

Internal Considerations in Support of Library Adult Learners' Services

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THE MODERN LIBRARY administrator, committed to the library's involvement as an active partner in the community's formulation of educational services for the adult learner, faces some difficult and opposing dilemmas.

On one point is the need for financial retrenchment, and on the other is the increasing demand of the adult trying determinedly to find the human and material resources to continue the learning processes. On one point is the governing unit's questioning of the library's involvement in the educational process, and on the other point is the library staff's questioning of the same involvement. On one point is the awareness of the burgeoning field of information technology that portends a restructuring of public library services and priorities, and on the other point, recent library school graduates steeped in the "traditionalist" world of library service (but with the ability to perform a computerized data search).

Somewhere in this maelstrom of conflicting needs and opinions, facts are being lost or ignored. These facts are: (1) our society is becoming older and better educated; (2) adults in our society look to continuing education as a normal element of adult life; (3) adult illiteracy is still a major national problem; (4) the improved physical health of adults enables them to seek second career instructional opportunities after retirement; (5) current unemployment rates are forcing working age adults to seek retraining to survive; (6) the middle-aged homemaker, with grown children or a spouse, voluntarily or involuntarily absent, is

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seeking training to develop employment skills; and (7) with the development of various educational agencies in cities and communities, there is a distinct possibility that if public libraries do not more actively assert their roles and functions for adult learners, then some other agency certainly will, relegating the library to an archival function.

Public libraries are in the business of serving the adult learner, whether they know it or not, in a multitude of ways under the broad banner of public library adult services. The librarian who vehemently denies the role of educator is going to have to redefine the librarian's function.

It is forecasted that the number of adult learners will continue to increase over the next two decades; it is time for the library profession to end its internal argument over its responsibility to the adult learner. Once this debate ceases, the profession can direct its full attention to the important task of structuring relevant and continuing services. The two major roadblocks to the development of these services are found within the profession: the library administrator, and the library staff member whose service philosophy separates service to the adult learner from the general provision of information services.

This separation creates an unjustifiable dichotomy: on the one hand, information services are provided to anyone requesting them in person or by telephone; on the other hand, there is a hesitancy to provide the information and resource assistance to the adult with an expressed need to learn about an identified topic. True, certain skills and competencies are needed for working with the adult learner, but the essence of the two services is the same. The differences between the reference interview, or the reader's advisory interview, and the educational counseling interview are differences in time and depth.

Library administrators often tend to use a lack of skilled staff, or a lack of funds to hire them, as explanation or justification for relatively passive or restricted services. In times of financial retrenchment, that defense strikes a sympathetic chord in all library administrators. But a more useful approach would be a critical assessment of existing resources and skills, in both community and library, in order to judge the extent to which services can be proactive and collaborative. It is at this point that the library administrator's commitment to the philosophy of the public library as an important community educational institution becomes most obvious. Without the top administrator's leadership, the internal development of adult services will remain unrealized.

The second formidable obstacle to a successful development of adult learners' services is the staff member who does not feel that the role

Internal Considerations

of educator is appropriate to a librarian. He or she may be content to carry out reader's advisory or reference work within a traditional perspective, without having the intellectual support or conviction of a wider view of the relationship of that work to the process of adult learning. The fact that these staff members are performing educational tasks as they help their community clients learn to use library resources does not change their perceptions of their current library functions.

Weingand found in her futuristic Delphi study that the participating panel viewed as very high the probability of the redefinition of the library's goals, role, function, and image to reflect the commitment to lifelong learning. The panel also felt that this redefinition, though aided by some library workers and adult educators, would be hindered by other library workers.¹ The resolution of the conflict in work roles perceived by staff is a key issue for the future and must be addressed in any plans that library administrators formulate to provide adult learners' services.

This article cannot deal exclusively with commitment and staff attitude factors; rather, it has to include them in a wider framework of factors which as experience indicates, are critical in the effective management of library-based services for adult learners. This framework can support and confirm whatever existing commitment exists; and it can also help to provide a management climate and resource base that will encourage sound development and lateral innovation.

