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Learning and Transitions in the Careers of Librarians

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Introduction

As libraries undergo transformation in an era of rapid technological change and shifting user expectations, librarians need to prepare themselves for new responsibilities on a more frequent basis. Skills and competencies acquired early in one's career are not likely to suffice ten or twenty years later. Our primary goal in this paper is to identify and describe changes and transitions experienced by librarians during their careers and the role of continuing education in these transitions. We began by reviewing literature related to adult development and continuing education, and we then conducted a pilot set of interviews with librarians about their career transitions. Of particular interest were the approaches and means used by librarians to develop their abilities and skills over the span of their careers in response to the changing social landscape in which libraries operate.

The process of change and learning often go hand in hand. Change involves moving from one form or phase to another. In the process of learning, there is also movement in that a shift occurs in how one perceives and responds to a situation or an experience. In some situations, change will lead to learning, and in other circumstances, learning will prompt change. When a library installs an automated circulation system, for example, the staff must adapt to the change by learning new skills and procedures. A librarian might first, however, be motivated to learn about computerized applications for library operations and then decide to install an automated circulation system, which in turn will lead to changes. Both processes are thus closely related and often imperceptibly intertwined. In this paper, we will describe and compare the relationship of change and learning as it occurs in the different career stages of librarians.

Background

The need for this type of study emerges for several reasons. In general, the profession has increasingly recognized the value of continuing education, and libraries and library associations have responded by devoting significant resources to training and educational activities for library staff. For those who are responsible for developing and offering educational programs, a better understanding of change and its relation to learning is essential. The complexity of needs that these programs are designed to serve should also be identified and described. In addition, the challenges and opportunities that librarians face are likely to vary in different stages of their careers, and thus, the similarities and differences that occur need to be understood. Finally, exploration of these issues will help to determine the most appropriate approaches, formats, and

content for continuing education initiatives. In sum, the design and development of continuing education programs and activities should take into account and effectively respond to the changes and transitions librarians experience over the span of their careers.

To respond to these needs, we focused our attention in two areas: (1) a review of the existing literature about relevant adult development theories and library continuing education, and (2) a pilot set of interviews with librarians in different career stages. The literature review identified key concepts about change and learning that created a framework for analysis of the interview data. The pilot study provided an opportunity to begin to gather information about the transitions experienced by librarians and their relation to concepts identified in the literature review.

Literature

Adult Development

Any examination of transitions and learning in the career stages of librarians should be examined in the context of adult development theory. In general, these theories help to explain the adult life cycle by considering both the internal changes and individual experiences and the external factors that influence adult development. The movement from adolescence to late adulthood is generally conceptualized in terms of sequential changes that occur. This section highlights some of the significant, germane literature in adult development and relates the key themes to potential changes that librarians might experience.

One of the first theories to address adult development in any detail was proposed by Erik Erickson. His influential psychosocial human development theory presents development as the resolution of a series of conflicts that emerge at critical stages in life. Only when a conflict is resolved, which involves a change and further development of the individual's self concept, does the person have sufficient "ego strength" to deal with the next stage of development.¹ Although Erikson considers the entire life span of an individual, our discussion will be limited to the three adult stages. During young adulthood (19-40 years of age), the principal conflict is intimacy vs. isolation. A person at this stage must "learn to yield some of one's own identity and independence in order to develop intimate and sharing relationships with others."² In middle adulthood (40-65 years of age), one deals with generativity vs. stagnation. It is important to note that generativity has a broader meaning than having children. According to Erikson, "A person does best at this time to put aside thoughts of death and balance its certainty with the only happiness that is lasting: to increase, by whatever is yours to give, the good will and higher order in your sector of the world."³ A person during this life stage strives to find some way to satisfy and support the next generation. Finally, in late adulthood (over 65 years of age), an individual struggles with ego integrity vs. despair. A successful resolution of this conflict is characterized by positive reflection on one's entire life in order to cope successfully with the realities of physical loss and the certainty of death.

¹Smelser and Erickson, *Themes of Work and Love in Adulthood*, .

²Kastenbaum, "Models of Adult Development and Aging," 13.

