

Libraries and the Right to Read

by John G. Lorenz

Deputy Librarian of Congress

My impression from my days in state library work and U. S. O. E. library services has been that North Carolina has been doing a good job of library development and promoting the Right to Read (within resources available) long before these became capital letters.

It was the late James E. Allen, Jr., former U. S. Commissioner of Education, who provided the capital letters and the national focus when he called in 1969 for a total national commitment to and involvement in the effort to see to it that by the end of the 1970's no boy or girl would be leaving our schools without the skill and desire to read to the full limits of his capability. He realized that this goal could not be met by teachers alone. Dr. Allen said, "To hit the target by the end of the 70's, to achieve a goal of such enormous dimensions, involvement will have to reach far beyond the forces of education. Necessary will be the committed participation and support of the Congress; State and local political leaders and legislative bodies; business, industry, and labor; civic and community groups; publishers; advertising organizations (if advertising agencies can sell soap, they can sell reading); television, radio, and the press; research and scientific organizations, foundations; the entertainment industry; the sports world; and, perhaps the most essential of all, the

understanding and support of an enlightened and enthusiastic public."

In the months since this challenge was presented, there has been encouraging progress. In the U. S. Office of Education itself the Right to Read Program, headed by Dr. Ruth Love Holloway, a specialist in compensatory education, has been given a high priority; a National Reading Council, of which Mrs. Nixon is honorary chairman, has been established to spur the volunteer effort; regional Right to Read representatives have been appointed in Regional USOE/DHEW Offices (an office in Atlanta serves North Carolina and its region); Reading Resources centers have been established; and a majority of the States (including North Carolina) have responded to the Commissioner's call with plans for reading development.

Like many of you, I am sure, I believe I made a commitment to my belief in the importance of books and reading when I chose the profession of librarianship. It may be, however, that too many of us have seen the role of libraries, even when we have been most active in the extension of their services, as contributing to an enrichment of the lives of the already reading public, not as basic to the educational needs of all of our citizens. This view of ourselves as being outside of the educational process may be shared by some of

the educators with whom we must be allied. It is regrettable, for instance, that the film, "The Right to Read," made for the Office of Education and previewed in Washington on September 21, does not include one mention of the role of the Library in achieving the "Right to Read." This may be as much our fault as the educators who made it.

The film does show various ways of teaching reading. And much has been said since the program began of the need for more imaginative self-teaching materials. As one educator put it, "Books are creative, imaginative, self-teaching, and reinforcing. The child reads and his enjoyment, his gaining information, and his knowledge that he understands, all act as reinforcement. The best programmed materials now available are children's books, and the best self-teaching program is a child reading a children's book. This is superior to all devices."

Who are the people we need to reach with books and library service to stimulate them to become readers and then improved readers? The present U. S. Commissioner of Education, Sidney Marland, has referred to the more than 7 million school children with reading deficiencies and the more than 15 million adults whose limited ability to read restricts their participation as adults in our society. The latter figure has been challenged as too low by some adult education experts. Since we usually define functional literacy as the reading ability of someone who has finished the fourth or fifth grade, and since comprehension of day-to-day reading matter such as driving manuals, newspapers, and job applications — not to mention more sophisticated documents such as tax forms — takes a 10th or 11th grade level of education, half the adults in the United States may not be able to handle such materials and therefore may be said to be unable to function properly in our society.

The reading deficiencies of 7 million children are going to be overcome only by

combined effort on the part of school principals, curriculum specialists, classroom teachers, and librarians, and everyone else who can be persuaded to become part of the movement. Virginia Mathews of the National Book Committee, is speaking to a teacher's conference last year said, "A good library is a must: a school library capable of sending classroom collections into every room for instant and constant use, capable of lending books to take home, and able to help with all manner of media, programs, and services, audiovisual as well as print; a public library system that works with all the agencies that touch the children and their families and reaches out to them in their neighborhoods." Her prescription was reinforced by a report in the *New York Times* last Sunday of an educational study of four schools that are succeeding in reading where the majority of similar schools are failing. Two of the four schools are in New York, one in Kansas City, and one in Los Angeles. All are inner-city schools with typical enrollments of poor children from minority families and they share four identifiable qualities: strong leadership, high expectations, special reading personnel, and a strong emphasis on reading. In describing the last quality, the report stated, according to the *Times*, that "Reading seemed the first, though not the exclusive, concern of the first three grades. For example, P.S. 11 (in New York City) had a large quantity and variety of storybooks, with a library of them in each classroom, in addition to a large school library. Children were encouraged to take books home." (The *New York Times* makes this sound like a great, original idea. Maybe it is in New York. I hope it isn't in North Carolina.)

