

The Intentional Curriculum: An Exploration of Academic and Intellectual Politics

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A Starting Point

Discipline or profession, a field of study and practice is defined by some unifying *telos*, or purpose. This is no mere empirical, or even prescriptive, observation, especially for professions. A particular relationship should exist between professions and society—a relationship of obligation and integrity. Professions are based on expert provision of goods and/or services that enhance the well-being of people. That is, they should be. Howard Gardner and Lee Shulman (2005) have outlined the elements that typify professions:

In our view, six commonplaces are characteristic of all professions, properly construed: a commitment to serve in the interests of clients in particular and the welfare of society in general; a body of theory or special knowledge with its own principles of growth and reorganization; a specialized set of professional skills, practices, and performances unique to the profession; the development of capacity to render judgments with integrity under conditions of both technical and ethical uncertainty; an organized approach to learning from experience both individually and collectively and, thus, of growing new knowledge from the contexts of practice; and the development of a professional community responsible for the oversight and monitoring of quality in both practice and professional education (p. 14).

Their outline implies a question: How do these characteristics come to be; by what means are they communicated and embodied?

As would be expected, various professions identify the six characteristics in different ways. The challenge faced is to be specific in our explication of the characteristics for the profession of librarianship. The profession itself is the ultimate arbiter in determining clientele (or more appropriately for us, communities), the performance and actions of librarians, judgment based in integrity, and experiential learning. Education for the profession contributes to the above objectives, but it is most closely connected to developing theory and knowledge, plus imparting that knowledge to aspiring professionals. What inheres in the characteristics is a collective self-determination of goals (ends) and learning, experience, and action (means). Following Richard Bagnall (2002) I use “collective” rather than “common” because the end is a matter of aggregating the plurality of individual interests instead of a uniformly and universally shared view (p. 82). I should emphasize that our profession is a constrained collective—plural voices and interests that are nonetheless defined by a clear focal point. Programs of education are contributors to the self-determination, but they are not primary. Professional practice is the home of the purposes, methods, reasons, actions, and (perhaps most importantly) the communities that constitute being for professionals. The characteristics of a profession are tied to its locus of performance; in other words, the characteristics shape, and are shaped by, practice (the work of the profession) and praxis (the action of professionals). Moreover, the locus includes, not just the professionals and their institutions, but society.

None of the foregoing is intended to diminish the importance of educational programs; the intent is to emphasize that professional education is just that—education for a profession. The intention is further not to imply that professional education *follows*

practice. Inasmuch as education contributes to the realization of the characteristics that Gardner and Shulman described (especially the development of theory and knowledge), it is a co-leader. What is essential is the realization that both the profession and education for the profession—as ineluctably joined endeavors—exist for purposes other than themselves. This is a *telos* that extends well beyond rhetorical approbation, political positioning, and economic privileging. Again, these three factors may be means to an end, but they are not ends in themselves.

What Has Been Said

The position stated here may be seen as one of several that exist in librarianship today. To mention just one ostensibly differing viewpoint, Michael Buckland (2005) called for a “liberal arts” of education. Buckland chose to identify one particular work that, according to him, is anathema to a liberal arts education for the profession, Margaret Stieg’s *Challenge and Change* (1992). Her book, he said,

provides a conception of LIS (primarily library science) that emphasizes the teaching of professional and technical skills. There is no interest in teaching anything else. It is a conception of LIS that lacks exploration of what might be intellectually interesting. Stieg’s book is not the place to look for constructive discussion of what research the faculty might do or what kind of doctoral dissertation research could be done.

His assessment of the book is unwarranted and mistaken; Stieg’s undertaking is a critical one that unites education and profession. Buckland’s statement obscures the richness that has long been recognized in librarianship (including what he referred to as “Pierce Butler’s thin polemic *Introduction to Library Science* published back in 1933),” dissimulates by presuming a hostility to interdisciplinarity, and diffuses any educational focus by reducing professional education to imparting instrumental (he calls it utilitarian)

materialism. This evaluation of Buckland's piece is harsh for two reasons: (1) he is an influential individual whose thoughts receive (usually justified) attention, and (2) he presents little more than dicta by stating claims with neither evidence nor warrant. In fact, he does say that his proposal for education can carry political import; as such it is an opportunistic ideology that should be recognized for what it is. I hasten to emphasize here that my assessment is grounded in education for librarianship; an academic program can certainly aspire to do more than this, but as long as it *does* aim to educate for the profession, there are some imperatives that are inescapable.