³Erikson, *Dimensions of a New Identity*, 10.

Another adult development theorist, Daniel Levinson, uses the metaphor of seasons to describe adult development and presents development as a pattern of stages that are related to age in terms of predictable events for most adults.⁴ In brief, an individual moves through an orderly sequence of stable periods interrupted by transitions. The transitions, which generally take four to five years, terminate some life structures to create the possibility of new ones. During stable periods, new structures are built around key decisions. When changes are not completed successfully, further changes become more difficult. From age 22 to 28, for example, the individual typically establishes a new home, begins an occupation, forms relationships, and assesses his or her basic system of values. Near the age of 30, a critical time of transition in Levinson's theory, an individual looks at his or her development thus far and considers problems which may have emerged. At the midlife transition (generally at 40-45 years of age), an individual moves from early to middle adulthood and starts to question the meaning of life and his or her accomplishments. Throughout one's life, rethinking goals is an important component of each stage.

While psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers do not focus specifically on adult development, they do consider human development from a life span perspective. They both address the struggles, conflicts, and challenges that individuals encounter as they work toward their full potential. They refer to the process as one of self-actualization in which an individual moves toward becoming fully human⁵. Maslow, in particular, established a "hierarchy of needs"

⁴Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*.

⁵"About Humanistic Psychology."

related to development with physiological needs at the bottom of the hierarchy and self-actualization at the top. Before an individual can achieve self-actualization, he or she must satisfy a progression of needs: physiological, safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization.⁶

All of these development theories can provide insights into the career challenges and opportunities encountered by librarians. Both Erikson and Levinson might argue, for example, that a 28-year-old librarian and a 45-year-old librarian would experience the same event differently primarily because they are at different stages of development. The 28-year-old is in Erikson's stage of Young Adulthood, a time when he or she is creating significant relationships with others. In a job setting, a librarian at this age would likely be concerned with establishing a network of colleagues. The 45-year-old, on the other hand, has entered the Middle Life stage, and would be focused on making contributions toward the betterment of the profession in general.

Levinson would also view the two librarians according to their particular age and stage of development. A 28-year-old would be focused on establishing a role for himself or herself in the profession. The 45-year-old, who is at the point of mid-life transition, would likely begin to question his or her accomplishments and personal goals in relation to the profession.

Finally, the capacity of a librarian to realize his or her full potential would be the concern of Maslow and Rogers. They would be interested in looking at whether a librarian is able to achieve a sense of self-determination and personal freedom through his or her work.

⁶Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*.

Some scholars have applied concepts from adult development theories to the more specific area of career development. Of particular relevance to this paper are the studies of Donald Super, Donna Bejian, and Paul Salomone.

Donald Super proposes that the stages of a person's career allow for the development and implementation of one's selfconcept.⁷ He outlines five stages, or a "maxicycle," that span a typical career: *growth*, *exploration*, *establishment*, *maintenance*, and *decline*. The first two stages, *growth* (7-11 years of age) and *exploration* (14-18 years of age), are essentially pre-career activities and provide a basis for later adult career involvement. The last three stages, which fit the central focus in this study, are *establishment*, *maintenance*, and *decline*, and they encompass the following characteristics:

Establishment (typically during the 20's and 30's): An individual tests out ways to fill a professional role and formulates ideas about how to practice the chosen profession.

Maintenance (begins three to five years after completion of the *establishment* stage, generally during the 40's and 50's): An individual tailors life decisions based on experience and career accomplishment. If the first two stages have been successful, he or she often has the confidence to break away from traditional practices.

Decline (the later career years and up to retirement): As an individual moves toward retirement, he or she has decreased expectations and output. There is a shift from career to non-work activities.

Super also developed the concept of "recycling," which means that a person may return at any point to an earlier stage for a while, thus creating the potential for a "minicycle" at each level. This is particularly true for those who change careers often. A librarian, for example, who has held two positions in a public library and then accepts a position in an academic library may need

to return to an earlier stage in the maxicycle before feeling confident with his or her job responsibilities in the academic library environment.

