

PARTNERS IN THE EMERGENCE OF LIBRARIES AS TOMORROW'S COMMUNITY CENTERS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers and librarians have the longest continuing working relationships for many years. This relationships as well as the role of librarians have changed significantly since technology being widely used in libraries and information centers. No matter what changes have occurred, the human factor is one of the reasons that these institutions will forever exist. The author suggests that the library is a community institution that symbolized knowledge and it should continue to work with the communities.

For many years, teachers and librarians have had long working relationships. They formed partnerships in their roles as purveyors of knowledge. Teachers must look to librarians for help in moving beyond textbook-centered teaching to resource centered with variations in points of view. Librarians need assistance from teachers when dealing with the obvious difficulties libraries encounter as they move toward a program of greater inclusion. Together, the synergetic relationship offers tremendous potential since both professions can and must play a significant role in meeting the challenge of the 21st century. The challenge is one that broadly interprets education as learning for all people at all levels.

Libraries have come a long way from the days when microfilm was a novelty. Automated catalogs and CD-ROM databases help improve library research. In the past, a library patron might have to wait a long period for a book or magazine to be published in order to look for research

materials only to find out the information published was not relevant or was out of date. With the rapid growth of the Internet - the information superhighway - libraries will continue to play the critical role they always have in communities. They will play an even greater role in the dynamics of a society experiencing the challenges of the obvious demographic changes.

No matter how far technology advances, the human factor, the face to face encounters of people in direct communication, and the need to have our thoughts shared with others, are obvious reasons libraries will forever exist. Libraries have been and still are the meeting places of the community. For many communities, it is the information center, a gathering place where information has always been freely and readily available to anyone who chooses to enter. It is truly a place of equitable access in a democratic society. It is a place where our basic right of intellectual freedom is preserved and where a basic quest for lifelong learning begins.

The library also has its past with the past, as it is a centerpiece of American democracy and American history. The community libraries are always located in the center of a city or village in the U.S. The library building is usually easy to identify because of its classical building, and many times it is the one that is connected to a modern addition that was built when the town outgrew the original library.

The libraries in the U.S. are where one can obtain information on the historical, cultural, and educational aspects of America. Many newly arrived immigrants can get information on becoming American citizens. Citizenship classes are available in libraries. In Chicago, a program has been established for those classes aiming specifically at new immigrants. In Miami, one library system has two card catalogs available in Spanish and English respectively. Spanish books are mailed to the homebound elderly. Project ASIS in California was established to meet the needs of the large Asian population. Public catalogs are provided in four Asian languages. In Milwaukee, special collections of books and materials are available for the Southeast Asian community.

Library programs for individuals with limited English proficiency are federally funded and include a variety of services from storytelling in foreign languages to foreign materials to library personnel trained in foreign languages and cultures.

Libraries are truly the starting places for democracy and knowledge. They are the places where the tenets of democracy are demonstrated in practice. Libraries are the only educational system that support a person from infancy to old age. In many intergenerational literacy projects, the talents of elderly volunteers are used to read to young children and to help promote the concept of family and community as well as to boost an individual's sense of self worth.

If it is a fact that a child's intellectual development occurs before the age of 4, then libraries should play a major role in being concerned about the quality of care preschoolers receive since it is the only educational institution available to all preschoolers. Libraries offer activities, services, materials to help develop intellectual and social skills. Programs are scheduled that involve puppets, crafts, language games, art, music, physical activity, and even dancing and acting in an effort to help preschoolers learn to share, listen, laugh, and play in a group.

Because of the American Disabilities Act, many libraries are now accessible to people with physical impairments. Braille or talking books are available. Deaf or hard of hearing people can check out books through telecommunications devices (TTY). In fact, some libraries offer educational toys with instructions for use to children with special needs.

Disadvantaged communities look to libraries as customer service centers. In Pittsburgh, a program called "Beginning with Books Project," started by giving books to preschoolers in clinics and have now expanded to include social services, stress and counseling centers, day care centers, shelters, and others. In other major cities, parents are taught how to help children learn while children are being helped with their homework or in day-care. Projects to raise self-esteem of minority teenagers at risk are gaining momentum in libraries throughout the U.S.

Bookmobiles are excellent opportunities for those unable to get to the library. In Massachusetts, one of the first programs to enable incarcerated parents an opportunity to share reading with children has begun.

In the U.S., many families have two working parents or single parent. Libraries are the ideal gathering places for the children from these families. Latchkey programs have been established in Ohio in cooperation with schools to provide bussing of students to the library. A librarian-teacher is hired to monitor activity and help with homework. The library

functions as a safe social interaction center. In Baltimore, Maryland, a special place in the library has been designated for homeless children to study.

There are many examples of libraries meeting the needs of the communities they serve. Libraries are systems which can enhance our effectiveness as a nation in addressing the six national education goals set forth in 1990 by the President George Bush and the Governors of the United States. In *America 2000*, President Bush outlined four tracks that would lead to the accomplishment of the six goals. The first two tracks deal with learning at the local school level while the third and fourth track deal with learning at the community level:

1. Creating better and more accountable schools for today's students.
2. Creating a new generation of American schools for tomorrow's students.
3. Transforming America into a nation of students.
4. Making our communities a place where learning takes place.

It is essential that both educators and librarians forge partnerships in building this nation of learners for life.

However, libraries may not be able to handle this new challenge due to budget cuts. It is now the responsibility of politicians to decide on using limited funding wisely in supporting important and essential library community activities. The U.S. First Lady Hilary Rodham Clinton has been using libraries to hold town meetings to discuss health care reform. She understands and realizes the role libraries are assuming more and more in today's society as community centers which provide a full range of services for all generations.

The library is the community institution that symbolizes knowledge and imagination. It is a place where knowledge is acquired by people joining together; learning and interacting with each other. Libraries play an important role in our communities and will continue to do so for years to come.