The Local Community As Story And Culture:
Strategies For The Better
Integration Of Community
Resources Into The Lives Of Youth

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This paper considers community as part of cultural literacy and cultural story. It t is based on theories suggested by folklore, sociology, community psychology, and community planning that explain how community life is vibrant and exciting and how modern students can be directed to be involved in their communities' stories through community resources and services provided by their school libraries. Various library models and techniques are offered based on experiences, research and observations. Effective use of the Internet and other computer technologies is likewise outlined. A review of the important role of community resources in students' multicultural education concludes the presentation.

What Is Community?

Hillary Rodham Clinton used this old African proverb "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child" as the title of her book on the role of community in modern child rearing and support. In using this, she reinforced a truism often reflected in traditional folklore that individuals are culturally, socially and genetically connected to each other through community (Clinton, 1996, p. 12).

This need for community structure and identity as reflected in folklore is universal and a common factor in all human cultures. This concept significantly explains why community and the obligations of community life are taught and supported in today's schools, and reinforces the ideas that such teaching requires community information to be available in the school library.

Curriculum in folklorist traditions

Curriculum is a cultural statement and in the modern school it is designed to reflect and reinforce social and cultural norms. In this way, curriculum acts much like traditional folklore. Like folklore in traditional societies, curriculum, based on social and cultural expectations within the school, gives structure to what is selected for presentation to students and what is expected in the way of academic learning and positive social behaviours. Traditional folklore taught values of loyalty to clan, tribe, and family and it offered a code of conduct concerning gender roles and all other social relationships deemed important to groups and society at large. Modern school communities in most countries have endorsed the

importance of teaching civic goals and responsibilities to students. Students are generally taught early in their education the framework of community life and how they fit into and use civil structure and community life. As students advance in their educational experiences, curriculum is generally broadened to include the role and responsibility of the individual within his or her community. In most societies this includes emphasis on loyalty and patriotism to country. In democratic cultures, the role that the individual must play in fostering a democratic society is emphasised (Ross, 2001, p. 4). Some argue that because of social uncertainty, modern community, like traditional folklore, can offer some relief from the turmoil of modernisation by providing a sense of purpose and a framework for individual prosperity (Jacobs, 2001). This need for community structure and identity explains how community is generally taught and supported in today's schools.

The school curriculum and community

The American and Canadian school curricula have traditionally assumed some responsibility for teaching about communities and the important role that individuals must play in maintaining a viable democratic society. School curricula for younger children stress the importance of the neighbourhood and the people in a child's immediate environment. Curricula for older youth continue to do this, but they also introduce some of the complexities of social life, and emphasise the importance of personal involvement in and responsibility for community. Work roles and economic opportunities that are available in the community are likewise introduced. Secondary curricula often continue this, but may introduce critical analysis skills directed at helping youth probe some of the larger social issues which plague modern life. There is some argument concerning the role that critical analysis plays in community life instruction. One school of thought holds that instruction must continue to stress personal responsibility and loyalty to the community, state or province, and nation. The other view maintains that a well-informed citizen must be taught early to consider information about one's environment and to use that information in meaningful ways to understand problems and to make well-informed choices about social change. This theory holds that community instruction must stress the responsibility of the individual to encourage and participate in actions to correct perceived social problems (Ross, 2001).

Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, published in 1989 by the American Association of School Librarians recognised the value of community resources such as the public library, museums, government agencies and other private and social agencies as sources for information. The standards maintain that collaboration, networking, and links with these as well as business and civic organisations are fundamental to good learning and to the development of good citizenship and the healthy, personal development of youth in society (American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998, 124).

Similarly, school librarianship has always attempted to connect library programmes to personal support through information. Early textbooks on school library management argued that providing job and career information as well as offering reader advisement were services expected to be made available by the school librarian (Lukenbill 2001, pp. 6-7).

Community resources

In general terms, community information is information that exists within a community environment. This can be in the local neighbourhood, the city, county, or any other geographically defined area. It is often non-bibliographic in nature and may come from various sources including individuals, agencies, groups, and businesses. As mentioned, school libraries have always recognised that community resources are important to their collections and services; but because provision of such services has not been uniformly provided, this service has not received the attention that it deserves.

