INTERLIBRARY COOPERATION: NEW TECHNOLOGIES CHANGE PRACTICES NOT PRINCIPLES

Lois Ann Colaianni
National Library of Medicine
Bethesda, Maryland 20894, USA
Lois_Ann_Colaianni@ocsshost.nlm.nih.gov

There is an old folk tale which I like. The details of the story change depending upon the country in which it is told, but the story's essential theme and immediate outcome remain the same [1].

My version starts on an isolated farm with a girl; it could easily be a boy. Despite the hard work of the girl and her parents, the farm just did not support them. So the girl set out to see if there was something she could do to support herself and possibly assist her parents. With the bread and cheese her mother packed for her, she left home to make her fortune. She walked for days, mile after mile, through forests and meadows, up and down hills, and across streams. By the third day she had eaten all her food and was very tired and hungry. As luck would have it, she came to a small village and thought, "someone here will be kind and share some food with me". Word spread quickly that a young traveller had come to the village asking for food. The good folk hid all they had because it was a poor village and they needed all the food they worked hard to get. Everywhere she went she was told that there wasn't any food.

Discouraged, tired, and lonely, she sat down under a tree just outside the village thinking about how she was going to get something to eat, for she couldn't go much further without food. Nothing seemed to inspire her and she sat sadly staring at a smooth stone about the size of her hand by the path near her feet. Soon some villagers came by and she had an idea. She picked up the stone and called to them, "I want to help you. You have no food. I will take this magic stone and make stone soup for the whole village". None of them had ever heard of stone soup. They thought it was impossible but they were intrigued. "I will need a large pot and water", she said. Two villagers fetched pot and water to fill it, and one built a fire to heat the water. The stone was put into the pot as the water began to simmer. She stirred and stirred and periodically tasted the soup while they looked on. More villagers came to see what was happening.

"This soup needs some salt and pepper", she said after one tasting and two children ran to get some from their homes. "This magic stone always makes excellent soup but sometimes it is improved with a carrot or two"; a peasant woman hurried off and came back with two bunches of carrots that she had hidden. "Oh, this smells good; I imagine that a cabbage would add a little more flavor". Another peasant woman knew where she could get a cabbage. Over the next hour or two, a shank of beef, some potatoes, barley and other ingredients were found and added. The soup was stirred and at last pronounced ready. She invited the entire village to share the stone soup. The villagers went for dishes, a table and benches and others suggested that bread and cider would go nicely with such fine soup. The story ends with everyone having a wonderful evening, sharing the special feast that came from the magic stone.

This is a story of cooperation, describing wonderful benefits that can sometimes be gained from sharing, even if those sharing have few resources. The tale also illustrates the need for leadership in resource sharing and the underlying resistance or skepticism which may be met in planning and executing a cooperative venture. It is likely that if the girl had asked the villagers to share in making soup, she probably would not have gotten their cooperation. The girl showed leadership; she had an objective which would benefit her and the villagers. She got the villagers to cooperate to achieve the outcome she envisioned. The outcome was sufficient soup to feed the village that evening but we are left to wonder how she ate in the days that followed and what behavior modification, if any, the villagers exhibited after making stone soup and having a delightful feast and evening together. What lessons do you think were learned?

My talk this morning addresses library cooperation, the main theme of your symposium. I will define the phrase and discuss some of the requirements for successful cooperative programs, mention some areas in which library cooperation has been successful, note the difficulties or challenges faced by cooperative programs, and close with ideas about cooperation in today's world where some libraries are connected to electronic superhighways and others lack the knowledge, skills, equipment, support and infrastructure to be connected.

Library cooperation

Library cooperation is defined as "any activity between two or more libraries to facilitate, promote, and enhance library operations, use of

resources, or service to users". [2] Cooperation can be informal or formal. It can benefit the libraries' internal processing or benefit the services to users, or both.

