Service at the Elementary Level

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The modern school—U.S.A. 1952—is directed to improving opportunities for children in public education. The concepts involved are those of furthering the growth of the whole child, of aiding him to achieve his developmental tasks at the appropriate time, of helping him to meet individual and common needs, of relating learning to life, of practicing democracy as a way of advancement of living, of developing the ability to think creatively and critically and to take action on the basis of valid conclusions, of measuring growth in terms of changed behavior.

The time lag between the development of such educational concepts and applying a curriculum which embodies these concepts is the Achilles' heel in public education today. Libraries as a part of the total educative force help to take up this time lag. The kind of curriculum under consideration cannot be put into effect without the learning tools. It cannot be put into effect without the support of librarians in various phases of library work—those who are concerned with human elements and tools of communication. Most vitally concerned are the librarians in elementary schools, high schools, teachers' colleges, demonstration schools, and public libraries, instructors in library science and education, and supervisors on state, county, and city levels.

The shift in educational philosophy from a subject-centered school to a child-centered school, greatly influenced by the works of John Dewey, has taken place gradually. It has been pointed out too that "in the changes that have taken place in the philosophy, or the science, or the practice of teaching and managing schools in the United States, the National Education Association has had considerable influence." It is interesting, therefore, to go back to the early Addresses and Proceedings of this association to determine what place libraries have had.

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in the programs. The work of the public library has quite frequently received mention. It was just before the turn of the century that children’s rooms began to appear in public libraries, and shortly after that, special service was being given to the schools. At the Detroit meeting of the National Education Association in 1901, Irene Warren pointed out that public libraries were rendering a fine service to the schools and that this year the American Library Association had held the first meeting of a section formed for the purpose of studying the child’s needs. To make the work of the library more effective, she urged that every normal school, and school having to do with the training of teachers, offer courses in the use of books and libraries. Several training schools at that time were “giving courses to the pedagogic classes with the aim of presenting enough of the principles of library economy to enable students to organize and administer the average school library, use books and libraries more economically, and more intelligently advise the children as to their reading.”

The training school at Geneseo, New York, established a library for the elementary and grammar grades in 1917. Since normal schools tended to set up standards for public schools, one might have expected to find central libraries in the demonstration schools of all teacher-training institutions, but educators have been divided in their opinion as to this need. By 1927 very little development had taken place. In 1930 Elsie H. Pine of State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas, sent out questionnaires on libraries in laboratory schools. Of the thirty-one replies received, only sixteen indicated libraries which would approximate standards published by the American Library Association in 1925. Teachers colleges are in the strategic position of being able to give teachers actual practice in the use of materials as they learn to work with children, but to date there are few statistics available to indicate how much is being done.

State laws permitting school districts to spend part of their funds for books had little influence on any general movement for establishing elementary school libraries. Beust has said: “As early as 1876 nineteen states had laws of some kind designed to promote the development of public-school libraries. While successful in some areas, the movement was generally considered a disappointment.”

Educators did not recognize the need for elementary libraries until 1918, when there was growing dissatisfaction with classroom teaching which consisted of transmitting knowledge that the teachers themselves had acquired in school or knowledge which they could easily
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find in textbooks. Since new ideas and discoveries were not quickly incorporated into textbooks, schools did not keep abreast with the times. As a result the National Society for the Study of Education appointed the Committee on Materials of Education, whose aim it was to produce new learning tools on a broad scale. The committee collected materials which had been developed and used by the more enterprising teachers and published them as Part I of the nineteenth yearbook of the society.7

Why were elementary libraries not then established to solve this problem of furnishing materials? Perhaps it was because educators were concerned with informational matter, and the library was regarded primarily as a source of recreational reading; or because trade books in the children's field had not been developed sufficiently to meet the need. Libraries did, however, appear in a few progressive schools. Classrooms were being converted into libraries, and in over-crowded situations halls, corners of study rooms, and principals' offices were being utilized. In her address at the National Education Association meeting in 1921, Zachert described the collections in elementary schools as small, inadequately chosen, and in some cases consisting of gifts from people of the community, donations from publishers, and old sets of encyclopedias. Freedom in the use of materials was not a general practice, for books were sometimes found housed in locked bookcases or on the teacher's desk in the classroom, where they could be supervised.8

