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Book Review

Digital Libraries: Philosophies, Technical Design Considerations, and Example Scenarios

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Digital Libraries: Philosophies, Technical Design Considerations, and Example Scenarios.

Ed. **David Stern**, The Haworth Press, Inc., 1999.

ISBN: 078900769X \$49.95

and Learning and Libraries in an Information Age: Principles and Practice.

Ed. **Barbara K. Stripling**, Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1999. ISBN: 1563086662 \$39.00)

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Our beloved libraries and the glamorous computer information age would seem to be a blessed coupling; however, the user-machine problem has proven difficult. *Digital Libraries: Philosophies, Technical Design Considerations, and Example Scenarios* and *Learning and Libraries in an Information Age: Principles and Practice* successfully address the issue that makes some libraries crumble and others thrive: adapting to and pushing change.

The Haworth Press has simultaneously published *Digital Libraries* as *Science and Technology Libraries*, volume 17, issue 3/4. This collection of articles focuses not on the hard-core technological aspects of digital libraries, but rather allows the reader to explore organization, collection development, and interface design issues. Real-life digital libraries are also highlighted: the **University of Connecticut Map and Geographic Information Center** is featured as well as various online patent collections. Because the information is largely theoretical and not technical, it will not be out-of-date by the next how-we-did-it-better story.

Digital libraries, virtual libraries, electronic environments: the paths of each of these scenarios can cross and the definitions can become quite unclear. Editor **David Stern**'s introduction, complete with a bibliography of selected readings, is an outstanding must-read for any information professional because it addresses and defines each of these scenarios. Stern makes no qualms about it; he deftly states that there is not "one simple solution to digitizing and distributing online library material" and that solutions "should be based upon niche situations." An incredibly important conclusion! What *Digital Libraries* has to offer is insight-options for different "building plans," if you will — into all of the glamorous possibilities that computers offer libraries. Stern states, "I hope this volume helps to motivate our readers to further explore the collaboration opportunities for information professionals in the new arena."

Digital Libraries is organized into three sections: Philosophies, Technical Design, and Example Scenarios. **David E. Lesk** and **Steve Mitchell** both address one of the most pivotal issues in digital libraries and the human-machine conflict: interface usability. Lesk's piece, "The Organization of Digital Libraries" examines this issue from a philosophical viewpoint, while Mitchell's essay "Interface Design Considerations in Libraries" examines it from a technical one. Interestingly, though these two articles are divergent in nature, they (along with all of the articles in *Digital Libraries*) sing the same tune: the future of information retrieval is in access. How things are accessed, where things are accessed, and the ease or difficulty of access will make or break digital libraries.

Be warned: the Technical Design section of *Digital Libraries* is filled with acronyms and techie lingo. However, all of the pieces included in this section relate technical facts and figures in a

layperson's language. **Robert Ferrer** even includes user-friendly graphics and diagrams in his piece "University of Illinois the Fed of Digital Libraries: Interoperability Among Heterogeneous Information Systems." While the content might be over some readers' heads, the song is still the same: access is the key.

This song can also be heard in *Learning and Libraries in an Information Age: Principles and Practice*. Whereas *Digital Libraries* explores the evolution of information from a management perspective, *Learning and Libraries* attacks it from an instructional standpoint. Both books don't deny that the change in information mediums has begun and will only continue; *Learning and Libraries* focuses on how to help our patrons survive the change by learning the new methods and responsibilities of information access.

Barbara K. Stripling has collected chapters that focus on school libraries and librarians' new role as instructional leaders and information designers. While this book might not appear to have immediate practical application value due to its focus on school libraries, do not overlook its worth. A number of noteworthy and talented educators, executives, media specialists, and consultants offer theoretical approaches, learning modules, information literacy concepts, and philosophies of information that span all library setting and patron demographics. Besides, it cannot be denied that many of our information customers are new to the computer information age, whether they are in an elementary school media center or a corporate research facility.

Learning and Libraries is divided into six parts that address literacy in the Information Age: the context of learning, collaborative planning and teaching, library media programs, connecting to the community, and connecting to research. These parts are further divided into chapters that address specific concerns. These chapters, especially **Diane Oberg**'s "A Community of Learning in an Information Age," make *Learning and Libraries* worth the purchase. Because Oberg writes with a broad scope, the information she presents is applicable to any type of librarian in the public service sector. Libraries are like little schools in themselves, and Oberg emphasizes that collaboration is the golden key to allow students (or patrons) to learn in the library, in school, and in the community. We are bombarded with daily doses of information, and we are constantly challenged by new ways of getting to that information. To become an informed citizenry — a community of learning — it is imperative that we work together to learn about and teach all of the new information issues that confront us. Oberg states, "Building a community of learning requires a quantum leap, a paradigm shift of major proportions." We can all benefit from words such as these.

Not only does *Learning and Libraries* contain useful theoretical information; lesson plans, example activities, and sample assessment tools are also included. Bibliographies and suggested readings follow each chapter. A detailed table of contents and an index are included as well.

From creating digital libraries to teaching school children information literacy skills, we are all facing monumental challenges in our profession. Surviving and even creating change requires us to "think outside the box" and facilitate the possibilities that technology has to offer. As information professionals, we are responsible for helping our patrons—our students—change as well. Accessing global information can be considered a lofty goal; *Digital Libraries* and *Learning and Libraries* make it much more attainable.