Design of Youth Services

How will the public library or school media center's program of service relate to the changing needs of youth? Take the word design—how do you interpret it? As the grand scheme of things, the master plan, a schematic, a blueprint? A blueprint is a detailed specific set of guidelines for creating a building from paper to brick. For the purpose of this discussion, the concept of a blueprint will be used as an approach to designing youth services for a specific situation.

When a blueprint concept was selected for this presentation, actual blueprints were examined to ascertain the areas and specific components for a building. They include: elevations, roof plans, foundations, plumbing, mechanics, electrical, or source of energy. Use this approach to energize your thinking of designing service with six designated areas. Instead of citing areas identified as the living room, kitchen, bedroom, etc. for a household building, six areas are identified with specific functions which, when aligned in place with each other, comprise a total children's and young adult library service facility. They are:

- Communication Center—In Touch
- Reflections—Room of Mirrors—Image
- Information Retrieval Center—Access
- Library-Den-Study—Literacy, education
- Energy Center—Pulse, power, programs
- Community Hub—Outreach, community involvement

Communication Center

A center of communication means being in touch with your counterpart school or public librarian, parents, teachers, library administrators, trustees, and community agencies. How many times a year do you meet with your school or public librarian, have lunch together, send memos to each other, forward project plans, trade reading lists, share books and equipment, or present programs jointly?
Do you offer parents evening and weekend programs on how to parent, sessions on child abduction, programs on new books for all ages, computer courses where parent and child are enrolled together, programs on how to pick a nursery school or summer camp? Youth services librarians must also be in touch with teachers. This involves honoring requests for assignments and reading lists and providing specially-planned programs on a topic such as science fairs.

Youth services librarians must also be in touch with the administration of the library. To make the administration an advocate and supporter
of youth services, they must be informed of what is taking place, how services are being provided, and what is needed to meet the community's needs. Constant reminders should be made to administrators of how the children's department makes them and the library look good. Submit monthly reports, send selected new books once a month for administrators to see, provide anecdotes for the board, and report to the board on a special program with a minimum appearance of once a year.

Another group to keep in touch with is trustees. Have you taken them on a tour of the children's area or sent them copies of any booklists you've prepared? Do you know their names so you can greet them personally? Are you demonstrating in a positive, professional way that the library is not just a babysitting service for children? If the library's program of service is not up to standard, the best chance of raising it is to court the trustees.

Other agencies serving parents and youth are also important in keeping in touch with. You need to know what they are doing, and they need to be aware of the library. Have you applied jointly for grant funds to underwrite a project? Have you discussed a joint strategy for sponsoring a program?

Yes, all this sounds like you are doing it all. Even though communication is defined as being two-way, your communication signals have to be stronger and more frequent to guarantee a return of even 25 percent.

Communication is your form of commercial. It's more than public relations. It's a way of telling what you have to offer and selling your service. Think of your communication center as the hub with the spokes sending out signals to the school librarian, teachers, parents, children, administration, and agencies.

The reverse holds true for school media specialists. Are you in touch with your counterpart? Are you in touch with the parents of your students? What service are you providing for them? Are you in touch with teachers? Do they know what you can do for them? Are you in touch with your administration? Aside from all the reports you're required to submit, have you sent the administration one memo citing an especially rewarding project that took place in the media center or sent a photo of a child shown achieving a particular level of success with a computer program or learning kit for the school bulletin board?

Another group to communicate with are school board members. Do you know who they are? At an open house, have you targeted a packet of materials for them or a bookmark with their names done in computer graphics?

Service to children is the cornerstone of public library service and school education. We are creating the library users of tomorrow, the voting adults who pull the lever for library funding and school bond issues, and the future contributors to the community, state, and beyond. Communication is your form of commercial. Use it to sell your product—i.e., library service.
Reflections—Room of Mirrors

What kind of image do we convey within the profession, to other professions, and to ourselves? Numerous publications have pressed the point that it is not sufficient for children's and young adult specialists to just have skills for working with young people. They must also have training in managerial skills and must be seen and perceived as managers. Every children's specialist serves as a manager on two separate levels. One level covers the responsibilities of providing, maintaining, and utilizing a collection of materials either in the school or public library. These are the day-to-day activities involved in managing a children's library department (Cummins, 1980, pp. 7-10).

