Canadian Library Standards

CATRIONA DE SCOSSA
MARY E.P. HENDERSON

FLORENCE MURRAY, WHO DESCRIBED the development and state of Canadian library standards in the October 1972 issue of *Library Trends*, stated at the outset that:

> Library standards reflect the objectives and priorities of the nation that produces them, and change as the nation changes. Canadian standards show evidence of the shifting relationships between the federal, provincial and local governments, the leadership newly assumed by the federal government in the provision of information to citizens, the effects of urbanization, a developing consciousness of social responsibilities and, above all, the rapidly changing patterns of education.[1]

Little has changed in the intervening decade, except that jurisdictional friction between levels of government is increasingly evident (witness the long debate over the "patriation" of the Canadian constitution), change in educational patterns reflects diminishing rather than growing funding, and Information Canada, a federal government creation—perhaps seen to be more propaganda than information—scarcely survived infancy.

Yet, to write about Canadian library standards in 1982 is to undertake a significantly different task from that carried out by Murray in 1972. At that time, one still enjoyed the afterglow of the economic prosperity of the 1960s, and the standards, plans and projections dis-

Catriona de Scossa is Associate Professor, Faculty of Library Science, and Mary E.P. Henderson is Professor, Faculty of Library Science, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

cussed seemed largely to point the way to a future of assured, rational growth. Standards developed in the 1950s and 1960s appeared to provide a valid framework for such progress.

Canada's political and economic volatility, of course, does nothing to simplify the modernization and application of standards. Provinces are constantly trying to widen and deepen their jurisdictions—jurisdictions which, from the beginning, have included education and publicly supported library services. The economy is ravaged by steadily worsening inflation, with its predictable effect on the books and materials budgets; and Canada is particularly affected in this area, because the bulk of its library materials must be imported, and paid for in soft and fluctuating currency. Great regional disparities, which prompt considerable population migration (or drift), add further complications to local and area planning and provision for libraries. Finally, there seems to be the possibility that the province of Quebec may detach itself almost totally from the rest of the country. It already has its own francophone library association, L'Association pour l'Avancement des Sciences et des Techniques de la Documentation (ASTED), quite distinct from the Canadian Library Association. The effect of such devolution on national standards might be considerable.

Murray, in effect, sums up the pre-seventies Canadian situation with the comment that: "A study of Canadian library standards leads to the conclusion that standards, if successful, have a short active life; they promote the development of service that makes possible new objectives that in turn demand new standards."[2] However, the term *standard*, here as elsewhere, seems not to be clearly defined. In so-called standards themselves, and in discussions concerning them, the word *standard* may be used to mean both "standard" as defined in Webster—"something that is established by authority, custom or general consent as a model or example to be followed; a definite level or degree of quality that is proper or adequate for a specific purpose"[3]—and, interchangeably, "specification," defined by Webster as "a detailed, precise, explicit presentation (as by enumeration, description or working drawing) of something or a plan or proposal for something."[4] To muddy the waters further, the terms *guidelines* and *manual* are also used in contexts which may imply standards or specifications.

It seems reasonable that true standards should be broadly based, essentially qualitative, with descriptive terms carefully, but not rigidly, defined. They should state the purpose, the raison d'être, of libraries and their component parts, and should spring from a sound grasp of the significance of libraries past and present, and the potential roles of the

library in the world of tomorrow. A clear goal must always be identified. The goal, the standards to be achieved, having been established, specifications—probably quantitative—would indicate how to meet the standards. The specifications should be flexible or adjustable in order to cope with changing times, user needs and financial support, but their thrust should be toward meeting or surpassing the standards. Thus the end will remain essentially unchanged, though the means to that end will almost certainly change. The present lack of clear distinction between standard and specification has resulted in a lack of clearly identified long-term goals for libraries, both the means and the ends being in constant flux.

Until *Project Progress* (discussed later) was developed and implemented under the auspices of the Canadian Library Association (CLA), and its report published in 1981[5] in time for distribution at CLA's annual conference, there has been since 1967 no Canada-wide attempt to update standards in the field of public libraries, nor to prepare the ground for such updating. However, individual provinces produced documents relating to their own needs and state of development, which may be seen as local adaptations of the national standards of 1967.

