The Role of the Large Public Library in Adult Education

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Libraries are still trying to define or redefine their role in adult education. This may suggest a continued reluctance to accept responsibility in this area or a tendency to view the learning situations in adult life so narrowly that the library has little part in them other than to provide materials and individual guidance. Educators since before World War I, writing on the sociological function of institutions, have stressed the unique characteristics of libraries which place them in a strategic position for working with adults. They have been called the least institutionalized and most flexible of all agencies and therefore able to adapt to changing situations. The whole field of adult education has expanded and undergone many modifications in the last two decades. So have the large metropolitan libraries. Concepts and practice have been modified and revised in the light of experiments to meet new needs and interests, though practice has frequently lagged behind theory, partly because of the thread of controversy which is found in all the literature: service to the individual versus service to groups. There are passionate cries that the library is the last great stronghold of the individual; that limitations of budget and staff make group service a luxury. This argument is weak from an administrative point of view. If in guidance in the use of books, many adults are better served in groups than as individuals, the administrator's responsibility is to make it a compelling enough need to get the budget for it. Municipal museums and schools have expanded their educational services to adults in the last two decades in line with current thinking. Why should libraries hold back?

C. O. Houle seems to resolve the dilemma in our thinking in an

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article “Adult Education in the Public Library.” He suggests two goals: (1) to help the individual to a full acceptance of responsibility for his own self-education. This means help in two ways: to aid those who themselves come for guidance and to discover those who are unaware of their own needs or of resources available and lead them to a conception of the importance of continued learning. (2) “a society in which thoughtful people work and want to work together in a reasonable, intelligent way, using factual knowledge in the service of their social needs.” One might wish to extend this beyond factual knowledge to an understanding of values but perhaps this is implied. With these objectives the needs and well-being of the individual and the group merge. A reader may pursue his own private concerns and enthusiasms through “solo” reading or he may seek a clearer understanding of the world around him and greater critical appreciation by the clash of opinion in group discussion or by planning, after study, for community action on local problems.

Houle’s objectives are not for the timid, passive, or sentimental librarian. They do not suggest giving the reader what he wants, or that reading for its own sake as a personal pleasure is the only goal. They suggest that it is equally important to help him to know the satisfactions of widening his knowledge and deepening his enjoyment and also his obligation to acquire the knowledge to take his place as a responsible member of society. This requires more than familiarity with books. It presupposes some understanding of adult concerns and human motivation, of psychology and sociology, and time for conference and planning. Much of the discussion concerning the individual versus the group is in the realm of opinion. Until there is a body of research to discover what reading does to people, whether the majority prefer or can profit best by the personal counselor relationship or get more stimulation by group discussion following home reading, there is not enough data to decide how important it is to take on this added responsibility. Librarians do not know whether most of their clientele are more comfortable with the lonely crowd or organization man. Nor have they given sufficient thought to the library’s responsibility to society as well as to its individual members.

Do the larger public libraries accept a broader role and how well do they measure up to it? Several directors have put their philosophy in writing. After a survey of adult services in 1954 by a staff committee, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh’s objectives were formulated as follows:
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We recognize that the primary function of the Library is informal education and that it has the obligation to provide leadership in stimulating the use of its books and services.

Book and information services to individuals are to be emphasized. The Committee believes that the Library should “cooperate with all adult education agencies . . . and provide materials for institutes, discussion groups, workshops, lectures and similar activities.” As a general policy, however, “the Library should not organize or initiate discussion groups, film forums or similar activities on a large scale. The way should be kept open, though, for the formation of groups if circumstances make them desirable.”

This recommendation reflects current policy. In conjunction with the Foreign Policy Association, the Library has organized and conducted from one to four foreign affairs discussion groups during each of the last several years. The main effort, however, has been to become the book and information center for groups which are organized by other agencies which exist for that purpose. . . . Book-centered programs which will stimulate the use of books for information and enjoyment constitute an exception, in the Committee’s view.

R. A. Ulveling describes the aims of the Detroit Public Library as “Developing in people fuller, more meaningful lives in their social relationships from the family outward; as citizens; and, in their enjoyment of leisure time pursuits.” In another source he states that

The public library, . . . should provide an individualized service for every patron who comes to it. Thus it is not a mass medium providing one message for all, but is rather a medium for serving masses of individuals with a prescription service whereby each gets the precise thing that is best suited to his particular needs, ability, interests, and background.  

To implement these objectives the Detroit Public Library’s Home Reading Services provide the books for general non-specialized readers, then through stimulation and guidance, promote their use, to the end that children, young people, men and women, may have an opportunity and encouragement for their fullest development as individuals, as members of a family, as citizens. Since this service is concerned with the best personal development of people through existing knowledge, rather than with the refinement and extension of knowledge itself, its purpose in selecting books is to choose the best and the most usable that are available at varying levels. . . .

This is an excellent expression of the ideal of service to the individual reader, but later, commenting on group work, he adds that
though this personalized service is a great heritage, something more has been added, work with groups, reflecting the library’s ability to identify itself with the community’s social problems. In this Detroit has long been outstanding.

J. M. Cory,⁴ writing on “Library-Sponsored Group Services,” finds no conflict between assuming responsibility for providing service to groups and working effectively with individuals. Though he believes that the public library “is one of the last remaining educational agencies interested in the individual’s ‘self-education,’” he notes that probably an overwhelming majority of the population are gregarious and prefer to share and compare with others. It is in part a matter of priority as to which service receives emphasis. As he concludes, “Obviously the emphasis given to group service will vary with the nature of the community served and the adequacy of the library’s financial support. First priority will normally be given to serving the individual and the individual group participant and group leader. Where funds permit or where other organizations are lacking, however, the library cannot fully discharge its educational responsibilities without helping to meet the normal, human need for group activity.”

