

1971

The Contributions of the School Library to the Learning Process

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Recommended Citation

Weber, Alice Rose, "The Contributions of the School Library to the Learning Process" (1971). *Graduate Research Papers*. 4096.

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Abstract

The goal of education in our democratic society is to educate citizens to function in such a society; the goal of the school library service is to facilitate the attainment of that goal. The library program must enrich, support, vitalize and implement the educational program, and encourage each student to reach his potential as a human, a learner and a citizen of both today and tomorrow.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY
TO THE LEARNING PROCESS

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Library Science
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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July, 1971

Accepted 7-6-1971 -
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Library Science

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Our free society designs and employs the instrument of education to strengthen, perpetuate and safeguard the American way of life. It is assumed that an educated citizen will be competent to act intelligently and thus preserve the hard-earned freedom of our forefathers. Conversely, uneducated citizens may tend to make unwise decisions involving false doctrines that could result in the loss of freedom for the entire nation.

Since life in society is continually changing, education must be capable of changing to meet the growing needs of man's everyday life in a complex and competitive society. Quality education, which must be planned and worked for, requires creative teachers concerned about the total development of individuals.

The goal of education in our democratic society is to educate citizens to function in such a society; the goal of the school library service is to facilitate the attainment of that goal. The library program must enrich, support, vitalize and implement the educational program, and encourage each student to reach his potential as a human, a learner and a citizen of both today and tomorrow.¹

The library must exist as a part of the school and never apart from it. Its collection of materials should be tailor-made to fit the

¹Ruth Davies, The School Library, A Force for Educational Excellence (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1969) p. 17

individual school.¹

The best school library is homelike and informal. Actually the library is a laboratory, a work shop and a materials center. It has materials, books, staff and equipment necessary for work. It is a unit of the school characterized by warmth and interest. It is a group of learners at work in a highly social atmosphere.²

Educators agree that children learn at different times, in different ways, from things in their environment and from each other. And that children learn best when sparked by their own interests.³ The various levels of education differ from one another in many respects. This paper is chiefly concerned with the elementary school which can successfully prepare students capable of excelling in work at the high school level. The writer, who has many years experience as a teacher in the elementary school, and who has helped promote and organize libraries in several elementary schools, wishes to show that the library when used as a teaching instrument can aid greatly in preparing students for education at a higher level. She has found that her experience in working with students in the elementary school substantiates the theory that "everywhere the educational world is agreed that without reading there is little learning or at best under a most discouraging handicap."⁴

¹Azile Wofford, Book Selection For School Libraries (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1962) p. 24.

²Iucile F. Fargo, The Library in the School (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947) p. 9.

³"Open Education," Nation's Schools LXXXVII (May, 1971) p. 51.

⁴Fargo, op. cit., p.32.

Thus she has gone into greater detail in Chapter III, "The Librarian, Promoter of Reading".

The ideal school library is manned by expert personnel capable of a wide range of duties from finding a book for a reluctant reader to providing biographical service for the faculty. The staff must be well versed in the psychology of children and skillful in handling various age groups. They should be understanding of the problems that teachers face in everyday school experiences, and be ready to enter into teamwork with the teachers.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN IN EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The school librarian exerts great influence not only on the quality of the school library program but also on the quality of the educational program in the elementary school. Because the service of the school library permeates the totality of the teaching and the learning program, the librarian's quality of service, guidance and leadership influences and directly affects the quality of both the teaching and the learning program. Thus the school librarian is a teacher in service and significance. The oft-repeated statement that no educational program can be better than its teachers and one of the key factors in achieving our national goals is the quality of teaching, the excellence of the school librarian becomes a key factor in implementing an educational program at the high degree of excellence that is needed to meet the growing needs of our contemporary society.¹

It is important that the school librarian be one of the best educated members on the teaching staff, because an intelligent, well educated person with a pleasing personality and good character traits, can bring a specialized knowledge to the teaching program. This special knowledge would supplement and complement the specialized knowledge of the various subjects and grade levels of the other members on the faculty. If the librarian has the respect and attention of the