The long and variously successful history of public-library involvement with informal and formal adult learner services has taught librarians many things—sometimes after rather stressful experiences. Reflection on immediate management experience enables revision of principles and the development of new or expanded applications of those principles within carefully defined contexts. In short, library administrators often stop doing more of the same and instead change their tactics and strategies, using a revised overarching conceptual framework. This article reviews past experience by implication, and renews the case for a framework of factors and principles considered essential for the internal management of library-based adult learner services.

Trends are implicit in this summary—and these will affect libraries variously, according to their individual contexts. The challenge will be to develop sophisticated political skills and flexible management procedures to work *with* learners and agencies rather than *for* them. Five key components of this management framework deserve attention: planning; staffing; coordinating, both within the library and within the community; budgeting; and evaluation.

Skillful use of these management tools, however obvious in theory, needs balancing in practice by some administrative boldness and creativity if the profession is to resolve any of the issues listed earlier. Much of the following discussion is based on the assumption that only a sophisticated use of the five factors in combination, based on a learner-needs perspective, will help the public library be more adaptive than it has been in the past. Given the present economic conditions and many prevailing professional attitudes, that is a tall order, but we cannot continue to use reduced funding and fixed work roles as safe reasons for minimal involvement with adult learners.

Planning

Martin states in the preface to Phinney's five case studies of library adult education programs that "an effective adult education program grows individually and directly from its particular setting."² To examine this setting, and to help in assessing the need for library services to adult learners, some form of community evaluation or survey should be conducted. As more public libraries implement *A Planning Process for Public Libraries*,³ this kind of information can be gathered. A needs assessment can also be done informally, if the library administrator and the staff are highly involved in the life of the community, and if communication has begun with groups such as the adult education departments of local school systems, extension departments of community or junior colleges, colleges and universities, local literacy groups, museums, and other library agencies.

Much has been written about the formal community survey process.⁴ The library administrator, before undertaking an in-depth community assessment, would be reminded that a great deal of important information can be found in most communities if a search is made. Local educational agencies and other governmental and community agencies will often have conducted studies pertinent to the library's planning. State departments of education and state health and rehabilitative service agencies can also provide important information on the needs of adults seeking instructional programs.

The information gained from such formal and informal inquiry will form the basis for the identification of the library's role in the community's educational picture. This role may be as an initiator of programs, or as a coordinator/cooperator in the community development of adult learning programs. Role identification also will be based on the evaluation of the library's capability to support such a role; that is the next step in the planning process.

Internal Considerations

Client demographic profiles need to be identified and continually checked. The extent and effectiveness of current services has to be assessed against specific criteria (as learner-centered as possible), as do the levels and formats of resources. The levels of funding need monitoring and their sources need further exploration, especially those that are alternative or nontraditional. Even the physical facilities of the main library and its branches will require assessment from a new perspective. For example, trends toward collaborative services mean that libraries may have to share space with other agencies for cooperative programs.

These and many other issues must be resolved before the library administrator can proceed with the development of goals and objectives for the service. The service priorities of the library must be critically evaluated in the context of their current effectiveness, their cost efficiency, and future community demands and needs.

Experience has too often shown that enthusiasm can overcome a careful analysis of the library's capability to successfully sustain an adult learners' service. One of the exciting attributes of committed library administrators is an eagerness to get on with the business of providing this service. But the failure to evaluate fully the library's current service demands and its budget and personnel limitations and failure to set service priorities can scuttle the service before it has an opportunity to demonstrate its worth. The stimulation of community response beyond the point where the budget, the personnel and the materials can be expanded fast enough to meet the community demand can force the library into the embarrassing position of having to renege on its promise to the community. "In moderation, such a failure may serve as evidence of the need for additional funds, but care and judgment are needed to avoid outrunning the community's ability or willingness to pay for services, or the library's readiness to provide them."⁵

After careful evaluation of the community's need for adult learning services and the library's capability to support them, realistic goals and objectives must be established. Here, again, much has been written in the literature on the formulation of library services goals and objectives.⁶ Figure 1 illustrates a model of the goal development process. This is perhaps the most difficult of the planning elements. Service objectives that are measurable must be developed because it will be upon these objectives that the performance measurements will be built. These objectives may change as the implementation of the services proceeds, a point that can be unconsciously or deliberately ignored. New factors will emerge that will have an influence on the development of the services. The plan for services that results from the definition of goals

and objectives will provide the guidelines by which service progress and goal attainment can be measured. In the plan, both time elements and financial considerations specific to certain objectives should be detailed. Alternative funding possibilities for specific objectives should also be included.

