

*Workplace Learning: How Space and Place Inform and Influence Librarian Learning*  
An Institutional Ethnography

by

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B.Hum., Carleton University, 2000  
M.P.A., University of Manitoba, 2002

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Public libraries have frequently been referred to as a ‘third place,’ which is defined as the place between home and work where people meet to exchange ideas, learn, and have a good time (Oldenburg, 2014). New and award-winning library branches have been built in Winnipeg, Halifax, and Calgary, and these central downtown branches provide not only access to books, but also to community meeting spaces and to social services; these major developments speak to the dynamic nature of the public library and to its importance in Canadian urban settings.

As cities seek to redesign their public library spaces, the emphasis is on service provision and the community and its patrons. But, what about the librarian? What is the librarian’s experience of and in this space? This study explores the librarian’s experience in the public library space, and how this space informs and shapes librarian’s learning. Employing the principles of institutional ethnography, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis. A detailed picture of the work of librarians emerged through the indexing process, and three key spaces in the public library emerged from the data to ground and situate the participants experiences and learning at work. The data revealed the ways these spaces inform, influence and shape participants’ experiences and learning; the impact of some spaces is explicit and formal while other spaces provide an incidental or informal impact on participants.

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## **Dedication**

My journey has taken a little longer than expected. Along the way, I have welcomed two children, changed jobs twice, and faced unexpected challenges and losses. Throughout it all, my partner in crime, family, and friends have stood by me – for which I am forever grateful. This is for them.

I would like to thank my supervisor and committee members for their encouragement, support and patience throughout the process.

And I would like to thank the study participants and library administration at my research site. You gave so freely of yourselves and your time – I can only hope that I have done you and your work justice!

## Introduction

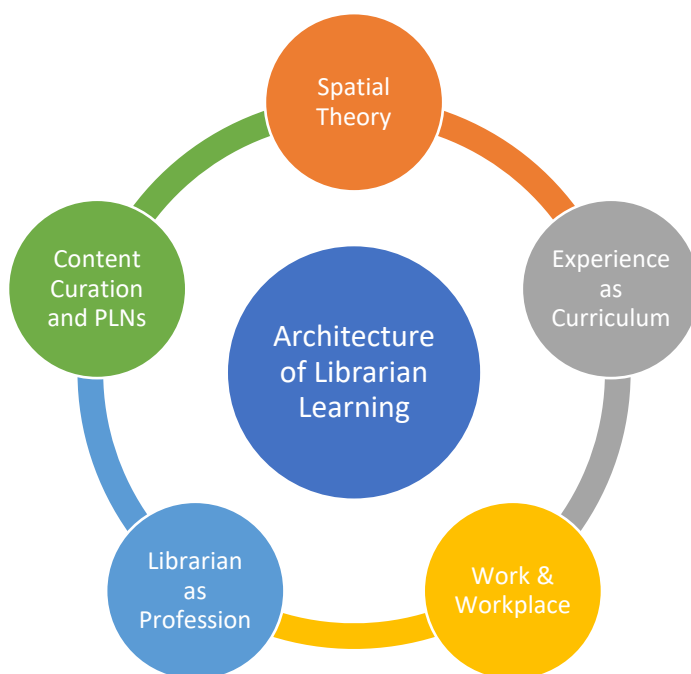
A library is a good place to soften solitude; a place where you can feel part of a conversation that has gone on for hundreds and hundreds of years even when you're all alone. The library is a whispering post. You don't need to take a book off a shelf to know there is a voice inside that is waiting to speak to you, and behind that was someone who truly believed if he or she spoke, someone would listen. (Orlean, 2018, p. 309)

As a lover of libraries and books from an early age, this quotation resonated with me. There is comfort in wandering the stacks and browsing books from all different genres and subject areas. Susan Orlean's words above, from her book, *The Library Book*, chronicles the fire at the Central Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library and her love of libraries. Margaret Atwood famously spoke out when funding for the Toronto Public Library was threatened in 2017, and Emilio Estevez wrote and produced a film that is an ode to the modern library and librarians in his 2019 film, *The Public*. Nearly everyone I have spoken to about my research has had a tale to tell about a memorable experience at the public library. And I have consciously worked to instill a love of libraries in my children – they had library cards before they had bank accounts, and there is a palpable excitement as we prepare for our regular trip to the local branch.

The quotation from Orlean's book seems to describe the essence of my research, where I explored how the place and space of the public library shaped and informed the learning of librarians. I was fascinated with the experiences of the librarians in the public library, of how librarians move and learn in their workspace, and how the public library as place informed, shape and influence how and what they learn.

## Dissertation Organization

This dissertation outlines my research journey and exploration into the learning experience of librarians in their workplace. I begin with a literature review in Chapter One, which introduces some of the key concepts that serve as the foundation or cornerstones of my study. I draw upon a diverse number of sources and areas in this research, as it is one of the first that explores the impact and influence of space on the learning experience of employees at work. At first glance, these fields appear to be five separate and distinct entities, but I demonstrate how they converge and flow from one into the next through my research. I have developed the following diagram to explain the different streams of research that converge and flow together.



**Figure 1 Convergence and Flow of Research Streams**

My literature review explores each of the five areas identified here in turn, starting with an exploration of place and spatial theory as described and defined by the works of Henri Lefebvre. The work of Lefebvre provides a lens through which I define and use the terms of

place and space in my study. His view of place and space as dynamic, living entities that are imbued with meaning and experience segues nicely into the second area of literature that I draw upon in my research: experience as curriculum. I have the privilege to study and work in the fields of adult education and workplace learning every day. As such, I have seen the significance of experience in the construction of knowledge and learning process, particularly in a work setting. It is the interconnectedness of place, experience and curriculum that is described in the works of Ted Aoki, William Pinar and Cynthia Chambers, among others, and I explore this theme more fulsomely in the literature review to situate the discussion of my research and findings in later chapters.

It is the critical role of experience at work and in the workplace that provides the segue or flow from experience as curriculum into the literature of learning at work. I picked up the thread of experience as curriculum and wove it into the fabric of work alongside that of learning, as they are synonymous. I drew upon the research into situated learning and communities of learning as developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. The notion of employee as an active player and driver in determining how and what to learn and do for work echoes the work of Stephen Billett. However, as work becomes increasingly virtual, that poses problems for boundaries and the very definitions of workplace and workspace. I explore some of the theory around workplace broadly, identifying the challenges facing employees at work resulting from an increasingly digital landscape.

In the literature, I transition from the research of workplace learning broadly to the librarian as professional specifically. Currently, in the literature, there is a debate about reframing the profession of librarianship to reflect the many changes that libraries have faced as they have come into and adapted to the digital age. I touch upon the experience of librarians as they have

worked through this transition, particularly those in public libraries, as they have had to embrace, design and shift their work from one that existed in a physical space, to one that now bridges the physical and virtual worlds. And as librarians shape their virtual workspace, they have become actively involved in the areas of content curation and the development of their personal learning networks (PLNs). This is the fifth area identified in Figure 1, and the final area that I touch upon in my review of the literature. These concepts are relatively new, and their development has accompanied the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media as learners make choices that directly impact and shape their unique knowledge construction input and processes. It is the exploration of how one's virtual network or space is created that leads back to the first field I identified, spatial theory, as the notion of virtual space and how it is defined, designed and shaped is critical in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and continuing evolution of the internet and online world.

Once I have established the theoretical foundation for my study, I focus on the public library as place and as an institution in Chapter Two. The decision to separate out the discussion of the library was purposeful and based on the significance of the place and space in terms of my study, and the importance of the institutional framework that governs the librarians who participated in my study. Public libraries are not independent organizations; they have been created and evolved through a myriad of factors, including legislation, policy, procedures, politics and community need. The public library has changed over time, adapted to meet societal needs, and positioned itself to survive in the digital age.

I begin by looking at the public library as place, providing a brief history of how the institution came to be what we see in the Western world today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I discuss how public libraries are used today and explore some of the challenges faced by library administrators, librarians and patrons. Following this, I offer a glimpse into the public library as institution in

Canada, how they are governed and funded, and how decisions are made that impact operations and patrons' experiences.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach I adopted for my research. Having read numerous studies into workplace learning, one of the things I wanted to accomplish in my research was to develop a comprehensive, holistic understanding of not only the workplace, but also of the work of the participants. To do this, I employed the principles of institutional ethnography in my research. Created by sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, institutional ethnography is defined as a method of inquiry that at its core, "offers the capacity to look at the everyday world and figure out and "map" how things happen the way they do" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 16). Smith developed this alternative method of inquiry from a feminist perspective to bring women's work and experiences out of the shadows (Smith, 2005). This stemmed from Smith's own experience as an academic and a single mother, and her observations that women's work was undervalued in existing research methodological approaches.

Typically, an institutional ethnographic study observes and maps the lived experience of participants with a view to identifying the 'problematic,' or source of issues or tensions arising from the institutional framework. As I had a pre-determined research area or focus in mind, I did not seek to identify a problematic. However, I did employ the tenets or principles of institutional ethnography as I determined it was the best approach to develop a fulsome perspective of the work and workplace. As the library is a feminized workplace that is increasingly focused on service provision or caregiving in a public institution, the employment of institutional ethnography is even more apt. In this chapter, I establish the method of inquiry employed in my study in greater detail. I also introduce the participants of my study and outline the various methods of data collection employed in my research. I conclude Chapter Three with a discussion

of some of the practical and ethical challenges facing the researcher in conducting an institutional ethnographic study.

Chapter Four offers a discussion of my research in greater detail. In this chapter, I provide the results from indexing and the desired holistic perspective of the work of my study participants. Indexing is one of the basic tools employed by institutional ethnographic researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the work. I also discuss the results from my interviews and identify the key texts from the public library. Key texts, like indexing, is a critical element of institutional ethnography, as they embody the institutional and bureaucratic nature of the work. In this chapter, I outline the impact of these texts on the work of the participants.

Finally, I provide my findings from my research in Chapter Five. I identify the different ways in which place and space shapes and informs the learning of the participants, both consciously and unconsciously. My study revealed three significant spaces: the public use spaces in the library, personal workstations and digital spaces, or networks. These spaces served to ground and situate the experiences and learning for study participants. Furthermore, in this chapter I explore the significance of each of these spaces and discuss their contextual roles in experience and learning. I also identify gaps or opportunities for future work in the literature that emerged over the course of my research.

### **Research Contribution and Significance**

While my research into the public library was driven by my love of books and the library at a superficial level, I demonstrate why the public library is important for scholars, librarians, and practitioners. At a scholarly level, my research contributes to the emerging and growing field of institutional ethnographic studies. As demonstrated in the literature and as I discuss in Chapter Three, there is a broad interpretation and application of institutional ethnography and its

principles across many fields. This has caused Janet Rankin, one of the predominant scholars in this field, to author pieces on how to “do” institutional ethnography in the field in a way that maintains the integrity of the method of inquiry as set out by Smith. By offering an in-depth description of the methods I employed, my research process, and an explanation of how I employed the principles of institutional ethnography, I believe I make a positive contribution to the field and provide an example of how the approach can be used with integrity.

I also believe that my research contributes to the field and profession of librarianship. While all libraries can trace their roots to the ancient world, the emergence of the different types of libraries and their need to adapt to the digital world, budget and resource restrictions yet simultaneously meeting the increasing needs of users and patrons has led to some anxiety within the profession (Caspé & Lopez, 2018; Fraser-Arnott, 2019; Garcia & Barbour, 2018; Hicks, 2016). For public libraries, their role in society is changing. Libraries and librarians are bridging both the physical and virtual worlds and working to understand and anticipate the needs of both communities broadly and patrons more specifically. Librarians are graduating from their Library and Information Science degree programs feeling ill-prepared to meet the educational, social and spatial needs of patrons (Williams & Willett, 2019; Seminelli, 2016; Garcia & Barbour, 2018; Fraser-Arnott, 2019). There is a need to be more: more collaborative, more flexible and more responsive. And yet, when I conducted my literature review, the focus of the majority of research and studies was on how libraries and librarians can assess patron needs, and how to design a flexible, user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing space. The emphasis is on the patron, which is not uncommon given the role that libraries and librarians play in society as a service provider.

By employing the institutional ethnographic principles in my research, I sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of the work of the librarians who participated in my study. I

believe that the findings from my research and the in-depth description of the work and how it is done will help inform the ongoing conversation on the profession and preparation of future librarians.

Finally, as noted previously, I am fortunate to work in the field of workplace learning. I rely heavily on the literature into formal and non-formal and informal learning, particularly the significance of experience in the learning process. What continues to strike me is the diversity of voices, definitions, and perspectives in this field of study. There are many efforts to explore and understand the workplace from a quantitative perspective, drawing upon national surveys and government demographic information (Livingstone, 2005; Billett, 2016; Billett & Choy, 2013). And there are a greater number of qualitative studies that draw upon one or sometimes two methods to explore a certain aspect of the work experience. While conducting an institutional ethnographic study is by no means a new approach, it is not one that is typically adopted in the workplace learning literature. It is my hope to add a new voice to the emerging and ongoing conversation, providing a potential new approach to exploring learning and workers' experiences in the workplace.

## Chapter 1 - Literature Review

My research into *workplace* learning is complex and focuses on experience, weaving together bodies of research related to philosophical notions of space and place, theories of knowledge construction and curriculum development broadly, and workplace learning specifically. I introduce these bodies of research, establishing boundaries and identifying key landmarks in each area that, when layered upon my research, introduce contours and provide much required definition and detail. Through each discussion, I introduce key concepts, clarify how my work has been informed by research in each field, and identify where this study is situated in the landscape, as laid out in Figure 1.

### Spatial Theory

Space is a deceptively complex term; the *Oxford English Dictionary* dedicated two pages to the myriad of readings and interpretations of the term. At its core, space is defined as “denoting an area or extension of general or unlimited extent” (“Space”, 2014). Although there are references to space in the works of Plato and Aristotle, the concepts of space and place as most often referred to in today’s literature came into being in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the works of Rene Descartes, Isaac Newton, Gottfried Leibniz, and Immanuel Kant (Agnew, 2011). Discussions of space and place began to emerge in philosophy, sociology, geography and other disciplines in the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the conclusion of the scientific, political, cultural and industrial revolutions and the emergence of modernity (Benko, 1997). Until this point, space was traditionally conceived of as empty, vast space. With 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity came a rejection of the past, an emphasis on reason, and a desire to construct a worldview, or a dynamic image of the world (Soja, 1986; Benko, 1997).

## **Modern Conceptions of Space**

Based on the initial works of Kant, Newton and Leibniz, early modern space was alive, given energy and life through the activities, events and individuals that passed through. The areas in which these activities occurred were referred to as places, in order to distinguish them from the larger whole (Casey, 1993; Agnew, 2011). This interaction served to create a linkage not only between space and time, but it also served to establish a seemingly unbreakable relationship between space and place that reverberates through spatial and social theory. This was echoed by Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. According to Hiralal Haldar (1932), Hegel believed that,

The objective world of experience is a world of reciprocally determining substances coexisting in space and manifesting themselves in their successive determinations in time related to one another according to the law of causality. Change in time presupposes interaction of things in space, and things interacting in space are ipso facto things changing in time. (p. 531)

This resonates with my research; the liveliness of space is evident in the busy-ness of the public library, and what defines it as a place is how patrons come and go, with employees flowing through the space as part of their everyday work.

## **Henri Lefebvre, Space and Place**

Following the Great Depression and World War II, the post-war era brought an explosion in spatial and social theories in the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, and human geography to name but a few. An exploration of space would not be complete without mention of Henri Lefebvre, a French neo-Marxist philosopher and sociologist, who published many of his works during this period. It is possible to trace Lefebvre's definition of space back to the beginning of modernity and his works rely heavily upon Hegel and Karl Marx (Merrifield, 2006; Soja, 1986).

Lefebvre set out to establish a “unitary theory of space” in his work, *Production of Space*, published in 1974, but his discussion of space extends to his other works, too (Merrifield, 2006). In his foundational work, Lefebvre (1991) identified upwards of 30 types of space and concluded that “space is never empty; it always embodies a meaning” (p. 154). According to Lefebvre (1991), these spaces do not exist in isolation but rather can be likened to “great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves – these all collide and ‘interfere’ with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate” (p. 87).

To assist in processing and understanding these intersections, Lefebvre (1991) created a triad or framework: spatial practice (perceived space), which translated everyday life, identified patterns and imposed organization; representations of space (conceived space), where politics, power, ideology and knowledge are seated or represented as it is this space where decisions of design and production are made that will affect and shape society; and representational spaces (lived spaces), where space is experienced everyday by the majority of society. According to Lefebvre (1991),

This space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently, it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational, or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic. (p. 42)

Experience, for Lefebvre was captured in everyday life of these lived spaces, which are akin, Merrifield (1993) argues to place. As noted previously, place was critical in modernity; for Newton and Leibniz, place was intertwined with space; place is what imbued space with energy and meaning (Agnew, 2011). Place was the space where events and activities occurred. While at

first glance place is seemingly overlooked or omitted in Lefebvre's works, Edward Soja (1991) claimed that Lefebvre was inferring place when he used the term 'everyday life.' According to Soja, "everyday life was presented and represented as the place where alienation and mystification were played out, enacted, concretely inscribed. It was also, therefore, the place where the struggles to demystify human consciousness, erase alienation, and achieve true liberation must be located" (p. 26). Thus, the information and experiences that would have led to the personal and social constructions of knowledge would have been gleaned through everyday life in these lived spaces.

### **Different Perspectives on Space and Place**

Lefebvre was one of the pre-eminent neo-Marxist philosophers and geographers who focused on spatial theory, including Doreen Massey and Edward Casey. Massey (2004) and Casey (1993) believed that place had disappeared altogether in modernity, thanks in part to Lefebvre. Massey (2004) argued that increasing globalization and acknowledgement of different worldviews were destroying the relational definition of space (the abstract) and place (the grounded, local environment) as the lines between the two binaries were becoming more and more blurred. As Casey (1993) argued, "place has come to be not only neglected but actively suppressed. Owing to the triumph of the natural and social sciences in this same period, any serious talk about place has been regarded as regressive or trivial" (p. xiv).

Despite the different views proposed by Casey and Massey, Lefebvre and his work remain central to an exploration of place and space. What resonates most about Lefebvre's work is the recognition that place and space are dynamic and fluid, and without them, our experiences would be incomplete as they provide a much needed context and setting for actions and events. While some may adopt the binary or relational definitions of space and place, where space is the

abstract and place is where we live, I have chosen to use the two interchangeably in my research as I believe they are both lived and imbued with meaning, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the overlap between our physical and virtual realities.

### **Space Deconstructed: Foucault and Post-structuralism**

Another key philosopher who shaped the way current scholars view space is Michel Foucault. Considered to be a key figure of post-structuralism, alongside Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, Foucault was influenced by Nietzsche and the debates of the 1950s and 1960s between French Marxists (including Lefebvre), structuralists and existentialists. According to Philo, Foucault's works consisted of “a series of powerful theoretical interventions that problematized the production of knowledge” (Philo, 2004, p. 121). Interestingly, only one of Foucault's works, published posthumously in 1986, addressed the topic of space directly. However, he invoked geographical references and symbols throughout his works as noted by the editors of *Hérodote* in their interview with Foucault as they attempted to elicit his definition of space (Foucault, 1980).

Space, as inferred by Foucault's works, is purposefully designed and produced. This could not be more evident than in *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault provided a detailed history of prisons and punishment and expanded upon Bentham's panopticon. Foucault extrapolated that the discipline and fostering of an internal conscience must be the aim of not only prisons, but extend into society to ensure economic efficiency through the same means of normalization, self-moderation, and creation of a life-path (Foucault, 1985; Hannah, 1997; Philo, 2004).

In his essay, *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault and co-author Jay Miekowiec explicitly addressed the notion of space. The spaces in which we live are bound to time, Foucault conceded; spaces are not empty but rather he believed that “we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another”

(Foucault & Miekowiec, 1986, p. 23). In this essay, Foucault (1986) developed the notion of heterologies and heterotopias that can be defined by six principles: they are ubiquitous, crossing all cultures; they have a “precise and determined function” specific to each culture; they bring together foreign objects that would not normally appear together; they are linked to slices of time; heterotopias are demonstrative of ritual; and finally, these spaces must “function in relation to all the spaces that remain” (p. 27). Foucault established a hierarchy of sorts, of space over time and history. The spaces described by Foucault (1986), “takes for us the form of relations among sites” (p. 23), thus opening for an-Other space, and consideration of alternative views of space and place (Soja, 1996). The implication of this 'other' space is critical for the evolution of experience and, by extension, personal and social knowledge construction because it will open the door for voices and information from a variety of sources, as will be discussed in the next section.

### **An 'Other' Space: Post-modern Views on Space and Place**

The Foucauldian sense of space and place provided the foundation for a number of post-structural and post-modern theories and interpretations, taking them in new directions and opening up new spaces and places for discussion. One such scholar is Edward Soja who introduced the concept of 'thirdspace' into the vernacular. While his *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), is predominantly an exploration and extrapolation of Lefebvre's spatial framework, Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996), builds upon Foucault's notions of space, the heterologies and the opening of an 'Other' space. The purpose of establishing a thirdspace, was to encourage questioning of existing notions and new thinking in relation to the “*spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography” (p. 1).

### Space, Place and Experience

What can be distilled through this discussion of space and place is that they are dynamic environments and not only provide the setting for events but are living elements of the event – they become part of the experience itself. It is this premise that provides the foundation for my research: that the spaces and places where work occurs become part of an employee’s experience and learning, consciously and unconsciously. It is *experience* which embodies space and place that is key, and to understand how experience fits within learning or knowledge construction is critical.

Historically, traditional knowledge belonging to families, groups and communities is passed through recounting experiences and storytelling (Barnhardt, 2008; Jardine, 2000). Constructivists, such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, believed that human beings actively constructed knowledge through their interaction with their environment, drawing upon their prior experiences and knowledge in the process. Others, such as Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and Barbara Rogoff have defended the importance of activity and experience situated in everyday life as the locus for the creation of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Lave, 1990).

But what constitutes experience? Broadly speaking, John Dewey defined experience as an activity that is consciously connected with its associated consequences (Dewey, 1966, p. 139). However, Dewey is quick to point out that not all experiences are equal; there are different types of experiences, those that provide insight and result in increased power and growth, and those that are more superficial in nature (Dewey, 1944; see also Hook, 1973; Tanner & Tanner, 1980; Brookfield, 2009). These experiences exist on a continuum, which is described by Dewey (1944) as, “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up

something from those that have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 27).

Similarly, just as experience is something that is lived, space and place are still perceived to be dynamic, living entities, as initially conceived in early modernity, bound in time and history. However, space and place are not merely locations for experience, but rather they are *a part of experience*. As noted by Lefebvre, space was omnipresent. He argued that spaces are organic, living beings described as waves in the ocean. Lefebvre (1991) states, “the hyper-complexity of space should now be apparent, embracing as it does individual entities and particularities, relatively fixed points, movements, and flows and waves – some interpenetrating, others in conflict” (p. 88).

Elizabeth Ellsworth (2003) argued that the space is a part of the experience that we contemplate; she believes that “we do not have experiences, but that we are experiences” (p. 24). Ellsworth claimed that space is in constant transition, and thus is an integral part of any experience or interconnection that is identified through contemplation. According to Ellsworth (2003), “transitional space opens up the space and time between an experience and our habitual response to it. It gives us time and space to come up with some other way of being in relation to that moment” (p. 64). In other words, transitional space provides time for reflection, understanding and the construction of our personal knowledge.

Similarly, Diane Silberman-Keller (2006) argued that physical space is integral to the context in which the experience occurs: “the physical setting of non-formal activities creates an atmosphere of belonging and security, of freedom and warmth, one that determines the very nature of the place” (p. 251). Place, therefore, is not only where learning occurs and knowledge is constructed, but it is also embedded in our experiences and resulting knowledge.

## Experience as Curriculum

Our experiences occur in and embody spaces generally, and places more specifically. These help us shape and create knowledge whether it is constructed through a formal or informal manner. Therefore, I propose that curriculum helps us, personally and socially, organize and make sense of those experiences as we engage in knowledge construction generally, and in the workplace specifically. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines curriculum as “a course; a regular course of study or training, as at a school or university.” (“Curriculum,” 2014). Traditionally, curricular references have focused solely on the formal education system but shifted towards a broader scope later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reflect more of a 'course of life' approach (e.g. Pinar, 2009). According to Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, curriculum is “understood as a symbolic representation refers to those institutional and discursive practices, structures, images, and experiences that can be identified and analyzed in various ways, i.e. politically, racially, autobiographically, phenomenologically, theologically, intentionally, and in terms of gender and deconstruction” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 16). I have chosen to focus on curricular theorists who explore the interrelationship between place, experience and curriculum. Not only do they share a common interest in curriculum-as-lived, but there is a rich dialogue among the group I have chosen, which includes William Pinar, Ted Aoki, Cynthia Chambers, and Wanda Hurren. I spend time exploring their ideas and works, where they engage each other in dialogue, in this section.

Pinar espoused lived experience in his definition of place in curriculum. He and his co-author, Madeline Grumet (1976), adopted the term *currere* to capture the essence of researching lived experience in curricular theory. According to Grumet and Pinar, to practice *currere* is to create a hyper-awareness of your current place and context in which the current or live

experience is occurring. To that extent, place is not only a component of the experience, but it also forms the context surrounding that experience.

Drawing upon the theories of Jurgen Habermas, Pinar (2000) argues that place is essential to bring thoughts into focus and it serves as a link to many contemporary curricular discourses, “it locates understanding of the individual and the psychic as well as those social forces which are expressed in and through him or her. Without place, our appreciation of the particular tends towards vagueness and depersonalization. Place embodies the social and the particular” (p. 291).

Pinar wrote about his explorations of curriculum and place, encouraging readers to look at texts in different ways, and in doing so crossed paths with Ted Aoki. In his works, Aoki looked at experience from three different perspectives: situatedness, in-dwelling, and third space.

Situatedness, according to Aoki (2003a), is the ability to locate oneself within her/his teaching experience and curriculum because he believed that location within a space was a fundamental feature of identity and necessary for one's being. With respect to curricular third space, Aoki used Soja's thirdspace and Bhabha's notion of cultural space as a platform, describing the third space as that 'in between' a number of discourses, including curriculum as lived / curriculum as planned, midst presence / absence, representational / non-representational discourses, midst western knowledge / aboriginal knowledge, and translation / transformation (Aoki, 2000).

According to Aoki (1999), this space is “Confusing? Yes. Confusingly complex? Yes. But it is nevertheless a site that beckons pedagogic struggle, for such a human site promises generative possibilities and hope. It is, indeed, a site of becoming, where newness can come into being. The space moves and is alive!” (p. 181).

The exploration of one's space or experience led to Aoki's third consideration of place, in-dwelling. This notion was expressed most clearly in his description of Miss O, who found herself dwelling in 'the zone of between' the curriculum as planned and the curriculum as lived experience (Aoki, 1991, p. 160). It is this struggle or living in-between these two poles that defines in-dwelling. For Aoki, place is an exploration and identification of one's location within a discourse. This is a notion that has also inspired Cynthia Chambers. Chambers' view of place was influenced by her work with the Blackfoot, Dene, and Inuit communities and the critical nature of place to their survival. Chambers often used geographical symbols in her work, and she paid a great deal of attention to lived experiences and place. According to Chambers (2003a),

The particulars of life lived in a specific place in relation to others – enabled scholars to at once be critical of the abstract discourses dominating curriculum and the violence they do the earth and children, and to see, hear, and feel the 'stubborn particulars of grace' of everyday life wherever it is lived. (p. 227)

The notion of place as integral to experience and learning is particularly evident in her chapter in Pinar's work (2003a). In this chapter, Chambers reviews the intersection of Canadian curricular theory and place, locating Pinar, Aoki and Hurren on her map. After exploring the many different theorists and approaches to curriculum, Chambers proposed that the best way forward was to weave or braid the many theories, approaches and experiences of curriculum and place into a *métissage*, acknowledging and recognizing the contributions of each rather than favouring any one approach over another (2003a). And it is in this chapter that Chambers issued an invitation to curricular theorists to envision or map their own curricular journey. Hurren (2003) accepted that invitation and explores the notions of time, place, space, curriculum and possibilities in her research. A student of Aoki, Hurren (2000) engaged with texts and words in a

unique way, breaking words apart to explore their roots and traditions from different perspectives, and in this way, explored the “in-between” of language and knowing. There is a questioning of what is “known” about place, space and curriculum and an encouragement to see beyond the facts, or lines on the map that demarcate the space, and read the “grand narratives that go largely unacknowledged in our everyday map ‘reading’” (p. 80).

With an emphasis on reading beyond facts and teasing apart words, it is no surprise that Hurren’s later work invoked imagery of weaving, maps and cartography while simultaneously emphasizing aesthetics, contemplation and reflection (2011, 2014). In her chapter written to celebrate Aoki’s contribution to Canadian curricular theory, Hurren (2014) invited the reader to “linger” in five moments with her to explore the aesthetics of place, life and experience. In her description of the five moments, Hurren demonstrated how the setting or place is an integral part of the overall experience, giving it life and meaning.

