

SECTION EIGHT

USING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

The purposes of the school library are:

1. To support the teaching and educational work of the school.
2. To develop in young people a habit of reading both for pleasure and for the purpose of gathering information for themselves.

These purposes will not be achieved automatically. The school and the librarian must set out to make them happen for the benefit of each child.

The use of books to support studies depends on two things. One is the existence of a well-stocked, well-organised and easily accessible library. The other is the attitude of the staff including the head teacher.

Take every opportunity to do what you can to foster a positive attitude towards the library. In undertaking this task the following facts may be helpful. One is that teachers nearly always find that they do not have time in their lessons to teach everything they would like their pupils to know about a subject. The pupils therefore need to supplement their classwork with further reading. A second is that a great deal of useful general information is not included on the school curriculum and is not taught in class. Only the library can supply this information. A third is that children need to develop their reading skill if they are to achieve their full potential. A fourth is that schools have the task of preparing children to continue learning after they leave school when they can no

longer turn to teachers for assistance. Modern education relies more and more on "project" methods, where the process of education depends on guided discovery by the pupil, using the library as well as other sources.

Educational Use of the Library

If your library is to play its full part in supporting the school's teaching programme, you will have to work closely with your teaching colleagues. You must keep in regular touch with them and suggest ways in which the library can help their plans. At the same time, you must also ensure that teachers do not develop ambitious programmes of learning based on the library which the resources of the library cannot support. If projects of this kind are to succeed, the library must be able to provide the materials required. It must also be able to accommodate all the children who wish to use the stock at any one time. Planning of this kind should take place at regular meetings at which you are able to discuss the school's curriculum and work with the teaching staff.

Information Seeking

The library must also encourage individual pupils to develop the habit of seeking and finding information in the library. Most of the information that people want throughout their adult life exists in published form. But many people have never learned the habit of seeking it in books and libraries. Developing the habit is something which can be encouraged at school and which will bring lasting benefit in adult life.

For this purpose the library needs to be available to the pupils when they want to supplement their schoolwork or follow up their own personal interests. It needs to have the range of materials to enable the pupils to succeed in finding the information they want. It needs to be organised in such a way that answers to questions can be found. It also needs to provide a service which helps children to develop the skills of finding information for themselves.

Promoting the Use of the Library

Booklists

The use of books and other materials can be encouraged by the preparation of lists. The object of a booklist is to draw the attention of pupils to books they may not have come across, or thought not worth trying. Before starting to prepare a booklist, therefore, it is important to decide:

1. Who am I trying to persuade - what age of children for example?
2. What kind of material am I seeking to encourage them to read?
3. Why do I want them to read it?
4. Is a booklist the best way to achieve this purpose?

Only when you have answered these questions clearly can you set about making a useful list.

Lists may be related to:

1. Pupils' needs in connection with their projects.
2. Their hobbies and interests outside school.
3. Widening their recreational reading tastes.

Many booklists will be prepared by the librarian or by other members of the teaching staff. But the preparation of a simple booklist can be part of a pupil's work, either as part of a project or to give practice in making use of books and the library.

The preparation of booklists can also be a way of checking the library's resources. A booklist is not simply an extract from the catalogue. It should also take into account what material ought to be available. This in turn will encourage you to fill gaps in the stock of the library.

A booklist is not a simple listing. In its arrangement, and in notes and critical comments, it should indicate to the user the usefulness of each item included.

Training in the preparation of booklists will be of special assistance to older students who should be encouraged to add bibliographical references to their written work.

Displays

The wider use of the school library will also be encouraged by the use of displays. They are a good way of drawing attention to sections of the library's stock or to new books, or new groupings of material from a variety of subjects. They are also a good way of linking the library to what is going on in the school. Thus, a subject department may wish to display some of its work, and the use of the library for this will both demonstrate the part the library has played and the kind of resources the library has on the subject. Displays may also be arranged in the library to link with special school activities or the work of school clubs or youth groups.

Sometimes an occasion arises which is of interest to the whole school. Possible examples are a major sporting event or an international conference in your country, or an important national campaign (e.g. on health or road safety). In such cases you may wish to mount a display in a prominent place in the school so as to draw everyone's attention to the materials on the subject which are available in the school library.

Teaching the Use of the Library

The use of books is not a skill which comes naturally: it has to be learnt. Non-fiction books are organised in such a way as to communicate information, and to enable it to be found easily. Unless the skill of using books is learnt, information can be missed or misunderstood, and much time can be wasted in searching for information.

