

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN THE CHANGING METROPOLITAN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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Change has become a constant, and the acceptance of this factor in all areas of our living has had the effect of continually challenging the assumptions that guide our personal and public relationships, and our productivity. That there are some important challenges to the assumptions on which school library service operates is the basis of my discussion today.

The setting is the school—the school which Dr. Hansen has discussed.

When School Libraries Today and Tomorrow was formulated in 1945 to provide standards for the development of post-war school library service, the first objective outlined for the school library was to serve the school in the accomplishment of its educational purposes. That objective continues to be the focus of planning for library service in the school, and is reflected in the judicious planning of this program. The definitions of the school library could be made only in the light of such an interpretation of the problems of the metropolitan school as Dr. Hansen has provided. The immediate environment of the school library is the school; and to the extent that that environment is modified and changed by demographic and sociological factors, as well as by evolutionary innovations in educational goals and methods, the school library is challenged to re-evaluate traditional modes of organization and avenues of service. The school librarian shares with every school staff member the responsibility for meeting the needs of increasing and shifting populations that change the socio-economic character and the educational commitment of a community, and at the same time he shares a part of the responsibility of every librarian to the continuing intellectual life of man and the records of his culture.

A key statistic to the examination of any phase of the school program today is pointed out on the first page of a book edited by Passow, Education in Depressed Areas: "almost one of every six elementary and secondary school children now attends a public school in one of the sixteen largest American cities."¹ A survey of public school library statistics for 1962-63 was made by Dr. Richard L. Darling, then School Library Specialist in the Library Services Branch, and in

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his report he throws some light on the access to libraries of this one-sixth of U.S. school children. He compares the statistics for a group of twenty-one public school systems of cities with 500,000 or more population with the total survey sample of school systems in cities of 25,000 and above and finds that approximately the same percentage of schools in both groups reported the existence of centralized libraries, (71 percent) but that there were these important differences: fewer books per pupil in the large city schools (four), lower per pupil book expenditures, (\$1.01 for elementary and \$1.60 for secondary), and fewer school librarians for the number of pupils to be served, (1 to 1684 pupils).²

This profile of the library service in our large city systems, sketched against the figures of the national standards for school libraries as published in Standards for School Library Programs, (Chicago, ALA, 1960)³ which recommend for a good school library program at least ten books per pupil, a per pupil expenditure of from four to six dollars, and a librarian for each three hundred students up to nine hundred ninety-nine, with one for each four hundred above that figure, will provide a frame of reference for a discussion of school libraries in the large cities of metropolitan areas.

Modifications in the school environment that are challenging school librarians have resulted from changes in educational goals, changes in the content and structure of the curriculum, and in the organization of the school. Basically, these changes are not peculiar to the school of the metropolitan area, but it is in these areas that we find both extremes of quality levels of schools. Stimulating innovations and experimental programs are to be found in the school systems of a few large cities, and more often of the wealthy, stable, and long-established suburban communities with a high per-pupil investment in education that can support well-developed administrative organizations, sophisticated research staffs, centers of higher education with reservoirs of consultant help, and a rich environment for learning that includes well-housed, adequately stocked and staffed school libraries. Such educational programs may be contrasted with the newly established, bedroom suburban community with new families in small homes or rented semi-detached dwellings where inadequate tax dollars cannot keep pace with the basic community needs, let alone provide more than minimum space for classrooms. In such communities, as well as in more seriously deprived areas of urban sprawl and in deteriorating inner city cores, libraries are likely to be non-existent in the elementary schools, and sub-marginal in the secondary schools. Because of the inequalities of tax-based support, we may find these extremes within the same area, often in adjacent school districts.

Because of the extremes in the quality levels to be found in the schools of the metropolitan areas, it is difficult to generalize about

library provisions in the schools, but there are some common denominators to be found in the issues that are challenging librarians as a result of the changing school—its goals, its organization for teaching, and its curriculum content. A number of these are assumptions related to the educational specifications of the school library program.