The program, then, has been exceedingly slow in unfolding. We may set forth such reasons as hesitancy in acceptance of a new philosophy, failure of teachers and librarians to merge their ideas, overtaxing demands on the teacher's time, shortage of trained librarians, lack of financial support, over-crowded conditions in schools, lack of understanding, and inability to plan a library program. Leadership in the national associations of librarians and educators seemingly was not strong enough to overcome the barriers. In 1896 the establishment of a Library Department within the National Education Association was approved, and in that same year the American Library Association appointed a committee to cooperate with the library department of the National Education Association.6 Sponsored by the Joint Committee of these two associations, standards for elementary school libraries were published in 1925,9 and from time to time promotional leaflets have been issued. Attempts at holding work conferences did not meet with great success.10 Had the need been expressed by those who were

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working directly with the children, progress might have been more rapid. The cooperative planning of the school staff, with the help of the community, in today's education picture seems to hold greater promise.

The elementary schools had no guide for organizing and handling materials other than what was provided for public and high school libraries. Not until 1929 did a book on administrative problems appear, when William King's *The Elementary School Library* was published. This was followed by Lucile Fargo's *The Program for Elementary School Library Service* in 1930, *A Handbook for Teacher-Librarians* in 1931, and Gardiner's *Administering Library Service in the Elementary School* in 1941.

Few states have set up standards for elementary school libraries, and those which have do not agree as to requirements in materials, librarian, expenditures, housing, or organization. Data indicating how nearly standards are being met are generally lacking except in the case of North Carolina. More significant to the growth of elementary school libraries has been the increase in the number of school library supervisors in state departments of education. Twenty-six states have school library supervisors at present. Their influence in bringing library science courses into the curriculum of teachers colleges, in improving book selection through recommended lists of books, and in implementing planning on a state-wide basis, helps to remove some of the stumbling blocks which have retarded development of the program.

There are no state or national totals to show exactly how far the program has developed, but the *Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1946–48* yields the following figures: “Group I [100,000 population and more] city systems have centralized libraries in almost half of their elementary schools; group II [30,000 to 99,999 population] city systems, in two-fifths of their elementary schools; group III [10,000 to 29,999 population] city systems, in approximately one-third of their elementary schools; group IV [2,500 to 9,999 population] city systems, in more than two-fifths of their elementary schools; while the county group has centralized libraries in only about three-twentieths of their elementary schools.” The above figures do not demonstrate that the schools which have centralized libraries are being adequately served, but they do indicate that more than half of our boys and girls are being limited in their educational opportunities. There is an urgent need for a complete survey which would yield
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information toward analyses, evaluations, and intelligent planning.

Reports received by the Committee for Elementary Schools Libraries of the American Association of School Librarians are proof of increasing interest in library service on the elementary level. Since 1947 the schools of Baltimore, Maryland, have organized twenty-three elementary school libraries. In 1951 the Jackson, Tennessee, City Schools set up central libraries in their four white elementary schools, with a full-time trained librarian in each. In Madison, Wisconsin, there are thirteen elementary schools with a centralized library in each. Nine of these schools have full-time librarians, while four have part-time librarians. In the five new buildings, two of which were finished in 1951, the library has been given the most central, convenient spot in the building, with modern equipment, space, and adequate lighting. The library budget for elementary schools in Houston, Texas, increased from $9,000 in 1948 to $27,012 in 1952. In Long Beach, California, the School District has built and furnished twenty elementary libraries since 1948.

