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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the factors that contribute to a library's decision to become involved in adult literacy and the service roles assumed by a given library. Common library literacy service roles (i.e., collections, services in support of local literacy efforts, and direct instruction) are discussed and profiles of the types of libraries that are involved in literacy education are given. Factors that contribute to a library's level of literacy involvement are then compared and contrasted among public libraries, community college libraries, institutional libraries, school libraries, state library agencies, and university libraries. Similarly, the types of literacy activities in which these libraries are involved are identified. One type of literacy activity, the family literacy program, is explored in more detail. It is observed that the effectiveness of the family literacy program stems from its holistic approach to literacy, in which both children's and adult services librarians blend their levels of expertise. Several funding sources for literacy education are reviewed, and it is suggested that the library's role as a partner in adult literacy education will continue to grow. (8 references) (MAB)

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LIBRARIES AS PARTNERS IN ADULT LITERACY

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LIBRARIES AS PARTNERS IN ADULT LITERACY

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Libraries have a history of serving adults who need help with basic skills, beginning at the turn of the century with service to immigrants. The library has been called "the people's university," which describes the library's ability to deliver one-on-one services to meet a broad spectrum of educational needs (Birge 1981). Since the early 1960s, attention to and efforts in designing customized services for adult new readers and their families has grown. Over this 30-year period, libraries, especially public libraries, have joined the ranks of other educational agencies as major providers of adult literacy services.

What distinguishes library services to adult new readers from other programs is their flexibility. Given that no legislative mandates guide library literacy efforts, each library's response reflects the needs of that community. This variety of approaches can be best described using three service roles: collections, services in support of local literacy efforts, and direct instruction.

LITERACY SERVICE ROLES

In the collections role, libraries build on their tradition of and expertise in developing collections of materials in a variety of formats. The most common activity in this role is

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developing of print collections for adult new readers and for tutors and instructors. As more and better adult literacy materials are published, libraries are becoming a major source for these diverse materials. Collections of English as a second language (ESL) items develop in communities that need such materials.

In addition to print materials, libraries collect audiovisual materials such as audiocassettes and videocassettes for use by independent learners and to supplement the materials available to tutors and local Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. As libraries in general add microcomputers and software as services, software customized for the adult new reader is being collected, and microcomputers assigned to the library literacy program are available.

At the most basic level, libraries offer print literacy collections, while increasing involvement in the collections service role reflects more diversity in terms of format and content. A selected number of libraries are publishing locally-developed literacy materials, often based on the writings and experiences of adult students. Related activities also include identifying other literacy collections in the area, collaborating on selection and acquisitions with other literacy providers, and producing finding aids, such as bibliographies and customized reading lists.

The second role for libraries, services in support of local literacy efforts, encompasses a wide range of activities. It is

in this category that libraries illustrate their important function as an information agency. Maintaining information about local literacy providers and referral of queries to the appropriate provider are among the most frequently offered services across types of libraries. These activities are seen as a logical extension of a library's reference service. Since the library serves as an information center for the community, it furnishes facts and materials about the literacy problem and possible solutions for the media, interested citizens, and local decision makers. Another common activity in this role is provision of tours and orientations for adult students, tutors, and ABE instructors and its related offering, space for tutoring and classes.

As indicated throughout this essay, cooperation is a key feature of library literacy efforts. In the support services role, this cooperation manifests itself in the form of local literacy coalitions. Libraries are not only partners in these coalitions, but also catalysts for the development of such coalitions. The library builds on its image of a "neutral" place in order to bring together local literacy providers and to encourage communication and cooperation among these agencies.

Libraries are advocates for literacy; in fact, their future existence depends on a literate society. In the support services role, the library attempts to promote literacy and its value to the community and strengthen the local effort by working with other literacy providers.

In the direct instruction role, libraries build on their tradition of one-on-one service to offer individualized literacy tutoring. This type of service exhibits characteristics similar to the one-on-one tutoring of literacy councils, such as those affiliated with Laubach or Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA). This service includes recruiting and training tutors; recruiting, placing, and evaluating adult students; and managing such programs, including record-keeping and funding. Many of these are affiliated with a state or national literacy agency, such as Laubach or LVA.

These direct instruction services vary in the degree to which libraries carry out any one activity. For example, recruiting tutors might be done in cooperation with a local volunteer center or community organization. Actual training might be offered by contract through a local literacy council, rather than by library staff. Since library literacy efforts tend to be collaborative, libraries in a direct instruction role may use these community contacts in the delivery of a one-on-one tutoring.

