

From Idealism to Realism: Library Directors and Children's Services

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Introduction

A REVIEW OF THE changing attitudes of library directors toward children's services shows striking parallels between the rhetoric of 100 years ago and that of today. This paper will compare and contrast the views of past and present library directors on three themes: the child as our future, outreach programs, and the children's librarian.

Since library directors generally reflect the view of children prevalent in society during their administration, consider the following sweep of events. In the 1880s, native-born Americans were mostly white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Between 1890 and 1914, a heavy wave of Catholics and Jews from southern and eastern Europe emigrated to the United States. By 1920, fears of the immigrant invasion resulted in policies designed to limit immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Another response was an educational and moral crusade to socialize and "Americanize" the new immigrants. The reform movement of which the library was a part concentrated its efforts on children.

Frances Clarke Sayers, applauding the reform spirit of her predecessors, called the opening of public libraries to children "one of the most gracious and humane acts of faith in this great and fumbling democracy."¹ A century later, native-born Americans again face the problems and challenges of a massive wave of immigrants, this time

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from Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. At a time when service to children is again the critical priority, library directors must deal with economic stress and a shortage of librarians who will bring a new generation of children into the library. The library directors interviewed for this report viewed children's services as:

- essential to public library survival;
- the critical outreach arm of the library; and
- dependent on multitalented, politically astute children's librarians.

The Child as Our Future

Empowered by their vision of saving children from illiteracy and crime, pioneer children's librarians strode into the gutters and ghettos bringing books—a magic window on the world. Library directors applauded and supported these efforts as appropriate expressions of a democratic institution in a new country.

William I. Fletcher, a library administrator from Hartford, Connecticut and one of the founders of the American Library Association (ALA), expressed in 1876 the first concern over the needs of younger readers. He urged librarians to reach the young as early as possible and warned: "Our public libraries will fail in an important part of their mission if they shut out from their treasures minds craving the best."²

During the years 1890 to 1914, says social historian Dee Garrison, "librarians joined the army of concerned citizens, chiefly female, who worked to enrich the life of the child, to Americanize the foreigner and to deal with urban problems."³ Early children's librarians attempted to inculcate the middle-class values of education and propriety. They believed, as Garrison notes, in the "perfectability of men and institutions."⁴

When ALA's first children's section was established in 1900, it was supported by prominent library directors and leaders such as Caroline Hewins, Richard R. Bowker, Linda A. Eastman, Mary Wright Plummer, Salome C. Fairchild—"all warm believers in the place of the child in the library."⁵ It was in keeping with the American dream for educated professionals to help the lower classes find their way into the mainstream of society. "If much of the work with children was overly sentimental and excessively controlling," Garrison points out, "still the lives of thousands of immigrant children who were introduced to books through the American public library system were enriched by the experience." Pioneer Canadian librarian Lillian Smith in the 1930s, unabashedly affirmed the missionary zeal of early children's librarians:

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The keynote of the whole work of the children's librarian is opportunity. Opportunity, if a children's librarian can keep her spirit clear and alive, to become a sort of channel through which some kind of the glory of the universe can get through to the children by means of the contagion of her own unfeigned enthusiasm for books.⁶

The social idealism expressed by early children's librarians was rekindled in the 1960s by the "Great Society." In 1964, library educator, Sara Wheeler, saw children's library service as a vehicle for social change:

Children's library service to the disadvantaged has brought heartening results,...Although we have a clear sense of the difficulties of a successful program, we anticipate a brighter future, in which all Americans can participate impartially in the American dream. Children's libraries can indeed play an important part in making such participation possible.⁷

In 1984, Will Manley, director of the Tempe (Arizona) Public Library, again proclaimed the child as our future. "However much the values of contemporary society may differ from those of the Victorian era," he said, "the perpetuation of society's goals, objectives, and ideals is dependent upon their transference to children. We may not realize it, but our futures are in the hands of our children's librarians."⁸

Outreach Programs

Over the last century, outreach efforts have targeted various potential library users such as minority, poor, immigrant children, preschoolers, and recently, latchkey children. The term *outreach* is used here to mean actions initiated by children's librarians outside of the library in order to encourage use of library materials. While adult services respond mainly to people who come into the library, children's librarians often reach out into the community.

