



School Library Service to the Disadvantaged Student

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THE INCREASE in the school age population after 1945 and mass movements from rural and small town areas to metropolitan areas between 1950 and 1960 had a dramatic impact on school libraries. The schools, engulfed in students, were forced to supply buildings, personnel, and services from the taxes of a numerically more limited generation. To add to the problem, a large part of this migration consisted of unskilled and semi-literate laborers, mostly Negro, Puerto Rican, and Mexican, who moved to the ghettos and barrios of the inner-city. At the same time, the movement of more prosperous residents and business out of the central city caused an erosion of the tax base of public school support. Existing school libraries found themselves facing a new school population and almost complete renewal.

Traditionally dedicated to the support of the curriculum, the school library found itself coping with problems of relevancy. While libraries had been essentially book oriented, an alarming percentage of the disadvantaged had language and perceptual inadequacies and could not read. Already victims of a low self-image as a result of social and economic discrimination, these students found library resources academically oriented and geared to a white, middle class society. The concept of the "right book for the right child," and the librarian's inner conviction that this book, when found, would motivate, create dreams, and lead to great accomplishments, met with frustration. The gap between the real world of the socially and educationally disadvantaged student and the expectations of the school program became evident.

The provision of adequate school library facilities was a major problem. The inner-city school was the old school. Increased school population prevented expansion of existing library facilities, and limited funds

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prevented building new libraries. While secondary schools had libraries, elementary schools had comparatively few. Districts attempting conversions of existing facilities in inner-cities were deterred by the wave of incoming students while suburbs undertook an extensive building program which often included library facilities. The disadvantaged had their own feelings about public buildings. While the more fortunate or more socially oriented family may have instilled a reverence for free libraries and library buildings in their children, the school building and its library with mysterious walls of books, and its charging desk looking more like a barrier than a functional piece of equipment, tended to give some disadvantaged a feeling of being institutionalized. Public buildings tended to mean trouble rather than accomplishment and a sense of well-being.

The education of the school librarian included work with the "special" student. Programs for gifted, "reluctant," physically handicapped, and mentally handicapped were under way and usually had special funding of some kind. The special needs of the inner-city and rural disadvantaged that were to reach 15 percent of the United States population in the 1960s, had yet to be a concentrated part of library education. Since Havighurst reports that socially disadvantaged are now present in all but the very high income communities,¹ it seems unlikely that anyone committed to a career in public education could escape facing the issues and changes involved.

In the years since 1945, a number of developments converged to make way for the school library to play a major role in educational programs designed to fill the needs of the disadvantaged. The curriculum content to fill these needs has been expressed by Passow and Elliott as: (1) compensatory—to make up deficits in experience and knowledge; (2) developmental—to incorporate basic skills which everyone needs as a part of general education; and (3) evaluative—to encourage choices of values to help all students live effectively in a complex, changing society.²

To be an effective part of this program, the school library had to undergo a change brought about by technology. Information was being produced and transmitted in formats other than the traditional book. The acceptance of the school library as a materials center is evidenced in the professional writings³ following the 1960 publication by the American Association of School Librarians of the *Standards for School Library Programs*. This acceptance and development were vital to educational programs for the disadvantaged. Taba and Elkins point out

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that children with meager backgrounds in experience, reading, and language do not learn under traditional conditions of standardized expectations regarding performance, uniformity of materials, and pacing.⁴ They recommend the strategy of providing for heterogeneity in the use of a greater range of materials including "pictures, films, and tape recordings to supplement or even supplant the textbooks."⁵ They also anticipate the production of material by teachers and recommend content of initiatory experiences having close bearing on the immediate concerns of the disadvantaged. Spiegler recommends television and motion pictures as effective means of generating reading interests in ghetto high school students.⁶ By 1969, the marriage of "print" and "audiovisual" was consummated in the publication of *Standards for School Media Programs*.⁷ By 1970, the Commission on Instructional Technology had collected evidence that instructional technology was helping teachers to establish new educational contacts with poor children. "Limited as it is, experience to date suggests that technology could help solve major instructional problems of schools in districts serving poor and minority-group students. Cameras and recorders, for example, help to dilute the over-verbalism of schools and relate education dramatically to the students' out-of-school life. These and other media foster original expression and help make learning more individual and effective."⁸

