

Evaluation of Library Literacy Projects

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LIBRARY INVOLVEMENT IN LITERACY projects has been extensively described in the literature. Activities range from purchasing special materials for new readers to participating in one-to-one tutoring. There is, however, a lack of understanding on how to effectively evaluate literacy programs in libraries. The reports of evaluation focus on usage figures and qualitative data from participants. Overall, the evaluation process primarily addresses the general question: "Did you meet the objectives set for your project?" Lipsman recommends that "cost, convenience and ease of collection, reliability of data, and possible disruption to ongoing operations"¹ be primary considerations in developing an evaluation model.

Birge reports libraries have had limited success in obtaining patron responses to literacy programs.² Planning the evaluation is cited by Birge as one of the most difficult tasks for literacy program planners. Because of this difficulty, evaluation is seldom planned ahead of time and often the data needed to evaluate the project are not collected. As a result, many library literacy programs are criticized as being expensive, ineffectual, and unnecessary (e.g., Lipsman). The projects have been characterized as "elitist in concept, tunnelvisioned in scope, poorly planned in educational methodology, costly, beyond description...."³

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The problem, then, facing libraries providing a social action program such as literacy services is to effectively evaluate the project. This article will examine the criteria used in evaluation of library literacy programs. Evaluation models that have been used in literacy projects will be reviewed, and suggestions for developing an evaluation model will be presented.

Library Literacy Programs

Before discussing evaluation of library literacy programs, it is necessary to define those programs. There is not one "typical" program. Depending on the community need, resources, and interest, library literacy projects have developed a variety of approaches, ranging from a cooperative role of providing materials, space, and equipment to a teaching role of providing one-to-one tutoring or sponsoring classes. Activities include publicity of literacy services, in-service education for tutors and teachers, and referral of potential students and tutors.

The evaluation approach used will vary depending on the type of library literacy activities carried out. Therefore, the evaluation techniques used cannot rely solely on "reading achievement" of students, since many library literacy programs are not direct providers of instruction. In developing evaluation criteria, the list needs to be expanded to cover noninstructional as well as instructional activities.

Success

A definition of a "successful" library literacy program has not been clearly addressed in the literature. It is implied, however, that continued existence is the primary indicator of success. Lipsman, in her study of library programs for the disadvantaged, identifies six factors that contribute to a program's successful implementation: (1) participation by outside groups in the project; (2) evidence of the importance of the activity to community decision and policymakers; (3) project visibility (public relations); (4) staff competency, including library training, capacity for leadership, good interpersonal skills, etc.; (5) quality of materials chosen; and (6) high degree of autonomy of project staff.⁴ Recently, the standards suggested in *Guidelines for Effective Adult Literacy Programs* support and greatly expand on Lipsman's list, including networking, community assessment, and setting of project goals.⁵ These guidelines, developed in cooperation with representatives from literacy agencies, offer librarians another view of features considered necessary for an effective program providing direct instruction.

Theoretical Setting

The proposed evaluation models have a common theoretical basis, referred to in the literature as the "goal-attainment" or "discrepancy" model. Schulberg and Baker identify this as a prevalent categorization of evaluation procedures,⁶ and Weiss uses this model in assessing the effectiveness of social programs.⁷ DuMont and DuMont refer to goal attainment as "by far the most common and frequently discussed measure of library effectiveness."⁸ Grotelueschen, Gooler, and Knox define discrepancy evaluation as "any evaluation approach emphasizing the discrepancy between performance of a...program...and prespecified criteria of adequacy (e.g., program goals, objectives, ideal state)."⁹

Essential to the goal-attainment model is the clarification of program objectives. The model includes evaluation of the progress of the project along with the final achievement of the objectives. Talmage calls these two stages formative and summative. Formative evaluation is conducted during the planning and implementation phases of a project to allow for changes during these stages. Summative evaluation determines the worth of a project following a set time period.¹⁰ The results of the summative evaluation are used to modify the project's original goals and objectives, creating a cyclical approach to evaluation. This cyclical approach may take into account three major purposes: (1) to justify a program (past orientation); (2) to improve a program (present orientation); and (3) to plan a program (future orientation).¹¹

Objective-based evaluation models are grouped by Stufflebeam and Webster into two evaluation categories. In questions-oriented studies (called quasi-evaluation studies), the authors place objective-based studies that are noncyclical—i.e., the information gained is not used to improve the program—in this category. Cyclical objective-based studies, however, would be categorized as value-oriented studies, since they assess worth of the program and implement changes to improve the project. Stufflebeam and Webster see this group as "true evaluation."¹²

In developing an evaluation model for library literacy projects, a variety of evaluation methods could be used within the theoretical framework of the goal-attainment model. This diversity of methods would allow for the variety of measures that presently is used by library personnel in setting program objectives and in determining program effectiveness.