The second level of management is the children's specialist as a supervisor and a member of the management team. It is at this level, regardless of the size of the staff or library, that the children's librarian has a function and responsibility as part of the overall decision-making process that governs the library and its service. This means that you must be able to present your program of service in terms of goals and objectives and learn to use statistics to make a case; you must be able to present a budget in terms the director can use, in terms that governmental forces want to hear, and in terms that express your needs and programs convincingly. You need to be able to make a public presentation, address various kinds of boards, and talk in terms that a particular group will understand and nod in agreement.

You need to be politically savvy. The board or council as a whole determines your budget but individual members make up that board. Who knows if the father of one of your preschool children might be vice-mayor and that subtle reinforcement of the positive aspects of library programs could eventually translate into funds. The same is true for the school media specialist. Know the members of the Board of Education. The election or appointment of a librarian or Friend of the Library could provide beneficial support.

To keep your image polished requires feeling and looking alert and energized. Everyone needs stimulation to keep abreast, to be perceptive, and to be invigorated, and that requires continuing education. Reading journals and talking to peers and other librarians will provide new ideas but not to the extent and stimulation that workshops, conferences, institutes, and in-service training will.

Continuing to learn after two or twenty-two years on the job is a measure of professional attitude and commitment to the profession. Involvement in library associations is important. Just paying dues is not sufficient in terms of presenting image. Involvement builds pride in being a librarian and a youth specialist.
**Information Retrieval Center**

Information retrieval requires access. A multitude of information is stored in the center—how and when may young people retrieve it, and how do you as the librarian interface with it?

The first way to provide access to information is by eliminating unseen barriers. Are children able to use and borrow materials from any section of the library? Does their library card restrict them by age or grade to numbers or kinds of items they may use or borrow? Are children included in interlibrary loan (ILL) programs? Are there any rules—local or state—that eliminate them from being able to request materials on ILL? If so, they are being denied service.

The second way to retrieve information is by format. Can children use the computer in the library, can they request database searches, are they allowed the use of the microfilm reader-printer? When automation decisions are made on the administrative level, the youth specialist must insist on equal treatment and equal consideration for young people.

A third aspect of access is physical. For young children, can they reach the top shelves, especially if the juvenile nonfiction is intershelved with adult materials? Are steps, counters, and furniture scaled appropriately for primary age children? If not, when renovations, remodeling, or new buildings are planned, it is incumbent upon the children's librarian and school media specialist to provide input to those people making those types of decisions to "design" with children in mind, including placement of the children's area. Access is an important consideration. Children must have it, otherwise they are inhibited in their growth, their learning, and their attitude toward libraries.

With spoken and visual formats of information expanding broadly, another element of access comes into play. Adele Fasick, in "Moving into the Future without Losing the Past," talks about children's need to hear language and speak language as a precursor to understanding and assimilating printed language and words. Background and experience determine differing responses by children to film or print and to ways in which information is learned and received. Librarians need to be able to assess and evaluate which format is best for a specific child (Fasick 1984, pp. 405-13).

Then there is access to information for the youth services librarian. Another communication link could be formed between the school librarian and the public librarian by ordering materials via computer. If the public or school librarian can punch up a screen to see if a particular title has been ordered, that is access to information that translates into wise collection management.

If this is not feasible, does the public librarian send reports or records
of selection lists or new books and nonprint acquired to the school person? Does the school media specialist in turn send lists of new software, equipment, and project assignments to the public library person?

You as the librarian are the advocate for access to information for children. Also remember that access to information for you is another interface with the whole information center.

