Library Training for Services to Minority Ethnic Groups: Concepts and General Principles

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ISOLATED INSTANCES OF LIBRARY training for services to minority ethnic groups occurred in the early part of this century, for example, a 1923 course for the German minority in Czechoslovakia and a 1932 course for the French in Canada,[1] but as a subject of study it has only recently been included in library schools' curricula. As information on such recent development is difficult to find, this paper will deal with general principles illustrated with a few examples rather than attempt a comprehensive coverage of the courses available throughout the world.

Libraries and Their Environment

There is nothing new in the idea of teaching students of librarianship to relate library services to the needs of their users. Professional courses in librarianship have traditionally included study of the relationship between libraries and culture. Increasingly, the community and our view of it are undergoing change. The movement of people in all parts of the world brings cultures together in new combinations. The one-nation state is becoming an anachronism. The term *multicultural* has come to be used in many countries to describe their complex societies. A multicultural society is not static, and what students are taught in their graduate days is going to be out of date before they are in positions of responsibility where they can apply it. In a society which is changing rapidly, professional librarians need opportunities to retrain and to bring their knowledge up to date.

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Closer contacts between cultures bring about some friction, but also a need for tolerance and understanding. In a strong nation-state, the minorities tend to retain their own culture with minimal changes because they fear the impact of the majority. In a fluid multicultural society, the threat is not so great and the participating cultures are not afraid to let spontaneous changes take place. This presents problems to librarians. A service to an encapsulated minority is a small-scale duplication of that for the majority. It is relatively easy to train for. The real problem is to find an approach suitable for a complex society with constantly changing needs.

The professional literature contains two views of the position of minority ethnic groups in society. Some writers see minority cultures as something added, or existing in opposition, to the majority culture. Library service to minority ethnic groups is thus seen as something special—either an act of benevolence on the part of the majority, or a struggle for its rights on the part of the minority. Others view multicultural society as a number of cultures existing side by side, with one of them conveniently playing a leading role. Here, the provision of library services is taken for granted. This view suggests that there is no need to provide special training for library service to minority ethnic groups, as such service seems merely to be ordinary librarianship applied in a particular context. The context, however, is specialized enough to justify a program at library schools.

Increased contacts between countries have brought about international cooperation and standardization of library practices. Multicultural countries share their library problems. There is opportunity in this for an exchange of experience and the development of a "system theory" of library service provision in multicultural societies. Though the specific problems differ from country to country, the basic system is applicable to all. This has implications for the planning of courses. There are advantages in making the approach comparative so that the students would be equipped not only to work with minority ethnic groups in their own countries, but also to understand the principles as they apply in others. There is also room for international cooperation in practical matters such as the provision of materials in the less common minority languages. As a starting point, a worldwide network of information is being built on an informal basis by Marie Zielinska of the National Library of Canada.[2]

A multicultural society has its effect on the individual. Like those upon whom marginality has been forced by migration, some open-minded individuals living in a multicultural society will become marginal;[3] the society imprints itself on their personalities. It is assumed that a

multicultural society will strengthen the cultural identity of members of minority groups, but it can also help them to transform their marginality into a positive experience. On those individuals who are secure in their cultural identity and whose minds are less open, multicultural society will not, however, have this effect; it will at best encourage their tolerance of other cultures. These are subtle psychological processes in which reading has a part to play. Students should be made aware of the effect of reading on people's inner lives.

Cultural Policies and Library Education

Official statements and legislation, such as the Canadian Prime Minister's statement of 1971 about "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" and the British Race Relations Act of 1976, embody a consensus of opinion about cultural policies. The details of the application of cultural policy to libraries are left to the bodies which formulate professional policies. The International Federation of Library Associations has developed a standard on provision for national minorities and nonindigenous groups.[4] In 1977 the Library Association of Great Britain issued the policy statement "Public Libraries in a Multi-cultural Britain" to encourage the improvement of services to minority ethnic groups.[5] The implications of the cultural and professional policies as they apply to professional education are not always fully spelled out, the exception being the Horton report in Australia, which has recommended that library schools offer specialized diplomas in public librarianship for work with ethnic groups.[6]

In a new field there has to be a close relationship between teaching and research. Schools of librarianship are natural centers of research, both funded research and that done by advanced-degree students. Research is useful to the practitioners in the library profession as well as to teaching, and it provides policy-makers with information. Government and other official bodies can encourage research by acknowledging the need for it (as in the Library Advisory Council report *The Libraries' Choice*[7]) and by providing funds. Much pioneering work tends to be done by advanced-degree students who, by their enthusiasm and often without financial backing, promote a subject long before it is officially recognized. Examples in Britain are Claire Lambert's article and J.R. Edgar's thesis, which antedate the Library Association's professional policy statement by eight and five years, respectively.[8]