Youngsters who drop out of school at an early age are a particularly difficult problem. Even North Carolina, according to the 1960 census, had a dropout rate of 32.7 percent from public high school. The median years of school completed for the total population of the State was 8.9 years. Dropping out, research has shown,

is in many instances caused by reading deficiencies; young men and women unable to keep up with studies that require more and more reading just give up. Unfortunately, it is this group too which finds getting and keeping jobs difficult, and in many cities it is this group which provides most of the juvenile offenders. Librarians will have to collaborate with others in the community to reach and help these young people, first in reading programs and then in innovative library programs to keep them wanting to read. Many prototype programs have been described in library literature. Some communities have established special libraries with materials designed to attract young people, others, like Brooklyn, have instituted "Sidewalk Services," and some have put library materials in places where young people naturally gather. But there are no ready-made recipes; programs have to be tailored to fit the local situation, and this is where the ingenuity, creativity and dedication of every librarian in every community can come into play.

Special qualities of tact and understanding will be needed to entice the adult non-reader into the world of books. He may be highly motivated, but hesitant and ashamed to uncover his deficiency. (Even though I could read at a fairly early age, I can still remember my trepidation when I first visited my local public library in Queens County, L. I., and downright fear when I first approached the imposing New York Public Library.) Another factor is that even after a newly literate adult has mastered the basic skill through adult education programs, he often will not become a reader unless special efforts are made to help him further. Here again, librarians can take advantage of every opportunity to help — reaching adults through their children, through institutions and agencies for the poor and elderly, through employers. What this will require is personal effort, a lot of imagination, and a whole-hearted willingness to contribute to every person's Right to Read and potential interest in reading.

Imagination and dedication will be needed because there is not a great deal of new Federal money to support this national program. I was very pleased to learn recently that the North Carolina General Assembly added \$414,840 in new funds to the State Aid to County Public Libraries budget for the 1971-72 biennium, bringing its annual total up to \$2 million and that LSCA funds have been channeled into the State Library's program for providing library service to the disadvantaged. The disadvantaged, I would say, certainly include those citizens who cannot read, do not have easy accessibility to materials of interest to them or the motivation to read. This is a specific challenge to libraries since this is the institution best designed to provide easy access to the broad range of materials which will motivate citizens at all levels of ability and interest to read. Two specialists in reading recently said in PTA Magazine, "More subtle, but in some respects more important, than the ability to read is the desire to read. Ability is relatively easy to measure; desire is subjective and harder to determine. Surveys of literacy in the United States show that a high proportion of students are literate when they leave school, but literacy declines over the years after leaving school. Furthermore, refinement and growth of ability result from wide reading of challenging material."

The implications of this challenge to libraries for good selection and the acquisition of challenging, interest materials for all levels of reading ability are boundless, and to meet it librarians are going to have to learn almost as much as the people they hope to reach. We can no longer assume the adequacy of the accepted standards of selection. Children come to school already conditioned by experiences

FOR SALE: The Times of London Index, 1906-1966, on microfilm, 66 reels. Make an offer. Acquisitions Librarian, Davidson College Library, Davidson, N. C. 28036.

with media other than print, young people are surrounded by TV and radio like the air they breathe—what can we offer them to counter the easy seduction of the non-thinking image and sound or the “boob tube” as some call it? Well, new tools do exist—bibliographies and guides are being updated, new ones are being created, and new titles are being published. Just a few examples—Nancy Larrick's *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading* has been rewritten for the National Book Committee to reflect the wider world and experience of present-day children; there is a growing number of bibliographies especially prepared for special audiences—blacks, Mexican-Americans, disadvantaged youth; and publishers have responded to the need for easy-reading materials for adults with titles of adult interest written in simple vocabularies. There are even television programs and films and filmstrips developed not only for entertainment but to lead directly to books. (That's fighting fire with fire—or if you can't lick 'em, join 'em.)

Now to take a deeper, more bibliographic look—more closely related to my LC experience. In order to do a good job of selecting materials, librarians need to know as soon as possible what materials are available, then acquire and catalog them, and get them ready for circulation as quickly as possible. This requires the most efficient and effective methods of bibliographic communication which in turn requires the development and acceptance of national and international standards pertinent to librarianship and information science. Many of us don't realize the importance of national and international standards in our everyday lives, e.g., telephone, radio and television communication, the 3 by 5-inch cards in libraries. I trust you are all aware of the hard work and creative effort that your librarian from the University of North Carolina, Jerry Orne, has put into the development of national and international standards for libraries. As chairman since 1965 of the Library Standards Committee of the American National Standards Institute, he has been a

leader in the significant achievement which resulted in the adoption of the International Standard Book Number by publishers in the United States, England, France, and Germany and is spreading rapidly to other countries. As a result, most books now being published in these countries have a unique identifying number by which they can be ordered and otherwise referred to. The increasing use of computers in the ordering and supplying of books makes standard book numbering both necessary and urgent. The ISBN makes possible direct links between the computers of publishers, wholesalers, library systems, and others concerned with books. It also will make possible far-reaching changes in the ordering process and in interlibrary loan after it has some further development. Now in process of development along the same lines, but more difficult to achieve, is a system for an International Standard Serial Number so that each issue of a periodical will have a unique number to identify it, but this problem too will be licked if Jerry Orne has anything to say about it.

