

The Children's Librarian

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The Children's Librarian as Viewed by Library School Educators

The triad is a combination of a group of elements that may be studied by scholars in different disciplines. A scientist may probe the secrets which are contained within its chemical compounds; a musician may extricate from it different tonal chords. Aspiring to be neither scientist nor musician, I shall utilize this unique configuration in the context of our concerns at this institute.

As an educator in the field of librarianship, I perceive the individual who engages in library service for children as a 3-dimensional configuration. Within the framework of a triad, it will be necessary to focus attention on three closely related elements that will influence the structuring of any profile of a children's librarian. These three elements are: (1) to have knowledge of the total environment that may affect children or be affected by children, (2) to have a knowledge of children with their singular commonalities and disparities and of their world with its dichotomous patterns, and (3) to have a knowledge of the philosophy, organization and program of service that will make library service to children an integral part of the total structure of the public library.

Our first concern is to have a knowledge of the total community that may affect children or be affected by children. Within the last two decades, children and adults have been confronted with a staggering array of complex sociological, technological and educational trends that have influenced societal changes. In the sphere of sociological trends, consider the impact on children who are directly affected by alternative family life-

styles, e.g., reverse roles of husbands and wives in parenting, mothers joining the labor force outside the home, domiciles headed by a single parent or by single men and women, homes split by increasing divorce rates or by separation of the parents. Probe the plight of children in poverty-level families who are inheritors of a welfare existence or of programs providing aid to families with dependent children. Understand the positive and negative potentials for children who reside in foster homes or who are adopted. Recognize the altered patterns of relationships for children in a growing number of smaller families or in families where there is a breakdown in communication between and among family members.

As the child's environment expands into the community, relate to the traumatic feelings of rootlessness that children may experience with the greater mobility of families. What are their inner sensations as they migrate from rural to urban areas or from one school district to another within the same city? Recognize their struggle to gain an entrance into a pluralistic society with the demise of traditional demographic patterns of community living based on economics, ethnicity or class distinctions. Identify with children as they test emerging beliefs in accepting the concept of cultural pluralism as a needed replacement for assimilation. In their exploration of such a premise, they may encounter tension and conflict caused by adult adherence to worn-out prejudices.

Sociological trends have given birth to conflicts in moral values, unrest and rebellion among the young. Sense the confusion of children as they seek to understand the adult attitudinal changes regarding morality, social and sexual relationships, and aesthetic values. Children value what adults value, accept what adults accept, discard what adults discard. In this respect it may be wise to refer to the thoughts of John W. Gardner:

We can make great progress in improving the functioning of our society and still not have anything that will live or last unless we concern ourselves with the values that underlie the enterprise. If a society believes in nothing, if it does not generate in its members a sense of moral purpose, there is no possibility that it can develop the high level of motivation essential to renewal.¹

Societal changes have also been influenced by technological and scientific trends that have far-reaching implications for children and adults. Ponder the limitless challenges for children as they converge upon new frontiers so different from those of our generation and those of their grandparents'. Technologically, during the past several decades, the final stages of the Industrial Revolution have given way to the nuclear age and now to the age of space. Born into this revolutionary era, children have been surfeited with a plethora of technological devices that have dramatically altered the structure of inquiry and the communication pro-

cesses. Overwhelming to many of us, we watch as children accept with a sophisticated assurance television, stereo, radio, CBs, satellite communication modules, computers, data banks, audiotapes, films and videotapes.

Knowledgeable beyond their years, children learn at an early age to master the varying combinations of these incomparable assemblages of interlocking multimedia sensory components. With a casual flick of a dial or the pressing of a remote control, children communicate with the far-distant operator of a similar machine and converse in a jargon understandable only to the two. Via satellites they may hear and view their counterparts in areas devastated by war or by natural catastrophes. Children gambol with their friends on "Sesame Street" or hear a taped telephonic story emanating from a library's Dial-A-Story service. Truly, the children's hour of today has little resemblance to the poetic depiction of the event by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Confronted with such scientific advances, children may adjust more easily than their traditionally-conditioned adults. For these young explorers, the psychological and intellectual barriers described in Toffler's *Future Shock*² will not be insurmountable. With proper guidance children may learn how to extract from the media and utilize those messages that will enable them to create meaningful visual and auditory self-expressions. As the forms, functions and versatility of media undergo constant changes, children may be the catalytic agents to test every new advance. Through their sense of wonder and their curiosity regarding these technological marvels, children may be the channels through which new ways may be devised and studied to retrieve, assimilate and disseminate knowledge. They will be the least afraid to try, to err or to succeed.

