

A Survey of Cooperation and Communication Between Public and School Librarians in Indiana and Beyond

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Over the past twenty years, most secondary school library media centers have developed services and collections with little attention to resources which might be borrowed from other local collections. "Our collection serves the needs of our teachers and our students, and items must be available immediately upon demand," is the usual reasoning. In many cases there are items which need to be available on immediate call. Planning for acquisition of other materials which might meet a common need but which could be borrowed from another school or from the public library takes time, creativity, compromise, and agreements negotiated over several meetings.

Individuals who make budgeting and staffing decisions for public libraries have observed the growth in secondary school library media services. Pressed to meet the information needs of as wide a clientele as possible, many public library directors have supported reduced attention for the young adults and greater attention for such patron groups as preschoolers, the business community, and the elderly. The result in many

communities has been the elimination of young adult librarian as a professional staff position and the reduction of investment in materials which support the standard secondary school curriculum. "The local schools have libraries with collections to meet the needs of these students, and there is no need to duplicate efforts," is a common response from public library directors.

The need for greater cooperative efforts may become essential as secondary school library media programs face the following¹:

- stagnant or declining budgets for materials;
- Continued increase in the cost of most print materials with many types of books and periodicals increasing by over 100% in cost over the past 15 years;
- increased budgeting specifically for technology which will allow use of computerized databases for periodical or newspaper indexes and community linked library catalogs;
- awareness on the part of student and teacher patrons of more materials available beyond the local

school's collection because of searches conducted on computerized information systems which will produce greater demand to borrow materials from other libraries;

- more assignments requiring the use of a wide variety of sources necessitating access to materials not contained in the local school library.

Public librarians have always complained about the lack of communication from teachers and school librarians concerning assignments which bring hordes of students or their parents into the public library over a busy weekend in order to complete the assignment by Monday morning. "Assignment Alert" is a communication process more and more public libraries have established with local school districts. In a few cases, because of growing demand, the position of young adult librarian has been reestablished on the public library staff.

With information demands for teenagers growing, and with the increased emphasis on networking and interlibrary loan, it is time to take some measurement of the cooperative activities currently under way and to determine if the communication channels are open between the public library and the secondary schools.

1986 Indiana Telephone Survey

In May 1986 a survey was conducted by Daniel Callison, Assistant Professor at the School of Library and Information Science, Indiana University and Judy Fink who served as the research assistant for the project. Funding for the survey was underwritten, in part, by the Committee on Research Development of SLIS.

47 public libraries in Indiana were identified as meeting the following common characteristics:

- one central public library facility,

with no branches, serving a community base of 10,000 to 35,000;

- the community had no more than one senior high school;
- the community had no more than three junior high or middle schools.

The average population base served was 22,651 based on information from Bowker's *American Library Directory*. Three of the public libraries reported a full-time young adult librarian on the staff. The average population base for three public libraries was 26,686. Twenty of the public libraries reported a full-time or part-time children's librarian on the staff, and the average population base served by these libraries was 23,725. The remaining public libraries in the surveyed population which did not have a specific professional position for either children or young adults served an average population base of 17,542. No comparisons were made among any of these groups since 1) only three reported specific professional position relative to the school age patron in question (young adults age 12 to 18), and 2) the population base did not vary significantly.

Such a population base was selected because it was assumed that in larger metropolitan areas it would be less likely that school and public librarians would know each other or would be investing time in cooperative programs, and it would be difficult to contact all of the possible secondary schools within a metropolitan public library service area. Public libraries serving a population base under 10,000 were assumed not to have adequate professional staff to deal with the public schools, and, in most cases, the secondary school would be a consolidated district which would be located several miles from the public library. While a future study would be useful in compiling data to make comparisons among various sizes of

communities and public libraries and the degree of cooperation with the local schools, this medium-size population base was selected as the only group to be surveyed.

In early May, a telephone call was placed to each of the 47 Indiana public libraries selected. In each case, a call was placed until contact was made with the "professional librarian who has responsibility for services to secondary school student patrons." In many cases this responsibility seemed to fall to the "children's or young adult librarian" (27%), but the majority of those who responded to the calls were directors (56%), with the remaining responders being "reference librarians." All responders were in professional positions; none were from the clerical ranks.

There was a dual purpose in the telephone contact. First, the phone call allowed us to identify a specific individual who would eventually receive a copy of a written survey and, we assumed, such personal contact would increase the number of responders to the written survey. Second, we needed specific names of the local school librarians as well as specific phone numbers since the school libraries are not given in the *American Libraries Directory*. Thus, of each of the 47 public librarians contacted, we asked, "Please name a professional librarian at the local senior high school, and please name a professional librarian at one of the local junior high schools."

