

Materials

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Library Materials for Children

Library materials for children cannot be considered alone, because the term *library* has long implied more than a collection of books. It is fitting that this topic follows papers discussing goals, facilities, staff, services, and children themselves. A collection of materials is a means, not an end.

There is evidence that the isolation of materials from the concept of service is not a new problem. Jesse Shera notes that the development in the nineteenth century of the American public library began with collections of books donated by successful businessmen and philanthropists to uplift the minds of the young. When the Boston Public Library opened its doors in 1854, however, those under eighteen were not admitted. The mere fact that collections of materials for youth existed and had encouraged library development did not mean that children were actually given service.¹ This paper will attempt to raise questions about materials for children in today's public library, their characteristics and availability; and to discuss the relation of materials to other elements of library service.

The sheer volume and variety of materials available to children through libraries presents problems undreamed of by those earlier librarians who had to struggle to develop collections of quality books, established awards to encourage the production of more and better children's books, and trained the children's librarian in the art of storytelling. This volume is due to a proliferation of materials and also to a diversification of clientele. The library is newly aware of potential use by adults, researchers and parents, the special child, the preschooler, and readers and nonreaders of various ages.

Early goals were expressed in terms of a philosophy that viewed the child as an individual needing guidance in reading beyond that received in the classroom. With changes in technology and emphasis shifting away from educational textbooks, however, library collections have expanded to include a greater variety of learning materials, such as toys, games, live animals and plants, uses of which are by no means confined to the classroom or school library. While collections have expanded, statements of goals and directions of service seem to have become more diffuse. Articles proliferate about the purpose or mission of the public library; service to children is not alone in seeking a direction.

In the strictest sense, the object of the collection of children's materials is to provide for a child's information needs, however they are expressed. Patterns of service have developed suggesting that effort be made to do more than that. Librarians try to stimulate and encourage curiosity, to share the excitement of discovery, and to encourage in the child a sense of independence in learning.

But "the times, they are a-changin'," and materials for children are changing — in content, form and style. The information explosion has created a big business, and raises for the children's librarian questions dealing with bibliographic control, availability and reviewing, and their implications for collection development. The absence, in the audiovisual areas, of a comprehensive, up-to-date source of bibliographic citations analogous to *Books in Print* is a significant handicap to the librarian in acquiring children's materials. Records, tapes, films and filmstrips, slides and posters, toys, games, realia — all require careful examination for conceptual as well as technical considerations. The endless search through producers' catalogs and evaluation tools for the sketchiest ordering information is time-consuming and often fruitless. (It is interesting to note that librarians in search of bibliographic data on recordings continue to rely on the *Schwann Catalog*, which is organized to fit the needs of record sales outlets.)

The increasing unavailability of children's books today presents another selection problem of real concern. Old favorites and standard library items disappear from catalogs without warning; brand new titles, given cool receptions, become extinct before proving themselves. The precise status of a book is often difficult to determine, from either the supplier or the publisher. In this framework, the book becomes a commodity whose characteristics are described only in economic terms, without consideration by manufacturer or wholesaler for a thin but nevertheless significant stream of continuing interest. This places on the would-be architect of a well-balanced collection the burden of close scrutiny at time of publication, continuous monitoring of both user interest and publisher avail-

ability, and diligent scrounging when a needed title becomes unavailable. It also suggests that both publishers and jobbers should be called to account for their performance in supplying books to libraries, and that children's librarians should research carefully the causes of ambiguous status of books in order to effect change.

If bibliographic data on certain materials are limited, evaluative information is even more so. The librarian who attempts to build a strong collection of records, tapes, filmstrips, etc., must consult a number of sources, only a few of which could be considered comprehensive. The late LeRoy Merritt characterized book reviewing in 1958 as "a chorus of praise, a reluctance to condemn, and a strong tendency to say nothing one way or the other."² He might well have been speaking of the field of children's materials today. This failure to be specific or to reflect a point of view is particularly noticeable in the reviewing of nonfiction. Here, a proliferation of titles often occurs within a narrow subject area and it is difficult to find reviews which identify classics or standard titles, mention older books which should be updated or replaced, or list recent titles in the same or similar areas. Such a review would not only provide a more accurate basis for selection but would call attention to the context in which a book may fit.