Professional meetings, workshops and conferences also fulfill an educational function in creating the right climate of opinion to develop

a new subject. In Canada the formation of a committee to investigate the problem of improving library services to ethnocultural groups in 1970 has led to the development of the Multilingual Biblioservice.[9] In Britain, the 1973 workshop on the public library and the needs of immigrants suggested a research project which was later carried out by Clough and Quarmby[10] and became the foundation of further research programs at the School of Librarianship of the Polytechnic of North London.

In the basic course in librarianship, at both the graduate and postgraduate levels, the implementation of new ideas is more difficult. Ideally, schools of librarianship should be aware of new ideas and should try to include them in their basic courses as soon as, or perhaps even before, they are formulated. In practice, however, there are restrictions of an administrative nature, and curriculum changes are not always easy. This is probably true in all countries. A flood of new ideas of all sorts competes for the attention of the curriculum and must be fitted into the framework of a set number of teaching hours. Decisions on priorities are not always easy, and a consensus on the method of introducing a new subject is difficult to reach.

Administratively, there are various alternatives. First, a separate course devoted entirely to library services for minority ethnic groups could be offered. It would be too specialized for a basic qualification. Such a subject is suitable for short courses for practicing librarians, such as those held at the Polytechnic of North London from time to time, or for a specialized qualification, such as the one planned by Monash University along the lines of the Horton report's recommendation.[11] Second, such training could be included as a compulsory subject in the basic library course. However, it is unrealistic to expect that curriculum planners would accept such a specialized field into the compulsory core. A third method, and the one used in most cases (for instance, at Monash University, Polytechnic of North London and Belfast University) is to teach the subject through assignment of an optional, specialist paper. The advantage of this administrative alternative is that the subject is taught to students who have a genuine interest and strong motivation. The fourth, and least satisfactory, way is to "infuse" training into existing compulsory subjects on the grounds that it should be taught to all students. If done with enthusiasm and conviction, students will benefit from it. It could, however, easily turn into lip service or "tokenism." Whatever the administrative format, the course is not always called "Library Services to Minority Ethnic Groups." "Services to the Disadvantaged," "Urban Libraries," "Community Libraries," "Inner-City Library Services," and "Afro-American Bibliography" are among

names given to it. The course is also related to comparative and international librarianship. The methods developed for the teaching of comparative librarianship are well suited to the teaching of library services to minority ethnic groups.[12]

The Ethnic Librarian

In their attempts to improve library services to minority ethnic groups, some librarians consider it a good idea to appoint a specialist to deal with them. Others criticize the provision of specialists on the grounds that a service to minority ethnic groups should be offered by all members of the staff at all times, and not singled out for special occasions. If the library does employ a specialist, the question arises of whether the person appointed should be from the host society or from among the minority groups. Although there are disadvantages to either alternative, good professional education can minimize them. Students opting for courses on library services to minority ethnic groups are likely to come from the host society as well as the minority groups, so the syllabus must be suitable for both. If the library's policy is for the minority ethnic group to be served by all staff, there is a lot to be said for the employment of minority group members in general library posts. This is not so much positive discrimination as good library management. Their presence on the staff should attract minority group readers who are often reluctant to come to the library.

Recruitment of qualified librarians from minority ethnic groups is not easy. Even if discrimination is outlawed, images such as "In the United States, almost everyone knows that a librarian is a middle-aged white woman" stand in the way.[13] Such images suggest discrimination against nonwhites and low status of the librarian. To a member of the minority group, it may therefore not seem worthwhile to try to become a librarian. If his basic educational qualifications are low, he does not have much chance anyway; and if they are high enough, he can do better elsewhere.

This situation presents library schools with the problems of recruitment and positive discrimination.[14] Minority group members need to be better informed about opportunities in librarianship and encouraged to join the profession. In the United States, Josey and Peeples have published a handbook about career opportunities for black librarians.[15] In Britain there has been some increase in the number of Asian librarians, probably due to relatively high educational achievement combined with a positive image of the profession among their

ethnic group. Positive discrimination, referred to as affirmative action in the United States, suggests that pre-entry requirements of courses should be lowered for minority group members to even out the ethnic composition of the profession. It has also been pointed out that minority ethnic groups should be better represented among the staff of schools of librarianship.[16] It is likely that this problem will resolve itself as the numbers of minority group librarians increase and the schools make their posts attractive to them. For example,among the thirty-four teaching and research staff at the School of Librarianship of the Polytechnic of North London, there is one Indian, one Chinese, one Central European, and one North European. This representation is spontaneous, not due to any kind of social engineering.