The above quoted statistics were chosen from various parts of the country to show that progress is not limited to any one area. The schools mentioned are concerned with centralized libraries; however, there are many patterns of service. Some schools are self-contained, while others have centralized collections which are supplemented with materials centers within the system. In Danville, Illinois, because of over-crowded conditions, the regional library concept has been adopted within the school district. The materials center serves the schools with fluid classroom collections as a temporary measure, until space can be provided for central libraries in each of the schools.

A present trend of school organization in some areas is away from departmentalization and for the use of a variety of materials within the classroom; hence, a number of schools are depending on permanent classroom collections for their instructional tools. Extreme care in the selection of materials and in planning for space would be required if a classroom is to house all of the instructional tools called for in today’s teaching program. This implies the services in the classroom of a well-educated and experienced supervising librarian. It would seem that the cost of duplicating adequate collections and providing adequate housing would be prohibitive. Studies of adequacy and cost of such service should be made in order that planning will be promoted which is geared to the needs of the school and to the financial ability of the community.
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Public libraries are still an important factor in service to elementary schools. Some urban schools are wholly dependent upon the public library and others have agreements for a part of the service. Coordination of service between the two institutions requires skill and close working relationships among the respective staff members. It implies cooperative problem-solving and planning. The remoteness of materials collections not housed in the school is a disadvantage not easily overcome. In a study comparing the use made of the public library and the school library by elementary school students over a two-week period, Blanche Janecek found that "There were 95.3 per cent of the students who read school library books and 9.5 per cent, public library books." Inaccessibility to reading materials in today's world of increasing entertainments and attractions may cause reading to give way to other activities.

Rural areas usually lack elementary school library service, as indicated above by the statistics in the Biennial Survey of the United States Office of Education, although in some states county service has been designed to include service to the elementary schools. Many schools cannot use a public library because it is supported by a city, and, as public library statistics show, many cities have no public libraries. There is great need for study and planning toward providing better opportunities for the children of rural sections. One solution is re-districting of the schools to consolidate a number of small districts into one unit. Illinois and other states have been experimenting with this. Two hundred forty-two consolidated community unit districts have been formed in Illinois since 1947. In an effort to arrive at some conclusions for future planning, Viola James made a study of library facilities for the elementary schools in the new community unit districts. In her conclusion she states:

It would seem from the data of this study that the pattern for the development of good library service in these new community unit districts of Illinois includes the employing of a school library supervisor who is responsible for the coordination and use of all library materials in the unit. A group of classroom teachers with a few hours in library science training assist the supervisor. There seems to be a movement toward the centralization of purchasing, processing, and circulation of library materials. Audio-visual materials are being frequently included in the planning for library materials. Central library rooms are being provided where facilities make them possible. More books are being made available through extensive purchasing and temporary
loans. The new library program also includes the promotion of reading during the summer months by story hours and available collections of books.21

Outstanding in the field of county library service to children is the program developed in Fulton County, Georgia. Each school has its own collection of materials, which is not limited to books but includes recordings, periodicals, slides, and filmstrips. Of the more than sixty schools in the county, thirty-nine now are served by trained librarians. The staff consists of eighteen librarians, a director, a full-time professional assistant to the director, and a full-time clerical assistant. The steady growth of this program since 1936, when it was first started, is an indication of sound planning. The fact that teachers from the schools had a share in the original planning insured acceptance of the program, and enthusiasm which could be translated into action. A number of the teachers in these schools have taken library science courses and now are serving as librarians.22

Whatever pattern library service takes, it should be so planned that it fits the needs of the school being served. In any case, funds and library-educated personnel are necessary ingredients for building an adequate program. At present the time allotment and training of library personnel vary from full-time library-educated personnel to non-library-educated personnel serving as librarians in addition to full teaching loads. Significant in today's picture is the growing number of city and county library supervisors already mentioned, pointing toward well-planned and coordinated programs, with due consideration for service to the elementary division as well as to the high school.

