

Leading the Reference Renaissance

Today's Ideas
for Tomorrow's
Cutting-Edge Services

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SECTION 11.2

Meeting Challenges through Evolving Service Models and Staff Development

CHAPTER 4

Inventing the Future by Examining Traditional and Emerging Roles for Reference Librarians

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Overview

As reference librarians invent their future, examining the variety of possible roles and constructing their own seems a wise course. Conceptual papers and research studies on these traditional and emerging roles are reviewed in this chapter to articulate the diversity of possible roles, to explore how they might interconnect, and to examine how librarians can use them to shape their work. Most of the discussion has focused on two major roles: *information provider* and *teacher*. There are a number of other roles that have received less attention and deserve a closer look as we move into the future, such as *communicator*, *relationship builder*, *guide/advisor*, *counselor*, or *partner*. This chapter provides a possible framework for a proactive approach to inventing the future.

Introduction

The role of the reference librarian has been a popular topic throughout the history of reference work. Often this discussion of role has been contentious or prescriptive and argued for one role at the expense of others. As reference librarians invent their future, examining the variety of possible roles and constructing their own seems a wise course. Conceptual papers and research studies on these traditional and emerging roles are reviewed to articulate the diversity of possible roles, to explore how they might interconnect, and to examine how librarians can use them to shape their work.

Most of the discussion has focused on two major roles: *information provider* and *teacher*. There are a number of other roles that have received less attention and deserve a closer look as we move into the future, such as *communicator*, *relationship builder*, *guide/advisor*, *counselor*, or *partner*. Research studies on reference librarians provide

evidence that these many roles are present in reference work. It is unclear, however, how these roles interconnect and how librarians choose them.

Inventing the future requires reflection and action to shape the direction for change. Examining the diverse roles for reference librarians and reflecting on how they can be used in practice expands options for librarians. This chapter provides a possible framework for a proactive approach to inventing our future.

Relevance to Today's Practice

There are many urgent issues requiring the attention of reference librarians. Taking time to reflect on one's role in the reference interaction may seem like a luxury that hardly rises to the top of a long list of priorities. However, setting aside some time to reflect and be proactive about one's practice has long-term benefits.

As librarians involved in instruction well know, reflective practice is a hallmark of good teaching, and Schön (1983) among other scholars has argued for the importance of reflective practice for all professionals. However, in the demanding environment that is current reference work, librarians must often practice in a reactive manner without thinking deeply about what reference should be. Often new roles are not ones that librarians have chosen deliberately, but are driven by new technologies or budget restrictions. Taking time to reflect on the key roles for reference librarians and to explore how these roles should influence reference work could contribute to improved practice.

Assuming that taking time to reflect on the proper role for reference librarians and letting that role drive one's practice is worthwhile, a synthesis of the literature into a framework for reflection and discussion is a useful tool. Clearly articulating the variety of roles that librarians have played can open up choices for librarians today—choices that librarians can explore and experiment with as they proactively shape their new roles.

Objective

Although "roles of reference librarians" can refer to new and expanded job duties, such as tech support or creation of online tools, this paper focuses on the one-on-one reference interaction itself. Even within this narrow scope, the role of the librarian within the reference interaction has always been open to debate and continues to evolve.

Whether the reference interaction occurs at the traditional reference desk, in a virtual reference (VR) environment, in a virtual world, or during a consultation at a coffee shop, each librarian plays a role with his or her user. What is the nature of this role? What are values and motivations behind these roles? What are roles that have not had a strong voice in the literature? It is challenging to think creatively about new roles for reference librarians, when past roles have not been thoroughly described.

This chapter clearly articulates past and current roles of reference librarians as described in conceptual papers and as reported in research studies in order to expose the variety of perspectives on the topic. Although the literature abounds with essays arguing that reference librarians should play one role or another, there is little theory or research on this topic. With a few notable exceptions, when there is theory, it tends to be isolated and untested. Research studies tend also to be isolated and sporadic. This review may begin to rectify this situation by bringing together a variety of arguments about the role of reference librarians. It complements existing discussions of the changing role of

the reference librarian, such as that of Rockman and Watstein (1999), in its focus on the reference interaction itself and its attempt to create a framework that encompasses the past roles for reference librarians in both conceptual papers and research studies.

