



Public Relations of the School Library

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“TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE” is *not* the question when it comes to public relations in the school library. The only choice open to the school librarian is between having an effective or ineffective relationship with the school library’s public. Obviously, the success of the school library program is determined by the choice the school librarian makes. It is important for the school librarian to realize that public relations is a “continuing process of keying policies, services and actions to the best interests of those individuals and groups whose confidence and goodwill a school library covets; and secondly, it is the interpretation of these policies, services and actions to assure complete understanding and appreciation of the school library.”¹ Accordingly, the school librarian has a key role to play in building an effective program of public relations.

When a school librarian begins to study the problem of public relations, immediately there comes a realization that the school library’s publics are the school administrators, the teachers, the students, the parents, and the members of the whole community. Each public may deserve a special program of interpretation in order to assure complete understanding and appreciation of the function of the school library.

If a “good school library is a collection of many materials of learning—selected, organized and administered for service to the students and faculty of the school,”² then the school librarian’s task is that of making friends and winning confidence, approval, and material assistance from the groups which are immediately concerned with the services of the school library. Librarians have always sought to capture ways and means by which all tasks involving the bringing together of library materials and their users might be made easier and more certain. Planning these tasks will

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not guarantee effective use, but it will aid immeasurably in assisting the users.

School library public relations acquires its direction and meaning to a large extent from the school itself. Of necessity the over-all plan of school library operation should follow the regular administrative procedures for public relations of the particular school system. Then too, the superintendent, the principal, the teachers, and the school librarian should work together to plan the over-all public relations program. This suggests that each member of the faculty should have whatever public relations responsibility falls within the scope of his general authority. Naturally, the school librarian should assume his responsibility for the area of interpreting school library service. The school librarian is the logical interpreter of all school library activities. He can either let his publics know the activities through an organized program of public relations, or he can let his publics gain their impressions of the services and actions of the school library through unplanned contacts. The school librarian must take the initiative in planning and carrying out a program which will gain support of the administrators, the faculty, the students of the school, the parents, and members of the community.

Public relations efforts will be more effective when plans are made for the specific publics served. One of the librarian's responsibilities is to keep his administrative superiors informed and to get their approval for the planned activities in school library public relations. Channels of publicity that have been set up in the school must be followed. Since few courses in education prepare administrators with an adequate understanding of the nature and services of the school library, the school librarian should be aware of the need for interpreting the library to the administrative staff. When planning a program of enlarging the administrators' understanding and recognition of the school library, the school librarian should remember that administrators are very busy people. Furthermore, when the librarian considers the heavy schedules of the superintendent and principal, he should time his approach at a period other than rush hours. The wise school librarian does not try to sell the entire school library in one afternoon. He involves the superintendent and principal in planning long-range objectives. He demonstrates to his administrators that he knows the work of the school library and does it!

It is always advisable for the school librarian to provide the superintendent and principal with information in brief form for a monthly

report which may be transmitted by the administration to the board of education. This report can be factual to include the basic school library statistics, but it should also include an informal resumé of exhibits, work with groups, classroom units, special features, and the like. The school librarian interprets the financial needs of the school library to the school administrators by planning a detailed budget which explains the need for and use of each item. No school board member can be expected to spend freely the taxpayers' money on the school library unless he is acquainted with the high rate of return in educational values from the tax dollars invested in a school library.

In explaining to administrators the need for increased staff, the librarian emphasizes the continuous contacts which make it possible to work directly with more groups and more departments. As a result an enlightened administration will free the librarian for full time library work and secure additional staff when needed. The librarian invites the administrators into the library to see the teaching laboratory at work, and he lets them examine the tools of learning. In addition, he keeps the administrators' office files continually supplied with pictures and slides of publicity and newspaper clippings about the activities and services of the school library. He provides his administrators with periodic write-ups of activities with various groups; e.g., the gifted child. Recorded comments of teachers, students, and parents as they attend special functions in the library, for example, a National Library Week Open House, assist the administration in understanding the many types of public relations programs at work in the school library.

Every library needs adequate quarters, conveniently located and suitably equipped. The wise school librarian uses every public relations device available to interpret the planning of school library space for the administrator as to adequacy, comfort, attractiveness, and service. For example, the filmstrip, "School Library Quarters," and detailed plans of recently completed school libraries with floor plans and photographs are available from the American Library Association's Headquarters Library. To be suitably equipped, a library needs a wide variety of instructional materials; books, films, filmstrips, maps, globes, pamphlets, periodicals, pictures, recordings, slides, and related learning materials must be provided to meet the demands of the curriculum and the capabilities of the student body. Through the school librarian's interpretation of these materials of learning, administrators will enlarge their understanding of the need for them. An

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Indiana Superintendent said recently: "So important is an adequate collection of appropriate books and materials for boys and girls through the twelve years of school, that such a library has become the mark of a good school and a school without this mark cannot be judged a good one."³

To insure continuous communication between the library and the classroom in the use of materials, the school librarian will assist administrators in understanding the need for the school librarian to serve on committees for curriculum development and for the improvement of the over-all program of instruction. In turn, the school librarian appreciates his administrators and gives them credit for their contributions.

