

Cooperation in the Library: Some Considerations for the Future

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A library is a place. It is a place where people come to seek answers and to create answers and a place where people work to provide the answers.

Providing these answers requires a certain operating efficiency in this place called a library. Our striving for this operating efficiency in recent years has met increasingly with problems of growth: the lack of growth in funds to operate this place, the tremendous growth in information we collect in this place to help provide the answers, and, the growth in methods for handling this information.

In our concern about the information explosion and the lack of funds, about resource sharing and networks, and access, about acquisitions and bibliographic control, about preservation and non-print media, we must not neglect our place of work, its organization, and its people, for the library will not vanish. It is certainly possible that our resolutions for these issues will not only demand interlibrary cooperation, but will also generate a realignment of library organizational structure.

We must continue to work across the lines of our traditional division of responsibilities within the library to solve these problems. This cooperation would encourage us to be familiar with an entire library system and would play to the strengths of each staff member: the acquisitions librarian, the catalog searcher, the binder, the cataloger, the stacks staff, the public service librarian, the computer trainer, the manager.

Cooperation at the Library of Congress

The Staff of the Library of Congress has not been alone in initiating some of this cooperation in the last few years. Many other libraries have experimented with job exchanges and rotations and task forces. Nevertheless, a few examples from the Library of Congress may be of interest.

We have developed a uniform position description that permits public service staff in the General Reading Room Division to rotate through different reference stations, including online training and bibliographic instruction, and permits management to make the most constructive use of staff strengths. Catalogers have worked in public service areas assisting readers with the main public card catalog. An Advisory Group on the Future of LC Retrieval Systems has been established, consisting of representatives from all departments, to advise the Automated Systems Office on the future characteristics of the retrieval systems, to address immediate questions concerning the integration of systems, and to address medium- to long-range plans for expanding retrieval capabilities. One issue the Library is confronting, the implementation of AACR-2 and the closing of its card catalogs, led to the formation of another working group.

Reference/Processing Working

In November 1977 a written announcement of the Library's intention to close its catalogs appeared in the Library's *Information Bulletin*. In January 1978 representatives from all departments met, at the request of the Processing Services Department, to discuss the first paper describing the specific questions to be asked. Between January and July, staff representatives from several public service divisions, including the Science and Technology, Loan, Serials, Collections Management, Federal Research, and General Reading Rooms Divisions, met to discuss some of the issues raised at the January meeting. By summer 1978 we had forwarded to Processing Services one suggestion concerning shelflisting and the shelflist, and we were working on other issues when there was established a Reference/Processing Working Group on the Future of the Catalogs. It is the task of this group to suggest to Processing Services ways of minimizing the impact of closing the catalog on reader services and processing activities.

The working group consists of approximately fifteen members representing all Library departments and includes managers who can make policy decisions as well as staff who work daily with readers and the catalogs. Meetings have been held at irregular intervals. It has been expected that members will canvass their respective colleagues as issues arise and return to the group with recommendations for action. Several smaller subgroups have been established on an ad hoc basis to focus attention on specific issues; some of these concern the format of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, the displays of authority and cross reference information on CRT's, and the possible editing work that may be done on the closed main public card catalog.

Conversations with our colleagues have made us aware that we often ought to "translate" the working group's questions in a fashion that makes the issues clearer for public services. Though not all public services staff express a keen interest in the detail of these decisions, increasingly they all are becoming aware of the impact of the changes and are concerned that services remain at a high level. Therefore the members of the group must make the complex questions understandable to our colleagues, and be able to present to staff a clear description of the temporary problems and ultimate benefits that will be generated by these decisions.

One of the first decisions made by the group concerned the nature of the add-on catalog. This is to be a card file serving as a backup to the online catalog and with entries based on AACR-2. We needed to determine whether it would contain MARC and non-MARC cards in a single file and coded in a fashion to permit each withdrawal of MARC cards when the online system proved reliable perhaps three to five years after the closing. We opted for a single file so as to have the fewest catalogs to consult. For Processing Services there would be a switch from the old divided official catalog to the add-on dictionary official catalog. Though the public add-on catalog would continue to be a dictionary one, it would probably not contain subject cross references. Since we had opted for full name cross references in both directions between old and add-on catalogs, public service staff accepted the suggestion not to file subject cross references so as not to generate false leads and to keep the catalog at a

workable size. Consequently we shall be relying even more heavily on the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*.

That decision led to suggestions to improve the design of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* to make it easier for reference staff and readers to use. Reference and processing staffs will be working together, with automation staffs, to determine what format changes would be feasible and advisable for a tenth edition. There is no certainty that massive changes can be implemented, but the suggestion provides an opportunity to examine the processing and reference uses of this tool in order to improve its functions for all concerned.