Evaluation Criteria

Library literature offers adequate information on the history of library literacy projects, selection of materials, guidelines to use in starting a project, profiles of individual programs, and the characteristics of adult new readers. There is, however, limited information on techniques for evaluating library literacy projects. Although frequently cited as a crucial step in developing library literacy projects, evaluation of specific library literacy projects is usually reported as secondary information to the description of the program. Birge concludes that evaluation techniques and the degree of the evaluation process vary among the literacy projects. "The amounts and kind of data sought and collected may differ considerably, depending on such variables as type of program, size of library and number of learners, access to computer analysis, and need or desire to coordinate data with those from other libraries and programs."¹³

Finding a way to measure effectiveness of library programs is not a problem unique to literacy activities. DuMont and DuMont, in their review of measuring library effectiveness, cite a lack of training in how to carry out evaluation, primitive evaluation instruments, and the complexity of determining the impact of the library on a community as reasons why more effective evaluation is not done.¹⁴ Interestingly, Smith classes "the development of means and approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of the library's literacy effort"¹⁵ as an "initiatory position" activity, indicating that this activity is seen as appropriate by only a small portion of those libraries most active in literacy projects.

Descriptions of library literacy projects give clues to some measures used in evaluating library literacy projects. MacDonald¹⁶ and Hiatt and Drennan,¹⁷ in their early surveys of library literacy programs, found "success" of these programs measured by number of users of the services, circulation of materials, amount of interagency cooperation, behavioral changes in participants (as reported on opinion surveys and through observation), and requests for service.

Lipsman conducted a research project to collect data on "available measures of the impact or effectiveness of the program."¹⁸ Her study, combining case studies and surveys, showed a number of impact measures currently being used: circulation count, number of people coming into the library, number participating in the activities, requests for services, reactions from participants, involvement with other agencies, and follow-up on individual participants. Of these, Lipsman found circulation and the number participating the most frequently used measures of program impact.¹⁹

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Lyman's profiles of several library literacy projects showed evaluation measures that fell into two general categories: use statistics (of materials, facilities, services) and opinions of participants including students, librarians, and tutors or teachers.²⁰

Erteschik reviewed sixty-two outstanding projects funded by the Library Services and Construction Act of which eight were related to literacy.²¹ Evaluation measures were similar to earlier reports with statistics collected on number of students or participants, use of materials, percentage of increase in library use, number of tutors trained, number of referrals to the project, and amount of interagency cooperation. These project reports, however, emphasized the effects of the program on its intended audiences. Attempts were made to document changes in students' lives—e.g., job changes, completion of GED (General Education Degree), driver's tests passed. These "changes" were usually student-reported, documented in case studies, and reported in student self-evaluations of the program's effects on their lives.

The most recent directory of library literacy programs was compiled in 1978 by the American Library Association.²² A total of ninety-one programs was reported, with each entry providing data on the results of the project and a multitude of evaluation measures. As noted in other reports, these measures encompassed usage figures for services, facilities, and materials; the degree of participation by outside agencies; and the amount of publicity received. Qualitative data were gathered from students, librarians, tutors and teachers, and participating agencies. These data were collected through surveys, observations, and anecdotal reports of participants' use and behavior in the library, case studies, student evaluation of personally set goals, student-reported changes in their lives, follow-up of learners' progress through personal interviews and telephone conversations, progress reports by tutors, and staff evaluations. Some newly reported effectiveness measures were included, most notably that of continued existence and funding as a sign of success. After consideration this may be an appropriate measure since tightening library funding usually affects social action and outreach projects first. Other unique measures reported were: publication of bibliographies and distribution level; referral of new program participants by current and past participants; requests to repeat programs; number of phone calls regarding the literacy services; learner demographic profiles; size and existence of waiting lists; and requests for information from other libraries on program features.

