

## The School Librarian: A New Image

AMONG members of the many groups that fall victim to the American practice of stereotyping, the librarian ranks high. A recent cartoon of "Dennis, the Menace" shows him sitting on the floor before a large library desk, wearing roller skates and saying, "All right! All right! I'll take 'em off!" as he meets the glare of a scowling harpy who represents the librarian. Much too rare is the compliment paid in another cartoon to a librarian by an elderly "wolf." When the librarian asks if he would care to take out a book, his answer is, "No, I'd rather take out the librarian!"

Actually the concept of a librarian today should approximate neither of these images, because physical pulchritude has nothing to do with her role in the modern school. What she does, how she interacts with her public, and the impact of the library on the school program are the keynotes of her image. While we are dealing with misconceptions, there are several others prevalent among educators and the general public that need clearing up. The librarian does not sit all day behind a large desk, stamping books and jealously guarding her wares; she does not pound a typewriter, continuously cataloging books; her main

function is not to tend study hall or to serve as a baby-sitter for teachers in their off period; and her favorite word is not a sibilant "sh-h-h-h-h!" The librarian is not even necessarily of the feminine gender, because there *are* some male librarians in our schools. Unfortunately, perhaps, they are in the minority; and so, in the discussion that follows, we shall concede to the stereotype to the extent of referring to the librarian as *she*.

### A Specialist with Many Skills

In the modern concept the school librarian has become a materials specialist instead of a book custodian. She organizes and makes freely available to every facet of the school program, the widest range possible of instructional materials, including all kinds of non-book media. Many people come to the library to use these materials during the school day, but the library's resources also flow back and forth freely between the classroom and the library as they are needed to enrich teaching and learning.

Being well versed in materials and the

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curriculum, the librarian develops the collection to anticipate every need. Teachers discuss new units with her so that they can enrich their lesson plans with all sorts of materials. If these are needed in the classroom, they are placed there. If a better learning situation is produced by leaving materials in their normal place in the library, they remain there for children to locate and use under the guidance of teacher and librarian. When curriculum revision is in process, the librarian participates in order that the newest and most effective materials among books and audio-visual aids can be included.

### Part of a Team

The librarian is an important part of a teaching team that operates with a class either in the library or out in the classroom. Such teaching may take the form of a highly functional type of library instruction in which the teacher brings the class to the library to explore resources in terms of a new unit; or the librarian may go to the classroom on invitation to participate in activities there.

For example, in fifth grade social studies, when a class is about to study the age of discovery, the librarian and teacher arrange a library period to review historical and biographical sources with children so that they may use reference tools, the card catalog, vertical file, etc., to prepare reports on the various explorers. This is also an excellent opportunity to review note-taking.

Or the librarian may be invited to go to the classroom during language arts to demonstrate effective book reviewing techniques; to introduce the works of some author; or share books of poetry, drama or folk literature.

Other special teachers may be drawn into this cooperative venture. Perhaps the librarian has told the old Russian tale of "The Golden Cockerel," tracing it from its folklore source to a poem by Pushkin, and ultimately to the opera and ballet. The music teacher may then share Rimsky-Korsakov's beautiful compositions with the children. Such team endeavor, found in every area of the curriculum and at all grade levels, indicates that the librarian is a valuable member of the faculty, who knows how to teach as well as to provide enrichment materials for good teaching by others.

The librarian is a reading specialist, who utilizes her extensive knowledge of the book world, particularly the current explosion in the publication of children's books, to transform boys and girls from insecure, beginning readers into a discerning reading public of the future. Again this is a cooperative effort, because the librarian, building on the foundation of reading laid by the teacher, introduces and guides children through the world of books, so that they become able, enthusiastic readers, who read widely, deeply and critically. She nudges the one-track reader of horse stories, sports or mysteries out of his rut into broader, greener fields. She slows down the superficial skimmer until he is able to savor more richly what he is reading. And she helps the reluctant or immature to attain self-assurance and maturity as he approaches the wider field of adult books.

She is also a member of the counseling staff, making use of the many opportunities for guidance offered by the library. Here young people develop independence and responsibility as she helps them to stand on their own two intellectual legs in using library facilities. Too many college freshmen behave like babes in the woods when they face the

bewildering maze of a university library.

Children also absorb the elements of good citizenship as they handle and protect the common property among the extensive resources of this materials center. They learn consideration of others as they operate within the quiet atmosphere of the study-reading situation which typifies a good library. The librarian becomes adept at finding the right book at the right time for a child to help him solve his personal problems or to contribute to the achievement of some developmental task. Books as vignettes of life are rich in values that can contribute to the growing up process and should not be overlooked in the guidance of children. Only a person who is sensitive to children's needs and thoroughly familiar with the resources of the book world can do this effectively.

