



Building the Foundation: The Book Collection

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THIS PAPER WILL DISCUSS questions relating to the selection and maintenance of the library book collection for children: its scope, breadth, and arrangement; the selection of new titles; duplication of titles; the re-evaluation of the collection and replacement buying. (Procedures for reviewing and ordering books for the children's library were discussed by Frances Lander Spain in the April 1955 issue of *Library Trends*.¹)

The youthful population exploding today into the children's library brings an ever broadening range and continuous change of interests, with more sophisticated personal and school-inspired demands. Publishing, dominated by a commercially successful materialism, offers a steadily mounting output of new titles, correlated with new interests through effective librarian-editor communication. The 2,584 new titles issued in 1962 have more than doubled the figure of 10 years earlier. With the library's simultaneous increase in difficulties of maintaining optimum staffs of professionally trained and experienced children's librarians, it has become a time-consuming and complex business to maintain balanced book collections reflecting wise and discriminating choice of books. Large libraries with approval book services and the staff to review and examine books before purchase have a more satisfactory situation than do smaller libraries which must rely upon reviews, approved lists, and examination of books in exhibits.

A children's librarian tries not to think of the exploding groups—children or books—in the mass, but to consider the varying potentials of individual readers, the gifted and the slow, and to view each title as one to be chosen or rejected upon its own merits, apart from any place it holds in mass made-to-order or series publishing. He expects

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each book to satisfy one or more of the reasons that children read—for recreation, aesthetic enjoyment and inspiration, information, or education. He attempts to have the collection in its entirety so balanced, broad, and varied that it will serve impartially the community as a whole and the children in all its schools, of every cultural and economic background, of every religious, racial, and national group. Through making available those books which have proved to have lasting worth and selecting the best of the new, the librarian aims to enable the child to grow in knowledge and understanding, to develop his capacity to wonder, to find laughter, and to respond to beauty.

A survey of some 50 large systems and independent libraries indicates that the generally followed pattern for children's room collections is that which serves children from preschool age through the eighth grade. A few systems include ninth grade; some others stop with the seventh (as does the New York Public Library); and a larger group outside the majority serve children only through the sixth grade (Brooklyn, Cincinnati, Denver, and some smaller cities and towns). Arguments for the break at the lower level relate to the advanced interests of children today, which are obvious not only in accelerated school work but also in voluntary reading. Brooklyn² has found that increased interest in reading adult books and using adult reference tools is more efficiently provided for when seventh to ninth graders, as the "young teens," are regularly served in the adult areas of the library (at Central, by a separate room; in most branches by a book collection set up in the adult area near the reference collection). Thus, in Brooklyn, librarians feel that they have done away with needless duplication. On the other hand, quite the opposite occurred in the Great Neck (N.Y.) Public Library,³ where youngsters reading on a high level, with difficult advanced assignments for a "varied and rich curriculum," were found to require a correspondingly enriched public library collection. To serve their needs, the young adults "teen" collection was moved into the children's room, and the juvenile reference collection was then amplified to serve both the up-graded junior-high needs and those of the lower grades.

Figures vary greatly for the size of children's room collections. An unusual one is the New York Public Library's Central Children's Room collection with its total of 48,858 books, including the Reading Room Collection and the Historical Collection. Figures of 30,000 to 40,000 volumes occur in some other large city central libraries which include special areas of children's books; *e.g.*, Brooklyn, Philadelphia,

and Pittsburgh. In branch libraries and town libraries, bookstocks differ according to population served, budget, and available book space; large units with collections up to 26,000, small ones most often ranging from 5,000 to 8,000.

It is interesting to note in Effie L. Power's ⁴ study of 24 large library systems, published in 1943, that the average number of books in the children's library in 1932 was 3,500, and in 1942 had become 7,000. At that time she considered "about 3,000 separate titles sufficient to start a well-rounded collection" ⁴ plus considerable duplication of standard books and classics. It is noteworthy that she found the increase in that decade the result of "an increasing number of acceptable books published, change in school curricula demanding use of a greater number of books, more children reading more widely, and more books available for experimental purposes" ⁴—the same activating forces that continued to work through the next two decades to promote change in bookstocks.

