantial reduction in detail... fewer book titles in...reference courses."[18] Robert Leigh's study, published in 1952, found reference and bibliography's place among the basic "subject matter fields" to be strongly supported by the views of the practitioners and the proportion of time given to it in the library school program to be pretty well right.[19] At the 1953 conference of practitioners and educators on the core of education in librarianship, there was almost unanimous judgment that there should be a core and that reference service should be part of it.[20]

To be sure, the various examiners were not talking about precisely the same subject. Inevitably the reference program had changed somewhat over the years. By Wheeler's time (1946), the required subjects (reference among them) were being increasingly limited to the first half-year, with the second half given over to elective courses.[21] There was also some tendency, notably at Denver, Chicago and Columbia, to "integrate" reference with other subjects into "materials" or "resources" groupings.[22] And of course, as in every field of knowledge, the march of specialization proceeded inexorably. Thus Robert Leigh noted in 1948 that half the schools were offering an elective course in government documents and most of them were giving at least one or two courses in specialized aspects of bibliography such as Catholic bibliography, legal bibliography and bibliographic history.[23] This growth in the number of specialized reference courses was markedly enhanced when, in the late forties and early fifties, all the accredited library schools in the United States made the change over from BLS to MLS programs. The new programs coincided with a period of considerable increase in enrollment and faculty size, and the combination of these factors made for a strong movement toward specialization in course offerings. The MLS programs encouraged depth and variety in course work, and the larger number of students and staff made such courses practicable.

Strangely enough, these specialized reference offerings occasioned very little comment in the writings on education for reference work, perhaps because each new course was likely to be of interest to only a small constituency. What did concern most reference librarians and teachers was the course they had in common—the basic or required or

introductory (it was usually all three) course in reference work. In the 1960s this concern manifested itself in the publication of an extraordinarily large number of articles on the subject. Murfin and Wynar's highly selective (and most useful) bibliography on the teaching of reference lists no less that thirty-six items[24] and the citations in *Library Literature* suggest that the total number of publications on the subject was probably several times as great.

Even more surprising than the sheer volume of the literature was its intensity: in a field where the blandness of mere description had been the prevailing mode, one now found the sharp flavors of outright partisanship. Much of the credit for the new vigor in writing must go to the example set by Wallace Bonk and Thomas Galvin, two prolific and articulate teachers who were not afraid to be contentious in espousing their views.

In a kind of debate sponsored by the *Library Journal* in 1964, Bonk and Galvin summarized their positions.[25] Bonk stood for the traditional emphasis on close knowledge of reference materials. "Reference methods," he maintained "consist of going to the place that has the information and teaching reference involves pointing out to students which sources have what kind of information."[26] Galvin did not deny the importance of learning about reference materials but felt that the student could gain such knowledge on his own. Teaching time, he argued, should concentrate on what the student could not get up on his own: the larger view of reference work as an "encounter" between patron and librarian and as a service involving numerous problems of policy and operation. The best way to convey this larger view—the reality of the reference process seen as a whole—was to simulate that reality by having the student do "problems" set forth in "case studies" based upon actual situations.[27] Galvin subsequently called this "the problem oriented approach in teaching general reference."[28] In 1965 he published a textbook of case studies (*Problems in Reference Service: Case Studies in Method and Policy)*[29] and this was successful enough to call for the appearance of another (*Current Problems in Reference Service*) in 1971.[30]

In the subsequent flurry of published comment on the two approaches, neither escaped without criticism, but the title-centered course undoubtedly came in for the heavier attacks. "Down with the Lists" was the revealing title of an article by Leontine Carroll, who recalled with distaste and exasperation having had to learn pointless and soon forgotten details about long lists of reference books.[31] Paul Dunkin called reference "chief among the donkey courses" which

required "rote memorization of a batch of titles and contents" and where the instructors imparted "soul-numbing facts and techniques" that in any case had a high degree of "built-in obsolescence."[32] Andrew Osborn wanted to "eliminate every reading list or syllabus and instead make students seek out their own sources of information."[33] Maureen Gilluly, a student, "sounded off" (her phrase) against the length of the lists and the requirement for memorization. She also revealed that students circumvented the point of the "question sets" by working together on them.[34]

