Public Library Children's Service:
Two Studies

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The Public Library Inquiry (1949 to 1952) did not include a study of children's service, although Director Robert D. Leigh had referred to it in most flattering terms. As a result, the former Children's Library Association of the American Library Association, knowing the need for information, interpretation, and evaluation of these services which had been growing and developing in the larger cities as well as in many smaller communities through the first half of the twentieth century, took steps to conduct a study. They believed that this unique service had characteristics which made it of special importance to children, to the community, and to the perpetuation of the literary culture of the country. As two survey committees worked on the project, many individual librarians and representatives of other professions were consulted.

The work of these committees resulted in a proposal, which was approved by the ALA Executive Board, to seek foundation funds to finance a survey which would accomplish the following: to examine the unique nature and the values of public library services to and for children, to study the extent to which those services are provided throughout the country, and to study the library personnel needed to provide the services, with special consideration of the causes of the present severe shortage of children's librarians.

There were obstacles of various kinds, including the need for financing of other ALA programs and the reorganization of ALA, all of which resulted in a long delay in making a request. After the reorganization of ALA, responsibility for this kind of study devolved upon the Library Administration Division. While funds for the inclusive project could not be secured, in March 1958 the Old Dominion Foun-

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dation granted $16,000 for two of the specific studies cited in the proposal. The first was a study of organizational patterns in library service to children in public libraries. This study was undertaken in cooperation with Western Reserve University School of Library Science with Elizabeth H. Gross as director. When the study was completed, with the collaboration of Gene I. Namovicz it was edited and arranged for greater practical usefulness and was published by the American Library Association in January 1963 with the title *Children's Service in Public Libraries: Organization and Administration*. There had been no substantial publication on organization and administration of children's service since 1941, when Lucas' *The Organization and Administration of Library Service to Children*, based upon observation and investigation of 12 libraries in cities of over 253,000 in the East and Middle West was published by ALA.

Demands upon all children's services in proportion to the tremendous increase in the number of children in the population, ironically accompanied by an increasing shortage of librarians, added up to a critical need for information on organization and administration to assist libraries which were re-examining their management practices in the light of changed needs.

The recent study of children's service in public libraries rests upon a broad base. In all, 950 libraries received questionnaires. The libraries were considered in five groups—Group I served populations 100,000 and over, Group II populations of 50,000 to 99,999, and Group III populations of 35,000 to 49,999. Group IV was composed of county and regional libraries serving populations of 50,000 or more; Group V libraries served populations of 3,500 to 34,999, both urban and county. Libraries in all groups but Group V received two detailed questionnaires, one of which was addressed to the chief administrator and the other to the head of children's work. The Group V libraries were sent a combined, less detailed, form. Libraries were asked to send additional information and illustrative material to interpret their situations. This procedure proved to be most useful.

Only when the questionnaires of both the administrator and head of children's work were returned were they used. Percentages of returned questionnaires for the groups were Group I, 82 per cent; Group II, 53 per cent; Group III, 49 per cent; Group IV, 44 per cent; and Group V (combined questionnaire), 61 per cent. In numbers of libraries rather than percentages, questionnaires were used from 259 libraries, each serving over 35,000 population and 303 serving less...
than 35,000 population. Supplementing this information were visits by Miss Gross to 20 public libraries, large and small, located from the west coast to the east, when she interviewed the chief administrator, the head of children's work, the branch supervisor (if any), the personnel officer, a branch and a children's librarian, and sometimes other officials.

It should be noted that this study of organization and administration investigates the means by which children's work was being carried out in the United States in 1957-58, not an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of those means. It makes available much essential information which may well serve as the basis for evaluative studies.

The first three chapters of *Children's Service in Public Libraries: Organization and Administration* deal with the need for the study, the nature of public library children's service, its organizational chronology, influences upon its development, and factors which influence organization patterns. Chapters IV through VIII discuss the various patterns of organization and their frequency. Chapters IX through XIV are concerned with administration; and the final chapter discusses goals and future development.

Every enterprise, whether it be a government or small business, must be organized in some way and libraries are no exception, of course. Within the public library framework there are two basic considerations which affect the organization of service to children. One is the duality of the work. The children's librarian's specialty is work with children. Her dual areas are children and books. The second consideration which has been inherent in work with children from the outset is the sense of obligation, of responsibility, to provide the best possible reading for children: "The poor and the mediocre are readily available, but without such a philosophy of children's library service there is no guarantee that the child, unaided, will encounter books of quality and, in his appreciation of them, develop the ability to discriminate." Organization has been primarily influenced by these facts in the past and continues to be.

