Western library practices: a few ways to build connections with library users, and why!

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Three Practices That Might Be NEW

1. Open Stacks
2. Subject Librarians
3. Reference Rotation
Books & People

These three areas are samples of usual Western practices in a university Library. All three may not be in every Western academic library, but most libraries will use at least one of these practices.

These may – or may not – fit YOUR library, but they are something to consider. Perhaps they are something different. Let’s look ...
Open Stacks

... this is when the library shelves are open to library users. Anyone may walk among the shelves and look at books.

... this is the opposite of “Closed Stacks” where the library user writes the title of a book on a card and gives it to the Librarian to find.

*Efficiency for the searcher...*
Open Stacks: Why?

In addition to, “Why NOT?” the practical aspect is that a student or researcher may look at the books on the shelf. Open. Read TOC & Index.

The student may often discover reference to another book, in another subject; or have a new idea; or think of another way to approach their topic.
Humans as Researchers

We humans (students, professors, scholars, librarians) are all sensory people!

- We like the tactile sense; we touch!
- We like to open a book and scan or read
- We like to ‘browse’ among the shelves of books in an open stack library

Most importantly ... these actions INFORM us and guide us, and cause us to make decisions!
Books are for Scholars

University libraries have books for scholars to use. So ... *let them use them*!

Even a basic search among the books on the shelves of a Library at the beginning of a project or paper can lead to better ideas, add shape to the project, and enrich how the scholar thinks about the topic.
“Material Responsibility”?

Maybe you are concerned about students or professors wandering through the stacks. What if they take a book and don’t borrow it from the Circulation Desk, as they should?

Yes, sometimes clever students or absent-minded professors walk out the door with a book that is not checked out!
Alarms !!!

That is why each book gets a magnetic strip or RFID tag that is de-activated at Circulation Desk,

Or – if it is active, when the student walks through the Exit Gate an ALARM sounds 😞

Most students and professors borrow books as they should from the Circulation Desk
Our Responsibility

- Administrators who are not librarians or scholars may think that an accurate inventory count of books is more important than ...

- A Library of books that can be actively used by scholars to enrich their study and research!

*Librarians usually feel their responsibility is to make materials available to advance research, not to restrict their use so that annual reports have accurate numbers for accountants and economists.*
Open Stacks & Academic Freedom

The concept of “Academic Freedom” is essential to western scholarship. A professor has the ‘freedom’ to discuss many views about their subject in the classroom.

In the Library, the student, professor, or researcher has the ‘freedom’ to roam among the books to find the best and most relevant information for their research.
Open Stacks: More Than Books

- The Librarian is more than a clerk who goes to retrieve the book that is requested.
- The Librarian learns about the collection: what is there, what is sought, what is often – or seldom – used, what should be added to develop the collection, and how subjects are inter-related and overlap.

This tacit knowledge of the library collection empowers the Librarian to better serve the library user, and be a valuable resource within the Library!
Librarian: a Human Resource

- The Librarian has a relationship with the person who seeks information.
- Librarians use and inspire critical thinking to determine the best information to meet the specific need.

Because the Librarian knows the content of the collection, she becomes a resource (human) that is of more value than the material resources (books).
Without A Reference Interview

A student or professor seeks information. They tell you what book they want, or think they want, but later get that book and realize it is not what they needed.

This is *not efficient* use of time. This *does not stimulate* creative thought about the available resources that might be useful. This *does not build* critical thinking skills.
A Reference Interview

The skilled Librarian engages the library user in conversation – *A Reference Interview* – to determine their real need, not just an immediate or superficially perceived need.

This is:

- Pro-active
- Customer Service
- Intelligent use of Critical Thinking skills for both the Librarian and the Library User
Critical Thinking is not BAD ... it’s Creative!

When we hear the word “Critical” we think of “Criticism” or “Critique” and other negative concepts.

A photographer’s assignment: shoot a BANANA.

