Evaluating School Library Services

MARGARET HAYES

Attempts to improve the school library through an appraisal of its present strengths and weaknesses are not new, but emphasis upon the effectiveness of its educational service rather than upon the adequacy of its facilities is of relatively recent origin. Changes in the instruments and procedures for evaluation of the school library have corresponded closely with changes in educational measurement and evaluation. Quantitative standards or norms for the secondary school library were adopted by regional accrediting associations and state education departments as a part of a larger schedule of regulations for the entire school program. Because these standards were stated in numerical terms they were easy to enforce and were useful in stimulating a school to supply the necessary framework around which an effective school and library program could be organized. Growing dissatisfaction with the rigidity and deadening effects of quantitative standards resulted in a comprehensive investigation of the problems of accrediting by representatives of the six regional educational associations, which was known as the Cooperative Study of Secondary School Standards. The Evaluative Criteria, published as a result of the work of this group, sought to judge the worth of a school in terms of the achievement of its objectives. The detailed specifications of the quantitative standards were replaced by descriptive statements of acceptable educational practice, and schools were weighed in terms of these statements. Standards of regional associations and state agencies were influenced by the Evaluative Criteria, and many of the specific requirements for the library were replaced by general qualitative statements.

These changes in standards resulted, in part, from the growing movement in education to broaden the scope of evaluation and measurement of student achievement. Educators had been stressing for

---

The author is an Assistant Professor in the School of Librarianship, University of Denver.
Evaluating School Library Services

a period of years that instruction should equip students with much more than information and skills, that learning should be functional, that education should adjust the student to life, and that it should modify his behavior in desirable directions. Curriculum planners realized that evaluation is a powerful influence upon curriculum content and learning. Students, and teachers likewise, are greatly influenced by the type of appraisal to be made. Unless evaluation procedures and techniques were broadened to provide for gathering evidence of desirable changes in student behavior in respect to such characteristics as thinking processes, social attitudes, and work habits, these broader objectives would be largely ignored in the teaching program. The evaluation concept of considering the child in a broad sense has also been stimulated by the recent tendency of educators and psychologists to consider the child as a whole rather than as an individual whose behavior and abilities can be classified in different compartments.

Thus, there has come acceptance of the idea that educational objectives of the school should be directed toward desired changes in the behavior of students, and that evaluation should provide measurement of the degree of effectiveness with which an educational institution, or a component part of it, achieves such objectives. The application of this to libraries has been affected primarily by the development of techniques and devices which can be used to gather the evidence necessary for appraisal. Consequently, the following review of recent trends in the evaluation of school libraries considers in chronological order the types of instruments and means which have been specifically designed for such appraisal, their strengths and weaknesses, and the research which is still needed.

The most common method of evaluating school library service has been that of measuring the library against the various standards of the regional accrediting associations, state educational agencies, national associations, and special groups. Thus there is a close relationship between the paper on standards in this volume and the present discussion. A considerable body of literature now exists about school library standards, and summaries of their historical development and the content of recent examples can be found in articles and theses by Spain, Hefley, Srygley, and Spaulding.

Quantitative standards expressing in numerical terms and specific regulations the requirements for school library budget, quarters, staff, and materials were the first type to be adopted by regional accrediting associations and later by state educational agencies. Although
qualitative standards are supplementing and in some instances replacing quantitative measurement, most statements of regional and state agencies still carry some specific quantitative requirements relative to budget, materials, and staff. The specificity of quantitative standards has been both their major strength and weakness. Frequently they have been easy to apply and enforce, and have encouraged the provision of a minimal structure upon which a school library program could be built. However, the attempt to apply a universal measuring stick or a single set of standards uniformly to schools that differ in purpose, size, and organization has resulted in some unfair appraisals. Also, because they have been frequently interpreted as maximum rather than minimum requirements, they have tended to restrict library growth. Other major criticisms of the standards have concerned their foundation upon assumptions which have not been proved objectively, and the lack of any realistic appraisal of their validity; their tendency to represent minimal rather than optimum requirements; their omission of specifications for audio-visual materials; and their unrealistic distinction among the educational requirements of librarians according to the school enrollments to be dealt with, e.g., the six semester hours of preparation in librarianship required in a small school and the fifteen to twenty-four semester hours stipulated in the case of a large school.

