

School Library/Media Supervision in State Agencies

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PUBLIC EDUCATION IN OUR democracy has been aptly described by Thomas Jefferson as "the most legitimate engine of government."¹ The responsibility for developing education policies and standards, offering consultation and research services, accrediting institutions, certifying qualified personnel, and providing other services designed to establish or improve the educational system has been, by tradition, assigned to state departments of education or public instruction.² As recently as 1975, this statement appeared in the publication *Media Programs: District and School*: "The state is legally responsible for establishing and maintaining a system of education and the education agency prescribed by its legislature to provide leadership in the area of media programs."³

As state libraries were founded, some were organized as components of education departments, while others were separate units. School library supervision, from its inception in Wisconsin in 1891,⁴ has been assigned sometimes to the curriculum area of education departments and sometimes to the state library agency. School library supervisors were appointed in New York in 1904, in Washington in 1909, and in Minnesota in 1911.⁵ The need for good school libraries was underscored in 1915 by Henry Johnson, professor of history at Columbia University:

While the textbook is in the United States the chief instrument of school instruction . . . a conviction has developed, especially during the last twenty years, that the textbook should be supplemented by collateral reading. The need of reference books was strongly empha-

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sized by the Madison Conference [1892] "Recitations alone," it was declared, "cannot possibly make up proper teaching. . . . It is absolutely necessary, from the earliest to the last grades, that there should be parallel reading of some kind."⁶

Almost a century earlier, Horace Mann had warned: "Pupils, who, in their reading, pass by names, references, allusions, without searching, *at the time*, for the facts they imply, not only forego valuable information, which they may never afterwards acquire, but they contract a habit of being contented with ignorance."⁷

State supervision of school library programs grew slowly in the 1920s and early 1930s. In the South it was encouraged and supported by the General Education Board (GEB) of the Rockefeller Foundation. Funds from this board, because of its concern for improving education for blacks and southerners, helped to provide salaries for persons in these library supervision positions. This was begun in Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky, and was then extended to Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee.⁸ The GEB also assisted persons in these positions to secure additional professional training. Among those people were many whose names have since become familiar as leaders in the school library field — Mary Peacock Douglas (North Carolina), Ruth Theobald (Kentucky), Charlie Dickinson (Virginia), Nancy Jane Day (South Carolina), Willie Welch (Alabama), and Martha Parks (Tennessee).⁹ Georgia financed its own supervisor. As the grants expired, all of the states except Kentucky took over the funding of their own staffs; later, Kentucky did reestablish its funding.¹⁰

Leadership was developing in other parts of the nation as well as the South, and in 1939 the State School Library Supervisors began as an informal organization.¹¹ This group met annually at the same time and place as the ALA annual conference. The Canadian provincial supervisors were invited to meet with them beginning in 1956. Among the early presidents were Agnes Krarup (Oregon), Lois Place (Michigan), Martha Parks (Tennessee), Mary Peacock Douglas (North Carolina), and Mattie Ruth Moore (Texas).¹² Their first constitution, adopted in 1961, cited the following objectives:

1. To become informed about school library programs, activities and developments in the various states.
2. To give united support to national effort for the development of school libraries.

School Library/Media Supervision

3. To share ideas and discuss worthwhile activities for a leadership role in the promotion of desirable school library programs at the state and national level.¹³

In 1960 a report by Mary Helen Mahar, *State Department of Education Responsibilities*, was published by the U.S. Office of Education. It indicates that fifteen states had delegated responsibilities for school libraries to state departments, while forty-four states provided for their regulation by state boards of education. Two states had no laws or regulations for school libraries in any agency.¹⁴ The report states that although in some states the responsibilities carried out seemed to be minimal, all state departments of education did perform some function for them.¹⁵

At present, eighteen state library agencies have been assigned responsibility for the school library/media program in their states. In the remaining states, school library supervision has become part of the curriculum area, with support services or similar divisions or bureaus within departments of public instruction or education. However, assigning responsibility for school library supervision to an agency has not meant that qualified professionals are employed. By 1959, the Mahar report indicates, only thirty-four professionals were employed as supervisors. Of these, Georgia and Virginia each employed three full-time supervisors, while Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and North Carolina were each served by two people. The remaining twenty professionals were scattered among all the other states.¹⁶

In 1961 a document entitled *Responsibilities of State Departments of Education for School Library Services* was published by the Council of Chief State School Officers.¹⁷ This 22-page policy statement was "designed to assist state departments of education in the development of excellent services for elementary and secondary school libraries."¹⁸ It goes on to state that its guidelines were based on the premise that improvement of instruction is assumed to be a major function of state departments of education.

