



## Research in the School Library Field

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THE LACK OF effective means of communicating the results of research done in the various library schools has been one of the major frustrations associated with such research. Too often the fruits of studies have been available only to the students of the particular library school where they were originally done, or to those few people from other library schools or interested agencies who could afford to come where they could be examined.

Although this situation still pertains in too many instances, more research information is available than formerly. The indexing of studies has become more prompt and complete, due to the initiation of a recent cooperative plan by *Library Literature* with the major library schools of the country through the agency of the Association of American Library Schools. More library schools provide notes, explaining methods and indicating results, to accompany the thesis entries in this publication. In 1950 *Library Quarterly* began an annual listing by library schools of theses and dissertations accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's or doctor's degree. It has been found that this annual compilation, although containing many of the entries to be found in *Library Literature*, does list supplementary thesis titles. Also, the English serial, *Library Science Abstracts*, with its excellent summaries, is a new factor in the availability of information about research. Not the least of its values lie in the differences of interpretation of aims and results because of its British point of view. The most important development, however, is the increasing availability of the research itself through the medium of microfilm.

The implications for research in the school library field by school librarians are clear. It will be reduced to that represented in the essays coming from the library schools still requiring theses, and to occasional theses or research reports from the remaining library schools. Without the incentive of thesis requirements at the master's level, the average

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school librarian will produce little systematic research. Although he is in a school situation and may be experimenting with new techniques or making observations which could be expanded into a research project, the nature of his position militates against such studies. If his experiences are recorded in an article for a library periodical, that generally will be about the extent of his contributions to library literature. The average school librarian will find little need or incentive for Ph.D. programs. Research relevant to the school library field from these programs will come primarily from two sources—library educators in the school library field and supervisors of school libraries at the state or large urban levels. It is relevant here that the type of research done at the Ph.D. level, as evidenced by the studies at the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago, differs considerably in scope and content from that done at the master's level, much of which cannot truly be classified as research. It is at the Ph.D. level that some of the larger problems of school libraries, which Eleanor M. Witmer,<sup>1</sup> W. A. Heaps,<sup>2</sup> Leon Carnovsky,<sup>3</sup> and Frances Henne<sup>4</sup> have stressed as being worthy of systematic investigation, should finally receive the attention they deserve.

A study of the research from the major library schools over the period 1927-52 in the school library field reveals two patterns: one, the fairly frequent development of a group of closely related theses within a particular library school; the other, and more significant pattern, the reflection of the major problems confronting the school and the library profession in the investigations of a particular period. An example of the first type can be seen in the series of master's essays at the Columbia University School of Library Service on the adequacy of reviewing media for various subject areas, ranging in content from that of chemical journals for college book selection<sup>5</sup> in 1933 to book reviews for the selection of adult books for high school libraries<sup>6</sup> in 1951. The evidence for the latter will be found in the following discussion of some of the research in the school library field at the major library schools within the last five years, and in the relation of this recent period to preceding ones. Some reference to pertinent literature other than theses and dissertations is included.

One of the persistent problems in the school library field relates to the distribution and nature of school library facilities. For the period 1927-47 Miss Henne<sup>4</sup> estimated that surveys dealing with this subject constituted almost forty per cent of all studies. For 1948-52 the percentage has been much smaller, i.e., a little less than ten per cent. The principal importance of the latter studies, all of which deal with con-

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ditions in either the Middle West or the South, is the picture they give of gaps in school library service to particular groups. They destroy any complacency which might have resulted from Nora E. Beust's interpretation<sup>7</sup> of the *Statistics of Public School Libraries*,<sup>8, 9</sup> for the situations described represent the realities of elementary school library service in cities of the size described by the statistics, and of school library services to Negroes in the District of Columbia<sup>10, 11</sup> and Virginia.<sup>12</sup> Another survey describes the libraries of unaccredited Southern schools,<sup>13</sup> most of which are in communities somewhat smaller than those represented by the statistical report.

Statistics have their values, but can be interpreted in many ways. For that reason there will always be room for the carefully prepared evaluative type of survey which presents the realities of a certain situation. Photographic views of school library quarters would also be useful for this purpose, and could be reproduced easily and exhibited to tell the public as well as the library profession of the contrasts in educational opportunity. The greatest need in this area is for a series of well-articulated regional evaluative studies covering all types of library service to children and young people. Such a national overview would be invaluable for planning and improving library service.