The best example of how community resources have traditionally been integrated into library programmes and services is the "Vertical File" or Information File." The Newark Public Library began its vertical file system early; and through the publication of its list of subject headings, it has undoubtedly influenced the development of the vertical file as a standard feature in libraries, albeit in present-day decline. The Library's subject heading lists, published from 1917 to 1956, were particularly useful in providing a guide for local community subject headings that could be easily modified for other localities. Not only did Newark provide guidance in subject heading construction, but it also suggested how and where to find community information ranging from biographical information to information about local cultural and governmental affairs (Ball, 1956).

The Hennepin County (Minnesota) Public Library is another excellent example of how community information has progressed well beyond the vertical file and has been integrated into the public catalogue. Early in the 1970s this library decided that because standard subject heading lists such as Library of Congress (LC) were not adequate to reflect the richness of community resources or to serve the information needs of citizens, that new subject headings were needed. Based on this rationale the library developed an internal subject heading list that reflected their view of local community needs. From there the library developed catalogue records that not only described traditional library book and non-book holdings, but also created records which described community information and services (Hennepin County [Minnesota] Public Library, 1993).

New information technology such as the Internet and information designs such as web pages and the development of MARC records to accommodate community information have likewise helped move community information into the mainstream of library information systems (Library of Congress and the National Library of Canada, 1999).

Louis Shores, reference authority, encyclopaedia editor, and a former dean of the Library School at Florida State University, recognised the vertical file or information file containing community information as a viable resource, and in his book on reference provided suggestions concerning its construction and management (Shores, 1954, pp. 227-28). Margaret Rufsvold, founding dean of the Graduate School of Library Service, Indiana University, in her book on the management of audio-visual materials in the school library likewise included community information as audio-visual materials, along with maps and globes. Unlike Shores who emphasised the reference value of the file, she directed her attention to the community file as a vehicle for curriculum support. She was particularly interested in seeing that school librarians of the day understood that the curriculum reached well beyond the classroom and that librarians played a key role in making the connection between school and community. She advised school librarians to keep a systematic record or file of appropriate sites for field visits, persons in the local community who had interesting collections and artefacts for sharing, and persons who would be willing to come to the school

as guest speakers or performers. She outlined how to record and disseminate this information and how to carefully maintain a file system based on appropriate subject headings (Rufsvold, 1949). Later writers such as Davies (1979, pp. 201-04) and Van Orden (2002, pp. 60-66) continued to support community information as a central service provided by school libraries.

Information and reference services

In the 1960s and 1970s both in the United States and abroad, public libraries began to pay more attention to their roles in providing community information and formalised Information and Referral (I &R) services. A generally accepted American definition of I&R service is that it is:

> ... the process of linking an individual with a need to a service or a source of information or advice which can fill that need. In providing this service, libraries must provide information and referral on several levels and by various methods. (Public Library Association, 1986, pp. 11-15)

Most public libraries have no problem in providing descriptive and directory-type community information. The problem appears to be that, in providing I&R service based on the above definition, some public librarians see a conflict in roles. The question is often asked: "By providing community information that requires advocacy or counselling support, is the library moving from its traditional politically neutral role to one of social activism?"

I&R services that have their base in social work agencies typically have been expected to offer advocacy and counselling support for their clients along with information. Although many librarians have rejected this aspect as not being appropriate for public libraries, the American Library Association, through the Public Library Association's guidelines of 1986 cited above supported a limited advocacy role for libraries. Because of school librarians' close association with their students and their working relationships with counsellors and other personnel, it is likely that community information provided in a school library situation will require an even more direct role in advocacy and counselling.

As mentioned previously, the theoretical literature of school librarianship has supported the concept of community information, but the idea had not been widely implemented. As the twentieth-first century unfolds, social, technological, and educational changes now at work are likely to bring community information more forcefully into the service and programme paradigm of the school library.

Rationale for community information in the school library

Information technology has made possible a global world where a "vast array of virtual communities" exists. Information technologies provide networks that bring people together and enable them to interact in a variety of ways, both publicly and privately (Jacobs, 2001, p.2385, cited Costells, p.22). Community information is an important aspect of this developing network.

Although school librarianship has long recognised the importance of community life and the value of information in promoting critical thinking skills and literacy, there have been reasons for community information's slow development as a service in school libraries. It is time consuming, it must be justified within the framework of a school's mission and

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objectives, and it is expensive to develop in terms of initial programme planning. The identification, verification, recording, and transmission of information are labour intensive. In some ways the growth of the World Wide Web and its fast assortment of community information have made this somewhat easier in that many of these sources are already available. Another positive attribute is that most of the appropriate resources have been developed by reputable governmental and organisational sources and their access and use simply require appropriate linkage through the library's web page. These problems are real, but using community information as a source for promoting youth success and empowerment are reasons enough for the inclusion of community information in the school library.

