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## Editorial

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# Editorial

Change or become irrelevant. That seems to be the essence of the messages bombarding libraries and librarians in this new century. We must be the change brought about by the explosion of information and technological innovation. Librarians are now challenged to create new paradigms and discard many of the old assumptions about library service.

Most of these comments seem to be the result of the onslaught of the digital information age. Online reference, databases of all shapes and sizes, Web pages, workstations, webcasts and many other Internet and computer related developments are the most often mentioned agents of change in our profession. But new developments have occurred in nearly every discipline. Now the information gleaned by researchers using the latest in medical imaging has brought new knowledge about a unique and powerful information processor—the human brain. The human brain is an incredibly complex and sensitive organ. No one really realized how sensitive it is to outside stimuli as it is developing until scientists could actually observe brain activity with the use of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans and other non-invasive technologies.

We now know that brain development takes place even before a child is born. We also have learned that the first three years of a child's life are the most crucial for healthy brain development, yet this development continues through adolescence. My proposal to have an issue of the *Quarterly* focus on an exploration of cognitive de-

velopment and libraries comes from my growth and development as a children's librarian. My original training and experience was as a reference librarian and cataloger. I enjoyed the challenges of these positions and never really imagined myself working with children. Then, after several years as a cataloger I had an opportunity to become a children's librarian. The time was right, as I was the father of two young children and had become very interested in children in general, but I knew next to nothing about working with children in libraries.

As I worked to gain the many skills I needed to be a good children's librarian and to serve our young library users, I realized it was necessary to learn about brain and cognitive development. I wanted to understand the mystery of billions of neurons making connections and how all these cells became a functioning human brain! As I learned more about brain development, and read of recent discoveries concerning the effect of parenting and environment on the development of a child's brain, I realized that the ongoing question of "nature versus nurture" at least in regard to this subject, now had a one word answer—yes!

In this issue, MaryKay Dahlgren presents the latest literature on cognitive development in the early years of life. This is a study of enormous value to anyone interested in working with children in libraries.

Recent research confirms brain development continues through adolescence. In fact, there may be some physiological basis for a teenager

to suddenly become an "airhead." This continuing process of cognitive development has a profound impact on the way libraries and librarians serve teens, and on the quality of that service. John Sexton presents an illuminating glimpse of teen cognitive development and its impact on library services.

Ellen Fader, in an article originally written for the Public Library Division of the American Library Association, presents the latest on incorporating the latest knowledge of cognitive development in children's programming.

Brain development and learning are inextricably intertwined. Fred Reenstjerna explores the crucial distinction between "life long learning" and "life long schooling" and the implications this has for both the library user and the library professional.

Finally, in my article I attempt to present the unique challenges of children's librarianship and why youth librarians feel so strongly about their chosen work. As more research becomes available it seems clear that librarians need to have a greater understanding of the complex continuum of brain development and cognitive functions in youth and how they are linked to the process of life long learning.

—Dan R. White  
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