

## INTRODUCTION TO THE IFLA SATELLITE CONFERENCE

Moving In, Moving Up, and Moving On:  
Strategies for Regenerating the Library and Information Profession,  
18-20 August 2009, Bologna, Italy

Organized by the Continuing Professional Development  
and Workplace Learning Section (CPDWL)  
and the New Professionals Special Interest Group (NPSIG)

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Welcome to the Eighth World Conference on Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning in Bologna, Italy. We are celebrating two important beginnings at this Eighth World Conference: it is the first time that the CPDWL section has partnered with another group on the satellite meeting, and it is also the first time that the New Professionals Special Interest Group has convened a satellite meeting. The intense collaboration between our two committees has set the stage for what promises to be an interesting conference focused on strategies for regenerating the profession. This topic is one that resonates around the world as new professionals enter the field and long-term professionals adjust to the changes in our rapidly evolving profession.

We are delighted to welcome you to this conference and wish to take a minute to thank the leaders in CPDWL and NPSIG who have worked tirelessly to organize this conference. We also have a team of dedicated editors and you can see the results of their work in the published record of the conference. We want to recognize our sponsors, Emerald and the University of Bologna. Emerald's support has been critical to the success of many of CPDWL's satellite meetings. We certainly could not have hosted this conference without the assistance that we have received from the University of Bologna. The local team of Marialaura Viognocchi and Enrica Manenti have made organizing a conference in another country less difficult and much more fun than trying to do so alone. The venue, Santa Cristina, is an ex-convent which has been converted into teaching and conference space by the University of Bologna – itself the world's oldest university. Additionally we thank Biblioteca Sala Borsa, Comune di Bologna for sponsoring the conference dinner.

Finally, congratulations to all the presenters, about eighty, who will be sharing their views with us over the next two days. We are delighted to have a variety of sessions that offer the opportunity to network and engage in conversation with colleagues from all over the world.

## **DOES OUR PROFESSION NEED REGENERATING?**

The answer to this question depends on our understanding of the ways that libraries will work in the future. Is the library role changing? In a 2005 environmental scan report from OCLC three patterns for future libraries emerged.<sup>1</sup> First is the “decrease in guided access to content” meaning that most library users operate independently and prefer easy and simple searches. Coming to the library and finding information in ways that librarians have determined may not appeal to users. Second is “disaggregation”. Increasingly users are accessing portions of a whole document, the portion that is most suited to their needs. The last pattern is “collaboration”. Users want to work and learn in a coordinated context, moving easily from one task to the other, while at the same time remaining connected to others. These three patterns do suggest that we need to reexamine and rethink the role of libraries and the implications for librarianship.

Another study that shows that the profession does need regenerating is “International Perspectives on the New Librarian Experience,”<sup>2</sup> a survey including 176 new librarians from 5 continents and 12 countries. It reveals that given the opportunity, these professionals would seek positions in a different library field. They would follow this path looking to obtain new skills and mentoring. New professionals also want a job that they find challenging and in which they feel they are respected and can play a role in the organization’s strategic initiatives. More than 61% of those surveyed want to search for a non-library job because their work lacks excitement and their skills and knowledge are not acknowledged. Still, surveyed professionals intend to stay within the library field for the next five years. These findings are an eye-opener for library associations and library-decision makers who must commit themselves to evaluate their way of working to identify areas that should go through a regeneration process.

Regenerating the profession becomes a priority as we change the way libraries operate. We need to identify competencies and needs while at the same time changing library organization and culture. To be successful in this endeavor all the generations of librarians must come to the table to discuss the future. While each group needs to have a voice in this discussion, what is truly critical is that we need to leave the table together focused on the same goal.

In the 2009 Elizabeth Stone Lecture given by Alex Byrne he is unequivocal about the need to change: “We must throw open our doors and move out into the highways and byways of the global information culture to cultivate a new profession which steps out comfortably in a borderless information world ...”

