



The Changing Environment and Changing Institution: Indian Project of the Northeast Kansas Library System

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THE TERRITORY COVERED by the Northeast Kansas Library (NEKL) System embraces all the current national economic and social crises in microcosm. It is an area in which suburbia, industry, government, and learning rub shoulders with the remnants of rural tradition. The factory worker in Lawrence finds the university relevant only two times a year, during football and basketball seasons. The university's street society, on the other hand, feels put upon in having to share the community. The Oskaloosa farmer no longer farms; instead he commutes daily to the Goodyear or Dupont plants in Topeka since it is out of the question for him to think of moving to the city. The executive in Mission Hills worries about his property taxes, his pool, and his job. The assembly line worker is oblivious to the polluted air choking both Kansas Cities; his concerns are centered in getting out of the city and having safety on his neighborhood streets after dark.

The regional library must effect a response to these manifestations of change. Somehow the library must find a means to relate to a clientele that is itself finding it increasingly difficult to relate to any situation. Moreover, the library must also deal with specific elements that are part of and hidden within the generalities of change. The disadvantaged are a prime example of this element. In Kansas, the varying degrees of disadvantageousness apply to the state's black, Mexican-American and Indian populations. There is no variation in this pattern in the

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region covered by the NEKL System. The system's racial/ethnic population is approximately less than 10 percent of a total population of over 600,000. The smallness in numbers, however, is in indirect proportion to needs and lack of response.

The organizational/administrative structure of a library system tends to mitigate against direct response to user needs. The organization is a kind of bureaucracy, separated from its clientele by an intermediate layer of individual libraries. The system, per se, actually has the function of a headquarters. For the most part, this situation is common to systems regardless of type (cooperative, federation, consolidated, etc.). The system, in this sense, is the manager and packager of services. The delivery of service, interaction between library and user, occurs at the local level via member libraries. The system is in no position to fill a gap when a member agency fails to meet the needs of elements of the immediate community. Even a mail order book catalog can usurp the limits placed on the system by the biases, fears, and self-interests of individual system members. There is one issue that bids to test existing structures of the system concept, and this issue is service to the disadvantaged.

A majority of Kansas's black, Mexican-American, and Indian citizens live in the area of the Northeast Kansas Library System. Of these groups, the Indian has been untouched by library service. This is not to say that the interrelationships between libraries and blacks, or libraries and Mexican Americans have progressed to a point where service is adequate and can simply be maintained as is. Instead it reflects simply that the responsibility gap between local agencies and the system is sufficiently narrowed as to allow the system to devote priority attention to where the service gap is enormous, i.e., service to the Indian.

In addition to the expected problems inherent when a system assumes a direct service role, it should be noted that the target service area, while in the system's territory, is under the library jurisdiction for non-system members. The system did have two factors in favor of its overcoming these barriers: (1) Kansas's new requirement of planning and program action on a system level as participant criteria in Title I of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), and (2) the system's decision to subdivide itself into districts. This latter decision spread the administrative burden and responsibility around and forced system members to become involved in an area adjacent to their own jurisdiction.

Consideration and planning for an Indian project began at the dis-

strict level (Topeka) in mid-1969. Coincidentally the Kansas State Library had by the fall of that year decided to initiate a state-wide program for the disadvantaged. The state library agency amended its LSCA Title I program to allow planning grants to each of the state's seven library systems. The emphasis was on planning with some allowance for demonstrations. The NEKL System's proposal was well ahead of the state's limitations since it had already done its homework (planning). What was needed next was the actual program. The NEKL System proposal had as its primary objective the establishment of system services to the disadvantaged on a continuing basis. The prime service element was a media-integrated information service. The program was to be implemented in two phases: the first phase was aimed at the Potawatomi Reservation; the experiences gained from this first part of the project were to be used in the second phase at the Kickapoo Reservation. The total program was projected as a five-year plan.

The chief features of the program's first year were the establishment of a liaison between the library and identifiable service needs within the community, a rudimentary program through which the needs of the community could be assessed, and development and training of a staff from the community to maintain an on-site program of service. The second year was projected as the period for developing the communication center approach and training librarians as information specialists. The transfer of services and experience to the Kickapoo Reservation was to begin in the project's third year. Development of special services, such as those for the aged and a cultural awareness program, were projected for the third and fourth years.

In actual operation, the project more than accomplished its first year goals. An effective liaison was established between the library and the community. A center for library operation was established in the Tribal Hall on the Potawatomi Reservation. A member of the community was trained to provide door-to-door, family-to-family service as well as maintaining the reservation library. A permanent collection of materials has been developed; collections and services were augmented from the system through Topeka.

Joan Yeagley, system consultant to the project, provides a needed backdrop to the project in the following observations: "There has been in this year some doubt as to roles. We consultants have been afraid of stepping all over the feelings of these people in our Anglo-Saxon overbearing ways, and the Potawatomi and Kickapoo people have been cautious in suggesting to us those ways in which library ser-

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vices and innovations might better serve these tribes."¹ The establishment of communication between the interested parties has been slow and closely parallels the experience described in "Service to Indian Reservations"² by William Gordon. Underlining Gordon's observations, prime interest has been in ethnic materials and culturally related books and magazines.