Miss Gross and Mrs. Namovicz note that the patterns revealed in the survey are not necessarily considered the most satisfactory patterns by the libraries using them, nor are they considered final. They change with changing conditions. No two patterns were completely identical even though based upon the same principles. The patterns described in the book, therefore, are composites of basically similar
organizations. While other patterns exist, the most prevalent and in some cases the most unusual are included.

The study cites five factors which play a major part in determining the kind of organization existing in a library. First is the responsibility for selection of children's books. This is usually assigned, of course, to a specialist in children's literature, if there is such a specialist in the library. The study indicates that whether this officer is or is not also the head of children's services in the library makes a great difference in the pattern of organization and consequently in the administration of the work.

A second factor is the kind of authority and responsibility exercised. Advisory responsibility or staff control describes a situation in which the head of children's work advises, suggests, plans, and implements. He has no responsibility for schedules, overseeing the children's librarian's work, and little for promotion and transfer, which rests with the personnel office, and possibly a head of extension or branches. In direct contrast to this type of organization is supervisory or line control which does carry these responsibilities. A combination of the two types also exists.

The third factor which determines the organization of children's service is the relationship between the head of children's work and other officers of the library. The importance of an administrator's position is sometimes gauged by the degree of his accessibility to the head of the institution. The study showed that in 193 of the libraries which commented upon this aspect of organization the head of children's service is immediately responsible to the director of the library. Twenty-seven report to the director or associate director, and six report to some other officer. The rank of the head of the children's service, opportunities for promotion in the library, and the range of positions within the children's service are also factors which are to be considered in any attempt to determine the relationship between the library administrator and the head of children's service. Another point which affects one organization of this special aspect of library work is the size of area and population served; fifth is the geographical arrangement.

The Gross-Namovicz book discusses in turn five patterns which are distinguished from each other by type-of-authority. The coordinator-advisory pattern is characterized by an advisory relationship between the head of children's work and the children's librarian which divides responsibilities among line and staff officers. One in-
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Interesting finding of the survey, incidentally, is that the increasingly popular term "Coordinator" gives no clue to the responsibilities of the position. The term refers, in some cases, to responsibility for book selection only and in others to full advisory and coordinating functions. The meaning in various libraries is whatever the chief librarian considers it to be. However, a number of libraries have defined these functions and detailed excerpts are included in the book from three statements from libraries using the coordinator-advisory patterns.

The advisory-supervisory pattern describes situations in which the children's supervisor is also the assistant or associate librarian. He carries the general library responsibilities usually associated with such a position and special responsibility for the library's work with children. Where this pattern obtains, the supervisor of children's work usually has the same relationship to the head of the children's room in the main library as to the children's librarians in the branches.

The main library children's room pattern is the situation in which the head of the children's services is in charge of the children's room in the main library. He may or may not have professional assistants who, by carrying much of the work of serving the public, release him for book selection, community relations, and other responsibilities. As might be expected this pattern obtains primarily where there are not many branches and where the few professional staff members do not include specialists in service to any age group. What might not be expected is that this pattern is by no means limited to such situations. While 87 per cent of libraries in the 35,000 to 49,999 population group use this simplest form of organization, so also do 61 per cent of the libraries in the 50,000 to 99,999 population group, 37 per cent of the libraries serving over 100,000, as well as 22 per cent of the county libraries studied.

The last in this group, which is characterized by type-of-authority, is the supervisory pattern, in which the children's supervisor is in direct control of the main library and branch children's rooms, children's activities, and book selection, and may also be responsible for appointment, transfer, and promotion of staff.

Obviously there are influences other than area, population, and number of branches which determine the kind of organization a library and its children's service will have.

The readers' adviser pattern assigns the responsibility for book selection to a children's book specialist, who may be responsible to the head of a book selection department or of a service which includes
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processing as well as selection. In this pattern the readers' adviser has no responsibility for other aspects of service to children.

In some libraries the assistant head of the children's services carries a responsibility for book selection similar to that of the readers' adviser pattern except that in this case he reports to the head of the children's service and may have other children's service duties.

The group distinguished by geographic considerations, size, or scope of the library system are the regional, county, and small library patterns. In some city systems the area is divided into regions in which either one library is the parent branch, or an administrative unit for the region—with its own book collection and staff—may be located in one branch but has the same relationship to that branch that it has to other branches. The county picture is varied. While some have age group specialists, in others all professional personnel are generalists and assist with all areas of the work. The tendency of libraries to specialize often does not emerge in the earlier phases of existence.

The small libraries, both urban and county, serving populations of 3,500 to 34,999, fall into four patterns. Predominant are two patterns, the first of which utilizes the services of a trained children's librarian or designates one staff member who has some training or aptitude to manage the children's services. In the second, even though there may be up to four professional librarians, all are generalists and share the work with children, with the director having the major responsibility. In the third pattern also, the director carries that responsibility but may assign subprofessional staff members to children's service. In the fourth pattern, all staff members are subprofessional. Nearly half of these libraries are in the smallest of the population groups surveyed.

