

„Turning an Idea into a Book“

A lecture series at the Department of Library and Information Science,
Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

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Abstract

Since 2002 the Department of Library Science at Humboldt University Berlin offers undergraduate students a seminar on the aspect: „Turning an idea into a book“ during every summer term. The class is held by Petra Hauke, M.A.

The goal of the seminar is to produce a comprehensive exhaustive volume on a subject relevant to library science. The articles of the volume are written by authors in their area of expertise in library science and related fields. Students learn the basic aspects of publishing project management: finding the right topic, acquisition of articles, contacting and communicating with the authors, professional layout, set-up and structure of a publication, possible forms of a publication, financing; editing an article, advertising and public relations. The projekt offers the students the possibility to use their knowledge in a practical way. They are decisivly responsible that the publication will be recognized by experts and book trade.

The paper will give both general informations as well as descriptions about the different projects from 2002 to 2005 including the prospected project for 2006.

Library science in Germany - quo vadis?

The Berlin-based Department of Library and Information Science is the only university institute in Germany, Austria and Switzerland which deals with all academic aspects on the discipline of librarianship. But the Institute was facing closure. With Berlin at the centre of Germany's struggle to finance the country's reunification, massive cuts in government funding for education are threatening the Institute's survival. As the Humboldt University strives to reinvent itself as a modern European university in the new information society, the Department of Library Science feels that it has a particularly important role to play. So how to rise the challenge? Library science in Germany - quo vadis? At the Institute, the sword of Damocles has concentrated minds. How come that library science is regarded so lowly in a country which prides itself on its literature, its publishing tradition and its rapid transition to an information society?

As students are faced with the prospect of working towards a degree from an institution which may be closed tomorrow, the Institute has become a forum for lively debate as well as constructive student action. The debate has produced a lot of ideas and opinions: What is library science? Why study it? Who needs library science? It quickly became obvious: This important subject deserved its own book!

Looking back: "The making of a book"

Since the summer term 2002 the Department of Library Science has offered students a class titled "The Making of a Book". The purpose is to produce a comprehensive volume on a topic related to library science. The articles of all volumes are written by authors in their area of expertise in library science and related fields.

This hands-on seminar has two special dimensions: On one hand it is an introduction to the real-life publishing by producing a book from the first idea to the bound volume. The schedule contains every step from finding the right topic, acquisition of articles, contacting the authors and keeping in touch to doing the layout, finding ways of financing the publication, editing the article, up to getting involved in the development of advertising and public relation strategies.

On the other hand it deepens the insight of the students into the chosen topic in a rather intensive way: As they edit an up-to-date volume they get in contact to experts of the special field which is dealt with. So they also get a feel of the state-of-the-art of this topic and they experience how scientific writing and discourse function in praxi. The aim of all our publications is to make clear motivation and development of diversal discussions and to help the profession to find solutions for problems in library science, librarianship and library services.

RAK versus AACR

It was 6th December 2001 when in Germany the discussion about the German cataloguing rules (RAK) began. The Committee of Standardization had decided to change from German cataloguing rules and formats like RAK and MAB to international standards like AACR and MARC because of the increasing importance of European and international cooperation. Because of the date this decision was called "St Nicholas' Decision" (Nikolausbeschluss).

When in April 2002 the first class titled "Turning an idea into a book" started, the students saw the importance of this discussion and decided together with their lecturer very spontaneously and very encouraged to set this first project under the main topic: "RAK versus AACR". The intention was to spread the current discussion about the rule type, to document the diversal positions and to help finding the best way for renewing the cataloguing system.

More than 20 experts were asked to write essays about this issue. Although there hasn't been so much time – only six to seven weeks – almost each asked librarian or LIS scholar promised to give a submission.

Finally the book contains 19 articles about different important points of view, pros and cons of the German cataloguing rules or the AACR as well as the difference between the German MAB format and the Anglo-American MARC format. "RAK versus AACR" offers articles e. g. about national and international standards, about the theory of library catalogues und search engines, about globalization and its affects to librarianship, about further solutions than RAK or AACR, about experiences in Germany and Switzerland in adapting AACR and MARC. There is also a compact bibliography of printed materials and electronic sources on this issue. The book was published October 2002. There have been many positive reviews as well as an invitation to present the project in the Berlin Brandenburg Library Science Colloquium.

Today there is no longer any discussion to change the rules – what had meant to rewrite both all traditional as well as electronic catalogues – but to change the format and to use MARC. As for the rules Germany decided to take a "third path" what means to develop RAK in the way of approaching international standards without rewriting any catalogues. Perhaps our book "RAK versus AACR" was helpful for the decision-makers.

A matter of honour!?! Voluntary work in Public Libraries

Positive and negative aspects of voluntary work have been debated for a long time. But in libraries in particular this is a timely topic as governments are spending fewer and fewer money on culture and education. The foundation boom of friends of libraries groups in the nineties in Germany is evidence for that. Nevertheless, voluntary work always has been seen in a strictly critical way. Are the andvantages of voluntary work (e. g. more social activities in libraries) really able to dispel the worries about professionalism in the job etc.?

