

Carrye Syma and Cynthia Henry

Sharing program

The Big-Boy Boomeroo of mentoring

There is a wonderful work by Dr. Seuss called *The Butter Battle Book*.¹ In this book, the Yooks and Zooks are sworn enemies: the Yooks eat their bread with the butter side up, while the Zooks eat their bread butter side down. Throughout the book, both sides develop weaponry trying to outdo one another and, therefore, never stop fighting one another. At the end of the book, we are left wondering which side will drop its Big-Boy Boomeroo and blow the other side up.

Of course we librarians are not developing weaponry (unless you count our mental swords), but we are, in a sense, in an ongoing battle. Some might call it a generational gap that is happening in the profession; others might consider it an educational gap. There are librarians who obtained their degrees in a traditional classroom setting, while there are other librarians who took their classes online. In addition to this dichotomy, there is a wide gap in the ages that are currently in the field of librarianship.

Experienced librarians know that they have a lot to offer newer librarians, but it sometimes seems that the knowledge of newer librarians is sometimes overlooked or maybe disregarded since this population is just emerging from a master's program. We all strive to keep abreast of current trends and topics in libraries, and we all have different interests, strengths, and weaknesses. At times, it seems as if experienced and newer librarians struggle to prove themselves to administration. Who is more valuable to the organization?

The experienced librarian with a lifetime of publishing, giving traditional library instruction, and developing bibliographic resources, or the new librarian with knowledge of DSpace, podcasts, and Web page design? Are they not both valuable in their own right? Must each side develop a Big-Boy Boomeroo to determine who is more valuable?

Mentoring as a two-way street

As we all have the same goals to disseminate information to the end user, let us not argue over how our education was obtained, and let us not further promote and divide our profession by focusing on the generational gap that is currently occurring in the profession. Instead, let us focus on how we can learn from one another. We all realize that lifelong learning is the key to a successful career, and mentoring is a good way to share information in an informal way.

Mentoring does not have to be a one-way street, with all the information and resources flowing in one direction. As we all have skills to offer, perhaps a nontraditional mentoring program could be installed. Most mentoring programs assign a "new" librarian to an "experienced" librarian. This is an invaluable combination, and one that should not ever be overlooked. What of the knowledge that

Carrye Syma is assistant librarian, e-mail: carrye.syma@ttu.edu, and Cynthia Henry is assistant librarian at Texas Tech University Libraries, e-mail: cynthia.henry@ttu.edu

© 2009 Carrye Syma and Cynthia Henry

the experienced librarian can glean from the new librarian? What if rather than the traditional mentoring program, pairing new and experienced, we were to implement a program where each individual mentored. Perhaps a more experienced librarian could mentor for collection development, while a new librarian could mentor for podcasts and D-space or another technology. Would we call this a “sharing program” rather than a mentoring program?

Could we learn from the Yooks and Zooks, lay down our weapons and see all that we have to gain from one another?

Mentoring programs have been implemented at some colleges and universities with varying degrees of success. A very good article on mentoring programs is “Beyond Mentoring: Toward the Rejuvenation of Academic Libraries” by Gail Munde.² This article discusses various mentoring practices and their applications to academic libraries, identifying the following as seven types of mentoring pairings: student peer-pairings; pairings between employees who hold the same position, the mentor being the employee with longer tenure; voluntary and mandatory organizational “match-making” based on the participants’ mutual interests; cross-library pairings via e-mail; tenured faculty members mentoring their untenured colleagues; group-centered structures in which one mentor serves from two to six protégés; and mentor/protégé pairs that focus only on long-range career advising.³

Munde advocates for a mentoring model that “comes from the fringe of the business literature,” and is a “program that would retain the functional components associated with information mentor/protégé relationships, but would combine them with the career experiences considered preparatory to an employee’s promotion.”⁴ One suggestion that is made in this article, which is incredibly beneficial, was requesting a complete resume from current professionals. This would allow the mentoring program to shift to sharing by pairing

individuals whose resumes highlight the differences in their strengths. This would be a good indicator of which individuals could learn from one another and could allow individuals to select a mentor based on skills that they would like to obtain.

