

A Call to Infuse Biographies of Asia-Pacific LIS Giants into the Curriculum

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In this article we argue that LIS education in the Asia-Pacific region needs to develop an appreciation of the role inspirational and communicative pedagogies could potentially play in providing key leadership skills. Furthermore, we

suggest that one way to do this is through biographical narratives. At the end of the article we provide three examples of librarian biographies that provide a number of important lessons about the profession for future librarians.

Introduction

Graduates in library and information science (LIS) are generally expected to hold leadership and management positions at some point in their career. However, the current LIS programs in many Asia-Pacific universities tend to place little emphasis on leadership education. The field in general suffers a handicap in this regard, due both to the negative stereotypes, real and perceived, that surround the profession. Librarians are perceived to be timid, bookish and retiring. In recent years, librarianship has evolved to encompass a wide range of potential occupational roles under the all-encompassing label 'information professional'. Nevertheless, information professionals still find themselves obscured by other, apparently more alluring, domains such as computer science, life science and business administration.

In this paper we argue that a powerful means to inspire a visionary approach in LIS students, one that creates capabilities for successful leadership and which at the same time exposes students to a more empowering view of the profession, is to consciously develop role models from the past and then use them as teaching exemplars. Moreover, we highlight the potential and value of in-

fusing biographies of these figures into the curriculum.

Narratives: An approach to leadership education

The last couple of decades have seen a proliferation of leadership training programs and methods (Rost 1993; Hernez-Broome & Hughes 2004). The philosophical question of "are leaders born or made?" appears to have been eclipsed by a more practical question of "what is the best way to train leaders?" (Komives, Lucas & McMahan 1998).

Traditional pedagogical practices tend to focus on acquisition, manipulation, and recall of abstract symbols which are often presented through concepts, models and theories in books. These practices may enable students to develop a general familiarity with some attributes or characteristics associated with leadership but have not been effective in helping them acquire leadership skills (Doh 2003).

There is an increasing realization that leadership education must go beyond the cognitive acquisition of leadership theory by including communicative and inspirational elements derived from role models. A wide variety of delivery strategies

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such as group activities, experiential learning, internships, role-plays and interactive presentations by experts have been used to achieve this objective (Doh 2003; Mitchell & Poutiatine 2002; Goski *et. al.* 2002). In this paper we focus on the use of narratives derived from biography as a means to provide resources for leadership development in library and information science.

Narratives are stories possessing a definite structure: beginning, middle, and end. They are an "organizational scheme" (Polkinghorne 1988, 13) for making sense of events. They are also a fundamental part of what it means to be human, so much so that the human species has been referred to as *homo narrans* (Fisher 1984). Bruner (1986) argues that humans have only two ways of thinking: logical reasoning and narrative, "each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality" (Bruner 1986, 11).

Narratives of all types surround us at different points of our life. We cannot escape them. Nor should we wish to for they are heuristic devices; they help to make the task of remembering easier. The benefit of story-telling results from the fact that it engages all the faculties of the brain at the same time "because you 'hear' the information factually, visually, and emotionally, it is more likely to be imprinted on your brain in a way that it sticks with you longer with very little effort on your part" (Neuhauser 1992, 5). Unlike abstract, logical thought, narratives weave individual human actions and events into an inter-related web of relationships. Breaching the pattern of predictability, narratives also have the potential to arouse curiosity, excitement and even generate a sense of awe and amazement. They provide guidance about which things could be taken for granted and which need explanation. A good narrative not only effectively conveys message rich in meaning and values, it inspires listeners and readers to participate, learn, and remember. Drawing an example from the business world, consider a story narrated by the former chairman of Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp (HSBC), Michael Sandberg. His story was about how his predecessor politely helped an elderly lady who, instead of queuing at the banking hall, came directly into his personal office and wanted to open an account with a small amount of cash. What this story did was to succinctly capture the humility and service-oriented mindset of Sandberg's predecessor, helping subse-

quent generations of HSBC management preserve the service culture, despite its global growth (Lim and Daft 2004).

