THE SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAM IN THE "ELECTRIC AGE"

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Effective school library service today is partially contingent upon the library's capacity to respond to meaningful change and to initiate creative movement. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, marked changes characterized library service to youth. The changes in the twenty-five years that followed were primarily variations of earlier developments.[1] Throughout the fifty-year period, the primary objective of library work with youth was to reach "*all* children and young people with *good* service."[2] This objective remains basically the same today; but the past two decades have witnessed dramatic changes in education and in the whole of society itself that necessitate flexibility and creativity in the library's approaches to achieving this goal. Marshall McLuhan has referred to the current period as the "electric age." Electric means of storing information have made large units as manageable as small ones. Mr. McLuhan compares the automation of a plant or an industry to the changes that must occur in society and its institutions as a result of this electric technology.[3]

Since the end of World War II, and more particularly the launching of the first Russian satellite, American schools have experienced curriculum changes more sweeping than those that had formerly reflected the rather gradual evolution of society.[4] These changes were given further impetus by the anticipated postwar economic collapse that did not materialize, by the rising hopes of middle class parents in education to better their children's lives, by unemployment caused by job obsolescence, by the rapid accumulation of knowledge, and by federal leadership in Washington.[5]

Change can be seen at a number of points in the modern school. Trends indicate an emphasis by subject-matter specialists on learning fundamental concepts and processes in preference to the rote memorizing of facts.[6] It is becoming increasingly popular to reorganize schools horizontally into a variety of teaching arrangements or vertically into non-graded or multigraded programs.[7] Special programs for slow learners, the physically handicapped, and the academically talented are being initiated.[8] Automation is affecting the revitalization of vocational and technical education,[9] and many are looking to cybernetics and technology as a means of revolutionizing the whole of education.[10] Important spokesmen in education are urging the development of facilities and flexible scheduling that permit large group instruction, small group discussions, and independent study.[11]

All of the sundry trends mentioned have implications for the school library, but perhaps none is of more special significance that this last emphasis on requiring students to seek sources of information, to formulate problems and hypotheses, to evaluate data, and to come to conclusions of their own.[12] There is strong opinion among school library leaders that skills necessary for students' acquiring and using knowledge can be most effectively learned through multiple resources.[13] And resources are only one facet affected by changes occuring in America's schools. It is imperative that librarians be aware of trends in all areas of the curriculum in order to understand their direct and important implications for library resources,

facilities, personnel, and all of the other components of the library program. Such an awareness makes the implications of the following statements obvious for the library:

> Each reformer comes to his task with a little bundle of desired changes . . . The true task is to design a society (and institutions) capable of continuous change, renewal and responsiveness. We can less and less afford to limit ourselves to routine repair of breakdowns in our institutions.[14]

What is needed to make the library self-renewing? The word *program* denotes planning and future direction. It looks ahead, anticipating change. Further, *library program* connotes purposeful change, presupposing the formulation of objectives. Little is done toward realizing an objective until it is recognized as a valid one. Planning the library program demands self-examination as well as study of the larger school program in order to determine objectives. The quantitative and qualitative standards of the library derive in large measure from the over-all goals of the school program. Indeed, an important *raison d'etre* for a library program is contained in the definition that a school library is "a centrally organized collection, readily accessible, of many kinds of materials that, used together, enrich and support the educational program of the school of which it is an integral part."[15] Certainly, selecting, organizing, and making materials accessible is a part of any library program. That the very provision of a balanced contact of reading materials extends the boundaries of a school's literature program is an example of the importance of the library's supportive and enriching functions for both the group and the individual student.[16] This supportive function should also be reflected in such considerations as library hours and circulation policies.[17]

"Deploring the spoon feeding of students, as librarians so frequently do, may actually mean deploring a more intelligent use of a student's time and efforts."[18] There is some opinion that placing information from all media in the hands of students as quickly and efficiently as modern technology permits is the chief function of a library.[19] This is, of course, a major service of the library; but the program best justifies itself when it goes beyond this concept and recognizes a further responsibility toward its patrons and toward the materials provided for them. The school library can play a role in fostering the important intellectual processes of "analysis, evaluation, synthesis, response, [and] appreciation" that come into play when students use materials.[20] When the school library program has this objective, students learn to learn in school libraries "under the guidance of teachers and librarians expert in their knowledge of students, the curriculum, the ways of teaching, and the ways of learning."[21]

If a goal of education in America today is to produce functionally literate citizens,[22] then as a part of the school, the library must be concerned not only with the important area of reading guidance but with guidance in the use of other media as well. Studies have repeatedly testified to the distinctive place that the mass media occupy in the lives of American youths and adults. Teaching how to operate a film projector is not enough to assure discriminative use of film. Guidance is needed in viewing and listening skills that foster visual and audio literacy involving perception, evaluation, [and] appreciation.[23]

The important observation that teachers who have not been introduced to the school library do not ordinarily motivate their students to use it[24] is only one factor favoring the opinion that communication with teachers and administrators should be emphasized in the library program. Indeed, the librarian himself has a professional responsibility to become cognizant of trends within the whole of society and education as well as his own field so that he can contribute to the developing of a relevant philosophical orientation. By touching so many persons and areas in the school, the library program has the opportunity not only to reflect curriculum goals and changes but to have an impact of its own in establishing worthy objectives and in initiating movement that leads to their realization.

The library program justifies itself with the planned support and enrichment it provides for the total school program. It enlarges the individualizing and compensatory capacities of the school. A program involves the establishment of goals and provision for movement toward these goals. It is the best assurance that the library will be ready to incorporate the changes made necessary by the "electric age" and by curriculum revision. It increases the probability of a significant contribution to the development of intellectual processes, to the continuing growth and education of students, which is, after all, the school library's first reason for being.

REFERENCES

[1] Frances Henne, "The Basic Need in Library Service for Youth," *Library Quarterly*, XXV (January, 1955), 38.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 358.

[4] John I. Goodlad and others (eds.), *The Changing School Curriculum* (New York: The Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1966), p. 9.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13

[6] John I. Goodlad, *School Curriculum Reform in the United States* (New York: The Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1964), p. 51.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Robert S. Gilchrist and Willard G. Jones, "The Instructional Program and the Library," *Theory into Practice.* VI (February, 1967), 7.

[11] J. Lloyd Trump, *Guide to Better Schools* (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Company, 1961), pp. 40-45.