British Columbia's Library Development Commission, with a long history of incremental development plans, produced second and third editions of *Quantitative Standards for Public Libraries* in 1973 and 1978.[6] The first edition appeared in 1968 and specified levels of service—interim standards, perhaps—to be achieved by 1971; and the 1973 edition then upgraded the requirements, to be met by 1976, and so on. In each case, steady improvement to at least the minima indicated was required, "thereby assuring the library of continuing maximum provincial support."[7] These standards are designed to serve libraries operating with a population base of up to 50,000 and indicate the numbers and kinds of volumes, opening hours, staffing and equipment appropriate. The Library Development Commission has also drawn up *Standards for Integrated Library Systems* (1973),[8] again a working rather than a philosphic document, covering briefly five major aspects of library service: government and structure; service; collections; personnel; facilities. These requirements must also be met by systems applying for, or depending on, provincial grants. Turning to those areas in the province as yet unserved by library systems (the terrain is almost totally mountainous), the Library Services Branch, now under the British Columbia Ministry of Recreation and Conservation, prepared in 1978 "Reading Centres: Requirements and Standards."[9] A reading center is defined as "the basic unit for public library services

which is eligible for Provincial recognition and support."[10] The document deals essentially with the regulations for becoming a reading center (a deposit station for a changing collection of rented books), and the minimum requirements to qualify as a borrowing agency. Thus, British Columbia spells out action at all levels of service.

In Saskatchewan, which enjoys almost complete regional library coverage, the Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA) established in 1977 a Task Force on Standards to develop standards for public (regional) libraries in the province.[11] The cities of Regina and Saskatoon were not considered because "standards and documentation are available for measuring the services offered by these libraries against those of similar libraries elsewhere."[12] Standards developed by the task force were approved, in draft form, at the SLA annual general meeting in 1978, were shortly published, and rapidly sold out. A second, revised edition appeared in 1979. The two documents deal with quantitative standards, but also record in detail the various responsibilities of differently sized units within the system and their relationships to each other and to headquarters. Hence the goal of each unit is defined in practical terms, as it serves its purpose within the system. In this way, one is given a clear picture of the intent of the system in toto. While dealing essentially with regional systems, certain "givens" are, however, noted: that university, college and public library services will continue to serve as backups; that school and public library services will continue to complement one another; and that the provincial library will continue its function as a central coordinating agency.

Quebec's Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Service des Bibliothèques Publiques, published *Normes pour les Bibliothèques Municipales* in 1974, and revised them some time later.[13] These standards provide a very detailed qualitative and quantitative expansion of a memorandum promulgated by the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1973: "Dans le but de nous donner un instrument de mesure conforme à nos besoins, le service des bibliothèques publiques entreprendra en 1974, avec la collaboration des spécialistes des bibliothèques publiques, la preparation d'un document précisant les normes de service que doit s'éfforcer d'atteindre chaque bibliothèque subventionée."[14] Services deemed necessary are recorded in great detail along with the administrative and budgetary support to achieve the service, and the personnel and collections needed to ensure proper provision. Cooperation among public libraries and between school and public libraries is encouraged, as is continuing education for library staff. Model policy statements are described and numerical specifications included, with the result that the

Normes provide both a philosophical and practical guide for the effective development of public library service in a province which, in the past, has been largely sustained by the parish library.

The revised *Normes* restate the principles developed in the original document; elaborate and, where appropriate, metricate the specifications; are printed instead of duplicated; and otherwise indicate little or no change. However, in his article "Présent et Futur du Réseau des Bibliothèques Publiques du Québec," Yvon-André Lacroix demonstrates statistically the wide margin which exists between the standards and the reality.[15]

Newfoundland, which has many problems in public library service still to resolve, not least in the areas of finance and public transportation, has only recently essayed standards meeting its own needs. "Library Standards," a mimeographed 1980 publication by the Newfoundland Public Libraries Board,[16] resembles the British Columbia publications for small libraries in providing guidance toward the provision of basic library service in the more remote communities.