The Language Barrier

Multilingualism is the natural outcome of a multicultural society, even if for convenience's sake the people agree on one, or more than one, official language. Knowledge of foreign languages is essential for serving minority ethnic groups. It is also essential for international cooperation and for coping with the information explosion. It seems desirable for librarians to cultivate language skills and for library training to include the study of foreign languages. To function in a multilingual society, librarians do not need to know all the languages to perfection. They need some language skills to handle the stock, for information retrieval, and for communicating with their readers, and with their colleagues from other countries. Curiously enough, it seems that interest in languages among librarians has been declining in recent years, at least in the English-speaking world. This decline is due partly to technological developments, such as mechanized translation and mechanized information retrieval, partly to the publication of research results in English even by those countries where English is not spoken, and partly to the increasing reluctance among young people to learn foreign languages in schools. Although in many parts of the world library schools still teach foreign languages, this is increasingly less common in Britain.

The librarian's different functions call for different types of language ability. In the handling of stock, several degrees of linguistic expertise can be distinguished:

1. shelving books right side up and knowing whether the title page is at the front or back of a book,
2. recognizing the script and the language of a book so that books in the same language are kept together,

3. transliterating the title page,
4. identifying the author's name and cataloging it correctly,
5. translating the title page with the help of a dictionary,
6. getting the gist of a publication by scanning,
7. allocating a subject heading and annotating in English, and
8. assessing for purposes of book selection.

In dealing with the reader, the librarian who has some linguistic exper-
tise can understand a language at one level and speak to the reader in his
language at another.

    One way to ensure the language ability among librarians is for
schools to insist on knowledge of a foreign language as a pre-entry
qualification. (This used to be the British practice, but for some time
now the Library Association has not insisted on this qualification, nor
have the library schools.) An alternative is to teach a language as part of
the librarianship course, either in a conventional format or as a special
course for librarians modeled on the "language for scientists" pattern.
The inclusion of foreign languages in librarianship courses varies
throughout the world. Some schools in countries of continental Europe
teach more than one; British schools in many cases teach none. Catalog-
ing of foreign-language materials should be taught as part of general
cataloging but is by no means universally included—nor is the ability to
recognize a foreign language or foreign alphabets. There are, however,
some recent publications which provide a guide to languages for
librarians.[17]

Outline of a Course

    A specialist course for library service to minority ethnic groups
should impart certain skills and insights and ultimately influence the
attitudes of its students. Services to minority ethnic groups call for
special skills, but can also be seen as a context in which to study all
library skills.

    Knowledge of languages, as mentioned earlier, is essential for the
selection and recording of stock and for dealing with readers. One
should bear in mind, however, that versatility is more useful than
complete mastery of one language.

    In book selection, students need to learn about the problems of
selecting stock in a foreign language, and about the structure of the
existing literature in the most common languages according to physical
format, subjects and levels. They should be familiar with the main book
selection tools available, such as Wertheimer's *Books in Other Lan-
guages.*[18] They should also be introduced to the practical problems of

acquisition and to the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods available. These aspects should be taught in the form of theoretical principles, as well as case studies about local sources of book supply.

Cataloging skills relating to foreign-language materials include transliteration, choice of title and/or author's name, choice of subject headings, and annotations. In addition to learning conventional methods of recording material, students should be encouraged to be resourceful so that they can cope with unexpected situations (e.g., Westminster Public Library's method of using photocopies of Chinese title pages with an accession number in place of a catalog). They should learn about useful tools, such as the *Annotations Manual* of the National Library of Canada's Multilingual Biblioservice.[19]

To be able to relate library service to existing needs, students should be taught the basic techniques of surveying the community, with special reference to minority ethnic groups. They should be introduced to the significant research in the field and to general principles of research methodology. The teaching in this area should draw on disciplines outside librarianship, such as anthropology and social science. To establish contact with readers, or potential readers, students must develop interpersonal skills. In cross-cultural contacts, understanding depends on insight into how others think and feel. It is a good idea, therefore, to encourage students to undertake an in-depth case study of a minority ethnic group which is not their own. The method developed by comparative librarianship is very suitable for this purpose.[20] Each student collects information about a group through a questionnaire and then presents it in a series of structured seminar discussions. (A suggested questionnaire is appended to this paper.)

