

Cooperation between Teachers, School Librarians, and Public Librarians: Improving Library Services for Children and Young Adults

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Introduction

In the literature on library cooperation, there is a great deal of rhetoric about the importance of cooperation and tremendous "lip service" to the concept, as well as some interesting success stories. Recent events have convinced me that cooperation may be the only solution to providing adequately for the library needs of children and young adults. What is important is that the best library services be provided for children and young adults - library services which will meet their total needs including education, personal information, recreation, personal interests, and career needs.

Areas which will be covered in this overview of cooperation between school and public libraries include: developments and trends which mandate cooperation (societal, historical, and current events); barriers and conditions for success in cooperative efforts; a planning model for implementing cooperation; and some specific suggestions for types of cooperation.

Developments and Trends which Mandate a Need for Cooperation

First, let's consider several societal factors. Library services to children and young adults have eroded since the late 1970s, largely due to economic problems, with decreased materials, budgets and less professional staffing in both school and public libraries. The closing of schools resulting from lower enrollments in public schools in the 1970s and early 1980s has created a situation where more librarians share several schools for part-time service to students. The information explosion adds to the problem in two ways: libraries can buy and store less of the available information; yet the changing and expanding curriculum demands a greater diversity and depth of information. It is apparent that no one library can provide for all of the needs of students. The new technologies, especially computers, have had a major impact on libraries; they are costly in terms of hardware, software, and the training required. Both school and public libraries are becoming involved in the technology; it is the most likely area for cooperation in terms of compatibility of equipment, in

providing the programs and services that students need to fulfill educational and informational needs, and in providing computer literacy. Also, the 1980s have been a crisis period for education as described in several national reports such as *A Nation at Risk*, and responded to by the library profession in *Alliance for Excellence*, and *Realities*.¹

From a historical perspective, cooperation between schools and public libraries began with the earliest public library. As early as 1876, in an influential report entitled, *Public Libraries in the U.S.A.*, William Fletcher contributed a section on "Public Libraries and the Young" which conveyed the message that public libraries were auxiliaries to education.² In 1897, John Cotton Dana, then president of the American Library Association (ALA), urged the National Education Association (NEA) to appoint a committee to study the interrelationships. That committee's report recommended cooperation between the school and the public library.³ School libraries were almost nonexistent at that time, so public libraries began to support the schools and teachers and students' needs. Eventually several models of public library services were established including public library branches in schools. A 1941 report of a joint committee of NEA and ALA, *School and Public Libraries Working together in School Library Service*, gave the responsibility of school library services to boards of education but still emphasized the importance of school and public library cooperation.⁴ By 1951, school libraries were fairly well-established, and public libraries complemented rather than substituted for school library services in most communities.

Controversy over the pressure of

student demands on public library services during the late 1950s and early 1960s led to an ALA conference on the theme and the 1964 report, *Student Use of Libraries*.⁵ Who should serve the children became the question again in the early 1970s after a report submitted by a committee appointed by the New York Commissioner of Education recommended that school age children should be served solely by school libraries.⁶

Professional Standards and Federal Monies

Standards and legislation play an important role in this historical perspective. Even in the first set of national school library standards in 1945, cooperation between the two institutions was recognized.⁷ It will be interesting to review the newest AASL/AECT guidelines as soon as they are released.⁸ Federal aid to education and to libraries was a phenomenon of the late 1950s and 1960s through the National Defense Education Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title II, and the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). Cooperation has been mandated in LSCA's Title III funding for interlibrary cooperation. Both the standards and the legislation led to development of school libraries.

Today public library standards have been replaced by a planning process with an emphasis on measurement. The 1970s *The Public Library Mission Statement* (PLA) emphasized cooperation.⁹ The two PLA 1960s guidelines, one each for children's service and young adult services, made a strong plea for total community library service.¹⁰ Community library service has emerged as a new trend in library services. However, PLA's new inter-

est in more standards and a new manual on "role setting" indicates some rethinking of the role of the public library vis a vis other community libraries such as school libraries. Many public libraries again have a "student problem" characterized by latchkey children, single parent families, home school training, and other societal trends.