In a recent study, Bejian and Salomone revisit Super's theory and contrast the work environment of the 1950's and 1960's with that of today⁸. While the long *maintenance* stage proposed by Super was valid in a stable corporate structure, today's environment assumes that most individuals will not continue in the same career or organization throughout their entire working lives. They propose adding a sixth stage, *career renewal*, to Super's five stages. In many ways, this last stage parallels Erickson's sixth stage of generativity vs stagnation. As they explain, "Renewal is a distinct career development stage, occurring during the late *establishment* (those in their early 40's) and *maintenance* stages, that has corresponding tasks of self-appraisal, reorganizing personal and career priorities, and reorienting to present and future planning."⁹

In general, the theories described above help explain how a librarian might respond to professional changes at various points in his or her career. The themes we have highlighted provide insights into how individuals change over time and how they might differ from one another in similar situations. The various sources of change, both internal and external to an individual, clearly come into play and need to be considered in relation to learning.

Continuing Professional Education

⁷Super, "Career and Life Development," 192-234.

⁸Bejian and Salomone, "Understanding Mid-Life Career Renewal: Implications for Counseling," 52

⁹*Ibid.*, 61.

A general review of the literature indicates that only limited attention has focused on continuing education for librarians from an adult development perspective. There is a wealth of literature about educating and preparing individuals to enter the library profession and about continuing education for specific situations (e.g., Internet training, supervision, the reference interview, or cataloging). There is also a large body of literature about general career development for librarians, the job search process, leadership development, and alternative uses of the MLS degree, but only a few articles specifically address the career stages of librarians.

Joyce Phillips, Kerry Carson, and Paula Carson, for example, surveyed librarians of varying ages about their career attitudes. They examined the relationship between age and three affective outcomes -- career satisfaction, career entrapment, and career identity -- to identify factors that can foster personal productivity and workplace commitment.¹⁰

In another study, Lisa Launey uses Super's career stage theory as a framework in which to examine possible coping styles for library workers who have reached a plateau in their careers and are unable to move forward. By identifying which of Super's stages the employee is in, Launey suggests that various choices can then be made to overcome the situation. She discusses strategies to help an individual consider the lifelong learning and career planning process.¹¹

While these studies contribute to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities librarians face in their careers, a more detailed picture of the different stages of a librarian's career is needed. As indicated earlier, the work of adult development and career development theorists

¹⁰Phillips, Carson, and Carson. "Evolution of Affective Career Outcomes: A Field Study of Academic Librarians," 541-549.

¹¹Launey, "Career Life Cycles: Coping Styles for Plateaued Workers," 27-30.

provides a useful umbrella, because concepts about life cycles, career stages, change, and transitions that appear in the literature can shed light on the career experiences of librarians. In addition, the role of learning (and more specifically, continuing education) in different career stages can be better understood.

A research study conducted Robert Fox, Paul Mazmanian, and R. Wayne Putnam in the field of continuing medical education is particularly relevant to the issues we are investigating and became a model for our pilot study.¹² In their study, the authors examine the connections between change and learning in the careers of physicians. They are particularly interested in looking at change from a career-span perspective in order to understand the role of learning in different phases of physicians' careers. Their findings are based on a series of interviews conducted with physicians. The open-ended interview questions used in their study were particularly effective in eliciting information about the kinds of changes experienced by physicians, and they became the basis for the questions used in our pilot study (see appendix). Their research offers a useful approach because of its focus on the role of professional education throughout one's career.

Interviews

To better understand the relationship between learning and the transitions experienced by librarians, we conducted a pilot set of interviews with twenty librarians representing four different career stages: librarians new to the profession (0-5 years), early-career librarians (5-15 years),

¹²Fox, Mazmanian, and Putnam, *Changing and Learning in the Lives of Physicians*.

mid-career librarians (15-25 years), and advanced-career librarians (over 25 years). The librarians worked in different types of libraries, including public, academic, school, and special libraries. Each interview used the same set of open-ended questions (see appendix), was conducted by one of the authors, and lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour. Information generated from the interviews was analyzed and compared to produce a set of generalizations about learning and transitions. As generalizations emerged from the data, the findings were compared to key concepts found in the literature. The emphasis remained on the analysis of the interview data, not necessarily on the verification of existing adult development theories. More specifically, our analysis was guided by the following questions:

What is the nature of the changes and transitions experienced by librarians?

