

The Bureaucratic Socialization of Library Practicum Students: A case study

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Abstract

This study is concerned with two things: To explore the extent to which certain aspects of the practicum students' orientation may be changed in the process of actual working experience and secondly to explore the possible influence of the students' working experience in future profession. An questionnaire was used on a sample of fifty library diploma students. The result showed that important changes did occur for the practicum students become substantially more bureaucratic in orientation as a result of their working experience.

Keywords : *Traditionalism; Innovation; Obedience; Bureaucratic socialization; Library practicum students*

Introduction

Student practicum today remains an important aspect of most library education programmes. In fact, for many prospective professional and para-professional librarians, it is still their first major experience in libraries of any type. Librarians learn to work in libraries by working in actual library situations. The prospective librarian gets something from experience in the library which is not included in formal taught courses in library schools. Waller described this as "elusive something" or "Social insight" which is difficult to put in textbooks or to communicate in a lecture.¹ Thus, this experience provides the prospective librarian with an understanding of the social situation of the library and the institutional milieu in which it is embedded. The practicum student working experience is usually the culmination of the formal preparation programme and the beginning librarian's experience. For a good number of students, the practicum is a confrontation with the real

1. Willard Waller, *Sociology of Teaching* (New York : John Wiley, 1997).

world of work in the library.

Bureaucratic orientation for the purpose of this paper refers to the individual's commitment to the set of attitudes, values and behaviours that are characteristically encouraged and rewarded by bureaucracies, that is, self-subordination, impersonalization, rule conformity and traditionalism. Gordon (1990 and 1999) measured this with the Work Environment Preference Schedule/WEPS) using a 24-item instrument made up a 5-point Likert response categories from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".²

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Some Hypotheses

Bureaucratic organizations attempt to mold role ideology and role performance of personnel through a variety of procedures and mechanisms designed to make individual beliefs, values and norms correspond with those of the organization. This process is sometimes referred to as bureaucratic socialization. The organization attempts to make consensus between new comers and the rest of the organization. It is obvious that almost all types of libraries are bureaucratic structures, that is, they have many of the trappings of the classical bureaucratic models. This has been explicated by Webber (1998) as having a hierarchy of authority, impersonality, division of labour and formulated rules and work regulations.³ When these characteristics occur together, they tend to produce bureaucratic climate in which librarians are expected to be loyal to the library organization, behave ostensibly according to the rules and regulations and defer to the authority of their superiors. Librarians are expected to adopt an orientation consistent with this climate — a bureaucratic orientation.

Under this condition, it is expected that as student intents begin to work in the library, they will normally begin to encounter the pressures of bureaucratic socialization. They will suddenly find that the attitudes and values which they bring to the job are idealistic, if not naive. The students in their various libraries are frequently confronted not only with the administrators demanding conformity and experienced librarians who willingly conform, but also with a

2. L. V. Gordon, "Correlates of bureaucratic orientation," In P.J.R. Dempsey, *Manpower and Applied Psychology* ed. (New York : The Ergon Press, 1990); and "The Measurement of bureaucratic orientation," *Personal Psychology*, 23 (1999) : 1 -11.

3. Marx Weber, *Essays on Sociology*, Translated by H.M. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (New York ; Oxford University Press, 1998).

host of other organizational forces impeding this expected professional autonomy. Student librarians, being faced with the above options appear quite vulnerable to the pressure of bureaucratic socialization as they try to succeed and earn good grades. They therefore in the words of Hoy and Rees “become significantly more bureaucratic in their orientation as they complete their internship.”⁴ To buttress this assumption, Merton has suggested that bureaucratic structures with their patent authority systems and elaborate mechanisms for socialization may have their capacity to modify types.⁵ As with the students’ intents one would observe that a five week working experience would not be sufficient for the modification of the basic personality structure of practicum students. In keeping with this assumption, the authors of this paper hypothesized that there could be no significant change in the socialization of student librarians as they acquired working experience.

Data Collection

The data for this paper was collected from a sample of fifty practicum students doing the sandwich undergraduate diploma in library science in Nigeria, using an opinionnaire sampling technique. The students did a five week practicum library work in five different libraries. An questionnaire made up of ten items was designed by the authors to test the following student relationships in the various libraries where they worked: **Conformity, impersonality, tradition, subordination, bureaucratic loyalty, and innovation.** This was distributed to each of the students after the practicum period. The students returned all the fifty questionnaire duly completed and the responses were analysed and used to test the hypothesized relationships.

Method of Analysis

The response to the tested relationships (ten of them) was on a five rating scale of: A: strongly agreed; B: agreed; C: undecided; D: disagreed; and E: strongly disagreed. This was coded in terms of number of responses in each of the relationships tested as shown in table 1. To bring out clearly the students’ impression in each relationship, percentages are used as medium of analysis. The authors chose this because what the students say or their beliefs and feelings in this study may not be amenable to statistical analysis. The authors are of course aware of the limitations of this procedure, for example, Best and Kahn (1989) observed that such limitations include con-

4. Wayne K. Hoy, & Richard Rees, “Bureaucratic Socialization of Student Teachers,” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 28 : 1 (Jan. / Feb. 1999): 23-26.

5. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glenco - Free Press, 2000).

cealing of people's attitudes but instead express acceptable opinions as well as inability of people to predict their reactions or behaviours.⁶

Results

Table 1 Students Beliefs in Tested Relationships

Group	N	M	St Dev
1—No previous library instruction	45	76.67	13.98
2—Assigned walking tour/worksheet	34	77.06	16.97
3—Prior course-integrated instruction	27	80.19	12.67
Total	106	77.69	14.64

Note: See Appendix for the questionnaire.