¹Davies, op. cit., p. 25.

faculty they in turn will convey their enthusiasm to their students and will go out of their way to create in their students a sense of pride in the library. This is a first requirement and on it are based all the other factors for success.¹

The librarian will be expected to have basic training in education and most states require certification. She will be expected to know something of the history and the philosophy of education, the psychology of youth, the methods of teaching plus as much else as she has time to learn about. No one librarian can be a master of the literature in all fields but she should know the reference and bibliographical tools.²

Since the professional training of a librarian equips her to be a specialist in knowing how to locate information in the carriers of information, her talents should not be limited to information in printed books but should extend to other forms as well. One area found helpful by teachers is the use of audio-visual materials. The school librarian can help teachers learn how to use the many aids.³

It is well for teachers to remember that printed books are both "visual" and "audio" because the reader can absorb the content through ears as well as eyes. Tapes and phonograph records made of the contents of books become audio aids. When pages of a book are put on microfilm, they become a filmstrip, a visual aid, but when these are accompanied by

¹Ralph E. Ellsworth, The School Library (New York: The Center For Applied Research, Inc., 1965) p. 76.

²Ibid., p.35.

³Ibid., p.32.

a soundtrack, they are AV aids.

The librarian selects books and other learning materials for the library. In selecting books, she works constantly with the teachers, encouraging them to take the initiative in the selection process. They also work together in assembling materials for special projects. However, the librarian is responsible to see that the proper selection is made. She will draw upon her special knowledge of bibliography to acquire pamphlets, government documents, and other materials that make up a rich collection suited to the elementary school.

In selecting materials, the librarian must be conscious of the degree of maturity of the students the library serves. With good judgment and tact, the librarian's freedom to select materials is a school asset of great importance.

The librarian prepares reading lists, special bibliographies, and news bulletins, and she develops displays to attract the student's attention and lead them to materials they would otherwise not know about. The librarian will be on the lookout for new materials that may be of interest and benefit to teachers but are published outside their regular orbit of reading.

Those who work with children must learn what the specific needs and interests of the individuals are. Teachers and librarians must be aware that each young person is a unique personality, having his configuration of needs and interests which result from his own growth pattern and personal experiences. Thus each student must be studied

and valued for himself.¹ The librarian should be so approachable that students will go to her with their problems in reading. She is in a unique position to be helpful because her response to questions can be indirect and she can recommend books that will aid the student in satisfying his requirements.

The librarian is in a favorable position to know all or the majority of the students as they come to the library in class groups or individually. Through observation of the student's actions, and through informal conversations and discussions of books read and enjoyed the librarian can contribute to the teacher's understanding of his students. In turn, the teacher can help the librarian gain an understanding of the student's needs. The teacher and the librarian work together as a professional team, for which one of the main purposes is to make the reading of books more meaningful and satisfying experiences for the reader, and this can be a powerful force for education.²

In bringing books and children together, there is no substitute for knowing at first hand what books are available. It is not too difficult to recommend a book when the librarian personally knows the child and has a wide knowledge of books children like to read.

A library resource frequently needs the specialized competency and guidance of the librarian just as textbooks need the inspired and informed guidance of the classroom teacher. The librarian teaches the

¹Geneva R. Hanna and Marianna K. McAllister, Books, Young People and Guidance (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) p. 144.

