

Library Support of the Art Program in North Carolina High Schools

by Willanna Griffin

The school media center's responsibility is to support all programs offered by the school. The accomplishment of this objective, however, may be easier for the "bookish" subjects that follow a rigidly prescribed course of study than for an art course. Art courses are comparative newcomers to the typical educational curriculum. They belong to that amorphous group of secondary school offerings known as "electives," outside the golden circle of courses traditionally required — English, history, and the sciences. The

study of art benefits from a less formal, less structured teaching approach, and an actual textbook is rarely used. Such courses make unique demands on the resources of the media center.

To determine the quality of library support to the art curriculum in North Carolina high schools, a recent survey was taken of fifty of the approximately 238 schools teaching art on a 9th-12th grade level. Questionnaires were sent to the art teacher and the librarian in each of the fifty randomly selected

schools, with a return rate of 79.2 percent.

Background data showed that the majority of the respondents work in schools of moderate size (between 500 and 1500 students). Almost half of the respondents considered their students to come from essentially rural backgrounds. The average books-per-student figure for the libraries surveyed was somewhat less than the A.L.A. standards for school libraries (11.3 compared to an ideal 16 to 24 books-per-student).

Selections and Acquisition.

The data provide insight into typical selections, practices, and factors that influence selection and acquisition of art-related materials in North Carolina media centers. Half of the librarians estimate that they spend less than .05 percent of their annual budget on art resources, and 14 percent spend less than .01 percent. Funds are obviously an important factor, as most librarians agreed; but the amount of enthusiastic use seems to have an equally profound influence on budgeting for the arts. Of the many marginal comments added to the questionnaires, a majority referred to user interest. One librarian remarked rather wistfully, "We have a beautiful art collection — books, prints, slides — which are rarely, if ever, used." Another stated bluntly, "More of the budget would go for art if the materials were to be used." Another librarian defended the dropping of all art periodical subscriptions because of lack of interest.

The survey also investigated the

methods of selection used by the librarians in the sample. The majority of both art teachers (82 percent) and librarians (69 percent) answered that the librarian and faculty member work together in reviewing materials and making choices. Library committees were used for selection by only .05 percent of the librarians responding and .09 percent of the art teachers responding. Twelve percent of the librarians responded that they handled selections independently with no faculty input; .09 percent responded that the art department chose its own materials with no help from the librarian.

Of the various methods of selection described on the questionnaire, art teachers seem to consider the method now in general use (working closely with the librarian) to be most effective. (The one art teacher who suggested that the librarian should ideally do all the selection probably did so out of a sense of fatalistic resignation; she commented in the margin that the librarian never filled her requests anyway.)

A question on the choice of the paperback format for art books showed that librarians were evenly divided on their paperback buying policies. Forty-six percent "often" chose the less expensive paperback format over the hardback when available, while 54 percent "rarely" or "never" bought paperbacks. Considering the high quality and diversity of paperbacks now available, librarians might reconsider the advantages of paperbacks, especially for supplementing crafts and how-to collections.

Patterns of Student Use

One of the most interesting of the patterns to emerge from this survey pinpointed reasons for student use of the library's art resources. While being able to research factual, bibliographical, and historical information about art was fairly important, the *main* reason for student use of art-related materials is *browsing for ideas*. A large majority of both librarians and art teachers responded that the art student often relies on library resources for inspiration, for the stimulus to spark his imagination for his next project. This data suggests that the librarian who has already developed a serviceable core collection of art histories, biographies, and how-to books might find that buying an occasional book for its unusual illustrations, or keeping up subscriptions for art-related periodicals, can be of greatest value for her users. Such materials are not limited to the fine arts category.

Despite the importance of resources for browsing, 12 percent of the librarians reported that they carried no art-related periodicals at all, and 41 percent carried only one (of which, *SCHOOL ARTS* was the favored selection, followed by *ARTS AND ACTIVITIES*). Only two of the responding libraries subscribe to all five periodicals listed on the questionnaire (*SCHOOL ARTS*, *ARTS AND ACTIVITIES*, *ART IN AMERICA*, *CRAFTS HORIZON*, and *DESIGN*), and both were large schools in urban settings. One art teacher, commenting on her impression that support to the art curriculum varies with

the librarian's own interests, remarked bitterly, "At this time I have lost subscriptions to *ART IN AMERICA*, *CRAFTS HORIZON*, and *AMERICAN ARTIST*, which were replaced with *ARTS AND ACTIVITIES*, which to me is as useless as having nothing at all."