The California Literacy Campaign evaluated its newly organized statewide project in 1984.²³ The evaluation was based on the intended outcomes of the program, on gathering information from project

reports, on questionnaires to project directors and tutors, and on telephone interviews with students. The main success indicators were based on client satisfaction, primarily the students and tutors. Students were queried regarding their evaluation of the program, tutors, and their own progress. Changes in student library use were also explored. The interviewer asked if the students had checked out materials or visited a library since participating in the program. Baseline measures, however, were not taken on library use prior to the student starting the program.

Following a review of the variety of evaluation measures used in library literacy programs, a researcher is left with a picture of the types of measures that might be used but no set direction for a systematic and standard evaluation process. Clearly each literacy program, based on the objectives set for the project, has determined what, if any, measures to use primarily dictated by expediency of data collection. There does seem, however, to be a combination of "numbers gathering" on the use of services, facilities, and materials, and qualitative data from program participants. A third implied measure of success is continued existence and funding. This combination of three categories of measurement is reflected in four proposed evaluation models reported in the literature.

Evaluation Models

Lipsman's proposed evaluation model has four main components: (1) setting objectives related to individual and community needs; (2) planning and implementation carrying forward these objectives; (3) determining if output (results) reflects achievement of objectives, thus satisfaction of user needs; and (4) asking if resource inputs (costs) are appropriate to the level of output.²⁴ Basic to the successful application of this model are workable, clearly defined performance objectives. Lipsman recommends collecting data by review of existing report documents, interviews, observation, and questionnaires. The type of data to be collected is defined as: number of users; characteristics and interests of patrons; types of materials circulated; types of information given, requested, and not provided; anecdotal notes of happenings in libraries; feedback from community organizations; characteristics of nonusers; and cost of program features. Lipsman sees as an evaluation "ideal" measurement of the library's impact on a target group. This would be done through pre-test and post-test measures, control group comparisons, and longitudinal follow-up study of participants in sustained library activity.²⁵

Lyman proposed an evaluation process compatible with Lipsman's objectives-based model. For Lyman the goals and objectives,

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along with a timetable, are the basis for the evaluation that is achieved by "looking at what has happened in relation to the function and objectives established for the service."²⁶ The pattern of evaluation has six elements: (1) summary of program effectiveness; (2) penetration in terms of reader groups; (3) participant impact; (4) library impact; (5) community impact; and (6) factors related to effectiveness.²⁷ Lyman, however, does not provide specific guidelines on what type of data to collect and how to collect it.

The Appalachian Adult Education Center (AAEC) proposed an evaluation model based on their field experience. In test programs combining adult basic education efforts with library literacy projects, the AAEC evaluation focused on the impact of the library programs on the quality of life of the participants. In early reports of the federally funded aspects of the project, the focus was on case studies of participants to identify changes in their level of coping skills. The 1975 AAEC report refines the evaluation process into four parts: (1) comparison to externally set standards—e.g., state, library, grant-specified standards; (2) accomplishment of objectives including records of new titles added, number and uses of deposit collections, what clients read, and resources used and their cost; (3) number of new library users from the target group; and (4) anecdotal records in the form of case studies that may be developed from structured personal interviews.²⁸ While the AAEC model does not provide specific tools for assessing whether objectives have been met, the evaluation model has been used in many libraries involved in the AAEC projects.

One of the most frequently cited evaluation models for library literacy projects is the "program effectiveness measure" developed by Barss, Reitzel, and Associates in 1972. The measure, based on responses to a telephone survey of library reading projects staff, has sixteen indicators of effectiveness:

1. increase in average attendance;
2. 90 to 100 percent regular attendance;
3. increase in regular attendance;
4. cooperation with community agencies;
5. program director's judgment of project benefits accrued;
6. changes in library use—e.g., circulation, number and type of users, types of materials circulated;
7. changes in library operation—e.g., policies, budget allocations;
8. requests for program expansion;
9. program staff reactions;
10. nonprogram staff reactions;

11. inquiries about the program from other libraries or groups;
12. adoption of program by at least one other library;
13. program director's citation the program met its goals;
14. program director's view of effect of program on library, participants, and community;
15. total attendance at all sites of 1000 or more; and
16. change in participants' skills or behavior.²⁹