How do transitions vary in the different career stages?

How do librarians conceptualize learning as it relates to change?

How did formal educational activities contribute to the transitions reported?

The interviews provided an opportunity to investigate the kinds of changes librarians experience in their careers and the role of continuing education. Rather than looking at specific problems encountered by librarians in their jobs, we used a career-span approach in order to begin to develop a picture of the transitions that occur throughout a career and the connections between these transitions.

Summary of Findings

In this section, we analyze the information gathered during our pilot set of interviews with librarians in the four career stages delineated for this study: librarians new to the profession (0-5 years), early-career librarians (5-15 years), mid-career librarians (15-25 years), and advanced-career librarians (over 25 years). We begin by describing the nature of changes encountered by the librarians and the kinds of both formal and informal learning that they utilize. We then look at the interview data in relation to the themes identified in the adult development literature to identify generalizations that help to describe and explain the career changes experienced by librarians. Taken as a whole, the generalizations begin to develop a framework for considering the continuing education needs of librarians from a broad career-span perspective.

Librarians New to the Profession (0-5 years)

For librarians at this initial point in their careers, primary attention seems to be focused on establishing a place for themselves in the profession. They are interested in looking at different professional opportunities, gaining firsthand experience, and building a network of peers. It seems to be a time of adjustment and adaptation.

In general, this group of librarians has high professional and personal expectations. They are excited about the opportunities in the profession and ready to take on new challenges and responsibilities. Many of the librarians volunteered for projects in their libraries to test their skills and “try out” different areas of responsibility. One librarian, who has just completed her first four years in the profession, indicated that she now realizes the variety of professional opportunities before her, which are greater than she had initially expected.

This group of librarians, as a whole, also seems ready to move away from academic theory to gain firsthand experience and to apply “real world” solutions to problems in the profession. Two of the librarians who have reference responsibilities mentioned that they are getting to know public service work firsthand and the challenges that come with it. Many recognize problems or flaws in the profession and express a desire to make a difference. As a group, they are particularly interested in promoting the role of librarians within their organization or within the community in general. Even at this early stage, many welcome the opportunity to speak to groups about the expertise of librarians and the contributions they can make to an organization or community project.

The librarians we interviewed also devote a considerable amount of attention to establishing a circle of professional contacts and understanding patterns of organizational communication. Such issues as office politics, networking, organizational norms, and management styles come to the forefront. One librarian, for example, felt she had to learn a new language to work with her primary group of users. Most of the librarians also mentioned the value of identifying colleagues within the organization who could help them “learn the ropes.” Networking with peers in general is also an important activity during this career stage. Taken together, all of these activities reflect a desire to learn about professional opportunities and to establish a professional role.

The challenges these librarians encounter closely match some of the themes identified in the adult development literature. Both Erickson and Levinson note that individuals in the early adulthood years focus much of their attention on establishing relationships and assessing their system of values. A parallel theme surfaced in our findings in that librarians new to the profession are keenly aware of the need to develop professional contacts and solid working relationships with their colleagues. Their strong ambitions, particularly in relation to “making a difference in the world;” also suggest that their library work may serve as a vehicle to refine and clarify their personal system of values. For the most part, this group of librarians also reflects a desire to achieve their full potential in the sense that Rogers and Maslow describe self-actualization.

These librarians also reflect many of the characteristics described by Super in his discussion of the *establishment* stage of career development. During this stage, an individual experiments with roles and career interests. During our interviews with librarians who have

just entered the profession, the need to try out different professional roles and speculate about one's career path emerged numerous times.

To meet their new challenges, this group of librarians tends to use informal learning methods to develop their skills and competencies. As one librarian commented, "You kind of learn as you go." Colleagues and personal acquaintances are a primary resource. They also take advantage of opportunities to network in order to establish relationships and as a means to learning more about the profession. Attendance at professional meetings and conferences helps them develop their network of peers. One librarian noted that a discussion with one person usually leads to other people who can help.

