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Developing a Youth Agenda for the Information Age

Looking at this audience of some 200 professionals dedicated to improving library services to children and young adults, I am reminded of a story about Don Adcock’s daughter. Some of you know Don—director of Library Services for the Glen Ellyn, Illinois elementary school district, and active in state and national library associations.

Some years ago he told me that one of his daughters in the early elementary grades was asked as a class assignment to draw a picture of what her mother or father did as “their job.” She drew her dad driving a car. During the “show and tell” phase of this occupation study unit, she explained her father’s occupation. He wasn’t a taxi driver nor a traveling salesman. She explained that her dad was a librarian—he went to meetings. There is a postscript to this story. Don’s daughter is now an adult and is now the director of a public library in a small town in Illinois, and now she goes to meetings too.

We all have ways of rating these library-related meetings. In addition to perceptions of the quality of programming and vitality of participants, we often have a subjective yardstick or measure.

As a “Notable Quotable” collector, I am a collector of memorable phrases, apt euphemisms, and vivid images offered by speakers at conferences and institutes. Let me share some of these quotes that I have gathered at this Allerton Institute. (Incidentally, on the basis of both quantity and quality of “Notable Quotables,” this has to rate as a Four-Star Meeting.) Perhaps, too, the process will help relive the memorable moments we have shared, and perhaps even help focus on the task of this conference.

Regina Minudri reminded us that: “Most important people have been young adults at some time in their lives!” She also urged us to remember that “while we are speaking on issues, hopefully if not all in one voice, at
least in the same key." Let's remember this as work is done on our agenda-building task this morning.

And so we are about to embark on the agenda-building process. It's time to work together to create a document to serve as a plan, a road map for the future using our higher order thinking skills. If we do our work well today, we truly do have the opportunity to fulfill Marilyn Miller's prophesy: "This Allerton will be viewed as a milestone in the development of library service to youth."

The following are the recommendations of the participants of the 1986 Allerton Institute for the Youth Agenda. They are presented by each of the three focus areas examined at the institute.

FOCUS 1
MANAGEMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES:
POLITICAL, FINANCIAL, AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Recruitment of Youth Services Library Staff on Professional and Paraprofessional Levels

1. Improve the image of youth services workers.
2. Attain pay equity within the profession.
3. Recruit in undergrad programs, schools of education, and from beginning students in library science programs.
4. Establish mentorship programs and other formal contacts between practitioners and students in library school.
5. Define skills and qualities needed for youth services staff.
6. Examine seniority issues in both school and public library settings so that transferring from within the profession is easier.

Coalition-Building

1. ALA youth divisions should work jointly to influence ALA legislation policy where youth issues are involved.
2. ALA youth divisions should train youth librarians to be effective politically and to build coalitions.
3. Professional relationships should be established at the local, state, and national levels both within and outside the profession. Individual librarians, state and regional associations, agencies, and the youth divisions of ALA should be active in coalition-building.
4. Identify and publicize liaisons already existing between youth divisions and other youth-serving associations and organizations, and identify and publicize special projects which show that cooperation works in improving library service for youth.
5. Respect differences between youth services librarians and divisions at all levels and make commitment to working together.
6. Have ALA develop policy and guidelines on coalition-building.
7. Build active liaisons with associations such as professional education associations.

Legislation
1. Develop a proactive stand in supporting legislation for youth.
2. Require state ALA chapters to report annually on legislation to the ALA council pertaining to all types of libraries.

Literacy
1. Identify illiterates including levels of illiteracy and examine motivations to become literate.
2. At the national level, develop a program that provides definition, an awareness campaign, funding for programs for the various target groups, the establishment of a program clearinghouse, and coalition-building.
3. At the state level, provide funding for literacy programs, legislative support, training for library workers, and consultant support.
4. At the local level, provide funding, implement programs, work with other community agencies concerned with literacy, and provide staff and other support to new readers.

