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This paper investigates the ways in which public libraries orient new adult patrons to library resources, services, and programs. Literature indicates that there is a general gap between those who hold library cards and awareness of the resources available at the library. It is also shown that libraries that employ orientation methods experience a potential increase in awareness, a greater utilization of library resources, increased support and funding to the library, and reduced library anxiety. To gain a better understanding of current methods undertaken by public libraries, an online survey was distributed to 701 library directors, supervisors, and branch managers listed on the Public Library Directory of the State Library of Ohio website. Respondents indicated that they rely heavily on printed brochures and informal one-on-one sessions with patrons. Additionally, little is being done to measure the effectiveness of such procedures. Recommendations from this study include the need for more orientation sessions as well as the need to more formally evaluate the effectiveness of orientation materials and programs.

Headings:

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ADULT PATRON ORIENTATION IN OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

by
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Introduction

While there is no doubt that some patrons are (at least partially) aware of the

multitude of resources and services offered at the public library, many patrons lack a

basic awareness of such services. The landscape of the public library has changed

dramatically over the last several decades, and anecdotally, there seems to be a large

disparity between the public's perceptions of the uses of the public library and the actual

services it provides. Payne (1990) contends that the public is generally unaware of how

the public library can help them and need to be told about resources and programs.

Although Payne wrote this article 20 years ago, this conclusion seems to ring true still

today.

While there are many ways that libraries can choose to market their resources, it

seems as though a good place to start is at the initial contact— when patrons sign up for a

library card. Again, anecdotally, I have found that when most patrons sign up for a

library card, they perhaps get a brief brochure listing library locations and hours, but

there is very little in terms of any sort of library orientation, that is, the process by which

patrons are introduced to the resources, services, and programs offered at the library.

It is my hypothesis that if libraries institute specific orientation procedures (in-

person library tours, online tutorials, welcome sessions, brochures, etc.) rather than leave

patrons to discover resources on their own, they will see an increase in electronic

resource usage, a decrease in library anxiety, and a greater awareness of library programs,

resources, and services— an awareness that could potentially lead to greater support,

participation, and funding from the public. As public libraries rely heavily on local taxes voted on by their patron base, the idea that greater awareness of resources could lead to better funding is of utmost importance in a time when many libraries are jockeying for public funds and struggling to justify their very existence.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on patron orientation in public libraries demonstrates that such literature is enlighteningly absent. In a survey conducted by Anne Marie Johnson and Sarah Jent, it was found that in recent years, approximately two percent of articles in the library science field address information literacy (a term often used in place of "library orientation") specifically in the public library setting (Harding, 2008, p. 277). While the study is not without its imperfections, mostly caused by language limitations and classification challenges, the low percentage is simply an indicator of the lack of research. Literature on marketing in the public library is also few and far between, so much so that in 2004, it was suggested that a survey be conducted asking librarians which marketing techniques they use (or have used) as well as the effectiveness of such techniques (Shontz, Parker, & Parker, 2004).

Most of the research in this topic in the public library arena seems to be lumped in with bibliographic instruction, which, although associated with library orientation, is actually quite a different topic altogether. Library orientation refers to the process by which patrons are informed about the physical layout of the library, what services and resources the library provides, and how to gain access to resources like the library catalog and electronic databases. Bibliographic instruction, on the other hand, serves patrons in

that it generally provides specific instruction techniques, such as how to best search specific databases or format proper citations. While it is well and good that libraries offer online tutorials on specific databases, how is the public to know that the database (or the tutorial, for that matter) exists in the first place?

According to a 2008 Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (OCLC) report, "people are generally unaware of many of the services provided by their local libraries" (section 4.2). The services of which they are aware consist mainly of what we often consider the traditional library services. Besides access to books, the majority of community members seem to be aware that the library provides access to the Internet (92%), newspapers and magazines (90%), photocopiers (90%), videos and DVDs (87%), and children's programming (84%). On the other hand, only about half of respondents indicated that they knew that the library provided teen programming, senior programming, computer and technology training, and literacy training, and fewer than half of respondents were aware of ESL classes (42%) and online databases (39%). The report also notes that while familiarity with the full range of library services and programs may not be a determinant of library funding, belief that the library is a "transformational force" *is* directly correlated (OCLC, 2008, section 4.6).

