ISTC 651 – Information Literacy and Access

REFERENCE INTERVIEW ASSIGNMENT

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**Grand tour: What you initially noticed when you first entered the library?**

The library I visited was the Aspen Hill Public Library in Montgomery County. The library was very busy when I first came in. This is a busy library catering most of the Aspen Hill and Twinbrook patrons since the Twinbrook public library closed.

The first thing I noticed was how good this library promotes reading to the community because there was a schedule board right in front of the door. I also liked that the circulation and information area were in front of the entrance / exit door and side-by-side each other. The signs were also noticeable and hanged from the ceiling with bold and big font size.

There were many areas to read. I first noticed the nice square tables close to the information desk and next to the couches and computers. I liked how they displayed the new fiction books right in the middle of the circulation and information desk. The whole library was carpeted and there was no carpet odor, which I really liked. This library looked old from the outside, but when you enter the place, it did not smell or looked age. They have the stairs going down to the community room and the elevator was located right next to the entrance door, which I think was convenient for everyone. I also noticed their good collection of DVDs because they were right across the circulation area. All the librarians were busy when I came. Two were checking out books, one was helping a patron find a book from the fiction area, and one was helping a parent find a picture book for her child. I also overheard one patron asking a question from the librarian and later on said, “thank you very much, you are really doing your job well”.

There were tall shelves for the fiction books and shorter shelves for the children’s books. Signs were displayed all over the library and they also have Spanish translations. All the computers were used and most of the tables were occupied by students or adults.

**Setting**

The Aspen Hill Public Library has a lot of areas to use for all patrons. There is a children’s area on the left, play area with toys and board books for the toddlers, computer area for the kids, sitting areas all over the library, three computer areas for adults, quiet room and tables to work on if you bring your own laptop or for kids to do their assignments. There is a circulation desk by the entrance, an information desk and self-checkout area for the patrons. The library has different genres of books like everybody, fiction, non-fiction, and materials in other format like audio books, CDs and DVDs. They also have their own website under the Montgomery County Public Library System. They have online database and eBooks that they offer in their websites.

The library has a community room downstairs where they mostly hold their activities and programs like the chess club, Spanish and English speaking classes, story time for toddlers, pajama night, book talks and book fairs. I have been to their story time sessions, and my kids and I really love their activities because it engages the toddlers to use all their skills to learn other than listening to the story.

I liked how they organized the books and put labels on each shelf. There was also a big distance between the bookshelves, which made it convenient for patrons not to cause traffic when looking for books. I also liked the book displays for the kids. They have book displays for winter, Kwanzaa and Christmas. There were also computers that kids can use that have learning software in it. Everything was neatly organized and colorful displays were on the wall.

I liked how the sitting and tables were equally distributed around the room. There were colorful soft chairs for the little kids, comfy couches and tables to use for everyone.

**Patron**

This library caters patrons of all ages. I saw kids aged two to probably 12, teenagers and the most number were the old aged. Many old patrons sit there by the couch and hold a newspaper, fiction book or magazine.

The parents come and take their child first to the play area while they look for books. Patrons can borrow up to 75 books in the library. Students who have their own public library card can borrow three books at a time. Every Tuesday at 10:30, parents bring their kids to hear a story time and then play afterwards in the play area while reading books.

Patrons can attend free programs like the English Conversation Club every Thursday, where members learn to speak the English language. Some patrons also take the privilege of free homework help every night, where teens offer free help to students from K to 8th grade. Mommies and grannies also attend the free knitting and crocheting club. Babies also have their “for babies reading activity” like singing songs, rhymes or bouncing. On the first Mondays of the month, parents come and bring their toddlers for a pajama night where they read books, sing songs, dance to music and do some fun activities. There are plenty of activities they offer to patrons and I can say that this is really a very busy and active library.

During my visit, most of the patrons who asked help got what they needed. Some needed help in looking for books, getting a library card, asking for a website to use for research, borrowing books, returning books, looking for movies, asking help in their homework, and asking for books that they can recommend. I also noticed that the young patrons knew where to go and find their books. It could be because everything has signs and labels on the shelves, it was not difficult to locate things.

**Librarian**

There were two people working in the circulation desk and also two in the information desk. I think that was really effective especially for a library this big and have many patrons per day. There were homework helpers walking around the library and library helpers organizing the bookshelves. One librarian in the circulation desk was busy counting money and putting them in the safe box. It was almost closing time, so I guess that was really her job to keep the money safe before the day ends. While she was working on it, the other librarian was doing the checkout of books.