Allotment of funds is as variable as are plans and personnel. Total library expenditures per pupil in the elementary grades in Florida in 1946-47 was $0.51.23 In standards published for Kentucky schools in 1949, we find: “Elementary library service should be financially supported to the same extent as high school library service. The local board of education should appropriate and spend annually $1.25 per elementary pupil. As a beginning there should be a minimum annual appropriation and expenditure by the local board of education of at least 40c per pupil in each elementary school . . . . Every effort should be made to reach the $1.25 minimum as soon as possible. Said appropriation shall be spent for books, periodicals, other non-book printed materials and supplies.”24 According to the tables published in James’s study, per-pupil expenditures for books varied from 30 cents in one
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school to $1.41 in another school within the same unit district.25 In another unit it varied from 67 cents in one school to $4.85 in another school.26 As administrators and communities become aware of the need for a variety of learning tools, to put into effect a curriculum that will promote growth of the individual child and of the group, financial support should be more generous.

The library of the future will be a center for instructional materials and will reach beyond printed and audio-visual materials to include models, information on community resources, and teaching devices constructed by teachers. Radio and television will be employed as learning tools. The materials will be completely cataloged in one card file, with subject headings suited to the needs of the school. Classroom collections will be shifted frequently as new areas of study and interests demand. Pupils will participate in the selection and changing of these classroom collections. There will be freedom in the use of materials in the central library as well as in the classroom. The librarian will be a resource person on the staff with a knowledge of instructional tools, learning processes, and child development. She will guide teachers and pupils in the choice and use of the items best suited to solving the problem at hand. Central processing and cataloging will free the librarian from technical details and provide full time for services to children and teachers.

The above picture has its foundation in facts. Audio-visual materials are being included in the library, as indicated in printed articles describing library programs. The public schools of Waco, Texas, have cataloged their community resources as a part of their instructional tools. The public schools of Oak Park, Illinois, are in the process of developing catalog cards for teaching devices constructed by teachers. The Chicago public schools have employed radio as a means of teaching for several years and are working, in conjunction with other institutions in the area, on the development of television for the same purpose. The Boston public schools sponsor a television program during after-school hours. The Technical Processes Committee, designated by the American Association of School Librarians, is compiling a list of subject headings which will meet the needs of children and young people. Students from all parts of the United States are participating in this project and helping to determine the most suitable subject headings. Many school librarians have been educated to teach and have had teaching experience before becoming librarians, and have therefore had courses in the psychology of learning and in child devel-
opment. Central cataloging and processing receives mention from time to time in library articles.

The vast amount of materials available makes possible the above-described materials center, but it also poses a problem of selection. The center will house only materials which have been carefully evaluated and chosen in terms of their contribution to child growth. There are many reviewing media available, but they do not always furnish critical evaluations. In a study to determine the book reviewing adequacy of six well-known periodicals for the selection of children’s books, Mayme Estes found that bibliographical information and description of the book content were sufficient, but evaluation for selection purposes were inadequate. The Bulletin of the Children’s Book Center, published by the University of Chicago, is unique in that its coverage is quite complete, it reviews books that are not recommended as well as those which are, and it indicates developmental values. Children’s reactions are obtained for many of the books, so that reviews are not written wholly from an adult viewpoint.

Criteria for evaluating the contribution of the library to growth of the total child are not available. Estimations at present are made in terms of the book collection and other materials, expenditures, adequacy of housing and equipment, qualifications of the librarian, size of staff, and services to pupils and teachers. These can be measured against the recommendations set forth in School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow. Frances de Cordova made a study of the value of the library as a resourceful aid to teaching, in which she submitted questionnaires to both teachers and librarians and secured opinions which are helpful in evaluating library service. The child’s reading skills can be measured, as well as his skills in using the library and books, but how much growth has taken place in terms of changed behavior? Studies are needed to show what benefits actually accrue to the child in a learning environment which includes a well-organized library.