Harold Hamill⁵ dissents from this broader concept of the library’s function partially because he is still equating it with adult education of a more formal nature, rather than as an extension of individual service. He speaks at times as though it was undertaken as public relations for the library and librarians, rather than as another means of relating people and books. He would have no adult education activities in his library until every essential service is adequately staffed and no spot is out of reach of library service with a strong book stock. He feels that librarians have a “solemn obligation to spend our time and energy on those things which are clearly proved to be of the highest possible benefit to the communities we serve.”

Emerson Greenaway⁶ points out in the same series of articles that both Cory and Hamill are speaking in terms of their own community situation: Los Angeles coping with a huge, sprawling, and exploding community with an excellent adult education program in its schools, feels less concern than New York, growing vertically rather than horizontally, and constantly meeting group problems. The “problem resolves itself into making a decision on the basis of the community, book resources, financial support, available non-library adult education programs and largely in the final analysis, the will and interest of the librarian himself.” Mr. Greenaway states his own philosophy:
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As to the library's credo of service I am willing to subscribe to the following, much of which has already been stated: (1) That public libraries accept as their basic objectives the provision and servicing of expertly selected books and other materials which aid the individual in the pursuit of education, information, or research, and in the creative use of leisure time. Since financial limitations generally prevent equal emphasis on all aspects of these objectives, the library should recognize that its major concern must be a positive contribution toward the removal of ignorance, intolerance and indifference.

(2) That we recognize educational service to adults as a primary function, and that the library pursue an active program of stimulation, leadership, and cooperation with other agencies in encouraging the reading of socially significant materials.

(3) That we accept the responsibility for the direct communication of ideas through organization of discussion groups, lecture series, informal talks, institutes, film forums, book discussions and the like, seeking thereby to direct the individual toward a continuous learning process through use of books and related materials.

It is not too broad a generalization to say that the libraries which have shown the most effective community leadership and have had a dynamic adult education objective permeating their total program have been those libraries in which the administration was committed to that ideal. These are the libraries in which the directors have supported and encouraged those staff officers who were responsible for planning and carrying on the program and have instilled the staff with a sense of responsibility for understanding the complexities of human interests and motivation so that the reader is effectively served in his many relationships whether as an inner-directed individualist or a gregarious group member. This is born out by an evaluation of the Indianapolis Project which was a part of the Indiana Study in library adult education. A report by R. M. Smith asserts that one reason for the failure of the project to mature was "uncertainty and ambivalence in the attitude of the head librarian toward the project; and pressing internal problems and an impending administrative realignment that caused library staff members to adopt a wait-and-see point of view. The attitude and role of the chief librarian was of crucial importance in the success or failure of the accelerated adult education program in the large library. The chief administrator had to accept the idea of time-consuming activities and results that tend in part to be intangible or subjective."

Nearly all of the twenty-four libraries serving a population of
500,000 or more and also of those in the 400,000–499,999 group, are known for the quality of reader service and book collection. Most of them also carry on varying amounts and types of group and community relations and activities. The latter, like special events in the news, are more apt to be mentioned in the professional journals but are not necessarily unduly emphasized in the total program of the library system. Louisville is frequently cited as veering farthest from tradition, with its collection of paintings which may be borrowed to hang on the living room walls and its two FM radio stations which broadcast educational and musical programs to schools, colleges, and other institutions totalling forty city-wide outlets by means of leased wires.

The Louisville library maintains a large collection of tapes and recordings which are used on closed circuit. A citizen may drop into a branch and request to listen to a musical selection piped out from the central library. Not a legitimate adult education activity? With a public to whom the audio-visual media are as familiar as books, may there not be good reason to emphasize them for educational and cultural enrichment? In this case a special fund, not the regular library budget, made the service possible. The librarian is relating his library to the community’s tradition that the city’s “greatest resource is a reputation for intellectual vigor.” Since the program began the number of library users has quadrupled.

Concern for the individual reader has always been central to what R. D. Leigh would call the librarian’s dream. Public libraries justly take pride in the unique reader-librarian relationship. They are among the few agencies to which adults come voluntarily to solve a problem, extend their knowledge, or broaden their cultural appreciation—those adults who look to books and other library materials as the means of self-education on their own time. “The Library Serves the Individual Reader” by Sigrid Edge discusses this basic function. Various methods have been devised to make the service more meaningful. In the twenties, it was thought that a readers’ adviser might best work with the patron who wished to undertake a reading program. Jennie M. Flexner and Ruth Rutzen pioneered in developing two different approaches in organization. Miss Flexner organized an office in the central building of the New York Public Library, with a small staff which experimented with techniques in reader interviewing, planned and continuously evaluated suitable reading materials, prepared reading lists on the basis of the reader’s interests and abilities, and explored
the needs of special groups of readers. The next step was the training of a selected group of branch assistants in the techniques, point of view, and desirable attitudes. Leona Durkes aptly describes the idea and process:

The Readers' Advisory Service in the Central Building can give more help to the individual with a reading problem than is usually possible in the busy branch libraries. Although the services and responsibilities of the Service have expanded since its establishment by Jennie M. Flexner more than a quarter of a century ago, it is still very much concerned with the same type of guidance of which Miss Flexner wrote in her first annual report: "At the beginning it was recognized that the functions of this office were those directly and indirectly concerned with the planning of courses of reading based upon the individual reader's needs. . . . This type of adult education divides itself rather definitely into two parts: first, the work with the individual wishing to follow systematic reading for his own benefit; and second, the work with groups and group leaders, seeking to accomplish somewhat similar results by extending the library's guidance far beyond the contact with the individual reader."