Children's librarians have always been expected to reach out and develop relationships with other community agencies. In 1901, ALA's new Children's Library Section suggested increased cooperation with playground departments, juvenile courts, detention homes, and settlement houses.⁹ While uncomfortable with the notion of "outreach" *per se*, Patrick O'Brien, director of the Dallas Public Library, joins the pioneers in calling for children's librarians to move out into the community, to schools, day-care centers, and other agencies serving the child. "We have to go where the kids are."¹⁰ And where the kids are is in school.

For the first three decades of the public library the most basic and enthusiastically promoted outreach program was service to the schools. Early library directors liberally supported service to the schools and by 1899 had persuaded reluctant teachers to introduce supplementary reading.¹¹ Yet in 1986 many states have few professionally staffed and developed school libraries, thus service to schools must still be a basic form of outreach for the public library. No matter what level of support or neglect departments of education give to school libraries, public libraries must continue to provide some kind of service to children in and through the schools.

Modern-day directors, in spite of the traditional resistance of teachers to the missionary efforts of children's librarians, still advocate a strong liaison with schools. O'Brien says, "Let teachers know we want to work with them—help them foster reading, they have more authority and impact when promoting books...the library could offer pre-reading computer programs to use with day care children and elementary school children."¹² "The future holds many opportunities for children's librarians to work in schools as they did earlier in the century," says Regina Minudri, director of the Berkeley Public Library. Minudri continued: "We must focus on helping schools."¹³ Michael Cart, director of the Beverly Hills Public Library, says: "We reach out regularly to schools. We can't sit and wait for people to come to us."¹⁴

Carolyn Johnson, city librarian in Fullerton, California, responded enthusiastically to the modern-day challenge of reaching out to immigrant children through programs and schools:

Forty-one different languages are spoken by children in the Fullerton public schools! Our children's librarians don't speak all of them—but they smile and they reach out. They are committed to winning the trust and allegiance of the children. These one-to-one relationships are expensive, but they are the strength of the public library.¹⁵

Over the last century library directors have expressed considerable ambiguity in the area of outreach. They seem both proud and scornful of the community contacts initiated and maintained by children's librarians. Some say service to children is the most effective outreach arm of the public library, and an ideal marketing device that wins friends for the library from all citizen groups. But, directors agree that one-to-one personalized service and children's programs are costly and difficult to evaluate. Furthermore, preached iconoclast Ervin Gaines, outreach programs are not the real business of the library.

Gaines, director of the Cleveland Public Library, called the social work role obsolete and suggested libraries focus on books and informa-

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tion. He urged librarians to resist the romantics who see the library as "savior of the illiterate and as a daycare center for the child of the working mother."¹⁶

In spite of the beliefs of directors like Gaines, a critical issue for the future of children's service is the attitude of American society toward its immigrants. Evidence mounts that Americans again feel imperiled by economic woes and ethnic distrust. These attitudes are reflected in an antiimmigrant backlash with "distinct racial overtones." Many Americans are ready to "pull up the welcome mat" in reaction to the recent wave of Hispanic and Asian immigration.¹⁷ While many Americans fear this immigration, library leaders in this study tend to view it as an opportunity that could help to preserve the public library as a vital American institution.

"The influx of non-English speaking immigrants," however, "exacerbated problems of service that were already serious in some areas of the country."¹⁸ This quotation is from *The ALA Yearbook* for 1980, but this observation could have just as well described the period from 1890 to 1914.

In a recent interview, Lillian Bradshaw, retired director of the Dallas Public Library, expressed a commitment (prevalent among the administrators interviewed) to introducing immigrants to American culture in a noncondescending way.

