What’s the real story? Is the Coquitlam library experience working?

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The debate over the school-housed public library is documented well in the literature on the basis of experience and criteria for its evaluation. It was surprising then that the Moccasin Telegraph chose to print an article on this topic (The Coquitlam Library Experience: A Critical Look at the Centennial High School Library, by Harry Hobbs, November 1971) which was poorly researched, grammatically unsound and quite incomplete. The article was printed previously in ADLIB in October 1970 but was not updated in spite of the experimental nature of the operation. More importantly, suspicions of a year ago ("I got the impression, perhaps an incorrect one...") were neither confirmed nor denied. An examination of a few of the issues seems in order.

The narrow Ontario basis is an unfortunate but common problem. The Ontario Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education did indeed recommend in Living and Learning (1968) the integration, where feasible and advisable, of public and school library services under local Boards of Education and, yes, "since the report came out, experiments have been tried at combination with various degrees of success"; however, Ontario cannot claim this red herring as her own. The school-housed public library is an old idea discussed at length on several occasions in the past. Several areas, among them Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York and Toronto, have tried integration but low circulation by the
public forced early closings. Some states have adopted policy statements based on these results opposing the practice.

How does the Coquitlam public react to the immediate need for extensive sections of the collection by students? How does the public react to forty minute "shuffles" when the library fills to capacity and empties with a bell? Does the noise of changing classes and student groups and the confusion therein cause frustration and consternation for adults? Does this adult use impede student use? Conversely, does student use interfere with adult use of library services? How do adults accept short term loan systems such as overnight and three days? The Hall - Dennis Report (Living and Learning) also recognized this need to have materials immediately on hand for student use:

Our perception of how learning takes place and of the kind of teaching that facilitates the process, requires that the teacher understand the use of a variety of techniques in the interest of every child. Information contained on film, records and tape and in pictures and books must be accessible to each child when he needs it.

(p. 15)

At Coquitlam is the public librarian subject to the rules and regulations of the school? Is the public librarian able to determine his goals on his own and set priorities emphasizing the community
rather than the school? Is the public librarian trained to deal with questions of discipline? Does the public librarian successfully engage in counselling students? Is he familiar with the curriculum, its development and potential in connection with teaching situations? Does the public librarian consult with teachers and suggest more and better uses of learning media? Does he selectively disseminate information of value to teachers? Indeed, do teachers welcome advice from a public librarian? Avenues of curriculum research and development and relationships with teachers and students form the basis of education in school librarianship as well as the teaching of learning skills when necessary. The training of the teacher-librarian de-emphasizes duties of library science such as circulation, cataloguing and processing which so often become havens of solitude in the public sphere; the art of librarianship is more important in the school. The school "clientele" is narrow and particular with unique concerns.

Adult borrowers must necessitate borrowers cards to follow overdue materials. School library materials can be traced immediately when needed and fetched without hoping for return or annual amnesty days. Are materials which will be needed next week or next month lent to members of the community? Is financial consideration given for added loss? In order to reach a level slightly lower than current
educational standards requires an initial budget outlay in excess of one hundred thousand dollars for learning materials alone—a sum unlikely in light of current restrictions. To lend equipment with non-print materials leads to other problems obvious at even a cursory glance. Hardware for slides, filmstrips, films, film loops, phonodiscs, audiotapes and so on are in constant demand by students and teachers.

The school library's primary purpose is to support the specific curriculum of the individual school whereas the public library must cater to the several and varied interests of the entire adult population of the community and thus supplement and complement the school library. Materials selected carefully by the teacher-librarian in conjunction with subject specialists holds less interest for the general reader; a collection selected for the community fails to serve well the requirements of staff and students in the school. The two are mutually exclusive within the context of good service under existing circumstances. Whether one advocates censorship or strict book selection or not materials above the level of the student in content or presentation receive little use; the "varied interests" of society do not necessarily reflect the intended purpose of the individual school.

Status and salary are purportedly major considerations in
the school - housed public library because "school librarians are better paid than public librarians due to the system of categorizing teachers laid down by their provincial federations". Could it be that school librarians receive higher salaries due to higher qualifications? Teacher training is not a summer picnic but a year of professional education culminating in a professional degree. Just as the professional public librarian is paid more than the library associate with an undergraduate degree so also is the school librarian making more money due to advanced training in both education and librarianship.

The major differences between the school library and the public library are focused in the education of their respective personnel. The teacher - librarian must know the curriculum thoroughly to ensure proper criteria in the selection of materials. Moreover, in his capacity as a resource person the teacher - librarian is constantly making suggestions on the best and maximum use of materials and services and in the wider, more important field of curriculum planning and development. Media must be integrated with courses to facilitate programme development or the resource centre remains a frill in the educational environment. The teacher - librarian is virtually the only person
in the school with a wide perspective on specific curriculum and where it overlaps between departments. It is imperative that he keep abreast of educational developments during the time that teachers prepare lessons and mark papers; it is also at this time that materials are selected for purchase. The training of the teacher - librarian emphasizes the student, his reading needs and interests and his role in the curriculum and education generally. School librarians must assist in individual research and develop and direct reading habits continually whereas the public librarian can and does tend not to emphasize these aspects. The public librarian is not trained to know when and how far to aid the student within the framework of the school and educational criteria.

It must be understood that the school librarian is not a public librarian situated in the school but an active member of the teaching staff planning and evaluating instructional objectives and directing learning experiences. At Coquitlam four specific areas of work defined only as "Materials Selection, Cataloguing, etc." are rotated according to the article among the school and public librarians as if there was no distinction. Surely this is not true and can be clarified. How much time is spent by the school librarians in curriculum planning and development? How was the collection selected? Was a methodical course by course ordering policy
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followed or was a public library balance the goal?

Our school libraries are hardly quiet avenues from the worries of the world; to the contrary, they are often the heart of the school with a vital and stimulating programme. Rather than bridge the infamous generation gap the school - housed public library could only widen it. The noise of bells, constant movement, student discussions and similar characteristics tend to irk the public. The public library should pursue programmes geared to the public sector without the straight - jacket of school bells and the constant and often complete use of auditorium and library facilities. What is the library programme at Centennial High School?

The public library must be where the "action" is be it downtown or in a busy suburban shopping centre. The school, however, does not have to attract clients in this way. Usually for financial and traffic reasons the school is located away from centres of activity. The school media centre must also be where the action is but emphasis is shifted from location to quarters and standards and programme. Where is the Coquitlam library located? Is the school programme hampered by the public use of facilities?

The school - housed public library may work quite well but this must be determined by the measurement of programme
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and services against solid criteria. The Coquitlam, British Columbia experiment in library service should be examined closely, critically and constructively unlike the Mocasin Telegraph report. Combinations of public and school libraries are more economical but the most important consideration of good service exists. Dual purpose organizations of this nature are often mediocre or worse. Is the Coquitlam experience a temporary economic measure or a permanent attempt at success? Poor service is no saving but a serious and immensely expensive loss to the public.