

**CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES
FOR CHANGE IN LIBRARY AND
INFORMATION EDUCATION IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA.**



SETH P MANAKA

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS DELIVERED ON ACCEPTING THE CHAIR OF
LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE
NORTH ON 23RD JUNE 1982.**

**CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES
FOR CHANGE IN LIBRARY AND
INFORMATION EDUCATION IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA.**

SETH P MANAKA

Hons B.A. (S.A.) M.A. Bibl (S.A.) F.S.A.I.L.I.S.

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS DELIVERED ON ACCEPTING THE CHAIR OF
LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE
NORTH ON 23RD JUNE 1982.**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Members of Senate, Colleagues, ladies and gentleman, I propose this evening on this occasion to share with you views on challenges and strategies for change in library and information education in Southern Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have been in existence since about 600 B.C. and throughout their long history have served man in intellectual and cultural spheres. Whether the library existed among Sumerians, in Ancient Egypt, during the Middle Ages or during any period in history, there has always been devoted individuals or teams of people whose duty it was to be the keepers of recorded knowledge, the custodians of culture, to meet the needs and demands of society as defined throughout recorded history. Dependant on the period in which these keepers of recorded knowledge lived and served, their guidelines for service were determined by the structure and value system of the society in which they lived and worked.

It would seem that recorded knowledge was, for a considerable time, associated with religion hence the believe that a librarian should, above all, be a profound and learned theologian. In antiquity the priestly caste exercised some monopoly over recorded knowledge, a sort of cultural prerogative; in the Middle Ages the monk in his scriptorium, preserved the art and practice of librarianship and with the rise of the liberal spirit during the *Aufklärung*, the scholar took over the functions of the keeper of recorded knowledge. All had one thing in common : commitment to recorded knowledge to serve their Creator but later to serve scholarship and, with the rise of the public library movement, to serve the community. Whatever inspired these people in their work, the service motive was overriding. In later years, like other professions and occupations of the time, apprenticeship was adopted as a method to ensure the supply of future librarians. Librarianship then became an occupation devoid of earlier scholarship. Today librarianship has developed to become a profession with most library institutions headed by professionally trained librarians whose training varies from country to country with varied aims and objectives of the training programme.

2. Definition of terms

For the sake of mutual understanding and in order to avoid confusion in interpretation it is perhaps essential to indicate a few major distinctions in terminology. As used commonly in library science literature and as understood generally in the library profession, the term *librarianship* refers to the professional activity generally concerned with the principles, techniques and operations undertaken in libraries with the purpose of making books and other graphic records useful to society. Librarianship is thus the art of the profession. **Library science** on the other hand is a discipline that encompasses all aspects of library operations in both theory and practice. It concerns itself with the scientific study of the library phenomena. A term very often used synonymously with library science is what is referred to in library literature as *library economy*. This term was used in earlier times and it is still being used in that context to this day in Great Britain.

Documentation is another term which is being used liberally in library science literature. Documentation concerns itself with the creation, production analysis and retrieval of documents. Documentation was conceived as an improvement of the methods of librarianship with reference specifically to the use of library materials (documents). Besides becoming a world-wide movement, it never developed to become a science but has, to a large extent, contributed to the birth of information science. *Information science* is considered to be broader in scope than documentation and is concerned primarily with the entire information transfare. It is a science that investigates the properties and behaviour of information, the principles and forces which govern the flow of information as well as the processing of information for optimum accessibility and usage.

The terms *librarianship*, *library science* and *information science* as used in this address shall be as understood according to this explanation as described already. Library science with its professional activity librarianship ;and information science with its applied science component (information retrieval, information service etc) are today accepted, if not universally but at least in South Africa, as basic principal subjects in library and information education.

3. Changes within society

Since a library is created by the society in which it operates and, at the same time, reflects the cultural and intellectual needs of society, an analysis of the changing nature of society is necessary in order to gear library and information education to the concept of a changing society. Society is not static but develops through various phases which are identifiable.

Daniel Bell, the American sociologist, describes the changes that occur in society taking the American society as an example and postulates three phases. In the first place he identifies a simple agrarian society which is a society basically concerned with struggling with nature as a provider of all necessities vital to the existence of man. This is a pre-industrial society in which man is matched against nature and thus subjected to the vicissitudes of natural forces, gathers all his necessities from the soil and under such circumstances, depends to a large extend on seasonal changes (1).

