PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign Library
School Library Supervision: Practical Problems and Answers

by Eleanora Alexander
Supervisor of Library Service
Houston, Texas, Public Schools

This is the story of how a program of library service grew because of the vision of a group of school people who saw how important it is to bring good books and boys and girls closer together. Inasmuch as each program for the development of library service must be geared to the given situation and planned in terms of the people directly concerned, this account will not provide a perfect pattern which can be followed. On the other hand, it may suggest some ideas worthy of consideration and most assuredly, some pitfalls to avoid.

The Houston Board of Education decided in 1949 to create a department of library services. At that time in Houston, the secondary school libraries were well developed. Each junior and senior high school, except for two combination elementary-junior schools, had its own library staffed with a qualified librarian, and was provided with a budget even though it was inadequate. On the other hand, only nineteen of the 109 elementary schools had libraries. Most of these had been created during the Works Project Administration days and until 1950 were entirely dependent upon funds raised by parent groups.

All the elementary schools, however, had, as they still do, access to two central libraries, one serving the white schools and the other the Negro schools. These central libraries primarily furnished sets of supplementary readers for classroom use in teaching basic reading skills. A few geography textbooks and an even smaller number of books for enriching the curriculum, for developing appreciations, and for widening the reading backgrounds of boys and girls were also available, along with a minimum number of such teaching aids as flash cards, puzzles, and recordings. The collections in these two central libraries, as a whole, were entirely inadequate for an enriched educational program.
The new department of library services was to be responsible for promoting libraries at all levels but it was apparent that the greatest need was in the elementary schools. The elementary teachers and administrators in recognizing, studying, and defining this need had been instrumental in bringing about Board of Education action to create the department. Aware that a good program for the teaching of reading skills had been developed in Houston, they realized that it was hampered by the lack of a wide variety of materials in sufficient quantity. In order to become truly proficient in reading, the staff thought boys and girls should have available to them even more books than the basal textbooks already plentifully supplied, books varying in levels of reading difficulty, and appealing to interests in many subject fields. This called for extended library service.

The staff agreed that through broad reading boys and girls will develop the ability to think objectively and critically; that they will develop an appreciation for their heritage and a love of their country; that their aesthetic and cultural abilities and experiences can be extended and enriched, and that their ability and desire to be good citizens at home, at school, and in their community can be strengthened. At the same time opportunity for simple research on topics covered in science, social science, music, art, and literature was recognized as an essential part of a reading program.

Such a viewpoint on reading requires that pupils have access to a wide variety of reading materials, well organized for effective use, housed in pleasant suitable surroundings, and administered in such a way as to assist teachers and principals in their work of guiding the growth and development of boys and girls. In other words, this elementary staff, with Board of Education approval, set out to give each of the 109 elementary schools a library. The goal was to make sure that, from the kindergarten through grade twelve, there would be a variety of instructional materials from which pupils and teachers could select the most appropriate for a particular learning situation. The initial step was taken when a person with teaching and library qualifications was employed as supervisor to organize and develop the program.

The new supervisor immediately sought to implement this goal with a plan of action. During the first weeks a way was mapped out to set up ten libraries each year until every elementary school should have its own library. Although the program was planned exactingly, in practice it was totally unrealistic. There was an immediate outcry for benefits of the budget. Which schools would be the first ten? And which would have to wait until next year? How could that first so little be spread so far?

Every school is as individual as the boys and girls and the principal and teachers within it. Differences in size of school, in space for a library, in materials already on hand and the present stage of library development in each school—all had to be taken into consideration. In addition to these, the supervisor had to face the problems of the way in which the principal and his teachers regarded library service, plus the equitable distribution of a meager budget.
As the establishment of libraries in the elementary schools got underway, some thought was given to dissolving the two central libraries previously described. However, this was dropped as it was soon realized that it would not be financially sound to set up a library in schools with less than six teachers. Furthermore, the rapid increase in school population left many larger schools without a room that could be converted into a library. Consequently, the two centers will continue indefinitely to furnish changeable classroom collections to small schools and schools that have no space available for a library.

In fact, the services provided by these centers are valuable to all elementary schools. Contrary to what was expected, the establishment of libraries in the schools has increased rather than decreased the number of loans from the centers, because more readers are developing and there is need for more material. For example, this year over 125,000 books circulated from the centers alone and the number would have been larger had more books been available. This distribution was made from a two-room shack on the grounds of a centrally located school and from a renovated, once abandoned school building.