Ontario has published no standards in the last decade, but much has been happening among the public libraries of that province, and a well-established tradition of stimulating surveys continues. At the end of 1974, the Ontario Provincial Library Council appointed A.W. Bowron of Information, Media and Library Planners to make a detailed study of the public library situation in the province. The report, *The Ontario Public Library: Review and Reorganization*, was published in December 1975.[17] The information gathered, which included a detailed historical review of public library development 1964-74 and comprehensive statistical tables, was to form the basis for a plan to bring about "the organization, financing and coordination of public libraries and outline a phased development plan valid for at least the next ten years."[18] Among other things, Bowron recommended the division of the province into seven planning regions, and the creation, where necessary, of federated library systems within the planning regions. He also viewed as necessary the identification and funding of major city libraries as resource libraries. In all, an integrated cooperative network was envisaged.

Such coordination implies a need for standards, and Bowron noted the temptation to lay out standards then and there, but conceded that: "to be effective they must represent a broad consensus, an agreement acceptable to, not the lowest, but the median library administrator. Standards should arise out of discussion and be acceptable to the provincial government, the O[ntario] P[ublic] L[ibrary] B[oard], the libraries

in the federated systems and the important public library organizations. They also must be rooted in a feeling for public needs for library resources and information."[19] He recommended, however, that qualitative standards "based on and coordinated with others accepted officially in Canada and internationally"[20] be drawn up. Thereafter, quantitative standards should be drafted and set in place, and if not met, would result, as in British Columbia, in the withholding of grants.

The report precipitated considerable controversy throughout Ontario, but to date no new legislation has resulted from it. Interest in improved legislation still exists, however, in Ontario government circles, for in 1981 an Ontario Public Libraries Programme Review (OPLPR) was set in motion. A review team coordinated by Peter Bassnett, director of Scarborough Public Library, has been crisscrossing the province to hear briefs, meet members of the library community, gather data and identify concerns—in short, to reexamine "legislative, financial, structural and organizational concerns that could affect future library service."[21]

Between the Bowron and the OPLPR reports, Ontario should have the most detailed picture of its library condition in the country, and a base par excellence for the formulation of provincial standards—which might, in turn, be of great service nationally.

The most significant development bearing on public library standards in Canada as a whole has been the preparation and publication in 1981 of *Project Progress: A Study of Canadian Public Libraries*. This has been a slowly evolved research study (funding being the essential problem) sponsored by CLA and begun in 1979. The study examined in general and in particular the ways in which public libraries have been affected by changing social, economic and demographic circumstances. Both the terms of reference and the steering committee for the project emphasized the need "to supply a base of practical information that public library planners and decision-makers would find useful in understanding and dealing with the current and future status of the public library service in Canada."[22] Accordingly, through examination of source materials, questionnaires and interviews, sampling from all areas of the country, statistics dealing with the quantifiable aspects of librarianship were assembled and analyzed, and impressions gathered of how public library workers perceived themselves as library workers, and how they perceived and reacted to change in library services. The resulting compilation is by far the widest sampling and presentation of data reflecting the whole Canadian public library scene that has so far been achieved, and provides a very necessary data base from which new

CLA standards may be developed. Most recommendations suggest how public libraries may cope most effectively with internal change and develop the most appropriate services to individual communities. Two of the recommendations, however, deal specifically with standards and standardization:

> Recommendation No. 8. We recommend that professional librarians in the public library service form a national organization equivalent to a licensing or testing body. There is a lack of structure in the profession that allows the incursion of forces outside the profession to impinge upon such areas as the definition of work and the establishment of standards.
> Recommendation No. 9. We recommend that the boundaries between tasks performed by professional librarians and those carried out by technicians and other workers be defined, maintained and standardized across library systems.[23]

These recommendations recognize both the lack of useful, wide-ranging standards and the imperative need for such standards. In addition, they take into account the need for standardization within certain areas, to allow for cooperation and mobility among libraries and even within an individual library or system. *Project Progress* may be seen as Canada's response to that need for new approaches recognized and met in the United States by the recent ALA *Planning Process for Public Libraries*.[24]

Florence Murray mentions, at the end of her description of the rapid development in university and college libraries prior to 1972, a draft report entitled *Trends for the Seventies: Guidelines for Canadian University Libraries*.[25] (The subtitle, *Guidelines*, brings out yet another aspect of the terminological difficulty attached to any discussion of standards and specifications. Some standards may actually be seen to be model procedure manuals and policy statements.) These guidelines were the result of two years of work by a Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL) committee chaired by Daniel Reicher, and were presented to the Association in June 1971, at which time they failed to gain ratification. A new committee was formed in 1972, but no report has since been forthcoming.