By identifying with groups other than their own and by listening to the contributions of others in the class, students realize the relativity of their own cultural conditioning. To provide them with a conceptual framework for their pragmatic insights, they are then introduced to some theoretical concepts, such as identity and prejudice.

Teaching Method

The skills can easily be taught by conventional teaching methods, such as lectures and demonstrations, with emphasis on practical exercises. The rest of the course should be centered on the students' own work. In the case study, the students collect information from literature and from informal meetings with members of the ethnic groups they are investigating. They participate in seminar discussions which follow the

outline of the questionnaire and summarize their findings in an essay. In the second half of the course, each student writes an essay on a particular problem, using the comparative method to see how the problem affects two or more ethnic groups in one country or one particular group in two or more countries. While the students are collecting their material for this paper, the lectures cover the theoretical concepts outlined earlier, as well as a survey of services provided in selected libraries. When the papers are completed, students present them to the class for discussion. Because of the emphasis on individual work and because of the motivation to choose the course in the first place, many students, apart from learning certain basic skills, find that the course helps them to deepen their understanding of themselves as well as people from other cultures.

Suggested Conceptual Framework:
The Librarian at the Tower of Babel

The professional philosophy on which this suggested conceptual framework is based is taken from Ranganathan's *The Five Laws of Library Science* and Foskett's *The Creed of a Librarian*.[21] The importance of Ranganathan's laws lies primarily in their emphasis on service to the individual reader and secondly in their recognition of the principle of continuous change. Foskett's paper is subtitled "No Religion, No Politics, No Morals." In providing a service to readers, librarians are expected to abstain from judging their readers' needs. This professional philosophy presupposes respect for all cultures, but to understand his readers fully, the librarian has to have beliefs and a culture of his own.

From childhood, the individual is subjected to a process of social conditioning by the group of people nearest to him. His personality thus grows to reflect the culture of this group. Culture is not static; in the course of time it undergoes various changes. Some are caused by developments from within, some by interaction with other cultures.

When two or more cultures interact, they either accept each other, live in a neutral relationship, or oppose each other. A contact between two cultures is brought about by population movement. The world population at any given time is the result of successive waves of migration. The interaction of the different cultures of past waves produces the culture of any given locality. The group that migrates consists of individuals who each have their own reasons for migrating, but there is usually a common motivation which applies to the whole group.

On arrival the migrant finds himself a stranger. He must learn to cope with new situations without the support his home group used to

give him. The reaction of the native population to his presence in their locality ranges from acceptance to open hostility. Their attitudes are influenced by economic, historical and psychological factors. Prejudice is a distorted form of rejection of the stranger. It would be unrealistic to expect all individuals to like each other at all times, but dislike does not on its own constitute prejudice. Some individuals have personalities predisposing them to be more prejudiced than others. The more two individuals or groups have in common, the less likely they are to reject each other. Similarity of cultures helps positive interaction.

Racial prejudice is a special kind of rejection. It stems from atavistic taboos, which in modern times take the form of pseudoscientific justifications, and from a complex pattern of negative emotions often associated with historical causes. Racial attitudes are themselves culture-bound and members of various cultures tend to display different forms of racial prejudice.

In coping with everyday problems the migrant is at a disadvantage compared with natives, who have all the local know-how. Even in the most favorable circumstances the migrant lives under stress, which in extreme cases can lead to maladjustment and ill health. Having made the move from one country to another, the best the migrant can hope for is an experience of the positive form of marginality. He no longer belongs to the old culture, nor to the new one. He is alone, having left his old supporting group and not having found a new one to take its place.

Migrants who live in a state of marginality tend to associate in various forms of ethnic organizations which provide them with support and facilitate self-help. The individual migrant's affiliation with these organizations, and the organizations themselves, tend to be short-lived, as the need for them is transitory.

The family group is another source of support to the migrant in a strange environment. Family breakdown affects migrants more than the natives, who have access to alternative systems of support. The migrant's children, who receive their education in the new country, experience a different form of marginality from that of their parents. They also stand at the threshold of two cultures, but the pull of the new culture is stronger, as it is the culture of their peer group. This creates a special form of generation conflict in migrant families.