We have had an obligation to immigrants (ever since the Statue of Liberty welcomed everybody over here)—to take those who come to us and do the very best we can with them. I do not mean that as Lord of the Manor. Here is an opportunity to show some of our ways of living and some of our better things, and I think the public library is one of them.¹⁹

Among the minority and immigrant groups, most directors report middle-class Asians as the most eager library users. Hispanic refugees often fleeing poverty or political unrest and confronting a language barrier have not used the library as much. Blacks, denied equal access to libraries until the 1960s and often discouraged in pursuing education by racial prejudice, have also underutilized libraries. O'Brien sees two practical problems facing the administrator who wants to reach out to minority children:

1. "Majority" librarians just don't work out in "minority" branches. They are often harassed and sometimes vandalized. Communities ask for librarians of "their own kind."
2. It is almost impossible to recruit ethnic minorities into librarianship, and *if* recruited they may perceive children's librarianship as a dead-end career or that their opportunities are limited to work in barrios or ghettos.²⁰

A curious theme that occurs as a problem in the outreach rhetoric of 100 years ago and again today is the presence of unwanted people in the library. Librarians have always resented the homeless and other “inappropriate” library users. Now, as in the late 1880s, problems of the homeless are on the increase. Garrison reports that 100 years ago: “most worrisome in the library was the presence in the reading room of unemployed or homeless men who used the library as a temporary haven from the elements.”²¹

The newest involuntary library user is the so-called “latchkey kid”—the child told to wait at the library until he is picked up or until an adult gets home to let him in—an ideal “outreach” target say some directors.

Protesting that they are not a babysitting service, however, professional children’s librarians find it difficult to either motivate or discipline children who are *forced* to be in the library. Library directors like O’Brien, however, turn a deaf ear to the complaints of overworked and overwrought children’s librarians. “Latchkey children are not a problem, they are an opportunity,” says O’Brien. “We’ve got all kinds of things for them to do. They’re classified as a problem because they’ve been cooped up in school all day, then parents tell them to sit and wait at the library and children’s librarians can’t tolerate that. But we want the kids to come.”²²

Michael Cart sees the abdication of parental responsibility as a sociological problem. Like O’Brien, Cart says: “Don’t complain about latch-key kids—it’s an opportunity. We don’t have to go out and get the kids—they are here.”²³

In addition to minority or immigrant nonusers and latchkey children, the most recent group to be targeted for library programming is the preschooler. Patrick O’Brien notes that, “no other agency can help children learn as early as the library can, we aren’t stepping on anyone else’s turf, we can offer programs for pre-school children and work with day-care centers....It’s the only place where we can really have an impact—where we can look back and say we had a role.”²⁴

Cart reports successful 1986 preschool story hours drawing 130 toddlers to each program. “These events establish great relationships with kids and their parents.”²⁵

Charles Robinson, director of the Baltimore County Public Library says: “Pre-schoolers are the library’s most important target audience...14% of circulation in Baltimore County is preschool material. It is the highest distinct category in our library circulation.”²⁶ One variation on the theme of outreach to the young child is the-child-as-

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link-to-reaching-the-adult. Pioneer leaders believed in the potential of children to lure parents and other adults into the library—"through the child the elusive adult could be indirectly influenced."²⁷

Current library directors repeat this theme but without the moral tone. Even if one is not idealistic about encouraging a "love for books in the hearts of children" then at least, says Will Manley, "recognize their ability to bring adult users to the library....the only way to get whole families involved in a weekly library habit is to appeal directly to the children, not their parents."²⁸

Carolyn Johnson says first grade children come to the library bringing shy, afraid, non-English-speaking parents. The child translates for them. "The parents care terribly about intellectual opportunities for their children. In some cases we will reach immigrant adults through the children."²⁹

Another variation on the outreach theme is, *The Adult is Lost—Let Us Save the Child*. "The juvenile department became a major component of public library work," says Garrison, "partly because library leaders, discouraged by their failure to shape the reading tastes of adults, turned to library service to children as one of the best means of guiding the minds and morals of the future citizenry."³⁰