The United States government through the Institute for Museum and Library Service (IMLS) as official policy has recognised the importance of community information and the networking of resources. The Institute, through its programmes of grants, has encouraged museums and libraries to make available to the wider community many of their special resources. This often takes the form of digitising of resources and mounting them in as web-based formats (United States Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2001). The Library of Congress's web site "American Memory" is an excellent example of how libraries with appropriate financial support can become a forum for public education through access to unique information resources (United States Library of Congress, 2003).

A model that IMLS has used to promote the integration of community and library has been a co-operative programme model whereby mutual interests are served through joint programming. For example, the Houston Public Library (HPL) and the Houston Children's Museum (HCM) in Texas together have developed a programme with grant support of IMLS in which each, based on common missions and goals, contributes some of its resources to a specific client group. In this case the client group is the children of Houston. The Museum offers programmes for children and maintains a parent resource library of quality materials in its quarters. The HPL permits these materials to be checked out from the collection using its library card and books may be returned through branch libraries (White, Bell, & McCallum, 2000; Houston Public Library, 2003).

Models for development

For various historical and social reasons, public libraries in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and other English speaking countries as well as Scandinavia, have long been involved with community development through outreach activities. In some cases school librarians have developed their own outreach programmes. The most common types of outreach programmes offered by school libraries are parent collections and resources, parent circulation privileges, extended library hours, including summer hours, co-operation with local public libraries in programming, and the development of web sites that include links to community and school information, and programmes which connect the home to information technology services offered by the school.

Aside from these important services, access to community information and its role in the curriculum and instruction raises important questions. For example:

How can community information be better integrated into curriculum design? How can community information be used to promote critical thinking skills and the overall development of information literacy?

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How can community information be taught adequately?

Who can and will teach community information?

What kinds of materials are necessary for community information instruction?

What place does community information have in government mandated examinations?

The British Library Study: A field-tested model

Similar questions were researched in a project sponsored by the British Library in the late 1970s. The project, under the direction of Terence Brake and reported in 1980 tested a curriculum unit that was developed to help students understand and better use community information in terms of their personal lives. The working definition of community information used in this study was information that could be easily found in students' neighbourhoods and which could be used to help them better manage everyday problems. The study considered developmental and information needs of students as well as technical problems such as how to locate appropriate information, how to organise it for access, and how to teach it within the existing structure of the centralised British school system. The study concluded that the school library could indeed play an important role in providing community information to students.

The study reported that in developing this system the school should begin with the local public library, but should also include other community organisations. Information delivery systems would include bulletin boards, a community information file with appropriate subject headings, a pamphlet or literature counter containing items for free distribution, a small local reference section, and a collection of local directories. This study was completed well before the introduction of computers in school libraries; nevertheless it is easy to see how most of its suggestions can be accommodated through new information technologies.

Although teachers involved in the study felt that the units of instruction were valuable and students seemed to benefit from them, the central problem they faced in terms of implementation was that the content was not a part of the centralised British national testing programme, and teachers were pressed to find time for it within the time given to them for daily instruction (Brake, 1980). Mandatory national and regional testing of students for specific skills which do not include community information is a problem to be faced by all who support community information as a legitimate instructional need and goal (Brake, 1980). New American federal and state requirements for the testing of educational skills raise similar questions.

Curriculum and community resources

Like folklore, curriculum is a cultural statement, and in the modern school it is designed to reflect central values of nations, states, provinces, and localities. Based on social and cultural expectations, like traditional folklore, curriculum within the school gives structure to what is selected for presentation to students and what is expected in the way of academic learning and positive social behaviours. As mentioned, modern school communities in most countries have endorsed the importance of teaching civic goals and responsibilities to

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students. As discussed previously the two major issues open to debate include these ideas: should curriculum and instruction emphasise indoctrination so that citizens accept traditional concepts of government or should the goals of curriculum and instruction be to educate students in critical thinking skills and in the astute use of information that empower them to question social, cultural, and governmental directives (Ross, 2001) National, state and provincial agencies charged with educational control and oversight often mandate curriculum and instruction that endorses either one or both of these propositions.

How students learn

Based on their understanding of brain research, educators Ann Ross and Karen Olsen maintain that learning comes from the complexities of the natural world, and not from oversimplification, as they propose occurs in schools. They reject the idea that learning is best when topics are presented in neat, orderly, closely planned, sequentially logical ways. They claim that brain research suggests that humans learn from "sense-making" or learning from the real world which is rich, random, and sometimes chaotic (Ross and Olsen, 1993, p. 24). Community information is an important element of real life, in school environments supports problem-based learning strategies.