Expert help is still being given both through oral suggestion of titles and through the preparation of book lists tailored to fit the needs of individuals or groups whenever such a list is requested or seems indicated. . . . Reading guidance is a unique library function which other distributors of books do not share. Anything which motivates interest in books and establishes habits of using them can lead to library guidance and purposeful reading.

In the branch libraries this is usually on-the-spot guidance to which the librarian brings skills bred of practice in quickly interpreting the reader's need from the most informal sort of interview, in the use of bibliographical aids, and a background of personal reading.

Expansion of the office to a center for community resources information and advisory service to organizations and special groups was a natural development out of a recognized need. Then came the recognition of the function of groups in adult learning in experiments with book discussion.

Detroit, like New York, found that reader guidance was needed throughout the system rather than in a single office and required the development of a new point of view for all floor service. In-service training programs were planned to give adult workers in branches and in the central departments this deeper concept of reader service, especially guidance technique and book selection from the standpoint
of a book's usability with the reader rather than from that of subject content or competence of the author. The separation of the reference and research services in the main building from the general home reading services made the latter the focal point for informal guidance.

The Enoch Pratt Free Library's departmental system with its subject departments in which both reference and general reader service is given is similar in arrangement to several other newer buildings. It is assumed that individual or group guidance in planned reading or study may be more effectively given by subject specialists. Staff members have asked themselves in their meetings whether or not the so-called general reader is given the kind of direction he requires in this setting. He is, if the librarians are skilled in interviewing and in selecting materials in relation to reader needs. But assistants who are more oriented to reference than advisory service and less conscious of the adult education point of view may treat a reader's query as a question to be looked up rather than as an indication of an unexpressed need to be explored. Grace T. Stevenson comments on the effects of this diffusion of responsibility:

With the dispersal of this function among several members of a staff, there was a considerable variation in degree of competence, personal attitude, and time available. The library remains one of the dwindling number of public institutions whose primary services are directed at the individual. The ideal relation between the readers' adviser and the individual can be compared to the difference between classroom teaching and tutorial instruction. If even a pretty good approximation of this is to be maintained, librarians need more training for it, both formally and through in-service methods. Libraries need larger staffs in order to free professional people from routine jobs. The probability of the average, too忙y librarian having the human relationship skills, the knowledge of materials, and the time to give many individuals adequate guidance is small. In actuality, partial guidance is given to many, and extensive guidance to a few. It is given only to those who seek it, and often, in a busy library, only to those who seek it with a reasonable degree of persistency.

This is a critical area in staff orientation and training.

Fewer than ten large libraries still retain the position of readers' adviser, usually either in the office of adult services or the home reading service division. Cincinnati's new building includes a readers' bureau. Here consultants planned 207 courses in 1955. Not only are lists tailored to special needs, but frequent conferences, sometimes
weekly, are held with those students who need it. The office also 
arranges for group and community activities.

Some institutions are combining responsibility for individual and 
group advisory service, including audio-visual, in a single office. Others 
have a separate films department and a group services department. 
Those libraries which have a Home Reading Service in the central 
building with a good general collection and a staff trained for reader-
oriented service, leaving the subject departments for more specialized 
users, have arranged a setting favorable for leading the casual reader 
to more satisfying uses of the library.

Administrative recognition of the need for coordination of these 
various special functions is found in those libraries which have created 
a position of supervisor or coordinator of adult services or adult edu-
cation, in some cases for the central building only or for branches 
only; in some, for the whole system. Responsibilities may be largely 
for community services and library programming but are generally 
broader, including some relating to the book collection, in-service 
training, and public service. This position is often the key to the 
degree of adult education emphasis in the total library organization. 
It has a more important public relations function than is sometimes 
realized. It identifies the library in the minds of community agencies 
as being more than ancillary to the adult education institutions of the 
city and shares in planning and policy making in cooperative under-
takings.

Emphasis on selective guidance has been effected through experi-
ments in arranging collections according to use rather than a logical 
classification scheme. Detroit pioneered with a reader interest arrange-
ment. As Ulveling describes it: Classification systems copied from 
university libraries are “ill-designed for achieving an educational 
objective calling for broad gauge development of people as opposed 
to specialized investigation of a subject. Clearly it seemed that, for 
public libraries, the books should be arranged not by subject content 
but by motivations in people’s lives.” In 1941, a part of the Detroit 
Main Library’s collection was arranged according to the every day 
needs of people: family, personal living, home, group activities, back-
ground reading, current affairs, for example. The plan, later extended 
to several branches, has been adopted enthusiastically by other li-
braries.

Some new buildings in other cities have a large part of the collection 
arranged in broad subject areas more nearly related to adult con-
cerns than to a standard classification. Dallas has departments of community living, family living, and fine arts. At the request of the Public Health Federation, Cincinnati set up "Your Health Alcove" in its Science and Industry Department. Several libraries have some type of World Affairs section. Pittsburgh has a Public Affairs Department.