The case method, being relatively untried, attracted nothing like the above sense of resentment derived from bitter experience, but there were objections enough.[35] Galvin himself has conveniently summarized most of them,[36] but two are worthy of special mention. C.D. Needham, a British librarian, found the contextual detail which Galvin provided for each case quite unconvincing: "the greater the striving for verisimilitude the louder the creakings, until a point comes when the intention is wholly defeated."[37] Needham thought that cases of the type given in Denis Grogan's books, which focused closely on the search process used in answering specific reference questions, avoided such hazards of artificiality and inconsequentiality.[38] Josefa Sabor, writing for an international audience, pointed out that Galvin's cases really dealt more with the operation of reference services than with "actual reference work" in the sense of finding information. She concluded that the "case study seems much less usable in the reference than in the administrative course."[39]

Although they attracted the most attention, the "title-centered" and "case" approaches were by no means the only ways to teach the basic reference course. In an excellent review of the "methodology spectrum," Laurel Grotzinger identified two more. "Types not titles" was her designation for the teaching that emphasized the properties of whole categories of information sources rather than specific books.[40] (And, as Needham later pointed out, such emphasis on types not titles was likely to extend the range of materials considered in the course—not just "quick reference materials" but also research reports, theses and the like.[41]) The last of Grotzinger's "finger-posts" to point the way to reference knowledge was what she called the "method of scientific inquiry." Here own preference, this approach in effect subsumed all the others, combining "reference facts," knowledge of bibliographic organization, "the experiential values of the case study" and the problem-solving methods derived from information theory.[42] How all this was to be accomplished in a half-year course was not indicated.

The last and perhaps wisest words on this kind of competition between approaches to reference teaching came from Robert Pierson, himself both a practitioner and instructor. Pierson pointed out that the various approaches were not mutually exclusive; one might well use several of them in combination. What was wanted then was not "the extreme position" represented by addiction to a single viewpoint but rather a judicious blending of components and approaches.[43]

What Pierson, Grotzinger, Galvin, and Bonk had been presenting was, of course, advocacy; the actuality of reference education in the library schools was something else. Toward the end of the 1960s, Kathryn Oller and Sarah Reed, both deriving their findings from an examination of library school catalogs, offered reports on the state of the art in reference instruction.

Oller found that twenty-nine different course titles were used (in the thirty-seven school catalogs) for the first course in reference work. She thought the variation in name reflected different emphases within what was essentially the same course in respect of coverage. That coverage usually included: a description of the nature and kinds of reference service as a library function; study of a core of reference materials arranged according to types; study of reference techniques with emphasis on search strategy and the reference interview; selection and evaluation of reference materials. The greatest divergence was to be found in the reference books studied; Bonk's investigation had shown that only five of 1202 titles listed were agreed upon by all the schools.[44]

Following the basic course there were usually available a group of "literature" courses covering broad areas of knowledge (e.g., the humanities, the social sciences, the sciences); courses in special subject areas (e.g., law, medicine, theology, music and business); courses based on types of publication such as bibliography or indexes; advanced seminars, which concentrated on reference administration and techniques, use studies, bibliographic resources and analyses of reference questions. Oller found that most schools offered at least four reference courses, with some offering several times that number depending on just what one counted as part of the reference curriculum.[45]

Sarah Reed, examining catalogs from fifty of the then fifty-two accredited library schools in 1968-69, found that forty-two of them still required all students to take one or more reference courses. Of the rest, three schools included reference as part of a required "foundations" course. The other five no longer had any required courses, but faculty guidance and course prerequisites achieved much the same result of causing almost every student to take a reference course.[46] One way or

another, reference was still solidly placed at the core of library education.

The 1970s: A Decade of Innovation

As will be apparent from the above surveys, the 1960s, for all their earnest soul-searching, seemingly brought no great changes in structure or character to reference education in the library schools. By sharp contrast, the 1970s, insofar as the published articles represented actual practice, saw the advent of a remarkable number of new ideas and new techniques. (All these ideas had antecedents and forerunners, but in the way that they were developed and applied in the 1970s, it is fair to call them "new.")