An assumption that is under particularly strong challenge today is that the role of the librarian is a passive one: he is a specialist on materials; he organizes these materials; he supplies them together with consultant help on request; and he gives as much reading guidance as possible. The challenge to this assumed role comes from any faculty that organizes into teaching teams, or that initiates a program with some degree of self-directed, independent study. The planning of materials collections to meet new curriculum areas—foreign languages in the elementary school; Chinese and Russian, History of the Far East, the Middle East, in the secondary school—demand a high degree of subject area specialization on the part of librarians; and the planning of facilities and schedules that will make it possible for the projected independent study to become a reality demand imagination, flexibility, and leadership on the part of the librarian. Librarians must be prepared to translate every new organizational innovation into its implications for library needs, to evaluate it critically in terms of its educational value, not for its immediate effect on yesterday's schedule and unfinished business. This exercise should be done at the initiation of new programs, such as institution of televised instruction, reorganization of curriculum content, and unscheduled programming. With good administrative planning the librarian will be a part of the planning team, but he must be ready to provide more than passive support. He must anticipate needs. Teaching materials should be on hand before requested if the librarian is fulfilling his role in today's school.

A second assumption that is under active challenge in the changing schools of the metropolitan areas is that the centralized library provides the highest degree of access to library resources for the school population.

The limitations to using the library created by the mere number of linear feet, quarter-miles of corridors, and flights of stairs that separate a student at the opposite end of a large suburban school campus from the library raise the question of a pattern of decentralization that will preserve the strengths of the centralized library system while making the actual flow of books from shelves to classrooms and resource centers more effective. Experience has demonstrated that the most effective method of providing access to the greatest range of learning materials, and to an efficient organization of resources is through a centralized library in every school. New and interesting innovations in school design are attempting to make possible a greater degree of individualized teaching for all children by

breaking-up the very large metropolitan area schools into "houses", or schools-within-schools. Dr. Karl R. Plath of Columbia University reported eighty-three schools using this plan over a year ago.⁴ The plans for the Evanston Township High School, as announced in the Chicago Sun-Times of October 21, 1965, call for a school to enroll approximately 6,000 children by 1967, in four schools on one campus.⁵ These schools will not be structured by grade or ability levels, or by special curricula, but will be each a cross-section of the four high school years. This plan presents dramatically the problem faced by school librarians in many schools, not necessarily only those moving into new buildings, who are asked to find ways to make library materials more accessible to teachers and students. The development of resource centers, "house" libraries, that will provide for both general study needs and individual interest reading, listening, and viewing is essential. Such collections will not replace the main library of the school which will serve as the administrative center as well as the source of special reference help and the consultant help for faculty and students that goes beyond the first levels of inquiry, but they will serve as "branch libraries", and will put library materials where students are.

The problems of decentralization came to the fore as soon as secondary schools began to implement, tentatively, some of the recommendations of the report of the Commission on the Experimental Study of the Utilization of the Staff in the Secondary School.⁶ Study and resource centers associated with laboratories and subject areas where students could engage in independent study and search were an important aspect of the physical facilities to implement the kind of learning environment described in this report. The problems of providing the guidance of professional staff in these subsidiary library collections in order to help students and teachers make effective use of the materials, and of providing the duplication of books, encyclopedias, filmstrips, recordings, periodicals, etc., that are needed to make such collections useful, are not to be minimized; but these are primarily budget problems that can be met if the total school commitment is toward providing a quality education.

I am not certain that librarians realize to what degree an assumption long held, that the library should not be a study hall, is limiting the development of programs that will place an increased emphasis on independent study and self-directed inquiry. A learning environment which provides for problem solving, seeking-out sources of information, developing problems, collecting data, and coming to defensible conclusions must have a learning center accessible on a flexible pattern of scheduling that will allow for groups of different sizes, at different times, to use all types of resource materials, including textbooks. One of the greatest points of failure in many secondary school libraries is the lack of provision for the independent

study that we have accepted to a large degree as the most effective way of learning. Fully equipped centers for learning are essential in the modern school; is not the center for learning the library?

A third, rather vague assumption, largely because it is not usually verbalized thus, is that the librarian has all he can do to try to meet the needs of the reading-oriented students, and that the others must first learn to read. The operation of programs based on this unformulated assumption has brought to the profession a most serious challenge.