Many schools give "library lessons", in which this skill is taught. The idea is a good one. But there are two weaknesses to guard against. The first is to forget the real objective which is to enable readers to use books and libraries efficiently, not to acquire the skills of a librarian - a very different thing. The second is to suggest that the skill of using books is an end in itself rather than a means to the end of being able to find information quickly and efficiently. Formal training in the use of books and libraries should be planned. It should be based on clear decisions about what pupils should be able to do at various ages and levels of achievement. It should be related also to what pupils need to know at various stages of their school work.

The skills that children need to acquire can be divided into two broad groups:

1. Skills in the use of books (study skills).
2. Skills in the use of libraries (library skills).

Study Skills

The first of these skills will help pupils to make the best use of significant parts of a book which they might otherwise overlook. You should therefore teach pupils about:

1. The title page: the importance of the information to be found there, including the title, the name of the author, and the date of publication; the importance of reading and recording this information correctly.

The author and title identifies the book, distinguishing it from any other book by the same author, or any other book with the same title by another author. Should a pupil wish to read the book again, or to check on any information taken from it, he needs to record these details accurately if he is to find the book without difficulty.

The book's date of publication indicates how recent the information in the book is likely to be. A book on any subject published ten years ago cannot contain the

most recent information on the subject. Sometimes this is not important. A history book is not likely to be unreliable merely because it is ten years old. But in other cases (e.g. space exploration) a ten-year-old book can be seriously out of date.

2. The contents list: its use in finding out what the book is about; what it covers (and excludes); and the guidance it can give to seeking a particular piece of information.

Turn to the contents list of this book. This shows what the book is about; how it is arranged; and whereabouts in the book the main subjects are likely to be found.

3. The index: how it is arranged: what special features it contains; care in using it intelligently so as to ensure that all the possible places are tried to find a particular piece of information.

Turn to the index-glossary on page 118. Most books merely list subjects, names and so on, and refer the reader to the page where they are dealt with. This one explains some of the less common terms. To find further information, look up the pages to which the index directs you.

4. The illustrations; what kind are they? What can be learnt from diagrams?

Turn to one of the pages of diagrams. The illustrations in this book are drawings intended to show detail more clearly than, for example, a photograph would. For some subjects (such as painting), a diagram would be useless; a photograph, if possible in colour, would be essential.

5. Bibliographies and other ways in which books guide readers to other sources of information.

Turn to the bibliography on pages 90-93. No book can tell you everything, even on its own subject. But it can suggest other books which deal with aspects of the subject in more detail or approach them in a different way. Pupils should learn how to use a bibliography as a guide to other information on the subject, making a careful and accurate note of the books suggested.

The Need to Prepare a Study Programme

Pupils should not be expected to learn all these study skills from the outset of their school career. Instead, they should acquire them gradually as they grow older and their familiarity with books increases. For example, books used by younger children may not include an index or a bibliography.

You will need to prepare a programme listing the skills which pupils should gain at each stage. You will also need to devise exercises, games and competitions which will help them to acquire the skills.

The aims of this programme are to show pupils:

1. How to use a book to find a particular piece of information rather than reading it from beginning to end.
2. How to make notes rather than copying out every word.
3. How to compare and combine information from more than one source (one of the most important skills a school can teach).

Library Skills

Training in library use is intended to make the pupils capable of using a well-organised library for finding information. They will need to know:

1. The purpose and nature of a library.
2. Its general organisation.
3. The basic idea of the classified arrangement.
4. How to use the catalogue to trace items so as to find information.
5. How to use bibliographical materials in order to find out what books and other items are in existence.

A Study Programme Year by Year

The skills can be taught in stages which take into account the number of years the pupils spend in school and the pace and ability of individual children. Thus a plan could be followed which would aim at giving children the following levels of skill over a period of nine years. Where less time is available, the period can, of course, be shortened.

Years 1 and 2

An awareness of books and other materials as physical objects and as sources of interest and enjoyment.