Some of the techniques warrant only brief note. Without denigrating their value, these articles of limited scope essentially represented the kind of advice on instructional procedure that teachers customarily make to one another. Thus, into this category of "here's what has worked for me," fall articles reporting (and usually advocating) the use of: "Pathfinders" (as an exercise in bibliographic compilation);[47] student-submitted questions (as being more "real" and fresh than the usual teacher-produced problem set);[48] flow charts (for their graphic quality and as a systematic representation of search strategy);[49] computer-assisted instruction (effective in improving learning, in reviewing information and as a means of cost control);[50] role playing (to inject more "reality");[51] and video-tapes (to illustrate interviewing and as a means of students' self-assessment).[52]

Still another instructional technique was of considerably more consequence in that it represented, theoretically at least, an alternative to *all* the other teaching methods, including the class meeting itself. This was self-instruction, wherein the student was to be enabled by various means to learn reference work on his own. At Texas, Knightly and Sayre reported that the Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) had been used to teach basic reference and that the student response was highly favorable.[53] Later, when some problems arose stemming from lack of student interaction, Bichteler made some modifications in order to achieve a compromise between the traditional method and self-paced instruction.[54] At Arizona, Gothberg experimented with another form of self-instruction which she called the "audio-tutorial approach." Student performance in and satisfaction with the audio-tutorial method fell off after the highly successful first year, but Gothberg still felt that the method had enough potential to justify further experimentation.[55]

The most thoroughgoing effort at developing a system of self-instruction was made by Margaret Taylor at Hawaii. Reasoning that the description of information sources in the classroom took up time which could be more profitably used for other purposes, Taylor prepared a programmed instruction book which would permit students to cover such material on their own time and at their own speed. In her two tests of the efficacy of this approach, she found that the experimental group students learned as much as the control group and were enthusiastic about the new method.[56] Taylor's book, *Basic Reference Sources: A Self-Study Manual* has now been published in a second edition (Scarecrow Press, 1981). Rather similar, but not as comprehensive, study guides were used in at least two other library schools.[57]

It might well have been argued that the self-study method was not all that much different than a program of directed reading. In that sense it was hardly a new idea, an attribute it shared with the several attempts to make a practicum part of the basic reference training. The practicum was, of course, a method of teaching that antedated library courses themselves; the novelty of such practical work, as advocated in the 1970s, lay in its power to enhance and enlighten the theoretical instruction given in the classroom and thereby to increase student satisfaction and morale. What was also new was that that power of enhancement was not only claimed but also tested and to some degree proven. At Michigan, Lynch and Whitbeck had their students do "observations" of reference work, work on "projects" in the library, and engage in "reference raps" with the librarians. The "projects" were not much liked but the other two features were most successful. Lynch and Whitbeck concluded: "the student must be brought out of the isolated classroom situation to the real work environment...only in this way can theory be fully assimilated and evaluated."[58] Nancy Bush's dissertation findings demonstrated "the preferability of having reference course students work behind a real reference desk....Active learning was correlated with positive attitude toward a reference course."[59] At UCLA, where Eisenbach had her students "learning by doing," the student evaluations were unanimous about the value of reference desk work.[60] The age-old debate between theory and practice was hardly settled, but the latter side was gaining ammunition and adherents.[61]

One may guess that a principal appeal of practice work lay in the opportunity it gave students to make contact with patrons. Reference work, after all, meant primarily "personal assistance provided to patrons in pursuit of information";[62] knowing how to deal with patrons could therefore be as important as knowing how and where to secure information. In a decade when libraries, like institutions of many kinds,

were desperately striving to make themselves known as "people places,"[63] reference librarians and reference educators "discovered" the need for communication skills.[64]

In terms of reference education, this new emphasis on communications took several forms which were actually closely interrelated but which, for convenience in identification, may here be separated into three categories. The broadest studies attempted to analyze and describe the "dynamics of communication."[65] As applied to reference courses, such studies made for greater awareness of the negotiation of the reference question as being in large part a communications problem. Thus Bernard Vavrek has called the "essence of reference librarianship...the interaction of the patron and librarian in an act of communication."[66]

