Reviews

RDA Essentials

Brenndorfer, Thomas (2016)
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The *RDA Toolkit* might be a little daunting for the occasional cataloguer, particularly one more used to the printed editions of RDA's predecessor, the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (AACR). Thomas Brenndorfer has compiled this book for such a person, who could well be involved in providing access to, say, a public or school library collection, for which original catalogue records may not need be created on a daily basis, nor to a very high level of detail. It can be used on its own, and as such is not a gloss or commentary to be used in conjunction with the code, nor an instructional guide or workbook that develops the cataloguer's skills.

The downside of this independence is that it essentially *extracts* the most important rules from RDA, and not all that much else, which would be fine if the RDA rules were readily intelligible to the occasional cataloguer, but alas this isn't always the case. One might in fact suggest that the level of abstraction on which RDA is based makes it less comprehensible to the non-cataloguing librarian than AACR, which was itself considered sufficiently complex to warrant a *Concise AACR2*, written by one of the editors of the full version. The difference between the *Concise AACR2* and *RDA Essentials* is that the former was not simply an extraction, it was a genuine simplification.

The theory is that by providing the occasional cataloguer with the 'essential' content of RDA, they can still contribute records that are compatible with RDA-based bibliographic databases, beyond the local catalogue. However, the practical outcome might be no records at all if the content is still 'too much' for busy librarians who don't have hours to spend getting to grips with over 350 pages of instruction. Indeed, there are some ways in which *RDA Essentials* is less accessible than the *Toolkit,* not least its limited navigational aids: the sections within each chapter are not listed anywhere, nor are they numbered; this makes users over-reliant on

the index, which is thorough, but employs the RDA terminology that the occasional cataloguer would not necessarily use or even understand.

The structure of *RDA Essentials* broadly follows that of RDA, with the initial chapters covering the various bibliographic elements according to their function and target entity (manifestations, works, persons, corporate bodies, etc.). The later chapters collate rules around more generic topics, such as transcription and name construction. There is an introduction that briefly sets out key concepts and how one would go about cataloguing using the book. However, those unfamiliar with the principles of RDA would do well to start with, for example, *Introducing RDA* by Chris Oliver or *The RDA Primer* by Amy Hart. There is nothing particularly wrong with this book, but one can't help thinking that it would be better presented as a 'basic view' within *RDA Toolkit* itself. We are still missing a 'Concise RDA'.

Reviewed by Dr Philip Hider
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Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World
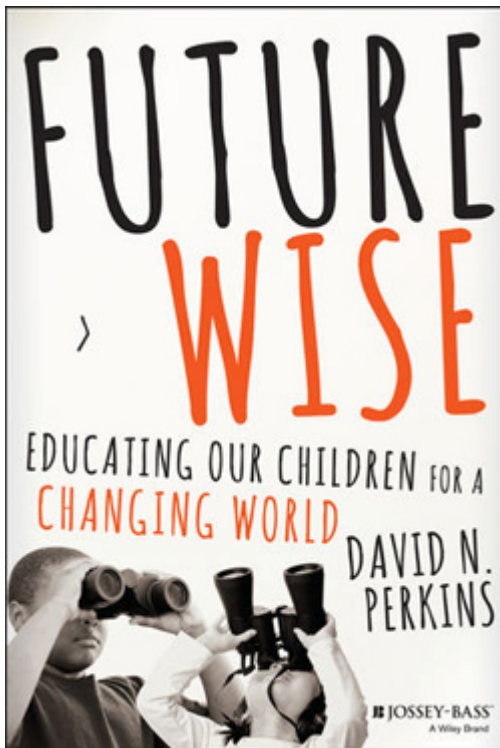
'What's worth learning?' is bound to lead to continuous inquiry as educators face diverse learners and settings. David Perkins, founding member and senior co-director of Harvard's Project Zero, does not provide easy answers to the above question in *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World*; rather he deepens understanding of the dilemma of educating for an unknown future. Perkins explores better ways to think and examine this issue by offering a toolkit, including key concepts, criteria and establishing priorities.

A reimagining of education, however, does not provide one best answer to what is worth learning but encourages questioning of what learning will contribute most to knowledge for future meaning. Is learning "lifeworthy", that is, is it likely to matter in the lives that students are likely to live? Perkins argues for reimagining education by balancing the current focus of achievement in traditional disciplines, information and expertise with lifelong learning. The current dominance of achievement, information and expertise reflects the traditional hierarchy of education or a curriculum based on discrete subject disciplines. Although these three agendas may contribute to learning, this may not be 'lifeworthy'.

Vigorous, flexible, adaptive and notably proactive understandings (known as "big understandings") connect well with the world we live in. These big understandings are big in four ways, including:

- Insight, revealing how our physical, social, artistic and other world's work.
- Action, suggesting ways to engage and paths to pursue.
- Ethics, encouraging an ethical quest towards humane, caring mindsets and conduct.
- Opportunity, revealing significant and varied circumstances leading to learning in broad themes, such as, democracy, energy, population dynamics and how to engage thoughtfully in works of art.

What makes big understandings, lifeworthy? They support quick, intelligent orientation to situations, careful deliberation and a foundation for further learning and transfer, which contrasts with once-and-for-all-learning. Big understandings, as such, do not guarantee sound teaching and learning. Since themes, however, connect so richly to many facets of life, they do provide many opportunities for lifeworthy learning.

