

The Role of State Library Agencies in Continuing Education

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CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONAL and support staff in all the professions has been receiving increasing emphasis in recent years. The need to update current practice through new knowledge and insight of societal conditions and client needs has had its impact in the library and information science fields. The advances in automation and technology, the proliferation of knowledge, and the growing recognition of the need to provide access to the rapid delivery of information in many formats have given priority emphasis to continuing library education as a means of responding to the changes taking place in our society. State library agencies have a continuing responsibility for a planned approach to the development of library and information services in each state. This planned approach includes the need for the continuing education of library personnel to meet changing service demands.

This article reviews the background for the continuing education role of the state library agency, the development of continuing education for libraries, the implications of these developments, current programs in progress, and trends which may indicate future change.

Historically, state library agencies have had the responsibility for statewide library development, particularly public library development. The provision of advice, assistance and consultant services has been one of the primary means employed. Included in the advisory activities were the conducting of workshops and other educational and staff development programs. State library agencies having responsibility for school library de-

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velopment as units of state departments of education carried on similar programs and activities to improve school libraries.

Following the enactment of the federal Library Services Act (LSA), state library agencies moved into a new era of growth and influence. The requirement to develop state plans and the attendant emphasis on establishing libraries, creating library systems and extending library services created the need for staff development and continuing education activities as a major component in the achievement of desired objectives.

A U.S. Office of Education study of state library extension resources and services compares the data from 1955-56 prior to LSA with the resources and services of state library agencies in 1960-61. For the purposes of this article, the report of consultant activity and training programs during this period is of interest. Forty-eight states reported 16,466 field visits compared to 6544 in 1955-56; 44 states held or sponsored some 1600 training programs for over 56,000 persons from 1956 to 1961. These programs served professional (36 percent) and nonprofessional (22 percent) personnel and public library trustees (26 percent).¹

The responsibility of state library agencies for the planning and administration of federal funds under the Library Services Act of 1956 and the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) of 1964 gave added impetus to national documents and conferences concerned with improving the capabilities of state library agencies. These reports emphasize a stronger focus on goals, purposes and long-range plans² with the attendant need for highly skilled consultants and related staff development activities in the field in order to implement the statewide program.³

As set forth in the *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level*, "the state library agency should promote and provide a program of continuing education for library personnel at all levels as well as for trustees. It suggests that the achievement of this goal may be attained through cooperation with library schools, professional associations and sponsors of meetings and workshops.

All state library agencies view continuing education and consulting services as a major responsibility of the agency. In a recent survey, about one-half of the state library agencies considered the continuing education responsibility to be a shared responsibility and not solely the responsibility of the state library agency.⁵ In recent years national activities of major importance have contributed to an increased awareness of continuing education responsibility and to an increase in planned activities of state library agencies.

In the regional hearing conducted in 1972 by the National Commission

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sion on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), one of the identified priorities was the availability of continuing education for the development and maintenance of competencies which are needed to deliver the library and information services required by the nation. Subsequently, NCLIS funded a study in 1973 to recommend a nationwide program of continuing education which culminated in *Continuing Library and Information Science Education*.⁶ This report made recommendations which eventually led to the formation of the Continuing Library Education Network Exchange (CLENE). The NCLIS report outlines the development of library continuing education and comments on the necessity for continuing lifelong learning.⁷ Based on responses from the field, an operational definition of continuing education was developed which includes the following: (1) the implication that lifelong learning is necessary to keep the individual up to date, (2) assurance that the individual carries the basic responsibility for his/her own development, (3) diversification to new areas of interest, and (4) involvement in educational activities beyond those considered necessary for entrance into the field. In comparison with other professions, the librarians felt that continuing education should be provided for all levels of personnel, not solely professional, and that it not be limited to improved competence for the job held now or aspired to in the future.