The information for this article was not gathered by direct questionnaire to libraries, thus it is necessarily fragmentary, probably less so for those libraries for which recent annual reports were available. There are expectedly many patterns of organization and direction in the programs, using that term in its broadest sense, in different cities. The amount and character of adult learning opportunities available through other agencies and the degree of cooperation and mutual understanding are important factors in determining the emphasis in the library's plans. How effective that cooperation has been in Baltimore where a climate of mutual helpfulness and respect for each other's goals has been built up and an avenue of communication affected through an adult education council, is brought out by a recent article in Adult Education by W. V. Bell, director of adult education of the Baltimore Public Schools.14

Three factors stand out as primary influences in determining how successfully a library carries out its educational function:

1. Clear objectives, not only stated by, but adhered to and implemented by the top administrator through his advice and encouragement, provision of machinery, and assignment of responsibility.

2. A staff office or officers, whether supervisor, coordinator, or department head, with direct responsibility for planning, coordinating, delegating, and in-service training. Though many specific projects may be initiated and carried through by branches, departments, or special units, some over-all coordination is needed for scheduling, maintaining standards, providing channels for wide staff involvement, and giving balance and unity to the total program.

3. A sufficient number of the staff holding the conviction that continuous learning is a normal part of adult life. These must believe that the library can create an appreciation of good books or films among those in the eighty or ninety per cent who do not now use the library, by going out to them to meet with them in their own interest groups, and by helping them to increase their skills in the selection and use of library materials. This point of view seems to exist where
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there has been strong leadership over a long period and sufficient staff participation to develop understanding. It is apt to be present where a core of younger librarians, who come from those library schools in which the adult education objective permeates the curriculum, are given responsibility and opportunity to experiment.

4. The dynamic quality of the library’s relation to its community.

Or in other words, blessing and conviction at the top, wide staff involvement and interest, deft and dynamic leadership, a high degree of community relatedness and cooperation, and an adequate organizational structure are factors which are apparent in those institutions which have an outstanding program.

Special feature series at intervals of two or three years involving many staff members and cosponsored by and jointly planned with other community agencies have been used by several libraries. Such was the Know Your Fellow Americans Series at the Brooklyn Public Library the idea for which grew out of an article in the Sunday Supplement about the erroneous ideas and areas of ignorance of average Americans about so-called racial characteristics. United States territories formed the general subject, with a particularly effective meeting on Puerto Ricans relating to a local problem. Handicraft and art displays, singing, dancing, a five-piece mambo band, talks, booklists and materials exhibits—every means was used to make an impact on the two thousand who attended. There were special programs in four of the library branches.

A community problem, a need for understanding of other peoples, or education in some area of daily living may be the reason for cooperation. Denver took note of a local migrant group in arranging jointly with the Committee on Spanish-Speaking People, a three months’ emphasis in programs, exhibits, and lists on Spotlight on Mexico. Health organizations in Cincinnati joined the library in lectures, panel and film discussions on health topics, a feature in some other libraries, along with mental hygiene. Several city libraries have held a course in the library on personal finance or investment know-how in cooperation with local stock exchange and related associations, with related exhibits and lists.

The strongest library programs on world affairs would seem to be in those cities which have an active world affairs council or United Nations Association. Fern Long describes the experiment with discussion groups, using the American Foundation for Political Education

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materials at the Cleveland Public Library, one of the first to sponsor this series. It continued for several years, with a large citizens committee and carefully recruited leaders. She rightly observes that it is difficult to achieve the aim: to help people to make sound judgments on public policy problems and to discern the “inescapable issues” imbedded in all important domestic and international questions. Among results over a five-year period are a new concept of librarianship, and the development of interest in other library activities and in new reading areas, on the part of participants. She herself found that leading a group was a unique and rewarding experience.

Cincinnati Public Library’s interest in music is reflected in the fine collection of recordings, the ideal arrangements for listening and the extent and imaginative quality of its music programs, both live and recorded. Here, as in Baltimore and other cities, live concerts are made possible by the Music Performance Trust Fund of the Recording Industries in cooperation with the American Federation of Musicians. Recorded music programs are regularly featured in some libraries as an appropriate noon-hour activity. An International Music Festival in Pittsburgh drew heavily upon the music division of the library which shared in programming, publicity, and operation. The library’s 1952 annual report, however, comments that demands were so heavy that it should not be repeated without special provision for the necessary service. Queens Borough received a special grant for an experimental series on music appreciation, using slides and records.

The improvement of reading skills is taught in a few large libraries. The Brooklyn Public Library is conducting a five-year experiment in cooperation with the Community Services Division of Brooklyn College. The latter’s reading clinics are testing the reader’s abilities and a librarian is guiding his reading. It is hoped that the study will show to what extent the average person can be helped by reading devices in combination with advisory service from a librarian. The College is supervising the research and evaluation. One might expect a larger number of libraries to offer courses in reading techniques though librarians would need special training for it.

American public libraries report few study groups purely for the enjoyment of books and reading; the trend being toward discussion groups directed toward ideas in books, notable books, or the classics. Enoch Pratt Free Library had a popular “Afternoon With the Poets” series for several years which was discontinued because interest dropped, though a later series of dramatic readings brought back the
same general type of audience. Student attendance has fallen off for this type of program but older persons attend regularly.

An indirect method of encouraging more significant and more cultural reading has been devised by Polly Anderson at Enoch Pratt. When requests for book talks come from book review and literature sections of clubs, she offers a session or two on how to read and enjoy books and share them with each other. Requests for program planning usually follow and by keeping in touch with the groups, she guides them to more satisfying experiences in reading and discovers at the same time latent leadership. The Boston Public Library also has formed groups for getting the most out of reading, with an advanced section dealing with specific subjects such as the short story, drama, and biography.