Ross and Olsen believe that good teaching comes from models that are pattern-seeking and multiple-intelligence-based. Their preferred model relies on multiple resources for information and knowledge such as government resources, organised advocacy groups, trade associations, foreign governments and their chancellors, professional groups, and individuals. Ross and Olsen recognise public librarians as having knowledge about community resources and their willingness to help facilitate the teacher's role in advancing the kinds of community-based resources teaching they endorse (p. 133). In a similar way public librarians, school librarians can also play a role in this type of teaching, and through their knowledge of community resources can help improve teaching and learning.

The following section provides an overview of how community information can be used in teaching and in promoting learning.

Examples of community information in curriculum and instruction

Numerous examples of teaching units and exercises based on community information exist to illustrate how community information is used in modern instruction. The following are a few selected examples:

For younger children:
Members of Our Community. Brandy Knieriem, a student at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown developed an instructional unit designed to instruct students in grades 2 and 3 about the many different members and professional groups found in a community. Her emphasis focused on helping students to understand what it means to be a good and helpful community member. Community information in this unit consisted of explaining the work roles found in each student's home, identification by students of helpers in the community, and a selection by students of community buildings that can be used to build a classroom collage (Knieriem, 2001).

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The United States Postal Service. Lora Jones and her colleagues developed a unit to help teach students in grades 1 and 2 to better understand and appreciate the operations of the United States Postal Service. Community information suggested in this unit consisted of a field visit to the local post office to observe how mail is sorted for delivery to their homes, followed up by having the students create an in-class post office. (Jones, Bennett, West, & Sutton, 2003).

For older students:
GI Bill. South Stanley High School, Norwood, North Carolina. This unit, developed by Greg Speight is for high school seniors in American history. It is a small 2-hour unit, and is designed to acquaint students with the GI Bill's creation and ramifications. In terms of community resources, the unit calls for a brief paper in which students locate and interview someone in the community who benefited from the GI Bill (Speight, 2003).

Exploring Musical Instruments Using the Internet [The National Anthem]. This unit created by Michelle Johnson for grades 6-8 is designed to teach students about musical instruments, musical sounds, and compositions for instruments. One aspect of the unit is to teach knowledge about the United States national anthem—its words, its sounds, and how it is to be honoured. Activities include researching music on the Internet and, students are to listen to the national anthem as recorded by local symphony orchestras or school bands if available (M. Johnson, n.d.).

Marketing/Advertising Project. This unit was created by Tamara K. Johnson for use in senior-level general business and marketing classes. The plan calls for students to create a television advertisement as a project. For this preparation students must visit television stations and businesses where television commercials are created (T. Johnson, 2003).

All of these units have been designed to teach concepts which are enriched by resources found in the community. A review of such projects found on "Teacher. Net" [www.teachers.net.] suggests that these resources centre on pictures, interviews, field visits, and use of the Internet. The assumption implied in most of these plans is that either the teacher or the student is responsible for locating the community resources required. Sometimes the school and public libraries are mentioned but usually only in regard to books and unspecified "resources."

School library media programmes have responsibility for acquiring resources and helping teachers build units and make presentations such as those listed, but implications drawn from a review of teaching units such as those just discussed suggest that the overall assumption made by teachers is that they and students, not the school librarian are primarily responsible for locating community resources.

Community resources in the school library media centre

Traditionally libraries have collected community resources such as pictures of various resources in the community, biographies of individuals, and pictures of institutions and activities. The Picture File and the Vertical Files have a long and respected history in library use. Over the years, some school librarians have developed index files and other means of access to suitable field site visits and to individuals who are willing to give of their time and

expertise to appear before classes. The wide use of the Internet and its vast resources give the school library an additional means of providing community resources.

Appropriate community resources are varied and their organisation and promotion require several approaches. Some of community resources that are found in school library media centres are listed below:

The Picture or Graphic File: The picture file is what it says — a file of appropriately selected pictures that have been collected for their usefulness in the school. In terms of community information, this may include pictures of buildings of historical, environmental, or architectural importance, people, and events. Paper-based pictures need to be appropriately mounted with archival quality materials and procedures and accessed through useful subject headings (Hill, 1978). New digital technology and indexing systems now make the collection and storing of graphic images even more economical and manageable.