Since society demands literacy of each individual and the ultimate involvement of a literate person is with the world of print, the school library found itself a focal point for the search for readable and relevant books for the disadvantaged. Research is confirming the educational value of the search. Since it is generally recognized that interest is essential in learning to read, some recent studies have assessed the impact of ethnic content in storybooks. John and Berney found that in a study of books used in several Head Start centers (each center being made up of a different ethnic group), ethnic content was a subtle variable. Its impact depended upon a variety of factors amongst which may be relative scarcity or abundance of books representing the child's own environment or the insularity of his ethnic group. For example, isolated Indian children were more concerned with the Indian-ness of a character than were Negro children in an urban area interested in a black character.⁹ A Los Angeles study by Stanchfield indicated that Negro and Mexican-American children using new multi-ethnic materials achieved significantly more in reading than groups using traditional state texts.¹⁰

In the 1960s only a few high interest, low vocabulary books were in the secondary school collection. The "easy reading" book for the newly independent elementary school reader was beginning to appear. Some librarians clung to the cult that deplored putting anything but great literature on a library shelf with the pale hope that literacy suddenly blossomed with a Newbery Award book in hand. Others hounded publishers until the hoped-for "relevant" materials began to appear. With individualized reading a cornerstone to many programs, each new title with urban, ethnic, or "tell-it-like-it-is" background was considered eagerly for guided or independent use by students. The acquisition of relevant materials was not, and still is not, an easy task. Selection criteria demanded a search for truth, particularly in black and brown literature. While students read or just carried in hand books reflecting their own ghetto life and heroes, school districts felt uncomfortable having library books telling it like it is. The uneasiness is not new. Many school and children's librarians will remember the controversy over giving children the realism painted in Lois Lenski's regional stories in the 1950s.

In 1965, Larrick's study of 5,000 trade books published for children in 1962, 1963, and 1964 found that only four-fifths of 1 percent tell a story of Negroes today, and most of these are mediocre.¹¹ Blatt found the Mexican American barely represented in 1968, listing only thirty-two books meeting the criteria.¹² The Southwest, with its Mexican-American and native American populations, has often been considered too restricted geographically in sales interest to warrant publication ventures. Haro's survey of Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles and Sacramento showed a preference for libraries where Spanish is spoken and where Hispanic materials are available. Respondents felt a general apathy toward libraries. Sixty-five percent had used only school libraries. Teen-agers and young adults criticized the lack of Chicano materials and writers. "On the whole, young Mexican Americans wanted libraries to carry more activist literature about Mexican-American political movements, Brown power, and material on what makes Chicanos tick."¹³

A glance through a list of selected bibliographies of multi-ethnic media prepared by the American Association of School Librarians Committee on Treatment of Minorities in Library Books and Other Instructional Materials shows an increased number of books available at the beginning of the 1970s, particularly on Negro history and literature. The poverty of materials in Spanish and by and about other concerned

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ethnic groups continues.¹⁴

A third area affecting school library service to the disadvantaged has been the advent of state and federal programs for support for education. Prior to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the Economic Opportunity Act provided limited funds for some programs. Title III of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) provided equipment and materials not necessarily devoted to poverty of children. Title II B of the Higher Education Act (HEA), through 1970, trained or retrained 4,700 school librarians. Many institutes concentrated on the needs of the disadvantaged with particular emphasis, in the most recent institutes, being given to training the disadvantaged for service in libraries. The urgency of this training as a priority item can be exemplified by a need in the East Los Angeles area mentioned in the Haro study.¹⁵ While the schools of East Los Angeles have the children of 75 percent of California's Spanish-speaking population, the Los Angeles City Unified School District can identify only two Spanish-speaking school librarians. The U. S. Office of Education, through grants supported by ESEA Title IV and HEA Title II B, is currently funding projects in Philadelphia and Los Angeles that will have direct influence on school library service to disadvantaged. The Philadelphia project is a cooperative effort of school and public libraries and is concerned with student use. The Los Angeles project is concerned with the study and development of an automated system which will provide multi-district information about materials. The Media-Selection Center Study of the National Book Committee, also funded by the Office of Education, will possibly solve some of the problems of search, evaluation and sharing of information about materials.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was a monumental step in federal support of educational programs for the poor. School library services benefited either from grants under an individual title or a combination of grants from Titles I, II and III. Title I, limited to a defined group of disadvantaged, provided facilities, equipment, personnel, and materials. Title II is limited to the provision of school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials. States are required to develop a plan for distribution of funds based on relative need for materials rather than the poverty of the child. This makes almost every child in the nation potentially eligible. Title III provides supplementary centers and services to develop exemplary instructional programs.