Library cooperation has existed for many years, but three trends have made cooperation a dominant theme in library management in the past two decades. The first trend is the increased availability and capacity of computing and communication technologies which facilitate cooperation. The second trend, at least in many countries, is the reduction in library budgets, which forces librarians to think of their role as providing access to information and not necessarily housing the information themselves. If one's library cannot own all the information its users need, librarians seek sources often in other libraries. The third trend is the emphasis on service to users, called customer service. Librarians are soliciting information about what their users need and making plans to satisfy those needs. Usually, those plans must involve arrangements for resource sharing with other libraries. Some librarians seek to turn to one source, but I know of no country that has one source that can serve all the needs of health sciences libraries in that country. For example, in the U.S., the National Library of Medicine receives and fills only about 10% of the interlibrary loans requested by health sciences librarians for their users. Ninety percent are filled through resource sharing arrangements among the libraries themselves. The National Library of Medicine sees its role as developing and implementing the tools necessary for sharing, such as union lists and automated systems. The NLM also trains librarians to use these systems and serves as a back-up resource for a small percentage of the information needs. The role of each library participant is to satisfy 75% of the requests its users have and to share its resources with the others.

Traditional areas for cooperation

Reports of successful cooperative ventures are reported in the library literature and presented at meetings. Librarianship is a service profession. Health sciences librarians' natural inclination to help each other is reinforced by their desire to improve services to their users; however, you can find librarians who, like the villagers, keep their resources solely for their own use.

One of the original programs in 1897 when the Medical Library Association (MLA) was formed, was a journal exchange where duplicate books and journals in one library were distributed to others missing these issues. Today, almost 100 years later, one of the major activities in the

MLA veterinary medical librarians' listserv is listing extra copies of books and journals which can be requested by others who subscribe to the listserv. There is often no cost to the recipient, except to reimburse postage.

Of course the most popular cooperative program among libraries is interlibrary loan. I use interlibrary loan (ILL) to encompass providing photocopies as well as lending physical volumes. In formal cooperative ILL programs, each library agrees to fill requests for other members from documents in its collection. Usually this works best with photocopies of articles or a few pages from a book, but some libraries do lend the actual textbooks, monographs or audiovisuals. A variation of interlibrary lending is when libraries within a city or state agree to permit users from one library or system to borrow books from or use any library in the group.

Fundamental to a successful interlibrary loan cooperative program is an up-to-date, detailed list of serial holdings for the libraries in the program (and monographs and audiovisuals, if they are to be lent). The union list of serials has been a popular cooperative project where one institution or association agrees to merge the holdings lists of a number of libraries and then make this merged list accessible to the others. Of course, the contributing libraries must agree to submit their holdings in a specified format and according to a schedule. With computer technology these lists can be merged, kept up-to-date, and made accessible by software programs. While simple to describe, these tasks are not trivial to do.

Another successful program has been cooperative cataloging. When I went to library school in the mid 1960's we were taught that every librarian needed to catalog the items in a collection with the special needs of that library's users in mind. This was especially important when describing the subject content of a book or serial title. Although the National Library of Medicine cataloged almost everything published that U.S. health sciences libraries would acquire, librarians were taught to catalog each item "de novo". Wisely, current philosophy is that a library, usually a national library or major research library with qualified catalogers, catalogs an item and loads the cataloging record in a readily accessible database. Others simply copy the cataloging. In order for such a system to work, there need to be libraries that acquire substantial portions of the published materials (such as a national library that acquires most of the health sciences materials published in the country), catalogers who follow the national and international cataloging

rules, and a way for others to easily find and download or print the cataloging data for use in local systems.