In all children's libraries, picture books on their separate shelves make an alluring area for small children. This collection must be carefully chosen, for children's librarians are well aware that books for this impressionable, "read-it-again" age can have a lasting influence in forming taste and developing imagination. The picture book collection has become more colorful and varied as modern book production and increasing sales of children's books have attracted artists from every field and every part of the world to add to the number and variety of picture books being published.

Since the common run of bookshop gives more space and attention to the cheap, stereotyped, glossy "flats," it is essential for librarians to compensate in every way possible through calling attention to artistic quality in picture books. Librarians must be willing to accept fresh approaches in art which to the child's uninhibited eye are neither startling nor distasteful—to encourage the artist's desire to be original in communicating with children. Trial with children themselves helps in the selection of unusual books. Children will reject the book slanted to sophisticated adult taste in which they are unable to find something childlike with which to identify.

In the large library, a broad range of children's book illustration by contemporary artists is welcomed for study by illustrators and other artists, advertisers, art school students, publishers, and students of children's literature in library schools and in institutions for teacher

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education, where an increasing number of such courses are being taught.

It is challenging to the selector of books for the very young to receive such a request as the following, from a young father: "We would like to establish a reading program for our little girl, who is currently twenty-one months old. We have introduced her to the wonderful world of books since she was seven months old. . . . It has never been our opinion that she is too young to enjoy books. . . . We would be most grateful if you would suggest a reading list of books for ages two-three." For such parents, fresh copies of outstanding picture books and other read-alouds on a parents' shelf are a splendid service—and it is offered in many children's rooms.

"Easy-to-read" books are also generally to be found in a separate area within the children's room. For so long the basic reader was the only kind of reading available on the beginning level; now the problem in choosing for the beginning reader is to determine *which* titles to select from the vast number of easy books rolling off the presses. Children's librarians agree with the reading specialist who, advocating the individualized reading program with nontextbook classroom collections of generous size, says that "Trade books are vastly superior to basal readers in literary value, artistic merit, and educational value. Children can be expected to learn to love to read and become book-reading adults when they read what they love."⁵ But children's librarians also recognize that the uninspired vocabularized nontextbook does not answer the need for the reader-substitute.

The great number of formula, easy-reading books—and a strange dichotomy is this emphasis upon vocabularizing and increase in advanced-reading, accelerated classes—sets annoying traps for book selectors. One is the assumption that prominent writers for adults will write well for children when presented with a prescribed list of words, drawn up by a team of expert educators. In the eye of the promoter (and of the author) the combination seems irresistible; in the eye of the discriminating selector, the results are unhappy. Rather than spread such mediocrity, the selector will supply creatively conceived "easy-to-read" stories in multiple copies. Able beginners read these brief books quickly, it is true, but soon grow to the next step of more challenging reading.

For boys and girls above the easy-reading stage, who read widely and in a wonderfully "sandwichy" way, there must be a broad collection of both fiction and nonfiction including an ample selection

of the classics in attractive editions (and fresh ones in distinctive format are continually being published to give new life to old stand-bys), the standard titles, duplicated sufficiently, and a judicious number of stepping-stone books for the more reluctant readers. For remedial reading, instead of buying made-for-the-purpose stories and watered-down classics, the children's librarian will be aware of good books in the collection which have high interest level and low reading level. Of the mass of encyclopedic, soon-to-be-superseded informational books, necessary titles will be added in moderation.

Division of the bookstock according to grade levels of reading is difficult to justify. As any children's librarian knows, books cannot be graded. And one expects children to read on many levels, at the same time, and for a combination of reasons. To meet recurring requests in children's rooms where there may not always be sufficient experienced staff, expediency has sometimes led to setting up, in a kind of reader-interest arrangement, popular subject collections: horse and dog books, mysteries, sports stories, science fiction, or a well known nonfiction series. This arrangement, like close grading of the book collection, may keep a lazy or unaroused reader from noticing other books which might free him from too insistently following one line or level of reading.

The need for a well balanced collection for the young adolescent is of prime importance, for his time for free reading is limited and what he reads must not be below his capacity nor above his level of maturity to understand and appreciate. The broadened curricula and accelerated classes with required independent reading of more advanced books compel the selection for the children's room of occasional adult titles and duplication of certain teen-age titles which are in young adult collections.