Among public libraries, over one quarter offer a library-based instructional program. This figure is based on data collected in 1987 (Johnson, Robbins, and Zweizig, 1990). During the "Strengthening the Literacy Network" conference held in May 1990, state library agency personnel estimated that this figure has increased because state and federal funding for library literacy efforts and awareness of the need for literacy

education have grown since 1987. This instructional service also is offered by other types of libraries, primarily institutional libraries.

Related instructional activities that libraries engage in include: continuing education on literacy for library staff, participating in tutor training and teacher in-service programs offered by other literacy agencies, and recruiting students and tutors for other literacy providers. It can be posited that if a library offers direct instruction, it is likely to offer activities in the other two roles as well: collections and support services. Case studies of library involvement in literacy support this scenario, although it is not clear if involvement in the other two roles necessarily precedes involvement in direct instruction. For the library that selects this role, however, a major commitment is being made to be an active participant in meeting local literacy needs.

NATURE OF LIBRARIES INVOLVED IN LITERACY

While not all libraries involved in literacy fit the same profile, research suggests that there is a set of characteristics associated with library involvement in literacy education (Lyman, 1977; Smith, 1981; Johnson, Robbins, and Zweizig, 1990). Public libraries, given their tradition and variety of involvement in literacy, have the most fully developed profile. A public library involved in literacy is likely to have other services with characteristics similar to literacy services, including

other adult educational activities (such as programming), outreach or extension activities for users with special needs, and cooperative activities with non-library agencies. This suggests that library involvement in literacy is seen as one of an array of customized services offered by the library.

Another important factor that affects the level of activity is the attitude of management toward library involvement in literacy. The support of library decision makers for the concept of library literacy activity is a necessary and understandable prerequisite to library literacy efforts.

When community characteristics are examined, the public library responds most strongly to the presence of other literacy providers in the service area. This relates to the essentially collaborative nature of library literacy efforts and the effort of the library community to avoid duplication of services. Instead, the library tailors services to fill a niche in community literacy efforts. Size of the community is only weakly associated with level of involvement by a library; case studies show that libraries of all sizes are offering activities in all three literacy service roles.

Community college libraries have a similar profile to public libraries, with other educational and cooperative activities, positive attitude toward library involvement in literacy, and the presence of other literacy providers in the community being the most strongly related to their level of involvement.

For institution libraries, the involvement of the

institution itself in literacy education is related to the library's level of involvement. If an institution library offers other educational activities besides literacy, it is more likely they will offer literacy services as an aspect of that educational role in the institution.

Another determinant of involvement for all libraries lies with the individual librarian. In interviews with librarians, it is frequently noted that one person was the catalyst for interest on the part of the library. This individual had a major impact on the design and delivery of the library's adult literacy program. The presence of an individual committed to solving illiteracy in a local area cannot be underestimated when one examines the evolution of library involvement in literacy education.

Clearly, more research is needed on the factors that contribute to a library's decision to become involved in adult literacy and the service roles assumed by a given library. Primarily, these factors derive from characteristics of the community and the library itself. A related and equally important question is "what factors in the library and community contribute to the continuation and success of library literacy programs?" This information provides planning information for libraries looking to improve their programs or for libraries just starting their work in literacy. As evaluation strategies are further refined and disseminated, more information on this critical question will be available.

INVOLVEMENT BY TYPE OF LIBRARY

Libraries vary in their mission and clientele, so it is understandable that their response to the need for literacy services will vary as well. As indicated earlier in this article, the public library offers the widest array of adult literacy services and has been involved since the turn of the century. Reports of public library literacy efforts are regularly found in the literature, and these reports support the picture of the public library responding to its broad mission to meet the needs of the general public. Within this expansive charge--to meet the educational, recreational, and information needs of the community--the public library has developed the most literacy activities in terms of types of activities and extent of involvement.

This diverse approach to literacy means that public libraries are customizing services that are appropriate to the needs of the local community. There is not a neatly packaged entity called "literacy services" that every public library will adopt. Instead, each library designs literacy services appropriate to the clients served and library resources available. This customization permeates the current philosophy of public library planning. While common characteristics can be identified across libraries, each literacy program will reflect the nature of the community served.

For community college/technical school libraries, their involvement in literacy will vary depending on the perception of

their role in the communities they serve. A community college library more likely serves a general audience, but with special attention to the students and faculty of the school. In contrast, a private, specialized technical school is more likely to serve students and faculty exclusively. This mission, then, affects the kind of literacy services the library (or more commonly named learning resource center) will design. For the most part, community college libraries support the special literacy education needs of their students through collections and support services, such as tours and space for tutoring. If the ABE and GED program also is part of the community college, literacy involvement of the learning resource center is more clearly defined in relationship to that program.