²Ibid. p. 154.

student how to use resources with profit, satisfaction and challenge. The effective and efficient use of library resources makes it an educational agent. If the librarian designs and develops the library program to make teaching more effective and learning more meaningful, lasting and significant the entire educational program is upgraded. Thus direct involvement in the teaching and the learning program changes the function of the library from a materials storehouse to a learning laboratory and the role of the librarian changes from storehouse keeper to expeditor of learning.¹

"The librarian who would serve effectively as a teacher must be self-motivated by a continuous compelling zest for learning. He must regard his service as a creative challenge-- a never-ending quest for added understanding and deepened insight. He must possess an infectious enthusiasm for learning which permeates his work with teachers and students. He must derive satisfaction from exploring the new, the untried, the unfamiliar as well as from uncovering in the familiar something new, significant, and unsuspected. He must possess an insatiable curiosity about the hidden value and potential utility of every library resource. He must value media not as things but as ideas, delighting in searching for, identifying, analyzing, grouping, and organizing ideas into patterns of logical, cohesive interrelatedness. He must derive stimulation and satisfaction for the realization that his work is never done; new materials must be searched for and evaluated; old materials must be reevaluated in the light of current needs; new curricular trends, content, and methods must be studied and reflected in the library program; new faculty and students must be welcomed and their interests and concerns discovered and translated into commensurate patterns of library support service. The librarian who elects to serve in an educational environment should be capable of finding challenge and satisfaction in learning and in helping others to learn. He must view his service as an adventure of the mind and of the spirit, a demanding but rewarding adventure in creative self-realization, self-expression, and professional self-fulfillment."²

¹Hanna, op. cit., p. 40.

²Davies, op. cit., p. 40.

work he feels will have an educational significance for an individual student. In addition the teacher needs the freedom to discuss with a student any work that the student reads whether the teacher has recommended it or the student has discovered it for himself."¹

Ascertaining the nature of a reader's difficulty and methods of increasing his reading efficiency is the concern of specialists. Reading should be natural and meaningful to the child entering a program. The child has a right to see the reason for learning. There are various ways in which children can learn basic reading skills and to use printed words as a means of communication. The basic reader is merely a tool in the program---it offers a framework on which the teacher builds a program to meet the needs of the individual. The goal is the ability to draw meaning from printed words.²

When considering the functions of the elementary school library the importance of the contribution it makes in providing a basis for the school's modern reading program should not be overlooked. Educators realize the vital relationship existing between reading skills and reading activities. The reading program provides instruction in reading techniques, but all children must acquire for themselves skill in the art of reading which is accomplished through constant participation in meaningful reading activities. The modern reading program must supply children with worthwhile reading materials as well as instruction in

¹Helen E. Saunders, The Modern School Library, Its Administration as a Materials Center (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1968) p. 193.

²Arthur E. Enzmann, "A Look At Early Reading," The Reading Teacher, XXIV (April, 1971), 620.

how to read. To carry out this function the school library needs a liberal collection of fine fiction and non-fiction books covering a wide range of interests and a variety in reading difficulty.¹

Since the reading ability of the children using the library is an important factor in book selection, the school librarian needs to know the approximate percentage of pupils reading at grade level and above and below it. After pupils learn to read, there are at least three levels at any one grade level. Books selected for one grade can be read by at least three grades and this is the outstanding advantage of a centralized library as opposed to classroom libraries where students usually have available materials for their grade level only. Because several reading levels use the materials in a centralized library, their use is widened and also makes more materials in a given selection. These facts are significant for librarians and teachers building a school library that will satisfy the needs of all pupils.²

The librarian should attempt to ascertain the reading levels of all who use the library, to identify the normal, the superior or the slow readers. This information comes from classroom visits, teacher-librarian conferences and results of school administered tests.

The curriculum is the instrument by means of which the aims of education are realized in the school. Like those aims, it deserves the attention of the school librarian. Learning is, of course, to be

¹Jewel Gardiner, Administering Library Service in the Elementary School (Chicago: American Library Association, 1954) p. 9.

²Wofford, op. cit. p. 41.

individualized. Certain areas of knowledge and certain skills are basic for all learners so the educator provides curriculum which is the portion of school experience common to all learners. As a pupil matures and advances, he is allowed increasing opportunity to broaden and cultivate special talents to follow special cultural or vocational interests through his choice of activities and readings.