E.C. Richardson, in his presidential address of 1905, explained at the ALA conference "in view of the fact that in the work of assimilating the foreign immigration, we can never hope to make great progress with the adult, but must of necessity rely on beginning work with children."³¹ Eighty years later, O'Brien would say much the same thing: "We've lost the adult minorities. They are not motivated to come to the library. Our real goal is kids—they are ours for the asking; they are our hope for the future and we are their hope."³²

The Children's Librarian

What do library directors think of children's librarians themselves? Feelings on this subject are rarely neutral. Attitudes toward children's librarians center around their personalities, their programs, and their professional skills. Pioneer children's librarians were beloved, feared, and respected. They were called the finest, the most knowledgeable, most compassionate, most competent of all librarians. Distinguished library director and educator, Mary Wright Plummer, outlined the position's qualifications precisely in 1897:

If there is on the library staff an assistant well read and well educated, broad minded, tactful, with common sense and judgement, attractive

to children in manners and person; possessed, in short, of all desirable qualities, she should be taken from wherever she is, put into the children's library, and paid enough to keep her there.³³

Later in the first decades of the 20th century the tough, visionary, risk-taking leadership of women like Anne Carrol Moore, Effie Power, Frances Clarke Sayers, Mildred L. Batchelder, and Rosemary Livsey built a stereotype of strength, at least at the leadership level.

In his classic study of the public library in the mid-1940s, Robert Leigh called public library service to children "an impressive achievement." "Not only are the children's librarians expert but also in the community they are recognized as such. Thus children's rooms and children's librarians have been the classic success in the public library."³⁴

Administrator and educator Lowell Martin echoes these accolades twenty years later: "The notable success in the public library has been children's services....It works in the slum as well as the suburb. And in the public mind it is thought of as one of the most natural and significant activities of the public library."³⁵

Yet by the end of the 1960s, political indifference and economic setbacks ushered in the bleak years—children's services became too special, too expensive—a luxury. Children's librarians were being "declared a species extinct in their own time," Anne Izard stated and added that:

This is not because children's librarians have not done their work well. In spite of certain administrators who have made slighting remarks about their libraries not being able to do proper adult and business services because of the money devoted to playing around with puppet shows, etc., many eminent librarians and researchers have reported to the contrary.³⁶

This was not the first time tight money and a shift toward business had reduced children's programs. One of the most vitriolic attacks of the century came from library director John Cotton Dana in 1915. Attacking the beloved storytellers, Dana labeled them "altruistic, emotional, dramatic, and irrepressible child-lovers" who wasted the library's money, time, and facilities.³⁷

During the 1970s, children's librarians became a casualty as a scientific management cycle drove library directors to analyze, evaluate, and measure their services. As historian Paul Frisch notes: "Moral resolve and fiscal resources evaporated almost simultaneously leaving library directors with limited options."³⁸ Library literature of this

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period brims with accusations blaming children's librarians for their own plight.

Old stereotypes were revived. Children's librarians were called petty, trifling, compliant, and inept managers. Carolyn Coughlin tells the story of Herbert Putnam in 1912 admonishing a group of women library students for "lacking a sense of proportion, for peevishness, and for being absorbed in small details." There might be a "grain of truth in it," Coughlin adds, since directors still criticize children's librarians for "concentrating on minute details, promoting outdated programs, and lack of involvement in management....It is no longer sufficient," she says, "to blindly accept Anne Carroll Moore's unsophisticated goal of 'bringing children and books *happily* together' as the total career goal for a children's librarian."³⁹

Children's librarians have "perpetuated beliefs and behavior patterns that may lead to the elimination, downgrading, or ostracism of children's services," said Coughlin, and called for abandonment of the nurturing role and moral motivations, for dispensing ideas instead of dispensing "goodness."⁴⁰

Taking the brunt of library directors' frustration, children's librarians were demoralized and pessimistic.⁴¹ Izard urged children's librarians to forget the victim role and forge ahead:

It is no time to spend our time moaning about the rosy past and the leaders who are no longer here to lead the way...let me remind you that the leaders we remember sentimentally were great because they were realistic and forged ahead into the future. They were ready to meet their administrators and the times in which they lived with hard facts and realistic plans....It is a time for taking stock of what we are, what we believe in, and how we can further the cause of total community library service.⁴²

While Izard and other leaders fought back in a positive tone, many rank and file children's librarians internalized the negative appraisals of library administrators, school boards, and of society in general. Their self-perceived isolation and powerlessness was blamed on lack of management skills. "The real problem," said Virginia Van Vliet, "lies in ourselves, in our over-attention to the materials of our trade and our lack of attention to analyzing its objectives and results, to our isolationism and our failure to involve ourselves in matters of concern to the profession as a whole."⁴³ Frances Sayers, decades earlier, had also warned children's librarians against parochial thinking.