Another very successful cooperative program has been preservation. As you know, the paper in most of the books and journals published between 1850 and 1950 will disintegrate over time because of the acid residue in the paper. To counter this, a library which has undertaken the responsibility of preserving certain titles on microfilm first checks to ensure that no one else has filmed a title and then indicates its intention in a national database. when the filming is completed, this is noted in the record to inform others of its availability and to save others from the expense of filming the item. Many libraries doing preservation microfilming also make printing masters available to others to purchase because it is usually cheaper to buy the film than to refilm the volume. A second cooperative venture in preservation has been for libraries that are not filming to lend issues or volumes to libraries who are intending to film several years of a serial, so that the preservation microfilm is as complete as possible. NLM is very grateful to several European libraries that have lent issues and volumes for our microfilming program in order to complete a run.

Some cooperative programs have been developed for the regional acquisition and retention of less frequently used books and serials. Each librarian in a group agrees to acquire, maintain, and provide interlibrary loan service on specific titles not heavily used by any one library. Often the group will work from a well known index like Index Medicus to identify the important titles not held in that geographical area to be considered for acquisition. Of course, the commitment is only good as long as each library has money to acquire and maintain these materials.

Some libraries have been cooperating by obtaining or building off-site storage to house low use volumes for which they have insufficient space. Also, cooperative reference is working, but I will mention more about this in connection with electronic networks.

Requirements for cooperative programs

The folk tale described the minimum requirements for cooperation; someone with the idea, a plan for sharing the resources, a leader who will help develop and implement the plan, others who contribute resources, and a perceived benefit to the parties. Of course in the folk tale the contributed resources were consumed. Library resources are just used, but there is wear and tear on library materials, and staff time is "consumed". Resource sharing and cooperation incur costs for all parties.

At a national level it is often the national library that provides the leadership and solicits funding to plan and get a cooperative program going. At a local level, it is necessary to have someone who has good ideas and is willing to work hard, even if some colleagues are initially unenthusiastic.

The second requirement is that there be a benefit for each library; although, each participant does not need to receive the same benefit. Why would a fairly large medical school library agree to send photocopies of articles from its collection to local hospitals when the hospitals don't have any journals from which that the medical school library needs information? It is easier to see the benefit to the library, such as a hospital library, with few resources, which gets copies of articles for its staff. The hospital library now has easy access to much more information without much additional expense. A medical school's administration may support such a program because they can then have access to even larger libraries' collections or they may want doctors from surrounding hospitals to refer patients with problems requiring specialists to the medical school or to attend continuing education programs. Sometimes the library providing the most resources may feel an obligation because of the mission of the library's parent institution. Pride in a national reputation as a primier resource is a powerful motivation.

Third, it is useful to have an advisory body that sets policy, develops and publicizes the rules, monitors feedback from library participants, ensures that participants who contribute are trained to use the program, and helps librarians obtain feedback from their users about how the service or information they received is being used to support research or to improve the delivery of health care. This advisory body generally oversees the program. The advisory body can be either an ad hoc group of one representative from each participating institution or a representative cross section from the participating institutions. The institution taking the leadership role or one maintaining the hardware and software for an automated system should be represented on the advisory body. The advisory group in a national cooperative program should certainly include policy makers to ensure that the program receives continued support.

The fourth requirement is data and system standardization. This is particularly important if automated systems are used. The data to be input into the system must be delivered in a certain format and in a certain way. I would further suggest that international standards be used so a system could be linked at some future date with systems in

other countries. Too often a cooperative program gets its start through some enterprising individual who, on his or her own initiative, sets up a system. Subsequently, people from several institutions want to use it. Although it is a stand-alone, non-standard system and easy to get going, it is not easy to keep it going. System developers form attachments to their original products and are often reluctant to see them replaced. If you start this way, agree to a time period by which the system will be phased out and replaced with a standard, supportable system.

Fifth, standards of performance are usually helpful. For an interlibrary loan network, it is useful for all librarians to understand the expected time in which a library will process a loan it receives. The interlibrary loan network in the U.S. National Network of Libraries of Medicine stipulates that 85% of all filled loans must be processed within 4 calendar days and non-availables processed within 7 calendar days. The group should consider dropping libraries that do not perform within the agreed upon guidelines.