Qualitative standards are being used to supplement and in some instances to replace entirely the quantitative requirements in many of the accreditation schedules of regional and state agencies. They employ functional terms rather than exact quantities or amounts to express the requirements for school library service, and appraisal is based upon the adequacy of the library in meeting the particular needs of an individual school. The lack of exactness of the qualitative standards makes them difficult to enforce and to follow, but permits, at the same time, their application to all types of libraries. If appraisal of library services and materials through qualitative standards is to be accurate, it must be handled by individuals familiar with the characteristics of effective library service and equipment. The lack of suggestions for methods of applying qualitative standards or for the type of evidence needed to rate the library against them makes their interpretation hard for even the skilled librarian.

The qualitative trend in standards reached its apex in the evaluative criteria of the Cooperative Study of Secondary School Standards, already mentioned. The purpose of the study was to develop a technique
Evaluating School Library Services

for measuring the program of the school as a whole according to quality rather than in the quantitative terms that had been used previously as a basis for accreditation. The instrument resulting from the study was chiefly diagnostic with reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The library was considered as a part of the total school program, and various areas of library service were appraised in different parts of the evaluation schedule. Although greater attention was directed toward the educational services of the library, the aspects covered were, in general, those of the earlier quantitative standards, i.e., size and range of collection, size and training of staff, size and location of quarters, and book selection methods. The minute detail and exact specifications of the old standards were replaced by checklists, consisting of a series of descriptive statements of provisions, conditions, or characteristics of acceptable library service found in good secondary schools; and evaluations were made on the basis of these statements. Each section was to be scored numerically and the results then translated into graphic form in a series of thermometers that showed the “educational temperature” of the library. To aid a school in comparing its program with practice in other comparable schools, thermometers were published showing the standings of two hundred experimental schools. By using these thermometers, any school could determine the status of its library in relation to norms established for other school libraries of the same type, size, or region. This system of visual presentation made possible comparison with previous scores and the gauging of growth from year to year.

The Evaluative Criteria was a marked improvement over earlier qualitative standards as an instrument of evaluation for the library primarily because the description of good library service in the checklists clarified by means of specific examples the functions and educational services of the library and the role of librarian, instructors, and pupils in the total school program. Although the desirability of gathering evidence upon which to base the evaluation was stressed, the type of records needed and appropriate techniques for securing data were left for the most part to the initiative of the individual school. Similarly, although emphasis was given to the importance of having school library service accord with the school’s philosophy of education and meet the needs of the school population, no suggestions were made for precise methods of determining the library’s success in these areas. The sections devoted to library materials were an improvement over similar sections in former standards, but the methods used to
determine the adequacy of the collection were questionable. Each periodical held was rated by a fixed quality score which represented the composite judgment of a large group of secondary school librarians. The score allowed no consideration of the particular needs of an individual school and thus gave no valid interpretation of the worth of the periodical collection. The value of the book collection was determined by noting the number of volumes, distribution, inclusion of titles in the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*, and an estimate of its adequacy in relation to need. Distribution was measured by a table of percentages which indicated relative representation of various parts of the book collection in the Dewey classification. Apparently, it was assumed that the percentages were a valid reflection of diverse student needs, but it would be interesting to know the basis on which the designers of the standards made their allocations. Reliable guides were lacking to help the evaluator decide the question of how adequately the requirements in any subject area were being met.

In 1950, following two and one half years of research, a revised edition of the *Evaluative Criteria* was published. Its sections parallel many of the divisions of the earlier edition, and the most drastic revision occurs in the method of reporting results. The thermometers and norms are eliminated, and graphic summaries are provided in the form of horizontal bar charts. The library section is expanded and improved; descriptive statements are reworked to point up the mutual responsibility of the library staff and teachers in the library’s educational program, particularly in relation to budgeting, selection and use of materials, teaching the use of books and the library, and curriculum planning; all aspects of the audio-visual program are given fuller treatment; and library quarters and equipment, formerly considered under the school plant, are included in the general library section. Methods for evaluation of the book and periodical collection are simplified; gone are the weighted numbers for periodicals and the attempt to determine the balance of the book collection by using a table of percentages for the Dewey classes. The collection is to be judged on its volume, recency, and number of titles included in the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*. Unfortunately, the rater is still forced to decide on the adequacy of each major Dewey class in relation to need, without any guides to show how such a conclusion might be reached. Extensive revision of the sections dealing with the school curriculum results in separate divisions for each subject area and the core program; a section on instructional materials included under each of these subject
Evaluating School Library Services

areas provides another check on the adequacy of the library as the materials center of the school. The major usefulness of the new *Evaluative Criteria* lies in its listing of the basic services and facilities essential in a good high school library program and its emphasis upon appraisal on the basis of student needs. Its lack of suggestions as to the types of evidence needed to get a complete picture of current services and methods for determining the success of the library program in terms of student needs constitutes its chief limitations.