The great pity is that too often the children's librarian is well content to inhabit a world of her own where she moves with a minimum of

interference; a kind of cherished Queen Bee, warm and comfortable within a circle of an admiring public who look up to her as a kind of fairy godmother. Such a children's librarian does herself, her profession, and children she serves great injustice. One of her chief functions is to stand as interpreter between the world of childhood and the life of the adult. How can she accomplish this when she isolates herself from the adult world, when she knows little of world literature and the changing concepts of man's relation to others and to the universe which that literature constantly explores and interprets.⁴⁴

More recently, Lillian Bradshaw exhorted children's librarians who feel isolated from top administrators to "cease thinking about themselves and think about their clients...pull together pertinent information and send it up the administrative ladder," she says. "This is not time for handwringing."⁴⁵

Library directors in this study agree that the single most important management skill for children's librarians to master is succinct, upward communication. They want children's librarians to write terse, persuasive, well-documented, synthesized reports and requests. "The mantle of infallibility does not fall upon one's shoulders the moment one becomes a library director," admits Regina Minudri. "Directors can respond most intelligently when they receive cogent, thoughtful insights and reasoning from specialist staff members."⁴⁶

Ruth Gregory offers practical advice:

At the very minimum children's librarians...must learn how to anticipate the type of information that is needed at administrative...levels for decision making...develop the patience to interpret and reinterpret the goals, the programs....Administrators,...need documentation on the purpose of a program, its cost in terms of materials, staffing, and operating time. In addition, the plan must indicate how the program may be evaluated. A plan with such elements becomes an instrument of communication and is respected by budget-planners.⁴⁷

Warnings about the inability of children's librarians to make their programs defensible in managerial terms had been issued for decades. Ruth Warncke told children's librarians in 1967 that it was not enough to be loved by the children—or to plan vital programs. They must learn to estimate costs and keep within them. "Every weakness in one department," she said, "puts a burden on other departments, and the pressure increases by geometric ratio until it reaches the administrator."⁴⁸

Despite these early exhortations, children's librarians remained reluctant to consider management issues until the 1970s. As William Summers pointed out in 1977, children's librarians suffered in status by not responding to "the demands of a scientific-rational approach to

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decision making." They had not been prepared in library schools to give their administrators cost benefit data on their programs. "It is essential that quality be defined and demonstrated, rather than asserted....Develop a means of measuring the outcome of your services."⁴⁹ One of the results of such admonishments was the reexamination of programs in terms of their purpose and cost. "The relationship of children's programming to the overall mission of a library has not been evaluated,"⁵⁰ noted Mae Benne. Reviewing early services for children, Fenwick notes the assumptions implicit in early program design:

It became evident that public library services designed over the years to serve children motivated to read by home experience and encouraged to learn—the children who would use libraries and would read books despite obstacles—were neither likely to attract nor satisfy children living in the overcrowded inner-city slums, where poverty, language problems and racial tensions were barriers to communication.⁵¹

Programs may not only be costly, but they may in fact disguise the true function of the library according to Kathleen Strelloff:

Librarians are called upon to be artists, musicians, puppeteers, entertainers, cloaking their real goals in the glamour of show biz in order to capture a youth weaned upon the instant gratification of the television screen and the arcade game. The necessity for assumption of this aggressive public relations stance by children's librarians,...has led to a decrease in the quality of the service provided. In many cases children's librarians lack the staff, the training and/or the money to accomplish their goals in a sophisticated way. Yet it is this same lack of quality that turns present day youth away from the public library as they perceive it to be an institution that does not meet their information needs.⁵²

This abundance of programs is reminiscent of the frenetic programming efforts of the golden years.

