



## AT THE LIBRARY

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*“Children’s librarians are practical people. We are very good at solving day-to-day problems ...What we don’t do so well...is reflect on what we do and why we do it”*

-Virginia Walter, 2001,  
from “Once and Future Library”

I recently wrote a paper comparing subjects taught in library schools to skills that are actually needed to be a children’s librarian. It was an interesting exercise, and since I am doing both, it seems like I should know at least half the answer right off the bat. However, as with practically any topic, there is always more to know and think about.

I started out by looking at what classes are offered and whether different library schools have similar classes. It turns out they do, although the methods and modes of teaching can vary quite a bit. For instance, San Jose State University (SJSU), where I am enrolled, has many online classes. This means these future librarians may never meet either their fellow students or their teachers – which is an odd concept when you think about it. After all, working with people is what librarians do, and so perhaps working with people should be part of the

training, too. However, I’ve actually changed my mind about this. And I say that not only because I now have taken many classes online – and, in fact, probably wouldn’t have been able to finish this degree any time soon if I hadn’t.

But I also say it because as I was writing my paper, I started thinking back on the online classes I’ve taken and who was in them. And I remembered all the working students and all the students with children and even all the students who don’t even live in California. And I realized that online classes attract a different student body and perhaps those students will contribute in ways the more traditional students may not.

I was also interested to see which classes were required and which were simply recommended. Of the three schools I looked at, the basic required classes are quite similar. They include introductory information about: developing and

maintaining library materials; managing a library; and what is called in the library profession “information retrieval.” I love that term. It sounds so complicated and basically means the process that is used to get the information someone asks for. The literature on this topic is enormous; researchers are constantly trying to figure out to get people to ask for what they really want – and then how to give it to them.

But what was particularly fascinating to me were the classes that weren’t required. For instance, marketing – a class I’m taking this semester. As libraries compete for funds and attention, marketing – the process of letting the public know how a library can be of help – is going to become more and more crucial.

Another class is interpersonal relationships. This class, like the marketing class, is offered at many schools, but not

required. I think understanding how people relate to each other, and gaining skills in this area is essential. And this leads me to cooperation: At the three schools I considered there is no class specifically on this topic. Yet libraries would do well to learn how to work with other agencies for the benefit of the agencies as well as the community.

Finally - and in my opinion, most critical - there are classes such as the one at SJSU called “Library Services for Racially and Ethnically Diverse Communities.” All over the country libraries are serving an increasingly diverse group of people. A class like this helps librarians understand the how and why of meeting the varying needs of their immediate community. And what could be more important than that?