In our systems of formal education, including education for LIS, we tend to undervalue narrative thinking. What is usually emphasized instead is the acquisition of abstract, logical knowledge concerning methods and procedures. Narrative thinking is relegated to introductory or historical courses at the beginning of a program of education. Given the benefits that we have sketched here, this is a mistake. Narratives have an important role to play in educating future LIS professionals and leaders.

An excellent source for developing narratives for LIS education lies in history, specifically biographies of the influential figures in their respective fields, whom we call giants. Biographies are the quintessential narrative form. The story of a life beginning with birth and ending with death follows faithfully the narrative structure. We can find in biography the materials to construct stories that inspire, caution, create vision and impart a set of resources for future story-telling use on the part of our students.

While we are engaged with biographies, our intention is not to promote hero-worship. We are looking instead for giants. As connoisseurs of myth and folklore know, giants come with a number of personality types, not all of which are pleasant. But all of them can be instructive. Our aim is to see developed realistic assessments of the work of outstanding information professionals. Where there have been failures and missed opportunities, or wrong turns taken, these must be faced and critically embraced as well.

Narratives in LIS

In many disciplines, the subject content is often replete with stories and narratives about past masters. In fact, Physics' Archimedes, Newton and Einstein, Biology's Darwin and Mendel, Chemistry's Curie, Economics' Smith and Computer Science's Babbage have become almost synonymous with the disciplines from which they emerged. All these great men and women are known to us through the efforts of biographers and historians. Their stories are now infused not only in their own fields of study, but the wider society as well.

In our view, it is definitively conceivable that a community such as LIS, which suffers a general lack of visibility, could generate similar inspiring leadership figures. The lack of current awareness within the LIS world of its own giants, their names and feats, in no way reflects badly on them, but on us, that we have allowed this state of affairs to exist for so long. We are not the first to note the fact that LIS, regardless of geographical region, tends to ignore its own giants. Sydney Pierce asks in one article: "What do other fields have that librarianship doesn't?" Her answer is a canon, a central body of work that all aspiring members of the profession need to learn and be familiar with. Pierce (1992, 241) argues that:

Students in most disciplines learn the use and value of research materials, from print documents to numeric databases, by observing what others have done with them. They learn not only what has been done, but how and why people have done it; this becomes a model for what they attempt in their own work.

Similarly, we argue that LIS education needs to provide students with a biographical canon, namely those people who have contributed to the development of the information professions over the years and that from this canon can flow the stories necessary for visionary leadership in their future careers.

The need for the narrative resources that giants provide is especially acute in Asia. On the Pacific side of the Asia-Pacific region there at least exists a foundation of biographical studies of key library and information science players, including the *Dictionary of American Library Biography*. Over much of Asia this basic resource appears close to non-existent. The role of information professional is a rather recent development in many of the countries here, with the notable exceptions of India and China. In many countries, building an effective information infrastructure has been a low priority for government leaders, intent on other projects seen as more important either economically or politically. As a result there is, compared to Europe and North America, a smaller base of libraries and librarians upon which to draw. This is exacerbated by the meagre legacy of information services inherited from colonial times which tended to serve the reading needs of the elite without paying much mind to the rest of the population. And recent economic events have not helped

either. The Asian currency crisis of 1997 has damaged the previously robust economies of many countries in East and Southeast Asia, while events such as SARS and the Second Iraq War have not improved matters. Thus it is not surprising that a literature search in the LISA database, for example, uncovers scanty mention of local figures associated with the field. This is not surprising but, disturbing nonetheless, and is a condition that needs to be rectified.

