
Educating Librarians About Service to Special Groups:

The Emergence of Disabled Persons into the Mainstream

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The decade of the 1970s saw great changes in the public awareness of disabled persons in our society. A large part of this change was the result of efforts by disabled persons, their advocates, and families in the courts and in the halls of Congress. A series of court decisions, usually based on the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, held that once a state had undertaken the task of compulsory public education, it was required to educate *all* children. Congress responded to the court decisions by debating and passing legislation to ensure that handicapped children received an education in "the least restrictive environment." In November 1975, President Ford signed Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, into law. The practical effect of this legislation was to move large numbers of children from residential or special schools (or no school at all) into the public schools.

At the same time, various provisions of the Rehabilitation Act(s) were being discussed in congressional committees. During 1973 these committees gathered hundreds of pages of testimony from advocacy and professional groups. Their hearings finally culminated in the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112) which contains the "500 series" in Title 5. Especially important were sections 503 which provided for affirmative action hiring of disabled persons, and section 504 which provided that disabled persons should have equal access to all programs that receive federal funds (including educational institutions). These two laws form the core of civil rights legislation for disabled persons of all ages. Together with the regulations (published *much* later), these laws allowed disabled persons and their advocates to seek entry into the mainstream of American life and to take legal action if they were denied that access.

Since libraries are often involved in the mainstream of American life, there followed an increased interest in services and programs for disabled persons of all ages. Any program of national, regional and state library agencies during the late 1970s and early 1980s saw announcements of workshops, preconferences, special events and awards related to the development, provision and evaluation of services to persons having disabilities. An increased number of disabled persons attended these meetings; American Library Association programs were often interpreted in American Sign Language; and the question of accessible meeting rooms, hotels and other facilities became important. Many library agencies developed excellent programs of outreach and inclusion of disabled persons in regular library programs. School library media personnel became actively involved as an increasing number of disabled children were "mainstreamed" into public schools for at least part of their educational experience. Since school systems were now responsible for handicapped children from birth (or discovery) through age twenty-one, a number of new media programs and services were developed.

The Response of Library Education Programs

Library education programs began to respond to the increased emphasis on programs and services to disabled individuals. Graduates were being employed in settings where disabled persons were a regular part of the patron group of libraries. Gibson¹ surveyed library education programs in 1976 to find out what special courses, institutes, seminars and workshops were being offered to prepare students and librarians in the field to serve disabled persons. She found that only twelve schools offered special courses, and fifteen schools included some information about the disabled reader in regular courses such as Library Services to Adults, Public Library Management, Services to Special Groups, Library Ser-

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vices to the Disadvantaged. Several schools offered opportunities for independent study in this area and at least one school had offered a United States Office of Education sponsored institute in this area.

The White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services responded to the changing awareness of disabled persons and their rights in a number of ways. Of particular importance to library education and training programs was the following resolution:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that institutions educating library and informational services practitioners assume responsibility to address the needs of said consumers through their training and education. . . .

(1) Steps should be taken to assure that instructors in library and information services training programs, as well as students participating in such programs, reflect the participation of disabled persons.

(2) Library training and continuing education programs shall be provided for library personnel to increase awareness of the special needs of disabled persons.²

Stone³ has summarized the ways in which library education programs can provide for their students' needs in serving disabled persons: 1. offering formal courses in master's programs which focus on services for disabled persons, 2. providing workshops and/or seminars, 3. offering post master's certificates for those who wish to focus their careers in services for disabled persons, and 4. some combination of these formats. She went on to note the general lack of interest in providing courses or information about disabled persons in library school curricula. She concluded her article by listing some of the areas which might be covered in the context of library education:

- teach the facts about particular disabilities and what they really entail
- educate people in the areas in which special services are available
- develop students' interpersonal skills
- alert students to future trends in information services for and about disabled individuals
- make students aware of standards developed for service, accessibility, and collection building
- inform students of certain basic rights affirmed in legislation
- encourage creativity in the design of retrieval systems so that disabled persons will have better access to information⁴.

Ruby⁵ in her address at a symposium on providing information and library services to blind and physically handicapped individuals made the

following suggestions as means of "enhancing the capabilities of new professionals to serve disabled people":

- secure funds to provide financial aid for those who want to go into careers of library and information services to disabled persons
- support library agency affirmative action plans in your own library education recruitment programs
- require all students to have some encounter with one facility serving the disabled
- prepare your students with an awareness that they are obligated to give their attention to the whole population in their service area
- assign research in this area of service and disseminate the results so that we can get the benefits of their findings
- use practitioners in the field of service to the disabled in your classes
- get more materials about current library services into your library school library collections
- in your management courses do some analysis which will make the students deal with the hard choices that practitioners have to make
- make sure a really broad approach is taken to the selection of materials . . . not just *books*
- ask some key local practitioners and some disabled people what one suggestion they would make to library students that would help those students serve the disabled
- train your students how to appraise a library in terms of its physical access
- inform your students about the many jobs in libraries that disabled people can do
- try to help your students to be better prepared to react to disabled persons
- alert your students to the "readers' advisory" aspects of helping the public learn what they want to learn
- alert your students to the range of service agencies out there with which they can work

