

The Theory of Human Caring and Service Friendly Librarians

Abstract

This reflective essay analyzes Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring¹ in the context of service friendly librarians. Aspects of Carl Roger's Actualization Tendencies² and Kay Vandergrift's' Ethic of Care³ are also discussed. How the cultivation of sensitivity to oneself and others can create a service friendly environment for the information user is a topic worthy of examination. Management theories which encourage team building as a way to better the organization (with the highest regard for the user) emphasize a culture of listening to the voice of the customer, the voice of staff, the voice of the process, and the voice of the organization.⁴ Librarians need to remain supported and informed of appropriate ways to deal with the user. They need to know how to manage themselves, inculcate the mission of their institutions, and develop qualities of human caring. The central task of library and information science education must be to help students; faculty and practitioners learn how to form caring relationships with their users and their communities because the profession is about educating mankind. The knowledge, skills, and values of librarianship are humanistic in orientation, even though expertise in technological tools is essential. Human caring is a normative standard of library service. Technical standards can change over time, but access to information must remain inviolate. Librarians adjust to local needs and aspirations even if their users are diverse within local needs and aspirations. Because users tend to be exceedingly diverse, they resist a common definition. In 1999, Dr. Marsha Bates⁵ wrote:

At this historical juncture, information scientists need to become more conscious of the thought-world we are operating out of, so that we can communicate it more rapidly and effectively to large numbers of new people, and so that we can continue to influence the future of information in the twenty-first century. (p. 1061).

The premise of this essay is that, by accepting human caring as a foundational concept of library and information science practice, librarians will become more conscious of the thought world operating not only at their own level, but at the

¹ Watson's Caring Theory. <http://www2.uchsc.edu/son/caring/content/evolution.asp> accessed 5/6/2007

² Boeree, C. George. Carl Rogers 1902-1987. <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/rogers.html> accessed 15/6/2007

³ Vandergrift, Kay. Journey or Destination: Female Voices in Youth Literature. <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/books/KAYMOS.pdf> accessed 12/6/2007

⁴ Phipps, Shelley (Spring 2001). Beyond Measuring Service Quality: Learning from the Voices of the Customers, the Staff, the Processes, and the Organization. *Library Trends*. Vol 49, No. 4. Retrieved June 15, 2007 from Academic Search Premier.

⁵ Bates, Marsha. (1999). The Invisible Substrate of Information Science. *The Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 50, (12), 1043-1059.

level of the user. This foundational concept is the best way to influence the future of information in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Because we live in a time when technology has played an increasing role in information provision, the responsibility to bring records of human achievement to assist in a greater understanding among people has never been greater. Twenty-first century librarians have a global view, yet they are still drawn to serve their audiences through the desire to interact with clients in a positive and humanistic fashion. As library students they have depended on faculty members for assistance in conducting research and writing papers and have inculcated the values shown to them. When students and faculty members work together, both are fulfilling a purpose of information literacy and lifelong learning. The importance of bringing meaning and credibility to library service through continued reflection and inquiry into information needs continues after graduate school and is an essential aspect of professionalism. A caring disposition is perhaps the greatest asset a librarian can bring to the profession and on that the librarian develops along with knowledge of resources. Since users are no longer just consumers of information, but contributors themselves, the importance of such a service mentality deepens simply because it empowers. Acknowledgement of library service as a soft science, a caring science, brings theory and practice together in a way which promotes teaching and learning. In his dissertation entitled *Interpersonal Communication in the Reference Interview*, Richard Crouch⁶ wrote: “The librarian’s role is to minimize the inquirer’s intellectual and emotional effort in seeking information”. This is no less true in the Digital Age.

⁶ Crouch, Richard Keith. *Interpersonal Communication in the Reference Interview*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Toronto (Canada). DAI 42/10 A., p. 4189, 1981.

Discussion

Adele Fasick writes “We welcome and support all people in their enjoyment of reading and pursuit of lifelong learning”.⁷ Such a profile of the librarian as an “information caregiver” clearly puts clientele needs first. Optimism is fostered through a welcoming approach to the library and its environs. Carl Rogers’s⁸ Self-actualization Theory - the innate tendency toward growth that motivates all human behavior - can also be applied to service friendly librarianship. Librarians encourage lifelong learning; they encourage self-development. They encourage the positive self-regard that Rogers spoke of, by showing positive regard to others. Rogers states that a therapist, in order to be effective, must have three very special qualities: (1) congruence -- genuineness, honesty with the client. (2) empathy - the ability to feel what the client feels and (3) respect – acceptance and unconditional positive regard towards the client. These special qualities are what an effective librarian generates as she interacts with people.