The host community is guided in its acceptance of migrants by its migration policy. This consists of the various rules and regulations under which migrants are admitted to the country and settled, as well as the unwritten norms about how best to approach the situation. Various

integration policies have been formulated. The policy of cultural plu-
ralism has much to recommend it, as it recognizes the equality of
cultures and the individual's right to live according to his own culture.
Present-day British policy, for example, is described as multiracial and
multicultural to empasize that racial equality is as important as cultural
equality.

Cultures that live side by side in mutual tolerance do not remain
separate forever. Due to the natural process of social change, they
gradually exchange the most suitable elements until they reach accultur-
ation. Like the Tower of Babel, society is gradually being built from
the little bricks that come from all over the world. The tower fell down
because, in the confusion of tongues, there were no interpreters to make
the multicultural society work. As librarians we are in an important
position to supply information where it is wanted, both to the newcom-
ers and to members of the host society. Information can reduce stress and
lead to mutual understanding.

Appendix
Suggested Questionnaire for Ethnic Group Case Study

A. Characteristics of a "typical" member of the ethnic group
   1. Was the migration forced or voluntary?
   2. Is the migrant's new socioeconomic status:
      a. improved   b. unchanged   c. lower?
   3. With regard to his country of origin, is the migrant expected to:
      a. return   b. send money   c. send knowledge?
   4. Was the migrant rejected by his country or was his country rejected by him?
   5. Is the migrant:
      a. a settler   b. a colonist   c. a political idealist   d. an opportunist?
   6. Was the motivation for migration:
      a. need for security   b. improvement in economic conditions   c. political
      d. improved opportunity for individual advancement   e. other?
   7. Was the migrant:
      a. welcome or invited   b. compassionately received   c. tolerated
      d. unwelcome?
   8. Following migration, were family ties:
      a. strengthened   b. weakened?
   9. In what decade did the migrant arrive at the host country, and at what age?

B. Cultural identity of the ethnic group
   1. Which factors contribute most to cultural identity?
      a. ethics   b. religion   c. language   d. social patterns   e. food   f. politics

    2. What do ethnic group members find difficult to accept about the receiving community?

    3. What does the receiving community find difficult to accept about the ethnic group members?

    4. To what extent are the cultural patterns of the receiving community and the ethnic group similar?

    5. Are all members of the ethnic group conscious of their cultural identity?

    6. Are there conflicting value systems within the community?

    7. Is there a conflict of viewpoints between the generations?

C. Relations between the cultures

    1. Does the contact between the two cultures bring about:
       a. annihilation b. expulsion c. dispersion d. segregation e. toleration f. conflict g. symbiotic relationship h. exploitation i. social stratification j. acculturation k. accommodation l. assimilation m. cultural pluralism?

    2. Are cultural changes motivated by:
       a. economic advantages b. social advantages c. congruity in existing culture patterns d. ethical and religious considerations?

    3. Do the two cultures have a language in common?

    4. Do the two cultures have a religion in common?

    5. Were members of the ethnic group well informed about the culture of the receiving community:
       a. before arrival b. after arrival?

    6. Is the receiving community well informed about the culture of the ethnic group?

    7. What practical steps have been taken to bridge the gap between the cultures?

    8. What practical steps should be taken to bridge the gap between the cultures?

D. The second generation

    1. What special problems do members of the second generation experience?

    2. Is there contact between school and parents?

    3. Is there provision of opportunity for the second generation to learn about their parents' culture?

    4. With which cultural group do the young people identify?

E. Institutions which contribute to self-sufficiency of the ethnic group

    1. Which of the following contribute most to the cultural identity of the ethnic group?
       a. club b. societies c. meeting places d. restaurants e. film f. drama g. music h. food shops i. community leaders j. churches k. schools l. newspapers m. periodicals n. books o. publishers p. booksellers q. art galleries r. learned societies s. libraries

    2. Which institutions could serve to form a bridge between the cultures?

    3. Does the ethnic group wish to retain self-sufficiency?

    4. To what extent does the ethnic group take initiative in bridging the gap between its own culture and that of the receiving community?

F. Communication needs
   1. Do members of the ethnic group have problems with:
      a. learning English   b. maintaining their own language?
   2. What practical facilities are available to cope with the language problem?
   3. What service is available in:
      a. public libraries   b. libraries run by the ethnic group?
   4. Is information needed about:
      a. life in the new country   b. the home country?
   5. How is information provided?
   6. Is there a need for publications:
      a. in the language of the ethnic group   b. in English?
   7. How are publications made available?
   8. Is there a need for nonbook media for the ethnic group?
   9. What media are available?

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