Mary Pat Fallon

The tale of two cultures

Reflections on changing roles

It was the best of times, it was the worst times . . ." clearly too dramatic for my tale, but it worked for Dickens. My tale involves culture, as most tales do in some form or another. Think of Davey Crockett or Brer Rabbit.

It's interesting to note that culture can be defined in so many different ways, but they all share a general theme. Look at this: "two cultures" is defined as "science and the arts, considered as being in opposition to each other." And then there is "culture clash," which represents a "conflict or discord resulting from the interaction of (two) different cultures." Or even one that has become very familiar to us "culture shock," a state of distress or disorientation brought about by sudden immersion in or subjection to an unfamiliar culture.

All sound devastating but worth exploring. And I hope the outcome will not be as tragic as Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities.*

My tale started three years ago, and during those years, I am proud to say that I experienced all three types of cultures. Now what did I do to be fortunate enough to have these experiences? What is my secret? I underwent a transformation from a practicing librarian to a full-time faculty member of a Graduate School of Library and Information. I didn't have to change my place of employment, but my different role represented a new dimension.

Now, my tale doesn't involve the range of characters or diverse situations in *A Tale of Two Cities,* but perhaps you'll see the revolutionary or reconciliation themes present in Dickens' novel. Dickens' novel is divided into three main books, and the titles of these work for me.

Book one: Recalled to life

Let's go back to the beginning. Always a good place to start. All three definitions of culture represent some type of opposition, discord, or distress. The opposition factor was an internal conflict. I loved being a librarian and now had the opportunity to teach future librarians. However, the first year I continually asked myself why I had left the comfort of the library? In fact, throughout that year I thought of Dorothy's determination to leave home, her experience in the Land of Oz and then her desire to go home "because there is no place like home." Somewhat wrenching isn't it? And, of course, I couldn't go home.

I loved the most important part of what I was doing—teaching. The students were smart and talented, and during that year I learned so much about librarianship and became much more aware of the changes happening in our field. Yet, I also felt isolated. Instead of being part of a busy library, and a social setting where I had spent ten years, I was in my own office mostly trying to figure out how to get out, along with figuring out how to teach my classes. I was disoriented by this "sudden immersion . . . . to an unfamiliar culture." University colleagues would often comment that they didn't see me any more. It wasn't because I was trying to be invisible, but my role had changed. A librarian serves the entire university and now I represented a slice of it.

Book two: The golden thread

So as a librarian I'm big on lists. I had made the change and now had to look at the similarities and differences in my new and virtually unexplored world. I had to explore the positives of the connection. What in fact threaded my experiences together? What was the same? Well,

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of course the place and the people. I already knew my dean and my faculty colleagues. I knew who did what and where to go when I needed help. I didn't have a lot to figure out other than how to feel comfortable in this new role. The differences—I was constantly learning, not only out of need, but as almost a rebirth of my initial interest in the field. I no longer worked five days a week—nothing wrong with that—but I was working harder (and please don't tell my former director) than I had in years. I was learning to communicate in a different way and also learning new priorities. Nothing major here, but I still felt a need to identify my "two cultures."

Librarians, of course, are not only big on lists but also on research. So I took the next step and researched different types of cultures and forgot the previous culture definitions for the time being. First discovery, I identified four types of cultures (and here I am already struggling to bridge the gap between two) that applied to my situation. And as with everything, nothing is black and white. However, as I studied the four main types I decided to be flexible and creative with the definitions and not try to fit into a predefined slot. This attitude helped a lot.

Book three: The track of a storm

The "clan culture" certainly represented the graduate school. It is stable and internally focused. I felt good about the stability and knew it was possible to try to combine the internal focus with the external focus. The library had represented stability but the focus was definitely external because of the involvement with the entire university. And then there is *adhocracy,* which can be defined as evolutionary and something that is constantly changing. Well, the evolutionary part certainly describes both the library and the library school; the constantly changing could represent the evolving nature of our field and different classes taught and different students in these classes.

Hierarchy represents stability, which seems to be an element in at least some of the other models but also represented ranking and power, so it turned out to be my least favorite. And then there is *market,* which is external and flexible—sounds like a lot of repetition here doesn't it? The role of a teacher is certainly more flexible than a librarian's set hours, but again this didn't define the external focus.

This is when the storm started to settled. I realized my purpose was to define and explain my change in role. Here is when I decided to create my own culture: culture redux. Now this does not mean I'm bringing back something but it's an attempt to explain an experience. I could look back as most of us do and examine the here and now. I can look at the internal changes by relating them to the external changes. I can see the conflicts between internal and external as an opportunity and this is the main crux of my culture

I'm comfortable with culture redux. It has given me focus and seems to be a fitting end to my tale. The big difference is that it is not imaginary but real. And the other difference is that *A Tale of Two Cities* has 45 chapters. ∕∕

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of comics, with   a particular focus on the works of Alan Moore. *Access:* http://www.enjolrasworld.com/.

• **Golden Age Comics.** A great source to download out-of-copyright comics from the so-called "Golden Age" of comics. Most of these comics are out-of-print and expensive, so this is valuable for research into the early years of comic books. *Access:* http://goldenagecomics.co.uk/.

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