In 1911 a survey revealed that the lives of approximately 1,035,195 children were being directly touched by the work of a woman from the public library, both inside and outside the library building....Utilizing every technique of publicity they could envision, librarians sought to attract new readers with storytelling, clubs, contests, exhibits and home visits.⁵³

One drastic response to the high cost of children's programming in the 1970s was the elimination of highly qualified Children's Specialists in Baltimore County Public Library. Director Charles Robinson rationalized the approach by noting that at the hours when adults poured into the library, children's librarians might be "cutting out paper

figures for their programs." His solution was to create a pool of librarians able to handle a full range of services and to eliminate age-level specialists.

The generalist approach generated a torrent of criticism from concerned children's librarians who saw the potential for superficial, reluctant service and mediocre programming. Baltimore County's action signaled that children's librarians were no longer unique or affordable. The essential requirement of "knowing the literature and knowing children" was gone.

Margaret Kimmel, in her review of the generalist approach, concludes that the experiment "suggests a 'conversion' from professional goals to a credo based on short-term objectives."⁵⁴ Robinson himself acknowledged: "I am not convinced that you give better service with generalism than with age-level specialists, if you can afford enough personnel, but I am convinced that generalism offers a way to give the best service we can under the present budgetary circumstances."⁵⁵ The approach did, however, offer children's librarians a chance to enlarge their boundaries both personally and professionally. Some discovered their talent for management unrecognized by directors until they served adults as well as children.

Realizing that knowledge of management principles and participation in the management process put them in a better position to govern their own fates, by 1982 many children's librarians had indeed mastered management skills. Others, as Minudri points out, had long demonstrated superior management skills. "Use the skills that every children's librarian possesses," she says, "in order to promote children's services to directors and voters."⁵⁶

Agreeing that it is a myth that children's librarians are not good managers, Jane McGregor observed:

They fool themselves and other librarians if they do not recognize that they make more administrative decisions than many others in their profession—decisions on expenditures of money, deployment of personnel, community relations.⁵⁷

Children's librarians also have rare personal qualities needed by administrators, notes Charlotte Szabo, "they are used to working creatively with slim budgets, they work effectively with both parents and children (our future taxpayers), they have boundless enthusiasm, and they are usually self-directed."⁵⁸

In light of these exceptional qualities, some directors and many children's librarians feel frustrated by the traditional practice of promoting only adult services librarians to the position of branch head.

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Minudri expresses the dilemma faced by directors who would like to use the administrative talents of children's librarians. "Children's librarians have the kinds of skills I'm looking for in a branch librarian," she says. "They have good communication skills; they know the community, and they are better acquainted with the adult collection than adult reference librarians are with the children's collection. But children's librarians can't always supervise along with their heavy programming and outreach responsibilities."⁵⁹ Some directors such as Los Angeles County's Crismond have spotted rising talent among children's librarians and promoted them into management. "I regard experience as a children's librarian as a significant accomplishment when a person comes up for promotion," she said.⁶⁰

Most other directors interviewed also viewed children's librarians as superior, essential, and unique. In fact the literature reveals few detractors of children's librarians. As former ALA Deputy Executive Director Ruth Warncke points out: "Library administrators were *very* reluctant to ever *say* they did not support children's services, but they didn't put money or staff into it."⁶¹

All of the supportive rhetoric from directors may be put to the test again in the late 1980s and 1990s. As historian Michael Harris notes: "Librarians have been characterized by a defect of will which has prevented them from committing the resources necessary to truly test their ability to conclude one of their crusades."⁶²

Rediscovering Children's Services

After more than a decade of preoccupation with technology and budget problems, public library directors and other professional leaders have begun again to focus on the library's largest group of users, children and youth.

