

Cooperation between School and Public Libraries

A Study of One North Carolina County

by Donna Shannon

Although library programs differ in central focus, there is significant overlap in patrons served and types of information and services provided by school and public libraries. Patrons turn to both types of libraries to satisfy educational and recreational information requirements.

The primary function of a school library media program is curriculum support; however, students do turn to their school library collections for recreational reading and information not directly related to class assignments or school activities. Half of all public library patrons are elementary and secondary school students. A survey conducted during the summer of 1987 for the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that 50 percent of public library patrons were 18 years old and under and that 25 percent were between the ages of 12 and 18.¹ Both school libraries and public libraries provide students with materials and services related to class assignments and recreational interests.

Planning in all types of libraries must take into account the continuing increase in available information and advances in technology. Individual libraries can afford to acquire and store less and less of what is available. At the same time, curriculum demands continue to change and expand. A single library cannot provide all of the information needed by today's students.

When school libraries and public libraries cooperate, improved service to patrons can result. Findings from the library literature indicate that there is "lots of talk" and "lip service" given to the concept of cooperation and its importance in providing library service to youth, but little empirical research exists on this important issue. Results of research which can be identified reveal that little cooperation between the two agencies exists.

Much of the current interest in library cooperation is related to interlibrary networking. Although the study reported here

addresses the topic of networking, it does so within the context of library cooperation. Definitions of library cooperation and library networks offered by Markuson are useful in differentiating between the two:

Library cooperation is any activity between two or more libraries to facilitate, promote and enhance library operation, service to users, or use of resources. A network is the most formalized type of library cooperation. I consider library networking to be a subset of the broader area of library cooperation.²

Public libraries have a long history of service to public schools. Before the widespread establishment of school libraries, informational and recreational reading needs of teachers and students were largely met by public libraries. Although most schools today have a library, students continue to call upon the public library for materials and services to complete school assignments.

During February and March of 1990, secondary school librarians and public librarians in one North Carolina county were surveyed in an effort to determine the status of cooperation between the two types of libraries. A questionnaire developed by the writer, consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended items, was distributed to one librarian from each of seventeen middle school and thirteen high school libraries. Another questionnaire was mailed to each of the seventeen libraries in the county's public library system. Telephone interviews were conducted with the school

library system coordinator and the director of the county's public library system for clarification of system-wide policies.

This particular county was chosen because of its relatively large population and its great variety of school and public library settings. The system's public libraries vary from regional libraries to small neighborhood branches, and are located both in urban areas and suburban settings. Not all branch libraries are staffed with professional librarians. One of the public libraries specializes in service to the business and professional community; service to school students is not part of its mission. Secondary schools range in size from a senior high school with an enrollment of

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over 2,000 to a junior high school of only 300 students. All schools in the system have a library with at least one professional librarian on the staff. There is one combined school/public library in the county. There is a county library association whose membership includes librarians from all types of libraries in the area. The association forms committees that work on a variety of projects of interest to members, such as collection mapping, preservation

of materials, and use studies.

A major purpose of this study was to determine what cooperative activities characterize school library and public library programs in the county studied. A simple model of cooperative activities was used to evaluate the level of cooperation (see Figure 1). In addition, the study examined factors leading to the success of cooperative activities, factors perceived as barriers to cooperative activities, and factors which have potential for facilitating greater cooperation between school and public libraries. There was also an effort to determine if there was a relationship between size of public library and level of cooperation with schools.

Twenty-three completed questionnaires were returned by school librarians (77 percent). Questionnaires were completed and returned by representatives from thirteen of the public libraries (77 percent).

Both school and public library respondents agreed that library services to youth could be improved by increased cooperation between school and public libraries. Respondents were asked to name factors which could enhance cooperation. Replies indicated general agreement between school and public library respondents. Suggestions included: more time to meet, more personal contact and interaction, more formal meetings, designation of an individual to work with both school and public libraries.

Public library respondents were asked if school libraries in their service area had

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been contacted for the purpose of establishing a liaison, and school librarians were asked if the public library had been so contacted. With two exceptions, all public library respondents reported having made such contacts. Seven of the twenty-three school librarians responding to the questionnaire reported they had not been contacted by a representative from the public library. Four of the public library respondents reported having been contacted by a school librarian for purposes of establishing a liaison, while fourteen of the school

librarians reported that contact with the public library had been made.

