Information Profession Principles and Their Influence

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Abstract

Beliefs, principles, values, practices, and assumptions help create the foundations of the information profession and its culture. In this paper, I analyzed three of the principles held by different professional associations in the information profession and discussed my thoughts about my personal direction in the information profession, in order to answer the question: Why do the three principles or beliefs I selected have such a powerful influence on my personal beliefs? The three principles that I analyzed involved the importance of reading, free and equal access to information, and intellectual freedom. When discussing my personal direction, I expressed that I plan on becoming a school librarian to help with the continued achievement of these beliefs. By the end of the essay, I discovered three possible answers to the question: 1) the principles connected strongly to personal beliefs I already had, 2) the principles have multiple interpretations, and 3) the principles evoked an emotional response.

Information Profession Principles and Their Influence

Throughout the semester, our class has been learning about the information profession and its culture. By reading, writing, and collaborating with fellow classmates, we have learned about the beliefs, values, practices, and assumptions that help create the foundations of the information profession. I have found that these beliefs and principles may vary in terminology from organization to organization, but at their core, the values of all information organizations are quite similar. For this assignment, we have been tasked with selecting three beliefs and principles in the information profession to evaluate and analyze, and discussing how the three beliefs and principles will influence our professional career directions. By the end of this essay, I hope to answer the following question: Why do the three principles or beliefs I selected have such a powerful influence on my personal beliefs?

Part 1: Culture of the Information Professions

Principle/Belief #1

The first principle or belief that will be covered in this paper is the fourth common belief of the American Association of School Libraries (AASL): "Reading is the core of personal and academic competency" (American Association of School Libraries [AASL], 2022). This principle explains how learners in school libraries will aim to gain knowledge through reading by actively engaging with relevant information resources and digital learning opportunities (AASL, 2022). It also explains that school librarians are responsible for motivating students to read by engaging learners through personal narrative and for curating up-to-date "digital and print materials and technology to provide access to high-quality reading materials that encourage learners, educators, and families to become lifelong learners and readers" (AASL, 2022, n.p.). In summary, this principle highlights that reading is important for a student's success, and

supplying and encouraging students with current, relevant, and informative materials and other opportunities is a school librarian's role. This belief represents school librarians, their patrons, which are typically students, and the beliefs of people across the U.S. This common belief, as well as the other five common beliefs of the AASL, were recently created during a process of remodeling by reviewing old documentation and evaluating feedback received from" more than 1,300 school librarians and stakeholders nationally" (AASL, 2022, n.p.). Therefore, the belief was constructed from over a thousand people's belief that reading is important and is the key to a person's personal and academic success.

A person's ability to read has been an important skill in the U.S. for a long time. For instance, in order to vote in the American colonies, a citizen had to have passed a literacy test (University of Texas Arlington [UTA], 2015). The founding fathers put a lot of importance on a person's ability to read, and it soon became a mark of status, so many early Americans worked hard to learn how to read (UTA, 2015). The literacy rate continued to rise in the U.S., especially after the improvements in bookmaking brought about by the Industrial Revolution (UTA, 2015). The U.S.'s belief that reading was important continued throughout the twentieth century, as seen by reading becoming a focus in U.S. public education in the 1920s and the reading habits of the American public began to be tracked by the Census Bureau and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the 1940s (UTA, 2015). This leads us to the age of information that we live in today (Eyre, 2003).

In this "information age" that we live in, society puts a huge emphasis on information and communications technologies, which require young people to have adequate reading skills in order to keep up and function in society (Eyre, 2003). School libraries play a key role in helping students achieve reading competency; they are seen as "the natural place to nurture the reading

habits" (Eyre, 2003, p.225) of a person in the early years of their life. The importance of young people being able to have access to libraries is even pointed out in the Library Bill of Rights; it states that the "lack of access to information can be harmful to minors" (ALA, 2006, n.p.). Also, the school librarians in these libraries will be responsible for providing a variety of print and digital materials to help learners successfully prepare for this era's version of literacy, which is multimedia, involving written words, as well as "fast-flowing images and sounds and sensory assaults" (Juergens, 2010, p.7). All in all, reading has been important in the U.S. for many years, and many people across the nation believe that it is imperative to the success of young people in today's world for them to be able to be competent readers and have access to the information in school libraries that are provided by school librarians.

Principle/Belief #2

The second principle or belief that will be covered in this paper is the third belief and guiding principle of the Michigan Library Association (MLA): "We believe in equal and free access to information and knowledge" (Michigan Library Association [MLA], 2022). This principle means that all users, no matter their defining characteristics like their "race, creed, color, social strata, or country of birth" (Preddy, 2015, p.4), are to be given access to information and services without any boundaries or limitations. This principle represents all library users, as well as the librarians and other staff members who are responsible for fulfilling this principle.