Many children may have had little contact with books, and will not know the pleasure to be gained from reading or the value of books as a way of finding out information. Teachers should therefore help to develop this understanding of books:

- (a) By reading stories, or amusing and exciting parts from longer books, so as to encourage the children to read them for enjoyment.
- (b) By demonstrating the value of books for information, by using books themselves, by showing children how and why they do so, and by setting children to find the answers to their questions in books instead of telling them the answers all the time.
- (c) By showing children how to take good care of books. Some points they need to know are:
 - (i) When taking a book from a shelf, never pull it out by the top of the spine or you may tear it off. Instead, press the first finger on the top of the book and pull the book gently towards you.
 - (ii) Dirt, dust, sunshine, and moisture all damage books. So never leave a book on the ground or near windows where the sun and rain might reach them, and never put down a glass or a cup on a book.

(iii) Never turn down the corners of pages to mark your place. Never underline passages in books or write in them.

(iv) Tell the librarian about any library book which requires repair or looks as though it may soon need to be repaired.

Years 3 and 4

An elementary understanding of the way in which libraries collect and organise their materials; the range of topics covered in books and other materials; the difference between fiction and non-fiction; how to find the book or other item needed to produce a piece of information required; the elements of the organisation of the book (e.g. author, title, contents, index); elementary reference use (e.g. dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases).

Years 5 and 6

The systematic organisation of the library; the internal organisation of the book; common types of reference tool and the retrieval of specific facts; print materials other than books (e.g. the use of periodicals, charts etc.).

Years 7, 8 and 9

More sophisticated skills in library use; the wider range of libraries and of other sources of information; the simple comparative use of books; the use of several books or other items to bring together different pieces of information on a topic, or different points of view on a subject.

If these levels of achievement are acquired gradually, beginning at about the age of seven years and building on what is already known, the young person leaving school whether for further formal education or not - will be equipped to make competent use of books and libraries in later life.

Training should combine teaching, demonstration and practice, and be related to the children's needs in their school work. To use the library at all, some basic

instruction in all aspects will be necessary from the beginning. Special attention should be given from the outset to the practical task of finding information needed to supplement class work because this will make the acquisition of the skills obviously worth while.

Study Methods

The preparation of a programme to achieve these aims will involve:

1. Identifying books of subject interest and at the reading level of the pupils in the class which you are teaching, and which have those features you wish to teach about (e.g. a title page, a contents list, an index, a bibliography).
2. Giving pupils the confidence to use these features through games and contests. For instance, you may ask them "Who has a book by such and such an author?" "Who has a book by such and such a publisher?" "Has anyone a book which contains information about dogs?"

The questions can be given to the whole class orally, or they may be written down on work cards so that children can work through the questions as individuals.

3. Demonstrating how to make notes. One way of doing this is to duplicate a few paragraphs so that each member of the class has a copy, and showing how you would make notes on the paragraphs. Pupils can then be encouraged to apply the same methods to certain paragraphs in a library book, and you can check and comment on their efforts.
4. Enabling students to practice the skill of comparing and combining information from different sources. You will need to identify books on the same subject for each pupil in a group. You can demonstrate the skill by means of a duplicated sheet containing paragraphs from two different books on the same subject. To be successful, the teaching programme requires careful preparation. You will be able to improve and extend your range of examples as time goes on. Remember to keep a file of information about the books you use in the programme.

Reading for Pleasure

The school library needs to develop the habit of reading for entertainment and enjoyment. There are several reasons for this.

1. Learning to read is more than a matter of learning the mechanical skills of the process. The more that children read for pleasure the more fluent they will become, and the more they will be able to increase their powers of comprehension.

2. Stories and other kinds of imaginative literature offer a range of experiences which children can relate to their own experience, or use as a means of testing social and interpersonal situations which they may meet in the future. In other words, children can exercise their imagination and judgement in ways which will help them to develop into mature adults.

3. The habit of reading for enjoyment will remain for life as one of the most creative ways of using leisure time.

In encouraging reading for pleasure, direct instruction is likely to be less effective than giving a good example and sharing your enthusiasm. So read children's books yourself and get to know them. You will then be able to recommend a book, not on the basis of formal approval but because you have yourself drawn enjoyment from it. Also, with your knowledge of the contents of the books and the personalities and interests of the children, you will be in a unique position to help individual children to make good choices from the books stocked by the library.

There are various ways of stimulating interest in story books. One is to read aloud an extract from a book, stopping at a point of particular interest or excitement and telling the class that the book is available in the library for those who wish to find out "what happened next". This is a task not only for the school librarian but for all teachers who share the concern for books and reading among the children. Make sure, as librarian, that if attention is being drawn to a particular book,

you have plenty of copies available for borrowing. It is no good building up enthusiasm if demand cannot be met quickly.