The longer life expectancy has created new social situations and it is not surprising that libraries have given them emphasis through lists, exhibits, or programs on problems of retirement and the aging. Cleveland’s Live Long and Like It group has a long history of experiment and accomplishment, with careful evaluation. Boston’s Never Too Late group has a similar pattern, with regularly scheduled programs of lectures, films, and music emphasizing member participation. In both libraries members have shared in the planning leading to smaller study and discussion groups arranged for special interests. The usual approach in Golden Age groups is a recreation program but libraries have recognized the need for mental stimulation and cultural enjoyment among older people. The satisfaction of a room of one’s own is recognized in Brooklyn where a special room in a branch is set aside for their senior citizens.

Educators sensitive to the most effective means of adult learning assert that the significant current trend is toward the discussion method. Data from surveys of the activities of such national organizations as B’nai B’rith, the League of Women Voters, and the service clubs reveal that about half of them are using this approach in current affairs. Informal neighborhood groups, often held in homes, attract persons who would not join a more formal, long-term group, introduced to the enjoyment of the exchange of ideas gained through reading and film-viewing they become recruits for more intensive activities. Libraries help these groups to become more meaningful by compiling lists for supplementary reading and recruiting competent leadership.

The Great Books Foundation project has a tie-in with most of the larger libraries, with varying degrees of responsibility assumed by the
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local institution. The fact that some cities have groups continuing for ten or more years indicates the pull of this approach to books. Members fall mainly into two categories: those who want to get more out of their reading by exchanging ideas with others and those who, lacking college training, seek further cultural background. Librarians report that these and other programs similarly set up such as World Politics do, in fact, create better readers.

The American Heritage Project grew out of the New York Public Library’s “Exploring the American Idea” plan which was tested out in several groups as a way of inducing people to read books they might otherwise consider too difficult. Some groups are now ready to move on to more challenging areas. Cincinnati is contributing to the liberal education of its business and professional leaders through a weekly discussion group led by the director of the library which analyzes “Ideas in Books.”

As to the place of such activities in a library’s total program Mrs. Stevenson has this to say:

What is referred to today as adult education activities—reader’s advisers, group work, lectures, discussion groups, film and record programs, are only further extensions of our long-term efforts to encourage the most effective utilization of books. The time will come when the discussion group will be as taken for granted as the open shelf.

And why not? Libraries have been giving specialized services to children for about sixty years, with separate rooms, specially trained staff, story hours and other special activities. Are adults second class citizens? Why not specialized services for adults instead of the self-service super market, with the old days of the friendly chat and the special service from the butcher gone forever.

What does it contribute to the librarian’s development? Margaret Monroe, who as a librarian has had experience with discussion groups and can also speak from the point of view of their value in the training of librarians, makes this statement:

I really do believe that it is not possible for the public library to do as good a job in book selection, in reader’s advisory work, in informal work over the desk with the public if the librarians have not had some experience of that very close contact between the mind of the reader and the book which comes in the discussion program. I think that you discover more about what books can mean to people in the discussion experience than in any other way. So I would say that this is
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one thing in which the library very wisely does some work just as a matter of training the staff to see what the use of books can be.

A new dimension in the library's relation to community adult education came with the addition of films to the collection. Under the leadership of enthusiastic trail blazers in a few libraries, the place of films has been established and their use demonstrated in the short span of twelve years since the American Library Association set up a film advisory service at its Chicago headquarters. Of the fifteen libraries of over 400,000 population which reported film statistics per capita expenditures ranged from $1.05 to $4.25, with the majority between $1.75 and $2.83. Fifteen held library-sponsored programs, twelve lent liberally to community groups, total expenditures ran from $2,500 to $10,717 and collections numbered from 204 to 2,050 prints.

On the whole standards are high in selection for free as well as for purchased films. Film departments furnish information on community resources in the audio-visual field, arrange previews for special interest groups to evaluate and discuss the possible uses of a particular film, teach the use of films and projectors, and advise in program planning. They work with church groups, labor and business, educational and health agencies, civic and cultural organizations. No library service touches such a variety of groups or has as much opportunity to emphasize the educational use of materials.

The extent to which this opportunity is realized, however, depends in part on the attitude and support of the library administration toward this service and the qualifications of the persons given the responsibility for conducting it. There are many examples of imaginative programming. Cincinnati held a film workshop on office supervisors' problems out of which came several leaders who could be called upon to lead film discussions for other groups. Detroit held mental health discussion programs in six branches; Cleveland developed a "fiction and film" series. One library presented "Through Music with the Sound Film." Film librarians are apt to be more aggressive than their fellow workers in making their resources known and demonstrating their use through workshops and institutes often co-sponsored with other organizations, such as the workshop in Baltimore, mentioned above.

The fact that the medium requires special equipment with which staff and public are not familiar and presents problems in housing has retarded staff involvement in their use. The Enoch Pratt Free
Library includes annually in its in-service training, a workshop on the use of films in which assistants preview and learn to evaluate films. Each enrollee participates in planning a film program which includes selection of the films, preparation of a book-related introduction, compiling the announcement flyer which includes a booklist, and the assembling of an exhibit for the public showing. Musical recordings are also selected for use prior to the start of the program. This project has given the assistants a better understanding of films and their relation to other materials and valuable experience with actual programs. Some of these programs are repeated at branch libraries and branch staff also conduct programs in the central library.