The curricular work of these scholars not only build upon and reflect the key thinkers on space and place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but they open up the traditional definition of curriculum from a formal, school-based course of study to one that recognizes the importance of learning from nature and society more broadly. They also acknowledge the new reality of the information age, where notions of space and place in formal and informal education are more fluid, interconnected, and open to interpretation. This is a key concept for me and my research. While I present some of the elements of workplace learning further on, my study is slightly different than a number of the studies I discuss insofar as I focus on the notions of place and space. So, while I make observations and discuss notions of formal and informal learning with participants, I also probe and watch their interactions and movements in their various spaces. In this instance, the

notion of space and place as curriculum provides a lens through which I can analyze and interpret my data.

### **Work and Workplace**

The third area or field of study that supports my research is that of work and the workplace as it is the workplace -- in this case the public library -- that serves as the location and provides context for the experiences of the study participants that I describe in future chapters. As such, it is important to look at work and the workplace as they serve to ground and situate one's experience. At its core, work is defined as an "action, activity or labour, or an instance of this" ("Work", 2020). Further digging exposed additional elements or characteristics: it is an activity or task that requires some effort either mentally, physically or both, that must be undertaken.

Despite the volumes of research and studies that focus on work, very few offer a definition. This was observed by Elaine Butler (1999), "despite the significance of work (or more likely, because of it), definitions of 'work' are prolific and often contradictory" (p. 134). Ulrich Beck (1992) noted that the history of work has become enmeshed with capitalism, even though it pre-dates industry and capitalism. Defining work raises issues and themes of "self-fulfillment and opportunity; about division, exploitation, oppression and contestation" (Butler, 1999, p. 134). Butler (1999) identified a number of dualities that also arise during discussions of work: public/private, capital/labour, labour/work and equity (including categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age ability and religion. Notions of work have changed over time, which further complicates the ability to define the term. As Webster (2017) noted, the definition of work has shifted and changed over time as society leaves one era and enters another. For instance, notions of work shifted in the 1970s when we entered the 'Information Age', when work became "increasingly knowledge-driven and that has been at the heart of much economic

and some sociological analysis of social and technical change” (Webster, 2017, p.1). This was further reinforced with the introduction of the knowledge-based economy in the 1990s, which coincided with increased interest in and expanded definitions of work at the same time.

According to Päivi Tynjälä (2008),

The reason for this expansion is the unprecedented rapid change in society and working life that has taken place during the past few decades. The rapid development of information and communications technology, the growing production of knowledge in the economy, increasing internationalization and globalization as well as changes in occupational structures and in the contents and organisation of work have challenged not only educational institutions but also work organisations to develop new ways of ensuring that the level of competence of the workforce meets these challenges. (p. 131)

### **Work: A Definition**

For the purpose of my research, I adopted the definition proposed by Dorothy E. Smith, the sociologist who created a method of inquiry, institutional ethnography, which is the method I employed for my study. Smith (2005) provided a “generous” definition of work, which is “anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about” (p. 152). Smith (2005) further offered,

Work is intentional: it is done in some actual place under definite conditions with definite resources, and it takes time. The merit of this kind of conception of work is that it keeps you in touch with what people need to do their work as well as what they are doing. (p. 154)

Not only does Smith's definition put the person at the core, but it acknowledged the importance of experience. It recognized a person's knowledge and expertise, creating space for their voice. This resonates with me and my desire to develop a holistic depiction of librarians and their work, placing their experience at the core of my work and allowing their voices to be heard. As I employed Smith's approach as the method of inquiry for my research, I expand on it further in Chapter Three.

### **Work, Experience and Learning**

Experience is a critical part of work. But how does a person experience and understand how and what they should do at work? This is done through doing and learning. In fact, Barnett (1999) argues that work is learning and learning is work. He states, "in an age of supercomplexity (sic), work and learning cannot be two distinct sets of activity" (p. 32). According to Mündel and Schugurensky (2008), there are three common categories or types of workplace learning that emerge in the literature: formal, nonformal and informal. As outlined by Mündel and Schugurensky,

Formal education refers to the highly institutionalized, curricular-based instruction that takes place in schools and postsecondary institutions. Nonformal education refers to the realm of workshops and short educational sessions where learning is a recognized outcome of the activity. Informal learning is usually conceptualized as a residual category for all other learning activities, to include self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization. (p. 50)

The interrelationship between work, experience and curriculum was studied extensively by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. Their research introduced the concept of situated learning and explored the work/learning relationship as demonstrated through apprenticeship positions and

communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In their works, Lave and Wenger observed that learning occurred through formal, intentional methods, as well as incidental and informal methods (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave 1990, 2011, 2019). While experiential learning can be designed as part of formal learning, experience is at the fore of non-formal or informal learning theory, further promoting the linkage and interrelationship between experience, work and learning.

What constitutes informal learning in the workplace? In a study by Eraut (2004), he found that most informal learning occurred in four workplace activities: participation in group activities, working alongside others, tackling challenging tasks, and working with clients. Informal learning, then, can include (but is not limited to) spontaneous conversations around the water cooler or copier, social networking events, staff meetings, communities of practice, personal assignments, research or projects, and reflection. According to Thomas Conlon (2004), informal learning is defined as “an integration of work with daily routines, triggered by an internal or external jolt, not highly conscious, is often haphazard and influenced by chance, inductively occurs through action and reflection, and is linked to the learning of others” (p. 285).

The definition proposed by Conlon captures the dynamic and elusive nature of informal learning perfectly; it is for this reason that I designed my research to explore the workplace and experiences of the participants in a holistic manner; my interviews allow me to understand not only their routines but also their perspectives on how they learn at work, while my observations and other methods provide opportunity to capture those jolts, chance encounters and unconscious learning moments.

Stephen Billett has dedicated much of his career to the articulation and description of how everyday activities, such as those outlined above, and interactions shape not only the employee’s

learning, but also their identity (Billett, 2019, 2014, 2007; Billett & Somerville, 2010; Billett & Choy, 2013; Billett, Dymock & Choy, 2016). Across Billett's work, he argued that the employee and their individual agency is critical, as people are not empty vessels that the organization needs to fill, but rather employees seek out input, knowledge and guidance from others of their own will and volition, and that each employee, through their character, education and decisions (among other factors) in the workplace, develops their own knowledge and expertise (Billett & Somerville, 2010; Billett, 2014). Therefore, in making choices, employees shape their own learning and construct their own knowledge. This notion of the employee as active learner is key. According to Theo Van Dellen and Valerie Cohen-Scali (2015), "learning in and through work not only corresponds to an employee being competent in his/her work but also focuses on constructing a worker's identity which is built through experiencing the personal and social aspects of work as a subject" (p. 725).

Research into informal learning at work, and the integration of experience in learning and work processes have been extensive over the past 20 years. Tara Fenwick has been a dominant voice in the field; her research has explored the notions of space and place at work and the blurring of boundaries between experience and learning at work. Recently, she has focused on the notion of the virtual workspace. Alongside Richard Edwards, she explored digital analytics and what data revealed about employees' knowledge and learning (Fenwick & Edwards, 2016; Edwards & Fenwick, 2016). Fenwick's latest work (2018), speaks to the changing work environment and the challenges posed by these changes and digitalization to the notion of profession. According to Fenwick (2018),

Digital analytics combine massive volumes of big data with software algorithms that collect, compare and calculate that data – not only to make predictions based on pattern

recognition but even to make new patterns, decisions and prescriptions. New smart instruments are also changing how professionals must work and think. While few would argue that digital analytics, robots and smart kit will put professionals out of jobs, these technologies raise new legal liabilities, make activities redundant, open exploitive potential and limitations, and suggest that existing practice must be rethought to evolve into some new hybrid effectively collaborating with digital technologies. (p.376)

Fenwick raised the challenges posed by an ever-changing work environment and data, which have been interpreted as a questioning of the very notion of ‘professional’ and professions overall. This theme has been raised by other scholars who have observed a shift in the workplace and experience resulting from digitalization (Schumacher, 2018; Giacumo, Villachica & Breman, 2018; Fischer, Goller, Brinkmann & Harteis, 2018). The changes resulting from the emergence of the virtual world may also explain the latest trend in the literature related to informal and workplace learning. Edited works by Messmann, Segers and Dochy (2018) and Marsick and Watkins (2018), include a number of chapters re-examining the theory underpinning informal learning at work (Segers, Messmann & Dochy, 2018; Boud & Rooney, 2018; Marsick & Watkins, 2018), and what we actually know about how employees learn through experience in the workplace (Baert, 2018). Recent literature includes a renewed desire to understand the drivers and factors that contribute to experience, work and learning (Bishop, 2017; Schurmann & Beusaert, 2016; Ranieri, Giampaolo & Bruni, 2019; Berman 2020), and the role of social media and other platforms that are used by employees as they shape work experience and notions of workplace (He & Li, 2019; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Lancaster & Di Milia, 2015).

The recent trends emerging in the literature related to work, experience and learning do not question the interrelationship of these three notions. However, the research identifies

challenges posed to these factors by changes to the notions of work and the increasing prevalence of digitalization in the workplace. The renewed interest in looking at theory and conceptual frameworks supporting learning through experience at work explores the impact and influence of these challenges on the existing structure. This desire for introspection is also evident in librarianship and the conceptualization of the workplace, as I discuss in the next sections.

### **Defining the Workplace**

The definition of work as developed by Smith and cited above also introduces the notion of workplace, or the place where work occurs. Just as the concept of work has changed over time, so too has the workplace. But at its heart, workplace is the place or space where individuals experience work. As discussed previously, place not only provides a location for but is an integral part of one's experience. According to Filstad, Traavik and Gorli (2019),

Workplaces act as mediators in people's experiences, transforming places into spaces (i.e., the "practiced place") filled with practices and meanings. Regarding current organizational contexts, these spaces and places for employees to practice are expanding. Globalization and digitalization create possibilities of being in different sites at the same time, and smart working reduces the need for physical offices and boundaries and enhances the capacity to work from anywhere at any time. (p. 117)

This observation about the nature of the workplace is demonstrative of spatial theory and highlights the significance of experience, as discussed previously. Jacqueline Vischer (2005a, 2005b, 2017) has conducted extensive research into workspace, probing workers' experience in the workplace broadly speaking, and the specific workspaces they occupy to complete their tasks as well as the "implicit deal between employee and employer that gives workspace its symbolic power" (2005b, p. 4).

Not only does Vischer look at the architectural and design elements of the workplace with a view to optimizing employee wellbeing and organizational efficiency, but she also probes the experiential and personal side of work in these spaces, probing issues of territoriality (Vischer 2005a, 2005b). Other scholars from various fields have also conducted research into the employee's experience at work, focusing on feelings of belonging (Filstad et al, 2019), creativity (Webster, 2017; Pink, Lingard & Harley, 2017), and organizational culture (Clements-Croome, 2017). Kersh (2015) explored boundaries and identified three key "boundaries" within the workplace: the individual, the organization and the space itself. The different data sets Kersh examined revealed that boundary crossing occurred not only across different spaces (e.g., communal, individual, learning, physical, virtual), but it also occurred socially through interactions and conversations, and organizationally through different opportunities afforded to employees. Her findings echo those of Vischer (2005b) who articulated the importance of the workplace and workspaces for employee morale and productivity:

[Work]space is important because, all other things being equal, the features of the physical environment in which work is done communicates the importance of the work and therefore the importance of the role and rank of those who are doing it. These three elements – the person's job, self-image, and social role and rank – are all at issue in relation to the space in which work is done. However dysfunctional the space a person works in its very familiarity ensures that it plays its part in sustaining one's identity or sense of self as defined by job, self-image and role. (p. 5)

What the research into employee workspace design highlights is the significance of workers' experiences at work – not only do they vary, but they are informed and impacted by the space where they work, the culture and social relationships they have at work, and the power

dynamics resulting from elements such as bureaucracy, organizational hierarchy, managerial approaches, philosophy, and mandates. The complexity and diversity of the work in this field is compounded by the evolution of the digitalization of work and the increasing amount of work that is performed online or virtually.

### **Workplace as Informal Curriculum**

As evident in the previous section, an employee's experience is framed by and within location. Not only is space part of experience, but I argue that space can be considered as informal curriculum, which is understood to mean "the ideological and subliminal message presented within the overt curriculum, as well as a by-product of the null curriculum" (Pinar, et al, 2008, p.27). The idea of design and place as informal curriculum is relatively new, with the first references emerging in the 1990s (Orr, 1994, 2002), and it is often associated with ecological education or design, the place where learning occurs influences what and how we learn. According to Orr (2002), "the design of building and landscape is thought to have little or nothing to do with the process of learning or the quality of scholarship that occurs in a particular place. But, in fact, buildings and landscapes reflect a hidden curriculum that powerfully influences the learning process" (p.127).

Certainly, the purposeful design of workspaces and places is not new. However, there has been a surge of place-based literature and research in the past decade that aligns with Orr's argument, accentuating and exploring the design, role and impact of space and place in knowledge and learning. A number of scholars in the area of informal and workplace learning have focused on the issues of space and boundaries in the workplace and the hidden knowledge embedded in those emerging and changing spaces (Fenwick 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Smith, 2006; Kersh, 2015; van Dellen & Cohen-Scali, 2015). This notion of space and place as informal

curriculum highlights the significance of space and place not only as interwoven into informal learning through experience, but also as a course of study, or of life. Place is not only part of the holistic experience, but it also influences and guides future action and learning and shapes identity (van Dellen and Cohen-Scali, 2015; Billett, 2014, 2019). According to Tracy Meerwarth, Robert Trotter II and Elizabeth Briody (2008), space has a critical effect on a “group's sense of culture, identity, and belonging, as well as establish the reciprocal condition in which architecture reflects cultural differences in identity and belonging” (p. 438).

I have provided some insight into the discussions and themes related to workplace learning literature to provide some context for my research and findings. Many of the studies I reviewed in the course of my research tended to focus on either the social and informal aspects of learning, but rarely did they look at both components, nor did many consider space. This is not surprising given the complexity of work and the workplace that I have highlighted; this is an exceptionally diverse area. As Tynjälä (2008) notes,

When we talk about learning in the workplace we should not to make the mistake of assuming that the workplace is a unified environment for all learners. Instead, we should recognize that people’s situations and organisational positions with respect to working and learning in the workplace differ. Workplaces in different fields have different working cultures and learners in the workplace come from different age groups, different educational and professional backgrounds and different positions in organizations.

Furthermore, an important challenge for workplace learning is that, to a growing extent, workplaces provide a learning environment not only for their regular employees but also for students coming from institutions of vocational and higher education. (p. 132).

Just as Smith put the individual at the centre of her research and method of inquiry,

Tynjälä articulates the need to look at the overall experience of each employee and how each individual defines, experiences and views work, learning and the workplace. I designed my research with a view to keep the employee at the centre and explore the interrelationships between work, learning and experience and how these concepts are revealed in the workplace.

### **Librarianship as Profession**

One of the reasons for the diversity of voices in the conversation on workplace learning is that there is such a wide array of workspaces and professions. An understanding of librarianship and its current state will help situate the mapping or indexing of my participants' work in Chapter Four. It will provide the necessary context to understand the findings of my research, which are presented in Chapter Five. In this section I will define and explore the role of the librarian, discuss their professional identities, and present some of the challenges facing the field currently.

What is a librarian? The definitions provided by numerous dictionaries provide a consistent and very simple description: someone who administers/assists/works in a library. While this is technically correct, it does not convey the significance or importance of the role. One reason for the seemingly basic definition can be traced to the historical roots of the public library, which I discuss in the next chapter. Libraries were enmeshed with private organizations, religious and governmental records, and other sectors and partners throughout history, and those responsible for maintaining and preserving the collections were not always referred to as librarians although that is the role they played.

Even now, with the emergence of libraries and librarians as separate entities, there are still difficulties in arriving at a more sophisticated definition. Seminelli (2016) observed that communities are very familiar with the role and function of the public library, but they “do not seem to understand the role of the librarian in acquiring, maintaining, and providing structured

access to the riches they encounter in the library” (p. 63). The American Library Association (ALA), defined the profession as “[those] devoted to applying theory and technology to the creation, selection, organization, management, preservation, dissemination, and utilization of collections of information in all formats” (“Librarianship”, 2013). This is a sophisticated definition that, arguably, is not accessible to the average citizen, and while comprehensive, is also somewhat vague. Part of the reason for this vagueness is because there are four different types of libraries and within each stream, there is significant variation in composition, funding, division of duties between the employees (e.g., librarians, library assistants, administrators, and other professional staff in non-library roles such as systems, human resources and finance) (“Role Definition”, 1991). As an alternative, the ALA worked with libraries and librarians to develop a set of core values that provides a deeper sense of meaning and a more sophisticated depiction of the role. According to the ALA (2019),

The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values that define, inform, and guide our professional practice. These values reflect the history and ongoing development of the profession and have been advanced, expanded, and refined by numerous policy statements of the American Library Association. Among these are: access, confidentiality/privacy, democracy, diversity, education and lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, the public good, professionalism, service, social responsibility, and sustainability. (“Core Values of Librarianship”)

The above core values transcend the four streams of libraries as well as the other variables and identify the heart of the work performed by librarians, in the past, present and future. It is a more accessible, flexible interpretation of the diversity of roles and responsibilities undertaken by libraries in the different streams.

## Librarian Demographics

It is interesting to look at the demographics in the field of librarianship. According to the American Library Association Office for Research and Statistics (2018), of the approximate 38,000 members<sup>1</sup> that responded to a voluntary survey in 2017, 86 per cent identified as white or Caucasian, and 64 per cent report having obtained a Master's of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree or equivalent. This is consistent with most job postings in public, school and academic libraries where a MLIS is an educational requirement for the position.

The ALA (2018) reported that 19 per cent identified as male, while 81 per cent identified as female. Historically, these findings are consistent with previous survey results and librarianship continues to be a female-dominated field and all four types of libraries are predominantly feminized locations of work. Interestingly, despite the significant change in work and service provided by librarians, the stereotypical image of a librarian is still an older woman, wearing glasses and conservative clothing who is most frequently seen to be shushing patrons (Orlean, 2018; ALA, 2018).

The female-dominated work site has resulted in some sensitive situations for male librarians, with claims of tokenism, sexual harassment, and questioning of sexual identity and preference being raised in the workplace (Perret, 2018; Mars, 2018). There are two recent studies by Perret (2018) and Mars (2018) which explored the experience of male librarians. Drawing upon raw data from the ALA survey, both studies probed the experience of male librarians to better understand how common the above concerns were raised. According to Perret (2018),

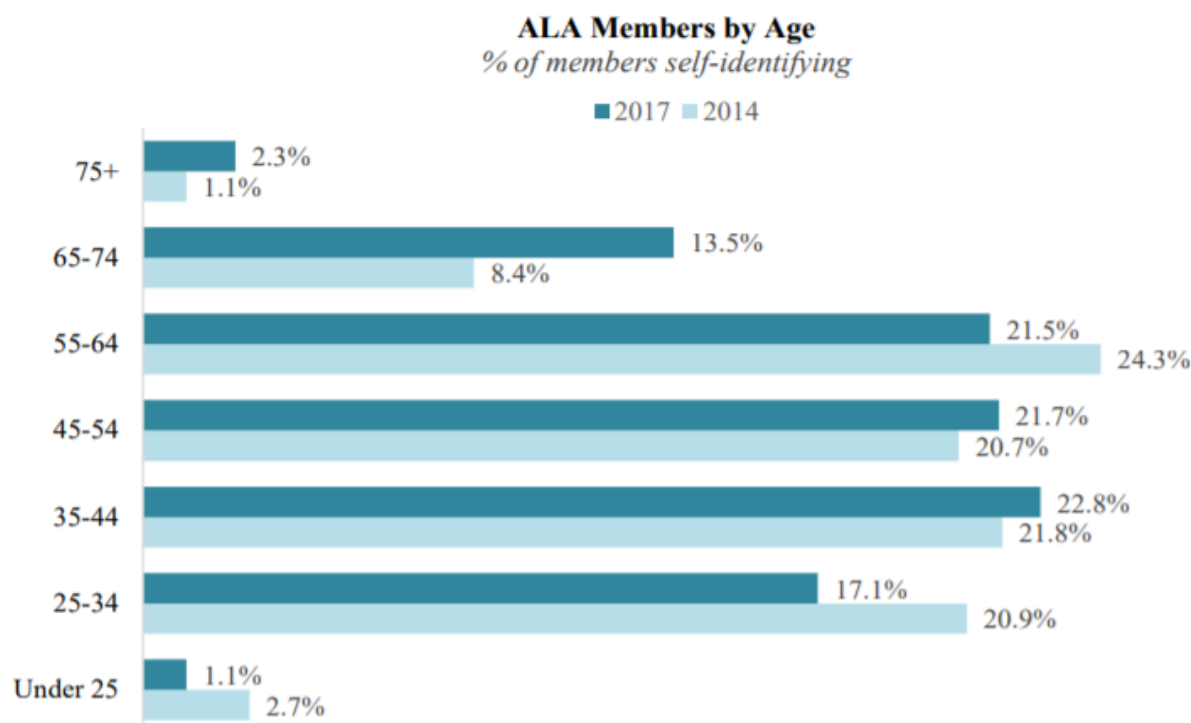
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<sup>1</sup> The ALA accepts memberships from and represents librarians from different library organizations and streams in Canada. As such, they are also invited to participate in membership surveys. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine whether these demographics are an accurate depiction of librarianship in Canada.

between 20-25 per cent of male librarians reported that they had encountered some form of negative experience or sexual harassment in the workplace. Perret concluded that there is more work to be done to understand the experiences of male librarians, particularly in the supports available to them when situations arise at work. However, Perret (2018) noted,

It is important to note that the preponderance (usually upwards of two-thirds) of male librarians responded to each of the prompts that their gender had no effect, or even a positive effect, upon their interactions with patrons and co-workers. A total of 92 per cent indicated positive feelings about being a male librarian. (p. 527)

These studies by Perret (2018) and Mars (2018) demonstrate that there are minor issues of division of physical duties, with male librarians being asked to undertake more of the physical labour when necessary. However, Perret (2018) reported that age seems to be an equal or greater factor when it comes to a librarian's experience at work, "with younger librarians reporting an expectation that they know a lot about technology and not a lot about other resources, while older librarians report that they felt they were considered to be out-of-touch and unapproachable" (p. 527). The following table provides an age breakdown of the 38,000 librarians who responded to the ALA demographic survey.



**Figure 2: Librarian Demographics by Age (ALA, 2018)**

The majority of librarians are between 35-64 years of age as of 2017. Given the observations highlighted by Perret (2018) regarding perceptions of ageism in and among librarians, it is interesting to note that the concerns raised are coming from the four age ranges that make up the minority of membership. The advancing age of librarians has been raised in the literature, as administrators recognize the wealth of organizational memory held by staff who are nearing the age of retirement and are concerned about the profession and information retention (LeBeau, 2018; Hagerty, 2017).

### **Librarianship Under Siege: Challenges to the Profession**

Alongside concerns about the aging librarian demographics, the current literature related to the field of librarianship indicates that the profession is experiencing an existential crisis.

There are numerous studies focusing on the perceived lack of the direction for librarianship in the future. Hicks (2016) raised the issue of service and the need for librarians to advocate not only for public services but for their own profession. Seminelli (2016) identified the interdisciplinary nature of both librarians and of MLIS programs, which leads to difficulty in articulating a clear vision of the profession. Caspe and Lopez (2018) illustrated the increasing need for librarians to provide resources and deliver educational programming for children and families despite the fact that librarians do not receive formal training or support in education or facilitation in their professional studies. Garcia and Barbour (2018) spoke to the reactionary nature of librarians, as they “negotiate stigmatized notions of what it means to be a professional while coping with shrinking budgets, changing technologies, and shifting understandings of librarians’ work” (p. 569). Research by Fraser-Arnott (2019) picked up on the same theme in her literature review and interviews. She concluded that,

The [library and information science] profession is undergoing a period of change due in part to the opportunities and threats posed by established and emerging technologies. LIS practitioners have found themselves operating in new roles (sometimes in new industries), using new tools and technologies, performing new functions and interacting with stakeholders, including clients and partners, with changing communication and information-use expectations. (p. 124)

While each of these pieces speaks to a slightly different element or aspect of the challenges, they do have something in common at their core: the variation and diversity of roles and responsibilities is proving to be a challenge when it comes to defining the profession. This is significant to my research in two ways. Firstly, it speaks to the design and nature of the workplace. It is not a coincidence that the difficulties facing the profession are surfacing at the

same time that the four library types (public, school, academic and specialized) are facing similar challenges as they shift and adapt to meet ever-changing and emerging community and patron needs, as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two. There is a greater demand for libraries to renovate or tend to their design to increase spatial flexibility (Schlipf & Moorman, 2018; Latimer, 2018), and provide access to not only computers but other forms of technology and media (Williams & Willett, 2019; Moorefield-Lang, 2016; Halpin, Rankin, Chapman & Walker, 2015). As a result, not only are librarians struggling to understand their role with these new demands, but they are expected to understand and attempt to meet the spatial needs of their community (Schlipf & Moorman, 2018; Latimer, 2018). This forces librarians to explore and understand their workspace in a new way, which in turn enhances the notion of experience and workplace as curriculum.

Secondly, the challenges facing librarians currently address the emergence and prevalence of digital tools and technology in their libraries and profession. The demand for libraries to bring in makerspaces and offer programs and tutorials on technology and social media is forcing librarians to develop a new set of knowledge and skills in order to meet these needs (Moorefield-Lang, 2016; Williams & Willett, 2019; Beavers, Esterton-Cady, Jiang & McCoy, 2019). Further, as an increasing amount of librarians' work is virtual, or computer-based, this has led to research into the need to understand how to develop information literacy in an online format (Courtney & Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015; Corral & Keates, 2010), issues of information overload (Burns & Bossaller, 2012; Shachaf, Aharony & Baruchson, 2016) and multi-tasking as library staff are frequently interrupted to answer reference questions or address patron requests (Dewan, 2014). This brings to bear the significance of the internet, technology and the virtual workspace as librarians spend an increasing amount of time working in these spaces.

### **Virtual Space, Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) and Content Curation**

The fifth and final section of this chapter speaks to the virtual world, including personal learning networks and the idea of content curation, that is frequently inhabited by librarians. But first, it is important to understand how the virtual world, this seemingly endless world was born and how it is impacting the very definition of work and the workplace. I then introduce the concepts of personal learning networks and content curation, both of which have emerged in the literature in the past five to seven years as a way of capturing and describing how individuals construct knowledge and navigate the onslaught of information available to them in an online or virtual world.

#### **Development of Virtual Space as a Place**

Following the confluence of events and shifts in the 1970s referenced previously, Western society underwent a series of rapid and significant changes, such as the fall of communism, the decline of the welfare state and subsequent rise of the liberal state and free-market economy. Advances in information and communication technology led to 24-hour news networks, computers and the internet. Gradually, society has entered the information age (although future scholars will likely devise a cleverer and more apt moniker), and the introduction of wi-fi, handheld devices and social media. The notion and role of virtual space plays a significant role in the work of librarians, as noted above, as well as in the work of participants I spoke to and observed in my research, so it is not possible to enter a discussion of place and space without exploring the literature related to online spaces.

As time and technology have evolved, so too as our perception and understanding of space and place. We have come to question and critically reflect on how we perceive space, to challenge assumptions and attempt to see space and place in a new light. Many studies exploring

this new notion of space draw upon the works of Lefebvre, Foucault, and Massey just as I have in a previous section, but these spatial theories have some limitations as they were developed prior to the evolution of the digital world, one without physical structures and boundaries.

Globalization and the emergence of the virtual world has caused society to rethink assumptions and understandings of borders, boundaries and place. Some have claimed that society has actually suffered from *displacement* as a result of globalization and digitalization (Casey, 1993; Soja, 2003). Richard Edwards agreed with Casey, observing that the development of technology has led to not only increasing flexibility, but a reorganization of the relationship between space and time on many levels (Edwards, 1997, 2012). According to Edwards (2012), “cyberspaces both disperse and bring people and things together across space and time within the globe, nation, region and locale. The everyday cannot be simply scaled as the local given the changing forms of gathering and distribution” (pp. 212-3). As I noted earlier, the introduction of the virtual world has given rise to existential crises in the fields of work and learning and our conceptualization of and experience in the digital workplace, which I expand upon in the next section.

### **Virtual Space and Digital Work**

Context has come to the fore in spatial research, particularly as new places and spaces are created as metaphors, without material substance (Sheehy and Leander, 2004; Sefton-Green & Erstad, 2013; Edwards, 2012), and virtual spaces cannot be dismissed. Various studies show that adults spend anywhere from five to seven hours online daily, most of which occur during the workday (Marvin, 2018; Fottrell, 2018; Hymas, 2018). Simon Kemp is the leading author of an annual report that summarizes the state and pervasion of the digital world. According to the 2019 study, Kemp (2019) found that internet users are online for an average of six hours and forty-two minutes per day, or the equivalent of 100 days per user per year. In a work context, employees

spend time tending to email, developing and writing content using a variety of tools, participating in virtual meetings, events and learning opportunities, and doing personal business, including checking social media (Kemp, 2019).