The next phase constitutes a society in which industries transform the simple agrarian society to become a society that concerns itself with the production of goods by means of machines. This stage is an industrial phase in which man employs large scale machines to transform his world of fabricated nature. Bell goes further to postulate what he calls a post-industrial society, a society dominated neither by nature nor by machines but one that has developed beyond these and has to grable with the production, storage, dissemination and retrival of information. In the post-industrial society nature is not experienced except as recreation and natural objects have

meaning but only as hobbies (2). Maurice B. Line, Director of the British Library, Lending Division confirms Bell's post-industrial society but terms it a post-technological society a society in which "technology, specifically electronic technology is fully intergrated and accepted, but as a servant of society.... one that has gone beyond technology and progressed to the concept of society for society's sake." (3)

It should be noted, however, that development of society from one phase to another is never a sudden and complete change. The change is determined by what the majority of the population practices and experiences. Thus in the industrial phase experiences of the pre-industrial phase are still prevalent whilst in the post-industrial or post-technological society both pre-industrial and industrial phases are still being experienced although the majority of the population will be practising and experiencing the post-industrial phase. Society thus changes continually and, since library and information education in many respect derives its existence and meaning from the nature of society, adaptation to change must characterize its foundation and operation.

Another dimension which is almost diametrically opposed to the concept of a changing, mainly technological society, needs to be taken into consideration in library and information education in the Southern African context and particularly at a Black University. In his widely read book *Roots*, Alex Haley, a Black American, traces his ancestry back to Africa, starting with Kunte Kinte (referred to throughout the book as the African) who is captured as a sixteen - year - old youth, transported in torment and anguish to slavery in America, being forcefully removed from his culture and finding himself in a new world and foreign culture nevertheless refuses to denounce his identity and the value system of his African culture. Through six generations his influence to succeeding generations is reiterated as the story of who *we is* and where *we comes* from is handed down orally to remind succeeding generations not only of their origin but, most importantly, of their cultural heritage.

All over the sub-continent traditional African culture exists side by side with a changing mainly technological society. The question facing library and information education as it affects students emerging from these communities is whether their background should be ignored totally in favour of the western background of library and information education.

Technological changes do not necessarily imply that the Black Communities all over Southern Africa should be cut out from their traditional African value system suddenly but should cherish and preserve the good in their cultural heritage for posterity. All over the sub-continent the traditional African culture is either practised fully or is gradually being forgotten or derided because of the impact of technological changes mainly because this culture is at best not fully represented as objective (recorded) knowledge. It must be one of the major concerns of library and information education, particularly at a Black University to identify the information needs of a society in a traditional setting, encoding all elements of its culture with the aim of attaining cultural refinement and enrichment.

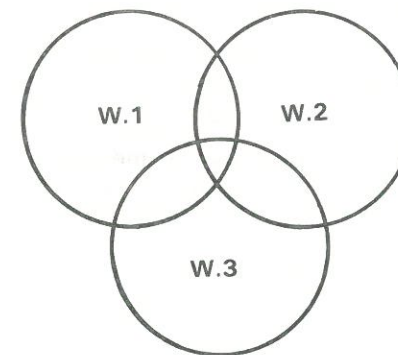
The dilemma which faces library and information education in the Southern African context and particularly at a Black University is to strike a balance between African culture on the one hand and the changing society of the technological era on the other. Changes will and are undoubtedly bound to come in whatever environment one has to cope with including the traditional African society but it would be unstrategic of library and information education to ignore the traditional African culture simply because it exists and only practised by the majority of the population of the sub-continent and most importantly abounds with folklore, legends, myths, praises, etc many of which have not been put to writing as yet and thus run the risk of disappearing with the advancement of technology. The oral tradition of handing down information to succeeding generations that is still being practised in some African societies while unfortunately disappearing in others, may be used to advantage in linking up with reading as a way of life. Library and information education must, in many respects, contribute to cultural refinement and enrichment if a meaningful contribution is to be made to the informational need structure of the Southern African Society.

A distinction needs to be made within the Southern African society between the information poor and the information rich. The concept information rich refers to developed societies in which libraries and information centres abound and are used effectively while the information poor societies are found among developing nations mainly of the Third World in which libraries and information centres are either scanty, under utilized for various reasons or non-existent. The Southern African society may on the one hand be regarded as information rich when one takes into account the white population in the RSA, particularly in the Pretoria - Witwatersrand - Vereeniging complex, but when the vast masses of the Black communities all over Southern Africa are taken into account, and as this section constitutes by far the largest percentage of the population of the sub-continent, grave concern is of necessity to be expressed with regards to the poverty of information among a larger percentage of the population of the sub-continent. The challenge for library and information education in the Southern African context is, therefore, to bring this fact to the awareness of librarians in training in order that they may interpret their environment in true perspective and, by so doing, develop strategies for bridging the gap between the information rich and information poor while placing this society in global perspectives as well. This, to say the least, is an important piece of work which requires people not alone with correct motivation but also with a deep insight into the problem.