Much of the debate in the literature has centered on the dichotomous roles of reference librarian as *information provider* or *instructor*, as if these perspectives are the only ones and are mutually exclusive. However, other roles have been addressed in the literature, including *communicator*, *relationship builder*, *guide/advisor*, *counselor*, and *partner*. Although these roles have not been thoroughly defined in the literature, Table 4.1 lists these various roles and defines them in terms of the motivations behind them. Articulating and examining these various perspectives provides a basis for reflection, discussion, and improved practice.

The Information Provider

The role of the *information provider* is one of the major roles addressed in the literature. It is likely motivated by the belief that reference exists to provide answers to users' questions. This role is described by Bunge (1980) as "finding needed information for the user or assisting the user in finding such information" (p. 468). In their textbook chapter, Bunge and Bopp (2001) suggested some examples of activities included in this component of reference service: "the simple provision of an address or telephone number, to tracking down an elusive bibliographic citation, to the identification and delivery of documents about a specific topic" (p. 7) as well as the more in-depth consultation required of "research assistance" (p. 10). Bunge (1980) used the general term "information services" (p. 468); Rothstein (1961) called it "getting information out of books" (p. 13); and Whittaker (1977) referred to this function as "enquiry work" (p. 58). Rieh (1999)

Table 4.1. The Various Roles for Reference Librarians and the Differing Motivations Based on Beliefs about the Goals of Reference

Roles for Reference Librarians	Professional Beliefs Motivating These Roles
The Information Provider	The goal of reference is to provide answers to questions.
The Instructor	The goal of reference is to teach skills in library and information use.
The Communicator	The goal of reference is a flow of accurate information and a human connection between the user and the resources.
The Relationship Builder	The goal of reference is a productive, long-term relationship between librarian and user.
The Guide/Advisor	The goal of reference is to guide and advise users.
The Counselor	The goal of reference is to develop lifelong information users through mentoring or coaching.
The Partner	The goal of reference is a balance of power and expertise between librarian and user.

used the term *information provision*, which seems the best term for a contemporary discussion of this function.

Information provision has been a key function since the beginning of reference scholarship. Green (1876) advocated for librarians providing information, later described by Tyckoson (1997) as "assist[ing] readers in solving their inquiries" (p. 6). Wyer (1930) may be the greatest advocate of answering questions as the main purpose of reference service. His theory of reference focused on levels of service: "conservative," "moderate," and "liberal." The "liberal" level of service, where the librarian completely answers the user's question, was considered by Wyer to be the fullest level of service. He called it "progressive" and "enlightened" (p. 9). Those, like Wyer, who view provision of information as the purpose of reference work value delivering an answer to a user or providing them with a specific source that the user can employ to answer his or her question.

There is evidence in the literature that practicing reference librarians value provision of information as a function of their work. In fact, in all the studies addressing this topic, participants included information provision as a key role. As part of their study of tasks and roles in the reference process, Alafiatayo, Yip, and Blunden-Ellis (1996) surveyed academic reference librarians in the United Kingdom about their "perceptions of their role." They reported that "respondents perceived their role as intermediaries between the inquirers and information resources" (p. 368). Respondents' open-ended comments describing their role involved information provision. The "highest ranked activity" was "answering requests to find source materials" (p. 368). A limitation of this study is that the researchers clearly defined reference service as information provision, and their data collection instrument conveyed this bias. The choices that librarians were given to rank included 12 activities, nearly all information provision-type activities. However, since there is so little research in this area, the results of this study need to be acknowledged.

Other studies emphasize the importance of information provision as a key role for reference librarians. Watson-Boone's (1998) participants seemed to focus on the information provision aspect of their work (pp. 28–32). Some of Gerlich's (2006) participants focused on information provision, as revealed in this representative quote: "helping people find things that they need . . . in the quickest and most efficient way" (p. 65).

