
The Selection and Acquisition of Books for Children

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THE SCOPE of this paper will be limited to a discussion of the methods of acquisition of books for children by public libraries and by public school libraries. It will avoid on one hand the Scylla of principles of book selection and on the other the Charybdis of order work. Both have been covered ably in books and periodicals.

Material on the general practices and variations in the area of acquiring new titles and replacing old ones for schools and children's collections is scarce. Order procedures and routines are reviewed in the standard works on school library administration and in public library work with children. A few articles in periodicals handle the topic briefly. However, the over-all programs followed by librarians generally to maintain a collection of books for children are not described in detail. Librarians throughout the country have furnished the data upon which this paper is based. They represent school and public libraries in large, medium size, and small governmental units in several parts of the United States.

Librarians working with children have established criteria, principles, and standards for books that are to be used with children. In order to build up working collections of suitable books, is it necessary to survey the output of books published for children, to apply standards to them, to select and reject new and old titles, and to establish procedures for accomplishing this.

Supervisors of library service to children in public libraries and in school systems regularly check, or have checked by an assistant in their offices, book announcements from publishers, book lists, and reviews in such standard publications as: *A.L.A. Booklist*, *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Saturday Review*, *Bulletin of the Children's Book Centre University of Chicago*, *The Horn Book*, *Junior Bookshelf*, *Junior Reviewers*, and the like. School librarians also check

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reviews appearing in general professional education and subject field periodicals. From these announcements and reviews, check lists of books to be considered for their collections are compiled and books ordered for evaluation.

Review copies of books suitable for school and public library children's rooms are sent by publishers to some large, strategically located systems. Other books are ordered "on approval" from publishers and jobbers, and single copies of some titles are bought for examination before quantity orders for branch and school distribution are placed. Most large school library systems and children's library departments approve for inclusion in the collections only books that have been examined, that have been read and reviewed by staff members, and that are available for further examination by the individual librarian selecting books for his school library or public library children's room.

All librarians responsible for selecting books for children would prefer to see books before ordering. However, those who live and work in small towns and out-of-the-way locations have little access to many children's books and must depend upon reviews and selected lists. They see books only when they go to cities with good book stores, when they attend professional meetings where book exhibits are held, or when they visit Book Fairs, Book Week celebrations, and other special exhibitions. State departments of education, especially if there is a school library consultant in the office, and state library commissions often have sample or display collections of books that are open for examination. Small collections of books are available to school and public libraries from some of these state agencies. School librarians in some systems are allowed school time to visit such exhibits. One of the great problems in the acquisition of books for children is the availability of books for examination before a decision to purchase them must be made.

Book selection and recommendation of books are done by all professional school and children's librarians in a system. They are appointed to book reviewing committees for periods of from two to four months. All members of the staff have an opportunity, therefore, during a year to participate in this basic activity connected with book acquisition. Appointment may be to a general book reviewing committee or it may be to a subject committee; in either case, the librarian's interests and particular knowledges are used. Specialists in subject fields are often invited to review books and in the schools, teachers, elementary supervisors, and often administrators sit on review committees.

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New books, after they have been recorded in the offices of supervisors of school and children's library services, are sent out to committee members to be read and evaluated. Reviewers make definite recommendations about each book. The Office of Children's Services of the New York Public Library, for example, has two categories of recommendation: for reading rooms—a book that is distinguished and should be in the collection of fine books kept permanently in the children's rooms for reading and enjoyment there; and for circulation—a book that is good, but not outstanding enough to become part of the reading room collection. Besides essential and approved titles, the Department of Work with Children of the Schenectady County [New York] Public Library designates some books "revolving." Two copies are bought to circulate among the branches as a try out before extensive ordering is done.

In many libraries recommendation for purchase by a particular branch is a common practice. Because of neighborhood needs or local interests, a book not suitable for the collection in general may be approved for a special children's room. An example of this is the great demand in sections of New York City for Spanish language books for the Puerto Rican children.

If there is a question about a book, it may be read by a second or third reviewer. Problem books are always read carefully by the supervisor with final decision left to him. In the Los Angeles and Denver school systems there is an advisory or reviewing committee which is called in to settle serious problems.

Reviews are written on "p" slips or order forms for permanent filing in the supervisor's office where they may be consulted when needed. In many public libraries the reviews are also given orally at regular meetings of the whole staff of children's librarians. Here books may be discussed and questions about the reviews asked. The Work with Children Department of the Los Angeles Public Library invites to its monthly meetings children's librarians of the surrounding smaller cities so that they may participate in and benefit from the discussion and examination of books not otherwise available to them. School librarians do not generally have regular system-wide meetings for book discussion. In the Los Angeles area, though, the Southern Section of the School Library Association of California sponsors a monthly book breakfast on Saturday mornings during the school year when current books are reviewed and discussed.

