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Manuscript

Leadership Education at Library and Information Studies (LIS) Schools

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Abstract:

Librarians' leadership skills can be trained at Library and Information Science (LIS) schools, but before that it is essential to critically review the traditional trends in the curricula. One of the most important obstacles in developing library leaders is related to the bias encompassed by the educational tradition established in the United States of America by Melvil Dewey's school, more than one hundred of years ago, and broadly spread worldwide. This paper analyzes the historical thread of the major learning goals of Dewey's pioneer curricula, and its influence on Latin America education for librarianship. The concepts of "character", "expertise", "institution", and "authority" are analyzed. Additionally, two approaches to modify the curricula are offered. The first constitutes a theoretical proposal drew by authors Totten and Keys (1994) based on training students to deal with risk-taking and innovation. The second is an actual modification made to the curriculum at the Department of Information Studies at Sheffield University, in England, explained by author Levy (1992). Finally, the conclusion critically summarizes both proposals and encourages more researches in the future.

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In her book “Leaders in Libraries”, Sheldon (1991) points out that Schools of Library and Information Studies (LIS) do not work toward attracting leaders to the library arena. This does not imply, however, that library schools do not have leaders; rather, the focus of the curricula is not centered on developing their skills. The main concern of LIS programs is, instead, centered on educating highly-qualified professionals, i.e. experts with a specialization in some branch of library sciences (p. 70). As Wiegand (2000) discusses, the emphasis has been given to develop skills strongly related to the handling of information, and this emphasis derives directly to the historical origin of library education in the United States begun by Melvil Dewey (Wiegand, 2000, ¶ 2). The arrival of technology stressed this approach, since the power of the computer to handle information gave to this traditional perspective a new kind of rationale.

This classical, technological emphasis on specialization seems to be incompatible with the competences that employers seek today in librarians. White (1995) highlights that employers deem hire worthy those librarians who are able to adapt easily to change, and furthermore to promote it (White, 1995, ¶ 2). In another study, Levy (1992) quotes the British Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) that points out that “employers will increasingly expect higher education to give a grounding in personal skills; communication, problem solving, teamwork and leadership. In many instances this will be achieved by changing the learning process from passive absorption to active participation” (CIHE quoted by Levy, 1992, p. 91). Even though this conclusion is derived from the British context, this trend stands out in a wide range of worldwide literature. Several authors cited here stress the importance of the above qualities and skills (Sheldon, 2001, ¶ 3; Totten and Keys, 1994, p. 3; White, 1991, p. 209; Lenzini and Juergens, 1994, p. 110). Detlefsen (1992) studies the trends in hiring library’s personnel, basing her work on a survey of research library job announcements. The survey shows

that employers seek for subject, technology of management specialists. Her findings reveal that the more the announcements emphasize one of these three specializations, the less they deem worthy the traditional technical knowledge and skills belong to librarianship. In the particular case of the management specialization, she says “whether described as a manager, director, chief of university librarian, it is increasingly clear that these individuals need not always present the traditional credentials in library education and training.” (Detlefsen, 1992, p. 195).

In this paper I will discuss the historical thread of the major learning goals in the curriculum of LIS at United States Schools. Since this curriculum became a paradigm for many library schools abroad, it is essential to discuss its philosophical assumptions to understand the librarians’ professional character. The main goal of this historical analysis is to support that one of the most important obstacles in developing leaders in library schools is given by this kind of character established by Melvil Dewey’s school one hundred years ago and broadly spread worldwide. I will focus on this influence in Latin America as an example of the character’s spread abroad. I will also introduce two approaches to modify the curricula. The first proposal is drawn from Totten and Keys (1994). The second is an actual modification made to the curriculum at the Department of Information Studies at Sheffield University, England, explained by Levy (1992). Finally, I will conclude by raising a set of question for future research in this field.

Historical Thread

Sheldon’s findings are particularly valuable regarding her professional context. While writing her proposal, she held the position of Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas at Austin. It is likely that her concerns were strongly informed by her role as Dean. Therefore, her proposal has the special approach of an involved protagonist of the outcomes of LIS education.