In its plan for continuing education, the report suggests roles and responsibilities of the individual agencies and organizations in order to coordinate efforts, including those of the individual employee, the employing library, the state library agency, the library schools, and state, regional and national associations. Major responsibilities outlined for the state library agencies include coordination of continuing education programs on a statewide basis, identification of continuing education needs of the state, provision of a link between librarians in the state and national and regional plans, and the appointment of a continuing education coordinator on the state library agency staff. The other major responsibility is three-fold: the planning, implementation and evaluation of statewide continuing education programs based on identified needs.⁸

These initial efforts to provide a suggested outline of responsibilities continued to receive attention through CLENE as a newly formed national organization. State library agencies which joined CLENE as sustaining members, as well as the state library agency directors and continuing education staff members, influenced some of the priorities of CLENE. In 1976 CLENE received a USOE, Title II-B grant to provide an "Extended Institute to Train State Library Agency Personnel to Im-

plement and/or Strengthen Statewide Systems of Continuing Education for Library/Information/Media Personnel." The workshop phase of the institute was held November 7-13, 1976, at the Illinois State Library. Continuing education personnel from twenty-five state library agencies met to develop planning and implementation skills in continuing education. For participating states the institute spurred development of statewide coordinated planning among providers of continuing education in the state.⁹

During this period several regional consortia of states were formed with a primary concern for continuing education. CELS (Continuing Education for Library Staffs in the Southwest) grew out of a survey of members of six state library associations where the need for continuing education was strongly expressed. State library agencies are major financial contributors to this program. The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) had a major continuing education component funded in large part by five state library agencies. The Western Council of State Libraries has succeeded WICHE in this regional effort.

In preparation for this article, state library agencies were asked to report on activities in needs assessment, programs in continuing education, the extent of cooperation of other agencies in planning and implementing continuing education programs, recent changes and improvements in state library agency continuing education programs, and trends and new developments in continuing education. Forty responses to the questionnaire were received. State library replies indicate that all state library agencies have a responsibility for continuing education. Several have stated that the agency statutes define this responsibility but most suggest that agency planning documents cover these functions.

Cooperation with other continuing education agencies is extensive; 63 percent of the respondents work closely with state library associations, and 34 percent with library schools. State universities, higher education commissions, state departments of education, and other agencies were also listed. State staff are active participants on the continuing education committees of other agencies, and either library associations or the state library agency has formed a continuing education committee for coordinated planning and programs. The formation of continuing education planning committees representing all types of libraries is a recent development in many states. These committees are in various stages of the development of guidelines, policy statements or state plans for coordinated continuing education programs. Examples of plans underway can be found in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Louisiana. Oklahoma reported the formation of a state committee in 1978, Maryland in 1977. Pennsylvania is planning a

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special project in 1978 with a director and task force to develop continuing education coordination. States participating in the Western Council of State Libraries and CELS are the primary planners for the continuing education program of the regional consortia. Coordinated planning appears to be one of the more significant activities now underway.

Continuing education needs were identified by the majority through surveys and questionnaires at state, regional or local levels; consultations with local staffs and "perceived changes in the library climate," evaluation of current programs and of new national library trends and programs were also cited. The responses did not indicate the types of libraries involved in the needs assessment process. The influence of continuing education committees and recently formed task forces has not yet been felt to any great degree in the development of continuing education programs as reported.

The continuing education programs sponsored by state library agencies are directed primarily to public library staffs, although program offerings to reach a broader group were listed. All respondents listed public library directors and public library professional staff as participants; twenty-six listed nonprofessional public library staffs. However, twenty-one listed academic librarians; twelve, school librarians; twelve, multitype participants; and two listed institutional and special library staffs.

Principal topics in continuing education programs covered a wide range including copyright, networking, automation, planning, management, public relations and audiovisual materials. However, over one-third of the respondents offered basic or refresher courses to public library staffs in such areas as reference, children's services, storytelling, and young adult services. A few states mentioned law materials, oral history, censorship, and government documents. Workshops on community needs and development of special services to disadvantaged, senior citizens and other groups reflect the outreach program priorities of some states.

Wisconsin reported a continuing education program for public library and staff through the University of Wisconsin using the Education Telephone Network (ETN). Once a month for about two hours, several topics are discussed by a group or panel. Local libraries may purchase sets of materials related to the program. Topics covered in the last two years include: networks, censorship, school-public library cooperation, the independent adult learner, deaf awareness, and service to special groups. Alaska and Hawaii reported the use of video cassettes to bring continuing education programs to remote areas, and West Virginia reported that the

capability now exists there to provide this form of continuing education programming.