Information provision is also an important role for reference archivists. Duff and Fox (2006) reported "a high level of satisfaction when documents were found quickly and easily, when they were able to find good complete answers, and when the user found the information they needed" (p. 147). When asked to describe a satisfactory reference experience, the authors reported that "all 13 participants chose examples where they provided an answer that satisfied the user" (p. 147). Later the authors stated that "the main cause of archivist dissatisfaction was being unable to find the answer" (p. 148).

Obviously, the role of *information provider* is considered important to reference scholars, as well as to practitioners. However, there are some critics of this role. Wagers (1978) critiqued the "information as an end-product of service" approach, calling it "stultifying" and calling for theory that could "transcend" it (p. 278). Campbell (1992), though neither a scholar nor practitioner of reference, published an influential paper devaluing the information provision function of the work, suggesting that 75 percent of reference transactions could be automated (p. 31). Kuhlthau (2004) saw some value in

the information provision role of reference work, noting that helping students with physical access was important, but just not as important as helping them with intellectual access (p. 114). Information provision is an important function of reference service, both in the opinion of scholars and librarians. Yet it is clearly not the only way to conceive of what reference librarians do.

The Instructor

The instruction role of the reference librarian may be motivated by the belief that reference exists to instruct users in library and research skills, so that users can find information on their own. The current climate of information literacy in higher education has highlighted the instruction function of reference work, but it has played an important role throughout the history of reference service. Bunge (1980) defined instruction as "helping users learn the skills they need to find and use library materials" (p. 468). More contemporary definitions extend this definition beyond just instruction in use of resources at the library to information literacy instruction, in general.

Those who advocate for the *instructor* role see their goal as making the user self-sufficient. Vavrek (1968) articulated this value in saying that "service falls short of its capacity when the reference librarian neglects or refuses to extend a device for self-education to the user" (p. 510). Others see instruction as part of the educational mission of a library, especially an academic library. Elmborg (2002), for example, went so far as to argue that "the reference desk can be a powerful teaching station—more powerful, perhaps, than the classroom" (p. 455).

The literature shows evidence that amongst practicing librarians the instruction function is valued. All of the studies include participants specifically noting instruction or the researcher noting that instruction was an important part of their service. Respondents in Alafiatayo and colleagues' (1996) study perceived their role partially as "teaching" (p. 370). Although the reference librarians studied by Watson-Boone (1998) did not specifically talk about teaching in relation to their reference work, she observed that instruction was an important component of their jobs (p. 33). Some of the academic reference librarians in Gerlich's (2006) study described their work as "teaching" (p. 60).

In their interpretation of reference archivists' "orientation," Duff and Fox (2006) reported a strong sense of the participants' role as teachers and the importance of teaching archival users to be independent (pp. 133–135). As mentioned earlier, however, the main source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the archivists' narratives related to success and failure in finding answers or specific materials for the user. The authors did not explore why the reference archivists, who claim a teaching orientation, feel satisfaction or dissatisfaction, not about student learning, but about effective question answering.

The Information Provider versus the Instructor

The conflict over whether information provision or instruction is the proper role of reference librarians is perhaps the greatest debate in reference work. The debate seems to have begun with Wyer's (1930) "conservative," "moderate," and "liberal" levels of service. Although Wyer did not place instruction in opposition to a liberal level of service, it seems that his work has been interpreted this way. In his discussion of instruction, Wyer claimed that helping a user to increase his or her knowledge about using the

library was "commendable" (p. 279). He simply did not include instruction in his concept of reference. It is this separation of provision from instruction that Wagers (1978) claimed "created an unprofitable distinction" between the functions (p. 272).