How to find giants and set them to work: Curriculum development

In identifying the criteria to be used to seek out LIS giants in the Asia-Pacific region, we do not wish to narrowly constrain the choice of individual teachers and scholars. Rather, we would like to draw attention to two characteristics of giants: their size and the fact that they are creatures of the past. When we note the size of giants, we mean that to be a giant, an information professional must have made a significant contribution not only to their particular institution, but also to the profession as a whole. The giant must be able to inspire students. In many cases, the contributions of LIS giants have likely gone unrecognized at the level of official rewards and pronouncements requiring the giant-seeker to think between the lines of a person's career, to understand their achievement from a broader perspective. We also prefer to choose giants from historic figures, people who have already lived out their careers and lives. Doing so allows for a sense of closure, of being able to capture a finite life and its lessons.

Example:

The good and bad in Shiyali Ranganathan

Everyone with at least a smattering of LIS training knows the name Ranganathan (1892–1972). Those with more than a glancing familiarity with the discipline also know that he is the creator of the Colon classification system, the five laws of library science and the "patron saint" of librarianship in India. Ranganathan started his career as a mathematician and a teacher at the university level. His first library post was only obtained in 1923 when the University of Madras appointed him university librarian. He was sent to study library science at University College in London, but re-

mained with the University of Madras library for twenty years after his return. During this time he produced his major works, the five laws in 1931 and Colon classification in 1933. After retiring from Madras in 1945 he taught library science at the Hindu University in Banares, was head of the Indian Library Association (1944-1953) and founded the Documentation Research and Training Centre in Bangalore in 1962. He died on the 27 September 1972.

Ranganathan is one of the better known librarians, yet his life is still not adequately documented. Although he wrote an autobiography, *A Librarian Looks Back*, it is not readily available. The centenary of his birth in 1992 occasioned a flurry of short articles written about and by those who had known him. But welcome though these contributions are, they have not been followed up to any degree. Here is a classic case where the field of LIS has neglected one of its giants, in this case a giant from the Asia-Pacific region. This is unfortunate because Ranganathan has a lot to offer those interested in putting together a biographical canon for the purposes of stimulating visionary leadership.

Consider first that he himself used the approach we are advocating in his book, *The Five Laws of Library Science*. The book is filled with the comings and goings of librarians. While not all are praiseworthy (some are seen as the antithesis of what a good librarian should be), the majority are portrayed as striving to put into practice the five laws of library science, the overall visionary approach Ranganathan was championing. The overall result is a picture of a rapidly changing and above all, exciting and vibrant, library world. Consider his story of the garden library of Lisbon:

At the far end, there is a giant cedar-tree spreading like an umbrella defying sun and rain. Inside its intense shadow, deep silence prevails; and you find a line of chairs encircling an enchanting collection of volumes in a lovely bookcase. Students in their flowing cloaks, workmen white with lime dust, raw rustics with timid and listless eyes, office and shop employees munching on their lunch, soldiers, printers, electricians, sailors and dock-hands, all share the contents of this unique Library, unhampered by any formality ... May the shadow of the ancient cedar in the public garden of the city of Seven Hills never grow less! May it long provide shelter for this patriotic enterprise, in the service of the gospel, 'Books are for Use'! (Ranganathan 1988).

A few pages later he provides his own experience at Madras University Library as an example

of what not to do to encourage use of the library. Again, the story told reinforces in a graphically appealing way the message he wanted to convey: that books, to be of any use at all, had to be available for people to read.

... when the authorities of a library were solemnly discussing ways and means to meet a great increase in the issue of books, a veritable Daniel came 'to judgment.' 'When do you have the greatest rush in the day?' asked the Daniel. 'In the evening, between 4 and 6', said the librarian. 'There you are,' came forth the solution, 'Close the library at four instead of six. That will end the bother.' There was a meek murmur [in reply]. 'They are the only hours when most of the students and teachers can use the Library.' 'Too much reading is no good, you know' retorted the strong-willed Daniel (Ranganathan 1988, 40).

