

Expanding Service Horizons: Cooperative Planning Strategies for Public and School Libraries

by

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Learning and cooperative planning between school and public libraries help create a community of learners. Students benefit from library programming strategies that reach them both at school and in the community. This is a story about a successful cooperative relationship between school and public libraries. The network that facilitated this relationship included the Indiana State Library and Department of Education, the Indiana Humanities Council, local businesses, and the Indiana Community Network Association.

Historical Perspective

Spencer, Indiana in rural Owen County is bordered by the west fork of the White River to the east, and heavily wooded land tracts to the north, south, and west. Busy State Road 46 cuts a heavily traveled path through the center of town. With the aid of a school crossing guard, students from Spencer Elementary School can walk the few short blocks to the Owen County Public Library, and many classes now do so on a regular basis. Ellen Dibble, the Spencer Elementary School Media Specialist, promotes both school and public library visits as central to creating a community of readers. With more than 1,130 PS/K-5 students and more than sixty professional staff, Spencer Elementary School is the largest elementary school in the state. Due to county demographics, many, if not most of these children will never see the inside of the public library—unless they come with a class.

The Owen County Public Library was originally established in 1909 as a town library. It was housed in both the courthouse and the firehouse before settling into a seventy-five year residency as a Carnegie library on the Courthouse Square. About twenty years ago, the town library converted to a county-wide library. Over the years the library had been content to maintain very modest service standards. By 1995 there was little interaction between the public library and the three school libraries in Spencer beyond occasional interlibrary loans. As director of the Owen County Public Library, Lynn Jurewicz's goal was to increase the profile of community library service.

In addition to Ellen Dibble, the Owen County school librarians also included Judy O'Connor at Owen Valley High School and Myrna Fields at Owen Valley Middle School. Both the school and public librarians were interested in building bridges in order to provide better service. The first step involved increasing communication between them. Regular meetings presented cooperative opportunities that included both technical help and grant co-authoring, as well as some very exciting community programs.

Task Force Influence

Our quest for cooperation was influenced by Dr. Daniel Callison of Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science in Bloomington, and his studies of cooperation between school and public libraries. The Task Force on School/Public Library Cooperation was commissioned by the Indiana State Library Board in 1993. Their resulting report indicated a lack of formal collaborative ventures and recommended not only initiating such efforts, but also publicizing successful programs. In 1994 Dr. Callison presented the task force's conclusions at an Association of Indiana Media Educators (AIME) meeting. His report indicated that most of the cooperation between school and public libraries statewide was initiated by public librarians. While this information was debated and disturbed many, the larger conclusion — the lack of shared service opportunities — was even more disturbing.

Regional Library Catalog

The key element in fostering collaboration is communication. On a regional level we were afforded an opportunity for communication through membership in a shared catalog project, **Shared Information Exchange (SHINE)**. The combined regional library catalog effort was initiated to help small public and rural school libraries become automated and meet the standards set by the Indiana State Library for automation. All Owen County libraries were original members of the regional catalog. SHINE was awarded

an Indiana State Library Grant in 1992. Sara Laughlin, whose group Sara Laughlin and Associates currently offers library consultation, was our regional INCOLSA (Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority) representative. As the grant writer and project coordinator for SHINE, she was responsible for ushering in a new era of school/public library cooperation in our region. Member libraries were offered opportunities to share cataloging and interlibrary loan problems both through the regional office in Bloomington, and through regular meetings of our Brodart Automation users group. It was a small leap from professional introductions to cooperative problem-solving; a larger one to shared programming.

Technology Planning

Another impetus to increased communication was the technology planning process. Indiana schools were directed to plan for the integration of technology by including community members and organizations, and the public library was an eager committee participant. The Indiana Department of Education Technology Planning Grant was a \$10,000 award to draft a five-year technology plan. The plan's acceptance would allow a corporation to apply for technology grants for low-income schools. Spencer-Owen School Corporation was awarded one of these grants. Subsequently, the Indiana Intelenet Commission through Access Indiana (Internet Services) provided for all school corporations to become part of the state communications network by providing Internet service to schools. The school corporation was awarded a 56K connection that is serviced by Sprint and housed at Spencer Elementary School. These respective proposals were the result of cooperative efforts fostered through community technology planning by the Spencer-Owen Technology Committee.

