



Selection, Orientation, and Development of the Professional Staff

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THE CHANGE FROM the belief that the main measure of the value of a library is its book collection to the realization that a well-trained staff is at least equally important, is a well-defined trend from the beginning of libraries to the present time. As our libraries have become more generally accepted by their representative communities, the need for a full staff, well trained, with all supervisory needs met, has become increasingly evident.

The problem of selection is critical and of first importance. During the past ten years the widespread necessity of recruiting for the library profession has emphasized again our need for careful selection. Selection should mean choosing the best-trained person available at the best salary that can be offered, and usually it does mean this. Unfortunately, many libraries are finding that the term "best-trained person" at the present time is a variable. They must be satisfied with any library school graduate who is available, and most libraries are dependent upon library schools for their professional personnel.

In some of the schools candidates are accepted who are able to meet the scholastic requirements but who possess personal characteristics so negative that placement is a serious problem. Encouragement of students who do not have the required personality for modern librarianship acts as a deterrent to desirable recruits and slows the public acceptance of the profession. Now that libraries of every kind are accepted as important and essential to our educational pattern, it becomes increasingly urgent for us to provide librarians who are recognized as normal, alert leaders. It is the duty of every individual staff member, of every library, and of every library school to encourage able persons to become librarians. It is equally important that they discourage the weak and the futile. Not too many years ago there was a feeling prevalent among librarians that there was a place

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in the profession for everyone regardless of his personal qualifications. Those with weak personalities could be assigned to cataloging or to a small library where the pressure would not be great. This fallacy has revealed itself in increased costs of operation and unsatisfactory service in the modern sense. It is extremely important that all phases of library work be carried on by the most capable, alert, and imaginative people possible.

It will be necessary sometime in the next few years to develop adequate tests to determine the potential success of candidates in the library profession. Several attempts have been made in this direction, none of which have proved especially successful. Most important is the recognition of responsibility by library school admittance officers to insist upon personal interviews with every prospective candidate in a further effort to determine full qualifications for potential librarians. These interviews need not necessarily require expensive travel but could be conducted by representatives of the school drawn from librarians in the local area.

Some of the larger libraries are able to do some of this initial selection themselves. The pattern followed in the Brooklyn Public Library is being adopted by more and more libraries. Under this pattern it is possible for the library to select college graduates who have expressed some interest in librarianship and who can be offered a preprofessional position while they try out librarianship by attending library school. While this is only possible, of course, in areas where library schools are located close to fairly large libraries, it may be that libraries and library schools will be able to enter into cooperative plans which will test future librarians on the job before a heavy investment in education is made by any individual recruit.

Between one-quarter and one-half of Brooklyn's potential professional recruits are chosen before they go to library school, chosen through an intensive recruiting campaign with colleges and universities on the East Coast. It has been so successful that vacancies among the preprofessional staff are filled as rapidly as they occur. Each prospect has a two-year opportunity to try out library work. Salaries are increased on an incentive basis as the recruit matriculates in a library school and again as he completes the first eight semester points.

The selection criteria for this group is exactly the same as for professional librarians. Leadership qualities are especially sought along with imagination, verve, outgoing personalities, and the ability to work as part of a team. In stressing leadership qualities it is not assumed that every librarian is going to be an administrator, but

certainly that every trained librarian will probably be called upon to guide the work of others. The person who possesses qualities of leadership is a superior librarian whatever the assignment.

In the future there is bound to be a greater awareness on the part of the larger libraries of their responsibility for training and for furnishing qualified personnel to smaller libraries. This has been retarded in the past due to unequal salary scales, but many of the smaller libraries are now beginning to pay better salaries and often living costs are less than in the larger cities. It will always be true that a fairly large number of people will prefer life in a smaller community. As this system develops, people well qualified to carry on an active program in smaller communities will be available after a year or two of experience and training in the larger library. The present acceptance of libraries by the public generally has been due to the increasingly fine library service in smaller communities. As a steady flow of better-trained librarians is available for these assignments, the whole profession will benefit.

In recent years librarianship has called for increasing specialization. For many years librarians have developed their experience to the point where a cataloger would speak only to a cataloger, a children's librarian only to a children's librarian. Library schools have been hard put to meet the constantly increasing demand for more and more specialized courses. But as pointed out on page 18 of this issue the trend away from this pattern is already noticeable in the library school curriculum, and the profession generally must soon accept the fact that sound general training can be adapted to the necessary requirements of the various phases of modern library service. In many of the larger libraries candidates are not hired for specific positions, definite assignments being made only after several months of experience in various parts of the library system.

Problems of recruiting and selection will always be with us, but as each librarian develops a better understanding of the broad needs of the profession and considers himself as a part of the whole profession, there will be less interference with the movement of staff to other libraries and better opportunities will be available to the individual. Some libraries will even encourage such movement in the belief that whatever strengthens the whole profession will benefit the individual library. When that time comes the problem of selection to afford the best-balanced staff in most libraries will not be as critical as at the present time, and all libraries will be able to do a better job.

There is an increasing trend in the direction of continued training

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after a librarian has finished library school. The education now provided in many library schools encompasses the philosophies and histories of libraries and attempts to provide the reasons why things are done rather than the specific how-to-do-it's. This has replaced the training which was geared primarily to routines. As this change has taken place there has been a greater acceptance by libraries of the responsibility for in-service training and for supplementing the library school program. While it is true that some still believe that library school training should be complete enough so that a new librarian can fit into any job with only minor adjustments, there is increasing realization that this is not possible and should not be encouraged. Training in specific techniques and methods can best be given by the library on the job. On-the-job training can and will vary with the individual library. It may consist of simple and informal explanations of the library routines and its method of operation in a community. It may be carried on entirely during staff meetings, or it may be set up on a more formal basis with regular class meetings over a period of time. The size of the library staff, the work load, the physical setup of the library, and the administrative organization will all have a bearing on the type of training carried on.

