

Making Libraries Relevant to Classrooms: the Nottinghamshire Experience

by
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Abstrak: *Peranan perpustakaan-perpustakaan sekolah tidak memberi kesan dalam sistem pendidikan kerana kegiatan-kegiatan yang diadakan tidak memberi sokongan yang positif kepada proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang berlaku di bilik-bilik darjah. Namun begitu, perkembangan dalam bidang pendidikan, terutama sekali dalam kaedah-kaedah pembelajaran telah menggalakkan pustakawan-pustakawan di sekolah mengkaji semula peranan mereka untuk memastikan yang kegiatan-kegiatan perpustakaan relevan dan sesuai untuk menyokong dan menggalakkan kegiatan-kegiatan kurikular. Sama ada perpustakaan-perpustakaan sekolah dapat menukarkan imejnya bergantung kepada sikap pihak-pihak yang berkenaan. Kekesanan peranannya juga bergantung kepada sama ada ianya dapat dianggap sebagai pusat pendidikan dan maklumat, bukan pusat rekreasi di mana pelajar-pelajar berkumpul, bersembang sementara menyelesaikan kerja rumah mereka.*

Kegiatan-kegiatan yang diuraikan dalam rencana ini merupakan kegiatan-kegiatan perpustakaan di beberapa sekolah di Nottinghamshire, United Kingdom, yang dikelolakan oleh pustakawan-pustakawan bersama-sama guru-guru sekolah untuk memastikan yang pelajar-pelajar di sekolah-sekolah tersebut dapat menguasai kemahiran-kemahiran asas dalam pembelajaran.

INTRODUCTION:

As part of my sabbatical leave programme, I spent a few weeks in several schools in Nottinghamshire observing school library activities. The main objective of this observation was to get an insight into how and what types of school library activities can support the teaching-learning process that took place in the schools. It was also an attempt to put into perspective the role of school libraries in the educational system.

BACKGROUND

In most countries, school libraries tend to exist in isolation. They serve more as recreational and homework centres than educational and information centres, with collections that are generally inadequate for and irrelevant to what are taught in classrooms. There seems to be no relationship between the library and the school curriculum, no rapport of common interest between teachers and school librarians, no connection between library resources and curricular needs – in short, there has been no indication that school libraries can play a positive role in the educational system.

Recently however, changes and innovations in education, particularly in teaching and learning

strategies, have made it imperative that school librarians reassess their role and that of their libraries. Significant in these changes and innovations is the emphasis given to *learner needs*. Teaching aims and objectives place importance on the *learner* rather than the teacher. Terms reflective of this shift in focus, like “discovery learning”, “individualised instruction”, “inquiry method of teaching”, “resource-based learning”, indicate a departure from the traditional talk-chalk method of teaching.

While it is beyond the purview of librarians to evaluate the merits or demerits of these new approaches it cannot be denied that they have far-reaching implications for library use that cannot be ignored.

For librarians, teaching strategies that advocate the use of technology and multi-media resources, and learning strategies that put to practice the concept of resource-based learning, do not only impose greater demands on library resources and services but also make it crucial that a new systemic approach to library use be initiated. *Strategies* to facilitate the use of library resources and *skills* to exploit these resources are important considerations to ensure that school libraries are not relegated to being mere white elephants in schools.

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To be effective however, these strategies and skills in library use cannot be developed in isolation. They would have to be developed in conjunction with other basic learning or study skills, like reading, comprehension and communication skills to ensure that skills essential to library use, namely "library skills" and "information handling skills", can be seen to be relevant and necessary to teaching and learning.

"Library skills" are skills in using the *library system* for the purpose of information retrieval — for example, understanding how to use the catalogues, appreciating the logic of the classification system, knowing the significance of the shelf arrangement, appreciating the rules and regulations, knowing what can be got from the library, where to get the book, etc. "Information-handling skills" are skills in using *library resources*, for example, understanding types and formats of library resources and their uses, knowing how to use each type (dictionary, encyclopaedia, etc.) or format (film, slides, etc.), and most important, how to extract information from them (scanning, skimming, note-taking, note-making, note-using, presentation, etc.).