Non-profit institutions similar to libraries, such as museums, have also noted the importance of making services clear to potential patrons before developing a market orientation strategy (Camarero & Garrido, 2008). In library literature, Odom and Strout-Dapaz (2000) make the point that only after basic skills (such as checking out books, knowing where to make photocopies, and learning a bit about the library collection) are learned, can more sophisticated library research skills be taught. The issue seems to be

that many public libraries are not teaching these basic skills in any sort of formal manner. In his 1990 article *Bibliographic instruction in the public library*, Kaehr writes that "there is generally some type of user instruction given in almost all public libraries. The failure of such efforts is that these programs have been given by chance and incomplete" (p. 10). Like Payne's assertion in 1990, it seems as though not much has changed in the past twenty years. In 2003, Wilson echoed Kaehr's claims and wrote that most instruction in public libraries occurs informally while "serving the patron at his or her point of need" and is done on the individual level (p. 26). At a time when "information consumers are willing to experiment with new resources and incorporate them into their expanding repertoire of information tools" (OCLC, 2005, conclusion), why are public librarians not offering more formal orientation sessions?

Certainly, in a time when operating budgets are decreasing and necessary library resources are increasing, there is a need to increase awareness. The 2008 OCLC report stated that over 80% of funding for U.S. public library operations comes from local taxes, while support from state and federal funds is in decline (OCLC, 2008, p. vii). Additionally, library levies, referenda, and bond measures are increasingly failing and appearing on ballots less and less. A potential reason is that many U.S. residents are unaware of the "value-added and 'transformational' services provided by their libraries, such as teen programs, computer training and 'English as a second language' (ESL) classes" (OCLC, 2008, section 7). Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the report also found that it is that very knowledge, the belief that the library is a "transformational force," that is the most important factor in increasing library support. Yet when asked what sources they consulted when addressing a recent problem, only 13% of respondents

in a 2007 Pew Internet and American Life Project identified public libraries (Estabrook, Witt, & Rainie, 2007).

There is a dearth of literature on library orientation in the public library field, but practitioners and academics alike have written a few articles on library promotion and marketing strategies, often including step-by-step suggestions for marketing programs (Brannon, 2007) or conducting library tours to specific groups (Bowers and Childs, 1993; Czopek, 1990; Burford, 1997). Again, while this type of literature is useful, it does not quite tap into the ways in which librarians interact with and instruct the average patron who walks in the door on a given day (or more specifically, on one of the first few days). However, important conclusions can be drawn from these articles.

Burford (1997) describes her experience of designing and implementing a tour program for the Houston Public Library. She soon found that that "little is published on how to provide user education in the library" (p. 106), but she never considered not offering such education— her own negative experiences as a library user convinced her it was necessary. She began to offer tours two days a week by appointment, mostly to school groups, but she found that groups frequently asked for instruction sessions on how to use the library and its resources. For this reason, she also began to offer sessions in library basics and created a handout to go along with the lesson content. It is notable that Burford soon found that she had more requests for tours than she could accommodate.

Czopek (1990) encountered a similar challenge when she surveyed 25 libraries throughout the western United States about providing library tours for school-aged children. One of the librarians surveyed responded that though her library conducted tours, the library had stopped publicizing them because it was receiving more requests

than it had slots available. The librarian wrote that since beginning the tours, twice as

many books had been checked out, but because the demand for tours was too high for the

number of staff, librarians need to "be careful, it [marketing tours] can snowball too

much" (as quoted in Czopek, 1990, p. 18). These situations provide real-life examples of

instances in which, when library orientation is offered, it is well-received by library

patrons. Similarly, after giving orientation presentations to "any group or service

organization that will listen" (Bussey, 2009, p. 21), librarians at the Glen Ellyn Public

Library in western Chicago saw the largest number of individuals in its recorded history

register for the summer reading program.