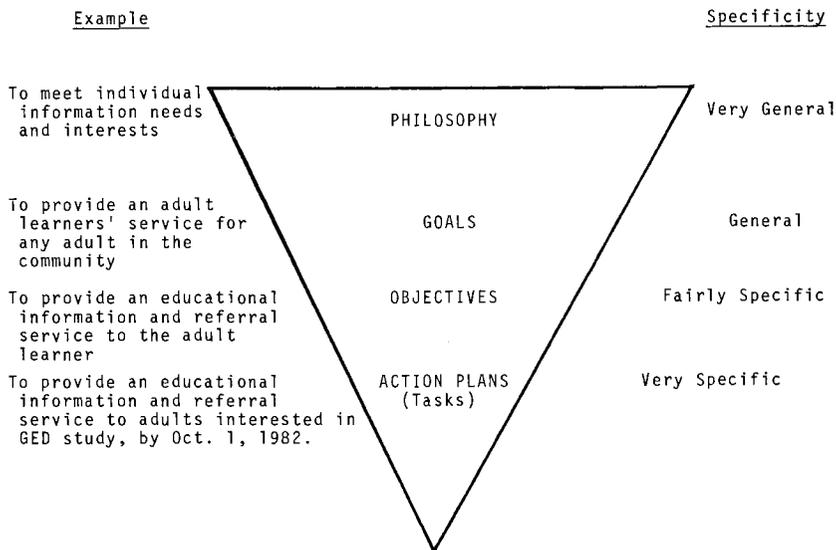


Fig. 1. Levels of Goals and Objectives Specification

Source: Adapted from the College Entrance Examination Board. *The Role of Public Libraries in Supporting Adult Independent Learning*. New York: CEEB, 1974, p. 46.

Staffing

Part of the library's evaluation of its potential to provide service for the adult learner will be the assessment of staff competencies and attitudes. It has been noted that negative staff attitudes toward the educational functions of the resource facilitator can be a definite hindrance to the effective development of appropriate services, as well as a barrier in learner/library staff interactions.

The College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) found, during the series of surveys done before beginning the Adult Independent Learning Project study, that

Internal Considerations

the existing situation in the public library does not emphasize or is not geared to the provision of focused support services for adult independent learners. With very few exceptions, emphasis is placed on traditional goals, services, and training areas by libraries and by librarians. In order to develop a successful national program for providing individualized service to adult learners through the public library it will be necessary to re-orient existing attitudes and programs.⁷

This statement has important implications for library educators and for the practicing library administrator. A survey of staff to determine attitudes is in order. Results of the survey will provide the information needed to justify a planned staff development training program, or will confirm the positive attitudinal climate in which further planning and implementation of the service can proceed.

There are several options available to the library administrator wanting to organize a planned staff development program. The ideal, of course, is to have the funds needed to provide consultant expertise for staff training included in the library's annual budget, and this is possible if there has been administrative foresight. If no such financing is possible through regular budgeting channels, perhaps an active Friends of the Library group can be helpful in fundraising.

As is often the case, there may be no monies available at all, and library administrators must turn to other means to begin staff development programs. Outside assistance may be obtained from the following sources:

1. A library school in the community can often provide faculty interested in helping develop the program.
2. Adult-education specialists on the faculties of colleges and universities or community colleges will often be willing to provide a "community service" of this nature. Some faculty members will help with the instructional tasks of teaching library staff the essential elements basic to the adult learning process. Often graduate students in education or in library and information science are looking for this kind of instructional activity.
3. State library associations are offering more and more continuing education programs. If the library administrator is active in the association, leadership could be provided to conduct workshops at annual conferences which library staff can be encouraged to attend.
4. Adult and vocational education departments in local school systems often willing to help a library administrator develop an instructional program, and are able to supply information on available instructional personnel.