Planning at the Public Library

In an effort to level the playing field, the State Library announced the availability of grant money to assist in automation efforts and to bring Internet access to public libraries. The RFP required a formal technology plan. The Spencer-Owen Public Library formed their own community technology committee for this purpose, and invited the school technology representatives to participate. The result was the co-authoring of several successful technology grants. Grant writing became one of the benefits of our cooperative efforts. Work on one grant led to another, and a larger community organization was formed to work on a grant for civic networking. The Indiana Community Network Association supported our grant application process. The central strategy of both planning groups was to include community stakeholders.

Cooperative Programs

Small beginnings led to larger involvement! Our association expanded from participating in one another's planning activities, to planning for cooperative programs. Our first program venture was Spencer Elementary School's annual Family Reading Night, traditionally held during Children's Book Week in November. Owen County schools have held family reading celebrations since the American Association of School Librarians' "Night of 1000 Stars" promotion. The 1995 theme was poetry, and a local poet/parent shared his work. Owen County Public Library director, Lynn Jurewicz, was a guest reader. In addition she brought her family, and helped with refreshments.

With Christmas fast approaching, the Spencer-Owen Community School Corporation technology coordinator, Lee Wiggam, and the Spencer Elementary School media specialist, Ellen Dibble, offered to conduct a pre-Christmas workshop for the community at the public library. The presentation and question/answer session were offered to answer the many Owen County Public Library patron requests for advice and direction regarding the purchase of home computers.

Tea Time

The month of March meant bad weather and Spring Break for local students. Buoyed by our early program and grant successes, we dovetailed programming for "Women In History Month". Dibble was featuring the American Girls dolls and books. The Owen County Public Library was offering a prize drawing. Participants registered by voting for a favorite doll. Dibble had rented the entire collection of dolls and their accessories, complete with author videos, buttons, bookmarks and literature, from Pleasant Company (Middleton, WI). Jurewicz arranged to rent the collection for the following week and hosted an American Girls Tea Party at the public library. Thirty-five girls were encouraged to dress like their favorite dolls, and participated in creating period crafts such as spring paper flowers and patchwork samplers. After posing for style photos, the girls indulged in fancy frosted cake, sipped juice, and watched an author video.

Goosebumps Lock-In

The flip side of our Spring Break programming was a Goosebumps Lock-In. This event was open to boys and girls in grades 2 through 4. Dibble had arranged for fliers to go home with the students to advertise the library's lock-in and the registration limit of thirty-five participants was reached immediately. We spent the entire night reading R.L. Stine's Goosebumps

books, playing board games, watching scary videos, telling stories, and drawing a mural, "Goosebumps at the Library". Refreshments included pizza covered with plastic flies, drinks with rubber bugs in the ice cubes, and a zillion batches of popcorn. Really lucky prize winners received such gross and disgusting prizes as plastic severed body parts, sticky eyeballs, and plastic spiders.

Internet Connections

Even closer collaboration followed during the American Library Association's (ALA) National Library Week's "Call, Visit, Log On" promotion. The Spencer-Owen School Board had just approved an Internet Acceptable Use Policy, and a few classes were dialing in to the Internet in the Spencer Elementary School Media Center. The Owen County Public Library was working on a technology plan that included Internet access. End-of-year funds had been spent on a new Pentium workstation for public access and this workstation had been placed in the public library's Youth Services Department. The Owen County Public Library wanted very much to be a part of the ALA promotion but the library had just purchased a building for renovation and funds were severely constrained by the building plans. Dibble provided complimentary technical expertise by arranging for the use of one of the school corporation's Internet access accounts from their service provider, Bluemarble, Inc. for the promotional period. She set up the modem and we drilled a hole in the floor of the Carnegie library building to run the phone access out over the fax line. Eleven-hundred promotional fliers went home to parents of the elementary level school children. A local manufacturing company was contacted to produce a 30-foot promotional tarpaulin, which read, "Surf's Up! Try the Internet Here!" One of the advantages of a small community is that members are so willing to pitch in to help. The local fire department used their ladder truck to drape the Internet banner across the front of the Carnegie library building, and the banner was visible across the Courthouse Square.

