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Library News

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Volume 6 No. 1

1978 January/March

CEYLON NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES BOARD

LIBRARY NEWS

Vol. 6, No. 1

1978, January - March

Quarterly Journal

Ceylon National Library Services Board

Edited & Published by

Library Education & Training Section

Ceylon National Library Services Board

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The opinions expressed by the authors
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PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE IN WEST AUSTRALIA

Geographically and demographically West Australia presents a contrast to conditions in our own country. It has a population of just over a million sparsely distributed over almost one million square miles of land. There are only 138 local authorities in the state, of which only 6 major authorities remain unserved. Nearly 80% of the local authorities have a population of less than 6,000 with a medium population size for a local authority as 2,500. The Library Board of West Australia which was set up in 1951 under the Stewardship of Mr. F. A. Shar has built up over the years a very effective library service considering the "tyranny of distance," in the State, paucity of qualified librarians, and other problems relating to the size and nature of local authorities.

The basic problems which the Board set out to solve are recounted by Mr. Shar as follows:-

- " (1) To devise a system which would enable local authorities to provide effective library service throughout the state, in the country equally with the city.
- (2) To awaken a demand for such a service
- (3) To establish standards
- (4) To persuade Government to provide the requisite funds."

In order to achieve state wide coverage, in an effective manner, making the maximum economic use of resources in terms of stock, the Board accepts the responsibility for the initial and exchange book stock, including processing, central cataloguing and organisation. A significant aspect of this state-wide service is the integration of the State Reference Library with the total public library service.

The organisational pattern of the public library service in West Australia may be stated in brief as follows:-

"It comprise a Headquarters organisational governed by the Library Board; a State Reference Library like-wise; and a large number of associated but independent public libraries controlled by local authorities."

The West Australian Library System is a highly centralised one, unlike the Victorian System already described.

The library Board provides the Local Authority with its book stock, professional services, including acquisition, technical processing, inter-library loans and the State Reference library Service. The Local Authority meets the cost of the buildings, which must conform to the standards set by the Board; the cost maintaining the establishment and the cost of the Library Staff. In addition, the Local Authority must meet one third of the cost of the initial stock of books provided by the Board. In effect the entire stock of books held by all local Authorities belong to the Board.

The Board supplies books to the Local Authority at the rate of 1.1 per head of population, the minimum stock being 800 volumes. A village of even 400 people will therefore get an initial stock of 800 books. The books held by all libraries in the system are exchanged at a given rate every two months with books from a Central collection, maintained by the Board. In a collection of 800 volumes 90% or 720 volumes are exchanged annually and in a collection of 2500 volumes 30% are exchanged. The exchange rate decreases with increased stock holdings of libraries. In a library with 100,000 volumes only 19% will be exchanged in a year.

The above exchange system helps libraries to maintain a reasonably up to date collection in good physical condition. This collection supported by -

(a) an efficient inter-library loan system co-ordinated by the Headquarters Union Catalogue and;

(b) a regular Reference Information service. helps even the smallest library in the remotest area to provide its patrons with the resources of the whole State.

The effectiveness of the Headquarters Inter-Library Loan system is evident from the fact that during the 1972/73 Financial Year the State Bibliographical centre handled more than 76,000 requests of which 86% were satisfied from the Central Stock, and 30% from other libraries.

State assistance to public libraries in West Australia with subsidy in kind appears to be the most feasible in the context of the nature of the local authorities. However the Board experience seems to suggest that the control of the Board over the Book Stock only, without similar authority over the staff, who service the stock, cannot ensure the effective exploitation of the resources of the Library.

It is doubtful whether the unification of the staff under the authority of the Board could be achieved without impairing local identification and participation, to render the maximum exploitation of library resources possible. Further the problems which such a highly centralised system would give rise to, especially with the rapid growth of the local authority units and the development of communication facilities would impede any move in this direction at least in respect of the larger libraries.

In this connection it would be of interest to bear in mind the following "crippling difficulties" that small independent libraries face and which conditioned the establishment and growth of the West Australian Library system about a quarter of a century ago.

1. "The selection of a good balanced and comprehensive book stock is impeded by lack of experienced qualified staff of bibliographical tools, of finance and also perhaps by the closeness of local pressures which influence the library's freedom in book selection and on other matters.

2. Because of the relatively small number of readers, books tend to be read out before they are worn out. This leads to silting up of the shelves with partly worn books which have lost their appeal.

3. The needs of the user whose taste and needs cannot be met except at extravagant cost."

In the light of the above considerations and the demographic and geographical factors mentioned earlier, it is understandable that a highly centralised organisational pattern had to be built up in order to achieve the effective and efficient state wide coverage of library service West Australia enjoys.