### Ready for Service

The librarian, therefore, must enact many roles during a school day—counselor, teacher, mentor of reading, and materials specialist. Yet there are other traits that comprise her image. A library is an orderly body of instructional materials, designed to be used fully and freely. It must be well organized and cataloged so that its resources are always ready for service. To accomplish this, the librarian must be an efficient administrator, who has a knack for organization and an aversion to red tape. She continually adds new materials to the collection, but she must also weed out the deadwood to keep it alive and functional. The library appropriation is often so meager that it requires the efficient spending of a bookish Scrooge. However, the administrative work, important though it is, should never dominate the school day. The librarian's primary objective is to

serve the school program and so, with little or no staff, she must somehow accomplish her administrative duties behind the scenes, after school, or on weekends.

Good public relations are part of her stock in trade. Any school faculty consists of many kinds of teachers, whose interpretations of library service differ widely. Some are content with ten copies of this and that to supplement their sadly traditional method of textbook teaching. Others are hoarders who prefer to stock their classrooms with all sorts of library materials. Such teachers start borrowing in September, but seldom return anything until June, when the librarian finally manages to retrieve story-telling records used the previous Thanksgiving, new books still uncataloged, and materials from units long since completed.

In between these two extremes, we find a varied assortment of library users. Since all classrooms need to share maximum service, the librarian has the problem of establishing a balance and still of keeping everyone happy. This comes by subtle and continuous education, in which the librarian uses a fine type of salesmanship to instill the sound concept of a modern library in the minds of the teachers, inviting further or more varied use in some cases and revising misconceptions in others.

### An Open Mind

There is always the danger, however, that the librarian herself may be too traditional or inflexible, inclined to turn a deaf ear to unusual demands or suggestions. She should keep an open mind to all requests for materials or use of library time and space, even though these may seem at first to tax her own concepts of library service. When this

occurs, the librarian needs to back off, take a critical look at herself and the matter under consideration to see if there is some way in which it can be accomplished without disrupting the overall program. She should always be willing to try out new ideas to see what is feasible, and to make concessions when these promise long-range dividends in better instruction, or improved teacher-library relations.

A librarian's working relations with her principal are extremely important, but vary with his understanding of the library's function in the school. The principal may require more education in what resources a library needs in order to assume its responsibilities. Sometimes he gives lip service to its importance, but sells it short when an increase in the budget or a larger staff is needed. The librarian should be able to speak up when she has something worthwhile to propose, yet at the same time she must recognize that the principal has many other problems on his mind besides the library. She must be positive, not negative, ready to offer some feasible suggestions for the solution of her problem, with documentary evidence in hand to support her ideas. If the time does not seem right and the principal seems to be preoccupied with other concerns, it is always well to retreat and come back later. The library is only one of the principal's concerns and probably he is already several jumps ahead of the librarian anyway. The alliterative qualities of prudence, patience and persistence, with a fine touch of politics, are important attributes of a modern librarian that will help her immensely in achieving the overall success of the library program.

How prevalent is this image of the school librarian today? Perhaps too much traditionalism among librarians is one

reason why so few school libraries are measuring up to national standards. The fact that a central library has been slow in gaining a toehold at the elementary level is another evidence that librarians of the progressive type are too rare a species. We have not been dynamic enough in our demonstration of good library service. We have been our own worst enemies in keeping alive old stereotypes and concepts.

### A Mobile Person

A first grade teacher, speaking before a group of administrators, said recently that she would be willing to "stump the state" in favor of central libraries in elementary schools. Without a doubt this teacher has been fortunate in being on the receiving end of services from a librarian who has broken the traditional image. When a principal states publicly that he considers his library the lifeblood of the school program, you can be sure that he has a librarian who is doing her job effectively. This seems to indicate that one major secret of successful library service lies in the kind of library orientation teachers and administrators receive in schools of education and on the job as well. When they know why a library is a vital factor in the educational program, when they have learned to depend on its services, the librarian will have to measure up to expectations and alter traditional patterns of operation. Yet this is only a partial solution. The bulk of responsibility lies with the librarian. It is time for her to come out from behind her desk, become a mobile person, carry the library out into the classrooms, and give it every opportunity to fulfill its broad functions. Only then will the old stereotype fade and the new image of librarianship emerge.

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