4. The changing nature of knowledge

Human knowledge is fast changing in breadth and depth. New ideas are born, new knowledge is being created and recreated, existing knowledge amended, and adapted, opinions held are changing as life marches on. In his book *Objective Knowledge* (1972) the philosopher Karl Popper postulates three worlds in the field of knowledge : the first world is the physical world, the universe of radiation and matter in which the earth and other planets in the solar system feature; the second world is the world of subjective human

knowledge or mental states while the third world constitutes the world of objective knowledge in which "the products of the human mind are recorded in languages, the arts, the science, the technologies - in all the artifacts humans have stored or scattered around the earth." (4)



Popper's three worlds

As humans living on earth we form part of the physical world, through our mental states we become part of world two while human artifacts, recorded knowledge libraries and information centres etc which constitute the work-world of librarians and information workers, are part of world three. The rationale is therefore found for the professional activities of librarians and information workers outside purely practical terms. (5) Pure scientists and technologists as they explore world one deposit their written records in world three, and when social scientists and humanists reflect on the interactions between world two and world one they deposit their graphic records and artifacts in world three. The task of librarians and information scientists is to collect, organise and prepare for use the records of world three which is objective knowledge that has attained "the degree of permanence, an objectivity, an accessibility which is denied the subjective knowledge of individual humans." (6)

The objective world (world three) expands continually for when scientists make scientific discoveries in laboratories world-wide as well as when research is conducted in outer space; when social scientists and humansists operating in world two, reflect upon the interactions of world two with world one knowledge explosion occurs in both worlds and leads directly to publication explosion, in both paper and paperless forms, in world three. The task of librarians and information scientists is not alone to organise documents, in a variety of formats, in world three but also to concern themselves with the transfer of knowledge from documents to humans.

5. Changes within library and information science

With the formation of library associations - the American Library Association in 1876, the Library Association (British) in 1877 and those which followed these the formal training of librarians gained ground and apprenticeship as a method of ensuring the supply of the keepers of recorded knowledge gradually disappeared from the scene. When Melville Dewey started his School of Library Economy at Columbia University in the 1880's library education found a foothold in the walls of academic institutions.

The training that Dewey introduced was mainly technical, certainly a step ahead of apprenticeship. It addressed itself to the needs of the time and aimed at matching technical training with experience. It was, undoubtedly, not intended to prepare students for intellectual and social leadership but, instead, aimed at training and producing good workmen.

This type of training which in some form or other was to dominate library education for a considerable time in countries with an Anglo-American influence was geared to the institution library and what takes place within its walls. It produced people schooled in the techniques and skills of librarianship. In its extreme application this type of training is likely to produce a type of professional who develops what may be termed a "clerkly mind", i.e. a mind that is so overconcerned with techniques and skills as to regard these as ends in themselves. Very often such a mind misses the main mission of a library, namely the transfer of information to users for the benefit of humanity. However, the training introduced by Dewey was in response to changing times which was :

- firstly, the need for library workers
- secondly, the breakdown of the apprenticeship system, and
- thirdly, the growth of technical library education.

A change from the technical approach to library education emerged when attention began to be focussed on the personal and social problems of students by introducing the relevant disciplines of sociology and psychology to influence library education. This approach gradually provided the students with insight into problem areas they may encounter after leaving school by exposing them to case-study methods and role-playing as vicarious experience. Despite these changes, library education remained geared to the library as an institution and what goes on within its walls.

6. Theory and practice

The question of theory versus practice in library education needs to be examined. While permanence of any knowledge cannot be guaranteed, theory seems to be having greater staying power than practice and, dependent on how broad it is, theory will prove to be useful to practice because it can be applied to a wide range of conditions. Education for most of the professions comprises an academic component, which is theory and a practical component. Professional training aims at providing the student with the necessary tools to predict or influence performance. It thus becomes essential that educators must not "become hung up on practice - seeking practical ways to teach practice to practitioners - but must concentrate upon order and structure (the principles which govern the practice), upon making theoretical assumptions concerning the raw problems of the field, and upon finding experimental means of putting them to the taste." (7)

The teaching of theory must be regarded as basic to library and information education because theory is a foundation upon which practice draws inspiration, provides intelligible patterns of the field to be covered, simplifies understanding and serves as a bridge for the understanding of the transfer of learning from one situation to other similar ones.

