

## **The School Library: A Force in Education**

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There is little need to dwell on the subject of change in modern day society except to say that it is evident all around us. Change can be seen in all aspects of life ranging from industry to business, from agriculture to communications and not least in social attitudes.

Allied with the process of constant change is the so-called knowledge explosion. This is well illustrated by the fact that it took from 1 A.D. to the year 1750 for knowledge to double in size. However, it doubled again from 1750 to 1900 and once more from 1900 to 1950. Now it doubles every 8 to 10 years.

As a result of such developments greater and more comprehensive demands are being made on education, which must attempt to keep pace. Indeed, many modern educational theorists now hold that the child should be educated as a totality. Besides memory training the child should learn how to acquire knowledge, insight and skills so as to read and evaluate critically.

Education will only be fruitful when students are not tied too strictly to a particular mass of facts. Although a basic grasp of any subject is absolutely essential, students should learn how to think independently and use knowledge in a constructive way as far as is practicable. Moreover, students should be encouraged to be curious rather than just passive recipients of a teacher's knowledge. In other words, they need to be encouraged to be flexible in order to continue discovering and learning for themselves.

Nowadays, modern pedagogics lays particular stress on the individual progress of the pupil, that is to say, on personal aptitude, interest and capability. Of course, this is a difficult concept to put into practice since education systems must deal with students in their thousands.

However, the authorities should at least attempt to provide students with the opportunity to develop their own personal aptitudes and interests, as well as encouraging individual initiative and creative thinking.

This is where the school library can play an important role. Indeed, the school library is well placed to provide a more open environment for students to develop their skills and abilities. The school library can be an important factor in the education process, with its unlimited scope for supervised independent study by pupils. Moreover, the school library could be utilized to enrich and expand on what is being taught in a more structured way in the classroom.

The underlying assumption here is that the school library should not be an unutilized appendage to the school but that it contribute in an effective way to actual formative education. And in order for the school library to perform this function it must be incorporated into the overall educational programme of the school and this includes both curricular and extramural activities. The school library should comply with the requirements of the various subjects taught in the school, but it should also make provision for the extramural interests and recreational pursuits of the pupils. Of course, a sound balance should be maintained between the two aspects.

The school library as an educational and learning aid has much to contribute, but one must accept that it cannot serve as a substitute for formal education. It is and must remain an essential supplementary aid to formal education. The school library is not an end in itself but a means to achieve the goal of helping students to develop their capabilities. In the school library environment the individual can be the focus of attention as opposed to the necessary group focus of classroom teaching. Thus, the school library naturally can offer a freer, more informal study and learning situation for students of all academic abilities.

The resources of the school library should supplement rather than replace the traditional textbook and class reading matter. In this respect, the collection should include far more than just the traditional book. Nowadays, *photographs, charts, film strips, films, slides, tape recordings, records* and three dimensional models all have a legitimate place in the collection and are useful tools of instruction which can be used to give added scope to the learning process.

An important function of school libraries is that of providing the pupil with information relating to the choice of suitable material for a specific purpose and of helping the student to read, reason and evaluate in a more critical manner.

As noted previously, the school library should play a central role in the school's educational programme. Ideally it should be located in a

central position within the school so that it is readily accessible to teachers and students. However, accessibility involves more than just location. It covers hours of opening, liberal borrowing regulations, provision of bulk loans to classrooms, facilities for teachers, audio visual backup and, perhaps most importantly, the librarian's attitude to users.

In progressive schools and school systems the school library is viewed as a learning laboratory where individuals or groups seek answers to questions. In such schools the librarian is considered to be part of the teaching team, involved in what is to be studied and in the teaching methods adopted. Such school libraries receive maximum use when teachers are closely involved in planning the library programme with the librarian. One of the greatest constraints on effective use of the school library is lack of knowledge on the part of teachers of how best to use the facility.

For school librarians to contribute to the educational process, they should try to work with other teachers in establishing programmes in which learning takes place. For their part, librarians must be able to offer competent advice on materials, and to know the strengths and recognise the limitations of the various media.

School librarians should not only be experts at retrieving information and in showing others how to do the same, but they should also attempt to help students to interpret information as in note-taking or in using reference sources. Helping the student to decide which of the materials best suits the task at hand is a major responsibility. This ranges from knowing that a reference book is what is required to answer a particular question, to realising that a visual presentation would be more suitable to understand a concept.

The teaching of study and research skills is another important area for potential close co-operation between teachers and school librarians. It is important that students become independent learners, but if this is to occur they need to learn information-finding skills, in other words choosing what is relevant to their needs, and recording it in an appropriate form.

Students should be taught how to use the school library, with library skills and research skills being differentiated. In the primary grades, emphasis should be placed on how to handle books and on how to use their various parts such as the table of contents and index. In the higher grades students should be shown how to read for information, how to take notes, how to follow up cross references and bibliographies, and how to interpret maps, charts, graphs and diagrams.

Another important potential function of the school librarian is that of reading guidance. For many students the school library may be their on-

ly contact with literature and with a library. It could be that there is a lack of adequate public libraries or that books are not readily available in their homes. School librarians should encourage students to enjoy reading, to choose it as a pleasurable pastime and to help novice readers to develop their reading tastes. Of course, the librarian must be enthusiastic about books and reading. Combined with this is careful selection of materials that will meet the varied needs of readers, keeping standards of excellence in mind. Consequently, a wide range of material on many subjects and at various levels of difficulty is required.

After selecting materials based on a careful evaluation of student needs and requirements, the librarian must become acquainted with the collection, and be able to speak from personal experience.

The librarian can facilitate reading by making certain that readers have the necessary knowledge and skills and, even more important, the confidence to use the library collection. Moreover, the library must be attractive and welcoming. Publicity of all kinds, including reading and accession lists, is necessary. Exhibitions, displays, posters and story telling can also contribute to the role of the school library as part of the educational process.

Clearly then, the scope for developing an efficient and worthwhile school library programme is almost unlimited. Although the level of service will depend to a large extent on available financial resources and support of the higher authorities for effective school libraries, at least as important is the individual librarian's imagination and commitment to the profession.