Libraries are constantly working to provide free and equal access to all users, but it is not always an easy task. Users that can be difficult to serve are vulnerable and/or at-risk populations that do not have the means for transportation to a library, such as users in residential facilities, hospitals, shelters, and jails (Kosmicki, 2020). Public libraries across the nation provide opportunities for these populations to receive access to information by partnering with outreach

organizations to bring the library to them through the use of bookmobiles, deposit collections, homebound services, and other strategies (Kosmicki, 2020). One specific example of this can be found in St. Johns County, Florida. The St. Johns Public Library sends an accessible van filled with a variety of materials, like books, DVDs, and books on CDS, to 31 different facilities in the area in order to reach their elderly population (Kosmicki, 2020).

Another factor of libraries working to provide all of their patrons with free and equal access to information involves "the implementation of space, which is how the physical building and staff of the library are arranged" (Kosmicki, 2020, p.52). In other words, libraries need to also provide physical accessibility to users with disabilities that visit the libraries in person. For instance, this topic was touched on in a recent interview I completed with a library director at a local public library. The director stated that access to information also dealt with making the building accessible for all, such as having ramps in certain areas and raised or lower desks in the computer labs and other workspaces. The director further went on to explain that these measures to ensure accessibility for all should also involve online resources. Examples of ways to make online resources accessible for those with disabilities include designing the website so that it can be navigated using the keyboard or voice commands; all buttons, links, and text can be read by a screen reading software; all images and graphics have alt tags that describe the image; all audio content has closed captioning or an equivalent to it (Jaeger, 2015).

Like all other libraries, school libraries also ensure that their students are given free and equal access to information and other resources. One example of school librarians working to follow this principle is when school librarians, especially those working in communities where other languages are used, provide resources that show the linguistic pluralism of the community in order to accommodate students that speak English as their second language (ALA, 2007).

Although school libraries strive to give all students equal and free access to information and services, there are several circumstances, such as imposing age, grade-level, or reading-level restrictions, limiting the use of interlibrary loans, requiring permission from parents or teachers, and labeling, that may be seen as barriers of sorts that prevent this principle (ALA, 2007). However, it is stated in an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights that these "[p]olicies, procedures, and rules related to the use of resources and services support free and open access to information" (ALA, 2007, n.p.). These rules, often used in the school library setting, are enforced for the student's own safety and well-being, not to prevent students from getting information. The school librarians, who are aware of the variety of materials gathered for many different ages and maturity levels in their collections, are in charge of implementing these policies in their districts to ensure free and equal access to all resources and services (ALA, 2007). Considering all that was discussed in this section, it is clear that librarians need to take many different factors into account when they are working to ensure that all of their users are provided with free and equal access to information and resources, thus achieving this principle.

Principle/Belief #3

The third principle or belief that will be covered in this paper is the second principle in the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association (ALA): "We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources" (American Library Association [ALA], 2021). This principle means that libraries will support every individual's right to "both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction" (ALA, 2007, par.1) and take action to prevent censorship of materials when the need arises. This principle represents library users and their rights, as well as the librarians and other staff members who work to ensure these rights are satisfied.

One of the first ways that librarians work to achieve this principle is to gather a variety of materials with numerous and diverse points of view and subject matter (ALA, 2007). However, librarians are not all-knowing and may not include all points of view since they typically make their selections using guiding criteria such as general interest, public demand, age and/or level of readers, and if it reflects the community that the library serves (ALA, 2017). If a library does not have a book or other resource with a point of view that a patron is interested in, then the patron simply needs to request the materials they want (ALA, 2007).

Libraries try to obtain and are open to requests for diverse resources in order to ensure intellectual freedom is granted to library users, but unfortunately, people often try to censor these materials. In fact, "Many of the most challenged books, year after year, feature voices from diverse communities (including those of women, racial or ethnic minorities, and LGBT people)" (Oltmann, 2017, p.410). In most instances, a person who attempts to censor a book or other resource in a library is an individual who truly believes that censorship is a way to improve society, protect children, and restore what they see as lost moral values (ALA, 2007).

