LIBRARY EDUCATION IN PERSPECTIVE

By

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The contiguity of several recent (or not-so-recent) library school graduates quite often eventuates in a discussion of "what is wrong with library education?" Much of the substance of these conversations contains what might be termed "standard library folklore": horror stories about the mountains of reference books whose titles had to be memorized, the dozens of tiny red marks which a pedantic instructor made on those carefully prepared catalog cards, the myriads of facts about library and publishing history which had to be regurgitated at examination time. The dreadfully dull readings and the miserably monotonous class sessions — all serve to remind the graduate that he is indeed fortunate to have survived the medieval marathon known as library school.

Many such criticisms prove to be, when analyzed, at least paradoxical, if not self-contradictory. Comments made by certain recent library school graduates suggest that they are—not surprisingly—somewhat confused about what library education ought to be. Newly employed, they lack the perspective necessary to evaluate objectively their recent experiences. At the other extreme are many of the graduates from former years who still rate library schools on the basis of experiences that are woefully out of date.

Criticism of library education is nothing new. Dating from Melvil Dewey's School (1887), we can trace the origination, stabilization, accreditation, and augmentation of programs in library education. Regularly, however, controversies in the field continue to be raised and discussed, often heatedly. Among these basic controversies are (1) practical training versus professional understanding; (2) academic versus professional undergraduate studies to support the master's degree in librarianship; (3) general versus library education; and (4) theorists versus practitioners as members of library school faculties. Out of the discussion of these four topics have grown many "new" developments in library education. For the purpose of analysis, five of these will be here represented: (1) articulated curricula, (2) "general special" degree programs in library schools, (3) continuing education, (4) training of library technicians, and (5) research in librarianship.

Substantial efforts have been made in recent years, through the Association of American Library Schools and ALA's Library Education Division, to understand the variations in pattern among undergraduate and graduate programs, with a view towrd "meshing" them more effectively. The correct educational term for such an effort is "articulation." At present articulation is more readily apparent among the graduate library schools than between them and the undergraduate programs. Much isolation is still discernible, and articulation is notably more successful between undergraduate and graduate schools within the same institution. Nonetheless, educators continue to discuss wider articulation and in so doing help to lay the foundation for a more comprehensive program to be implemented in the future. The 1963 and 1964 midwinter meetings of the Association of American Library Schools focused effectively on the matter of content of the basic courses in librarianship: the so-called "core." While much diversity remains, it is surprising how much of the content is essentially the same from one graduate institution to the next.

Such discussions also tend to foster standardizaion as insructors learn from each other which methods have been successful and which have not, what topics may be omitted and what should be retained in the core courses. Neither should the effect of a regular program of ALA accreditation be overlooked, for visiting teams of librarians often recommend similar corrective action at different universities, thus — over the years — imposing a subtle kind of standardization.

In order to meet the needs of neophyte librarians who want to specialize in a particular type of service, the library schools are developing a kind of "general special" approach (users of the Library of Congress classification will recognize this term). Where technical subject specialties are involved, the student is urged to take advanced courses apart from his library education; however, within the library science curriculum he may select special projects and tailor many assignments to fit his own interests. In addition, he may be provided with a seminar especially developed for his needs; or he may be permitted to enroll in a "Readings and Research" course which will allow him to pursue his specialty systematically. As a whole, library schools resist the establishment of multiple courses which have limited appeal. The staffing of such courses is difficult because part-time instructors must usually be sought, with all the attendant problems mentioned earlier.

To some degree, the needs of specialists for additional custom-made instruction may be met through the introduction of continuing education programs: institutes, seminars, colloquia, symposia, workshops, etc. A recent Earl Wilson column noted: "Today's technology is moving so fast that if a man takes more than an hour for lunch, he has to be retrained." Librarians occasionally appear to blame their alma mater for not teaching, for example, procedures for operating a new type of machinery which had not even been invented when they were in school. For reasons noted earlier, library schools cannot introduce a new course every time a new invention appears, although the instructors can discuss its implications within the existing course structure. This has, in fact, occurred in many library schools with respect to computer technology; information regarding the application of such a powerful tool can easily be incorporated into the regular courses in reference and technical services as well as those dealing with library administration. Such an "absorption" plan does not, however, solve the problem of the practicing librarian who needs to update his education.