Extending themselves beyond learning cognitive skills with the aid of these tools, children may find within these same scientific components the means to satisfy their aesthetic needs as the affective domain is nurtured. When the young have such experiences, they will feel a spiritual kinship with the space-searching Columbus who exclaimed in E.G. Valens's *Cybernaut, a Space Poem*:

...
I
The new Columbus
...
Single handed I
Have pushed to the limits
Of the veriest unknown
 The last
 The limitless
 The final unexplored frontier...³

Conversely, if improper guidance is offered in the use of these technological marvels, children may become victims of subtle, subliminal methods of negative persuasion. Duped into believing false assumptions, they may be morally and intellectually impaired. Their perceptions and values which relate to the known and the unknown environments of which they are a part will be marred. The ultimate result will be the creation of a body of young, joyless strangers. Like programmed robots, they will be denied a freedom of the intellect; they will suffer an atrophy of sense and spirit.

Trends in education for the 1970s have entered into new stages, prompted by societal changes and technological advancements. No longer is the human endeavor confined to the limitations of earth. Man has been projected into outer space; he has soared beyond the gravitational pull of our planet into the fathomless regions of the heavens to the landing of a fragile craft upon the moon. Yet, while scientists have it within their power to send rocketry great distances into the celestial spheres, our educational endeavors have not enlightened the intellect as to how to eradicate slums, terminate wars or grant deprived children and adults a rightful place in society.

In this past decade we have come to question educational practices that have failed to reduce racial and class inequalities. Children of the "have-not" segments of our society still enter programs of learning with inappropriate content concealed by euphemistic labels. Still they emerge uneducated, underachieved, unenlightened. However, the 1970s has witnessed a unique phenomenon: these estranged recipients are demanding equal educational opportunities and are causing institutions of learning to reassess their philosophies, their programs and their methodologies. Simultaneously, as these children of ethnic minority and low-income groups seek entrance into this mainstream of learning, some of their peers in the middle-class segments of our population consider such moves as threats to their own educational pursuits. In the tension-ridden atmosphere which evolves in such situations, antagonism occasionally erupts in confrontations; for example, legal maneuvers are instigated by parents to protect outmoded interpretations of law with cries of "reverse discrimination."

The educational trends have also caused the pendulum, now, to swing back in an effort to still the clamor for "basics." Fearing the consequences to their children who are unable to read, spell, speak in coherent sentences, and master the principles of mathematics, agitated parents are holding the schools accountable. In varying degrees of nostalgic remembrances, concerned adults are demanding a complete revamping of the curricula to eliminate what they consider to be "frills." No less concerned are the proponents of the arts, who feel that a precipitous

elimination of other subjects without a careful review will be detrimental to the total education of children. Nyquist realized this fact when he stressed this need in "Humanities and Arts in Elementary and Secondary Education; Towards a New Humanistic Emphasis in Our Schools."⁴ In a syndicated newspaper column, the noted scholar, Norman Cousins, reflected on this topic in "The Arts Are No Less Basic."⁵ Charles Silberman echoed similar sentiments in his provocative book *Crisis in the Classroom*: "The false dichotomy between the 'cognitive' and the 'affective' domain — can only cripple the development of thought and feeling. If this be so, then poetry, music, painting, dance, and the other arts are not frills to be indulged in if time is left over from the real business of education; they *are* the business of education."⁶

Overshadowed by these societal and educational concerns is the equally impressive challenge to help children in their search for knowledge. It is essential to know this youthful public who attend schools daily. According to National Center for Education Statistics data, enrollment in public and nonpublic schools for kindergarten through eighth grade was 34 million in 1974-75.⁷ From the Bureau of the Census, the total enrollment of children in public and private nursery schools in autumn 1975 was 1,748,000.⁸ In statistics issued by the Office of Education, the total enrollment of exceptional children in special education programs for 1973-74 was 3,158,000.⁹

Some of the educational trends that are shaping the learning environment for these children should be noted. These include the development of early childhood educational programs such as nursery schools, day care centers and Head Start. The rise of alternative schools, street academies and contact schools have entered the scene. New forms of technology permit the packaging of education in new ways in terms of length, content and location of courses. It also provides for the use of television sets with self-instructing cartridges, while computer-assisted instruction through decentralized terminals makes possible independent study at home.