It may be that the timing was wrong, as CACUL was on the verge of schism and subdivision. The head librarians of the larger universities shortly formed themselves into the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), and the residue of CACUL divided into two groups: those representing librarians attached to degree-granting institutions on the one hand, and those working in community college libraries on the other. Thus, *Trends for the Seventies*, geared predominantly to the

larger academic institutions, may have failed by falling between stools. The research institutions, still elevated by the divine afflatus induced by the heady budgets of the sixties, may have considered the guidelines to be inhibiting rather than helpful, while the smaller institutions—degree-granting and otherwise—doubtless considered them to be well beyond their reach, and hence irrelevant.

Moreover, *Trends for the Seventies*, a forward-looking document, may have been born before its time. It recommended fundamental change in traditional outlooks. It suggested that "academic librarianship in Canada is facing a crisis of identity with libraries finding it increasingly difficult to chart courses in the face of 'future shock' and with no rationalized goals toward which to steer."[26] The authors recognized that they were proposing no more than a provisional model, but they hoped it would stimulate research, which in turn would produce "generalizations and a rationalized philosophy of librarianship"[27] and, in due course, standards for the eighties. In the outcome, these standards—albeit unofficial—are the only standards for the eighties that have been offered academic libraries, and as such they warrant attention.

Rationalization of library collections is suggested at the broad end of the scale—a prophetic and practical suggestion.[28] At the very specific end, the average amounts of time required to process a single volume are indicated.[29] Also, the academic and professional qualifications of particular staff members at particular salary levels are detailed.[30] The vital importance of long-range planning is repeatedly stressed;[31] because of this awareness of the future, the document, particularly in its qualitative sections, bears reconsideration. In the financially troubled eighties, the sections proposing and explaining collection rationalization might be very useful indeed.

The cause of collection rationalization was further promoted by John Ettlinger in a paper presented at a CACUL workshop in June 1973.[32] Although Ettlinger is not dealing specifically with standards and specifications, the tenor of his paper is that there should be common goals and united effort. This implies a shift in the precise specifications each institution would need to effect a change in its methods of achieving standards.

In any event, the only concrete standards developments on the postsecondary institutional library scene emanated from community college libraries and the libraries of the new Quebec Collèges d'Enseignement Général et Professionel (CEGEP). The community college standards, at least, represent an outgrowth from the 1965 *CACUL Standards* rather than from *Trends for the Seventies*.

Canadian Standards

In 1973 CACUL published *Standards Recommended for Canadian Community College Libraries.*[33] Two types of standard, the qualitative and the quantitative, are listed. The eight types of college libraries to which these standards are applicable are specified. The qualitative standards are very broad, recognizing the multiplicity of physical and intellectual requirements of each type of college. To some extent, this is advantageous and allows for flexibility. But terms like "adequate space," "sufficiently high" budget, and hours of service to meet "reasonable demands" are subject to almost infinite interpretation. Lacking working definitions, it is possible that the standards might be so differently interpreted, not just from library to library, but by successive administrations, that they would cease to be standards. Though they lack the clear focus of *Trends for the Seventies*, the college standards can certainly be applied in the eighties, but they can hardly be seen as actively forward-looking and adaptable. Rather, their generality may tend toward causing great gulfs between the quality of library service in one college library and that in another. The quantitative specifications are such that, though still quite broad, they do not seem to provide for increased use of nonprint material, automation, and the accompanying hardware and professional and paraprofessional expertise. Most interestingly, as the majority of technicians are college-trained, no provision is made for their presence as specially equipped staff members, or indeed at all.

