

Revitalizing the Academy Library

BY KEITH CLOUTON

Whether we like to admit it or not, the library has often been regarded as non-essential in a secondary school program, peripheral to the real business of teaching. However, that idea will not fly in the 1990s. We are in the midst of an information revolution, accompanied by two major paradigm shifts that are destined to change forever the role and function of the secondary school library:

- A shift from content-based to resource-based teaching.
- A shift from print to electronic resources.

The first is carving a new and dynamic role for the library in the education process. The second is providing a door that opens directly into the marketplace of the global information village. And both are being driven by a third phenomenon of the late 20th century—a dramatic explosion of knowledge¹ that strikingly fulfills the prediction of Daniel the prophet.²

The changes occurring in the wake of this turbulence are affecting libraries at all levels, as well as the entire education process. The emphasis is shifting from teaching content to teaching information skills. This means that students must learn (1) how to locate sources and find information, and (2) how to use and interpret the information. The teacher is less and less a “sage on the stage” and more and more a “guide on the side.”

Out of this scenario emerges a new role for the school library. Receding rapidly is the traditional image of the library as a stuffy little room housing a motley collection of books, viewed as good-but-fairly-irrelevant to the

“real” task of classroom instruction. Consider these modern learning scenarios, of which the library is an integral part:

- A teacher and a librarian at a Charleston, North Carolina, school cooperatively plan a social studies unit that they will team teach in the library, utilizing a variety of learning techniques and a large pool of print and non-print resources.

- A student in a Lacombe, Alberta, high school uses a library Internet terminal to “talk” by e-mail with a student in Auckland, New Zealand as he gathers information about Christmas celebrations in various parts of the world.

- At least half of the publisher exhibits at a recent library convention featured CD-ROM and other electronic products, many of them interactive.

These are by no means isolated occurrences. A new information world is taking shape out there, and if it hasn't affected your library yet, it is probably time that it did.

Contemporary research provides support for the school library as a force for academic excellence. Two 1993 studies⁴ highlight the relationship between libraries and academic success with these findings:

- The size of a school's library collection and its staff is *the best school predictor of academic achievement*.

- Students who score higher on standardized tests tend to come from schools with well-stocked libraries—regardless of all other factors, including economic ones.

- Access to school libraries results in more voluntary reading, itself the best predictor of reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, grammatical usage, spelling ability, and writing style.

With all of this as background, how can the typical SDA secondary school equip its library for the Information Age without wrecking the budget?



Students must learn how to locate sources and find information, and how to use and interpret the information.

How can the academy principal who typically lacks formal training in library matters and is already burdened with other concerns and priorities, lead in the development of a library which, if not state-of-the-art, is at least pointed in the right direction?

The Academy Library—Looking Toward the 21st Century

Some futurists have dared to imagine a library of the future without walls or books. They foresee an elec-

tronic wonder-state described as the “virtual library.” But the reality of the 1990s finds libraries in a gradual and sometimes painful transition. The printed page continues to be the preferred medium for knowledge communication, while electronic formats and networks are the emerging tools of information access. Today's school library may look much like the one of the past, but there must be important differences of role and direction. Listed below are four characteristics of the contemporary academy library:

Materials Selection Policy

1. The library must have a clear materials selection policy.¹

Too often the library collection develops in an ad hoc fashion, with no guiding selection policy. Periodic purchases merely supplement donated materials. The result is a poorly balanced collection with much that is irrelevant and obsolete.

Start by developing a mission statement for your library, if you don't already have one. Next, establish a sound financial plan for ongoing library support. Finally, establish a set of goals for collection development. Typical goals are to obtain library materials that (1) support the curriculum, (2) provide a broad, balanced collection in all areas of knowledge, (3) encourage reading for enjoyment, and (4) build character.

An adequate materials selection policy will go on to specify the following:

- *How items are selected.* What criteria will be used to ensure that the library contains quality materials?

- *What formats will be collected and for what purposes.* What kinds of audiovisual materials and non-print media will be included?

- *Criteria for literary materials, including fiction.*

- *A plan for periodic weeding of the*

collection. What are the criteria for de-selection?

• *Procedures for dealing with challenges to items in the collection.* How are objections to be submitted? What procedures will be followed? Who has ultimate responsibility in dealing with objections? The principal? The school board?