The line between the survey and historical research is a tenuous one at times, if it exists at all. An example of the difficulty of distinguishing between the two is revealed in Lauretta G. McCusker's<sup>14</sup> study of accredited school libraries in Iowa, which combines a survey with a study of development. Another piece of work of this type is Frances N. Neal's examination<sup>15</sup> of the services of the Arkansas State Library Commission to the schools of the state. Jean K. Gates<sup>16</sup> traces the progress which has been made in both the school and public library fields in the same state during the last quarter century by means of county surveys of library facilities. Two historical investigations have shown the development of school libraries in the state of Kentucky. M. Louise Galloway<sup>17</sup> has written a history of the public high school libraries from the establishment of a statewide system of high schools to the present time, and includes a brief survey of public education in Kentucky. Clardy<sup>18</sup> has traced the contribution of state supervision to the development of Kentucky schools.

One of the most important contributions to the library field is the dissertation by the late Frances E. Hammitt, *School Library Legislation in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin: a Historical Study*.<sup>19</sup> Following a resumé of school library history with special reference to the Midwest,

she traced the legislative story of the school library in each of the three states against the background of their respective educational development. This study is marked by a quality unusual in such work—good literary style. Comprehensive and scholarly, Miss Hammitt's work provides the cornerstone for the long-proposed history of the school library.

In the area of organization and administration of school library services, thirteen studies were tabulated. They range in complexity from a plan for the organization of a school libraries division in the West Virginia State Department of Education<sup>20</sup> to the kinds of shelving best suited to a school library.<sup>21</sup> Sara M. Krentzman<sup>22</sup> explored the problem of state supervision of school library service to determine what the position in a state department of education comprehends, and what the results of such supervision have been. Trean A. Maddox<sup>23</sup> studied school library supervisory programs in city school systems to ascertain the supervisory functions and services carried on and needed in city schools, and the characteristics of good direction.

In 1943 Wilma Bennett<sup>24</sup> proposed a plan for the administration of school library service in Indiana on a regional basis to promote better results at reasonable cost, without changes in governmental or school units and leaving initiative and control in the hands of local authorities. In 1945 in the adjoining state of Illinois, legislation was passed for the consolidation of school districts to produce the community unit district. In 1951 Viola L. James<sup>25</sup> studied thirty of the resultant districts to determine whether an elementary school library program had emerged from this consolidation with a sufficiently definite pattern to be helpful for future planning. From the improvements in services and materials discovered in her survey, Miss James found a guide for planning betterment in community unit districts which had little or no provision for libraries in their schools. It is interesting to see in Miss James's report parallels to Miss Bennett's earlier proposals—the larger unit of service, the coordination of materials and activities, the centralization of stock and technical processes, the development of new services—although they are on a much smaller scale. Whether or not Miss Bennett's proposal had any influence in the development of libraries in this new type of consolidated district remains to be seen. Since it is quite generally agreed that it is only through larger units of services that educational opportunities in rural areas and small communities can be improved, Miss James's report is of value to school administrators as well as to librarians. Another study which should be of value in this connection is Elenora C. Alexander's

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study<sup>26</sup> of budgetary procedures. Her findings could do much to eliminate those practices which hinder rather than encourage improvement.

In this day of expanding school facilities to meet the needs of a growing population, the research necessary to plan adequate library quarters for schools has come from an organization, the Subcommittee on Library Service to Schools of the Planning Board of the Illinois Library Association.<sup>27</sup> Its publication, *Planning School Library Quarters*, is an interpretation of modern school philosophy in terms of physical requirements.

In the area of organization and administration, there remain many needs. The necessity and merits of elementary school library service are clear, at least, to school librarians. Studies should be made of the actual organization and administration of elementary school libraries, to determine whether or not they are an integral part of the school. The values of the elementary school library have been seriously challenged in Pennsylvania, and in one of the states of the Pacific Northwest, on the ground that they do not contribute materially to the schools' program. With rising prices, and the difficulties in providing adequate school monies from the present tax bases, the importance of getting the best use from funds available becomes markedly greater. To this end job analyses, examination of procedures, and cost analyses are essential. Further studies of the organization and operation of larger units of service, and determination of their strengths and weaknesses are needed to facilitate improved planning for the future.