National Developments

There have been several developments since the late 1970s which mandate a fresh look at cooperation and patterns of library service for youth. The need for interlibrary cooperation was addressed in both the 1975 national planning document, *Toward a National Program for Library and Information Services: Goals for Action*¹¹ and the final report of the 1978 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services.¹²

A most influential change agent of the 1980s, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, sponsored by the Department of Education, *A Nation at Risk*, was very critical of public education and included recommendations for change. Since this report, national attention has been focused on education. The library world, appalled by the report's lack of inclusion of the importance of library services, reacted through the Department of Education's center for Libraries and Education Improvement, by a project called, "Libraries and a Learning Society" with a final report, *Alliance for Excellence*.

The report specifically deals with school libraries but also recognizes education for all citizens and for a total Learning Society. The basic premise of the report, as summarized by the Secretary of Education

in the introductory statement, is that it is essential that we have an alliance of home, school, and library in order to attain excellence in education and a Learning Society.

The report recognized that the role of the contemporary school library media center has changed, in terms of types of materials, in personnel, and in function within the school. Despite the ideal role the report presented, it acknowledged that in reality the strength of school library media centers has been hurt in the last few years. For example, fifteen percent of our public schools have no library media center; almost three million public school students attend schools with no library media center; there has been an erosion in qualified personnel; and people in the schools—teachers, administrators, and students—are confused about the role of the librarian and the library media center. This is magnified at the elementary level where the library media center has never established itself as a basic ingredient needed in education. Several recommendations are made in the report; several have implications for cooperation between school and public libraries.

To summarize the value of these reports, *A Nation at Risk* recommends that an alliance of home and school is needed to bring about educational reform and excellence, while *Alliance for Excellence* builds on this by suggesting a third dimension to the alliance—libraries working with the home and school for both excellence in education and a Learning Society. This recommendation for a coalition of all types of libraries in a community needs to be considered in planning for changes. Networks of libraries will be needed to provide total library services including those for children and

young adults.

A third reaction statement was prepared by a committee of the American Library Association, in a publication named *Realities*.¹³ The report delineates four realities for effective educational reform: learning begins before schooling; good schools require good school libraries; people in a learning society need libraries throughout their lives; and public support of libraries is an investment in people and communities.

These three reports and sets of recommendations are a mandate for action by the library profession itself, not alone, but with those people also concerned and involved with education—school personnel, especially teachers and administrators, the parents, and other resources in the community.

Barriers and Conditions for Success

Several factors can be identified that present barriers to cooperative efforts. For example, articles in the literature have suggested that legal conditions such as those of a fiscal and formal nature are often used as barriers to cooperation even when they are not formidable, can be changed by state legislatures and/or governing boards, and are more in the minds of librarians than actual. Most formidable are both those attitudinal aspects of people (librarians, administrators, and governing boards) and the institutional rigidity of the structure of many libraries' and schools' settings. In a study which assessed such people's attitudes toward cooperation, Esther Dyer concluded: "This investigation constitutes a refresher course in institutional

rigidity. The highest priorities for both institutions [school libraries and public libraries] are self-preservation and protection of territory [while] cooperation is [viewed as] an implicit threat to autonomy."¹⁴ It would appear that attitude is the greatest barrier. An additional attitudinal problem is that of the youth user—toward both the school and public library. Students form attitudes as they interact with librarians and libraries; these attitudes stay with them when they become adults voters and decision-makers.

Part of the institutional rigidity is caused by the sincere opinion of the librarians themselves that the users of their libraries are the most important, and that their types of library must be preserved over others. In fact, respect and understanding of each others' roles and the goals of each institution are essential to cooperation. This is also true with teachers and librarians - a mutual respect for the importance and value of each role must be developed.