The much more detailed *Normes des Bibliothèques de CEGEP*[34] were published by the Fédération des CEGEP, Commission des Coordonnateurs de Bibliothèques in 1974, having been formally approved by the commission in 1973. Here standards are dealt with at a philosophical level, and more concrete specifications are included, making the *Normes* potentially long-lived. Although designed for largely French-speaking institutions in a specific province, it seems likely that these standards could be more widely used. The administrative structures supporting each kind of college library seem not to be totally at variance, nor the ascertainable objectives at odds.

School libraries, too, were provided with a useful, though not entirely new, document for the seventies. This was *Resource Services for Canadian Schools*,[35] edited by F.R. Branscombe and H.E. Newsom, jointly sponsored by the Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association (a division of CLA), and published in 1977. The book, as the preface notes, was prepared as the successor to *Standards of Library Service for Canadian Schools* (1967), produced by the CSLA, and *Media Canada: Guidelines for Education* (1969) by the Educational Media Association of

Canada.[36] From 1972 until 1977, the two associations were collaborating on a fresh, integrated definition of the role of the library in the school, preparing and providing learning materials of whatever medium or format. Ideas and information were sought from more than seventy leading school librarians and audiovisual specialists; draft versions of the manuscript were sent for criticism and correction to a panel of consultants; and every effort was made to ensure trans-Canada input and applicability.

Inevitably, a "national" program for school libraries can only suggest directions in which services should be developed, and specifics concerning personnel, materials and equipment, facilities, funding, etc., needed to support such a program, since education is a provincial responsibility. If not specifically a book of standards, the publication is a very useful handbook for anyone faced, with or without formal library training, with the duty of managing a school library.

The sector of special libraries may be seen by some to be too diverse to operate well within standards. However, in the mid-seventies, two examples of standards for special libraries, the first very precisely focused, the second more broadly based, were produced. At the end of 1974, "Canadian Standards for Hospital Libraries,"[37] was approved by a wide range of associated bodies, from the Health Sciences Division of the Canadian Association of Special Libraries and Information Services (CASLIS) to the Board of Directors of the Canadian Medical Association. The standards envisage the health sciences library as an intrinsic part of the hospital unit, whose ultimate goal is the best possible patient care. Given the very clear idea of the purpose of the hospital, it is relatively easy to define the library's place within the hospital, even allowing for different types and sizes of institution. The standards cover the usual topics: objectives, organization and administration; staffing and personnel qualifications; nature and scope of services; facilities and equipment. It is emphasized that they are recognized as minimal— sometimes being surpassed in extant hospitals, but more often being demonstrably higher than the service offered in many institutions across Canada. It is also pointed out that the information would be useful to community health centers and other health-related facilities, but not to patient libraries (which relate rather to public libraries).

Standards for a wide range of special libraries within the government of Alberta were produced a year after the highly specific hospital library standards. In 1975 the Alberta Government Libraries' Council (AGLC) published *Standards and Specifications for Alberta Government Special Libraries.*[38] Clearly, and in both qualitative and quantita-

tive terms, it details policies and procedures necessary to operate a special library within a system of government libraries. In spite of the highly specialized nature of the libraries it was designed to sustain, this document should be—indeed, is—valuable to many different varieties of special library. One of the reasons for this is the diversity of the Alberta government's special libraries, which deal with a great range of subject areas and have been established to deal, individually, with an equally wide range of users. At the time of writing, the AGLC includes, among many others, the libraries serving the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Alberta Vocational Centre, and libraries sup-porting such government departments as Alberta Environment, the Solicitor General, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Alberta Culture, and Alberta Agriculture—a distinctly diverse group as to both holdings and patrons.

While the bulk of libraries in the public domain are under provin-cial jurisdiction, the federal government mandates and supports the National Library of Canada, founded in 1953, in providing both leader-ship and support to the libraries—especially the research libraries—of Canada. The development of a national union catalog was one of the first tasks undertaken by the National Library. Implicit in such an activity was the formulation and adoption of standards, which led in due course to the creation, within the National Library, of the Office of Library Standards. This office is concerned with the evaluation and evolution of both national and international bibliographic standards, to improve internal library systems and to contribute both to Canadian and universal bibliographic control, through work with IFLA and the International Organization for Standardization, and through participa-tion in such activities as AACR revisions.[39]

The National Library has realized "that research and development for automation must be done on a national and international level in order to design formats which facilitate the exchange and communica-tion of bibliographic data in machine-readable form between organiza-tions and to develop automated systems which are compatible and provide for the fullest exchange of information."[40] This has resulted in the development of Canadian MARC, with its special bilingual feature, which accords with international MARC specifications.

