

The Development of Technical Services Training

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I BEGIN with Robert Frost:

.
Ants are a curious race;
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest—
Seems not even impressed.
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae,
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court.
Then word goes forth in Formic:
"Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
Our selfless forager Jerry.
Will the special Janizary
Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary
Go bring him home to his people.
Lay him in state on a sepal.
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
This is the word of your Queen."
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician;
And taking formal position

With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle,
And heaving him high in the air,
Carries him out of there.
No one stands round to stare.
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.

How thoroughly departmental! The chain of command to the queen; the detailed routine for every move of the rank and file. So it goes also in the technical services. The chain of command to the chief; the detailed routines and rules for the order librarian, the serials librarian, the catalog librarian.

Now departmentalism—the ant's eye view—works well enough perhaps when we set up a department of technical services within a library. But can we carry this departmentalism into the world of the mind? At once we face at least two groups of questions:

1. The chain of command: Is the idea of technical services an intellectual concept or is it simply an administrative device? Is technical services a discipline such as mathematics or the classics; or is it simply the administrative union of some groups of people with various skills? What of the various units within the department? The fine line between ordering and book selection—who can see it clearly? Does cataloging include classification? Where do subject headings fall? Should the cataloging student deal only with cataloging “tools”—e.g., Sears and Dewey—or should he also learn of general reference “tools”—e.g., C.B.I. or D.N.B.? What are serials? Cataloging or order work? Finally, how much of what we call technical services may most profitably appear in the curriculum as segments of other courses—e.g., library administration courses?

2. The routines and rules: Can—or should—routines and rules be taught in school? Are they the stuff graduate study is made of? The techniques of catalog card reproduction change even as we talk of them. Book dealers come and go. Serial routines of yesterday no longer do the job well. Apart from a few basic facts about cataloging and classification, is there not much in the technical services that might better be learned on the job, or that is so fluid it cannot be taught at any one time in any one course?

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The world of the library and the world of the mind: our two questions raise an ancient dilemma:

The history of the teaching of the technical services goes back at least to Melvil Dewey at Columbia in 1887. Dewey had described his proposed "School of Library Economy" at the A.L.A. Convention in Buffalo in 1883 and asked for comments. Poole had at once obliged:

I think [Mr. Dewey] is in error in stating that there is now no institution in this country for educating librarians. I have the impression that there is an excellent one in Boston, known as the Boston Public Library; there is another in Boston called the Boston Athenaeum, and still another in the adjacent city of Cambridge, called the Harvard College Library . . . There is no training school for educating librarians like a well-managed library.¹

Cutter had a characteristic reply:

Undoubtedly it is well that a librarian should have worked in a library; there are some things which he will never understand unless he has. But any one merely employed as an assistant in a large library is likely to be assigned to one particular department, and to understand that only. And, even if his chief take care that he shall have variety of work, he only learns the method of one establishment; and as those are probably all determined upon before he goes there, he only learns them by rote, and, unless he is unduly philosophic, he never thinks of the reasons for them. No one is thoroughly fit to have charge of a library who has not pursued some comparative study, and learned to reason about what he does.²

In November 1887, J. Schwartz, self styled "poet-lariat of the *Library Journal*" published a "poem" on the new School of Library Economy:³

I.

Three little maids from school are we,
Filled to the brim with economy,
—Not of the house but library,
Learnt in the Library School.

1st Maid—I range my books from number one.

2d Maid—Alphabetically I've begun.

3d Maid—In regular classes mine do run.

All—Three maids from the Library School.

All—Three little maidens all unwary,
Each in charge of a library,
Each with a system quite contrary
To every other school.

II.

Our catalogues, we quite agree,
From faults and errors must be free,
If only we our way can see
To find the proper rule.

1st Maid—I decide for the Dictionary.

2d Maid—I for a classified Summary.

3d Maid—Mine combines these plans that vary.

All—Three maids from the Library School.

All—Three little maidens all unwary,
Each in charge of a library,
Each with a system quite contrary
To every other school.

The exchange of the Three Founding Fathers and the poem of the Three Little Maids: Here at the outset we have the built-in conflict which has haunted library education and, in particular, education for the technical services ever since. What is the place of practice; what is the place of theory? Do we want the ant's eye view or the prophet's dream?

We began with a compromise: We would educate librarians in schools instead of by apprenticeship; but we would have a thoroughly practical curriculum. We would give an over-view of various techniques as practiced in various libraries, as Cutter had wanted; but we would not deal much with theory about *why* these things were done, as Cutter had also wanted.

The first school called itself a "School of Library Economy for Training Librarians and Cataloguers"⁴ and most of what the Three Little Maids had learned we should now include in the "technical services."