In order for it to be transmitted as a professional science, library and information education should be involved in four phases:

- the acquisition of professional knowledge and attitudes
- developing intellectual abilities and skills
- teach the methods of acquiring knowledge relevant to the problems of library and information science, and
- prepare students to be viable and relevant to the needs of the times.

7. The social environment

Since the social environment plays a significant role in interpreting the functioning of a library and information service it becomes essential that library and information education should take cognisance of this fact and thus not view a library and information service in isolation but as part of an elaborate social system which it must never ignore. Libraries and information centres must thus function in a social system they are aware of if their services are not only to be relevant but also effectual. The search for objectives in library and information education should start with the social system as a whole interpreting it holistically rather than concentrating on pressing or troublesome areas. In that manner the library as a social agency will not be regarded as separate from other agencies in society in the fields of education, health, welfare, religion, commerce etc but should "function in a seamless environment in whichs it must take an active and material role" (8)

This seamless environment should be viewed as dynamic rather than static, as one whose information base grows and develops. An acceptance that change takes place continually at the information base of society is indeed

fundamental to library and information education.

The curriculum for library and information education must, therefore, be designed in such a manner as to accommodate the needs of a changing society.

The informational needs of individuals and organisations; the problems involved in organizing, disseminating and retrieving information change continually and thus require a curriculum that will accommodate such changes hence the feeling that any part of the curriculum that is a generation old seems unlikely to have current validity. (9) It thus becomes essential to prepare students for beneficial change, that is, to expect change and, above all, to accept change. A curriculum which will be viable to the needs of the times will be one which will promote professional competence: identify needs, set goals, analyse problems and formulate creative solution for them. It will then make it possible for those who have gone through such training to participate in planning, organising, communicating and administering programmes of service for users of information resources and services. Library and information education should, to a large measure, change to fit with circumstances because in the contemporary world of rapid and drastic shift in which no man's life is confined to the world of his early maturity education must assist in adaptation to changing conditions as well as a changing personality. Library and information education must, in this context, anticipate the future because it is in the future that the present generation of students will practice the profession.

Perhaps an important point that should be kept constantly in mind in library and information education is that a librarian's true professional knowledge lies in the interaction between sources of information and their users. Library and information education must therefore provide the student with an understanding of the mission of the profession. While the conceptual level of training as distinguished from the practical should receive attention, this approach should also incorporate examples from the practice in order to maintain a balance between theory and practice. This approach, however, excludes the training of library technicians whose educational will of necessity differ from that of the professional librarian because the library technician, as support staff, will be more embedded in the practice - the technical aspects. Professional education involves a blending of theory and practice, a science and an art, *Wissen und Können*.

The demands currently made on library and information education are immense more so as a result of the development of the information industry. This industry which has crept into the subcontinent concerns itself with the generation, acquisition, selection, organisation, packaging and retrieval of this new commodity called information. Although this industry seems to develop without the assistance of the library and thus very much independent, its impact on library and information education is immense. In the Southern African context cognisance must be taken of the information industry as its impact on library and information education is certainly to become immense.

8. The type of library and information education envisaged

The question now arises as to what type of library and information education is suitable and relevant to the needs of the times. My approach to this question represents my present convictions and I may change my standpoint in the future as a result of new evidence put to light by research findings. The type of library and information education will, to a large extent be determined by the end use or what we train librarians and information workers for. A library and information service is primarily designed for users thus the training should be user orientated. A change of emphasis should occur in which library and information education should be re-directed from the institution "Library" to user-orientated programmes. Such an approach will demand that the user be identified in his environment, his information needs analysed in order to gear an information service to his needs if the information service is not alone to be relevant but effective as well. The possible user environments which may be identified are the following:

8.1. Educational environment

In this environment is identified firstly the school library or school media centre or resources centre. This environment is linked to formal education and derives its aims and objectives from that quarter. Changes taking place in the educational field as well as those taking place in the library and information world should blend to create a new environment, the educational- informational environment that should assist in the school providing quality education, with the school library becoming a force for educational excellence. If we take into account what obtains at schools for Blacks presently where school libraries, if available at all, exist only in name but not in service, it will then be realised what a challenge there is for library and information education to change the existing scene.

Secondly the academic environment of the college, technicon and university is identifiable within the broad educational environment. The information needs of users in the various subject areas such as science and technology, the humanities and social science will have to be identified and analysed in order for the library to take its rightful place as the heart of the university in study and research.

