

The Child and the Library Center

THIS is an era of vitality, even of turmoil, in public education. One exciting trend is the recent establishment of library-instructional materials centers in elementary schools.

In my childhood, the Carnegie Public Library furnished our only recreational and informational reading. My father, a confirmed "book lover," made a real adventure of our trips to the library because he would often browse through the shelves of children's books with me. As we examined this one and that one, he unconsciously demonstrated that books were the very stuff of life to him, and that through a sort of miracle they were there just waiting for me to pick up and enjoy.

Children enjoy a modern miracle today when they attend a school with a good library. This is true because such a library is stocked not only with all of the recommended books for boys and girls, but also with records, filmstrips, magazines, pamphlets, pictures, tapes and other media. In addition, pupils can use this resource *every* day. This provision is important because one or two library visits a month are no longer enough. The school librarians in such schools give all

of the children, as they grow from kindergarten through sixth grade, the kind of intimate reading guidance that I knew as a child. In many schools, second grade children begin to learn how to find information in library books, and during the intermediate years many of them become independent learners, finding answers to their numerous questions in reference books.

These valuable library materials for learning are often given ample, well located space in a school. They are also attractively arranged to make each reader as comfortable as possible. One or more librarians are responsible for seeing that this wealth of informational and pleasure reading is effectively used by teachers and by students. Old patterns of library use are changing; new staff roles are unfolding; and new learning guidance responsibilities are being recognized by teachers and by librarians. In such fortunate schools, the library learning center gives vitality to every area of instruction.

Serving New Needs

What has been happening in our school of about 600 children, illustrates the transition that has been taking place. Several years ago, our school was like

Virginia Tozier is Librarian, Central Park Road School, Plainview, New York.

many other elementary schools in this country. We had a library room, a few books, and one librarian who served two schools, spending half of a week in each one. Classes were arbitrarily scheduled to come to the library at a set time once each week to exchange books while the teachers were having a "free period." This once a week book service was not frequent enough for the good readers, and was too frequent for the poor readers. Usually about one-third of the children had not finished the book they were reading, one-third had forgotten to bring back their book, and so only the remaining third charged out new books. The rest of the library period was used for storytelling, reading aloud, or for a library lesson about such things as the card catalog or a reference book. Filling the library day with once a week scheduled class visits, left no time for children to use the library, and gave the teachers no part in the library program.

There were also some unusual pressures in our town. Our school serves a postwar suburban community which grew from 100 pupils to 10,000 in just 13 years. The problems attendant upon such rapid growth encouraged the school administration to adopt such modern educational devices as showed themselves to be of value after careful experimentation and evaluation. The school board, the superintendent of schools, and the school principal, all felt that libraries were important, so money was provided to build up the collection, and, before long, a full time librarian was provided for each school.

Soon our school library grew to the extent that it could truly be called an instructional materials center. With 6,000 books, 450 filmstrips, and 400 records, magazines, pamphlets, pictures, etc., at hand, it became evident that there was a

need for free and full use of this library material all day and every day by the teachers and by the children. A new pattern of library service was needed. In addition our elementary school was selected for an experiment in team teaching and closed circuit television which was made possible by a state grant and by local support. Here was the basis for a strong educational program.

Flexible Scheduling

We began to believe that more flexible scheduling would be advisable for our school library. I discussed the possibilities with our teachers at grade level meetings to see what they thought of the idea, and to have the benefit of their suggestions. They were interested, so we decided to start by using a part of each day for the new program in grades four, five and six, and by continuing to schedule classes every week for grade three, and during alternate weeks for kindergarten and grades one and two. Televised lessons, given by the librarian to several classes at once right in their classrooms, immediately made possible a new and different use of the library room.

We set aside two one-half hour periods each morning, and invited any teacher of grades 4, 5 and 6 to sign up for a library period whenever their classroom teaching required the use of library materials. For instance, a teacher whose class was studying Indians might divide the class into groups of three or four and assign topics to each group; and then bring the class to the library where they would search for information in non-fiction books, reference books, biographies, pamphlets, pictures, filmstrips and records.

