



## Plans and Equipment for School Libraries

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THE SCHOOL LIBRARY has been a significant factor in the development of the modern school program. Years back, the recognition that the use of many materials enhances the educational growth of small children as well as that of mature students caused educators to examine and evaluate the place of the library in the over-all planning for schools. Provision for the housing and utilization of library materials became a necessary consideration. Interestingly enough, this trend in the recognition of the importance of library facilities has grown from the top down, although other major innovations in the public school program have more frequently originated in the elementary than in the high school. The school library, however, is largely a product of the twentieth century and has in reality come into its own since 1920, if an examination of library literature and of school building literature may serve as measuring gauges.

Obviously the function which the library has in the school program has influenced its location and its physical planning. The fact that many architects and some school administrators have not fully understood the possible uses to which the library space should be put has sometimes resulted in inadequate and unsuitable quarters. The unprecedented building program for schools now under way has brought these inadequacies to the fore and has led to many improvements in the design for school libraries. Perhaps a summary of the changing functions of the library and the librarian is pertinent to the discussion.

Among the vocal pioneers of school libraries were Martha Wilson and Lucile Fargo. Wilson<sup>1</sup> in *School Library Management* calls attention to the need for providing: (1) rooms of adequate size, conveniently located, (2) good light, (3) open wall shelving, and (4) floor covering. She interprets each recommendation and describes a very

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formal room with rows of tables at which readers will be seated. Fargo,<sup>2</sup> long recognized as a mentor in school library matters, carried the idea further by interpreting the functions more fully: "to provide adequate and convenient housing for books and other graphic materials valuable in carrying out the educational and leisure-time program of the school, to provide for comfort and convenience of individual readers while using library materials, to provide reasonable opportunities for group work involving the use of library materials, to furnish facilities for the necessary technical work of the library staff and for housing records."

This statement is modified in the fourth edition of her *The Library in the School*,<sup>3</sup> in line with the rapidly accepted concept of the library as an integral factor in educational opportunity. The shift in viewpoint, from the statement of functions in terms of the library to the statement in terms of the user, has been well phrased by Jessie Boyd. She points up the following five needs which elementary and secondary school children have for a school library in even the smallest schools:

1. Access to reference materials which will help them with their immediate curricular needs or problems . . .
2. Opportunity to read books of their own selection for pleasure and pure enjoyment . . .
3. A chance to become an independent investigator with all the satisfactions attached to mastery of library skills . . .
4. The right to expect reading guidance and stimulation and help with critical evaluation of many materials . . .
5. The opportunity to find materials which will help them in their daily relations with friends, in their home and family life, and in shaping their vocational future.<sup>4</sup>

The growing concept of the expanded use of the library both within and without the confines of its physical walls adds to its functions and affects the total picture. The Subcommittee on Library Service to Schools of the Illinois Library Association Planning Board expresses this change in terms of the expected activities of the librarian as follows:

First, . . . a major function of the librarian is to stimulate requests for service.

Second, the library is expanding its range of materials, and this expansion may be expected to continue.

Third, the librarian is assuming an increasingly important role in

the school—as a teacher of students and as a coordinator and helper of teachers.

To these three activities should be added consideration of certain aspects of the organization of the school and of the principle of flexibility, for, in the future, schools may be expected to change their demands upon the library even more rapidly than in the past.<sup>5</sup>

To carry out the library program indicated as desirable requires properly designed space. Librarians have been especially articulate in specifying areas which should be included in the plans and in indicating location, size, and other special considerations. Many architects are aware of these needs and are sympathetic toward them, as is obvious in many of the school-building plans appearing at the present. Complete unawareness on the part of both architects and school administrators is equally apparent in other plans, and it is to be deplored that many new buildings for elementary schools have omitted quarters for libraries entirely or have assigned space woefully insufficient to seat a class-group of pupils or to house a minimal collection of materials.<sup>6</sup> However, the trend apparently is to provide some library quarters; and indeed in some school systems,<sup>7</sup> they have been adequately included by renovations in old buildings and by inclusion in new buildings.

The basic requirements for library quarters are a reading room, workroom, and storage space. This minimum would not meet needs beyond the very small school with limited library-trained personnel service. Large progressive high schools include reading rooms, book stack space, conference rooms, a workroom, librarians' offices, a library classroom, storage sections, provision for housing audio-visual materials and equipment, a screening room for projected materials, and facilities for listening. No doubt similar space allocation will soon begin to appear in large elementary schools.