The selection policy should be developed by a committee or with input from all the faculty. The final document should be approved by the school board. Once established, the policy should be applied consistently to all library acquisitions, including donated items.

Reference Resources

2. Good recent reference resources must be emphasized, including both print and electronic materials.⁵

General encyclopedias published within the past 10 years should comprise the core of a reference collection. There should be at least three major sets, including at least one in CD-ROM format. Be sure to subscribe to one or two of the major encyclopedia yearbooks; though they have limited value as encyclopedia updates, they do provide a useful chronology of world history and perspectives for the years covered.

Each major field of knowledge should be represented by specific dictionaries or encyclopedias. For the sciences, choose a good general set as well as titles covering specialized areas such as astronomy, mathematics, and biology. Don't forget handbooks that

identify birds, fungi, fish, poisonous plants, et cetera. Other subject reference materials should include social studies, medicine and health, art, music, sports, history and political science, geography, and literature (including dictionaries of quotations). CD-ROM titles such as *Granger's World of Poetry* and the full text of Shakespeare's plays on disk are worthy of consideration.

Other "must haves" in the reference collection include up-to-date world and regional atlases, biographical dictionaries, and who's whos. Among language dictionaries, include a thesaurus, a rhyming dictionary, a book of synonyms and antonyms, and appropriate foreign language dictionaries, as well as several recent English language dictionaries.

Published guides to reference books tend to offer minimal coverage of religion, so the academy librarian needs to seek out appropriate titles. These include Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, a Bible concordance, a good Bible atlas, the *SDA Yearbook*, the *SDA Encyclopedia* and the *Bible Dictionary*, and a selection of Bible versions. A representative set of Ellen White books accompanied by the *Comprehensive Index* should also find a place in the reference collection. If possible, obtain the CD-ROM that contains the full text of Ellen White's published writings.

The importance of career choices for high school youth makes a well-stocked and up-to-date career section of the reference shelves essential. Be sure to include the current bulletins of SDA universities and colleges, along with directories and handbooks of higher education in general.

It requires constant attention to keep the library's reference materials up to date. Be ruthless in weeding out obsolete and worn-out items, and plan to spend some money each year to acquire new sets and editions.

Periodicals Selection

3. Periodicals selection must emphasize content.

Periodicals have always been a

problem area for the academy library. Subscriptions are expensive, they recur each year at rates that often exceed inflation, and keeping them is either expensive (if you bind them) or messy (if you don't).

Yet periodicals are an important source of current information, especially in this age of knowledge explosion. The academy librarian, assisted by the faculty, should develop criteria for periodical title selection. Typical criteria might be (1) whether the title is included in a standard periodical index to which the library subscribes, (2) whether the title fits the needs and interests of the school, and (3) whether the subscription price is not prohibitive.

The first of these criteria is especially important. Once the current issue is taken off display and relegated to the stacks or a cupboard, it will have little or no value unless the library owns and promotes the use of a cumulative index such as *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. If it is an SDA periodical, the appropriate access tool is the *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index*. Both these indexes are essentials for Adventist academy libraries. The first is available as a CD-ROM subscription, and the second is available either in a printed edition or as an electronic database searchable via the Internet.⁶ Most libraries subscribe to *National Geographic Magazine*. Although it is indexed in *Reader's Guide*, the library should consider buying the cumulative index, especially if there is a substantial set of back issues.

There remains the question of when and what to bind. Titles of permanent worth, especially if published weekly or monthly, are logical candidates. A less-expensive alternative is to buy open-style storage boxes for the loose issues. Available in attractive styles and colors, such boxes provide protection and less-expensive storage than binding.

Electronic Resources—Planning for the Future

4. The library must move into the

electronic future as quickly as possible.

More than ever before, the librarian must be a keen observer of new trends and technologies, ready to adapt or innovate. Electronic formats such as CD-ROMs, laser disks, and multi-media provide dynamic teaching tools.

Within the library world, there is a clear trend away from ownership of resources and toward remote access. The trend will be increasingly felt at the K-12 level. Early signs are seen in some academies as they explore access to the Internet, a powerful world-encompassing network of computer systems. An Internet link provides a gateway into electronic communication and shared information, including access to the full text of some books as well as thousands of periodical articles. It also carries some worthless and undesirable material, so a degree of oversight or screening is recommended.