## **MOVING IN, MOVING UP, MOVING ON**

The conference addresses this need by considering three groups. First we deal with those entering the profession, their expectations and needs and how we recruit and

retain able people (Moving in). Several papers look at recruitment of young people, in light of how librarianship as a career is viewed, from the perspective of various countries and changing demographics. Second, we look at those already in the profession, how they develop the skills needed to become leaders in their own areas of activity as well as leaders of wider organizations and how we consider, value, and develop the contribution of our staff (Moving up). Topics included on the program include one-person libraries and the challenges of professional development for this group; conflicts and dilemmas that exist between developing new skills and the demands of constructing a life-long career; and training needs of graduates as they are perceived by themselves compared to how more established professionals see them.

A third group we consider includes those concerned with using their skills in different places (other sectors and other parts of the world to name two examples) and how we pass on some of the wisdom and experience of those leaving the profession (Moving on). Young librarians will hear about ways of seeking work with international organizations such as UNESCO that offer careers across geographical boundaries. Mid-level professionals will hear advice from senior leaders in the profession on how to nurture their successors.

### **MOVING OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE**

The cultivation of a new profession as envisaged by Byrne is already underway. New and developing roles for both the academic and public library sectors are discussed by presenters in the hope that they will shake up the library community. Some areas to look at are the preparation of new library professionals, ways of re-skilling entrenched professionals, and the changing qualification landscape in various countries. Any time of great change is bound to create tensions, and there is a need to face some of the negative effects that the rate of change and an inter-generational workforce trying to co-exist can have. One way towards harmony among library workers is to introduce the notion of “internal customer service” as a means of bridging the generational differences and creating a balanced organization. Another way is to seriously design succession planning strategies. These strategies must be developed by professional associations, library decision makers, and library administrators at local, regional, and international levels.

There is no doubt that some of the differences between generations are due to developmental differences. Some of us are not the same person we were thirty years ago; then we were more direct, focused on the end task, more concerned about accomplishments and less about the journey. We see some of those same characteristics in younger generations. Technology, however, has made a huge difference, one that cannot be explained away by developmental theories. Professionals who have grown up with technology have different strategies for working, strategies that intrigue the older generation but that are not always understood. The

issue is not solely about technology, but agreeing to provide services needed by the users anywhere and in any way they need.<sup>3</sup> We look forward to emerging from this conference with a better understanding of the diversity of voices in our profession.

The use of newer technologies is addressed by presenters including topics such as e-learning and e-tutoring to develop staff as well as online communities of practice to help develop leadership skills. The more tried and tested methods such as coaching and mentoring are also discussed in a number of papers, including one which uses the example of a conductor-less orchestra as a way to coach a library team. Future library leaders and what they think are discussed by a number of presenters, whether they are more reluctant than their predecessors to step into leadership roles and the key factors in leadership development. Differences among generations become evident when there seems to be a group that perceives younger librarians as less keen to move into top posts, and another group that sees them as eager to take on leadership roles.

It is apparent that both generations must reach an understanding to move library workers into the new profession mentioned by Byrne. In that sense, it is of benefit for new and seasoned professionals to cultivate healthy communication patterns to help them understand each other. Different communication styles might lead to negative generational stereotypes.<sup>4</sup> There are indisputable needs and challenges that will only be addressed by understanding both generational and developmental differences. The library has expanded and moved beyond traditional concepts and so should librarians across generations.

To sum up, in order to provide services according to the new progressive roles of libraries and librarians, they must reinvent themselves. New and veteran librarians should rise to the task or risk entering a state of stagnation that will cause the library concept to cease to exist. Definitely, what unites us is stronger than what divides us; as Byrne says, we need to “hold tight to our values.”