Factors that seem to affect success, based on the above premises, include: careful planning by all involved constituents including the users; the need for some formalization of the cooperative process; the need to establish continuous avenues for communication including periodic meetings, written communication, and liaisons to pertinent groups; and ongoing evaluation efforts to monitor effects of change. In addition, a basic principle of successful cooperation is the support of top leaders, both administrators and governing boards, of each cooperating institution.

Implementation and the Planning Process for Cooperative Efforts

Communication is the first step in the process of cooperation. It may be better to have informal sharing and planning sessions of several constituencies before official planning bodies are formed. Next it is important to establish an advisory group in the local community. The committee should represent teachers, administrators, school librarians, public librarians, parents, students, and community persons.

A community analysis/assessment is needed as soon as possible. Each community may choose a different pattern to meet needs for library services, based on the current state of library services and the needs identified. After establishment of the advisory committee and the needs assessment, the most important step in the process is the joint planning, with the involvement of diverse constituencies and user groups. Wholehearted commitment and continued communication throughout the ongoing process are essential to success. A plan for evaluation, both at intervals and when specific programs are completed, is also necessary to determine success and problems.

The roles of both the school library/media center and the public library need to be carefully delineated and understood. One suggestion in the literature for better understanding of each other's role is for the school librarian to work with the public librarian over a typical day or a typical week and vice versa. Even the communication during this period leads to better understanding. Perhaps, the same idea would work between teacher and

school librarian, and between school administrator and school librarian in gaining a better understanding of each other's role.

Before efforts are formally initiated, it is necessary to secure support from top administrative levels of the library and educational world. It is clear that librarians must take more of an initiative. One way to initiate specific cooperative projects is to become involved in the development of the state library's five year plan, mandated for state libraries that receive funding through the Library Services and Construction Act. Ideally, state libraries should coordinate their plans with state education departments and school library people. Usually these state-wide plans will include: objectives, priorities, funding, and recommendations of responsible libraries and agencies for the implementation of specific objectives. Joint statements of state library agencies and state education agencies are the most influential in lobbying for legislation or additional monies and as planning documents for actions.

Goal setting by the advisory committee is an essential early activity. Common goals of school and public libraries which might form the basis for cooperative action include: 1) creating an awareness of the importance of reading to success and quality of life; 2) meeting information needs of children and young adults; 3) providing information and library skills to children and young adults for self-learning and life-long learning; and 4) introducing libraries to children and young adults in ways that will make them life-long users as well as supporters of libraries as adult citizens.

To summarize, the planning

process for cooperative efforts between school and public libraries should include:

- 1) communication on an informal basis
- 2) formation of an Advisory Committee
- 3) obtaining formal support from administrators and governing boards.
- 4) a needs assessment of the community (with a focus on youth needs)
- 5) consideration and redefinition of the current roles of both school and public libraries
- 6) assessment of current library services
- 7) development of a plan of services with specific responsibilities
- 8) continuing formal and informal communication
- 9) ongoing evaluation process

Types of Cooperation

Teacher/Librarian Cooperation

Teacher/librarian cooperation may be the most important success factor in accomplishing both the educational goals of the school and those additional goals of the school library media center which may extend beyond the narrowly-defined term, education, but which enhance learning the quality of life.

One of the most difficult problems in developing such relationships seems to be the rather murky area of whether school librarians define themselves as teachers or not. When school librarians claim to be teachers (just like the art or music teacher) they neglect a consideration of their total role. Although school librarians do teach, they have a unique role as a librarian

which is different from a teacher. In their teaching of library and information skills, they teach a content which is coordinated with the curriculum and in cooperation with the teachers. They advise and consult with teachers on reading materials for individuals at certain grade levels. They work directly with individuals and small and large groups of students to encourage and motivate reading and provide literary experiences.

