Chapter IX

EVALUATING SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES

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Services of the school library are intangible and qualitative in nature and thus do not lend themselves readily to instruments of measurement. There is recognition, too, of the impossibility of evaluating services of the school library as separate and apart from an evaluation of the school -- certainly of the major elements if not of the whole school. This does not mean that an effort to evaluate the services of the library should be undertaken only at such intervals as when a committee, composed of educators outside the school personnel, come in to appraise the school for purposes of accreditation. On the contrary, the successful on-going of the educational program is so dependent on a functional library that continuous evaluation of its services is highly desirable if not imperative. For best results, such an evaluation should engage school-wide participation, and to whatever degree this practice is not employed, the evaluation is less valid than it should be from the standpoint of providing learning situations in which the learner is motivated by real problems and goals that have meaning for him. Creating readiness and desirability within school staffs for acceptance of this responsibility is one of the major tasks for supervision.

In large measure, needs which schools have considered basic for student growth and development have been those derived from two types of investigations: (1) those which have resulted from studies of large groups of young people and are, therefore, suggested as being characteristic of most if not all American youth; and (2) those from studies of young people in a particular school. Typical of the former type are the needs of youth outlined in the cooperative plan of evaluation, Evaluative Criteria,[1] which have had and continue to have wide use as the basis for standards of the accrediting associations of secondary schools. To these criteria credit is given for having a larger number of objectives for appraising more situations of the school program than similar standards; consequently, they have been popular as a re-evaluation measure. Also, under the plan of Evaluative Criteria, and another contributing factor to their popularity, there is opportunity for schoolwide participation. School administrators and their staffs are challenged to evaluate themselves and the school prior to the evaluation for accreditation.

The high recognition accorded Evaluative Criteria has no intention of minimizing the significance of the second type of investigation in which a particular school makes a study of its own pupils to ascertain their specific

needs and to establish methods and techniques by which such needs can be met. While the majority of secondary schools adopt the objectives outlined in Evaluative Criteria as long-range goals, through their self-evaluation efforts, they invariably determine more definitive needs of their particular pupils and devise methods of attacking them. This is highly commendable. However, in view of the national use that is made of Evaluative Criteria, the educational needs of youth which they prescribe will be employed in this discussion for whatever clarity they may give to the specific procedures for evaluating library services outlined below.

Present day concepts of meeting the needs of youth contend that the educational agency makes no direct approach to the problem; instead, it assumes responsibility for helping youth to acquire patterns of behavior which will assist them in meeting their own needs. In the evaluation process, when patterns of behavior have been defined, it becomes necessary to determine which situations will demonstrate most effectively the achievement of the objectives, and which evaluation methods and devices seem most promising as an instrument for passing judgment. Evaluation of services of the school library is undertaken here with this concept in mind, and with the conviction that in many school situations it becomes the responsibility of school library supervision to provide stimulus and guidance to effect comprehension of this concept and to identify learning experiences through which such values as desirable attitudes, ways of thinking, appreciations, understanding, interests, abilities, and habits can be acquired.

As the supervisor works with school administrators, principals, teachers, pupils, supervisors of instruction, and various lay groups in the community during the preliminary stages of the evaluation program, he endeavors to find answers to questions typical of the following:

1. What are the objectives of the school? Are they realistic, i.e. based upon an understanding of social issues and needs in human growth and development? Have they been developed by the staff? Have principles been formulated to give guidance in the application of the objectives? Do pupils know what these objectives are, and do they know what the school is trying to do?

2. What is the school organization?

3. Is the curriculum an outgrowth of community needs, and is there continuous curriculum planning? Is the curriculum functional for the pupils -- designed to give meaning to their experiences in their particular environment?

4. What is the school enrollment, and what is the socio-economic background of the pupils and the community?

5. How many faculty members are there and what is the faculty load?

6. What are the prevailing methods of teaching in this particular school, and is there anything in the school's program which indicates "academic" vs. "non-academic" subjects and "half-credit" or "full-credit" subjects?

7. How are pupils and teachers scheduled?

8. What is the school's concept of work? Is there any indication that it draws lines of distinction in appraising the intrinsic worth of different types of work, e.g. intellectual, manual, or otherwise?

9. What concept has the school administration of school librarianship?

10. What is the school-community relationship?

11. Is there a well organized guidance program in the school?

12. What is the principal-superintendent, principal-teacher, teacher-librarian, teacher-teacher, and teacher-pupil relationship?