The major portion of investigation for the period 1948-52 concerned the educational functions and activities of the school library. Without including the studies on reading, which will be considered separately, thirty investigations were tabulated by the present author. The term "investigation" is used advisedly, for some of the studies are little more than a loosely knit combination of experiences against a partial survey of the literature of the field. For that reason, only those studies which make a genuine contribution or with unusual subject matter will be indicated for bibliographical entry or discussed. The principal topics treated were the guidance functions of the library, particularly in the field of social adjustment, the place and training of student assistants in the library, and library instruction.

Ruth S. Itamura's study<sup>28</sup> of the literature on administration of the secondary school, to discover the presentation given the high school library, is both encouraging and discouraging. Most writers consider high school libraries essential—one wonders sometimes if from con-

viction or from the existence of regional standards—but few suggest that the school library holds an administrative problem, and that the success or failure of the library program depends on the administration. Mary H. Mahar<sup>29</sup> has thoroughly explored the modern concepts of the educational function of the school library and has weighed them against the activities and services of a selected group of high school libraries which meet the A.L.A. standards for personnel, and where the school philosophy and program are such that progressive programs of service should be operative. Where there were obvious discrepancies, she attempted to ascertain causes. Helen C. Welsh,<sup>30</sup> a librarian of a vocational high school, has surveyed the quarters, holdings, and personnel of selected vocational high schools and has analyzed services to students and curriculum. The educational and service role of a student library club has been studied by Rachel W. DeAngelo.<sup>31</sup> In an investigation of correlated library instruction in secondary schools, Mary C. Calloway<sup>32</sup> discovered that although a large percentage of high schools offer instruction in library use, there was lack of integration of such instruction with either school programs or school objectives. Genevieve J. Geiger<sup>33</sup> studied the publicity activities in senior high school libraries reported by librarians, teachers, and student groups, and had the eighty-five activities reported ranked for educational value by eight specialists in the field. Her findings regarding the most educationally valid types of publicity activities are of special value to practicing school librarians.

In this day of challenge to education as a whole, any steps which can be taken to improve the effectiveness of the school library will help to insure better understanding of that part of the educational system and to bring better support financially and philosophically. As school library service is introduced into new places, "before-and-after" studies of the effects of the library on student reading interests, amount and quality of reading, responsibility for books and library materials, attitudes toward service, differences in kinds of classroom teaching, the use made of library materials, involving all the assumptions of values of the school library, need to be made.

In view of the public interest in the subject of reading, it is not surprising that the number of studies dealing with various phases of this topic in the period of this review of research equals that treating the other varied educational functions of the library. Twelve of the thirty investigations deal with the general reading interests of high school youngsters, and three with interests of this age group in specific areas. For the most part they are either very general in nature, or are so re-

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stricted to the limits of one school or of grade groupings within one school, to have comparatively little value to anyone outside the particular system. The one reservation here is that they may provide some future researcher a body of findings comparable with those of G. W. Norvell's twelve-year study<sup>34</sup> on reading interests which, despite the volume of its data, is not considered definitive by this writer. Four studies in this field are concerned with books and remedial reading. A reflection of current interest in readability<sup>35, 36</sup> is seen in the two investigations of this topic.

A major contribution to the whole literature of reading is Miss Henne's *Preconditional Factors Affecting the Reading of Young People*.<sup>37</sup> After assaying the status of reading in the curriculum, she analyzes the general characteristics of young people as readers, i.e., the time spent in reading and the amount and kind of reading. Each of the preconditional factors that presumably affect motivation and reading patterns—accessibility and availability of materials, purpose and motivation, and interests of adolescents—is discussed in a separate section, as are their implications for the secondary school library. These are in turn related to the identification of the school library's place in the reading program of the secondary school. The larger aspects of the matter, as related to national, regional, and local planning of school libraries, are identified and possible solutions suggested.

Each school, and each type of school—elementary, junior high, senior high, vocational, academic, university elementary and high—has its own reading problems. Some of the problems are common to all. Although there are generalizations which can be made about reading interests of children and young people, there are differences in the interests of the urban and rural child, and of youngsters living in the various regional and geographic areas. What does the child who is beginning to read actually select when given a wide variety of materials from which to choose? How does his reading differ from that of the child who has access to one basal reading set, or to a variety of such sets? Is there variation in the amount and kind of reading problems at any given school level among youngsters from these different backgrounds of reading experience? These are only a few of the subjects on which further research is needed.

