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Do Libraries Build Strong Communities?

The library has its origins from Latin and Proto-Indo-European bases with the word *librarium* to mean Book House. The presence of books is an identifying mark of a library. However, over the years, the library has expanded its capacity to give itself a refined meaning. The library is not just a house of books anymore, it is now a home for all who seek knowledge and skills. The library has become a source of practical information for the improvement of individuals and their societies. Today, most users of the library are students. By extension though, this refers to anyone who is dedicated to the study of a subject of interest in their community. Communities of today are built when students congregate to know their past and analyze their present in order to make the most of their future. The library creates an environment conducive to all of such learning and thus lays the foundation for the building of strong communities.

Not surprisingly, the relationship between certain school library characteristics and student achievement is well established. Thus, when libraries are well equipped, staffed, maintained and are available more hours to students and faculty, students experience higher achievement (Roberson et al, 45). Students, who use the library, excel because the main focus of the library is knowledge acquisition and application. As such, many libraries steer towards being academic in nature and have study skills programs in place to render assistance to students enrolled in schools. The libraries at Collin College contain a massive reservoir of books and

eBooks, DVDs, Music CDs, flashcards, journals, software and the unfathomable database to enable students access and utilize information to their satisfaction.

However, the library is no longer limited to academics. There is an expansion in the library's function to accommodate skill building programs in crafts, creative arts and even graphic design. These programs are open to the public and are free. Due to the user-friendliness of the library, any individual can visit and benefit from library services. Thus, the library becomes a home to people of diverse backgrounds, all united with a common goal to learn.

Also, literacy has become very instrumental to education in this age. The strength of a civilization lies within its education system. To keep this civilization strong, 1) There has to be a center of knowledge- the library and 2) The library must create an allure for its residents to become its patrons right from their youth. The library sets a stellar example of building young people to embrace the opportunity of reading and writing. The benefits of this key function of the library is shown in a study by Lance and Kachel that states, "Given the emphasis on literacy and reading in many libraries, it makes intuitive sense that students' reading and writing scores would be better in schools with a strong library program" (16). These youths, who are citizens of the future, can thus be empowered with the ability to make informed decisions in life because they are educated.

In all, some visit the library to utilize internet services or just to interact with other people. Yes, it is at the library that individuals join social groups. It all starts with a youth working quietly on an assignment in a study room. A problem arises, an idea is formed, a solution is proposed, but with uncertainty. Another library resident is drawn to that thinker to provide an alternative, then a solid solution is created. Finally, the problem is solved. Maybe a friendship is forged. Little do they realize the overlooked function of the library as a social hub is

the real basis of community unification. The library promotes exchange of opinions and creation of solutions for the community. The library gives an identity to all who search, and rewards them with knowledge, skills and builds up a stronger community for them to thrive therein.

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