Furthermore, criteria for reviewers (for any kind of material) are diverse, vague and inconsistent. It is a small world in which librarians, critics, publishers and authors/artists live. We read one another's books, comment on each other's art and sit in judgment on our professional writing. John Hollander, in an essay on the state of the art of reviewing, cited the plight of the poet as a microcosm of the problems of reviewing. One might substitute the field of children's books and professional literature in the following: "Either new books of verse are not reviewed at all, or they are written about by other poets. The result is a lot of mutual taking-in of washing and clique reputation-mongering, all without seeming embarrassment."³ While it is comforting to talk with a fellow professional, one must guard against introspection which limits one's outlook and merely confirms prejudice.

Closely related to the problems of reviewing is the awkward problem of awards. Questions have been raised about these awards throughout their history, and efforts to refine the process by which they are given continue. New awards have been created in the hope of stimulating growth and improving quality in several nonprint fields, and the procedure for choosing the Newbery and Caldecott Medal winners has recently undergone yet another evolutionary change. It is time for the profession to ask the very basic questions: What purpose do these awards serve today?

Have they become the self-serving tools of either the library profession or the publishing trade?

Furthermore, the conflicting priorities of the reviewer are amplified in awards committees, where literary values must be weighed against social ones, and where the desire for improvement and increased relevance to children vies with artistic integrity and good writing. The time for giving awards may have passed, unless the process by which winners are selected can be made less political and the ends they are to serve more carefully defined. The very fact that such terms as "conflict of interest" and "cronyism" have been directed toward the relationship between awards committee members and publishers of children's books — whether or not such charges are justified — indicates the need to look beyond the details of awards selection and committee procedure. The effects of the awards on children as readers; on adults who buy books; on authors, illustrators, and publishers; and on patterns of children's book publishing and library book purchasing for children must be considered.

The reviewing of materials and problems of bibliographic control have significantly influenced patterns of collection development in the public library. In selecting books, the traditional children's librarian subscribed to a faith in quality typified by De La Mare's "only the rarest kind of best is good enough" and reviewed and debated books in an effort to distinguish good from bad and better from best. This approach, developed and practiced in large municipal systems, has stressed evaluation of the total collection, discussion of current purchases in light of other titles of the same or similar nature, and the need to reexamine long-standing favorites in order to replenish the supply or weed out those titles no longer useful. The significance of such in-house reviewing for staff training and development is sometimes lost on administrators, who hear only the noise of debate and see only expensive duplication of effort in local reviewing.

A different sort of collection development is practiced in those smaller units where selection is done by one or two librarians who rely on instinct, reading-when-possible, and the reviews of one or two journals whose recommendations seem reliable. This is an attempt to acquire the best by eliminating the worst and, together with the method of choosing the best, forms the conventional wisdom disseminated by most library schools.

There are, however, other theories and practices which cannot be ignored. In the Boston Public Library, for instance, one copy of every title published for children in a given year is purchased and made available for branch selection, allowing librarians to build collections that fit the needs of individual communities, without prior selection by a central au-

thority. Emphasis in purchasing is on the current year's production; retrospective replacement lists are generated by subject and are selective.

Another distinctive approach is advocated by the Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) which drastically limits the number of new titles bought each year and develops collections around patron demand. A study released by the BCPL indicates a commitment "to collecting, not a broad array of materials that librarians feel users *should* read or use, but those materials which most users *do* read or use; to provide these materials as soon after publication as possible; and to support the ensuing demand with sufficient copies to satisfy user requests promptly."⁴ This approach, according to Director Charles Robinson, aims at saturating collections with material children want and will read. He contends that it is an underestimation of the library's public to assume that this approach will result only in the mediocre. High circulation figures and increased support from staff and public indicate that the impact of this approach is considerable. The BCPL collection is one that changes constantly. Titles that do not circulate are discarded. While this library's approach to collection development is open to debate, it deserves serious critical attention.

Other policies, not as well articulated and less thoughtful, are practiced far too often. Many collections are not built; they simply grow, with the addition of all the Junior Literary Guild selections, or all prize-winners (regardless of suitability), or whatever the local remainder salesman has on hand. Gifts are accepted without screening; little or no thought is given to selection of titles or to duplication; money is just spent until it runs out.

Collection development is not an end in itself, nor was it invented to occupy the librarian's time. Its object is to provide, as effectively as possible, materials with which to meet user needs. The children's librarian, like any other professional, must know the community in order to assess present and potential needs. Children have changed, perhaps more than librarians who serve them realize. While some of the "Sesame Street" generation have learned to read at an early age, laments are heard at the other end of the educational yardstick about a general decline in the ability of students to read, write and concentrate. Television, combined with other media used by children, seems to have a limiting as well as an expanding effect on the viewer, but little is known about its effect on the learner.