Educators are also focusing their attention on learners with special needs and bilingual education for ethnic minorities. Through federal, state and local governments, grants and programs are made possible to extend educational opportunities for all citizens, children and adults. Most important for those who serve children are the educational theories advanced by such leaders as James S. Coleman, Clark Kerr and James E. Allen, Jr., who espouse the concept of extending education beyond the formal institutions of learning. As summarized by Allen:

We must recognize that to consider education solely in terms of formal institutions is to hold a narrow and unrealistic concept of the

process of learning. Education comes as much or more from outside the schools as within and we must begin to try to shape the entire environment of life so that its influence is positive and reinforcing with respect to the total development of all human beings.¹⁰

Our second major concern in the configuration of the triad is to have a knowledge of children with their singular commonalities and disparities and of their world with its dichotomous patterns. According to the Bureau of the Census, the U.S. population of children to age 14 totaled 53,649,000 in 1975. Included in this figure were 15,896,000 girls and boys under the age of 5 years; 17,335,000 children between the ages of 5 and 9; and 20,418,000 between the ages of 10 and 14.¹¹

However, children are more than statistics. What do we know about the children with whom we interact? Do we know the environments from which they have come? Have we visited their communities? Have we entered the housing developments or apartments in which they live? Have we traveled the rural roads to reach those in isolated areas or on ranches or reservations? Have we mingled in environments where English is a second language and faced the task of communicating with children in ways foreign to us? Can we appreciate the cultural and ethnic differences among children? Can we understand and accept their value systems, which may be different from ours? Do we know them as individuals with unique personalities, human beings with potential? Or do we take the easy way out and put the children into neat categories, referring to them with adjectives of ghetto, welfare, slum, middle-class, culturally advantaged, problem, suburban, culturally deprived, black, white, Chicano, Appalachian poor white, handicapped, native American, etc.? Labeling any individual has harmful effects, and when adults engage in such tactics in speaking to and about children, the damage is irreparable. We are in danger of imposing ourselves negatively on segments of society who are least able to defend themselves — children.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to work with children and to include them within our circle of friends know the intangible gifts which they bestow upon us — the ready smile, the joyous greeting, the spontaneous response, the mischievous pranks done without malice, the innocent trust, the quiet moments of companionable silence. We come to know children through their thank-you letters, their almost-illegible scrawls of newly invented spellings of words, their creative poetry or artistic expressions. We share their concerns in *Miracles: Poems by Children of the English-Speaking World*, collected by Richard Lewis.¹² We react to their feelings as voiced in the book *Here I Am: An Anthology of Poems Written by Young People in Some of America's Minority Groups*,

edited by Virginia O. Baron.¹³ We walk the streets and experience sights and smells with children as they ask *What Is a City: Young People Reply*, compiled by Dianne Farrell and Ruth M. Hayes.¹⁴

Perhaps the essence of the world of childhood has seldom been expressed more sensitively than in the perceptive insights of Jean Karl as recorded in her book, *Childhood to Childhood*:

Childhood is not a time of innocence, it is not a time of unmitigated pleasure, it is not a time of easy joys and carefree days. It is so only in the nostalgia of adults. Childhood is a time of difficult inquiry, of trying discovery, of hard quests and unfulfilled desires. It is a time of bumping into limits that seem to have no reason, of enduring meaningless ceremonies, and also of striking out into exciting visions. It is a time of pain and yet a time of ecstasy, because so much is new and discovery of the new is always filled with both a wonder and a hurt.¹⁵

The configuration of the triad has a third element to make it complete in structuring a profile of a children's librarian. It relates to the need for a knowledge of the philosophy, organization and program of service that will make library service to children an entity and an integral part in the total structure of the public library. Embodied in the history of library service to children are the basic premises set forth by the early founders, from which evolved a philosophy as pertinent today as it was for its originators. It is imperative that children's librarians have a thorough knowledge of the historical foundations of public library service to children. This may be secured through a study of the contributions of such pioneers as Minerva Saunders, Caroline Hewins, Caroline Burnite, Anne Carroll Moore, Clara Whitehall Hunt, Alice Jordan, Frances Jenkins Olcott, Linda Eastman, Mary Wright Plummer, Effie L. Power, Mary E. Dousman, Alice Hazeltine and others. These were some of the women who established the principles and set the patterns upon which library service for children rests today. Their philosophical concepts for such service were visionary and creative. One sometimes wonders what their thoughts and their approaches would be in confronting children in today's environments. Perhaps Anne Carroll Moore would ask us to seek answers to the questions she posed in 1913 concerning the children's department in either a large or small library:

1. Does the work show elements of strong vitality to any one sincerely interested in children?
2. Is the book collection adequate to the cultural needs of the community?
3. Is the library service intelligent, active, and sympathetic?
4. Is the library *growing with* its community?