**Library—Den—Study**

Literacy and education as a broad topic encompasses print literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy, and technology literacy. To keep up with children, librarians must be computer literate. Children are as comfortable using computers in various facets of their educational life as well as their home life as we were with typewriters. There is a natural affinity between students and microcomputers. The public library and the school library should serve as links between the natural desire of the child to learn about his world and the equipment necessary to accomplish it (Lintner, 1985, pp. 91-93). We need to know how to operate a computer or word processor and know what computers can do for us.

But that alone is not sufficient. The rate at which technology is changing and advancing is extremely fast. It is not conceivable that an individual children's librarian can keep pace with or on top of the newest format, the latest development, or the 8000th model of a piece of equipment, but it is conceivable—and necessary—that the youth librarian be aware of what is developing, knowing that change is constant, and being alert to updates of technology through journals and conferences.

Of course, we as librarians support literacy, but you must decide what is the library's role in helping with the literacy problem. Is it as simple as providing space for tutors to work with students, or should you be involved more directly? Philosophies differ on this issue so the critical thing is to determine the extent of the library's or system's responsibility. Provision of materials for both children and adults is basic and so is a congenial atmosphere. Is staff time also made available for them to work with tutors or student groups?

Actually, most of the programs children's librarians plan have literacy at the core—e.g., by fostering a love of books and stories, relating books with activities, exploring films and books together, sponsoring reading clubs, and so on.

Other programs that can be used to visibly promote reading in the community are read-a-thons with local celebrities, media coverage for the March of Dimes Reading Champions, and other agency campaigns. Learn to use any connections as features of literacy—e.g., local people on award committees, a local sports figure to hand out prizes or certificates at library
activities, pictures of the mayor reading with his/her grandchildren or holding a favorite children's book. Use all of the available national promotions and add a local twist.

At the recent AASL conference in Minneapolis, William Bennett, the U.S. Secretary of Education, called librarians the ambassadors of literacy. He cited the most important responsibility of elementary schools is to teach children how to read and become active and avid readers (Flagg, 1986, pp. 737-739).

Dr. Seuss put it more succinctly in the new book, Once Upon a Time, published for the 20th anniversary of Reading is Fundamental: "The more you read, / the more things you know. / The more that you learn, / the more places you'll go" (Dr. Seuss, 1986, p. 41). Recognize that unless there is a commitment to literacy, there may be fewer and fewer readers to serve.

**Energy Center**

The energy center is the power behind your service, the pulse of activity that energizes program offerings. It is the "life" of the children's library in the community. The energy must come from you, the children's librarian, and from the programs you plan.

If you have had a Saturday morning film program for years and years and the attendance has dwindled from 175 kids to 25, that should tell you something. For many reasons this program no longer has the appeal it previously did—the over-familiarity of 16 mm films as a medium, passive instead of active programming, and a program format that has become routine and dull. Drop it or change it and in its place try something that involves children. All programming does not have to be passive.

Try having children make their own films. With very simple equipment, kids can draw on film, or create animation with live characters or clay figures. Do a whole animation series. Have children make flipbooks and move on to other animation forms. A show could be presented at the end of the series and maybe a local camera shop would sponsor the event or supply the equipment.

Expand your programming with other age levels. Intergenerational programs that use senior citizens with elementary age children can bring new life to both groups. Craft workshops and reading skill groups are examples, but the possibilities are extensive. In exchange, have the kids teach computer skills to the seniors. A good example of tapping the talents of senior citizens to use with children is a program created in Iowa called "From Sheep to Shirt." Members of a local weavers guild brought looms, two craftswomen brought their spinning wheels and dye pots, and a 4-H student brought her sheep to demonstrate sheep shearing. The occasion provided a first-hand experience and understanding of the fabric process
for the children who attended (Irving, 1985, pp. 82-84). The goodwill and support that is gained from this approach is immeasurable—support you can’t buy but is worth money on a bond issue.