An alternative method of making patrons aware of resources, as well as providing

bibliographic instruction, is to create virtual orientation tutorials. Because librarians at

the Winter Park Public Library in Florida noticed that there was a high demand from

patrons for information on navigating the library catalog, managing their accounts, and

using library databases, they chose to create online tutorials that could be used both when

the library was open and after it was closed. Their belief was that it was "important not

to overwhelm the patron with too much information. By focusing on just the essentials of

each database and resource, we hoped the patron would have greater success using them

in the future" (Heintzelman, Kronen, Moore, & Ward, 2007). At the time of the article's

publishing, the staff was also beginning to prepare mini-workshops. These kinds of

needs, the basics of library resources, seem like they might be best served in the form of

an orientation session upon receiving library cards.

While there is a lack of literature on the introduction of new patrons to the public

library, there is quite a bit of research in this field in the academic library arena. A 2005

OCLC report found that while most information consumers are not aware of electronic resources at the library and/or do not know how to navigate the library website to find such resources, "college students [referring to students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels] use electronic resources at significantly higher rates and are the most familiar with what libraries have to offer" (OCLC, 2005, conclusion). Could this be because academic librarians are much more focused on providing orientation and instruction sessions than their public library counterparts? Much of the literature in the academic library field focuses on introducing first-year students to university libraries but illuminates important conclusions that could be transferred to the public library arena. Formal orientation and library promotion efforts in academic libraries have been shown to contribute to increased library funding (OCLC, 2008; Marshall, 2001; Duckor, 2009), a greater use of library resources (Brannon, 2007; Barber & Wallace, 2009; Brewerton, 2003), and a reduction of library anxiety (Brown, Weingart, Johnson, & Dance, 2009; Sobel, 2009; Odom & Strout-Dapaz, 1999).

So why aren't public libraries acting in accordance with their academic sisters? In 2005, 96% of a surveyed population (including residents of Australia, Singapore, the U.S., U.K., India, and Canada) had visited a public library, and 72% held a library card (OCLC, 2005, section 1). This means that almost 100% of the surveyed population had entered a library at least once and almost ¾ of the surveyed population was inside a library long enough to complete a form and at least speak with a librarian, para-professional, or aide, yet only 42% of respondents were sure their libraries had access online databases, only 55% were aware that their libraries had online reference materials, and just 34% could say positively that they knew if their libraries had electronic

magazines and journals (OCLC, 2005, section 2.2). Similarly, 55% of respondents who had never visited their library's website (all of whom had access to the Internet, as the survey was administered electronically) indicated that they had never done so because the library either did not have one or they did not know it existed (OCLC, 2005, section 2.5).

According to a 2010 OCLC report, "much work remains to connect information consumers with library resources, but those who find the library Web site find success" (OCLC, 2010, p. 43). Yet in this updated version of the 2005 report, it was found that while 68% of Americans have library cards, only 33% use the library website. So how can we point people to the library website? Why are so many who hold library cards unaware of library resources? What is the exchange between residents and librarians when people sign up for library cards? What are public libraries doing to promote their resources at a time when adults are visiting the library for the *first* time?

Methodology

I chose to investigate these questions by sending an online survey to 701 library directors, branch managers, and supervisors of the libraries listed on the Public Library Directory of the State Library of Ohio website (found at http://www.library.ohio.gov/LS/Directories). Because many libraries in the state of Ohio consistently rank at the top of Hennen's American Public Library Rating index, I used this group of libraries as the sample population for this study. Additionally, Ohio boasts the highest number (36) of America's Star Libraries for the year 2010 (Lyons & Lance, 2010). New York comes in at a close second at 35, but after that, the number drops to 17 in the state of Kansas.