Since the reference librarian not only communicates with the patron but helps him, emphasis on the communications function of reference work led some librarians into seeing and teaching reference work as something very near counseling. Thus Holland wanted courses to teach the "concept of facilitative responding," Crickman described the "Helping Aspects of Training the New Information Professional," and Lukenbill explained how he taught "Helping Relationship Concepts in the Reference Process."[67] Patrick Penland, at the University of Pittsburgh, probably went furthest in this direction, and actually gave courses and wrote books on "advisory counseling for librarians."[68]

Most reference teachers were content to stop well short of that point and dealt with the subject of librarian/patron communications in the relatively simple and straightforward form of teaching their students how to conduct an interview. As far back as 1944 Margaret Hutchins's textbook on reference work had devoted a whole chapter to the reference interview,[69] but the publications of the 1970s invested the subject with a greater sense of importance, even urgency. They also emphasized the use of videotape and the importance of nonverbal communications, and in some instances they were able to bolster their case with evidence drawn from tests of students' reactions. In the latter light, Peter McNally's "Teaching and Learning the Reference Interview"[70] and the Jennerichs's "Teaching the Reference Interview"[71] may be singled out as among the best of the many articles on this theme. The degree to which the reference interview "caught on" in reference education may be gauged from the fact that as early as 1974 Murphy and Nilon reported that two-thirds of the accredited library schools were offering instruction in interpersonal communication.[72]

Unfortunately, Murphy and Nilon did not ask which aspects of reference work went *out* of the basic reference course when reference interviewing came *in*. The same question might equally well be asked

in respect of all the other "innovations" previously discussed. The answer, which for want of specific data must be only an educated guess, is probably that these new topics or approaches were usually sufficiently small in scope or importance as to be "squeezed into" the existing course content. But what if a new subject were thought to be too large or complex to be given its full justice *within* the basic course? Then such subjects tended to leave the main reference tent and to set up as sideshows of their own.

In the 1970s there were three such subjects, all closely associated with the basic idea of reference work as information service, that came increasingly to be taught as separate courses. By far the most important and most numerous of these was computer-based reference service, which later tended to be termed "online services." Whether seen as an issue (e.g., fees for payment), a skill (how to conduct a literature search) or as a portentous "revolution in libraries,"[73] the subject occasioned a spate of publications on how it was to be fitted into the librarian's education, of which the article by Bourne and Robinson may be singled out for its comprehensiveness.[74] Though the opacity of course descriptions defies an accurate count, an examination of library school catalogs indicates that by the end of 1981 almost every accredited school had one or more courses on online services.

A second candidate for separate treatment was the subject of "community information services," also known as "urban information services" and as "information and referral services (I&R)." The ruling idea here seemed to be that "community information specialists" were something of a breed apart from other kinds of reference workers and therefore required courses, indeed perhaps a whole sequence of them, specially designed for them. Braverman and Martin gave a broad conspectus of the general problems and approaches involved in the "Education of Information and Referral Librarians"[75] and earlier Martin described in detail the full-fledged "Community Information Specialist Program" at the University of Toledo library school.[76]

The third of the subjects setting up on their own, so to speak, was bibliographic instruction or library use instruction. Although, as Rader has pointed out,[77] the teaching function (i.e., instructing patrons, individually or in groups, in how to use the library), had been a major component of reference service from the beginning, there was a marked increase in such activities from about 1967 on—so much so that Hogan referred to it as "the bibliographic instruction (BI) movement."[78] A growing number of people were coming to identify themselves as "library instruction librarians" and they "voiced a persistent, indeed almost fervent need for specialized education and training."[79] For the

librarians already in practice such training was accomplished by a remarkably dynamic and sustained program of continuing education. Not surprisingly, that same dynamism and fervor soon prompted a campaign to incorporate training for bibliographic instruction into the curricula of library schools.[80]