Expand your programming to other agencies and institutions. Consider jointly sponsoring a program with the art or science museum. Use special exhibits for program inspiration. A dinosaur exhibit could springboard into a program of dinosaur models/stories/riddles, or a medieval festival at the gallery would be perfect for dragon tales told in both locations. A unique project could take place by applying jointly for funding from Arts Councils, Poets-in-Residence, etc. What programs can you plan with the local Association for the Education of Young Children, YWCA, or YMCA?

Expand your thinking about programs. Look for new ideas and topics that will be featured by other organizations, ways of underwriting projects that need funds, and initiate communitywide events such as read-a-thons or cosponsorship of an author-illustrator with a bookstore or PTA.

Bring technology into your programming particularly in the schools. Use interactive video to involve an entire school building in a project on reliving history or taking a trip into space. Connecting a videodisc, videotape, filmstrip, or slide projector to a microcomputer allows the student to make interactive decisions involved with a scenario (Troutner, 1983, pp. 337-340). Think of the possibilities.

Does your school or library have cable access and capabilities? Besides routine school newscasts, instructional demonstrations, and story programs, how about having students present book reviews on the air and running them as spot announcements during the day or in the school cafeteria at noon time?

The Energy Center is where things happen. It is the pulse, the power source that gives your library vitality. Make it come alive with creative, fun, and involving activities.

Community Hub

To get community involvement you need to know your community—i.e., percentages of population by age, ethnic groups, diversity, and location. What do demographics tell you about the community? What is the birthrate in your area? What ethnic group is having the most babies?

The 1980 census reveals the average white in America is thirty-one years old, the average black twenty-five, and the average Hispanic only twenty-two, which shows a definite population momentum for minorities. It indicates that the average Hispanic female is just moving into the peak childbearing years while the average white female is moving out of them (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 3).
This is why California now has a majority of minorities in its elementary schools, while Texas schools are 46 percent minority, and half the states have public school populations that are more than 25 percent non-white, while all of the twenty-five largest city school systems have minority majorities (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 3).

The 1980 census indicates that 59 percent of the children born in 1983 will live with only one parent before they reach eighteen—that becomes the normal childhood experience. Of every 100 children born today, twelve will be born out of wedlock, forty will be born to parents who divorce before the child is eighteen, five will be born to parents who separate, two will be born to parents of whom one will die before the child is eighteen, and forty-one will reach age eighteen “normally” (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 3).

You don’t exist without your community. Libraries are next to Mom and apple pie, but without people—children and adults—you have no business. So service is the key. Do you have a large number of families where both parents work? Has attendance at the regular morning story hour dropped because of few children or because those children are in day-care centers? Demographics indicate that the number of children eligible for Head Start type of programs will increase in the next decade as the number of children in poverty continues to expand. That number of eligible children has increased by one-third while the funding for the programs remained the same as in 1985. How does that affect preschool services in schools and public libraries? Should an evening story hour program be offered to those parents? Should the public library plan weekly sessions with Head Start, should the Head Start groups meet in the public library or in the school library, where will Head Start programs get materials and books without sufficient funds?

Reading parents have reading children. Libraries should foster programs for parents, informational and educational programs to help them “parent”—e.g., how to choose day-care facilities, how to choose educational toys, discussions of quality videos that are available for purchase, computer instruction with their kids, cable TV programs on good books, etc. Consider parent-child learning centers as an alternative approach to programming for preschoolers. The learning centers are special places in the library where parents and children interact together. The tactile experiences, “hands-on” art processes, music, and physical activities are designed to enhance the development of prereading skills and directly involve the parent in the learning process (Rogers & Herrin, 1986, pp. 343-355). The benefits are parent education, service to children, and a positive attitude toward the library.

Other programs and services that reach out into the community are read-a-thons with local bookstores and local celebrities, summer reading
programs for which schools loan copies of their books to public libraries for the summer, reading competitions that reward quality reading in liaison with the schools, a holiday activity program on a Saturday for children to allow parents to go shopping without them.