The compromise lasted long and flourished. A third of a century later in 1923 the Williamson Report on the library schools noted, for instance, that there was much training in clerical routines; the use of the typewriter was a common entrance requirement, just as in Dewey's

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school students had first to learn the library hand. There was no agreement as to the relative importance of different subjects: Cataloging, classification, book selection, and reference usually took about half the student's time, and to these subjects some schools gave two or three times as many hours of instruction as others did. Four to twelve weeks (one-eighth to one-fourth of the school year) was given over to "field work" (usually known as "practical work") in some library or libraries with no particular attempt by the schools to make this an educational experience. Seven of the fifteen schools he surveyed were connected with public libraries.

Among the Williamson recommendations which dealt in some way with the teaching of the technical services, we may note at least three:

1. That the schools become integral parts of universities.
2. That the first year of study be general and basic.
3. That there be a distinction between professional and clerical skills and that training in clerical skills be largely eliminated.

And so the pendulum started to swing back. The schools moved into academic settings. Chicago's Graduate Library School, at first eyed with suspicion, gave impetus to the theoreticians, particularly when the other schools began to imitate it. Librarianship—and along with it the technical services—became a graduate study with a number of schools even offering the doctorate. Laboratory work and clerical routines tended to disappear. Accreditation became a matter of professional pride.

Finally, perhaps most important of all, came the revolution within cataloging itself. Departmentalism—the eye of the ant—had taken its toll. To the Five Laws of Library Science we were about to add two more:

Every book its rule.
Every rule its book.

Then in 1941 appeared A. D. Osborn's famous "Crisis in Cataloging." There is nothing new in this pamphlet and there is very little that rests on concrete evidence. But it came at a time when books were engulfing the world and its libraries while we spent our days multiplying rules and exceptions to rules and exceptions to exceptions. There have been other better and more scholarly papers; but this one crystallized what a great many people were thinking.

It is true that revision of the rules came to little in the 1949 rules for entry and was only somewhat successful in the 1949 rules for de-

scription. And it is further true that the current revision, for all its bright beginning, faces constantly the danger of being nibbled into the image of 1949.

But the spirit of revolution was in the air and it still abides with us. What is the theory *behind* the rule? What is the *reason* for the practice? What can be discarded? Humeston's study showed us that in the early 1950's teachers at least thought they were giving more attention to principles and theory and less to lab work and drill in detail.⁵

Today the bulletins of the accredited library schools offer a somewhat confused picture because of individual differences in combinations of material to make up a course, vagaries in titles given to courses, and general confusion as to just what the technical services are and where they should appear in the curriculum. So the technical services curricula these bulletins offer may be described only in very broad outlines.

Generally cataloging and classification are combined. They appear in two or three—sometimes four—courses with generally only the introductory course required. Generally the word "laboratory" does not appear even in describing the introductory course, but one cannot escape a sneaking suspicion that at least some of the old fashioned "lab" lingers on in the guise of what is now and then vaguely called "practice" or "problems." A few schools offer courses called only "cataloging" or only "classification"; these are generally advanced courses and they frequently deal with "special problems" or "special material."

A handful of schools (e.g., Chicago, Illinois, Syracuse, and Western Reserve) offer courses in the history and/or theory of cataloging and/or classification. And another handful (e.g., Florida, McGill, Michigan, Western Reserve) offer courses dealing only with serials. Practically all schools have courses in selection and/or acquisition of materials, but generally it is impossible to tell what if anything is done with the techniques and principles of order work. A number of schools have courses in documentation and/or bibliography.

Less than a dozen offer a course called "technical services" and often they offer this course as a sort of advanced survey to students who have already had specialized courses in cataloging and classification, administration, and so on. Some schools (such as Syracuse and McGill) offer a beginning course in technical services *except* cataloging and classification; others (such as Peabody) offer courses called "technical services" which are described as chiefly cataloging and classification.

A few schools sponsor a work-study program by which the student may earn his degree in (say) two years while working to pay expenses in a cooperating library.

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Two variations in the beginning course may be worth noting. At Columbia the beginning course is a survey of the technical services "designed to develop critical understanding of practices and alternative methods." At Chicago beginning cataloging and classification are integrated into a four-quarter course intended to give students "competence to evaluate and interpret books of the major different kinds with particular reference to the basic problems of the creation, organization, and use by readers of book collections."

So much for the library schools and their curricula. Broadly speaking, after some thirty-five years devoted to the practical details of the technical services, they have spent another thirty-five years groping, sometimes blindly, toward the theory of technical services.

What of the textbooks which the schools have used? We have time to look at only a few.