One of the school library's most important publics is the faculty. The success or failure of the school library program will be determined, in a large part, by the quality and amount of library use by the classroom teacher. As a working member of the instructional staff, and as a part of the school library's public relations program, the school librarian keeps the contribution of the school library to the teaching program constantly before the faculty. Generally, the school librarian is a fully trained teacher who knows and understands the school, its objectives and goals, and the school curriculum. As the librarian works with courses of study, with teachers and with students in completing assignments, he comes to understand the teaching methods of each member of the faculty, his point of view and his special interests. At departmental meetings the school librarian makes suggestions and recommendations and receives requests from fellow teachers. He prepares bibliographies and arranges for a constant flow of curriculum materials to and from the classroom. The new teacher sees the librarian as a co-worker ready to help him and his students, and the alert librarian offers to have a session in the library for new teachers in the school, showing them around and answering their questions.

As it is important for the school librarian to know and understand the work of the teacher, similarly it is essential that the faculty know the duties and responsibilities of the school librarian—selecting, organizing, and servicing an up-to-date materials collection, working with classes, working with individuals in free reading and reading guidance, and giving ready reference or informational services. Sometimes the school librarian may be resented by other teachers who assume, because the librarian does not teach five periods a day, that

he has a very light schedule of work. This misunderstanding will not happen if the school librarian attends and participates in in-service training programs, faculty meetings, professional meetings, and parent-teacher meetings and if he has other opportunities to work with his colleagues. Involving all members of the faculty in the selection of materials, getting the teachers' assistance in discarding materials, and sending to the teachers lists of new books, magazines, films, filmstrips, and other purchases in their teaching areas are good public relations practices. The librarian's daily contacts should invite teachers to come in to read or to browse, to talk with students or other faculty, or to chat with the librarian.

The stereotype concept of a school librarian is too often that of a person who is aloof, snobbish, unworldly—who is standing guard over the books and materials with little or no regard for the individual, whether he is a student or a member of the faculty. The frequent appearance of the librarian in the classroom as a helping teacher and a tactful, friendly person directing the services of the library will erase such stereotypes. Perhaps, too, as a result of these contacts in the classroom the school librarian will be more effective in the informal teaching done in the library. The school librarian should also be present for the social events and school-sponsored activities to demonstrate that he is interested in the success of every part of the school.

The school librarian assists the faculty in their efforts to be informed about the latest developments and trends in their respective fields of teaching. Every school library should have an educational or professional collection which provides materials on curriculum, teaching, evaluation, counseling, and current social trends and a file of important professional magazines. Fortunate is the teacher who has the resources of a good school library, and equally fortunate is the school librarian who is a member of a faculty that is aware of the services offered by a good school library. B. L. Johnson said, "Teaching is a creative activity; librarian participation in teaching can and must be creative in the highest sense of the word."⁴

The students of the school are another important public. Satisfied students are the best publicity agents for the school library program. The school librarian is in a strategic position to learn much about student interests, attitudes, and problems. From this information he guides the students to find books and materials suited to their interests and abilities and to solve their problems. Effective public relations with students will be strengthened through the appropriate use of

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displays, exhibits, discussion groups, story hours, assembly programs, and book talks. Through browsing, discussing, and sharing, students learn to discriminate and develop judgment in the evaluation of materials. The librarian provides students with lists and other bibliographic services, encourages students to help in the selection and discarding of materials for the library and invites students to assist in formulating library policy.

Some librarians have found that student library committees provide opportunities to express opinions concerning policies and procedures in the school library. Through library participation students learn responsibility for use of public property and social responsibility in group situations. Students learn how to plan and work together effectively. One activity which has public relations merit as well as educational value for the student is the student library assistant program. The best training comes from actually doing a variety of tasks; e.g., circulation, publicity, book lists, all under the direction of the librarian. A manual of instruction that describes the duties to be performed should be provided for each assistant. Varied assignments, arranged by planned work schedules and rotation of work, give students opportunities to develop a variety of learning skills and also to be a part of the public relations program of the school library.

The school librarian, through a planned program in teaching the use of the library, has an opportunity to improve public relations with students by teaching students to locate, organize, and use the library and all its resources. While teachers frequently share in giving various kinds of library instruction, the school librarian must assume the major responsibility for the program of teaching the use of the library. An attractive library bulletin explaining library organization and different ways of using library materials will be very helpful to students. Skills in the use of the library which are learned in school will be used by the student whenever he uses libraries throughout his life. The school librarian can see that students have opportunities to become acquainted with other libraries in the community by arranging visits sponsored by the school library and by encouraging them to use the public library and other educational resources.