5. State library agencies often have manpower grant monies that could be obtained for the training of an enthusiastic staff member, who then can return to the library and assist in the development of a staff training program. The state library may be able to provide a continuing education specialist consultant who will help develop such a program.

Finally, if none of these sources is available, the library administrator, can begin the planning, development and implementation of a staff development program with a committee of staff members who will provide the service.

If the library administrator must pursue this latter course in order to achieve staff attitudinal change, additional time must be built into the service development plan. It is recommended that the administrator study Conroy's excellent manual of practical guidelines "focused on systematic planning, involved participation and useful evaluation" of staff development and continuing education programs.⁸ This publication details the processes involved in assessing, developing and implementing staff development programs. Conroy includes bibliographic references that would be useful to the library administrator and the planning personnel interested in further reading.

Coordination

The coordination function of the library administrator is both external and internal. Externally, the library administrator's active involvement in the community will help establish the contacts necessary to coordinate the library's adult learners' services within the context of the total community education program.

Internally, the extent of the coordination function will be determined by the assessed capability of the library to provide such services. Services to the adult learner may begin with the provision of information on the number and kinds of instructional programs that are currently available in the community. If the library already provides information on community organizations and social service agencies, the educational information can be simply added to the other data maintained for the library's information and referral services. In that case, the administrator's coordination function would be the establishment of the linkage between the library and the various agencies responsible for conducting traditional, nontraditional, and nonformal instructional programs in the community.⁹

Internal Considerations

If the library can provide space for adult study, but does not have the staff to provide resource facilitators, the coordination efforts of the administrator may be directed toward an interagency cooperative program. Through this program the library provides the space, the furnishings, and perhaps the material resources, to support a school-system adult education teacher in conducting adult classes, which could include literacy classes or General Education Development (GED) preparation. In some areas, this interagency relationship has been gradually expanded to include the library in the school system's community education program, thereby making available to the library a community education coordinator to help in further adult education program development. This arrangement can be mutually beneficial to the library and to the community, particularly if the community education coordinator is cognizant of the public library's important role in the community education effort. A community education coordinator can help the library in providing nonformal programming that is not duplicated elsewhere in the community, and can be a prime source of information for the instructional program information and referral service.

If the library is capable of providing a full range of adult learners' services, then the administrator's coordination function will involve the organization of staff, materials, financial resources, and space just as is necessary for the implementation of any other library service.

Budgeting

Probably the biggest challenge to the library administrator in a time of financial cutbacks and economic uncertainty is budgeting. The current admonition of local governing units is "No new programs!" How does the committee administrator proceed to develop services for the adult learner under that mandate?

Data for establishing clear directions and realistic yet innovative objectives will have to come from two distinct sources: details of past performance, and assessments of the library's capabilities to continue and expand or modify services. Data for these sources will need to come as much from clients and staff personally as from quantitative measurement. The following questions have more importance for administrators in the 1980s than ever before.

Can the library document an increasing demand for adult services as now provided? Has the adult services staff experienced, and recorded, an increased number of patron requests for community instructional

program information, or for more in-depth help in using library resources? What budget categories will have to be curtailed to provide the necessary funding to expand the service? If the library currently conducts an interagency cooperative program, what is the retention rate of students in the program? Is there funding through the cosponsoring agency to help the library develop further services? Perhaps most important: if the library restructures its priorities to provide more direct services to the adult learner, what documented justification does the administrator have to give to the governing unit to continue the current level of funding? Searching for answers to these questions can frustrate even the most enthusiastic library administrator.

If the library already has in place some form of service to the adult learner, data to justify the continuance of expansion of the service should be available. If the library recognizes the need for such service, but has not had the opportunity to demonstrate this need, the library administrator would do well to search for alternative funding to initiate the service. If such funds can be found, the need to cut other services will be alleviated, and time will be gained to demonstrate the community's need for the service. Once the need for the service is documented, future funding can be built into the library's annual budget. Also, time gained through this kind of funding can be used to further develop staff skills and competencies. Some of these will be recognized as new skills, and this in itself is a planning issue.