For the elementary school librarian perhaps the most significant aspect of the educational aims is the way in which these aims reach beyond the mere acquisition of skills in reading and comprehension to include: rich and varied experiences; to develop strong motives for and permanent interests in reading; to encourage the intelligent use of books as sources of information; and to foster reading of a wide range of printed materials for pleasure as well as personal development.¹

In the pursuit of these aims or values elementary school reading programs have been extended and methods have been adopted that are of great importance to the librarian. The teachers of various grades take pupils to the library for free reading time. This gives students ample opportunity to browse through available materials, and guided by the librarian or the teacher, to select that which has personal appeal and is adapted to their ability. Students can be given opportunities to dramatize what has been read, to talk over reading experiences, or to give formal book reports. Records of verse, hero tales and other subjects should be available for listening enjoyment.

¹Fargo, op. cit., p. 33.

Educators must realize there are many boys and girls who can read but do so with reluctance. A very important function of the school librarian is to stimulate a desire among young readers to use the library materials to enliven their leisure hours and to provide courage, inspiration, and knowledge.

The availability of attractive books is itself a stimulus to promote reading. Publicity is also a great factor in promoting the use of a library. Attractive bulletin boards displaying colorful book jackets, exhibits of hobbies, bulletins containing articles written by the students who have read fascinating materials and are eager to tell about it, recordings, films, activities involving the handling of books, all have a definite role in encouraging children to use the library.

Creating a favorable atmosphere in the library cannot be over-emphasized. This begins with open doors and open shelves----open doors for easy admission and open shelves for availability of books. Picture books and easy books for the young readers are usually shelved on low shelves easily accessible to pupils in grades one through three. These include books with little text widely spaced or scattered with extra large print and simple vocabulary for the beginning reader; picture books with very little text and simple enough vocabulary to be read by the child himself; and picture books with a larger amount of text or text with greater vocabulary difficulty to be read to the child. Every elementary school library will need lots of picture books and easy books because they constitute the main collection for the first three grades. They are helpful in getting beginning pupils accustomed to handling books

and to associating books with both information and enjoyment. They are useful in developing reading skills and in establishing the important habit of reading.¹

It is necessary that the collection of picture books and easy books is on a wide range of topics. Young children delight in animal stories, things about the home, children of their own or other lands, and mechanical objects such as anything on wheels. Children profit from and like repetition in text and picture, folk tales, and rhymes. They prefer simple colored pictures which appeal to their imagination.²

Provision for physical comfort in the library is a necessity--good lighting, ventilation, work area, and seating as well as a quiet atmosphere conducive to reading. Students will want to come to an atmosphere of friendliness, helpfulness, good humor, and approachability. They learn to seek and prize unforced reading guidance and they are impressed with educators who show interest in their reading selections.

If librarians are to effectively guide young readers, they must know the interests of the young people in the school. Motivation may come through probing of individual interests as well as through the curriculum and current happenings in the school. The librarian should capitalize on classroom activities that provide experiences that encourages reading. Book discussions, book reviews, and imaginary interviews with authors can aid in developing an interest to read.

¹Wofford, op. cit., p. 91.

²Ibid., p. 96.

Some schools have "graded" the books in their libraries, that is, the difficulty level of each books is determined and a master list compiled of titles and difficulties. Once this tremendous task is completed and titles have been assorted into topic areas, teachers have this important tool of information at their disposal. This enables them to match the student difficulty and topic at any time. This helps the teacher provide growth in reading ability and content area simultaneously.¹

¹Robert H. Geeslin, "The Graded Difficulty Library" The Reading Teacher, XXIV (April, 1971), 645.

CHAPTER IV

TEACHING THE USE OF REFERENCE MATERIAL

Even though our schools have stressed the verbal as the most important process of learning, modern schools are placing much more emphasis on the seeing and experiencing learning process.¹

In our educational program knowledge is no longer considered as confined only to textbooks, so a great variety of reference materials are needed if the minds of our students are to be opened to the world about them. They need to be familiar with these reference materials and to acquire skills in getting information through various sources. Children in primary grades are capable of using library resources only in a restricted way, but as progress is made through the elementary grades they become more capable of using all types of materials. The needs in the individual school will determine which reference books will be made available to those who use the library.

