

## SECTION FIVE

### THE STOCK OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

The most important factor in the school library is its stock of materials. Most of the stock will consist of books. They should be selected for their quality and usefulness to the school. The stock should also contain non-book materials as these have great possibilities as a source of learning. They, too, must meet the needs of the users. When you are thinking about purchasing them, take into account their usefulness to staff and pupils. Also, if they require the use of equipment, make sure that the equipment is available and that the materials fit the equipment.

Librarians with only a small stock of materials may be tempted to add any others that they can obtain. This temptation must be resisted. No matter how limited the stock is, all the items must be useful. Any item which is not helpful to your users; any item which is out of date; any item which is kept after it is worn out or damaged; any item which is inaccurate or misleading; any item which no one uses or will use, is a waste of time and space. Worse, their presence will lead some users to suppose that the library as a whole is of no value to them. Such users will depart and may never return.

#### Size of Stock

Recommendations on the size of a school's library stock vary widely. Well-endowed schools may have up to 20 items

per pupil. More realistically, Singapore, for example, sets a standard of five books per pupil, and to these will be added audio-visual materials.

Many school libraries will begin with far less than this. But if the library is to serve all the pupils in the school, it should possess enough books to enable:

1. Every pupil in the school to have a book out on loan.
2. Some additional books to be available on the shelves so that individuals can refer to them or borrow them.
3. Some books to be kept on the shelves for class or group work in the library.

As an absolute minimum, therefore, the library should have a stock to start with of not less than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  books per pupil. It should aim to increase this as soon as possible by a planned process to a much more adequate figure.

### Principles of Selection

The stock of the library falls into two main divisions:

1. Materials chosen because of their value as information sources (information materials).
2. Those selected for their recreational or inspirational value.

### Selecting Information Materials

There are six points to take into account when selecting information materials for the school library:

1. The book or other information source should be accurate.
2. It should give a balanced view of the subject and not emphasise only a part of it.
3. It should cover the subject clearly. Ideas and facts

should be presented in a suitable sequence in a manner that can be easily understood.

4. It should be up to date.

5. It should be related to the ability of its users. For example, the text of a book for young children must be written in a simple vocabulary and use a simple sentence structure. Note also that a book written for users in a particular country may not be so useful to readers elsewhere (e.g. books on natural history, or the public services).

6. It should be of value to those who will be using the library. Ask yourself these questions: "What will it contribute to the stock and subject coverage of the library?" "Is material already available on this subject?" "Does it need to be supplemented by other material, and if so in what way (e.g. with material more suitable to younger readers)?"

In order to help you to put these six points into practice, here are some useful tips to bear in mind when making selections:

1. Check the past record of the publisher. Have previous books given him a good reputation for quality?

2. Check the name, background and reputation of the writer. Has he written other material on the subject?

3. Check the publication details given on one of the pages near the front of the book. You will learn from them how long ago the book was first published. You will see how often it has been reprinted. (Frequent reprinting is an indication that the book is a popular one). You will see how often it has been revised and brought up to date. (Note, however, that a revised edition may mean nothing more than a few alterations here and there).

4. Check up-to-dateness by sampling the book for recent events or changes (e.g. new countries or personalities who should be mentioned in the book).

5. Check accuracy and balance by consulting someone with

expert knowledge of the subject. You cannot be expected to be an expert in everything yourself, but you will often be able to find someone to give you useful advice.

### Selecting Fiction

Reading fiction is just as valuable as the use of information materials in the development of the individual. In the school library one of the main objectives of providing fiction is to encourage reading for enjoyment.

Children like stories that are well told, that relate to their interests and experience, and are written with a choice of words and style which they can follow easily.

Look, then, for a good story, with a sequence of incidents leading on from one to another. Some children's books rely too much on coincidence to make things happen or sort out problems. Look, too, for stories in which the characters are believable and behave as real people do. Some children's books by shallow or unpractised writers make their characters unbelievably good or bad. As in real life the characters should be a realistic mixture of good and bad qualities, and should behave in a realistic way. A story should also have a point. One which is nothing more than a series of incidents may entertain, but it will not stay in the memory. The good fiction book comes from a writer who wants to express an idea or make a point but who never allows the underlying message to dominate the story.

The school library should therefore aim to provide stories which children want to read for enjoyment, which are worth reading for their quality, and which will arouse in the reader a lasting interest. This does not mean that all books of acclaimed literary merit will appeal to all children. Some are difficult to comprehend and children may be discouraged from reading them for pleasure.

