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Changing Priorities for Service to Children and Adolescents in School and Public Libraries

This paper is an attempt to present some issues and concerns that will have to be addressed as continued plans are made for library programs for young people that will serve them effectively in the coming decade.

This Allerton Institute is a milestone in the history of the development of library service to American youth. What is now organized as three youth divisions of the American Library Association (ALA)—The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), and The Young Adult Services Division (YASD)—was at one time a single body representing all youth services. Youth services librarians worked together originally as an organized, integrated group. They separated thirty-five years ago to develop unique areas of specialization by type of library and age level. Now in a different and fast changing period of time, youth services librarians are being forced to confront the inescapable fact that they may have to come together again in some way to provide more effective service to a shrinking youth population beset by tremendous social and cultural change and unrelenting rapid technological development.

Organizationally, youth services librarians have tried for the past several years to have more jointly sponsored programs at national conferences. ALA candidates and forums have been sponsored at the ALA Mid-winter meetings, the three executive committees have met regularly twice a year to discuss ways of cooperating and positions that might be taken for a political impact on ALA. Overlapping services and activities are beginning to be thought of as possibilities for cooperation—ideas coming from the Alliance for Excellence and joint publications. And on the home front in various cities and small towns across the country, there have been

cooperative efforts at book evaluation and selection, union catalogs, resource sharing, homework hotlines, school visits, and public library field trips. All of these things have been and are good, and these must neither be denigrated nor stopped. However, it is suggested that the time has come to confront strategies and methods, prejudices, and territorial imperatives and to look at some changing priorities for delivering library service to the young. From that effort, youth services librarians could develop heightened understandings of each other and those served, decide to pool efforts, to share expertise, and to plan more effectively to improve both organizational efforts and program delivery in more home communities than is now done.

Library services are offered within a social context. The society that is shaping the current crop of children is very different from the society most of us grew up in. Children now sitting in preschools will graduate in the year 2001. They will not remember a time without computers and VCRs. The children we are talking about serving in the next fifteen years will be confronted by unrelenting and rapid changes in the demographic composition of society, family structure, schooling, and technology. In addition, the changing economy, with its developing global nature, especially a transnational work force competition that is forcing a national move away from an emphasis on an indigenous skilled blue collar work force and small family farms, forms a backdrop against which all other social issues swirl and take shape.

Demographics must be considered in designing future library service to youth. Census statistics reveal that, in general, we will have an older population, fewer children, and a different ethnic mix. The traditional nuclear family has broken up, and many single parent homes managed by women are homes of poverty. Specifically, the ethnic/linguistic composition of the population is changing rapidly and drastically. The birthrate for white women in the United States has dropped from a peak of 2.9 children per woman during the baby boom era to 1.7 in 1984. In comparison to 1970, there are some 100,000 fewer white children under the age of five and 280,000 more black children. The fastest growing minority group is Mexican-American, whose birthrate of 2.9 children per woman is currently the highest in the nation. (Asian-American populations are also growing rapidly but because of immigration and not birthrates.) In 1985, two-thirds of all immigration in the world was to the United States. The first institution to receive the children of these immigrants is the school, the second is the church, and it is hoped that the third is the public library. Fully 27 percent of all public school students in the United States represent minorities, and each of the nation's twenty-four largest city school systems has a "minority majority." By approximately the year 2010, one of every three Americans will be black, Hispanic, or Asian-American.

In 1983, for the first time in history, there were more people over 65 than there were teenagers. Of the 24 million Americans over 65, 2.2 million are over 85 and 30,000 are over 100. One forecaster has predicted that by the year 2000 there will be over 100,000 people over 100 years of age. In essence we are talking about a smaller generation of workers containing a larger percentage of women and minorities that must supply the financial support for not only a huge number of retired parents and grandparents but for the public schools and libraries and other public institutions that serve the young. Every forecaster reminds us that youth will become relatively scarce. Children will truly become national treasures eagerly recruited by colleges, the military, and employers. (McDonald's, I was told last spring on a professional visit to Connecticut, now buses teenagers from the Bronx into Connecticut suburbs to keep the glow on the golden arches and the eggs in the McMuffins.) Tomorrow's children will have even more opportunities (or problems) than their predecessors.