A number of scholars have supported the argument that information provision, rather than instruction, is the proper role of reference. Rothstein (1961) essentially saw arguments supporting instruction as excuses not to provide better service (p. 14). McClure (1974) stated that "any person is entitled to receive specific answers to questions involving needs for exact information . . . when people come to the library they do not want to learn about the methods and mechanics of biographic control; they want information" (p. 208). Rugh (1975) claimed that while instruction was important, it should not be considered a component of reference service, but rather something separate (p. 297). After reviewing the literature on the provision/instruction debate, Schiller (1965) concluded that information provision is the primary purpose of reference and that instruction is "not necessarily a reference function" (p. 60). Even Whittaker (1977), who included instruction in his model of reference, acknowledged that "it is not universally accepted that library instruction is part of it [reference]." Despite Whittaker's inclusion of instruction, he classified it under the "library users" section, rather than the "librarians" section, with no explanation for this choice (p. 58).

Rothstein noted in 1955 that debate about levels of service had "dominated the theoretical discussion of the nature and extent of reference work" (p. 42). By 1992, Rettig described the positions as "firmly entrenched" and "inimical" (p. 159). He further described instruction and information provision as "the two cultures of reference librarianship" (p. 158). This is an apt metaphor. Just as people from different cultures can be challenged to understand each other and accept each other's values, librarians from different "cultures" of reference sometimes have difficulty understanding and appreciating each other.

Despite decades of debate, no research has been done to study this conflict in practice. It has remained a purely theoretical debate in the literature. Future research could help to clarify the priority reference librarians place on these two roles and how they might complement each other or interconnect.

Some scholars bemoan the debate between instruction and provision, arguing that it is misguided or unproductive to set information provision and instruction in opposition to each other. Wagers (1978) argued that early reference theory included both instruction and information provision (p. 274), but later theory "bifurcated" the earlier unified theory into an "information dogma" (p. 271) that excluded instruction. He further argued that guidelines separating instruction from reference "prevent integration of significant components of service into a viable theory" (p. 277). He continued: "later theorists . . . in their desire to appear progressive, distorted these early contributions and erected misleading conceptions of effectiveness" (p. 279).

So perhaps the issue is not whether instruction or information provision is better, but whether or not one should separate the two functions. Wagers (1978) argued against separation: "Such a narrowing of scope [to just giving specific information] may be productive if it serves to isolate key factors, but misleading if vital elements are not taken into account. With preliminary investigations which identify the relationships among reference factors, such a focus is presumptuous" (p. 277).

Nielsen (1982) is often cited as an advocate of instruction, but really he advocated for a new role for librarianship to be discussed later in this review. He expressed concern that the role of instructor and the role of information provider would coexist and cause division in the profession and competition for resources. He saw this situation as a problem and argued for a new role. "The present competition between those who advocate the intermediary role and those who advocate the teaching role is unfortunate and unnecessary. It divides the ranks of reference librarians at a time when unity of purpose on behalf of user needs has never been more important" (p. 188).

Clearly the roles of information provider and instructor are important ones for reference librarians. The relative importance of each of these roles, however, is not clear. As previously mentioned in Duff and Fox (2006), for example, individual librarians seemed to value their role as information provider, as well as their role as instructor. In addition to these two key roles, however, other roles are explored in the literature. While they have not been included in the classic information provider/instructor debate, they merit consideration.

The Communicator

A review of the literature demonstrates that the *communicator* may not be a separate role but a skill that overlays other roles. However, it is frequently discussed, and therefore is a possible role to consider. The role of the *communicator* is motivated by the belief that reference exists as the human connection between the user and the resources. A common metaphor for communication is a conduit, and many librarians may see themselves as conduits or channels or intermediaries between the collection and the user. The role of the *communicator* is not clearly defined in the literature. It involves the dynamic between librarian and user, both the actual communication that occurs and the subsequent relationship that develops, discussed in this review as the *relationship builder*. Future research should work to clarify this ambiguity.

