

## Digital Library Education: synthesis of the session of 24 March 2005

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The World Wide Web has had a huge impact on society the last ten years. Its future implications are hard to predict. New technology enables digitisation and distribution of text, sound and images that was hard to imagine twenty years ago. These possibilities are facts. However, the social consequences are harder to predict. What will be the outcome for librarians and their education and work?

Professional work and control over work tasks are the focus points in Andrew Abbott's theory of the system of professions (Abbott 1988). Abbott calls the link between a profession and its work tasks jurisdiction. Professions are defined by their work tasks and the system of professions changes by interprofessional competition for jurisdiction over work tasks. New technology is the most important disturbance to the system, and can open new tasks areas and destroy others. Some professions may even become extinct as an effect of technological development.

Librarians' work has through history been challenged by technological development many times before—especially by the introduction of computers. According to Abbott, librarianship has always been able to adjust to the changes, and in effect librarians have had a gain from new technology. Some work tasks in their jurisdiction have become more or less extinct (like maintaining card catalogues), but librarians have become the experts on using the new tools being developed (librarians are the experts on database search and retrieval).

The World Wide Web and its applications are new important challenges for librarians and other professions or occupational groups working in—using Abbott's term—the qualitative information area. Some librarians consider general web search engines like Google as a threat to traditional library reference services. On the other hand, the web also creates new environments where librarians' skills in knowledge organisation can be utilised. Information architecture is an example of a new discipline related to the web where LIS (library and information science) has made an impact.

In the museum, library and archive community, the term *digital libraries* has been introduced. There are many definitions of the term, but the current Wikipedia (12 August 2005) definition is as follows:

*A digital library comprises digital collections, services and infrastructure to support lifelong learning, research, scholarly communication and preservation.*

Librarians and computer professionals are involved in developing digital libraries, as they are in many of the work tasks defined or constructed in general by new digitisation and networking technology. Some would say they are collaborating. Using Abbott's model of professional development, we could say they are competing for jurisdiction over the new work tasks.

The focus of the first session of the workshop was digital library education. To be able to cope with the challenges from new technology and compete with the computer professionals, the LIS education also has to change. According to Terry Weech, computer science took the initiative in the digital libraries education in the 1980s. LIS education has been a follower, not a leader in the field. Digital libraries courses and programs were introduced in the late 1990s and LIS education is now trying to define the core skills necessary to work in digital library environments and to collaborate effectively with IT professionals.

In Weech's keynote speech, he gives an overview over the LIS digital librarianship education worldwide, referring to three different surveys from 1998, 2001 and 2003. There has been an increase in course offerings over the years. According to Weech, the content of digital librarianship education in Europe is more technical than in North America. An important question raised in the presentation is how to balance technology and traditional LIS education. Should there be special programs in digital library education, or is the digital working environment so important for librarians that it should be encompassed in the general LIS education?

Aban and Gerhart Budin concentrate on e-learning, another field created by web technology. Their topic is the role of librarians in providing e-learning environments for students and teachers. In their presentation, digital libraries are enabling tools for e-learning and knowledge management. The problem is that neither librarians nor libraries are prepared for their new roles. They present examples from continuous education in their home country Austria, and list the content of these courses.

Aira Lepik and Ton de Bruyn's presentations concern other local perspectives on LIS education. Aira Lepik gives an overview of the NORSLIS (Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science) project, a collaboration between the Nordic and Baltic countries in giving Ph.D. education. NORSLIS started up in 2004, and will go on until 2008. NORSLIS is a very good example of internationalisation in European education, and projects like this will be of good help developing digital librarianship education and research customised for Europe.

Ton de Bruyn presents reforms in higher education in another European country—the Netherlands. The reform is a model of competence learning, reducing complexity in earlier pedagogical models.

I want to end this short introduction by giving my opinions on digital library education. The web and digital libraries provide librarians great opportunities to use their skills in new environments. There is no reason that the LIS community should be followers in this field, and I would welcome a more offensive position. LIS has a strong tradition in knowledge organisation that is necessary to create good and usable digital services. This means that core skills in cataloguing and classification must not be ignored, as mentioned by Linda Ashcroft on the second day of the workshop. These are unique competencies that are important means in professional competition. However, to be able to see the possibilities in the digital environment and create new services, LIS education must also provide sufficient skills in how the technology works. Current examples are XML and different standards and protocols needed to create interoperable services. This will give librarians the skills to work in digital libraries, but also enable librarians to find new work tasks outside libraries.

## **References**

Abbott, A. (1988): *The System of Professions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press