The American Association of School Librarians, a section of the American Library Association, formulated a set of national standards in 1945, which was based upon the experience and judgment of authorities throughout the country. These standards are significant for several reasons. A dynamic service and educational program for students and teachers is outlined in qualitative statements; and quantitative standards for staff, housing, and budget are increased significantly in order to permit its development. Broad objectives have been included toward which all librarians should work if effective school library service is to become a reality on a state and national scale, e.g., state school library supervision, state and regional planning, and centralization of technical processes for all school libraries in a given region. In addition, provisions are included for the elementary as well as the secondary school library. Previously, elementary school standards had been established only by the state, since elementary schools are not included in the accreditation program of regional accrediting associations. Most of the requirements for the elementary school library in those states which have formulated definite standards are lower and simpler than those for the secondary school. The national standards make no distinction between the two levels of library service; the educational functions of both the elementary and secondary school library and the machinery necessary for their activation are regarded as identical.

As a device for evaluating the library of an individual school, the national standards are useful as a supplement to the state and regional standards and the *Evaluative Criteria*. The higher quantitative standards can be used to stimulate increased support for the library, while the qualitative requirements outline succinctly the purposes, types, and characteristics of library service necessary for a vital educational program. The standards have been criticized by Fannin from the standpoint of their effect upon the development of elementary school library service because of (1) the marked increase in quantitative
requirements, which may retard rather than accelerate the expansion of the elementary school library, and (2) the failure to recognize the need of the elementary school for extensive duplication of titles in the numerical requirements for book collections.

Standards, thus, are important instruments in library evaluation even though their application does not permit a thorough appraisal of the status of the library in question. Since effective library service is dependent upon adequate resources, sound organization, and a capable staff, devices for measuring these aspects of the library are essential. The quantitative standards of state and regional agencies and of the American Association of School Librarians provide a convenient measurement of the physical aspects of the library, but a realistic appraisal of the validity of these varying norms is needed before they can be accepted as reliable guides.

The need for more precise measures of the educational functionalism of the school library was recognized by Henne in 1943 in a paper discussing the evaluation of school libraries. A four-point program was proposed for the total evaluation of any school library: (1) obtaining information concerning basic factors which describe the school and which affect the evaluation of the school library; (2) measuring the library in terms of existing standards relative to budget, staff, materials collection, equipment, and library use; (3) appraising the library’s participation in the achievement of the school’s objectives; and (4) keeping the essential records necessary for a valid evaluation. The statement was a landmark in school library evaluation because it not only recognized the need to judge the school library in terms of its contribution to the growth of students, but also made specific suggestions about the kinds of activities which might be evaluated and the type of evidence which might be collected to show the library’s part in student development. The chief value of the proposed program was as a guide to the librarian interested in establishing for his own use procedures which would go beyond the application and interpretation of standards; it was not intended nor could it be employed as a universally appropriate instrument.

A Planning Guide for the High School Library Program, designed by Henne, Ersted, and Lohrer as a tool for gathering and evaluating data essential for the construction of a library planning program, is based in large part upon the suggestions made earlier by Henne. The end-product of evaluation—planning a future program for improved school library service—is emphasized throughout the volume. Follow-
Evaluating School Library Services

Ining accepted practices in evaluation, the guide commences with the definition of objectives of the individual school and of the library, accompanied by a preliminary evaluation of the degree of success in achieving library objectives. The main body of the guide is made up of sections relating to background information; library activities and services for students and teachers; general use of the library (accessibility factors, attendance, circulation); staff; materials in the school library and classroom; budget; and quarters and equipment. Final chapters provide charts for making a reappraisal of the success with which objectives are being achieved, directions for constructing a five-year planning program, and a summary table.