13. To what extent can the physical facilities of the school provide opportunities for achieving its objectives?

Answers to questions of this nature seem to have more validity when derived from several sources, conferences with the superintendent, the principal, the librarian, supervisors of instruction from local and central offices; individual and group conferences with teachers, parent-teacher groups; observation of student behavior and of the general atmosphere of the school; and notation of remarks made by pupils, teachers and lay-people in the community. The importance of this information can hardly be overestimated as it may well serve as the determinant factor for next steps in evaluation procedures.

It is not too unusual to find that the school's stated philosophy has not grown out of a study of the needs of its pupils; that school administrators and principals show more concern for getting the school rated than for helping pupils to meet their needs and that even librarians are not too unimpressed by quantitative standards. So atypical is a situation which provides

opportunities for teachers to identify and evolve their own purposes, to plan and work cooperatively on problems that have meaning to them, to know what part good leadership can play in the utilization of resources, and to plan and carry through an attack on real issues that one can never assume that the proper environment for evaluation exists.

No two school situations are identifical; thus, of necessity, there is considerable variation in the specific objectives of schools and/or libraries. Evaluation of services of the school library should consider specific objectives as well as its long-range goals, and in each case there need be no fundamental difference in the methods and techniques used.

As has already been stated, the educational needs of youth taken from Evaluative Criteria are being employed here as an example of what can be done: (1) they need to learn to live with other human beings; (2) they need to achieve and maintain sound mental and physical health; (3) they need to learn to live in their natural and scientific environment; (4) they need sound guidance; (5) they need to learn to think logically and express themselves clearly; (6) they need to prepare for work, for further education, or for both; (7) they need to learn to use their leisure well; (8) they need to learn to live aesthetically. In the last analysis, the measure of the school library is its effectiveness in contributing to their successful attainment.

Foregoing discussions have pointed out phases of the library program which are more or less prerequisite to evaluation. There is nothing new about this approach except perhaps it has not been used too effectively. The fact that outlined methods and procedures [2-4] for evaluating the services of the library have existed for some time is not enough. Much of the courage, self-confidence, and "know-how" required of librarians and teachers for the satisfactory use of these methods remain to be stimulated and supplied by school library supervision.

The following library activities, coupled with the objective to which they seem to lend most promise, have been employed with more than minimum success in some evaluation endeavors:

1. They need to learn to live with other human beings.
   The library reading room affords an excellent laboratory for all members of the school family to work harmoniously together. Respect for the worth and integrity of the individual regardless of religious affiliations, economic circumstance, race, etc. is mandatory.

Is the librarian cognizant of the opportunities inherent in this circumstance, and has she provided leadership for organizing student library assistants, the faculty library committee, the library club, and representatives from all student groups to work out library policy?

Does the library provide opportunity for group living through conference room activities, e.g. pupil-teacher study groups, groups of students engaged in units of work, debating groups, etc.? And is as much freedom as can be exercised without infringing upon the freedom of others always permitted, in an effort to cultivate self-discipline in the library?

Does the librarian exemplify the best kinds of personal relationship with pupils, teachers, and the principal? Does she administer and operate the library with smoothness and ease?

Are there ample materials on human relations, and are pupils and teachers encouraged to read them for general information as well as for classroom discussion?

2. They need to achieve and maintain sound mental and physical health. If the library has concern for attaining this objective its physical setting is of prime importance.

Are building materials and the color scheme of library walls, furniture and floors such that cleanliness is facilitated, unpleasant effects of color monotony are minimized, and quiet operation of the library in the performance of its many duties is possible?

Does the librarian make special effort to create the desire among all pupils to keep the library attractive? Does she delegate responsibility to student library assistants for maintaining proper ventilation and room temperature?

Do teachers and librarians work cooperatively in special efforts to prevent blocks to mental health -- by providing learning experiences and materials that are appropriate for and comprehensive to each student?

Is student behavior in the library effected through group discipline as well as through self-discipline?

What leisure-time activities of a nonphysical-recreation type are provided through browsing corners, the audio-visual room, and a good collection of recreational reading materials to aid pupils in satisfying their mental and emotional needs?

Does the librarian work closely with teachers and the guidance counselor to provide opportunities for discussion of personal problems, health services in the school and in the community, health insurance, and health hazards encountered in various employment opportunities?

Is the librarian representative of good health habits, e.g. eating in the school cafeteria, correct posture in sitting, standing, and lifting; and does she encourage students to show equal concern for such?

