

Libraries and the Deaf

by
B. Krishnan*

Abstrak Tanggungjawab utama perpustakaan adalah untuk memberi perkhidmatan yang baik kepada penggunanya — iaitu dengan memenuhi keperluan maklumat mereka. Di samping itu, kita harus juga sedar bahawa perkhidmatan yang kita berikan itu mungkin tidak dapat dinikmati dengan sepenuhnya oleh segolongan pembaca misalnya orang pekak, kerana mereka mempunyai ciri-ciri fizikal yang berbeza; tetapi keperluan maklumat mereka sama seperti orang lain. Jadi, untuk memberi suatu perkhidmatan yang sesuai dengan keperluan khas pembaca kategori ini, beberapa faktor harus dipertimbangkan oleh pustakawan. Secara amnya, orang pekak ini boleh dikategorikan kepada dua iaitu pekak sebelum tahu berbahasa (prelingual) dan pekak sesudah tahu berbahasa (postlingual). Oleh itu masalah yang dihadapi untuk memenuhi kehendak di antara dua golongan ini adalah agak berlainan. Beberapa cadangan juga dikemukakan tentang langkah-langkah yang harus dipertimbangkan bagi menyediakan perkhidmatan kepada golongan yang kurang bernasib baik ini.

Library service for the deaf has the same philosophical base as that for the non-handicapped, namely that librarians have a responsibility to provide information in a usable form to all its patrons. Access to information is vital if an individual is to function effectively in our rapidly developing society. The deaf require the same accessibility as their non-handicapped counterpart to data and other processed materials if they are to operate personally and professionally without disadvantage.

The question before librarians is how best they can serve special categories of users who have a need for information in special formats. Many countries consider the library service for deaf persons as an adjunct to its welfare services whilst some place it in the library orbit.

Developing in a hearing child a real interest in reading to the point where this becomes for him a rewarding satisfying cultural activity, calls for the skilful guidance of a trained librarian. The deaf need the benefit of this special help even more than do the normally hearing. Reading would seem to be the

lifeline of communication to the world of intellectual stimulation for the deaf. But the nature of the reading process is such that deaf children, lacking knowledge of auditory symbols are at an extreme disadvantage in learning to read.

Different kinds of deafness produce different degrees of hearing impairment. The various types of deafness can be broadly divided into two, namely, prelingual and postlingual deafness. For the prelingually deaf, i.e. those who became deaf before learning how to speak, the difficulties in understanding and communicating are very great. The postlingually deaf, who have become deaf later in life, will have heard spoken language and therefore have some experience in the spoken language.

Deaf Literacy

There are two different views regarding the training of hearing impaired people. On the one hand, the oralists believe that the hearing impaired must be taught to communicate orally and to receive communication orally. On the other hand, another group advocates the use of whatever method of stimulation and aid to communication to achieve suc-

* Pegawai Perpustakaan, Bahagian Katalog

cess in speech and understanding. To this end, electronic aids, finger spelling, use of fingers in signing and lip reading are all intended to aid communication and can be very rewarding to the deaf.

Special Needs

In attempting to provide equal access to information for the able bodied and disabled alike one has to take into consideration the special needs of the deaf patron. The librarian needs to be aware of the allowances he has to make in terms of noise and behaviour, if he admits deaf patrons to his library. When hearing impaired people speak, they may not be able to modulate their voice to fit the circumstances of their speech may be difficult to follow, requiring a more prolonged communication and of course a very patient librarian. While in the library, the deaf patron may be unaware that he is making noises either with his voice or in some other way, for example, banging doors or in handling library materials. The librarian must be prepared to make allowances for such unusual noises in the library.

One factor common in both prelingually and postlingually deaf persons is that they will have defective speech and limited spoken language to communicate with. Hence, whether prelingually or postlingually deaf, the hearing impaired patron will need some sort of aid to speech, aid to hearing or aid to understanding, when he wants to put forward his enquiry to the librarian. However, for the deaf patron who has limited language ability, he may be able to read notices, books and magazines, if they are in simplified language. For this particular category, who prefer to depend on the written word for acquiring their information, simplified texts and magazines may be provided. When the written word is of no help, particularly to the prelingually deaf, electronic gadgets such as communicators, micro-processors, phonotype teleprinters, videotape teletext, computers, reading machines and sophisticated hearing aids are available as another means of communication.

Besides serving the needs of deaf patrons, there are several other related audience who will be interested in information about the deaf. They include parents and teachers of the deaf; professionals working with the hearing impaired for example audiologists, speech therapist and doctors; hearing users who want general information about deafness and others who want some good inspirational reading (mainly the achievements of such disabled

people). Apart from acquiring library materials on the subject, the library can also provide bibliographies and arrange to hold exhibitions, talks and seminars on the deaf and about deafness.

Initiating a Library Service for the Hearing Impaired

1. To begin with, one can explore one's own collection to select books on the deaf, deafness and related topics for example on sign language, hearing aids or noise pollution leading to deafness, and prepare a catalogue to those items.
2. Establish contacts with outside sources for a supply of free materials and brochures on the deaf and deafness.
3. Purchase materials on the deaf and deafness, together with some reference tools such as directories and catalogues which can provide information on published material as well as addresses of organisations for the deaf.
4. Study the possibility of using electronic gadgets for communicating with deaf patrons.
5. Also consider the possibility of hiring qualified deaf employees who will be in a better position to serve deaf patrons and provide them proper orientation. They can also teach other staff on-the-job finger spelling, sign language and other factors hearing people need to be aware of when communicating with the deaf.

For any library wishing to start a collection on the deaf, the following works by Alice Hagemeyer should prove very useful. (Alice Hagemeyer, a deaf person herself, is also a qualified librarian at the Washington D.C. Public Library).

1. *The Joy of Being a Deaf Person*
A book dealing with deaf pride, deaf culture and deaf heritage.
2. *Communicating with Hearing People*
Based on experiences and information sharing of deaf participants in sign language classes with hearing participants. Will help deaf people communicate with the hearing world, especially at libraries.
3. *Library Services to the Deaf*
A collection of A. Hagemeyer's speeches and papers.
4. *Deaf Awareness Handbook for Public Libraries*
Washington D.C., Public Library, 1976.