These indicators are drawn from actual evaluation measures reported by project staff on the telephone survey. The Barss evaluation model accepts these sixteen indicators as appropriate measures (perhaps it would be better to say realistic measures) and focuses on developing effective evaluation tools for measuring the final indicator—i.e., change in participants' skills or behavior. To determine the program's impact on participants, Barss conducted oral and written interviews with program participants. The interviews resulted in impact measurements in six areas: (1) reading (use of print) affect; (2) reading behavior; (3) reading skills and knowledge; (4) reading-related (use of nonprint materials) affect; (5) reading-related behavior; and (6) reading-related skills and knowledge.³⁰

The Barss model, then, provides a framework for effectiveness measures as well as a process for measuring program impact on participants. The effectiveness measures are useful to all types of library literacy projects even those not directly involved in tutoring and teaching. The impact portion of the project seems more directly related to those programs that include tutoring and teaching. Although Barss was concerned with reading programs for all ages, he did field test his participant impact tool in two specific adult library literacy programs—Brooklyn and Los Angeles public libraries. Unfortunately, while the Barss model is frequently cited as exemplary, there are not reports in the literature of the model being used in actual library literacy programs beyond Barss's own field tests.

A Proposed Evaluation Model: An Outline

Grotelueschen provides an eight-step process for an evaluation plan.³¹ The following proposed evaluation plan for a library literacy project uses these eight steps. The plan would be for a library project that carries out activities one through five with an optional activity six:

1. to be a cooperative link between providers of literacy activities in the community;

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2. to provide materials, including computer software, to supplement local literacy efforts;
3. to publicize literacy efforts in the community in conjunction with other agencies;
4. to act as a referral agency for potential participants, potential tutors, and other interested groups;
5. to provide space for tutoring and offer tours and library instruction to interested groups; and
6. to offer direct instruction through tutoring or classes.

I. *Purpose.* The evaluation process will have three main purposes: to assist in planning, to improve the project, and to justify the program's existence.

II. *Audience.* For most libraries, the audience for evaluation results is diverse. As the decision-makers regarding library service priorities and funding, the library board of trustees would be the primary audience for the evaluation. If funding was received from an outside source, the evaluation would be used as part of the grant process. For cooperative projects, the agencies involved would become another member of the audience for evaluation results. These results would be of particular interest to the persons most closely involved in using the library services. For improvement of the project, the project staff and library administration would need the results from the evaluation. The governing body of the library—e.g., city council, county board—would be a potential audience for the summary evaluation to justify the program's existence.

III. *Issues.* In the broadest sense, the issue to be addressed is "were the objectives of the project met?" For the board of trustees and library administration, however, costs of the program related to outputs will be of primary concern. With cooperative agencies, a major concern will be the benefits accrued from the cooperation. Impact on participants—which would include tutors, adult basic education instructors, and adult new readers—will be of primary interest to the library staff, cooperative agencies, and usually, the funding source. One issue to be discussed in the planning stage is consensus on the goals and objectives of the project. This would, of course, involve the library staff, board of trustees, participants, and cooperative agency personnel. Effects of the project on the library—e.g., increased use of services—will concern the library staff.

IV. *Resources.* For most libraries, evaluation is conducted in-house with existing staff. Lipsman's primary considerations in evaluation

(“cost, convenience and ease of collection, reliability of data, and possible disruption to ongoing operations”³²) are to be kept in mind. As Smith found, personnel resources for literacy projects are usually restricted to one or two people whose work with the literacy project is only one part of their responsibilities.³³ For a grant-funded project, there may be more funds allocated for evaluation, but generally the cost of the evaluation is a small portion of the literacy project budget.

V. *Evidence*. A precise description of the project is the basis for what evidence should be collected in the evaluation. Following this description, the Barss “program effectiveness measure” provides several effectiveness indicators that may relate to the project.³⁴ Of the sixteen indicators developed by Barss, the following can apply under the project description offered earlier: cooperation with community agencies; program director’s judgment of project benefits; changes in library use; changes in library operations; requests for program expansion; program staff reactions; inquiries about the program from other libraries or groups; adoption of program by at least one other library; program director’s view of the effect of program on participants and community. In addition, those programs offering instruction would be able to use the remaining Barss indicators. It should be noted that these indicators depict actual evaluation measures used by libraries involved in literacy projects and, as such, should be considered potential evaluation measures in any evaluation model. Based on the literature review, one additional measure can be added to the Barss list—i.e., continued existence of the program.