If Buckland misses the target in stating the profession's reason for being, then what is at the heart of librarianship? Ken Haycock (2005) has tried to answer the question:

We still focus on a specified community of users (whether geographic or organizational), collect resources (both physical and virtual) for that community and its needs, organize this information for ease of access and knowledge production, preserve the human experience, provide programs and services to improve connections to information and ideas, and ensure quality management such that the orchestration of players and funds results in valuable and valued services delivered effectively and efficiently for the maximum good (p. 18).

Wayne Wiegand (2005) has presented a somewhat different vision: "we have to make substantial adjustments in our research and teaching agendas (and especially in core curriculum) to accommodate questions of place and reading that are (and have been) so important to our patrons" (p. 61). There is merit to both of these proposals; in fact, it is difficult to take issue with them. The challenge, then, is to incorporate them formally into a working curriculum. A working curriculum *must* serve the needs of the students

who will become professionals. Anything less is not only a disservice; it is an abdication of a fundamental responsibility.

There is very little formal discussion of core curriculum in library and information science (LIS). Karen Markey (2004) has, though, conducted an analysis of ALA-accredited programs' Web sites in order to identify requirements. She found that four courses tend to be required (as of 2002) by programs: organization of information, reference, foundations, and management. When it comes to reference, foundations, and management courses (considered individually), about 20-40% of the programs do not require them. Markey also found that the percentage of programs requiring information retrieval declined, and those requiring a practicum (while increasing) totaled just over 10%. The data Markey presented includes some hints at even less consistency in requirements. Organization of information, for example, may include a cataloging and classification course, but it may also include indexing and abstracting. There is no clear indication that there is an agreed-upon core curriculum. She concluded that, "The author's experience with changing the curriculum at the School of Information at the University of Michigan has demonstrated that *faculty* are the key to making change [emphasis in original]" (p. 336), and that, "The author concludes that new educational trends are primarily user-centered. The curriculum remains strong in traditional coursework that seeks greater understanding of users, their information-seeking behavior, and the sources and services that libraries provide to users generally and to special populations" (p. 338).

Her evidence, however, indicates that new curricular directions may not be aimed at librarianship. Courses on competitive intelligence, e-commerce, information and

database architecture, and natural language processing may be very useful to some students, but one may wonder if the resources of an LIS program are best employed in these areas. Universities tend to have computer science departments, schools of business, and other units whose primary curricular objectives include such areas. My own institution, the University of Missouri-Columbia, has units that offer just those kinds of courses, and our students may avail themselves of the courses if they fit the individuals' career and intellectual goals. It would seem that the wisest use of collective institutional resources, the wisest means to achieve social, intellectual, and professional good, would be to cooperate across academic units so as to offer the richest, deepest, and most focused programs possible. Of course, if opportunism is the driving force, no amount of reason will convince opportunists that social obligations are better achieved through interdisciplinary cooperation in curriculum and research, if cooperation prevents some material gain.

What Markey observed related to a core curriculum appears to affirm the trend noted previously as part of the KALIPER project, sponsored by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE). The KALIPER report (2000) read, "Based on the Examination of mission statements, course titles, descriptions, and syllabi, LIS schools and programs proclaim that their domain includes cognitive and social aspects of how information and information systems are created, organized, managed, filtered, routed, retrieved, accessed, used, evaluated, and disseminated." The points are indisputable; all of the elements listed could certainly be seen as essential to a master's program. They should not be seen as exhaustive, though. There are individual, social, cognitive, affective, intellectual, recreational, and other purposes for the profession that

do not necessarily entail “information-as-thing.” The KALIPER report further noted that there are factors that can both enhance and inhibit curricular change, including, “demands of students, employers, graduates, and professional associations for graduate competencies.” There are two important points that are missing from the observation—knowledge and the profession itself. The report, along with all of the other statements above, reflect (to an extent) efforts to define a foundation for the profession, but the foundation is neither articulated as necessary nor grounded in an analysis of the profession in society.