The use of informal channels for learning corresponds to the kinds of changes these librarians experience. Working at the reference desk on a daily basis, for example, provides firsthand experience that is difficult to create in a more formal workshop environment. The emphasis on informal learning may also reflect the fact that this group of librarians has recently graduated from a college or university program and may prefer a different learning format.

Early-Career Librarians (5-15 years)

After becoming familiar with the profession in general, most librarians move into a period of creating a specialized role for themselves within the profession. They tend to focus on developing and expanding their skills in one or two areas of interest and comparing their experiences with those of others in similar positions. One librarian felt good that she is now at a point in her career where she can concentrate on what she does best. Another librarian, who is developing specialized public information services, devoted a substantial amount of time to investigating models that might be applicable to her situation. Most of the librarians in this

career stage move between fine-tuning their skills and gaining a broader perspective of their particular area of expertise.

At this point in their career, they also have an eye to the future in that they are developing a personal career strategy and mapping out possible directions to head during the next several years. Two librarians noted that they are beginning to compare potential career paths within their organizations to career options in other organizations. The librarians we interviewed are generally confident in their present position, but they are using it as an anchor to formulate future career plans.

The challenges and “tasks” encountered by these librarians seem to correspond most closely with the adult development issues addressed by Levinson. As individuals near the age of 30, they are likely to assess their development thus far and assess any problems that may have emerged. In a similar manner, librarians who have entered the profession at the traditional age of 24-26 are approaching the age of 30 at this point in their career and are considering future options in relation to their prior career experiences.

These career patterns also correspond with Super’s findings. While librarians at this point in their careers have not yet reached Super’s *maintenance* stage, they seem to be building a foundation from which future career transitions can be made. In general, they are developing a solid base of skills and considering how their professional interests might be best utilized in the future.

During this career stage, more than in any other, learning by the librarians seems to be constant, and they utilize both formal and informal methods. Several librarians expressed frustration with lack of time to learn all that they want. Colleagues play an important role for librarians as they assess their competencies within the larger context of the profession. They

seem especially interested in sharing ideas and receiving feedback that will help them perfect their particular area of expertise. In the process, they also broaden their perspective about the profession and its opportunities and challenges. Professional meetings and conferences frequently serve as a forum for these discussions, as well as Internet discussion groups and listservs.

This group of librarians is also actively participating in continuing education workshops and programs. They tend to place a high value on practical programs that help them develop proficiency in a specific set of skills. The professional contacts that they make at these programs become a secondary benefit. The formal continuing education activities that these librarians attend are sponsored by library organizations and associations, but they also occasionally take advantage of programs offered by other professional groups.

The changes and challenges that the early-career librarians encounter seem to be two-fold. On the one hand, they focus on developing a specialized area of expertise with a specific set of skills. They are also interested, however, in establishing a context for their skills, and they look at their particular area of expertise in relation to the role it may play for them in the future.

Mid-Career Librarians (15-25 years)

As Super notes, this period in a career is often pivotal in that an individual either moves in new directions or stays at essentially the same point in a career. For those who have progressed successfully through the earlier stages of their careers, the transition becomes a positive experience. Some individuals, however, are unable to break from what is familiar and consider different career options.

Most of the librarians we interviewed who are in the *maintenance* stage have a positive view of their careers.¹³ On the whole, they embrace new opportunities and are interested in keeping their skills fresh. Several librarians indicated that this particular period of their careers is a busy, stressful, and often frustrating time, but also brings rewards with the challenges. Some of the librarians experienced a sense of renewal as they assessed their careers and reoriented their skills and roles. The capacity at this point in one's career to move successfully from a period of doubt and self-examination to a level of renewed career commitment corresponds with the findings of Bejian and Salomone. Rather than settling in for a period of relative calm and predictability, the librarians we interviewed have not, for the most part, remained static.

Several of the librarians in this group, for example, have moved into upper-level management positions that not only added responsibilities but also required learning new kinds of skills and competencies. Many now find themselves in a leadership role. In addition, most of the librarians have discovered that many of the skills they perfected earlier in their careers are now outdated, and they feel the need to update them, particularly in the area of technology and automation.

