

VIEWS OF SCHOOL-PUBLIC LIBRARY
COOPERATION FROM THE NATIONAL LEVEL

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There are some things going on at the national level that are relevant to school and public library cooperation in urban and suburban areas as well as in the rural community: 1) an increased awareness of grass root activities in school and public library co-operation; 2) an awareness of needed research to address the subject and an effort to promote the development of a proposal to provide the funding; 3) an ever increasing number of statements supporting the concept; 4) and the production of a manual entitled A Planning Process for Public Libraries with an awareness of its implications for planning community library and information services.

My personal professional experience for six years was in rural public library service in West Virginia. I personally recognized immediately that there was no need to compete with others attempting to provide similar services, but rather there was a need to cooperate wherever and whenever it was administratively and legally possible. It is that perspective that I brought to my position at ALA as Executive Secretary of the Public Library Association.

Within a few months of working with Alice Fite, Executive Secretary of AASL, I became aware of the broader questions and needs in this area of cooperation from a national perspective. Alice and I talked about it often--and within ALA that can be a beginning. During the past few years the ALA has organized opportunities for the issue of school and public library cooperation to be addressed by groups within the Association. When two divisions--the Association of State

Library Agencies and the Health and Rehabilitative Library Services Division--were combined into what is now known as the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA), one of its charges was identified as representing multi-type library cooperatives. When a new section was organized within PLA--the Public Library Systems Section--one of its charges was to encourage improved library service through the participation of public libraries in multi-type library systems.

In 1979 the Public Library Association issued The Public Library Mission Statement and Its Imperatives for Service. The Mission Statement mandates the following changes:

The Minimum Standards for Public Library Systems, 1966, recommended the creation of regional public library systems; Imperatives for Service proposes multi-type library structures to coordinate public libraries and public library systems with all school, academic, and special libraries in a region. These regional multi-type systems must be affiliated with state, multi-state, and national networks. (p.11)

In an effort to initiate public library - school library cooperation, I spoke first with Mrs. Fite; then I had follow-up discussions with the PLA President, Ronald Dubberly. An effort was made to identify someone who could accept the concept of cooperation between the two types of libraries, organize a functioning committee, and develop a proposal for implementing a program. Two such persons were identified; during conversations with each, both gave their endorsement and full support that this was a legitimate and important question to be addressed on the national level by PLA and AASL. However, both individuals declined to chair such an effort owing to important personal commitments. Both individuals gave additional time to supply the PLA Office with names and to cite studies that would be important in developing such a proposal.

The subject continues to be a legitimate and valid area for PLA activity. However, it must always be remembered that ALA and its divisions are made up of volunteer membership. In a year I have learned what I did not appreciate as a member--the division offices are limited by staff to implement the many tasks for which they are responsible. Each new activity must be viewed in terms of its time requirements, making it even more important to have committee or task force chairs that organize and carry out their charges. A research proposal is no small task.

The Public Library Association has developed a managerial tool that has broad implications for cooperation between all types of libraries in a community-- A Planning Process for Public Libraries. I shall provide a brief history of the Planning Process.

In 1974, the PLA Goals, Guidelines, and Standards Committee developed a proposal for preparation of an instrument for public libraries "which will enable them to 1) understand the particular community they are serving; 2) choose objectives in the light of that understanding; and 3) measure the degree to which these objectives are being met." "The Process of Standards Development for Community Library Services" was funded in 1977 by USOE under the HEA Title II-B Research and Demonstration Program.

That two year effort is now complete and the resulting manual will be published by ALA in the spring of 1980. Anyone can purchase it from the ALA Order Department. The manual will make it possible for a public library to plan effectively without spending large amounts of time deciding how to proceed.

The manual will show public library planning committees (made up of library staff and citizens from the community) how to implement the planning process through seven steps:

1. Assessing the community and library environment
2. Determining the mission of the library in the community

3. Evaluating current library services and resources
4. Setting goals, objectives, and priorities
5. Developing and evaluating strategies for change
6. Implementing the strategies
7. Monitoring and evaluating progress toward goals

I spoke with Eugene Palmour, Principal Investigator for the Project, about my visit to Clarion and about the implications of the Planning Process for school and public library cooperation. Mr. Palmour agreed that as public libraries became involved in the Planning Process it would mean more than planning for public library service; it would mean planning for community library service. And because the planning process is cyclical, it provides one avenue to ever-increasing cooperation between all types of libraries.

This past week, I was in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with the PLA President, Ronald Dubberly, the PLA Vice-President, Robert Rohlf, the Chair of the Goals, Guidelines and Standards Committee, Charles Robinson, and Mary Jo Lynch, the Director of the ALA Office of Research. A program at that time was developed to disseminate the information about the Planning Process through the ALA Conference in New York in 1980. We will also provide three regional programs between July 1980 and December 1980. A priority in registration for the one-day programs will be allotted to people from the state libraries. A second priority will be to teams of two or more persons from one community. I would hope to see school librarians in those teams. In addition, we will be putting on three training workshops, i.e., two to three day sessions presented by King Research, Inc. in different sites throughout the country.

The reaction that I get and that I have myself is, "How will the Planning Process help small and rural public libraries?" We don't know. We have tested the program in three sites in small libraries, but those small libraries were in regional systems that had access to

a data coordinator who is a very important person in the process. If a library were not part of a regional system, it would have the state library to rely upon. That is why we are planning to give state library personnel a priority; state library consultants can learn the Planning Process.

We are also in the process of writing a proposal for a public library planning officer within the PLA Office who would offer short term consulting services free. Services on the phone would be completely free. If you wanted this individual to come into your community, you would have to provide his expenses. I would appreciate very much any comment you might have about the proposal while I am here. What would you expect as a small public library if you did not have access to state consulting services? What would you like for this person to be able to do? This type of information would be very helpful as we put the proposal together.

Another aspect of the proposed consultative services has been implemented within the last week. There is need to collect data from those libraries who decide to participate in the planning process. Mary Jo Lynch of the Office of Research at ALA developed a preliminary, simple method to collect data from those libraries who participate in the beginning stages. It's particularly important to us that small public libraries and rural public libraries participate so that we can begin to understand more about this process that we have developed. It's a cyclical process, and if there is any validity to it, it will have to be revised. The only way it can be revised is to have understanding of its effectiveness in the field, i.e., what it really means to a librarian using it. It's very easy for researchers, who don't work on a day to day basis with you, to have one concept of your problems and for you to have another.

It's very easy, the longer you stay at ALA, to forget what it was like to work in a library and to actually deal with the problems in your community. Therefore, we are going to need your assistance as we move along on this.

Again, when it comes to cooperation, I believe that it is built into the planning process. I personally think that any public library that began this program would be very foolish not to bring someone from the school system into the planning process.