Ideally, our educational system is providing an equal opportunity for every child to develop to the limit of his potential. We have become increasingly aware in the past decade that there are many children (some reports say one-third of the population of our fourteen largest cities) who are disadvantaged by slum environment, low economic status and opportunity, lack of educational background of parents and by prejudicial treatment. These children, if they are to share equally in the economic and cultural benefits of our collective productivity, must have some compensatory attention and help in school. They are not a new group in our schools, but whereas they were dispersed before, now they have become identifiable as a mass within the large cities because of population shifts and migration of the poorest members of the population to the deteriorating core of the cities. A great many programs, involving a considerable array of professional talent and time, and much money, have been inaugurated to serve this need. From some of them a great deal has been learned, and one of the most commonly recurring references in reports of special programs of compensatory education in schools is to the need for greater access to libraries for the children who are trying to improve reading and study skills. These references provide important clues to what the role of the school library could be in programs of compensatory education. Examples are to be found in An Adventure in Human Relations by Dr. Muriel Crosby, in which she summarizes the experiences of the Wilmington, Delaware, schools in a Three Year Experimental Project on Schools in Changing Neighborhoods. She recommends that "a full-time library teacher is needed to supplement the efforts of the classroom teachers."⁷

In order to gather some evidence concerning the activities of the school libraries in elementary school programs of compensatory education, Miss Delores Vaughan, a graduate student at the University of Chicago,⁸ conducted a questionnaire survey of the thirty-six U.S. cities which were identified as providing compensatory education programs at the elementary level by the Educational Research Services of the NEA. Replies were received from seventeen school systems; nine reported having no elementary librarians and/or no central libraries in their elementary schools. Librarians were asked to indicate the range of services provided, including opportunities for

regular class visits, individual and small group visits, instruction in library use, storytelling by adults, book talks by adults, storytelling by children, individual reading conferences, provision of individual reading lists, tutoring of individuals and small groups. The majority of these activities are the traditional facets of any good school library program, and yet only one of the thirty-seven librarians returning a questionnaire indicated that all of these services were provided. The single most important factor in the richness of the program was the presence of a fulltime professional librarian. Among the thirty-seven, only one reported evening hours of service—in a school of 1100 students, with two professional librarians and two clerks. A total of eight schools reported that the library was open one or two hours before and/or after school.

The thirty-seven librarians participating in special programs for the culturally disadvantaged children, were asked to identify the types of service then believed to be most beneficial to the education and personal development of these children. One librarian had the useful idea that the library should be made attractive and available to groups in the community for various activities. The sponsorship of reading programs independently or in cooperation with the public library was mentioned by several librarians, apparently with the objective of encouraging those who are interested and capable of extra work. Creative dramatics, roundtable book discussions on radio, and creative writing were other activities mentioned. It is rather obvious that the thinking of too many of our profession is still oriented to traditional library procedures and the involvement of the reading-oriented child.

A depressing preoccupation with failure to meet present library standards was evident in the replies to a question in which librarians were asked what they would like to add to their facilities and programs if time and budget were no consideration—to “wish for the moon.” Most wishes were in the dimensions of felt inadequacies. Thirteen would introduce, or add to, audiovisual facilities; eight would like more individualized service, with facilities for independent use by children; six generalized more of everything; four would extend services beyond the present hours. Only six mentioned more personnel, a need that should be of first priority if more intensive work with individuals—children, teachers and parents—is the indispensable ingredient of service to children with special needs.

Let me continue to quote from Miss Vaughan's unpublished paper, to use the framework of her summary of what library programs in the elementary school ought to provide (for all children), especially in those schools where special planning has been instituted for the children of limited background. To provide an enriched learning environment, the library should have space for individual and group activities, with areas divided according to function—a storytelling

corner, reference area, individual study carrels, corners for quiet reading, space for listening and viewing film and telecast. Developing independence in learning requires opportunity for students to make independent use as well as directed use of materials, opportunity to come to the library to browse, to talk with the librarians until they feel at home to such an extent that they can ask for special help, to take as long as they need to find an appealing book. Extended hours during the school day and through the school year are essential.