"Library and information-handling skills" are therefore complementary and interdependent with the other types of basic learning skills — namely the reading, comprehension and communication skills mentioned above. The ability to understand the alphabetical sequence, the ability to read and read intelligently, the ability to understand what one reads, the ability to express or communicate what has been read, the ability to extract information from the resources, are requisite to the development of library and information-handling skills.

On the other hand libraries encourage the development of these skills by providing an extensive range of materials efficiently organised for easy location and retrieval, providing services geared towards providing information and facilitating cross-curricular information retrieval.

So, in the basic philosophy itself, libraries are not at variance with classrooms. The importance given to learner needs, the commitment towards inculcating basic learning or study skills for effective learning, the need to develop life-long learning habits, etc. are common areas for which library activities can be undertaken to support curricular activities.

SCHOOL LIBRARY ACTIVITIES

My observation of school library activities was undertaken in selected comprehensive state schools in Nottinghamshire. Pupils observed were of the 9–12 age group. They comprised those in the last year of

primary schools and first year of middle schools. The observation was on a random basis and was merely exploratory.

In general, activities observed varied in depth and scope. Provision of facilities, too, varied in extent and volume. But the most significant factor influencing library use in these schools was the attitude of the heads of school towards library provision. It was generally found that in schools where heads had a commitment towards resource-based learning, libraries and librarians were actively involved in curricular activities. However, since the objective of the observation was to get an insight into what types of library activities were carried out to encourage teaching and learning in these schools, no attempt was made to fathom the reasons as to why certain heads of schools could not relate library provision with curricular development. In most schools however, activities were planned to encourage library use and although these activities took different forms and approaches, it was nevertheless possible to identify them as below:

- (1) Formal library instruction
- (2) Project work
- (3) Fieldwork

Examples of the activities undertaken are described below and whenever necessary, names of schools are quoted.

(1) FORMAL LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

(i) Park Comprehensive Secondary School (11–12 years old)

Use of library resources was incorporated into the Integrated Studies programme. However, formal library instruction took the form of 6 one-hour sessions, conducted in the first year of middle school for students of 11–12 age group. This will be reinforced throughout the pupils' school career through classroom teaching. In the first year, pupils were given library instruction in five sessions by the school librarian, through talks and pamphlets. At the sixth and last session, students were tested by means of practical exercises which took the form of a game. The class was divided into groups of 5–6 pupils and each group took turns to perform an assigned task. Each pupil was given exercise sheets which entailed having to answer 5 questions, and each question had a 10-minute time limit. Each group took turns to perform the tasks, which were designed to test their use of the subject, author and title indexes, shelf arrangement and encyclopaedia. Through these exercises pupils were taught the alphabetical and simple numerical sequences as well as use of indexes in library search. At each stage, either the librarian, her assistant or the class teacher was in attendance. There was no immediate feedback but the pupils will be tested at the end

of the year by means of a formal examination. This examination will form part of the Integrated Studies examination and would constitute 20 of the total marks. Those scoring less than 5% will be given remedial exercises.

(ii) **Hempshill Hall Primary School (5–10 years old)**

Formal library instruction was not undertaken in isolation. Library and information-handling skills were to be gradually developed through project work and the reading programme. However, in each class there was a simple library instruction flip chart containing instructions on how to look for books in the different sections of the de-compartmentalised library *as well as* a set of 6 cards containing exercises on how to use the encyclopaedia. Below is given a sample of the cards:

CARD 1

Fred Bloggs wants to find out about lots of different subjects so that he can appear in Mastermind!

Could you help him to use the Children's Britannica. Find vol. 20 (Index and Atlas).