Social and Political Tensions

It may seem off the topic to speak of politics while addressing the issue of curricula in professional education, but, as is the case with so many human endeavors, the political impinges upon the rational and the ethical. Unfocused curricula are not uncommon across campuses, especially at larger universities, that are concerned with attracting students as paying customers (a political choice). There is a cultural context for higher education’s choice. Bagnall (2002) suggested that the context includes,

The privatisation [sic] of responsibility, value and exchange; the concomitant erosion of state power to act in the public good; the pluralisation [sic] and the fragmentation of social structures and cultural formations, including those of higher education provision and engagement; erosion of the authority of the academic disciplines and professions as the legitimators of knowledge on behalf of the state (pp. 77-78).

The forces Bagnall identified are powerful and affect professions and educational programs; underlying values and goals may be distorted for some forms of material gain, but to the detriment of the objectives that Gardner and Shulman articulate.

I would propose that there is a more unified imperative of which the phenomena Bagnall lists are symptomatic—transformation from concern for public good to concern for private good, with the following losses to epistemic and political life. While there is more rhetoric devoted to knowledge in current discourse, less seems to “count” as knowledge within an ideologically framed social and educational structure. While there is more talk of politics as well, there is less concern for a collective civitas or polity. Even to speak of a *core* curriculum runs counter to powerful forces. Whether from the right or the left, higher education today is subject to the tugs of classical liberalism that privileges the individual and a sweeping conception of property, including intellectual effort, educational programs, and curricular direction. The counter to classical liberalism is not conservatism, but a kind of socialism. In that vein, a core curriculum aims at a collective goal—for the profession as well as for professionals. Yes, this goal is that of a public good, a betterment of people’s lives through expertise applied democratically and with equity. “Universities are more likely to serve society well not by adopting the quantified values of the market but by preserving a realm where the nonquantifiable values of intellectual excellence and integrity, and the supporting moral principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination, flourish (Gutmann, 1999, p. 183). Gutmann’s words hint at a paradox in liberalism—an almost total focus on what we can call positive freedom (“freedom to”) with no attention to negative freedom (“freedom from”). The positive freedom is a siren’s song, calling us to a sort of political hedonism in which individuals’ desires hold sway. Buckland’s suggestion that we move to a liberal arts of LIS, for example, could lead to an educational hedonism that would ill serve the

profession and society. Individual and unconnected (from both the profession and society) curricular sampling does not lead to a shared ethos or body of knowledge.

This political background applies directly to the discussion taking place today in LIS education. There is a decided strain of liberalism in the rhetoric of some forceful voices that expresses an individualistic, sometimes reductive, often asocial, and occasionally disingenuous platform that leads to self-serving isolation. That liberalism, though, can devolve into a Hobbesian state wherein all behavior is based in a drive for advantage. In an early work Thomas Hobbes (1998) wrote, “in the natural state of men, sure and irresistible power gives the right of ruling and commanding those who cannot resist; so that the right to do anything whatsoever is an essential and direct attribute of omnipotence” (p. 31). In light of what Hobbes said, we can read a proclamation by John King, Dean of the School of Information at the University of Michigan (2005), with an eye to the political element of curriculum:

Turning now to issues that lie more within our field, there is the “core curriculum” crisis. This is the one where practitioners claim that educators are misbehaving. . . . There is a simple but brutal truth to all academic accreditation efforts, and this truth applies to accreditation in the LIS field: elite educational institutions accredit accreditation processes, and those accreditation processes, in turn, accredit less elite educational institutions. Any accreditation process that alienates the elite institutions will fail, and any effort to reform LIS accreditation to start mandating what should be taught will be rejected by the elite institutions (p. 15).