A few years ago, this author saw a fascinating film for the teaching of visual literacy. One section of the film had pulled together a montage of television commercials depicting the typical American family as portrayed by cereal and Jello commercials in the fifties. The typical Jello family—father in business suit, mother in pretty dress with two children (a boy child and a girl child) all sitting at a formally laid dining room table having, of course, good conversation about the day's activities as they consumed a well-balanced meal of salad, meat, vegetable, potato, and dessert (Jello, of course). That two-child, two-parent family doesn't exist anymore. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) stated unequivocally in a report ten years ago that: "The family is not currently a social unit we value or support" (p. 39).

Although the present administration would have us believe otherwise, the devastating cuts in human aid programs give lie to the word. And the shunning by adolescents of adult family contact, advice, and company for the sharing of ignorance and myth of their peers is a concern addressed by few. The partial results of this contemporary youth society and the breakdown of the family unit and support systems can be seen in the 9,000 teenage suicides, the majority of whom, some say, are gifted and talented, and the 25,000 deaths by automobile in 1985 alone—a total of 34,000 teenagers. This is more teenagers than attend the high schools in the Durham, Raleigh, Chapel Hill area.

Of today's children, 14 percent are illegitimate, 40 percent will be living with a single parent by their eighteenth birthday, 30 percent are latchkey children, and 20 percent live in poverty. One-third of all American children will experience poverty sometime before reaching adulthood. Fifteen percent of today's children speak another language, 15 percent have physical or mental handicaps (Hodgkinson, 1986), and 10 percent have

poorly educated parents. Fifty percent of children under six have working mothers while 60 percent of children ages 6-17 have working mothers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985, p. 6).

As we all know full well, the educational pendulum swings back and forth with great regularity in this country. The blessing and the curse of living in a democracy. The populace, it must be admitted, is fickle when it comes to dealing with social issues. Attention is short-lived and easily deflected. That is, of course, why missionaries are needed to keep the faith and remain steady to the resolve even when the public's attention is diverted. When the pendulum sweep starts back, the missionaries are ready to lead the forward motion.

The problems facing education are disquieting. This is really not new considering the function of schools. But concern today is about the inequities brought about by a philosophy that views an interstate highway system as federally fundable but not a fiscal floor for educational budgets to ensure a national minimum access to educational equity. Experts seem to agree that in addition to diminishing financial resources, there will be declining enrollment along with substantial shifts in enrollment at all levels of education. Some say the dropout problem will disappear in the next fifteen years because the job market and the military will be so hungry for the young that those disaffected with formal education will simply disappear and continue their learning in the informal educational institutions unbothered by the formal educational power structure because they are "off the streets."

There is no doubt that a power struggle for control of the curriculum exists. Who will determine what texts are to be used? What subject matter is to be taught? Schools have traditionally taught the values of the culture, thus they are always a little behind, and when values shift drastically, as certain elements of society today would have us believe is happening, the schools truly get caught in the crossfire. The battle lines are being drawn all over the country on the teaching of religion, sex education, values education, and global relationships, to name only a few. During this author's tenure in education, there has been a power shift from the local community, to the state, to the federal government, back to the local community, and now seeming to shift again to local competing community groups and competing professional organizations. If the school library media specialist cannot or will not buy materials objected to by community groups, will the public library stand strong?

School faculties are graying. It is predicted that two-thirds of the current crop of school library media specialists will be gone within the decade. A few years ago the average age of teachers in San Francisco was fifty-five.

An increasingly litigious society and strident parents and students will continue to cast shadows on the desirability of remaining in the teaching profession. However, there is an exciting other side. The demand for teachers will be accompanied by a call for increasing the rigor as well as the quality of the curriculum and for teaching students to think—i.e., to select, to compare, to evaluate, to synthesize. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is but one professional group calling for the teaching of thinking skills. ASCD is involved in a Collaborative on Teaching Thinking which is working to: (1) define thinking skills and processes, (2) encourage publishers to develop instructional materials and tests that promote student thinking, (3) establish a research agenda, (4) establish and encourage adoption of standards on teaching for pre-service and inservice education of both teachers and administrators, and (5) promote teaching thinking in a national public awareness campaign (Hughes, 1986, p. 33). Librarians—both school and public—need to watch this movement in terms of both selection and programs. Materials and activities which require students to develop higher order thinking skills will be essential, and teachers will be turning to us in both schools and public libraries for those resources.