This duplication of certain titles found in young adult collections includes not only the long familiar book-report classics but also more recent and popular titles when outstanding in quality and desirable for filling requests—e.g., *Kon-Tiki* (the original), *Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be*, and *Born Free* (the original). The adapting of adult titles for young people seems unnecessary most of the time.

Considerable variation exists in the amount of teen-age book duplication of titles in both young adult and children's collections. In New York, where sixth- and seventh-grade reading parallels to a large extent what the eighth graders read in the young adult area, liberal

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duplication is natural. In the large number of libraries where children's rooms serve the eighth grade, duplication is more limited. In general, duplication exists for outstanding, popular titles of light romance, science fiction, sports stories (including hot-rods and racing), and World War II stories; in nonfiction, for sports biographies, World War II history, archaeology and early man, diving, science, and information about countries. The growing trend is (a) for reduced duplication, as collections for young adults become more adult or entirely adult in bookstock, or (b) for keeping only a small, purely recreational teen-age selection of "bait" books, since it is recognized that much of what used to be "bait" for teen-agers is generally now standard reading for sixth graders.

The increase in required home reading throughout the country at younger levels and the spread of individualized reading programs in more and more schools, with its greater need for nontextbook titles for the classroom, point to the need for teachers to know more children's books. The misguided teacher or parent who sets out to suggest the reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Exodus* by advanced sixth graders is not thinking of the maturity level of the children's understanding and is quite unmindful of the richness in modern children's literature, as well as in older classics, for the gifted child: the great historical fiction by such writers as Rosemary Sutcliff and Hans Baumann, whose novels are exciting, but not easy reading; the fascination of new worlds in such imaginative books as *A Wrinkle in Time*, *The Gammage Cup*, *The Hobbit*, and C. S. Lewis' Narnia stories, all of which make unusual demands upon the young reader. Acceleration leads to the temptation to make the child progress too rapidly away from childhood's heritage of its own great literature. Children's librarians have a mission here to acquaint teachers and parents with the stimulating children's books which are not downgrading to the child with high levels of capacity and interest, while at the same time to make sure that grown-up fare which is interesting and suitable to his maturity and comprehension is not withheld.

In many libraries, the children's room contains a shelf, perhaps a section of shelving or a substantial separate area, in which is kept a circulating collection of professional literature about children's books and reading, about storytelling, and about arts and crafts, games and recreational activities for adult use with children.

In addition to the circulating books for adults, a desirable provision is the noncirculating collection of outstanding children's books, re-

flecting the development of children's literature. This collection serves researchers, publishers, authors, parents, teachers, college students of children's literature, and those, young and old, who like to browse among fine books. For many years, the New York Public Library has had its great Reading Room Collection at Central Library (and other smaller noncirculating collections in branches). A considerable number of other libraries have come to have such general collections, and historical collections, as well. Almost all sizable libraries have special collections of the Newbery and Caldecott winners. This is a boon to children's literature students, but the children's librarian must point out that this collection is not to be considered the all-in-all in the study of literature for children.

The excellence of any children's room collection will reflect the wisdom and discrimination in use of the budget available for buying new titles and replacing and duplicating copies of older ones, and in keeping the collection up-to-date and attractive by careful weeding and withdrawal.

Great variation exists among libraries in the percentages of the juvenile book budget spent for new books and for replacement and duplication orders. This difference is due partially to the size of the institution, considerably to the size of the budget, but sometimes appears to be related more to the degree of discrimination in selection. In nine large library systems, 30 per cent-40 per cent of the juvenile book budget is devoted to new titles; for five, the figure is 50 per cent, and for another five, 60 per cent. Within each system, however, the figure rises for the small unit, where there is relatively less replacement needed and a proportionately broader selection of titles is necessary. In three cases, with large budgets, the proportion spent for new titles is down to 10 per cent-20 per cent. For some small independent libraries, the figure has risen to 80 per cent-90 per cent.

In handling the avalanche of new titles, the children's librarian's chief concerns are to make certain that collections have the best of the older titles already available, with sufficient duplication of basic stand-bys; to compare newly published titles with these old stand-bys and with other new titles on the same subject; to provide, in moderation, books to meet school-inspired nonfiction requests for class assignments, but not to be unduly influenced by curricular demands to the extent that provision of creative literature is sacrificed; and to add to the collection only the best available steppingstone books needed for reluctant or slow readers. Fantasy, folklore, and poetry must be

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acquired in generous amounts to provide freshness in meeting the continuing demands for fairy tales and the increased reading of poetry.