F. K. W. Drury's *Order Work for Libraries* (1930) parades a dreary profusion of detailed forms and intricate routines dredged out of many libraries; the book was, no doubt, the apple of the eye of the ant.

Margaret Mann's *Introduction to Cataloging and the Classification of Books* (2d ed. 1943) protests that it "is not a manual of practice" but at once adds that "naturally some definite rulings are stated" (p. v). The chief trouble, of course, is that many of the "rulings" are now long since out of date. We have had two codes of entry and two editions of Dewey and a flood of theory and controversy since the last Mann. Susan Grey Akers' *Simple Library Cataloging* on the other hand, has kept somewhat up to date with a 4th edition in 1954. It is a book of straightforward instructions with no attention to theory and it calls for somewhat more detail in cataloging than may be needed in the usual small library. Individual teachers have tried to fill the vacuum left by Mann and Akers with manuals designed for their own particular needs.

There are some exceptions to the how-to-do-it approach. Among other books, John Metcalfe's chaotic harangues and Sayers' lucid treatises offer a stimulating contrast in the approach to classification. In a class of its own is M. F. Tauber's *Technical Services in Libraries* (1954). It is in no sense a how-to-do-it book; instead it is a state-of-the-art volume, scholarly and encyclopedic, which gives an excellent survey. Such a book, alas, is out of date the minute it is published.

Cutter's *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog* (4th ed., 1904) was perhaps the only really good code so far as possibilities for use in instruction were concerned. Not merely was it a code which opened with a statement of "Objects" to be accomplished by the catalog and then proceeded to lay down rules based on these objects for both author and

title entries and subject headings. Also, with every rule where there was some possibility of question, Cutter gave the reasoning behind all sides of the question.

Successive A.L.A. rules in 1908, 1941, and 1949 were more and more complex, and in no case was the reason for the decision given. Even L.C.'s rules for descriptive cataloging of 1949, although opening with a statement of principles, were not always as simple as those principles would have allowed, and, like A.L.A., they had no discussion of individual rules. Seymour Lubetzky's current revision, likewise, is based on principles and somewhat more logically developed than the A.L.A.-L.C. codes, but the individual rules here again have no discussion; the commentary which accompanied the most recent published version was more concerned with comparison with the 1949 rules than with theory.

The Sears and L.C. lists of subject headings are simply that: Lists. They represent only the accumulations over a period of years of what different librarians at different times for different reasons have considered good. The instructions in the Sears introduction, and Haykin's book on L.C. subject headings simply try to erect a logical framework around the lists.

The same is true of classification: The various editions of L.C. and of Dewey have appeared without explanation other than what is needed to apply them, and Merrill's *Code for Classifiers* simply tells how libraries were applying them in 1939 and tries to offer some rationalization.

So, in spite of the trend toward theory in the schools, the textbooks remain largely how-to-do-it manuals.

Perhaps more important than the schools and the textbooks are the teachers.

In 1923, the Williamson Report noted that 32 per cent of the library school teaching staff had no adequate experience in library work. The percentage of inexperience may be higher today. Indeed, one library school administrator has suggested that with the emergence of theory in the schools there is less need for teachers to have practical experience, and that such experience may even be a disadvantage.⁶

But the practicing librarian in 1961, just as in 1887, wants the library school to send him a graduate who can take up where the departing cataloger with twenty years' experience left off. Recently a head cataloger remarked that she would like to hold an institute for her friends who teach in library school.⁷

There is a third corner in this debate.

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Teachers do need practical experience, a lot of it. But this experience is wasted if it leads them merely to turn out carbon copies of librarians already in the technical services.

The teacher must be a revolutionary, not a preacher that "whatever is, is right."

But he cannot revolt unless he knows precisely what he is revolting against and why. The melancholy fact is that the librarians are sometimes ahead of the teachers. The revolt against the elaborate details of the 1941 A.L.A. code, for instance, was led by librarians and first bore fruit in a library, the Library of Congress. Even today many cataloging details hang on in some classrooms long after most libraries have found them useless and expensive. In small libraries the librarian, trained in such a class room, is sometimes so wrapped up in the details of technical services that the technical services have ceased to be services because they leave no time for public service.

When the teacher gets his experience he spies out the land. Then he goes to his school and trains his band of rebels. But his men, like their leader, must also know the lay of the land. So he will begin with the basic techniques and he will stay with these techniques till they are mastered. Then will come theory and devastating analysis.

And the troops will be ready to march into the Promised Land.

I began with Robert Frost; I close with John Cotton Dana: "Where there is a standard method of doing a thing which has been accepted and approved over a considerable period of time, it is safe to assume that it is wrong. Or, at least, that it is capable of being improved. It is no longer based on the intellect, but has become merely habit and imitation."⁸

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