There should be materials that reflect a multi-cultural society, that will help children to become aware of opportunities to select among many cultural opportunities, and through several media—folk songs, tales, literature of many peoples, reproductions of art, recordings, etc. Every child should find something he can read, something worth reading; and he should find graphic representations, three-dimensional objects, films (the 8 mm film is the most promising development because of its compact size and ease of operation), tapes, all of the rich variety of audiovisual media that would make possible the exercise of a variety of learning styles. There should be an intensified program of storytelling to give children experiences with literature, to set the stage for language development, growth in listening ability, and the stimulation of creative imagination.

This learning environment is no more than the definition of what a good school library ought to provide in every school; some of the needs have been underscored by past failures to provide for them. They have now become critical lacks. And the most critical lack of all is that of professional librarians to provide the continuous guidance in use of library materials from kindergarten on, to give unhurried personal assistance in preparing assignments, to devote the necessary time to the evaluation and selection of materials that will meet the interests and needs of students and teachers, to work closely with teachers, individually or as teams, to serve as the specialists in materials that librarians are prepared to be.

In a number of large cities, librarians have had dramatic and spontaneous demonstrations of the services that are desperately needed. After-school study centers have been organized by concerned citizens—parents, social workers, church leaders, college students, and others. They are providing, invariably, space for study during after-school hours, reference books, help with school assignments, special tutoring in reading. In addition, many are providing lending library services, storytelling and club groups, special student counseling help, trips to local museums, parks, industries, and places of interest—including public libraries. Libraries serving children have perhaps never had a more direct challenge; why were we not anticipating the vastly increased needs that are the basis for volunteer programs? It is an indictment of librarians that they have not engaged in continuous assessment of community needs, and have not exercised

active leadership in their institutions that would insure an opportunity to bring vision, imagination, and authoritative assessment of future developments to long-range planning. Many factors may be operating in the study-center situations, but there is no more pressing problem demanding our professional study. What stumbling blocks have we unwittingly put in the way of reluctant readers, lacking in confidence and curiosity? Is it only hours of service, is it a multitude of rules that may have questionable relationship to objectives, are our attentions absorbed by the most eager learners at the expense of the unskilled, is it lack of personnel, and, if so, have we exerted our leadership to demonstrate what the needs are, and how to meet them? All questions surrounding this important social development in the educational life of our metropolitan centers will demand careful deliberation, but they demand that attention now.

Whether our attention is drawn to one end of the quality scale of library service in the outstanding programs of certain of our wealthier suburban communities or to the other extreme of poverty-ridden inner city slum schools, there is one fact that seems to be abundantly clear—that access to knowledge and ideas, as represented by libraries, and aid in the interpretation of those resources, are common goals which the community as a whole shares with the school as a part of the community. There is an interrelationship between institutions, specifically between libraries, that is the basis of our evolving concept of continuing education. That this is true from a functional standpoint has been well demonstrated to us by the recent so-called “student invasion” of public and academic libraries. Students looking for materials to satisfy assigned inquiries or personal quests, with money in their pockets, given today’s access to public and private transportation are on the move; and in metropolitan areas that offer a tempting array of library resources, such as Chicago, for example, where a student can conceivably start with the Northwestern University libraries at the north, work his way down the lakefront with only a slight detour to the Chicago Public Library’s main library, to John Crerar farther south, and to the University of Chicago twenty blocks farther, not to mention all of the special business, professional and industrial libraries, e.g. the Municipal Reference Library, on the way. Secondary school students have tried to do just this in the past, in such numbers that restrictions had to be established. There would seem to be reason, however, to assess our access to library resources on a full community basis rather than school by school and town library by town library, and to take steps in our planning to open the paths of communication so that the inequalities of community tax support and citizen commitment cannot be allowed to curtail the access of students to the total resources of a community. Such a goal could be accomplished through regional resource centers, through a network of communications that would provide requested searching,

telephonic and televised bibliographic service, and print-out copying of materials, and consultant service that would not be available or necessary in every individual library.

Finally, the "lighted school" of community planners should include a "lighted library," open for as many hours outside the regular school schedule as community needs dictate, including summer school and vacation times. There should be available library service to night school and adult education classes, as well as to other community activities that use the school as a program center.

