



Ministry of Education



Organization of
American States

INTRODUCTION TO BASIC LIBRARY PRACTICE

An Overview of Libraries

Module 1

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Nassau, Bahamas
May 2002

PREFACE

The trainer's edition of Introduction to Basic Library Practice was compiled by Dorcas R. Bowler from the Ministry of Education In-service Summer Workshops held at the College of The Bahamas (COB). The material in this manual was presented by instructors, Nellie Brennen, Vanrea Rolle and Curlean Fernander, librarians in the Bahamian System. Some articles have been adapted and modified to reflect current information and trends in library work. This information will be presented to persons with little or no knowledge of basic library routines but desirous of working in a library. It is not a certificate course but provides a base knowledge for those who wish to pursue the diploma course at COB or abroad.

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What is a library?

A library is a collection of materials organised for use. Therefore, the library must perform a number of functions, including:

Acquisition selecting and ordering or otherwise acquiring materials for the collection;

Preservation maintenance and processing as well as storage of items in the collection;

Organisation retrieval of materials in the collection, including the selection of a relevant loan system and a relevant classification scheme;

Dissemination of information informing users of the potential and scope of the collection.

Libraries are often referred to as ‘storehouses’ of knowledge. The economic development of a country is measured by the quality of its library services, for the library often reflects the information needs of the people and the ability of the country to supply those needs. The most basic needs are:

- to preserve governmental and other records
- to support general education
- to support religions and normal instruction
- to cater to the information needs for self improvement
- to cater to the intellectual and aesthetic needs of man
- to fulfil information needs for development purposes

The Development of Library

The history of Western libraries began approximately around 3000 B.C. around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers called the Fertile Crescent. (The Development of Libraries) During 1500-1800, there was an increase in literacy and libraries throughout Western Europe. In Germany, town libraries were established providing popular reading for its citizens. Great Britain established municipal libraries in the 1600s and passed the first Public Libraries Act in 1850. Private collections, for example, that of Thomas Bodley provided the basis for the development of Oxford University and the creation and expansion of national libraries.

The first American public libraries began in 1803 in Salisbury, Connecticut. However, it was not until the 1850s that the Boston Public Library was established and publicly supported in the manner that we are familiar with today. American libraries mirrored the growth of those in Europe from 1500 to 1800. Like Europe, many private collections laid the foundation for university libraries such as Harvard and Yale and the national library, the Library of Congress. (See Appendix A)

A Brief History of Public Libraries in The Bahamas

Traditionally, the impetus for establishing libraries in The Bahamas came from two main sources:

- local communities which saw them as a necessity for educational advancement and social recreation; and
- Governments which saw the need to provide libraries to serve the communities.

Calls for libraries came as early as 1804, as populations increased following the Loyalists influx of the late 18th century. The first libraries were started over one hundred fifty (150) years ago and are still in existence today. They are the Nassau Public Library, Inagua Public Library, Dunmore Town, Harbour Island, New Plymouth (Green Turtle Cay), Abaco and Governor's Harbour Public Library.

Types of Libraries

The four main types of libraries are:

(i) **School Libraries**

These were developed during the 20th century so as to provide materials to support the curriculum. They also provide students with the basic skills needed to use libraries effectively;

(ii) **Academic Libraries**

These are found primarily in colleges and universities. They support the curriculum and provide and preserve information and resources for papers, research projects, thesis and dissertations;

(iii) **Special Libraries**

Special libraries provide research and information needs of special groups of people for example, physicians, lawyers, scientists, and artists. Special collections can be found in banks, engineering and shipping firms, hospitals, research laboratories, law offices and art galleries.

(iv) **Public Libraries**

These are the most common type of libraries. They serve all sectors of society. The general collections provide information for:

- answering queries
- leisure reading
- research projects
- class assignments
- self improvement
- general education

(See Appendix B)

National Libraries

The main aim of a country's national library is to preserve and safeguard the national culture and heritage and fulfil the informational needs of its society.

National libraries perform the following functions:

- serve as a cultural storehouse by acquiring, preserving and organising the literature produced by or about a nation in any form (i.e. books, filmstrips, tapes, videocassettes, paintings, etc).
- accept legal deposits
- prepare and publish the national bibliography
- publish essential catalogues and indexes (including a national union catalogue, or a list showing the location of materials housed in all other libraries in the country)
- acquire selected foreign literature of special interest to the nation's citizens
- collect oral history, folklore, etc.
- establish and maintain branch libraries and bookmobile or 'boat mobile' services to these branches, as necessary
- provide interlibrary loans and international exchange services
- provide exhibitions and display collections to cater to the information, social and cultural needs throughout the country
- provide materials and facilities for the blind, physically challenged and other interest groups.

Library and Media Personnel

In order to effectively operate a library, there is a need for various types of personnel such as chief librarians or library directors, librarians, library technicians, library associates,

clerks, pages, security officers, and janitorial or support staff. Each area of work demands a specific knowledge and experience. For example, librarians require general education and knowledge in the theory of library studies in order to establish organise and run a library. According to the American Library Association (ALA), the term *librarian* should only be used to refer to someone with a master's degree in library science or its variant designations. The same is true of a library media specialist. A library associate is one who holds a bachelor's degree and assists the librarian with various duties in the library. The job description of a library clerk is mainly clerical or secretarial in nature relating to library functions (See Appendix C).

Besides a general knowledge of how the library operates, there are other characteristics that are crucial to library workers. Stueart and Moran (1998) identified two basic qualities needed by persons working in libraries as, interest in people and a concern for the accuracy of details.

Education for Library Staff

According to Kratz and Platz (1993) "Continuing Education is essential for all library personnel, professional and supportive, whether they remain within a position category or are preparing to move into a higher one." A professional librarian is one who possesses a master's degree in library science from a programme accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). In some well-staffed libraries, there are a reference librarian, a cataloguer, web master and a system analyst along with library clerks and other support staff. (See Appendix D)

Professional Qualifications

There is a significant number of ALA accredited library schools in the U.S.A. and Canada. All offer master's degrees in

librarianship. The entry requirement for a master's degree is an approved bachelor's degree. Persons interested in pursuing librarianship may also do so in Great Britain and other developed countries around the world.

Many universities including the University of Wales and the University of Illinois offer online courses, with an on campus component for those pursuing a master's degree in library science or information studies.

Presently, there are no professional qualifications in librarianship offered in The Bahamas. Plans are underway for a master's degree in library science at the College of The Bahamas (COB) in the near future. COB offers a programme of two (2) years of full-time study leading to a diploma in library science.

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