

Public Libraries and Film: Meeting New Demands

Richard Smith

Circulation of 16mm films in Indiana public libraries has increased annually which follows the national trend. Attendance at film showings is quite impressive. More people view LaPorte County Public Library films than attend Indiana University's home basketball games; the Pittsburgh Steelers football team draws fewer spectators to their stadium than viewers of Anderson-Stony Creek Public Library's films; it would take seven Indianapolis 500's a year to duplicate Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library's two and a half million 16mm film audience.¹

I know of no free public library film collection that has ever laid dormant. On the contrary, usage continues to put a strain on present collections, and the major problem presented to the film librarian is deciding how to meet this demand with meager collections. Supplements to the film collection are used by most librarians. Sources of free films from other public agencies and commercial sources are constantly taped; film curcuits are still used as a means of providing basic or additional service; regional and state collections are another source used to supplement the in-house collections of the public library. What film librarians see as their primary problem is funding to purchase more films.

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This funding dilemma makes film circulation unique when compared with other library materials. Thus, libraries set limits on how many films or minutes of programming can be borrowed by a patron, allow advance booking of a film within a limited time frame, lend films for one or two days, and often recommend alternate titles or dates. These restrictions in effect enlarge the collection titles available to the user. Moreover, they assure high user statistics, a strong justification for the expense of the film collection.

Evaluations of book circulation and library usage is diligently kept by librarians to justify library service and to evaluate community demand for service. Even when money is tight, librarians are proud when the library is filled and the number of books that leave the library (and hopefully return) increases. Why are not these same librarians impressed with the usage statistics of films? When a film circulates, it has an average audience of more than 20. The compact and continual rate of circulation ensures it of a short, but full, circulating life span.

Yet, film is not accepted as an informational resource by all librarians. Dierdre Boyle acknowledged this and warned,

So long as there are librarians who still view media as a peripheral to the main function of the library, the first items to be cut will be the media services and staff.²

As with books, it may be unrealistic to even attempt to fully satisfy film users' demands on the public library. Unlike books, however, interlibrary loaning of films to help alleviate some of this demand is not feasible because current collections are already under the strain of constant use by the local user. Film budgets seldom reach the ALA recommended ten to fifteen percent of the acquisition budget of a library, and the success of free film service is likely to encourage librarians not to start the library's film collection.

The fact is film usage and circulation statistics fail to assure funds to continue film service by library administrators and boards. A closer look at these statistics reveal why some librarians' enthusiasm soon dissipates for film service.

One of the most comprehensive statewide A V studies, *Mitchell/Meyers Overview of Audiovisual Resources in the State of Ohio*, totaled 43 public library 16mm film users into the following groups:

Individuals	4.8	Youth Groups	2.0
Public Teachers	61.4	Senior Groups	3.5
Private Teachers	9.4	Religious Groups	5.2
College Teachers	2.5	Civic Groups	4.2
School Students	.7	Government	1.0
College Students	1.0	Business	1.3
		Other	3.0

Teachers represent over 70% of the public library film users. Viewers of the films borrowed can be presumed to be students in either formal or informal classroom showings. The percentage of teachers using other 16mm collections were:

Area Film Libraries (schools)	99%
Television (educational)	100%
Government	54%
Multi-county Cooperatives (LSCA)	15%
Public School Districts	93%
Post Secondary	89% ³

It is this predominate use of films by teachers which makes public library film services synonymous with school service. Unless library administrators and library boards agree that this is the goal and objective of their public library, film service cannot receive the budget equivalent to circulation statistics. Usage of film service is demanded by and used by an exclusive clientele of the public library community.

That education uses film extensively should come as no surprise. Large amounts of money became available to education for film purchases from Federal funds beginning with the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 and continuing with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title II of 1965 and ESEA, Title IV - Part B. These Federal programs through the years encouraged the use of film for formal education, allowing students to benefit from all types of information materials. Equipment, materials, and human resources have been developed in all of our educational institutions to make use of a variety of nonprint materials from a transparency to computer self-instruction. Even with federal, state and local monies far exceeding the public library budgets, educators still recognize problems in providing 16mm film, stating that “. . . the demand exceeds the supply and probably will for many years to come. . .” and that:

It is true that some public libraries are receiving federal funds for films and that the Higher Education Act allows for discretionary media acquisition. But the bulk of film purchasing will continue to funnel to those film libraries that provide service to the public schools. In some areas, a very large portion of public library film circulation is to teachers who use their own personal library cards to supplement the films provided by their own district or other source.⁴

The public library's film collection is heavily used as a secondary film source for education. One important aspect of this secondary role is that most librarians do not purchase curriculum films, or films ordinarily purchased by schools. This represents one of the few excellent examples of cooperative acquisitions in the library field.