Information skills and literary skills are equally important in school library media centers. Teachers, parents, and school and public librarians working together can meet both the information and the reading and literary needs of children and young adults. Just as research has shown the importance of parents as literary models for preschoolers, classroom teachers, public librarians and school librarians can serve as literary models for school-aged children. No librarian or teacher can do this alone; they must work with the parents and the community library. School librarians should work with teachers in the following areas: selecting quality, worthwhile literature to be used in group activities; providing booklists that are appropriate to specific grades and curricula, and to specific themes and subjects; providing information about book-related media to entice nonreaders into literary experiences; providing displays and information about cultural community events and television programming which is related to literature; and providing the materials which will "sell" books such as posters, bookmarks, visuals, toys and artifacts, and puppets and materials for creative dramatics and storytelling. The curriculum and information needs are equally but not more important; the role of

the school library media specialist in working with teachers to provide this support has been adequately documented elsewhere.

A great deal of time is spent on teaching reading skills and the technical aspects of reading. Yet we have schools full of children and young adults who have difficulty reading, and /or who do not care for reading and do not develop the reading habit. A large body of research is available which shows us that if children are not told stories, nor read to, nor shown that reading is a valued individual pursuit, they have little reason for wanting to learn to read. This is one of the areas in which teachers, librarians, and parents need to cooperate.

School Librarian and Public Librarian Cooperation

There are several research studies which are particularly pertinent to school and public libraries cooperation. The 1973 survey by Woolls of public libraries, school libraries, and fifth grade students in elementary schools in Indiana¹⁵ and the 1977 survey by Aaron in Florida¹⁶ are summarized elsewhere in this journal. Both studies reported little progress during the 1970s in such cooperation. However, a study that proves the worth of the public library and of library service during the summer (and consequently the need for cooperation between schools and public libraries in summer programs) is the study by Heyns in 1978, *Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling*.¹⁷ Heyns tried to determine what factors most influence learning of 6th and 7th graders when schools are closed. A whole chapter in her book is titled, "Reading, Libraries,

and Summer Achievement". Her major finding which relates to library use is— "The single summer activity that is most strongly and consistently related to summer learning is reading."¹⁸ Whether reading is measured by the number of books read, by the time spent reading, or by the regularity of library usage, it increases the vocabulary test scores of children. Her conclusion, that "at least one institution, the public library, directly influences children's reading," was the basis for her recommendation that "educational policies that increase access to books, perhaps through increased library services, stand to have an important impact on achievement, particularly for less advantaged children."¹⁹ Because so few school libraries are open in the summers this is an important area for school library/public library cooperation. Besides public school children, those attending private schools should be included in these summer library programs.

A valuable resource in this area is Philip Baker's book, *School and Public Library Media Programs for Children and Young Adults* (1977).²⁰ In the book's preface, Augusta Baker argues that children and youth must have wider access to information and develop the ability to use it. In her view, the artificial lines between what is considered enjoyment and culture (the main role of the public library in some people's minds) and what is learning and instruction (the school library's responsibility) should be eliminated. The school librarians must work cooperatively with public librarians, both children's and

reference librarians.

Cooperation through Networks

It is useful when library leaders in positions of some authority in national, state, and regional agencies begin the initiative with long-range plans. Some examples of this do exist such as the 1976 statement of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, "Public Libraries and School Library Organizational Relationships and Interlibrary Cooperation: A Policy Statement."²¹ In other cases, professional organizations representing the two constituencies have joined in the initial effort. In 1978, both the Minnesota Educational Media Organization and the Minnesota Library Association endorsed a statement on public library/school media center relationships, with the state board of education adopting the statement.²²

Specific cooperative efforts at the systems/network level might include formalized contracting for services in such areas as: processing, sharing staff, joint purchasing, joint collection development efforts, interlibrary loans, and reference/referral services including data-base searching.