When asked if each was satisfied with the amount of contact with the other, school librarians were more positive than public librarians. Fifteen of the school librarians responding were satisfied with the relationship; eight were not. Four of the public library respondents reported satisfaction with the relationship. Of the four satisfied respondents, one was from the business library (which does not serve students), and one was from the combination library. Eight public library respondents were not satisfied with the arrangement.

Responses to questions relating to whether or not meetings between school librarians and public librarians were held were dissimilar. Seventeen school librarians said that meetings were held; two responded that meetings were not held; three did not know if meetings were held. Two public library respondents reported that such meetings were held; four said meetings were not held; seven did not know if such meetings were held. From comments of the respondents, this disagreement could be related to whether or not meetings of the area library association constitute meetings between school librarians and public librarians as perceived by respondents. There was no specific question about meetings of this organization included in the questionnaire.

Because responses to some of the questions appeared inconsistent, telephone interviews were conducted with the school library coordinator and the director of the public library system. One of the inconsistencies arose when respondents were asked if their library was a member of a multitype library network. There was no pattern in the responses of either school librarians or public library respondents to this question. The public library director reported that the county library system is a member of OCLC and SOLINET. The school library coordinator reported that school libraries are not members of a multitype library network, but are working on the

establishment of a network of the county's school libraries.

School librarians and public library respondents were asked if their library had written policies concerning school library/public library cooperation. Here again, answers were mixed, most reporting that there were no such policies. The public library director reported that each library in the system had its own "branch plan," and that policies concerning cooperation should be part of the plan.

Existence of a union list of holdings

and a union list of periodicals was another area of confusion subsequently clarified by the school library coordinator and the director of the public library system. The public library system has a union list of the holdings of all the public libraries in the county. All school libraries have a microfiche copy of this list which is available to their users. Public libraries have a copy of the school system's union list of periodical holdings. There is no combined union list of school and public library holdings.

Questionnaires included a list of cooperative activities frequently mentioned in the literature on school library/public library cooperation. Respondents were asked to indicate which of those activities their library had participated in during the current school year or the past school year. There was no relationship between size of public library (including number of staff) and number of cooperative activities reported. Cooperative activities mentioned most frequently by school librarians as activities in which they participate were: "Homework Alert," interlibrary loan, and arranging for the public librarian to visit the school. "Homework Alert" and visits to schools were cooperative activities reported most frequently by public librarians. ("Homework Alert" is an arrangement through which teachers can notify the public library when students have been given an assignment which could require use of public library collections. Pre-printed forms requesting information about a specific assignment are completed and returned to the public library.)

According to both the director of the public library system and the coordinator of school libraries, there is no formal agreement for interlibrary loan between school libraries and public libraries. Of public library respondents, only the combination library reported participating in interlibrary loan with schools. Seven school libraries reported participating in interlibrary loan with the public library.

Seven public library respondents reported that school classes made visits to the public library. Visits were most often arranged by the teacher. Six public library respondents reported having visited schools during the past two years. The purpose of the visits most frequently given was to discuss "Homework Alert." "Homework Alert" was mentioned most frequently both by school librarians and public library respondents as a cooperative activity in which each participated. Special programs, such as "Battle of the Books," a middle school reading motivation program sponsored by the schools, and "Quiz Bowl," a program sponsored by the public library,

were mentioned as examples of cooperation in completed questionnaires and in the telephone interviews with the school library coordinator and the director of the public library system.

The school library coordinator stressed the important role of the area library association in promoting and facilitating cooperative activities among all types of libraries. In addition to "Battle of the Books" and "Quiz Bowl," the director of the public library system pointed to efforts on the part of certain individual schools in promoting collaboration between schools and the public library.

Results of this study confirmed much of what was reported in the library literature relating to factors leading to successful cooperative efforts as well as factors which are barriers to such efforts. There was variation from library to library, however, in how the current level of cooperation was perceived.

Evaluation of the level of cooperation between school and public libraries in the county studied was based on a simple model which includes four levels of cooperation: (a) level one—no cooperation, (b) level two—informal communication, (c) level three—informal cooperation, and (d) level four—formal cooperation (See Figure 1).³

Based on this model, cooperative activities between school and public libraries

in the county reflected those included in level two—informal communication. In most cases contact between the two agencies has been initiated by either the public librarian or the school librarian. Public librarians are concerned about meeting the information needs of secondary school students relative to their school assignments. "Homework Alert" is an activity actively promoted by public librarians.