Titles of the public library collection are not typically available to teachers from their own organization. Unfortunately, the benefits of this public library acquisition policy are usually realized only by the educational system. Teachers have access to the public library's film collection while the school's film collection is restricted for educational purposes only, and the public library's film librarian does not find a demand for curriculum films by public library patrons since teachers already have access to school collections. Educational opportunities for those who work with nonprint materials is predominately school oriented.

Institutions training professional librarians have available nonprint courses for library students. However, courses designed for the school library/media specialist, for nonprint cataloging, and for children and young adult services still dominate. In a survey of 41 library school catalogs Munday and Ellison showed an increase in library schools nonprint courses, but they still argued:

A serious question immediately surfaces upon examining the above results. Each graduate library school averaged 1.53 nonprint media courses designed for library school students, while only 1.83 nonprint media courses per school remain to serve public, academic (especially community colleges), and special (especially medical) librarians combined.⁵

The emphasis for community colleges and medical librarians can be attributed to the increase in funding for and utilization of AV materials at the time. Maybe, the emphasis should be placed on the library area that is most restricted in funding—the public library.

Professional literature by those in the educational community explaining the success, failure and future improvement and usage of nonprint materials in education is prolific. Using this literature, public library film librarians must relate their services to their clientele. However, materials, concerning film use in the community are limited. Those available are comprehensive and well written. Two useful books are *The Film Users Handbook*,⁶ and *In Focus: A Guide to Using Films*.⁷ Thus, library school students would have little trouble in developing a paper on the acquisition, cataloging, programming, and developing services for the elementary, secondary or university film collection, but their imagination would be used if writing the same paper on the public library collection.

Finally, the public library film librarian, with films used to their maximum capacity and funding and staff never sufficient or guaranteed, is hard pressed already and seldom has reason to try to expand the film users in the community or to improve community awareness of film service. Expensive film purchases can be shown to cost less than books on a person per showing basis when there is a ready audience of twenty or thirty students in the school's classroom. Ronald Sigler discusses classroom usage of public library films

in "A Rationale for the Film as a Public Library Resource and Service" and remarks:

The problem of justification of film in today's age of accountability forces circulation figures, per capita use, more showings, and larger audience requirements, and it is all too easy for public libraries to use the classroom as the quickest way to statistical success.⁸

Yet, increased circulation statistics are no guarantee in maintaining or keeping film budgets from being reduced.

What can guarantee adequate support of film budgets? Successful school library/media programs have developed financial stability, not by providing an additional or special service, but by making the library/media program recognized as essential to the educational development of the student. Elsie Brumback, Director of Educational Media in North Carolina, emphasized this in her presentation, "P.R. or You're Only as Good as They Think You Are," at the spring AIME Conference. The North Carolina program is successful not only in funding; its philosophy of media in education is accepted by administrators who would cut the football budget before the library/media budget.

In the public library film service must be viewed as an essential resource for the community. Service must be broadened to reach a greater number of the public, and public awareness of film as a valuable educational, informational, and recreational resource must be set as a goal for the public library. The film librarian must find a tangible way to communicate the success of the film service in meeting community needs to the library administrators and boards who make budget allocations. Statistics of film audiences should be only part of film justification.

Will the public accept film as a viable media to meet their needs? Education has provided the leadership needed in establishing film and other nonprint materials as valuable resources in the education process. ESEA Title II of 1965 was a vital funding source in making this possible. Now, after sixteen years, our educational institutions are graduating students who will continue as life-long independent learners. Will they demand continued access to nonprint materials to meet their informational needs? The adult learner, exposed to film in elementary, secondary, and post secondary education, is currently left in an audio visual void, that neither broadcast television nor cinema promises to fulfill. Cable television, with the potential to meet this need, will not unless it is financially profitable. Videocassette, videodisc, 8mm film, home computers, and other AV formats are available for those that can afford them. The public library has a responsibility to provide access to these materials.