While they may not be comprised of bricks and mortar, these electronic worlds are equally dynamic and fluid spaces that provide the same context and setting for experiences in the workplace as those with physical boundaries. This is emphasized not only by the amount of time employees spend in these virtual spaces when at work, but how it has shaped the work itself. According to Webster (2017), “entirely new types of digital, or ‘virtual’ work have been created, new value-generating activities have emerged and the geography of employment, underpinned by global divisions of labour, has been recast” (p. 1). The advancement of tools and technology means that employees working for one organization can be located anywhere in the world and connect in synchronous, or real-time, for meetings, to collaborate or plan, deliver presentations or attend events. Companies such as Amazon, Google, eBay, and Facebook have emerged as some of the largest and wealthiest organizations in the world and they conduct their business almost exclusively online, making money through selling products, filtering information, collecting and selling user data.

Technological advancements and the evolution of the virtual world have also resulted in the emergence of new fields of study. One such field is interdisciplinary in nature and explores the design of virtual workspaces and places. Halford (2005) assumed a management lens when identifying changes required by organizations and management to operate in an effective manner in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, shifting from a standard workday or work week, to one that focuses on productivity and communication and allowing employees to have more autonomy. Bullivant (2005) and Berti, Simpson and Clegg (2018) explored new approaches to workplace and

workspace design from an architectural aspect with emphasis on the user and their relationship to and within the places and spaces. Meyer (2012), Fructer and Bosch-Sijtsema (2011), Vischer (2017), and Kinder, Stenvall and Memon (2019) explored the employee's experience at work from different perspectives, looking at how to increase notions of innovation and play at work. Rose (2016) and Richardson (2018) spoke to the role for geographers in mapping virtual spaces and how users experience work in a digital landscape, particularly if employees are not physically located in the same workplace.

Another field of study related to virtual work explores the experience of employees and how they communicate within and navigate the seemingly endless amount of information that accompanies the digital age. Reyna, Hanham and Meier (2018) examined the notion of digital literacy in their study and how to communicate effectively, particularly in online learning environments and platforms. Laurell (2017) and Christiansen (2017) both studied the notion of place created by social media and probe concepts of space and boundaries in this virtual landscape, and how users navigate through this world. Halpin, Rankin, Chapman and Walker (2015) made the linkage between the navigation of the virtual world to the work of librarians, who have become de facto navigators for citizens, helping provide guidance and direction as patrons develop their digital or information literacy.

The article by Halpin et al marked a shift that has occurred – the incorporation of digital literacy into the overarching notion of information literacy, a domain that has historically been associated with libraries and librarians (Gross & Latham, 2007; Tuominen, Salvolainen & Talja, 2005; Bruce, Edwards & Lupton, 2006). With citizens spending more time online, so too must librarians if they are to continue to promote their roles as stewards for information literacy and meet the emerging needs of their patrons. As noted in the previous section, this poses a new set of

challenges for librarians as they shift their work to bridge the physical library with the virtual world. In this way, librarians are also learning how to navigate the digital world, developing an understanding of how to filter and process information, and helping citizens do the same. This notion of processing and filtering information is a form of content curation and guides the construction of knowledge and shapes personalized learning networks, which I explore further in the next section.

### **Personalized Learning Networks**

Personalized Learning Networks (PLNs) as a concept emerged alongside, or arguably as a result of the evolution of Web 2.0 and social media. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, personalized learning is often synonymous with student-centred learning, where each student can access tools, resources, and assistance to achieve outcomes. However, there is no one agreed upon or set definition.

Across the various definitions, I have identified four similarities and common or shared characteristics: individualized, student-centred or student-driven, experiential and meaningful.

The PLN, which can also be referred to as Personalized Learning Environments, is the mapping of all resources, sources, tools and technologies that comprise the learner's network. These include the search engines used to seek information; tools used to sort, record and write information; sources of information reviewed; social media tools; and technologies used for accessing the online world. But as humans learn in many different ways, these networks also include the offline world and include classrooms, books and other sources of information, relationships and so forth. And they are not limited to students in formal education. Professional Learning Networks have emerged over the past decade which serve the same purpose and articulate the same vision for learning, but these networks represent the network of employees or professionals in the world of work.

Librarians are beginning to embrace their role in the development of PLNs for themselves and for patrons. There is an organization in the US, Future Ready Libraries, which educates librarians about PLNs and their role in learning, thus building awareness and deepening understanding of the networks, how they are created and their importance. Future Ready also offers resources and tools to be used with students and patrons (Future Ready, 2016). They have even created the following visual aid to demonstrate the elements of a PLN and how librarians can provide “wrap-around” service, informing and supporting all aspects of the network (see Figure 3 below).



**Figure 3: Future Ready Librarians Role in PLN Development (Future Ready, 2016)**

In this figure and the accompanying framework, Future Ready identified and articulated the significance of PLNs, and how librarians can inform and influence their development of the various elements through allocation and development of library resources. This information allows librarians to increase awareness of their own network and recognize how and where they assess, filter and select sources and information, and identify potential biases or gaps in their network. But they also provide librarians with the ability to help students and patrons to map their own network and build awareness and critical thinking, both key attributes in building informational literacy. Given this, it is not a surprise to note that the elements of this figure align with librarian competencies developed by ALA and its members in 2019 to communicate the core skills and services provided by librarians across all types of libraries.

### **Content Curation**

Content curation is a relatively new term that has emerged alongside the development of Web 2.0 and PLNs in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cushing & Shankar, 2019). Content curation is defined as the act of discovering, gathering and presenting digital content related to a specific topic (Macek, 2013). It is the process of sifting, sorting and filtering the seemingly endless amounts of information that face learners at every turn. It is not unlike the type of curation that occurs in museums and galleries, which select pieces as part of a collection or special exhibit on certain topics or of certain artists. However, there are some key differences. Firstly, content curation takes place in a virtual setting; it can take the form of an RSS feed, links posted on blogs, social media feeds, or an online news mashup. Secondly, content curation is performed by everyone who searches for information online or contributes to social media or other collaborative websites via tagging, liking, or comments; there is no training or knowledge required, and most people do not realize they are engaging in the curation of content. Yet, for

some individuals who are aware of content curation, they have turned their knowledge and skills into careers, getting paid for to create content and curate collections of links or products (Macek, 2013).

Librarians participate in content curation for patrons when they seek out information in response to a reference question, or help a patron learn how to navigate the online world and help develop their information literacy skills; through these actions, librarians are participating in content curation through recommendations and provisions of links and selected content (Aitken, 2017). There is increasing awareness of curation in the field of library and information studies. Cushing and Shankar (2019) presented the findings of a multi-year professional development project in Ireland which aimed to assess and develop digital curation awareness and skills for information professionals, including librarians working in any type of library. Kirkwood (2016) detailed a study undertaken at the University of Manchester Library where librarians experimented with new approaches to curation in their work with faculty and students. Eddy and Solomon (2016) described a different study involving librarians and a faculty in the development and organization of journal infrastructure. In this work, Eddy and Solomon (2016) proposed that with their expertise in content curation and organization, librarians are best suited to a consultancy role within the academy and community. In each of these studies, librarians became active participants in content curation and worked with their community partners and the academy to further develop awareness, knowledge and skills in this area.

Eddy and Solomon made the linkage between the emerging awareness and need for librarians to actively participate in content curation with the changing roles of librarians that I discussed in the previous section of this chapter. They stated, “to support new and unique user needs, library professionals are moving beyond their traditional roles, responsibilities and subject

specialities to the extent that the ‘liaison subject specialist’ and ‘functional specialist’ roles are increasingly being merged” (Eddy & Solomon, 2016, p. 121). With increasing use of social media and time spent online, over time, the awareness of PLNs and development of content curation abilities and skills are only going to increase. These are skills and areas of expertise that librarians possess and, given their critical role in helping to develop and support information literacy, it puts them in a unique position to advise, consult and teach others to map their networks and curate their content in a conscious and meaningful way.

### **Conclusion**

The unique nature of my research is that it brings together five seemingly disparate bodies of research into one: spatial theory, experience as curriculum, workplace learning, librarians as professionals, and the virtual world, including PLNs and content curation. And yet, when you dig a little deeper, a web of linkages emerges. I provided a brief overview of the major spatial theories from modernism to post-structuralism and post-modernism, touching upon some of the key philosophers and scholars from each period and tracing space and place from Lefebvre's triad of perceived/conceived/lived to Foucault's 'other' spaces, making way for diverse perspectives and locations. Through the most recent thoughts on space, I proposed a definition of place that not only locates but is actually part of a more holistic view of experience, particularly those that would constitute informal learning.

Place and experience are brought together through place-based curriculum as articulated by Pinar, Aoki, Chambers, and Hurren generally, and through the informal curriculum of place specifically as defined by Orr. This informal or incidental curriculum weaves together space and place in one fabric, that of experience. The culmination of these experiences is social change resulting from the activities, dialogues, debates and relationships shaped in and by place. As

citizens participate in these activities and changes either physically or virtually, they construct both personal and social knowledge. And this extends to employees in the workplace. Employee space is a part of experience at work, as employees attend meetings, perform work duties, participate in learning events or just eat lunch with colleagues in the breakroom – all of these activities contribute to their overall experience at work, and the space where they occur provides the context and helps to ground and situate the events.

These different threads come together in the setting or workplace. In my research, this is the public library and the role of the librarian is critical, as it is their experience in the *workplace* that is at the centre of my study. To provide context for my research and situate my observations and findings, I offered a definition of the role and developed a picture of the librarian, their backgrounds, including gender and age, as well as the challenges they are facing in their profession currently. All of these factors contribute to their lived experience at work, informing and shaping their learning and approach to their formal role.

This leads to the fifth area of research, virtual space which includes PLNs and content curation. As noted in the report of digital trends published in 2019, adults spent approximately 6.5 hours online per day (Kemp, 2019). Much of this time spent in a virtual environment occurs at work. These seemingly “boundary-less” spaces were not considered by Lefebvre and his contemporaries when they developed their notions of space and place. This is not to say that these theories do not apply – indeed, virtual spaces are also dynamic places that are imbued with meaning. However, these digital spaces are unique in that individuals take an active role in constructing them, determining what and who to include or omit. Digital spaces change the way in which we communicate, relate and work with others and how we view and experience space

and place. This also reflects some of the challenges facing librarians and their experience as they seek to bridge the physical library with the virtual world at work.

## **Chapter 2 - The Public Library as Place and as Institution**

As my research took place in a public library focusing on learning in the workplace, it is necessary to explore the public library as both place and institution. Not only does this provide critical context for my research, but it also sheds light on the work of librarians within the institution. This section provides an overview of the public library literature, developing a picture of the modern public library in Canada broadly speaking and then focusing on my research site specifically. This chapter also explores the public library as an institution, discussing the governance model and leadership broadly and then focusing on the policies, procedures and other key documents that are specific to the site I studied.

### **The Public Library: A Brief History**

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a library is defined as “a building or room containing collections of books, periodicals, and sometimes films and recorded music for people to read, borrow, or refer to” (“Library,” 2014). Literature in library studies identifies four types of libraries: academic libraries, which serve universities and colleges; public libraries that serve communities and citizens; school libraries located in formal school settings that serve students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12; and special libraries that serve specific audiences in specialized environments, such as hospitals, private sector organizations, and military operations (ALA, 2013). While all four streams or types of libraries have evolved over time, their roots can be traced to the ancient world with the emergence of record keeping. It is believed that the first private library was founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC in what is now known as Nineveh, Iraq. This library belonged to the Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal, who is believed to have amassed his collection in part through various battles (Andrews, 2018). There are further traces of private record or textual collections dating back to 3000 BC in Babylonia and 2000 BC in Assyria and

Egypt (Haider & Foskett, 2017). There is also evidence of libraries or collections in Alexandria in 300 BC and China in 200 BC (Andrews, 2018). According to *History Magazine*, it is believed that the first public library (one funded and managed by a governing body) was founded in 4000 BC (Krasner-Khait, 2007), but that these were few in comparison to private libraries and collections.

As humanity developed its ability to record, reproduce and preserve data, stories and history, the emergence of libraries followed suit. Library collections grew overtime and existed in various states and hybrids, housed by private citizens, universities, and churches as time progressed. These collections were maintained, funded and managed through a number of public and private channels, and access also varied depending on different factors including but not limited to membership, class or social status, occupation and religion (Krasner-Khait, 2007). It wasn't until the 1600s and 1700s that the public library emerged as a unique organization that was both publicly funded and accessible to citizens and there are claims to being the first public library in Europe, Mexico and the United States (Krasner-Khait, 2007; Sturgis Library, 2020). The public library system in North America surged alongside immigration rates in the late 1800s and it was during this time that Andrew Carnegie, an American philanthropist, funded the construction of 1700 public libraries in Canada and the US between 1881 and 1919 (Krasner-Khait, 2007). The reason for the sudden surge in public libraries was detailed by Susan Orlean in her work, *The Library Book*. According to Orlean (2018), "the general public didn't really agree on the value of public libraries until the end of the nineteenth century. Before that, libraries were viewed as scholarly and elite, rather than an indispensable and democratic public resource" (p. 130).

Early public libraries were predominantly knowledge repositories. The emphasis in the early development of public libraries was on developing collections, including the creation of classification and labelling systems, and building infrastructure, including the design and construction of buildings, and purchase of furniture for patron use (Mattern, 2014). As Orlean (2018) documented, the focus of the Los Angeles Public Library for the first 50 years was to build the collection and meet the demands for resources and services of the growing population.

### **The Public Library in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The first notions of the modern public library as we know it today emerged as early as the 1930s in the US, but really came into its own in the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s (Krasner-Khait, 2007). It was during this time that standards and educational programs for librarians were developed, and the profession began to take root (ALA, 2020). Funding models for public libraries were established through different pieces of state, provincial and federal legislation in Canada and the US (Lamb, 2019; Wilson, 2009). Librarians engaged with patrons in a different way and sought to meet not only the needs that were presented to them each day but also anticipating future user needs. It is also during this time period that educational programming for children and families was created and the public library grew to become what Ray Oldenburg referred to as the “third space”, that place between home and work where people meet to exchange ideas, learn, and have a good time (Oldenburg, 2014). The notion of the library as critical to discourse was echoed by Nancy Kranich. She noted, “founded in the 1850s to promote an informed citizenry, public libraries advanced both adult learning and citizenship education in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thus becoming cornerstones of democracy” (Kranich, 2010, p. 15). Therefore, according to Parrish (2010), those who chose to visit the

library, attend programs and learning events, were seeking out places that “avoid privileging a dominant narrative” (p. 89).

As the profession began to emerge and libraries entered a new phase of service or advocacy in the 1970s into the 1980s, they also began to focus on developing different collections. These different or specialized collections included newspapers, magazines, video recordings, music and other audiovisual materials, and local history news and information (Lamb, 2019). In British Columbia, the 1970s marked the creation of the First Nations Interest Group, as the BC Libraries Association and other Canadian and American libraries began to work with Indigenous and other minority groups to build special collections that acknowledged different ways of knowing (Lamb, 2019). The first computers also began to appear in public libraries during the 1970s and 1980s, at first for librarian use, but expanding over time to include patron access (Krasner-Khait, 2007). The movement to make collections more accessible and available, and to position the library as an advocate and institution for all citizens continued to build throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

### **The Modern Public Library in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

With the evolution and pervasion of the internet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, information previously found only in books can be accessed through a few strokes on a keyboard and a search engine. Many people thought that the increased access to information online, in combination with budget cuts and staffing reductions that occurred in the 1990s and onward, would render the public library obsolete. This has been the subject of many debates on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) over the past decade (Young, 2010; Marandola, 2012; Enright, 2016), as well as other print media outlets such as the *Walrus* magazine (Hutchinson, 2009; Harris, 2012) and the *Globe and Mail* (Rochon, 2001; Mickleburgh, 2012; Hawthorn, 2010). However, despite and

perhaps in spite of these challenges, the library still exists and continues to flourish and thrive (Hoye, 2019). New and award-winning library branches have been built in Winnipeg, Halifax, and Calgary, and these central downtown branches provide not only access to books, but also to community spaces and to social services; these major infrastructure investments speak to the importance of the public library in Canadian urban settings. As do the increasing circulation rates released by the Canadian Urban Library Council. According to an article on Canadian public library circulation rates in the *National Post*,

The Montreal Public Library and Vancouver Public Library, two of the other largest branches in the country, have seen eight to nine per cent rises in visits between 2010 and 2015. Not to be outdone, the Toronto Public Library, which houses over 10.6-million items including books, DVDs and eBooks spanning 40 languages, is the largest public library system in Canada and, in 2008, had averaged a higher circulation per capita than any other public library system, making it the largest neighbourhood-based library system in the world. In 2017, its 100 branches hosted more than 17-million visits, its website welcomed almost 30-million visits, and over the course of the year, 157,000 people registered for a library card. (Ahsan, 2018, Culture /Books)

For sociologists Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein (2003) the public library therefore “functions as a kind of community centre, a place where people get to know one another, where communities find themselves” (p. 49). Academics, journalists and practitioners have celebrated the library’s “new” role in society as a pivotal place in the community and a destination for learning. Edward Taylor and Marilyn McKinley Parrish (2010) included libraries in their description of public places that have become critical to community quite succinctly:

They are structures that promote cognitive change; they are commons, places of community outside of home and work, where individuals and groups gather to share and discuss ideas. They are sites of conflict and contestation, where economic and political challenges may call into question institutional purpose and mission, and debates arise over whose story is being told. They are also potential sites of deliberative democracy that foster social change and reform, where the public, often for the first time, engages with new ideas and issues that are important to society. (p. 1)

### **Modern Public Library Space**

In the same article discussing library circulation rates, Sadaf Ahsan captured the reason why public libraries thrive in Canada and other countries around the world,

As an accessible space and a primary resource for recent immigrants (to not only take classes, but find a place to connect with others) and even as a source of shelter for the homeless (for whom several librarians are trained with which to deal), the library stands out as a public institution that actually makes our communities better places by caring for its most vulnerable members. (Ahsan, 2018, Culture / Books)

As Ahsan noted, the modern urban public library provides more than just books; the library provides meeting places, makerspaces, learning spaces offering a variety of educational courses and programs, access to technology, and social services. I will explore each of these in turn as it is in their entirety that the complexity of the modern urban library can be understood.

### **Educational and Learning Space**

Recognition of the diversity and significance of more non-classroom or non-traditional learning places and spaces, such as museums, art galleries, and libraries, has expanded over the past 10-15 years. These non-traditional learning places, therefore, foster public dialogue and

debate, and provide space for social change. History provides numerous examples of social construction of knowledge occurring as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century in salons, reading groups, religious education and agricultural associations that came together in informal settings for the purpose of sharing information and experiences (Hugo, 2002). Knowles, Eduard Lindeman, and Stephen Brookfield have all provided overarching histories of community [informal] learning, detailing the eventual rise of the 'community education movement' in the 1970s. Since that time, a strong body of literature and research dedicated to learning in 'other' spaces and places has emerged, including the workplace (Fenwick, 2000, 2008; Eraut, 2000, 2004), the community (Clover & Stalker, 2007; Barnhardt, 2008; Packham, 2008), and even social movements (Hall, Clover, Crowther & Scandrett; 2012, Friere, 2009b; Giddens, 1987). There is also a strong body of literature emerging that focuses on places within the community. These public places include, but are not limited to libraries, museums and galleries, markets and parks (Sanford & Clover, 2016; Imel & Duckett, 2009; Bekerman, Burbules & Silberman-Keller, 2006; Ellsworth, 2005; Hein, 1998).

Accompanying, or perhaps even driving the need for flexible spaces is an increase in educational programming offered in public libraries. This began with the emergence of children's spaces in the 1970s but has really taken shape in the past 20-25 years with the emergence of computers and associated technologies (Caspé & Lopez, 2018). At the same time, public libraries were also facing budget and resource challenges. The emergence of educational programming and learning spaces was driven in part by necessity, to retain library budgets and resources, but also to address reductions in services and programs offered by other community partners (Lamb, 2019; Caspé & Lopez, 2018).

Public libraries have stepped into the learning domain to provide learning opportunities to every age and stage of life, promoting a culture of lifelong learning. Over the past 20-25 years, the public library has become host of a wide variety of educational programming for all ages, hosting reading sessions for children in different languages, providing English as a Second Language courses for immigrants and newcomers, technology courses for adults, and employment-based learning focused on job searching and resume building (Caspé & Lopez, 2018; Evjen, 2015; Lingel, 2014). Public libraries in Canada offer a range of programming, with major urban centres offering more than 200 events per month (CULC, 2018). All libraries welcome programming recommendations and offer a number of events, such as lectures, in partnership with other institutions such as museums, universities, and colleges. Some public libraries, such as the one in Victoria, offer access to over 4000 online and video learning opportunities through Lynda.com (now LinkedIn Learning) if patrons have a valid library card.

Access to technology and the internet is also a critical piece of this educational puzzle. Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the library was the only place where some citizens could access computers and the internet. All public libraries have a dedicated space for computers and printers. According to a study conducted for the Toronto Public Library, almost 50 per cent of patrons reported that they visited Ontario public libraries to access the internet and technology that they cannot access in their homes (Nordicity, 2018). The traditional focus of information literacy, a cornerstone of the profession, has expanded to include technical literacy as part of that definition. As Caspé and Lopez (2018) noted, “libraries are amplifying their digital services for parents and families in support of such vital 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills as problem-solving, collaboration, digital media literacy, and creativity” (p. 173). As Northwestern Mutual (2014) observed,

Today's librarians are social networking gurus. They are highly trained professionals who can assist patrons in finding what they seek among the myriad of 'hits' the Internet search engines generate. Equally important, librarians are continually reimagining new ways to actively engage library users in their own learning. In doing so, their aim not only is to put the right resources in readers' hands, it's also to empower them to build the curiosity, skills and confidence necessary to seek answers on their own. (paragraph 7)

### **Collaboration Space in the Public Library**

Space is a hot commodity in modern urban libraries; there is an increasing trend to create flexible spaces that allow for a variety of events and uses. New main branches in Halifax, Winnipeg and Calgary not only have cafés, but they have purposefully designed many meeting rooms and spaces that provide opportunities for community to gather. And this trend continues as central branches under construction in Edmonton, Ottawa, and Kitchener have also prioritized flexible spaces in their designs, and existing public libraries across Canada are re-purposing and renovating existing spaces to achieve the same objective. And there is good reason for this shift. According to the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), a global library collaborative, over 200 public libraries offered community meeting rooms or spaces in 2011 and these were frequented by 28,000 people each month (OCLC, 2011).

These new flexible spaces are used for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to community meetings, educational programming, lectures, tutoring, library staff meetings and lessons. In these spaces, the public library's physical collection is housed on stacks or shelves with wheels that can be easily moved around as required to create the desired space. These efforts at maximizing flexibility in public library spaces is demonstrative of current literature and practice in library design. Fred Schilpf and John Moorman (2018) developed a 2000+ page

handbook on creating and designing library spaces that work. This work was the culmination of their research and practical experience in libraries spanning several decades. At the beginning of the handbook, Schlipf and Moorman provided their seven key design principles for creating spaces that work, and the first principle calls on architects, designers, and librarians alike to keep space flexible (p. 4). The rationale for this being the most important principle is that “library functions are in flux, constantly changing, therefore it is necessary to keep design flexible and simple” (p. 511).

Another rationale for the need for flexible library space is to allow for spaces that promote collaboration, creativity and innovation (Schlipf & Moorman, 2018). These spaces may take the form of themed children’s sections that encourage play, reading and adventure, to specific teen zones with young adult literature, writing contests and resources, and makerspaces. Children’s zones in public libraries were developed in the 1970s as part of the innovative programs aimed at engaging with families and this has expanded in the past 10-15 years to include spaces dedicated for teens (Caspé & Lopez, 2018). Providing tailored spaces allows public libraries to meet community needs. According to Hoffman, Subramaniam, Kawas, Scaff and Davis (2016), public libraries have emerged as “natural environments to connect learning, creativity, and knowledge production, for youth both in school and out-of-school settings” (p. 30).

### **Makerspaces in Public Libraries**

Makerspaces are another example of design or spatial innovation and they have been growing in popularity in libraries across North America (Wang, Wang, Wilson & Ahmed, 2016; Moorefield-Lang, 2014; Mann, 2018; Maceli, 2019). Educause (2013) offered the following definition:

A makerspace is a physical location where people gather to share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, and build. Makerspaces provide tools and working room in a community environment – a library, community centre, private organization, or campus. (p. 1)

These spaces are open to kids, adults, and entrepreneurs who have a desire to create, or make. According to Jennifer Horton (2019), “makerspaces come in many forms, from large scale facilities with thousands of dollars of equipment to mobile makerspaces that may encompass materials housed in a couple of boxes” (p. 866). The library in Hamilton is one Canadian urban public library providing such a space, offering opportunities for photo editing, video creation, 3D printer, coding and music recording and editing. The Ottawa Public Library opened their makerspace, Imagine Space, in 2014 in partnership with the US Embassy. Imagine Space offers patrons access to a 3D printer, a laser cutter, a digital modeler, green screen, video and audio editing software, hand tools and electronics, and a wall-to-wall whiteboard. The purpose of the space was to “provide public access to new technologies and tools, enhance hands-on learning experiences, and create a collaborative environment for exchanging ideas and sparking innovation” (Wang et al, 2016, p. 8). The public library in Toronto has created a makerspace, developing a mobile outreach program to reach high school students and youth in underemployed areas of the city (Gaitskell, 2014).

The ALA has encouraged all types of libraries to engage and invest in makerspaces. Their rationale is that public libraries specifically are in a unique position to reach a greater number of citizens and help develop their technical literacy. As observed by Mann (2018), librarians should embrace the maker movement “to help library users locate, evaluate, and effectively use resources and materials to explore the world around them, and tap into hidden passions and

skills” (p. 83). These flexible and innovative spaces encourage creativity and foster lifelong learning for the entire community. They also help to close the digital divide, providing access to technology and tools that some patrons and citizens would not normally use.

### **Social Services at the Modern Public Library**

One of the most prevalent populations that frequent public libraries in urban centres is the homeless; the public library provides a warm and welcoming space where the homeless can visit during the day to stay warm and dry. Susan Orlean (2018) described this sense of welcoming and the accompanying considerations in the following excerpt,

One of the few places homeless people are welcomed, given access to computers and the Internet, and permitted to dally all day (unless they act out) is a public library. Libraries have become the de facto community center for the homeless across the globe. There is not a library in the world that hasn't grappled with the issue of how – and how much – to provide the homeless. Many librarians have told me that they consider this the defining question facing libraries right now, and that they despair of finding a balance between welcoming homeless people and somehow accommodating other patrons who occasionally are scared of them or find them smelly or messy or alienating. (pp. 73-4)

It is widely accepted that a portion of the homeless population struggles with mental health and addiction challenges, and this has created a new set of needs for public libraries to consider. New public libraries in downtown Edmonton, Calgary, Halifax and Winnipeg have not only prioritized communal and meeting spaces, but they have also increased the number of programs they offer to the public and have either hired or invited social workers and other social service providers into their branches to meet with clients and patrons who require support (Hoye, 2019). Libraries have faced opposition in recent years for taking actions which limit the movements and

freedoms of this population, such as when Edmonton banned sleeping in the stacks in 2015 and when Winnipeg installed metal detectors at the entrance of the Central Branch in 2018. In both instances, the municipalities and library administrators faced a great deal of scrutiny and their plights were covered by national media (Bethune, 2018; Tobin, 2017; Tremonti, 2016).

Librarians working in urban public libraries have developed a new skill set to help patrons access a variety of health and social services, and some have received training in mental health first aid in addition to CPR, first aid, and training on how to administer naloxone in the event of an overdose (Peet, 2019; Ford, 2017). Library programming in self-care, mental wellness, and navigating the health care system are now provided at some major centres across Canada and the US (Ford, 2017). The movie *The Public*, released in April 2019 provides a cinematic interpretation of the social issues being addressed at and facing the modern public library. In the movie, a small group of homeless individuals refuse to leave the Cincinnati Public Library during a spell of bitterly cold weather. While I do not want to provide any spoilers, as the movie unfolds, the need for social services are at the film's core, as is the role of the librarians who work at the branch who are faced with difficult choices.

### **Public Library as Institution**

Public libraries are dynamic spaces that are constantly adapting to meet the needs of the community. However, public libraries are not independent institutions – they are governed and funded by different levels of government. These levels of government determine how public libraries are funded, make decisions on how to allocate resources, and set out policies and procedures that have a direct impact on daily library operations. Therefore, it is important to understand the public library as institution.

In Canada, public libraries fall under provincial or territorial jurisdiction. According to Valerie Wilson (2008), “almost all public libraries are governed by a library act—provincial or territorial legislation designed to outline governance and functional duties and purposes of public libraries” (p. 3). These pieces of legislation direct the types of public libraries that are sanctioned and outline how funding to public libraries will be calculated; some allocate funds on a per capita basis while others establish a base amount, or lump sum regardless of population. These arrangements vary by province and territory, and some require municipalities to contribute a percentage of their independent budget to fund the library. The one exception to this is Quebec, where public libraries are the exclusive jurisdiction of the municipal government (Wilson, 2008).