In general, the early recommendations of twenty-five square feet per reader in the general library room continue to be standard and would appear to be adequate. The over-all size of the room is dependent on the enrollment in the school and the services to be offered. When library rooms have been included in elementary schools as shown in plans in recent issues of *Nation's Schools*,<sup>8</sup> they have tended to be of a size to seat a full class, but, with limited exception, have not provided for larger groups. In junior and senior high schools, on the other hand, the library reading room has tended to be more spacious

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in the average-size school. In the very large high schools space per reader seems enough, but the percentage of the student body which can be accommodated in the library at any one time appears low. In the modern high school curriculum, organized with a minimum of study-hall groups, there would appear to be a need for better provision for class-group work in the library under teacher supervision. This writer would raise a question as to whether sufficient reading room and auxiliary space for such work is being provided.

The location of the library is of as great concern as is its size. Architects, administrators, and librarians alike agree that it is best placed in the area of maximum accessibility and as centrally among the academic classrooms as possible. It has been further recommended that the library be located to allow expansion. This suggestion cannot be emphasized too strongly. Obviously the need for expansion stems from one of three causes—either the library quarters were not planned and made sufficiently large to start with, or the school has grown beyond any anticipated increase, or the program of the school has changed so completely that different physical facilities are needed. In any case, the location of the library will have direct bearing on the possibility of keeping it large enough for the needs of the school. This factor does not appear to have received the consideration which it merits in the over-all planning of school buildings.

While the reading room is the major part of the school library, auxiliary rooms have direct bearing on the effectiveness of the service which can be given in the main room. Until recent years, details of the workroom were given scant attention in the literature relating to libraries. The importance of this area becomes quite apparent when the activities carried on there are enumerated. Probably of first consideration is the processing for use of books and other materials. There must be provision for housing accessions before they are ready for circulation; worn materials must be put away till they can be mended; supplies as well as publicity and display materials must be stored. As may be expected when there is much use of paste, ink, paints, and shellac, a place for washing hands and tools must be provided. A well-planned and equipped workroom is as essential to the well-run library as a well-planned kitchen is in the modern house.<sup>7</sup>

Storage of back issues of magazines so that they are readily accessible is essential if the magazines are to be used for reference purposes. Space for housing these magazines, the majority of which are unbound, will determine how effectively they can be utilized by the pupils and

teachers. Little-used books are also frequently housed outside the main reading room.

Conference rooms serve a much needed purpose by providing opportunity for class-committees to work unhampered without disturbing others, but under supervision. They are used also for teacher-pupil groups, for parent-teacher conferences, for teacher study committees, and for various pupil needs. Conversations with librarians indicate a growing awareness of the possibilities in the use of conference rooms and the firm belief that they are increasingly desirable.

It was not until the middle thirties that much attention was given to the school library as a probable center for housing audio-visual materials and as a place for screening or listening. It now appears that the audio-visual function of the school library is established, and building plans frequently show audio-visual rooms adjacent to the reading rooms. One of the more elaborate layouts for a junior-senior high school library, which includes a screening room and listening booths, is that prepared by Margaret Rufsvold and Paul Seagers of Indiana University.<sup>9</sup> This plan may set a pattern for design in library quarters.

Perhaps the most popular innovation in school library arrangement, especially among pupils, is the use of informal furniture in certain sections of the room. This has commonly been referred to as "the browsing area," but it is perhaps more fittingly described as an informal reading area. The pupils who sit there are under no necessity of taking notes, and they find comfortable chairs more conducive to reading enjoyment than straight chairs and a table. The use of window seats and of upholstered seats around posts are illustrative of the same idea.

The trend away from the all-over-brown battleship linoleum floor covering of the twenties toward the attractive lighter colored tiles of today—rubber, plastic, cork, asphalt—is very gratifying. Along with sound-resistant floor covering has come also the use of acoustical ceiling materials, both of which contribute materially to the atmosphere of the room. The use of color and of decorative features, such as draperies, also helps to develop an inviting and harmonious room.

Especial consideration is being given to illumination, to assure adequate foot-candles without glare or unnecessary reflection. The use of fluorescent lighting has been on the increase, but the concentric ring incandescent fixture is also popular.

The general layout of the reading room is receiving considerable attention, to the end that it achieves a harmonious and functional ap-

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pearance. Variety in furnishings and informality in arrangement is to be noted in the majority of sketches and photographs of the modern school library. Especial notice is taken of the provisions for displays. Large recessed bulletin boards are replacing small narrow strips. Glass cases, sometimes facing both into the library and into the corridor,<sup>7</sup> serve an excellent purpose in calling attention to specific materials. The whole arrangement is toward an attractive and inviting environment and away from the former stilted plan.