The question that King’s statement raises is: Does a Hobbesian gauntlet thrown down require a Hobbesian response? The obvious answer is, no. There is a response to this kind of liberalism that does not accept the discursive strategy that King’s piece illustrates. For one thing, we can refute Hobbes and King by drawing from Geuss (2001) and

asserting that there is no natural right (the power of every individual to everything, which leads to those with greater resources exercising force over those who have lesser resources). As Geuss (2001) has said, “Thinking about the social and political world in terms of rights encourages illusory assumptions of stability and predictability. This is exactly what makes it useful in the short term and in well-defined political contexts of the peaceful operation of social institutions” (p. 147). For King, the stability rests with two presumed facts: (1) the elite lead by virtue of their eliteness, and others should follow their lead, and (2) an embrace of change, especially technological change, is, in fact, the stability that the elites invoke as an instrument of rule.

The liberal (even libertarian) ideal that is manifest in simplistic utility maximization appears to be the hallmark of the programmatic and curricular directions of some LIS programs. Raymond von Dran (2004), touting Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies and other similar programs, stated, “By taking this perspective—by putting the “I” in IT education—“I” school can add value and serve people, expanding human capability through information” (p. 9). Perhaps most notable, the driving force behind both means and ends is capitalism. Much could be said about capitalism’s influence over higher education and the profession (both good and ill), but the emphasis here is one particular factor. Following Bellah and others (1996), who recounted Ronald Reagan’s identification of “we the people” with people’s occupations, curricular initiatives that replace polity with economy distort the three elements of concern in the present context: professions, education, and society. In particular, critics of librarianship and a curriculum aimed at the profession point to specific tasks that have been essential in libraries. “Reference,” then, is merely a transaction of potential benefit to the

questioner; in other words, it is reduced to an economic exchange (see Gandel, 2005).

This brief critique sets the stage for some suggestions regarding curricula for librarianship.

Librarianship and Curriculum

Returning to the starting point and the characteristics of a profession identified by Gardner and Shulman, we have a basis for the development of a core curriculum. This basis does not necessarily include the courses or course content that may presently typify program requirements. The question to begin with is: What do professional librarians need to know to begin their careers? The first step to an answer to that question is that the knowledge (the *epist_m_* and the *techn_*) has to be based in a historical consciousness. The liberal-capitalist curriculum that has a decidedly *laissez faire* character seeks, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998) argued, to abolish history, to relegate it to the unconsciousness (pp. 56-57). Historical unconsciousness deletes both telos and reason, so that a new purpose—one that is dismissive of the past—can be created. The new creation does not limit itself to the profession's past; it also replaces the more general social history. The necessary consciousness is certainly no mere antiquarianism or chronological erudition; it is cognizance of present being as it has been shaped over time. This last point cannot be overemphasized; “being” is historical and phenomenological. It is a totality of existence, not only of self, but of self-and-other. This definition of being captures the essential relationship between librarianship and society; the entirety of a curriculum, and a core curriculum in particular, relies on this definition.

A preliminary answer to the question of what professionals need to know involves a binary division of education—skills and knowledge. Skills are, in some ways, the more

readily identifiable components of an educational program. The profession demands that practitioners be competent users of information technology (able to make effective use of operating systems, software, databases, and other tools). Other competencies include (not exhaustively) the application of cataloging rules so as to insure effective access to materials, the ability to account for the finances of the organization's operations, an understanding of the basics of managing an organization, and a close familiarity with collections and accessible information provided by the organization. In short, the mundane aspects of practice (although not praxis) can be translated into skills that can be taught in LIS programs. However, if education for the professions contains nothing more than these skills, LIS programs need not exist. Some apprenticeships or training experiences would suffice.

Knowledge is a different matter. If Gardner and Shulman are correct and theory, judgment, and connection with communities are important, education for the profession is not simply the design of a training program. For example, the Standards for Accreditation state that organization and description should be a component of a program's curriculum. One way to fulfill the letter of the Standard is to provide course content on cataloging rules, metadata applications, and/or assignment of classificatory identifiers (such as call numbers) to texts. Nothing at the level of practice suggests any of the characteristics of a profession. Organization and description are intellectual acts (praxis) that demand an understanding of the ontology of things (what they are, or, more importantly, what makes them what they are) and of the metaphysics of texts (what formal communication entails, as well as how the communication is intentionally created). Of necessity, understanding of such matters requires a facility with language

and an ability to comprehend the potentiality and the limitation of language. In the former instance (ontology) the challenge is to use linguistic structures to describe things; in the latter case the challenge is to categorize language with language. Anything short of this kind of complex treatment of organization fails the profession and society.