Community college libraries that encompass the learning laboratory function, especially computer-assisted instruction, will have a more direct instructional role in literacy as they work with students individually in the learning laboratory. Software designed for use by adult literacy students makes up part of the learning laboratory materials. It is used independently by students or as a supplement to classroom instruction.

The learning resource center responds to the mission of the parent institution in its response to the need for literacy education. The majority of community college libraries will supplement existing literacy education efforts by the college, although models of a more direct instruction approach do exist.

Involvement currently is concentrated in the support role, with referral to community literacy providers and providing library tours and orientations as the dominant activities.

Among institutional librarians, the expectation is that their role in literacy will be increasing as institutions, especially correctional facilities, increase their commitment to literacy education. As is the case with community college libraries, the institution library is more likely to be involved in literacy if the parent institution offers literacy services. If the library is seen as part of the educational branch of the institution, it can offer an array of literacy services similar to that of the public library. Each of the three roles--collections, direct instruction, and support services--are evident in institution libraries. The referral to literacy providers (usually within the institution) and print collections are the predominant activities.

A general picture of institutional library involvement in literacy is available, but increasing involvement in literacy by institutions suggests that this picture is rapidly changing. In terms of extent of involvement and diversity of activities, the role of the institutional library in literacy is the most likely to change over the next decade.

State library agencies play a pivotal role in the delivery of literacy services by local libraries. Not usually a provider of direct service, state libraries support local and state-wide literacy efforts through consultation, training, and funding.

The state library staff are perceived as motivators for local library involvement and are called upon to share their expertise on literacy. As administrators for Library Services and Construction Act Title I funds, the state library has worked with public libraries to develop literacy programs. The state library is the representative of libraries in state-level literacy planning.

Using the data from the 1987 study cited earlier, all state libraries reported involvement of some level in literacy education. At the 1990 "Strengthening the Literacy Network" conference for state library staff, 47 states reported on their efforts in literacy. When compared to other types of libraries, state libraries are the most active in the extent of involvement and the consistency of that involvement in literacy. As advocates for libraries in general, state library agencies will most likely remain leaders in adult literacy education.

Two other types of libraries also have a part to play in adult literacy education. For school libraries the primary clientele are not the out-of-school adult, but rather children. The school library's role in literacy is really one of prevention, as it works with children and their parents to promote literacy. As libraries become more involved in family literacy, the school library is a likely cosponsor of these activities.

For college and university libraries, the expectation is that their primary clientele--students and faculty--do not need

basic literacy services. Their role comes in supporting teaching and research in literacy. Materials to support the training of adult education teachers is critical to the creation of adult education professionals. Research as to teaching methods, adult learning, and program development primarily occurs at universities. The college library provides the resources needed to help carry out this important research.

There is a variety of responses by libraries to the need for literacy education, largely dependent on the mission and clientele of the library. The levels and kinds of involvement are still evolving, especially for libraries other than public libraries. In all settings, however, libraries are expanding on their educational mission to develop literacy services appropriate to the communities being served.

FAMILY LITERACY

Libraries are among the early adopters and providers of family literacy services, particularly public and school libraries. Libraries see as central to their mission the promotion of literacy for all ages. Public and school libraries regularly work with children and parents to help develop a pattern of family reading. Currently, libraries are building on this tradition and combining it with their expertise in adult literacy to develop special family or intergenerational programs. These family literacy efforts are targeted for adults in need of basic skills and their children in an attempt to break the

illiteracy cycle.

Family literacy efforts blend the expertise of children's and adult services librarians. Children's librarians bring to the family literacy program a strong tradition of child-centered services and a record of working with parents and other adult caregivers. Their knowledge of children's literature, a style of service that is highly interactive and individualized, and a communication network with schools, child care providers, and other agencies and organizations that work with children are essential to the family literacy effort.

The adult services librarian, usually involved in literacy services, brings the critical knowledge of working with the adult new reader. The librarian cooperates with other literacy providers in the community that are important players in the family literacy program. Adult services librarians have expertise in adult literacy materials, adult programming, and services to adults in general that contribute to the successful design of family literacy projects.

Since the focus of family literacy is on families, the programs cannot be totally child or adult-centered. Public libraries, with their history of serving all generations, are ideally suited for offering family literacy services. The goals of such programs include helping parents and other adult caregivers understand the modeling of reading-related behaviors and reading with children, to enhance the reading skills of children, to increase parenting skills (especially those related

to reading), and to improve a parent's ability to serve as an advocate for his/her children's learning.

Research on this type of literacy involvement by public libraries shows that the kinds of activities offered fall into two categories: services that center on children's literature and programs that center on parenting skills (Johnson, forthcoming). Within each of these roles, libraries are using a collection of activities to fulfill the goals of family literacy programs.