The statement outlines the principles for state-level administration of school library supervisory services. These include: (1) planning state programs for school librarians, (2) supervision and leadership, (3) coordination and cooperation, (4) certification of school librarians, (5) standards for school libraries, (6) statistics and research, and (7) budgeting and finance.¹⁹ This policy statement was prepared by librarians, library supervisors, commissioners and assistant commissioners of education and superintendents of instruction, as well as other educators.²⁰ It became a

model for policy statements or position papers for the agencies providing school library service in several states such as Pennsylvania. Now badly outdated, the document nonetheless remains as a focal point for many contemporary programs.

The advent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with its Title II designed specifically to support school libraries provided administrative funds to state agencies in November 1965. School library supervisors were appointed for the first time in some states while staffs were increased in others. The ESEA Title II personnel in some states were not part of the school library supervisory staff. A review of the *School Library Supervisors Directory* published in 1966-67, 1967-68, and 1968-69 indicates offices and persons assigned this responsibility.²¹ Even with this kind of support, professional school library supervision was not assured. As the federal funding source began to erode in the early 1970s, some states cut back or dismissed persons they had employed. The fall of 1973 saw many programs fade and others disappear. The State School Library Supervisors Association merged with the Association of Chief State School Audiovisual Officers in 1974-75. The resulting organization is designed to give more visible support to library/ media programs.

In the eyes of many district- and building-level library/media persons, state supervision suggests a big stick that can be used to force reluctant administrators to provide staff, facilities, equipment and materials for school library/media programs in sufficient quantity to satisfy the wishes of the stick-wielder. Through the years, however, most state supervisors have seen their role differently. Richard Darling wrote in 1963 that he believed a large part of the supervisor's job was to convince others of the importance of good school library service. He identified cooperation with curriculum specialists within departments of education as a prime means of accomplishing that goal.²²

An article in the *Oklahoma Librarian* describes the work of the state supervisor in these words:

Title II of ESEA also provides funds for a school library coordinator and that term is frequently used interchangeably in printed material with supervisor and consultant. The position is held by Elizabeth Geis. . . . In 1966 the Library Resources Division itself issued a paper in which it stated: "The state school library consultant shall. . . . stimulate every school to reach or exceed state and national standards. . . . aid in improving proficiency of librarians by. . . providing consultant help in selection of all materials (audiovisual as well as

School Library/Media Supervision

the printed word), technical organization, effective utilization of library resources, planning library quarters, selecting furnishing, and equipment. . . . The competence, experience, and willingness of Mrs. Geis notwithstanding, it seems a difficult, if not impossible task for a staff of one."²³

The names of many state supervisors could be substituted for that of Elizabeth Geis.

In May 1969 a 2-week institute for state media personnel, school library supervisors and audiovisual supervisors was held in Kalamazoo at Western Michigan University. Designed to assist state leaders in planning and developing strategies for implementing the 1969 standards, the institute provided speakers such as Frances Henne, Mae Graham and Henry Brickell to stimulate both thought and imagination. As small groups worked together, participants took a realistic look at the emerging changes in the role of supervision. No longer defining it as consultative or regulatory, the supervisors recognized a new identity they would have to develop. Mary Frances K. Johnson summarized this in *American Libraries*:

The following functions are suggested as paramount: 1. Stimulating and coordinating statewide planning involving all types of libraries, to meet the individual needs of users. . . . 2. Promoting the network concept for optimum use of resources. . . . 3. Providing guidance in special aspects of library service. . . . 4. Interpreting library service. . . . to the library profession generally. A state library agency comprehensive in its interests can do much to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of all library service.²⁴

The group analyzed the implications that Planning, Programming, Budgeting Systems (PPBS) would have on their work. This included the ability to assess needs, set priorities, establish objectives, test activities, evaluate and recycle resulting information, and communicate data. They recognized their need to develop skill in handling problems resulting from social changes such as student unrest, taxpayer revolts and growing teacher (including media persons) militancy. The word *media* was used to describe all professionals working in library and audiovisual roles. Mae Graham of Maryland spoke directly to the changing role of these supervisors when she cited the need for a revolution in school librarianship led by leaders who have "a clearly defined objective, and . . . are courageous, persuasive, fearless — and ruthless."²⁵

When the new revision of the standards, *Media Programs: District and School*, were in final preparation, the supervisors were again in session at Western Michigan in August 1974. The first institute had welded the state leaders into a communicating, cooperating organization that resulted in the merger described earlier. At the second institute, which lasted only one week, the supervisors were joined by the presidents of the state school library and audiovisual associations to evaluate progress made since 1969. The attendees, working as teams from their respective states, defined needs for services yet to be met.

