

Evaluations of the Institute Program

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Reactions by a Public Library Administrator

I must confess that I came to this institute expecting dry dissertations on the ivory-tower level that would have a sedative effect on me — in short, an opportunity to rest my weary director bones and catch up on a little napping. What a rude awakening! The speakers, participants and agenda have kept me interested and alert — perhaps because they were reinforcing my beliefs.

Peggy Sullivan began by asking if children's librarians are sure that they have goals for public library service for children. A good question — and after three days, there has been no answer. Or, if the goals exist, you surely don't know how to state them. Bernard Spodek made the point that libraries are not schools, but are arenas for mental action. Keep this in mind: libraries are not a replacement for formal education. George Canney reinforced this premise by emphasizing that librarians do not teach reading.

To Spencer Shaw's comments, I say, hallelujah! A children's librarian should have knowledge of the total environment, knowledge of children and their world, and most of all, knowledge of organization of services, management skills and the philosophy connected with library service to children. Carolyn Field has shown from her presentation that she is first and foremost a librarian, and secondarily one who specializes in children's services. William Chait's observations are accurate; librarians must experiment and develop rapport with both children and adults. Librarians must develop adult interests within themselves. Norma

Rogers points out that children are individuals with individual tastes, who want well-informed librarians, not book-checkers. Thanks should be expressed to Faith Hektoen and Mary Jane Anderson for stating that librarians must know the content and impact of library materials, and that to grow, the librarian must break out of the local setting by joining and becoming active in professional organizations.

At this point, a spirited discussion took place that astounded me as a director. I heard administrators described as parsimonious, perverse, pigheaded, intolerant, aloof, unsympathetic and outright nasty ogres who regularly discriminate against children's librarians and their programs. Would you care to wager that the same would be said at a meeting of adult services librarians, or that a meeting of technical services librarians would agree with you, too?

I submit that we, the enemy, are really reasonable individuals who will react positively *if* you do your homework, know what you want, why you want it, what it will do for library service as a whole, what you need to do it, what it will cost in both time and dollars, and what will be the inevitable reaction to your proposal. Present this in a logical and orderly manner and you have an excellent chance of getting what you want. Remember, you must convince only one person — that person must convince a board of seven or more. Give the boss complete background work so his or her job will be easier. However, be careful; you may get what you ask for! To keep administrators happy, keep them advised of activities on a regular basis. Ask questions. Communicate! Have the courage of your convictions. Educate the director. A well-informed boss will have a greater tendency to try to accommodate your desires, plans and programs. If you don't think you're getting a fair deal, look at yourself first.

Bridget Lamont made the point that children's librarians like to talk only among themselves and then wonder why no one takes them seriously. Beating-a-dead-horse syndrome, perhaps? Amy Kellman prescribed the three purposes of programs: increase library visibility, bring people in, and stimulate use of library materials. Barbara Rollock accurately stated that librarians are not social workers.

Environment (i.e., facilities) is essential to positive service, according to Margaret Bush. I might add, though, that it is not a substitute for a friendly, well-informed and dynamic librarian.

Margaret Kimmel and Dudley Carlson asked who is responsible for materials selection. The answer is the administrator, who then delegates responsibility to departmental librarians. Selectors should give readers what they want, not what selectors think is good for them. Adult selectors should not ignore Emily Loring, Grace Livingston Hill, and the nurse

stories because they are poor literature. Why do too many children's librarians opt not to clutter their shelves with the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew or, heaven forbid, the Bobbsey Twins? I say if you do have these, they won't clutter your shelves — they will be out most of the time. Try it and see. Most of your so-called lasting literature will last, and last, and last . . . because it is never used.

Mary Kingsbury leads into an interesting point with her statistic from the Benne study that "in one library with over thirty children's staff positions, two-thirds of the occupants lack the MLS." In recruiting for librarians to staff two new libraries in the past two years, I have found that the graduate library schools appear to emphasize training and coursework for: first, academic librarianship; second, special librarianship; third, media specialists; fourth, public librarianship; and fifth — if you can't do anything else — children's librarianship. Very few of the resumes I received indicated "service to children" as the primary job objective, and the coursework taken seemed to back this up. I am glad to learn from Spencer Shaw that the University of Washington is correcting this curriculum oversight. More schools should follow this lead.

What is the future of children's services? Let me use songs from three Broadway musicals to illustrate:

- "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" from *Kismet* — follow this philosophy of service through crafts, games and fun times only, and your future is dim;
- "Impossible Dream" from *Man of La Mancha* — follow the high ideals of trying to be all things to all people without regard for reality and practicality — tilt with windmills, if you will — and your future is even dimmer and rather short-lived;
- "You Gotta Know the Territory" (the theme of the lead song "Rock Island") from *Music Man* — apply the philosophy of a salesman: know the product, know the customer, know the territory. You are selling a product and have stiff competition from the park district, television, school programs and other forms of recreation. To sell your unique product, you must advertise. You must create a congenial atmosphere. You must know your job. You must stop keeping your light under a bushel basket and let administrators know what you are doing and plan to do. You must develop managerial skills in supervision, budgeting and planning. When you want something, ask directly and apply the six *ps*: Proper prior planning prevents poor performance. Do all this and stop feeling sorry for yourself because you are "just children's librarians" and you will blossom and flourish, grow and command respect . . . and higher salaries . . . and have a bright and limitless future. The future is yours — what you do with it is up to you.