We found that units on the United Nations, brotherhood, the human body,

current events, and many other subjects could be studied in library material more fully, and with more interest than in regular textbooks. Gradually we tried other ways of using library class periods. Group discussions of books, reading magazines for information, and reading poetry for pleasure proved to be valuable. Instead of copying or outlining information found in encyclopedias, small groups discussed the ideas they found, and tried to reach understandings of their own, based upon their reading.

Teachers Cooperate

As teachers began to initiate library lessons and assignments it was possible to interest them in taking an active part in presenting these lessons. Sometimes the librarian and the teachers used role playing to illustrate how to find information in the best possible source. At other periods the class would listen and learn as the librarian and the teacher held a conversation about the way to select books or to evaluate them after reading. Teachers began to know the library materials and to use more books in their classrooms. Some teachers came with their class two or more times in one week, and then not for a while. It became obvious that these young children needed a great deal of help and guidance as they used nonfiction and reference books. To assist the librarian in answering the many questions about words or meanings, the teachers *always* stayed in the library when their class was working there. Some of the periods began with a review or a lesson about some library tool. Then for the rest of the period the class members applied the lesson by using what they had learned to find information for an assignment. Periods were set aside for individuals and small groups to come

to read and to do special projects. Three book exchange periods a day were arranged for pupils in grades four, five and six to get books as they needed them.

Teachers found that when lessons were to be given to many classes at once through television, they must be more carefully prepared. This created a constant demand for library material and services. These same television lessons were followed by assignments to be done in the library, using library materials. Teams of teachers met to plan and to pool abilities and interests, and the library was called upon to provide information on a greater range of topics, and for a deeper study of many subjects, than ever before. Teachers' skills developed along with lesson plans at team meetings, and an appreciation for library resources grew as library-minded staff members and the librarian brought their influence to bear. Better lessons and more interesting assignments were made possible because of the fine instructional materials available in the library which were constantly brought to the attention of the teachers. Children were encouraged to satisfy the curiosity aroused by their teachers, and to develop individual interests in the library.

New Resources

As the methods of instruction used by the teachers changed, so did the librarian's, as she took advantage of the means now available. Besides lessons on the use of the library and of library materials, book talks, stories, and book discussions could be presented to children over closed circuit television. The teachers could see the programs too, and follow these up with assignments, discussions, or further teaching, thus increasing the amount of learning.

This year, with the assistance of a Knapp Foundation grant, we have a library suite of two adjoining rooms and two full time librarians helped by two part time aides. Three periods daily and one librarian are available for the intermediate grade teachers and their classes. Simultaneously the second librarian conducts library periods for the kindergarten, first and second grade classes in the other room. When the day is warm, the younger children often go outside on the grass to hear stories before selecting books to borrow. Each primary grade class has a library period each week with the librarian, and often one other period with their teacher who may read to them, or just let them look at books or listen to records.

At noon every day, the library is open to all children in the intermediate grades who wish to come. Instead of going to recreation from 11:30 to 1 o'clock, they can come to read books, browse through magazines, play chess, or do special reports, either in the library or on the porch just outside the library door. We found that it was not a good idea for children to take books to the lunchroom with them, so they read or use materials which they find in the library. A special section is reserved for the books of noon-time readers, with bookmarks to keep the place from day to day. Often small groups do special projects, or find the answers to questions which classroom work, or televised lessons, or the reading of books has stimulated. They also listen to records and tapes or look at filmstrips.