The Films Department, though separated spatially from the subject departments, constantly promotes the use of books with films. Departments include films when compiling booklists. Department staffs as well as community specialists are notified of previews in their subject fields. Close communication is maintained between the Films Department and the Office of Adult Services in information about the community and library programming. The fact that in the Enoch Pratt Library films are given department status and the head is responsible for promoting their use throughout the system as well as in the community results in close contact with branch and central staffs and offsets to some extent, the disadvantage of the spatial separation.

The use of television as an educational medium, has had a slow and spotty development; partly through lack of conviction as to its value in relation to the cost and the amount of time required but probably still more because of lack of training and experience. The PLD Reporter in February 1955 reported a study based on a questionnaire sent to sixty-five public libraries. Of the twenty-two which replied, eight were in the large library group. Most of these depend upon the station or outside help for direction and programs take the form of book reviews, ideas in books, interviews with readers, demonstration of hobbies related to books or talks on library services. The last two are not necessarily educational in content. Responsibility in two libraries is placed in the public relations department.

Only one, Detroit, has a full-time position of educational television coordinator in the office of community and group services. Detroit has an educational television station with the library represented on its board and a heavy contributor to its upkeep. It stands fourth among community agencies in the use of air time. Over a third of the professional staff members have appeared on the air and have received
training in community workshops. Active cooperation of many departments and staff enthusiasm have made this heavy program possible.

Seattle received funds for an experiment which has run for some time in which four people from the community discuss issues in a book of current interest. Discussion groups are organized in homes or gather before television sets in branches. The Enoch Pratt Free Library participates in an annual series, *Man the Maker*, cosponsored with the Walters Art Gallery relating books and art objects. Philadelphia is currently producing a ten-week series, *Portraits in Print*, profiles of writers of the past, illustrated with prints, engravings, and portraits used to visualize the author's life and time. The series is planned and scripted by Kathleen Molz, the public relations officer, and is available on kinescope.

It has been estimated that it takes from ten to fifty hours of preparation before the rehearsal for a good program, including planning, writing the script, arranging for the necessary props, and many other details. This is a big slice out of a week's schedule unless staff members have time regularly assigned for this purpose; it is a stumbling block as serious as lack of know-how. Yet the popularity of Sunrise Semester and the exceptional demand for the books it has fostered indicate that television can be a potent force in stimulating reading. An article by C. W. Stone whose experience well qualifies him to speak, points up some of the problems and makes some suggestions. He deplores the lack of conviction of the importance of television in the library program, notes the lack of long range plans, the tendency to beam the program to an elite audience rather than to various possible publics, and the treatment of the medium as a means of publicity rather than education. His recommendations are sound: the need for cooperative ventures, more satisfying opportunities for training, the sharing of scripts and kinescopes, and flexibility in experiments with new formats. Two quotations are apt:

> When addressed to a well-defined audience (taking age levels, background, and interests into account), carefully produced radio and TV programs may assist the intelligent youngster or adult to think more seriously about himself, his neighbors, and the world in which he lives as well as come to appreciate and enjoy more fully the culture which surrounds him. As by-products of the process, good programs also win respect for libraries as institutions and for librarians as individuals worth knowing—people who recognize an important idea
when they see it and who generally can be relied upon to judge it without bias and report accurately the quality of its presentation. . . . It isn’t a question of “know-how”. Librarians who have wanted to learn broadcasting techniques have done this job just as successfully as they have learned other skills considered essential and basic to their professional job (e.g., cataloging, reference work, circulating routines, etc.) The problem is one of attitude. Writing about public libraries and adult education problems generally, John Powell expressed it this way: “[It is] for the lack of the teacher’s impulse that libraries have remained places from which books are taken rather than centers in which a community may cultivate the skill and power of its thinking.”

A modern city library is expected to assume the role of a community agency working with other institutions and with citizens to create a better place in which to live. A library which rejects this responsibility is doing a disservice to the profession. Agency teamwork is an accepted method of discovering needs, uncovering and analyzing problems and finding channels for cooperative study and action, both on a citywide and neighborhood level. Urban renewal, race relations, juvenile delinquency, and work with the aging are areas in which experiments are being carried on. The need may be brought to the attention of a group of agencies by any one of them or by some coordinating council. Something more may be expected of the library than furnishing materials and meeting places. As a neutral agency which knows local organizations, their interests and purposes (if it is fulfilling adequately its function as a community information center), it is in a strategic position to recognize a problem which is concerning many groups.

The public library should be equipped to take leadership in calling together those interested or to urge another appropriate body to do so. In some situations the library’s community responsibility may be to initiate plans for cooperation in holding a workshop. For example, Violet Myer, head of Enoch Pratt’s Film Department, noted many church groups and civic organizations needed greater skills in human relations programming and sought the cooperation of leaders in these areas, in setting up a very effective workshop in the use of films in intergroup relations. The Boston Public Library, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the Institute of Human Relations of Boston University held a training institute in human relations for community leaders for similar reasons.
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The community role of the library, the way in which it functions as a community agency with other institutions, is an important area for study and research. The Library-Community Project increased the awareness of this, for it “brought the outside community into the task of joint investigation for joint planning.” Educators are emphasizing community schools and school buildings now include rooms for neighborhood use. Adult education departments are not concerned with courses for credit only. They offer their resources and staff for conducting workshops on community problems and assisting churches or business and labor organizations in setting up discussion groups. Churches and unions have “social relations” or similar committees to cooperate in community activities. The library also has a place in the main stream in which the modern concept of democracy flows.