The Vertical/Information File: The vertical file offers an easy and inexpensive way of collecting and making accessible various types of community resources. Because of time constraints, the vertical file can be limited to information relating to the school, the local area surrounding the school, a region of the city, or any locally defined area of interest. Once a collection policy has been developed and sources identified, the materials can be organised and arranged using a controlled vocabulary subject approach. (Sitter, 1992)

Directories: Directories can include school, organisational, city, county, phone and government directories.

Indexes: Indexes to specific community sources can include indexes such as those found on the Internet as well as indexes that are produced by the school library staff to satisfy specific access needs, such as indexes to local publications.

Materials for Distribution: Most, if not all, organisations within communities produce free materials for distribution. This includes information on health, cultural and social events, recreation, and access to help of various kinds. Within the selection and acquisition policy of the school, the school library media centre can encourage and facilitate access to this material by identifying, reviewing, collecting and maintaining a distribution centre for free items. This can often be done with the assistance and help of such school personnel as the office staff, the counsellor's office, the food staff, and the school nurse.

Clipping and Posting Service: Based on school selection and acquisition policy, a school library media centre staff can also review and clip items from selected local newspapers, magazines and other publications. These clippings can be placed in the vertical file, the picture file, or posted on a bulletin board as appropriate.

Internet Resources: The Internet offers an abundance of materials. Community information is provided by cities, school systems, organisations, newspapers, radio and television stations, trade organisations and other entities that have an interest in promoting aspects of the local community. Most of these have individual web sites and can be located through web browsers such as Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Search engines such as Google.com are also useful. Subject access at these sites varies; but once a city or regional site is found, the indexing system can point out links to appropriate sites within the area. Public libraries often provide links to these resource sites through their own

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web sites. Following selection and acquisition policies of the school, the school library staff can determine the most useful and appropriate of these sites and can make these available to students and teachers. For convenient access, the school library can mount appropriate community information sites on their own web sites.

In-House Information Production: School librarians have always had opportunities to be producers of information resources. They have created bibliographies, finding guides, reading lists, and even photographed events happening in the school. With the advent of better technologies, these opportunities have expanded. Products of local information can now be created using the computer and appropriate programs such as *PowerPoint, Front Page*, and the various programs that create web pages. Photo editing programs such as *PhotoShop* and less expensive programs like *Ulead Photo Explorer* can help the inexperienced school librarian to become a proficient graphic artist. *PowerPoint* presentations of local information (e.g., historic homes, contemporary buildings, landscapes, recreations areas) can be created by the library staff and made available to teachers and students as resources; and the school library staff can create school and community scrap books and other forms of memorabilia. Many school librarians already videotape school events and programmes, adding to community information available in the centre. This all means that now local experiences and information products can be created with a minimum level of expertise.

Archives: All organisations produce archives and manuscripts in the course of their operation. Archives can certainly add to the depth of community information available in the school library. Based on careful acquisition and review consideration, a school archive can include materials created by school clubs and organisations and school-based events. An easy to follow and understand guide that offers help in management of a small archival programme is Elizabeth Yakel's Starting an Archive (Yakel, 1994).

Self-Help and Personal Information: As mentioned earlier, public library community information and referral services have generally considered personal and life-coping information as a legitimate part of their responsibilities. Social service agencies which also provide information and referral services differ from libraries in that they generally consider the offering of advice, counselling, and advocacy as an important part of their responsibilities. Following guidelines established by school policy and in co-operation with other school personnel, school library programmes may collect and distribute information in such areas as well. This information may be in the form of information to be distributed, it may be listed in a directory, or it may be maintained on the school library's web site.

Problems and rewards

Community information is varied and its use is widespread. As we have seen, teachers make considerable use of it in lesson plans and presentations, but often they are left to their own resources to find it. Although the school library is appreciated for its collections of books and audio-visual materials, it is not generally seen as a source for local and/or community information. Clearly community information plays an important role in student learning, and because of this, school librarians must carefully consider their responsibility for collecting this material. Not only does community information support curricula, but it plays an important role in helping students to develop information literacy skills and how to manage information are their everyday lives.

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Just as with traditional folklore, modern educational systems play a vital role in socialising youth into community life and into democratic culture. Within educational systems, school librarians now stand at a unique place. Although we may not have the time or the resources, and it may mean readjusting the meaning of our role within the school, school librarians are well equipped to bring community information more forcefully into the school environment. This new role can only enhance our effectiveness as influential professionals working for the success and empowerment of youth.

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