
The King Report: New directions in library and information science education

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A close look at a controversial study.

It is fitting that *New Directions in Library and Information Science Education*¹ should have appeared in 1986, the 100th anniversary of the beginning of formal education for librarianship. This major curriculum study, often referred to as the King Report and sponsored by the United States Department of Education, Center for Libraries and Educational Improvement, was controversial from its beginning because of the apparent manner of its award (there seemed in the eyes of some to have been a prior decision to give it to a private vendor) and because the initial presentations failed to persuade the professional community that the research methods to be employed would produce valid results. However, on reading the final report, several who were critical at the outset now consider it to be worthy of serious study and consideration.

The King Report is lengthy, and the reader can easily become bogged down in detail. This review provides an overview of the report and summarizes some of the more important points. However, this

review is not intended to be a substitute for reading the report.

Background

Among the previous studies of education for librarianship, the two by Williamson and Conant deserve particular mention.

C.C. Williamson's report was completed in 1921 and published in 1923 with the title, *Training for Library Service*. It was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, which having donated over \$50,000,000 to communities in the United States and the United Kingdom to build libraries, hired Williamson to study why these libraries had not flourished as expected. The report prompted our current system of accreditation of programs in institutions of higher education by the ALA Committee on Accreditation. Two other major recommendations remain as unfinished business: a thorough distinction between professional and clerical tasks and the certification of librarians. Sixty-four years after it was published, Williamson's report remains the single most important and influential document on education for librarianship (and information science).

In the early 1970s the American Library Associa-

¹José-Marie Griffiths and Donald W. King, *New Directions in Library and Information Science Education* (White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., for the American Society for Information Science, 1986). 465p. \$45.



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tion felt that it was time for a "new" Williamson report. Ralph W. Conant was selected, and he began the project in 1973. He addressed three principal questions: 1) What is the function and responsibility of professional education to the profession it serves, to the students it admits into its formal programs, and to society at large? 2) How does the present system of library education measure up to

by the information professional community to strive continually for achieving future required competencies. 2) Determine a first set of information professional competencies which are validated in the workplace to some extent. 3) Establish initial education and training requirements for the future. 4) Initiate a process for communication among the principal information professional participants which can, hopefully, be continued after the project ends. 5) Describe steps that can be taken in the future to ensure continuation of the competency achievement cycle. (p.29)

"Competency-based education is a valid approach."

accepted functions and responsibilities of professional education? 3) What reforms are needed to improve library education and to bring it closer to accepted standards of professional education? The final report was "received" but not published by ALA. When *The Conant Report: A Study of the Education of Librarians* was published by MIT in 1980, it was largely ignored because it was seen as lacking rigor in data collection, analysis, and reporting. In contrast with the Williamson Report, its impact has been negligible.

Objectives

The King Report began with two highly idealized objectives: "the listing, description and validation of the competencies required at several professional levels and within several areas of professional specialization in the library and information science field; and the discussion and examination of present and future education requirements necessary to achieve the discrete levels of competencies by professional level and specialty." (p.19)

Lacking the time and resources for such an ambitious project, these were promptly scaled down to a more reasonable set of five main objectives: 1) Set forth an idealized framework that can be used

Assumptions

A critical step in reading any report is to identify the underlying assumptions. This is especially important in reading this study, because these assumptions are the most important part of the report, even more important than the results or conclusions. There are six assumptions: 1) Competency-based education is a valid approach to determining a suitable curriculum for library and information science education. 2) We are moving "from an industrial and manufacturing economy to one based increasingly on information services and products." (p. 245 and elsewhere). 3) The topic of this report is Information Professionals, the vast majority of whom work outside of libraries; librarians are one small subset of the larger group of Information Professionals. 4) Information agencies (including libraries) are businesses! 5) Library and information science education should be in professional rather than academic (graduate) programs of instruction (see page 250, bottom of page, and elsewhere). 6) Personnel are more important than the collection.

These assumptions are the underlying foundation of this study. Competency-based education, open to attack for being too limited in its goals, is nevertheless a useful approach for evaluating some types of educational results. No one who has read a recent newspaper can doubt that the industrial and manufacturing components of our economy are declining and that information services and products are becoming more important. Nor are all information professionals employed in libraries or described as librarians. An obvious corollary is an adherence to business practices in the operation of information agencies (including libraries).