Many supervisors of work with children in public libraries and some in school libraries issue lists of titles approved for purchase. These lists are based on the reviews and recommendations of staff book com-

mittees and in some systems become the order form. Large public libraries seem to use lists more than small public libraries or large and small school library systems. In some school systems lists of approved titles are offered for discount bids and thereafter for the period of the bid carry the discount price. These lists then may be used as order forms without further bids. Instead of issuing separate lists of approved books many school systems recognize standard lists—the three *Basic Book Collections* for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, *The Children's Catalog* and its supplements, *The Standard Catalog for High School Libraries* and its supplements, and state lists—and accept for inclusion in their collections any titles appearing on them. Special lists are compiled where needed. Because of the great range of books used in the high school libraries, their librarians are generally free to order books they require, clearing titles with their supervisors.

Lists of approved titles are sent to the children's and school librarians prior to the book order period and are used in conjunction with ordering. They are not for public distribution, but are kept as a record of books that have been approved for purchase, as a second check of the titles ordered by each unit, and in some systems as an order form from which composite order slips are made. The Boys and Girls Department of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has discontinued its monthly annotated lists, but continues a list, revised every five years, of titles that form the nucleus of every branch children's collection. In Chicago, the supervisor of school libraries issues an annual list of three to four hundred books which is a supplement to the *Approved List of Library Books for the Chicago Public Schools*.

Whether books approved for inclusion in the collection appear on a list or not, they are available for examination by all children's and school librarians in those public libraries and school systems where review and on approval copies are provided. Regular book order periods are scheduled at which time the individual school or children's librarian handles the books; reads the reviews, or listens to them as they are given orally in a meeting, or both; and makes his decision regarding the need his unit has for them. Books not approved are also available for examination with reviews suggesting the reasons the book was not recommended. Usually a school or children's librarian may question a review or request a reconsideration. He may also ask that a book not being considered for the collection be reviewed.

Each school and children's librarian is free to select and order the books he wishes and the number of duplicates his library can use.

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When inexperienced or untrained persons are responsible for school library or branch children's room service, the supervisor's office through the supervisor or an assistant, gives a great deal of direction in book selection. Experienced librarians of good judgment and extensive book knowledge require little supervision. Though each librarian is given wide freedom in selecting books for his library, some departments of children's services have over-all system-wide requirements for all units. In Pittsburgh every children's room of the Carnegie Library must have a copy of the approximately 500 books on the basic list which is the nucleus of the children's collections.

The frequency with which children's books are ordered varies greatly. Orders for books to be used in children's rooms of public libraries seem to be placed more often than those books to be used in school libraries. The former are placed generally on a monthly basis, the latter on an annual or semester basis.

Books selected by individual school and children's librarians for units within a system are cleared generally through the office of the supervisor. He is responsible for checking orders, approving or disapproving them, and forwarding them to the order department or business office for purchase. In secondary schools books ordered, especially if from a previously approved list, may go through the office of the principal directly to the business office for purchase.

Orders for school library books are usually sent out for bids. Small orders may be placed without bids, and in some systems comprehensive discount bids cover all titles on approved lists for a specific period. Public libraries are not so frequently required to have bids on book orders. However, books are bought where best discounts are obtained. Books for children are usually purchased from jobbers and publishers, and only occasionally from local bookstores. Foreign children's books are ordered directly from importing houses and stores, and prebound books directly from prebinding companies.

Books in prebound, library, and school editions are purchased more extensively for use in the elementary school libraries than in children's rooms of public libraries. However, when publisher's bindings are weak or books will have hard and long use, the general practice seems to be to order them in reinforced bindings whether they are for elementary or secondary school libraries or for the children's rooms of public libraries. Picture books, large flats, paper bound books, fiction, and titles that promise to be popular are most often bought in prebound editions.

School libraries and children's rooms of public libraries usually have

portions of the budgets of their central agency allocated to them to cover the cost of book orders during the year. For the school library the amount is based on the average daily attendance in the school and is, in many states, governed by state adopted school library standards. For children's rooms the amount is based on circulation, special needs of the children who use the rooms, high percentage of replacements, additional language requirements, condition of the book stock, and other pertinent factors. The librarians in charge of these units may order books—new titles and replacements—as they wish under the general direction of the supervisor.

While school librarians and children's librarians of public libraries are selecting new titles they are also concerned with the maintenance of their collections, with the replacement of specific titles and with the evaluation of their holdings. Methods of accomplishing this vary from simple, incidental reordering of single books by individual librarians to highly organized checking of scheduled lists.

The collections in children's rooms of public libraries are re-evaluated according to a carefully developed plan that in many systems is almost as important as the acquisition of new titles. In order to keep their collections live and active, children's librarians are constantly reviewing their contents. In Atlanta, Los Angeles, and New York the departments of work with children have monthly lists of replacements which cover fiction, picture books, easy books, and subjects by classification so that in any year the whole collection is revised.

The quality of service given in school libraries and in children's rooms of public libraries depends upon the over-all collection. The selection of new books, re-evaluation of older ones, decisions to withdraw or replace specific titles are professional responsibilities of the librarians developing these collections of books for children. There are many details, numerous steps, multiple forms, and procedures to the process of acquiring books. The larger the system and the greater the number of units, the more elaborate the process seems to be, but large or small, the reason for the procedure is to determine for any library the books that will be of most value in it and to set up routines for acquiring those books economically and quickly.

INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS CONTRIBUTING INFORMATION

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