A recent study of children's use of the public library conducted by Adele Fasick and Claire England of the University of Toronto describes those children who use the library as avid television fans. Samples indicate, in fact, that public library users watch as much as nonusers. Watch-

ing television does not seem to make the difference between using and not using libraries — even between reading and not reading. Interestingly, both users and nonusers claim to have been encouraged to read because of a television movie, citing such titles as *Heidi*, *Black Beauty*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and *Star Trek*. Perhaps one of the most notable facts in this intriguing study is the documented evidence that an overwhelming 87 percent of the children who use the public library are there for books — not programs or even other kinds of materials, although many mentioned an interest in records, games and the like.⁵

One of Fasick's recommendations — that more books of medium quality be added to the collection to encourage library use — strikes a sore spot of many librarians, for here good intentions often become confused with questions of judgment and taste. "Standards of excellence" had been a rallying cry even before Frances Clarke Sayers demanded a belligerent attitude toward the promotion of the best reading for the young. Librarians want to provide the best available books for children, and in searching for the best may overlook the reader who needs plainer fare to help him learn that he can, indeed, enjoy and learn from books, or who needs to approach learning through some other medium before trying the printed word.

Carried to their extremes, problems of selection can lead to the issue of censorship, where theories are posited as truth, charged with emotion and often delivered in raised voices. Dr. Spodek's article on child development and education bears directly on many of the problems of censorship and children. Consider the question of instruction versus information: Do we tell children what they need to know, or show them how to find the information? Does the library provide what children want, or what the librarian believes children need? Should children be exposed only to the positive values adults wish them to emulate, or should children know experiences considered negative as well?

These dilemmas all involve value examination and clarification. We must be willing to face the fact that if we do not buy nonprint materials because we do not like media, we are practicing censorship. If we do not learn about the technology that can give children access to information, we are practicing censorship. If we buy all the prize-winners and none of the less ethereal books that ordinary children ask for, we are practicing censorship. The vague and inconsistent effort to define and refine the complexities of these questions must be resolved. Questions of social responsibility and freedom of access, however, are pervasive and perennial. They cannot be dismissed, but neither can they be allowed to stop everything else.

A collection of materials for children serves many different purposes,

but it is necessary to look at the collection in terms of the child's needs and in relation to other materials in the library. For many children, the scope of the children's room, based on criteria related to age, is inadequate when their interests or information needs advance beyond those typical of their age group. The separate children's department exists to meet the special needs of children. The child whose needs have expanded should be expected to pursue his interests in the adult department. Children mature in different areas and at differing rates. While arguments about limiting a child's access to adult materials on any basis other than parental restrictions remain unconvincing, it is the children's librarian who bears responsibility for guidance of a child.

Like adults, children seeking information are frequently unaware of the variety of resources available to them. Without avoiding the public library's responsibility for providing information, the children's librarian should become familiar with and introduce children to other local sources of information, such as museums, historical or cultural societies, and even government records. As in any adult department, a community resource file to which patrons may be referred is important. First among such resources is the child's own school library.

Clearly, school/public library cooperation is not a new concept, but it is a logical first step in broadening a child's access. A recent study in New Mexico, for instance, indicates that virtually all the hardware and equipment exists in public schools, while software is housed in the public library.⁶ It may be that cooperation between types of libraries is difficult in some jurisdictions, but there is evidence that even small libraries can support interlibrary loan networks. A study done by Ellen Altman indicates that interlibrary loan is feasible in a sample of public secondary school libraries; at least 48 percent of the collections in the sampled secondary schools were unique titles, and 31.4 percent of the school titles were not held in the public library. The study concluded that the collections in the schools are diversified and could support an interlibrary loan network.⁷ There does not seem to be a corresponding survey of the diversity of public library collections, but if collection building methods served as indicators, diversity would definitely be "statistically significant."

Collections of children's materials also serve the needs of parents, teachers, scout leaders, artists, adults with reading problems and others concerned with children and their development. The Fasick study found that 20 percent of the circulation of children's materials in the Regina Public Library System was to adults.⁸ This is another aspect of collection development that needs consideration as adult education programs studying the literature proliferate. Master's degree programs are now underway (or soon will be) at several colleges, and at least one major university

offers a Ph.D. in children's literature. Planners of children's services have always been aware of the adult working with or interested in children, but the scholar or researcher has not always been considered, and the problems are significant.