The data and responses for this paper were generated using Qualtrics Labs, Inc. software, Version 12,108 of the Qualtrics Research Suite. Each potential respondent was sent a personalized link that could only be used once. Of the 701 surveys distributed, 120 were begun (response rate of 17%) and 113 completed. The survey consisted of closed- and open-ended questions that asked how the participants' library introduces and orients new users to the institution, as well as the reasoning behind and effectiveness of these procedures. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. They were not required to complete all questions, so percentages should not be compared between questions unless done so in the text.

Findings and discussion

In order to get a general understanding of the initial interaction between library staff and patrons, respondents were asked to describe the process by which new adult patrons receive library cards for the first time. The majority of respondents outlined the general process, mentioning that patrons must provide proper identification for proof of residency and complete some sort of application. Many also outlined what the borrowing privileges are for the first visit (at times more restrictive than those for current users). Twenty-six of the 103 respondents who answered this question indicated some sort of orientation at the point of receiving a library card. Orientation methods include providing brochures with library system hours, locations, rules and regulations; explaining borrowing privileges; providing copies of the latest newsletter; giving verbal orientations and physical tours; and handing out calendars and newsletters detailing the library's upcoming events.

One librarian indicated that his or her library offers a "welcome bag" with information that includes how to use the online catalog system. The welcome bag is an interesting concept. If one thinks about it, how often are they offered welcome bags when signing up for new services? Certainly this is seen in the profit-driven world of car dealerships and even doctors' offices, but they are used in the non-profit sector as well. Many churches and schools often use this type of welcoming tactic, asking first-time guests and/or students to stop at a table and receive some goodies before continuing their experience.

An interesting insight gleaned from these responses is that several librarians indicated that the initial card patrons receive upon completing their application is only a temporary card. After librarians have processed new patron information, the permanent cards are mailed to the home (often to verify the mailing address). One respondent mentioned that it is at this point that the library chooses to provide the patrons with welcoming brochures. The respondent writes, "Depending on how busy we are at the desk, the staff member taking the application will give the patron a quick tour of the facility. When the cards are mailed, several brochures are included: Information for Borrowers, Computer and Internet Use Policy and Borrowing Materials Information." It is uncertain what exactly these brochures outline, but mailing them to the home may be a good option for librarians or paraprofessionals who are pressed for time at the circulation desk.

Certainly, more than 26% of responding libraries offer some sort of orientation at the initial meeting between card and patron. Immediately after requesting them to describe the card-receiving process, the survey provided options as to the types of

orientation given immediately after patrons are presented with their library card (see

Figure 1).

What kinds of library orientation does your library offer immediately after presenting patrons with a library card? (Choose all that apply).
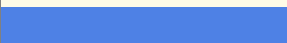
Answer		Response	%
None		2	2%
Printed brochure of library locations and hours and/or library policies		101	88%
Printed brochure of resources available		69	60%
Verbal orientation		80	70%
Physical library tour		27	23%
Self-guided audio tour		0	0%
Other (asking about their immediate library needs, welcome bag, "depends on staff")		14	12%

Figure 1

Here, 88% of respondents indicated they provide a printed brochure of library

locations and hours and/or library policies, 70% indicated patrons receive a verbal

orientation, and 60% hand out a printed brochure of resources available. It seems telling

that while more than 26% of libraries orient new patrons, many responding librarians did

not include the procedures in the open-ended first question. Could this be because they

are completed so quickly or rushed through that they are nearly forgotten? Or deemed

not important? It is a question to consider.

While "verbal orientation" ranks just second to the printed informational brochure

in terms of usage, it appears that while employees may indeed be instructed about the

general idea of what to say (83%), very few have actual scripts they are required to

follow or are given specific talking points. Additionally, as some responses suggest, the orientation at times depends heavily on the particular librarian giving it. One respondent noted, "Some librarians are much more extensive in informing the patron about how to use the online catalog and how to access their account. Some of us are briefer, giving the highlights and asking if they have any questions. It varies widely from librarian to librarian."

Additionally, as the literature suggests, libraries are increasingly using technology as a means to advertise their services, and, accordingly, 99% of respondents indicated that their library has a website. Orientation materials on the website include virtual tours of the library (12%), lists of library locations and hours and/or library policies (94%), and tutorials that teach patrons how to use databases, search the catalog, access their accounts, etc. (29%). Other virtual orientation procedures include Ask-A-Librarian resources, frequently asked questions, and maps of the library.