Librarians have a tendency to heave a sigh of relief once their degrees are awarded and to relax under the delusion that they will never again have to submit to the formal classroom situation. Nothing could be less true, for librarians of today are severely hampered by their failure to keep up with developments in their own and allied professions. Many of those, however, who are aware of their need for further education never make this need known to a nearby library school. With Federal funds in abundance, many schools would be both willing and financially able to undertake the sponsorship of institutes and workshops to bring practicing librarians up to date in their fields. Many teachers and businessmen know that they must attend at least one such institute each year if they are to hold their own in their respective disciplines. Librarians can hardly afford to do less.

An earlier emphasis upon the value of separating clerical training from professional education is mirrored today in the growing concern about the fantastic estimates of the shortage of librarians. Certain library administrators and educators have charged, however, that the shortage exists only because professional librarians are continuing to per-

form clerical tasks. One possible answer which is currently being explored is a type of "training institute" program to produce the so-called "library technician." Candidates for this position are given academic training in such basic subjects as English and history as well as practical education in acquisitions, cataloging, circulation, and reference routines. Emphasis is placed upon acquiring certain skills, under the assumption that the professional librarian will, in contrast, be more a planner than a doer and hence will require a different type of education which stresses thought and creativity. Some library educators fear this production of technicians because the general public has yet to learn that these people are not "librarians." Perhaps it is more important that the work force be sensibly augmented through all types of appropriate training than that effort be wasted in trying to protect the dignity of a title that is now — as it has always been — ambiguous at best.

A final development which merits attention is the systematic provision for library research. The U. S. Office of Education and the American Library Association, in conjunction with several of the library schools, have been fostering programs of research aimed at acquiring some basic data needed to assess the state of the profession today and plan intelligently for the future. Some of the research programs have been attached, with varying degrees of flexibility, to existing graduate library schools, primarily those which are already supporting a doctoral curriculum. As with any research unit, there is always the danger of the "tail wagging the dog," in that the emphasis upon securing funds and producing acceptable research reports may overshadow the educational purposes of the library school. For this reason, the most recently established units are essentially independent of the educational arm, although some of the researchers are drawn from students and faculty of the institution.

In addition to these developments, there are certain psychological gains which are favorably affecting library education. The first is the public's increasing identification of librarianship with the more glamorous field of information science and information retrieval. The man on the street views information control as important and thus affords higher status to the librarian whose work is so defined. Many library schools have either allied themselves with information science programs or have installed such programs themselves; in so doing, their prestige on campus and in the community has increased.

A second psychological advance is tied to the growing importance of education, particularly higher education, throughout the United States. Library educators are able to achieve higher salaries and greater community recognition than ever before. Illustrative of this advance is the fact, discovered by Lennox Cooper in his research project at the UNC School of Library Science, that of the 292 full-time faculty in graduate library schools, 136 of them (or 46.6 percent) were not teaching in accredited schools in 1962. Such a rapid growth would not have been possible had the psychological climate and related fringe benefits not improved significantly within the last five years. Further advances along this line are to be expected.

Concomitant with the more elevated views of librarianship and of education in general is the higher quality of recruits to the profession. Whether this is to be attributed to the efforts of ALA or simply to the better spread of the "word" at the grass roots level, it is still to be applauded, especially since it spurs the library educator to develop curricula and course presentations which will challenge a new breed of student. The degree candidate who learns faster and thinks more serves as a goad to the instructor to keep his material fresh and to discard many of the outdated examples which have long

since served their purpose. A number of the new students are more sophisticated in their library experience and can provide pertinent illustrations during class discussions — assuming that some time is protected for such discussions. As educators recognize these characteristics in their students, they are propelled to reduce much of the routine course content to "programmed learning," wherever possible, so that class sessions can become creative and developmental in nature.