These are the major requirements to be considered in establishing a cooperative program. Obviously, more formal, large scale programs may have other requirements such as bylaws, auditors if money is involved, etc.

Challenges to be overcome

It would seem that cooperative programs, especially if there is a mutual benefit to all parties, would surely succeed. In fact, there are numerous problems, or to use a positive term — challenges to be faced and overcome to be successful.

First of all, cooperation is not a pervasive condition in all countries or cultures, and even in countries where cooperation is customary, there may be competition between institutions or the librarians. Some time ago I visited medical faculty libraries in a certain country in order to prepare a plan for establishing an infrastructure for resource sharing. Although the few serial titles received by most of these libraries were in a printed union list of serials, none of the libraries provided interlibrary loan service. When a user came into the library wanting an article in a journal the library did not have, if the librarian knew about the union list of serials, the librarian looked to see which library might have the item and told the user. It was the user's responsibility to go to that library and find the item. I had an opportunity to visit the library school at which the librarians in this country were trained. I asked if they taught interlibrary loan practices and was told that they did but only in the abstract, not actually how to do it.

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Certainly without a philosophic understanding, librarians will not participate in cooperative programs; but cooperation cannot be practiced at a philosophical level. Cooperation requires an institution or a librarian to give up some autonomy for the good of the group. Participants rarely gain equally in cooperative programs; however, each must gain enough to continue to support the costs of the infrastructure that is necessary for the program.

A second challenge is obtaining and retaining conformance with an agreed upon standard. What happens when one of the members wants to change an internal system and as a result of the change the institution will no longer output the data in a format needed by the program? Will this institution discontinue participation in the program? Will they be willing to pay for extra programming in order to convert their output? What if other participants depended upon their data? This challenge is often encountered in cooperative programs that extend over many years

What happens when the parties cannot agree on the standards? The National Library of Medicine feels strongly that there should not be a separate cataloging record for the preservation microfilm of an existing book. We put a note in the general note field in the bibliographic record. Neither OCLC nor the Research Library Group agree with NLM and we must do special programming to enter its preservation records into these bibliographic utilities.

Third, obtaining financial support from one's institution for cooperative ventures is sometimes difficult. Often institutions are struggling to obtain sufficient money to exist. Even if money is available, administrators are more likely to provide money for something they can see and touch that direct benefits their institution. It is important for a librarian seeking institutional support for a cooperative program to be able to estimate how much benefit the institution will gain from participating. On the other hand, it is sometimes easier to obtain financial support from outside agencies for cooperative programs because the results benefit more than one institution. Of course this situation is more complicated in countries where the hospitals, medical schools, and public libraries are under different ministries. Cooperative programs have costs — at a minimum staff time. As an illustration, periodically NLM does a study to determine the cost of an interlibrary loan. Even in an institution with low labor costs, a very efficient system, and most items on the shelf, it costs between $7.00 and $8.00 in labor and supplies, excluding overhead, to fill a loan.

Fourth, sometimes institutions or individuals are in competition with each other. They may want to be considered "the best" and be unwilling to help other institutions improve their information services. As Rudyard Kipling said, "He travels the fastest who travels alone"[3]. Cooperation requires commitment to an overall vision of improved dissemination of health information, because it is not the fastest way to get information in every case. Over the years systems have been built to reward individual achievements. The Nobel Prize is a well known example. Our institutions and professional associations develop systems to reward individuals when what is required is a team approach. Improved service to users is often the only reward for librarians who do the work necessary to support a cooperative program.

The electronic environment

I can almost hear at least one person in the audience saying, "she's talking about issues that were relevant years ago. We are living in the age of the information superhighway. hat is relevant to today's world of networked libraries that are connected electronically?" Michael Gorman, has written that .."we are, like it or not, entering a Golden Age of Cooperation because (1) the technology to link libraries and to make the users of one library aware of the collections of others is available and getting better all the time, and (2) economics are forcing us to cooperate".[4] Also, many of you are in libraries that may be near an information superhighway but are not near one of the on-ramps. Some may lack the communications lines, the computer equipment, funds to support the connections, and staff training to get on and use the superhighway. Some of you may know about the information superhighway but it will be some time before you are up and running on it. For the time being, because of this, resource sharing programs must include both libraries which are connected and those that are not.