"The success and problems of the Library services of West Australia have both arisen from the fact that the Board ~~has refused to sanction a second rate library service.~~ Public libraries have all commenced with a full stock at the minimum standard for the approved figure of service population and have been able to offer both lending service and supporting reference and inter-lending library services from the State library and the Board."

One of the main factors facilitating the provision of an effective State wide library service in West Australia is the channelling of the State Government's subsidy to local authorities in the form of books and not cash as done elsewhere. In a report to the Government of New South Wales Mr. W.J. Weeden (1972) has clearly indicated the disadvantage in relating to the acquisition of books to the budgetary provision of a local authority.

"The only substantial item in the budget which can be controlled by a Council itself is the Book Vote. If salaries or other charges rise during the year and the library is required to work within a fixed budget then savings must be made. Most libraries work on a fixed budget and most attempt to save by reducing the book vote."

BOOK SELECTION

Book selection, a major operation co-ordinated at the Headquarters of the Board is the responsibility of the Chief Assistant Librarian. What would at first sight appear to be a severe restriction of the freedom of choice of the individual librarian on the field, is in fact a co-operative effort limited only by the "numerical constraints of their quota which is determined by the exchange programme."

The individual librarian on the field receives an Advance list of about 140 titles every week. Of course this is limited to libraries staffed by professionals. The Librarian will then make his selections from these advance lists and advise the Chief Assistant Librarian of the Board of his choice. The advance lists are compiled with a good deal of circumspection and they include suggestions made by the librarians themselves.

In recent times periodical meetings of librarians are held at the Headquarters for the purpose of book selection. and such meetings help to impose a sense of participation in the librarians in the system. I was personally associated with one such meeting and was able to discern the unity of purpose of those participating.

Since the Board's subsidy is limited to books, the provision of periodical literature by the individual library depends on the financial position of the local authority. The Board quite rightly does not consider it feasible to enter the field of periodical literature, however essential it may be as reading material in view of the heavy commitments it would entail in respect of organisational machinery. However, it must be stated that this increasingly important area will receive inadequate attention from local authorities unless state subsidy filters into it, even in a limited manner.

BOOK MOBILES

Book mobiles have not found favour with the West Australian Library system mainly because of the geographical factor. However, it is recognised that suburban areas far removed from service points could best be served by Book Mobiles ~~at the same time~~ as Branch Libraries cover them.

CHILDRENS LIBRARIES

The Board has made adequate provision in its budget for the acquisition of Children's Books. The absence of a special officer on the staff of the Board to supervise and promote this important aspect of the service has not lessened the concern of Board in this matter. The following policy relating to its book acquisition reflects this.

"Books are supplied to local libraries on a scale of one book per head of population served, with a minimum of 800 volumes if the population is below that figure. The stock is in the following proportions:
one third for children and of the adult two thirds 40 percent fiction, 40 percent non-fiction of fairly general interest and 20 percent non-fiction of more advanced standard or more restricted appeal."

Some of the libraries I visited, of which the Riverton Public Library needs special mention, provide excellent service for children.

S. M. KAMALDEEN,

ASST. DIRECTOR/LIBRARY SERVICES

C. N. L. S. B.

CAN LIBRARIES ASSIST IN POPULATION REDISTRIBUTION

The International Development Research Centre in Canada (IDRC) has announced a grant of \$ 220,000 to help evaluate government sponsored programmes to redistribute population from over populated areas to sparsely peopled territories in Southeast Asia.

Some of the resettlement schemes already implemented have run into problems due to bad roads, poor marketing facilities and unsettled political conditions with the results that the "settlers" instead of settling have returned to town.

Among the factors affecting the quality of rural life especially for new comers, are the dearth of cultural and leisure activities so reading available in town. Development of rural library services, as envisaged in the de Heer proposal, using the term "library" in its most encompassing sense could well prove to be a much more important segment of infrastructure input than even the most ambitious Librarian have realised. All the more reason for the library fraternity to fraternize with the planners.

(Comla:Newsletter)

COMMONWEALTH ASIAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN LIBRARIANSHIP

Singapore, 17-22 October, 1977

Jointly Organised by

COMMONWEALTH LIBRARY ASSOCIATION and
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE

The commonwealth Asia Regional workshop on Research Methodology in Librarianship, sponsored jointly by the Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA) and the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) was held in Singapore at RELL International house from October 17 to October 22, 1977.

The workshop was officially opened by Dr. Ow Chin Hock, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Culture at 9.30 a.m. on Monday, 17th October 1977.