Ranganathan's own life is also filled with useful narrative resources. Here we will present only two examples. More research would likely uncover numerous others. The first concerns Ranganathan's background as a library outsider. Considering that many people enter this profession later in their lives and with a variety of experiences it is important to welcome them into the fold. And for those already "in the fold" it is equally important to acknowledge the ability that outsiders have to inject new ideas and new thinking into library and information science. It is necessary for the basic foundations of the profession to be passed on to each new generation of library and information workers, but it is wise to remember that Ranganathan's contributions stem partially at least from his own outside status to the profession. In fact, Ranganathan's background should serve as an inspirational story for those approaching the discipline. He was, keep in mind, a mathematician first and only later a librarian. In the first chapter of *Five Laws* he explicitly states the value of his previous education in helping him take up as a problem the lack of systematic laws for librarianship. He writes:

Prior experience in scientific study and pursuit induced a sense of revolt against having to hold in memory and deal with myriad unrelated pieces of information and independent types of practices ... Cannot all these empirical aggregates of information and practices be reduced to a handful of basic principles? (Ranganathan 1988, 3).

It was from this appeal to the inductive generalization characteristic of natural science that the five

laws developed in the earliest years of Ranganathan's library career.

The second example we wish to dwell on here is Ranganathan's passion for library work. There are numerous telling examples of this aspect of the man's life. The first comes from his experiences on board the ship taking him back to India after completing his library studies in the United Kingdom. During this voyage, Ranganathan employed his time not only by reading or conversing with the other passengers, but taking every opportunity possible to further his chosen career, in this case by reorganizing the ship's library according to the principles of classification that he was in the process of devising. Another indication of his passion for library work comes later in his life. Not many of us would choose to donate our entire savings for any cause, however noble. Yet in the late 1950s, that was exactly what Ranganathan did in order to establish the Sarada Ranganathan Professorship for Library Science at the University of Madras (Encyclopedia 1991: 25, 61). Similarly, in 1961 he took the salary he was earning as a National Professor in Library Science to set up the Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science (Encyclopedia 1991: 25, 65). Truly this was a passion for his life work and a graphic reminder that ultimately we must work not only for money, but also for the gratification of our calling. Passion is something that can sadly be lacking in our increasingly automated and managed society, yet it is key to both engendering a successful organization and in achieving a happy life. Before closing this section, it must be noted that passion can also be dangerously self-consuming: we are told that Ranganathan went back to work in the library immediately after his wedding. He was a LIS giant, but that does not make him above reproach nor is he the source of only positive lessons!

Other Asian librarian giants

Ranganathan is one of the few Asian giants of LIS who is recognized around the world. However, this does not mean that the field is completely barren for those who seek diligently. As mentioned earlier, the contributions of many giants lie unrecognized and buried. Take for example, the case of Kong Tian Cheng. It is doubtful that this name is familiar, but Kong Tian Cheng, Chief Clerk of the Raffles Library and Museum around the turn

of the 19th century, also exhibited the passion of Ranganathan towards his profession. In his spare time he worked to produce, first a bibliography of materials held by the library related to China, and later, a similar bibliography on the Malay people and culture. For his labour on the Chinese work he received a passing mention in the library's annual report for 1901: "A catalogue of literature relating to China contained in the library was published in June. This catalogue was compiled by the Chief Clerk of the Library, Kong Tian Cheng, in his leisure time. It was originally published in the Straits Chinese Magazine" (Annual Report 1901).