Alternative funding sources are many and current financial restrictions on social service agencies imposed by the Reagan Administration are creating a highly competitive arena into which library administrators must advance in search of funding. There are some potential sources in the U.S.:

1. Federal funds are in short supply under the "new federalism," but monies can still be found in those federal programs supporting adult education activities. LSCA funds may also still be available.
2. State funds (usually administered by state departments of education, and directed by state university, community college and public school adult education departments) can often be directed to public library adult learner programs.
3. Industrial and corporate funds may be available in areas where industry or corporate headquarters are located, particularly if the service can be shown to address the educational objectives of the firms.

Internal Considerations

4. Community funds and private corporations can be helpful in funding such services if the library can show the value of the service to the community.
5. Grants from foundations interested in adult education programs can be sought. Information on foundations is found in the *Foundation Directory*¹⁰ or in resource collections of various public libraries that have been designated Foundation Center regional centers or affiliates. A list of these libraries can be obtained from the Foundation Center.¹¹

Needless to say, the more experience a library administrator has in writing proposals, the better the chances of competing for alternative funds. For those administrators with the desire but little experience, there are agencies to help the executive learn how to develop fundable proposals. Many universities have grants offices that will assist the local library administrator. A search of state agencies may also unearth such assistance. Government departments involved in community affairs activities are possible sources of assistance.

The library administrator should also not overlook the possibility that the adult learner would be willing to pay a fee for instructional opportunities if they meet his or her particular objectives. Distasteful as the concept is to the library profession, fees for human and material resources may enable the library to provide the services and programs so badly needed by the adult learning public.

Long-range requirements will be more likely to become a part of the library's annual budget if the library can prove the worth of the service to the community. To do this, very careful and comprehensive evaluation of the services and programs is necessary—most governmental units demand hard data as expenditure justification.

Evaluation

In this time of greater services and funding accountability, the need for appropriate evaluation processes is a familiar and persistent refrain. They are an essential element in setting service priorities, and they furnish funding agencies proof of the need for a service or a program.

Evaluation can be defined as "a planned systematic process...with implementation procedures, roles, and standards for the quality of the evidence presented."¹² Many books on the process of evaluation are available,¹³ but none of them provides an easy trip through a difficult process. The best judge of what should be evaluated in a management

context is the library administrator, who knows the particular emphasis needed to assess how far the library has met its goals. Evaluation instruments are developed from the service objectives established during the planning phase of the services. Different evaluation strategies will be needed for programs or services at different stages of development. Anderson states:

Innovative and developmental programs probably need less restricted or constrictive evaluation designs than are typically applied to static programs that are to be evaluated in relationship to cost-effectiveness, validity or productivity.¹⁴

Anderson also states:

There may be reasons why a decision *not* to evaluate in any formal sense might be made:...if the program is a one-time effort;...if the constraints in the situation prevent a professionally responsible evaluation; if there is no possibility that the results will be acted upon in decisions about program installation, continuation, or improvement; or if there is no one interested or informed enough to carry out the evaluation effort required....The point to be emphasized here is that decisions *not* to evaluate—to assemble orderly evidence about program needs, processes, or results—should be made as early and deliberately as the decision to evaluate.¹⁵

Evaluation “is not simply measurement and data collection;...it is also not decision making;...it does not always qualify as research;...it is not necessarily limited to determining how well programs achieve their objectives. It may begin before a program or policy is implemented, or it may touch on issues that were not envisioned at the time the goals or objectives of the program were formulated.”¹⁶ The purposes of evaluation, as outlined by Anderson, are:

1. to contribute to decisions about program installation;
2. to contribute to decisions about program continuation, expansion or contraction;
3. to contribute to decisions about program modification:
 - a. program objectives,
 - b. program content,
 - c. program methodology,
 - d. program context,
 - e. personnel policies and practices;
4. to obtain evidence favoring a program to rally support;
5. to obtain evidence against a program to rally opposition; and
6. to contribute to the understanding of basic psychological, social and other processes.

