Book reviews

The reference collection: From the shelf to the Web.
Ed. William J Frost.
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William J Frost (MA, MLS) brings a great deal of experience as a reference librarian, web manager and electronic resources librarian, and as the creator of the Internet Collegiate Reference Collection (icrc.bloomu.edu), to his task as the editor of this collection of articles. The contributors come from academia, public libraries, publishing and the U.S. public school system. There are reference librarians, systems librarians and subject specialist librarians. Yum! I thought (I am a reference librarian at a university library) ,but then the following statement in the first chapter shook my confidence, 'Books began to be housed in bound codices made of paper [sic] rather than on papyrus rolls around AD 200' (Landesman, 2005, p.7). Despite this slip, I have found this monograph useful and thought-provoking.

The theme of the volume is the large-scale migration of reference materials from print to various electronic formats, which are accessible via the Internet. The migration is far from complete and the electronic media have not yet won hands down. This is, therefore, a hybrid age, which John M. Morse has dubbed 'the Age of Also'. Another important theme emerges as a consequence: librarians must also be educators.

I did not find the articles overburdened with technical jargon, even the ones by systems librarians, and articles which I thought would have little to say to me, viz. those on school and public libraries, surprised me with what I found we had in common. This volume is written from a First World perspective, in fact most chapters deal with the situation in the United States, but South Africa does get a mention.

The first chapter, *Getting It Right – The Evolution of Reference Collections*, covers the history of the reference collection.

The second chapter, *Out of the Stack and onto the Net: International Perspectives on Academic Reference Resources,* makes reference to the situation in South African academic libraries, two pages worth. The primary focus of this chapter, however, is Australia; the U.K., the U.S. and Canada are also covered briefly. In their conclusion the authors highlight some of the challenges facing academic librarians:

- How to wean (and win over) the Google Generation from the seductive ease of uncritical surfing the 'net for information;
- What is to be done with the remaining print reference collections?
- How are reference librarians to keep their knowledge and skills sharp and up to date, in the face of such fast change in this hybrid age?
- Does the reference collection have a future?

'It is a mistake … to assume the need for information is finite and that it can be fully satisfied in any single medium' (2005, p.50), this quotation from Kathy Niemeier in the third chapter, *Electronic vs. Print Reference Sources in Public Library Collections* by Jeanne Holba Puacz, gave me pause. Puacz makes this significant comment in her conclusion: 'electronic resources, particularly the Web, have raised the expectations of patrons. Libraries and librarians must grapple with the issue of 'how to bring the library to where the users are' (2005, p.50).

Chapter Four deals with school libraries, *Digital versus Print: the Current State of Reference Affairs in School Libraries*.

The chapter *Reference Publishing in the Age of Also* by John M. Morse, a publisher and the president of Merriam-Webster, was a wake-up call from an unexpected source. He argues that there is a hybrid age where print and electronic reference products co-exist because they meet different needs, and they will continue to co-exist for some time for the same reason. He makes the point that the Library itself is becoming a reference portal. Librarians, who are so often seen as just finders and keepers, must champion their role as educators. 'The spirit of this age is choice, but choice is only valuable when it is an informed choice, and responsible reference publishers will encourage librarians to put themselves forward as an important resource in making that choice' (2005, p.87).

There are two chapters, in particular, which should be compulsory reading for all academics and students, as well as librarians, at tertiary institutions, viz. *From the Womb to the Web: Library Assignments and the New Generation* (the author deserves 'Three cheers, and nog 'n piep!', for telling it like it is), and *Cyberplagiarism and the Library: Issues and Solutions*.

For library web page designers there is Sowards' chapter, *Structures for Ready Reference Web Sites*. He surveys 100 web sites of American academic and public libraries to see how they offer ready reference web sites to their patrons. His

recommendations for improvements include, for example, the addition of help screens and annotations. He also suggests that studies of the behaviour of users of such sites could provide a guide for further improvements.

Stephen C. Boss and Michael L. Nelson have written a chapter entitled *Federated Search Tools: The Next Step in the Quest for One-Stop-Shopping*. They present a brief survey of the following packages, viz. Metalib/SFX, ENCompass, Agent and WebFeat. They conclude that as matters stand, this type of tool may satisfy uncritical or inexperienced searchers, or provide a useful starting point when a searcher is unsure which source(s) to begin with, but it will still not do for researchers.

My real interest was the chapters on internet reference sources, in particular, the chapters dealing with the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Two African sources were listed in the Humanities chapter, NISC's African Studies and AfricaBib [http://www.africabib.org]. It is rather disappointing there were so few. There are also chapters dealing with web reference sources in the disciplines of Science, Medicine, Business and Education. The final chapter offers a selected list of *100 Best Free Web Sites*. The list format used in the chapter on *Science Reference on the Internet* is easier to scan than the denser text format used in the chapters on Medicine and on the Social Sciences, but it is a pity that there are no annotations in the Science Reference chapter. Users of the internet will find these chapters of some interest, but as is so often the case with such lists, they are out of date by the time they are published.

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