The information desk was very busy, and the librarian was very helpful to this old woman who needed help on how to use the library website. I feel that teaching an old lady is very difficult especially if they are not tech savvy, and this librarian was very helpful and patient all throughout their talk. I think she was teaching her for almost an hour, and she was very patient and informative.

There are three kinds of librarian in this public library: a librarian 1, librarian associate and librarian 2. Librarian 1 and the librarian associates do similar work and the librarian 2 does the advance work. I interviewed Ms. Patricia, a full time librarian at Aspen Hill Library. She works 40 hour per week. She has been working for 12 years now, but she started as a part-time librarian for 12 years before she finally became a full-time in 2012. She works in seven different libraries in Montgomery County Public Library System and worked in virtual services doing the MCPL website. She also worked in the outreach schools like in the university libraries. When I observed her during my visit, the first thing I noticed was her being professional and the same time helpful and knowledgeable of the books.

**What worked?**

Ms. Patricia shared to me that the best part of being a librarian is to have a contact with individuals and being in a helping profession. People come, ask questions and she has to do the research all over the web looking for information. She enjoys working with people especially with elders.

When helping patrons, she mentioned that the most imp thing is to find out what they really want? If someone comes and asks about “canon”, you have to be informative and the goal is to do reference interview. She asks them to tell her a little bit more about it. What kind of canon? If they don’t know the word, the English literature, or cannot say anything, she has to help them figure out what kind of canon are they looking for. The primary goal is to take them to a journey when they answer questions, and they have to answer yes or no. It is a process using sieves to get to know a lot of information. She loves her job and it’s like offering database at your fingertip.

When I observed Ms. Patricia, I noticed that she was very helpful and never stopped her job and helping patrons. When she was out of her desk, she was helping someone in the copier machine, computer, reading area or helping someone looking for books from the shelves. She always asked them questions and she never stopped until she got the right information she needed in order to help the individual. One old lady from India needed help on the website, and she was very patient and used different websites to find what that lady needed. One kid approached her showing his iPhone where he had the title of the book, and she was very much helpful and took the boy to the children’s books area to find the book. She was very friendly, respectful, and polite to everyone who approached her.

**What didn’t work?**

Ms. Patricia shared that the problem she usually have was managing young boys. During my visit, I saw one situation where the youngsters who were seating next to me were talking loud and throwing paper. She warned them three times and told them that the library is not a wreck center or a gym. After three warnings, she asked them to leave the library. She said that it was the first time after a year that she asked teenagers to leave the library because of their behaviors.

A certain level of communication is fun but should not be disruptive. Library should be a nice place for people to come, and dealing with situations like that was her least favorite thing. Some people seating next to each other in the computer using headphones would talk loud, and she had to ask them to be quiet and they would still do the same thing. There were also situations in the copier machines, where the copier continued to print what was not supposed to be seen by a patron, but that was a technology problem. She had to be right there when printers don’t work properly.

Some patrons would do unnecessary behavior and Ms. Patricia was very patients, although there were times that she had to really do something about it because other patrons were already distracted. I think it is a similar problem I face when I am with my students during Media. Sometimes, students like the sixth grades talk loud in the library and I sometimes I cannot control them. I end up removing their recess time so they can learn their lesson and behave in my class next time.

**What you would do differently?**

I could have a done it in a different way in handling the situation with the teenagers that day. Ms. Patricia waited for three warnings before she told them to leave the library. I have been seeing these boys everyday in the library making noises even in the tables near the quiet area where I always study every night. Maybe no one was complaining, including me, but if I were Ms. Patricia, I would have given them a warning the first time I heard them laughing and disturbing other patrons who were quietly studying or reading in that area. I will approach these kids and tell them that this is a quiet zone where people read quietly and their behaviors are disturbing other people. If they do it again for the second time, I will ask for their names and their parents’ name and telephone number. I will call them to inform what their children are doing in the library. If they do it again for the third time, I will ask them to leave the library.

If I were to change something, maybe the story time schedule. They have it in the morning from 10:30-11:00 AM. I really love the librarian giving the story time. I wish they have one in the evening so parents who have work in the morning can also take their children in the evening.

Almost everything in this library is organized and well planned. I did not have any problem checking out books or returning books. The information desk was very helpful and everything is organized. I would not do anything differently in the setting or organization of shelves and books.

**References:**

Patricia. personal communication. December 2, 2015.