The campaign was not wholly successful. A number of library school deans openly opposed the idea, claiming that the subject could be best handled as part of other courses.[81] In 1975 Galloway's survey found that four accredited library schools in the United States offered courses specifically on library use instruction.[82] In 1977 Dyer reported that four more schools were offering such courses and another sixteen were including units on bibliographic instruction as parts of other courses.[83] Hogan indicated that as of 1979 there was little change, but if her own views were typical of the BI movement, the pressure on the library schools would obviously increase rather than diminish.[84]

Some Current Developments in the Library Schools

No authoritative and comprehensive data are available on the present state of reference education as conducted in the North American library schools. However, Robert Stueart has supplied valuable summation of the state of the art in library education in general,[85] the Association of American Library Schools (AALS) has issued two library education statistical reports,[86] and the library school catalogs and annual reports offer their own pictures, admittedly murky, of trends and directions. Together these sources suggest the following impressions of the most recent developments.

The chief trend continues to be in the direction of greater specialization, with new courses generally reflecting the changes in library practice itself. Thus Stueart reported the field as wanting more training in human communications and information technology, and the library schools were responding with more offerings in information science, management of information services, and information technology.[87] An even greater degree of specificity is seen in the marked trend toward the establishment of joint or double degree programs, wherein the student combined studies in librarianship with those in a subject field. Stueart reported no less that 37 percent of the accredited library schools as offering such programs[88] and the AALS stated twenty-two more were being planned.[89] The most frequent combinations were with history (archives), art, music, education, communications, business administration and law. Other techniques for specialization included independent study, cross-listed courses and "streaming."

A pressing question for the schools is how to accommodate such increase in specialized offerings when enrollments themselves are steadily declining and funding problems are becoming more and more severe.[90] One way is to reduce the number of required courses either by abandoning such requirements altogether or by grouping the required material together into a single large course, variously called "the unified core approach," the "foundations course" or the "integrated core."[91] In either case the effect is to diminish the place of basic reference in the curriculum; some students no longer take the subject at all or, if they still do, they get less time for it. The number of schools offering such integrated core programs is still a minority but it is certainly growing each year.[92]

Another way of making more room for specialization is to expand the length of the program. All Canadian accredited schools have been on a two-year program since the mid-seventies. There are now at least three such in the United States,[93] and there has been enough general interest by others in the possibility of going the same route to have prompted a special conference on extended library education programs.[94] The idea may also receive some support from the recent recommendation in its favor by the *Conant Report*.[95] The published writings on the two-year program have not indicated what their effect is on reference education specifically. Since, however, all the United States schools have stressed the importance of an internship or fieldwork component, it is likely that the extended program will have the effect of increasing the share of "practice" in the preparation of reference librarians, as of all other types.

Within the reference area itself an examination of the library school catalogs suggests that a basic reference course is still offered by the vast majority of the schools, even though very few indeed still call it that. Most of these basic courses still give a major share of their time to study of reference materials but seemingly the courses are not as "title-centered" as before. Larsen's study of 1979 found that ten of his thirty-one respondent schools did not have "fixed lists of titles"; three more did not discuss reference sources at all, devoting the basic reference course to the communication process and the administrative aspects of reference service.[96] To judge from the latest catalog descriptions, however, such eliminations of the materials component are still rare. What is becoming evident is a trend toward splitting off communications and administrative aspects into separate courses of their own. For example, UCLA offers a course entitled "Colleagues and Clients" and Catholic University one on "Servicing Individual User Needs." Once more then, it appears, the centrifugal forces are at work.

What is not apparent anywhere in the library school catalogs is the mention of organized *programs* of preparation for reference librarianship. There are many individual courses of reference interest and undoubtedly the students can, if they wish to concentrate their electives into that area, gain a considerable knowledge of reference work in its various aspects. It is also quite possible that counseling by faculty advisors may have a powerful synthesizing effect, by helping the students choose a sequence of electives that "come together" to constitute a coherent whole. However, a good deal of skepticism on these points seems in order. The tendency of most students, in a period where competition for jobs is keen, is to equip themselves for the maximum number of possibilities by taking courses in a large number of "areas." Faculty members' "advice" is just that—that is, seldom a strong enough factor to alter the students' decisions. If there is indeed an invisible "reference stream" in the library school curricula, it seems highly unlikely that many students are taking it.

