



LMS ... Libraries Must Suffer?

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Margaret Köberl writes an open letter to the clients of School Library Services everywhere.

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Dear Headteachers and School Governors,

Before you succumb completely to the LMS gold rush and desert your local school library service, consider the three Es ... efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

First, though, let me agree with you - anyone can buy books. But can you put hand on heart and honestly say that you'll buy library books - and only library books - with the money you receive from the education authority? No, I'm afraid cheating isn't allowed. Text books and multiple copies of set texts - important as they may be - are not necessarily the books which will foster a lifelong love of reading in your children. Have you really the time to sift through the wealth of literature and information now on the market? 5063 books were published for children alone in 1988. A good specialist children's bookseller can stock up to 20,000 titles and secondary schools also need to acquire non-fiction titles from the adult lists.

The books chosen by your SLS are selected using a strict set of criteria to ensure that standards are maintained and that value for money is given. Each book is examined by a professional librarian for style, quality of illustrations and factual content. Once purchased, the books are then categorised into infant, junior, secondary and teenage to help the teacher and save that most valuable commodity - time. There's also a wide range of other material available - books for tiny tots, for children with special needs, books for the reluctant reader and for GCSE candidates, books for fun, books to educate, books to treasure, in paperback and hardback - whatever your preference.

What's more, if you're unable to visit your library centre, many school library services will come to you. The schools' mobile will make regular visits, enabling both staff and pupils to do their own choosing from books and cassettes.

Are you having problems, perhaps, with resourcing the National Curriculum - only five books on the Romans for a class of thirty information-hungry ten-year-olds? Then don't despair. Put pen to paper and fill in an application form for a project loan, or curriculum pack, to supplement your own resources. Project loans are short-term loan collections of books and AV material on a wide variety of topics, ranging from 'Myself books for the reception class to resources on, for example, World War II at GCSE level - not to mention a video of 'Hamlet' or 'Macbeth' to delight your English Literature students. Once the project is completed, all that's required is that the material be collected together, boxed and returned. What could be simpler and yet so economical? Or so effective and efficient?

After all, with the National Curriculum, GCSE, HMI visits and reports, can you afford to neglect the school library? How many schools, for example, have a written library policy?

'Perhaps the most important step a school can take to improve its resource provision is the fundamental one of formulating a policy for the resource centre, based upon discussion by the whole staff and presented within the context of discussion about the curriculum.'

DES, 1985

Your SLS provides an advisory service on all aspects of school librarianship - from formulating policy to book promotion. At your invitation, a senior librarian will visit the school to discuss your library projects or problems. We offer practical advice on layout, shelving and furniture - creating an attractive library, however unpromising the starting-point.

If you already have an attractive library, maybe you need an effective information retrieval system (manual or computerised). For this our help is at hand - also with operating it once it's in place. Librarians, working alongside teachers, can formulate library/information skills programmes which will be of value to children as independent learners throughout their lives.

Professional librarians will share their secrets, giving talks and holding practical sessions on everything from book selection, publicity and displays to computerisation. Why not invite a Schools' Librarian to participate in one of your own INSET days? Remember - while you have a school library service, you're never on your own.

What else can we offer? Well, we reduce the nightmares of organising a book week by offering information on authors, putting on book exhibitions, telling stories, and showing videos whilst our voices recover. Or, if you prefer, you can take advantage of our own special events such as book fairs, Christmas activities, Children's Book of the Year Award, library quizzes and so on. There will be some variation according to area, but every SLS in the country offers a wide choice of services.

In conclusion, let's consider the need to foster the growth and development of school libraries in conjunction with a school library service:

'Evidence regarding the need to improve the provision of library and information services in schools and the use made of this provision is abundant... The need is also an urgent one.'

LISC report, 1984

The teaching of English within the National Curriculum reinforces this:

'Teachers need ... the support of well chosen and well supplied book stocks in classrooms, in school libraries and from local authority library services.'

So the evidence is strong for the improvement of school libraries and for the continued support of a dedicated and professional school library service. By building together for the future, we can make our school libraries something to be proud of and the envy of all. And if you are still not convinced ... a good school library may be a selling point in attracting more pupils. Now that's a thought!

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Koberl

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