It seems as though most of the library orientation, then, appears at the initial receipt of the card and through online sources. Just 17% of respondents indicated that their libraries offer any sort of in-person welcome session. Of these respondents, 78% of the sessions are offered only when requested. Others are offered a few times a year, a few times a month, when requested, and "occasionally for the public and sometimes on request by local groups." From the text descriptions of these welcome sessions, though, it appears as though some of these respondents considered their one-on-one staff/patron exchange at card receipt an "in-person welcome session." However, 11 librarians indicated that they offer what I would consider true in-person welcome sessions; that is,

librarians informing and orienting groups of new patrons to library resources, services

and programs. Some descriptions of the classes are as follows:

> We have just begun offering a 'Get to Know Us' session that introduces patrons to our webpage and the many downloadables [sic] and databases offered there. A typical session would be a formal guided tour of our branch, this is usually done for kids and ya's [young adults] through class visits.

> Many times these sessions are for students in formal education or homeschooling families. These sessions are taught by reference librarians. We also conduct one-on-one 'classes' for adults on the computer technology available to them in our branches, including Internet, email, Word, and specific research topics.

> Brief tour of the Main Library, overview of library catalog and database searching. MLS librarians teach. Last public session drew just one attendee. Evaluation forms are available for attendees. Occasionally, students come in for brief tours, explanations of services, materials, etc.

> Usually it is a class or a scout group that requests an in-person orientation. A Librarian leads the tour and gives information relating to how the library operates and how to access the catalog and databases. It usually lasts 30-45 minutes.

> General tours last about an hour. We explain subjects covered in each area of the library and point out general layout— reference collection here, circulating collection here, etc. Group size can range from small (4-5) to very large (100+). The last one was 15 or so. We also do tours that focus on special areas of our collection--ESOL, genealogy, business, jobs/careers, specialized tours for groups of kids, etc. We have a small group of tour guides--at least one staff member from each of 6 library divisions. Staff from the children's area usually do the tours for kids, although staff from other divisions will help when the groups are large and vice versa for adult groups.

Interestingly, none of these sessions seem to be formally evaluated, and when

respondents were asked if *any* of their welcome services were evaluated using

quantitative measures, the majority responded with a resounding… no (see Figure 2).

However, some respondents are considering adding to or revising their current methods,

and many of these revisions involve online orientation, such as tutorials, virtual library

maps, and online tours.

Of the welcome services you typically provide, have you measured any effects on financial support, community awareness, electronic resource use, or patron satisfaction?
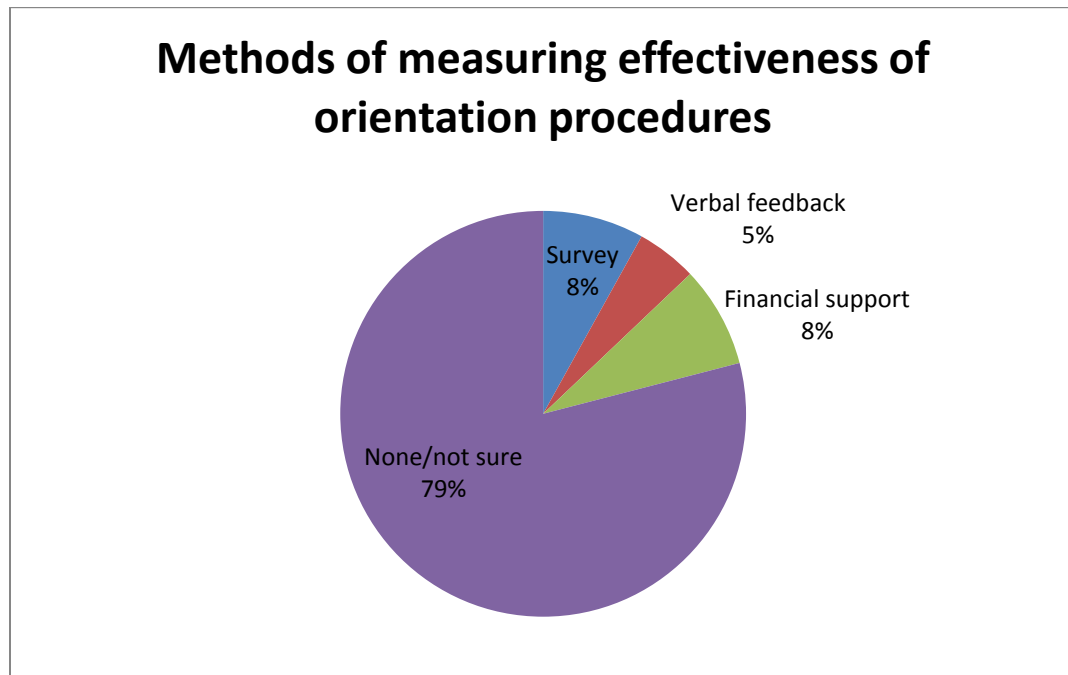