THE DICTIONARY

Good first dictionaries of the picture book type should be made available for the very young child in the elementary school. This successfully introduces the dictionary to the child at an early age.² Book companies now publish volumes suitable for use in the first, second,

¹Gardiner, op. cit., p. 6.

²Wofford, op. cit., p. 81.

and third grades, the difficulty of which progresses with each grade level. The writer has successfully used this program in the primary grades.

Many elementary schools begin the formal study of the dictionary in the fourth grade. Competence in using this reference tool depends upon daily use, drill, and practice. The librarian can supplement and enrich the regular classroom instruction but her program is not intended to replace it.

Some educators question the need or use of an unabridged dictionary in an elementary school program because of its difficulty. The writer believes that the library should have a copy to be used by the good students and the faculty.

ENCYCLOPEDIA AND REFERENCE BOOKS

The backbone of any school library reference materials consists of encyclopedias on various reading levels.¹ Primary grades can greatly benefit from the use of encyclopedia geared to their ability.

Dictionary skills lead naturally into use of encyclopedias which usually begins in a more detailed way in fourth grade. However, a well planned encyclopedia goes beyond the spelling, pronouncing, and word meaning found in the dictionary for it devotes many pages to the subject.

It is important to know by whom the encyclopedia is to be used

¹Wofford, op. cit., p. 79.

and this should be kept in mind when selections are made. The encyclopedia provides information accurately and objectively so that it can be understood by the readers, young and old.

In selecting other reference materials, the librarian should consult with the various faculty members to find out their needs. Again the needs of the individual school and the needs of the students who will use the reference materials should be kept in mind when making the selections.

REFERENCE SKILLS

The reference skills program is basic to the educational program because these tools are productive learning, effective thinking, and intelligent action. The goal of this program is that students will effectively and creatively solve problems he meets throughout his lifetime. All study skills must be an integral part of the planned, ongoing classroom teaching and learning program and these are the joint responsibility of those who teach. The librarian shares in the responsibility of all who teach our future citizens to function as informed, effective, and efficient ones.

The test of the effectiveness of the reference-skills program will be measured when the student of today intelligently applies his skills as he solves the problems he meets in the future. The most permanent learnings are skills, because they are the thinking tools essential for self-initiated learning and self-directed problem solving. If the student develops a command of skills which he carries into adult

life he will have a firm basis for continued learning throughout his life. Learning how to learn, solve problems and think is training preparatory to effective citizenship. A skills program designed to educate such a citizen should be the goal of our schools. Such a program requires the planned use of teaching and learning resources appropriate for the development of specific skills at each grade level. The librarian shares the responsibility for the teaching of skills and for providing resources which will expedite the learning as well as teaching of these.¹

DEWEY DECIMAL SYSTEM

Since children are great imitators, initiation to the card catalog can take place early in the elementary school. Younger children see older ones refer to the card catalog when making a book selection and are curious about this. The learning of the alphabet, the shelf arrangement of easy books, and the alphabetical order of titles, authors and subjects have helped prepare students for this skill. As they progress from grade to grade, the card catalog becomes more meaningful and they learn that books are classified by numbers into ten main groups.

Practice in locating materials in the main groups gradually brings children the feeling at home with non-fiction books and may aid in making the use of a library a lifetime habit.

¹Davies, op. cit., p. 200.