In addition to the career development research of Super, Bejian, and Salomone previously discussed, it is likely that Maslow and Rogers would also see this stage as a critical period, one that strongly influences an individual's capacity to progress toward self-actualization. As a group, the librarians we interviewed were expressing a sense of self-determinism, personal freedom, and choice, which are qualities that reflect self-actualization.

¹³An expanded study would provide additional data to help determine the degree to which this finding applies to all librarians in the *maintenance* stage.

During this stage, as with the previous one, the librarians we interviewed use a combination of formal and informal learning resources. The formal continuing education activities seem to help most with updating one's skills. Some librarians also take advantage of continuing education resources outside the library field to help them through the challenges they experience. Attendance at management and planning institutes is common.

As in the previous two stages, colleagues continue to be an important resource for learning. For many librarians, the network of peers that they have maintained over the years provides a forum for ongoing dialogue and support. Peers also serve as a sounding board for discussing their experiences and reflecting about their careers.

During this stage, many of the librarians find themselves at a crossroads, and they enter a period of career re-assessment. They feel the need to consider their past experiences in light of the present situation and with an eye to the future. As the research literature suggests, those individuals who are able to move successfully through this period of self-examination often gain a sense of career renewal and commitment as they look to the future.

Advanced-Career Librarians (over 25 years)

During this career stage, the librarians we interviewed are considering ways to keep their careers vital. They often turn inward to reflect on their own needs in relation to their prior career experiences. Their extensive experience allows them to see the "big picture," which provides a unique perspective for considering their options. One librarian, for example, is particularly interested in establishing a strong role for the library within the larger organization in which she works. Her focus is on the library as a whole rather than on a particular service or department in the library.

In our interviews with this group of librarians, personal interests and concerns were mentioned more often in discussions about their career choices and transitions than we found in the interviews with librarians in other stages. Two of the advanced-career librarians mentioned that they felt they had accomplished many of their professional goals and are now focusing on career activities of personal interest to them. Another librarian said that there are many projects she could undertake in her job, but she tends to choose those projects that will give her the most personal satisfaction.

In general, this group of librarians enjoys and seeks out opportunities to make personal contributions to the profession. Two of the librarians mentioned that they feel it is important for them to be mentors to librarians who are just entering the profession. The advanced-career librarians are also keenly aware of the role and image of the profession in general and actively participate in library associations at the state, national, and international level.

These librarians also frequently look outside the profession for ideas and perspectives. One librarian, for example, worked closely with colleagues in departments outside the library to gain insight about her skills and career options. Many of the librarians also attend conferences and programs sponsored by other professional groups, such as business and management, to develop their competencies. During our interviews, the librarians in this career stage frequently mentioned the value of bringing fresh ideas from these meetings back to the library profession.

For the most part, the advanced-career librarians we interviewed have been able to find personal fulfillment, a sense of self-determination, and personal freedom through their work, characteristics that Maslow and Rogers would say reflect self-actualization. These librarians

would also fit Erikson's conception of generativity in that they have found ways to support and contribute to the next generation of librarians.

Super's final career stage, *decline*, needs to be examined in light of these findings. The advanced-career librarians who we interviewed do not seem to have decreased output and expectations. Their focus and choices seem to be based on personal reflection about their prior career experiences and their particular career interests and concerns. Additional interviews are needed to provide a more complete picture about the career choices that are made during this stage.

Implications for Continuing Education

Some general implications about the role of continuing education begin to emerge from our pilot set of interviews. At each career stage, themes about learning and transitions reoccur.

Three themes in particular should be noted:

- Promotion of the Profession: In each career stage, the librarians emphasized the importance of the profession in contemporary society, particularly related to its role in understanding and using technology. Librarians want to ensure an adequate public perception of the role of libraries and the unique expertise of librarians.

- Self-Directed Learning: The self-directed learning style of librarians and their ability to discover and create educational resources for themselves stood out repeatedly in our interview data. The lifelong learning behaviors that they describe reflect accepted adult learning theory concepts. In brief, they learn best when they understand the whole picture, when they are ready to learn, when they actually perform and then practice, and when they have a sense of control and self-direction and a sense of their own progress.