Reference Education Outside Library Schools: Staff Development and Continuing Education

Anomaly: the overwhelming majority of the *writings* about reference education in North America deals with reference education as it has been conducted in the accredited library schools. (And the present review therefore reflects that fact.) The overwhelming preponderance of reference education, as it is actually *acquired* by North American librarians, goes on outside the accredited library schools and very little indeed has been written about it.[97] The real reference education seldom gets to stand up.

A little arithmetic proves the preceding assertion. For one thing, it is likely that most of the people who do at least some reference work in American libraries are not graduates of accredited library schools at all. They are the products of unaccredited library schools, or of school librarianship programs, or of library technician training courses, or they are subject specialists and nonprofessionals who have had *no* formal library studies. Space limitations prevent dealing with these forms of reference education here. In any case, they are not easily ascertained.

Even in the case of the graduates of accredited library schools, the share of the library school program in their total education for reference work is small. Library school graduates usually have seventeen or eighteen years of formal studies; of this amount, reference-related

courses in the library curriculum would usually take up no more than one-quarter of one year and often as little as one-tenth of one year (i.e., the basic one-semester reference course). After receiving their MLS degrees, the graduates then practice librarianship for something like thirty or forty years. Whether that practice turns out to be of high quality or low, the logic of the arithmetic rules against according the library school reference program much responsibility for the outcome. No surprise then that when Wallace Bonk and Thomas Galvin held their "reference encounter," the point on which they heartily agreed was that the library school program was "really the introduction to the... [students'] education, which will continue on the job."[98]

There are many ways by which that further education may be conducted. For convenience one may distinguish four main types (by no means mutually exclusive). The first is the learning that comes simply with the experience of doing reference work. Contact and discussion with other, more experienced reference librarians is an especially important aspect of such "learning on the job." The new librarians learn from their colleagues invaluable information about the collection, the clientele and searching "shortcuts" that no course could possibly impart.

The second is deliberate self-study—reference librarians initiating and devising their own ways of improving, deepening and refreshing their knowledge and skills. Margaret Stieg has recently made a very good case for this approach, at least in academic libraries, arguing that what reference librarians need most is more substantive knowledge. This is best acquired by reading and taking university courses in nonlibrary subjects.[99]

Undoubtedly many reference librarians do conscientiously pursue programs of self-study but the fact that their labors are private makes for much doubt as to the effectiveness or even of the existence of such efforts. This doubt has prompted a search for a more "demonstrable" means of ensuring further education. That third type of further education is *staff development,* the term used here to identify the programs, planned and financed and supervised by the employing institutions, which they conduct to achieve intellectual and professional growth in their reference staffs. Margaret Knox (now Goggin) has convincingly pointed up the need for such a development program and made clear the principles and techniques on which it should be based.[100] She also demonstrated, in a comprehensive case study, that excellent results are achievable at reasonable cost.[101] She concluded: "A development program is...a practical plan for every library and for every reference department....The results of such a program more than repay the time spent."[102]

Unfortunately, Knox's advice seems to have gone almost entirely unheeded, if one may judge from the testimony (or rather the lack of it) in the published literature. Admittedly, many libraries have produced staff manuals for their reference departments,[103] and there are some published examples of training guides prepared primarily to familiarize new reference staff with the local collections and routines.[104] However, Helen Rodney's account of staff development at the University of Victoria (British Columbia) reference department is the only ascertainable report of a program that comes anywhere near the scope recommended by Knox.[105]

Since 1961, when Knox published her paper, another aspect of staff development has come very much to the fore. It is no secret that a great many libraries are using nonprofessionals to staff their reference desks. For example, Boyer and Theimer's survey of 141 college and university libraries indicated that two-thirds used nonprofessionals in reference service and that the latter accounted for 33 percent of total reference desk hours.[106]

The suitability of such utilization has produced a lively dispute,[107] and it is not yet clear whether the employment of nonprofessionals in reference work will increase or decrease. It is clear, however, that there will continue to be substantial numbers of such people. Two corollaries follow from that fact: one is that if nonprofessionals are to work at the reference desks, they should be adequately trained for those duties. The second is that the education of professionals should reflect the fact that some of the tasks at the reference desk (notably "ready reference") may be handled by nonprofessionals.