There are two types of organization which rest on dual responsibilities of the head of children's work. In one, the work with children and young adults is combined. In the second, the head of children's work is also responsible for service to schools or for school libraries. The public schools usually give some financial contribution to the library. The head of children's services works closely with school officials, but is responsible to the library director. In this type of organization the head of children's work has a supervisory relationship to the children's and school librarians in the system.

Although libraries fit into a number of discernible patterns of organization of work with children, they have also developed a great deal of variation in response to local conditions.
Administration is the concern of the second part of *Children's Service in Public Libraries*, for which the questionnaires elicited information about the authority responsible for the chief librarian's appointment. Sources of appointment range from the most common, the board of trustees by this or other names, sometimes subject to confirmation or approval by other officers or groups, such as government officials, school boards, clubs, or committees. A few libraries are under boards of education or city managers. Just under a quarter of the libraries in all except Group V are under civil service, although the chief librarian usually is not a civil service employee.

Of considerable interest is the fact that sources of funds and areas served seldom correspond exactly. A table is used to bring out the differences between the two. The 32 tables which form an appendix of the book extend and amplify the text. An index and a bibliography of references used in the text have been included, along with information regarding the number of agencies, including branches, sub-branches, and bookmobiles. Budgets are discussed as part of the administrative background of the libraries surveyed. A chapter on registration, circulation, and bookstock provides a more complete and broadly based comparative picture of the prevailing situation than has hitherto been available, touching upon the proportion of children's registration and circulation (including loan periods) to the total, and circulation increases with reasons offered for the increases noted. (Interestingly, only six of 248 libraries reported circulation losses and noted among the causes the growth of school libraries, while 55 libraries reported this same factor to be one of the causes of increased circulation, corroborating a widely held view.) Juvenile book stock percentages and correlations between them and total book stock, registration, circulation, and juvenile population reveal wide differences; such variation in the case of the ratio of book stock to juvenile population indicate that most libraries have not set standards in this regard. No doubt they have had to be concerned with attempts to achieve adequacy for the immediate demand before developing optimum standards.

The personnel chapter deals with the educational background of children's librarians and their number per library system. It does not cover reasons for personnel shortages, because this aspect of service to children is coming under intensive scrutiny in the other study of children's work supported by the same Old Dominion grant. Valuable information on staff training is included. The chapter devoted to
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selection of children's books is particularly informative and useful, as is the description of the range of children's service. Of 259 libraries in Groups I through IV, 235 serve children from infancy through the eighth grade or until the age of 14, but these libraries report flexibility in the use of young adult and adult collections. It is noted that the increasing maturity of children has also influenced the nature of the juvenile book collections.

Story hours, reading clubs, summer reading plans, book talks, book fairs, use of audio-visual materials, and other activities which may be a part of a public library's program for children are reported on as are those concerned with individual adults and adult groups, e.g., talks or a series of meetings on book selection, formal teaching in institutions of higher education, conducting of workshops, and film programs.

Reports of the libraries' cooperation with schools and other organizations in the community show that the services are many and varied, but also that this is an area in which funds and staff are insufficient for an adequate response to the needs. Also reported upon briefly is the situation regarding publicity through the press, radio, and television.

In its concluding look at the future development of public library service to children as expressed by the respondents to the questionnaires, the book cites goals for administrators, both library directors and children's supervisors. Unquestionably this compendium of information is a basic publication in the field of public library administration.

The second of the two studies made possible by the Old Dominion grant is in the vital field of personnel in public library service to children. This study, not yet ready for publication, is being conducted by Hazel B. Timmerman, formerly Executive Secretary of ALA's Library Administration Division and also former Chief of the Office of Personnel Administration, who has had extensive experience in dealing with library personnel problems. By means of questionnaires and interviews with chief librarians, heads of children's work, librarians, school officers and students, former children's librarians, and others, Miss Timmerman is bringing to light a great deal of information which bears upon the problems of recruitment and retention of children's librarians.

The shortage of children's librarians has long been a problem undoubtedly because of a composite of many reasons which have often
been noted. Miss Timmerman is attempting to obtain the facts which underlie the problem. Under scrutiny is the picture with regard to positions, vacancies, and persons available; salaries; promotional opportunities; range of positions in large and small libraries and by geographic regions; and a comparison of school and children's librarians' salaries. Out of this investigation should come factual knowledge of what kind of positions former children's librarians take and why, as well as what considerations influenced those who have remained in the work. Because shifts from one type of library work to another or to other fields are not, of course, limited to children's librarians, the study keeps this fact in perspective.

The kind of information this study is eliciting is essential to intelligent efforts to remove the obstacles to recruiting more and better children's librarians.

References