The preceding issue of *Indiana Libraries* centered on community analysis. Dr. Kim's article stressed the importance of providing a community profile of both users and non-users of the public library. The film librarian must be involved in this process—especially in the analysis of the non-user. Adults are already using AV materials outside of the public library. Many businesses, professions, and organizations in the community make use of AV and house film collections. Police departments conduct programs using crime prevention films; the medical profession has used AV materials to meet general and specific needs; businesses now equal education in AV spending for employee training. These programs are not available to the public. At staff meetings, workshops, or conferences, adults are being exposed to film and other nonprint materials in conjunction with their occupation. AV is being used in many communities, but the public library's collection is not the access point for this use.

Public libraries need to change their traditional film policies to provide for both the change in patronage and technology. Changes should occur in the three general classifications of film types as described by Euclid Peltier.⁹

The teaching or classroom film is the type of film which most public library collections neglect with the current practice of not buying film designed for curriculum use unless funds have been specifically budgeted for this service. Although Peltier says they have no place in most public libraries it must be argued that this type of film can be useful to the adult learner. If the library supplies the community with curriculum information in print, the nonprint could supplement the library collection. This is particularly true for special adult programs in the community such as grammar courses which support illiteracy projects, budgeting courses for the economically depressed community, art courses, car mechanics, and a variety of adult programs.

In this area the public library can make use of the educational systems materials or human resources which help provide learning to the community. Funding could be supplemented by groups or businesses who would profit by a central collection of special materials. Videotape would be more appropriate for individual usage and is slightly cheaper than film. These materials will never be used as frequently by as many patrons as traditional public library films, but the information provided can offset the statistical failure.

Peltier's second film classification is the informational or idea film. A standard in the public library, this type of film most reflects the community concerns, and the public library is the only public access point for many of the independent and non-theatrical films. The selection of this type of film is the hardest and most rewarding

for the film librarian. It is possible for public libraries to build in-depth film collections on certain subjects particularly suited for the community, and to provide interlibrary loan of these materials to other cooperating libraries with special collections.

The entertainment or recreational film is the third and most frequently used film type found in the public library collection. Experimental film techniques, animation, and the classic Charley Chaplin make the variety unlimited. The home video market has reduced the cost of many feature films. Libraries are not providing video features to the home user.

It appears that the entertainment film will continue to be available from the public library, but that expensive 16mm entertainment features could soon be restricted to rentals for library and community group programs. If in the future film service shifts from educational use to community use, library administrators will recognize this service as instrumental in meeting the public library's goals. Once a community becomes well aware of the value of nonprint materials, it will demand continued service from both educational and public library systems and film service will take on a new dimension.

Notes

1. *Statistics of Indiana Libraries 1978*. Indiana State Library. Attendance at sports events are based upon capacity seating.
2. Boyle, Deirdre. "In the Beginning Was the Word. . .Libraries and Media," *Expanding Media*. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1977, 8.
3. Mitchell, John W. and Judith K. Meyers. *Overview of Audiovisual Resources in the State of Ohio*. Columbus, OH: The State Library of Ohio, 1977, tables 49 and 52.
4. Owens, Calvin L. "Can You Get Films When You Need Them," *Audiovisual Instruction*, September 1978, 3-9.
5. Munday, Karen S. and John W. Ellison. "A Systematic Examination and Analysis of Non-Print Media Courses in Library Schools," *Expanding Media*. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1977, 294.
6. Rehrauer, George. *The Film Users Handbook*. New York: Bowker, 1975.
7. Blackaby, Linda, Dan Georgakas, and Barbara Margolis. *In Focus: A Guide to Using Films*. New York: Cine Information, 1980.
8. Sigler, Ronald F. "A Rationale for Film Service as a Public Library Resource and Service," *Library Trends*, summer 1978, 19.
9. Peltier, Euclid. "The Public Library Film Redefined," *Library Trends*, summer 1978, 34-35.