

## EDITORIAL

# From Practice to Praxis: Transcending Practice-Oriented Librarianship in the Philippines

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The Philippine Librarianship Act of 2003 (RA 9246) lays down the parameters of the practice. This serves as the guiding principle for the education, qualification, and regulation of librarianship. The professionalization of librarianship affirmed the librarians' roles in schools, higher education institutions, public and special libraries, as well as other institutions and agencies that deal with documents and records. It was a significant progression of the profession, but also a considerable limitation. The improvements are seen in the establishment of standards for practice, competencies, education and training, thereby elevating librarianship from a mere clerical role to a legitimate practice requiring specialized knowledge and technical expertise. These improvements, however, resulted in a more practice-oriented LIS, focusing more on services and technical processes. This has also resulted in a dichotomized image of an LIS professional, where one is either a traditional librarian who is service-oriented and proficient in technical aspects, or an information scientist who can innovate and critically engage in theory, but not both. This

dichotomized image must be dismantled. The profession should strive to be proficient in both technical services and epistemic practices.

The strong tradition of service does not primarily stem from RA 9246. This can be traced back to the Columbia School of Library Economy, the first library school in 1887, which offered “selection, readers' aids, bibliography, repair of materials, administration, and cataloging” (Rubin & Rubin, 2020, p. 470), all of which are practical skills. The term library economy perpetuated the impression that “library management was a practical skill,” similar to learning “domestic skills or home economics” (Ibekwe, 2019, p. 138). At that time, training for librarianship consisted of several months of education and about two years of internship (Vann, 1961). The training was deemed too short to cover the various topics, and made the students unsure of the lessons, but the apprenticeship would validate what they had learned eventually. While Dewey's perception of library education was on the practical side, Mary Salome Cutler Fairchild incorporated and emphasized “more theoretical and cultural aspects” (Rubin & Rubin, 2020, p. 470). In

the 1940s, several studies were conducted on the education of librarians, and all of these called for changes in library education (Davis, Jr., 1976). These studies discussed “routines and ‘technique in the curricula, the lack of application to real problems” (p. 123-124), among others. Through the years, changes have been made to include the incorporation of new developments in information technology, the incorporation of theories, and the discussion of critical and ethical issues within and outside of library and information contexts – a significant breakaway from the practice-oriented curriculum. Some library schools have also removed the “L-word” and moved toward information science or information studies, leading to the iSchool movement (Shu & Mongeon, 2016).

In the Philippines, education for librarianship took inspiration from library schools in the US. After all, the first Filipino librarians were trained there (Vallejo, 1990). The practice of librarianship, and education for librarianship have evolved elsewhere, but its development in the Philippines has not kept pace. The core courses are still focused on the technical and service aspects of the profession. While this has been the source of pride of the profession – having experts in the core functions of librarianship, this is also the same source of limitation, as there can be less space for critical inquiry and theoretical engagement. We continue to graduate implementers, not that there is anything wrong about producing skilled practitioners, but when this is all there is, it causes an imbalance in the development of the field. There is a need to balance practice, theory, and critical inquiry because this would ensure that LIS graduates can pass the licensure exam, become proficient in library functions and services, and, more importantly, be capable of addressing real-life information problems within and outside the confines of the library.

The profession is predominantly practice-oriented, where theory engagement and reflection are often overlooked. This has been reflected in professional identity and in perceived roles and contributions to knowledge production. Apolinario et al. (2014) found that librarians do not have a high level of confidence in conducting research. And while Santos (2018) explored the competencies of the modern Filipino librarian and found that they are proficient in traditional and non-traditional competencies. The identified non-traditional skills include marketing and creativity skills, communication skills, networking and public relations, advocacy, and information technology (IT) skills. While it is commendable that they are going beyond non-traditional skills, these

competencies are still well within the practical skills in librarianship. It is laudable that they are being trained well within the National Competency-Based Standards for Filipino Librarians (NCBSFL), where the Policies Standards and Guidelines (PSG) for the Bachelor of Library and Information Science Programs are aligned (Sajona, 2024). However, there’s more to LIS than its core practical functions. Times have changed, and there is a need to be “assertive, proactive, and decisive in taking new and influential roles” (dar Juan, 2024, p. 3) and move from practice to praxis. Various concerns in society deal with information such as misinformation, disinformation, digital divide, data privacy, algorithmic biases, epistemic inequality, and information policy gaps. Librarians who are proficient in both practice and critical inquiry can move beyond addressing technical concerns in information systems toward addressing the deeper issues underlying these concerns.

RA 9246 provided the legal basis for the training and qualification of librarians, thereby distinguishing them accordingly. This is also the basis for the various policies and standards surrounding the education and training of librarians. However, it should be acknowledged that these are also minimum requirements, and going beyond these is necessary for the profession to move beyond compliance toward intellectual and epistemic engagement.

It is commendable that various agencies involved in the education and training of librarians have taken initiatives to move the profession beyond its practical and skill-based orientation. The NCBSFL is being revisited by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Technical Committee on LIS (TCLIS) in cooperation with the Board for Librarians (BFL) of the Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC) to ensure the cultivation of professionals who are capable of technical functions, research, as well as critical, sustainable, and ethical thinking. LIS schools have also been actively revising their curricula to “expand to more information-centric rather than institution/library-centric content” (Buenrostro & Cabbab, 2021, p. 2). Adding more research courses allows students to develop the necessary skills from conceptualization, theorizing, data gathering, data analysis, and writing, so that they can become more confident in conducting various types of research. The inclusion of philosophy, critical theory, and ethics should develop not only managers of information systems but ethical, critical, and socially conscious professionals who are open to diverse ideas, who can question assumptions, unmask social inequalities, and

advocate for marginalized communities. Designing continuing education programs that integrate practical, theoretical, and critical aspects should also be done to foster well-rounded professionals. With these efforts, the dichotomized image of a librarian in the Philippines will eventually be dismantled.

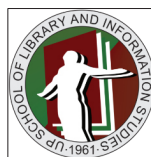
This issue features articles that showcase the range of inquiry and scholarship within library and information science that is beyond concerns of practice. Bradley Brazzeal looked into the correspondence of Gabriel A. Bernardo, along with entries in UP Catalogs and shows further details in the development of the Library Science Program at the University of the Philippines. Dridge Paul Reyes presents his comparative analysis of the faculty status of librarians in higher education institutions, which is a contentious issue among academic librarians. Anna Divine Espiritu's article on embodied information practices in relation to the Kuraldal. Gabriela Lising's analysis of how three art archives were established, taking note of the positionality of those who have established them and how these have shaped their collection and organization. Sylvan Dan Moldes and Kevin Cuevas analyzed Wikipedia entries on Filipino athletes to identify instances of inequality and underrepresentation. These articles show critical inquiry and social awareness, indicating that the field can move from mere practice to praxis.

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