The workshop proper began at 11.00 a.m. on Monday 17th October and was held daily from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. It ended on Saturday, 22nd October at 1.00 p.m. The course director was Professor J. Clement Harrison, President COMLA and Professor, School Library Service Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Twenty six participants took part in the workshop. The participants were:

1. Five official delegates from member Library Associations of COMLA in the Asian regions, including Mr. M.A.P. Senadhira, Sri Lanka Library Association.
2. Four overseas participants from Malaysia.
3. Seventeen local participants.

The following topics were covered in eight sessions at the workshop:

1. Identifying research topics.
2. Themes for Library research.
3. Searching the literature.
4. Writing the research proposal.
5. Research Methods.
6. Preparation of research report.
7. Practical problems of research
feed back of a proposed questionnaire.
8. Evaluation of workshop.

Country problem on the development of research in libraries and librarianship were presented by the five official delegates on their respective countries.

The participants were divided into three discussion groups according to their interests in the three chosen topics. The three reports presented were:

1. Reader use of Reference Services, presented by Mrs. Koo Siew Mun.
2. Workload study of non-professional staff in the Reader Services Division of a University Library, presented by Mr. M.A.P. Senadhira.
3. A National Social Science Data Bank for Singapore, presented by Mrs. Alice Leong.

The workshop proposed the following three recommendations:

1. It is recommended that COMLA should consider the publication of a "guide to research in Librarianship" carried out in the Asian Commonwealth countries upto December 1977, to be updated thereafter by annual supplements.
2. Recognising that library services should be organised nationally to pool a country's total library resources to meet the national demands in its totality, it is recommended that in library research group organisation be established in each participating country to evolve national standards for services and to provide the basis for planning at the national level. It is further recommended that the library research group/organization should also promote research in Librarianship on a continuing sustained basis.
3. Recognising the importance of research in Librarianship, it is recommended that research methodology be included in the curriculum of professional library science courses conducted in Asian Commonwealth country.

(COMLA: Newsletter)

BIGGEST LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND

The port and Trading City of Hamburg, which prides itself on caring for handicapped citizens, has the biggest library for the blind in the federal Republic of Germany.

The Library has a permanent stock of 65,000 books in Brailles and 4000 blind people are registered as subscribers. Last year some 60,000 volumes were lent to people all over the world, and there is a permanent list of "readers" in such east European countries as Poland, Hungary, Rumania and Yugaslavia.

In addition the North German Audic Library for the blind have possessed 2,650 titles, two thirds on tapes and the rest in cassette form. Since the tapes are available in several copies, blind subscribers have about 50,000 tapes and 25,000 cassettes to call on. Cassettes are easier to handle and more practical for elderly.

The North German Audic Library is financed by Hamburg, Bremen, Lower Saxony and Schleswig - Holstein Federal States.

The point of emphasis of the material is literature and work in low German and cassettes are being increasingly used to inform and educate citizen who live in a world of permanent darkness. There are other libraries of this kind in West Germany, but all of them are much smaller than the Hamburg organisation.

The Braille works cover every sector imaginable - Poetry, classical dramas, history, travel books, medicine, nuclear Physics, cookery, children's and youth books. To round off the programme, two popular news magazine provide 5000 editions of their articles every fortnight.

("Sun")

SEMINAR ON BOOK PRODUCTION

A seminar on book production in Asia, organized by the Asian cultural centre for Unesco with Assistance from UNESCO and in cooperation with the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the Japan book publisher Association, successfully completed its one month training programme on 28th October 1977.

This course was decided to be a general course, aimed training those who are engaged in the editions of educational books and children's books. 21 participants from the 14 Asian countries attended the seminar. Most of the participants held leading positions in the editorial aspect of publishing, half of these engaged in the private sector of children's book publication and the other half concerned with publishing text books in the public sector.

In the course following two points were taken into consideration in drawing the curriculum.

1. The participants should become aware of, through the course, what they want or need to study and what can be utilized for their future work.

2. The lecturers should grasp the nature of the problems the participants are confronted within their work, and the lecturers should concentrate on those matters relevant to publishing educational books and children's books.

(Newsletter -iii 1977)

EXPERT MEETING FOR AUDIO-VISUAL
MATERIAL IN ASIA

The expert meeting for co-production of cultural/Educational Audio-visual material in Asia was held from 23rd to 27th August 1977 in Tokyo. The main purpose of this meeting was to investigate possibilities of expanding the regional joint programmes through available Audio-visual devices. Those devices could be used as additional tools to ensure greater participants of the public at large, so as to meet the needs of Asia today and to further serve books and cultural development. The biggest and most difficult problems was an absolute shortage of hardware. Especially sophisticated devices such as 16 mm film projectors and VTR/VCR appeared to be beyond reach at this moment. It was strongly felt by experts that in the long term the selection of the audio-visual media should be based on its widest possible utilization in the region.

(Newsletter - iii 1977)

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