CHAPTER V

MEDIA CENTER

Education employs the intellectual, physical, and social skills of students in a learning process which promotes desirable human values as expressed in attitudes and actions of students. If these outcomes are to be secured the teacher and the librarian must be aware of the characteristics which can effectively guide the learner's development. The student must learn reading skills, as well as those of observation, listening and social interaction. He will need to develop self-motivation, self-discipline, and self-evaluation along with a spirit of inquiry. He will need to master knowledge and to develop skills so that he can communicate his ideas to others. The library media center plays a vital role in this entire process. Media not only control what is learned but convey information, affect the message, and establish the learning environment as well. They help determine what a student sees and what his attitude will be toward his environment. Therefore, it is important that the librarian actively participate in shaping the learning environment and the instructional design, and that all media equipment be selected, produced, and used to challenge the students to a dynamic participation in a free, exciting and enriched life.¹

Since learning is an individual and private thing, what will aid the process with one student may not with another. The appeal of one medium over another varies from student to student. Hence, a variety

¹American Library Association, Standards For School Media Programs (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969) p. 1.

of media easily available in the school library is a necessity. Books and other printed materials are basic to any library collection. The printed word is the major means through which formal education is acquired. All other materials are used to enrich, to supplement, and to make more meaningful the learning process.¹

Educational media are means which teachers will accept or reject as a means toward an end. Every teacher is constantly looking for new tools to accomplish new tasks or to perform old ones in a better way. Educators are challenged to examine their goals and see if media will attain the end. Teachers must keep in mind the purposes for which materials are used, the characteristics and special needs of students to be served by them and the basis for selecting materials most likely to help students achieve their goals.

The media center's program, collections, and environment can provide learning for individuals or for large or small groups of students. The aim of the program is to facilitate and improve learning with emphasis on the learner, on ideas, concepts, and inquiry. Students can be effectively guided in their study and opportunities are given him to create and produce materials necessary to meet the demands of today's youth. The librarian provides information about new materials, makes materials accessible, produces needed materials, channels information regarding students' progress to the teachers, instructs students on uses and resources of the media center, and assists in analysing instructional needs.

¹Saunders, op. cit., p. 2.

Quality education is expensive today but poorly educated youths whose talents are lost, are more costly. Quality education needs resources and facilities. Educators recognize the fact that educational programs depend upon media services and resources to extend, reinforce, and improve learning.

Checking out records and the other audio-visual materials to students is common in the elementary school today. Records, filmstrips, transparencies and other multi-media are an essential part of the library and the classroom. A listening-and-viewing center with carrels are available in many libraries for reference and leisure time activities. Directions and instructions for the use of materials are given by the librarian.

Small children can be taught to use view-masters and reels, simple tape recorders, and individual filmstrip machines. These multi-media meet the needs of many disadvantaged pupils. Opaque, movie, and overhead projectors can be used effectively. As long as the child learns, any medium is worthwhile.

The school librarian should encourage the use of library services. She helps both pupils and teachers discover new materials of interest and to determine their values. Trained librarians must be ready to cooperate with others and serve as coordinators, consultants, and supervisors of instructional materials service in the elementary school.¹

¹Davies, op. cit., p. 295.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the effective operation of an elementary school library is not a simple task and that it requires wide knowledge in the fields of education and librarianship. But for any individual who likes boys and girls, it is highly challenging and full of opportunity for initiative and exploratory work, as well as for helpful service and inspiring contacts with youth and the teachers of youth.

Present-day educational philosophy places emphasis upon readiness and growth. It is the responsibility of those who teach to discover where the pupil is in his development and to take him as far as his skills and abilities will allow.

The school librarian needs to know the collection of materials in the library and be thoroughly familiar with the curriculum. This involves more than merely knowing what subjects are taught and who teaches what grade. To do a thorough job of selecting materials for curriculum use, the librarian should know what the curriculum is and what materials are needed to enrich the various phases of classroom work. She must also understand the place of the school library in the modern elementary educational program and what her relation is to each. She must know the school her library serves and the program it offers.

The librarian must be aware of the reading levels and interests of individuals or groups who use the library and the materials must be selected accordingly. The collection must take cognizance of the needs of all readers--superior, average, or retarded as well as the reluctant reader.

We can conclude, then, that one of the most essential educational objectives is to lead children into the realm of books, so that children and books are brought together in happy association. It is not enough for the school to teach children to read, but it is far more significant to furnish them with something worthwhile in order that they may read. And this would become a habit for life.

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