- 83% of the public librarians could not name all of the local secondary school librarians.
- 34% of the public librarians could not name a professional librarian at the local senior high school
- 57% of the public librarians could not name a professional librarian at any of the local junior high schools.

Through each public librarian we

were able to obtain telephone numbers for the local senior high schools and junior high schools. Telephone contact was made with 47 senior high school librarians and with 95 junior high school librarians. In each case, we asked if they would be interested in responding to a mail survey on school library and public library cooperation. Each school librarian was asked to confirm his/her local address, and to "identify any professional librarian at the local public library who would have responsibility for working with students from your school."

- 28% of the senior high school librarians could not name a single professional librarian on the local public library staff;
- 46% of the junior high school librarians could not name a single professional librarian on the local library staff.

1986 Indiana Mail Survey

Questionnaires were sent to each of the 47 public libraries identified through the *American Library Directory* and contacted over the phone. 98% of the public libraries responded to the survey. 147 secondary schools were sent questionnaires and 71% of the librarians responded.

There seems to have been no dramatic change in school and public library cooperation in Indiana since 1972 when Blanche Woolls' surveyed librarians in the state in completion of her dissertation at Indiana University.² She found that there was a great lack of communication between the two institutions. No long-range planning for cooperative programs or cooperative collection building existed then; and such planning does not seem to exist today in the medium-sized library communities surveyed.

The 1986 survey reflected a low level of cooperative activity in that

both the public librarian and the school librarian simply reacted to the immediate requests or demands of the other without an attempt to determine how cooperation could be improved in the future. There seemed to be a great lack of understanding or a void of ideas as to what cooperation could exist at higher levels of information service. For example:

- 37% of the secondary school librarians who responded indicated that there had been NO cooperative activities of ANY KIND over the previous year with the local public library. 52% of those secondary schools reporting no contact were also not members of their Area Library Service Authority group. 63% of the secondary schools who reported some form of contact or cooperation were members of their local ALSA.
- The most frequently listed examples of cooperation which occurred during the previous year had nothing to do with collection planning or program planning, but with services one would expect to happen in any community on a regular basis:
- 13% of the secondary school librarians reported that they exchanged book lists with the public library;
- 11% of the secondary school librarians reported that they returned books belonging to the public library which had been returned by students to the schools by mistake;
- 11% of the secondary school librarians reported that they called the local library get an answer to a reference question.

79% of the responding secondary school librarians and 65% of the responding public librarians reported no contact between the two institutions over the previous year for the purpose of "planning joint programming." 71% of the responding secondary school librarians and 73% of the

responding public librarians indicated there had been no contact concerning discussion of materials which could be purchased specifically for use by young adults (age 12 to 18) in the community.

The 1986 survey did produce some evidence that there is a desire for more communication between the public librarians and the secondary school librarians. 90% of the responding public librarians agreed that there is a "need to increase cooperation with school librarians," and 71% of the responding secondary school librarians agreed that there is a "need to increase cooperation with the local public library."

74% of the public librarians agreed that "regular monthly meetings between the school librarian and the public librarian" are desirable and they would attend such meetings. 54% of the school librarians agreed that they would attend such meetings. The most common reasons given by both public and school librarians for the lack or nonexistence of such meetings included, "not enough time," "no precedent," "lack of ideas as to what to discuss." Many school librarians indicated that their principals do not encourage such cooperation, or "I can't get away from school to meet with the public librarian." Several other librarians, both from the public and school institutions, indicated the main barrier to be a lack of ideas as to services and programs in which cooperation could take place. Over a third of the responding librarians gave no indication of being able to describe what some possibilities might be in cooperative activities.

A majority of both groups, secondary school librarians and public librarians, when asked, "If there is one thing that would encourage more cooperation between secondary school libraries and the public library" had

no response, or simply, "I don't know of anything." One suggestion which received the most attention from both groups was cooperation concerning "homework or assignment alerts."

A question which challenged the librarians to indicate how important cooperation is to the quality of their performance on the job did not receive strong support. Only 46% of the public librarians agreed that "contact and involvement with the local school libraries should be a primary objective to be judged on my annual job evaluation." Only 35% of the secondary school librarians indicated that they were ready to list cooperation with the public library as one area for evaluation in their annual performance review.