An example of a censor is a concerned parent who is worried about a book that their child checked out from their school library. A real-life example of this occurred in Beaverton School District in Oregon, when "a formal complaint requesting reconsideration of the book's availability to students was made by a concerned parent" (Jamison, 2020, p.21). The book referenced in the complaint was *Stick*, a story that "follows the life of 13-year-old Stark McClellan as he navigates the complexities of a tumultuous life" (Jamison, 2020, p.21). It is stated that "[i]ntense themes related to homosexuality, physical abuse, and bullying are intertwined throughout the story" (Jamison, 2020, p.21). In situations where complaints are made, libraries will follow through with a formal review process of the material and reconsider

having it in the library's collection (ALA, 2016). In the previous example with the novel *Stick*, a diverse review committee was put together to discuss the appropriateness of the book, and after deliberation, decided to deny the parent's request for removal but restricted middle grades, freshmen, and sophomores from reading the novel (Jamison, 2020, p.21). Of course, there are other ways that librarians work to prevent censorship and promote intellectual freedom. One simple way is sharing the importance of intellectual freedom with others and building a community of allies (Jamison, 2020). In light of this section, it is evident that librarians work to support intellectual freedom by providing a variety of materials with diverse points of view and by working to prevent censorship of materials.

Part 2: Personal Directions

Before I started to work toward earning a Master of Library and Information Science degree at Wayne State University, I already had a pretty good idea of what I wanted my future job to be: a school librarian/media specialist. Even after all that I have learned this semester about the information profession and its culture, I can still say that I want to work in that position after I graduate. I believe that further exploring the principles of the information profession, especially the three that I have selected in this essay, has truly reinforced my ideas for my future career. In this section of the essay, I will explain how each of the principles discussed in Part 1 affected my personal relationships with the profession and the directions I think I wish to pursue in terms of society, work organizations, and professional associations.

First, I will discuss the principle from the AASL: "Reading is the core of personal and academic competency" (AASL, 2022). This information profession principle already matched my own personal belief that reading was important, so it made my personal relationship with the profession stronger. In fact, teaching others, especially youth, that reading was important and

also could be fun was one of the main reasons that I wanted to become a librarian. I also agreed with the rest of the beliefs expressed by the AASL, so I would not mind supporting this professional association. As I analyzed the principle, I discovered how important school libraries are to creating competent readers and lifelong learners. School libraries are one of the first places that young people would go to if they are seeking to gain knowledge through reading, and school librarians need to make sure that the library's collection is filled with a variety of print and digital materials that students may need. I am also interested in the challenge of motivating students to learn as well as preparing them for the "information age" that we live in today that school librarians are tasked with. I feel like it would be an honor to have a hand in creating the bright minds that are our future. Therefore, I want to work in a school library in the future. The explanation and analysis of this principle highlighted how important reading is now and will be in the future. I feel that I should become a stronger advocate for reading and continue to share the belief that reading is important to others.

Second, I will discuss the principle from the MLA: "We believe in equal and free access to information and knowledge" (MLA, 2022). Just like the first principle, this principle coincides with my own personal belief that all people should be able to access the same information, so this principle also strengthened my relationship with the information profession. As I learned more about this principle, I discovered that there are multiple ways to provide free and equal access to a variety of populations, such as bookmobiles for the elderly and making building or website adjustments for those with disabilities. I was not aware of how much went into ensuring all users received free and equal access, but now I am quite interested and wondering how I could help provide access in my own community. I will have to look into measures that my local library takes to achieve this principle and help if possible. In my analysis, I also found that

school libraries work to ensure free and equal access by doing simple things, like making sure books are available in languages spoken by people in their community. This helped fortify my want to work in a school library. Before I discuss the next principle, I would like to note that I agree with the rest of the beliefs held by the MLA and will continue to support this professional association, even if I end up finding a job out of Michigan.

Third, I will discuss the principle from the ALA: "We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources" (ALA, 2021). In a similar theme as the first two principles discussed, this principle corresponds with my own personal belief in intellectual freedom as well as my strong dislike of censorship, especially towards books, and thus further strengthened my relationship with the information profession. As I explained and analyzed this principle, I learned that librarians could support intellectual freedom by providing users with a collection filled with a variety of points of view. I think that it would be interesting to help create a collection like this, especially since I would have to learn about and experience the points of view for myself as well. I also learned more about censorship and the steps librarians have to take to deal with it. Most of the examples I found about censorship involved banning books at school since parents filed complaints. I have never liked book bans, especially at schools, so learning about examples of censorship attempts at schools made me want to be a part of the movement to stop it from happening. A good way to work to fight censorship in schools would be in a school library, which is my plan even after exploring this principle. As I continue on this path, I will work to help others in society understand the importance of intellectual freedom and continue to fight against censorship. Lastly, I would like to state that I agree with all of the ALA's principles, so I will support the professional association now and in the future.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, I posed a question with the hopes that I would be able to answer it by the end of this essay. The question was: Why do the three principles or beliefs I selected have such a powerful influence on my personal beliefs? I would have to say that I found a few different answers to this question. The first answer that I would give is that the three principles connected strongly to personal beliefs that I already had. This answer is probably the most notable related to the first principle I analyzed about how reading was important, which matched my personal belief that reading was important and also could be fun. This personal belief also happens to be one of the reasons I wanted to become a librarian, so this principle really resonated with me.