In the chapter, 'The Seven Seas of Knowledge', Perkins argues for teachers making the most of knowledge in subject disciplines for student learning, particularly since many strongly lifeworthy themes are often neglected. Familiar disciplines offer ample material for designing a curriculum full of lifeworthy learning themes. The subsequent chapter explores the question: How can a discipline's way of knowing be included as a main focus in teaching that subject?

Later chapters focus on "bucket systems", including both the broad content categories in familiar disciplines as well as future, improved bucket systems that redescribe and regroup traditional disciplines but are not "the old story pumped up with recent detail" (p. 175). Cross topics are essential to address themes and issues that span multiple disciplines and address lifeworthy big understandings, for example, the persistence of poverty. Contemporary themes with connections to big questions about personal and community concerns can stimulate thoughtful and engaged patterns of teaching and learning.

Chapter Nine studies "big know-how" at the two levels of personal and interpersonal know-how; the weaving of twenty-first century skills and related themes into education. Perkins concludes with the identical question posed at the start: What's worth learning? This is an impossible question if we want a perfect answer. Nevertheless, some thoughtful criteria, as presented in *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* can guide us thoughtfully and intelligently in educating for the future unknown.

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BiblioTECH: Why Libraries Matter More than Ever in the Age of Google
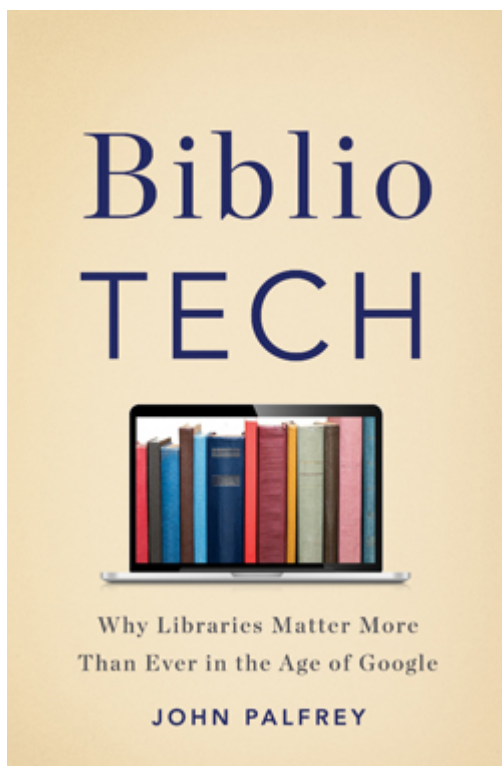
The title of this book, *BiblioTECH: Why Libraries Matter More than Ever in the Age of Google*, alerts the reader immediately to its content and perspective. Author John Palfrey, founding chairman of the Digital Public Library of America, is setting out to inform the reader and address this argument. This, he achieves.

Coping with the dilemma of the changing format of information is a challenge for library services and the staff who manage them. "The nature of the demand for library materials is changing mostly toward the digital. Our modes of teaching, learning and research are changing along with the format changes."

Palfrey writes about the complexity of transitioning from a largely print collection to one dominated by digital resources that are often derived from new and complex sources. Librarians have the role of accommodating patrons firmly lodged in the world of print, whilst they service the needs of clients who are more familiar with digital sources of information. Acknowledging that they have a stewardship role in the preservation of knowledge, the modern library professional must embrace the broad range of activities that enable them to span the analog and the digital to fulfil the library's role as a public institution.

This book was written for the American public library market, yet the quality and scope of the content makes it a valuable resource for librarians internationally. The author addresses the perennial issue of funding and staff reductions and the danger of clinging to a nostalgic view of libraries. He provides the reader with an introduction to the exciting plans and information access achieved through the digital networking of libraries and museums to build the DPLA: Digital Public Library of America. He cautions the library world that if they do not embrace the digitisation of resources, society's knowledge in the future will be monopolised by a handful of worldwide digital companies.

Palfrey is an optimist. He acknowledges the complexity of change but through this text offers the reader with options to consider. He speaks of library champions who are already "charting the way toward a new, vibrant era for the library profession in an age of networks" but laments that the change is not happening quickly enough. Tools, he says, such as the Harvard Library Innovation Lab virtual browsing engine Haystack are just a glimpse of where libraries must venture.

The end result of the redefinition of all libraries – school, public, research, government and special collections – is in the creation of a new nostalgia, a nostalgia with an emphasis on the physical space and the social role of libraries within their communities. The author concludes with a warning to leaders in the democratic system that funds libraries, to not make the mistake of believing that libraries are needed less in the digital age. We have entered an age of information abundance where organisation and access to quality resources is essential for the democratic creation of new knowledge.

This books supports a positive future for libraries. The reader has a sense of being taken on a journey through the history of libraries, encompassing an overview of the present state of transition and hope-filled innovations, to a glimpse of a possible future. The tone of the writing is enthusiastic and engaging. It contains extensive notes, selected bibliography and index.

I recommend this book to all library professionals, but in particular those responsible for driving change within their organisations. It is an excellent resource.

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