In furthering good public relations with students the school librarian should provide ready reference service and suitable work spaces for individual research as well as for group and committee work. The reference and research uses of the school library will depend, in a large part, upon the classroom teacher and his assignments, although

hobbies and special interests of students sometimes lead to research. In our present day society there is much concern for the scientific approach to information; therefore, it is important that young people learn to use many tools in finding answers.

Other public relations techniques for implementing the students' use of the library may include assistance in planning club and co-curricular activities, publicity about the school library and its resources through a library reporter to the school newspaper, and assistance with career day activities and hobby shows. Some school librarians have used an attractive news bulletin board of current happenings about students, clubs, and sports to draw students into the school library. It should be remembered that an attractive school library is like an attractive home—students like to come to it. When pleasant surroundings are coupled with a tactful and friendly librarian, students will feel "at home." And when the librarian provides adequate materials and suitable work spaces students will make use of these.

A fourth important public to be considered in the school library's public relations program is the members of the community. The school librarian can build stronger the public relations of the school library by knowing the community and by being an active part of it. Even though school library public relations begin within the school, much of the success which the school librarian desires will depend upon the impression created outside the school. The librarian's individual conversations and person-to-person contacts are very influential because these reflect the policies, practices, and actions of the school library. Librarians should never overlook the fact that every community has organized groups such as the P.T.A., Woman's Club, League of Women Voters, and the Junior Chamber of Commerce who have a natural interest in the school and its library program. These groups are enthusiastic about reports on children's reading skills, the free reading programs in the school library, provisions for the gifted child, research techniques, and the scientific approach to information. School library personnel need not be accomplished public speakers, but the librarian should know how to prepare a speech and how to deliver it. Sometimes speeches can be made more interesting by the use of student-made projects, pictures, slides, portable exhibits, and charts.

Parents are an important part of the school library's public. Through home visits the librarian assures parents of his interest in the student's

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welfare and invites the cooperation of parents in solving problems. Other means for making contact with parents are open houses, teas, and book talks which provide opportunities to visit the school library, to see its facilities, and to observe its services. Many school librarians have found that advisory citizen committees are important public relations contacts, since they assist in informing the public as well as in developing policies.

Some school librarians have found that a good public relations technique is to use the school library card catalog to include cards by subject area of resource the people who live in the community and who are willing to supplement classroom discussion by talks, reports, or slides of their "first hand" experiences while living in other places and getting to know other people. The librarian should not overlook highly trained people in the scientific and technical areas, who usually are pleased to assist teachers and librarians in the teaching areas in which they are expert. Tapping the resources of community groups, such as industries, crafts and social agencies, the librarian has available for loan many exhibits and displays for use in the school library. In addition, the card catalog also may contain cards by subject area of field trips, places of historic or local interest, museums, public buildings, and shrines which are useful in enriching the teaching program of the school. It is important that the card contain full information concerning location, hours open to the public, the person to contact for arrangements, and distance from the school.

Another community agency which can be of assistance to the school library in serving its publics and in enlarging library resources for school personnel is the public library. If a public library is located in the community, the school librarian should be well informed of its resources and should work closely with the public librarian in all areas in which coordination can make more materials more available to more young people. Much can be accomplished if the public librarian and school librarian will meet periodically to share, in a friendly and understanding manner, their common problems and the possible solutions. In addition, the school librarian can strengthen his relations with his publics by being informed about and making use of regional and state agencies and services. Advisory services are available also from state departments of education, national and state professional associations, and from nearby colleges and universities. Professional library journals often carry articles and ideas concerning public relations and publicity. A wealth of current literature is avail-

able on school public relations and can be adapted to school library public relations.

School librarians do not have to look far to discover an array of media for their use in communicating with their publics. If not in the school, somewhere in the community the librarian can find motion pictures, filmstrips, pictures, slides, exhibits, displays, bulletin boards, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, which are at the librarian's disposal for interpreting school library service to its various publics. It is important that the school librarian select the proper medium to reach a particular public which the school library serves. Once he chooses the right medium, he will have a better opportunity for reaching a particular public and for achieving desired actions or attitudes. Whenever the school librarian considers a mass media approach to public relations, it is important that he consider the available resources, the time needed for preparation, the cost, the possible effectiveness, the subject matter presented, and the extent of influence. If the school librarian considers these factors, he is in a better position to choose the best medium to do an effective job of public relations.