The Title I statistical reports of 1967 and 1968 indicate library service as the most popular service activity in both years, reaching over 3 million children. Of major importance to the programs was the ability to hire school librarians and supportive staff from Title I funds. In 1967, 2.2 percent of the personnel expenditure went for 7,810 librarians; in 1968, the 2.2 percent remained constant for 4,406 librarians.¹⁶

A special report of the U.S. Office of Education, *How ESEA Title II Meets the Educational Needs of Poor Children*, makes an analysis of the effect of Title II on the disadvantaged using the same criterion of poverty as is specified in Title I.¹⁷ In the first two years, up to 84 percent of Title I children also benefited from Title II. States have either used their Title I formula or have weighted factors in their relative need formulas giving consideration to poverty areas. Special purpose grants, usually for exemplary media centers, were allocated to 991 libraries in the fiscal years 1966, 1967, and 1968. This type of grant implies school district support from regular funds or coordination with other grants. As might be expected, the most extensive coordination of Title II was with Title I of ESEA and Title III of NDEA. These combinations offered possibilities for facilities, equipment, staff, and materials.

While Title I certainly promoted quality programs for the poor, there was no specified requirement for quality materials. Title II required that criteria for selection of the school library resources be provided for in the state plans. If the selection of materials for school libraries in poverty programs is to be legal, as well as effective, it should be based on established criteria taking into account the special needs of the educationally disadvantaged.

In spite of the support from these various sources, the 1968 report of the National Advisory Commission on Libraries "noted that libraries in schools serving educationally deprived children appear to be extremely deficient, and it would be advisable to bolster the library assistance provided by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with supplementary legislation to help solve this problem in our large cities where so many disadvantaged children reside."¹⁸

In the 1970s, the keynote is accountability. With the rigors of Program-Planning-Budgeting System (PPBS) ahead, the school library may be partitioned by the objectives of instructional programs. The effect may be better funding for materials and services related to programs. Another effect may be the indication of areas wherein it becomes obvious that the media center is a leadership and creative unit rather than only a support unit. Instructional materials service has little

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in the area of research to show a measure of success or failure.

A study of the effects of new media centers and materials on elementary schools of selected ghetto neighborhoods was made by the U.S. Office of Education in May 1968.¹⁹ The study included nine elementary schools in three large school districts and showed evidence that:

1. media center programs were lagging behind instructional innovation,
2. accessibility to printed materials organized for use was the service most appreciated by teachers,
3. materials did not effectively meet special needs of pupils but did support the instructional program,
4. 99 percent of the pupils voiced enthusiasm over accessibility of materials, and
5. scheduling policy affected accessibility and attitudes toward the center.

The study did not show any affect on reading scores. However, since the centers had been in operation only a short time, no conclusion was drawn.

School library services do not seem to lend themselves to evaluations that can be reported on an exacting quantifiable basis. The multiplicity of variables defeats answers to questions of appreciation, reading scores, and success in use of materials. It is thought that only in the study of an individual's development will the real impact be known. A study made of Sobrante Park Elementary School in Oakland, California, has probably revealed more about school library service to disadvantaged children than we have known thus far.²⁰

The program of Sobrante Park, a borderline disadvantaged school, is highly individualized. Borderline schools suffer from not being disadvantaged enough; thus in a community becoming increasingly impoverished, the schools usually decline with no special compensatory funding to stem the tide. The struggle to find other money to fund staff, equipment, and capital outlay can be defeating. Sobrante Park found funds and, as a result, qualified for an ESEA Title II Special Purpose Grant for materials for an exemplary media center project.