But, if there are challenges, there are also new resources coming to light—in both personnel and leadership. The most encouraging and hopeful evidence of library improvement in the metropolitan areas is in the increase in the number of county, district and school system supervisors. Data to support the importance of this trend is to be found in a report by Professor Mary V. Gaver of the Graduate School of Library Service at Rutgers, The State University, New Jersey. This report was made as an appraisal of the 159 school systems that have participated in the past two years' competitions for the Encyclopedia Britannica School Library Awards Program to recognize outstanding progress in the development of elementary school libraries. "Of the nineteen systems winning finalist place in the first two years in which awards have been made . . . fourteen have district school library supervisors. Underscoring the importance of this provision is the fact that 63 of the 139 nonfinalists also have a person employed with system-wide responsibility for all school libraries or for elementary school libraries alone. A survey of the dates of appointment of these supervisors indicates real accelerations since 1958."⁹

The appointment of system-wide supervisors, in elementary school districts often as the first step in library development, has made possible the long-range planning for sound book selection policies, consultant help for administrators and supervisory personnel and teachers, step-by-step growth of libraries in each school, system-wide purchasing and processing, and maximum access to resources. With accelerated consolidation of small school districts or the emergence of other types of system organization, an increase in centralized planning and coordination of system-wide development by this pattern of organization can be anticipated. The presence of a corps of experienced library supervisors in a state can be expected to raise the quality of service to a high level, with judicious planning for the improvement of library holdings and facilities, and the training of personnel with funds from the recent Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the National Defense Education Act.

It is much too early to make any kind of prediction concerning the impact upon the level of school library service of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965: Title I, with funds for

assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with concentration of children from low-income families, would seem to have great educational potential for the central city areas, among others. Discussions of the possibilities have pointed out that needs such as instructional materials, tutoring programs, evening hours of library service for study facilities and pre-school programs, may be identified as priorities in many areas, and these have immediate implications for school libraries. Title II provides the important opportunity to improve school library collections—print and non-print materials—through the authorization of grants for the acquisition of school library resources, textbooks, and other printed and published instructional materials for the use of children and teachers in public and private elementary and secondary schools. It is in Title III that the vision and professional skill of librarians will be measured, with an opportunity to share in the designing of educational activities and services which are supplementary to existing programs of instruction. Demonstration schools with libraries that are effective learning centers; regional resources centers that provide not only the wide range of instructional materials, including all of the books that would make a school library a true arm of teaching, but also the services of professional personnel to interpret the content and effective use of all materials; regional reference centers with all modern communication technology to put them at the service of all schools in the area—these may be upon many drawing boards, together with other plans to raise dramatically the quality level of education.

Another source of Federal help for the improvement of school libraries is available under the expansion of Title III in the National Defense Education Act as amended by the 88th Congress. This act now provides financial help for improving and strengthening programs in science, mathematics, modern foreign languages, and other critical subjects—history, civics, geography, English and reading. Audio-visual materials and equipment, printed and published materials other than textbooks may be acquired, and the specialized equipment of audiovisual libraries (which may be a part of the school library), instructional materials centers or curriculum centers may be included.

The key to the effective design of new patterns of library programs to meet the specifications of the changing school is the librarian. For his preparation to perform this important role, the library profession and particularly the library educator must take the responsibility.

As in many other specializations in librarianship, school librarians are in desperately short supply. For a considerable time in the future I am certain that we will be welcoming librarians who have had a well-designed library science minor in their undergraduate training. At the same, however, we shall, I hope, be investing a great deal of our time and effort in continuing education, and in

in-service programs that will provide nourishment for leadership qualities and flexibility of approach to professional decisions. I cannot help but think that undergraduate programs which present the general principles of librarianship, rather than being adapted to serve one specialization, will set the stage for stronger professional leadership and provide more personal resources with which to plan with wisdom for long range development in the face of change. An essential ingredient of the professional training of school librarians continues to be a sound general education and the preparation of a good teacher. Increasingly, for teachers and teacher-librarians—and I use that term in the best sense of a librarian who is performing a teaching role in every point of contact with teachers and students—the school is seeking people who are able scholars, with a field of specialization, as able teachers. We are seeking no less in recruiting school librarians.

The changing environment within the school will continue to challenge the assumptions on which school librarians make decisions and execute plans. Environments without the school are no less a dimension of the program; the librarian joins other educators, including other librarians, in reacting to an awakened sense of responsibility to make that environment a nourishing one for all children.

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