

DOCUMENTALIST AND SUBJECT SPECIALIST
(TRAINING IN LIBRARY SCIENCE, 11)

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This is a report of an orientation class to bring out the difference between the relation, of a documentalst and a subject specialist respectively, to a nascent document with emphasis on new thought. The difference is first traced in respect of time-lag experienced by each in getting access to the document. It is also traced in respect of the intellectual relationship of each to the document. The report also demonstrates the teaching technique used.

ABBREVIATIONS USED:

T = Teacher

P1... P8 = Pupil 1 ... Pupil 8

T.- Both a documentalst and a subject specialist are related to the nascent micro documents appearing as articles in periodicals. Do you agree?

P's.- Yes.

T.- Are the two relations alike?

P1.- No. They are different.

T.- Let us examine how they are different. We shall examine this difference in respect of the time factor and of intellectual relation respectively. We shall first take the time factor. Who comes in contact with the nascent document earlier? Is it the documentalst or the subject specialist?

P's.- Documentalst.

T.- Howdo you say that?

P6.- The periodicals are first opened and glanced through by the documentalst and then only they are made available to the subject specialist.

T.- What is the time lag-difference in time?

P6.- One day.

P1.- One hour.

P4.- One week.

T.- The Fourth Law of Library Science would ask for immediate action. Is it not?

P1.- In LRDE we telephone to the subject specialist immediately the article is spotted out.

P2.- It all depends on the staff we have.

T.- What has the strength of staff to do with this?

P1.- We get about 50 periodicals a day. One of us peruses them quickly and telephones to the concerned subject specialist immediately.

P2.- It will take a long time to peruse 50 periodicals.

P1.- I only mean the moment the documentalist peruses an article, the telephone message goes out. Thus, the time lag is only a few minutes.

P2.- Perusal of all the periodicals is difficult for one and the same person.

T.- Yes. It will be so for a beginner, but only for a beginner. In a year or two, a documentalist will develop a tremendous speed in perusal. While perusing, one part of the mind will be assessing the thought-content of the articles to find out what is nearly new. And another part of the mind will be recalling the name of the person interested in it. I was able to develop speed in this perusal work in a year. As the perusal goes on, the page of the article and the name of the possible consumer would be noted in pencil on the back of the back wrapper or it would be noted in a slip and the slip inserted in the periodical. As soon as a sufficient number of slips are accumulated, communication would go out to consumer either by telephone or by letter. In the twenties of the present century, foreign mail would come at 7.00 hours and 9.00 hours. Any of you can acquire this capacity. In fact, you ought to, if you are to escape the curse of the Fourth Law!

P4.- There is a danger in this. As soon as the information goes out, the consumer will come and snatch away the periodical.

T.- What is the danger in that?

P's.- (Laughter).

P4.- We have to make a documentation list for the week's arrival. If the readers snatch away the periodical, how can we prepare the list?

T.- How do you meet this danger?

P4.- We will not show the periodicals to the readers for one week.

T.- Here are now two views.

1 To facilitate documentation work, we must offend the Fourth Law to the extent of one week; that is one extreme.

2 If we let in the consumer

immediately to satisfy the Fourth Law, documentation work suffers. Therefore the Third Law will be violated. That is the other extreme.

P4.- The second is true; for, there may be consumers for many of the articles about which the documentalist does not send out information.

T.- This conflict between loyalty to Third Law and Fourth Law is real. This conflict should be resolved by suitable organizational device. Can you think out any suitable organizational device?

P3.- We can prepare the catalogue slip of the article, if any consumer wants to "snatch away" the issue.

P4.- Slips must be prepared for all the articles in the issue.

T.- Let us take that there are ten articles in an issue. What will be the time required for preparing the slips for them?

P3.- A few minutes.

P4.- No. It will take something like two hours. This will block all perusal work.

T.- Both a "few minutes" and "2 hours" are out of the mark. Let us consider how many slips of main entries with locus section can be written in a day.

P3.- 150 in a day of six hours.

T.- Forty years ago we used to do 100 slips. But those were the days of pioneers. Today only about 60 are written--that is, 10 per hour.

P7.- The Indian Statistical Institute using the IBM typewriter prepares 70 per day. They could not maintain this speed long.

T.- P3's organizational device will not be very fruitful.

P2.- We have in our Institution the practice of keeping all the current issues within the library for a week.

T.- What about the consumer who comes to snatch away?

P1.- We can give the issue to him

and ask him to peruse it in our own room. That will not interfere with the making of documentation list. At the same time, it will eliminate the time lag suggested by P4.

P4.- What will happen if two or three people want the same new issue.

T.- Here comes an administrative device. You may telephone to these persons at suitable intervals of time or at worse they should be asked to stand in queue. But what is the probability for this?

P4.- Very little.

T.- We can now say this. The time lag between the documentalists and the subject specialist is inevitable. But it can be made very small. However small it is made, the documentalists has earlier access to a new document than the subject-specialist. Is that right?

P's.- Yes.

T.- But you are forgetting another possible case. In that case the documentalists will be behind the subject-specialist. Can you guess what that case is?

P's.- No.

T.- When the subject-specialist belongs to the team originating the document, he will know it much earlier than any documentalists anywhere. How long will this difference in time be?

P1.- The time taken to print the document and distribute it.

T.- Let us now restrict ourselves to a document containing new thought. New thought is announced much before the whole document is printed in a particular kind of organ. Can you tell me any organ of this kind that you know of? I shall call it Reporting Periodical. Can you mention any Reporting Periodical?

P3.- Nature.