5. Does the library believe in its children's work as an integral part of a civic institution, or does it merely tolerate it?

In whatever exploration or pioneering we may do we must endeavor to let our work be the center of as much as possible, and refuse to let that pass for work whose affinity with life is narrow and whose range of influence is small.¹⁶

Time does not permit an intensive view into the different aspects of the preparation and performance of a children's librarian in organizing and managing library service to children. Simply stated, there are several components. Know the operational structure of children's services in terms of communities served, the type of library system of which the children's department is a component. Understand current organizational patterns for children's services in a wide spectrum of library systems and libraries serving urban, county and rural populations. Know alternative organizational patterns that may be utilized. For example, should the organizational structure of public services be based on type of service offered rather than on the age levels of users? Or should there be a consortium formed with related community agencies to provide a total environment for children to meet their diverse needs and interests?

Knowledge of organization and management is enhanced with competencies in the art of research. Through research a children's librarian evaluates traditional methods of service to determine those which are to be retained and those which may be eliminated. Research will enable a librarian to assess use and nonuse of services by children and adults concerned with children. Modules may be structured to identify publics served and unserved and to determine needs and opportunities for extended services to the public. In the area of organization and management, a children's librarian has a responsibility to determine and to relate new directions of service to reach the unreached.

Management of service to children requires a high degree of competency and skill in the sphere of collection building and maintenance. With a wide variety of materials from which to select, a children's librarian must consider the holdings in terms of their form, function and versatility. Carefully devised procedures for evaluation and selection must be developed. In this respect the sentiments of an early pioneer of library service to children, Clara Hunt, are as pertinent today as they were when she spoke them: "If we are to follow instead of lead the taste of the children we must not flatter ourselves that we are anything more than clerks whose duty it is to discover exactly what a customer wishes and then to give her that commodity."¹⁷ Once the children's librarian has made the selection of materials, it is necessary to consider their organization and control. This requires a knowledge of the cataloging and classification of

book and nonbook materials. Collection development also demands constant attention to maintenance and to the handling of current issues and concerns.

Pertinent to the management function is a thorough understanding of the theories and principles relating to the dissemination of information. With the glut of knowledge and information permeating even the environment of children, a librarian must be conversant with and understand the workings of networks, data bases and media programs. In this manner it will be possible to extend the availability of resources to those who use children's services. Insights into this realm and its importance for school media specialists have been cogently explored by Dr. Bernard Franckowiak in the fall 1977 issue of *School Media Quarterly*.¹⁸ The applicability of information for children's librarians is unquestioned and this article should definitely be read.

Programs and services for children have been the high points of work with the youthful public. Numerous library studies, surveys and research projects have alluded to the great success of children's librarians in this aspect of their work. If the high level of achievement is to continue and ascend to even greater heights, then a children's librarian must work incessantly to improve competencies in programmatic tasks as new avenues open for exploration of new ideas and new approaches. Developing programs and managing them within and outside the library require an understanding of the administration of these activities within the total service of the library. Also, a children's librarian is expected to adhere to standards as they relate to the planning and execution of any program. Most important in meeting these standards is a need to conform to the fundamentals for excellent programming. These elements may encompass six essentials: (1) identify needs and opportunities, (2) define program objectives, (3) assess resources, (4) establish priorities, (5) determine methods of implementation, and (6) conduct evaluations. Success in conforming to these essentials will depend on an ability to develop and sharpen one's diagnostic, motivational and prescriptive skills.

A children's librarian gives service to the individual and to groups as well, both inside and outside the library. Diverse publics are brought into the matrix of service — schools and allied agencies, special audiences with special needs, adult audiences concerned with children or with materials for children, adult users and senior citizens who may derive benefits from services, materials and programs emanating from the children's department. The demands on a children's librarian are many and varied; yet enrichment and a recharging of one's potential are necessary if the creative spark is to continue. This is achieved in part through continuing education, affiliations with and participation in professional

library, educational and allied associations. Equally enriching is the involvement in cultural pursuits and the intangible benefits derived from travel.

Thus, the triad has been completed. A configuration of a children's librarian has been postulated here from the vantage point of one library educator. Elements have been omitted which should perhaps have been included. Yet, through it all, if one were to ask: "What is a children's librarian?" a simple response could be: "How far does your vision reach in profiling such an individual?"

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