This was a success story for all involved: Jurewicz was able to launch a successful promotional campaign during a time of high interest in this new technology. Parents and community members were enticed to try the Internet, smoothing the way for the school corporation's Acceptable Use Policy. This beginning led to installation of a free telephone line and long-term Internet service, donated to the library by Clay County Rural Telephone. This was a great deal for the public library whose financial commitments were already constrained by the need to budget for their new facility. The library gave credit to the expertise of the schools, which was great for community relations, and the library gained credence for their technology profile.

Reading Warriors

As we approached the end of the school year it was time to turn our attention to summer reading. The theme of the 1996 Owen County Public Library program was "Reading Warriors". Our promotion skills were really starting to pay off. Each successful venture built the positive image of libraries and learning in our community, and attracted stronger sponsorship for future program ventures. Summer reading activities took off with record numbers of participants. Reading Warriors benefited from more funding than previous summer programs due to the successful community support that had been generated by our increasingly visible cooperative programming. In this case, the library board attorney challenged members of the Owen County Bar Association to match her grant for the summer reading program. Attorneys who supported the program were acknowledged in promotional program fliers and on T-shirts, giving them positive visibility as library supporters. Reading Warriors T-shirts were presented to donors and program presenters, as well as youth program assistants. A summer schedule packed with Native-American-style festivities included building a wigwam on the library lawn, authentic grass dancing with an award-winning pow-wow dancer, and arrowhead making. Local author Dark Rain Thom made a rare public presentation and Dibble told picture stories using Native-American characters and settings.

Where's Walden?

"Where's Walden?" was the most involved program to take advantage of the successful partnership that had been created between our school and public libraries. The inspiration for this exciting cooperative venture came just as Reading Warriors was winding up. Local hero and beloved third grade teacher, Fred Walden, had arranged to accompany a group of Indiana teachers to the Amazon Rainforest just before the fall semester was to begin. Coincidentally the public library was kicking off a fund-raising campaign for a \$16,000 Rainforest model to be installed in the Youth Services area of their new facility. The concept was simple: Take a laptop into the jungle and have Walden communicate with the kids back home through an Internet connection. After all, wasn't there a project in South America that did this? Walden was reluctant to take someone else's computer into uncharted territory and there was the issue of phone service. So instead, we would settle for a simple cellular telephone connection. This seemed like a logical grant project for Ameritech but it was turned down because of an Ameritech corporate policy prohibiting grant funding of their own services. The grant proposal was then submitted to the Indiana Humanities Council (IHC), which had the discretion to approve with a short lead time, and we were delighted to be funded by the IHC for the global community emphasis of our project.

The library already had a dial-a-story line that featured storybooks, so that line was commandeered for the Rainforest relay. Now we needed to set up remote access to the message machine. The voice-mail process was beset with technical glitches. A number of answering machines were tried before we found one that would allow remote call-in by password, and remote message retrieval for our community callers. Our contacts with the Brazilian embassy were sketchy and apparently cellular technology is protected in some foreign regions. Walden would not be permitted to bring a cell phone into Brazil! We finally settled for daily pay phone connections. The brainstorm of pre-recording expected itinerary and experiences was our saving grace, however. Walden was unable to get to a phone on a couple of days but we had the tapes and their transcriptions to play when this occurred. Children and families were able to follow Walden's adventure and learned to plot the trip on maps of South America. They filled a jar with questions about the trip that Walden answered during his phone calls.