She observes that “the professional schools basically educate students to assume entry-level positions, and cannot be expected to anticipate the leadership challenges inherent in more responsible positions” (p. 70). These entry-level positions involve the description, storage and retrieval of information entities in any medium. There is a set of services, more or less sophisticated (like reference interviews, interlibrary loan, OPACs, etc.), directly related with these activities. In short, students are prepared to handle all types of information.

Sheldon wrote this document at the beginning of the nineties. Eight years later, the American Library Association (1999) held a Congress on Professional Education, titled “Focus on Education for the First Professional Degree.” The Subcommittee for Issues in Library and Information Studies Education published, among its “Required Readings”, a paper by Wayne Wiegand titled: “Core Curriculum: A White Paper”. Here, the author provides a thoughtful approach to understanding the historical origins of the information-processing orientation, referring to Foucault and Starr, among other authors. The process began when Melvil Dewey opened the first Library School at the Columbia University in 1887. The school was a pioneer project because it broke the previous model more centered in security and preservation of books. Dewey’s new professional paradigm proclaimed that “by providing the masses with access to quality literature and reliable information resources they [the librarians] would benefit society and make America a better place to live for all” (Wiegand, 2000, ¶ 5). The core curriculum of Dewey’s program was centered in practical professional matters to accomplish the goal of providing mass access to information: cataloging and classification, book selecting procedures, circulation methods and management of library institutions. The main concern revolved around developing skills related to the efficient selection, organization, and retrieval of information for the public. In the new Dewey paradigm, the role of management was to provide the tools for running libraries, making sure public access was successfully accomplished. Dewey’s vision of

the main goals of LIS has continued through American library schools' history without significant changes, including such landmarks as the Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs settled by the ALA in 1951 (Wiegand, 2000, ¶ 8).

This characteristic of looking for a “safe environment” or conservativeness is strongly related with the kind of skills required in Melvil Dewey's paradigm of professionalism. In another recent paper, Wiegand (1999) discusses the characteristics deemed by Dewey in his students. They were: *character*, *expertise*, *institution* and *authority*.

Character was the school-entry condition for all candidates. It was defined by two factors: a) membership in a homogeneous social and political group, i.e., middle-class, white Americans, b) the possession of a college degree. Both characteristics proved that the student had the moral and intellectual potential required to be educated. To possess such a character constituted an essential condition for the candidate to be accepted in the school, since it was the “fertile ground” to be cultivated through teaching. To be cultivated was the “library spirit” that put quality books and information to everybody's access. This spirit was consummated later on through the “Library's Bill of Rights”, which advocates for the defense of intellectual freedom (Wiegand, 1999, ¶ 27) and encompasses the complete access to any intellectual content to the public. The required skills carried by this “spirit” were developed through several core courses—cataloguing and classification, selection and acquisition, management, etc. (Wiegand, 2000, ¶ 4). All these courses were strongly based on developing technical skills contributed to the conservative disposition of librarians.

Expertise refers to the training of methods of acquisition, cataloguing and classification, reference work, and circulation that mark conventional library services. It alludes to the “library spirit” to be taught, the core technical abilities related to the handling and storage of information. *Institution* means the skills related to managing the physical plant, its architecture, employees,

and services (Wiegand, 1999, ¶ 12). Traditionally, management was related to this late ability, and confused with leadership because both comprised high-level position tasks, the administration of power, and organizational planning activities.

The last quality, *authority*, is related to the power (and trust) that is placed in librarians as the legitimate owners of information. Societies can rely on the fact that the best places to find information are libraries and librarians are the best information-holders. Also, there is an expectation that the professionals with the library “spirit” will provide the “good books.” The Dewey school trained this spirit, and library users relied (and rely) on these trained professionals work and advice to get the best possible information.

Throughout history, the librarians’ tendency to collect, to preserve, to put order, in sum, to handle information, relates strongly with a conservative character. And, along with this tendency, the social role of authority connected with those tasks consolidates the reactionary spirit that underlies LIS education until today.