One effective on-the-job training device is the annual institute for the staff as used in the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. This provides an opportunity for the full staff to come together on a holiday for talks and group discussions based upon a central theme, usually one that has public interest and represents a current problem. This type of training has several advantages. It brings the whole staff together to participate regardless of grade or type of assignment. The professional and clerical staffs meet on an equal basis. All get a chance to know one another better by participating in the same discussion. All have an opportunity of being part of the whole and should come away with a better sense of belonging than would be possible for them to develop during the average day's work. Because care is used in the selection of the topic to be discussed there is an educational benefit to be derived from thinking out the problem and receiving encouragement to go further in the study of it after the meeting is over.

Another form of on-the-job training which is traditional in the field of children's work and which is carried on in larger libraries consists of regular meetings of the children's department staff or, in larger areas, through groups of children's librarians. This kind of meeting, which is also common among other specialties such as reference work,

cataloging, and young people's work, provides an opportunity for talks on common problems, deciding on the development of new techniques, exchanging ideas of storytelling, exhibits, etc. A third type of on-the-job training is internship, where the new person has an opportunity of working under guidance for a specific period of time in various departments of the library. Successfully developed recently at the Library of Congress, and also in several special libraries, internship is now receiving renewed attention.

Some libraries combine all of the above methods with variations. The Brooklyn Public Library has formally instituted a rounded In-Service Training Program. Each year a group of discussion meetings are held for the new professional members of the staff who have been added during the previous year. These meetings require two hours every two weeks from September to May and are designed to develop the leadership potential of this group. No effort is made to teach routines, although at least one meeting is devoted to background and orientation to give as clear a picture as possible of the policy of the library in relation to its service to the people of Brooklyn. The rest of the meetings are given over to practical discussion of management techniques, personnel problems, and methods of planning.

The results more than justify the time and money required to carry out the In-Service Training Program. For example, it has been possible in several instances to appoint a person who has had this training as branch librarian with only one year's experience out of library school. Also, each year several staff members who have gone through this program leave to accept responsible positions in other parts of the country. Thus the Brooklyn Public Library has been able to assist in the development of the profession generally by giving these people a sounder training than they could obtain under most of the better-known methods.

There is a difference between training and orientation. The purpose of orientation is to help staff members become quickly familiar with the philosophy and methods of a particular library; to help them to know the community; to become acquainted with their fellow staff members. If they have come from out of town, the librarian should make sure that they have satisfactory living conditions and should help them to know the churches, the stores, the various things which can help them get started in a new community. Much of the orientation plan will be similar for all types and levels of staff appointments. Orientation of clerical appointees has been discussed in the article on clerical personnel on page 55.

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For the professional staff members an additional orientation will be necessary, because in addition to the philosophy and methods of the library, they should also be introduced quickly to the philosophy and methods of the particular specialty in which they will be working, such as children's work, young adults' work, cataloging, and readers' services. This orientation can best be accomplished by one individual who can carry through on a friendly basis and act as a special guide to each new staff member, one to whom he can take his special problems and feel that every effort will be made to help him solve them. Part of this can be done by the personnel director of the library if the library is large enough to have such a staff member. Part of it can be done by the librarian in charge of the special phase of work to which this staff member is assigned.

The development of more satisfactory methods of in-service training and of orientation has been intensified during the past several years by the belief that specialized types of library training were not being supplied in library schools. Children's librarians, for example, have felt that the great lack of courses in storytelling techniques in many of the library schools. They are also concerned about the need for more courses in child psychology. There has been an increasing development of enthusiasm for group leadership in some of the library schools, but many libraries have found it necessary to establish special courses in training for group leadership because of insufficient practical training of the students. In both of these cases the responsibility for filling the deficiencies in training has been accepted by libraries, and various methods have been used in solving the problem, sometimes in cooperation with a library school or a university but more often within their own walls.

As librarianship has developed more and more as a real career and as librarians have tended to become nomadic in their conception of a profession on a broad national base, the need to train leaders in all fields of librarianship has increased. Good leaders can in turn develop their own staff members and continue their training. One of the basic reasons for training is to fit a person for promotion more rapidly than is possible under the trial and error method. A staff member must know how to consider unnecessary routines so that they may be eliminated and more time given to more worth-while things. He has to be able to develop imaginative programs geared to community needs. He must know how to analyze problems objectively and to arrive quickly at sound methods for meeting the problems.

This is the kind of training that is hard to accomplish in a formal

program, but it can be done by the personal interest and stimulation of a good leader who believes firmly in the value of the profession as a whole and in the great need for the rapid development of new librarians. These will carry on, making the service of their particular library more satisfactory, more important, and less costly to their particular community. With the increasing possibility for good career service and with the increasing trend toward better caliber librarians, this phase in the developmental procedure of future librarians becomes increasingly important.

Our key librarians will raise eyes above the horizons of their own particular communities and see library service as a broad and all-encompassing educational function of the nation, or even on an international basis. With this awareness of the whole profession, the acceptance of responsibility by the librarians of larger libraries to assist in the development of staff for small communities will increase and with it will come what we have all hoped for so long—a sound program of development of librarians from the recruit straight on through to the head of any particular library service.