A library furniture company recently carried an advertisement picturing an old roll-top desk along with its sleek, clean-lined, "soft-tone" light-oak library equipment. The caption read "From this . . . to this in half a century." No better description could be given of the apparent trend in school library furnishings. While some schools continue to use dark oak or mahogany equipment, the majority of those pictured in library and educational literature are using light finish and more streamlined design. No doubt this preference will continue, since studies of light reflection indicate that light-colored, dull surfaces are most satisfactory in preventing eyestrain.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of simply two or more rows of large rectangular tables, school libraries often now contain some of this sort, some round, and some individual-study tables. The size and shape of the room determine the arrangement. Height varies with the ages of the groups to be served, as it should. In the elementary school twenty-six inch and twenty-eight inch tables seem to be most popular. In many of the elementary school libraries (e.g., Raleigh, N.C.), moreover, chairs of three heights are procured, i.e., fourteen inch, fifteen inch, and seventeen inch. The lower chairs are in addition to the number needed for the tables, and are used by the primary-grade pupils who come to the library for story hours or to browse. The chairs of the two lower heights usually accommodate a full class-group. All chairs are designed for the comfort and posture of the user. Tubular furniture has been used, but only to a limited extent. Both elementary and high schools show interest in providing some informal furniture.

Special pieces of equipment, such as charging desks, catalog cases, and atlas stands, show only moderate functional changes—which speaks well for their original planning. They have, however, been redesigned to achieve sleekness and modernity. Photographs indicate a growing tendency to place unabridged dictionaries on revolving table stands, so that they can be used readily by seated readers.

Shelving is definitely being planned for the use it will serve, and it

appears that in many schools, under present practice, it is being installed by the contractor who is erecting or renovating the building. This is not to say that library furniture dealers are not also installing shelving in many school libraries. Innovations which should receive specific comment are the sloping bottom shelf, for greater readability; the special shelving for easy books and oversized books, with slender partitions at six-inch to nine-inch intervals; and the "slyd-in-shelves," which make it possible to house oversized books or phonograph records anywhere in adjustable shelving, with resultant flexibility of arrangement. It would appear that there is growing use of magazine shelving as opposed to the old separate magazine rack. The height of all shelving varies with the ages of the groups to be served, with the wise precaution that the user should be able to reach books on the top shelf.

An examination of the statements of standards in planning and equipping the school library issued over a period of thirty-five years shows remarkable stability in the quantitative or measurable recommendations. A similar examination of photographs of school libraries, however, reveals remarkable variance in the interpretations of these standards. The chief changes seem to be toward functionalism and informality in arrangement, and toward increase in the number of schools—elementary, twelve-grade, junior high, and senior high schools—which provide planned libraries and library services.

Throughout the period named school librarians have joined with educational organizations, with school administrators and architects, with library equipment manufacturers and dealers, and with contractors to achieve more useful and more attractive school libraries. The work in this field may be summarized as follows: (1) There has been an upsurge in the improvement of school library facilities in the last half century. (2) Especially significant is the attention being given to the elementary school library. (3) The program of the school and the vision of the administrator determine to a large degree the library quarters provided. (4) The library quarters, whether in new buildings or resulting from renovations in old buildings, are projected in terms of usefulness and attractiveness. (5) The need for reading rooms, workroom, storage, conference rooms, office, and library classroom is receiving general acceptance in the more far-sighted schools. Provision for housing and using audio-visual materials and equipment as a part of the library plan is assuming importance. (6) The fundamentals of sound library planning apply to all types of schools—ele-

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mentary, twelve-grade, junior high, and senior high schools. (7) Informality rather than rigidity is in evidence in the layout of all types of school libraries. (8) The use of color in decoration and the use of light furniture has improved the "eye-rest" factor. (9) Continued adaptation of shelving and furniture to the needs of the group served is providing more functional equipment. (10) Attention is being given at the national, state, and local levels to the desirability of printed standards to serve as guides in new construction, as well as in renovation, of library facilities.

The modern school library has an unusual attractiveness. Perhaps this lies in its simplicity. Perhaps it is in the colors used, enhanced by effective window treatment. Perhaps it is attributable to the beautiful lines of the furniture and the grain of the wood. Perhaps it derives from the general informality, combined with functional design. Whatever it is, children and adults alike more and more find the library a haven replete with dignity and charm.

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