While many turn-of-the-century directors and current directors focused on children, their motivations differ radically. Pioneer directors were driven by the hope of uplifting the masses. Today's directors still believe public libraries are a mainstay of civilization—and they understand the importance of children's services, but they have few illusions. They focus on children for survival of the institution. Preoccupied with survival, they could be described as having a pragmatic vision. Their concerns to a great extent are focused on money, management, and marketing. They recognize the cost of one-to-one service and of programs; they want children's librarians to manage objectively on the basis of hard data. Los Angeles County Public Library Director Linda

Crismond echoes this idea: "Children's librarians and library directors must manage the future together...be willing to give up things that don't work."⁶³

Faced with increasing immigration, a climbing birthrate, and a shortage of both children's librarians and money, library directors like Crismond are considering a range of practical solutions.

We will need to start our own internal continuing education program to teach practical skills. We need to make an investment at the library school level...encourage internships in children's services....For new immigrants we can design bi-lingual *marketing*, survival information, and job information. And literacy efforts should include children.⁶⁴

Pauline Wilson, analyzing library user studies of different socio-economic areas, concludes, "service to children...will have the greatest and most long-lasting benefits...for the individual and for society."⁶⁵ O'Brien adds:

I believe that our best target of opportunity in serving minorities and disadvantaged is concentration on children's services. The staffing implications are obvious. We will need more children's librarians and nonprofessionals trained in serving children. I do not believe that these staff have to be minority or bicultural as advocated by the Committee on Library Services to Minorities. Certainly in some areas bilingual staff will be necessary. The basic need will be the same as it's always been—for loving, caring, concerned, and dedicated children's services staff.⁶⁶

O'Brien also seems to suggest that librarians fulfill a role as surrogate literate parents. Illiterate or semiliterate parents, he believes, in a TV-centered environment, are unlikely to foster intellectual curiosity or love of reading.⁶⁷

Along with pragmatism library directors express a new *realism* in attitudes toward both children's librarians and children. Bradshaw reflects on the "precious" children's librarians of her youth.

I wasn't a very precious child. I wanted non-fiction usually, but the children's librarians pushed *Wind in the Willows*. I came to feel children's librarians represented a world apart. They wanted the world to be the way they wanted it to be, not the way it is. A glimpse of that fanciful kingdom is all right, but I don't think we live in that kingdom. The children's librarians I respect most have a more practical way of thinking.⁶⁸

Will Manley, while acknowledging the redeeming virtues of children, says:

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Just as we must revise our notion of children's librarians as gentle, sentimental, precious creatures, it is important to adopt a *realistic* attitude toward children. They are not the cute, kind, innocent and naturally loving creatures portrayed on television. They are loud, uncompromising, cantankerous, obstreperous, selfish and very difficult to communicate with.

Making a commitment to children's services...therefore, is asking for hassles and predictable problems as well as for a busier library. The important step is to make the commitment, but this will not be easy. It involves putting more money and more staff into the children's department and any administrator knows well that changing budgetary priorities always meets traumatic resistance.⁶⁹

Library directors seem to know intuitively that their survival depends on creating a new middle class.

A robust, growing middle class is central to the continuance of democracy. Society now threatens to erode in the middle. Children of the future middle class are less likely to assume positions equal to the level their parents had and it is harder now for new members to gain entrance to the middle class. The library has always been a middle class institution. If the fate of any institution is tied to a particular class, the institution must make sure the class remains strong and growing.⁷⁰

The mandate for library directors is clear—focus on children to ensure creation of a literate and informed middle class. Encourage lifelong learning, deliver services which are sensitive to the desire for personal mobility, and recognize the indelible influence of the formative years.