Bunge (1999) proposed "communication" as a way of conceiving of reference (p. 15). Although Bunge (1980) did not include the concept in his encyclopedia definition of reference, he later addressed it in an extensive literature review (1984). Radford (1999) took a communications theory perspective and demonstrated the value of "interpersonal aspects," including attitude of the librarian, quality of communication skills, and approachability in the reference encounter (pp. 73-74) as well as the content aspects of information delivery, providing access to information, and subject knowledge. She extended this work in an analysis of interpersonal dimensions in virtual reference (VR) live chat transcripts (Radford, 2006). Radford and Connaway (2009) have more recently developed a content/relationship model of reference work. This model emphasizes the importance of interpersonal dimensions, such as relationship quality, attitude, approachability, and greeting and closing rituals to the success of a reference interaction in traditional as well as virtual environments.

The relative value of the interpersonal dimension in reference service constitutes another important debate in reference work. This debate is not nearly as clearly articulated as the one concerning instruction versus information provision. Some scholars claim that communication or relationships are of key importance; while others set up an explicit or implied dichotomy, such as information provision versus interpersonal

aspects. Radford (1999) set her communication approach in opposition to Katz, who she claimed advocated information provision as the sole role for reference librarians. Like Radford, Stover (2004) argued that "answering reference questions accurately is important, but in many ways attitudes, actions, and non-verbal communication are just as important as factual authenticity for quality reference service" (p. 290). Evidence from the field suggests that the interpersonal dimension is valued in the profession. Alafiatayo and colleagues' (1996) respondents described reference work as "a communication process" (p. 370). Gerlich's (2006) participants also mentioned communication (p. 62).

So does the literature suggest that there are two distinct dichotomies: instruction versus information provision and communication/interpersonal relations versus information provision? Or might communication and relational aspects overlay the instruction versus information provision continuum as an additional dimension? Rather than being a separate role, communication may be an aspect to how other roles are performed/executed. Research is needed to understand how all these elements fit together and how they interact in different situations.

The Relationship Builder

Although the *relationship builder* role shares much in common with the *communicator*, there are some differences. Rather than perceiving the reference librarian as a conduit or the human mediator between user and resources, the *relationship builder* takes interpersonal dimensions of the reference interaction a step further. This role may be motivated by the belief that the end goal of the reference interaction is productive, long-term relationships with users. In her study of academic reference service interactions, Radford (1999) argued that there are two goals of the reference encounter: to build relationships with users in addition to helping them satisfy an information need.

In his early discussion of the role of reference librarians, Green (1876) also seemed to support this perspective. Although Tyckoson (1997) interpreted Green's "personal relations" as "promotion of the library," Green's phrase could be interpreted as "developing relationships with library users." Bunge (1984) also focused on the relationship aspects of Green's work, rather than the promotional aspects. Regardless of Green's exact intentions, it is clear that he highlighted the interpersonal aspect of reference work. His metaphor of the reference librarian as a "friendly innkeeper" and advocate of librarians "mingling with users" indicate the importance to Green of librarians working to develop relationships.

To date, studies of reference librarians provide some, but not strong, evidence of the importance of the relationship-builder role. In her ethnographic study of reference in an archival environment, Trace (2006) found that development of relationships was a result of "good" reference questions, though whether or not these relationships were a deliberate goal of the service provider is unclear (p. 129). Why is the *relationship builder* role not more frequently mentioned in studies of librarians' roles when there is demonstrated importance of relationship building in reference work? Perhaps it is perceived as a component of the *communicator* role or as an end goal rather than a role. More research is needed to understand how the *relationship-builder* role relates to other roles for reference librarians.

The Guide/Advisor

Another role for the reference librarian is that of *guide* or *advisor*. This role may be motivated by the belief that guiding and advising users in their research is the key role for reference librarians. This role has been mentioned by a number of key reference scholars. Tyckoson (1997) attributed "Aid the reader in the selection of good works" (p. 6) to Green's definition of reference, and it is described by Rothstein (1961) as "guidance in the choice of books" (p. 12). Bunge (1980) defined this function as "users are assisted in choosing library materials appropriate to their educational, informational, or recreational needs" (p. 468). Later he added, "helping to interpret materials so that readers can choose among them according to their interests and needs" (p. 470). Examples of guidance according to Bunge and Bopp (2001) included readers advisory, bibliotherapy, and term-paper counseling. These authors acknowledged that guidance is "not as often discussed in the literature" although they claimed it has been just as significant (p. 11).