Cooperative activities also reflected a number of those included in level three—informal cooperation. School classes made visits to public libraries, and some public librarians visited schools. Representatives from both the school system and the public library system cooperated in special projects, such as "Battle of the Books" and "Quiz Bowl." School libraries had been furnished microfiche copies of the public library's holdings. Public libraries had been furnished a union list of periodicals held by school libraries. The public library system and the school system cooperated in the operation of a combination school/public library located in a large secondary school.

With the exception of joint administration of the combination library, results of the study do not indicate that libraries are moving toward level four of the model—formal cooperation, which would include written and formalized policies and procedures for cooperation and mutual sharing of resources.

The factor most frequently associated with successful cooperative efforts was

communication. Basic to such cooperation were school librarians who made a special point of frequently communicating with public librarians relative to student assignments. The public library's aggressive campaign in promoting "Homework Alert" was important in making all involved sensitive to potential problems when public library staff did not have the necessary information to assist students with homework assignments.

Lack of time and lack of communication were frequently mentioned as barriers to cooperation. Time was mentioned most by school librarians. Public library respondents and school librarians suggested more frequent personal contact—formal meetings, visits, idea exchanges.

Suggestions for enhancing cooperation between school libraries and public libraries reflected those mentioned by Shirley Fitzgibbons in her recent article on cooperation.⁴ Both Fitzgibbons and the respondents in this study called for planning, formal meetings, and continuous communication. A number of respondents in the study felt that the area library association was too "general" and did not address those problems unique to school and public libraries. According to Fitzgibbons, "respect and understanding of each others' roles and the goals of each institution are essential to cooperation."⁵

Esther R. Dyer's⁶ research, which focused on cooperative library service to children, revealed three major barriers to interlibrary cooperation: time, money, and attitude. The findings of this study corroborated Dyer's work in two of the three findings, i.e., time and attitude. This study also revealed the need to pinpoint when and for what materials students and teachers turn to the public library.

Lack of time was seen as a barrier to cooperation by both public library respondents and school librarians. Time (or lack of it) was frequently offered as a reason for not becoming involved in activities seen as peripheral to central responsibilities. For school librarians it may be related to how others in the school community perceived their role. If school administrators and teachers did not see the school's librarian as their link to a wider information community, or if they did not see such a role as valuable or necessary, the librarian's work outside the four walls of the school was not viewed as central to the job. Was it possible that the perception of the school librarian's role represents a greater barrier than does lack of time? Writers on interlibrary cooperation mentioned the importance of administrative support. Gaining such support from school administrators

Figure 1

Model for School Library and Public Library Cooperation*

Level I No Cooperation

Libraries exist as separate and independent institutions by choice or lack of precedent. No history of cooperation. Contacts have not been initiated by either school or public librarian.

Level II Informal Communication

Libraries still exist as separate and independent institutions, but contact has been established by either school or public librarian or both. Sporadic communication occurs for purposes such as reference or assignment alert. Libraries still relying almost totally on own resources to satisfy user needs. There is some exchange of information and sharing.

Level III Informal Cooperation

Cooperation is occurring on a regular and somewhat frequent basis. Class visits to the public library are arranged by the school librarian or public librarian or both. School and public librarians are regularly and routinely in contact relative to homework assignments. School librarian acts as liaison between teachers and students and the public library. Public librarians make visits to the school library and/or classrooms. School art, other projects are displayed in public library on a regular basis. Libraries sponsor joint activities. Resources are shared (such as classroom collections, ILL, school may loan a/v material to public library).

Level IV Formal Cooperation

All of Level III AND written and formalized policies and procedures exist as part of school district policy and public library policy. This may mean the existence of a multitype library network in which both school libraries and public libraries participate. Mutual sharing of materials of any kind. (Possibly cooperative collection development, sharing of central processing facilities, and/or union list of periodicals or complete holdings).

*Derived from models proposed by Billman & Owens (1985), Kester (1990), and Krubsack & Krubsack (1985). See reference note 3 for complete citations.

for cooperative activities could make a big difference for school librarians.