8.2. The industrial and professional environment

This is an environment that is concerned with the provision of information to industry as well as professional practitioners in the field such as lawyers and medical practitioners. You may pose the question: Why train Black Librarians / information scientists for this environment? Besides industrial development and decentralization taking place in the sub-continent, we were caught unprepared when from among the second group of librarians trained at this University one found employment in a platinum refinery firm whose information system she had to design and put into operation and, ever since, more trainees are attracted to this environment. Coupled with this environment, of course, will be the provision of information to agriculture and allied areas engaged in the vital sector of food production.

8.3 Community service

This environment constitutes the major area in which the Black masses both in the urban and rural areas are involved. To a very large extent this area is neglected, an area associated with adult and informal education, with the adoption of reading as a way of life. It will be the primary function of library and information education to produce what one may term *information missionaries* to embark on a life of service in this area. Information missionaries will of necessity be devoted and dedicated individuals who should serve as intermediaries between the community and communication via the record.

The work of such information missionaries will not be confined to work within the walls of the library alone but will spread out into the community as a living organism, tapping the information resources of the community, encoding that which has not been put to writing as yet and, in that manner, playing a significant role in cultural enrichment. Besides the professional zeal that the information missionaries must possess, they will need to be culturally aware and should, in their daily operations, identify themselves positively with social and educational activities within the community such as literacy campaigns, reader's circles, etc. Incidentally this environment comprises virgin soil in which research may be undertaken in order to promote a library and information culture in Black Communities.

Conclusion

In presenting its programme of action, library and information education will start with a basic or core training of a general nature after which a student will choose an area of specialization in which he is interested from one of the environments mentioned already.

Although local considerations are important in library and information education global aspects in a world that has become small, thanks to technology, should not be ignored. Today a global library, a concept that does not necessarily refer to book collections as such but one that is involved in linking users of information to data-bases world-wide, involved in searching for information by means of computers through telecommunication, seems to be realised. A global library in this sense harnesses technology in the information environment for the benefit of mankind.

Library and information education must prepare the librarian of the future for possible innovation in information handling not alone to cope with population explosion but also with knowledge explosion as well as publication explosion. Keeping a balance between the needs of traditional African societies in transition on the one hand and the concepts of changing times and expanding knowledge and technology on the other will be endeavoured in library and information education at this University.

Mr Vice-chancellor, I hereby accept the Chair of Library and Information Science at this University.

REFERENCES

1. Bell, Daniel Welcome to the post-industrial society in *Libraries in post-industrial society*, p.5
2. Bell *Op. Cit.* p.5
3. Line, Maurice D. Libraries and information services in a post-technological society *Jnl of Library Automation* (14) p. 252
4. Brooks, Betram C The foundation of information science, *Jnl of information science* 2 (1) 1980 p. 127
5. *Ibid* p. 128
6. *Ibid* p. 128
7. Harlow, Neal Designs on the curriculum in Goldhor, Herbert : *Education for librarianship: the design of the curriculum of library schools* p.13.
8. *Ibid*
9. Shera, Jesse H. *Foundations of education for librarianship* p. 349

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. BROOKS, Betram C The foundations of information science, *Jnl. of Information Science* 2 (1) 1980 p. 125 - 133
2. CONANT, Ralph W. *The Conant Report: a study of the education of libraries* MIT press, 1980
3. CURRICULUM *design in librarianship : an international approach*, Wait AID Inc. 1974.
4. ESTABROOK, Leigh *ed Libraries in post-industrial society*, Oryx Press, Ed. 1977
5. COLDHOR, Herbert *ed Education for Librarianship: The design of the curriculum of library schools.* University of Illinois, 1971
6. HORN, Andrew H Time for decision: Library education for the seventies *Special libraries* Dec. 1971, p. 515-523
7. HUG, William E. *ed Strategies for change in information programs.* Bowker, 1974.
8. LIME, Maurice B. Libraries and information services in a post-technological society. *Jnl. of Library Automation*, vol. 14, p. 252-267
9. MOREHEAD, Joe *Theory and practice in Library education: the teaching - learning process.* Libraries Unlimited, 1980.
10. SHERA, Jesse H. *The foundation of education for Librarianship.* John Wiley, 1972.
11. SWANSON, Rowe-Education for information science as a profession. na Weiss *Jnl of the American Society for Information Science* May 1978, p. 148-155
12. TAYLOR, Robert S Information specialists: an emerging profession reprinted from *Jnl. of College placement*, Winter, 1976, p. 44-47
13. TAYLOR, Robert S Educational breakaway. *American libraries* June 1976, p. 364 - 367

I.S.B. 0/907986/04/8
C 75