Internal Considerations

To further define these purposes, Anderson relates them to specific methods applicable to each purpose.¹⁷ The methods are:

1. surveys,
2. personnel or client assessment,
3. systematic "expert" judgment,
4. clinical or case studies,
5. informal observation or testimony,
6. research studies (experimental studies, quasi-experimental studies, correlational status studies).

In the evaluation of library services, library administrators have often relied exclusively on the client assessment method. A major problem with this method is that the client's responses often provide data influenced by the "halo" effect, or, as Conroy calls it, "happiness data."¹⁸ What we have often failed to assess, and perhaps it is the most difficult area to assess, is the impact the service has had on the client. "Personnel or client assessment at the end of a program can seldom in itself provide data attesting to the effectiveness of that program."¹⁹ Qualitative data collection requires certain methods including a more long-range, longitudinal type of study than does the gathering of the short-range quantitative data that library administrators are familiar with collecting.

Quantitative data, such as the number of people served, retention rates, and the cost per unit of service are important elements of the evaluation process, but it is a sad fact that this type of data is still the only element that most governmental funding units require in their determination of programs worthy of future funding.

Library administrators and staff, however, are interested in the quality of the programs and services they provide. Obtaining qualitative data has proved to be a difficult and sometimes impossible task. But in adult learning services, securing such data is to some extent possible using an objectives approach. To assess the impact on the client's life one must be aware of the client's learning objectives: if the library staff working with the adult learner has helped in the development of these objectives, then the follow-up, or longitudinal assessment, of the accomplishment of these objectives can provide some assessment of the library's effectiveness. In a literacy program, for example, if the client's objective is to pass the GED tests to obtain a high school equivalency certificate, and the client succeeds in this effort, then the program can be assessed as being effective. A longitudinal evaluation of the program could be the number of program participants who then obtain higher paying and more skilled jobs or pursue further education.

If the library is providing an educational brokering service, or an instructional information and referral service, Heffernan cites the need to "be able to demonstrate...the positive impacts"²⁰ the service has had on its clients. He discusses the problems, the strategies, the approaches, the criteria and indicators, and the evidence of impacts for evaluating this kind of adult learners' service.²¹ He also states that multiple functions, activities and outcomes of brokering agencies require a wide variety of perspectives and criteria for evaluation. "We need to recognize and legitimate a variety of ways of assessing our impacts, in both quantitative and qualitative terms."²² This may be the case for all library services that fall under the heading of adult services.

Library administrators and staff must determine what factors are needed for assessment and structure objectives for that evaluation at the time the service goals are developed; they must not be overcome by the wide spectrum of evaluation processes, procedures and admonitions. Too much hit-and-miss, nonstructured data collection can create a mind-boggling amount of information, and can consume an inordinate amount of precious staff time that would be better spent on individual work with learners.

Conclusion

Public libraries are providing a myriad of services for the adult learner, too often not specifically recognized as such. This is as it should be, as long as the staff participating in these services recognize their functions as educators. The management considerations prerequisite to the planning and implementation of adult learners' services are basically the same as those employed in the development of all library services. The processes and procedures inherent in internalizing these services should be included in the normal management activities.

The library administrator must be committed to the development of the library's potential as an active force in the community's educational spectrum and must be continually sensitive to innovative methods of providing adult education activities in the most cost effective manner.

As the further development of information-providing technologies exerts pressure for the redefinition of public library services, programs, and staff skills, so will a clearer recognition of learner behavior and needs call for reassessments and attitudinal shifts. These are needed not just in terms of the learners, but also in terms of potential collaboration with other adult educators. The assumption of the educational role of

Internal Considerations

the public library will become an alternative of increased importance to the future of the public library. Development will also require an increased educational effort through public relations programs and the active involvement of the library administrator in the political realities within the community. Governing units, library boards and the community itself must be made aware of the importance of the public library's contribution to the community's educational activities. In fact, this political emphasis may be the most important factor in the 1980s for the public library in maintaining and developing its active role as a major community information agency.

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LOIS FLEMING

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