Demographics
1. Identify changes in composition of the library community, for example the number of mothers in the work force, information on the current immigrant population, and the growth/reduction of specific age groups, etc.
2. Devise tools for collecting demographic data.
3. Actual collection of data on the local level with data compiled at the state and regional level.
4. Evaluate present services/resources in light of population changes—at the local level.
5. Library education institutions need to recognize changes and adjust curriculum and recruitment strategies.

Librarian as Agent of Change
1. Youth services librarians should be involved in the management and development of library service in the larger sense at the local, state, and national levels.
2. Practitioner and library educators should work together to change and amend library school curricula as needed.

Access to Information for Youth

2. Removal of regulations denying access to materials of all forms and formats by age.
3. Education of parents/community on the importance of open access to materials and information for youth.
4. Provisions of new technologies and use of technology for obtaining information and communication for youth.
5. Development and promotion of book selection, interlibrary loan, collection development, and fee policies that include service to youth.

Youth Services Staff as Managers

1. Youth services librarians should have opportunities for involvement in local, area, and state boards, including boards and committees outside youth service.
2. Youth services librarians should be assertive as managers.
3. Youth services librarians should go outside parochial interest by showing interest in topics outside youth areas.
4. Youth services librarians should interact with committees and faculty in library schools and in teaching courses outside.

FOCUS 2
THE RIGHT STUFF: RECRUITMENT AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT SPECIALISTS

Continuing Education

1. Create a clearinghouse of educational programs for youth specialists coordinated with CLENE.
2. Explore opportunities for teleconferencing and other alternative forms of continuing education.
3. Provide continuing education for all youth services workers.
4. Provide continuing education in related disciplines such as child psychology and management.
5. Develop ways of funding continuing education.
Youth Consultants

1. Provide a state level consultant in each state for youth services.
2. Work with the state board of education on coordinating programs between school and public libraries.
3. Link libraries with literacy efforts at state and regional levels to support the rationale for youth consultants.
4. Provide system and regional youth services consultants.
5. Develop a coalition of youth divisions in ALA and PLA.
6. Petition to adopt a youth agenda by ALA.

Standards

1. Develop a list of competencies for youth services workers.
2. Set standards for library and media center programs.
3. Explore the possibility of the construction of a national exam for youth service workers.
4. Gather data on the various state certification programs. Identify or develop a workable model for certification of school media specialists.
5. Examine and revise as necessary library school curricula related to youth services.

Image

1. Identify model individuals and programs in youth services and publicize them.
2. Be visible in nonyouth-oriented activities in the library profession.
3. Assume leadership roles in professional activities.

FOCUS 3
LIVING UP TO EXPECTATIONS: EVALUATION OF SERVICE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

National Coordination

1. ALA divisions should gather, synthesize, and distribute local and/or state standards.
2. Adapt Output Measures for Public Libraries to youth services needs, recognizing that tools and standards can be used to justify effective budget results.
3. Include training for evaluation in library education and provide in-service training for youth service librarians on evaluation techniques.
Measurement

1. Develop measures of success in reaching target audiences.
2. Create a clearinghouse for samples of evaluations using qualitative and quantitative measurement techniques. Publish results of research related to youth services.
3. Hold a national program on this topic with representatives from other organizations concerned with evaluation.
4. Develop a research agenda for youth services.

Having developed a national youth agenda, it is time to develop a personal agenda, a commitment—to list the beginnings or continuations that you can make, for this is not a challenge to “they” but to “we.” What will you do tomorrow? What will you do next week? Next month? Next year? As Gerald Hodges said: “We all need to establish priorities.”

At the opening session Marilyn Miller said she hoped it wasn’t a “freeze-dried” speech. I can say that I know this is not a freeze-dried agenda we are developing.

I’d like to share two final notable quotables, not from the Allerton Institute but two of my favorites. Both relate to attitude, often an overriding factor in the success of any venture. First, Henry Ford said: “If you think you can or if you think you can’t, you’re right!” Second, as Yoda said to Luke Skywalker: “There is not T-R-Y—there’s only DO or NOT DO. Let’s do it!