

SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES COMMUNICATE

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I have been asked to address the possibilities for cooperation between school and public libraries in general and then to speak more specifically concerning the influence that the American Association of School Librarians has had in the development of such cooperation.

Any review of such development requires a brief understanding of certain significant dates and activities peculiar to the involvement of the Association in the history of librarianship. The American Association of School Librarians, the association which I represent, became a division of the American Library Association in 1951. It is interesting to note that the date of 1951 corresponds closely to the early years of a time period which saw unusual growth in school libraries. Prior to 1951, most secondary schools had made some commitment to a school library program; however, elementary school libraries consisted largely of small book collections, classroom libraries and some professionally-trained personnel.

Current efforts toward cooperation are based upon an understanding of the fact that the school library has made progress to the extent that the collections and the services of library media programs can be of benefit to other types of libraries. This became possible when local and state educational agencies made a commitment to the philosophy that the school library was an essential part of the instructional program.

National associations influence the development of a concept through task forces, resolutions and professional literature, usually

in that order. In 1960, 1969, and 1975, comprehensive guidelines were published by the American Association of School Librarians. These documents provided the means by which school libraries could be involved in the area of cooperative efforts with other libraries and determined the philosophy through which resource sharing could receive national acceptance.

In 1977, a task force was formed by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science in cooperation with the American Association of School Librarians for the purpose of expanding the definition and delineation of the role of the school library media program in networking. This task force has prepared a document in which immediate and intermediate recommendations are supplied to counteract the five factors which inhibit cooperation. The Role of the School Library Media Program in Networking (1978) clarifies the importance of the school library's involvement in cooperative efforts with other types of libraries and challenges equal opportunity of access to total information resources for all individuals without the participation of the school library in a network of cooperation. Mr. Luskey, Conference Chairman, has asked us to discuss our views regarding the concept of cooperation of public and school libraries in a rural setting. I like the word concept because I believe that the principles of sharing are basic to the understanding of any acceptance of what is or is not possible in cooperation.

The message is not new. School librarians and public librarians have come together to talk about cooperation or about the combination of the school and public library for many years. The first separate set of standards for school libraries jointly authored by the American Library Association and the National Education Association was titled School and Public Libraries Working Together on

Library Service and was published in 1941. Many years ago public libraries were founded in New York State through funds obtained from local school taxes. These school district public libraries which came into existence in the mid 1800's are receiving their budget allocations in much the same manner today.

The message is not new, but the mission is current. It is not unusual that in a decade when inflation may very well be the number one problem and when taxpayers in almost one-third of our states are being asked to place ceilings on local and state budgets, there appears to be a desire for greater dialogue for shared services between the school and public library in whatever form is feasible for a given situation.

The school library media program has much to offer to the total community. There are over 74,000 schools in the 1,600 school districts in the United States; the majority of these have library media centers. There are approximately 52,000 full-time certified library media specialists prepared to work with students of all ages. Normally, the licensing of this individual acknowledges the ability to understand and cope with the individual library user as a learner. The school library media specialist should have access to, and the ability to use, a wide variety of bibliographic tools. The school library media specialist may have access to data bases on the national level and therefore help to provide that link between the school media program and the totality of information necessary for the individual community.

The key word is communicate. The challenge is to learn about each other's functions and to accept the fact that there are many areas for cooperation. We must begin to explore the possibilities for structuring cooperative efforts and find nontraditional ways

to cooperate. Those of us at the local, state and national levels must decide upon ways and areas of cooperation before others lacking knowledge in our career field will mandate the future for us.

Some will question whether the autonomy of institutional maintenance is too strong a barrier to overcome for the kind of cooperation necessary to meet the needs of total access to information. Are we still saddled with traditional methodology, and are the legal and financial structures too great a deterrent for change?

The national view does not focus upon one type of format. The national view asks that the central focus be placed upon the individual community. Identify all the resources, whether they be educational, recreational, social or cultural. Then, engage these resources to meet the information needs of the community. A brief review of the field will reveal some interesting data and information.

In 1977, the State Library of Florida funded a study to examine the concept of cooperative ventures and combined libraries to determine which institutional structure had the most potential for improving school and public library services in the state. The study concluded in June of 1978 with the development of a model procedure to be used by a community in deciding whether a combined library or another alternative would provide the best library services for community residents. Seven on-site visits were made to school-public library combinations in the United States and Canada.