Citizen responsibility is taught in the schools. Libraries need to join with other agencies in helping to carry the idea into adult life, for helping to find ways of working on community problems. This may mean, for example, that a branch librarian is allowed time to work on a neighborhood council. Denver’s adult education council has quarters in the library and is strongly identified with it. The city of Baltimore has a number of surveys and neighborhood betterment projects planned or under way, some of impressive proportions. The library is not fulfilling its responsibilities simply by knowing and giving out information about them or by gathering research material. It needs to study its possible relation to each of these projects as a responsible community agency. J. W. Powell has expressed something of this thinking in his imimitable way in “Join the Community—Risk or Opportunity”:

The library’s knowledge of materials, standards, and principles is unique and precious; but it is always in danger of being reserved for the already-motivated individuals who come to get it. Unless, that is, the library can somehow wade boldly out into the currents of community action, community need and change and controversy. Not to “give leadership” necessarily; but to be there to do what only libraries are equipped and trained to do.

And what does this do to—or for—the librarian?

The second perspective is harder to define, riskier to propose. It is the one I kept being driven to as I studied recent trends in adult education in libraries, public schools, community colleges, university extension, and national organizations (Learning Comes of Age, New
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York, Association Press, 1956; especially pages 41, 44, 49, 54, 61, 68, 87). The thesis there is that as individual agencies move out into the active community and mingle in its concerns, they and their staffs acquire a new education, a new way of acting; they begin to act as members of the community, rather than professional guides or servants of it, and so begin to grow up in unpredicted—and probably quite valuable—ways.”

It can be recorded that librarians have been ready. Adult education councils have been initiated by librarians, program planning institutes have been started by libraries, to be taken over later by citywide committees. These have done much to improve the quality of programs in all kinds of organizations and have contributed to the cultural development of cities. Film festivals, workshops, and institutes on a wide range of subjects have been sponsored or cosponsored. All of these activities serve to make library resources known, encourages their use, and identifies the library’s educational purposes.

What is lacking has been a careful evaluation as to the quality and as to the attainment of objectives. It is not entirely a question of lack of training in evaluation. It is partly a reluctance to analyze projects objectively and a concern for possible criticism if results are not outstanding. Detroit’s project to reach out-of-school youth 24 is an example of a research project with evaluation which not all libraries would feel mature enough to undertake. On the other hand, Brooklyn is consistently evaluating many of its projects; the present reading improvement study is being conducted with evaluation specialists involved at every stage.

Librarians need to know more about the adults with whom they work. Adult Education and Adult Needs 25 by R. J. Havighurst and Betty Orr can be read and reread profitably and made the basis for staff discussions. It is a study of the productive years of middle age and the implications for adult education through understanding of the goals and activities of adults in an American city. The study includes consideration of the level of performance in work, parenthood, leisure, and home-making and the relation of that level to their expectations, and the motivation for effort. A salient fact revealed by the study is that while most adults apparently wish to do a good job in these areas of life, they are less motivated toward citizenship. The case studies in this brief monograph and the discussion of the “teachable moment” will stimulate the imaginative librarian with ideas on what the library can do.
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The two articles by P. M. Hauser and Dan Lacy in the October 1957 Library Quarterly, along with W. H. Whyte's "the Exploding Metropolis" indicate the need for rethinking the library's function and program in this half century. The expanding suburbs with thousands of new homes for young families suggest larger decentralized collections, with emphasis on family living, community affairs, and materials contributing to vocational competence and liberal education. Hauser estimates that the population may increase 37 to 50 per cent by 1975, with the large part of the increase in metropolitan areas by then containing more than two-thirds of the entire population of the United States. Prognostications supported by R. J. Blakely elsewhere in this issue of Library Trends. The suburban areas will grow much more rapidly than the center of the city, with industries as well as families moving out. At the same time city planners are pointing out signs of deterioration in the center of cities and older neighborhoods bordering on the downtown.

It is to these run-down neighborhoods that many of the families of lower economic and educational levels such as the poorer southern white families and Negroes from the rural South who migrate north go in search of better jobs. The movement of Negroes to northern cities, which began during World War I and greatly accelerated during World War II is a major one and it is possible that by 1975 a fifth to a third of the population of a number of metropolitan areas will be Negro.

In both groups, the educational level is not high and many are not accustomed to urban living. The special problems which they will meet in making the transition from rural to urban life in little more than a generation have implications for libraries, for it will be the institutions serving adults effectively which can help them most. While the parents get much from their children who are fortunate enough to attend schools in which the teachers are conscious of the dual responsibility to teach the children and, through them, to bring knowledge of hygiene and community services into the home (a study of the Baltimore Pilot Project brings out this effective source of learning) it also points up the opportunity for libraries. The dimensions of the problem, and the opportunity, are well expressed in the Pilot Project report:

One reason why the church was an important social center for many Pilot Area people was the fact that their low level of income and education cut them off from most of the cultural activities of the city.
They were also cut off—by segregation, either enforced or implied—from other forms of recreation, such as first-run movies, good hotels and restaurants, swimming pools and public parks. As a result many of the residents had turned to the forms of entertainment where race and education do not count: namely, television, automobiles and liquor.

