



Tools of the Serials Trade

Reviews

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ABSTRACT

Bedoya reviews *The Generation X Librarian*, William Breitbach reviews *Instructional Design for Librarians and Information Professionals*, and Stephanie Rosenblatt reviews *Workplace Learning & Leadership*.

The Generation X Librarian: Essays on Leadership, Technology, Pop Culture, Social Responsibility and Professional Identity, edited by Martin K. Wallace, Rebecca Tolley-Stokes, and Erik Sean Estep. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011. 217 p. \$55.00. ISBN: 978-0786463091

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Appropriately enough for a book about an entire generation, *The Generation X Librarian: Essays on Leadership, Technology, Pop Culture, Social Responsibility and Professional Identity* is a hodgepodge of essays of varying quality with a wide range of writing styles and approaches to the topic. The editors and authors, mostly academic librarians and a few public librarians, library students, and professors, aim to create “a picture of Gen X librarians [that] is painted up, stripped away, reevaluated and remodeled” (p. 7) and to fill a perceived gap in the library literature on Gen X librarians. Indeed, there are few books on working with Gen X librarians, although there are career guides like Rachel Singer Gordon’s *The Nextgen Librarian’s Survival Guide* (Gordon, 2006). The intended audience for *The Generation X Librarian* is not exactly clear. Is it for Gen X librarians themselves, who might be inspired by the section on social responsibility, managers of Gen Xers, or those who are supervised by Gen X managers? Luckily, with so many chapters (eighteen in a book of just over 200 pages, including index) many people in the library world will probably find a topic that interests them.

The first section of the book, “Getting to Know Us,” has five chapters that examine Gen X librarianship in light of changing social

and technological challenges within the library and often explain why Gen X is perfectly positioned to meet those challenges effectively. For example, as one of the stereotypical Gen X electronic resources librarians, I found the description of the multiple challenges that liaison librarians face in dealing with faculty in “Generation X Librarians, Faculty and the Rise of Information Literacy,” by Leslie Porter Mathews and Sergio Rizzo, to be informative and interesting. Although some chapters provide interesting anecdotes and research, the section does suffer from a lack of demographic data that would prove there really is a difference between Gen X librarians and their older and younger coworkers. Possibly this is impossible, but if so, it would be helpful to know whatever is known. Some chapters display an uncritical acceptance of Gen X’s supposed characteristics and extrapolate from there without at least mentioning broader cultural structures like gender, race, and class. Are Gen X librarians representative of the larger Gen X model? Are there more male librarians now that the profession is becoming more technological, and if so, what are the resulting effects? Are Gen X librarians really more technologically

capable than preceding generations? One exception is Lisa Carlucci Thomas and Karen Sobel's "Stuck in the Middle with You: Generation X Librarians," which notes that technological fluency, a supposed Gen X characteristic, is not limited by generation so much as by "income, college education, and individual preferences" (p. 55).

"Section 2: Leadership" contains advice on management and mentoring and a survey of Gen Xers' previous careers. Although I found chapters such as Breanne Kirsch and Jonathan Kirsch's "Managing Millennials: Advantages of Generation X Librarian Approaches" helpful for providing concrete examples of projects and interactions; if you see them as just collections of anecdotes, you may not agree. Dawn Lowe-Wincentzen argues in "A Finger in the Pie: A Look at How Multiple Library Careers Benefit the Library Professional" that rather than seeing Gen Xers' job (or career) hopping as a detriment, we should embrace the multiple perspectives and diverse skill-sets they bring to the workplace. Lowe-Wincentzen also provides survey results on what are some of those career changes.