Frequently, continuing education programs sponsored by the state library agency are executed by contract with a university or other educational organization. Some states (such as Ohio) do this extensively; others (such as Maryland) use this method for institutes in such areas as management.

Recent changes and improvements in the continuing education activities of state library agencies reflected the increased emphasis and direction given a planned and coordinated program. The establishment of a new position of continuing education coordinator was listed by five states (Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Maine and Oklahoma); assignment of this responsibility to an established position was listed by many states. Several states were engaged in "train the trainer" programs with the shift to local library systems of responsibility for staff development and training in their own institutions, particularly for nonprofessional staff. State programs will provide for more advanced and intensive training and attempt to ensure continuity in program offerings. At least two states—North Carolina and Maryland—provide reimbursement to public library staffs for attending out-of-state institutes.

The responsibility of the continuing education coordinator for developing and disseminating information on continuing education offerings in-state and nationally; for maintaining a master calendar; for providing continuing liaison with library schools, library associations and other educational agencies; and for assuring a program of needs identification and developing plans to meet needs were mentioned. These activities reflect to a marked degree the influence of the CLENE report and subsequent programs and activities of CLENE. It should be noted that state library agency personnel active in CLENE are frequently those most active in continuing education development in their respective states.

Several states commented that NCLIS and CLENE had provided the impetus for renewed continuing education activity at the state level; one saw CLENE as the key to noteworthy, effective state library agency work in continuing education. The continuing education programs of CLENE itself provide state library agency personnel the opportunity to gain knowledge, exchange information, and encourage the further coordinated development of continuing education activities of state library agencies.

Changes and trends seen as important and needed for further development of continuing education include the development of more non-

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traditional methods for the delivery of continuing education programs, as well as education techniques more suitable to adult learners. States expressed the need for improved needs assessment and evaluation skills and techniques.

At least one-half the states were interested in a recognition system for continuing education. This seemed to be the national trend of greatest interest. Some states are currently using the continuing education unit (CEU) in institutions of higher education for library programs. CEUs are directly related to certification in several states. South Dakota State Library provides voluntary certification for public libraries based on CEUs. Michigan and North Carolina have proposals for recertification of public librarians through approved programs in continuing education and the CEU. The "college without walls" program in New Hampshire and Vermont has prompted library staff to indicate that continuing education programs should provide some academic credit.

A nationally recognized CEU program for librarians was specifically cited by several respondents. The study recently completed by CLENE, Model Continuing Education Recognition System in Library and Information Science,¹⁰ was first discussed in January at a CLENE meeting and is to be further examined and discussed at a national convention sponsored by NCLIS in June 1978. State library agencies will need to give the proposal and comments from the field serious study, since it has implications for an increased state library agency role.

This article has attempted to provide a summary of the development of continuing education responsibilities in state library agencies as viewed in the literature and reported from the agencies themselves. A few other points and issues need to be raised. State library agencies have a continuing responsibility for the improvement of the quality of library services in the state. In that respect they are in a unique position to assess the impact of continuing education programs on library services in the state, and have a responsibility to do so. There is no documentation to determine whether this is being done, but the need to develop the evaluation and performance criteria for this purpose is evident. In the author's opinion this would lead to fewer programs of longer duration, involving participants in more appropriate learning situations and plans for implementation in their libraries.

Another issue is the responsibility of the individual for his own continuing education and for the pursuit of programs that satisfy individual needs and interests. State library agency programs are geared primarily

to the perceived needs of the institution and to the priorities of the state library plans and objectives. To the extent that these coincide with individual needs and interests and that participation is voluntary and encouraged, the interests of both can be served. By publicizing continuing education programs at state, regional or national levels, state library agencies are helping individuals to become aware of other opportunities. Each state library agency needs to define its own role in continuing library education in relation to those of library schools, library associations and other providers of continuing education programs.

State library agencies should continue efforts to make possible situations in which innovators and practitioners can reach each other, invent ways to be mutually instructive and supportive, define steps by which to strengthen the drive toward improved continuing education programs, and undertake cooperative endeavors that ultimately may matter greatly in the capacity of library personnel to deliver the library and information services needed in today's society.

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