

programming in public libraries indicates that the broad view is a constructive one; that the public is

ready to be engaged if the effort is made.

A Response to David Hoppe by Verna Pungitore Indiana University SLIS

We appreciate Mr. Hoppe's thoughtful comments regarding the report and are pleased that he has shared with the readers of *Indiana Libraries* his "humanities" perspective on the issue of the public library's role in the life of the community.

There is little to disagree with in his letter. Libraries do indeed collect and provide access to the "fruits of human endeavor." Instituting and strengthening cooperative ventures between humanities professionals and public librarians can only enhance the cultural life of our communities and should certainly be encouraged.

Often it is the librarian in the smaller community who seeks to form such partnerships, realizing that the public's access to local sources of cultural, artistic, or humanities programming is limited. In larger communities, however, there are many competing agencies that provide such access on a regular basis. Librarians in some of these communities apparently believe that they should identify for their institutions a purpose that is uniquely theirs. Hence the emphasis given by librarians to the provision of "equal access to information," or to the provision of self-paced alternatives to formal education.

As the report indicated, one of the difficulties encountered in attempting to measure the extent to which public libraries assume an educational role is that of determining the boundaries of the term "education." Many informational, cultural, and recreational activities and services are also educational. Certainly, a distinction between educational and cultural (humanities) programming can easily become an artificial or purely semantic difference. The perceptions expressed by public librarians of the importance of each role were necessarily dependent upon the way they individually defined role boundaries.

Perhaps librarians are so accustomed to thinking of the library's "cultural" purpose (in terms of the library's contribution to the betterment of society) as a given component of all the library's services, that they tend not to recognize that particular role as one that is separate and distinct. By maintaining a dialogue with humanities professionals such as Mr. Hoppe, maybe we can increase our awareness of the importance of public libraries to the cultural lives of individual communities.