Many states now have state-wide networks of cooperative library agencies. Formerly, not many public schools were members of such networks. Increasingly, they are, and so are many private schools. The networks' main purposes have been: shared resources through interlibrary loans and reference services; inservice training in new areas such as technology and management; cooperative summer reading programs; shared review of materials including computer software and media; and most

importantly, better communication of needs, problems, and ideas. A study of school library/public library cooperation in New York, funded by LSCA funds and released in 1978, found that public library interloan service to schools is feasible and provides better access.²³ Some state library agencies have a consultant in library services for youth who plays a leadership role in coordinating services. At the regional levels, many large public library systems have a person designated as outreach person or as school services liaison. For example, in the late 1970s, the Suburban Library System in Illinois received an LSCA grant in support of experimental children's services/school service liaison consultant position to act as a catalyst and to develop cooperative projects.²⁴

Cooperative Efforts at the Local Level

Local efforts are the most important level of cooperation in terms of direct services and benefits to students.

If there is no one at the state or regional levels, a committed children's librarian in the public library and/or a reference librarian should take initiative, working with school librarians in public and private schools. Many public library youth librarians visit school classes with book talks, give talks about public library services, and publicize special programs such as summer reading programs. When the initiative is not taken by the public library, the school librarian should invite the public librarian to visit a faculty meeting at the beginning of each year, to visit classrooms, to come to meetings of school librarians, and to provide and share

special booklists, pathfinders, and resource lists of serials, films, microfilm, etc.

Providing service to handicapped children, now mandatory in all public agencies, can best be done through cooperative efforts to support such networks as the Library of Congress's National Library Service program of braille and talking books and some state and regional libraries' efforts to provide large print materials. Providing services to gifted children also demands cooperative efforts to provide the variety and meet the demanding levels of materials not always found at the school library level.

Summer Reading Programs

One of the most often described cooperative projects is the summer reading program. When school librarians and school teachers have demands from parents for summer reading lists, and for college preparatory reading lists, the public library collections are waiting to be used. An example described in 1976 in Shaker Heights, Ohio,²⁵ began with April meetings of school and public librarians; it involved public librarians using the club approach with students reading and reporting on a minimum number of books. School librarians publicized the program, recruited support of teachers and parents, and encouraged students to participate. In addition, school librarians and teachers shared their knowledge of each child's reading level and interests by helping students plan their reading lists before school ended; they also designed the pamphlet that would serve as a contract. The result was greater participation which pleased parents and teachers. In some situations, books are borrowed on summer loan

by the public libraries from the school libraries to provide a larger number of popular titles.

Introduction to the Public Library

Visits of classes to the Public library on a regular schedule—such as all first, sixth, and ninth grade classes—might be a beginning to ensure that students are aware of resources, services, and helpful personnel. In addition and/or if not feasible due to busing problems, the public reference librarian and/or children's librarian can have a regular schedule of school visits to the above grades as well as accept invitations from individual classes. For primary grades, storytelling, book check out, and talking about the library might be the focus of a thirty minute time period; while for middle and high schools, booktalking either new titles or titles around a general theme and an introduction to the public library might be the program. Curriculum book talks and displays might be arranged with social studies or English classes through the teachers and school librarians. Personal contact with both teachers and students would encourage their use of the public library as the need arises.

Meeting Curriculum and Information Needs

Curriculum and information needs can best be met by assignment alert sheets from teachers either directly to the public librarians or through the school librarian who knows what needs cannot be fully met by the school library's collection. Timeliness, actual use of these sheets for all major papers, and specific requests such as reserves, setting up homework help

clinics, or special hours of reference service on evenings and weekends help make this cooperation a success. Forms should be developed by the public librarians, and distributed at faculty meetings and by school librarians throughout the year. Data base searching of expensive bibliographic networks might be done in public libraries for both students and teachers, with compensation from the schools, if necessary, or from special-funded projects. Montgomery County, Maryland was doing this at one point in the late 1970s.²⁶ If college libraries do not exist in the community, this might be an even a more important service.

