RURAL LIBRARIES AND THE THREE T'S -
TECHNICAL SERVICES, TECHNOLOGY, AND TIME

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The key ingredient in the development and continuing survival of the rural library is a persistent determination to thrive despite adversity - the quality of "true grit". The rural library, although small, addresses many of the same objectives as sister libraries serving more populous areas. The dilemma of the rural library is that it reflects in microcosm the needs and concerns of larger libraries, but lacks the commensurate range of problem-solving options.

The local tax base in rural areas cannot begin to support the elaborate media collections, array of programs, or depth of personnel available in larger libraries.

Although frequently short on funding, the public library is almost always long on determination. A resolve to provide the local community with good library service has enabled dedicated staff to turn limited resources into public library service that meets community needs and of which the community can be proud. As a matter of fact, rural librarians have become so adept at "making do" that a "Catch 22" service situation has developed. As conscientious librarians make every effort to make the library the best it can be, the public expects more, and the library is faced with the need to put forth more services with relatively fewer staff members and budget dollars. On this type of daily treadmill, the library administrator is likely to focus

attention and effort on the public service aspects of library operation and give little consideration to technical processes.

While rural libraries are moving ahead in areas of public service, technical processes such as cataloging and classification are stagnating. The rationale behind the classification (technical services ignored) system used or the possibility for improvement is little considered. While rural libraries are moving ahead in areas of public service, it is very likely that cataloging and classification is handled in the same way as a decade ago. Possibly a new edition of Dewey has been used, Cutter numbers added or deleted, but the process remains the same. The rural librarian, pressured by the volume of materials to be processed and other library demands, has little time to consider new developments, much less implement them.

Numerous changes have taken place in the library field in technical processes. Many librarians recognize and readily acknowledge the relative lag in keeping up with advances in technical processes. They protest that the work load, the library budget, and attitudes of board members or library administrators make changes impossible. Other librarians are so engulfed in the problems of their individual libraries that they have little opportunity to become aware of what is happening in other libraries on the periphery of their immediate environment.

All of this is understandable. Each of us gets wrapped up in his own particular job and niche in the world. Yet, it is important to make an effort not only to keep up with the current developments in librarianship, but to envision the future and prepare ourselves to meet it. If we accept the general premise that libraries encourage ongoing educational and personal

development, it should follow that librarians themselves are progressive and well informed within their own field. But, when limited financial and human resources combine to force a choice between public services and technical services, the latter is likely to get pushed to a back burner. The status quo is rationalized by saying that technical services affect only the library staff, so are not really important. Yet technical services are inter-related with other library operations and are important to library users in terms of availability of materials, ease of use of catalogs and locating materials, cost effectiveness of staff time, cuts in processing time - getting the materials to the public more rapidly, relation of class numbers used to those in other types of libraries facilitating transfer of skills from one situation to another, and increased staff time available for providing public service when that required for technical services is reduced.

It is always necessary to keep in mind that not all changes are improvements. Alternatives need to be reviewed and considered with an eye toward advancement rather than tradition. Perhaps one of the most radical changes to be considered is whether to retain the DDC (Dewey Decimal Classification). Even considering a change to LCC (Library of Congress Classification) by a small library would have been considered revolutionary less than a decade ago. Is Dewey adequate? Anyone who has ever had difficulty finding a number for a new subject or spent time changing numbers, labels, and cards to satisfy Dewey revisions knows that Dewey is not perfect. Although revised editions of Dewey have incorporated some new subjects through expansion of decimals and reassignment of numbers, Dewey classification is still based in the 19th century and does not always meet the needs of the 20th.

The LCC system is the classification of the 20th century and may well be the basis for cataloging development in the 21st century. LCC is not a panacea for the small library but does offer advantages. With a broader range of divisions and room for expansion, LCC can more easily accommodate new subjects without causing havoc with previously established classification numbers and without increasing the length of the call numbers to an unwieldy size. A major disadvantage of LCC is that it does not provide for separate fiction and biography sections as does the DDC system, and LCC class schedules are spread throughout several volumes as opposed to the three volumes of Dewey. The familiarity of users with Dewey is a point in favor of the DDC. The system seems much easier to use to many practicing catalogers since they have often had years of experience with the Dewey classification. LCC remains a nebulous area for many librarians and administrators since library schools did not commonly emphasize the system prior to the mid 60's. For the very small collection, the revisions in Dewey may not pose serious problems. Perhaps the most frequent argument in support of continued use of Dewey is the potential cost of converting previously cataloged titles to LCC. Librarian's time and the cost of additional supplies are both considerations.