With the reduction of federal funds in the 1970s, cutbacks in state programs were inevitable. The number of state personnel was diminishing. Some became primarily "housekeepers" for their state agencies, having less and less contact with district and building persons; even assignment to federally funded programs was reduced.

David Bender recently examined the current role and function of school library/media supervisory personnel and reported his conclusions in *School Library Journal* in December 1975. Having served at the supervisory level in both Ohio and Maryland and having worked with supervisors in many other states, he observed that six basic premises seemed to form the foundation for future media program supervision on the state level. These include a team approach to media management and supervision, a thorough knowledge of the clientele to be served, and the development of a method to measure the suitability of the service provided. The remaining components include an understanding of the needs of the persons served, the maintenance of a record of the operational program area, and finally a statement of the responsibility of state education agencies for media programs.²⁶

The state departments of education provide for school library/media service in two ways, with supervisors located in one of two places. Eighteen states, including Maryland and New Jersey, place these supervisory people in state library agencies. In other states, these persons serve in curricular or support service areas as in Pennsylvania. Persons serving in each type of organization feel their organizational structure is best. When located in a state library, staff members feel that they have more visibility. They also believe that financial support is more easily available to them. A knowledgeable librarian in this structure reviews the budget, for example, and battles for funds. Interlibrary cooperation and networking are easier when office suites are shared or when opportunities are available to travel with the people responsible for those services in public or other libraries.

School Library/Media Supervision

Arguments for placing school library/media supervisory persons in curricular agencies were summarized by John Rowell, who has served as a state consultant or supervisor in Michigan and Pennsylvania. Writing in *School Library Journal*, he observed that "school" in the title of these persons was the "generic determinant," and that their bases of operations were properly in the education complex.²⁷ When queried about their roles in this kind of structure, some consultants felt they could better coordinate and demonstrate their role in curriculum planning and implementation when they were associated with curriculum specialists. Some expressed difficulty in demonstrating their role in serving a total school program from that vantage (or rather disadvantage) point. Curriculum personnel serve a specific portion of the school program. This type of limitation is almost unconsciously imposed on library/media people. On the other hand, several felt it was easier to participate in in-service workshops and continuing education programs when they were identified with curriculum personnel.

All persons interviewed cited either directly or indirectly one major factor affecting the success or failure of supervision on the state (or indeed on any level): the effectiveness of the person as a supervisor. In successful supervision for future programs, they believed the humanistic approach would be centered on a dynamic helping relationship between supervisor and supervisee, whether the latter be persons, districts or regions. This type of supervision would involve an interplay of the goals of all persons involved in a state's education program, including: parents; students; teachers; building, district and regional administrators; as well as state-level personnel. It implies that supervisors must be able to use learning theories and instructional strategies. The individual in this position must include among personal skills the ability to use data gathering techniques and to analyze resulting information. The supervisor will have to be able to act as a communications facilitator, whether the communication be oral, verbal or computerized. The ability to see education as a whole process and to recognize the manner in which components interact will be a prerequisite. Supervision, in short, has become a means to achieve a goal rather than remaining a monitoring and directing procedure.

One term well describes this new role: *change agent*. Supervisors, or as they are more frequently called, consultants or coordinators, become part of the planning process, become more accountable for their roles in program development, and have a greater effect on the final consumer of their work, the teacher and the student. The upcoming 1979 White

House Conference on Libraries and Information Services and the governors' conferences preceding it will make few, if any, direct references to the supervision of school library/media programs. However, it will be difficult to describe the state of the library and information art in the nation without including the results of their work. Recommendations for future growth will have to include them. These state persons are planning and helping to demonstrate innovative programs, seeking adequate funding, participating in networking, and generally helping to improve the school instructional program. Although some states are continuing to operate with minimal staffs, those with a real commitment to the role of library/media programs will continue to mature and adapt their relationships to their schools to meet the changing needs and demands of their clientele.

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School Library/Media Supervision

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