

A year in the 'extracurricular' life of a library school



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The 'extracurricular' life of a library school is the life outside our standard academic programmes – as in the series of intensive courses we have offered in 2012. This life is often invisible to those not directly involved; and it sometimes raises the eyebrows of our academic leaders on campus, whose chief preoccupation these days is research output.

Our extracurricular activities certainly throw into relief the challenges facing professional educators working within an academic faculty. John Budd (2008) argues that library schools occupy the interstices (or cracks) between:

- ▶ practice and theory
- ▶ profession and discipline
- ▶ doing and inquiring, and
- ▶ immanence (meaning what librarians do) and transcendence (asking why there are librarians).

The interstices can at times be uncomfortable with, on one side, academia questioning our scholarly respectability and on the other, practitioners expecting us to be firmly planted in their everyday realities. Reflection on the four sets of intensive courses we ran in 2012, each in a different sphere, leads me to see how we might be bridging these gaps.

Many of CL's readers will be familiar with the workshops and courses we facilitate for the City of Cape Town library services each year from November to January, which range in length from

two to six days. One challenge is to present courses that are useful to unqualified library assistants, and also to experienced professional staff who come to be 'refreshed'. Another is to 'train' within existing practices on the ground, as expected by the Library Service, while also opening participants' eyes to wider horizons.

The other three courses of 2012 were fresh initiatives. Two were explicitly oriented towards practice and the third took a more probing lens to explore how information behaviour theory and research might apply to information services.

The NGO Equal Education was the force behind the innovative, and indeed experimental, 10-day course ran in June (with a follow-up in November) with 25 unemployed matriculants. From its beginning, the UWC Library School had supported Equal Education's *One school one library* campaign; but we questioned the value in setting up handsome libraries which are often doomed to remain locked up for much of the day, because they have no

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staff. After all, a library is far more than a room full of books. In response to these kinds of questions, the NGO raised funds for what we call the *Bringing life to the school library* project. It comprises a two part intensive course in school library work. Its participants receive a small salary for two years to be placed in schools with an Equal Education library. They are under the wing of an Equal Education project manager and some are in schools with one of our trained teacher-librarians, who, although recently qualified, remain fulltime classroom teachers. The value of the project is still uncertain and we are documenting its progress and outcomes carefully. The reality is that, even if the Department of Basic Education were to agree today on a school library staffing policy, it would take many years to find qualified staff for the 90% of South African schools without a functioning library. Perhaps our initiative might serve to add to the thinking on school library development by pointing to a pragmatic model.

The five-day *Preservation management* workshop in June was also a response to a request from the outside, this time from the National Library of South Africa. It involved six experts working in archives and libraries; and it hoped to fill a gap in professional education and practice that many have expressed concern over. Its participants were library assistants and attendants and the aim was to empower them with knowledge and skills in the preservation of their library collections, both in print and digital format.

Probably the most ambitious event in our extracurricular programme in 2012 was the five-day course in September, awkwardly named *Information behaviour in the world of social media and health literacy*. Under the auspices of our *North South South Curriculum Development* project, which was set up in 2008 and funded by the Finnish government, it brought together 25 students and academics from UWC and five library schools in Namibia, Tanzania, Senegal, and Finland. It built on our existing postgraduate module in information behaviour but expanded it to give hands-on practice in the applications of social media in information literacy

and in health literacy programmes. The week included two 'quick and dirty', but successful, research projects, when students went out to the UWC student body to explore their health information literacy and their use of social media in their academic studies. One outcome of the week will be a shared project across the five countries to investigate the everyday life information seeking of students. It will rely on the body of the Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) theory developed by Reijo Savolainen at the University of Tampere in Finland.

My purpose in this article has been to provide insight into an aspect of one library school's work in the interstices described by John Budd (2008). Although our extracurricular activities do not feature in our formal job descriptions, they certainly take up much of our energy. Some extracurricular activities definitely lean more toward practice but perhaps the most satisfying are those that turn into real value that interesting space between practice and theory.

Reference

Budd, J. **Self-examination: the present and the future of librarianship.**- Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2008.

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