



AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF LIBRARIES
ON THE EDUCATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN
IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

by

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A Thesis

submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

Department of Education

The University of Adelaide

November 1963

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SUMMARY

Children and teachers, university students, heads of schools and librarians, were questioned on a variety of topics related to the influence of school and public libraries on education. Data were obtained on, inter alia, what First Year children read, what influence teachers and librarians have on what they read, relationships between reading and other interests, the library facilities available in South Australia and the function of libraries in both formal and informal education. In addition criteria were established for differentiating children according to the quality of their reading, and possible differences between 'good' and 'poor' readers were investigated. Information was obtained by both questionnaire and interview, and the evidence presented is illustrated with the actual words of children, teachers and others. The part played by libraries in education is also demonstrated in a number of case-studies of individual children.

Since this is an exploratory investigation the number of tentative findings, with related discussion and implications, is large. It is suggested that there are significant deficiencies both in libraries and in education in South Australia; that libraries are essentially irrelevant to an education in which much emphasis is on passive receptivity and 'cramming' for examinations; that reading becomes closely identified with formal instruction and unattractive to many children;

that 'good' readers tend to be non-conformist and, if boys, to be unpopular with teachers; and that they differ in certain values and qualities of character from 'poor' readers. It is also demonstrated that, although library provision is often inadequate, particularly in staffing, certain individual librarians and teachers significantly influence children's education through libraries, and the need for increasing the supply of exceptional and influential individuals is discussed.

Some evidence on social forces is also presented; for example, the problem of what libraries can do for children's education as one of many influences from home, school, peer group and the mass media operating upon them. Wider cultural issues are also explored as a result of findings on the role of libraries in beyond-school education. It is suggested that reading, particularly in some boys' independent schools, may not be regarded as a manly activity, and the prevalence of certain values in such schools and in society generally, is discussed. The thesis concludes with analysis of future prospects for the influence of libraries in education and makes a number of proposals for further research into issues raised by this investigation.