Demands increase as users hear more and more about what is available electronically. These demands can sometimes be used by a savvy librarian as leverage to get the necessary equipment and connections. In 1986, the American Library Association's Commission on Freedom and Equality of Access to Information wrote that: "Libraries of all types today find themselves caught between the anvil of growing citizen demand for increased access to a broader range of information resources in a wider variety of formats and the hammer of declining financial support"[5]. This situation is infinitely worse in 1995.

Today the technologies facilitate increased cooperation and user demands put additional pressure on librarians to participate in cooperative programs. The technologies are also making significant changes in how libraries function and are organized but whether you are talking about networked or non-networked libraries, I believe that the basic principles of cooperation — ideas, leaders, participants, objectives, standards — remain essentially the same. A librarian who uses the Internet to locate and obtain resources for a patron is using an electronic resource but only partially participating in cooperation or resource sharing. Resource sharing and cooperation involve the willingness to provide some help to others. It involves making the decision to become professionally active working with other librarians to develop and jointly implement a plan to improve access to resources to benefit users.

How could the Internet be used to share resources to cooperate? I will describe a few ways. First, a group, perhaps sponsored by EAHIL or an institution, could get together and agree that each member will monitor the health resources on the Internet in one or two of the fields of biomedicine. Each person in the group could agree to regularly look for and update specified data about information resources on the Internet or Web pages in one or two specialties of interest to the group, like molecular biology, diabetes, environmental toxicology, or breast cancer. The members would maintain that information in a specified location so if others wanted information on diabetes, for example, they could go to the group's directory file and look for resources in that subject field.

EAHIL libraries could cooperate to develop a union list of serials which could be maintained on the Internet. Instead of serials you could prepare a union list of incunabula, archives, books published since 1985, or many other things depending upon you and your users' needs.

Some libraries are cooperating to answer user or staff generated reference questions. This can be very informal, for example, using a listserv as was done for the question asked by a librarian in France for information on birth control in primates in zoos which was thought to have been presented at a meeting in 1990. The question was automatically sent to everyone who subscribes to the listserv. The first librarian receiving the message who knows (or can find) the answer replies, either directly to the requestor or to the entire listserv. In this case the answer from the 1990 AAZPA Annual Conference Proceedings was provided by a librarian in a zoo in California along with an offer to send a copy of the paper. Replying to the listserv produces a lot of mail for everyone, but if the answer is educational, perhaps all learn something.

It also signals to the rest of the group that the question has been answered. Veterinary librarians from many parts of the world participate on their listserv, resulting in some 5 to 10 messages a day asking for or providing assistance. Other groups are doing the same thing.

Librarians are making their library catalogs accessible through the Internet enabling anyone to identify and locate publications held in their collections. If they agree to provide interlibrary loan service these become especially useful resources. A cooperative program of listing the up-to-date ILL policies for these libraries would be a useful program.

This morning I have reviewed interlibrary cooperation, what it is, the hallmarks of successful cooperative programs, challenges librarians encounter in cooperating, and cooperation in the networked environment. In closing, let's take a second look at the tale of making stone soup. We left our villagers enjoying a wonderful feast because of their contributions to the meal. If you were the author, what would be in the next chapter? Does the girl go from village to village feeding herself and others with her magic stone until she meets the villager of her dreams and they live happily ever after? Does she get discouraged and return home? Does she find a village willing to share food where she can work and support herself?

The feeling of joy from a successful cooperative program is like that experienced at the stone soup feast. But it does not result from a magic stone. Sharing is necessary if we are to survive and prosper. I wish you and your users much joy and many benefits from library cooperation.

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