### **Public Library Governance Structure**

Typically, public libraries receive grants and funding through municipal governments. Municipal (or regional) governments across Canada play a significant role in the development of public library policies, procedures and operations. This role is formalized through the establishment of library boards. Library boards are committees or groups that meet at regular intervals to govern the public library; this means that library boards are responsible for decision-making, setting goals, and establishing policies. According to the Ontario Library Association (2001), library boards are accountable for the public library. Their manual states,

Going hand-in-hand with governance is the issue of accountability. Accountability means having to explain and accept responsibility for actually carrying out what the library is there to do. Because the library belongs to the public, the Board must be able to provide detailed information about how responsibilities have been carried out and what results have been achieved. Today’s more stringent expectations for the accountability of public bodies call for a focus on outcomes rather than a simple report on efforts and activities.

The Board is accountable for the whole range of activity of the organization and for the results it achieves, but is not responsible for carrying out everything that is done. The activity of running the organization on a day-today basis is a responsibility delegated to the staff. (p. 35)

This governance structure is consistent with the one in place at the public library where I conducted my research. I will focus on this public library now to bring the aforementioned legislative framework and governance structure to life.

As noted previously, I conducted my research at a public library in British Columbia and this library is governed by the *British Columbia Library Act*. This legislation defines five types of libraries, provides the overarching authority for public libraries to operate, outlines the process to develop new libraries, and defines the role and function of the library board(s) (Government of British Columbia, 2019). According to the legislation, the library where I conducted my research is defined as a Municipal Library and it must follow the guidelines set out in Part 2. Part 2 of the legislation includes the following sections:

Table 1

Sections of Part 2 – Municipal Libraries of the *British Columbia Library Act*

3. How a municipal library is established	9. General powers and duties of the library board
4. Role and status of the library board	10. Budget and financing
5. How the library board is appointed	11. Expenditures and financial statements
6. Term of office	12. Powers and duties of chief librarian
7. Election of chair and vice-chair	13. Abolition of municipal library and dissolution of library board
8. Regular and special meetings of the library board	

As evident in the above table, Part 2 of the legislation sets out the process by which a public municipal library is created and granted authority and defines and establishes the library board as the overarching governing body for the institution. Further to the guidelines set out in Part 2, the library must also follow directives in Part 4 which speaks to the Public Library Association, or library board meeting and composition, and Part 5, which includes a number of general guidelines on what constitutes basic and free services, provides authority for library boards to levy and collect fines, and enter agreements with community organizations and partners.

While the legislation provides direction on how public libraries are to be governed, decisions related to the implementation of the governance model, operational policies, procedures and funding are made by the Libraries Branch in the Government of British Columbia (2019). Questions and requests for grants and additional resources may be directed to this branch in the provincial government for review and decision. However, these requests may also be submitted to the municipal government as public libraries receive the majority of their funding through the local level.

### **Public Library Board Role and Functions**

At the public library where I conducted my research, the library board is comprised of 19 Board Trustees that are appointed either from the municipal governments served by the library, and a certain number of appointees from the community based on a population base ratio. The board authors several different types of texts, all of which directly influence and direct the work of the library. The strategic plans, board reports, and facilities plan are all available publicly and set out the overarching direction of the library organization for a set period of time, typically three years. The library's strategic plan reports out on the organization's accomplishments and

speaks to the mission, vision and goals as they pertain to patrons and their needs in the present and future. The board reports speak to special studies or research undertaken by the library and reported to the board for discussion and decision. The facilities plan and related updates speak to the current state of the library buildings and infrastructure (e.g., furniture, shelves, other equipment), and seek to identify future needs based on demographics, projections and current library trends.

Additionally, the library board has established policies in five areas which govern the day-to-day activity in the public library: governance, values, operations, financial and human resources. Each of these policy texts are quite prescriptive and detailed in nature and provide direction and guidance for decisions that impact library employees and the everyday operations of the public library. For instance, in the Operations Policy, there is a section related to the collection, the philosophy of and criteria guiding the selection of materials for the collection, and the process to follow if an item is to be de-selected or removed from the collection. The same Operations Policy has sections that speak to membership or eligibility for public library services, borrowing (including suspension of) privileges, meeting rooms, public computer stations, and the rights and responsibilities of library users, including a statement on conduct.

Another example is the Human Resource Policy. This text speaks to how library staff will be recruited, selected and hired to work at the institution. The same policy outlines the employee code of conduct and establishes the expectations for and of librarians in the workplace. This is not to say that the library board or the trustees participate in all of these actions, but rather they set out the direction and guidelines for library administration and management in their day-to-day work. And as per these policy texts, library administration, via the Chief Librarian, must provide

status updates and reports to the board at regular intervals as that position and all library staff are accountable to the board for their actions.

While these texts are decidedly public or outward focused in terms of audience, they do serve to shape the work and learning of library employees indirectly. By focusing on patrons' needs, the library and its staff must remain flexible and responsive, adapting the services provided and possibly even the work of employees. A focus on literacy and lifelong learning, for example, places an emphasis on programming in a variety of areas, tutorials with patrons to achieve technical competence, and other programs or services to assist with comprehension and knowledge acquisition. Another example is a proposal for renovations or a new branch to meet growing populations or demographic shifts; this could result in the creation of new positions or reallocation of current library employees and resources (temporarily or permanently) to accommodate these emerging needs. This also impacts the work and learning of employees as they may be faced with learning new systems, teams, and buildings.

### **Library Policies and Procedures**

Another text or set of texts that inform the work of the library and its employees are the library policies and procedures. According to library administration, these are consistent with other library organizations across Canada and the Canadian Library Association. Whereas the plans are more futuristic in scope, these texts establish the responsibilities of patrons and library employees and set out the expectations for conduct, behaviour and service provision in the organization. There are some public or patron-specific policies that have a direct impact on the library employees, including participants in this study, and serve to shape their work. The first is the policy which speaks to the collection and articulates the principles of selection, including resource allocation and criteria. These have a direct impact on the participants whose specialized

duties included collections management and oversight, as they must abide by this policy and its criteria in their everyday work.

The second policy text that directs the work of librarians across the organization is the one dedicated to defining and articulating information services. Information services are predominantly available through the information desk, and thus, shapes the work of library staff who work at the information desk. The policy is not prescriptive in terms of duties and accountabilities at the desk, but rather establishes a benchmark for service provision and how patrons are to be treated when they request information services, no matter what the topic.

There are two policy texts that address employees directly, namely the employee code of conduct and the criteria for travel, education and other allowable expenses. These are consistent with the terms and conditions of employment set out in the collective agreement and job description and offer a little more detail. One text speaks to education, communicates how employees should identify and request learning or training opportunities (formal learning) and identifies a linkage between performance and professional development. This is not unique to this library, as I have encountered this policy and practice in my everyday work as a public servant. However, it does introduce an administrative element and highlights the power differential between positions as supervisors must make decisions on all development and learning requests and there are times when not all requests can be granted. I will address this further in the section addressing the collective agreement.

The other policy text is the employee code of conduct which articulates the employees' responsibilities to conduct themselves in an appropriate way to ensure the workplace is professional, respectful, safe and free from discrimination and harassment. Again, this is not a document that is unique to the library and it is consistent with the Human Rights Code and

WorkSafe BC legislation. These documents serve to shape or direct employees to behave or conduct themselves in a certain manner or follow certain processes in order to attend a course, program or conference.

While certainly not novel, these texts do shape the work of employees and their learning. As an employee joins the organization, they must become familiar with these texts and model their behaviour after the rules and parameters set out in each. As these texts change or adapt over time, the library employees must also adapt accordingly. The texts also serve to establish the power of the supervisor to approve training requests and define or perhaps limit the definition of what constitutes learning and professional development in the workplace.

### **Library Organization Structure**

As established in a number of the library board policies, the Chief Librarian is appointed as the head of the public library. This is consistent with the administration of public libraries across North America, according to the American Library Association (2018). Under the Chief Librarian, as in other public library systems, there are a number of managers responsible for different departments or portfolios and these managers are excluded from union membership. Under these managers are the librarians, librarian assistants, and other staff and volunteers; the organization structure is very similar to that of other public or private entities.

While the Chief Librarian and managers may be excluded, public library employees in Canada belong to a collective bargaining unit, or union organization. The library board, including the Chief Librarian, are responsible for negotiating the collective agreement on behalf of the public library. Many public library employees in British Columbia (and Canada) belong to a local chapter of the Canadian Union for Public Employees (CUPE). This agreement, like others that exist across many organizations, includes provisions and terms related to occupational health and

safety; hours of work and overtime; vacation and special leave allocations; dispute resolution mechanisms; wages and benefits, and job performance and evaluation. These are additional guidelines that direct the work and decision-making of the public library.

### **Collective Agreement**

The collective agreement was one of the most cited texts in my interviews with management and participants and is negotiated by the board and Chief Librarian with library employees. A collective agreement is a written contract that sets out the terms and conditions of employment for employees who belong to the bargaining unit or union; the agreement serves to establish the roles, responsibilities and expectations of both management and employees who are members of the bargaining unit. The agreement, like other texts that exist across many organizations, includes provisions and terms related to occupational health and safety; hours of work and overtime; vacation and special leave allocations; dispute resolution mechanisms; wages and benefits, and job performance and evaluation.

The agreement referenced in my study established many formal boundaries for participants. There is one clause specific to training that establishes that formal, work-related training will be offered within work-day hours wherever possible. The agreement also sets out the way in which employees will be selected for training opportunities should there be a limited number of seats and to minimize impact on operations when it is not possible to have all staff attend. Therefore, the criteria identified in the agreement will be used to determine who can attend a conference or learning event that is sought after by many employees. This can have a significant impact on employees and participants, particularly if they do not have seniority or there are more senior staff who wish to attend.

Outside of the training-specific clause, the agreement impacts participant learning in other ways, too. It establishes the hours in which their work must be completed; given the informal learning identified by participants occurs at work, the agreement also serves to set a soft boundary for these activities. I call it a soft boundary as many participants and administrators interviewed noted that they also undertake informal learning related to work outside of working hours due to personal interest. The types of activities undertaken outside of working hours include visiting libraries in other urban or rural centres when on vacation for ideas and inspiration, attending lectures or talks, listening to podcasts, watching videos, and reading articles related to work. The agreement also has a section pertaining to technological change. This section establishes the right to introduce new technology to the workplace if it will improve operations and increase efficiency and sets out how the organization will approach the change if it occurs.

### **Job Description**

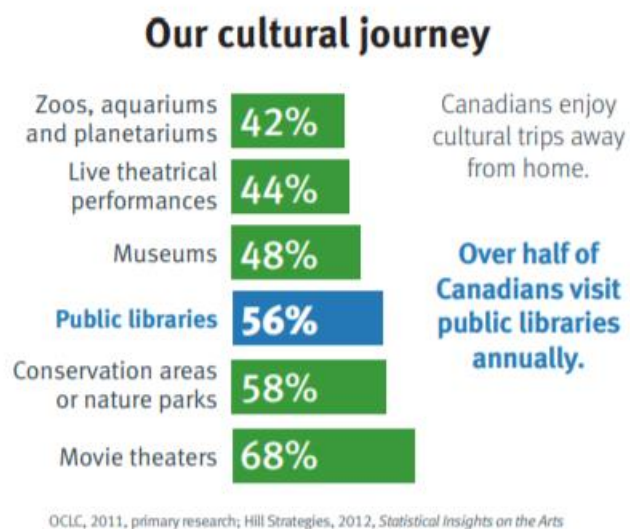
Whereas the collective agreement sets out the high-level details such as leave allocations, wages and hours of work for all employees in the organization, the job description sets out the duties, tasks and responsibilities of librarians. In this instance, what is most striking is what the job description does not address. The job description does not address learning, training or professional development in any way, nor does it describe the specialized duties or related responsibilities that have emerged over time. Interestingly, the job description does not actually identify or speak to the tasks or responsibilities of the information desk either. The accountabilities of the position are almost exclusively user or public focused; there are only one or two accountabilities that are internally focused, and they address the issue of workplace behaviour, ensuring all employees conduct themselves in a respectful and safe manner.

## Conclusion

In my previous studies in public administration, there was an emphasis on how public sector organizations, such as the public library, had a greater number of policies, procedures and regulations that granted authority to make decisions and oversee the administration of the organization. The reason for the attention to detail and specificity of these documents was to ensure that the public servants were responsible stewards of public funds, accountable to government and citizens for making careful, calculated decisions. The public library is demonstrative of a public institution; administrative and operational decisions must be made with careful consideration, with integrity and accountability at the foreground. In this chapter, I have sought to provide a holistic description of the modern public library. After establishing its roots, I provided a sense of the public library as place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The public library has evolved and taken on new roles and responsibilities in the community and has become a focal point or hub for citizens of all ages who attend the library for meetings, to access specialized zones, for example, collaborative and maker spaces. Citizens attend the library for learning opportunities at every age and stage of life, and some visit the organization to access social services. The public library as place is thriving. According to the Canadian Urban Libraries Council, the American Library Association, and the OCLC, public library usage rates are at an all time high. The following figures put the number of visits and usage rates into context.



**Figure 4: Comparison of Usage Rates Annually (OCLC, 2011)**



**Figure 5: Cultural Centres and Annual Visits (OCLC, 2011)**

As a place in the community, public libraries are meeting a need and owning their space.

The same is the case in the US, as per Orlean's (2018) account below.

[In one study], almost three hundred million Americans used one of the country's 17,078 public libraries and bookmobiles in the course of a year. In another study, over ninety per cent of those surveyed said closing their local library would hurt their communities. Public libraries in the United States outnumber McDonald's; they outnumber retail bookstores two to one. In many towns, the library is the only place you can browse through physical books. (p. 289).

This quotation from Orlean highlights the high library usage and borrowing rates.

According to the Canadian Urban Library Council (2018), the site where I conducted my research saw than 2.5 million in-person visits in 2018 and had the highest circulation of items per capita in Canada with more than six million items were borrowed. What is more extraordinary is that public libraries are public institutions, with less freedom and flexibility than retail or private sector organizations. As public entities, they are subject to greater scrutiny and must take greater care to ensure accessibility, transparency, integrity and accountability are considered in day-to-day operations and decision-making processes. Public libraries in Canada have been granted their authority to operate and serve through provincial or territorial legislation, and they are accountable to both the provincial / territorial and municipal levels of government for grants, funding and resources. This accountability occurs through the library board, whose membership is comprised from the municipal government(s) served by the public library. These layers of policies and procedures have a direct impact on all public library employees, including those who participated in my study, as I will explore further in Chapter Five.

### **Chapter 3 - Methodology and Research Design**

The purpose of this research is to explore workplace learning in public libraries in a holistic manner, examining the different structures – physical and non-physical – that direct, shape and contour what and how participants learn on the job. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is great value in learning in/from place and space, such as a jobsite, and there is a great deal of curricular value gained from experience. This chapter provides an orientation and context for the findings and analysis that follow. I discuss the approach chosen for my study, institutional ethnography, and provide an overview of my research, including the methodologies employed to collect data and for participant selection. As well, I discuss my epistemological orientation, researcher stance and approaches to data analysis including the theoretical lenses used to frame my analyses. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations for this study including the researcher's role and challenges posed by the unique requirements for conducting research in a workplace that impacted the overall study design.

#### **Institutional Ethnography: A Method of Inquiry**

In my research, I wanted to develop a different and unique understanding of learning in the workplace. Specifically, I wished to identify and describe the structures, physical and non-physical, that shape (and are shaped by) learning at work, examining possible influences and relations between those structures and the employees working in one public library. Understanding that the best way to elicit and explore workplace learning was through experience, I knew my research would be qualitative and involve several different methodologies to give me a holistic view of the workplace, with all its angles, corners, and structures. After examining a number of methodologies, I decided that the best way to explore this topic and achieve my objectives is to draw upon the tenets of institutional ethnography.

Developed by sociologist Dorothy Smith in the 1970s, institutional ethnography is defined as a method of inquiry that seeks to:

*[R]eorganize the social relations of knowledge of the social* so that people can take that knowledge up as an extension of our ordinary knowledge of the local actualities of our lives. It is a method of inquiry into the social that proposes to enlarge the scope of what becomes visible from that site, mapping the relations that connect one local site to others. Like a map, it aims to be through and through indexical to the local sites of people's experience, making visible how we are connected into the extended social relations of ruling and economy and their intersections. (Smith, 2005, p. 29, emphasis in original)

According to Marie Campbell and Frances Gregor, institutional ethnography is unique insofar as it “offers the capacity to look at the everyday world and figure out and “map” how things happen the way they do” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 16). Learning and notions of work in the workplace are inherently experiential and as such, are good subjects for institutional ethnographic study.

Institutional ethnography was created out of Smith's frustration with traditional methods and sociological approaches which devalued or rendered women and their experiences invisible (Smith, 1987). Smith's (2005) book on institutional ethnography starts by reflecting on how she viewed her life that seemed to be grounded in two parallel but separate streams, as a university faculty member and as a single mother – and it was not until she began to delve into how to view the world differently as a sociologist and as a feminist, that she began to think about the crossovers in vantage points. As such, institutional ethnography is founded on an ontological shift that recognizes the expertise of the 'embodied knower' or individual, rather than accepting preconceptions, behaviours and norms (Smith, 2005). Smith developed her method of inquiry

based on the importance of ideology and the social articulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology* (1939), Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1967), Alfred Schutz's emphasis on the everyday world and society (1962), and research into communication and language by George Herbert Mead (1938), and Mikhail Bahtkin (1981, 1986).

According to Smith, institutional ethnography is unique and differs from traditional notions of ethnography. While both methods focus on the experience of the everyday, institutional ethnography goes beyond the individual, looking to *explicate* the institution and its processes, connections, interrelationships, and ruling relations in an effort to describe the structures that shape actions and behaviours (Smith, 1987). This is evident in the studies that adopt institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. For instance, Janet Rankin (2004) and Elizabeth McGibbon, Elizabeth Peter and Ruth Gallop (2010) explore reforms and ruling relations in health care, focusing specifically on nursing. Naomi Nichols and Allison Griffith (2009) focus on the institution and its processes in their study of educational policy. By institution, Smith is not referring to a physical structure or bureaucracy, but rather “a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function. [...]. In contrast to such concepts as bureaucracy, “institution” does not identify a determinate form of social organization, but rather the intersection and coordination of more than one relational mode of the ruling apparatus” (Smith, 1987, p. 160).

Ruling relations, as referred to above, are “forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places” (Smith, 2005, p. 13). These relations regulate our actions and dictate our behaviours and relationships with others. This was particularly evident in the study of integrated care in special education conducted by Stella Ng and her research team (2013). The study explored the actions

undertaken and collaboration resulting from the creation of an Individual Education Plan for students who suffer from chronic health issues or disabilities. In this instance, this text (in the form of the Individual Education Plan, or IEP), was a form of ruling relations that directed families, school staff, and health care employees to organize themselves and coordinate their actions in an extraordinary manner.

According to Campbell and Gregor (2002), ruling relations are defined as “more than an imposition of rules. They rely on people knowing how to take them up and act in an appropriate manner” (p.33). In many ways, this is consistent with Michel Foucault's (1981) definition articulated in his work. Just as discourse is controlled by a select few for Foucault, Smith believed that society is ruled by people who are “at work in corporations, government, professional settings and organizations, universities, public schools, hospitals and clinics, and so on and so on” (Smith, 2005, p. 18). These people have been delegated authority to act in these institutions and formulate social relations, but they are also subject to the culmination of their actions as individuals.

### **The Standpoint of Everyday Experience**

Institutional ethnography is rooted in experience or the everyday world (Smith, 1987, 2005). This could not be more apparent than in the studies that have adopted this approach. For instance, Jean-Paul Restoule and his colleagues (2013) explored the transitions of Indigenous students to post-secondary education; Susan Turner (2006) and Kate Murray (2011) focused on public participation in municipal governance; and McGibbon, Peter and Gallop (2010) looked to explicate the stresses of paediatric nurses. These studies start with the everyday experiences of individuals. It should be noted that Smith (1990) is quick to clarify that experience is not

synonymous with perspective but refers to our “directly experienced world,” or lived actuality (p. 23).

The researcher seeks out a variety of experiences to arrive at the problematic that will shape the course of inquiry. According to Smith,

The ethnographic problematic recognizes the real interpenetration of the present and immediate with the unknown elsewhere and elsewhen and the strange forms of power that are at once present and absent in the everyday. A problematic is a territory to be discovered, not a question that is concluded in its answer. (Smith, 2005, p. 41)

Therefore, the problematic is a common thread that runs through the experiences that can be explored further. Thus, the purpose of the research is to discover new knowledge about social relations or the ruling apparatus or ruling relations and their impact on society that was not known previously.

### **Forms of Data Collection in Institutional Ethnography**

Since its creation in the 1970s, use of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry to explore social organization and ruling relations has increased, particularly within the last ten years. The subject areas using this approach are diverse, ranging from health care (McGibbon, Peter & Gallop, 2010; Malinsky, Dubois & Jaquest, 2010; Diamond, 2006; Rankin, 2004), to child care (Nichols & Griffith, 2009; McNeil, 2008; Griffith, 2006), education (Restoule, Mashford-Pringle, Chacaby, Smillie & Brunette, 2013; Ng, Stooke, Regan, Hibbert, Schryer, Phelan & Lingard, 2013; Gerrard & Farrell, 2012), manufacturing and work (Smith & Dobson, 2011), and public sector activities and organization (Murray, 2011; Turner, 2006; Eastwood, 2005; McCoy, 1998).

Why is institutional ethnography so appealing? According to some, it is because of its purely exploratory nature that is driven by experience or praxis, not theory (Ng et al., 2013; Smith, 2005). Others feel it is because this approach is flexible and responds to the data derived from experience (Campbell & Gregor, 2002), and others believe it to be the best method of inquiry to explore institutional processes and organizations (Deveau, 2008; DeVault & McCoy, 2006; McCoy, 2006).

Institutional ethnography employs a variety of data collection techniques including but not limited to interviews, participant observation and textual analysis (Smith, 2005; DeVault & McCoy, 2006; Campbell & Gregor, 2002). The diversity of data collection tools is purposeful, as institutional ethnography is intended to provide the researcher with some flexibility to receive data and respond and investigate using the most appropriate methods to elicit results and information that can be generalized to work and institutions broadly speaking. According to Smith, the “methods of research work with people's work knowledge of what they do, as these are collaboratively produced in the research process as well as with texts that are essential to the production of the generalizability, generalization, and the objectivity of institutional regimes” (Smith, 2005, p. 44).

### **Identification and Location: My Personal Biases**

Before embarking upon a discussion of my research, I want to take a moment to identify my personal biases and locate or situate myself in relation to my research. As noted by Berg and Lune (2012), it is next to impossible for researchers to maintain a “value-neutral position” (p. 208) due to their previous education and experiences, all of which inform and influence researchers throughout the process from topic selection to interpretation of data and findings. Certainly, my previous education and experiences influenced my topic selection and allowed me

access to the workplace to conduct research and I wish to acknowledge these effects and privileges in this section.

### **Personal Education**

I am privileged to have been born, raised and educated in Canada. I received a high-quality education in public school and I attended two post-secondary institutions in Canada where I obtained my Bachelor's and Master's degrees. I have studied the arts, literature, history in my undergraduate degree and administrative sciences, including human resources, financial management, and policy development in my graduate degree. While my undergraduate and graduate degrees were granted in different fields, what they do share is their foundation which is derived from predominantly Euro-centric, Caucasian, male, and traditionally educated scholars. This is due to the nature of the academic work I pursued, but also due to the timing of my studies as there was not such an awareness or emphasis on diversity and inclusion as there is today.

My previous educational experiences granted me access to my doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. My studies here continue to be informed by Euro-centric, Caucasian, male, and traditionally educated scholars, but also by a number of diverse voices from different ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds. This has helped me to broaden my perspective and deepen my understanding of the impact of colonization and identify the historical roots and foundations of different movements and approaches. Through studying a plurality of voices, I have become more aware of my personal biases and understand how they impact and influence my own scholarship and work. These voices have influenced my approach to studying and work and I need to work to be conscious of these biases, which means reflecting on the questions I pose in

interviews, thinking about how I interpret my observations and review texts, and question my presentation of data and findings.

### **Personal Experience**

As noted by Berg and Lune (2012), topic selection is often informed by the researcher's personal experiences and interests, and this is exactly how my research was born. I have always been a book lover, library enthusiast and lifelong learner. I began visiting the public library when I was a small child and I have always visited the public library, no matter where I have lived. When we relocated to Victoria, British Columbia, one of the first things I did was get my library card and check out the local branch to see what it offered. I was surprised at the variety of programming offered at our local library and that started my exploration into what type of programming was offered at other branches, both urban and rural, within and outside British Columbia. While being a library lover is what led to my decision to conduct research in a library setting, it is also a bias that has influenced my research. My long-time familiarity with libraries was part of why I gained approval from the organization to conduct my research, but it also allowed me to build rapport with my participants and helped me to access their work. While these biases are described by Berg and Lune (2012) as desirable in a qualitative research study, I am aware that they may also colour or taint my observations and interpretation of data and findings. As such, I found it necessary to reflect and analyze my notes to ensure that my bias was minimal, and I followed best practice in writing my field notes, ensuring that my own feelings and interpretations were captured as my own in first-person rather than adopting a third-person or objective stance (van Maanen, 1988; Pink, 2015; Berg & Lune, 2012).

My professional identity is a part of me and determines how I interpret and view the world, and I need to recognize and situate this part of my identity within the context of my study.

I have worked in management in the public sector for over 10 years. This has given me knowledge and experience in many areas including human resources, financial management, leadership, navigation of workplace politics, and an understanding of organizational reputation. My knowledge of these fields in addition to my professional experience allowed me to develop a rapport with both the management and participants as I could relate to the opportunities and challenges facing them in these areas. However, I recognized that it was a fine line between using my knowledge to gain entry or access to the organization and intervening in the organization and having an impact on decisions. I made a conscious effort to remain curious and seek information only without offering advice or drawing comparisons with my own workplaces or experiences. In recording my field notes, I did my best to take ownership and responsibility over my observations and interpretations of situations, as recommended in the literature (Berg & Lune, 2012; Pink, 2015). While undertaking the indexing of work and data analysis, I reviewed my findings against interview transcripts, notes and documents to ensure that the voices were those of the participants directly and not my interpretation of their words coming through in my research.

### **Workplace and Participant Selection**

In December 2015, I received Human Ethics Review Board Approval from the University of Victoria to conduct my research and I approached an organization to conduct research in their workplace. As I discovered and discuss further in this chapter, in order to undertake research in a workplace, there are unique requirements that need to be met. Namely, the research must be presented and approved by leadership in the organization, in this instance a library in British Columbia. I met with the leadership of the organization to “pitch” my proposal. They could see the value in participating and I received their approval to proceed. I should note that library leadership also provided informed consent and participated in my study in a limited capacity – I

interviewed them as part of my effort to establish context for my research and to better provide a holistic view of the workplace.

Once approval to proceed with my research in the workplace was received, I began to select participants. As agreed with the library's leadership, I drafted an email outlining the purpose, elements, and time commitment required for the study and this was sent out by the organization's administration. Because I was not communicating with the organization's employees directly, I made it very clear that my research was independent and that I would not share the identity of participants or information they shared as part of the process with the organization. Participants were invited to contact me directly to protect their identity. Four employees reached out to me and we met to discuss my research, following which, each of the participants provided their informed consent and agreed to participate in my study. I will continue to honour the commitment I made to keep their identities anonymous in my initial meetings with the participants through assigning each a pseudonym in this paper and not identifying the library's location.

My research into the workplace occurred over an eight-month period in 2016, during which time I conducted interviews with leadership and participants, observed participants while they were on the job, and collected key texts for further review and analysis. I have outlined the number of interviews and participant observation sessions with all participants in Table 2 below.

Table 2

## Participant Summary

NAME (pseudonyms)	ROLE	INTERVIEW FREQUENCY	PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FREQUENCY
Zena	Library Leadership	One semi-structured interview	N/A
Sally	Library Leadership	Two semi-structured interviews	N/A
Paul	Librarian	Two semi-structured interviews	Three sessions
Abigail	Librarian	Two semi-structured interviews	Two sessions
Colin	Librarian	Two semi-structured interviews	Two sessions
Freda	Librarian	Two semi-structured interviews	Three sessions

### Research Participants

I want to take a moment to introduce the participants who volunteered for my research study. By providing a brief profile for each person, it will better situate them in the library and help provide context for my data, analysis and findings. It will also provide an opportunity for their voices and their passion to be heard as part of my research and speak to factors such as education and experience which I discuss in later chapters.

#### Zena

Zena worked as a senior library administrator in the organization. Zena has an undergraduate degree in the arts, and her career in libraries began in Ontario, where she worked in various roles in an urban library. According to Zena, “I’ve worked in public libraries forever pretty well, but in roles like community programming, public relations and music” (Zena, personal communication, April 14, 2016). Upon earning her MLIS, Zena took on more senior

leadership positions and eventually moved to British Columbia to take on her current role.