The public relations minded school librarian knows that exhibits, displays, and bulletin boards are the show windows of school library service. These are splendid media for keeping students, faculty, administrators, and the general public informed of the work, assets, and services of the school library program. The school librarian uses his ingenuity to make use of many places in addition to the school library for exhibits and displays. Some possibilities are school corridors, auditoriums, or gymnasiums; store windows; meeting rooms used by community groups; local and state fairs; and youth and teachers' conventions.

The medium of the motion picture may also be used to show the services of the school library. The visual image can inform and deliver a message which will be remembered for a long time. An excellent example of the motion picture as a public relations instrument is "A Carpet Under Every Classroom." Written and produced by Marion Hock, librarian of the Manhasset, New York, High School, the film is intended to show the nature of school library work and how the library supports the school program. It is designed for use with teachers, curriculum consultants, administrators, school boards, parents, and interested lay groups. Some librarians have found that slides and filmstrips can be just as effective as the motion picture in a public relations program. One can also use slides on television for

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spot announcements or parts of a program. If desired, sound can be added to slides or filmstrips by the use of a synchronized tape recording. However, the school librarian will be more effective by giving a running commentary because he can choose his remarks to fit the interests of the group.

Photographs are a familiar and highly valuable visual aid to public relations in and out of the school library. They are concrete and interesting and arrest attention. Even an amateur photographer—either the school librarian, a member of the faculty or a student—can take very creditable pictures with care and practice. Among the many activities for photographing are student activities, bulletin boards, exhibits, types of materials, and types of services. The school librarian should be careful that the shots taken of the library portray the story which he wishes to tell. Every school librarian should build a good picture file which shows the activities of the school library for publicity purposes. Large blow-ups can be used for posters and in displays in corridors, at conventions, and in store windows.

Newspapers, radio broadcasts, and telecasts can carry news of the school library's activities to a wider public than that reached by other media. Local papers and broadcasting stations usually are cooperative because they are interested in giving the community news of local events. The formation of a library club, an unusual presentation of a film showing, an announcement of a previewing session, a speech by a locally important man to the student body concerning a library-related topic, and the election of officers can all qualify as news. Sensitive to the high public interest in radio news, some school systems have developed a daily news show devoted exclusively to school news. The school librarian should see that school library activities are reported. Taped interviews add variety to the regular newscasts. If handled properly, panel discussions can be highly successful, particularly if lay citizens are panel participants. The studio classroom type of television show has been used widely and could easily show the variety of services offered by the school library.

The well-known questions of the newspaper world—the “five W’s”—What, Where, Who, When, and Why, with the How as an alternative to the Why—should be used as a guide in testing each news release. It is usually easier to “rough out” a report first, then make the necessary changes. Editors appreciate copy that is typed, double-spaced, and on only one side of the paper. A margin of at least an inch should be left on each side of the copy; the first sheet should have

four inches of space at the top containing the subject across the middle of the space. The name and address of the writer should be placed in the upper left-hand corner. A school librarian who has learned how to write and to take good action photographs will be able to present an acceptable story.

Every school library public relations program needs careful evaluation to appraise its work with the school and community. Methods of evaluation can range from informal observations to inventories, checklists, and special rating devices. The public relations conscious school librarian always takes inventory of what he is doing and planning. Here is a checklist of ten questions which may help in the evaluation of the school librarian's planned program for the public relations of the school library. These questions also serve as a summary of this discussion.

1. Does the school librarian know the value of good public relations and does he recognize that he is the key to the public relations program of the school library?

2. Does he know the interests and needs of the various publics which he serves?

3. Does he interpret the school library program to his administrators by involving them in the planning of the program; by reports; by preparing a budget; by explaining the need for space, staff, and materials; and by serving on committees?

4. Does he interpret the school library program to the faculty by knowing the courses of study, teaching methods, and curriculum materials; by participating in all professional meetings; by involving the faculty in the selecting and discarding of materials and by taking part in all school activities?

5. Does he interpret the school library program to the students by providing a wide variety of library materials which meet the needs, both curricular and co-curricular, abilities, and interests of students; by involving students in selecting and discarding materials and in formulating library policy; by directing a student library assistant program; by teaching the use of the library and by providing reference services?

6. Does the school librarian see that students know all the educational resources in their community including the public library?

7. Does the school librarian consciously consider the community in interpreting the school library program by knowing the community

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and being an active part of it, by reporting to organized community groups, by using citizens of the community as resource persons, and by personal contacts?

8. Does the school librarian keep the school librarian program before parents by visits; by open houses, teas, and talks; by advisory committees?

9. Does the school librarian use every known public relations media—pictures, motion pictures, filmstrips, slides, exhibits, displays, bulletin boards, newspapers, radio and television—to interpret the school library program to its various publics?

10. Does the school librarian have a sense of direction, of values, of appreciation, of human relations and of adventure, and does he evaluate his public relations program?

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