Research on reference librarians seems to indicate that they perceive guidance as an important function. Gerlich (2006) reported academic reference librarians using terms such as "guiding," "helping," and "advising" to describe their work (pp. 60–67). She did not probe the meanings of these perceptions, so it is difficult to determine exactly what the librarians meant or how these perceptions related to others expressed by the participants. These librarians see "guiding" and "advising" as a component of what they do; however, there is no evidence in the literature that guidance or aiding in selection is considered a primary or core purpose. In addition, it is unclear whether librarians who express reference work as "guiding" and "advising" are speaking about guiding or advising in selection of sources. One of the reference archivists in Duff and Fox's (2006, p. 134) study mentioned "guiding people to a source," but the authors interpreted this statement as pertaining to instruction.

Bunge and Bopp (2001) described information provision, instruction, and guidance as approaches that a reference librarian may choose from "depending on the needs and goal" of the user (p. 6). Rothstein (1961) viewed "these basic approaches or emphases" as "the three primary colors in the reference work picture... almost every respectable library in the United States and Canada does some of each; almost no two libraries mix the colors in quite the same way" (p. 13). This metaphor of mixing colors to provide the perfect composition of reference service is beneficial because it recognizes some variety in approach to the work and hints at conscious choice in approaching service. However, Rothstein's metaphor is based on Wyer's conservative, moderate, and liberal framework, which is not necessarily adequate for describing the purpose of reference work. Also, Rothstein says that "libraries" mix these colors in certain ways, but libraries are not the entities that are selecting the colors. It may be that librarians "mix" approaches to service, but more research is needed to understand what these colors are and how librarians mix them.

The Counselor

The role of the *counselor* may be similar to that of the *guide* or *advisor*. However, this role may be motivated by a value on mentoring or coaching users as they become accustomed to the information-seeking process. Despite the similarities between *guide* or *advisor*, the assistance described in this role is broader in focus, perhaps dealing with the whole

research process or lifelong learning, and it is more in-depth. There is some overlap with instruction or communication, but the focus for this theme is an intense interaction between librarian and user, where the librarian attempts to lead the user to a greater understanding of his or her need.

Drawing on student personnel theory, Maxfield (1954) argued that fact-based reference and instruction do not meet the needs of users and that a counseling approach is required (p. 8). He suggested that this is particularly important for librarians serving undergraduates although he sees evidence of this approach in readers advisory and bibliotherapy (p. 20). He stated that librarians must take into account users' full needs: "There might be significant limitations for undergraduate library users in the conventional reference approach, and that librarianship at the college level possibly should give more careful attention to the student patron *as an individual person*" (p. 8). Later scholars, such as Penland (1970), distilled this approach to a technique, but Maxfield was clearly focused on developing counseling as a core purpose of reference work.

Maxfield's explanation puts the *counselor* role and the *information provider* role in opposition to each other: "The major emphasis in counseling, as already shown, is not upon any information that is to be imparted, but upon aiding of the individual toward self-motivation and self-decision" (p. 19). So while advocates for information provision might not be against counseling values, they would be at odds with the very purpose of counseling librarianship: the focus on development, not information.

Fine (1997) also promoted a *counselor* role for reference librarians. Her major focus lies in using counseling theory and techniques to improve communication and build relationships (p. 90). However, Fine also argues for user development as a goal or at least a positive outcome of the reference interaction: "The growth of one becomes the mutual concern of both" (p. 81).

