



Libraries Matter

by Dr. Peggy Sharp Chamberlain

Libraries inspire fond memories. Perhaps you remember it as the place that welcomed you as a child with so many, many good books, and a great "story lady." Many are grateful for the library and the librarian who always knew exactly which book we wanted to read. For some it was the special way the librarian read the books aloud, or told those stories. Getting your first library card was special, as it made it possible for you to choose your very own books to check out and take home for free. Many remember the knowing librarian who helped find the exact resources you needed to get that report done by tomorrow. For me, it was the librarian who gently reminded me how to pronounce my last name with a twinkle in her eye when a really good-looking boy sought my attention, and I was tongue-tied. There are few places so universally favored and loved as the library.

Today's library is different than the library many of us remember in so many ways. We live in a world filled with digital resources, e-books, e-readers, on-line data bases, iPads, iPhones, iPods. With so much information available in so many formats, are libraries still necessary? The answer is an emphatic yes!

Whatever the format of the materials and information, the role of librarians remains the same: **to help users choose, use and understand the resources selected.** Whether users select an e-book or a print book, they need guidance to make wise choices. When users research via the Internet or using one of the library's databases, they need to know how to effectively search to get the information they really want. After users have read or viewed their selected resource, a librarian can help them understand and interpret the information or story. Let's take a look at each of these activities separately.

The librarian helps the users choose or select their materials. Initially, the librarians select the resources from which the users make their choices. A librarian is trained in the selection of all materials based upon quality, need, and interests. Resources are selected with the knowledge of the specific community and patrons in mind. Therefore, the librarian helps users make initial choices by selecting the appropriate resources from the many options available. They help patrons learn about all kinds of resources available from the expected books to the unexpected sources such as a local Culture Pass.

Users still must select from the available resources, and often they need guidance. Some ways that libraries and librarians help users select resources include:

- face-to-face conversations with users and recommendations from librarians based upon what the users say they want
- on-line lists of recommended books developed by librarians in a variety of categories

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- What's New bookshelves in the individual libraries and on the library web site that highlight print and e- books newly acquired for the library
 - library displays of books and resources on various timely and popular topics
 - library displays and on-line lists of new and most-wanted books
 - lists of books read by library book clubs as well as other local book clubs
 - classes and presentations on a myriad of topics to introduce patrons to resources of interest
 - book talks and summaries of books on-line and in library programs
 - children's programming that introduces stories and books through story hours, special programs, and book sharing sessions
 - summer reading programs that inspire reading

Users need to know how to use the resources they have selected. To this end, librarians provide person-to-person tutorials on the use of electronic devices - how to download e-books to an e-reader, how to download music (often available free to keep), how to use various databases, specialized resources developed by libraries such as a local history database, etc. In short, librarians are personal tutors for users to help them understand the ever-changing world of technologies and their use in relation to library resources. Additionally, there are many classes offered through the library to help patrons navigate the many resources available.

Additionally, libraries provide many programs for parents and care-givers to help young children grow intellectually through interactions with books, other library resources, and with other children. Teen programs help users create dynamic products with new resources.

Finally, **users want to fully understand the resources they have used.** To that end there are many discussion groups to help users process their understanding of resources:

- book clubs meet regularly to talk about selected books, helping readers of all ages sort out their thoughts as they share insights with others
- user-groups meet regularly to talk about developments in their areas of interest
- special interest groups on a wide range of topics meet regularly
- summer reading programs for kids encourage them to share what they've read with others in creative and thoughtful ways

Libraries are changing in changing communities. They are proactive as they adapt to changing user expectations who want 24/7 availability, convenient locations, a user-friendly website, and a concierge model of customer service. They have changing collections and services in changing physical spaces with digital resources, social networking and resources available outside the traditional library space. My local library offers classes in parenting, retirement plans for small businesses, a job help hub, play groups for young children, after school programs, and income tax helps just to name a few of the innovative programs. Libraries are dynamic social centers changing to reflect and create communities. They are an expression of community spirits, and librarians are stewards of what generations have built.

We can all make coffee at home, yet coffee houses are more popular than ever. We can get many resources from home, but the library is the hub where we can learn about new resources and engage with others to enhance our experience with books and other resources. We are social beings who delight in social interaction and intellectual stimulation; the library is the place where we can share our passion for both.