It is through this Committee also that the standard format for Machine Readable Cataloging, known as MARC, which was developed at the Library of Congress, has also become the national standard and is well on its way to becoming an international standard. This development has been basic to the mechanization of our Card Division and in speeding up the delivery of LC cards to libraries. Card orders are now being read, arranged in number sequence, and recorded for billing and mailing back by machine. Cards for books on which machine readable cataloging has been done can now be printed by computer on demand. When the complete system goes into operation in the near future, the card orders will go in one end and the packaged order ready for mailing will emerge from the other end, further reducing the time factor in filling orders.

The MARC standard format has also provided us with the bases for putting all

of our English-language cataloging on magnetic tape weekly and making this service available to subscribing libraries and other organizations for their use. Many of the bibliographic products you now see advertised are the result of this service. The value of these tapes was shown in two tests recently conducted by the Oklahoma State Department of Libraries. Eight thousand titles for the Tulsa City-County's book catalog project dating from November 1969 to February 1971 were searched against the MARC data base and 75% were found, 75% that did not have to be key-punched by Tulsa. The Oklahoma Department of Libraries, searching for cataloging information for 2,442 titles dating from February through July 1971, found 78% already on MARC tapes. As the MARC data base grows it will become even more useful to subscribing libraries for book catalogs and information retrieval. This library has also developed a Selective Dissemination of Information Service for key State officials under which their profiles of interest or key subject terms are run against the data base and they are automatically notified of new books of interest to them.

Another bibliographic development was begun this year which will have the result of promoting standard cataloging and making library books more quickly available to library users. Last June the Council on Library Resources, Inc., and the National Endowment for the Humanities made a grant of \$400,000 to the Library of Congress to support the Cataloging in Publication program in its developmental phase. Cataloging in Publication, an idea first broached almost 100 years ago, will provide in the published book itself those elements of cataloging requiring professional decisions, such as the main entry, a short title, bibliographical notes, the LC call number, the Dewey Decimal Classification number, the LC card number, and ISBN. Libraries throughout the country which were surveyed for their reactions to this program were enthusiastic about the possibilities not only of faster service to

their readers but also of savings in the cost of processing books, some of which could be diverted to much needed book purchases. As you know, cataloging costs can be a large item in the library budget; one university library estimates the cost of cataloging a new book at \$18 a volume, compared to the average book cost of \$10. The wholehearted cooperation of American book publishers—about 70 are already actively participating and at least 40 more will be participating next year—makes us confident that we will reach our goal of providing cataloging information which will appear in the book itself for 30,000 to 36,000 titles, or the total annual output of the American book trade, by June 1973.

Over and above the efforts the Library of Congress is making to improve and speed up the delivery of cataloging information to libraries throughout the country, it offers other services which can directly or indirectly aid the Right to Read program. In addition to its published bibliographies—such as the annual lists of references on the American Revolution, the well-selected bibliography on the Negro in the United States—it will provide bibliographic assistance to scholars when that assistance is not available in any other library and lend books from its own collections to other libraries when the books are not available from the local and State sources.

There is one particular group of citizens that we should never forget have a very important Right to Read—the blind and physically handicapped. This is one of the Library of Congress' most popular and appreciated services. But we could not hope to reach those in the United States who are prevented from reading conventional printed books if it were not for the cooperation of the 50 regional libraries for the blind and physically handicapped and the thousands of local libraries in the U. S. I am pleased to report that new technology is making it possible to speed up the printing of Braille books, to improve the per-

formance of record players for Talking Books, and to introduce tape cassettes and cassette players, especially important for the mobile young readers, in schools or on the job.

Although most of the professional jobs at LC are technical, specialized or scholarly, I am glad to say that the Library of Congress, through its Professional staff association, can also provide an example of personal dedication to the Right to Read. Hearing that the District of Columbia's Lorton Reformatory had only very inadequate library services, a group of young professionals undertook to weed the collection, augmented it with donations of books and cash collected from the staff, organized the collections, and set up a reference service. So popular and successful were their efforts that Lorton's

administration requested and obtained funds for a full-time librarian. Our volunteers are still working on further development of the library's collections.

In conclusion, I suppose my principal message to you is that it is this kind of spirit and dedication that is needed at all levels of education and librarianship if we are to achieve the goals of the Right to Read. This nation can accomplish miracles when it develops the necessary degree of dedication and harnesses the necessary resources. Within the past ten years, we have seen this nation reach the moon. The achievement of the Right to Read for all of our people within the same length of time may have even more important implications for our future development as a nation. In this achievement, we as librarians can be important participants.

FOREIGN BOOKS and PERIODICALS

CURRENT OR OUT OF PRINT

Specialties:

Search Service
International Congresses

Irregular Serials
Building Special Collections

ALBERT J. PHIEBIG INC.

Box 352, White Plains, N. Y. 10602