Generally, the cooperative initiatives seemed to come from the public librarian toward the school librarian or toward the public school and its teachers. Seldom was there evidence that the school librarian initiated cooperative activities. The secondary school population which seemed to be the least responsive to cooperative efforts was the junior high school. Lost between the reading programs developed for elementary school students and response to term paper assignments for senior high school students, early teenage students are often ignored by public librarians. Few examples, if any, seem to be present in Indiana in which the junior high school librarian is taking any action to see that students are given the opportunity to capitalize on the services of the local public library.

It appeared from this 1986 survey that few public librarians and secondary school librarians had given thought or action to pursuing cooperative collection development. The concept seemed alien to them, almost something that would cause more problems than either party wanted to

deal with even if such cooperative planning might open up greater access to information for teenagers.

What does it take to stimulate discussion, planning and eventually cooperation between school and public libraries in collection development? Billman and Owens³ have suggested three elements:

- There must be a mutual attitude of trust and cooperation, a willingness to abandon turf and a library's stand-alone status. At the same time, cooperative collection development should be approached in a manner that does not threaten the need for or support for the individual library or media center.
- There must be a willingness to think more globally and long term about library services. This necessitates plans for greater communication with participating institutions and library staff development.
- There must be a willingness and ability to share the information and to lend materials through interlibrary loan [materials must be loaned from the schools to the public, not just from the public library to the schools].

Results from the 1986 survey of Indiana medium-sized public libraries and their associated secondary schools indicated that:

- 71% of the responding public librarians and 67% of the responding secondary school librarians DISAGREED with the statement, "The public library and the public schools should develop a joint collection policy."
- 75% of the responding public librarians and 67% of the responding secondary school librarians DISAGREED with the statement, "The public library and the public schools should cooperate on acquisition and processing of materials."

- 68% of the responding public librarians and 76% of the responding secondary school librarians DISAGREED that "the public school should employ one public librarian to work during half of the school day in the secondary school libraries."
- 68% of the responding public librarians and 60% of the responding secondary school librarians DISAGREED that, "at least one of the local secondary school librarians should be employed to work two evenings per week and/or several hours on the week-end at the public library."

Matching Collection Demands

Both secondary school librarians and public librarians were requested to judge 26 subject areas as to the general demand for materials placed on that area by local students from the secondary schools in use of the public library. There was a slight difference in the topic areas which were most frequently identified as in "high demand" by the public librarian group compared to the school librarians group. See Table 1.

Lists reflect top seven subject areas from 26 given to identify as "high demand," "limited demand," or "no demand" by students on public library

collection in May 1986.

It might be a fair conclusion to say that although there is a great deal of agreement, school librarians are predicting that there is, or should be, a high demand on public library materials dealing with "teen sexual relations," and "computers," although most public librarians didn't rate these two areas in high demand. School librarians did not identify "careers" and "U.S. History" as two areas which seem to place a great deal of demand on public library collections.

Such comparisons are rather general and reflect the opinions of two groups contrasted for purposes of giving a summary to a few areas of difference. More enlightening is a comparison of opinion of the public librarian and school librarian who represent the same community. In addition to the topics given in Table 1., each survey respondent was expected to indicate the degree of demand for such subject areas as "folk stories," "poetry," "crime," "wildlife," "supernatural," "crafts & hobbies," and others. twenty-six subject areas were to be judged as "high demand," "limited demand," "no demand," or "I don't know."

Direct comparison of the public librarians' responses to the local

Table 1.

**High Demand Subject Areas for Public Library
Materials from Indiana Secondary School Students**

Public Librarians:

1. Drug Abuse
2. Fiction
3. Child Abuse
4. Careers
5. U.S. History
6. Sports
7. Biography

Secondary School Librarians:

1. Drug Abuse
2. Teen Sexual Relations
3. Fiction
4. Child Abuse
5. Biography
6. Computers
7. Sports

school librarians' predictions produced the following results:

- In 80% of the comparisons, the public librarian and the school librarian described a different degree of demand on 50% or more of the subjects given.
- In 60% of the comparisons, the public librarian and the school librarian selected a different degree of demand on 75% or more of the subjects given.

In other words, in more than half of the comparisons, the school librarian failed to match the public librarian's judgment as to the degree of demand on the public library's collection made by young adults. The results should not be used to state that the school librarian simply does not know the demand on the local public library's collection (although 36% of the school librarian predictions on the demand were simply "I don't know"). What should be concluded here is a confirmation of what both public librarians and school librarians from this sample in Indiana stated throughout the telephone and mail survey, "We don't know each other, and we don't know each other's collections." It seems that there is an agenda for discussion once these parties decide to "take time to talk."