A few of the global problems that demand a well-educated and informed citizenry are a shrinking world with a burgeoning population, shortages of natural resources and a decline in food sources such as fish and fertile areas for farming, the rising tide of masses of refugees, 17 million economic and political exiles now live in a land other than their birth and thereby draw on the resources of wealthier nations.

Last, but not least, of the trends affecting the future is the rapid development of communications technology—i.e., the global village, microchip technology, publishing on demand, the digital transformation of the way messages are sent and received, new languages, read only memory discs, compact discs, handheld computers, voice activated calculators, books printed on wafers to be used in calculators (which some predict may make the necessity for learning to read and write unnecessary).

With all of these wonders, one might hasten to add that the citizenry can also be instantaneously galvanized and trivialized with the same media. The destruction of tradition, the creation of true masses, the “dumbing down” of textbooks have all become reality in the mid-1980s. Everything everybody ever knew can be stored. Data can be collected about people and their lives and hoarded away to be used in ways few dreamed could ever be possible. The poorest scholar can tap information at its creation. So impressed by microchips, information is beginning to be equated with education and knowledge. One should be reminded that technology is used to provide information that people can use to become

educated and to gain knowledge so that they may live full, useful, and productive lives.

The electronic classroom of the future is here. The May-June 1986 issue of *The Futurist* (Larick, 1986, pp. 21-22) describes the first phase of the Placentia Unified School District's (Orange Co., California) development of electronic classrooms. There is a similar installation in Michigan (described in the *School Library Journal* by the library media director, Bernice Lamkin [1986]) an installation that is being replicated in a large number of high school renovations all over the country. These systems coordinate multiple technologies—i.e., satellite-delivered instructional programming, laser discs, computers, videocassettes, and closed-circuit television. The coordinated system can be directed and monitored from a central workstation. Information can be obtained from international, national, regional, and local databases via microwave, cable, telephone, or fiber optics and put into the district resource computer from which it can be transmitted to classrooms upon request (Larick, 1986, p. 22).

Against this backdrop of reality is changing demographics, shrinking financial resources, continued debate on education and its problems and strategies, and continued revolution in communications technology. How should goals and priorities be examined? The next step is to examine what is to be done based on demonstrated need and then decide how to do it. First it is decided what can be done to help this nation become a nation of readers. Then the approaches are examined: collections, coalitions, community education to support the effort, and strategies to get children to recognize the importance of reading and to want to read. Then available resources needed to accomplish the task are examined—e.g., personnel, other community agencies, collections, funding. Then strategies are developed for meeting the shortfall—i.e., acquisition of different kinds of materials, staff development, development of a volunteer cadre, community publicity, and legislative lobbying. The overriding concern is to answer the question: "How can we best effect the delivery of information and educational programs to the young that will enhance their growth and development into healthy productive citizens of a democratic society?" The following goals should be considered as deliberations are begun on new priorities:

- Attack the aliteracy problem. Work with those who know how to read but do not (an adolescent problem that one Westchester County library manager who is an active spokesperson for service to young adults told me recently is the most critical information/education problem facing educators who work with teenagers).
- Participate in the teaching of basic information skills.
- Assist in the teaching of critical thinking skills.
- Help immigrants maintain their culture.

- Advocate services by other agencies and support those services with information resources.
- Raise literacy. Support adult literacy programs.
- Support/implement, enrich, and extend school curricula.
- Shelter/after-school activities—i.e., provide a safe place.
- Provide materials for counseling—i.e., bibliotherapeutic use.
- Make common knowledge of society available in appropriate forms.
- Provide services to unserved groups in the population.
- Provide referral services to other human services agencies.
- Provide information on social and medical problems of concern to the young.
- Be more effective in working with adults who work with children—i.e., parents, teachers, grandparents, social workers.

As these priorities are discussed and fleshed out, arguments to consider are: (1) missions: where, as type of library, youth services librarians differ and where they support each other; (2) patterns of service and collection development; (3) recruitment and library education efforts; and (4) the possibilities of forming coalitions.

As these missions are considered, remember that both school and public libraries are educational institutions. The school library is concerned with both the schooling of the young and their education. The public library which has traditionally seen itself as an educational institution has also felt that it offered these experiences informally and voluntarily. The serendipity of the public library experience is truly one of the most intriguing aspects of the library for those who use it well. But if a coalition to improve information services is going to be formed, public librarians need to cast off the idea that curriculum is a word or process that is to be avoided. For some the definition of *curriculum* as planned learning experiences suffices to begin a discussion. Both school and public librarians serving youth must be cognizant of what is being planned and taught in the schools if collections are to be developed that serve the information, learning, and developmental needs of children.