#### **WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THIS TYPE OF A CONFERENCE?**

The organizers of this satellite conference took much care in writing the Call for Papers, hoping to engage new and long-time professionals in examining if and how we should regenerate the profession. Judging from the number of abstracts submitted the Call was successful! At this meeting we want to have new and experienced library professionals discussing issues on an equal footing. We want to create a space where individuals are free to express their opinions, regardless of the number of years of experience, and where everyone can listen openly to the ideas being presented. A main goal for this conference is to have participants leave with a better appreciation of the skills and working preferences of each generation and ideas on how to create a positive work environment for everyone.

To achieve this vision we offered help and advice in two ways – through mentorship and through making awards available – so that new professionals or those new to presenting at international conferences had the support in place to develop the skills and confidence to participate fully.

CPDWL used some of their funds to offer 40 awards to presenters covering all conference formats, not just those writing papers and sharing their research findings. We backed this up with the offer of a mentor for all new professionals or presenters and had a very positive response. This seems to us to model exactly the collaborative, cross-sectoral, worldwide and inter-generational partnerships the conference wants to foster. We hope both sides of each mentor relationship learned from the experience. It is very pleasing to see joint papers from lecturers and students and from new and experienced professionals. The experience of attending an international conference both to present a session and a poster has also been used as a deliberate learning event.

One of the goals of the NPSIG is to build a forum for the discussion of issues faced by new professionals worldwide. This satellite conference represents a prime opportunity for veteran and new librarians to come together and discuss hot issues impacting each group. The status of the profession, leadership roles, involvement in association work and understanding of generations concern newer librarians. This historical event seeks to provide new professionals with a space for dialogue, sharing of ideas, networking and to engage them in IFLA's work.

## **WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM WORKING TOGETHER?**

Although this introduction necessarily touches on the topics of the published papers, the program itself includes presentations, discussions, workshops, posters, and interactive sessions of different types. Whilst there may be generational differences in ways of working we believe that considering different learning styles is more important and that these learning styles are represented within all generations, so it is pleasing to have such a mixture of types of activity planned. It is hoped that these proceedings will be supplemented with material from the other sessions on the CPDWL website for those who couldn't be part of the Bologna experience.

The perception that new professionals are unwilling to take on leadership roles has been disproved by our experience of working together on this conference. It has been a very positive and enlightening experience to work across cultures, countries and generations. The notion of a lack of work ethic or drive to move forward has been dispelled. New professionals are willing to take on challenging responsibilities.

Working together was an enriching experience for both CPDWL and NPSIG. The New Professionals saw that CPDWL members' commitment attested to their passion for the profession as many eagerly produced workshops and presentations for the satellite conference. Veteran librarians have accumulated a wealth of knowl-

edge which allows them to make quick decisions based on their understanding of past experiences. At the same time the younger generation was keen to engage in dialogue to reach agreements including both groups' desires. In the end, it was enlightening to see how these camps did what they said they were going to do. Respect, professionalism and equal opportunity for participation were the basis for developing the first IFLA event of its nature including new and veteran librarians.

CPDWL leaders have found working with the New Professionals SIG to be wonderful. Chair Susan Schnuer says that

We have found the members to be committed to the project, willing to openly express their opinions and finding time to have some fun with the project. We have appreciated the speed of their communication and have learned to decipher the short-hand style of their notes. We have admired their ability in putting together a program that is balanced and interesting; a program with flexibility and time for conversations. The past year has been a great and enriching journey. We are delighted to have been one of the participants.

## IN CONCLUSION

We truly believe this historical conference is setting the foundation for future collaboration between new and seasoned professionals. It is our wish that the published papers will help equip library workers with tools to start strategic planning to move libraries into a new conceptual frame.

We need a library revolution. We ought to encourage a serious shake up of the library core, mind, heart and strategies followed by libraries worldwide. The time has come for librarians from all generations to open their minds and devise best ways of preserving the profession. Healthy communication is the key element to iron out generational issues and understand each other. This conference serves as a direct call to library decision makers to facilitate this dialogue.

## REFERENCES

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