Within each category in the central portion of the guide are a series of questions relating to the characteristic of the library being evaluated, and statements describing good school library practice. Standards of the regional accrediting associations and the national professional association of school librarians are included for those aspects of the library program for which standards exist. Evaluations of the relative importance to the school of the services or facilities described, and of their effectiveness or adequacy, are recorded by encircling letter and numerical symbols in the margin. When these symbols are transferred to the summary tables, the evaluator is able to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the library program and the aspects which should receive emphasis in planning. The guide does more than ask for the recording of an evaluation. The quantitative facts that must be gathered, and the qualitative aspects that must be determined concerning these facts for a total picture of the library program, are clearly described, and space is provided for recording this information. For example, school library service to meet student requests is evaluated on the basis of an analysis of such service. The librarian is asked to record for a week the number and types of requests answered, and for those not filled a statement of the reason why. Measures for determining the adequacy of the materials owned have been expanded and improved over those in the Evaluative Criteria. The book collection is appraised not only according to its balance, quality, currency, and size, but also to its holdings in subject areas related to the common educational needs of all youth, e.g., those which concern personality, home and family living, and world planning. The newspaper, periodical, pamphlet, and audio-visual holdings are analyzed with equal thoroughness.

A re-evaluation of the library's achievement of its objectives in
terms of the facts and judgments recorded in the guide is the final step in the appraisal procedure. A significant part of the reappraisal is the identification of the reasons for not achieving the objectives to the extent desired. The relationship of the objectives to the planning program is clearly delineated; the objectives provide the philosophy upon which the program rests, and the causes contributing to failure to attain them suggest aspects of the program which should be given precedence.

This planning guide is the most useful tool available for evaluation of the secondary school library at the present time. By indicating the types of evidence needed for a thorough appraisal, and providing through its system of evaluative symbols a technique for their evaluation, it takes care of omissions noted earlier in the qualitative standards. In asking for a definition of aims, the identification of methods to achieve them, and an evaluation of their attainment, it brings school and library objectives down to a working level for the first time. The convenient devices and clear directives for utilizing the information collected in the evaluation for planning an improved library program are probably the most commendable features of the volume. Its limitations are few and minor. Arbitrary descriptive statements about library techniques for organizing and administering the materials collection preclude consideration of alternative possibilities which may be equally feasible. The 1951 revision of the standards of the Southern Association were published too late for inclusion.

That effective library service is dependent upon the informed and constructive participation of teachers, administrators, and students is an accepted principle of school librarianship. The lack of understanding of the value of school libraries on the part of school officials has also been noted as a major obstacle in the enforcement of library standards. Early methods of evaluation through the application of qualitative and quantitative norms by outside authorities tended to perpetuate cloudy thinking about the role of the library in the school. The technique of self-appraisal preceding judgment by outside experts, required by the Evaluative Criteria, helped the librarian to think critically about the library program, but few teachers were involved in the process. Similar difficulties occur in all areas of the school program. Recognition of the need for informed faculty, student, and community participation in planning the educational program led the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program to organize the Local Area Consensus Studies in 1949. The fundamental assumption
Evaluating School Library Services

upon which these studies rest is that sound curriculum planning is based upon decisions by the entire faculty and representatives of the student body and community as to: (1) the purposes of each of the subject or service areas of the school; (2) which of the accepted aims are and are not currently being embodied in the program of the school; and (3) what can and should be done to achieve such of the accepted purposes in each subject or service area as are currently being neglected.

Instruments to guide the faculty, student, community groups in their deliberations were developed by juries composed of subject specialists and representatives from the state education department, universities, professional associations, and the secondary schools. Three inventories for nineteen subject and service areas were formulated. Each inventory consists of a series of statements of the principles which should govern and the chief ends which should be striven for in the subject or service area. Inventory A and Inventory B are to be used by all teachers in the high school and by a representative panel of pupils and patrons. In Inventory A, each respondent is asked to indicate anonymously, first, whether or not he believes his school should accept and strive to accomplish the principle or purpose and, second, to estimate the extent to which he thinks his school is currently accomplishing the principle or purpose. The data from Inventory A are to be tabulated and utilized as a basis for full faculty-patron-pupil discussions. The principal aim of the discussion, under the leadership of the local principal and representatives of the subject areas, will be to argue the pros and cons of each principle and purpose with a view to building the broadest possible basis of faculty-pupil-patron consensus in support of the program of the particular area under review. A realistic appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the current program of the school should also result. Inventory B is to be administered following the discussions. This repeats the listing of principles and purposes of Inventory A; in addition, each respondent is asked to indicate which, if any, of them he believes his school should attempt to implement better or achieve more fully. From the data in Inventory B, teachers in the subject area and the principal will decide which are to be made the objects of serious attempts at curriculum development. The final inventory, C, is designed to enable the local school to work out its own ways of achieving each of the desired improvements in the area under review. Inventories A
and B have been given experimental trials in a sampling of schools, but the first real studies were planned to begin in the fall of 1952.