Although some teachers prefer to visit the centers to select their own materials, most requests are made by telephone. To meet demand, two deliveries per week are now made to each school. While this service in no way takes the place of a library in the school, it allows for frequent change in classroom materials as new subjects are introduced and as new interests are developed.

Within the four year period being reviewed, these centers have expanded their services so that distributing materials is not their only purpose. Processing books for the school libraries that have been established has become an important new function. The staff for the centers has increased. The center serving the eighty-eight white schools has a qualified librarian, a part-time secretary and a maid who does double duty in taking care of the building and in the packing of books for delivery to the schools. The character of the collection in these centers has changed, too. More books have been added to enrich the curriculum and to meet the interests and needs of boys and girls.

The first year or two, every school thought, and rightfully so, that it should have a share in the library budget, even though it did not have space for a library. Consequently, part of the budget is now allocated to each school on a per capita basis and part is retained for the centers. Although the per-pupil expenditure is about one-fourth of the two dollar standard set by accreditation and library associations, the schools are gradually acquiring basic collections of essential materials. Now, the funds supplied by the Board of Education are supplemented by Parent-Teachers' Association. Each school is encouraged to house the books which its budget appropriation provides in a place where the entire collection will be available to all its teachers and pupils rather than in individual rooms.
This it may be noted is the policy advocated in the Thirty-first Yearbook of the American Association of School Administrators:

"The argument between advocates of classroom libraries and those favoring central libraries seems to be waning. Efficient utilization of materials decrees the allocation to classrooms of those in daily use and the allocation to central depositories of those materials used irregularly."  

Surely, in a school of some 200 or more pupils, a collection of some 500 books available to all 200 pupils allows for meeting individual differences and for a wider choice in selection and use, than would this same number of books divided into smaller collections in each room.

Schools in Houston have been ingenious in finding a place to house their book collections. The principal of one school attractively arranged the collection in her office where she personally supervises the circulation of books to pupils and teachers. Another school started its collection in the bookroom, but when the space there became crowded, three-foot sections of shelving, purchased from a state school furniture manufacturer for less than forty dollars per section, were set up in the teacher's workroom. Still another found a smaller room for its clinic and converted the clinic into a library which accommodates half a class at a time. In several schools the library books line the walls of the cafetorium--a combination cafeteria and auditorium.

Another problem which the newly elected city school library supervisor had to face was that of becoming acquainted with each school in the Houston area. Realizing at the offset that some time would go by before she could visit each of the 109 elementary and the twenty-five secondary schools, she prepared a bulletin describing the services the Department of Library Services hoped to give. Schools were encouraged to call upon the department for help when it was needed. As soon as the bulletin was issued, requests to visit particular schools were immediately received.

One such request came from a school of some 800 pupils, in which the principal, faculty, and parents had long realized the need for a library and had tried within certain limitations to provide one. The several thousand books accumulated over a period of years were housed in a small room not much larger than a closet, a room that was also used as a teacher's workroom. The shelves towered high, reaching above the heads of adults to say nothing of the children. A P.T.A. library committee, headed by a former children's librarian, had been working for over a year to bring order to the collection which was then arranged somewhat according to units of study within each grade level.

This library committee had also worked out a schedule whereby several sub-committees were responsible for various phases of the library program, one group in charge of circulation, another of processing materials, and still another with keeping the collection in good physical condition. The circulation committee was on duty once a week.
At the time of the supervisor's first visit to the school, the P.T.A. library committee chairman, working with the principal, was trying to devise some way to solve the problem which arose as a result of the teachers not being able to locate books, especially when the committee was off duty. A card catalog had been set up but so far books were only listed by author and title. This problem was temporarily solved by rearranging the books according to accepted library practice and by placing in the card catalog subject reference cards to such particular classifications, as "Africa, see 915 and general travel books marked 910". Sets of printed Wilson catalog cards, wherever available, soon replaced the manuscript ones in the card catalog. These changes, of course, helped with the location of materials, but they did not relieve the crowded condition or limitations on the use of the library by pupils.

Then came the day when the Board of Education decided to enlarge the school as a result of an increase in enrollment. The principal tried her best to have a library included in the rehabilitation of the building, but as yet the Board of Education, in view of the great need for classrooms, was unable to allow for library space in new buildings or additions to the old. However, the board did not discourage the principal. In anticipating the number of needed classrooms, several additions were stipulated to allow for further growth in school membership.

