BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Renewing Professional Librarianship: A Fundamental Rethinking. By Bill Crowley. Beta Phi Mu Monograph Series. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2008. 184 pages (soft cover). US$45.00. ISBN13 978-1591585541.

This slim volume by Bill Crowley is not a new subject for the author. He has a passionate dedication for keeping the "library" in the field of library and information science, and has written and presented on this subject extensively. Crowley, as a librarian with decades of experience in both public and state libraries, is now a self-described "pragmatist", and "library theorist", who teaches at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University, Illinois.

Crowley attempts to engage library practitioners, professional library associations, and library science faculty to recognize that the "information science paradigm" (p. 3) is defining professional librarianship "down" in the "information universe" (p. 3) and that the education of librarians is all too quickly becoming the education of "information providers". How does he get there? Let's take a look at the assumptions he makes in his introduction. First, "information science is a field of study that is related to, but separate from librarianship or library science" (p. 11). Second, traditional librarians have allowed "information advocates to successfully redefine library education as information education" (p. 11). Third, the notion of library science as a unique field is not supported by "opinion leaders within the twenty-first century university" (p. 11). Fourth, librarianship is more involved with education and learning than it is with the "information life cycle" (p. 12). Fifth, librarianship is more interested in the "advancement of human learning" (p. 12) than it is with information provision. Sixth, information theorists will attempt to prove that "library science is really part of their information model" (p. 12). Lastly, Crowley asserts that because many faculty hold doctorates from other fields, there will be "an irresistible bias in ALA-accredited programs toward educating librarians as information providers and not librarians" (p. 12).

After the introduction, the book is divided into five chapters, which expound upon the author's seven assumptions outlined above. The first chapter entitled "Librarian professionalism and professional library education" is a rather odd one, making the point that the studies published by library faculty to meet the academic standards of tenure and promotion at their institutions are not often relevant to the daily work of library practitioners. If Crowley correctly assumes that, more often than not, the faculty hired are information scientists, not librarians, then traditional schools of library science and the research they produce are in danger of becoming irrelevant to both the practising and the aspiring librarian.

The second chapter, called "What's the story", provides an interesting history of the development of education for professional librarians and makes an argument for the library as a place to learn, to read, and to support literacy. According to Crowley, the United States is "suffering from a combination learning and reading crisis of truly significant proportions" (p. 59), and librarians, he feels, are well positioned to address this problem. He asserts that students of library science should spend a greater percentage of their time studying reading and learning theories to better serve the needs of library patrons. Instead, Crowley is dismayed that library science students are being molded into "information specialists", learning how information is "generated, accumulated, organized, stored, disseminated, and ultimately, either archived or removed from a given information system" (p. 60).

The chapter "Information – library conundrum" presents the case of the United Kingdom's recent proposal to return librarianship to an apprentice model, wherein a library employee may rise through the system to earn a "fellowship" without either a library science or university degree. At this point, one gets the impression that this is a personal issue for Crowley. Statements such as "higher education's information faculty are simply better than library practitioners at manipulating the operations of the internal academic system" (p. 81) and "information researchers have gained control of many ALA-accredited programs and in a few instances have greatly expanded the size of their faculty" (p. 88) smack of professional jealousy, particularly when many of Crowley's claims are not supported by evidence of any kind. The lack of evidence for the arguments put forth is this book's Achilles' heel. Despite Crowley's objection to information science nudging traditional "library" courses out of the curriculum for the library science student, he undertakes no examination of the curricula of the ALA-accredited schools of library and information science in Canada and the US to prove his assertion. Neither do we find any quantitative analysis of the composition of faculty at these schools to support his claim that the information scientists are taking over.

Crowley's final two chapters propose that the fields of "information sciences and librarianship have evolved into different fields with a focus on solving different societal problems" (p. 133). Within these two chapters, Crowley encourages both practitioners and professional associations to reestablish librarianship as a distinct field of its own and introduce more courses at the graduate level to prepare librarians to solve North America's reading and learning crises. I struggle with the latter point of view. As I understand it, Crowley seems to be suggesting that librarians should become more involved with teaching reading, consequently taking on more active educational roles. Perhaps I'm mistaken, but aren't teachers tasked with teaching children to read? Certainly, librarians support, encourage, and inspire users to read, but we're not charged with teaching them to read. Suggesting that librarians step into this role raises issues of professional territory with the teaching profession, which might cause discomfort in both camps.

Personally, I think it would be a great societal loss for the fields of information sciences and librarianship to part company. There are many examples of collaboration between the

two fields, such as the area of usability testing, resource design, text analysis, digital archives, and citation analysis that further the cause of education and reading that "traditional" librarians hold dear.

Crowley has presented the library profession with a well-researched, logically flowing argument. Unfortunately, there are a few things that jar: the lack of quantitative data to support his arguments, a number of editing errors, the number of self citations by Crowley, and the occasional instance of "peevish" tone that detracts from the essay (e.g., "the annual conferences of this association…now offer frequent examples of the pernicious effects of information's regulatory capture on the ALA process of accreditation" (p. 114)).

This thoughtful extended essay deserves a place in all library school libraries as a starting point for discussion on the information versus library debate. Most library practitioners would likely feel their time better spent by reviewing some of Crowley's earlier articles on the same subject.

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