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The Importance of Newer Media in Library Training and the Education of Professional Personnel

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NEWER MEDIA DO NOT YET HAVE MUCH status in libraries nor, as a consequence, do the in-service training and formal audio-visual education programs developed for professional library personnel. It may be conjectured that, if library practice continues to be slow in accepting and putting into effect new theories and principles, both pre-service and in-service training will be out of date and will thus perpetuate already negative attitudes.

Audio-visual courses currently offered in library schools tend to be more concerned with the "nuts and bolts" aspects of the newer media —equipment and material maintenance and scheduling of use—than with the shape of future media service requirements. It is true that the introduction of information and computer sciences into professional library education has generated a shift of interest in the direction of library networks and computer capability. But, generally speaking, little professional recognition has been or is now being given to what the author believes is probably the way of future program development—the creation of a new variety of media service agencies which, as they cut across "type of library" lines and "plug in" to local, regional, state, and national systems and networks, will enable local agencies to become chiefly terminals for larger units serving specific clienteles.

Current thinking about such future library service development and about what might be done, for example, to serve newly-planned communities, is reflected in a number of recent articles and studies. One such study of communication and information services planned

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for Columbia, Maryland, proposes creation of a new Communication Service Agency [1] which would contract with schools, colleges, business, industry, local government, and public as well as private groups to provide a full range of traditional as well as newer media program services.

In the author's opinion, present audio-visual equipment and materials are, in large part, obsolescent if not entirely obsolete, as are the administrative arrangements by which they are provided. Thus, the more typical in-service training programs and pre-professional courses which stress present-day operations and models are that much more deficient. Training outside library schools is usually sponsored by the employing libraries and by professional associations. The latter give chief attention to the availability of materials and to the need for bibliographic aids, while the former tend to represent the afterthoughts of a library personnel training officer who "throws" A-V into an already crowded schedule just to be sure it is not overlooked.

The picture is not any brighter for library schools. A few years ago a conference [2] was held in Chicago to introduce library school professors and deans to some new ideas about ways in which the new media might be deployed (1) to enrich patron services, and (2) as teaching aids in both library school curricula and in-service training programs generally. The conference was attended by faculty members representing almost every major graduate school located in the United States and Canada. It hardly needs reporting now that the conference failed to produce a "revolution" in library school thinking. Indeed, there has been no visible follow-up. And at this point in time, it may be fair to state that:

1. The newer media are still not regarded as significant elements in library service by library school teachers and administrators.
2. Neither pre-professional nor in-service training programs developed for libraries have reached a significant stage of development respecting new media services.
3. The newer media are not used either extensively or well to assist teaching any aspect of librarianship in either formal or informal instructional programs, and there is no evidence available to suggest that there will be any changes in the near future.

The results of a study conducted by the author in 1965 for the ALA's Audio-Visual Committee [3] on the use of audio-visual aids in

library in-service training programs serve only to corroborate the above statements. The scope of the study included (1) the use of non-print training aids in libraries; (2) the extent to which such aids were made available; and (3) their presence and use, if any, in the training programs offered by accredited library schools. Two aspects of new media training were considered in the study: use of aids for training staff, and use of aids for orienting library patrons.

Some 144 questionnaires were mailed. The sample was restricted to larger library units, i.e., public libraries which covered populations of 50,000 to 100,000, and of more than 100,000; academic libraries with student populations of more than 8,000 and full-time staffs of more than 60; and state libraries. It represented approximately one and one-half percent of all public, academic, and state libraries in the country. The returns, when analyzed, indicated that of those which replied, 104 (or 75 percent) actually made no use of non-print materials in their training activities. Among libraries which gave an affirmative response were a number which offered some patron instruction and, therefore, made at least limited use of films, filmstrips, slides, recordings, tapes, posters, projectuals, and the like.

Follow-up visits were made by the author to a number of metropolitan centers including greater New York, Detroit, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. Conclusions based on direct observation bore out the results obtained from questionnaires:

1. Even among those libraries which did make use of newer media in their in-service training programs, such use was scant.
2. Some few aids had been locally produced for specific purposes, and some commercially; for the most part, librarians felt that the use of standard commercial films, filmstrips, and projectuals ensured better results.
3. There appeared to be little, if any, relationship between the need for large-scale training programs and the use of audio-visual aids.
4. Aside from library personnel directly engaged in providing audio-visual services, professionals appeared to resent the generally amateur use of A-V aids in their in-service instruction.
5. It was noted that library training officers were not really familiar with new media and tended not to use them effectively.
6. Even at those institutions where more sophisticated inventories of A-V equipment and other resources were available for patron orientation and/or staff training, utilization of these resources

for in-service training was at best occasional and, more commonly, inferior.

Thus, to sum up results of the survey in colloquial terms, librarians on the job were simply "not with it" respecting use of newer media for either in-service or pre-service education.