A conference as an idea for a book

A conference titled "Possibilities of Voluntary Educational Work in Libraries" took place in May 2003 at Free University Berlin to get ahead in this controversial discussion. The key objective was to discuss different experiences.

When the topic of the conference was announced in January 2003 an idea was born: What about opening the conference's contents to a broader audience. The conference's organizer was enthusiasted about that idea. Supplemented by more articles, a documentation of the conference should be created as part of the seminar "Turning an Idea into a Book" in the summer term of 2003.

Only 12 weeks to publish a book – tasks and activities

The tasks and activities of the class participants were multiple. In addition to the seminar's teaching schedule the students visited a famous publishing company in Berlin (de Gruyter), to learn more about the publishing business.

It wasn't less important to deal with the publication's topic. An introduction to "Voluntary Work in Libraries" was essential. Relevant terms had to be defined and the significance and functions of voluntary work in public libraries had to be discussed. The students got the chance to attend the conference and to meet the speakers and future authors.

It was decided to publish the book in the series "Library and Society" at the publishing house Bock+Herchen in order to reach best the target group of public libraries as well as people who might be willing to volunteer in libraries. Bock+Herchen agreed and published the book in autumn 2003.

The students were also active in promoting the book. An advertisement, published in the German library journal BuB, was placed directly next to the conference-report, which too was written by students. The book project itself was presented on several events e. g. on the Berlin-Brandenburg Library Science Colloquium. One highlight was a radio transmission with interviews about the seminar and its concept, which was broadcasted on 3rd July 2003 in “Deutschlandradio”.

Positions – Models – Basics: The Content of the Book

30 articles offer a wide spectrum of theoretical reflections, field reports and proposals for voluntary work. They’re supplemented by a comprehensive bibliography.

Fundamental theses to the topics voluntary work, civil society and civil engagement are summarized in the field “Positions”. Volunteers are very important for libraries dealing with decreasing budgets. But of course they should not take over the professional librarians’ job but do only additional work like encouraging reading skills with children, organizing events etc. Practical experiences with volunteers are described under the heading „Models“. Examples come from USA and Germany, from public libraries as well as from church libraries, telling about working with children, youths or pensioners.

The book offers with “Basics” e. g. a model contract and – translated into German by a student – the very useful “Guidelines” of the British Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) for the assignment of volunteers in libraries. As a model of joint venture the German translation will be assumed by CILIP for their prospective German homepage.

“Very recommendable”

The book received very positive reviews not only in library journals. The German Library Association judged it “very recommendable.” The director of the former German Library Institute, Prof. Guenther Beyersdorff, found that the special merit was to disengage the discussion from the “One-Way-Dimensionality” which had been present for a long time. Prof. Dagmar Jank, Potsdam, found that this kind of seminar has to be valued in the context of university didactics. “The students try out their abilities under real-life conditions, learn teamwork, they have to meet deadlines, cooperate with authors and publishing houses, in short: such a project trains the presently high rated ‘social skills’ [...]” Participation in such a project is a kind of social engagement for the students themselves.

“Library Science – quo vadis?”

“Library science – quo vadis“ is the third book that has resulted since 2002 from the seminar “Turning an Idea into a Book”. The idea for this project was inspired by the special situation of the Institute in 2003 and 2004. The class in summer term of 2004 took place at the same time as the Institute was facing closure due to financial restructuring at Humboldt University. The situation caused enormous efforts by both the students and the scientific staff not only to maintain the institute but to develop new perspectives. Instead of focussing on problems of the librarians’ world as the books of 2002 and 2003 did this project keeps an eye on LIS itself. Questions like “What is library science? Why study it? Who needs library science?” came up and should be answered. Another reason for discussing what Library Science is all about is based on the fact that the Humboldt University in Berlin did not know what ‘Bibliothekswissenschaft’ meant and therefore, it has to be stressed, summarily decided to close the Institute, the last of its kind in Germany.

International contributions

Under the headline “Library science – quo vadis?” the seminar’s goal was to create a book that would define the role of Library Science and its ability to adapt to the demands of the fast-paced information society. It is definitely not easy, and maybe not even possible, to find the one and only answer to the question of what Library Science exactly is. A lot of answers are conceivable and every one could be right in its own focus on Library Science.

A great number of prominent authors and experts in the field were contacted for written contributions. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Well-known IFLA- members and chairs among them Rainer Kuhlen, Hans-Christoph Hobohm, Claudia Lux and Thomas Hapke, promised to write essays. Also an impressive number of leading international experts, including Michael Buckland, Carol Tenopir, Josef Herget and Hans Roosendaal were interested in participating in the discussion.

