

COURTESY S. COHAN, LIDA LEE TALL SCHOOL, TOWSON, MD.

A personal expression of the library's "unique function."

Isabel Wilner

A Library Is A Library

A LIBRARY is a Library. Make it a Materials Center and you have created something else. Put it in an All-Purpose Room and you have changed its purpose. Divide it up among classrooms and you have altered its function.

A library is a place for books. And books need people to enjoy them. Children to pore over them, to wander through them and wonder, to leaf over them and laugh over them and love them. Teachers to know them, to delight in them, and to want to share them. Librarians who are not merely the keepers but the ambassadors of books, their representatives, their introducers, their friends and advocates.

Knowing the library should therefore begin early, and a knowledge of its use should be acquired by a process akin to osmosis.

We sometimes hear the view expressed that the library is for the older children in the school, and that the younger ones could very well be omitted from its services. Surely a librarian could not hold with this view; I would, in fact, go so far as to say that we should forego library experiences in the last three years of elementary school, rather than omit them in the first three. "Train up a child in the way he should go . . ." holds true here. After three or four years of close contact with a library the children are committed to books. They will find them. When they find them in their school library the delightful harvest of joy in reading is ready to be reaped in the years that remain.

To Open the Books

The kind of library to which I refer is created by an attitude on the part of teachers, children, parents, librarian, administrators. All must see the library for what it is. No one person alone can make it what it might be. Sharing, communicating: these are so important. Teachers and librarians, working together, see library and classroom each extending, confirming and strengthening the work of the other.

There are many ways of working together, many times and places. We have library periods—a unique time for teacher and librarian to work together in the library with children and books.

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Some schools apparently view this library time as a free period for the teacher. Nothing so quickly defeats the whole library purpose as this view of the library. By his very presence the teacher is announcing his commitment to books. He can browse, he can read, he is there to help when needed. He can unearth treasures waiting for his touch.

I am reminded of the time a teacher of our oldest children left the library while stories were being told. When he returned the children said, "Oh, you missed the *best* one!" and then to me, "Could you tell it again so he can hear it?" Of course I did: who could resist such an invitation!

To open the books: that is the business of the librarian. To tell stories, to dip into books here and there, to read children into books and let them go on by themselves. To work with teachers in building up a common background of literature. To know what books children have loved and what ones they might love, if given a chance.

Time in the library is by no means limited to a library period. The library doors open a half an hour before the school day begins. It is used all day and after school as well. There is often time early in the morning just to sit and read together, for children to read aloud to each other, for the librarian to read or be read to, a time when books can be introduced to two or three.

Children like to help. We have enough jobs at hand so they can be distributed to all who ask. Some of these jobs can be quiet ways of reinforcing library skills. Tasks which include checking the card catalog or looking for certain books all serve a double function. I shall never again attempt to do an inventory without the help of ten-year-olds. Among other things this introduces them to books they may have overlooked. Last year at the close of inventory one of our ten-year-old helpers appeared with a package addressed "To the Library and Miss Wilner." The inside flap of his penciled, decorated card bore a legend which said "For reading to me and . . ." Here I could see that it had been revised. What had originally said "and helping me" was now altered to read "and letting me help."

Oh yes, we let lots of people help. Our parent volunteers, at least twenty-four different ones every two weeks stamp, shelve, mend, type, paste, mark, file. We could not survive without them. Parent volunteers are another link between books and children, another link between home and school.

A group of our older children helped this year as readers to the kindergarten. For the first semester the kindergarten had come to the library for storytelling, but the looking-at-books had been done in the classroom. In February our Readers came, ten or twelve at a time, to read to the five-year-olds books they chose to hear. An older child from another group coming in one day and hearing the din of a dozen voices said, "This is a library? It doesn't sound very quiet to me."

The Width of Wonder

Quiet. Children love it. One said one day, "Do you know what I like about the library? Well, for one thing—quiet, and for another, I just like messing about with books." There is a time for talking and a time for silence, and the library makes use of both.

A library that sees itself as a Materials

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cordings in a listening room or with earphones, according to the circumstances; others preparing materials in an area where facilities and supplies are made available.

The challenge and the opportunity for the librarian in the materials center is all but limitless. How he meets the challenge and takes advantage of the opportunities will make the difference between whether the library will be swallowed up by the materials center, overshadowed by the materials center or expanded to encompass or become the materials center.

A Library—*Wilner*

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Center looks in a different way at a book. I do not believe that books can be relegated to the region of materials, touching as many of them do the realm of the heart and the spirit. Books cannot be discovered by catalogs and indexes alone. They must be read. How else could we answer requests such as, "Find me a book about a girl who goes away for a visit and has a real good time and comes home again." . . . "Find me a book that feels like *Loretta Mason Potts.*" (When you say, "How does it feel?" you receive the reply, "Well, you're there.") . . . "Find me a funny book and a wonderful one." (And, knowing the speaker, you know what *wonderful* means.)

Books are not *things* to be *used.* Too many teachers ask of a book "How can I use it?", expecting it to teach a lesson or correlate with the study of the moment, underestimating the tremendous dimensions in books: the width of wonder and wisdom, the breadth of beauty, the length of loveliness, the height of humor, and the depth of delight.

Books that give information should give it accurately and interestingly, but there are books which give immeasurably more. Books that take us beyond the bounds of time and space into ages past, into other regions and races, into imaginative realms where good and evil are engaged in a mighty struggle. This is what makes children readers: the magical process of converting words on a page into the thoughts and feelings of people like ourselves or people far from here or long ago, in mystical realms like Narnia or down-to-earth ones like Cranberry, Connecticut, in the big woods of Wisconsin, or on the Island of the Blue Dolphins, on Spider Monkey Island or on the Island of Tangerina.

Children become readers from experiences with books in which "you're there" knowing, seeing, feeling, understanding, wondering, watching, waiting, hoping, fearing, guessing, wishing.

In the making of readers the school library exists to help.

Communication Specialist—*Jensen*

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Teachers would be able to devote their time to the tasks that only human beings can accomplish. The planning of programs; the direction of discussion; the identification of student need and difficulty; the evaluation of projects and achievement involving subjective judgments; individual guidance and counseling on the problems of social, personal and career development; the human acts and contacts for which there has never been adequate time and energy—all of these technology can free a teacher to do.

The end result could be that the entire school plant, and local community everywhere and the world at large would be the Centers of Learning, not only for the developing young but also for the graduated adult.

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