Moreover, failure to comprehend the foregoing can be seen as symptomatic of the shortcomings of education for librarianship. This may sound harsh, but fulfillment of the characteristics Gardner and Shulman spoke of requires critical apprehension, not only of the hows of practice, but of the whys of praxis.

Such critical apprehension readily and openly admits to the dialectic that inevitably typifies profession and education. In fact, the approach grounds the discourse in the dialectic so that it can be neither ignored nor avoided. A framework for discussion can help minimize, if not eliminate, the effects of a manipulative rhetorical strategy. For example, when King (2005) said that the American Bar Association's (ABA) standards for legal education are not prescriptive (p. 15) (in an effort to deny that need for *any* prescriptive educational standards) he fails to add that the ABA requires that a law school include "the substantive law generally regarded as necessary to effective and responsible participation in the legal profession" (<http://www.abanet.org/legaled/standards/chapter3.html>). Could the ABA accredit a law school that does not require contracts, torts, civil procedure, criminal law, property law, and constitutional law? Or can it be that the ABA assumes this content under the requirement of "substantive law" and then examines the processes and effects (outcomes) of the program at any given law school? The two questions are important to an assessment of accreditation of legal education, precluding any dissimulation.

Borrowing from Andrew Abbott's (2001) description of sociology, LIS education can be characterized by interstitiality. LIS education finds itself in between in the sense that it is both a middle ground between forces in LIS generally and the site for the tension between the forces. Figure 1 illustrates some of the interstices that educational programs have to deal with.

Figure 1

Interstices of LIS Education

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Praxis</i>
<i>Profession</i>	<i>Discipline</i>
<i>Professional Associations</i>	<i>Universities & Colleges</i>
<i>Professionals</i>	<i>Educators</i>
<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Objects</i>
<i>Communities (real)</i>	<i>Community (abstract)</i>
<i>Organizational Being</i>	<i>Individual Being</i>
<i>Doing</i>	<i>Inquiring</i>
<i>Immanence</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>

Each of the above pairs can be envisioned as a continuum with much middle space between the poles' LIS education must engage that middle space. A curriculum, accepting its interstitial nature, can take a cue from a metaphor offered by Michel Foucault (1977):

[T]he visionary experience arises from the black and white surface of printed signs, from the closed and dusty volume that opens with a flight of forgotten words; fantasies are carefully deployed in the hushed library, with its columns of books, with its titles aligned on shelves to form a tight enclosure, but within confines that also liberate impossible worlds. The imaginary now

resides between the book and the lamp. . . . The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is a phenomenon of the library (pp. 90-91).

Organization, mediation, management, selecting and accessing, along with people's reading, seeking, encountering, and knowing all exist between the book and the lamp. The territory of this space is large, but it is finite. It is there that a core curriculum can emerge.

So we come back to the characteristics that Gardner and Shulman identify. In fulfilling the responsibilities inherent in the characteristics—all of the characteristics—we see very clearly that education for the profession is not separate from the profession; both are parts of an integrated whole. There is an extension from the characteristics that can apply specifically to librarianship. As long as there are texts, images, and sounds there will be the need to organize these entities so that they can be used. As long as there are human beings who want and need the contents of texts, images, and sounds there will be the need to provide mediation services. As long as texts, images, and sounds are produced with the intention of communicating them there will be the need for expertise in acquiring and providing access to them. As long as communicative content is ordered and accessible there will be the need to manage the organizations that fulfill this need. As long as technologies facilitate the use of communicative content there will be the need for competence in the use of technologies. Notice that this litany does not include specific courses, but it does, *de facto* if not *de jure*, require clear and convincing evidence that graduates of programs accredited by ALA are able meet those needs. This is no different from the ABA requiring that

graduates of law schools know about substantive law. The culmination of the foregoing is that librarianship is clearly a profession that should embrace the six characteristics discussed here, that education for librarianship be fully integrated with the characteristics of the profession, and that a core curriculum reflect the integration. Anything less, including standing apart from the profession, is utter abdication of the responsibilities of any program to educate for librarianship.

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