Help Fred by finding the reference number for the following subjects:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. DIPLODOCUS | 4. SIGNET RING |
| 2. MUSICAL BOX | 5. DETECTIVE |
| 3. PRESS GANGS | 6. CANNIBALS |

CARD 2

Fred Bloggs is going to make some notes from the Children's Britannica but he needs your help.

Here are some subjects with their reference numbers. Could you look for these subjects and write the first sentence for Fred:

1. ABSORPTION –1–9b
2. ACCORDIAN –1–11b
3. FESTIVALS, MUSICAL 7–12bb
4. LYREBIRD 11–23A
5. MUFFIN MAN 12–24b
6. TOWN CRIER 17–251b

Formal library instructions in the schools observed took different forms and approaches. Some were undertaken in isolation while some were integrated into the curricular activities of the schools. Despite the different approaches there was a general awareness of a common aim – the need to inculcate skills in the use of the library system and resources.

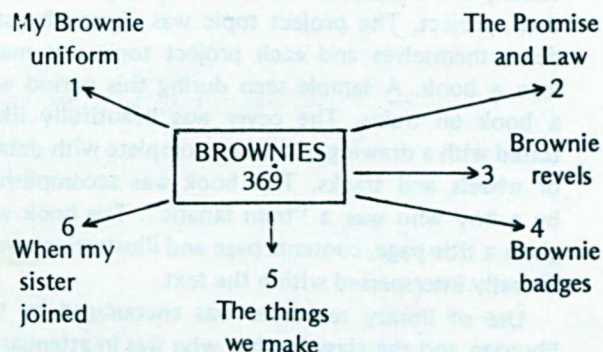
(2) PROJECT WORK

(i) **Hempshill Hall Primary School**

Project work was regarded as the most suitable vehicle for the development of study skills. Most schools observed had project work as part and parcel of the school curriculum but in Hempshill Hall, project work formed the basis of classroom learning. Project work was structured such that pupils were exposed to using library resources from as soon as they had mastered reading to the time when they completed their primary education. In this school, each project was teacher-directed at every stage.

A brief description of what constituted a project is given below. The illustration is an example of the flow chart drawn by the pupil. The stripes represented blue colour and the call number 369 denoted location of the subject area as determined by the school.

PROJECT ON BROWNIES



Steps in project work

- (a) Every pupil was required to provide an "Introduction", stating the reason why the topic was chosen.
- (b) Pupil was asked to construct a simple flow chart – with each arrow representing a chapter.
- (c) The pupil was directed to the library to get books about "Brownies".
- (d) The pupil coloured in the denoting the area from where the books (colour coded) could be located. In this case it was blue.
- (e) The pupil also noted down the call number in the square. All books except fiction were classed according to simplified Dewey system.
- (f) The pupil then read the relevant books and made notes in her note-book, a chapter at a time.
- (g) The teacher checked her notes for each chapter and discussed with the pupil which points could be used for the chapter. This stage was

crucial in that the teacher would be expected to make comments that could lead the pupil to points missed by the pupil at the time of reading.

- (h) The pupil was encouraged to obtain information from all sources available in the library.
- (i) Based on the notes finally agreed upon by both teacher and pupil, the pupil wrote out the relevant points *in her own words* into the project book.
- (j) The pupil then went on to the next chapter, and the whole process began again.
- (k) A conclusion was provided in which the pupil expressed her intention to know more about Brownies, probably in the areas prompted by the teacher.

(ii) Park Comprehensive Secondary School

Project work was also undertaken in this school but during the period of observation, it was not possible to see the whole range. During the week of observation, one classroom was in the library writing up their project. The project topic was chosen by students themselves and each project topic was made into a book. A sample seen during this period was a book on trains. The cover was beautifully illustrated with a drawing of a train, complete with details of wheels and tracks. This book was accomplished by a boy who was a "train fanatic". The book was given a title page, contents page and illustrations were liberally interspersed within the text

Use of library resources was encouraged by the librarian and the class teacher who was in attendance throughout the whole library session.

