



IJIDI: Book Review

Stoltz, D., Miller, M., Picker, L., Thompson, J., & Willson, C. (2020). *Inspired thinking: Big ideas to enrich yourself and your community*. ALA Editions. ISBN 9780838946718. 144 pp. \$54.99 US.

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Inspired Thinking: *Big Ideas to Enrich Yourself and Your Community* examines the role of librarians as critical thinking experts who have the responsibility to encourage creative and analytical reasoning with their library users. As advocates of lifelong learning, librarians help others develop innovative ideas. Through the insights of historic western philosophers and literary greats such as Plato, *Inspired Thinking* describes ways the altruistic information professional makes a difference in libraries.

This text examines how educational systems in North America encourage students on what to think versus how to think on one's own; individuals are not encouraged to explore ideas and challenge opinions of the status quo. Libraries provide resources and the ideal environment; a solution to think beyond one's comfort zone without a hidden agenda. Big ideas stem from values—a purposeful thinking process that benefits and enlightens all of humanity (p. 47). As a result, librarians have the moral duty to champion this cause. By pinpointing the root cause of status quo thinking, one must develop innovative thinking.

Stoltz, Miller, Picker, Thompson, and Willson (2020) provide an optimistic view of library sciences. Each chapter endorses virtuous principles that librarians must exemplify to encourage innovative thought amongst their library users. Often referring to Plato's theories, Stoltz et al. posit that librarians can become modern-day, purposeful service professionals with the help of ancient philosophers and literary greats. Written in a questioning dialogue with the reader, the solution on how to generate "big ideas" is by exploring various creative disciplines. If the learner is curious and guided by their moral compass, joy, humility, and unity can become the center of one's professional life (pp. 103-112).

Themes of diversity and inclusion are presented with a sanguine tone. "Do we sometimes become overly focused on problems that we overlook solutions?" is a rhetorical question the authors present to the reader (p. 101). The positive attributes associated with a librarian are repetitively defined and reinforced, however, answers to creating a diverse and inclusive library space are not addressed with practical solutions. Suggested case studies and solutions would be beneficial to the reader, instead of questioning the reader on how to "facilitate 'free discussion' among a group of diverse individuals with who can find common ground amid differing opinions" (p.16). Instead, solutions were exemplified in the lives of historical Americans who lived with "big ideas."

The utopian tone by the authors reiterates how free thinking was exemplified by America's founding fathers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Abraham Lincoln; including literary greats and philanthropists such as Helen Keller, Mark Twain, and Andrew Carnegie. Written in an encouraging self-help tone for librarians, historic examples are perpetuated in the text with Stephen Covey's principles applied on how to develop one's intellectual curiosity (p. 54). The spirit of democracy and freedom of speech is not absent in the authors' account of U.S. history. The relevancy of this text is biased towards Western cultures; primarily, for U.S. librarians living in a democratic society. This includes exploring the notion of Jefferson as an advocate of slavery or a social justice advocate. Stoltz et al. (2020) assert:

Those who condemn Jefferson based on modern attitudes about slavery are demonstrating that they have a closed mind. A truly open mind accepts Jefferson as he was, not as we believe he ought to have been...Jefferson became the bridge between the lack of freedom for some and eventual freedom for all by declaring that "all men are created equal," meaning all human beings. It cannot be overstated how radical idea—this big idea—was at the time. (p. 15)

The authors suggest Thomas Jefferson had a stance on social equality despite having slaves of his own; that those who fail to see him as an equitable thinker possess a narrow mind. Even though it took eighty years to achieve the ideal of public and private freedoms (p.16), the authors believe Jefferson was inherently a civil human rights hero. Through examining U.S. history, the relevancy of this text may not appeal to international readers. *Inspired Thinking* introduces Plato's philosophical terms only with Western examples.

Furthermore, this utopian tone continues the discussion of how librarians must provide exceptional customer service. "Harmfulness can happen when we don't focus our cheerfulness when assisting a customer, or when we don't make needed decisions or when we avoid following through on our commitments and responsibilities" (p. 79). The insistence to remain cheerful can appear inauthentic to library users; a librarian who does not have a genuine cheerful disposition presents a dishonest façade to the library user. Even though *Inspired Thinking* perpetuates inclusive library spaces, a librarian's authenticity should take precedence over providing a cheerful demeanor. Ironically, Alexander Pope's infamous proverb, "to err is human, to forgive divine" is quoted often throughout the text (see p. 9 and p. 96, for example). If a librarian appears uncheerful, perhaps forgiveness can be exhibited.

The main takeaway of *Inspired Thinking* is to remain hopeful as a library professional. "Libraries can offer something no other agency across the spectrum of civilization offers—an open invitation to walk through the doors of wisdom without promoting any ideology, be it political, social, or religious" (p. 82). Libraries are the breeding ground of innovative thought, where librarians assist others in achieving this ideal without any preconceived judgement. Throughout *Inspired Thinking*, libraries are endorsed as premium spaces for diverse and inclusive thinking. Regardless of one's socioeconomic status, age, or social network, a library provides the ideal environment for innovative thinking. With numerous resources and the latest technologies provided, library users have all the tools to think creatively.

If one is searching to define what morals, ethics, and ideals distinguish the library profession from others, this text is highly recommended. The inspirational and optimistic tone of the authors facilitates how to creatively think and explore one's thoughts. Written in an American self-help

style for librarians, this text encourages readers to innovate the world. By freely taking one's first step into the library, big ideas can be born.

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