The assumption that education for librarianship and information science should be professionally based is particularly interesting at a time when many of the schools of library and information science seem to be moving in the opposite direction toward academic and research programs which display little or no consideration for professional matters.

The traditional yardstick by which libraries are measured and rated is by size of collection, a logical measure of certain information services provided within the library; however, this is not a logical measure of information services provided outside

Research methodology

Are you using interviews or observation to gather information for library service? Constance A. Mellon, who is writing a book on the use of qualitative methods and anthropological techniques for research, evaluation, and teaching in librarianship, is soliciting short case studies of such work to include in her book. You may contact her at the Department of Library and Information Studies, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27834.

the library. This assumption is applied to libraries and is expressed several times as in the following statements repeated here because of their importance.

"Libraries and other information organizations utilize many resource components including people, information materials, equipment, facilities, supplies, etc. Libraries, in particular, are perceived by many people in terms of the information materials stored and made available to patrons. Yet the keystone of an information organization is actually the organization's staff who ensure acquisition of useful and relevant information materials; organize and control the information so that one can gain access to it; search, identify and retrieve information from data bases which describe millions of recorded information items found in the libraries or elsewhere; and gain access to, analyze and turn over useful information to users. Not only are information organizations highly labor intensive (i.e., labor costs tend to dominate organization budgets) but the staff also require substantial capabilities to perform at the high level that is both necessary and expected. The basis for such a high level of performance is the competence of the professional staff. Competencies of information professionals can be defined in terms of three components: knowledge, skill and attitudes . . ." (pp.72-73)

"The ultimate effect of the librarians' and information professionals' work is the contribution that is made to the value of information from the perspective of users and of society in general." (p.60)

"The value of the information profession to the organizations served by it and to society is dependent on the capabilities of its professionals." (p.60)

"Probably the most important information resource component is personnel and the most essential characteristics of these people are their competencies. The reason for this is that information service performance (e.g., measured in terms of quantities produced, quality and timeliness) is highly dependent on the competencies of information professionals. The performance in turn affects the effectiveness of the information service in such terms as user satisfaction, repeated use and total amount of use. The purposes and amount of information use determine the value of the information (hence, the added value of the information services and products) and produce higher order effects such as an informed public, improved institutions and better education." (pp.61-62)

While these assumptions may seem self-evident to persons in business-oriented information center settings, each represents a major departure from the thinking of some librarians who abhor a business approach, love books, and regard the collection of books as their ultimate function. Thus, it is important to evaluate this report in the light of these assumptions and to recognize that the point of view they represent is widely held in the informa-

tion community and is gaining in support. Both the competencies identified and the conclusions of the report are based solidly on these assumptions.

Competencies

Griffiths and King amassed a wide range of information professional competencies and organized them by level, by function, and by work set-

"On-the-job training is essential."

ting. Within this hierarchy, the competencies are described in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A selected hierarchical set of representative competencies is included in the report to serve as an example, while the remainder of the competencies are available in twelve(!) separately published supplementary volumes.

The first level of competencies is a general set which extends across all functions and all work settings:

1. Knowledge
 - a. Knowledge related to literacy, numeracy, communications, etc.
2. Skills
 - a. Literacy, numeracy, cognitive, analytical, communications, etc.
 - b. Communicate well by written, verbal and non-verbal means.
 - c. Manage time effectively.
3. Attitudes
 - a. Respect for the work unit.
 - b. Willingness to draw upon and share knowledge and experience with others.
 - c. Alertness.
 - d. Dependability.
 - e. Organization.
 - f. Willingness to take/accept responsibility.
 - g. Willingness to ask questions.
 - h. Responsiveness to time constraints.
 - i. Accuracy.
 - j. Desire to follow through.

The example for the next level is a set of competencies which are generic across all library work settings and library functions. Note that these are in addition to the first level. (There are also other second-level competencies for nonlibrary work settings and nonlibrary functions in the supplementary volumes.) The competencies generic across all library work settings and library functions are listed below to illustrate the content of one set of competencies.

1. Knowledge
 - a. Knowledge of the costs associated with library resources (materials, personnel, space, etc.)
 - b. Knowledge of methods of resource allocation.
 - c. Knowledge of standards, measures and methods for evaluating personnel.
2. Skills
 - a. Make effective, timely, and well-informed decisions.
3. Attitudes
 - a. Respect users.
 - b. Respect co-workers.
 - c. Desire to learn/try.
 - d. Desire to work to best of ability.
 - e. Positive attitude toward job.