### Other Selection Principles

The physical quality of a book or other item is important

when a decision is being made on its selection. Here are some points to bear in mind.

1. Will the paper and the binding of the book stand up to the wear and tear of use by pupils?
2. Is it easy to read? A good clear typeface, well spaced, is important and will encourage reading.
3. For non-fiction material, is it easy to find a particular fact? A contents list and an index are usually desirable. Do they cover the contents thoroughly? Is the index detailed enough to lead quickly to a specific item? Does it guide readers accurately to the right place?
4. In most information books, illustrations, maps and/or diagrams are found. Do they help the text, or are they there only as decoration?
5. If colour is essential to an understanding of the text (for example, in a book on art) is it used and is it accurate? For some topics, it may be better to have one expensive book which has good quality colour than two cheaper ones which use only black and white.
6. Sound recordings should be clear and without distortion. On a disc recording, it should be easy to pick out one item from a collection where needed.
7. Visual items, such as slides, should be clear in focus. Colour, if it is used, should be close to reality. Headings and captions should be easy to read.
8. Where two types of the media are linked (e.g. a film-strip and a pamphlet of notes) they should be linked up clearly, and each should be an expansion of the other.

### General Conclusion

Experience in the library will soon reveal the gaps in the stock and the kinds of demand that users are likely to make. To add a book or other item just because you do not already have it, rather than because your users need it, is a waste of money and effort.

## The Process of Selection

A school library exists to support the school's work. The better it is, the more it will be of help to the teachers and the more use they will make of it. So do all you can to involve the teachers in the selection of informational materials for the library. They will bring to the task their knowledge of the subjects they teach, the materials that can best support their teaching, and the ways in which pupils can use the materials.

The best action to take is to form a Selection Committee to advise you on the choice of materials and the development of the library's stock. The members of this committee will be teachers representing each subject taught in the school. This will arouse and maintain their interest. It will encourage them to play their key part in providing a library which will serve their needs.

One of your tasks is to let your teaching colleagues know about material they wish to select. Teachers are fully occupied with teaching and will expect to be able to rely on you to draw their attention to new publications which are likely to be of interest to them. Another of the librarian's tasks is to build up a balanced stock. Some teachers may need to be persuaded to recommend books for the library. Others may have to be restrained from asking for more than their fair share.

## Budgeting for the Stock

It is helpful if the librarian has an annual budget so that spending on library materials can be planned and not left to chance. The budget should provide for three sections of spending:

1. Stock which is primarily the responsibility of the librarian to select. This will cover material which:

(a) is of interest to more than one subject area of the school's work;

(b) covers very broad fields of knowledge, such as a general encyclopedia;

(c) provides recreational reading, such as fiction;

(d) provides pupils with information on subjects which are not part of the school curriculum, such as their hobbies.

2. Stock related to the teaching programme which teaching colleagues should help to select.

3. Periodicals and newspapers which are acquired on the basis of a subscription.

One way of encouraging members of staff to participate in the selection process is to divide the part of the budget allocated in 2 above between the various subject departments (or, in a primary school, between class teachers).

Teachers who are told how much money they can spend are likely to make recommendations. Those who are not told may not bother to offer their ideas. (See also Appendix D).

#### **How to Balance the Stock**

Balance the stock of the library so that some subjects are not especially favoured at the expense of others. Try to give all subjects adequate coverage.

Material may sometimes be missed by a subject teacher because it relates to two or more school subjects, and each teacher expects the other to select it. Make sure that such gaps are filled.

Do ensure that books which fall outside the specific subjects taught in the school are not neglected. You must take responsibility for selecting material which is mainly intended to encourage reading for enjoyment, and which supports the out-of-school interests and hobbies of the pupils.

Finally you must select information materials of a general kind, such as encyclopedias and dictionaries, which are an essential part of the school library. Suggestions from teaching colleagues will of course be helpful.

## Gifts

Some materials may be offered to the library as gifts. Look at these very carefully. The same rules of selection which you use for buying material apply also to gifts. Do not add materials to the library just because they are free: consider whether they deserve a place in the library at all.

## Sources of Information and Supply

Ideally, books should be inspected before purchase. So you should take every opportunity of seeing books before deciding whether or not to buy them. One way of doing so is to visit neighbouring libraries that are bigger than yours and see what they possess. Another is to visit bookshops and publishers' showrooms. Occasionally book fairs and similar exhibitions will be organised. Attend them if you can. Perhaps you would like to organise a book exhibition yourself so as to encourage parents to buy books for their children or for the school library. If so, you will find the Commonwealth Secretariat's booklet "Organising Book Exhibitions" helpful.