The upsurge of professional consciousness among librarians has also had a salutary effect upon library education. There is talk of accrediting librarians as well as library schools, after the manner of the medical boards and bar associations. Although the accreditation of librarians — or their universal certification — may never materialize, such a discussion focuses attention upon the need to define clearly the role of the professional librarian in contrast to that of the technician or library assistant. As this role increasingly involves such qualities as creativity, ability to plan services and work flow, and depth of understanding of information sources and needs, library school courses will become more interesting and more demanding by virtue of the fact that they can eliminate many of the tedious "how to do it" elements.

These comments about brighter students and more professional consciousness suggest, perhaps, that the library world belongs to the young. If library education is to achieve its promise, however, it must draw heavily upon the services of librarians who are on the job today. There are, among others, three important areas in which practitioners can aid educators.

First, they can espouse "positive thinking" when they discuss library schools with prospective recruits. It is quite possible, for example, that the "washout" professor who taught you in library school has moved on since you left. It is even reasonable to hope that the course content has changed somewhat, so that the subjects which bored you may challenge a new generation of students. Thus, you can help significantly by avoiding expressions such as "everybody's got to get his union card, so you might as well get it over with" and "library school involves a lot of busywork which you'll just have to put up with" and "after all, it's only a year — you can stick it out for that long no matter how bad it gets." This type of prejudice infects a student body and sometimes requires the major part of a year to dispel. Perhaps such remarks are "in" or "smart," but they have the unfortunate effect of reflecting not only upon library education but upon you as a member of a "mickey mouse" group.

Second, after you have acquired several years of library experience, offer your services as a summer school instructor. Many library educators cherish their summer freedom as a time of research and renewal. In addition, some universities restrict the amount of summer teaching which a regular faculty member can undertake. For this reason, supplementary faculty are always in demand. If you are willing to try, you will undoubtedly find the experience both rewarding and frustrating. In any case, you will certainly become more sympathetic to the problems of library educators once you have seen the field from the "inside."

Finally, you can proffer considered and thoughtful criticism. No library educator of any merit feels that he has solved all the problems presented by his courses or his students. He welcomes the fresh and less biased view of an outsider whose goals are the same as his own. He will not, however, respond cheerfully if he is always taken to task and never praised. Gentle criticisms, born out of warm friendship and mutual interest in

achieving quality library education, will normally be prized and carefully appraised. Indeed, the library educator is still at heart, a librarian, and as such he wants and needs to know in detail the situations which his students may face and for which he may not be adequately preparing them. Such "feedback" from the profession is essential to the development of a vital and exciting library educational program. And — given the context of today's world — excitement about library education is a distinct possibility.

ROLE OF THE PARISH LIBRARY

By

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Christ Episcopal Church library began some 15 years ago under the guidance of a committee composed of parish members. They chose the library's first selections, which together with donations and memorial gifts, composed the 300 volumes which constituted the library nucleus.

The library operation continued in this manner until 1961, when it became a project of one of the women's guilds. They began an updating and revision which found Christ Church with an expanded library of some 1,200 books and a completely new system of cataloging and circulation.

Although the library had been originally set up under the Dewey system, the committee found that some slight adaptations and occasionally the creation of new categories made it easier for laymen to find books.

A system of "self-service" in check-out procedure was set up, along with a series of explanations on the use of the card catalog and shelves (it is amazing how many adults acquainted with the Dewey system in their school days seem to forget totally any part of the system in later years), and check-out procedure. These explanations are repeated to adult classes and other meetings (teachers and group leaders) at intervals so that potential readers will not be discouraged from using the library because they do not know how to find a book.

The bulk of the Christ Church library is theological and related material; however, some related fiction and a number of biographies are also included. A separate reference section contains concordances, dictionaries and encyclopedias, and also serves as a repository for material used by some county-wide Episcopal groups, which use the library as their central meeting place.

A section of the adult library is devoted to young adults, ages 15 to 19, along with material helpful to advisers and workers with this age group. *YA* selections include "Campus Gods on Trial", "Facts of Life and Love For Teenagers", and the ever-popular Salinger books, once used as study material by youth groups.

The children's library is entirely separate from the adult library, being contained in a separate room. The committee believed that children might be discouraged from using the library if they felt they had to enter a room which would look to them