Has the physical development of boys and girls affected the choice, purchase, and arrangement of library furniture, e.g. chairs and tables of good quality and proper dimensions; floor lamps if and where necessary; lounging chairs and table arrangement relative to light?

Is there a wealth of materials on health and personal problems?

3. They need to learn to live in their natural and scientific environment.

Does the library maintain a file of community resources, both human and natural?

Does the librarian work closely with the science teacher and the science club to encourage scientific exhibits of pupil projects, scientific discoveries, and prominent personalities in the field of science?

Are filmstrips of scientific interests a part of the library collection, and are they made available to individuals as well as discussion groups and for classroom use?

Does the librarian work closely with the guidance counselor in the interest of providing opportunity for pupils to discuss their social problems, problems of civic interests; problems pertaining to industry and employment?

Does the library provide up-to-date materials -- books, filmstrips, periodicals, exhibits, and pamphlets -- on recent discoveries; local, state, and national resources; transportation, communication, food, and medicine?

Does the librarian provide space in the library for displays and exhibits, and does she work cooperatively with teachers, class advisers, officers of student groups, and community groups to the end that displays acquaint students with interests and activities of the school, of teachers, of students, and of the community?

4. They need sound guidance.

Is the librarian constantly engaged in a program of reading guidance, employing her knowledge of the reading program in the school; her knowledge of backgrounds and abilities of as many individual pupils as opportunities provide?

Does the librarian keep records of student projects; individual reading records; anecdotal records of pupil behavior and growth? And does she share these records with teachers and the guidance counselor for whatever constructive use can be made of them?

Does the librarian seek advice from teachers, remedial reading specialists, the guidance counselor, and the health service agency in an effort to ascertain special material needs and information pertinent for reading guidance?

Respect for public property, wholesome attitudes toward religious and racial differences, and desirable group behavior are needs which library opportunities in this area can provide.

Does the library collection consist of many up-to-date materials on occupations, vocational guidance, personal problems, study skills, etc. ?

Does the librarian encourage pupils to read widely in the field of biography and in the content areas? Such materials provide inspiration, information, and real life situations.

5. They need to learn to think logically and express themselves clearly.

Do teachers and the librarian work together in planning assignments, and in selecting special materials to provide experiences for critical thinking, for study skills, and for discussion groups of many kinds?

Does the librarian encourage book reviews in assembly programs and club activities? Does she organize book selection projects with the library club, library assistants, teachers, and other groups and individuals? Does she work with teachers in order to effect similar projects in classroom activities?

Is instruction in the use of the library worked out by the librarian and teachers in connection with units of work so that real learning experiences for pupils result?

Does the librarian observe and make notation of oral remarks that pupils make on materials read? Does she observe pupils in their choice of relevant or irrelevant materials (as the case may be) from a great variety that is made available to them?

Does the librarian delegate responsibilities to student assistants that require judgment and critical thinking e.g. selecting all kinds of materials for the library; library publicity; reference service; preparing bibliographies; annotating books; and selecting materials for the information file?

Does the librarian work with teachers in supplying materials for units of work in various subject areas; for debating, and public speaking?

Does the librarian make special effort to keep teachers informed of new acquisitions to the library? And does she encourage them to use many kinds of materials in their classroom experiences?

Does the library collection consist of much graphic material -- maps, charts, diagrams, etc. -- and does the librarian work with students and teachers to encourage students to use such material?

Are library materials always placed where maximum use can be made of them -- in study halls and classrooms?

6. They need to prepare for work, for further education, or for both.

How many student library assistants are there, and are provisions made for rotating the duties in their schedule?

Does the librarian recognize the significance of the concept which accepts work as having intrinsic value, be it manual or intellecual; remunerative or gratis? Does she instill an attitude of respect for the interdependence of all workers; for work well done; and an appreciation for the contribution of all workers in making society economically and socially healthy?

Does the librarian work with the counselor in order to help pupils appreciate work that is done at the school as having significance for life-work education?

Is there sufficient material on occupations, and does the librarian solicit the advice of the guidance counselor in building this collection?

Does the librarian provide a manual of duties for library assistants? and does she give close supervision to their work performance?

Does the librarian guide students into reading producer-consumer literature?

Does the library maintain a file of recent college bulletins and books on choosing the right college? Are students urged to make use of them?

Does the librarian, with the assistance of the guidance counselor, maintain a file of work opportunities which the community affords, e.g. industry, professional offices, business, schools, community social agencies, and homes?