Thus far, it would appear, neither of these corollaries has had much effect on reference education. Although a number of articles have reported on in-service training programs at individual libraries,[108] the Boyd and Theimer survey found that 80 percent of the libraries employing nonprofessionals in reference work had given them no formal preparation for such duties.[109] And if professionals at a given library are to turn over the easier questions to such untrained nonprofessionals, then presumably their employers should be preparing the professionals to master such skills as administration, supervision of reference assistants, and answering more difficult questions. However, there seem to be few if any professional development programs specifically keyed to these requirements.[110]

The last of the four main types of further education, to which reference was made above, is *continuing education*. The term has many meanings but as used here it is to be understood to connote the activities conducted by agencies other than one's employing library.[111] Library

associations, library schools, commercial firms (such as IBM), bibliographic networks (such as OCLC) and individual libraries which have regional, state or national constituencies—all these and probably other types of agencies as well sponsor conferences and seminars. The Continuing Library Education Network (CLENE) publishes a substantial directory of such offerings.

Some of these have been of considerable importance to reference librarianship. The success of continuing education efforts in the field of bibliographic instruction has already been mentioned. Training in the use of online services was originated and largely developed by the commercial firms; the library school courses came later and even now do not pretend to be as specific in terms of hands-on training, or as up-to-date. Reference interviewing, community information services, reference networking, interlibrary lending (via networks and bibliographic centers) are other examples of subjects of reference interest that have been initially or largely conveyed through continuing education.

The achievement is thus substantial but ultimately it has been unsatisfactory. In part the deficiencies are simply those of continuing library education generally: lack of coordination, lack of sequence, lack of a recognition system. In short, the librarian has too little incentive or opportunity to pursue a thorough, systematic and convenient program of relevant professional studies over the long run of his or her career.

More specifically, the reference librarian seems particularly ill-served by the present spectrum of continuing education offerings. Most continuing education workshops, short courses and institutes cannot be put on unless the participants are willing to pay fairly high fees for them. The subjects chosen are therefore those which are calculated to attract attention—the new development, the controversial issue. The field of reference service has relatively few such "attractions" to offer.

A second problem is that reference librarians are perhaps the least homogeneous of the "type of work" library groupings. The subject field (e.g., humanities, medicine) or the type of clientele (e.g., undergraduates) or the type of activity (e.g., library use instruction, interlibrary lending), seems to take precedence over the reference function itself in the reference practitioners' view of themselves. It is no accident that the regular features of *RQ* (the official journal of the ALA's Reference and Adult Services Division) deal respectively with "online services," "library literacy" and "government documents." Only the "reference books" section seems designed to address the entire readership.

Finally, as Margaret Stieg has perceptively pointed out, it may well be that the general education component in the reference librarian's preparation is really more important than the professional education

component. "Reference sources," she claims, "are only a bridge to the world of knowledge and the effective librarian must operate in that world."[112] The present form of continuing library education offers very little help in the pursuit of that kind of knowledge.

Some Conclusions and Personal Views

Both rightly and wrongly, the centerpiece of reference education has always been the basic reference course in the accredited library schools. Whether as themselves providing the bulk of the reference service (as in the larger libraries) or as supervisors of nonprofessional reference workers, it is the "qualified" librarians who dominate the practice of reference work. And what those qualified librarians have in common, insofar as preparation for reference work is concerned, is that first reference course. In that sense, the attention given to it for a hundred years has been reasonable enough.

It is an open question as to how much that course has changed over the hundred years. I do not mean that remark to sound disparaging or to suggest that reference teaching has been rigidly traditional, though (as indicated above) some others have indeed made that very accusation. I simply want to make the point that most writings on matters curricular are unreliable. They tend to be derived from or focus upon course descriptions, and these may bear little relationship to the ultimate character or effect of a course. I hold with Robert Pierson that the teacher is a good deal more important in the outcome of a course than its formal contents or "methodology"—and so are the students.[113] There is little point to arguing about just which topics are to be included in a given course if you cannot tell what actually gets through to the students. A case in point is the intriguing recent article by Margaret Stieg. She demonstrates that Isadore Mudge, whose name has usually been associated with "title-centered" courses, was actually emphasizing the "problem method" (i.e., search strategy) in her teaching at Columbia fifty years ago.[114]

Proper caution having been duly paid, I still venture the judgment that the basic course *has* changed considerably in two main respects. One is internal—the welcome shift in scope and emphasis from a narrow concentration on the "tools" of reference work to a concern with other important matters such as bibliographic structure, search strategy and, especially, knowing how to deal with the patron.