It may be appropriate to discuss Kuhlthau's (2004) examination of the role of the reference librarian in this section. Although her work focused primarily on users, Kuhlthau applied her finding to the librarian's role, developing five "levels of mediation." The highest level of mediation was termed "Counselor." Kuhlthau's Counselor level focused on helping a user to achieve a greater understanding of the research process: "holistic... over time" (p. 119). This level also has some instruction overtones and may not be a close match to Maxfield's counseling function. However, her deliberate use of the term "Counselor" and her references to holistic and intellectual development suggest more than simply an instructional exchange. She did not view counseling as an alternative or alongside other components but in a hierarchical relationship, with the Counselor level being a superior type of mediation (p. 118).

It is unclear whether practicing reference librarians perceive the intellectual development characteristic as a key role in their work. Alafiatayo and colleagues' (1996) respondents described reference work as "advising, helping, guiding" (p. 370), and Gerlich's (2006) participants used these terms as well. However, as mentioned previously, the intended meaning of these terms is unclear.

The Partner

The *partner* role is inspired by the belief that reference work is a team effort between librarian and user with both bringing areas of knowledge and skill to the interaction.

The role of collaboration or partnership has much in common with the counseling role, but is isolated in this review because of its focus on a balance of power and the emergence of ideas through a synergy between librarian and user. This perspective is a more recent development in thinking about reference work. The literature hints at this theme, but it has not been fully developed. The concept of reference librarianship as a collaborative partnership is not so much a new activity, as a new perspective on existing activities. The perspectives discussed thus far, such as providing answers and instructing users, are somewhat focused on the librarian as agent. The emerging concept of a collaborative partnership between the user and librarian provides a balance of expertise and power.

Nielsen (1982) is among the first to have addressed the need for this new perspective in his call for a new role for reference librarians. He suggested that librarianship should look to human services for inspiration: "Their message calls upon experts of all kinds to rethink their relationships to non-experts, and to work toward the sharing of knowledge rather than its opposite" (p. 188). Rettig (1992) also acknowledged an imbalance of power in the reference transaction. In his critique of both the information provision and instruction approaches to reference, he stated "nor does either culture give due credit to information seekers' and librarians' complementary obligations and roles" (p. 163). He felt that both cultures were "designed to promote a preferred role for reference librarians" (p. 162).

Mabry (2003), who explored the partnership concept, as did Stover (2004), also called for a rethinking of reference librarians' "expert" status. Stover focused on the issue of librarian expertise in what he called a "postmodern approach." He advocated perceiving the user as an expert in his or her own research endeavor. Through listening and dialogue, reference librarians can help users arrive at their own solution. Together, they can create knowledge through the research process, rather than simply finding and delivering existing truths. He stated: "The stance of the librarian as non-expert moves the profession of librarianship away from the technocrat/expert model and back towards its earlier mission of service and human-centered values" (p. 274). As an example of the arrogance of reference librarianship, Stover cites the de-emphasis of social sources of information and browsing, both of which are popular and effective ways for people to get information, in favor of searching (p. 290). Another advocate of this role, Doherty (2005) called for a new approach to reference that puts more control in the hands of the user. He advocated for a "reference dialogue" instead of a "reference interview" (Doherty, 2006, p. 107).

There is some evidence in studies of archival reference that librarians value a balance of power in the reference interaction. Duff and Fox (2006) quoted a participant saying "your role is a guide rather than as an expert" (p. 134). For this participant, a position of expertise was not a goal. Trace (2006) noted the concept of "reciprocity" in reference, which she described as "the constant exchange of information back and forth between the [service provide and user] as both learned from each other" (p. 133). However, among the few studies of reference librarians' perceptions of their work, none reported participants mentioning partnerships, collaboration, sharing, or dialogue as functions of reference work. It is likely that the researchers were not looking for this theme in their data since it is relatively undeveloped.

Both answering the user's question and instructing the user imply an expertise that puts the user in a lower position than the librarian. "Partner" implies that the user and the

librarian share an equal position. So this concept of partnership or the reference encounter as a synergistic place where the information need is synthesized is an interesting direction for theoretical discussion to go. It may be that this collaborative partnership concept is not a purpose on its own, but merely a different way to view another role, like counseling. There is enough discussion about this perspective to merit further investigation.