American’s educational influences—the case in Latin America

The Melvil Dewey Program founded a large school of thought, which has influenced library science world-wide during the past century. In the case of Latin America, Krzys and Litton (1972) point out that “in their anxiety to establish librarianship in the countries, library science educators in Latin America have slavishly imitated library education, especially that of the United States.” (Krzys and Litton, 1972, p. 65). Many grants coming from American institutions helped widen this trend (Jackson, 1963, p. 347). In Brazil, the *Escola de Biblioteconomia* of the *Escola Livre de Sociologia e Política* (Sao Paulo) received a five-year grant (from 1948 to 1952) from Rockefeller Foundation. The grant was up to \$ 27,500 for staff salaries, scholarship aid, and the preparation of materials, and was administered by the American

Library Association. The majority of Brazilian faculties were trained in the U.S., and they thoroughly influenced the Brazilian movement of research in library issues (Jackson, 1962, p. 62). The same Foundation sponsored the establishment of the Inter-American Library School (*Escuela Interamericana de Bibliotecologia-EIBM*) at University of Antioquia in Medellin, Colombia, in 1956 (Jackson, 1962, p. 34). This well-known institution has contributed to the training of librarians across Latin America (Krzys and Litton, 1972, p. 68). Other philanthropic foundations as Ford and Carnegie contributed to the education of Latin American librarians, and also supported through other programs (Jackson, 1962, p. 81).

Scholarships and professionals' exchange constituted a fundamental way that U.S. influenced the education of Latin American librarians. Notably, after World War II, the international exchange steadily increased. Fulbright Foundation sponsored a number of lectures given by U.S. librarians to Latin American colleagues. At the same time, "U.S. government agencies, such as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Department of State and the International Cooperation Administration, have sponsored library training for both individuals and groups, but usually as part of a larger project." (Jackson, 1962, p. 81). Of the 234 scholarships granted to Latin American professionals, up to 1965, 60% (142 grants) were given to fulfill studies at United States institutions (Krzys and Litton, 1972, p. 69). Among European institution, in Spain studied 11% of professionals (26 grants), in France 4.7% (11 scholarships), in England 3.8% (9 awards) and in Germany 1.2 % (3 grants). Carlos Victor Penna (1960) pointed out that this large support offered by the government of the United States determined the high spread of American cataloging and classifying techniques in Latin America. Consequently, technical procedures from France, Spain and Germany, formerly adopted by many Latin American libraries, withdrew to give way to American ways of work (Penna, 1960, p. 24-25).

Together with this support given to education, there were several activities related to booktrade and standardization of techniques, strongly related to teaching. Krzys and Litton discuss that Latin American literature on librarianship consisted mostly of translation of books from the United States. “According to a recent survey, the majority of texts used in Latin American library schools is imported from other countries of the world and mainly from the United States.” (Krzys and Litton, 1972, p.70) Organizations like UNESCO and the Organization of American States (OAS) largely contributed with translations. Regarding standardization, Marietta Daniels highlights the efforts made by OAS to translate into Spanish and Portuguese standards like Dewey Decimal Classification and MARC (both American), and the international ISBD (Daniels, 1966, p.187). Librarian Penna explains that most schools of librarianship in Latin America teach American techniques and standards, with several exceptions training Vatican cataloging rules and Universal Decimal Classification (Penna, 1960, p.17).

All these ways of influence –grants, professional exchanges, booktrade and standardization- encompassed that education was based on the same core courses of American schools. “Many of the countries’ programs bear a strong resemblance to the traditional core curriculum of the former bachelor’s program in library science in the United States. Generally, the library education programs in Latin America have included courses in reference and bibliography, cataloging and classification, history of the book, and administration of libraries.” (Krzys and Litton, 1972, p. 68). However, as Carlos Penna says, this contents of teaching are neither completely relevant nor enough for Latin American libraries’ reality. In spite of the fact that several professionals have researched issues on the local level, these efforts were not enough (Penna, 1960, p.17, 20).