There was also a strong determination to find the resources they needed. When a specific course was canceled, for example, a librarian created an independent study opportunity. When very few books about the Internet were available, another librarian

called a publisher who had put out a few titles to find out what would be published next.

➤ Peer Support / Opportunities to Network: The librarians who we interviewed all recognize the importance of peer support and the need to network. They have been extremely resourceful in terms of networking through local and national organizations as well as through resources available on the Internet.

The delivery of discrete, content-based continuing education classes and using traditional methods will likely continue to be the core of continuing education activities in the foreseeable future. Our findings suggest an additional function for continuing education. An important role for continuing education would be to assist librarians in stepping back, examining their current and future learning needs, and developing learning plans. Both traditional and non-traditional continuing education resources can be organized to enable the piecing together of an individualized learning program. Specific classes and materials in all media can be organized for that purpose. Networking groups and mentoring programs can be utilized more fully for specific learning tasks. In addition to helping librarians understand where they are individually, continuing educators can also assist librarians in examining the place of the profession as a whole.

Recommendations for Future Study

As previously discussed, our interviews represent a preliminary pilot study that involved a small, convenient sample of librarians. This specific study needs to be continued with an expanded pool of randomly selected interviewees in order to provide more data about transitions experienced by librarians. An expanded study would also provide an opportunity to

investigate in more detail the role of such factors as type of library, first-career librarians vs. second-career librarians, job history, race, and gender. In addition, the initial categories were established based on our own knowledge and experience. We need to verify if the stages delineated in this study accurately reflect the periods of transitions. The transitions experienced by support staff in libraries should also be studied and looked at in light of their continuing education needs. Finally, future studies should be conducted in variety of countries to provide a fuller picture of continuing education needs for librarians.

Conclusion

Although we have looked at the transitions librarians experience at various stages throughout their careers, it is also important to take a step back and look at how work and the workplace in general are changing as we approach the 21st century. Mary Catherine Bateson, in *Composing a Life*, talks about life in contemporary society as an “improvisatory art,” one in which we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations. Not only do our lives take new directions, they are also subjected to repeated redirection. The patterns and traditions that were once familiar are now replaced at a more rapid pace by new ones. As she explains, “Just as the design of a building or of a vase must be rethought when the scale is changed, so must the design of lives. Many of the most basic concepts we use to construct a sense of self or the design of life have changed their meanings. Work. Home. Love. Commitment. ... Fluidity and discontinuity are central to the reality in which we live.”¹⁴ Thus, it becomes increasingly important to discover and understand the varied connections between one’s career and the changing social landscape.

¹⁴Bateson, *Composing a Life*, 2.

In contemporary society, a commitment to keeping libraries viable is increasingly a commitment to the continuing education of library staff. As a profession, we have become quite proficient in developing content to assist library staff in keeping up with new ideas and skills. A better understanding of the career stages of librarians, particularly in relation to a changing society, can help shift our primary focus from the content of continuing education to the needs of the individual learner, thus providing for the most effective use of education.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions¹⁵

1. What changes have you made or have occurred in your job or in your life (that have affected your career) within the past twelve months?
2. When did this change occur?
3. What caused this change to occur? How did it come about?
4. Did you seek information or attempt to develop your skills in connection with this change?
5. What information or resource did you seek/use?
6. Did anyone help you develop your skills or gain information?
7. How much time did you devote to developing your skills?
8. Which resources were most important? Why?
9. Did you encounter any problems in developing your skills?
10. Did your learning bring about other changes?
11. Did formal continuing education play an role in the learning associated with this change?
12. Could formal continuing education have helped you with this change? How?
13. How do you use continuing education in your position as a librarian?
14. If we were to repeat this study in five years, would you be willing to be interviewed again?

¹⁵The following interview questions are based on the interview guide developed by Robert D. , Paul E. Mazmanian, and R. Wayne Putnam, *Changing and Learning in the Lives of Physicians*, 1'

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