Elisa F. Topper wrote an article entitled “The library as intergenerational workplace.”⁵ In this article, Topper highlights ten ways to bridge the generation gap. The five areas that seemed to stand out, as a fairly “new librarian” of less than five years professional experience, were:

- all generations have similar values,
- develop and nurture relationships,
- focus on the strengths,
- manage the difference, and
- everyone wants respect.⁶

Identifying areas that all generations can relate to is a way to find commonality in colleagues. This allows a basic trust to be established in the relationship, which then sets up the opportunity for colleagues to learn from one another. This article is very supportive of all librarians, in that it really gave kudos to all generations and spoke to looking past generational gaps to work together for the good of our libraries and library patrons.

Another article on mentoring, “A Formal Mentoring Program in a University Library: Components of a Successful Experiment,” by Loise Kuyper-Rushing, looks at traditional mentoring. Mentoring programs traditionally have been set up where an established or tenured librarian shares information, knowledge, and professional experience with the newly hired librarian. While this is a very informative article, and gives a great deal of insight into the traditional mentoring program, it also sheds light on some of the pitfalls to such a program. This particular article lists one component of the plan as “Tenure-track librarians will be required to participate; tenured librarians’ participation will be voluntary.”⁷ The article states that the reasoning behind this was that “requiring an unwilling person to mentor another was

absurd.” However, the opposite of that is true as well; requiring an unwilling person to be mentored would be just as absurd. This is a rather harsh but all too true scenario. Because mentoring is a learning process for both mentor and mentees, each participant needs to approach the mentoring relationship with an open mind.⁸

In a case such as this, you could allow mentees to choose one another because what we are proposing is a system that would not be the traditional caste system of a new, inexperienced librarian shadowing the experienced, tenured librarian. Rather it would be two librarians of different interests and specializations coming together and sharing what they know. Perhaps there could be a series of workshops attended and presented by tenured and nontenured librarians alike. Each librarian could present on his or her strength, sharing that information with colleagues. Topics could range from obscure article retrieval using Lexis-Nexis or collection development to interacting one-on-one with faculty or students or perhaps even how to set up e-mail alerts. Mentoring should be a two way street: with no true teacher or student, but rather two individuals learning from one another.

In order for libraries to continue successful transition into the 21st century, we must start approaching librarianship as equals rather than experienced versus inexperienced, new versus old. Developing a new approach to mentoring programs such as the “sharing program” as outlined above will allow librarians to focus on the strengths that each of us have to offer, and also allow us to work on our weakness in a system that is supportive. And if librarianship is able to embrace the generation gap that is happening in the field by setting up the “sharing programs,” then not only do we benefit at present, but we would continue to benefit as a whole by setting the precedence that learning can take place with any pairing, as long as each brings a different set of strengths to the relationship.

After all, our roles and titles may have changed over the years, but we are still,

lifelong learners, retrieving and sharing information, with our patrons as well as with each other. Some of us eat our bread butter side up while others eat their bread butter side down, but we all have a great deal to offer the profession.

Notes

1. Dr. Seuss, *The Butter Battle Book* (New York: Random House, 1984).

2. Gail Munde, “Beyond Mentoring: Toward the Rejuvenation of Academic Libraries.” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 26, no. 3 (2000). EBSCOHost, Texas Tech University Library, Lubbock, Texas, March 17, 2008, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=tfh&AN=3256306&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live.

3. *Ibid.*, 172–73.

4. *Ibid.*, 174.

5. Elisa F. Topper, “The library as intergenerational workplace,” *New Library World* 108, no. 5/6 (2007). Google Scholar, Texas Tech University Library, Lubbock, Texas, 12 May 12, 2008, www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=/published/emeraldfulltextarticle/pdf/0721080507.pdf.

6. *Ibid.*, 287.

7. Lois Kuyper-Rushing, “A Formal Mentoring Program in a University Library: Components of a Successful Experiment,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 27, no. 6 (2001). EBSCOHost, Texas Tech University Library, March 17, 2008, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=tfh&AN=5602703&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live.

8. Jeffery S. Bullington and Susanna D. Boylston, “Strengthening the profession, assuring our future: ACRL’s New Member Mentoring Program pairs library leaders with new professionals,” *College & Research Libraries News* 62, no. 4 (2001). EBSCOHost, Texas Tech University Library, May 12, 2008, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=lxh&AN=27763912&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live. ♪