One major thing that prevents moving comfortably into this arena of joint understanding is a tension between school and public library service to children that is untenable as youth services librarians plan for the future. This tension needs to be resolved by a recognition of that tension—i.e., its roots and its counterproductivity.

Braverman (1979) traces this tension back at least to 1913—the year that Edwin White Gaillard was eased out of his New York Public Library job as superintendent of work with the public schools and Anne Carroll Moore brought all services to children under her jurisdiction. As Braverman notes, the roots of this tension are both economic and philosophic, and since the real disagreements and uneasinesses are tacit and often

unrecognized, it is possible for most to pay lip service to the ideal of cooperation between school and public libraries, but it may not be possible to cooperate without first confronting a few personal implicit beliefs. As Braverman (1979) documents this period, she notes that Gaillard "worked systematically to bring library resources to the schools, which then had few library services. [This] included supplying classroom collections and help to teachers, the setting up of a model school library, as well as providing reference services for students, special collections for teachers and class visits to the branches" (p. 16). Apparently, reports Braverman, Gaillard's jurisdiction overlapped with Moore's more than his philosophy did. "Moore thought that libraries should be used informally and voluntarily to promote the joy of reading" (p. 17). What a shame that a mission statement that encompassed all of those objectives could not be hammered out except for the interactions or lack of interactions and communication of those early leaders.

On a personal note, one of the genuinely exciting events of being president of ALSC was participating in a U.S. mission to visit children's libraries in the U.S.S.R. Participants visited many public libraries, some school libraries, and trade union and pioneer palace libraries. The first goal of all libraries in the U.S.S.R. that serve children is to support and encourage children to read and to see that the materials necessary to complete school assignments are available. Soviet librarians have organized study areas in public libraries, and public and pioneer palace libraries have reserve school and text collections. It was emphasized over and over again how important it is for children to learn to read and to want to read. It is not suggested that present models be replaced with the Soviet model, but it is suggested that programs developed in isolation from each other do not serve youth well.

In the United States, people are socialized by separate organizations, separate association journals, and separate library school classes, and by careful distinctions made by commission or omission. Through socialization, a blend of routines, ideals, selection techniques, programming habits, and expectations are acquired. Things are learned that conflict and which cannot be believed simultaneously with any logic, but youth services librarians go on believing them because they are too busy even to notice that they have been learned.

Patterns of service and collection development in school and public libraries must be reviewed in terms of resource sharing demanded by diminishing financial resources and continued acceleration of information produced by research, discovery, and publication by scholars, creative artists, industry, and groups of citizens demanding to be heard. Acquisition of materials based on an identification of information, idea, and knowledge needs determined by educational and developmental needs of

users is crucial. A view of nonfiction collections that match needs shaped by sex, age, and socioeconomic condition must be developed if the young are going to find libraries truly essential. The response to a child or student who asks for a "good book" should be motivated by the need of the child and not just a personal aesthetic response to children's books. And one should pursue discussions of programs for the next century by realizing that users are immersed in a flood of information from a startlingly broad array of sources. It must be considered that without intermediaries, people can still be information poor if they do not know how to organize it for use, deal with it critically, and use it for a positive, beneficial purpose. It must also be realized that when collection development is discussed for the next century, the discussion should not be just about collections at one site. It must be known where other collections are located and how data can be acquired, repackaged, and disseminated. The consultant, facilitator, and producer roles will define youth services librarians just as much as these are the roles of the "special" librarian, for all users, regardless of age, will have options for access. This author must confess that she remains momentarily helpless—still, after all of these years—when students say they have decided to go into public library work rather than school library work because they love books so much. The future will place many different demands upon youth services librarians because of personal knowledge and abilities. "Just the books" won't be enough.

As noted earlier, curriculum is not a naughty word. Going to school is the full-time job of millions of residents in this country. These residents need good school libraries and good public libraries. They need school libraries which are available to them during the day and which are not full of organized classes teaching library skills in isolation of what is being presented in the classroom. They need public library collections that will extend and support what they are learning in school as well as provide them with the information needed to develop personally.