After one o'clock, boys and girls in the intermediate grades have book exchange periods—one for each grade. They may come on any day that they wish, to return the books they have read, and to take out new ones. Many books

are short and there are an amazing number of boys and girls who read a book a night, and who are developing the habit of using the library as a necessary part of their daily routine. If a child takes a book that he does not like or that is too hard for him, he can bring it back the next day and thus keep reading. The discussion of books that goes on among the children when they are exchanging and selecting books is most enlightening, and many a book is "sold," immediately upon being returned by an enthusiastic reader. Each book read leads at once to another, and this adds momentum to the child's intellectual development. I am one of those who feel that nothing can be more effective than wide reading in developing an individual who is truly educated at maturity.

Our foundation grant has also provided us with five listening-viewing booths, so that our records and filmstrips can be used by individuals as well as by class groups. A puppet stage allows for acting out stories, and 84 magazines and several important newspapers provide up-to-date information for both students and teachers. Extensive files of pamphlets and pictures are kept for use by teachers and students, and we are experimenting with programed material and with individual listening to tapes for remedial work or make-up lessons by children who have been absent. Several clubs meet in the library—"book-lovers," who have regular book discussions, poetry club, whose members read poetry, favorite story club, who come to hear a librarian read popular books, and a chess club. Slow readers in grades three and four come sometimes for special periods to hear about appropriate books they can read.

Such a program requires the interest and cooperation of the principal, the as-

(Continued on page 261)

Continuous Program Plan: A New Design for Public School Organization, Curriculum and Instruction. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Laboratory School, 1963.

3. Mildred L. Krohn. "Learning Centers' Experiment at Shaker Heights." *School Libraries* 12: 27-30; May 1963.

4. Mary V. Gaver. *Effectiveness of Centralized Library Service in Elementary Schools* (Phase 1) USOE Contract No. 489, SAE-8132. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Graduate School of Library Service, 1960.

5. Carl R. Rogers. "Learning To Be Free." Address presented at a symposium on "Man and Civilization: Control of the Mind," at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center; January 1962.

6. N. L. Gage, editor. *Handbook of Research on Teaching.* Chicago: Rand McNally Company, 1962. Preface.

—LILLIAN SPITZER, *Curriculum Librarian, Department of Education, San Diego County, California.*

The Child—Tozier

(Continued from page 226)

sistant principal, all supervisors, and the teachers, since it touches every area of the school. Schedules and lesson plans must be arranged to fit this kind of library program. Each activity must be purposeful, and this valuable space and professional time should never be wasted in "baby sitting" a group, no matter what the reason.

The superintendent and the school board must find money for materials, for personnel, and for abundant space. There should be at least the minimum library staff recommended by the American Library Association—that is, one full time professional librarian and one half-time clerk for each 300 children plus another half-time librarian and one-quarter more clerical assistance when the audio-visual materials are included. Staff shortages have long frustrated the most gallant attempts to give good school library service. It is like asking a principal, no matter how capable and hard working, to administer two, three or more

schools without professional or clerical help and do an effective, first class job.

Strong Leadership

The librarians must exert strong leadership, and be familiar with the teaching being done, if the instructional materials in the library are to be really integrated into the curriculum in each grade. The head librarian is charged with the responsibility for coordinating the use of instructional materials by all of the teachers and by all of the children, so perhaps he or she should be given the administrative power to perform these duties. Donald D. Durrell, of the School of Education of Boston University, has pointed out that librarians should have as much authority as assistant principals if they are to provide the effective library service expected of them. Some such arrangement seems inevitable.

The results, it appears to me, more than justify the greater effort and expense. A flexible schedule, allowing free and full use of the instructional materials in the library every day by teachers, classes and individuals is far more effective than random or arbitrary use, and makes the library a real center for learning. This goes a long way toward freeing a major portion of the curriculum from the narrow boundaries set by textbooks. When children are free to come to the library every day to exchange books, and to read or browse, they seem to be far more appreciative of the privilege they enjoy in their library. An effective "center for learning" type of library, not only offers strong nourishment to elementary education; it conditions the children during their impressionable years to the daily use of books and libraries, a habit which should remain with them throughout life.

Copyright © 1964 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.