Some refinements of the Barss measures, however, should be considered. With regard to the “cooperation” indicator, input on agreement of project objectives, benefits of the cooperation, and referral patterns should be received. The program director’s view on the effects of the project and meeting of goals should be expanded to include input from library staff, participants, and cooperative agencies.

VI. *Data Gathering*. In planning the library literacy project, a survey of library staff, board members, administrators, personnel from cooperating agencies, tutors, and adult basic education (ABE) teachers can be used to develop the goals and activities of the project. Verbal input from adult new readers is also needed. Grotelueschen suggests several tools that could be used to measure perceptions of what “ought to be.” People would be asked to show their perceptions of how resources should be distributed. For example, possible activities (related to the proposed project goals) are given a “percent of effort” to total 100 percent (see appendix A).³⁵ The listed activities could also be ranked to help determine program emphases.

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The activities listed in the "distribution" questionnaire could also be measured on a rating scale such as "ideal emphasis" on a scale of 1 (little) to 5 (much). Another form of the rating scale would be to adapt the activity statements for a rating scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For example, one statement might read, "The library can be an effective alternate source of audiovisual English as a second language (ESL) materials." The Lincoln Trail Libraries System (Champaign, Illinois) used this approach in surveying librarians, public library trustees, adult educators, and community agency personnel. Respondents also were asked to rate a series of activities on a ten-point scale of not desirable to highly desirable. Not only does this approach aid the library in setting program objectives, but it also points out differing perceptions of the library's role by nonlibrary people.

Collecting data on program outcomes requires different techniques depending on whether quantitative or qualitative data are being collected. For example, several of the indicators in the Barss list require straightforward record keeping—e.g., number of contacts with cooperating agencies; changes in library use (reference questions, circulation of materials, use of facilities); requests for program expansion; inquiries about the program from other libraries or groups; and adoption of the program by at least one other library. Two other indicators—changes in library operations (more flexible hours, budget allocations) and continued existence of the project—can usually be documented by the project director. For projects providing direct instruction, reading levels can be tested to determine student improvement.

The qualitative data, however, are less easily obtained and often are more time-consuming to collect. The qualitative data to be collected include: benefits of cooperation; completion of project activities; impact on participants (including the library); and referral patterns. One approach to collecting this information is to use instruments similar to those in the planning process, not only asking what ought to be but what they perceive the program to actually be doing. Grotelueschen discussed ways to document program outcomes.³⁶ One approach is to use a "satisfaction" questionnaire (see appendix B), which can be distributed to the library board and staff, cooperating agencies, and participants. This may be administered periodically to monitor participant satisfaction.

With regard to cooperative activities, Grotelueschen offers an assessment tool that asks agency representatives to select statements that "best reflect those outcomes your program has experienced as a result of cosponsorship and collaboration."³⁷ Both positive and negative statements would be included—e.g., (a) student recruitment was facilitated;

(b) public awareness of ABE was increased; (c) student use of library increased; (d) administrative trivia increased; and (e) confusion on the role of the library in literacy efforts was created. The Arrowhead Library System (Janesville, Wisconsin) used this approach in evaluating an LSCA project. Participants in the county literacy coalition were asked in a questionnaire to identify outcomes their programs experienced as a result of cooperative literacy activities; respondents were asked to provide specific examples of the outcomes.

The library literacy project described at the beginning of this section serves three main groups: adult new readers, tutors, and ABE teachers. Realistically, many of the contacts with adult new readers will be initiated by and through tutors and teachers. The program's impact on the latter two groups would be measured on previously described questionnaires. For the adult new reader two approaches can be used—oral interviews and anecdotal reports. The oral interview would focus on the person's response to the library services in relation to his or her needs. This would involve reactions to statements about personal experiences at the library as well as attitudes about the library. To help determine changes in student behavior (use of the library) and in their attitudes about the library, the interview also would be conducted at the beginning of the students' involvement in the program.