His bibliographies are still to be found at the National Library in Singapore, but we know very little about the Chief Clerk himself. He started his library career as Second Clerk in 1896 and was seen as someone worth keeping as a year later he was promoted to First Clerk with a raise in salary from \$15 to \$25. The records tell us of increasing augmentations of his pay in succeeding years, something that was by no means an automatic occurrence in the professional lives of library staff in Singapore at the time. The Library Board's minutes are full of refusals of appeals for more money by various employees. In fact, Kong left the service of the library in 1900 to seek greener pastures in Penang (in present-day Malaysia). This move led to repercussions, as revealed in the minutes for June 1st, 1901: "The Curator complained of the inconvenience he had experienced in working the library since the former First Clerk had been transferred by Government to Penang, and of the difficulty in finding a suitable man for the post at such a small salary" (Minutes June 1, 1900). The Curator, R. Hanitsch, won the day, and Kong Tian Cheng was encouraged to return at a more reasonable salary of \$75 per month. This was the period when he must have begun work on the Chinese bibliography. His Malay bibliography appeared sometime in 1902 and was also dutifully recorded in the library's annual report for that year. But in 1905 Kong Tian Cheng disappears from the record, no doubt able to command a higher price for his services elsewhere. He has the last laugh though, as we find a note reporting that: "that the Acting First Clerk Heng Ban Loon [Kong's replacement] had embezzled various subscription and petty receipts to a total amount of \$33.50" (Minutes Jan.4, 1906). It would have been wiser human resource policy to keep the dedicated Kong on the payroll

by rewarding and encouraging his interest in the work.

A giant from the Pacific side of the Asia-Pacific region: Norbert Wiener

The life of Norbert Wiener provides our third example of the how biographical narratives can aid professional education. Wiener has been called by some "the father of the information age" and as the founder of the science of cybernetics he is antecedent to the discipline of information science (Conway 2005, ix). He provides an excellent example to extend our reach to the information side of LIS.

Wiener was a genius. He started his university education at age eleven, gained his doctorate from Harvard at 18 and soon afterwards joined the faculty at MIT. His accomplishments are many. He worked on the design of one of the first digital computers, was responsible for building a new generation of automated anti-aircraft weapons, founded the science of cybernetics and was instrumental in creating an artificial arm that was tied to the human nervous system. He was also an accomplished writer, with several best-selling books to his credit.

However great these achievements are, we argue that Wiener is important for another reason entirely: his dedication and commitment to a set of ethics and ideals in his professional life. To sum up these ideals, we would say that Wiener wanted to use his science for the good of humankind. He wanted people to benefit from his technical feats, rather than be harmed by them. And when, after the Second World War, he began to see the emerging shape of the new military-industrial complex he refused to be co-opted. More than that, he spoke out against these trends towards the permanent militarization of the United States at a time when such views were decidedly not fashionable. Regardless of one's position on the ethics of the Cold War, one can admire Wiener for the tenacity of his ethical stand, even as that stand played havoc on his professional and social life. This is one message his life holds for educators who are responsible not only for instilling technical skills in students, but also a sense of professional ethics and integrity.

The story of Wiener's passionate article, "A Scientist Rebels", in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1947, of

the further articles he published in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, of the effects this had on his relations with colleagues at MIT (the largest non-profit military contractor in the USA at the time) and his eventual winning of the National Medal of Science in 1964 are inspirational in the perfect sense of the word. They are evidence that a scientist/professional can take an ethical stand and be successful at the same time. At the same time his more eccentric qualities, namely, his habit of strolling apparently randomly around the MIT campus in search of conversation (Wiener walks were the name attributed to these rambles by his colleagues) and his rather more unconventional snoring through lectures given by other professors, embellish his tale by adding to the human interest of the man.

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that traditional pedagogy in LIS has championed the acquisition of abstract forms of knowledge that tend to ignore more inspirational and communicative elements that are essential to leadership training. We further noted that biographical narratives are excellent means to overcome this handicap, especially since narratives are a basic building block of human cognition. Yet here too LIS education is lacking. Whereas other disciplines more or less actively seek out the stories of their "heroes" this has not been the case in our own field. Facing these constraints, we have provided only a few examples of how biography can inform LIS education. We are also acutely aware that the examples we have drawn upon are all male and that this represents even more of a disparity when set alongside the fact that librarianship as a whole is a female profession. Gender should not be ignored when it comes to seeking out role models. However, it is hoped that these examples serve to whet the appetite of members of the profession in Asian countries to change this sad state of affairs and in so doing provide enhanced inspirational and communicative resources for the next generation of LIS professionals in the region.

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