Some will attend adult education classes, and will more readily go to a class in a library under school auspices than in a school. They will need a varied collection of very simple reading materials on home, health, jobs, and community. A field worker who could visit churches and centers and acquaint these adults with the ways in which a neighborhood branch can help them may be as significant a contribution to good citizenship as the school visit of a young adult worker in a high level neighborhood already accustomed to good reading. Incidentally, it should be remarked that present conditions will not prevail forever.

Where school facilities are good, urbanized Negroes as well as white youth will in much larger numbers be high school graduates in the near future. More of them will be aware of library resources, through school libraries and young adult services. Libraries need to devise ways to encourage continuous learning beyond school years.

Family patterns are also changing. With earlier marriages and parenthood, the child-bearing period ends earlier in life. In 1950, both parents on the average were well under thirty at the birth of their last child. As these earlier born children leave the family earlier, the average couple will have a longer period of later life without children in the home. The burgeoning leisure for which they are not prepared is frightening to many. Libraries, schools, churches, and other agencies have a serious responsibility to help people to learn how to make creative use of this leisure time. For women, freed from home responsibilities earlier, there will be need for refresher courses or retraining in order to enter the working world again. There are many civic and cultural organizations and social agencies which could use volunteers who are willing to take some basic training. The library is in a strategic position to know which agencies may need volunteers and can encourage community plans for training as well as furnish materials.

Is there a large city now which is not in some stage, talking, studying, or planning action, on urban renewal? There is no stage in which the library cannot be helpful through its materials, knowledge of com-
munity, bringing groups together, citizen education on the problem through well-planned programs, and helping within the project itself. When the Baltimore Pilot Project got under way, a branch librarian served on neighborhood committees, searched for simple materials on actual problems brought up in meetings, and took materials to neighborhood gatherings. In some areas the information needed was too difficult for the readers, if available at all. The schools and some other agencies have since produced needed leaflets. Does the library also have a responsibility here?

What other factors will determine the character and reach of the community program? What are other organizations doing? What do they need? What are their relations to the library and the community? Where does the library fit in? Bigness and complexity are not confined to the business corporation. Our large churches with extensive plants, numerous societies, and trained staffs are highly organized. A member may not be related to a single small intimate group. Many women's clubs are so large that the average member only attends lectures. A P.T.A. is not vigorous without several hundred members. Community service agencies, related on the one hand to a national organization and on the other to the city's fund raising agency and community council, become impersonal and professional in outlook. For the individual looking for a small autonomous group, discussion and study groups furnish the opportunity for a meeting of minds and a social hour. They are a natural for a library of any size to promote.

It is encouraging to find that recent graduates of several library schools have a definite adult education orientation. The library's responsibility is to foster this and give opportunity for its development in practice. The amount and type of in-service training in large libraries varies greatly, dependent on the staff and time involved and also on the availability of qualified trainers. According to a 1955 survey, systematic training for adult workers is much less frequent than that for children's and youth. The Committee "finds inconsistent the reluctance of many libraries to offer training for those working with adult groups comparable to the high degree of specialized and continuing in-service training programs required of those responsible for serving children and youth." Some have given training in discussion leadership to a selected group, usually in relation to specific projects. Other areas covered are: how to work with the community, the study of community resources, general leadership training, program planning, and book reviewing. In the New York Public Library,
a group of staff members planned an intensive study of books in psychology for branch collections, calling in experts as needed. They also conducted a workshop on the needs of the less skilled reader and compiled a useful bibliography. It was felt that the increased amount of critical reading, the training in judging books and opportunities to discuss them resulted in better service to readers.

The Illinois survey found few real attempts at systematic training or long range and purposefully planned activity. The problem is two-fold: the extent and variety of knowledges and skills required in helping the adult to learn and the lack of library personnel sufficiently well-trained to act as trainers over such a broad field. In a single library adult workers divide these responsibilities. Probably a combination of training on-the-job; through staff workshops, and committee assignments under skilled leadership, and participation in workshops or courses given by other community agencies is the answer.

For a knowledge of community organizations and structure, librarians gain a broader experience and understanding if they participate in discussion with fellow workers in other institutions. When inexperienced staff members are asked to suggest gaps in their training, they usually mention selection of books for the individual reader. This may indicate the need for training in some aspects of psychology and the art of interviewing. Among specific skills needed are program planning and group leadership and the use of the mass media. This is a large order. Possible ways of meeting these lacks are centers for training of field workers on a regional basis, more arrangements for released time of a few months to acquire special training in an internship situation, more short-term institutes and workshops offered by library schools. Librarians active in community councils may stimulate the setting up of community workshops. Many of these skills are common needs of agencies other than libraries.

This somewhat random review of the trends in adult education in the large public library suggests an amorphous growth, as much the result of sensing a specific need or being pushed into it as a carefully thought-out plan. Budgets, the climate of the community and, above all, the attitudes of administration and staff are the dominant factors. The growing interest in and study of the library's responsibilities toward the aging is the current emphasis. A significant and serious gap is the lack of concern for the effects of scientific and technological developments on society. Public librarians may feel they are not competent in this area. This would appear to be an opportunity for special
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librarians familiar with the subject matter to work out joint undertakings with public libraries.

Lacy in the article previously referred to offers the library a challenge. The educational level is rising so rapidly that today one in three youths enter college. He foresees "the adult in our changing society as prosperous, alert, leisured, better educated and more highly cultured than ever before, and more intellectually curious, and more imperatively confronted with needs for continued self-education and for the widest diversity of information in his daily business and civic rounds." The latent demands of this group "cannot readily be met by other institutions. The future of the public library will depend on its success in finding a full place for itself in these activities."

References