As indicated in the table above, the relationships are tested on a five point rating scale. The first relationship investigated on is whether students' real loyalty during the period of practicum is first to his/her superior. Here a total of 31 (62%) of the students strongly agreed with this relationship while 17 (34%) just agreed. On the other hand, two students disagreed. On relationships within the library where students did the practicum, 31 (62%) of the students believed generally that such relationship is not based on position or level of seniority but rather on general consideration. To buttress this opinion, only 10 (10%) of the students strongly disagreed with such a relationship based on position or level while 21 (42%) disagreed. Only 11 (22%) of the students shared the opinion that relationship should be based on position or level of professionals within the organization. Eight (16%) of the students could not decide on the role that position or level has to play in the practicum students' relationships within the library where they worked. This neutrality though insignificant when compared with "agreement" or "disagreement" but in actual working situation could trigger the practicum students level of relationship with the staff.

Obedience to an experienced superior personnel by a "new comer", i.e. the practicum student showed a symmetrically divided opinion. The degree of "agreement" and "disagreement" showed that 26 (52%) and 24 (47%)

6. John W. Best, & James V. Kahn, *Research in Education* (New Delhi : Prentice Hall, India, 1989).

of the students agreed and disagreed respectively on this issue. The differences are further seen where it is clear that 21 (42%) agreed while 5 (10%) strongly agreed on the role of the superior and experienced librarians in obeying orders without questions. On the other hand, 15 of the students strongly disagreed as against 11 students who disagreed. The implication of such response is that superiority in the carrying of orders is rather fluid. The role of traditionalism to enable practicum students contribute to the running of libraries showed that 47 (94%) of the students confirm this role. Twenty-five (50%) believed strongly on this role while 22 (44%) had a strong belief.

In the area of innovation, 28 (56%) of the practicum students disagreed that innovation is not encouraged where they worked while twelve students agreed. Ten of the students were undecided on the issue. On the conformity of the practicum students to the established rules and regulations in the library, 48 (96%) of the students felt that this is necessary in order to achieve a good working relationship with the insiders. This feeling is strongly buttressed with twenty-nine out of the forty-eight students who strongly agreed with the need of this demand. There is a strong correlation between this need and the demand for self-subordination from every practicum student where 36 (72%) of the students agreed with this demand.

Based on the lessons learnt from the practicum, 37 (74%) of the students agreed that they were convinced of the necessity to conform to the rules and regulations of the libraries where they will work in future. The relationship between theory and practice as seen by the students showed that 26 (52%) and 20 (40%) of the students respectively had a divergent view of the chance of implementing what they were taught in the classroom in actual working situation. The fact that there is a minute difference shows that innovation and change may be subject to the willingness or unwillingness of the experienced librarians that they may work with in future.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study showed that important changes did occur in the socialization of practicum students as against the earlier hypothesis. It is obvious that library intents become substantially more bureaucratic in orientation as a result of their working experience. Without doubt, the library bureaucracy quickly begins to impress upon the practicum students the value of bureaucratic loyalty, conformity, impersonality, self-subordination and traditionalism. Despite all the innovations taught in the classroom, it appears in the words of Hoy and Rees (1999) that libraries “in general begin to almost immediately to mold neophytes into roles to maintain stability.”⁷ The forces

7. *Op. Cit.*, Hoy & Rees.

of bureaucratic socialization in all types of libraries seem strong and efficient. The librarians expect the practicum students to maintain the status quo and try to impress on them to carry this impression to future employment. The students were regarded as tabula rasa on which values and norms best cherished by the library bureaucracy could be written.

In conclusion, it appears necessary to point out that the methods of training adopted in many library schools in Nigeria should be modified. In majority of cases, students were imbued with idealistic orientation concerning the library as an organization. The actual working situations in the library should be stressed. On the other hand, the experienced librarians who form part of the bureaucratic elite should be patient with interns, watch them react to instructions, allow if any innovations which they bring into the job to be tested and evaluated with an open mind. This becomes necessary so as to create a situation for a dynamic growth in the library profession which should be centred on a new concept of power with emphasis on collaborative consultation and democracy. However, one should not forget that bureaucratic features are still the hallmark of many contemporary organizations.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

The following sentences represent opinions and your agreement or disagreement will be determined on the basis of your particular convictions. Kindly check your position on the scale as the statement first impresses you. Indicate what you believe rather than what you think you should believe.

Thanks

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Rating Scale

a: I strongly agree b: I agree c: I am undecided
d: I disagree e: I strongly disagree

Items	a	b	c	d	e
1. A student's first real loyalty with the library where he/she does his/her practicum is to his/her superior.					
2. Relationship within the library where the student works should be based on position or level, not on general consideration.					
3. A superior (i.e. experienced librarian) should expect practicum student to carry out his order without question.					
4. Practicum students in order to contribute to the growth of the library should keep to the working traditions of the library.					
5. Innovations are not encouraged in where practicum students worked.					
6. To achieve a good working relationship, it is necessary for practicum students to conform to the established rules in the library.					
7. Self-subordination during practicum period is expected from every student.					
8. Personal commitment to the set rules of the library is expected from every practicum student.					
9. Lessons learnt from the practicum period have convinced me of the necessity to conform to rules and regulations of the library where I will work in future.					
10. All the talk of change and innovation taught in classrooms cannot be effectively implemented in actual working conditions.					