In her 1943 study Effie L. Power reported that the large library added an average of 200-300 new titles in a year, and the town library an average of 100. In 1962, when 2,584 titles were newly published for children, new titles were purchased as follows in large library systems: in seven systems, 1,000 and more titles; in 10 systems, between 800 and 1,000 titles; in six systems, between 600 and 800; and in another six, between 400 and 600. Among smaller city and town libraries, three ordered between 300 and 400 new titles, and three ordered over 1,000.

The ordering of multiple copies of new titles varies with the size of the collection and also with the selector's point of view. Duplication of titles, of the kind for which there is great demand, is generally considered a *practical* matter, but more important is the availability for the child of outstanding books that he should have an opportunity to read. Initial duplication orders may be moderate but can be increased as books prove themselves and as need arises. Picture books and easy-reading titles most often justify initial heavy ordering—as many as 15 to 20 copies of outstanding titles for a large unit.

In the maintenance of a live, well rounded children's room collection, weeding and replacement buying must be continuing processes of selection, just as regular as the purchasing of titles newly published. Library systems—city, county, or regional—with staff available to serve on committees for reconsideration of older titles at specified intervals after original acquisition find the making of basic replacement lists indispensable for the maintaining of the well rounded collection, as well as important for the compiling of quantity orders. Through checking the children's room collection against the lists (duplicated for each unit in the system), selectors may discover and fill gaps and drop titles which have not proved their worth with children or have been superseded by more up-to-date, accurate, and attractive volumes on the same subjects and reading levels. Because each library community varies in some respects from other communities in socio-economic, cultural, religious, racial, and national backgrounds affecting a child's reading, it is important for each library to do its own re-evaluating and compiling of replacement lists. Variation in community background is also the reason that standard basic buying guides (the H. W. Wilson's *Children's Catalog* and the Ameri-

can Library Association's *Basic Booklists*) never supply the whole answer to a library's needs for its public.

Even if no committee work is possible because of lack of staff and time, it is still essential that regular (at least annual) weeding be done. Nothing so repels interest as dead books, past all usefulness, crowding and dulling the shelves, seeming to bury the live titles. Even more important are the damage to intellectual development and the killing of confidence in use of the library's resources caused by the offering of out-of-date or false information. Such inaccurate books must be removed, without regard to unworn conditions of binding and paper.

Schemes for perpetual re-evaluation of collections are being followed in an increased number of libraries today, with planned revision of the entire collection in basic replacement lists or supplements at regular three-to-five-year intervals. Different classes of books are covered in a fixed number of order lists (six to twelve, usually) during the year. Between basic order lists in major Dewey categories, special shorter lists may be issued for needed "pick-up" orders of books on timely topics such as Africa, poetry, or sports. In library systems following well established plans for this kind of book ordering, all replacement buying is done in quantity from the approved lists, single orders being filled as special contingencies arise. Starring and double-starring and initialing some titles as "special" add guidance as to relative importance of the titles.

Out of replacement lists of approved titles may come a "core" list of titles—from the 750 in Pittsburgh, required for every branch library in the system, up to much larger lists of titles to be purchased for each children's room. In some other libraries, the starred and double-starred titles in the basic replacement lists constitute a nucleus collection, and many of these will be duplicated heavily. Into this category of the basic or standard book, some of the many new books selected yearly through conscientious reviewing will come to stay. Children by their continued reading, and children's librarians through their replacement orders, keep good titles alive and in print. Time alone can reveal which titles are essential as part of a continuing collection and which ones, having served their purpose in meeting a need, have become dated.

Many of the questions handled only briefly in this article may well be covered in a library's written book-selection policy. Well thought out policies, as those of the Enoch Pratt Free Library,⁶ whose *Sele-*

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tion Policies for Children's Books (reprinted in 1962) is "available on request" (for a small charge) and those of other libraries with well formulated bases for maintaining book collections serve an important function.

In conclusion, one may reaffirm the principle that if children's librarians make the best books easily and attractively available, children will read the best; and that if only a small minority of gifted and adventurous children read certain of the "notable" books, these librarians are fulfilling a major responsibility in providing such titles.

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