Some "How to" Suggestions

Here are some ideas for keeping the academy library alive and progressive:

1. For published standards and guidelines for school libraries, obtain a copy of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, prepared by the American Association of School Librarians.⁷ Besides offering a guide to school library organization, the book lists minimum requirements for space, staff, and budgets. Basic "how to" guides to everyday library procedures are produced by several church and government educational agencies.⁸

2. Conduct an evaluation of your library. This could be an internal study using the school's own personnel, or an evaluation by an outside consultant such as a librarian from another school or college. Collection evaluation must constitute an important part of any study. Of course, the decision to conduct an evaluation implies a commitment to act or at least develop an action plan.

3. Visit other school libraries

(including some large, well-funded ones) and children's sections of public libraries. Make appointments and ask to be shown "behind the desk." Schedule enough time to be able to ask questions. You will come home laden with ideas and renewed commitment.

4. Organize class visits to the local public library. (Be sure to make prior arrangements.) As Adventists, we have often been slow to take advantage of our community library resources, to the detriment of our schools and their students.

5. Attend library conventions periodically for professional development and to visit exhibits of library materials and technologies. Academy librarians should be given the same opportunities as teaching faculty to attend professional conferences. The Association of SDA Librarians (ASDAL) conducts an annual conference with a section for academy librarians.⁹

6. Subscribe to one or two professional journals of interest to school librarians. If you cannot afford to subscribe, stop by a community library or college that does subscribe and browse through its files. Talk to other librarians with similar interests and challenges by telephone or electronic mail.

7. Encourage resource-based learning in your academy.¹⁰ To get started, visit a school where this technique is well established. Begin in a small way by cooperatively planning a unit that lends itself to a resource-based or stations approach. Success demands a lot of planning, but the rewards will be great. ☞

Keith Clouten is Director of the James White Library at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. There is perhaps no better illustration of this phenomenon than these Unesco statistics of annual book publishing between 1900 and 1990. The figures from the *Unesco Yearbook* are for new book titles worldwide in all languages.

1900	70,000 titles
1950	240,000 titles

1990 850,000 titles

2. Daniel 12:4.

3. Keith C. Lance, et al. *The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement* (Englewood, Colo.: Hi Willow Research and Publishing, 1993); Stephen Krashen, *The Power of Reading* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1993).

4. For examples of school library selection policies, contact the American Association of School Librarians, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. The following books cover this topic well: John T. Gillespie and Diana L. Spirt, *Administering the School Library Media Center* (New Providence, N.J.: Bowker, 1983); Phyllis J. Van Orden, *The Collection Program in Elementary and Middle Schools* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1982).

5. There are several excellent published guides to the selection of reference books for secondary schools, including the following: Christine G. Wymar, *Guide to Reference Books for School Media Centers* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1992); Carolyn Sue Peterson, *Reference Books for Children* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992); Keith Clouten, *A Framework of Learning Resources: Reference Materials for Seventh-day Adventist School Libraries in Canada* (College Heights, Alberta, Canada: Logan Curriculum Centre, Canadian Union College Library, 1988). (This one is most useful for identifying items of special interest to Adventist libraries.)

6. The *SDA Periodical Index*, 1980 to the present, is mounted on Andrews University library's online catalog, "JeWeL." The Internet address is: Telnet library.libr.andrews.edu.

7. *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, prepared by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988). (Publisher address: American Library Association, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Cost: U.S. \$15.00).

8. For example, the office of the Library Consultant, Central California Conference of SDA, produces *The Librarian's Handbook*.

9. For more information, write the Association of SDA Librarians, c/o Weis Library, Columbia Union College, 7600 Flower Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

10. Some recent books that promote resource-based learning are: Ken Haycock, *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning Through the School's Library Resource Center* (Kalispell, Mont.: Rockland Publishing, 1993); Ken Haycock, *The School Library Program in the Curriculum* (Seattle: Dyad Services, 1990); Kay E. Vandergriff, *Power Teaching: A Primary Role of the School Library Media Specialist* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1994); and Patricia G. Winn, *Integration of the Secondary School Library Media Center Into the Curriculum* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1991).