Finally 31 original contributions from German, American, Dutch, Scandinavian and Swiss authors were arranged in 6 areas:

- Library Science between Traditions, Self Understanding and Public Perception
- Library Science in the Age of Digital Media
- Library Science in the Service of Society
- Library Science in the Service of Scientific Information and Communication
- Library Science in the Service of Library Practice
- Library Science in Teaching, Higher Education and Profession

Library Science as a separate discipline

Having arisen from a kind of protest against the closing of the Institute of Library and Information Science at Humboldt University in Berlin, the book now presents the history, the current position and the future of Library Science, not only in Germany but also in other European countries and the USA. The book regards Library Science from various positions and reflects as well points of view as problems of electronic publishing, eLearning and information ethics, the 'Open Access' debate, conveying information competence to (not only) universities, reciprocation between the economy, politics and libraries, and also library science training in view of librarianship in practice. In conclusion this book justifies the Library Science’s right to exist as a separate discipline and makes its contribution to the perception of Library Science not only at Humboldt University.

“With a little help from my friends”

The last book project took place in the summer term 2005, and this time it was our class which provided the idea for a conference. The topic was “friends of libraries”: what are they doing, what goals do they set themselves, and what do they achieve? Voluntary work has become an essential factor in the existence and quality of public as well as research libraries in the recent years. This can be seen in the growing number of 'Friends of Libraries' groups. From 45 active groups in Germany in 1975 the number was growing up to more than 300 in 2005.

The Berlin conference in May 2005, organized together with the Department of Further Education at Free University Berlin, drew nearly 100 participants not only from Berlin but from all over Germany representing Public Libraries as well as Special and State Libraries. Speakers came from research libraries (Berlin, Munich, Wolfenbüttel) as well as public libraries (e. g. Bremen, Halle, Solingen) and from foreign countries (Austrian National Library Vienna, Friends of Libraries USA, The Library Campaign, UK).

On the basis of the papers given at the workshop and further texts by well-known experts, the class produced an anthology on the topic which aims to provide new insights into the work of voluntary organisations in civil society who devote their time to libraries. In addition

to the conference papers there are more general reports on voluntary (library-)work in the civil society. Rounding off the book also contains a useful annex which includes an extract from the German statute book with all statutes important for friends of libraries groups, as well as examples on legal aspects, information flyers, well-designed websites, a list of addresses of all German friends of libraries groups and a comprehensive bibliography which charts the development of the concept over the last 80 years.

Wasn't it a wonderful coincidence that at the same time the DBV (German Library Association) – not knowing about the actual book project at our institute – decided to give much more support to friends of libraries groups. When the DBV chair was invited to speak on the conference, he was very much impressed about the project. He assured to give any assistance which might be needed. Finally the German Library Association ordered 2,500 copies of the handbook to give them – for free! – to their members who are libraries as well as friends of libraries groups. It seems that this time we produced our first bestseller!

All articles contained in this book are freely available in PDF format on the institute's homepage: www.ib.hu-berlin.de/buchidee. A Creative Commons License for all articles is still in process.

New challenges

Fortunately, in Berlin we were given a new chance. During our one and a half year's struggle we received an incredible amount of support from all over the world. In February 2005 the Humboldt University in Berlin decided to maintain the Department of Library Science (which has now changed its name to Department of Library and Information Science), and now there is space even to expand.

After having presented our book projects at the Berlin-Brandenburg Library Science Colloquium as well as at the German Library Congress in Leipzig 2004 and in Düsseldorf 2005 we were invited to give a paper at the World Library and Information Congress in Oslo, Finland, 2005. The students were welcomed very friendly in the workshop of the IFLA Section "Education & Training" (SET) – so the students left Oslo highly motivated both on behalf of their scientific education and their professional future.

At that time the IFLA Section "Education & Training" was looking for a new editor for their SET Bulletin. After the given paper in the SET workshop the section's Standing Committee found, that the group from Berlin's Institute should be asked to volunteer. So the new editor's team in Berlin created a new profile for the bulletin, collecting news and articles for the next issue and integrated as one main point in this new concept the focus on the new LIS generation! The first issue of the new SET Bulletin is for January 2006, and it is available on the internet on the section's homepage www.ifla.org/VII/s23/index.htm

Looking forward

The new book project for the summer term 2006 is already in advance. It will be published both traditionally in a printed version and in the XML format for open access on the Humboldt University's own server. As there was a large common opinion within the German LIS community to realize open access for these book projects we are now going to take up the challenge. But it will not be easy to find a well known commercial publisher accepting both open access and financing a printed edition. Even a low-price printed book must be financed in any way, and there is a risk for the publisher for not being able to sell printed copies when the articles are also for free on the internet.

Resumée

The LIS students at Humboldt University are very enthusiastic about these project seminars because they get valuable practical experience which complements skills acquired in other more theoretical courses.

These seminars prepare students for an academic career, including skills needed for publishing or editing scientific books or articles, and develop their understanding of quality aspects in the world of publishing. They get in contact to professional librarians and authors outside the university which is an important bonus for their professional career prospects. Presenting the results on national and international congresses they learn to look and go outside their own world and come together with colleagues from other countries, to find ideas for cooperating projects. In an IFLA 2005-review article for a German library journal they wrote: "You'll learn so much as you never have believed before."

For further information please visit the project's website: www.ib.hu-berlin.de/buchidee

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