Buttons and T-shirts advertised the project and its cooperative partnership, and Owen County's Friends of the Library sold out of the shirts at the County Fair. Students and families from all over Indiana learned of the project and called the Rainforest Relay to follow their teachers who were with the Amazon group. Owen County State Bank, the cornerstone bank in Spencer, underwrote the program. Thousands of Highway 46 commuters read of the project and its phone number on the bank's scrolling lighted sign, and public service staff at the bank participated by wearing "Where's Walden?" T-shirts on Day-One of the adventure. The local newspaper, the *Spencer Evening World*, printed the text of Walden's phone calls daily under the program's logo.

Rainforest Redux

In order for Walden to share his adventures in person, a follow-up celebration was planned. The public library hosted the program, but the celebration focused on the involvement of Spencer Elementary School. The return of Family Reading Night featured our local celebrity, Mr. Walden, sharing his Amazon adventure with both school and community. A standing-room-only crowd gathered at the school to meet a pink-toed tarantula and view Mr. Walden's slides. Refreshments of Rainforest Crunch and Tropical Punch reinforced the theme and that night the public library kicked off their first-ever winter reading promotion, Read Around the World.

Read Around the World

This winter reading program followed the Children's Book Week theme of "Oh, the Places You'll Go..." Library staff took instant passport photos of children in attendance and used them to make Reading Passports. These were stamped for South America and signed by our own South American adventurer, Fred Walden. Students were encouraged to read or visit Web sites that would take them beyond their own shores. The public library set up an International Penpal program and encouraged school classroom members to sign up. Mr. Walden's class was the first to register. The program took full advantage of promoting international awareness, which was one of the goals of the Indiana Humanities Council as sponsoring grant agency. The high profile of the Walden grant helped raise an additional \$11,500 in private gifts for the Youth Services Department in the new library facility.

Spirit of Cooperation

Cooperation was not limited to Spencer Elementary and Owen County Public Library. Both the high school and middle school participated in community-wide efforts to raise the profile of libraries. Owen Valley Middle School, a recipient of a Middle Grades Reading Program grant funded by the Lilly Endowment, worked extensively on creating a community of readers among middle grades youth. Their grant helped fund student participation in the Young Hoosier Book Award program that is sponsored by Association of Indiana Media Educators. The grant funded annual visits by Young Hoosier Award authors. These visits were celebrated by elaborate "Read and Feeds," which included recreating an environment from a book, playing a board game based on the book, and community presentations by the famous authors. Public library staff members were involved in promoting and facilitating these Read and Feeds. A team from the middle school (Media Specialist Myrna Fields, Reading Specialist Darla Staley, English teachers Becky Hayes and Kim Benton, and Principal Jeff Sherfield), presented their successful Read and Feeds program at the 1997 International Reading Association conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Owen Valley High School librarian and public library board member, Judy O'Connor, sponsored a "Read Around Owen County" promotion in the Spring. She compiled our reading statistics and submitted the cumulative miles of reading around the county borders, as our county's contribution to American Association of School Librarians initiative "Count On Reading" totals.

Challenges to Service

One of the challenges to having a close working relationship between public and school libraries is changing the image that library service may have in the community. The image has traditionally been a sleepy warehouse of books, rather than a dynamic information center with programs to promote lifelong learning and literacy. Community taxpayers may point out that tax dollars are paying for both school and public libraries, which some may consider a duplication of materials and services. Paradoxically, this sentiment is most likely to surface when services become successful and have a higher profile in the community. Library board members may be put under political pressure to discourage their support of even successful programming. This can be true even though programming is not budgeted and fund raising is the primary source of financing. It is the perception of spending tax dollars that can hurt a higher service profile in some communities.

As librarians we purchase books and other materials as we can afford them, and we teach information skills and promote reading, but we believe programming creates an invaluable outreach to our service population. Our success has proven to us that programming is worth the time and effort and the continual quest for funding to support it. Most importantly, all of these elements go further when we work together!

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Other Resource

Indiana Community Network Association; <http://www.icna.net>

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