Public library collection development policies that on the one hand prohibit acquisitions that might support school work, but that, on the other hand, articulate the desire to serve the recreation, information, and cultural needs of children are puzzling. In reviewing several selection policies, I have found that many are vague and seemingly unresponsive to children's school needs when describing in positive terms the great informational needs of the young.

When examining policies: do they reflect the full-time work and needs of children? Do they reflect technology other than books? Are they positive supportive statements or are they too careful to list the restrictions? Are nonfiction books being recommended to an adolescent who says he/she needs a good book? Have the information needs of patrons been examined and then materials acquired? Have systems for keeping nonfiction

collections up-to-date and accurate been developed? Are public and school librarians talking together in a community about sex education, child abuse, careers of the future, alternatives to a college education, drug abuse, loneliness, peer pressure, nuclear war, and terrorism? After talking about those subjects and determining what is being collected, are discussions being held about practices and patterns of program development for getting those resources used that will be mutually supportive? Are public and school librarians talking together about the fact that 34,000 teenagers died in 1985? All ills cannot be cured nor all problems solved, but the potential in contributing to answers and solutions for some should at least be rethought.

Public library service to adolescents as dreamed of in the fifties, sixties, and seventies is not to be—at least in this century. The realities of school, work, social pressures, and communications technology confront the avowed mission to adolescents with too much to overcome. Youth services librarians should face this fact. Public library directors have had to make choices, and they have dared to allocate this specialization to school librarians, and they have gotten away with it. It is hoped, however, that there will always be public librarians with a passion and a concern for serving adolescents and that they also will provide leadership through ALA in some organized form both to make certain that public libraries are serving the information resource needs of these young people. It is hoped they will care also about the library service in the secondary schools.

The question nagging at many youth services librarians is: where are the next decades' youth services librarians coming from? In my own state, the gains made in the seventies in staffing professional children's librarians in public libraries is being eroded: lower salaries than the public schools, lower salaries than surrounding states, and a desire to be part of a career ladder are taking their toll. All are familiar with the public school situation—i.e., the shunning of education by the bright, the variety of career opportunities now open to women, and the alarming retirement projections for school library media specialists. Where youth specialists will be educated is slightly less a concern than wondering about their recruitment. Accredited library schools continue to be dismantled—one closing announced this fall and one undergoing the type of program evaluation that has typically led to closure. The American Library Association has been strangely silent about this phenomenon. In the meantime, small unaccredited programs in schools of education in small colleges and universities all over the country are producing large numbers of school library media specialists entering the field. At this writing neither ALA nor any of its divisions has any input into the evaluation and guidance of the development and implementation of these programs. With the closure of programs has gone the opportunity to provide professional public library

directors and children's librarians for many small public libraries, and with the draining of the pool of qualified librarians goes access. If the American Library Association is not going to promote education for the operation of tomorrow's libraries, then it should at least be proposing to study alternatives for the training of those who will be organizing information for delivery to various communities.

Certainly we are beginning to forge coalitions by coming here and thinking about the future as public and school library media specialists. It is believed, however, that the leadership of the youth professions should move more publicly and diligently to identify mutual concerns with other educational and helping professions. School library media specialists are coming to see that they can reach more young people if they work more diligently with the teachers. Public librarians may serve more children and adolescents also if they make more contacts with adult youth workers in the community. It was made clear during this Allerton Institute that the terrible struggle for First Amendment survival is going to be won only if coalitions are forged between and among organizations, professions, and the general public. The struggle to produce physically and mentally healthy young adults will take a coalition of social and public health workers, service groups, the law, educators, information specialists, librarians, and governments. Should we not begin to identify and promote some models at the national and state levels to help communities develop some of the same sorts of working and sharing relationships?

There are wonderful public and private schools in this country. There are outstanding public library and school library media programs across the nation. They set the pace and demonstrate excellence. But as we look ahead to the challenge of providing leadership to the next generation of librarians who will serve different constituencies than have many of us in a world that has undergone radical social change, there are things we must address. It is hoped that this conference will produce new mandates for library school researchers, the managers, and the missionaries. The mandate is to examine the mission, the collections, access and adequate staffing, the response to emerging technologies, and cooperative efforts.

The goal should be to have library/media/information services to the young directed by a professional. As a profession, answers must be found to the questions of staffing, educating, and recruiting able people and then work to provide structure to enable the service provider to offer youth the best in library/media services.

NOTES

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