(3) FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

The term "fieldwork" is used for want of a better word and to distinguish these activities from project work. Fieldwork activities were curricular activities undertaken outside school and in various formats, the main ones being nature study excursions, local studies walks and visits to historical sites. Formats may vary but the purpose was the same – to provide students with a first-hand experience whenever possible, of things learned. This was one area where the school libraries played a dominant role in laying the groundwork as well as provide back-up services for the fieldwork.

Briefly, the main features of these activities were:

- (i) Teaching was conducted on-site with students taking down notes and making relevant drawings.
- (ii) Specimens were collected and brought back to classrooms for verification (from reference

books) as in the case of nature study excursions.

- (iii) Library resources were utilised before and after the fieldwork. In the case of the visit to the Roman remains undertaken by the Park Comprehensive Secondary School for their history lesson on the Roman period of British history, pupils were required to answer numerous questions on-site but one or two questions had to be dealt with before the visit.
- (iv) The fieldwork was usually structured to facilitate learning, thus for each:
 - (a) Teachers explained the objectives of walk/excursion/visit.
 - (b) Teaching-learning support materials (maps, questionnaires, etc.) were prepared to ensure that learning took place *eg.* pupils were given question-answer scripts for each of the 12–15 'relics' visited at Lincoln.
 - (c) Pupils undertook their own note-making on-site.
 - (d) Library resources relevant to the topic were retrieved and displayed for reading/reference before and after the activity.
 - (e) The fieldwork was backed up by classroom work with pupils having to put together their notes and illustrations as an assignment, which in most cases were marked and graded by the teachers.
 - (f) Grades or marks obtained were incorporated into end-of-year examination *eg.* the Lincoln visit assignment was allotted a certain percentage in the final examination.

These activities enabled different skills to be learned *eg.* map-reading skills as in the case of the local studies walk, observation skills as in the case of the nature-study excursions, note-taking, note-making, note-using, and presentation/communication skills as in the case of the Lincoln visit.

CONCLUSION

The activities described above were some of the types of library-related curricular activities that were undertaken by certain selected schools in Nottinghamshire. The extent and scope of library involvement ranged from total involvement of the librarian in curricular activities, working together (as head of department) with other heads of subject departments through the Integrated Studies Programme as in the case of Park Comprehensive Secondary School, to total non-involvement. Reasons for this non-involvement could be attributed to the negative attitude of the head of school towards libraries thus influencing

the philosophy and policy of library use, the conservative and traditional nature of the school (and of the head of school, teachers, students) which could be a reflection of the mentality of the population within its catchment area, lack of funds, no provision for the appointment of a professionally qualified librarian, etc.

Since the main purpose of the observation was to get an insight into the *type* of activities that libraries could undertake to support curricular activities as well as *how* they could be undertaken, there was no specific attempt made to observe teaching methods.

However, by observing the activities described above, it was possible to identify certain features or elements in the teaching strategies that were conducive to the fostering of greater library involvement in classroom activities, such as:

- (i) Team-teaching
- (ii) Cross-curricular teaching
- (iii) Resource-based teaching

Together they represented a method of teaching from which (a) pupils could take advantage of the skills and expertise of many different teachers (b) benefit from multidisciplinary activities and (c) be exposed to a wider range of information sources.

This multidisciplinary and cross-curricular approach could be the answer to the librarian's prayers. To ensure that the librarian can fully support this new approach to teaching-learning, she has got to be a member of the teaching team so as to ensure the effectiveness of the librarian's role. She has to fully understand teaching objectives and curricular aims inherent in this approach and to be conversant with the types of activities to be undertaken so that the right type of resources could be made available.

Thus, considered from different angles, there seems to be no plausible reason why school libraries cannot effectively support classroom teaching and learning. All that is needed, as in many other things in life — is probably the opportunity to prove that it can be done.