Yet despite the initial expenditure of time and money, a change from DDC to LCC should not be completely discounted. Immediate conversion of the total collection may not be necessary but in some instances, it might be a worthwhile investment. There may come a time in the not-too-distant future when the virtues of simplicity of use and adequacy of Dewey will be severely tested. As library technology continues to expand, Dewey is likely to become more outmoded and to seem even more patchwork in nature.

Although the writer does not advocate the use of LCC in all rural libraries now, it is proposed that rural librarians take a closer look at what is happening to cataloging and classification in the world around them. It is easy to accept the routine without questioning why. It is well to remember that DDC is over one hundred years old. Henry Ford did not stop with the model T, Bell Telephone has found "a better way," and even the U.S. Constitution has been amended. . . maybe a change in library cataloging is needed too.

Rural librarians are practical individuals and are inclined to make the most of the resources available. Dewey, until now, has seemed the most efficient method of organization. If a better way is demonstrated, the writer feels that the rural librarian will select that route for future use. A "better way" for many libraries is already in operation in large libraries. A combination of LCC and on-line computer access has facilitated processing of library materials and also has made possible more effective interlibrary loan, serials control, and acquisitions of materials.

In this era of networking and library cooperation, more libraries are plugging into LCC and cataloging networks like OCLC On-line Computer Library Center via on-line terminals. The literature shows that a few small libraries have not only looked at the system but also tried it out and found that it can work.

Acronyms like OCLC and RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) are rapidly becoming a part of every librarian's daily vocabulary just as microforms, cassettes, and 16mm films have in the past.

Library literature and on-line directories show greatest cost benefits occur at present to larger public libraries or to library coopera- tives with centralized processing operations. With rapid advances in both

computer hardware and software, prices should become more affordable to smaller libraries.

On-line is the word for libraries of the future - all types of libraries. For smaller libraries, the major networking responsibility may rest with district or regional centers with local access terminals. It has already been proven that on-line access is not only an effective tool for cataloging and classification, but for other cooperative ventures including interlibrary loan and cooperative acquisitions. In some libraries, the on-line concept is so well accepted that on-line catalogs are replacing the traditional card catalog. The Library of Congress has already "closed" its card catalog. No more cards will be added to the traditional catalog. All information will be computerized and accessed by computer terminals.

Library literature within the last two years has discussed Computer Output Microform (COM) Catalogs - computer generated and produced on microfilm or microfiche rather than paper stock - as opposed to the card catalog. COM is considered as an alternative and a stepping stone between the traditional catalog and the on-line catalog where the computer, in a sense, holds all of the cards. The traditional card catalog is being condemned as outmoded, expensive, and inconvenient to the user. As more libraries computer-input cataloging data and access data in that way, rather than purchase catalog cards in bulk, it may no longer be profitable for jobbers to supply book processing or cards. Rural libraries may ultimately be forced to move with the times - ready or not.

The initial reaction to the idea of computers, networking, and change will quite likely be "all very nice, but what about the cost?" Cost is obviously a consideration but not an insurmountable obstacle. One local

budget may not be able to handle the financial outlay, but perhaps a group of libraries working together could. Cooperation has worked for the small library before and will continue to be a key element in the metamorphosis of the rural library.

One of the best, most familiar, and most widespread forms of co-operation is interlibrary loan. Cooperation in this area has been successful because: 1) the service is needed to supplement available collections; 2) there is no significant strain on the library's normal operating budget with postal costs sometime defrayed by the district or the library user; 3) usually, the staff time needed is incorporated with the other responsibilities of an individual already employed by the library; 4) there is no threat to the autonomy of member libraries and for most small libraries, no strain on their own collections. Many of these principles would also apply to cooperative network access.

In Pennsylvania, cooperation on varying scales ties together small public libraries and enables all to benefit directly from the resources each has to offer as well as from the expertise and resources of the District Center. This linkage may involve continuing education, rotating collections of books, cooperative acquisitions agreements, union lists, shared public relations, programming ideas, recordings, art prints, etc. Perhaps it is time to concentrate more on shared access to on-line cataloging networks and cooperative cataloging processing in general. Cooperation is a viable possibility for improved and cost-effective cataloging and technical processes for the rural library.

When the weather bureau issues a tornado warning, it is a good idea to take cover. When the library literature and library operations indicate a

move toward automation, computers, and revision of cataloging methods, it might be a good idea to take notice, re-evaluate present practices, and made plans for gradually coming to terms with the future.

The time has come in rural librarianship for serious consideration of changes in traditional cataloging and classification methods and plans for adoption of the "revolutionary" ideas that have now become the routine in larger libraries. Time, cost, and "smallness," or even "ruralness," will not long remain valid excuses for ignoring advances in the library field and improvements in ways to serve the rural library public. Cooperation has worked before. With the determination to move forward, and the willingness to face the challenge, it can work again. What is needed is a little more of that old-fashioned commodity for which rural libraries and librarians are famous - true grit.