At the next level are a set of competencies generic across all functions within the academic library setting and then a series of specific competencies for acquisitions, cataloging, circulation, collection maintenance, interlibrary loan, serials, and reference across all work settings. In each case the competencies from the previous levels of the hierarchy are to be included.

Conclusions

The authors of the King Report point to two conclusions. First, that newly graduated professionals must be given a period of on-the-job training before they can be expected to become productive members of the organization:

"One of the clearest results of the project is that, in considering information professional competencies required in the workplace, there are some competencies that can be acquired through formal programs of education, some that can be acquired through continuing education, some that can be acquired through training and yet others that can only be acquired on the job. This may seem obvious, yet it is an important point. Too often employers complain that librarians and information professionals (and in particular those who work in libraries) are not prepared upon starting work to perform the required tasks. This attitude or expectation that professionals who have completed their education should be able to walk 'cold' into an organization and start to work effectively and productively is perhaps a residual from the days when professionals were apprenticed to an organization. In other professions recent graduates—physicists, chemists, statisticians, etc.—are not expected to perform as full-fledged professionals. There is a period of orientation and training that occurs on the job and without which professionals cannot perform effectively." (p.246)

Second, because information professional skills are transferable throughout the information environment,

"... it appears that specializations should be functionally oriented rather than oriented toward the type of organization within which the work is

conducted. It is interesting to consider that most courses organized by work setting (i.e., medical librarianship, records management, etc.) must cover all the functions that will be performed in those settings, if they are to prepare professionals to perform well in those settings. It is our contention that specialization by function is the way programs should develop. In so doing, graduates can be prepared to apply their competencies in a wide range of work settings and increasingly in non-library settings, the information employment sector generating the greatest demand at present." (pp.249-50)

Thus, they argue against both programs designed to produce graduates who can begin productive work the first day on the job and courses oriented toward only one kind of library (e.g., academic or public). They argue for professional on-the-job training after graduation and courses that are oriented toward particular functions (e.g., reference or cataloging). Our professional literature contains frequent complaints that recent graduates are unable to step into new positions and immediately begin productive work. Academic and special librarians, among others, share a long history of wanting courses specific to their particular work settings, courses which often ignore other types of librarianship.

Impact

The King Report can be expected to have an impact in two areas. First, it can be usefully applied to the design and redesign of instructional programs in library and information science. (Actually, many of the competencies identified by Griffiths and King are already in library and information science instructional programs.) Nevertheless, curricula should be examined in terms of the competencies graduates (as information professionals) should be prepared to perform, the work settings graduates (as information professionals)

OWL alert

Ohio Women Librarians (OWL) has recently been established "to educate women candidates for administrative positions, to advocate promotion of qualified women into administrative positions, and to provide mutual support for women in administrative positions in Ohio public libraries."

Formed in mid-1986, OWL's membership represents women managers in public, academic, and special libraries throughout Ohio. Since OWL's inception, women have been appointed to five top-level administrative positions, four of which were previously held by men.

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should be prepared to work in, and the structure (functional vs. work setting) of the curricula.

Second, the report can be useful in the administration of libraries and information centers. Specifically, the competencies developed in the report can be used for designing job descriptions, preparing position announcements, selecting employees from among applicants, assigning responsibilities to employees, evaluating work of employees, reviewing recommendations for promotion and tenure, and terminating employees.

In other words, the King Report has the potential for leading us to a rethinking of the work of librarians (who are only one type of information professional) and a concurrent reexamination of our professional curricula in which librarians are prepared. Whether *New Directions in Library and Information Science Education* is the new Williamson Report remains to be seen.

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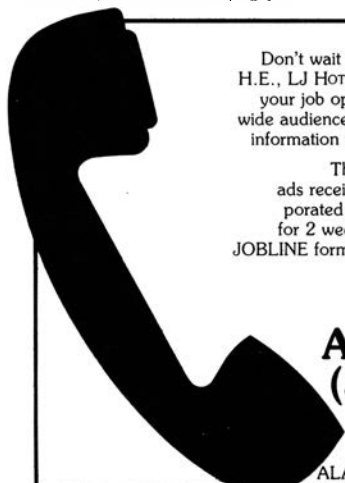
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