In many countries, well-stocked libraries, showrooms and bookshops are confined to the major cities. If you live elsewhere you may have to rely heavily on booklists and catalogues as a source of information about available material. This is particularly true of materials published abroad. They can be very useful provided you know what purposes they are intended to serve and what their limitations are.

Most publishers of books and producers of non-book materials issue lists both of new works and of currently available stock. You should scan these for possible items, and then file them for future reference. These lists will include some information on the nature and purpose of each item: but the lists are of course intended as advertising, and should be used with this fact in mind. Such information is also intended in most cases for readers in the country of publication, and what may be true there is not always true outside that country.



## Reviews, Bibliographies and Lists

A more balanced and impartial view is given in reviews. Children's books are not often or very fully reviewed in general journals. The best reviews appear in specialist journals, such as The School Librarian. Educational journals also often include reviews of books suitable for school libraries. A list of some of the best known reviewing journals is given in Appendix G. Some national and regional school library services provide a reviewing service. It is important to find out if one is available in your area, or in an area with similar conditions to yours.

Bibliographies and booklists are prepared by libraries or professional groups of librarians and teachers. They are compiled to meet a particular need and are usually confined to a specific subject area, a specific age range, or a specific problem. The collection and scanning of such lists is a helpful starting point.

Non-book materials are, at present, not covered by lists or by reviews as extensively as books, although the situation is improving. Some reviews appear in specialist journals. Experience of a producer's earlier work is often the best guide in the use of his catalogue.

Most of the major British library suppliers issue annual lists of materials which they have in stock. Such lists are a useful guide to what is available, especially for pupils up to the age of about 15 or for general reading beyond that age. They must however be used with some of the same caution you apply to publishers' catalogues. They are not necessarily selective, and are not usually annotated.

As a comparison, examples taken from a publishers' list, a review journal, and a library-produced booklist appear as Appendix F.

### **Locally Produced Materials**

Locally produced materials have several advantages over foreign ones. They will have been prepared with local

needs and situations in mind. Their authors and publishers are likely to be better known. They are more frequently available for inspection before purchase. Even so, book distribution is not organised efficiently everywhere, and you may have difficulty in finding out what exists. You should therefore seek every opportunity of finding out what is being written and produced locally.

Give local publications very careful consideration. Because they are local they may be expected to be especially appropriate to the needs of your school. Look for those that endeavour to preserve the cultural heritage, record the background of the local society and help to develop new cultural forms and traditions. It is important for the school, and its library, to enable young people to appreciate their cultural heritage. Moreover the support given by schools will encourage further publishing and writing. But purchase should not be automatic. It is no service to local publishing to buy the poor material as well as the good. The careful selection of materials to meet needs of your library is just as important in purchasing local materials as in purchasing those produced elsewhere.

### Stock Editing

The stock of the library will not remain useful for ever. For this reason you should examine the existing stock regularly and remove items that are no longer worth keeping. Take as much care over this task as you do when adding new books and other materials. You must look at your library's stock regularly to decide:

1. Is the information content still accurate? Changes in the subject, and new developments and events may make a book, which was once very sound, inaccurate, wrong and misleading. Remove such books from the library.
2. Is the material still being used? If not, why not? Has interest in the subject disappeared? Has the style in which it is written become old-fashioned and unappealing? In short, does nobody want it? If so remove it from the library.

3. Is it still physically useable? Materials suffer from wear and tear. They become dirty, or fall apart, or pages fall out and get lost. Apart from making the book useless, this sets a bad example. If children see books in the library which are dirty or have loose binding or missing pages, they will think that care for the book does not matter. Small defects can be seen and corrected before they become serious, and loose pages can be replaced before they become lost. Other media must also be checked regularly. This is more difficult as wear and damage to non-book media may not be as obvious as they are with a book. Try out the materials on the proper equipment, and seek the comments of users when they return items to the library. When the materials are no longer serviceable, remove them from the library.

#### Binding

Books in a very poor physical condition can be rebound. Before doing this, however, consider very carefully whether it is worthwhile. The cost of rebinding is fairly high. If it is done, will the book repay the cost by its continued use? Would it be better to buy a newer edition? Or would another book, published more recently, be of more help?