Figure 2

Finally, 11% of respondents indicated that there were orientation services they performed in the past but no longer perform. The reasons cited for the changes include budget restraints (55%), staff did not have enough time (55%), and patrons did not demonstrate enough interest (27%). Similarly, librarians cited numerous limitations on providing orientation services (see Figure 3), the biggest culprit being that staff simply does not have enough time.

Please explain any current limitations you face in orienting new patrons to the library. (Choose all that apply)

Answer		Response	%
Budget restraints		38	49%
Staff does not have enough time		56	73%
Library patrons do not demonstrate enough interest		33	43%
Staff does not demonstrate enough interest		2	3%
Unfamiliarity with technology needed to produce particular types of materials		2	3%
Other (includes not enough staff, not deemed necessary)		8	10%

Figure 3

Limitations and suggestions for future research

With any study that relies on self-reported data, one has to take into account that the results are likely to be biased. Even though the respondents and the libraries are not identified, they still might have attempted to cast their procedures in a favorable light. Additionally, as the survey was anonymous, there is no way of knowing if several participants were from the same library system, and therefore the results weigh one system's procedures over another's. As a result, the findings may not accurately reflect the varying procedures of the many public libraries in Ohio. Finally, voluntary surveys always contain an inherent non-response bias.

The anonymity also makes it difficult to make judgments and properly analyze the types of services these libraries provide without knowing their constituents and the communities in which they are located. In future studies, it may behoove researchers to

identify the libraries responding to the survey in order to gain a better understanding of how the services and programs offered correlate with the orientation sessions provided. For example, if a library does not offer ESL classes or teen programming, there is obviously no need to mention it at the initial contact with a new patron. Additionally, knowing more context and the library's place in the community would allow researchers and librarians to be able to make a connection between marketing, library orientation, and the particular needs of that community.

Conclusions

As the literature suggests, libraries that provide orientation procedures experience a potential increase in awareness, a greater utilization of library resources, increased support and funding to the library, and reduced library anxiety. Yet these effects are not being measured in the greater part of libraries responding to this study. What this study highlighted is that while some of the nation's best public libraries do indeed provide orientation procedures, the vast majority of these procedures occur on a one-to-one basis and through the form of written brochures that highlight circulation policy more than resources and services available. There are very few formal, spelled-out orientation procedures, and much of the orientation depends on the staff member giving it. Similarly, the effectiveness of the welcome procedures is also measured informally—mostly done through verbal praise from the patrons and the passing of library levies. Finally, when librarians do wish to implement new procedures, they simply find that they do not have the adequate resources (money and time) to do so.

The 2010 OCLC report found that people wished that the library advertised more (p. 98). Perhaps it is time for libraries to find the finances and staff time to develop more formal orientation and evaluation procedures in order to better market their services and programs, demonstrate their transformative power, and respond to their patrons' request.

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