1987 National Center for Education Statistics Survey

A summary of data gathered from the 1987 national survey of "Services and Resources for Young Adults in Public Libraries,"⁴ will emphasize some additional facts which should be considered as school librarians and public librarians begin to plan together. This survey involved a national sample of 846 public libraries in the fall of 1987

- One out of every four public library patrons in 1986-87 was a young

adult (between the ages of 12 and 18).

- Only 11% of the Nation's public libraries have the services of a young adult librarian.
- 84% of libraries offer a section or collection of materials specially designated for young adults. In 74% of these libraries, the young adult section or collection was moderately or heavily used.
- Libraries that employ a young adult librarian were more likely to report moderate or heavy use of library services by young adults, including:
 - use of the library after school, evenings, and on weekends;
 - use of the reference, adult circulation, and children's sections of the library;
 - use of most library services including readers advisory services for both school and independent needs, study space, and college and career information.
- The young adult collection in libraries with a professional young adult librarian is 48% on average; the average young adult collection in libraries without a young adult librarian is 38% paperback.
- Proportionately more libraries with a young adult librarian reported moderate or heavy use of the following sections of the library compared with libraries without a young adult librarian:
 - adult reference (89% vs. 73%);
 - adult circulation (78% vs. 66%);
 - children's circulation (54% vs. 36%).
- On average, libraries cooperated with about half of the schools in their service areas during 1986-87. Cooperative activities with schools enrolling 12- to 18-year-olds included hosting class visits to the library, visits to classes for booktalks or other activities to promote reading, and meetings with school staff to promote reading

or library usage. Libraries hosted an average of 6 class visits to the library for 12- to 18-year-olds, presented booktalks in schools about 3 times, and met with school staff an average of 2 times during the last 12 months.

1989 National Telephone Survey

Three years following the Indiana telephone survey involving medium-sized public libraries and their area public schools, a second telephone survey was funded by the Research Development Committee of the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University. The 1989 survey attempted to determine the amount of basic communication between public librarians and school librarians and to determine what items would be of most importance to each group if future planning takes place. This survey was designed by Daniel Callison, Assistant Professor at SLIS, and administered by Greg Hager, graduate research assistant at the School.

A sample of 147 public libraries were selected to represent medium-size libraries in the Nation. Each state was represented in the sample in proportion to the state's representation in Congress. Each state had at least one representative library with the more populous states being represented by one additional public library for every three U.S. Representatives that state had in Congress for 1989. Larger states (California had 15, New York 11, and Texas 9) therefore received their "fair share" of representation in the sample.

Once each state's allocation of public libraries was determined, the *American Library Directory* was used to determine which public libraries served determined which city or cities would represent that state. A total of 145 public libraries were finally contacted. From this group, 7 either

did not respond or it was determined through the initial contact that the library was not truly an independent public library system. Seven new public libraries were selected to replace the original sites. In each case the replacement was simply the next public library listed in *American Library Directory* which served a population base of 10,000 to 35,000.

Within this sample, 12 public libraries were on record as employing a full-time young adult librarian. These libraries had an average service population base of 20,965. The average service population base of those libraries which listed a children's librarian was 20,760. The average service population base of those libraries without either a young adult or children's librarian was 16,832.

Results of the mail survey will not be available until 1990. However, results from the telephone contacts have generated the following results (which are interesting to compare to similar Indiana findings three years earlier):

- 59% of the public librarians nationally reported that they had NOT met with a local secondary school librarian during the past year concerning cooperative activities. 25% of the 12 public libraries with full-time young adult librarians reported no such contact.
- The most common topics given for discussion at such meetings from the 41% who reported that contact had taken place over the previous year were "assignment alert," "automation," "resource sharing," "collection development."
- The most common reason given for the 59% who reported no contact or meeting over the past year with secondary school librarians were "lack of time," "lack of interest," "I have given up trying to contact

- them.”
- 57% of the answering public librarians indicated that “assignment alerts” would be the topic of discussion if a meeting was to be held soon with secondary school librarians. 26% would put “collection development” on the agenda.
 - 37% of the answering public librarians could NOT name a local senior high school librarian. This dropped to 25% in the group which employed a full-time young adult librarian. Three years earlier, 34% of the Indiana public Librarians could not name a local senior high school librarian.
 - 29% of the answering senior high school librarians were not able to name a professional librarian at the local public library (compared to 28% in Indiana in 1986).
 - 46% of the answering public librarians could NOT name a local junior high school librarian. This dropped to 17% in the group which employed a full-time young adult librarian. Three years earlier, 57% of the Indiana public librarians could not name a local junior high school librarian.
 - 39% of the answering junior high school librarians were not able to name a professional librarian at the local public library (compared to 46% in Indiana in 1986).

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