

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

New Directions in Reference. Edited by Byron Anderson and Paul T. Webb. Binghamton, N.Y.: Hawthorn Information Press, 2006. 161 pages, includes index (soft cover). ISBN 0-7890-3089-6. US\$19.95. Co-published simultaneously as *The Reference Librarian*, No. 93, 2006.

Written for reference librarians from all sectors of librarianship, *New Directions in Reference* offers an eclectic collection of well-written articles by knowledgeable authors from varied library backgrounds. As a whole, *New Directions* presents reference services as an area facing changes so sweeping that no library can expect to continue doing business as usual. At the same time, it reminds librarians that the primary goals of reference services do not change, even if technology changes how reference transactions occur.

In a brief introduction to the articles, Anderson and Webb stress that the burden of any shift in reference service will fall on the shoulders of reference librarians themselves. The editors hope that, through reading about the efforts and experiences of other reference librarians, readers of *New Directions* will become more informed about possible changes they may face, be reminded of ideas they may have forgotten, or at the very least start thinking about how to prepare for the future.

Anderson and Webb have elected to organize *New Directions in Reference* into three broad categories of articles: New Roles for Librarians, Impact of Technology, and Issues in Library Services. However, significant overlap occurs between the articles presented in each category, particularly on the topic of technology. Since technology is one of the biggest change agents in libraries, it is not surprising to see some mention of technology issues in almost every article. Unfortunately, the discussion and emphasis on technology in, for example, the articles about the (United States) Government Printing Office by Hathaway, and reference services in a rural environment by Standerfer, bring in to question the need to arrange *New Directions* into broad topics at all.

New Directions in Reference succeeds in its editors' goal of presenting the reader with a variety of ideas and examples of how reference service is changing in all types of libraries. Lindbloom et al. write about a new career path to consider and detail the rewards and challenges of becoming a virtual reference librarian, an area many librarians may have only considered as adjunct to their regular reference duties, not an entire career. Meserve's article about the integration of a public and academic library is a fascinating look at what could possibly be a new trend, or might simply be another library cost-saving experiment gone wrong. Of particular interest to health librarians is the article by Burnette and Dorsch on the impact of personal digital assistants (PDAs) on medical libraries. The article includes discussion about

how to select and support a technology that is becoming increasingly important to clinicians, nurses, and allied health professionals alike. Health librarians considering adding resources or support (including instruction) for PDAs should think about reading this primer on the topic before investing their library's resources in a rapidly changing technology.

Despite the book's success in providing its readers with numerous examples of how reference services are changing, as well as meeting its goal to provide reference librarians with some creative ideas, *New Directions in Reference* misses the opportunity to provide a unified argument that explains why the "new directions" offered should be of importance to librarians. *New Directions* also lacks any guidance for reference librarians coping with change, something that would be useful in a book of this kind. It is unfortunate that the volume does not make an effort to go beyond presenting examples of libraries in action. An attempt to get deeper into the heart of what change in reference services means to librarians and libraries would be a useful addition.

The reason *New Directions in Reference* cannot move beyond its basic premise lies in the fact that *New Directions* is simply a journal volume (*The Reference Librarian*, No. 93, 2006) served up as a book. Since each article is a separate entity written independently of those preceding and following, there is no linking one part of *New Directions* to the next. The reader is left with more questions than answers and a feeling of being abruptly moved on to new ideas without any closure or discussion. The articles in *New Directions* could be better presented to the reader if they were used as case studies illustrating concepts such as new career opportunities, new technologies, and new issues (i.e., concepts based on the editors' original idea of organization) that were accompanied by some theoretical and practical discussion of why such changes are important and what librarians can do to make their lives easier.

On their own, the articles in *New Directions in Reference* present unique and timely discussion on how reference service is changing. Unfortunately, as a whole, the volume does not offer anything beyond the sum of its parts. Librarians interested in purchasing *New Directions in Reference* would be advised to review the abstracts of the articles it contains and order any items of interest if their library does not already subscribe to *The Reference Librarian*.

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