Through these activities, Latin American librarianship was influenced by the American tradition. The abovementioned professional character encompassed by the American schools’

pattern was spread thoroughly and adopted by professionals in both Central and South America. The core courses related to the handling and preservation of information that correspond to Dewey's influence were adopted and diffused by Latin American professionals. After many years of professional librarianship education, we may wonder if this American influence is strong enough, and whether it has the same bias of the American tradition itself.

Today's need for transformation

The times have changed for library and information science professionals. Technology emerged, claiming ownership of the operational tasks valued under the Dewey paradigm. Computer programmers appeared and sat down by librarians' side, co-opting the questions that used to fall exclusively under their domain: how to retrieve relevant information successfully, how to store huge amounts of information entities, how to duplicate those entities to make them accessible to patrons, etc. Search engines like "Google" or "Yahoo!" are successful tools for researchers, with their own indexations criteria and retrieval tools that ignore librarians' advice or traditional practices.

Our current era, therefore, presents new challenges. We need professionals who move away from the information-handling paradigm to one based on the acceptance of change. Nowadays, libraries are living in an unstable world, in which almost all archetypes seem to be questioned. The world-wide economy, the information age and the digital divide, impose limits to our society and raise social questions that did not exist previously. Information is the *leitmotiv* of our era, and its pervasive influence determines the changing environment of our society. Therefore we, as librarians, cannot escape to its influence. It does not mean that we need to stop training information-handling skills. It means that more people who feel comfortable facing change should make important contributions in information institutions. For this reason, those

people adaptable to change are highly sought in library's job positions (Walton and Edwards, 2001; Winston and Dunkley, 2002).

In the particular case of Latin America, a survey sent to employers in the region reveals that they complain about the Schools' traditional mentality. Criticisms focus on the lack of ability to deal with changes, mostly entailed by older practitioners who teach new generation of professionals with outdated paradigms (Johnson et al, 2001, p.12). These paradigms are far from the skills currently in demand.

The Role of LIS Schools

Coming back to the American context, Sheldon also highlights that the education historically offered at LIS schools is no longer appropriate. LIS schools do not need to educate library professionals to assume "entry-level positions", and then wait for them to reach high-level ones to provide leadership skills and tools. In this changing environment, leadership is required in all levels of an organization. It is needed to facilitate innovative solutions to respond to the new reality. As Lester (quoted by Sheldon) explains:

Although the tendency is to think of leaders as those who have rank or authority of high position, the leaders in our field have also been the thinkers, the ones who challenged the status quo, the developers of new approaches and ways of conceptualizing what we do. They have been the individual librarians, unknown and unsung outside of a specific environment. (Lester quoted by Sheldon, 1991, p. 70).

Lester's finding is strongly supported by the idea that "leadership ability can be identified, nurtured, and strengthened in the process of attaining the first professional degree" (Sheldon, 1991, p.71). Sheldon believes that students do have leadership skills, and LIS schools should encourage them to identify and work on their development. In the following section, I will briefly outline two proposals of modification to LIS curriculum and goals.

Library School Management Course Proposal

Totten and Keys (1994) propose a change in the contents of Library Management Course within LIS Programs. The model is based on four skills to develop. These skills are related each other so deeply that the total system constitutes a *gestalten*.

The authors define the skills in the following way:

- Creativity: (1) having the power to bring into an act or cause to exist; (2) a causation; (3) the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc.
- Risk-taking: to venture upon that which involves possible loss, danger, or disadvantages
- Innovation: the introduction of something new
- Intuition: knowledge obtained, or the power of knowing, without recourse to inference or reasoning. (Totten and Keys, 1994, p.4)

A successful training program should consist of some kind of equilibrium in the development of such skills, or qualities. Underlying such an approach, the authors mention some concepts that could be included in the course as theoretical support. The most important is *open system*. Open system is a whole which is made up of diverse interrelated and interdependent elements that interact with and are modified by the environment. The key functional element in this kind of system is *homeostasis*, i.e. the tendency of maintaining internal stability. This concept is particularly related to psychological conditions that apply as a base of an educational program for teaching leadership (p. 5). The process of learning is based upon the ability to maintain such psychological equilibrium, or homeostasis. The authors propose that the students should be sensitized to inconsistencies in their psychological systems, in order to achieve homeostasis. Through this exercise of disrupt-reconstruct psychological equilibrium, students can deal with risk-taking and innovation. Also they can be more creative, by seeking for ways of

reconstructing homeostasis, and they can also use their intuition as an indicator of the level of steadiness. Following this explanation, the four elements work together in a learning system based upon change as a thread of personal development.