Using Traditional and Emerging Roles to Invent One's Own Future

Examining the current and past roles for reference librarians may be interesting, but then what does today's reference librarian do with this new perspective? Reinventing the role of the reference librarian does not have to mean a complete overhaul of reference work. As demonstrated in this review, there are a variety of roles, including some which have received little attention, to explore. The specific role that a librarian chooses to play may be less important than the deliberate process of examining and articulating this role. Differences in users and environments may require different choices of role to meet user needs. By carefully considering user needs, a librarian can choose the most appropriate role or roles. The only truly wrong choice is practicing without reflection or making an arbitrary, unexamined choice. Specific strategies for reinventing one's future based on role include thinking about some of these possible roles, reflecting about what works for each individual and what does not, and sharing experiences with colleagues and learning from them.

Reflecting on the Role of the Reference Librarian

It is important to take time to think about what is most important in reference work. Using the roles described in this review may be a useful starting point for this self-reflection. Reflection may take the form of asking oneself questions such as:

- Do I value being an expert and providing exact answers that users would need hours to find themselves?
- Do I value teaching users to be independent or to use tools?
- Do I value developing relationships with users?
- Do I value helping them grow as future researchers with the context, secret tips, and enthusiasm they need to be successful?
- Do I play other roles with users that have not been discussed in the literature?

In reflection, one role might emerge as key or predominant in one's practice. Or one might perceive a variety of roles that interact in some way.

Although some organizations dictate the primary role that reference librarians must take, librarians may still find benefit in examining their preferred role. Does the role dictated by the organization match the role or roles valued by the librarian? Answering this question may shed light on conflict or contribute to productive conversations about possible future roles.

Sharing Reflections on Role with Colleagues

As this chapter demonstrates, there are a variety of possible roles for reference librarians. Understanding that librarians approach reference work from different perspectives can provide opportunities for learning and collaboration.

Within a reference department, recognizing the roles that colleagues value can help to turn workplace challenges into opportunities. Sharing differences can be a real asset to a department. In the same way that understanding others' Myers-Briggs type or leadership style can help colleagues understand one another and better communicate, understanding fellow librarians' beliefs about the proper role of reference work can help groups to understand the motivations behind decisions or behind behaviors. Within a department, creating diverse project teams that include librarians with a variety of beliefs about the proper role for reference can help ensure the best-quality services.

Applying Reflections and Discussion to Practice

Once a librarian has reflected on the proper role for reference work, this role should be incorporated into practice. Librarians will likely find that they are already incorporating key roles into their reference practice. Librarians who value the *instructor* role likely already take time to teach users how to find resources on their own, and those who value the *partnership* role likely already leave the reference desk to work alongside users. However, it is easy for outside pressures, habits, or even burnout (which is increasing in likelihood during difficult economic times when staffing shortages occur) to interfere with professionals' ability to act in accordance with the roles they value. It may be useful to actively think about roles that one values as one is practicing reference work. Are constraints such as the arrangement of the service point, the features of the VR software, or the number of librarians staffing the desk having unwanted effects on practice? What changes could be made to ameliorate these conditions and allow librarians to better play their key roles? Discussing roles with colleagues may yield good ideas for solutions to these problems. Clearly articulated roles, both on the part of individual librarians and departments, can help inspire exploration and experimentation for better solutions. This discussion could also contribute to improved communication about the roles of reference librarians to the public.

Conclusion

Reference librarians must continue to reflect on the role that they should play in their interactions with users and be proactive in designing their professional destiny. Will changing roles be shaped by technology or budget constraints, or will they be shaped by what librarians value about reference work? The literature reveals a variety of possible roles for reference librarians. Although *information provider* and *instructor* are the most often discussed, *communicator*, *relationship builder*, *guide* or *advisor*, and *partner* are other models that should be explored in more depth. The roles as articulated in this chapter provide a framework and offer a critical challenge for reference librarians to embark on a time of heightened reflection, discussion, and experimentation, as they explore, discover, and create their future.

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