In general, the teacher evaluation showed a favorable effect on student motivation. The highest tally for any single item on an evaluation sheet indicated that the media center is effective in "leading students to self discovery." Student evaluations showed recognition of and pleasure in the use of many kinds of media. Older children showed pleasure in taking media and equipment home, and later frequently discussed fam-

ily use such as reviewing and listening done by mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. Both students and teachers expressed a need for more materials and audiovisual equipment.

Case studies in the project showed that the relaxed, creative, and individualized atmosphere of the media center contributed to the better behavior and academic achievement of some students who were heavy users of the center. Among these were educationally handicapped children with severe emotional or behavioral problems upon whom the center may have had a therapeutic effect.

An interesting result appeared in a study of findings of the McHugh-McFarland Reading Readiness Test, although the evaluation team cautioned that the findings are only conjecture since a study of kindergarten classes was not intended to be a part of the media center evaluation. One of four homogeneous kindergarten classes scored consistently higher than the other three classes. Media center circulation records and observation of the librarian showed that the teacher of the high scoring class provided many experiences in independent use and handling of materials in addition to her own classroom use of multi-media approaches to learning. The other three classes had only traditional experiences. The teacher indicated that the use of media contributed to development of visual discrimination and identification of letters.

The Sobrante Park Media Center Study pointed the way to needed controlled studies to confirm the conjecture that accessible media in many formats can contribute to success in the learning and teaching of disadvantaged students.

A current trend of concern to school library service to the disadvantaged is the decentralization of large school districts into smaller but related units. Inherent in this concept is increasing community participation in the discussions basic to educational programs and priorities. The effects of this trend on school libraries are not known at this time. Emphasis upon local determination of use of funds is another factor encouraged in decentralization. Currently, tax and bond elections are failing. Public confidence in education seems shaken. New forms of revenue are needed to rescue the urban schools and their hopes for relevant library services. Enrollments are beginning to decline and though this represents some loss of total funds, the frantic pace of building classrooms has ceased. Capital outlay funds can concentrate on rebuilding and remodeling old facilities wherein are concentrated most of the disadvantaged. How a school library looks, sounds, feels and smells is important.

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For the decade of the 1970s then, it seems that school library service to the disadvantaged will realize educational objectives in the same measure as education survives the current transformation or rebirth. The following points are conjecture but evidence seems to support them:

1. Impoverished communities now participating in decisions relating to expenditure of funds for education will put high priority on school library service but will not be able to finance the service desired. New funding sources will be needed.
2. Since the school is visible and familiar, communities will request services traditionally within the province of public libraries, such as collections for parents. Cooperative efforts of both agencies will be needed to prevent turning off parental interest and enthusiasm so badly needed by both.
3. Concentrated efforts for the development of literacy will demand greater availability of materials and personnel involved with providing motivation and experiences as well as skills. The materials for school library listening and viewing can reach the student's whole family. The members of this family are indirectly learning. The catalyst is the librarian or teacher. Current manpower studies may settle some questions of staffing. The decade will probably see more dependence upon volunteer services in the total educational community to assist professionals. The right to read program seems to point in this direction.
4. While individual schools and their communities become more independent in the management of educational affairs, the smaller unit will look with some suspicion on traditional "centralized" evaluation and recommendation of materials. However, the need for networks of descriptive information about materials and their success in use in specific learning situations will increase. State and federal support of programs, personnel, and supporting technology will be needed.
5. The poverty of research itself must somehow be surmounted. The library in the school seems unable to account for its expense except by explaining that it makes a standard set of materials available for a time when they all or in part might be needed, though the concept of total collection availability is basic to all our freedoms to acquire information as desired. The media centers developing in innovative ways today are each an experiment in what is believed to make teaching and learning possible, exciting, and relevant. Much of what happens to an individual when he becomes involved with books, filmstrips, records, art prints, films, etc., escapes research.

Almost everything stated here about school library service to the disadvantaged can be applied to service to any other student. The problems differ in timing and emphasis and the amount of compensation needed to insure the possibility that all young people will become reasonably happy, educated, and contributing members of a multi-ethnic and technological society.

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