

Public Libraries in the 21st Century

Dr. Sontakke Shivaji Narayanrao
Vice-Principal and Librarian,
Kai. Rasika Mahavidyalaya, Deoni
Dist. Latur, Maharashtra, India

Abstract:

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) is an advisory body constituted by the Prime Minister to provide recommendations for improving India's knowledge infrastructure. As part of this Commission, a set of recommendations has been developed to improve India's long neglected library system. This article explores the implications of these recommendations, with a specific focus on India's public library system and the social development gains that are often associated with public libraries.

Keywords: Public, Libraries, School etc.

Public libraries in the 21st century:

Take a virtual visit to some public libraries around the world that have re-invented their space and design, their approach to collections, and their understanding of patrons as "customers".

- [Almere Library, Netherlands](#) Ten years ago, facing competition from other information sources and dwindling interest, the main library in Almere realised something drastic need to be done to re-establish the branch as an information destination and community hub. They started by surveying their existing members and discovered that some interesting 'customer profiles' emerge.
- The [Indie Librarian](#) blog has a post [Library Dreamspaces in Europe](#) featuring David Adjaye exploring the beautiful architecture of Peckham Library in London and two others in

Public Libraries in the 21st Century

Lyons, France. Back in the UK he talks to architect Wil Alsop about his design for the Peckham Library and the importance of architecture and community in this [BBC video clip](#).

- An innovative community library in Magdeburg, [East Germany](#)
- [Demco](#) is a UK library design company, specialising in the design, specification, installation and project management of library refurbishment and new build projects. From the Home page you can go to Projects and to [Public Libraries](#) to see some photos of their work.

People are born with all sorts of different advantages. Those advantages might include high intelligence, great wealth, a secure and loving family, a respect for education, nurturing teachers, a safe neighborhood, a chance to play, not being born genetically susceptible to substance abuse or mental illness, not witnessing violence, not being a victim of rape or abuse, etc.

The way life works is that once you have a disadvantage, other disadvantages tend to come along with it. If you have a predilection to depression, that makes you more likely to be an alcoholic. If you are unlucky, you become depressed and an alcoholic. If you are depressed and alcoholic, you are likely not to have a stable family life, secure income, good education, etc. So these "risk factors" tend to snowball.

Further, our society is not set up to help people who have a strike against them. If you lose your job, you can become depressed. You also lose your health insurance, so you can't get treatment for depression. Depression makes it harder to find a job. Not having a job makes you more likely to become an alcoholic, or lose your family. So many people are just a car repair away from being homeless. If their car breaks down, they can't get their job. They have so little resources that just that little change can tip them over. It is like standing on top of a giant ball of ice. As long as you are on top, you are fine. But begin slipping just a little, and pretty soon you are slipping faster and faster off the side. And the mantra you hear is "You have to decide to change," as if everything bad in your life is your choice.

Public Libraries in the 21st Century

Libraries are one of the few things in the world that give even the worst-off people a chance to improve themselves. People can learn about depression, alcoholism, personal finances, how to find a job, fix their house. It isn't easy, and you still have to work hard. You have to know English, and you have to spend many hours at it. But a library at least offers a door.

So it is one of the very few forces in the world that can help you climb back up if you slip, that doesn't help only the people who already have a lot going for them.

Libraries treat every question, every need, every person equally, with the same respect. You can learn why you can't seem to concentrate, why you feel so bad about yourself, why you can't get a job, without judging. It is an open book.

Public libraries and schools

Public libraries are for the whole community. Many school libraries work closely with their local public libraries and encourage their students to become library users both within and beyond the school library environment.

An excellent example of collaboration is Christchurch's [Upper Riccarton Library](#) (see image above). Opened in 2006, and located on the grounds of Riccarton High School, the library not only shares its services with the school but also provides facilities (through its Learning Centre) for both community and other school groups to discover and integrate new technologies and skills into their learning.

Regular visits to the public library as part of your school's learning programme will enrich students' reading and build their confidence as library users.

Public Libraries in the 21st Century

Consider the following strategies:

- Talk to your students about borrowing from the public library – show them your library card and talk about visiting the library - how it is the same as the school library, how it might differ.
- Invite the Children’s Librarian to visit the class / school and introduce themselves and their role, and the resources their library can offer.
- Arrange a visit by the students to the public library if feasible.
- Send library membership forms / brochures etc. home to parents with a note encouraging them to visit the library with their children
- Publicize the library e.g. in school newsletters or via a link on the school website. location, opening hours, contact details, etc.
- Liaise with the local library about promoting any special activities or events such as visiting authors, summer holiday reading programs, or competitions.
- Share art or other reading-response work by students for display in the library, as appropriate.
- Organize for your student librarians to have a special visit to the public library “behind the scenes”.
- Encourage all staff in your school to promote the library to their students too!

Successful collaboration with your local public library can also have benefits for whole families with school students encouraging their parents and siblings to go to the public library after school and during the weekends and school holidays.

Conclusion:

A growing economy has buoyed the hopes and aspirations of a large segment of the population, but the benefits of this growth remain uneven. Thus, despite the rising world economic status of the country, a neglect of proper investments in the social sector and public services will ultimately hinder this growth and continue to create vast inequities in Indian society.

Public Libraries in the 21st Century

References

1. Amey, L. J., and R. J. Smith. 1976. Combination school and public libraries, an attitudinal study. *Canadian Library Journal* 33:259.
2. Anderson, R., P. Wilson, and L. Fielding. 1988. Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly* 23:285–303.
3. Baker, D. Philip. 1977. *School and public library media programs for children and young adults*. Syracuse, NY: Gaylord Professional Pubn.
4. Bender, David R. 1979. Networking and school library media programs. *School Library Journal* 26:29–32.
5. Billman, Betty V., and Patricia Owens. 1985. School and public library cooperation: A prerequisite for cooperative collection development. *Collection Management* 7:183–95.
6. Callison, Daniel. 1991. A national survey on public library and secondary library cooperation: Do they know each other? *Indiana Media Journal* 13:17–21.
7. Cassell, Marianne K. 1985. Combined school-public (community) libraries: A brief overview. ERIC ED 269 031.
8. Drew, Sally J., and Kay Ihlenfeldt. 1991. *School library media centers in cooperative automation projects*. Chicago: ALA.
9. Fitzgibbons, Shirley A., and Verna Pungitore. 1989. The educational role and services of public libraries in Indiana. *Indiana Libraries* 8, 1–2.
10. Fletcher, William I. n.d. public libraries and the young. *Public libraries in the United States of America: Part 1, 1876 report*. Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois.
11. Garland, Kathleen. 1989. Children's materials in the public library and the school library media center in the same community: A comparative study of use. *Library Quarterly* 59, 4:326–38.
12. Halverstadt, Julie. 1995. Catering to students: A public library serves alternative schools. *School Library Journal* 41, 16–18.
13. Haycock, Ken. 1990. The school housed public library. *Emergency Librarian* 17:33–4.