

Workshop On Research & Documentation For The Development Sciences In The English-Speaking Caribbean -

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Remarks made at the Opening Session
by

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Mr. Chairman, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Augier, ladies and gentlemen, when I was asked to make some remarks at this opening session of your workshop, my guide-lines were, a copy of your programme and the assurance that I could talk for as long as I liked and on any subject that I chose. I made haste to assure Dr. Greene, as I now hasten to assure you, that I shall not take up more than 10 minutes or so of your time and I shall endeavour to be relevant.

At the opening of a workshop planned to explore in some detail the nature of research in the development sciences, the role of information and documentation in the support of this research, and the methods and strategies likely to advance such research, it seemed to me that I might usefully attempt to relate in an overall and general way these concepts and their supporting organizations and methods to that older, wider and perhaps better known organization called the library.

Research in the development sciences will certainly include pure as well as applied research, though I am led to conclude that both the needs of the English-speaking Caribbean area and the current emphasis on planning and policy-making indicate that priority is being given to the latter rather than the former. However, whether you are concerned with basic research or its applications, you will feel the need for information or access to sources of information.

Because of the information explosion, the complexity and inaccessibility of much of the most current literature, and because those concerned with applying the results of research to the solution of urgent social and economic problems, particularly in a developing area such as ours, want ready information rather than the task of searching for it themselves, there has been an increasing importance attached to prepared information as distinct from having access to sources of knowledge and information, with the consequent growth in the number of documentation centres, data bases and a new emphasis on the training of specialized personnel called documentalists and/or information scientists. In many instances such documentation centres do

indeed successfully serve the purposes for which they are created but the measure of their success will depend on a number of factors - the availability of expert staff with the right subject specializations, carefully selected documentary material oriented towards the specific fields of research and classified, indexed and abstracted in such a way as to extract the required types of information, and with the technical facilities for speedy retrieval and dissemination of information, and, where possible, links through networks with larger data bases which may supplement or complement the information and documentation locally available.

Documentation and information services which are purposeful or, to use a term from the DEVSIS study team, "mission-oriented", may exist as separate units or within the ambit of a more comprehensive library service. In fact, the beginnings of such services to some extent are to be found in the old commercial and technical library divisions of public libraries with their clippings and vertical files, collection of patents, trade literature and directories, geared to give speedy information to the businessman or to those engaged in applied science or industry.

Useful and necessary as these services indeed are, they cannot function effectively, or rather I should say, research whether basic or applied, supported by such services, cannot be done without the additional support of a good library. It would be as if one could conceive an engrafted scion thriving without its rootstock.

The research worker will need from time to time to consult not merely the latest report, periodical article or pamphlet, but also older runs of government serials, periodicals, occasional reports, scarce ephemera, non-print media and secondary sources which often may only be found in the library, in addition to the current material which it holds. Increasingly, sociologists, anthropologists

and philologists are turning to the records of the past for evidence of the theories deduced from their observations of contemporary society, and some of the most antiquarian documents seemingly devoid of relevance for present day society have been skillfully used to illuminate demographic, ethnic and linguistic studies pertaining to the past,

which are most pertinent to an understanding of contemporary social problems. I note also that ISER'S Development-Output Evaluation and Research Service (DOERS) has been engaged in copying PRO records though the interest here is evidently in those which pertain to 20th century social and economic conditions.

However, the point I am really making, is that there is no real dichotomy between libraries and documentation services, nor should the attractions of the one or the other service serve to create any polarization in the search for information.

This leads me to the practical conclusion which I throw out in the form of a question for what it is worth to each one of you, but for which I claim no other basis than the fruit of some little reflection coupled with my own experience, an experience with no pretensions to definitive authority. If the essential character of the documentalist and the information scientist is a dominant concern with the process of extracting and disseminating information for a special purpose, is there any reason why he should not do this and do this more effectively, more often than not, within the ambit of the more comprehensive and inter-disciplinary collections of the Library, provided that the latter is cognisant of and sensitive to these varied needs and is so staffed, so structured, so stocked and so equipped as to enable it to meet these needs in addition to the more conventional requirements of its technical and readers services? The question, in my opinion, is far from being a rhetorical one and would seem to me pre-eminently relevant in discussing research and documentation in an area such as the English-speaking Caribbean.

May I close by adding a cautionary word on the subject of information and its retrieval. Librarians have traditionally been, and by training are still inclined to lead research workers (and I distinguish here between research and reference enquiries) to the sources of knowledge or information, rather than to provide potted information, but we have seen how the proliferation of informational literature has led busy practitioners to turn to information scientists often using automated methods capable of speedily handling vast bodies of data. These latter methods have revolutionized and will further revolutionize many of the practices of librarianship, especially as the data bases on which they draw