Services that center around children's literature encourage reading as a family activity by helping parents understand how to use literature with their children and how they can model reading behavior in the home. One of the most important activities within this category is teaching adult students how to read children's books. This builds on a common motivator for parents learning to read -- to help their children. This teaching is usually done with tutors and is supplemented with other reading materials, such as books-on-tape and "wordless" story books. The process of reading to children not only models reading behavior, but provides an opportunity for children to express ideas and ask questions of adults. Family literacy programs in libraries enhance child-parent interaction within the context of reading.

A major theme among programs that center on children's literature is increasing the amount of reading materials in the home. Basic to this, of course, are library materials lent to the family. Beyond this, however, libraries aid families in

creating new reading materials for the home, such as family story books, wordless picture books, and audiotaped family stories. Many programs also involve providing books for the family that can be the beginning of a home library. These efforts help to surround children with a world of print and encourage family reading and sharing. Related services are teaching storytelling, creating story telling aids, and developing family reading kits that include books, tapes, educational toys, and learning activities.

Services that center on parenting skills have as a primary goal to enhance skills that relate to a child's success in school. Program series on parenting topics are offered in the library and at various locations in the community, such as neighborhood centers, Headstart programs, and health care clinics. Special attention is given to offering programs that relate to the school, such as school tours and orientations, volunteer programs for parents in the school, homework hotlines for parents, and sessions where parents meet school officials and teachers. These activities help parents understand and carry out their advocacy role on behalf of their children in school.

Other parenting-related programs offered by libraries are: programs for teenage parents, individualized learning stations in the library, learning activities for use at home, "welcome baby" projects at local hospitals, and family activities such as field trips and festivals. Parenting collections support family literacy efforts, and the collection includes videotapes on

parenting topics.

A common feature of family literacy programs in libraries is their collaborative nature. In most cases, libraries are linking with other community agencies to develop and deliver family literacy services. These partners include other literacy providers, schools, child care services, local businesses, family service agencies and organizations, and teen parenting programs. Not only does this collaboration enhance the program offerings, it assists in the recruitment and retention of adults for the family literacy program. A broader base of expertise is available to help make these efforts successful.

This more "holistic" approach to literacy that blends prevention and remediation is a natural outgrowth of the public library's intergenerational mission. School libraries are likely partners in this effort, as school systems increase their involvement in reading-readiness programs and encourage more parental involvement in their children's education. Family literacy programs also build on the educational mission of libraries and are another example of the library profession's response to the national problem of illiteracy.

FUNDING

The funding for library literacy services comes from a wide variety of sources, beginning with local library budgets. As community coalitions are developed, libraries also have been successful in garnering financial support from service

organizations and local business. As is true of other library services, funding derives from a combination of operating budget allocations and contributions from the community.

Grants supply a large portion of funding for library literacy services, especially for start-up costs for new library literacy programs and the development of special projects that build on this basic program, such as family literacy or workforce literacy. Increasingly, libraries are working with local and national foundations to solicit financial backing for their literacy efforts. From the federal government, libraries seek funding under the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). LSCA Title I, administered through state library agencies, has and continues to provide support for local and regional library literacy efforts. Since FY 1986, LSCA Title VI, administered directly by the U.S. Department of Education, awards grants exclusively for adult literacy programs to state library agencies and local libraries. Approximately 200 libraries are funded annually from this source (Cameron and Humes, 1989). State library agencies are beginning to play a major role in funding library literacy activities, among these California and Illinois. As is the case with the kind of literacy services offered by libraries, funding for these efforts is often a mosaic, drawing from a number of local, state, and national sources.

FUTURE

Every indication -- reports in the literature, conference proceedings, and announcements of funding -- suggest that the library's role as a partner in adult literacy education will continue to strengthen and grow. By working in collaboration with other local literacy providers, the library attempts to identify an appropriate and needed role for itself. The library field would not identify itself as the sole solution to the literacy problem. The library profession would, however, identify itself as an equal participant in national literacy efforts. As an educational institution, libraries will continue to develop responses to community needs for literacy services. These responses will be varied, as is the nature of the communities being served.

The library has been recognized as an institution that emphasizes lifelong learning. For any literacy program, cooperation with local libraries helps to build in a pattern of learning that can continue once the student completes a literacy program. Making library use part of the instructional process of any literacy program is essential to the person's continued learning and, hopefully, enjoyment of reading as a leisure activity. This suggests that the library is a natural collaborator in literacy efforts not only in the instruction of adult students, but in the continuation of their development as learners and readers.

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