The principal had in mind the possibility of converting one of the existing oversize classrooms, adjoining a teachers' lounge, into a library with library workroom. Consent to remodel this room was finally given as a part of the rehabilitation. With a floor plan designed by one of the parents under the direction of the principal and with the advice of the supervisor, the change was affected.

The room had ample wall space along three sides for regular book shelving. Space below the windows was designed for picture and easy books with shelves partitioned every eight inches. On one side of a short hallway entrance into the library a section for magazines and recordings was built. Converting this room cost approximately $1,250.00; the inexpensive yet sturdy built chairs and tables accommodating forty pupils cost less than $600.00. While it is true that a library furnished with expensive, specially built library furniture is undoubtedly attractive, a very satisfactory one can be attained with regular school furniture. The only absolutely essential item to be purchased from an established library equipment manufacturer is a well-constructed card catalog cabinet. After all, it is the program of a library which counts, not the furniture.

When the collection was in order in the bright, colorful new quarters, the principal undertook to see that the children, teachers, and patrons of the school should not only look upon the library as a pleasant inviting room in which to find a good book to read, but also to know how to use it. Her first step was to meet with the P.T.A. mothers who were to assist the teachers when classes came to use the library. Then she gave each class
some instruction, emphasizing what it meant to have this service and the responsibility which accompanied this privilege. The instruction varied according to the maturity of each group. Nor did she stop with the children and a few patrons. At a P. T. A. meeting during Book Week, through skits put on by the children, other parents also became acquainted with the classification of books and different kinds of library activities. After that program, practically all the parents went into the library to discover for themselves how the Dewey Decimal Classification System worked and to pull open the card catalog to test its value as an index to the books they had provided for the shelves.

Following the orientation period, a daily schedule for the use of the library was set up, with some time left open for other than scheduled visits. The library supervisor and the assistant director of curriculum looked upon the library as providing an ideal setting in which to study the ways in which the library could be used in stimulating children to read books they might overlook otherwise, in meeting individual differences, in broadening and enriching classroom instruction, and in developing desirable study skills. The faculty was willing to cooperate. Since this was the first time they had been able to see the collection as a whole, they wanted to learn what materials were available and in what areas the collection was weak. Therefore, each teacher decided to take a topic her pupils were then studying and have them, with her assistance, discover the wealth of material or lack of it for the selected topic.

The library was a beehive of activity. The card catalog became a familiar tool. Eloise Rue's *Subject Index to Books for the Intermediate Grades* and the *Children's Catalog* were equally popular reference books. Encyclopedias were a spring board into more detailed accounts of some special interest.

One class decided to learn about the Newbery and Caldecott award winners and their works. In addition to reading about the distinguished persons in the *Junior Book of Authors* and other reference books, they wrote the authors and artists or their publishers for pictures and other information which eventually would be placed in the vertical file. The supervisor's collection of book jackets was used by some pupils. A terminating activity was an author-artist tea when each child impersonated one of the award winners about whom he had read.

Some of the library activities and references used by the different classes found their way into curriculum bulletins which the principal and one of the teachers assisted in preparing during this past summer. Included were skills which require a library situation and others which can be developed either in the classroom or in the library.

An encouraging and tangible result of the elementary school library program is reported by the junior high school librarians. They are now noticing that boys and girls entering the seventh grade have developed increasing independence in using library resources and also that they have
richer and broader reading backgrounds. In the light of this change, the junior high school librarians are giving less formal library instruction and are working with teachers in developing activities which provide more numerous opportunities for the use of the library and knowledge of special tools. In the newly revised English bulletin for the junior high schools, one-fifth of the content is devoted to the library as integral part of the work; the social studies and science bulletins follow a similar pattern. These changes, in turn, will demand the development of more purposeful library activities at the senior high school level.

At the end of the first four-year period of organized library service, forty-eight of the now 115 elementary schools have a library program, with minor variations, similar to the school described. Looking into any one of them is always a rewarding experience. To see first graders come in with their teacher to select a book to be read to them; to witness a second grade class enjoying books either in groups or separately; to listen to Mary, with all the poise and self-assurance of an adult, share with her classmates the story of Snipp, Snapp, Snurr and the Red Shoes, stopping long enough to show the illustrations and to read the captions; again, to marvel at the expression on Johnny's face when he was able to prove to his teacher that Roger Duvoisin who drew the pictures for Sun Up had also illustrated White Snow, Bright Snow; to be present when members of the orthopedic class come to find books to fit their special interest; to hear the poem fifth-grade Billy has written after reading a folktale about Pecos Bill; to watch the efficient young person who represents the library on the student council; to witness a look of satisfaction on the teacher's face when Richard, who is labelled a non-reader, became absorbed in Goode's School Atlas—these are just a few of the incidents which are daily occurrences in any one of the forty-eight elementary school libraries.