However, her love of libraries goes back to her childhood. As she states, “I actually started in libraries as a child, I can show you the picture I use whenever I talk about myself, but this is when my brother and I were at story hour at our local branch” (Zena, personal communication, April 14, 2016).

### **Sally**

Sally occupied a new role in the organization, a hybrid position of sorts that acted as a bridge between senior leadership and unionized librarian staff. Sally pursued communications and media during her undergraduate studies and worked in community and cultural development before she returned to graduate school in British Columbia to obtain her MLIS. Sally worked in another library organization in before accepting a position at her current branch. Sally is also a lifelong library lover. According to Sally,

[The library] is a passion of mine, I think. It’s a great experience to be working in the library, so for me I’m an advocate for literacy, working with staff, working with community, making sure that the spaces, the public spaces are a reflection of the community and that we’re accessible and open. So to me that’s why I’m a librarian but also those are my values that I bring to work each day. (Sally, personal communication, January 15, 2016).

### **Paul**

Paul worked as a librarian in the organization and has held his current position for over five years. He works as a librarian with some supervisory responsibilities and provides leadership in social media and communications. Paul started working with the organization in a part-time job when he was in high school. He left the organization to pursue his undergraduate degree in

the arts and social sciences and worked in another field for five years before returning to university to pursue his MLIS in Ontario. Once he completed his studies, he returned to British Columbia and to the organization where he started his career. While Paul has confessed to be a lifelong library lover, he did not picture himself as a librarian, even when a librarian approached him during his teen years to encourage him to pursue it as a career. However, Paul finds himself at home in his chosen career, as he shared with me below,

I'm really kind of proud of the work I do, like one of the reasons I got into the profession. One of the reasons that I, other than the fact that I initially scoffed at the idea of being a librarian, [...], I was thinking what kind of work would line up with my values and the kind of person I think I am. And of the things I realized quickly is that lifelong learning, literature – libraries are about more than books, so I wasn't here just because I love books. [...]. I wanted to do something that had some value, that made the world a better place, that helped people, not just people who are under-served but just people in general. I don't know how anybody could argue with the beauty of libraries, they're just amazing. (Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016)

### **Abigail**

Abigail came to Canada almost 20 years ago. Trained as an educator with an undergraduate degree in education and graduate degree in the arts and social sciences, Abigail worked in that field upon immigrating to Canada before she earned her MLIS in Alberta. She worked in public libraries in two different urban centres before relocating to British Columbia and joining the organization as a librarian. Abigail's special area of interest is literacy for children and young adults. According to Abigail, one of the benefits of working in a public library is that "you can learn a lot from people in a very friendly way, without feeling like you're learning"

(Abigail, personal communication, January 18, 2016). Abigail also took on a supervisory position during outside core work hours. According to her, the additional role allows her to “feel a bit more grounded because I want to understand what’s happening a little more. So my [supervisory] position is a bit different than the regular children’s [librarians] who are just focused on children” (Abigail, personal communication, January 18, 2016).

### **Colin**

Colin worked at the organization for more than 20 years (and has since retired since we spoke in 2016). He earned an undergraduate degree in sciences and completed some graduate level courses in the arts in Ontario. Colin worked in the sciences before returning to school to complete his MLIS in British Columbia. Shortly after completing his schooling, he joined the organization as a part-time employee before winning a librarian position. Colin believed it’s a privilege to work in the public library and has enjoyed the experiences and challenges posed over his career.

I’ve never ever regarded this as just a job and I think that so many of the people that work here [feel the same way]. It’s a profession and to which people have been called. And there’s really a feeling here of allegiance and responsibility to the organization and to the people it serves. So it’s far more profound than just a job. The people that do it, they do it passionately and they do it with care and attention. And it’s all about making the library look as good as it can be in the community, through good service and good work. So it’s a wonderful place to work and to have worked. And I feel very lucky to have it, it’s the first steady job I ever had. (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016)

**Freda**

Similar to Abigail, Freda also immigrated to Canada from abroad. Upon arrival in Canada, Freda earned her MLIS in Alberta and relocated to British Columbia and joined the organization as a librarian. She has worked in the organization for approximately 10 years. Freda's duties include updating and maintaining the multi-cultural collections for the organization. These specialized duties provide her with a unique perspective in the organization as she works not only in the branch I focused on in my research study, but she also spends time at other branches to monitor their collection throughout the year. Freda described her work to me as captured below,

[I'm] very lucky to work here and I enjoy my work here. Basically, I work as a public services librarian as other librarians in the branch. We work at the information desk for regular shift hours. And in addition to that, I take care of the system collections in languages other than English and French. We have books in 15+ languages, and we have newspapers and magazines in over 10 languages. I take care of the collection development of those collections. I order books and distribute them to different branches, and I take care of the circulating, monitoring the use of books. And I also do some multi-cultural related programming. (Freda, personal communication, January 22, 2016)

All four participants, Paul, Abigail, Colin and Freda, were employed as librarians at one branch. The two administrators I spoke with also work at the same branch, but their responsibilities are different in scope and geography. While the research participants' core duties were the same, each participant also has some unique duties based on a combination of their education, experience and interests. The number of observation sessions with each participant varies depending on their duties and job functions. Each participant has an undergraduate degree (all from different backgrounds and institutions) and an MLIS from an accredited program in

Canada. I will speak to their roles and responsibilities in subsequent chapters as they relate to establishing a holistic view of the workplace and structures – physical and non-physical.

It is also interesting to note that, contrary to the demographics presented in Chapter One, the group of participants is gender balanced, and two of the librarians identify as immigrants from different cultures and ethnicities. Given that librarianship is typically a female-dominated field and identifies as overwhelmingly Caucasian (86 per cent) as reported by the ALA (2018), it may limit the ability to extrapolate my findings as the participants are not from the prevalent or dominant librarian demographics. However, as I have designed my study to allow for the participants' unique experiences to be at the core, my research will provide a platform for librarians who do not belong to the mainstream and introduce new voices into the ongoing discourse in the profession.

### **Research Site**

As noted, I conducted my research in a library in British Columbia. This library is located in an urban centre and as such experiences many of the same social issues as other urban libraries in Canada and other developed countries (Ford, 2017; Garcia & Barbour, 2018; Seminelli, 2016). There is more than one branch of this library, and at the time of my research, all participants were located at the same branch which was preferable for my study so that I could focus on developing a holistic view of just one workplace, rather than a number of different workplaces which could potentially inhibit my ability to identify trends or extrapolate information from my data.

It is one thing to tell you that I conducted my research at the library, but I would like to take a moment to introduce the branch in more detail. The scene is not unlike that depicted in the Estevez's 2019 film, *The Public*. Before the doors are open, the library is relatively quiet. There is a smell of books in the air, along with a faint scent of coffee that has accompanied the

librarians, library assistants and other staff who have arrived before opening. You can hear the hum of electronics and printers that have been turned on and the wheels of book carts being wheeled around, transporting books back to the stacks or picking up books that need to be sent to different branches. There are conversations between library employees about shifts, coverage, and security concerns that may arise during the day. There is sense of anticipation just before the doors open.

Meanwhile, prior to opening, a large group gathers outside in front of the doors. The size of the group varies depending on the day, growing in diversity and numbers during the week and on days when there are educational programs or meetings scheduled for the morning. There are typically between 15-50 people awaiting the opening; some sit on benches, reading books or looking at their phones. Other people stand at the entrance, eager for the doors to open. The group is diverse - there are many with large backpacks and garbage bags of belongings, retirees, parents with strollers and children, all from different ethnic populations.

Once the doors open, those who were at the front race inside, some heading directly to the computers while other patrons head to favourite carousels or to the washroom. Those who appeared to be sitting more casually are also keen to enter the building. Parents and children head to the children's zone, while the retirees head to the computers, stacks or favourite carousels. Other people head to the community meeting rooms for planned events or programs. There are stops at the entrance to return materials, some patrons head to the section that houses inter-library loans and requested items.

During the day, there is a steady stream of people coming and going to and from the public library and a constant hum of busy-ness throughout the day. Some know exactly where they are going when they come through the doors, while other patrons linger, a little less certain.

They are the ones who are more likely to approach the information desk which is located close to the entrance. The type and number of requests vary as much as the library's users over the course of the day, as I outline in Chapter Four. There is a security guard stationed by the entrance, and he or she will spend time sitting at the entrance, but they will mostly be on the move, walking through all the public areas of the library, including the washrooms. The two areas that house the public computer terminals, printer/copier, and other associated tools are very popular and as soon as one patron gets up to leave, another person takes their place.

As patrons come and go, so too do the library employees. They walk from one zone to another, sometimes on their way to meetings or to locate a reference. They rotate through shifts on the information and circulation desks. Library assistants wheel carts, delivering books and resources where they need to be. When they are not on the floor or at one of the service desks, you can find employees in different private areas – working at computers in their assigned spaces or desks, taking a break or meal in the breakroom, or meeting with patrons or colleagues in the many meeting rooms. On occasion, a radio can be heard calling an alert and one or two library employees race off to respond to a security incident. On one particular visit, two raced by the information desk where I was sitting during an observation session with another participant. They came back accompanying the security guard and two males who had gotten into a physical altercation in the washroom. They were escorting them out the entrance and stood out front, waiting for both individuals to calm down and go their separate ways. Only then did all three re-enter the building and head back to their tasks.

At closing time, the library is a little less busy, as patrons seem to sense it is closing time. However, the computer terminals are still busy, as are the children's and teen zones. Once the announcement is made that it is closing time, patrons slowly begin to pack up. Library employees

walk through the building, rousing some at carousels who have fallen asleep, ensuring washrooms and the special collections are empty. It takes much longer than the allocated 10 minutes for the building to empty, but it is eventually just staff remaining. The bustling sound is gone and the quiet din that I heard at the start of the day returns, although it feels a little more tired and less energetic than it did before. The smell has changed as the day has progressed, and the smell of books is now mixed with coffee, sweat, and other foods, some from employee breakroom and others from food and drink that patrons have consumed during their visit. Employees responsible for closing, along with the security guard, do a thorough tour of the building, looking in all washrooms and stalls, collections and in between the shelves to ensure the library is really, truly empty. Only then are carts still, computers and lights turned off, and the remaining staff leave, and the building is empty.

### **Data Collection in the Workplace**

Before I get into the methods through which I collected data, I want to touch upon the role of the researcher in this process. As Smith points out, researchers are at the centre of their research, for it is the researchers (and their inherent biases) whose fieldwork is considered in the textual analysis and it is the researcher who collects, interprets, analyzes the data and reports out on the findings and may even make recommendations. With respect to my study, I have had a direct impact on the participants and the workplace, and it is important to acknowledge that impact. From the development of my research question to seeking and obtaining approval from the organization and participants, to my field observation sessions and interviews which raised the notion of learning at work, I have had a significant impact on my research. One of the biggest concerns that arose for me in reviewing institutional ethnographic studies was the lack of recognition of the researcher and the researcher's inherent biases in the research.

However, as discussed earlier, it is the recognition of my biases (conscious and unconscious) that led me to select institutional ethnography at the outset, with its ability to explore my research question using a variety of qualitative methods, each with a different lens on the workplace. Not only does institutional ethnography allow me to gain a holistic perspective on the workplace, but it also puts the participants at the centre. Through selection and application of different methods to collect data, my use of open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, and multiple observation sessions with minimal dialogue, I have designed my research with the participants and their experiences and voices at the fore. These multiple methods and strategies have also been chosen to mitigate or mute my personal biases and experiences which accompany me into the field.

### **Interviews**

As mentioned previously, the researcher begins with the experience of everyday life. The knower and his/her experiences represent the standpoint, or *point d'appui*, for study (Smith, 1987). In the institutional ethnographic studies I reviewed in preparation to conduct my research it became apparent that the researchers had assumed the standpoint of those they studied through engaging with the individuals in conversation. For instance, Timothy Diamond (2006) assumed the standpoint of nursing assistants in a residential care facility, McGibbon, Peter and Gallop (2010), and Adams, Carryer and Wilkinson (2015) explored different nursing experiences, and Nichols and Braimoh (2018) explored social issues such as homelessness and community safety from the perspective of youth-at-risk.

Experiences are sought through interviews predominantly (McCoy, 2006; Smith, 2005; Campbell & Gregor, 2002), which are often semi-structured (Nichols & Griffith, 2009; Malinsky, DuBois & Jacquest, 2010), and can occur one-on-one (Smith & Dobson, 2011) or in groups

(McGibbon, Peter & Gallop, 2010; Diamond, 2006). These may be formal, scheduled interviews or more informal and spontaneous depending on the situation, or a combination of the two, according to Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy (2006). What is consistent is that the interviews are open-ended and focus on social organization, work, or “sequences of interconnected activities” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 23). McCoy (2006) advises institutional ethnographers to pose explicit questions and try to avoid applying their own definitions and interpretations onto the subject matter to ensure that the research participant’s experience speaks for itself. The researcher is not seeking alignment or validation of accounts among the participants but is looking “for the intersections and complementarities of their different accounts in the relations that coordinate their work. Indeed, in institutional settings, difference in perspective and experience are central to discovering how people are active in producing institutional forms of coordinating” (Smith, 2005, p. 63).

The approach assumed by the researcher is contingent on the type of experiences being sought and the time it takes to arrive at the standpoint or point of entry into the experience. According to DeVault and McCoy (2006), this varies depending on the subject matter and in some instances, researchers will spend considerable time at this stage particularly if it is not an area with which they are familiar or have prior knowledge. If a researcher, such as Rankin (2004), J.L. Deveau (2008), or Jessica Gerrard and Lesley Farrell (2013) has prior knowledge of the area or direct experience in the field (e.g., through education and employment), then they may proceed to the second stage of data collection. However, in the studies reviewed for my research, I found that this was the exception and not the norm.

Experience is critical for both informal learning and institutional ethnography. To identify the standpoint, it is necessary to gain access to the experiences of employees at the workplace. As

such, interviews were at the heart of my research. They allowed me to inquire about employee workplace and workspaces to get a sense of the physical and non-physical structures and environments in which they work. An excellent example of the type of information researchers can elicit through interviews and how to use that information to research informal learning at work is that of Dorothy E. Smith and Stephan Dobson (2011). The researchers used interviews to access the standpoint in their work on informal learning and knowledge transfer in the steel industry in Hamilton, Ontario. Unable to conduct participant observation due to the occupational and health hazards of the work setting (a steel manufacturing plant), Smith and Dobson relied solely on interviews to explore the experiences of the plant workers.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant – one at the outset and another at the conclusion of the study. I should note that all interviews took place during worktime and as such, could not be longer than 90 minutes in duration as this would have an impact on staffing levels. Having said that, my participants proved to be very generous with their time and often scheduled our meeting times over breaks and lunches to provide extra time for our interviews. Our time in conversation lasted anywhere from 45 to 120 minutes per session. These sessions took place in offices, meeting or conference rooms, and coffee shops. I allowed the participants to select the location to ensure they felt comfortable and safe to share work-related information without fear of reprisal.

My preliminary interviews, including those with library leadership, began with a review of my study and confirmation of their consent to participate. I then began our semi-structured interviews with gathering some demographic information and questions about their roles and responsibilities. We then discussed their perspectives on the branch, spaces (virtual, physical) and their thoughts on learning at work. As different topics came up, I allowed for some time and

flexibility in my design to pursue these threads further. My final interviews allowed me to probe changes in perspective on a variety of topics and follow up on observations I had made during my fieldwork.

Using interviews, I elicited data regarding work, including information about work experiences, responsibilities and tasks, and key texts that generate or are generated by the employees. The interviews allowed me to inquire about employee relationships at work, their views of learning, including their understanding of workplace and informal learning, as well as individual learning preferences and processes. Through use of open-ended and semi-structured questions, I was able to follow up on terms, phrases, and comments that required further explanation or elaboration, and to probe different topics or issues that arose during our conversations.

### **Key Texts and Textual Analysis**

Once the standpoint has been established, the next phase of research involves a shift in “research site” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.21), from experience to textual analysis of key documents or texts. This is a critical component of institutional ethnography, according to Smith, and she dedicated a great deal of time and energy to outlining the role of texts in ruling relations and institutional processes. All of the institutional ethnography studies I reviewed have dedicated significant time to texts and textual analysis in their written account, and I also employed this methodology in my research.

The reason for this attention to texts is that texts bely the ideology of the ruling class. Smith is not referring to political beliefs in this instance, but rather she has adopted the notion of ideology from Marx and Engels. Ideology, then, is defined as “those ideas and images through which the class that rules the society by virtue of its domination of the means of production,

orders, organizes, and sanctions the social relations that sustain its domination” (Smith, 1987, p. 55). Texts play a pivotal role in social organization as “texts perform at that key juncture between the local settings of people's everyday worlds and the ruling relations. They come before us as something to read, watch, or listen to” (Smith, 2005, p. 101).

A text in institutional ethnography does not necessarily refer to the written word exclusively. According to DeVault and McCoy (2006), “a text can be any kind of document, on paper, on computer screens, or in computer files; it can also be a drawing, a photograph, a printed instrument reading, a video or a sound recording” (p. 34). This diversity in texts is evident throughout the studies reviewed for this research. For instance, researchers exploring health care settings have identified as texts, various forms, patient charts, files, guidelines and/or hospital policies and union information to name but a few (Rowland, Manogaran & Bourgeault, 2019; Ng, Bisallon & Webster, 2018; Malinsky, DuBois & Jacquest, 2010). Researchers engaged in education-related studies identified legislation, regulations, forms, policies, and websites as key texts in the course of their research (Ng et al., 2013; Restoule, et al., 2013; Nichols & Griffith, 2009).

How are texts identified in institutional ethnography? As demonstrated through each of the studies reviewed for my study, there are some common sources where texts are located. The first source is through the interviews. Rowland et al (2019) asked nurses about the key documents that directed their work and acted as a source of stress. Similarly, Smith and Dobson (2011) made inquiries about texts in their interviews with steel workers if references came up, or if the experiences relayed appeared to be organized externally. For those researchers who have prior knowledge and/or experience in their research field, they would draw upon that to identify key texts for study and analysis.

Institutional ethnography inquiries themselves also serve as a source of texts. As noted by Rankin (2017a, 2017b), DeVault and McCoy (2006) and Smith (2005), the transcriptions resulting from interviews and participant observations provide insight into ruling relations and social organization. Further, these texts may also reveal what Smith calls “intertextual hierarchy,” or texts that organize, generate, or control other texts (Smith, 2005, 2006). Examples such as these include regulations, policies and guidelines, and briefing documents. Reflections from the researcher in a participant observation also serve as key texts in institutional ethnography, as the researcher is a direct participant, too, with a position in the study (Diamond, 2006; Smith, 2005). As Diamond (2006) stated, “there is no room in this method for an invisible author” (p. 59). The reflections of the researcher will not only serve to ground the researcher in the study, but it may also lead to revelations regarding social organization and relations that may not emerge in any other way.

A new and emerging source of texts can be identified using social media. Meuleman and Boushel (2014) undertook a study of social movements, focusing specifically on political protests in Egypt and Iran as well as the Occupy Wall Street movement. In their research, they considered tweets and posts to be texts and they included hashtags, status updates and 'likes' in their textual analysis of ruling relations. Sorce (2019) has explored the potential of employing institutional ethnography in communication and media studies as a way to understand our new digital world and the overwhelming amount of content and information available online.

As noted, textual analysis is critical to any study of institutional ethnography and it was equally critical to my research. Through the course of my interviews and observations, I collected several texts that were subject to analysis. The largest body of texts were internal or work-related. This category included texts such as the collective agreement, policies, and guidelines, such as

those identified in Chapter Two, that shape the work that is performed; they outline responsibilities and tasks, dictate and generate action, and reveal the ruling relations and social organization at work. There is another body of texts, that being external, which include library publications and reports, educational philosophies and programs, specialized sources of knowledge (e.g., websites, journals, forums), and media coverage related to the field. These texts provided insight into the social organization and ruling relations of the workplace, both of which figure prominently in shaping employees' experiences and the non-physical structures of work.

### **Participant Observation**

Institutional ethnography as originally envisaged by Smith includes participant observation as a means of data collection (Smith, 2005). According to Diamond (2006),

Participant observation studies are to be encouraged in institutional ethnography because they have the potential to refine our appreciations of at least the following dimension of the craft: stories, authors, bodies, place, time, motion, how ruling relations work, and particular ways for seeing the social organization in the local. (p. 58)

This sentiment is echoed throughout the studies I reviewed in preparation to conduct my research. For example, Murray (2011) observed activists in their interactions with the municipal government in her project on public participation. In another study, Rowland et al (2018) became immersed in the work experiences of nurses working in the maternity and neonatal intensive care units in a hospital to understand their work and challenges. Stella Ng (2013) has conducted multiple institutional ethnographic studies, working with colleagues to explore health care work in special education in Ontario, and more recently explored the education and practice of health professionals (2016).

As I was hoping to create a holistic view of the workplace, including participant observation was a necessity. By employing this methodology to collect data, I was provided with first-hand access to the work of the participants which supplied a different perspective on the experiences and information collected in interviews. As a novice researcher who has not undertaken participant observation previously, I wanted to ensure that I was as prepared as possible to minimize my impact on the interactions and work of my participants during observation sessions, and to understand how to record my observations. The latter is particularly important not only to ensure that I was allowing the participants' experiences to come through, but also because fieldnotes become part of the textual analysis in institutional ethnography.

To prepare, I reviewed as many institutional ethnographic studies as I could find and re-read the foundational texts from Dorothy Smith to ensure that I was honouring the intentions of this method of inquiry. I also reviewed the works of Sarah Pink (2015), John van Maanen (1988) and Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw (1995) to inform my understanding of what and how to record my observations. These works were instrumental in not only providing me with an understanding of the roots of ethnography, but also about good practices regarding how to conduct myself during observation sessions and how to take notes. I did my best to adopt the style of dress to the workplace so that I would blend in with my participants and not attract attention to myself. Additionally, I tried to refrain from asking questions during our sessions so that participants could perform their duties without interruption thus giving me an accurate sense of how they work, as recommended by van Maanen (1988, pp.88-90). When I asked participants to describe their job functions and duties during our interviews, I found that I did not have many questions about tasks during my observations. As my participants are frequently training new volunteers and staff, they were accustomed and comfortable with someone shadowing them

during a shift and did not appear tempted to engage me in conversation but rather focused on their work. Our sessions typically lasted upwards of 90 minutes in duration, or the length of a shift. I met participants 15 minutes prior to the start of the shift and had them briefly describe to me what they would be doing during our session. This limited my need to ask clarifying questions during our observation session. I encouraged them to go about their work as best as possible, allowing me to shadow, but not feel the need to narrate every single movement. When asked by some patrons who I was, I informed them that I was a researcher conducting a study in the workplace. I also conducted observation from within the library but not shadowing any one participant specifically to understand the flow of patrons and staff through the space and understand the rhythms and hum of the organization.

During my observation sessions, I tended to “jot” brief notes for routine events or actions and wrote detailed notes for occurrences that were unusual or seemed to elicit a reaction from the participant I was observing. Upon conclusion of the session, I retired to my home office immediately to write my detailed fieldnotes. In writing my fieldnotes, I followed the principles outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995):

1. Ethnographers should take note of their initial impressions. These impressions may include those available to the senses – the tastes, smells, and sounds of the physical environment, and the look and feel of the locale and the people in it.
2. Field researchers can focus on their personal sense of *what is significant or unexpected* in order to document key events or incidents in a particular social world or setting.
3. In order to document key events and incidents, field researchers should move beyond their personal reactions to attend explicitly to *what those in the setting experience and react to as “significant” or “important.”*

4. Ethnographers can begin to capture new settings by focusing and writing notes as systematically as possible, focusing on *how routine actions in the setting are organized and take place*. (pp. 24-28, italics in original)

Through participant observation I was able to perceive things about the employees and their places of work, such as division of labour and tasks, types of relationships between participants, and the flow of the space (e.g., design, construction, physical obstacles or barriers, and organization). This type of data is not necessarily accessible through just one method, such as interview or texts, and yet space and place are a fundamental aspect of experience and contribute to what is learned and how (Ellsworth, 2005; Orr, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

I made efforts to transcribe my interviews with participants as soon as I could in order to ensure that the context and content of the interview was fresh. In doing these quickly, I was also able to identify and collect key documents and texts immediately for my textual analysis. While there is less urgency to do this in a digital age where most documents can be retrieved electronically, I wanted to ensure that I had the “right” versions or editions of the documents discussed or identified.

I reviewed my interview transcripts and fieldnotes at the mid-way point of my research to determine whether I had any perceived gaps or ideas for follow-up in my final interviews. Once I had completed all my interviews and fieldnotes, I reviewed the data. Specifically, I was reviewing the data to identify the standpoint of each participant (for each one had a unique standpoint based on their roles and experiences), and the ruling relations. The one thing that I did not identify was the problematic – at least not in the traditional sense – as I had unknowingly done this before commencing my study. According to Grahame, the problematic is a methodological device that

“direct(s) attention to a domain of possible questions, questions that have not yet been formulated, but which are implicit in the way the everyday world is organized” (Grahame as cited in Rankin, 2017a, p. 3). In developing my research question focused on what and how employees learn in the workplace, I unwittingly limited my ability to identify a problematic. This is, as Rankin observes, a common misstep made by novice researchers (2017a, 2017b). In my study, my problematic focuses on learning at or in the workplace – and therefore does not identify potential injustices or over-arching struggles resulting from ruling relations (which is commonplace across many institutional ethnographic studies).

As I considered my data, I followed the guidance of DeVault and McCoy (2006), who recommended indexing data. Indexing differs to coding which seeks to identify themes and categories, and was described by Rankin (2017b) as a way to commence analysis as it provided “a way to engage with the data, to begin to sleuth out the disjunctures, and to describe what differently located people know and do” (p. 6). I reviewed the interviews and observation notes from one participant at a time to identify: a) what work functions they performed; b) how they approached the work and the steps they took to complete different tasks; and c) the tools (physical and virtual) and key documents referred to in doing the work. As noted by Smith and Rankin, by approaching the work in this way, the researcher can keep the participant(s) at the centre and serves to minimize researcher bias.

Once I had completed my indexes, I reviewed the information to identify what Rankin (2017b) referred to as “analytical threads” (p. 7). These are similar to the resulting categories or theming of data that occurs in coding qualitative research (Berg & Lune, 2012). In doing so, I identified different ruling relations or non-physical structures that shaped the work and learning of the participants. These included their approaches to work as established through formal

education in an accredited program, the structures imposed by the collective agreement (all participants were members of the bargaining unit), and organizational change which was occurring during the time of my research and emerged as a key thread throughout my interviews, observations and texts. These relations, as will be outlined further in the next chapter, proved to be critical in shaping the problematic of how / what participants learn at work.

### **Ethical Considerations for Conducting Research in a Workplace**

Undertaking research in a workplace is not without its challenges, all of which provide ethical considerations. There are two main areas of concern I would like to mention: the critique or potential short comings posed by institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, and the unique requirements posed by organizational approval to conduct research.

#### **Critique of Institutional Ethnography**

Despite its increase in popularity and application in the past 10 years, institutional ethnography is still not widely accepted and supported, facing scrutiny due to its exploratory nature and flexible approach to data collection. Sociologist Michael Hammersley criticized institutional ethnography and its proponents, claiming they have gone too far in moving away from traditional ethnography in pursuit of a “separatist orientation” (Hammersley as cited by Walby, 2008, p. 1026) and its focus on the institution. This is echoed in Kevin Walby's critical examinations of institutional ethnography (2013, 2008). Walby (2008) was concerned about the treatment of subjects, lack of attention given to the power dynamic between researcher and participants, and the flexible approach and variety of methods used in institutional ethnography inquiries. This is echoed in recent articles by Marie Campbell (2016) and Janet Rankin (2017a, 2017b), two of the leading figures of institutional ethnography who worked closely with its founder, Dorothy E. Smith. Both Campbell and Rankin have published papers directed at

researchers interested in applying institutional ethnography in their work as they have observed several studies that stray from the methodology's "core epistemology and ontology" (Rankin 2017b, p. 1).

This is consistent with my own observations on the flexibility and diversity of institutional ethnographic studies while deciding what methodologies to employ for my research. In reviewing studies for my research, I found myself developing a table to capture the basic tenets of institutional ethnography because the studies were so diverse. An additional challenge presented itself in the form of the written account of the study, as it was difficult to discern how some studies were considered institutional ethnography when in fact, upon first read, they more closely resembled a document analysis (Gerrard & Farrell, 2013) or collaboration to identify best practices (Malinsky, et al., 2010).