Materials for the study of the school library are being prepared by Lohrer with the guidance and appraisal of the library jury. Inventory A, *What Do You Think About Our School Library Program?* and Inventory B, *In What Respects Should We Strengthen Our School Library Program?* have been pretested and are now available in printed form. They consist of forty-one statements of principles and purposes, comprising not only a wide range of desirable library services but also of matters of administration, e.g., methods of organizing and selecting materials. Regional and national standards pertaining to budget, staff, and quarters are included to aid consideration of principles related to library facilities. The statements are notable for their clarity and freedom from professional jargon. A manual for discussion leaders has also been prepared to guide the debate about library purposes among the faculty-student-patron group after Inventory A has been administered. The manual is made up of a series of questions which point up possible results accruing from the acceptance or rejection of each principle. The construction of Inventory C is still in progress and represents the most difficult problem in the library series. Its end is to assist a working committee of the librarian and faculty in devising a program to improve library service in areas which the consensus study indicates should be strengthened. The inventory consists of a series of questions designed to suggest procedures that might be a possible part of the total plan. In addition, the introductory section of the inventory lists test questions which each proposal for improvement must pass before it can be regarded as workable in the school.

It is too early to estimate the effectiveness of the consensus technique in improving either the school or library program. It would appear that the library, in particular, would benefit, inasmuch as the carrying out of its program is so directly dependent upon understanding by teachers and pupils. The success of the consensus study hinges upon the effectiveness of the discussion in enlarging the area of consensus. Recognition of this fact led to the organization of six workshops during the fall of 1952 to train discussion leaders for the studies. The school librarian will necessarily play an important role in the outcome of the consensus study in his area. His objectivity, capability, and interest in an improved program cannot but influence the results of the study. The extent of improvement possible where library programs
Evaluating School Library Services

are handicapped by a reactionary librarian is in doubt. The Illinois School Library Association will provide librarians to work in the study with schools which do not have a librarian.

The progress of the Illinois Consensus Study Program will be watched with interest by all school librarians. Participation is on a voluntary basis and schools are encouraged to undertake only one study each year. How frequently the library area will be selected is not known. Library leaders anticipate a number of library studies early in the experiment as a result of the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program, which has awakened many schools to the need for library improvement. In the meantime, school librarians outside Illinois will find Inventories A and B helpful guides to stimulate faculty recognition of the aims and principles inherent in an up-to-date library program.

Thus it may be seen that procedures and tools for evaluating the effectiveness of the school library have undergone marked changes during the last decade and a half. As a result, the educational function of the school library in attaining the school's objectives, and the quality of library service, have been recognized as the important aspects, and facilities are judged primarily on the basis of their use rather than their presence. Evaluation is considered an essential element in library planning, to be justified only in terms of the utilization of the results in constructing an improved program. Recognition by the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program of the need for informed participation by an entire faculty and representatives of student and community groups in planning the school program, if optimum educational results are to be achieved, has led to the development of an entirely new technique, which holds great promise for improvement of the school library program as well as subject areas.

Further research is still needed. The services and facilities of the library in the elementary school are not entirely identical with those of the secondary school library, because of differences in the educational needs of children and youth. Thus far, devices other than standards for evaluating library programs have been designed only for the secondary school library. Work is in progress, however, on an edition of the Evaluative Criteria for the elementary school, and on a planning guide for the elementary school library which will follow the general pattern of the tools already available for the secondary school. The effect of the library on individual students, and its contribution to their growth, needs to be noted precisely if the true significance of
library service in the school is to be established. Thus far, evaluation has concerned itself only with an appraisal of the services offered to students, and the question of whether the library can be evaluated in terms of changes in student behavior remains unanswered. If we can discover what good library service does for students, we shall be in a better position to demand and get the adequate support so far denied to a large number of school libraries.

References

Evaluating School Library Services
Springfield, Ill., Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, March 1951.