Closely allied to the previous topics is that of materials for the school library. Of the seventeen studies concerning these, ten deal with the selection of books for various purposes, three with periodical choices and use, and four with audio-visual aids. As bearing on the first group, *A Vocational High School Supplement to the Standard Catalog for*

*High School Libraries*<sup>38</sup> has greatest value at the present time. Margaret Welch, an experienced librarian in the vocational school field, has compiled this buying guide for her type of school. In addition, she has written a short history of such institutions and has discussed some of the particular problems affecting their situation. Her book, together with the study by Miss Welsh,<sup>39</sup> adds considerably to the small amount of pertinent information available. Winifred J. Masson<sup>39</sup> has compiled a list of government documents from widely scattered sources which would be useful in high school home economics courses, and has given illustrations of possible uses of certain of the publications by both teacher and pupil. The two bibliographies on family relationships<sup>40, 41</sup> may be valuable in home economics courses, guidance, and social studies. The treatments of audio-visual aids are largely survey in type, and deal very little with the educational implications in the use of such materials. On this subject, although the number of investigations at the library schools has increased, the best research continues to be done by outside agencies.

In the present period of stress, it is to be expected that the problem of censorship should be taken up. However, as far as could be discovered, Mary L. Eakin's study<sup>42</sup> of 1948 is the only one specifically dealing on this matter with high school library books. In answers to a questionnaire from 120 librarians in all parts of the country, it was reported that some degree of censorship exists in the purchase and use of materials in secondary school libraries, and that the pressures for it come from persons within and individuals and groups outside the school. Most of the concern was with the effects of certain books on adolescent attitudes, yet there was little agreement as to exactly what books or what aspects of them constituted danger to attitudes and to morals. As the result of her study, Miss Eakin recommended policies to be adopted as a guide in selecting books for adolescents.

The area of materials remains a fruitful one for investigation. As larger units of school library service are brought into being, the question as to the need for a selection policy should be investigated. Would the principles adopted by the Enoch Pratt Free Library<sup>43</sup> be equally applicable to a school situation? One of the great needs is an evaluation of standard book selection tools in the light of curriculum and student needs. Analyses of the use of a selected list of magazines by students in a variety of school situations would provide data for further evaluation of school magazine purchases. As audio-visual centers acquire rental libraries of filmstrips, the relative feasibility of purchase or rental needs to be considered. The question of which audio-



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visual aids are most effective in library instruction, and under what circumstances, should be investigated.

These previously mentioned studies of magazines and newspapers as mass media were made from the point of view of materials rather than that of their effects on the reader. From the point of view of library research, interest in the comics seems to be on the wane. Both studies done during the period of this review consist largely of summaries of previous investigations on this topic. In the main, research in the field of communications has been done by agencies outside the library. Studies of content, retention, and the relation of frequency to learning, are the principal types of research at the present time, and are probably the ones of greatest significance to the school librarian. Some of the follow-up reports on earlier television investigations show that the long-range effects on reading are not as bad as early investigations indicated. Although an immediate fall in reading following acquisition of a television set is reported, there is a return to a normal reading pattern after the period of novelty has passed. Some children and adults even reported being stimulated to read by television. In a study of children's reactions to radio adaptations of books, Mae O'Brien<sup>44</sup> found that ten-year-olds were quite capable of rating such programs, that their criticisms of scripts and productions were valid, and that the characteristics of radio programs which affected children's reactions applied equally well to television and recorded programs.

In order to more fully understand what is going on in the field of communication, it is important that the school librarian should at least try to keep abreast of developments. In many instances the results of research are of more importance than the research itself.

The pattern of interest in school library personnel and training for school library work has definitely been a product of the times. In the late 1920's there were some studies touching it. Then came the depression, with the over-supply of school librarians and the unfortunately prevalent attitude that school librarians were not essential. Personnel and training were passed over in choosing thesis topics. When the discrepancies between demand and supply began to be apparent in the market, these topics began to reappear, and they formed an important part of the research undertaken.

In her study of the status of secondary school librarians in cities of 20,000 to 250,000 in New York and New Jersey, Dorothy Annable<sup>45</sup> sent questionnaires to supervisors, principals, and librarians to ascertain the relative positions of teachers and librarians as to qualifications, salaries, hours, prerogatives, and faculty status; and of librarians, de-

partment heads, and supervisors. She also obtained reactions as to the desirability of department head status for librarians. Since New York City continues to classify school librarians as clerical staff, such a study is particularly pertinent to that section. Another facet of the history of school library service in Arkansas<sup>15, 16</sup> is Ruth I. Dunaway's examination<sup>46</sup> of the progress made toward meeting the 1952-53 standards for training school librarians of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools by college and state agencies. The purposes of a study by Ruth B. Galbraith<sup>47</sup> were to learn what school library functions administrators feel make the greatest contributions to the school program, and to determine whether library school curricula provide for instruction in these functions. Her findings raise several questions as to the adequacy of preparation for essential school library work by library schools.