All these recommendations point toward the *inclusion* of information about disabled persons, their information needs, and types of service available in the library school curriculum. The emphasis is on information for *all* students rather than specialized training for those students who are planning careers focused on information services for disabled persons. Jahoda⁶ has provided the most extensive exploration of the possibility of including information about disabled persons in traditional library science courses. One crucial factor in educating all library science students to serve disabled per-

sons is the promotion of positive, realistic attitudes. Wright and Davie⁷ have suggested some staff development activities and materials which could be incorporated into traditional library science courses which focus on user services (at any age level), or courses which include information about community analysis and understanding and/or interinstitutional cooperative services. Lucas⁸ summarizes the research literature on attitude change and illustrates how one library education program is attempting to promote such positive attitudes through required and elective courses.

Library Education Programs in North Carolina

Informal conversations with library education faculty and administrators in North Carolina indicate that these faculties have decided that information about disabled persons, material format appropriate to various disabling conditions, and materials should be included within the context of the regular library science curriculum rather than through special courses or career specializations. Specialized career tracks do not seem feasible in light of the opportunities available. Cylke⁹ has pointed out that there are only about 180-200 specialized library jobs within the network of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The total national outlook for specific jobs outside of residential institutions is around five hundred jobs.

The most typical courses where discussion of disabling conditions and library and information services for disabled persons occur are the programs and materials courses for various age groups. Children's and Young Adult Services or courses targeted on specific populations in the public school deal with materials, including disabled persons in the client group, and specialized formats of services. Materials courses often include a section on the selection and use of materials *about* disabled persons. Some of these courses also discuss the various community, state and national agencies which provide services. Courses focusing on school library media programs and public libraries also deal with community (or patron) analysis, access to physical facilities and materials, as well as cooperation with other professionals and agencies.

Foundational and "block" required courses as well as basic administration courses also deal with certain aspects of serving disabled persons in the context of client groups, legal requirements, and budgeting decisions. A great deal of what students learn will be influenced by the interest of individual faculty members through

guided independent studies or through personal discussions in informal context. North Carolina library education programs are fortunate to have a number of faculty members who have both professional and personal experience in dealing with other professional agencies and with disabled persons.

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Possible Future Developments

It seems likely that library education programs throughout the southeast will continue to *include* information about disabled persons as a client group in their regular curriculum. Two national trends may have some influence on what is taught about disabled persons and services to those individuals: 1. The renewed emphasis on human relations/communication skills and 2. trends in the development of microcomputer-based library services. The "high tech/high touch" advocates¹⁰ of business administration publications have focused on these two issues as critical to successful operations on any enterprise.

Good human relations and communication skills are essential to working with any client group within the context of any institution¹¹. During a program review process at the Department of Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the faculty decided that these skill areas were critical to the overall goals of the program. If library education is to increase its focus on "people skills," then it is possible that understanding of one's own prejudices, stereotypes and "blind spots" will be included in the education of librarians. Having a positive, open attitude toward others; liking work with people over work with things; and understanding one's own limitation in the human comedy will go far toward assuring that emerging librarians treat people who are different (including disabled persons) as individuals. In terms of providing excellent service to the possible client groups and in terms of the need to work successfully in service institutions "marketing" their services in the public sector, human relations/communication skills are essential. It seems likely that there will be more and more emphasis on such skills in library education programs.

The pace of technological development is well known to all librarians: "Whatever we buy it will be obsolete by the time the purchase order is paid." Microcomputers have become increasingly powerful and increasingly varied in their input and output capacity. The last American Library Association meeting exhibit area was full of optical disc storage devices and services¹². The library can select, organize and disseminate information in a bewildering array of formats.

In the midst of all of this development, librarians should note that information can now be requested and used by persons who cannot see, by those who cannot hear, and by those whose physical conditions previously shut them off from access to any information resources. The annual meeting of the President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped always has an exhibit area where voice input and output to computer, Braille input and output, as well as special input devices are regularly displayed. As libraries turn more and more to online/full text services, information stored in machine-readable form, and access through telecommunications or optical disc, the possibilities for services for disabled persons increase dramatically. Library education programs will need to introduce their students to the possibilities of nonprint input and output with computers and remote delivery of information in whatever format is appropriate.

One crucial factor in educating all library science students to serve disabled persons is the promotion of positive, realistic attitudes.

As a final note, library educators and professional library service managers should note that technology now makes possible job redefinitions and assignment which can be adequately filled by disabled persons. Non-disabled persons have no particular skills beyond those of disabled persons when we enter the microcomputer/telecommunication age. Nationally very few disabled persons come to library education programs; area programs see only a few applicants over a number of years. As librarians explore the possibilities of the developing technologies, they also need to be alert to paraprofessional and professional jobs which can be modified so that qualified disabled persons can be hired. Library educators and universities need to be alert to the possibilities of closer working relationships with vocational rehabilitation

programs and offices for services to disabled students so that an increased number of qualified disabled persons can be recruited into library education.

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