There were two major conclusions after the data were analyzed. One, it is unlikely that communities offering separate types of libraries will offer better school and public library service through a combined program. Second, if a community is unable to provide minimum library services through separate facilities, and there is no option for services through a system membership, the combined program

presents a possible alternative to limited or existent services. Further, there was no documented evidence that economy resulted from the combined school and public library combination. The Florida study gives several conditions which should be met if a combined facility is the only answer to library service. Two of these conditions call for a planned program of service and a systematic evaluation procedure.¹

The state of Wisconsin, concerned with some of the same issues as the state of Florida, prepared a policy statement in 1976 to help communities which were contemplating the consolidation of facilities. Again, experience showed that combining facilities in Wisconsin did not regularly save money.²

Most recently, the province of Alberta, Canada, has issued a policy urging school and public libraries to review several alternatives before attempting the establishment of a school-public facility; however, there are combined facilities already established in Canada which have met a specific community need.³

In Olney, Texas, a town of 4,000 people, a new concept has been developed in the delivery of library services. It is one that challenges tradition. Olney is a small town with a rural atmosphere. The problems were numerous in the attempt to coordinate all library services. Since August, 1973, Olney has operated a program which has united three school libraries and a public library. All materials are available to a total citizenry. There is a continuous year round program which makes use of school collections in the summer. There is increased reference service. There is a centralized source for all informational materials.

One of the originators of the Olney concept expressed his feelings this way:

"This new information and resource center was designed to meet total community needs in a unique way. Attempting more than to allow the public to use school materials or to physically relocate the public library on school property, the project has actually created a new institution--one which merges the book collections and functions of both libraries into a single unit."⁴

There has been recent emphasis upon investigating the possibility of combined school and public library programs in a single facility, and I shall not expand upon this as you shall be hearing from Wilma Woolard tomorrow; however, this concern relates to a very important principle in the concept of sharing. Taxpayers are asking all types of community services to provide more efficient use of existing community and educational facilities. Schools and public libraries are going to have to explore alternative ways of offering adequate services with less money. The growing trend toward total access to information for all library users will require that school and public librarians rethink their roles and functions and more clearly define the division of responsibilities.

For many years there has existed a joint committee of the American Library Association and the National Education Association whose charge is to explore problems of mutual interest in the fields of education and library service. In May of 1972, through funding from the J. Morris Jones - World Book Encyclopedia - ALA Goals Award Program, a small group of school, public and academic librarians met in Washington, D.C., with school administrators and government officials to attempt to define what is total community library service and to suggest ways in which all the libraries in a community might work together to achieve this goal. There was unanimous agreement from those in attendance that the coordination of activities, services and resources was not only feasible but desirable. It was recommended

that there was a need for coordination of all library services and resources at the community level in order to provide maximum service to the library user. The Conference did not propose a single format for the coordination of community library services because the consensus of the group was that local needs should determine the forms of coordination. It was further recognized that reformation of library service would not come easily; there would be apathy and resistance. However, those in attendance agreed that initiative for change could best come from the professionals involved and that the responsibility lodged with them.

Why has it taken us so long to come to a basic understanding of what cooperation is all about? There have been the vested interests of both the school librarians and the public librarians; there are the poor experiences of inadequate types of libraries; and there have been poorly developed combinations of the two. All these barriers have prevented any widely accepted consideration of the total information needs of a given community.

I am suggesting that school and public librarians review both present and potential roles of their libraries, become active members of a meaningful community education program, and then implement that unique, essential contribution of both types of libraries. This is networking in its truest form. And if this is going to become more than talk, school and public library professionals are going to have to make a commitment to continued exploration of the concepts of multi-type library cooperation.

A change is taking place in the United States from self-sufficiency and local ownership of library materials to a desire for mutual dependency among libraries. We are in the age of networking, and resource sharing must take place among all types of libraries. We

are in an age where public, academic, school and special libraries within a community, state or region will find it necessary to interconnect in order to facilitate a new kind of resource sharing. The climate is ripe for change, and I believe that this sharing of information between school and public libraries will not only help to maintain but also improve the quality of both the public and school library services.

REFERENCES

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4. James A. Kitchen, Sandra Kimbro, and Frank R. Williams. The Olney Experiment: A Progress Report. Denton, Texas: North Texas State University, 1974.