The American Library Association has recently issued two new statements of standards<sup>48, 49</sup> which are discussed elsewhere in the January, 1953, issue of *Library Trends*. Ruth M. Ersted,<sup>50</sup> who worked with the Board of Education for Librarianship on standards for teacher education institutions in library science programs, developed concurrently her thesis *The Education of School Librarians*, in which she tested certain hypotheses concerning adequate educational programs for school librarians, and arrived at a proposed basic program.

Interest in standards has recurred at almost regular intervals since the beginning of systematic research in the school library field. With the recent humanizing of standards it has been rising. Caroline M. Piscitello<sup>51</sup> traced the development of standards from 1918 to 1949, and their change in emphasis from goods to services. Where early criteria seemed to exist for their own sake, the new ones have been developed primarily for measuring purposes. *Evaluative Criteria*,<sup>52</sup> which appeared in 1939, probably has been an influential factor in this interest. Another thought-provoking instrument is *A Planning Guide for the High School Library Program*,<sup>53</sup> with its emphasis on school objectives, aspects of service in terms of them, and long-range planning. The Local Area Consensus Studies,<sup>54</sup> sponsored by the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program, represent an effort to get school and community agreement on the school's problems and programs. Of special interest to librarians are Inventory A, *What Do You Think About Our School Library Program?*<sup>55</sup> and Inventory B, *In What Respects Should We Strengthen Our School Library Program?*<sup>56</sup> Like the other inventories in the Area Consensus Studies, these are to be checked by pupils, parents, laymen, and faculty members to deter-

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mine the present and future role of the school library in the school and community. The data on this section of the study are being gathered and will be interpreted by Alice Lohrer as part of her Ph.D. dissertation at the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago. Such evaluation is a forward step, inasmuch as it brings the public, upon whom final support of the school system rests, into an active role.

The American Association of School Librarians have underway a national study of school library standards. This project, which is being carried on in cooperation with other national educational and library organizations, should provide school librarians and educational officers with a body of data for further studies in the field.

Evaluative studies of school libraries in demonstration schools which train teachers are needed, particularly as they supposedly are factors in developing library consciousness among future teachers. Investigations should be made of the effects of evaluation on school library programs. Further investigations of the type of Miss Lohrer's are needed, not only to get at the value of school libraries, but to acquaint the public with the purposes and services of such agencies.

As has been made obvious, the needs for research in the school library field are great. Some of the larger problems lend themselves to the kind of investigation undertaken at the Ph.D. level. However, a vast body of smaller projects need exploration. Whether or not this sort of investigation will almost disappear is dependent to a large extent upon the five-year programs of library science in teacher education institutions under the new A.L.A. Standards.<sup>49</sup>

Whatever the source of research, one need is paramount, i.e., improved communication of the results of research. Closer cooperation with *Library Literature* in supplying entries and informative summaries would be an important step in this direction. Where theses or dissertations are available neither on interlibrary loan nor microfilm, a gap in the availability of research results would be closed if two-page abstracts of their contents and conclusions could be duplicated and made available to those interested, at a small sum. Such improvements in the accessibility of findings would do much to avoid duplication of effort, and would provide a much more thorough picture of the amount and kind of investigation, whatever the phase of study. Equally important is the need for spreading the news about research results. The outcomes of studies like that of James<sup>25</sup> are as important to administrators as to librarians. Again, administrators and teachers as well as practicing librarians would be interested in the publicity

activities listed in the Geiger<sup>33</sup> study. The direct and implied criticisms of preparation for school librarianship in the findings of the Misses Mahar,<sup>29</sup> Geiger,<sup>33</sup> Krentzman,<sup>22</sup> Maddox,<sup>23</sup> Galbraith<sup>47</sup> and Ersted<sup>50</sup> should be considered by library schools in planning curriculum revision. When the results of research in the school library field are more effectively communicated, such research will assume the roles for which it was intended, i.e., those of adding to knowledge and helping in the revision of accepted conclusions.

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