T.- Naturwissenschaften, in German, Comptes Rendus, etc in French and Science in America.

P1.- Electronics of America.

T.- There are also such reporting

weekly periodicals in some special subjects. What do you think the total number of such reporting weekly periodicals will be?

P3.- About one hundred

T.- I want to give you an assignment for tomorrow. Go to the Indian Institute of Science Library. With the help of the periodicals assistant, find out what weekly reporting periodicals they get. Take help also from the bibliographical sources they get. Thus prepare a bibliography of weekly reporting periodicals. Each entry should contain the title, date of publication, year of origin, name of publisher, average number of pages per issue and the subject field. The subject of course will be indicated in the top line by its Class Number. I want you to do it co-operatively. You can share the hundred periodicals and then merge the slips in one classified sequence. You can then get the list duplicated so that each one of you can own a copy. This list should be your constant companion. How long will it take to complete this bibliography?

P's.- One afternoon will do.

T.- Yes. That is the advantage of doing the work cooperatively.

P4.- But how to do with the periodicals in different languages. We do not know the languages.

T.- Don't get into despair. Don't look at the problem en masse. Let us analyse it. When you want to pack your cloth in a box, if you stuff them en masse, you will fail. But if you sort them out, fold each one neatly, and insert them in the box according to a good scheme, the box will take all the clothes and even more. Let us sort out your problem. Do you mean different scripts or different languages?

P4.- Both.

T.- Let us take them one by one. Let us first take the script. How many scripts will you have to face?

P4.- Many.

T.- Think it over. Don't give an indefinite answer like that.

P3.- Roman script and Russian.

P2.- Japanese and Chinese.

T.- We do not have much of Chinese and Japanese documents with us. Let us therefore confine ourselves to the Roman script and Cyrillic script which is the generic name of the Russian and other Eastern European scripts. Let us take that there are 30 letters in the Cyrillic script. Is there any way of familiarising ourselves with them?

P3.- We may have the list of the alphabets before us. By using it often we can soon become familiar with it.

T.- Let us then go to language. You have just to know the subject covered by a reporting weekly periodical. For this purpose, is it necessary to know the language so as to read and understand the whole article?

P7.- No. It is enough if we know the subject-terms.

T.- Let us take that there are 30 subjects with reporting weekly periodicals. Let us also suppose that there are 10 different languages involved. Then what is the number of subject terms involved?

P4.- 300.

T.- Most of these terms in several languages such as English, German, French Spanish will be cognate words. They will not give any difficulty. The words in English, you will understand. What will be the number of totally foreign terms you have to understand in preparing the list of reporting weekly periodical?

P7.- About 50.

T.- Can you know their English equivalents easily or not?

P7.- Yes. We can use the dictionaries.

P3.- We can use the multilingual dictionary.

P5.- We can also use the UDC schedules given in different languages in parallel columns.

T.- Are you now satisfied P4, that the language problem is not a big problem?

P4.- Yes:

T.- Let us then turn to the intellectual factor--the difference in intellectual relationship between A the documentalist and the documents on the one hand, and B the subject specialist and the document on the other hand. What do you think of this difference?

P8.- There is some difference.

T.- Here again, let us proceed systematically. The first question is, "Does difference exist?"

P's.- Yes.

T.- Is the difference in quality or quantity?

P6.- Mostly quality; but a little in quantity also.

T.- Let us first take the difference in quality. What is the difference in quality, particularly with reference to new thought?

P1.- The documentalist has to scan through several periodicals, think about them, and index them.

T.- Let me be an advocate of P1. A documentalist has to:

- 1 Spot out the existence of new thought;
- 2 Recognise the new thought;
- 3 Relate the new thought to the already known thought in the measure of their filiation;
- 4 To classify and make several entries for the new document to make its retrieval possible and easy whatever be the angle from which any consumer may approach it; and
- 5 Store the document containing the new thought in a helpful way to facilitate its retrieval and for this purpose to link up the document with each of its several entries by the index number which is its call number.

The documentalst will not absorb the new thought, handle it, or make it the basis for his creating still further new thought.

On the other hand, the subject specialist has to absorb the new thought, assimilate it with his apperceptive mass, perhaps find out applications for it and/or extend it, and perhaps even expound it to others at different levels of attainments. He has also to know its filiation with others' subjects but in a more extended way than a documentalst who will spot out the filiation only to the extent to which phase relation, Facet relation or Super-imposition go. But the subject specialist should know much more subtle much more remote filiations too. The difference in the intellectual relationship of the documentalst and subject specialist respectively to the nascent micro-document is represented in the following table;

SN	Documentalist	Subject specialist
1	Absorption (in less intense degree)	Absorption (in full measure)
2	Storing	Assimilation
3	Classification	Verification
4	Cataloguing	Application and creation of new thought

SN	Documentalist	Subject specialist
5	Affiliation in broad lines	Affiliation along more intimate lines

T. - This is about the qualitative difference. Next we shall take up the quantitative difference. The documentalst covers a more extensive field of knowledge than the subject specialist. Is that right?

P4. - Yes.

T. - Does this mean that the subject specialist has lesser work to do? Does the subject specialist go scot-free?

P3. - No. The subject specialist has to go deeper and deeper in his field of knowledge. Whereas, a documentalst does not go deep in any one of the fields of knowledge.

T. - Yes. The subject specialist unravels the minute details in a field of knowledge. He works in a more intensive field of knowledge. He concentrates on a particular study. But the documentalst flies from one field to another. While the subject specialist tries to understand everything about something, the documentalst tries to know something about everything.