The elementary school library program in Houston has developed without the employment of trained library personnel except for the supervisor and those assigned to the centers. The success of the program has depended largely upon the P. T. A. library committees to give limited service in organizing the collections, keeping them in good physical condition, and in circulating materials. These library committees have been guided by the supervisor in the individual schools or in workshops which they have helped to organize and direct. At meetings held this month thirty-six new chairman, representing sixteen schools, were present to learn more about their responsibilities. A comparable number attended a mending demonstration.

Since the elementary schools in Houston are organized around a self-contained classroom, it is impossible to consider having teachers serve as librarians on a part-time basis as is possible when a school is departmental or even semi-departmental. One school, however, has a second-grade teacher who spends the last hour of the school day as librarian. Here, as in many schools, each teacher, when she brings her class to the library, is responsible for guiding the pupils in their choice of books, checking out materials and library housekeeping.
Pupils can also be trained to assume this responsibility. On a bulletin board in this library is a neat, well-lettered chart which gives the names of two pupil library helpers for each class. The chart also shows by the days of the week the names of two sixth-grade pupils who have the coveted assignment of reporting to the library at two o'clock to see that it is in readiness for the next day. A special service award is given these helpers.

In several instances, an elementary and a junior high school are housed in the same building. Since a library was already established for the junior department and administered by a qualified librarian, the natural step was to extend service to the elementary department. Now budgets for each department are pooled to provide materials at both levels and the librarian plans with both the elementary and junior high school teachers for purposeful library experiences for the children. Future plans for the extension of elementary library service include the employment of a librarian on a multi-school basis; that is, one librarian will serve several schools, the amount of time apportioned in terms of the size of the schools. A formula which may be considered is one day of service per week for each 100 pupils.

Since 1949, multi-school library service has spread rapidly in Texas. This is due to the fact that the state's Minimum Foundation Program entitles a school to have a librarian or one of four other special service persons—a doctor, a nurse, a visiting teacher, an itinerant teacher—for every twenty teacher units. Schools with fewer than twenty teacher units frequently enter into a cooperative agreement to employ a librarian to administer the libraries in each school involved. It is inevitable, that one day, approval will be given to initiate this service in Houston on a gradual basis as qualified persons can be found. An enriched educational program calls for more extensive use of all kinds of instructional materials, audio and visual as well as printed, and it seems logical that the library will become the materials center for the school; the librarian, a materials specialist.

Another major gain has been the approval of the inclusion of libraries in new buildings. This spring, the school architect was instructed to confer with the library supervisor to plan classroom-size libraries for future elementary buildings. The limitations in size are offset by a combination teacher-library workroom, a visual education storeroom, and an adequate bookroom all adjacent to the library and connected with the principal's office. Thus all instructional materials will be brought together where they can be easily supervised by the principal and his office force, and centrally located in relation to classrooms.

As yet no amount has been stipulated for the initial collection for the libraries in the elementary schools now under construction. The $1,200 to $1,500 generally considered necessary for providing the minimum basic needs for a school of 500 pupils will be requested of the Board of Education. This amount, according to current prices, should cover the purchase of some 500 books including a few basic reference books such as an encyclopedia, a poetry index, a semi-abridged dictionary. Another thousand dollars will be needed for furnishing these classroom size libraries.
The most challenging problem which the school library supervisor constantly faces is that of improving the quality of the library collections. A very satisfactory system has been devised to assist teachers in the selection of materials and to help them know what is available. First, each school is asked to select a teacher-library coordinator to represent the school in matters of book selection. Then every teacher, through the library coordinator, is encouraged to make recommendations, the number being limited to thirty books per school or approximately five books for each grade.

When the recommendations are submitted, a small group of the teacher-library coordinators with equal representation from the kindergarten through the sixth grade meets to review the recommendations and to choose approximately 300 books for examination. The books are chosen on each grade level for different topics covered in the courses of study and in consideration of individual interests. These books, which are secured from the public library or purchased or borrowed from publishers and book stores, are placed on exhibit for an extended period of time. All teachers and interested patrons of the schools are urged to examine the collection and to choose within the limitation of their budget those books which they want purchased for their particular school. This procedure does not prohibit the inclusion of other books, especially those which appear in basic book selection aids and those listed in the various courses of study. The best way to select books is through personal examination and this procedure has proved satisfactory.