The other major change is external. The basic reference course now occupies a steadily diminishing place both in the curriculum as a whole

and in the reference area in particular. In some schools the basic reference course is no longer required. In a growing number of other schools, basic reference has become part of a larger "foundations" or "integrated core" course. There are as yet no firm facts on the results thereof but my guess is that basic reference tends to lose much of its "identity" in such an approach. Most important of all, as ever more numerous and narrow aspects of reference work have come to be presented as separate courses, the unifying power of the basic reference course has weakened. The center does not now hold as it once did.

The increasing weakness of the generalist position in reference education may well be seen by many as no problem at all. In this view, specialization in reference education is only an accurate and desirable reflection of what is happening in the field itself. Perhaps the truth is indeed that there is no such thing as "reference librarianship" but just a congeries of loosely-connected reference specialties. But personally I contend that librarianship is too small a profession to countenance the splintering effects of unchecked specialization, with the attendant losses of mobility and flexibility.[115] In any case, even the specialist cause is not well served by the present structure of reference education. With a few exceptions (notably the new double degree programs), the library schools are not providing carefully plotted and clearly delineated *programs* of reference specialization. The typical curricular menu features many à la carte choices and few complete dinners.

I attach very little blame to the library schools for this situation. Given their very small size, acute financial problems and the pressure of students for freedom of choice, I doubt that the library schools can feasibly be expected to do very much about improving the preparation for specialized reference work. Nor, if one looks at the example of most other professions, *should* they. Education for specialization and for other forms of further education are usually not the responsibility of the professional school; they are rather the responsibility of the professional associations and of the employing institutions. So too is the responsibility for determining the appropriate training of support staff and for coordination of such training with that of the professionals.

These tasks are certainly not easily accomplished, but it is also certain that they have received too little understanding from the field. It is my contention that the employing libraries and the reference practitioners ("the field") have committed a double error. Most seriously, they have seen themselves as only consumers, not producers, in the process of reference education. They are ready to voice reactions and wishes but essentially expect the library schools to shoulder almost all the

burden.[116] Now, consumers' views are indeed most useful, but—and this is the second error—even here they have missed the mark. The literature of reference work clearly indicates that practitioners have concentrated almost all their discussion on the teaching methods used in the basic reference course. This is the most visible and obvious aspect of reference education, but hardly the most important. The field has misunderstood its role and misplaced its attention.

In 1890 Andrew Carnegie was asked by Melvil Dewey for money to support his new library school. Carnegie refused, on the grounds that a school was not needed at all: "I have taken occasion to inquire of several parties about the supply of proper persons for libraries and find, that there is no difficulty in getting persons naturally adapted for this work."[117] I assume that Carnegie was wrong, at least about reference work, and that we shall have to do something more than simply rely on finding proper "persons naturally adapted for this work." But if good reference librarians are to be provided, it will take a concerted effort from many parties to do so. I have purposely refrained from titling this article "education for reference librarianship" because the term connotes for too many people simply the task and activities of the library schools. The library schools do indeed have a large responsibility, but so do the library associations, the employing libraries and the practicing reference workers. All four groups must participate in the making of a reference librarian.

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90. Robert Stueart states that, "since 1970 the number of graduates has been reduced from around 9000 per year to the current figure of around 5000 per year." ("Library Education: State-of-the-Art," p. 9.)

91. This statement is not meant to suggest that the movement toward "integration" of the core subjects is dictated primarily by the desire to make more room/time for electives (specialization). But certainly one effect of "integration" is that the ratio between required and elective subjects is changing in favour of the latter.

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