The researcher is interested not only in the history of children's books, but in all aspects of child life: family, play and welfare. Furthermore, when dealing with contemporary books, the student wants both the good and the not-so-good. The student is interested in the poor writing, the stilted dialogue, and the trite plot precisely because of the need to study what makes a good (or bad) book. Educational institutions must support their own teaching activities, of course; these teaching collections will have to present the controversial, the less than perfect, the "trendy" literature for the very reason that the public library has rejected these books. Titles reflecting racial or sexual stereotypes, slanted or biased points of view, slick distortion, and so on must be available to the student somewhere.

The trend toward extensive resource-sharing among libraries serving adults has broad implications for service to children, many of which remain largely unexplored. These concepts have been the subject of conferences, papers, books — and most especially the concern of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). The NCLIS reports as one of its goals for action: "To eventually provide every individual in the United States with equal opportunity of access to that part of the total information resource which will satisfy the individual's educational, working, cultural and leisure-time needs and interest, regardless of the individual's location, social or physical condition or level of intellectual achievement."⁹ The phrase "regardless of . . . level of intellectual achievement" might lead one to believe that children and their requests are welcomed, that the ability to pursue an interest beyond the scope of the local library is encouraged and that the child is able to find additional titles by a favorite author. For children, however, access to such information is often severely limited, sometimes by the reluctance of library personnel to accept a child's request as serious or legitimate, but often by limitations built into the system itself. In New Jersey, for instance, libraries are encouraged to request children's books throughout the New Jersey library network. Local libraries may submit juvenile requests to their own area libraries, which, in turn, refer unfilled requests to the state library. Some area libraries will undertake lateral searches among libraries in the region; others do not. If, however, the state library's collection does not contain the title sought, the manual on interlibrary loan procedures states that "juvenile in-print titles . . . should *not* be requested," having been proscribed with "ephemeral fic-

tion, current 'best sellers,' titles announced in current alerting tools . . . and titles available in mass-market editions.'"¹⁰ Furthermore, requests for titles published after 1956 may not be made to the Pennsylvania Union Catalog (PUC), with which New Jersey has a contract covering "some 4,000,000 titles, reported by some 200 Pennsylvania libraries."¹¹ (PUC's juvenile additions stopped in 1956.)

Although library systems and networks may in fact practice resource-sharing within their own jurisdictions, the development of resource-sharing across political and geographic boundaries remains outside the scope of most service to children and beyond the priority considerations of many children's librarians. A number of areas of consideration invite further exploration:

1. *Sharing collections on a trial basis* — In many areas financial restrictions severely limit the individual library's freedom to experiment with new or controversial materials. Through cooperative efforts of several libraries, development, utilization and evaluation of collections of toys and games, special audiovisual materials or equipment or other such materials could be developed. Such an alliance might represent school and public libraries within a limited geographic area, as well as members of regional systems, or be offered through state library agencies.
2. *Children's materials for adults* — The importance of developing special collections of materials for adults has been stressed by ALSC's Committee on National Planning of Special Collections and others.¹² Cooperation between public libraries, and colleges and universities offering courses in children's literature, offers an intriguing opportunity for cooperative planning in collection development.
3. *Media examination centers* — This is not a new concept by any means, but is one which needs to be developed for coherent collection development, especially for the smaller, independent or rural public library or school where there is often no available resource for examination of a broad range of children's materials.

The structure and method of resource-sharing and interlibrary loan networks for children's material is debatable. The need for such access is not.

A fighting posture or even goodwill on the part of librarians will not assure that access. There must be participation in the planning and development of interlibrary loan schemes and on-line bibliographic retrieval systems. NCLIS has appointed a task force on the "Role of the School Library Media Program in Networking," but the group has no one representing children's services in public libraries. This is another example of the fragmentation of power of those who are concerned about children.

When the New York Commissioner's report about combining public and school library service to children was issued in 1970, public and school people united only in the horror of the moment and then retreated to their pinnacled institutions to defend what was and had been. If a child's right to information is to be developed and enlarged, if children's literature is to be critically studied, a system of networking which commits the sin of omission cannot be allowed to develop.

We have moved very quickly from *Peter Rabbit* to on-line data bases — and some librarians don't like it. An administrator of a public library recently noted that one children's librarian's response to a query about selection procedures was "But you'll take all the fun out of being a children's librarian." Problems of management and implications of restrictive access for children do not make the job less challenging. These questions open up new possibilities. Colleagues who discuss career opportunities with new professionals may recommend the field instead of suggesting anything *but* children's work, because the opportunities are too limited. By relating goals for service to thoughtful, creative collections of materials, library service to children should be able to grow and develop with the same enthusiasm, zest and optimism that characterize the children to be served.

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