The new focus on children's services seems inevitable, necessary for survival, and central to professional health. Acknowledging that library directors and children's librarians need each other to create a future market for public library service, Will Manley says: "Educational and humanitarian ideals aside, our future livelihood depends on how seriously we regard children and children's librarians."⁷¹

It is not surprising, perhaps, that many of the contemporary library leaders cited in this review use money metaphors to characterize their opinion of children's services. They cut through sentiment to the bottom line—no customers means no service. "Children are a goldmine," exclaims Robinson. "We ignore them at our peril."⁷²

"You gamble that an investment in children will pay off in a taxpaying library-using public," says Crismond. "Service to children is a fantastic *investment* for the public library."⁷³ Service to children is the "best buy for the money," reasons Wilson.⁷⁴ "Design children's programs that give the 'most bang for the buck,'" counsels O'Brien.⁷⁵ "It

will take money to remove cultural isolation—children’s librarians can bring together kids who are different, and that is a key to survival.”⁷⁶

Library directors quoted here cite changing populations and diminishing budgets as major factors shaping their current view of children’s services as a “best buy.” While their vision of the future beyond survival is unclear, they see two initial commitments.

1. Library directors must express their commitment to children’s services with higher budget and staff allocations.
2. Children’s librarians must assess the level of their own commitment to serving all children and select those age groups and programs designed to maximize use of the library.

The traditional ambivalence toward outreach programs persists. Librarians still face a profound contradiction between a professed philosophy of service to all and the fears and attitudes that prevent them from actively reaching out to all. Now, as a century ago: “To function as an elite corps with a *spirit* of democratic equality was essentially an impossible goal.”⁷⁷ On the one hand, directors point to the critical need for a major new outreach effort. “We have to think beyond our walls.”⁷⁸ Yet Crismond says that: “Programs for children are costly and time consuming. Our staff is so busy [that] they want to know what they *don’t* have to do to meet growing population needs.”⁷⁹

Conclusion

This review of library directors’ attitudes toward children’s services has compared the opinions of the idealistic and moralistic pioneers with those of today’s pragmatic, survival-conscious directors. There are distinct similarities.

There are also vast differences between the two groups, differences profound enough to preclude the success of yesterday’s solutions to today’s problems. Today’s directors and children’s librarians are not so absorbed with moral uplift. There are more social services available to the “masses.” Not only are library directors more practical and less visionary than their forbears, library school students have also adopted a practical outlook. They often seek more money, prestige, and career opportunity than children’s librarianship now offers. They are also less willing to superimpose their values on others and this change is a key to the current dilemma. No matter how vigorously directors now advocate outreach, without a moral imperative, few professionals will mount a passionate crusade to bring the new children into the library. Ironically,

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it is no longer library directors who balk at further outreach—it may be the children's librarians themselves.

Without question, today's children's librarians are very different from their forebears. Pioneer children's librarians were "Victorians" with strong middle-class values, liberal educations, and limited career options. They were often reared as confident leaders who won the respect of both community and colleagues. Current and potential children's librarians may come from less affluent families, they are rarely reformers, often have children themselves, and enjoy limitless career options. These differences in background may influence the level of commitment that can be awakened in the new children's librarian.

Library directors today seem to seek a revival of the golden years when children's librarians were willing to dedicate youth and energy to their high calling. However, fewer children's librarians today are driven by the need to "rescue" children. They are less willing to go into dangerous communities where their services are not welcome, and they may be reluctant to encourage the patronage of children who don't know how to behave in a library or who are just taking up space and disturbing legitimate users. Directors will look in vain for the new library missionary.

Over the past century, library directors have viewed children's librarians as saviors of the masses, precious sentimentalists, tough dictators, superior performers, useful or expendable—and now, as the key to survival.

While these interviews did not reveal breakthrough solutions to the cyclical problems affecting relationships between directors and children's librarians, they did clarify a current dilemma of great consequence to the survival of librarianship.

1. Directors now need children's librarians to create a new generation of library users from among poor and immigrant populations.
2. Directors need the development of this new literate middle class to provide a future tax base for library support.
3. To create this support, directors need children's librarians who are compassionate, committed, and competent, and who will consciously target services toward the new populations. They call on children's librarians to perform the miracle of turning reluctant, distracted, semiliterate children into tomorrow's informed taxpaying library-using citizenry.

At the very moment when the United States has millions of new children for whom the public library could be a road to lifelong learn-

ing, directors face an acute shortage of children's librarians and continuing economic pressures. Library directors and children's librarians individually and together must determine if they will pay the price in money, commitment, and energy to meet the challenge.

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