Similarly, Karin Widerberg (2006) and Jonathan Tummons (2018) expressed similar concerns about institutional ethnography in their works. Widerberg reflected on her sociological studies on tiredness, which included interviews and participant observation, from the perspective of an institutional ethnographer. She found that while her research team could have benefited from employing an institutional ethnographic approach, Widerberg believed that they would have missed out on the "role of the body, emotions and identity" (Widerberg, 2006, p. 78). Therefore, Widerberg mused that institutional ethnography might not produce a holistic image of social organization by minimizing the role of the subject and focusing on the institution in data collection and analysis. Tummons (2018) arrived at similar findings in his work, arguing that there are ways to augment institutional ethnographic studies with other, more accessible and compatible theories and methods that would yield equally rich result. While he recognized the value of employing the method of inquiry, he also believes that there is not enough self-reflection

within institutional ethnography as an approach. Tummons (2018) believed that “institutional ethnography needs to remember not to retreat within itself, but to be willing to work alongside other research frameworks and be willing to problematize its own practice, to attend to its own standpoint” (p. 160).

I will attempt to address these concerns individually. With respect to the treatment and location of participants, I maintain that institutional ethnography was the most appropriate method for the study. While I do not mean to diminish the role of body, emotions or identities of the individuals or employees who participate, my study's primary objective was to explicate the structures of work and explore their influence and impact on experience and learning. I believe it is possible to adopt this approach and be respectful of your participants, as is evident in the studies conducted by McGibbon, Peter and Gallop (2010), Nichols and Griffith (2009), and Wagner (2007), who 'check back' to ensure that their communications are correct and to share the resulting research.

After reviewing other studies of institutional ethnography, my commitment to this method of inquiry for my research remained as I was convinced it would best capture the social organization and relations of learning at work. Smith (2005) maintained that institutional ethnography is not a methodology, but a method of inquiry that is both flexible and responsive. While I concur with Walby's assessment of the apparent lack of rigour in some studies, I believe it is possible to counter concerns regarding data collection and analysis in two ways and I have attempted to adopt these techniques in my research. First, I do not think it possible to avoid issues of power and influence when one is conducting research, but it is possible to minimize and recognize one's footprint along the way. As such, I tried to locate myself in the research, acknowledge biases and experiences, and reflect on my role in and impact on the research in a

very conscious and continuous way. Also, I tried to make conscious and informed decisions regarding the methods I selected and to document the rationale for the selection. The strongest institutional ethnography studies reviewed for my research were those that described the research and methods used and provided an explanation for their inclusion, such as the study of housing, community safety and youth (Nichols & Braimoh, 2018), and the exploration of integrated care in special education undertaken by Ng et al. (2013). I have attempted to emulate their detail and descriptions in this and subsequent chapters to preserve the integrity of this method of inquiry.

Second and related to the first point, having reviewed several institutional ethnographic studies, I find that the final written account is just as unique as the research. There are some exceptionally detailed and robust accounts that describe rigorous and well-founded research studies such as those by Restoule and his colleagues (2013), Nichols and Griffith (2009), and McGibbon, Peter and Gallop (2010). Additionally, Smith (2006, 2005), DeVault and McCoy (2006), Campbell (2016), and Rankin (2017a, 2017b) addressed the reporting of results in their works, providing guidelines for those who are preparing results for publication. I believe that these have laid a solid foundation upon which future studies can be built, which is one of the premises of institutional ethnography. According to DeVault and McCoy (2006), “institutional ethnographies can “fit together” - much like the squares of a quilt (Smith, 1987) – because they share the same organizing ontology and the same focus on generalizing processes of ruling” (p. 18). As such, I have worked to provide a very clear and detailed account of the indexing of work and tried to allow the voices of my participants to communicate the data as much as possible.

### **Requirement for Organizational Approval**

In finding a workplace in which to conduct my research, I came across some unanticipated difficulties in obtaining approvals. My initial request to conduct research in one

organization was rejected and I needed to make some concessions to gain approval from the workplace I did study. There are two main areas of concern that arose during the approval process, and they are related: the inability to predict the outcome of research, and the preservation of the organization's reputation upon completion of the study.

In employing institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, it is difficult to know in advance what you will uncover as a researcher as you rely on the data you collect from your participants to guide you towards the standpoint, identification of the ruling relations and key documents that structure their work (Taber, 2010). This inability to predict the outcome was cited as the reason for denying my first request to conduct research, and it is because of the potential negative impact on reputation that it is significant. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reputation management has become its own field with the explosion of social media and the internet, and there are individuals who make careers out of providing advice on the careful definition and maintenance of reputations. This challenge of needing to preserve reputation results in accommodations or concessions to obtain organizational approval and is not unique to my research and has been documented by Kathleen Benjamin and Janet Rankin (2014), Laura Bisailon and Janet Rankin (2013).

In order to gain approval from the workplace I studied, I spoke with the organizational leadership about the study at great length, focusing on my interest in exploring how / what employees learned and the impact of space on that learning. My approval was contingent on ensuring that the organization did not get portrayed in a negative light, or if my findings were negative that I would communicate that to the organization before making them public. While this did not have an impact on obtaining ethics approval, it did have an impact on my application of institutional ethnography and its tenets. Institutional ethnography and its focus on the

standpoint and ruling relations has its roots in activism, identifying the cause of oppression and often criticizing management and sources of power for unfair practices or poor decisions. While Campbell (2016) and Rankin (2017a, 2017b) both raise concerns about researchers not applying institutional ethnography as originally designed by Smith, it is not difficult to see why, if other researchers have encountered similar ethical dilemmas in seeking organizational approvals. As I was conducting my analysis and preparing my findings, I found that my concession to ensure that the organization's reputation was unharmed resulted in an internal struggle as I sought to identify the standpoint and ruling relations in the workplace.

Interestingly, as I chose to focus my study on learning and the construction of knowledge in the workplace, I found that this placed unanticipated limitations on myself and my findings as it served to narrow my focus which negated the organization's concern. As such, I believe it is fair to say that I have applied the basic tenets of institutional ethnography but have not employed the full method of inquiry as originally designed by Smith. This is consistent with personal communication I had with Smith, Campbell and Rankin individually in 2016 as I worked to understand the data I was collecting and how to approach the analysis and discussion of my findings. Campbell and Rankin both expressed some reservations in their communication with me about the purity of institutional ethnographic studies and the ability to borrow from it yet not apply it fully as originally intended. As a novice institutional ethnographer, I was appreciative of their guidance. Prior to our communications, I found myself struggling to reconcile the social justice nature of institutional ethnographic studies where a previously unknown problematic or focal point emerges from the research. The reason for this struggle was because I had decided upon my focal point, learning in the workplace, prior to commencing my research. My personal

communications with Smith, Campbell and Rankin were helpful in understanding how I could employ and apply the institutional ethnographic framework in my study.

### **Conclusion**

Drawing upon the core works of Dorothy E. Smith and numerous studies from the past 10 years, I have identified the roots or basic tenets of this method of inquiry and identified the tools used in data collection: interviews, textual analysis, and participant observation. This method of inquiry allowed me to undertake an exploratory study into the physical and non-physical factors, including relationships and texts, that shape and influence how employees turn their experiences into learning. Through an institutional ethnography inquiry, I believe that I have been able to shine a new light on how we learn in places broadly speaking and at work, in particular, and in doing so, make a contribution to both the employees and the field of workplace learning.

In this chapter I outlined the tenets of institutional ethnography, along with the reasons why institutional ethnography lent itself to my study. I have identified myself and my biases in the research and spoken to some of the ethical considerations that arose during my study. I introduced the participants and provided a description of the research site to provide context for and situate my research and the findings that I present in Chapters Four and Five. I discussed the challenges that I encountered in obtaining approval from a research site and actions I took to overcome those obstacles. Finally, I presented some of the criticisms of institutional ethnography, acknowledging some of the perceived shortcomings of Smith's method of inquiry as it is not universally accepted by all researchers, and discussed my strategies of overcoming these issues.

## **Chapter 4 – Mapping the Work**

In Chapter One, I discussed the demographics and challenges facing librarians working in modern urban libraries today. In this chapter I describe and discuss the work of the study participants. I describe the results of the indexing of work that I performed. In reviewing my observation notes and interview transcriptions, I noted the division of participant activities into two types: the information desk shift work, which was common to all participants, and specialized work, that which was unique to each participant. While most institutional ethnographic studies do not discuss the work indexing in detail, I believe it is important to situate the participants in their setting and provide context for the findings I will discuss in Chapter Five.

### **Information Desk Shift Work**

Over the course of a day, each participant is scheduled for at least one shift at an information desk in the library. In some cases, though rarely, depending on staffing levels and scheduling, participants may actually have two information desk shifts over the course of one day. Each desk shift is two hours in duration and may take place at one of the three information desks that exist in the branch where I conducted my research. Each information desk serves a specific area or zone, although the library staff may need to enter into zones other than their own to complete work responsibilities or assist a patron with a request.

During my observations, I found that there were three distinct phases of work that occur over the course of an information desk shift: the start of shift, the information desk activities, and the close of shift. These may seem obvious and indeed the participants seemed to proceed through their activities unconsciously, but each phase consisted of unique actions that emerged through my observations.

### **Information Desk – Start of Shift**

At the start of shift, all participants commenced by turning on and logging into the computer, reviewing notes from or speaking to the employee who had the previous shift, and opening email, the library intranet, and the client management system (CMS). Colin commenced his shift by checking unique spaces that occupied the ‘catchment’ area for the information desk. These unique spaces are meeting and archival research rooms that can be accessed during library hours by patrons. Access to the meeting rooms can be scheduled and arranged online, but the archival research room can only be accessed through request at the information desk.

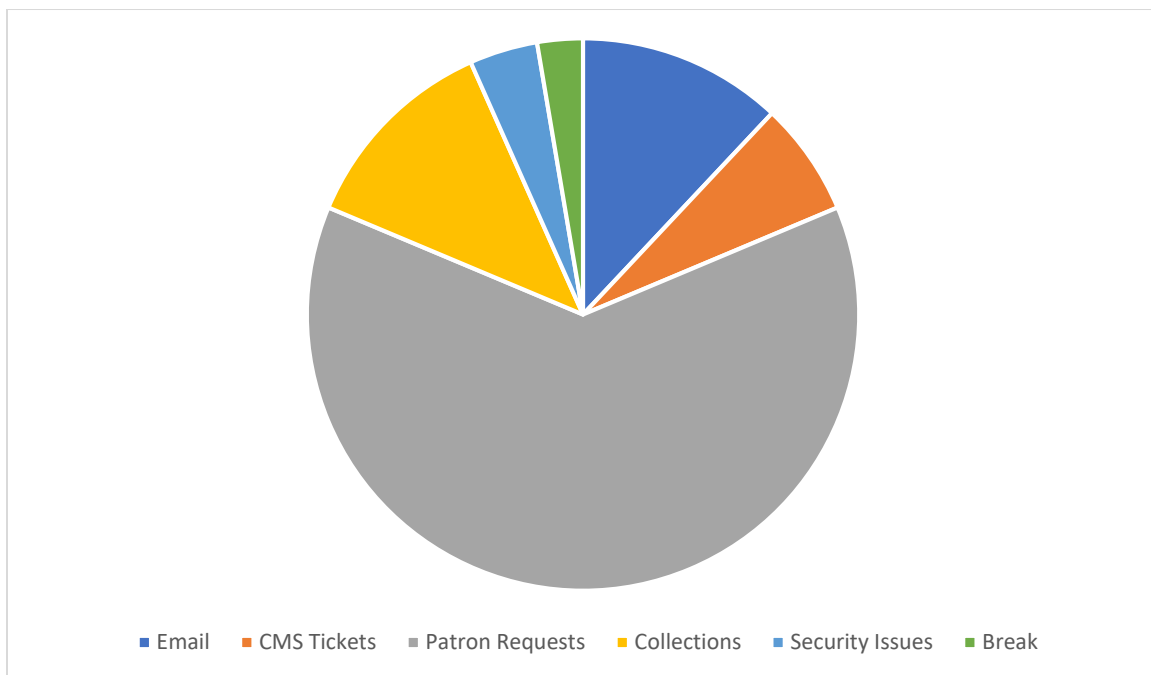
The information desks are key physical access points in the library where patrons may engage with librarians or other library employees for assistance. They are located in one of three areas within the library; two of which are very open and exposed, with no barriers between library staff and patrons, and one of which was an older service desk with a small wall serving to divide the front where the patron approaches the desk from the front and where the library employee is located behind the wall. This is consistent with good library use and design as described by Schlipf and Moorman (2018).

While the employees were located at these physical service desks in the library to meet and engage with patrons over the course of their shift, the initial actions taken by all participants were to open their virtual spaces and focus on their computer when not assisting patrons. This speaks to the reality of most office or knowledge workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Christansen, 2017; Reyna, Hanham & Meier, 2018). One participant told me that the evolution of the internet and technology has changed the role of the librarian in the way they conduct research for patrons, in the way that their work is assigned and organized, and in their communication with patrons and other library staff. According to Colin, online or virtual work is a significant part of his day,

Whenever I'm on the reference desk, the first thing I open is the catalogue because it takes a long time to load. In another window on that browser, I open my bookmarks, and another tab I have the CMS. Then I open another browser for internet searches, and another for the ADV site [incident reports for library]. [...]. Then email opens up. And that's how we begin. (Colin, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

### Information Desk – Shift Tasks

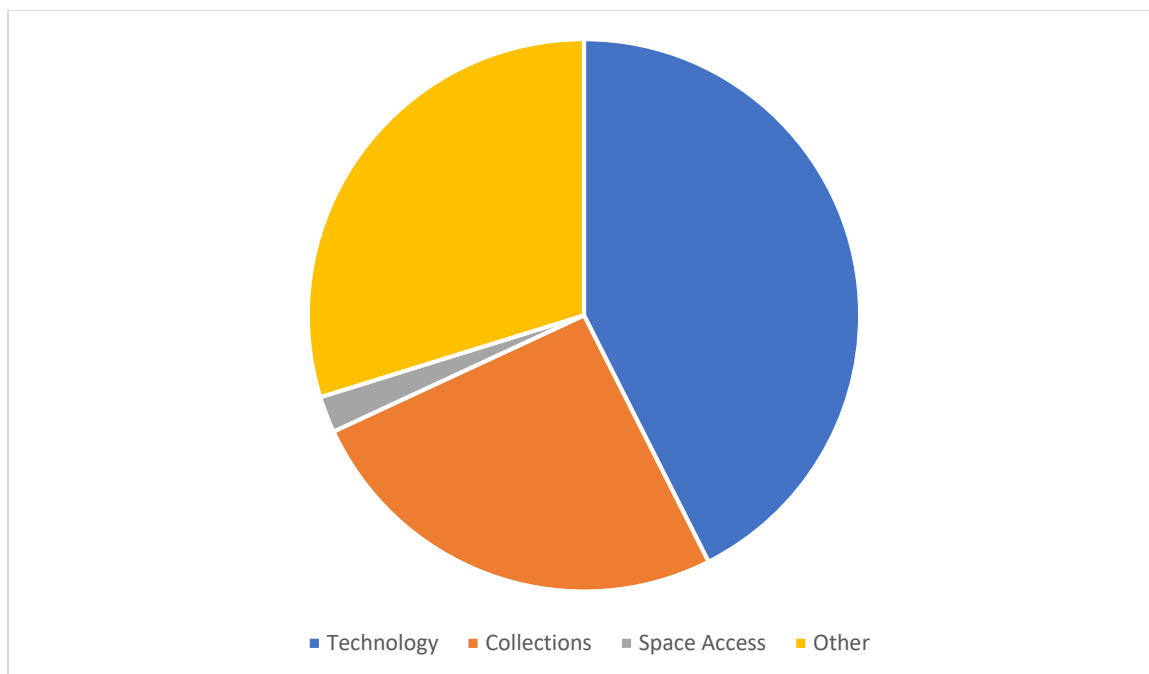
Once the start of shift activities is complete, participants commence the second phase which is the actual work of the information desk. Figure 6, below, outlines the types of activities that participations engaged in during this phase as noted during my observation sessions.



**Figure 6: Information Desk Work Breakdown**

During their shift, participants spent a portion of time responding to internal emails and tickets through their CMS and following up on collections work. These are the same activities they performed during their specialized task time, which I will touch on below. However, the

majority of time at the information desk was spent engaging with and responding to patron requests. While this may not be surprising given the purpose of the information desk within the library, the tasks participants responded to may not be what one would expect. The breakdown of the patron requests is outlined below in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Types of Patron Requests**

Figure 7 illustrates the changing nature of work in an urban library as discussed in Chapter Two and is consistent with the range of tasks identified by librarians and library designers (Holley, 2013; Eigenbtodt, 2013; Schlipf & Moorman, 2018). The greatest number of requests received by patrons is related to technology. In this branch, all three of the information desks are located by banks of computer terminals and the library employees frequently receive requests for assistance to access and use programs and software, instructions on how and where to print, and where to find or how to search for information. This routine was described by Abigail in her account of her shift.

[When I come in], I'll be at the desk for about one and a half hours, one hour and forty-five minutes. I will sign onto my computer, read emails, go over meeting minutes and write minutes, program plans. Then I will take a break. When I come back, I will be at the desk. [...]. We have computers, so sometimes we need to give a bit of assistance, logging into the computers, show them games and doing some troubleshooting there. We have people using the checkout system who have troubles with passwords or something's happened with their card. During all this time we're also reading emails at the desk, answering emails and tickets because you know, you're there. (Abigail, personal communication, January 22, 2016)

The majority of Abigail's information desk shift is spent addressing technical questions and queries. This experience is similar to that of public libraries in Ontario where a study by Nordicity found that of those who used technology at the library, "46 per cent would not have been able to access the internet if it were not for access at the library, and of the 56 per cent of patrons in Ontario who access technology, 68 per cent were over the age of 55, and 63 per cent identified as low income" (Nordicity, 2018, p. 11). The statistics collected in Ontario as well as those reported in Figures 6 and 7 do not include technology classes or individual sessions where patrons can schedule time with a librarian to learn about technology. However, this work leads to increasing need for librarians to not only understand government websites and services, but also the

Ability to plan for and teach digital literacy in a variety of settings, including formal training classes, one-on-one training by appointment, point-of-use assistance and online training materials, and for a wide range of purposes, such as job seeking, computer and internet skills development, and economic development" (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 203).

The second greatest number of requests are what I referred to as “other” insofar as they did not relate specifically to collections or traditional library duties. These requests ranged from checking in for individual sessions with librarians, to inquiries about public phones and needs for pens, paper, other stationery and desk tools and tissues. These requests also point to the changing role of the library in an urban centre in Canada, with a diverse patron population with an equally diverse type and number of requests. Finally, there are inquiries related to collections, the next category, and these requests had librarians researching items, assisting with library cards, placing holds, and going into the stacks to help patrons locate items. The shift in patron requests was noted by Paul in our interview,

Do we get reference questions anymore? Not really. So it’s changed even within the eight or nine years that I’ve been here in terms of the types of questions that we get on a desk. You’re not getting the in-depth research questions generally. You know, every once in a while but mostly its directional questions, catalogue look-ups, so part of the role of the librarian is something really that is no longer Master’s level, at least at the desk. (Paul, personal communication January 18, 2016)

This was echoed by Colin, who observed, “we used to do the complex [reference requests], things that were really, really interesting. Now, the nature of the reference work we do has changed” (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

The change is also consistent with other study findings presented in the literature review in Chapter One. Observations made by Hicks (2016), Seminelli (2016), Fraser-Arnott (2019), and others engaged in the ongoing dialogue about the role of the librarian in an increasingly digital age, explored possible new models and roles to reflect the changing times.

### **Information Desk – Shift Close Out**

All participants concluded their shift at the information desk by completing the same activities: closing email and programs, exiting the internet and intranet sites, and closing the CMS. There was a bit of variation during close out as some participants made notes on questions that had come up during their shift which they wanted to follow up on back at their desks, and two participants walked through their areas, assessing the state of the environment, checking the number of patrons in the zone(s), and ensuring that specialized collections were secured. I reviewed my notes to determine if the timing of my shifts might have related to that variation (e.g., I observed some at closing time or conversely during the week when there is a full staffing complement), however I was not able to make any linkages between the timing of my observations with the notes or checking certain areas; therefore I must conclude that this is the result of individual practice.

### **Specialized Work**

When the participants were not situated at the information desk, they could be found engaging in what I refer to as specialized work. Over the course of my interviews and observation sessions, it emerged that each participant had unique responsibilities within the library or again, what I refer to as specializations. These responsibilities varied, from the types of collections that each engaged with or oversaw, to the focus of their research and the tools they used to complete their tasks. I asked each participant to tell me about their roles and responsibilities and how they came to fruition. In all cases, the specialization evolved over time and emerged for three reasons: demonstrable need, a participant's education and/or background, and their personal interest. The library where I conducted my research is not unlike other urban public libraries in Canada insofar as they rely on statistics, such as circulation rates and visits, and demographics and population

projections to determine current and future needs; the first phase of Nordicity's (2018) research in the Ontario Public Library System was focused on understanding the number of libraries in the province and how their services were accessed both physically and virtually. The Canadian Urban Library Council records statistics such as borrowing rates and visits in an effort to provide not only comparative information but to provide a sense of the impact of public libraries across Canada (CULC, 2020).

It is this type of information that provide library staff and management with data required to allocate resources and determine areas of focus and growth. In the library where I conducted my research, this was also the case as attested to by both administrators in my interviews with them. According to one administrator, the various demographics and statistics are compiled into "a facilities plan that documents our main and neighbourhood branches, community libraries, all of which are different sizes, [provide] different types of programs and services, different staffing within each" (Sally, personal communication, January 15, 2016). Therefore, as data dictates that specific areas require certain services, such as increase social services or collections in different languages, the public library is able to shift priorities and refocus to ensure needs are being met.

Another factor in the assignment of specialized work is the personal education and/or background of library staff. All librarians at the branch where I conducted my research have been conferred a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree from an accredited Canadian university. In my research, all participants, including library management, had earned a unique undergraduate degree, often unrelated to libraries and library sciences. Some had worked in different careers prior to earning their MLIS, and this combination of education and prior experience had a direct impact on all the participants' specialized duties or responsibilities; all participants had taken on work that had been identified as an emerging need that was also

informed by their previous training, expertise and backgrounds. In some instances, Abigail and Freda were fluent in languages other than English and had taken on roles in reviewing collections in other languages. Colin had training and expertise in the social services sector and assumed some responsibilities related to that area. Paul was interested in technology and had begun work on the library's website and social media presence.

Some participants viewed their work in the library as a culmination or convergence of their education, experience, and areas of professional and personal interest. They may have brought specific knowledge and skills to the role initially, but they have continued to develop and hone their craft in these areas on their own, driven by personal interest, curiosity and passion. All participants noted that they completed other formal learning that was unique to themselves and their respective interests and roles; at least one participant completed leadership and communications training, another took technology courses through continuing education, while two others attended conferences related to writing / authors and providing services to vulnerable populations respectively. These opportunities came about in a variety of ways, sought out by individual participants to support their specialized duties or responsibilities identified in the previous section. When probed, participants reported that they requested permission from library administration to attend these training opportunities as they felt these opportunities would enhance their knowledge, increase skill or competency level, and allow them to understand the social issues they encounter in their branch.

In some instances, participants helped to identify a growing area or worked to shape the roles that came into being; this has been possible due to the participants' specialized knowledge and experiences and what they bring to the role. This is captured in Stevenson and Domsy's discussion of modern library needs and the emergence of new competencies that librarians

require to meet patrons' needs. In the course of their research, Stevenson and Domsy (2016) identified a tension between the traditional training librarians receive during their MLIS education, and the need to "move beyond the information desk" and adopt a more "client-service" approach to their work for which they are not adequately prepared (p. 371).

During the course of my research, I observed participants performing specialized roles. In an effort to preserve and protect participants' anonymity, I will focus on the observations I made and focus on activities more broadly, providing insight into the approaches to the work, commonalities and unique activities that emerged through observations and participant interviews.

### **Specialized Work - Start of "Shift"**

At the start of shift, or when commencing the specialized roles, participants all undertook the same activities – some of the same activities that they undertook when working an information desk shift. At the start of shift, all participants commenced by: turning on and logging into the computer, opening email, the library intranet, and the client management system (CMS). I observed that participants also opened more specialized programs and software that were required to complete their tasks. These may be websites, search engines, blogs, library webpages, or organizational tools. Based on participant interviews and observations, the specialized work is more often than not virtual or computer based in nature; even individual appointments with patrons and courses led by participants were technology-based and centred around helping patrons access / use devices or learn a new software, program or access and understand social media.

### **Specialized Work Duties**

The participants all performed similar activities, although I noted that the prioritization and duration of each activity varied depending on several factors, including individual approach and intent. All participants undertook the following activities: responding to email and CMS tickets, connecting with colleagues via email, instant messaging or telephone, walking around the floor or area, and responding to security issues. These issues ranged from speaking with homeless patrons regarding the storage of their belongings, responding to reports of sexual activity in a washroom, and calling police to assist with an altercation between two citizens in the library.

Unique activities performed during these shifts, or those that are not consistent across roles and positions, included program instructions, meetings with a special group of patrons, and specialized collections work. From the information gathered through interviews and during my observation, there is no regularity to this work but rather it is driven by scheduling (of programs or patron appointments) and time – both in terms of availability and in terms of the fiscal cycle. Library programs are planned out months in advance and therefore, the librarians know that they must either reserve the time for preparation and instruction or contact a vendor or partner to arrange for the program delivery. For individual appointments or tutorials, patrons can schedule time with library staff in advance, which again requires some preparation and instruction from participants. With respect to timing, some specialized work is conducted during the “in between” times, when participants had time to spare. At other times, the work may be driven by the fiscal or library business cycle; for instance, one participant reviewed the special language collection once a year, at the same time during the year, to coincide with ordering and fiscal year planning. However, there is no conclusion of specialized duties in the same sense that an information desk has an official start and end time. Participants focus on their specialized work when they are not

in meetings or working an information desk shift; their specialized duties conclude when it is the end of their shift.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth description of the type of work undertaken by the librarians who participated in my research. This was necessary not only to meet the requirements of the indexing that informs an institutional ethnographic study, but to allow the experiences of the participants to be seen and recognized as a source of knowledge. This is particularly important as the specific duties of these two job functions, serving on the information desk and performing specialized work, are not captured or documented in any formal manner. A review of the key texts, including the library board policies, collective agreement and job descriptions revealed that the core work of the librarians was not described or documented. Without having the opportunity to observe the participants, this work and their experience would not have been visible to the researcher. The lack of formality also explains the nuances and variations I noted during my participant observation sessions; study participants had mapped their own work and individual paths based on their observations and teachings from others, as well as their own experiences in their respective roles. As observed in Chapter One, the literature speaks to the unique role of the public library in society broadly, and the new role of the librarian specifically, but there is little evidence or research into the specialized roles or tasks that emerge. The reason for this, as I noted, is that each librarian has unique tasks to match their education, skill set, interests and societal needs, as dictated by their patrons, community and organization.

There was work underway in the organization to identify and map the specialized roles formally, which included the documentation of roles and responsibilities, but there was nothing in place during my research. I will discuss the work underway in greater detail as it relates to the

findings in Chapter Five. Librarians, including those who participated in this study, attended meetings with library leadership, administration and supervisors related to the bureaucratic and organizational work. These may include staff or team meetings, discussions of the business cycle (e.g., budget and resource allocation at the start of end of the fiscal year, orderings deadlines), and planning processes (e.g., business and strategic plans for presentation at library board meetings). As my research occurred at the start of the fiscal year, there were not many administrative meetings scheduled. According to Sally and the participants, team meetings were focused on gathering input and feedback on the new job description and specialized duties. There were no meetings held on this work while I was conducting my research, as much of the input had been gathered prior to the commencement of my study and feedback and updates were being communicated via email. However, I did discuss the process with the participants, as well as other meetings or sessions they attended over the course of my research, and I have included data and excerpts as they relate to the findings in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter 5 - Findings**

I began my dissertation with a quotation from Susan Orlean (2018) which not only captured my love of books and libraries, but which also spoke to the focus of my research: on how librarians experience their workspace, and how the public library as place informs, shapes and influences how and what librarians learn. The previous chapter spoke to how librarians move and learn in or experience their space over the course of their days. This chapter addresses my findings as they relate to learning in the public library, or workplace, and space as lived curriculum. I divide this chapter into two sections, the first explores the participants' learning experiences at work, and the second addresses the physical and virtual workspaces.

### **Learning at Work**

In my interviews, I sought to gather more information and data related to their perceptions and experiences of learning in the workplace. In both the initial and final interviews, I included a number of questions specifically designed to elicit information regarding the participants' learning experiences in the workplace. I should note that while there are different forms and types of learning, as discussed in Chapter Two, I used the most frequent and common terms of formal and informal learning in my communication with participants. I did not introduce or use the term nonformal learning as I did not want to introduce a new term or unknown concept which may result in confusion for participants. This section presents the data related to formal and informal learning in my study.

#### **Formal Learning at Work**

In my interview sessions, all participants reported having taken formal learning in the six months prior to the study commencing, as well as during the study. According to participants, these formal learning events were quite diverse, including professional development events

offered at and by library staff and administration, courses at a post-secondary institution, conferences, and webinars. What defined the event as formal learning was consistent for all participants. For events offered at and through work, they were described as training by library administration, and directly related to job duties. For other events, such as courses, professional development, conferences and webinars, there were clear learning objectives or outcomes and the content was work-related. For those where fees or tuition were required, the participants reported that they had to submit an application to register and have the fees covered by the library's training budget. As part of this application, study participants were required to provide a rationale or justification for the training and explain how it would improve their knowledge, skills or abilities. Paul had just completed a course at a post-secondary institution that was directly related to his specialized duties, which was a requirement if the organization was to cover the cost of his registration fees (Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016).