The second answer that I would give is that the principles, especially after analyzing them, can have multiple interpretations. This answer relates to the second principle that I analyzed, which deals with all users being given free and equal access to information and resources. Before analyzing this principle, I just thought of giving access as making sure that all people have the same rights to materials, but after analyzing it, I learned that giving access also deals with physical and digital accessibility to get materials. This discovery made me open my mind and realize that these principles can have deeper or hidden meanings.

The last answer that I would give is that the principles, specifically the third principle that I analyzed, evoked an emotional response of sorts. As I previously mentioned, I have a strong dislike for book censorship, so when I read a principle that encouraged resisting censorship, I got excited and felt a sense of camaraderie. In conclusion, these principles that I analyzed had a powerful influence on my personal beliefs and on my personal direction by backing them up and strengthening them.

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Appendix

INF 6010: Introduction to the Information Professions

Analysis Essay Self-Evaluation Rubric

Complete this form by assigning points to yourself in every criterion area and by making comments regarding how your essay addresses the specific written criteria. You may add this as an appendix to your essay or turn it in separately.

Evaluation Criteria	Points Assigned	A	Comments
Essay Organization 15 points	15	The essay has a strong and well-organized introduction and conclusion. The introduction includes a thesis question and the conclusion answers or discusses this thesis. Effective headings and subheadings are used and help the reader understand the content of the essay.	Strengths: I believe that my introduction and conclusion were well-organized. My introduction included a thesis question and my conclusion provided answers to the question. Effective headings and subheadings were used to help with the organization of this essay. Weaknesses: I probably could have had obvious transition sentences. Also, I could have been more creative with naming my titles, headings, and subheadings.
Essay Content: Part 1 40 points	37	Part 1 contains 3 to 4 beliefs, values, practices and/or assumptions reflecting the culture of the information professions as relevant to the writer. Substantial supporting evidence, details, examples and references explaining the chosen ideas are provided. Comprehensive evaluation and analysis is evident.	Strengths: Part 1 contained 3 principles/beliefs that reflect the culture of the information profession as relevant to me. I provided evidence, details, examples, and references to explain the chosen ideas. I successfully evaluated and analyzed the principles. Weaknesses: I feel that my analysis may have been awkward in parts or that my evidence may not have directly related to what I was trying to explain.
Essay Content: Part 2	30	Part 2 clearly explains the relationship between the ideas	Strengths: I discussed my career or job interests within the information

40 points		expressed in Part 1 and those of the essay writer. The career or job interests of the writer within the information professions is thoroughly explored through reference to society, work organizations and professional associations.	profession. I explained the relationship between my ideas and those expressed in Part 1. Weaknesses: If I was correct in my interpretation of exploring my interests through society, work organizations, and professional associations. I took that very literally so I am not sure if this will agree with your interpretation.
Citations and References 15 points possible	15	A minimum of 15 in-text citations and accompanying references are included. The in-text citations are appropriate, substantial and meaningful in context.	Strengths: I ended up using 16 references in this paper. I believe both the references and in-text citations are correct. I would say that the in-text citations are appropriate, substantial, and meaningful in context. Weaknesses: I sometimes forget that direct quotes need page numbers in in-text citations, so I have to go back to resources and find the quotations again sometimes.
Formatting 10 points	10	The essay has a clean and professional appearance and follows APA guidelines. Citations and references are in APA style and are complete and accurate.	Strengths: This essay has a clean and professional appearance and follows APA guidelines. Citations and references are in APA style and are complete and accurate. Weaknesses: I always have to double-check my capitalization in titles when I make references. Also, I sometimes forget to italicize parts of references, so I have to check that as well.
Writing 15 points	13	Correct grammar, punctuation and spelling are used throughout.	Strengths: I believe that correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling are used throughout this essay. Weaknesses: I might have a few run-on sentences. Also, I probably used passive voice too much.

Self-Evaluation 15 points	15	All areas of the rubric are completed with points assigned and comments regarding strengths and weaknesses provided.	Strengths: I have completed all areas of the rubric. I have assigned points and provided comments regarding strengths and weaknesses. The self-evaluation was added as an appendix to my paper. Weaknesses: My self-evaluation is a little uneven if that makes sense. I feel like I was hard on myself for sections of it but then easy on myself for other sections.

TOTAL POINTS = 135/150