The anecdotal reports, used especially in the Appalachian Adult Education Center project, would combine the stories from students, tutors, and ABE instructors regarding the library's role in the adult learner's progress. These anecdotal case studies can provide a more personal perspective to the evaluation results and also can serve as the basis for publicity about the program. Oral interviews with students may also address the impact of the program in terms of the individual's personal learning goals, self-esteem, and willingness to participate in further learning activities.³⁸

VII. *Analysis.* In keeping with the discrepancy model, analysis would focus on a comparison of "what discrepancies, if any, exist between what people think *ought* to be and what they perceive *actually* to be the case."³⁹ In the categories of data that involve number keeping, simple percentages of increased use or percentage of use in relation to other library activities would be used in the analysis. Improved reading levels of students would also be reported. Results from the questionnaires would be graphed for each group for comparison of perceptions. The oral participant interview combined with the case studies would provide a verbal description of the program's impact.

VIII. *Reporting.* The results would be summarized in written form

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for most intended audiences. A more detailed description would be used by project staff and library administrators for improvement of the project.

Conclusion

A large number of library literacy programs are being conducted in public libraries. There is, however, little consensus on the degree or type of evaluation needed for these programs. While some evaluation models have been proposed, most lack a clear process for practitioners to follow. For the most part, these models have not had widespread use or field testing.

The development of an evaluation model for library literacy programs should consider the present measurements used by librarians in these programs. The Barss "program effectiveness measure" may provide a framework for categorizing the variety of measures described in the evaluation section. A second consideration is the need for valid instruments to determine, in particular, the effect of the literacy project on participants and the library. Grotelueschen provides a good starting point along with the Appalachian Adult Education Center's case study approach. Examples of instruments used (such as the California Literacy Campaign and the Lincoln Trail Libraries System questionnaires) need to be shared among project coordinators. Evaluation of student progress draws from the adult education field although more work is being done on assessing not only improvements in reading skills but also in changes in students' self-confidence, willingness to continue their learning, and the effect of the program on their economic status. B. Dalton Bookseller has contracted with the Matrices Consulting Group (Norwalk, Connecticut) to develop a student impact evaluation handbook that will be available early in 1987.

The need then is a practical one. An effective, cost-effective evaluation model will help in achieving the purposes behind evaluation. As Talmage writes, an evaluation provides a judgment on the worth of a program, assists in decision-making, and serves a political function.⁴⁰ Developing local financial support for projects started with grant funds remains a critical use for evaluation results.

Beyond the local situation, however, a more systematic and standard evaluation process will assist in comparing library literacy projects and in sharing program results. Consistent reporting of the impact of library literacy programs would contribute to improving standards for such programs. At present, comparing results from library literacy projects is like comparing apples to oranges. To develop an effective yet

expedient evaluation model seems the next logical step in the evolution of library literacy programs that began over 100 years ago.

Appendix A

Determination of Program Activity Priorities

Suppose you were able to decide how all of the time or effort would be distributed in the library literacy project. How would you allocate that effort? For each of the activities listed below, show what percentage of the total 100 percent effort you would have the library literacy project devote to that activity.

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Percent of effort</i>
Providing books to supplement teaching and tutoring programs	_____ %
Cosponsoring tutor training sessions	_____ %
Arrange for space for tutoring students	_____ %
Provide tours/in-service programs for ABE/ESL classes	_____ %
Publicize adult basic education services in the community	_____ %
Referral of potential ABE participants to appropriate agencies	_____ %
Provide ABE microcomputer software and equipment for in-library use	_____ %
Provide cassettes and records for ESL students	_____ %
	100%

(List other program activities as appropriate.)

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Appendix B

Assessment of Satisfaction with Library Literacy Program

Please indicate the extent of your general satisfaction with the library literacy program *as you know it*.

	<i>Highly Satisfied</i>	<i>Quite Satisfied</i>	<i>Hardly Satisfied</i>	<i>Not Satisfied</i>	<i>Not Aware of Service</i>
1. Are you satisfied:					
with the type of books provided?	()	()	()	()	()
with the competence of the library staff you worked with on this project?	()	()	()	()	()
with the amount of space available to you for tutoring?	()	()	()	()	()
with the library's policy regarding microcomputers?	()	()	()	()	()

(continue with examples of other program activities)

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