

Chapter V

BUILDING LIBRARY COLLECTIONS: PRINTED MATERIALS

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The selection of printed materials is one of the most important tasks of a school librarian. It involves many factors - endeavoring to serve and satisfy the needs of many kinds of people, including the administration, the faculty and pupils as well as considering the type of school, the community in which it is located and the methods of teaching within the school. It is a steady process and should be shared by principal, faculty and pupils, for cooperation and interest is essential in planning a serviceable library. If there is a Library Supervisor in the city school system or within the county or state the librarian will have additional means of advice and council.

In presenting this subject of selection no effort will be made to discuss the fundamental principles of book selection but rather to consider some of the problems and policies.

The first problem is "Who selects the Printed Materials"? Is there a city wide or a state wide policy of selection? Should the Supervisor be responsible for the selection? What authority does a supervisor have in a specific school system?

In some cities the individual librarian may be responsible for the final recommendations after having received recommendations from her faculty. These recommendations may then be checked by the supervisor and after approval, ordered. Another policy which is followed is for a group of school librarians in a school system to be responsible for the selection. In this case the Board of Education delegates certain members of the group and gives them the authority to select the materials for the library. A recommended list is then sent to all the schools and the librarians choose materials from the list. Some states send out recommended lists from which selections may be made, while other states merely recommend aids from which selections are acceptable.

In some states the Superintendent of County Schools may make the selection from the state lists and distribute the materials to the county schools or perhaps there is a librarian to distribute them from the central office. These are a few of the variety of practices of selection and it is earnestly hoped that there is a state, county or city supervisor of libraries at hand to help plan and advise. The St. Louis school system has a rather liberal policy in the High Schools where the trained librarians are responsible for selections from recommendations received, as well as material they feel necessary to serve the needs of the school. These recommendations are approved by the

principal and then sent to the Supervisor for final check and approval and then for the final approval of the Superintendent of Instruction. In the Elementary schools there is an "Approved List" from which purchases may be made.

Careful book reviewing should be a part of the routine of selection. The librarian may not be able to review all material personally, but she may rely on reviews by committees and other authoritative review sources in final judgment. It is well to use the knowledge of specialists in the various subject fields for opinions as to authenticity, accuracy and importance of subject materials. A monthly meeting of the librarians is also an opportune time to discuss materials about which there may be question or new publications. It is at such meetings that the Supervisor may acquaint the group with plans and recommendations made by Supervisors in the Subject Areas.

Since not all school systems can yet boast of trained librarians in elementary schools it is essential that some guidance is given to the schools in selection of elementary materials. The Supervisor may assist by suggesting aids for selection or by having a committee of teachers review materials. In St. Louis again a committee of teachers - six in number - is appointed. It is a rotating committee, each member serving three years. The Supervisor is chairman of the committee and it is the purpose of this committee to review materials suitable for the elementary school libraries. It meets with the Supervisor once each month throughout the school year recommending materials to be purchased and to be included on the "Approved List of Library Books and Magazines for Elementary Schools." Some materials included on the list though not purchased are recommended so that schools wishing to add to their library collections from their own funds may do so, but the selection must be made from this approved list.

The second problem is the Library Budget. Who determines the budget needs? What part does the Supervisor have in the decision?

Fortunately, Accrediting Associations, State Standards and the American Library Association have helped to bring about more satisfactory decisions concerning library funds in schools. Where there are state requirements, state funds may be designated and allocated for library materials. However, in some states the fund may cover several items such as "educational materials, libraries and audio-visual aids." This type of allocation is in danger of an unequal distribution, often at the expense of the library. In such cases the State Supervisor needs to be alert to such conditions and use every effort to become a member of the committee which directs distribution of such funds.

In large city systems funds may be allocated in various ways. Funds may be received from the state and these may be augmented by local funds or the school system may depend on local funds alone. Allowance for expenditures is usually designated at so much per pupil for both secondary and elementary schools, but this allowance varies in school systems throughout the country depending on whether or not the school belongs to an Accrediting Association and if so, which one, or if the state has any particular standard or requirements for school libraries.

Evaluation can also prove a boon to school libraries, as it did in St. Louis, for it was only after an official evaluation that the amount of expenditure per pupil was doubled, even though previous recommendations for increases had been made by the Supervisor. Incidentally, in the matter of budget planning it is desirable that the Supervisor be a member of the budget committee or at least be consulted as to the possible needs of the library.

Having made a decision as to the plan of selection, and presuming that adequate funds are available, the final problem of selection is the collection itself. What materials should be included? Should there be a basic collection regardless of the size of the school? Is the curriculum more important than the size of the school? Should there be a standard basic collection prescribed for all schools.

A basic collection is needed for any school library no matter what size of the school may be, but there can be no one prescribed collection for no one basic list can satisfy the demands of all types of schools. This basic collection should include essential general reference material, materials which will implement and enrich the curriculum, and material that will provide for wider interests of children. Because the school is a working laboratory and materials center there is need for great variety of printed material, both fiction and non-fiction. The collection should be a well-balanced one of quality rather than quantity, for although the size of the school may influence the size of the collection, the usefulness and kinds of materials are more important than numbers. Duplication of titles varies in different schools but it would seem that a number of titles provided they met the criteria would be preferable to multiple copies of one or two titles on a subject. Some school systems stipulate the number of copies which may be purchased. In St. Louis five copies of any one title is the general rule while in Pittsburgh the number in the high school libraries is arbitrarily set at six. This sort of ruling is a safeguard against using multiple library copies as unauthorized textbooks in classrooms.

Since modern education has recognized that there are differences in achievement, abilities and interests in individuals, the library must also recognize these facts and provide books and materials for the slow reader and the slow learner, for the reluctant reader and the avid reader. Books

with higher interest level and lower reading level must be furnished to the boy or girl who is perhaps in upper grade or even high school but who cannot read beyond fourth or fifth grade. For the reluctant reader materials must be found to stimulate and arouse interest, whether through hobbies, sports, adventure or handicraft. For the dreamer, the young scientist, and the Jonahs who literally swallow anything in print, there must be material to broaden their horizons, build character, and promote growth and development.

Frequent visits to the classrooms will enlighten the Supervisor as to the needs of the teachers and the interests of the pupils. Remote contacts from the office desk are never as effective as personal visitation. If there is a librarian in the school the Supervisor can in turn advise and guide her more intelligently because she, the Supervisor, is familiar with school situations. If there is no librarian, then the Supervisor is better equipped to plan for the school.

In summing up, the responsibility of the Supervisor in the selection of printed materials resolves itself into a three-fold role:

1. The Supervisor is advisor and consultant.
2. The Supervisor is a coordinator between subject area supervisors and librarian.
3. The Supervisor is a liaison officer between the librarian and the administration in helping to plan the budget and determine policies for school libraries.