Faculty Use

Over half of the librarians surveyed believe that the art teachers at their schools often send students to use the library for specific assignments and browsing. Slightly less than one-fourth of the librarians believe that art teachers limit themselves to classroom collections.

Correspondingly, less than half of the art teachers (44 percent) responded that they prefer to keep a personal collection of reference books in their classrooms for student use while using library facilities as well. A surprising 26 percent of the art teachers prefer to keep *all* art-related reference materials in their classroom, making little use of the library (a finding which tallies with the libraries' estimates). Only 20 percent of the teacher-respondents checked the response, "The library at this institution has a useful collection of materials for the art student and I send students often for information and ideas." Another 20 percent make use of the library themselves — checking out print and non-print materials for reference or for illustrating lectures — but do not send students to the library as a general rule, either for ideas or for specific assignments requiring supplementary research.

These findings seem to support the opinion expressed by school librarians surveyed in 1967 for the National Advisory Committee on Libraries that one of the future prospects for school libraries will include curricular area libraries near department classrooms. Most older art programs have already established such collections. It is usually the newly established art program that must rely heavily on library resources.

To encourage more faculty use of the library, librarians need to make their holdings more visible so that teachers can easily find out what is available. Art educators can help by emphasizing to prospective art teachers the potential of library materials in their teaching. It has been suggested that our concept of the art program is gradually changing, and that "as . . . emphasis is shifted from the working processes of art to aspects of appreciation and aesthetics, more art teachers will turn to the resources of the library."¹

Adequacy of Art-Related Materials by Area

Data from the art teachers' questionnaires suggest that in their estimation, most of the libraries responding to this survey have adequate collections of materials emphasizing art history and biographies of artists, both for student and faculty use. Areas of the art program for which art teachers say the library offers *least* support, both for students and teachers, are in (1) techniques of media use (how to use

acrylics, water color, etc.); (2) techniques of the traditional crafts (weaving, pottery, etc.); and (3) general techniques of design and composition (principles of balance, color theory, etc.). Interestingly, art teachers feel that the area for which their libraries offer least support for their own needs as teachers is that of the philosophy of art. An obvious reason for the lack of materials dealing with art philosophy is that it is an area often overlooked both by librarians and the faculty members who make selections. The very term "philosophy" connotes a somewhat rarefied topic with little practical application to the teaching of art. Every teacher, however, welcomes insights into the structure of his chosen discipline. Any teacher who has ever tried to explain the abstract concepts of aesthetics will appreciate help from literate sources, if only to be able to persuade the uninterested student who is taking art because it is an "easy" credit of the intrinsic value of art in his life; or to reinforce the teacher's sense of dedication on those days when the students have glued the desks together, spaced themselves out on rubber cement, and adorned with unspeakable graffiti the scale-model diorama of the campus which Fourth Period was supposed to present to the principal.

Adequacy of Art-Related Materials by Type

When questioned about the types of materials they used most in actual teaching practices, half of the teachers chose audiovisual materials as the most valuable resource available to them from the library.

Correspondingly, almost half stated that the audiovisual collections at their libraries were the *least* satisfying of the four types listed on the questionnaire (audiovisual, art reproductions such as prints, how-to books, and periodicals). Librarians should work on building stronger audiovisual collections in support of the art program in their schools. They should also properly maintain the equipment necessary for use (one frustrated art teacher declared that she had a fine collection of slides available through her library, but the projector was always broken). How-to books are another type of tool upon which art teachers depend heavily, but often find their library's holdings to be limited.

Librarians in North Carolina media centers may wish to review their collections to make sure that they fully utilize the advantages of non-print materials, periodicals, and paperback editions (especially in how-to and crafts manuals). They may wish to review their selections policy to make sure that the art faculty member has some input into the selections process. In particular, they may wish to examine their collections to make sure that among the art histories and the Mona Lisa prints are other materials with innovative illustrations and visual excitement — materials that will give the student ideas and inspiration for his own work.

Though the art teachers in this survey do not seem to make optimal use of their libraries (only 20 percent claimed to send students often), the overall tenor of the comments and problems described on the questionnaire suggests that North Carolina's

school librarians are eager to provide resources that support, complement, and enrich the art program. They seem to realize that extra effort is required to provide materials suitable for a less structured curriculum, and that feedback from art teachers and students is a necessary element in making sure the collection serves its purpose.

Footnote

¹Earl Collins, "Art and the School Library," *WISCONSIN LIBRARY BULLETIN*, 63 (November-December 1967), p. 441.



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