The process by which the library can make a contribution in sociological, cultural, and human terms to society is via the service given by the librarian and found in the literature of science, social science and the humanities. The leadership role of librarianship is tied to the basic mission of library services and has not changed in 200 years. The personality of the librarian can determine if the information is used at all. Status is gendered, however. Rossiter⁹ states that the stereotypical status of “womanly activities”, that is, non-competitive and nurturing kinds of feelings and behavior, is seen rhetorically as the opposite of “science” which is rigorous, impersonal, competitive, and

⁸ Boeree, C. George. Carl Rogers 1902-1987. <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/rogers.html> accessed 5/6/2007

⁹ Rossiter, Margaret W. *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action 1940 – 1972*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

unemotional. Applying research to practice involves the service role and that role is often not held in high esteem – for many reasons. Preparing students to become librarian leaders through service is a qualitative aspect of graduate education. Leaders have a capacity for self-direction and lifelong learning. Rather than asking what do people want to know, the librarian can ask “How can I intervene?” ; “What questions can be asked?”; “How can I enter the user’s informing processes?”; “What can I deliver that will be informing to the unique individual asking the question?” The approach is reflective, flexible, and communication based.¹⁰ It is also historically indicative of women who pioneered library service to children; service to children was to be intelligent and sympathetic, and this was the most ethical way to approach them. Not unlike Watson’s science of caring, Kay Vandergrift¹¹ promotes the ethic of care. In the past, the advocacy role of caring was possible in the library because the library was a channel of hospitality, idealism and reverence for culture.

Jean Watson’s¹² Theory of Human Caring, proposed as a framework for nurses, and is philosophically congruent with Fasick’s optimism, Rogers’s positive self-regard, Vandegrift’s ethic of care, and contemporary global approaches to education and library promotion. Jean Watson’s caring science theory is congruent with the traditional role of librarians, predominantly women, drawn to a traditional role. Her theory states:

¹⁰ Dervin, Brenda and others. The Development of Strategies for Dealing with the Information Needs of Urban Residents. Final Report. ED125640. Washington, D.C.

¹¹ Vandergrift, Kay. Journey or Destination: Female Voices in Youth Literature. <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/books/KAYMOS.pdf>. Accessed 12/6/2007.

¹²Watson, Jean. Dr. Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring. University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. www2.uchsc.edu/son/caring/content. Accessed 26/9/2007.

Caring science encompasses a humanitarian, human science orientation to human caring processes, phenomena and experiences. Caring science includes arts and humanities as well as science. A caring science perspective is grounded in a relational ontology of being-in-relation, and a world view of unity and connectedness of All. Transpersonal Caring acknowledges unity of life and connections that move in concentric circles of caring - from individual, to others, to community, to world, to Planet Earth, to the universe. Caring science investigations embrace inquiries that are reflective, subjective and interpretative as well as objective-empirical and Caring science inquiry includes ontological, philosophical, ethical, historical inquiry and studies. In addition, caring science includes multiple epistemological approaches to inquiry including clinical and empirical, but is open to moving into new areas of inquiry that explore other ways of knowing, for example, aesthetic, poetic, narrative, personal, intuitive, kinesthetic, evolving consciousness, intentionality, metaphysical - spiritual, as well as moral-ethical knowing.

Because this theory gives librarians so many epistemological ways to look at the people they serve, the questions they ask, and the way information is used, the librarian can easily internalize the role of servant-leader.

James Heaphey¹³ explores this idea in an article entitled *Servant-leadership in Public Libraries*. Servant-leaders possess the ability to listen, be empathetic and compassionate, encourage growth in people, have foresight and focus on community. He states that servant-leaders must be able to assume duties carried out by those in more subordinate positions rather than maintain rigid hierarchies. Clearly, what makes a good librarian is a

¹³ Heaphey, James. Servant-leadership in public libraries. *Indiana Libraries* 25(3), 2006

servant-leader, propelled by human caring as well as knowledge of resources; therefore, the context of interaction with individuals in the community is essentially qualitative. More quantitative, systems based approaches were used in the past because LIS research concentrated on systems rather than individuals using those systems. Management style in public libraries tends to be traditionally hierarchical and chain of command or systems based. Although qualitative research in LIS literature has gained strength in the last twenty years with a focus on investigating user needs and user-seeking behavior, Waseem Afzal¹⁴ writes: “at the same time, a lack of research to explore the importance of context in the development of those needs is prevalent.” (p. 22). Afzal suggests exploring context to build LIS theory and address multidimensional ways of interaction because “the nature of research problems that have been declared to be worthy of exploration have contributed to this lack of theory building” (p. 23). The profession of librarianship shares much in common with teaching, counseling, and nursing. The links between these professions are clearly worthy of exploration because all have grounding in service.

Conclusions

In order to determine how adaptive we can be to face problems and opportunities associated with theory building in library and information science, we must consider service friendly librarians as powerful designers of the information and research landscape of tomorrow. Librarians are experts in the context of the information milieu.

¹⁴Afzal, Waseem. An Argument for the Increased Use of Qualitative Research in LIS. *Emporia State Research Studies*, vol. 43, p. 22-25 (2006).

The milieu may be subjectivist, but in the end, it is more participatory and therefore coherent. We can speculate as Joanne Passet¹⁵ did that because early women librarians accepted modest salaries and less-than-satisfactory working conditions to gain experience, be near their families or to ‘minimize health limitations’. Ironically, dependent relationships with female library educators and directors, caring as they were, tended to have a deprofessionalization effect. Speaking of the time period of 1887-1912, Passet writes: “In the final analysis, the library educators succeeded admirably in placing their students, but, like female pioneers in other feminized fields, failed to empower their progeny or the profession.” (p. 228). This was in the past, however, and the future holds much more promise. Today librarians are more conscious of the past, their own thought world and the complexity of what they do.

¹⁵Passet, Joanne. Entering the Professions: Women Library Educators and the Placement of Female Students, 1887-1912. *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2 Summer 1991, pp. 207-228.