The most common forms of formal learning attended by participants were webinars and those offered through work, often delivered by other library staff. Participation in webinars was also prevalent in my research. The webinars were predominantly offered through national and provincial library associations, including the ALA which is responsible for accreditation of all MLIS programs and training in North America. While the subject matter tended to be broader in nature, touching on demographics, trends in library and information science for example, the purpose of the webinars was the same as the training provided by the library organization: to increase awareness and develop staff.

A significant amount of the formal training completed was offered by the library organization and was branch and work specific. The topics covered included Indigenous storytelling, systems or computer programs, reporting, mobile library services, and security

protocols. All topics were directly related to the duties and responsibilities that are shared or common across all positions. These trainings were offered within the branch during business hours, by library staff or management, with the aim of ensuring consistency in application, reporting and excellent service standards. This type of approach and subject matter is consistent with the literature of formal workplace training.

Formal learning events and training for library staff frequently occurred at the library in one of the meeting rooms. I was able to make some interesting observations of the significance of the environment in the overall learning experience through my interviews. Sally reported that the room set up was one of the first things she attended to prior to delivering any learning event, because she felt it had a significant impact on engagement and interaction (Sally, personal communication, January 15, 2016). Paul and Abigail, noted that the environmental factors, such as space and windows, had a significant impact on their learning. Abigail made the following observation in relation to the training venue or environment and her learning experience.

I think [space] has a big impact. Like when you teach or are taught, you are not, you have moments when your mind might wander, and usually it wanders around the room. Then you notice the ugliness or whatever doesn't sit well, and that takes your focus away from the message you need to receive. While the opposite, if you are in a space that makes you feel comfortable and is sunny or it's well-lit and you feel comfortable in in, then you are more prone to not pay attention to your comfort level but to the person who is teaching and better absorbing the content. (Abigail, personal communication, January 22, 2016)

By comparison, Freda and Colin observed and recalled these environmental factors, but they did not feel that they had bearing on their learning process. In response to my interview question about the relationship between learning and space, Freda observed that, "the spaces and

different places make some difference, but basically, I just focus on the task or content” (Freda, personal communication, April 28, 2016). Colin echoed this sentiment, noting that,

[Space] is sort of immaterial for me. I don’t know whether it’s because I’ve done a lot of learning in the engine of a fishing boat. It doesn’t really matter to me, noisy, stinky, bobbing around, rocking around. If the material’s compelling, and I’m interested in the material, the venue is quite immaterial. As long as I can hear it and see it, I’m good.

(Colin, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

I believe these variations are evidence of personal preferences or individual learning styles. They are of particular interest to me given the significance of the workspace or personal work environment to all study participants discussed later in this chapter. While the impact of the environment on the learning was not noted by all study participants, for some there was a definite connection or interrelationship between the overall experience and curriculum, as described by Orr (2002) in Chapter One.

### **Informal Learning at Work**

The literature reports that the majority of learning takes place informally (Marsick & Watkins, 1999, 2001, Wihak & Hall, 2012, Fuller, Unwin, Felstead, Jewson & Kakavelakis, 2007), although the definition of informal learning in the literature also tends to be ambiguous and difficult to pin down (Eraut, 2004, Conlon, 2004, Skule 2004, Billett, 2014, 2015). I was curious to understand how the participants defined informal learning as it would provide insight into their activities.

The participants’ definitions of informal learning had many commonalities. According to one participant, Freda, informal learning was “something I learn for myself, I think I should learn to use in my job. [...]. There are lots of learning opportunities and you don’t have to choose every

one, just choose the one that's related to you. And then you find the time that fits your schedule” (Freda, personal communication, January 22, 2016). This definition identified the key themes that underpin informal learning in the literature: job-related, self-selected, and flexible. Another participant, Paul, added that informal learning is un-structured, while Colin preferred to define it as “self-learning” and said that it was driven by passion, curiosity, and was meant to develop competency in a target area (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

The type and subject matter of their informal learning activities varied greatly, including web-based content, everyday experiences with patrons, peer-to-peer learning, and reflection. Web-based informal learning occurred through watching Ted Talks and videos and reading articles, news and blogs. All study participants identified a number of blogs that they followed, as well as a number of library websites that they visited daily. Study participants engaged in these activities frequently and for a variety of reasons, including personal or professional interest, knowledge and skill development, time commitment, and flexibility.

All participants reported that learning was a natural part of their job and that every request from a patron was a learning opportunity as they often required research into a new and different area. One participant, Paul, noted that it was not until he was part of the study that he began to understand how much he learned from patrons' requests in his everyday work, but until that point he had been operating on “auto-pilot” and processing the requests as part of his daily routine (Paul, personal communication, April 19, 2016).

The diversity of informal learning opportunities is consistent with the literature of informal learning at work discussed in Chapter One. Study participants are seeking out topics and opportunities to enhance their experiences at work, either through competency and skill development or in interactions with patrons. This echoes the research and findings of Van Dellen

and Cohen-Scala (2015) who looked at how employee develop and construct their own knowledge in an effort to build competency and identity in the workplace. It also reflects the emerging literature exploring the role of virtual learning and technologies in the workplace (He & Li, 2019; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016, Lancaster & Di Milia, 2015). What is apparent in the data is that the majority of informal learning occurs in a virtual setting and is driven by the employee. I believe that the significance of the digital nature of learning at work and how it is accessed is just beginning to emerge in the literature, and it is something that all organizations will need to explore and grapple with in the not-so-distant future and I address the reason for this later in this chapter.

### **Workspaces, Experience and Learning**

My study was driven by my desire to understand how space and place informed or influenced learning in the workplace. Over the course of my research, I found that participants experienced their workplace as curriculum in different ways: as explicit or formal curriculum, as implicit or informal curriculum, and as learning spaces. This section explores the interrelationship of learning, experience and workplace through these three spaces.

#### **Workplace as Formal Curriculum**

As part of my research, I sought to gather data related to the study participants' perceptions and experiences of place and space. In both the initial and final interviews, I included several questions specifically designed to elicit information regarding the participants' perspectives on their knowledge and experience of learning in and from place and space. I have included the complete list of interview questions related to learning and space in Appendix A. In their interviews and in my observations, it was evident that the study participants recognized the importance of their space and sought to really understand it in an intimate way. I speak to the

significance of the open, public spaces and the study participants' personal workstations separately, as they both served as explicit or formal curriculum albeit in different ways.

**Public-use space as formal curriculum.** The spatial and curricular theories presented in Chapter One emphasized the interrelationship between space, experience and learning. The works for Pinar, Aoki, Chambers and Hurren explored how place, time, experience and learning are woven together to form a lived curriculum. This is consistent with my findings related to the public-use space. In my interviews, I posed a number of questions to participants and administration on the physical library space (see Appendix A for questions). These questions yielded some very interesting responses; how space was accessed and considered was dependent upon the individual's role and associated responsibilities.

The participants accessed many areas with greater frequency, particularly when they were on an information desk shift. Study participants noted that they also accessed different parts of the library when undertaking their specialized work. Abigail noted that she accessed different sections of the library when she assumed her supervisory role on the weekend than in her usual role which saw her based in the children's and teen's sections. Of her additional duties, she said they helped her feel "less isolated [...] the responsibility makes me feel a bit more grounded because I do want to understand what's happening [in other areas] a bit more" (Abigail, personal communication, January 22, 2016). In this instance, the areas visited, and the frequency was determined by a number of factors including time allotment for the task(s), type of task (e.g, security duties, collections work), and personal preference.

Study participants also accessed different areas of the library purposefully during breaks, in transit to meetings, and while undertaking other work. These trips were described as more personal or routine in nature, allowing participants to "check in" on favourite subjects, observing

new additions to popular collections, and checking on secluded, less frequented spaces. As Paul observed,

I try to take different routes every day. [...]. Being able to walk through [the collection] every day, I tend to pick things up. I see books on display, I'll leaf through them, normally something will jump out at me. [...]. This is a place of learning, I don't think you can get away with [not learning] unless you're going to walk through with your eyes closed.

(Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016)

All the participants commented that they undertook these duties with the explicit purpose of getting to know the collection and locating key resources and references. This helped them in the performance of the tasks associated with the information desk and with the resolution of tickets that come in from patrons electronically that are assigned through the CMS.

Administrators also noted that they went through the public use areas throughout the day to observe user activities and access points (e.g., popularity of different collections or spaces), visit different collections of personal interest, and to observe staff as part of their management or human resource responsibilities. According to Sally,

I walk around in the morning and I try to do it in the afternoon, too. While I'm walking I'm constantly checking the [circulation desk] and walking. I think one, it's important to be seen, and the other thing I'm really trying to do is look at different spaces and think of how I can make it more vibrant. (Sally, personal communication, January 15, 2016)

According to Zena, another administrator, trips into the public use areas were more frequent during planning phases of the business cycle, when facilities and strategic plans were in development, or funding proposals were in drafting (personal communication, April 14, 2016).

During these periods, administrators were interested in considerations of space usage in terms of maximizing user access and meeting user needs for spaces.

The participants' must know their space, how to navigate the various areas and stacks to locate resources. They need to develop an intimate familiarity with the space in order to perform their duties effectively. The participants and administrators plan purposeful movements through the space as part of a desire to feel grounded, to thoroughly understand the space and its significance to staff and patrons. There is recognition that these spaces are dynamic and fluid, and that they situate the needs of patrons and library staff alike. The workplace, in this instance, grounds and becomes part of the experience and learning, which is demonstrative of the research and works of Aoki, Pinar, Chambers and Hurren discussed in Chapter One; the public library as place provides context for participants and is intimately connected to what they know and how they know it.

### **Workplace as Informal Curriculum**

Study participants did not just experience their workplace learning in an explicit or formal manner. My research uncovered an implicit or informal curriculum that informed the knowledge and experience of study participants, too. This notion of place as hidden or informal curriculum, as discussed in Chapter One, was described by Orr (2002) as “the design of building and landscape is thought to have little or nothing to do with the process of learning or the quality of scholarship that occurs in a particular place. But, in fact, buildings and landscapes reflect a hidden curriculum that powerfully influences the learning process” (p. 127).

In the course of my research, I found that the participants had informally learned the language of design; all administrators and participants spoke about the design of the building, its highlights and vulnerable areas, the security challenges and the potential or opportunities for

future change and growth. When I asked whether participants had completed formal design training, all reported that they had not. What I observed is that the building or infrastructure itself served as curriculum; through experiences and challenges, participants learned to speak this new design language. One of the administrators, Sally, noted that she travelled through the collections every day to understand how patrons were using the space, to determine what they needed and how it could be improved. She noted,

Because it's an older space I'm trying to look at different areas and look at how I can make it more vibrant, and how if no one's going into the space, how I can reinvent it and reimagine it to make it where the public wants to be. It also makes me understand how people are using the space to get a better feel of it. You look at the second floor and you may think there's no one there but when you really look, it's packed. So you get a better sense of the space when you see how people are using the space [...]. It's making space accessible, sociable, where you want to bring someone. So for me it's making sure we're meeting all those types of requirements. There's some deficiencies here because it's such a huge building, it's hard to see. It wasn't built to be a library so we're still working at that. (Sally, personal communication, January 15, 2016)

The experience of a burst pipe, as reported by Paul, taught him and other library staff about the importance of having a flexible space where they can move parts of the collection that may require work, but also in being able to move the stacks to preserve the collection if necessary. He stated,

I guess I've learned a fair amount about the space and the nuts and bolts of it through my many disasters like floods and stuff like that, from being in the space and then having to subsequently plot out, okay, how do we respond, where do we put all the sheets of plastic.

[...]. I have to spend a lot of time actually being out in the public area, looking at the four or five different flood related things or water in the ceiling. One huge one shut us down for days where a pipe burst somewhere in the building. [...] I was the first one on the scene, I was here at seven in the morning and there was water up to my ankles on the floor. It had started to seep through down there. It was stressful, seeing water pouring off parts of the collection. So that big event informed a lot of how I thought of [planning], so I've got plastic rolls stashed in strategic areas here and there. (Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016)

The security challenges experienced by this public library also inform the librarians' actions and knowledge, as the issues accentuate the need for a security presence, protocols, and regular tours through areas that are not easily visible from information desks. As Colin observed, And in my estimation, when you design a library, you have to have a firm idea of the functions and the design itself; the security part of the process has to be built into the genetic code of the building. It cannot be an add on, it cannot be addressed satisfactorily in retrospect. You can't take something that is inherently insecure by way of spaces and blind spots and fields of vision, all of that kind of stuff, the position of bathrooms, the design of bathrooms, all of this kind of stuff has to be informed by, run through the sieve of security. Otherwise its going to be much more difficult to guarantee the security. So that was never done and this is causing some problems. Because we can't see what's going on. So things are happening. (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016)

Interestingly, Colin never had an opportunity to finish his thought because he was called away to assist the security personnel with an incident involving two inebriated patrons who were causing a disturbance.

None of the study participants or administrators studied design and yet they were all well-versed in design language. They learned this from experience and necessity. The interview excerpts I have included demonstrate the more implicit nature of place as curriculum. Sally was entering the space to get a sense of patron usage patterns and trends, and found that it was only when she really engaged with and explored the space did she understand its value. The experiences of Paul and Colin are not uncommon in modern libraries, and it is through their interactions with the physical space, and even necessity in the case of emergent situations, that they have come to understand the impacts of previous design decisions. Their experiences are not unlike the librarian response and rapid learning resulting from the fire at the Central Library in Los Angeles as described by Orlean (2018), and they are very similar to the social issues chronicled by Estevez (2019) in the *The Public*. This is consistent with the literature on libraries. Brian Kenney reports that in addition to their graduate degree, librarians need to become well-versed in design as most libraries look to meet users' needs. According to Kenney,

What does this mean for those coming to work in libraries? It means, in the words of the great librarian S.R. Ranganathan, that the organization you've joined is 'a growing organism.' It means that the job you've signed on for will morph and change over the next few years. It means that as libraries align their resources to their publics' needs, there will be discomfort among some staff members who see activities or collections they treasure replaced by new policies and services. (Kenney, 2013)

This is echoed in the work of Schlipf and Moorman (2018). In the introduction of their handbook on library design, they dedicate their work to professional librarians, who, according to Schlipf and Moorman, "are too often nearly ignored when it comes to planning the spaces they know best and work in constantly" (p. 3). Their work, which includes high level design principles

and detailed chapters on such things as evaluation criteria for current library areas, security of collections and personnel, public service desk design and function, and librarian workspace requirements, provides librarians with a crash course in design. As the authors acknowledge, design is not included in the modern library and information science curriculum, but there is a need for librarians to be conversant in design if they are to meet user needs in the present and in the future (Schlipf & Moorman, 2018).

But does this constitute informal curriculum? I argue that the evidence indicates it does. This workplace has been a part of the study participants' overall experience in the space; they have learned not only where different references can be found, or where the works of popular authors reside, but the participants have also learned to listen to their building, to see the invisible areas. Through their experiences they have learned about design, about what they would do differently and how to adapt an older space and maximize its potential. Further, they have observed patrons in their space, and learned from their experiences of what the community needs and wants, where they sit and how they move within the library. The workplace has directed their energies in terms of design, security and even social services depending on the number and location of incidents and the citizens involved. In this way, the participants' experience and learning is interconnected with the workplace, and demonstrative of Orr's (2002) research into the influence of environment in and on the learning process, providing context for the overall experience.

### **Personal Workspace as Learning Space**

When not at the information desk or in meetings, each librarian, including the participants of my study, had their own personal workspace. In the context of my research, the personal workspace proved to be pivotal; not only was this where the study participants spent the majority

of their time, but it also played host to learning experiences and opportunities. In this sense, the personal workspaces served both as learning site and workplace.

Before I explain the significance of their personal workspaces, it is necessary to provide a description of their appearance and location. Each workspace was complete with a desk, chair, computer, and telephone. Workspaces were located away from the public use areas in separate rooms and there were several workspaces co-located in the same room. Rooms were closed off from the public use areas by a door, had three solid walls and exterior windows in most instances (one office had no exterior windows and had four solid walls). The rooms had standard fluorescent lighting in the ceiling, carpeted floors, central heating and cooling, and there were no walls or barriers between desks or workspaces, making them shared spaces. All but one participant had their own dedicated workspace; one participant shared a workspace with a colleague. This workspace was shared for two reasons: firstly, because the area in which she was located was quite small (the smallest room for workspaces of the study), and because her specialized responsibilities were shared or divided into two, and she shared with her teammate.

**Personalization of individual workspaces.** In all instances, participants had personalized their workspaces to suit their needs. Each workspace was a unique representation of the employee. Personalization of the workspaces was accomplished through addition of task lighting or lamps, wireless keyboards and mice, wrist rests for keyboarding, containers to hold pens and other tools, plants, and personal pictures. Colin reported that he shared an office space with some like-minded colleagues. “We play music and we have lots of giggles and well, one of the things about it we all enjoy is the same light level. [...]. It’s dim, we’ve disconnected two thirds of the [fluorescent] bulbs and use task lighting along with the natural light instead” (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

Study participants reported that they spent anywhere between four to six hours a day at their personal workspace, and all participants confirmed that they had personalized their spaces and these customizations were very important to them. Three reasons for the significance afforded to the personal spaces: comfort, security, and productivity. Participants cited that they added personal touches to their workstations to make them feel more comfortable or at home. All participants had photos of family or their travels on their desks, as well as some additional task lighting. According to Paul, he has included “[photos of] family, loved ones, posters and that’s done on purpose. I like the reminders of things and people that I love because I’m apart from them a lot during the day” (Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016).

The personalization of the workspaces made participants feel more at ease and brought a sense of security. According to Abigail,

I like clean lines and I like things to be the same and that makes me really calm. And I notice when I’m calmer I think better than if I’m in a panic or anxiety kind of mode. I don’t make the best decisions, and I have to come back and say oh how I wish we had done that instead. And I think the space, clean space, makes me feel more grounded and safe emotionally and then I can take risks, or I can think better if I have to make a riskier kind of decision. (Abigail, personal communication, January 22, 2016)

This was echoed by other participants, Paul and Freda, who went further to state that their productivity was higher when they were at their own workstations, surrounded by their belongings and resources. According to Freda “I have my own PC. I have the resources, I always use my folders, some reference books that I always use.” (Freda, personal communication, January 22, 2016). In our second interview, Freda had noted that she had shifted her thinking about her personal workspace since we first met. She stated,

Actually, I really started to think about it, because before that I hadn't thought about it before. I think a proper space, a proper office space or working space, can really make my work more productive and efficient. [...]. I think about my working space, I think it is under my control. I can just make some changes to make it more convenient, and for my collections work, I have partial control over that because it has to fit in the system. (Freda, personal communication, April 28, 2016)

**Significance of personal workstations.** The findings from my interviews are consistent with the research noted in Chapter One that speaks to the importance of an employee's workspace. According to Vischer (2005a), by addressing comfort for employees in the workplace (e.g., comfortable seating, temperature, lighting, and amenities), their productivity increases. Further, by allowing employees the ability to personalize their spaces with photos, plants and other items, the organization is granting them control over their workspace. As Vischer (2005a) states, "managers who want to ensure that employees remain comfortable, healthy and productive at work need to guarantee that their employees have some degree of territorial control" (p. 72). This is consistent with research into organizational development and design – employees who have some degree of control over their environment are more productive, efficient and happy (Buillivant, 2005; Meerwarth, Trotter II & Briody, 2008; McGregor, 2000).

These personal workspaces hosted many formal and informal learning activities. As noted earlier in this chapter, participants often enrolled in webinars and online learning opportunities. Study participants reported that they would watch videos, join virtual webinars, read and conduct research from their desks. Given their personal workstation was home of specialized duties, research into patron requests and informal learning activities, the personal workspace is critical to learning at work, not only as a physical site, but also as the zone where they access their virtual

workspaces. I speak to the significance of virtual spaces as curriculum in the next section. As noted previously, study participants spent between a half and two-thirds of their days at their personal workstation, and using tools to complete work and access learning, they had developed a connection with their respective space. They observed and noticed its strengths and weaknesses and edited it according to their own personal need and style.

This connection to one's workspace is also evidence of the role it plays in situating and providing context for learning in the workplace. According to Aoki (1991), place is an exploration and identification of one's location within a discourse that is defined by lived experience. These study participants have come to value their personal workspaces to increase their feelings of comfort and productivity, which speaks to the role they play in their overall experience at work. This is important when it comes to learning, particularly given the data shows that the environment played a significant part in the overall learning process for some participants. Thus, whether the participants were conducting tasks related to specialized duties or participating in an online learning opportunity, their workspace was grounding the event, providing context and becoming a part of the overall experience, which is consistent with the literature described in Chapter One.

### **Virtual Space – Uncharted Curricular Landscape**

My research revealed that virtual spaces are very personal. But I also found that these online spaces are where the participants spend most of their day or shift. All of the sites and resources accessed, whether they are mandated by the organization or selected by the participant, constitute a Personalized Learning Network (PLN). As noted in Chapter One, every individual has a unique PLN, that is, it is comprised of a combination of tools, programs, websites, blogs, social media sites and applications (or apps) that is unique to the individual or participant. The

PLN is organic and evolutionary in nature, constantly changing along with individual preferences and emerging technologies.<sup>2</sup> The creation of one's PLN also relates to the notion of content curation, a practice which emerged from the data and has significance in not only the development of one's PLN, but also in the design of virtual space. In this section, I outline the various components of the PLNs as described by the study participants and discuss their significance in their work. Subsequently, I demonstrate how and why content curation and virtual space emerge as significant concepts in my research.

### **Librarians and Virtual Work**

As I noted in the previous chapter, the first activity undertaken by all participants no matter whether it was working at the information desk or performing specialized work, was to turn on the computer at the workstation and login. They opened email, the intranet, the library internet or external-facing website, and the CMS. These are the specific internal programs and tools that are common to all participants and required to complete work. Participants spent a great deal of their time using these programs and tools over the course of their day, responding to emails, patron inquiries or tickets assigned to them by a senior librarian, or looking up references or resources. For instance, when a ticket is assigned in CMS, the librarian receiving the ticket has a set amount of time to research the answer and provide the response, either through CMS or back to the patron directly. There is also an internal ticketing system for website changes and technical difficulties. While most use this site to log problems, one of Paul's special duties is responding to these tickets, as he described in the below excerpt.

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<sup>2</sup> . It is important to note that while the library's internal website for employees and external website with public interface are accessed daily, I did not include those as part of the participants' virtual workspaces or PLN, but rather included them as key texts as they are not chosen but rather are imposed as tools of the organization as determined by library administration, best practice and accreditation standards.

I do a lot of answering of tickets as well because when people have issues with the website, if you want to change content or if you want a new page, you put in a ticket and it comes to me. I get an email saying there's a new ticket, I can go into the ticket system, open it, give an answer back to the person who sent it, close the ticket when I've made the fix or done what they've asked me to do. Between this system and the CMS, I spent almost half the time at my desk responding to tickets. (Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016)

These programs dictate the direction and focus of work for participants, which is not unlike the experience of other knowledge-based worksites where the work is increasingly performed online (Schumacher, 2018; Giacumo, Villachica & Breman, 2018; Fischer, Goller, Brinkmann & Harteis, 2018).

However, the study participants also access external spaces, or those not owned or governed by the library. These spaces are frequented by participants over the course of their day and they are unique to each participant, as I touched on in Chapter Two. Participants accessed these sites to fulfill any number of duties, including responding to patron requests, developing digital library resources, locating collection-specific information, researching library trends or participating in learning activities. Unlike the internal sites, programs and tools which have been adopted by the organization, these virtual spaces have been learned, developed, curated and honed over time and are specific to the participants' position or duties, interests, preferences, and comfort level with technology, among many other factors. In my interview with Paul, he has adopted the use of two tools, Evernote and Instapaper, to keep track of citations and websites, "I've got the buttons on my browser windows, so I can drag articles and things over so I can read it later. Evernote is what I like to use for repository stuff I keep. Instapaper is more transitory for

stuff that may be more of a bookmarking site” (Paul, personal communication, January 18, 2016). Colin noted that he insisted on installing a program called NoteTab for the same purpose as Paul, to track useful website addresses and links to articles of interest and so forth (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

### **Evidence of PLNs at Work**

In interviews with study participants, I asked them to consider the different sites they used and to identify or elaborate on why these specific tools, sites and programs were important. I used the information from the interviews along with notes from my observations to map the participants’ work-specific PLNs. Initially, participants identified the following reasons for accessing specific sites, programs and tools: easy to navigate, host to relevant information specific to work or task, functionality or easy to use, file/idea management or organization, and to provide different perspectives on an issue or topic. When asked how or why they use them Colin stated, “there are certain tools that I cannot do without and I will not do without. [...]. Because I know the results I need, I know the tools I need to get the results and if I can’t have them then I’ll find a way around it to get them” (Colin, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Freda noted that she visited sites that had information she required, “basically for the information, but I don’t mind just a navigator along the side to find the information” (Freda, personal communication, January 22, 2016).

I mapped the participants’ PLNs through interviews and participant observation, noting what sites were visited during the course of their work. Across the participants’ PLNs, I observed that common sites, or those websites accessed by several participants, such as the BC Library Association (BCLA) website and the ALA. These sites were accessed to learn about library-related news, upcoming events, and to participate in webinars. Both the BCLA and the ALA have

taken to producing and offering an increasing number of webinars for their members to disseminate information and promote professional development in a cost-effective and timely manner.

There are also sites that may be accessed by all study participants, but I observed that they use them differently or access different information from them. YouTube is an excellent example – it is accessed by all participants in my study yet utilized in very different ways. Some participants access YouTube to learn songs or rhymes that they can incorporate into programs for children, while others use it to watch TED talks and other lectures for personal and professional development. Amazon is another site that is frequented by all study participants for many different reasons, from reading reviews of books to looking at the top seller list in different languages and countries to determine the direction of the multicultural collections. The way they used the site was dependent on a number of factors, including program preparation, learning preference, and the need to locate information as part of a specialized duty or function. For instance, Freda, Abigail and Paul all noted that they used YouTube to access webinars and TED talks on a variety of different topics, but it was also used by Freda to learn a new song she wished to teach at a forthcoming program with families, and Abigail used it to access videos recommended by the youth and teens she worked with so that she could keep abreast with trends and understand their perspective.

Given the majority of adults spend over six hours online per day (Kemp, 2019); perhaps it is not surprising to hear that the study participants are also spending more of their time on their computers during work hours. As I observed above, these virtual tools are defining and dictating the work of study participants as they seek to meet deadlines and respond to tickets in the CMS or respond to emails through Outlook. Beyond the organizational programs, sites and tools, study

participants spent a good portion of time accessing other sites that comprise their PLNs. In most cases, they are accessing these unique programs, sites and tools to complete tasks either assigned through tickets in CMS or emails from colleagues or supervisors, but they are also accessing these sites as part of their specialized duties and perhaps for personal use (e.g., checking personal emails, scrolling through newsfeeds on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter).

### **Significance of PLNs in Librarianship**

Through visiting, bookmarking and frequenting these programs, sites and tools, study participants were actively engaged in shaping their own unique and customized PLN or virtual space. There was no guidance or direction from library leadership, and their selections which comprised their PLNs were largely crafted through experience and preferences such as style, navigation, utility and content; all study participants were able to identify desirable traits that drew them to tools, programs and sites.

However, when probed about messaging, stance or bias, only one participant recognized the importance of selecting and visiting a broad range of sites, particularly when it came to gathering information in response to a patron request or to resolve a ticket. Colin is the only study participant to recognize the significance of ensuring that the sites and resources accessed were balanced to prevent bias. He described the process he developed to collect news and understand current events,

I start with the Drudge report, which is far right. And then I go immediately to the Guardian, which is lefty. Then I go to CBC which is kind of lefty, kind of centre left. And that would be world, national and BC. [...]. Then it's the New Scientist for science news, Doonesbury for political news and a few other sites depending on what I'm looking for.

But you need to have a balance to ensure you're not biased one way or another. (Colin, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

This excerpt from my interview with Colin touches on the salient point: bias. This bias can be traced in their thinking and approach to the work and the responses to patron requests or resolution to work related duties. This could be problematic depending on the type of task and could lead to errors or omissions, and it is not unique to the participants or librarians. However, the role of librarians is to teach others how to develop their digital or information literacy skills. If they are not aware of their own biases, they could be unconsciously passing on their biases to patrons and community members through tutorials or programming. This could negatively impact these parties and inhibit their ability to understand the sources or biases of the sites they visit and detract from the development of their critical thinking skills, which include the ability to identify fake news.

