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The Challenge of Teaching to the Heart and Mind

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It's probably a safe assumption that almost all of the contributors to this special issue of the *Oregon Library Association Quarterly* are practicing librarians. These remarks may be a bit of a departure from the other comments. Actually, this may be a fortuitous time for a library and information science educator to be speaking about the rewards, the gratifications, the excitement, and the sense of purpose of teaching in this field. The recent ALA-sponsored Congress on Professional Education was convened to address some concerns with LIS education now and into the future. I won't pretend that there is no reason for concern; the degree of change we've all faced has produced some tensions and, perhaps, some uncertainty. The change has certainly affected LIS master's programs, and many programs have altered their curricula and even their missions in some response to the change. I will hasten to state here that the following represents only my own personal experience and thoughts; I do not pretend to speak for all of LIS education or even any one program.

With the above as a preface, let me introduce myself. I earned a master's degree in LIS in 1979 and worked for several years in an academic library. Early in my career I was drawn to the educational side of the profession, in part because it would present an opportunity to investigate some of the questions that the profession faces, and in larger part because it would offer an opportunity to influence the future of the profession. As we all know, the particulars of an educational program tend to be somewhat fleeting; we may recall only a limited number of specific exercises or assignments a few years after graduation, if any at all. On the other hand, a rewarding educational experience can have a transforming effect. It can reshape our thinking and our ways of looking at the purpose of the profession. It is that potential that drew me to the life of a teacher. This may seem a bit egotistical, but I've always felt that by reaching people through teaching and scholarship, I could realize one of my deepest desires—to change thinking in LIS.

Some aspects of teaching are skill-based and can be learned. These include the organization of a course, communication of expectations for student performance, effective presentation of material, use of various media, and eliciting participation by all involved. These elements are necessary for a meaningful educational experience, but they may not be sufficient. I believe something additional is needed for the experience to be transformative—the teacher has to be genuinely excited by the content. The teacher must believe that the course content is rooted in the purpose of our profession and that learning is the route to realizing that purpose. In my own experience, the teachers who have made a difference have been those who are not just knowledgeable and who don't just have a command of pedagogical skills. The transforming teachers, for me, have been those who have been able to shift my entire perspective, to alter the ways in which I've thought. These individuals, among whom have been Edward G. Holley and Lester Asheim, have brought out in me not just an understanding of the functions of libraries and librarianship, but a deep sense of personal fulfillment in this work.

Of course that sense of fulfillment is essentially reflective of what students experience. It does the teacher little

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good to think that she or he is doing a great job if none of the students really learn. The sense of fulfillment extends beyond learning (although learning is certainly an essential part of the experience). I feel the greatest personal reward when a student becomes excited about our profession and is motivated to contribute to librarianship. It's extremely gratifying to see former students at conferences and to find out that they are now active in our associations and are working at state, regional, and national levels for the betterment of the profession. Without that activity by students I confess there is a feeling of failure. As Juanita Benedicto said in her call for papers, "Good librarianship cannot be reduced to systematic strategy or learned technique." There is much more than that to a profession.

We have to recognize that it's not possible for a teacher to give students identity—that must come from within. It is possible for the teacher to exemplify what the

profession and the discipline stand for. That necessitates a genuine sense of identity on the part of the teacher. The individuals mentioned above showed me, during my own student experience, the possibilities of librarianship. They never failed to present their ideas about the purpose of librarianship or to communicate their own quest to know more about what we do. That intellectual curiosity, so essential to their roles as teachers, helped me to find my own way. I should hasten to add that the discovery of professional identity is never complete; it's not a single event. It's a lifelong journey of learning, of seeking knowledge. Realization that there is no end to discovery may be daunting, but acceptance that learning and discovery continue throughout our lives is, for me, one of the most exciting and sustaining parts of professional life.

I mentioned earlier that the ideal educational experience is transformative: it should elicit a change in all involved. That requires my being open to learning from students, hearing their thoughts and ideas and finding meaning in what they say. It also requires, I believe, searching for intersections and unifications of the various elements of our profession. A frequently-stated concern by students and practitioners is that educational programs focus too much on theory, to the detriment of practice. I see our educational responsibility as seeking out the conjoining of theory and practice. It's not possible to have an idea of professional purpose without theorizing. Each time we consider better ways to organize collections and to serve communities we think about the conceptual foundations of librarianship. These are substantial challenges, but they also represent the excitement of our field. They represent the most fundamental task of the teacher—enabling an understanding on the parts of students that practice is a critical process, a process of conception and then application of the ideas we develop regarding organization, service, etc. The challenge for me is developing such an understanding for myself. What this means is that I have to be willing to transform.

A recent experience probably illustrates most clearly what can be the best thing about teaching. During the spring semester of 1999 several students expressed the desire to discuss the issues that are affecting us all in librarianship and further said that they didn't find sufficient opportunity for discussion in formal classes. We decided to get together once a week at a local coffee shop. Each of us brings something to the discussion—an article in a journal, a posting from a listserv, a statement from a Web site. We can then exchange ideas about the topics the students are most interested in. This has been a very rewarding experience. Everyone is there by choice, not because we're scheduled for a class. Everyone can get as animated and passionate about a topic as she or he wants. Each person can challenge the rest. The structure of an official course sometimes limits the subject matter and the willingness of people to speak. A less formal setting allows everyone to shed some insecurity and to explore ideas. I look forward to

each Thursday afternoon and the opportunity to see the light in students' eyes and to hear the excitement in their voices. Maybe that's the ultimate teaching experience. Maybe that's what makes it worthwhile for me.

It may be apparent from this piece that I really can't separate mind from heart. For me the excitement of learning and discovery strikes at the core of my being. This is what led me to the job I have, and it's what keeps me in it. It's difficult to describe the almost physical thrill of a new idea or of coming to a clearer understanding of some issue related to our discipline. Trying to instill some of that excitement, trying to foster the connection between mind and heart in students, is the purpose I find in LIS education. And just as mind and heart are linked for me, so too are the personal and the professional. My answers to the questions of what I do and what I am would be essentially the same. I don't think I'd want it any other way. ☐

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