A Special Course on Innovation

In the second proposal, Levy (1992) explains the curriculum on innovation made by the Department of Information Studies at Sheffield University, England. The innovation consists of introducing a new course on interpersonal skills development for librarians. The course focused on developing communication, problem-solving, groupwork, and other interpersonal skills. These skills are strongly related to the notions of “lifelong learning” or “learning to learn ideas connect[ed] with concepts of more student-centered and self-directed learning opportunities which aim to develop abilities of autonomy, initiative and awareness of learning process, and thus tend to emphasize [sic] the need to make explicit the ‘process’ dimension of the curriculum” (p. 91-92). The necessity of such skills was based upon studies of the current job market. Employers require librarians with abilities to learn and to adapt to the new environment, rather than merely possessing technical skills (p. 92). Therefore, the course, so-called “People Skills”, was centered on their development.

The active learning method laid emphasis on concrete experience. Students participated actively in practices such as role-play, simulation, structured exercises, discussion of reactions and ideas, etc. Also, students were “encouraged to keep individual learning ‘journals’ from week to week, along structured lines” (p. 94). As a base to understanding their learning process, the facilitators introduced students to the Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory (LSI); this inventory describes individual learning styles as a path going through four stages: affective, perceptual, symbolic, and behavioral competencies. Individual characteristics of learning stress one of these

competencies or a combination of them, without disregarding the remaining ones. Each student was able to find his/her own style, and to improve it. “The inference is that individuals have strengths and weaknesses in particular dimensions and thus need to experience learning events which stimulate engagement with all dimensions, as a means to developing what Kolb calls ‘integrative’ competence” (p. 96).

An example of such self-directed learning constitutes the use of “learning contracts”. In these contracts, students chose their own learning goals, methods and means of evaluation. The contracts constituted a tool that provided students the opportunity to explore their own aspirations and possibilities and to make commitments related to their own self-learning development process.

The “People Skills” course was evaluated by both Department’s faculties and the majority of students as a successful experience. Students provided invaluable feedback, and further assessment will be made of the long-term value of the course through follow up interviews at six months and one year after graduation (p. 99).

Conclusion

The two proposals we discussed constitute important contributions to the research of leadership education in LIS programs. Totten and Keys focus directly on management courses; their finding implies a shift from a dependence on management to a new, more positive reliance on leadership. However, this analysis requires further analysis and a deeper research of its basic concepts, mainly in psychology and education sciences. On the other hand, Levy’s proposal has the advantage of experience and outcome. His work has an interesting link with the self-knowledge invoked by Sheldon as a fundamental task to undertake for LIS Schools. The experience described by Levy is centered on each student’s self-knowledge development, through the discovery of their strengths and weaknesses, and the consequent work of fortifying

the former and compensating the later. Sheldon claims this educational goal in her proposal (Sheldon, 1991, chapter 4 and 6). Additionally, the curriculum of the course was developed together by specialists in education and library sciences.

Both Levy's self-directed learning, and Totten and Keys' psychological homeostasis are clever answers to the issue of how to train library students to be comfortable with change. In the same way, these approaches call for multidisciplinary research, working with Psychology, Education Sciences, and Management.

Library employers express a common claim: they would prefer the LIS programs to prepare students to be able to work in unstable environments. The two proposals presented constitute important attempts to answer this claim, because they base the learning process on the development of leaderships' skills rather than information-handling ones. But Library and Information Schools, at least in U.S. and Latin America, should still undertake the large research on education required to find an appropriate answer to this concern. The future is compelling school teachers and researches to lead this challenge.

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