Studies such as the Mancall work²⁷ have shown repeatedly over time that students use the public library for specific reference work; many public libraries have more extensive resources, such as backfiles of journals, microfilms, and adult reference tools, which are necessary for term projects - whether written papers, science projects, or timely topic reports. School librarians and public librarians could jointly prepare bibliographies, booklists, and pathfinders which would include titles from both collections. Shared union lists of serials, microfilms, films and videos, and computer-produced acquisitions lists would expedite ongoing sharing. Borrowing from the public library of materials on a particular subject for short term loan by a classroom teacher might be the best method if transportation to the public library is a problem. Public libraries should be provided with the curriculum guides from the local schools including private schools.

The public library might prepare pamphlets as tips for teachers in

guiding students to better use of public libraries. In addition to assignment alert sheets coming to the public libraries, some public libraries have tried a troubleshooting sheet sent back to school libraries and/or teachers giving reasons why the library was not able to successfully help the student (materials all checked out, student did not understand assignment, etc.). Some public libraries have established homework hotlines which are partly supported by classroom teachers working after school hours, or homework clinics when major papers are assigned. If assignments are distributed throughout the calendar so that all schools are not studying the same topic at the same time, public libraries might better supplement and augment school library collections. Many public libraries have set up career information centers or have career weeks with both information and people to help students choose colleges or careers.

Sharing Media

One of the most desirable cooperative efforts is in the area of sharing of films and video. Although this is sometimes set up as part of a state or regional cooperative, often local schools and public libraries cooperate in the purchase and dissemination. School library media centers often have more materials in nonprint formats that could be available to users of public libraries, to parents, to private schools in the community, and to day care centers. This type of resource sharing, including the hardware to support the media presentations has not been extensively implemented. Large public school systems often have equipment repair service people; they

could extend this service to public libraries and private schools in return for other services or on a contract basis.

Teacher Services

Special services to teachers might be provided by the public library if the school system is small or inadequately staffed and funded. There has been a long history of teachers' libraries in public libraries before school libraries were adequately funded. Professional books, journals, and access to interlibrary loans might be publicized as special services. These same materials could also be used by parents, other personnel in child services, and by college students for coursework. These services would depend on local community needs.

Special Events

Joint or coordinated programming might evolve from events during special weeks such as Children's Book Week, Black History Week, Disabled Persons Week, the Week of the Child, etc. Special speakers, booklists, displays, and visits between libraries might be featured at these times. In addition, public library programming around school vacations, parent conferences times, and kindergarten orientation sessions could be coordinated on a regular basis.

Displays of students' work and student presentations—whether artistic, literary, or theatrical—make the public library truly more of a cultural center and a showcase for the talent of various age groups.

Continuing education for teachers and librarians might include joint and cooperative workshops involving new technology, evaluation of materials, specific local problems

such as censorship attempts, and planning for cable TV programming, and could avoid duplication and expense in addition to improving communication.

Taking the Initiative

As important as any of these above ideas might be to an individual community and to students, probably none will be successful or even started if there are not formal mechanisms established for communication and planning. *The key ingredient to success in cooperation is communication.* The chain of communication needs to be established by someone initiating the cooperative activity; but everyone should be aware that if it is not happening, it is because they have not taken the responsibility of initiation.

Whose job is it? It is the responsibility of many groups—teachers, administrators, school librarians, public librarians, as well as state education and library agencies and professional organizations. Someone needs to initiate the effort. Often extra funding is necessary, whether it's from the school board, the public library board, federal or state funding, or local community organizations. In these cases, at least a year and often more time is needed for the planning, the project description, and meeting the timelines for budget or funding decisions. It is necessary to be aware of legislation at both state and national levels which affects funding priorities and programs. Working through local, state and national professional organizations to monitor legislation and funding for library services is essential.

It is also important to capitalize on movements such as the current

National Coalition on Literacy and the 1975 Education for all Handicapped Children legislation; on research such as the findings of the Heyns study on learning during summers; and on the impact of national reports such as the *Nation at Risk* and the responses from the

library profession, *Alliance for Excellence and Realities*.

There will never be a better time; and each of us needs to become involved in the effort. Though cooperation is important, the first step is communication.

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