Some cataloging changes required by AACR-2 will affect both subject headings and classifications. The Library's deferral of a decision on closing the shelflist is due in part to the projected impact of shelflisting procedural changes on the classification system. The Library will be making every attempt to retain existing cutter numbers, including those for authors using more than one name. In some cases the shelflister may have an additional searching responsibility, for example in determining whether different forms of a place name represent the same location. Perhaps reference librarian experienced in this type of searching could offer assistance. The retaining of existing call numbers may make a later decision on the shelflist somewhat easier, and will provide a continuity on the shelves that will help in any library function requiring browsing, from reference to photoduplication searching, acquisitions to interlibrary loan. In addition, this is likely to be beneficial to the reader, either browsing the shelves or an online shelflist.

Staff Exchanges

Staff exchanges have long been praised as a way to spend professional horizons, and such exchanges will be especially beneficial in this period of little financial growth and rapid change. Reallocation of staff has become a common means of solving problems of staff shortages, as well. At the University of Hawaii, collection development staff have served in the public service areas. In Wisconsin there has been experimentation statewide in staff exchanges among all types of libraries. Indiana University library science faculty exchanged places for a day with the Monroe County Public Library staff. With fewer beginning librarians in the job market, less changing of jobs between institutions, more library school graduates going into non-library information organizations, and librarians apparently "bailing out" of the profession, one wonders why job exchanges are not viewed more seriously as a means to attain increased job satisfaction and career programs. Perhaps the increasing emphasis on bibliographic instruction represents this concern as well, for the staff member involved in this activity must work outside a restrictive structure that reflects the common library work flow and become intimately familiar with the library as a place as well as a process.

There is some benefit to be gained in having a cataloger understand the searching habits and requirements of the library user. In a continuing project at the Library of Congress, catalogers are assisting readers in the main public card catalog, a catalog that is different from the official catalog and in a different building. Nearly all catalogers have found the experience very rewarding. One remarked that she now understood the impact of cataloging on reference, and

how cataloging information needs to serve the immediate requirements of the library community and the general reader. Another indicated that after more than ten years, he began to feel a part of the library.

The changes in bibliographic control we will see with AACR-2 and the move away from card catalogs will have a large immediate effect and a subtle long-range one as well. Not only will we create catalogs better designed to help readers find publications on any given subject, but also to help staff members search more effectively. To do that we will need to keep each other informed about our searching requirements. Public services staffs may begin to consult with faculty about improving and standardizing citation practices. Public Services librarians who have serials routed to them for review could assist serials catalogers in determining the nature of changes in the content of these items, which will directly affect the cataloging under AACR-2. The staff member searching for a chapter in a book to be photocopied has needs different from the staff member searching for a difficult citation sent by another library for inter-library loan. And the cataloger, as well as the acquisitions librarian, may need to know this, and may require yet different bibliographic information.

Non-Print Media

Not only will the increasing emphasis on preservation affect the format of materials, but also the higher expectations of readers and staff will generate an increasing need for thorough control of non-print media. Shelf browsing is more difficult with these materials and with microforms. Reference and archives staffs traditionally have had more experience in the access to these special collections. Their public service activities in the future would benefit from the cataloging expertise of the bibliographic control specialists. A recent study reports on problems in bibliographic control of media and cooperation among libraries.¹ Project Media Base, a project of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, suggested in its published report that evaluative information would be very important in a nationwide network of audio-visual resources.² The need for evaluative information in the bibliographic record presents an interesting opportunity for staff cooperation.

Similarly, the Special Libraries Association's issues for consideration at the White House Conference noted the need to identify quality data and quality information resources. The association suggested that criteria need to be developed to aid in determining what should be retained in collections. The study on scholarly communication described a similar need.³ Catalogers and indexers may not be able to predict all the uses for a given work. Public service staffs, through their subject knowledge, interactions with users, and searching experience, may be able to assist more readily in evaluating and selecting materials to collect, and in suggesting value-laden subject terms to apply to these materials. As research increasingly serves to link academia and society, we may see scholarship with less purely bibliographic orientation. But the library, if it is to avoid being set aside as the most efficient or important information place, will need to maintain and improve its bibliographic expertise in an environment where all libraries are seeking help from each other.

Networks may tend to have governing practices different from the traditional library. I would suggest that a way to resolve any differences in process or structure, a way to clear up any ambiguity of goals, is to reemphasize the library as a place where the knowledge of the entire organization, and the satisfaction and challenge of working there, encourages the human mediation for personalized service.

Linda Arret is on the staff of the General Reading Rooms Division of the Library of Congress.

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