

EDITOR'S notes



Five Laws

S. R. Ranganathan wrote his “The Five Laws of Library Science” in 1931. The Five Laws are:

1. **Books are for use.**
2. **Every reader his book.**
3. **Every book its reader.**
4. **Save the time of the reader.**
5. **The library is a growing organism.**

In 1931, books and periodicals were about all that most libraries collected, and certainly school libraries—where they existed—had little beyond print. But Ranganathan’s idea was on the right track. Too bad we somehow left it behind.

I would propose that we broaden our outlook. Knowing what we do about learning styles, and the power of multiple media to address learning differences, plus media richness theory that shows mediated information is retained much better, doing a little editing to Ranganathan could help us rethink our mission. Consider this improvement:

1. **Media are for use.**
2. **Every patron his information.**
3. **Every medium its user.**
4. **Save the time of the patron.**
5. **The library is a growing organism.**

Media are for use. Ranganathan believed that books were no good to anyone if they sat on the shelf and didn’t circulate. Are media any different? What good does a video or CD do if it sits on a locked shelf 364 days a year? How many patrons might learn something from that item? Should we really say, “No, you can’t learn that, because some teacher you may never have wants that item to be locked away”? Aren’t we learning facilitators?

Every patron his information. Who said that the information the patron wants is only available in print? In fact, as media become more and more ubiquitous, an increasing amount of information is only available in non-print formats. In order to provide information to patrons as they need it, we may need to re-think library policies that restrict media to faculty and staff.

Every medium its user. Back in the days of Beaver and Miss Landers, school populations were pretty homogeneous. Everyone read well, and learning from books was just standard operating procedure. Those who couldn’t learn in that environment dropped out. No more. School populations swell with those for whom print is the least effective learning channel. Shouldn’t those students learn through their most effective channels while they are learning to be better readers?

Save the time of the patron. When one of your students needs to know the essentials of Pearl Harbor, for example, is it more effective to give him a 100 page book, or hand him a 20 minute video? Assuming the information is the same in both, couldn’t the student use the extra time to acquire other knowledge or experience? We set up OPAC’s and Web page pathfinders to make student searching more efficient and effective. Couldn’t we make their knowledge acquisition just as economical?

The library is a growing organism. If this was true in 1931, it is even truer today. With new types of learners, and more knowledge of media richness theory and its evidence of efficient and effective mediated learning, the school library would be foolish to not embrace media for student use. Media don’t replace books. The library grows to encompass the expanded knowledge. As new media emerge, the library expands. As we have more resources, we gain new patrons, who demand more resources. But isn’t that our goal, anyway? ■

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