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Open Stacks

When we allow library users to go into the stacks of books, we:

- Learn more about our collections
- Learn more about our library users
- Develop their critical thinking and our own
- Enrich our work ... because we

Build connections!
Subject Librarians

What qualifies someone to be a Subject Librarian?

In Western university libraries the MLS degree is usually required to be hired as a Librarian. Often a 2\textsuperscript{nd} Masters or PhD degree is also required.

The MLS Librarian has a standard level of knowledge and skills about Librarianship. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} advanced degree assures a specialization in another academic subject.
Our Subject Librarians

- Most qualified staff (BLS, MLS)
- Staff who have at least a Bachelor’s degree and who have used a Library as a student
- Individuals who are fluent in English
- Qualified staff with varied work experience or other backgrounds
Who ??? ... How ???

After we identify the best staff, we match them:

- To Subjects (Bachelor degrees, past work)
- Partner them (International MLS, local)
  - To cover more languages
  - To mentor
  - To have more educational and experiential skills
Subject Librarians ... Do What?

Two general responsibilities:

1. *Collection Development* – build the library’s collection of resources to support their Subject

2. *Instruction* – give students, faculty, or researchers instruction in how to best use library resources
Teams: Autonomy

- May split the two main responsibilities
- May share ‘office hours’ in the School or Center
- May share the two responsibilities and collaborate to maximize language or other skills

May be creative, such as our “Embedded Librarian” who piloted a project with several professors in her School
Subject Librarians = Bridges

Subject Librarians build bridges between the Schools (professors and students) and the Library. Librarians are included in School faculty meetings.

When a professor needs something from the Library they have an immediate contact.

When a student needs assistant from a Librarian, they have a familiar face to approach.
Why Have Subject Librarians?

TO

BUILD

CONNECTIONS !!!
Reference Rotation

Reference ... Open Stack Collections
Reference ... Subject Librarians

Rotation?

This is a staff management tool.
Rotation

Reference Rotation gives:

1. A larger pool of staff to fill the Reference Schedule
2. More flexibility in the Reference staff schedule
3. Job enlargement for staff
4. Job enrichment for staff
A Larger Pool

When the Reference Schedule is set up on a “Rotation” there are a few full-time ‘core’ Reference Librarians and they are supplemented with other library staff from different (technical service) areas who work a few hours each day or week.
More Flexibility

- There are more “open hours” to staff the desk
- There are more time slots ... several people who fit into the schedule for 2 hours a few days each week
- There are more people who are trained and can be called in as back-up when someone is sick or on vacation
- More staff can be available for a few hours if there is a big program or event
Job Enlargement

ENLARGEMENT???

(I have too much work already!)

- A break from your daily routine work
- Exposure to another part of the Library
- Learn how to use E-resources effectively
- Learn what other staff do and become ‘cross-trained’ in new skills
Job Enrichment:
How Much Richer Will I Be ???

1. You get to learn new skills in Librarianship (for FREE)
2. You interact with more Library colleagues and learn what they do at work everyday
3. You add value to your career in the Library
4. You get to explore new possibilities (instruction, reference interviews, tour guide, project teams)
5. You learn more about university professors and students ... their research topics ... why or how they use the Library ... what they need.
This is just about a staff schedule that gives more people Reference Desk responsibilities, gets some people away from their corner in Cataloging or Acquisitions, allows the Reference Desk to be open longer hours, gives new possibilities for staff to give instruction, learn databases, guide students in their searches, and become aware of new areas of Librarianship.

More Staff become More Connected with the Library
Connections!

Open Access
--- allows connections between the Librarian and the Collection and the Library Users

Subject Librarians
--- allow connections between the Library and the Schools’ professors and students

Reference Rotation
--- allows connections between Library staff and Library Users
Western Models

These three practices may or may not work in your Library. Perhaps an adjustment of the idea to fit your place, your staff, and your users will be more appropriate.

Whatever you do ... continue to develop as individual Librarians, and **BUILD CONNECTIONS** with your Library and Users!
Thank You !!!

I appreciate this opportunity to meet each of you and share with you in this beautiful city, university, and Library!

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