In a 1979 recommendation, *The Future of the National Library of Canada*,[41] submitted by Dr. Guy Sylvestre, National Librarian, to the Canadian Secretary of State, national networking needs are further spelled out, the two top priorities being identified as a decentralized bibliographic network and a concomitant resources network which

would link catalogs and data banks. This document, substantially endorsed by CLA in 1980, has obvious implications for future standards formulation.

Cooperation among libraries across the country and all segments of the information industry is seen as vital, along with the need for standardized messages and procedures. National Library thinking on these matters is explained in *The Context of Interconnection for a Nation-Wide Bibliographic Network* (1980).[42] A task force on Computer/Communication Protocols for Bibliographic Data Interchange has been appointed to recommend standards appropriate to Canadian libraries which will fit the Open Systems Interconnection model of the International Standards Organization.[43] The degree of success these activities are likely to achieve will probably be commensurate with the amount of funding provided by the federal authorities to promote cooperation in the field.

Concern for a degree of standardizaion is also evinced by CLA in its dealings with educational programs for library personnel. Again, provincial control of education means that a national organization can only approve or recommend; enforcement can be dealt with only at the provincial level. However, CLA has continued to avail itself of the services of the ALA Committee on Accreditation, and only graduates of ALA-accredited institutions are automatically considered professional in Canada. Accreditation requirements, while permitting considerable flexibility in programs (exemplified in Canada by the massive move to the two-academic-year MLS as first professional degree), do assume the meeting, if not surpassing, of basic standards in knowledge and skill in professional matters. This common denominator must have its effect as graduates enter the field.

The training of library technicians, developing from local needs, has been a much more ad hoc operation, initially achieved with little library input and less professional blessing. However, in due course, the CLA Education for Library Personnel Committee's Subcommittee for the Training of Library Technicians took cognizance of the situation, began to visit and report on training programs, and subsequently drew up "Guidelines for the Training of Library Technicians" which were endorsed by CLA as official policy.[44] Since that time (1973), all programs in anglophone Canada have followed these guidelines as closely as their individual administrations permit. Improved relations with the library profession have also been effected by the establishment—as recommended in the "Guidelines"—of Local Advisory Committees (essentially composed of librarians) for each program and, if appro-

priate, where there are several programs available, of Provincial Committees as well, who may make recommendations to provincial governments.[45] Thus, CLA has in effect much more direct input in technican education than in professional library education. Curiously, few extant standards or specifications make provision for the ready incorporation into library operations of the technician. Consequently, this valuable source of highly and specifically trained manpower is frequently either under-used, exploited or, to all intents and purposes, ignored.

In 1981 the Canadian School Library Association produced *A Recommended Curriculum for Education for School Librarianship*,[46] dealing with diplomas in school librarianship—M.Ed. and MLS. The recommended curriculum suggests not so much standards for libraries, as it does a way in which to achieve standards for a particular type of librarian—a valid approach, given the facts that school librarians come within different provincial jurisdictions, and that specific school libraries operate at different levels to serve different student bodies. To produce an individual designed to function effectively within a range of circumstances may well be an excellent way to cope with the question of standards.

It must by now be evident that the Canadian approach to standards has changed little in the last decade—unless *Project Progress* sets our faces in a new direction. Murray's observation that standards "promote the development of service that makes possible new objectives that in turn demand new standards"[47] still holds good. Standards-shapers look around for successful operations and striking new initiatives, and offer directions as to how they may be emulated, rarely allowing for local differences. But the declining role of libraries in today's universe of information suggests that emulation of the best of the status quo, however impressive that best may be, is insufficient for our needs now—still less for our needs through the eighties. *Trends for the Seventies* noted that, "Ideally, universally valid standards should derive from basic research, still insufficient, in the field of information science."[48] The need for that research is even more urgent today than it was in 1971.

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