A step in that direction appears in “Elementary School Libraries Today.” Elizabeth Masterton describes an interesting experiment with twelve seventh and eighth grade pupils whose intelligence quotients seemed to indicate that reading scores were below ability of achievement. In a nine-week period of concentrated effort there was improvement in every case, ranging from .8 years to 2.0 years. Pupil B, whose case is described, had an intelligence quotient of 101, was in grade 8, and had a reading score of 6.0, which she raised to 7.4. Pupil B was con-
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conscious of the fact that she did not read well. She seemed disinterested and lacking in self-confidence and poise, but as the reading program unfolded, definite changes were apparent. She became alert, interested, persevering. Personal appearance improved. A report says: “Now she smiles and her eyes sparkle as she carries on a conversation.”

Does the librarian, then, do more than guide reading and use of materials? Does she help to provide for learning experiences in which knowledge and skills may be translated into action?

The above-described experiment was a cooperative project of the classroom teacher of language arts, the adjustment teacher, and the teacher-librarian. When classroom teacher, librarian, all staff members working with the child, the parents, and other education forces in the community form a team and apply their composite learnings, the resulting environment will be more conducive to the growth of the child.

An important aspect of the matter has also been set forth by Olson, as below: “An important and necessary aspect of investigations in child development has been to select some particular expression of growth and to subject it to detailed and systematic study. . . . A need has been expressed continually for [the] type of investigation in which many attributes of the child are viewed and in which the individual is studied primarily as a total organism rather than as a source of separate sets of data. In practical work there is a need for a consideration of the child as a whole in his social setting. In such detailed studies of interrelationships as have been made it is obvious that the individual cannot be divided except in a very arbitrary fashion. There is an intimate relationship in the functioning of all aspects of growth.”

The library becomes a learning laboratory when guidance in the use of materials is based on understanding of the child, and on appreciation for his perceptions and purposes as well as his knowledge of materials. Success and satisfaction in the initial library experiences will invite the child’s return. Each time he is ready for a broadening of the horizon, new tools are added to his resources. True educative experience results if the instruction in library usage is timed to the real need of the child rather than based on synthetic problems devised to perfect skills. The latter approach serves merely as a manipulating exercise disassociated from the actual purpose of furthering the child’s independence and self-reliance in the use of the functional resources of the library. Related to his growing perceptions and wider horizon is his demand for having at hand the tools that permit him to investigate. The child learns to select, evaluate, and use materials for prob-
lem-solving. He chooses the media that best meet his needs at the time. The problem may be the achievement of a developmental task, the accumulating of facts and information, the exploring of new interests, the pursuit of a hobby, the striving toward perfecting skills, the adjusting to a social situation, the deepening of appreciation.

The materials of the library are a composite of past and present communications which cut across the strata of human experience and serve as a common bond to understanding. All who manipulate as tools the media of communication in this laboratory tread on common ground. As the child increases his skill in the use of the tools, his rewards are greater and his sense of security deepens. He reaches into his own understanding and finds resources in his own experiences that he can extend to his associates. He offers and accepts counsel and so becomes a participant in the seeking, finding, evaluating, choosing, and applying carried on by the group. As his sense of security enlarges, proportionate to participation in the collective action, so will grow his respect for his relation to the total concept. Sharing experiences with one's peers and fraternizing with other age groups are a part of the democratic processes that provide the child opportunity of finding his place within the social order. Flexibility in its use permits such democratic practices in the library.

Since the library is to be used by the whole school family, they may well share in determining its policies, its materials, and use. Discerned and expressed needs, specific recommendations, the curriculum, the community, new developments—all enter into the selection of stock. The library ceases to be regarded as a source of supplementary and enrichment materials, but rather as one of learning tools. Librarians pool their knowledge of materials, child development, and learning processes with that of the entire teaching staff, and thus are able to supply the needs of a curriculum which promotes individual growth and group interaction.

References

2. Ibid., p. 480.
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16. Information received from the Executive Secretary of the American Association of School Librarians.


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25. James, *op. cit.*., p. 17.


32. Olson, *op. cit.*., p. 163.