The literature is replete with reports of how services to young adults have been downgraded in recent years. Few public libraries or library systems have a librarian whose sole responsibility is service to young adult users.⁷ In addition, outreach activities are not always given the same priority as other public library services. Work with schools could be seen as another outreach program. Is it possible that the attitudes of the profession toward outreach and youth services play a greater role as barriers to cooperation than does time?

What significance can one attach to the finding of this study which revealed that a higher proportion of school librarians were satisfied with current levels of cooperation than were public library respondents? Perhaps this is related to a perceptual circumstance as well. Perhaps it is related to how each sees the role of the other agency in its responsibility toward students. The literature pinpoints "attitude" as one of the most significant barriers to interlibrary cooperation.⁸

The literature indicates that school libraries are unable to meet all the information needs of their students. Public library respondents in this study verify that students do indeed turn to public libraries for

completion of school assignments. Determining exactly when and for what kinds of information students turn to public libraries has implications for both school and public libraries relative to collection development, hours of operation, and interlibrary cooperative activities.

The ever increasing array of available materials and technological developments, together with acute budgetary constraints, make cooperation between school libraries and public libraries more important than ever before. The results of this study indicate that commitment and communication, two essentials in developing and sustaining cooperative relationships between school and public libraries, are critically important first steps in fostering interlibrary cooperation.

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²Barbara Markuson, "Library Network Planning: Problems to Consider, Decisions to Make," *Wisconsin Library Bulletin* 71 (May-June 1975): 98.

³This model was derived from those proposed by Betty V. Billman and Patricia

Owens, "School and Public Library Cooperation: A Prerequisite for Cooperative Collection Development," *Collection Development* 7 (Fall 1985/Winter 1985-86): 186-87; Diane K. D. Kester, "Modeling the School System Adoption Process for Library Networking." Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990, 72-81; and Harold Krubsack and Rosanne Krubsack, *The Cooperative Spirit: School Media Centers & the Public Library* (Wisconsin Educational Media Association, 1985).

⁴Shirley Fitzgibbons, "Cooperation Between Teachers, School Librarians, and Public Librarians: Improving Library Services for Children and Young Adults," *Indiana Libraries* 8 (Number 1, 1989): 57-69.

⁵*Ibid.*, 60.

⁶Esther R. Dyer, "Cooperation in Library Services to Children: A Fifteen Year Forecast of Alternatives Using the Delphi Technique." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976.

⁷Frye, "Services and Resources," 414.

⁸E. Blanche Woolls, "Cooperative Library Services to Children in Public Libraries and Public School Systems in Selected Communities in Indiana." Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1973; Dyer, "Cooperation in Library Services to Children;" and Fitzgibbons, "Cooperation Between Teachers, School Librarians, and Public Librarians."

⁹Woolls, "Cooperative Library Services to Children."

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Roadbuilders Award for Ethnic Minority Librarian

The Roundtable on Ethnic Minority Concerns (REMC) of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) is seeking nominations for its second biennial "Roadbuilders" award(s). The award will recognize an ethnic minority librarian who has made a significant contribution to librarianship and served as a role model for ethnic minority librarians. Presentation of the award(s) will be made at the NCLA Biennial Conference, High Point, NC during the REMC session on Thursday, November 14, 1991, 3:30 - 5:30 p.m. A reception for the award recipient(s) will follow at Top of the Mart at 6:00 p.m.

Nominations are sought from all areas of librarianship: academic, public, school, special, and library education. A nominee must be an ethnic minority librarian, living or deceased, who:

1. Has worked in North Carolina for at least five (5) years,
2. Has made a significant contribution to the field of librarianship/information services,
3. Has established a record of accomplishment, service, and dedication, and
4. Currently serves as a role model for practicing and new minority librarians and as an incentive for prospective minority librarians.

Nominations should include the following:

1. A cover letter,
2. A short biographical sketch including educational background, work experience, major accomplishments, and attributes of the nominee that make him/her a positive role model, and
3. Any supporting documentation (i.e. newspaper clippings, articles, letters of endorsement, etc.).

Mail your nominations to: Barbara Best-Nichols
Lord Corporation
405 Gregson Drive
Cary, NC 27512

DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT OF NOMINATIONS IS SEPTEMBER 15, 1991.