6-1-1998

Conference Notes: WNYLRC Spring Conference

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Recommended Citation

Ellen T. McGrath, *Conference Notes: WNYLRC Spring Conference*, 23 ALLUNY Newsl. 12 (1998).
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/law_librarian_other_scholarship/5

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MANAGING CHANGE: PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY
WNYLRC Spring Conference
(Ellen McGrath, University at Buffalo)

I attended the Spring Conference of the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) on April 23, 1998 in Buffalo, entitled "Managing Change: People and Technology." This was a day-long meeting with a number of interesting speakers, including Walt Crawford as the keynote speaker.

Walt Crawford is an access services officer at the Research Libraries Group (RLG). He is the author of *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness, & Reality* (with Michael Gorman), published by ALA in 1995. I was especially pleased to get two presentations for the price of one from Mr. Crawford. He prepared a 13 page paper as his keynote address, which was distributed to attendees on paper. During his actual one hour presentation, he delivered a sort of overview of many of the points he elaborated on in his paper. It was nice to be able to read the paper later on and reflect upon his presentation a bit more. And I was impressed with the manner in which Mr. Crawford could pull pertinent points together quickly and put them in appropriate context in terms of his paper and his presentation.

I came away with an impression of a very well read man, comfortable in both the library and the technology worlds, and extremely knowledgeable about both. I should say that these presentations given by Mr. Crawford form the basis for a new book he is working on, *Being Analog: Building Tomorrow's Libraries*, due out in winter 1999 from ALA. I found this method of refining one's research as it is written by getting constant feedback very intriguing and admirable. I know I could not do full justice to his ideas here, but I will try to convey some of the points Mr. Crawford made that resonated with me. Many were introduced in *Future Libraries*, but have been further refined since its publication.

There is no apparent replacement for the book. It simply does some things better than any other medium can. Mr. Crawford did comment that amazingly enough, though we are well past the time when paper was supposed to have died out, people now are less willing to read from the computer screen, rather than more willing to do so.

Mr. Crawford commented that libraries are in the "context business," as opposed to the data business. The important things that libraries do is to put things in context, to provide perspective. And we do this by making choices all the time. One of the basic drawbacks to the Web is its lack of context, its overwhelming presentation of raw data. Mr. Crawford commented that some people may prefer raw data, so that they can filter it themselves. But others prefer it filtered, as it saves time and energy in understanding it.

Why do futurists like to make sweeping predictions? Basically because they want to simplify, they can make money doing so, and they think everyone feels the way they do, not to mention the fact that people listen when they talk. But it is clear that "new media almost always *complement* older media rather than *replacing* them. New media find their own niches" (quoted from p. 5 of Mr. Crawford's paper). Some characterize technology as a kind of thing with a life of its own, that is poised to (or already has) overpower us. People are often ignored in the predictions of the future, but it is wise to remember that technology can be adapted only as quickly as the people that use it. And people tend to adapt slowly and not to throw over something old, just because something new has come along.

This is just scratching the surface, but I obviously enjoyed Mr. Crawford's presentation and paper very much. His final words of advice were to simply calm down and to step back a bit (don't be so alarmed by the technological changes), but at the same time to stay involved and to pay attention to these changes. There was a breakout session that followed the keynote, in which Mr. Crawford further discussed his ideas. I, however, moved on to another concurrent presentation.

The session "Changing the Light Bulb Without Offending the Fixture" was presented by Theodore Callisto, who is a consultant to the Departments of Education in both New York State and West Virginia and is also adjunct professor at Canisius College. This was a general examination of the concept of change and the challenge it presents. Mr. Callisto emphasized that it is imperative that we deal with the process of change itself. Resistance is most often the result of a failure to adapt during the change process, rather than a real objection to the actual new thing.

Mr. Callisto is a very engaging speaker with a forceful and humorous style. He seemed to have a vast supply of amusing anecdotes from his education and business consulting work that illustrated his points quite well. Mr. Callisto provided a good handout that covered the content and context of the continuous improvement process, the roles people play, role transitions, and the four "Ds" (disengagement, disidentification, disorientation, and disenchantment). And he reiterated a few key ideas over and over:

*   Change is a process, not an event;
*   Change requires active participation, which must be voluntary;
*   Training and breathing time is essential, so that fears associated with change can be addressed;
*   Planning is necessary, but must be flexible;
*   The team approach is successful, but only if all members of the team are equal shareholders and roles and goals are clearly set;
*   Deciding not to change is not an option!

After our luncheon, Susan Grelick spoke about her experiences previously as Amherst Town Clerk and currently as Amherst Town Supervisor, with an emphasis upon how her training as a librarian influenced the way she organized records and archival materials. (Amherst is the town within which the North Campus of the University at Buffalo is located.) Ms. Grelick discussed the grants she received to archive and index the records of the town. This made the records more accessible, while at the same time instilling pride and interest in the people of the town and saving time and money in carrying on the business of the government of the town.

The final session I attended was "Filtering or Faltering? The Library's Role in Limiting Internet Access." It was given by Elizabeth Lane Lawley, an Assistant Professor of Information Technology at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). I am not aware if this is a hot topic in most law libraries, at least it is not in mine, but I did find the presentation interesting nonetheless. A big portion of the attendees of this conference were from public libraries, so this was a well-attended presentation.

I learned about the various types of filters (keyword blocking, site blocking, and Web rating systems) and that there isn't a happy medium in terms of filtering. It seems either too much is blocked or not enough. Ms. Lawley emphasized that it is important to know how the filter in use operates, yet this is not usually clear, so a library with a filter system in place often does not know what it is not getting.

I had not attended a WNYLRC conference in some time and I was very impressed with the quality of the speakers and the topics covered. It is challenging I am sure to develop a program for such a mixed audience (public, school, academic, and special librarians), but in this particular case the WNYLRC Continuing Education Committee did a remarkable job.