The Houston elementary schools, like many others, had their share of out-of-date encyclopedias, out-of-adoption textbooks, too advanced and unattractive trade books as well as books which were used beyond repair. Through constant re-evaluation of existing collections, books of this type are gradually being discarded.

An attempt has been made to broaden the library collections to include other than printed materials. Several schools now have excellent picture files which are the result of teacher cooperation in selecting, mounting, and organizing material. Still other schools have filmstrips and recordings, processed and listed along with books in the card catalog. All of this activity promotes a more adequate library service.

This account has shown the rapid expansion of library service for the Houston elementary schools. Meanwhile development of the secondary school libraries continued apace. Basic principles of library service hold true for any level, and in the last analysis the work in the upper level is a proof of that which has been established at the lower level. There are no new problems in the secondary schools that have not been faced in the elementary schools. Most important however, is the fact that the junior and senior high schools have qualified librarians with good experience. The supervisor's responsibility, therefore, is only to coordinate their efforts for improved service.
As a whole, standards for these secondary school libraries have been raised. Each librarian is now expected to have, in addition to her qualifications as a teacher, thirty hours in library services earned in an accredited school and within a planned program leading toward a degree. Throughout the state, salary allowance is made for a library degree which represents a fifth year of study. Furthermore, a policy has been established wherein a school is entitled to two librarians when the school membership reaches 1,500, provided the use of the library warrants it.

Efforts to broaden the library collections are being made constantly. Increases in the budget have facilitated this along with allowances made by the Department of Audio-Visual Services. A few schools maintain in addition to printed and audio-visual materials, community resources files and teaching devices constructed by teachers. The greatest problem at this secondary level is to make more effective use of the materials. To this end, in curriculum planning, emphasis is being placed on the integrated use of library materials. More and more library instruction is being handled by teachers in the various subject fields. They, with the librarian, plan activities for making use of all resources as a follow-up to classroom instruction. The orientation lessons, however, are still given by the librarian.

Recently, each library has been colorfully redecorated. In most instances, partitions between the library and adjoining classrooms were removed to allow seating space for ten per cent of the school's membership. Workroom areas were included where needed. In the schools constructed in the last several years, the library has been placed in a part of the building where the width can exceed that of an ordinary classroom. For example, at the end of a corridor the width of the library includes the corridor plus two rooms. In several buildings, the entrance extends beyond the main structure and the library occupies the space directly above this part of the building.

The library in the buildings now on the drawing board are on the first floor. This enables the room to be almost as wide as it is long. The library is also accessible both before and after school hours. For the first time, conference rooms are included. The workroom connects with the audio-visual storage room, making the handling of the machines convenient for the librarian should she have this responsibility. Storage space for recordings and filmstrips are built within the main reading room near the place designated for the listening post--a record player with earphones attached.

This growth of library service in the Houston public schools has been based on five guiding principles:

1. Any plan proposed should be made jointly by all school persons directly concerned. Teachers, principals, and others who will be affected by the program should have a part in the planning.
2. Accepted library standards should be used as a guide but not to the extent of complete standardization. Programs should be developed within the framework of these standards, remembering that they may be a step at a time.

3. A qualified person, one with both teaching and library education and experience is essential for putting the program into effect. A librarian, not necessarily one in a supervisory capacity, can give the necessary leadership.

4. Small schools, those of less than six teachers, are more economically served from a library administered by a central depository. There are, however, some basic materials which every school should have regardless of the size.

5. Making the needs known and keeping them constantly before those who can meet the need is an essential function of the person charged with administering the library program.

The ideal is a library in every school, even though that ideal may be long in achievement and even though it is imperative to begin with whatever is at hand.

FOOTNOTES


* * * * * *

Numbers in this series are issued irregularly and no more often than monthly. Single copies of any issue are available free upon request; appropriate institutions wishing to receive a copy of all issues should so indicate in writing. The Occasional Papers will deal with some phase or other of librarianship, and will consist of manuscripts which are too long or too detailed for publication in a library periodical, or are of specialized or temporary interest. The submission of manuscripts for inclusion in this series is invited. Material from these papers may be reprinted or digested without prior consent, but it is requested that a copy of the reprint or digest be sent the editor. All communications should be addressed to Editor, Occasional Papers, University of Illinois Library School, Urbana, Illinois.