By contrast, information obtained for the survey through conversations held with directors of training and personnel services employed by commercial organizations revealed that these organizations made extensive use of many well-designed training aids—films and projectuals—and of some programmed instruction as well. These aids were believed invaluable in improving the quality of the training offered, in reducing training costs, and in accelerating the teaching and learning processes. One chief difference noted between typical company and library attitudes toward training was the higher priority given by business and industry to staff training, especially that offered to middle- and upper-management levels.

As for library education agencies, the net yield of the author's survey impressions suggests considerable lack of interest among most faculty members, apart from showing general films on library service; introducing occasional slides, a few projectuals, and recordings in materials courses; or making occasional use of an opaque projector to present materials used in teaching cataloging.

This is a rather dismal situation when compared to the results of attention now being paid the new media within the world of education as a whole. Since passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, projects involving Titles I, II, and III of this legislation have led to many attempts to procure and use successfully a variety of new devices. While the feedback from user to educator within a training institution is neither swift nor certain because of on-the-job pressures among teachers and school administrators, the number of special training ventures, both short- and long-term, is impressive when viewed from a national perspective. And as such ventures continue, designers of formal training programs are becoming increasingly aware of their responsibility to prepare the teacher to deal more effectively with newer media within education.

Since completion of the survey, some new approaches have developed including use of closed-circuit TV to introduce classroom presentations simultaneously to two or more audience groups, to demonstrate cataloging procedures, and simulate basic library routines. A new type of demonstration laboratory is being planned for installa-

tion in one institution (the University of Pittsburgh), which will in-
clude a full range of Flexowriter and computer terminal equipment
on which "live" projects may be managed by students working under
faculty surveillance to ensure acquaintance with the newer equip-
ment and the procedures needed for library automation.

Other exceptions to the negative survey results reported above were
reflected in (1) information provided by Southern Illinois University
regarding experiments with programmed instruction for library orien-
tation; (2) the information received from Illinois State Normal Uni-
versity concerning use of televised presentations to accomplish the
same end; and (3) in a recent article by Becker [4] which called atten-
tion to a growing interest in systems of communication among some
libraries. But, generally speaking, a review of pertinent literature and
informal field queries have not discovered any new activity begun
since completion of the survey which would lead the author to modify
the conclusions stated. Nor are there reasons to change his opinion
to the effect that the common denominator found among librarians
respecting use of newer media in training and professional education
programs is a view that such use usually entails "too much time"
and "extra expense" to be warranted.

Since, then, there is a lack of interest in adequate training oppor-
tunities and improved service programs, what should be done? One
possibility is to make more use in larger libraries of technical media
specialists who have been trained outside the library profession. Here
the difficulty is, of course, that such personnel may find it hard to
mesh their efforts comfortably with those of a traditional library staff.
They just do not feel "at home" and tend to leave a library employer
when the first "good opportunity" comes along.

Respecting in-service education as such, more use could and should
be made of consultants and of commercially prepared instructional
aids devised by commercial and non-commercial agencies which spe-
cialize in training problems. Such agencies are often used with much
success by business and industrial concerns. Library managers would,
of course, have to be convinced of worth because of the substantial
costs to be met. But, at the least, the proposition deserves a trial under
fair conditions.

Within state as well as national professional associations there
should be established strong headquarters staffs and membership di-
visional units which will keep librarians up to date respecting devel-
opments and trends in the field and which may provide badly needed

counsel and professional expertise to assist and improve both new media service and training effort.

But, in the author's opinion, the most important place to break the circle of apathy and ignorance regarding new media is within the graduate library schools. Here, at least, some time is available to introduce expanding concepts of library functions, the nature of library systems and networks, and the probable requirements that automation and the national information demand are likely to impose on the design of future approaches to library service.

From books to films, from films to computers and from computers to more advanced installations—this is a series of steps which should have been taken long ago in planning modern library school curricula. And, to repeat a point, throughout professional training greater attention should be given to the acquisition, processing, storage and retrieval of *knowledge* as distinguished from specific forms of library *materials*.

Beyond the library school curriculum there is, of course, the possibility of developing more advanced in-service training programs, perhaps to be supported cooperatively by regional groups which may very well have been organized primarily for other purposes such as the common storage and processing of material. One also might suggest the development of traveling training teams, staffed independently, or perhaps even cooperatively, by one or more of the graduate schools which now serve the profession. In any case, developed on a regional base, a suitable orientation and training center (perhaps to be located physically in one of the larger libraries and/or a neighboring library school) should be established and sufficiently well-equipped and motivated to manage on a sound contractual basis an effective training program and the demonstration of new media services under optimum conditions.

In closing, there is just one question to ask—will or will not the library profession take hold and use to the full those resources now available in modern communication and information technology in terms of both services to be provided and as aids for use in the training process? If not, even the most book-oriented service programs stand to be isolated and compromised seriously while others take over both functions stated. The need now is not for more A-V gadgets and gimmicks, but rather for sober, professional recognition of two facts: (1) responsible performance of the library function must include provision of a full range of recorded communications media;

(2) the professional education process can be assisted greatly by proper use of new communications technology.

References

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