In order to acknowledge, balance and mitigate these biases, it is important to develop awareness and knowledge of PLNs, their constitution or make-up. Librarians in the US have commenced this work through the Future Ready initiative, as identified in Chapter One. However, it is difficult to determine how prevalent and well-known or referenced this resource is in the library community; it is not a site that is linked or referred to on the ALA, CULC or BCLA sites. There are very few references to PLNs in library and information science literature, and those references are quite recent having been published in the past three years (Kirkwood, 2016; Aitken, 2017). Therefore, this could be a potential gap in the literature to be addressed. This could be as simple as creating an awareness campaign of PLNs for professional librarians to build their knowledge, allowing them to map their own networks explicitly and reflect on their sources.

Librarians could then take this knowledge and help patrons map their own networks as part of the digital and information literacy assistance provided through the public library.

### **Content Curation and Librarians**

The process through which study participants conduct their work and create their PLNs (consciously or unconsciously) is related to the practice of content curation and the design and emergence of virtual workspaces. As described in Chapter One, content curation is the act of discovering, gathering, and presenting digital content that surrounds specific subject matter. It is a concept that has been borrowed from museums and art galleries, institutions that own collections and undertake a selection process to design and develop shows and displays on a specific topic. This is a new concept for libraries of all types, and there are very few references to it in the literature as noted in Chapter One (Kirkwood, 2016; Eddy & Solomon, 2016; Cushing & Shankar, 2019).

Despite the lack of familiarity with the concept, librarians, including the study participants, engage in this practice on a daily basis, although they may not think of it in these terms. They collect sources and information in response to reference questions from patrons and gather and present information from a variety of sources as part of the selection and decision-making process for collection acquisition and development. Study participants even engage in content curation as they prepare songs and content for children and teen programming. Colin explained the steps he took while answering a reference question, which is demonstrative of content curation as practice.

I received a question the other day, it was really good. A woman came in who had fibromyalgia and she had a medical question so it was referred to me. So I had done a presentation on that a few years ago, on medical research resources, so I recovered that,

found it in the depths of my files and reworked it as a webpage. I changed the focus to fibromyalgia and searched through these resources. I found all kinds of these cases, case studies and how to use the proper meds. I made her a detailed list, categorized with links and annotations and that sort of thing. And really this was a return to librarianship that we used to do. (Colin, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

While participants acknowledged and recognized the actions they were undertaking, they were not familiar with the concept of curation, nor were they aware of its implications in practice. Content curation is a significant practice insofar as they are informing the experiences and learning of patrons and community members; anyone who receives information or attends a program is the recipient of a librarian's content curation activities. If a librarian is unaware of the process of content curation and does not make a concerted effort to remove or minimize bias, the same possible repercussions identified in the previous section apply. Therefore, it is possible to unknowingly create and sustain bias through everyday activities, and these may have a detrimental impact on the development of analytical and critical thinking skills with patrons. This was evident in the study at the University of Manchester as discussed by Kirkwood (2016), where librarians experimented with different curation practices to assess their impact on university library user groups to see which led to the development of deeper understanding and improved curation practices among learners.

Given the expectations of librarians in the delivery of educational programming, and their role in the development of digital and information literacy, the lack of awareness of content curation and its impact on patrons, community members and the organization is a potential risk. As there are only limited references and research into this area, it is a perceived gap in the literature and more research is required into this practice. Just as with PLNs, there is a need for

greater awareness and information across the profession, building on the literature referenced in Chapter One. Given the increasing amount of time spent in PLNs online and curating content daily, I believe it is worthy of further study to understand the implications in the library organization and for the profession and the role of content curation within the institution.

### **Design and Development of Virtual Space**

The very existence of PLNs and the practice of content curation coupled with the amount of time spent online every day speaks to the development and significance of the digital world. These virtual spaces exist without physical boundaries and they are unique to every user who enters the online world. In the discussion of work and workplace learning in Chapter One, I referenced several studies that explore the impact of digitalization on and at work (Schumacher, 2018; Giacumo, Villachica & Breman, 2018; Fischer, Goller, Brinkmann & Harteis, 2018). This is still an emerging area of research, largely because the rate of change over the past 20 years has been so rapid and its impact is widespread, affecting the philosophy and approaches to and processes and routines at work. These changes have driven researchers to return to the basics of what we actually know about how employees learn through experience in the workplace (Baert, 2018), and a desire to understand the drivers and factors that contribute to experience, work and learning in this digital age (Bishop, 2017; Schurmann & Beausaert, 2016; Ranieri, Giampaolo & Bruni, 2019; Berman 2020). The lack of physicality of virtual workplaces prove difficult to comprehend, as evidenced in new research into the role of social media and other platforms that are used by employees as they shape work experiences and notions of workplace (He & Li, 2019; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Lancaster & Di Milia, 2015).

When I spoke to the study participants about their use of sites, tools and programs and inquired about their perspectives on virtual space, their responses indicated that they viewed each

of the sites as a functional tool to be used in completing daily tasks or as a vessel for delivery of information and learning. There did not appear to be a perception of virtual space as an entity or as an integral part of their experience at work. Even library administration was focused on the library's web presence as an extension of their services and as a tool for patrons primarily.

According to Zena,

One of our priorities is to make [the website] less dependent on discovery layers [...] there is a lot of material on our website but it's not [well-organized]. It kind of needs to be blown up again, but that requires increased capacity. [...]. I think we have increasing awareness of how important our presence is on a mobile device. Because what works as you know, traditional web design, doesn't always translate, things like our catalogue. Our mobile site is quite improved, but I think again we can do better. We are also more and more active on social media, so we do take advantage of Twitter and Facebook. But this all depends on the staff and their knowledge and abilities. (Zena, personal communication, April 14, 2016)

This interview excerpt reveals that the library organization, as a whole, understands the need for online presence and the need for a well-designed website to facilitate a good impression and positive experience for the patron. However, the focus is firmly outwards, and the role of the librarian is to work towards greater skill development so that they can improve the patron or community experience. There is extensive research and marketing of services, tools and technologies that facilitate user interfaces or experiences online. However, the focus, in the case of the public library in my study, is outward, aimed at the external user. The study participants all noted that they visited the website daily to access the catalogue, research collections information,

and respond to patron requests. Yet their experience in the virtual space is not explicitly considered.

But what about the implication for spatial theory and notions of place and space in this virtual context? The concepts of place and space as lived, dynamic, and imbued with meaning are more easily understood when there is a physical workplace or workstation to describe and comprehend, as discussed in the previous sections. I believe that relatability is a necessity in understanding physical places as key to experience and space as informal curriculum. However, every person who accesses the virtual world has a different approach, philosophy, and level of engagement. Every person accesses different programs, sites and tools which make PLNs unique; the diversity of perspectives and experiences make it more difficult to relate or “see” how spatial theory applies, or how the digital world is informal curriculum. It is this inability to relate to and “see” digital space that led Soja (2003) to describe the virtual world and our activity and existence in it as a form of “displacement.” Edwards (2012) built on this notion, observing that the development of technology has led to not only increasing flexibility, but a reorganization of the relationship between space and time on many levels that serves to simultaneously attract and disperse people and things without their knowledge.

Despite its complex and intangible nature, virtual space provides the same context and grounding for experience as physical space. The digital world is the location for different activities, interactions, and relationships that we experience in physical spaces. As Edwards noted, it reorganizes our relationships with time and space, but it also serves to increase flexibility; virtual space does not reduce or limit the amount or quality of relationships between people and things. However, as these relationships take place online, they are not subject to the same constraints as physical distance, time and space. There may exist different boundaries and

rules, but the digital world serves to situate one's lived experience, and in this way, virtual reality is informal curriculum and an integral part of our overall experience.

As alluded to in the previous discussion on personal workstations, there exists a significant gap in the literature and research when it comes to the experience of the librarian as employee. The literature presented in Chapter One focuses on the librarians' duties and responsibilities to the patrons and organization, or their role as service provider. Schlipf and Moorman (2018) speak of the need to ensure there is sufficient space for circulation and collection related activities, such as shipping, receiving and shelving. The role of librarian as service provider is also the focus of current discussions on librarianship as a profession (Hicks, 2016; Seminelli, 2016; Fraser-Arnott, 2019; Caspe & Lopez, 2018). There is extensive reference to the role of librarian in relation to another body, whether it is patron, community or organization. But there is no reference to the librarian as employee in a workplace, nor is there an acknowledgement of the virtual aspect of work. Even in the project to renew the role of the librarian in the public library where I conducted my research, the specialized roles focused on service provision but not necessarily on how the work is to be performed or completed.

### **Conclusion**

Through my research I found that the physical and virtual spaces and workplaces served as formal and informal curriculum as well as sites for formal and informal learning. The public-use space of the library served as formal curriculum as the study participants sought to actively understand the space and its value through purposeful exploration and journeys of and within the workplace. However, the same public-use space also served as informal curriculum, situating participants' experiences in the space and implicitly directing their increasing fluency in design language. Personal workstations were also significant for study participants as they became part

of the participants' overall learning experience. These places to ground and situate learning experiences in the workplace, thus embodying the definition of Aoki's curriculum-as-lived; these spaces are interconnected with formal and informal learning at work, as proposed by Orr and Ellsworth.

The importance of personal workstations revealed through the data also led to the identification of a gap in the literature, between the research of workplace design and that of library design, or library and information science more broadly. The research into workplace design places an emphasis on the employee's wellbeing as it relates to productivity, retention and overall effectiveness. However, the literature related to library design or the purpose of the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century public library does not consider the librarian as employee, but rather they focus on the librarian as service provider (Schlipf & Moorman, 2018; Fraser-Arnott, 2019; Williams & Willett, 2019). I believe there is a gap or missing linkage between these two bodies of research that is critical. As provincial and municipal governments are reviewing expenditures, resource allocations and service provision, which includes funding for the public library, they are scrutinizing circulation rates, number of visits per capita and other quantitative statistics to evaluate the public library. At the same time, the public library seeks to understand and anticipate the needs of its patrons and community so that it can be more responsive and prove its utility in society. The responders, more often than not, are the librarians and other library staff who provide the services. Throughout this process, the emphasis is on meeting the needs of the community and not of the employees. As employee roles and responsibilities are changed and libraries renovate to make space more innovative and flexible, the stability and sense of territoriality as described by Vischer (2005b) are under threat and this may have long-standing and long-term impacts on the organization.

The emergence of the virtual or digital space was also important. As noted in Chapter One, adults are spending an increasing amount of time online every day, both at work and during their leisure time. All study participants reported spending an increasing amount of their day at their computers accessing their virtual workspaces, or PLNs. These spaces were comprised of programs, sites and tools mandated by the organization for library business and other programs, sites and tools that were selected by the study participants. What I observed in the data was that three of four study participants did not demonstrate awareness of their networks they had developed. Only one participant discussed his network and the need to ensure balance and a plurality of perspectives. It is very much akin to Hurren's (2003) description of map reading – that the majority of people just see the lines but do not read beyond to understand the map as narrative. In this instance, study participants are using different elements of their networks as functions or tools but not recognizing the overall narrative. Without explicit or conscious acknowledgement and recognition of this overarching network, there exists a risk that biases are passed along to patrons and community members through information and programming, and that given the pivotal role of librarians in the development of digital and information literacy, these practices may be passed along with negative consequences.

Finally, the creation of one's PLN and the application of content curation practices culminate in the design and development of virtual space. Just as a PLN is a network that is unique to every individual, so too is their experience and interpretation of virtual space. These defy traditional relationships and convey their own sense of meaning and significance. Every single person, including the study participants, experiences their virtual spaces differently, depending on any number of factors including but not limited to involvement and participation in activities in this world, the amount of time spent in the space, and the weight or significance the

person assigns to this digital world. Despite the uniqueness of these virtual spaces and their lack of physical boundaries, these spaces are dynamic, living places that are imbued with meaning and serve to ground and situate experiences and learning. They are very much like the physical places, such as the public-use library space or personal workstations, in that they serve to provide a necessary context for experience at work, grounding and situating experiences and learning for all study participants. While there are certain challenges posed by the rapid changes to the digital world in which we live, work and operate, there is a need to develop greater awareness of the concept of virtual spaces alongside PLNs and research required to understand the impact of digitalization and the virtual world on experience, learning and the workplace.

## Conclusion

People pass through the library all the time, unobserved and unremarked upon.

Libraries may embody our notion of permanence, but their patrons are always in flux. In truth, a library is as much a portal as it is a place – it is a transit point, a passage. (Orlean, 2018, p. 59)

I began my dissertation with a quotation from Orlean, and I feel it is fitting to end with one that is equally important. Just as I conducted my research at the public library, so too did Orlean as she spent time at the Central Library in Los Angeles as part of her research into the fire that devastated the branch in 1986. The above quotation came from one of Orlean's observation sessions and I believe it captures the essence of the public library: it is a place or space that serves to transport and transform patrons and community members. It anchors and situates experiences and services but it is never still; it is truly an ever-changing, dynamic space. Orlean (2018) went on to describe the library as,

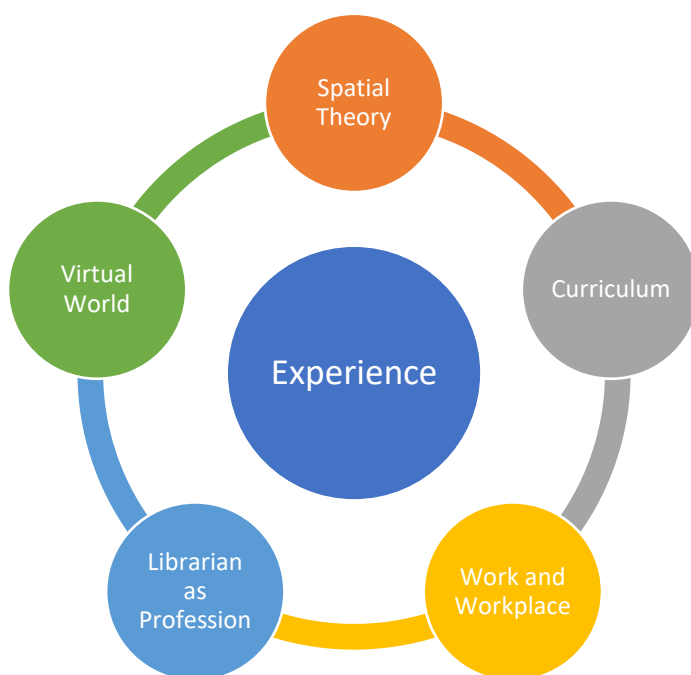
An intricate machine, a contraption of whirring gears. [...]. They rumble with voices and footsteps and a whole orchestral range of book-related noises – the snap of covers clapping shut; the breathy whisk of pages fanning open; the distinctive *thunk* of one book being stacked on another; the grumble of book carts in the corridors.” (p. 60)

The same description could be applied to the public library where I based my research. There was a constant ebb and flow of people, old and young, and a pervasive hum of computers, carts, footsteps and people, with an occasional outburst from the children's area during story time or from a patron in distress.

At the outset of my research, I sought to explore the impact and influence of the *workplace* on employee learning. My experience in the design and delivery of workplace

learning showed me that the classroom environment had a definitive impact on learners in professional development settings. This was echoed in the place-based literature of Orr and Ellsworth, and the curricular theories of Pinar, Aoki, Chambers and Hurren. But I was curious as to what the impact would be in a workplace. Driven by my curiosity, along with the desire to develop a holistic, comprehensive view of the workplace, I undertook an institutional ethnographic study at a public library in British Columbia.

Early on, it was evident a study of this nature would draw upon the literature from a number of seemingly unrelated disciplines, and I outlined the findings from this journey in Chapter One where I created a diagram to demonstrate how the five fields came together and segued from one to another. I would like to amend that diagram to demonstrate the relationship after presenting my findings in Chapter Five (see Figure 8). The fields still flow from one to another based on their scope and applicability in my research. However, I have added one critical element: experience. Not only do these fields flow one into another, but they are also interconnected through experience, and in this instance, I believe that experience serves as the anchor for these seemingly disparate bodies of literature.



**Figure 8: Revised Model of Convergence and Flow of Research Streams**

This journey began with a review of spatial theory, drawing upon the works of Lefebvre, Foucault and Soja, who argued that space and place are dynamic, lived entities that are imbued with meaning through experience. It was experience that led me to look at the works of Pinar, Aoki, Chambers, Hurren, Orr and Ellsworth, all educators and curricular theorists who explored alternative notions of place and curriculum and found them embodied in experience. Continuing on the path, I visited the literature and research into work and the workplace, establishing a definition of work and the workplace, where again, experience proved critical. This led to an exploration of the literature into workplaces, design and employees, and workplace learning, which puts experience at its core.

Given my research was to occur in a public library, it was then necessary to explore the public library as a workplace. In Chapter One, I outlined the work of librarians, developing a picture of the demographics of the profession and in Chapter Two, I provided a sense of the

public library as place and as an institution. Together the literature and research from these areas create a profile of the employees as well as the workspaces they inhabit, which situate their work, learning and experiences. However, with an increasing amount of work being spent online, the employee experience is split between the physical and digital workspaces. As librarians, like most workers, are spending more of their time in an online work environment, my journey took me from librarianship to a virtual reality, where I explored the digital world and its boundaries and edges. I also investigated the literature and research related to personalized networks and content curation as they are integral to defining and mapping these virtual spaces. And this notion of space connects with the starting point of the journey – a discussion of the meaning of space and place.

Given the significance of space and place in my research, I dedicated Chapter Two to the definition and description of the public library as a place and as an institution. Following a brief history of how the public library came to be, I presented a depiction of the modern public library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This included an overview of the spaces that can be found in the library and an exploration of the challenges facing public libraries in North America and other western nations to be more flexible, more adaptable and to provide greater services, including social services, which are not being delivered elsewhere. My research focused on these libraries and this body of literature as this is where the public library where I conducted my research is based.

Chapter Two also included a description of the public library as an institution. Public libraries belong in the public sector, and they provide services for the community; they are not independent bodies. Public libraries in Canada are governed by the provincial or territorial government (with the exception of Quebec), but they receive their funding and operating costs through the municipal or regional government, depending on the type of library or governing

arrangement. In developing a sense of the public library as institution, I provided an overview of the legislative and policy frameworks that govern decision-making and everyday operations. This helps to situate the public library and provides context for the work of the study participants and library staff and administration more broadly.

Having established the foundation and a deeper understanding of the public library as a research setting, I outlined the approach to my research in Chapter Three. After careful consideration of different methods and approaches, I determined that an institutional ethnographic study would allow me to achieve my objective of exploring the workplace in a holistic manner. Through the adoption of the principles or tenets of institutional ethnography as set out by Dorothy E. Smith, I was able to explore the workplace from many different aspects. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with study participants at the outset and conclusion of my research to better understand their work, as well as their approaches to and understanding of learning and space. Participant observation sessions with each participant allowed me to observe their routines and better understand the work. Textual analysis of key documents identified through both of these methods allowed me to understand the public library as an institution and how these documents and decisions shaped the approach to and the very work of the participants.

One of the core principles of an institutional ethnography is to understand the work and allow the experiences of the participants to be at the centre of the research. This is achieved through indexing of work. In Chapter Four, I presented the findings of this indexing activity. The findings in this chapter are the culmination of observations made during participant observation sessions and interviews with participants. I identified two major types of work performed by study participants: information desk or reference work, and specialized duties. Through indexing, I was able to provide a breakdown of how study participants spent their time when performing

information or reference desk services. My findings were consistent with the literature which speaks to the shift in librarianship as a profession, away from in-depth reference questions to the development of digital and information literacy which now includes providing technical assistance and helping patrons and community members access and process online programs, sites and tools. The second area of their work is what I captured as specialized duties. These tasks or responsibilities had emerged over time, reflecting not only the changing roles of librarians in the modern public library, but also the individual interests, training and abilities of study participants and the ever-changing needs of patrons and the community more broadly.

In Chapter Five, I presented my findings related to my research question: how space and place inform, shape and influence how and what we learn at work. Through the data, there were three distinct places that emerged as significant to the study participants: the public-use areas of the library which include the information or reference desks, personal workstations, and virtual or online spaces. I found that each of the three spaces identified through the data serve to ground and situate experiences and learning at work, and in this way the very space where study participants perform their work becomes part of their overall experience. If they were to perform this work in a different setting, their experience and learning would not be the same because of the change in location or venue. For instance, when Freda performs collections work at different branches, she is performing the same tasks, but her experiences and learnings are different because of the different settings. The lighting, the number of patrons, the shelves or stacks, and even the languages of collections are all unique to each setting and these nuances result in a different overall experience and Freda takes something different away as the setting changes. In this way, I argue that place and space act as curriculum – sometimes overt or explicit and sometimes informal and hidden, depending on the activity.

### **Future Research Opportunities**

Through my findings, I also identified gaps or opportunities in the literature and fields for further work, marking the significance of my research. As I noted at the outset, I was hoping to demonstrate my contribution at the scholarly level, in the ongoing discussion of librarianship as profession, and in the field of workplace learning. I will address my contributions in these areas and touch upon the opportunities for future research now.

As demonstrated in the literature and as I discuss in Chapter Three, there is a broad interpretation and application of institutional ethnography and its principles across many fields. Even in my personal communication with three of the leading scholars who promote and practice this field of inquiry, there was disagreement about whether my study would constitute the requirements. The great degree of variance in practice caused Janet Rankin (2017a, 2017b), one of the predominant scholars in this field, to author two pieces on how to “do” institutional ethnography in the field in a way that maintains the integrity of the method of inquiry as set out by Smith. By offering an in-depth description of the methods I employed, my research process, and an explanation of how I employed the principles of institutional ethnography, I believe I have made a positive contribution to the field and provide an example of how the approach can be used with integrity. While my research will not change the way institutional ethnography is employed, I believe it provides an example of how the principle can be honoured and applied in practice and shape how others describe and discuss their methods and the indexing of work. I also think there is space to employ institutional ethnography in an exploration of virtual spaces as these are still relatively new and very little is known about their impact and influence in learning at work.

With respect to the field of librarianship, I believe that my research will contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the role of the professional librarian. For public libraries, their role in

society is changing. Libraries and librarians are bridging both the physical and virtual worlds and working to understand and anticipate the needs of both communities broadly and patrons more specifically. According to the literature, librarians are graduating from their Library and Information Science degree programs feeling ill-prepared to meet the educational, social and spatial needs of patrons (Williams & Willett, 2019; Seminelli, 2016; Garcia & Barbour, 2018; Fraser-Arnott, 2019). However, the focus of the majority of research and studies was on how libraries and librarians can assess patron needs, and how to design a flexible, user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing space. The emphasis is on the patron and community need and librarian as service provider almost exclusively. Through my research, I developed a comprehensive understanding of the work of the librarians who participated in my study. I believe that the findings from my research and the in-depth description of the work and how it is done will help inform the ongoing conversation on the profession and preparation of future librarians, to see them not only as service providers but as employees and individual entities within the enterprise or organization.

Further, I think there are opportunities to look at the conflicting perspectives of service provision or public service and the techno-rational approach that is employed or practiced by library management. This conflict emerges as library leadership seeks to develop business cases for existing or new budgets and grants, demonstrating the utility of the public library as an institution in terms of accountability and quantitative figures.

As noted at the outset of my research, I am fortunate to work in the field of workplace learning. I have both studied and applied the literature and research from this field, drawing upon formal, non-formal and informal learning theory and practices in my work. What has struck and continues to strike me is the diversity of voices, definitions, and perspectives in this field. There

are many efforts to explore and understand the workplace from many different perspectives, drawing upon quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the work experience. While conducting an institutional ethnographic study is by no means a new approach, it is not one that is typically adopted in the workplace learning literature. It is my response to Tara Fenwick's call for a multi-disciplinary approach that incorporates many voices and perspectives to understand the new world of work. Fenwick stated,

We differ in the moment where we encounter and experience difference – which more often than not means: as it confronts us. We could, then, consider our responsibility with respect to adult education whether in the workplace or elsewhere as helping to open encounters with difference. That is, encounters for purposes of expanding people's experiences and possibilities of what it means to be human. Again, this is not about simply experiencing diversity, as though difference consists of interesting variations that need not disturb our own world's norms, values and interests. (Fenwick, 2010, pp. 92-23)

It is my hope that this research will contribute to this emerging and ongoing conversation, providing a potential new approach to exploring learning and workers' experiences in the workplace. Fenwick's call for exposure to different and broader experiences and voices is also at the core of the gaps in the literature, or opportunities for future research I identified in my findings. For the field of librarianship, it is the consideration of the workplace and library design from the perspective of librarian as employee, not just as service provider. In Schlipf and Moorman's (2018) handbook on library design, the only reference to private workspaces is for library administration and human resources to complete their work; there is no reference to the librarian as employee with individual or personal needs outside of break rooms and workstations that allow them enough time to conduct corporate tasks. There does not appear to be

consideration given to the increasing amount of time librarians spend at personal workstations. Exploration of librarian experiences within the space to better understand their psychological needs as employees and personnel is required if organizations wish to retain staff and increase efficiencies.

The second opportunity for future research is the impact and influence of virtual workspaces in an organization. These digital spaces are very much like the physical places, such as the public-use library space or personal workstations, in that serve to provide a necessary context for experience at work, grounding and situating experiences and learning for all study participants. While there are certain challenges posed by the rapid changes to the digital world in which we live, and work, there is a need to develop greater awareness of the concept of virtual spaces alongside PLNs and research required to understand the impact of digitalization and the virtual world on experience, learning and the workplace.

This goes beyond the field of librarianship as there are significant implications for all workplaces as employees are asked to complete tasks using virtual resources. As a supervisor, I was guilty of asking my team to complete tasks, assuming they would consider their sources to ensure that the findings or work were balanced and unbiased. For me, this assumption was based on the fact that my team was well-educated and had developed their critical thinking skills and an awareness of their inherent biases. However, my experience working with senior university students as they identified, mapped and understood their own networks and content curation practices for the first time, showed me that there is much work to be done to build this awareness in higher education and the workplace more broadly to mitigate the risk of bias.

I began my dissertation with an admission that I was drawn to my research through my love of books and the public library. Many years of research, analysis and writing has not

changed my perspective. In fact, having spent many months interviewing and observing the participants in my study, my appreciation for their work and the services they provide has increased. The study participants, like many librarians across North America, face many challenges as the library as institution seeks to shift its role to anticipate and meet current and emerging community needs. Through this shift, they are also adapting to new approaches to learning and work that sees them spending more time in virtual spaces. Despite or in spite of these challenges, the participants in my study strived not only to provide excellent service, but to continue to learn and develop as professionals and share their passion for learning and knowledge with patrons and the community whenever possible. I hope that my research has done the study participants and their work justice.

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## Appendix A

### Interview questions related to learning at work

Initial Questions on Learning	Concluding Questions on Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you attended any formal training in the last six months? If yes, can you tell me about it? Where did it take place? What did you learn about?</li> <li>• Research indicates that learning at work also takes place informally. What do you think about when I say informal learning?</li> <li>• Thinking about the last six months, have you engaged in any informal learning? If so, can you tell me about it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you taken any formal learning in the time since our first interview? If yes, can you tell me about it? Where did it take place? What did you learn?</li> <li>• Do you feel that you approached the learning differently? If yes, can you tell me why your approach changed?</li> <li>• Have you engaged in any informal learning since our first interview? If yes, can you tell me about it? Where did it take place? What did you learn?</li> <li>• Did you find that you took more notice of learning opportunities since we last met? Have you reflected on your learnings?</li> </ul>

## Interview Questions Relating to Space and Place

Initial Questions on Place	Concluding Questions on Place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you do your work in the library? Can you describe the location(s)?</li> <li>• Can you tell me about your desk / personal space? Is it significant to you? Why or why not?</li> <li>• Are there other areas in the branch that you visit often? Any places you consider special?</li> <li>• What makes these spaces stand out?</li> <li>• Are there any virtual spaces, like websites, programs, or social media sites that you visit as part of your work? Can you describe them?</li> <li>• How frequently do you visit these sites?</li> <li>• Is there a reason you visit them? Do you like them? Do they look nice, or are they easy to access?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you still work in the same space at the same branch as when we first met?</li> <li>• If you completed any formal training, can you tell me where it took place? What about informal learning activities? Where did these occur?</li> <li>• Do you think about your space as you're going through your daily work? Has this changed at all since we first met?</li> <li>• Do you ever take notice of your workspace or that of another colleague? Can you tell me about that?</li> <li>• Thinking back to the spaces you identified as important when we first met, do you look at any of those differently now?</li> <li>• Are you using the same virtual spaces or websites that you were using when we first met? Do you find that you are</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you're in training, or taking a webinar, do you consider the location or venue? Is it important to you?</li> <li>• Do you think space has an impact on what you learn at work? Can you tell me about this?</li> </ul>	<p>using them in the same way? Do you think about them differently?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on the learning you've completed, either in-person or online, did you think about the space when you were learning?</li> <li>• Do you think space has had an impact on what you've learned at work?</li> </ul>
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As noted in Chapter Three, I employed a semi-structure interview format which allowed for flexibility to follow up on participant responses. The questions identified in the above table served as an entry point into conversations about learning in and about the *workplace*. In every instance, the participants and I discussed the unique responses to each of these questions in both interview sessions which allowed me to further probe their understanding and experiences with learning in and from space and place at work.