In "Section 3: Technology," we get a survey of public library users by generation, thoughts on changing services within the library, and an admonishment to consider some librarians' privileges ("Hackers vs. Librarians: Some Thoughts on the Privilege of 2.0 Thinking," by Jessamyn West). As an electronic resources librarian, it was not surprising that I found this section the most interesting one, not just for the technology talk. Two of the three chapters (West's and Rachel Williams and Jennifer Cromer's "Twitter My Glitter: A Dialogue on the Technological Expectations of Library Users") place technology in the social context of our users, reminding us that their concerns might be different than ours (privacy vs. convenience, for example). And Wil Weston's "The Transitioning Library Collection: Is the Gen X Librarian the Right Librarian at the Right Time" wants us to see Gen X as an outlook rather than a collection of people who happen to be born around the same time and advocate rethinking library collection development with that critical perspective.

Section 4 on popular culture is easily the most entertaining of the book. In "Watchers, Punks and Dashing Heroes: Representations of Male Librarians in Generation X Mass Culture," authors Rafia Mirza and Maura Seale investigate the changing perceptions of librarians as they move into more technological (and thus, traditionally male) areas through an examination of three recent pop culture librarians. "Pinko vs. Punk: A Generational Comparison of Alternative Press Publications and Zines," by Jenna Freedman, gives a brief comparison

of underground presses and magazines and zines, and offers a stirring justification for why libraries should be collecting these marginalized materials.

The last section, "Social Responsibility," examines the role of Gen X librarians and whether and how they are participating in social reconstruction (in multiple meanings of the word). Two chapters ("Remaining Responsible, Remaining Relevant: Gen X Librarians and Social Responsibility," by Peter Lehu, and Skeptic/Artist: Gen Xers in Radical Reference," by Melissa Morrone) touch on activism and specifically Radical Reference, an ongoing collective project to "support activist communities, progressive organizations, and independent journalists by providing professional research support, education and access to information" (p. 176). A third chapter, "The Thin Red Line: How Gen X Librarians Make It Thicker (Views from Bosnia and Herzegovina)" by Mario Hibert and Sasa Madacki, looks at how librarians have a duty to preserve cultural memory in their countries where ethnic cleansing aimed to erase the past. All three chapters give librarians a special responsibility to participate in their larger communities (even if it is a library association) as part of the service aspect of librarianship.

At their best, the chapters in this book offer engaging and insightful commentary on thought-provoking topics relevant to all librarians, not just to Gen X librarians. The editors could have chosen more chapters with data, rather than relying on so many experiential and theoretical essays, but perhaps none were forthcoming. If you feel like you don't understand the newer librarians and you want a "CliffsNotes" type of guide,¹ this book is for you. If you are a Gen X librarian, you may come away feeling you've gained some insight into why and how past interactions and events unfolded, or that you sat down with some of your friends and compared experiences. Although I share many of the authors' skepticisms about whether Gen X is a valid construct, the book does provide talking points so we can continue discussions of how libraries are changing and how new librarians are contributing to these changes.

Reference

Gordon, R. S. (2006). *The nextgen librarian's survival guide*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.

¹ CliffsNotes are study guides and notes that summarize works of literature and other publications (<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/>).

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Instructional Design for Librarians and Information Professionals, by Lesley S.J. Farmer.
New York: Neal-Schuman, 2011. 229 p. \$80.00 ISBN-13: 978-1555707361

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Many librarians assume the role as teacher whether or not they have had any formal training. Although there appears to be a renewed emphasis on this over the past decade or two, the librarian's role as teacher has been discussed at least since Samuel Swett Green's famous article in the first issue of *Library Journal* in 1876 (Green, 1876). At that time, teaching probably occurred at the reference desk, in the stacks, and at the card catalog. Now librarians may still teach at the reference desk and in the stacks, but we also teach in classrooms and online. Based

on Green's article, it is safe to say that the role of librarian as teacher was firmly established in the nineteenth century, while the information tools and context of the teaching has changed dramatically. It is surprising that with such a long history of librarians as teachers, relatively few works have been published on instructional design (ID) that focus on the work of librarians.

Instructional Design for Librarians and Information Professionals makes a good case for the value of instructional design in the work of

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