This project was fortunate to have had the services of Duane Evans and Ellen Allen of the Potawatomi and Kickapoo tribes, respectively, who have acted as liaisons between the system and the tribes. These native Americans are dedicated to working for their people's welfare and were able to transcend the Indian reticence in dealing with outsiders and made it possible to establish communication with the tribes. The approach has been to keep the library in the hands of the people themselves, and to supply training and consultation where needed.

The success of the project with the Potawatomi tribe is in marked contrast to the situation for them in other local matters. The problem of racial discrimination was emphasized recently in a successful request for a change of venue for an Indian charged with murder. The defense attorney was able to prove by statements made to an interviewer and tape recorded from a random sampling of the population in Holton, the county seat, that discrimination against the Indian by the majority population was the order of business in that community, and an Indian could not receive a fair trial in that community.

Harassment of Indians takes many forms. Two Indian students were recently threatened with expulsion from school for wearing their hair according to tribal custom. In treaties made with the Indians and ratified by Congress, the Indian was granted free hunting and fishing rights on the reservation. On the Potawatomi Reservation, Indian men and boys have been arrested and fined for hunting without a license. Four Indian men were arrested for hunting without a licence on the reservation while waiting in a parked car for service repairs to that vehicle.

From her personal experience in working in the project, Yeagley adds the following:

In touring the reservation, I learned that only one Indian actually farms the land on the reservation. All the rest of the land is owned or leased to non-Indians. Some leases go back several generations to the forced allotment of reservation land in 1890. Indians barely realize a living from the rental fees of family owned and leased land which presents a peculiar problem. If these families apply for public assistance they will lose the

income from these lands and the rights to ownership. Knowing that many Indian families existed on a marginal level, I had been perplexed by the fact that the welfare statistics we studied failed to reflect any appreciable difference in those counties which contain the reservations, Brown and Jackson, from any other county in the NEKL area. The people choose hardship rather than risking losing their lands. Much of the reservation land is commonly owned by the tribe and the income from this land is appreciable. How it is spent is the source of friction between the younger members of the tribe and the present business committee.¹

Many of the problems the Indian faces will be resolved in time by legal action. The tribe is patiently working toward these solutions through a tribal action committee. This committee plans to elect a library committee who will keep NEKL consultants informed of tribal progress and who will interpret and support library services and activities to members of the tribe. The library has become a point of identification for these people as a rational and responsible arm of state government.

One mark of success for the system's efforts is that the four tribal councils (of the four Kansas tribes: Potawatomi, Iowa, Kickapoo and Sac-Fox) now invite the system to councils' deliberations. The NEKL System, as an institution, is responding to a changing environment.

The experiences gained from the Potawatomi project have led to a commitment by the system to fulfill the five-year plan. The commitment raises some major problems for the system. The system has assumed a responsibility for a population that is within its borders, but who are located in a county and/or local library district that does not belong to the system. The question has been raised whether system efforts for the Indian may further polarize the white and red populations, as well as jeopardize chances of the non-member areas joining the system.

The services being provided to the Potawatomi Reservation are attracting attention from the non-Indian community at Holton which may come to believe that system participation is of value to itself. With only one library in the county, whose jurisdiction is contained in the city of Holton, the total population is as badly off, in terms of resources, as the reservation population. By working closely with the Potawatomi Indian Reservation we find that the problems engendered by poverty and lack of resources are paralleled throughout the system for all of the disadvantaged. The reservation is a microcosm of the situation of the disadvantaged throughout the system. The most important single service planned by the NEKL System in its program to the disadvantaged is the system program of public service resource data on

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services available to the disadvantaged. The library functioning as an information center and community resource for education, recreation and cultural growth will be of immediate value not only to the Potawatomi Indian but to system patrons at large.

The problem of project funding is an even greater dilemma. Although the project has been funded from Title I funds of LSCA, the system has borne the greater share of the project cost. The Kansas State Library extended federal participation for an additional year, although this participation will probably be eliminated in fiscal year 1972. In its planning, the system investigated other supplementary sources of funding. Its pursuit of Johnson-O'Malley (JOM) funds was an exercise in a Kafka-like nightmare. Neither the state education agency, nor the local education agency knew anything about JOM (although the local school district had surplus JOM funds). Without supplementary monies, the system's contribution alone is not enough to continue the project. Should the system decide to go the funding alone, it can do so only at the expense of other interests of the system.

Another possible problem area for the NEKL System has to do with the nature of the library program. Thus far the program has been fairly fluid. The services delivered are primarily to provide a stimulus to the Indian population's thinking and planning for what they want as a library program. However, it should be noted that the part of the library effort having the greatest impact is that which relates to social action and awareness. The project's staff, in addition to their expected library functions, has had to assume the role of a kind of rural information specialist. Its passive role is a matter of pointing to sources of information on health care, elections, etc. Its active role pursues decent health service, elects Indians to school boards, etc. There is currently nothing available on which to develop a frame of reference for such functions. Although the University of Maryland's Urban Information Specialist Project might be of some value in the future, the system needs something now. The choices seem to be to assume a structure which would be meaningless to the political and social needs of the Indians, or to assume responsibilities which could produce a running confrontation with the local power structure.

References

1. Yeagley, Joan. Personal communication, March 1971.
2. Gordon, William. "Service to Indian Reservations," *Minnesota Libraries*, 22: 348-49, Winter 1969.