7. They need to learn to use their leisure well.

Does the librarian accept the philosophy which makes no marked distinction between work activities and leisure activities? Does she attempt through her work with library assistants, the library committee, and the library club to foster the idea that doing work in which one finds genuine interest provides excellent opportunity for spending leisure well?

Does the librarian have concern for providing much material on hobbies; does she work with the photography club, the science club, the choral group; does she encourage students to read widely in the fields of fiction, drama, and poetry?

Do current periodicals and books of fiction constitute a large portion of the materials collection?

Does the librarian encourage the use of all other community library resources?

Does the librarian call attention to special radio and television programs of worth?

8. They need to learn to live aesthetically.

The general appearance of the library -- an attractive color scheme, adjustable shelves which permit correct placement of books on them, pictures on the walls, growing plants and the cleanliness of the room make marked contributions toward meeting this need. Are students made mindful of these possibilities?

Does the librarian work with teachers in home arts to the end that good books are provided in this area; effective room decoration is achieved; and beauty in personal attire is facilitated?

Does the library maintain for circulation and exhibit purposes works of renown artists?

Does the audio-visual materials center consist of a large file of recordings representing the world's outstanding music and musicians? And are these records made available for maximum use?

Does the librarian seek to have pupils gain wide acquaintance with many books on home decoration, landscaping and personal grooming?

Does the librarian make it a general practice of exhibiting the creative works of students and teachers?

Continuous work with librarians and teachers helping them to identify library activities that have high potential instructional value is a major portion of evaluation to which supervision can make great contribution. Librarian and, especially, untrained teachers assigned to the school library part-time need much help in this area of service. There are many teachers in our public schools who are "experts" on methods of teaching, but whose effectiveness is depreciated by their limited familiarity with materials that have interests for youth.

Observations of educational practices in the library, much like observations of educational practices in the classroom, reveal many disparities between professed ideals and actual behavior. There is educational opinion which assumes that all learning is reflected in change -- either through what pupils say and do, or through what they fail to say and do.[5] Gathering evidence of the extent to which actual learning has taken place as a result of pupils having engaged in a variety of educational activities in the library is perhaps the most difficult phase of evaluating its services. It means collecting signs of changed behavior, both negative and positive, from many types of records, rating scales, checklists, questionnaires, attitude scales, observation schedules, and all sorts of formal and informal situations. There is need for more definitive indications of the extent to which services of the school library and classroom instruction make significant contributions toward achieving the purposes of education in American society than the evaluation process thus far shows. Educational results and evaluations of school library services must show growing concern for changes which instructional experiences produce in individuals or for answers to such questions as:

1. Are children growing in their ability to live and work together toward common goals?

2. Do they understand and appreciate the ideals of American democracy, recognizing its imperfections yet always striving to develop objective attitudes in an attempt to achieve its ideals?

3. What attitudes do teachers show when student opinions differ from theirs?

4. Do students show concern for what constitutes fair play in situations where conflicts arise? What are their attitudes toward this world-shaking issue of majority and minority?

5. In respect to athletic activities, do pupils exhibit signs of good sportsmanship whether they win or lose?

6. To what extent do students understand the purposes of physical activity; their own bodies and bodily functions; their responsibility to the family, friends, and to society for maintaining a high degree of physical and mental proficiency?

7. What premium do pupils place on physical endurance, poise, agility, skill in muscular coordination, relaxation and rest?

8. Are students sympathetic in the presence of suffering and indignant in the presence of injustice?

9. Do students show increasing concern for matters of social, economic and civic importance? Are they spending money wisely and becoming more skillful in doing some type of useful work?

10. To what extent are students interested in becoming intelligent producers and consumers of their natural environment?

11. Are youngsters growing in understanding their strengths and weaknesses -- their capabilities and aptitudes?

12. Are they manifesting increased skill in accepting and weighing opinions?

13. To what extent are young people learning to use the tools of learning in out-of-school experiences, e.g. reading, observing, speaking, and listening?

It is recognized that the problem of evaluating services of the school library as outlined here has scarcely penetrated beyond the surface. Attempt has been made to highlight the significant contribution which school library supervision can make in this phase of its work. Because of the difficulties inherent in its qualitative nature, it challenges school library supervision as does no other responsibility to provide skill in defining goals, in interpreting the service to school administrators, in establishing standards, in devising methods and techniques of evaluation, and in collecting evidence of achievement in order that classroom instruction is improved, and that the needs of youth are met.

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