The library should be seen as a focal point of the community, providing service and responding to its needs. A major factor in families is the high percentage of women in the work force. The number of latchkey children has shown a major increase and will continue to rise. There are at least 4 million school age latchkey children in the United States (Hodgkinson, 1985, p. 8). Where are they after school in your community?

Susan Rosenzweig, information manager for the Center for Early Adolescence, has identified criteria for developing responsive after-school programs for young adolescents that are what children and parents want. The successful programs use community resources, invite parent participation, provide staff training, utilize interagency cooperation, and demonstrate longevity in the community. They are proof that energetic and committed adults can meet the challenge of aiding and promoting the healthy development of adolescents (Center for Early Adolescence, 1983, pp. 37-47).

Agencies are part of the community hub. Can your library assist with providing collections of books, provide training to leaders and staff in areas like puppet making and how to share and read a book, or write a newsletter every several months with titles of new preschool books available at the public library?

For teachers and school librarians, how about an annual open house to talk about the best children’s books of the year? The books the public librarian is “selling” to kids are the ones the school librarian needs to know since children may be asking for them. If the public librarian prepares a booklist of gift books, it should be sent to the school librarian. Even better, almost every school district has a newsletter that is sent to parents and taxpayers. The school and public librarian should jointly write an article on books to give as gifts to children. Corresponding displays are a good reinforcement. Share your enthusiasm for books by helping teachers bring books into the classroom, helping school librarians keep current with new titles, and helping parents select books to buy with recommended booklists.

These people are paying the taxes that support your library, school or public. Plan your service to benefit them and involve them.

Conclusion

Does all of this sound like you’re expected to be six people rolled into one? Yes, it does. The truth of the matter is that the children’s librarian and
school media specialist are the Renaissance people of the profession. You are expected to know how to run the children's department, know the children's materials both print and nonprint, plan programs, work at the adult reference desk to help cover the schedule (or fill in in the classroom), know the best-sellers and adult reference materials, understand computers and automation, provide outreach to the community, know how to deal with teenagers, have competent managerial skills, often serve as second in command, and smile as you try to cram sixty hours of work into a thirty-five to forty hour work week. Is the adult librarian expected to know children's books? Is a teacher expected to fill in in the school library? Who covers the children's section when you are not there—most likely a page or an aide? Is the director or supervisor expected to have specialist skills as well as administrative ones? The answers are no. Nor is this inequity likely to change.

So how are you supposed to find time to “design” youth services? You make time (remember, youth specialists can do anything). If you don’t have a vision of service in mind and goals in sight, your library’s service to children is apt to be underfunded, unused, uninviting, or unappreciated.

Hugh Atkinson, in his article “Strategies for Change: Part I,” stated: “The prime thing to remember when trying to plan, perform, or simply survive library activities in the next decades is that the value of library successes comes from meeting the needs of the patrons. Those patrons are changing—their attitudes, their economic status, their needs. When our patrons change, then we must change too” (Atkinson, 1984, p 58).

Take a step backward and take a hard look at your current program of service. Use demographics to determine the changes that are shaping your future community, the next decade of children and parents, and the decade after that. What are those changes telling you about the needs of the community?

Stop and look at the pie—plan, implement, and evaluate in terms of these six areas: (1) communication center, (2) reflections—room of mirrors, (3) information retrieval center, (4) library—den—study, (5) energy center, and (6) community hub. Are you in touch; does your image shine; are all avenues of access open to you and the youth you serve; what is your library’s role in literacy; is there life, vitality, and energy lighting up your library; and do you know your community and are you involving them in using the library? As long as all of the pieces are in place and aligned with each other, you have a blueprint, a design for service. You are establishing the significance of libraries in an individual’s life and the community’s existence. The library youth specialist is the Renaissance person of tomorrow. Work from the past, assess the now, design the future.
NOTES


Linsley, L. S., et al. (1986). The future is now—the online catalog. *Poster Session, 19*.