Decision-Making for Young Adult Services in Public Libraries

GERALD G. HODGES

IN THE LATE 1980s we have rationally concluded that libraries really cannot be all things to all people and that no single agency, be it school library media center or public library, can be all things to all young adults. Community differences, budgetary realities, networking developments, and other forces have required youth librarians to focus more on planning and decision-making to determine, on a local level, what libraries need to be and can be for youth. This trend is incredibly positive. Youth librarians can now attempt to learn from, rather than emulate, exemplary programs in different communities. A common agreement is that the diversity of local youth services can be made in light of local library roles and service objectives (McClure et al. 1987; Van House et al. 1987; Zweizig et al. 1985).

The critical importance of decision-making as it relates to young adult (YA) service diversity has been underscored in a research study "Factors Influencing the Provision of Information Services to Young Adults in Public Libraries" conducted by this author and Alan R. Samuels of the University of Missouri. Questionnaires were mailed to two groups. Group I was made up of 200 randomly selected medium-sized (by budget) public libraries. Group II consisted of twenty-four medium-sized public libraries identified as having notable YA services by the executive director of the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association. The response rates were: Group I, 142 (71.0 percent) and Group II, 19 (79.2 percent). In this study a young adult librarian was defined as the person with primary responsibility for collections and services for youths ages 12 through 18.

The questionnaire, which follows, elicited data regarding collection and service and service management scales.

Young Adult Collection and Service Scales
1. Young Adult Collection Diversity. The extent to which young adult collections contain a variety of different types of materials.
2. Young Adult Service Diversity. The extent to which young adult services are of more than one type.

Young Adult Service Management Scales
1. Young adult librarian decision-making impact. The extent to which the person responsible for young adult services feels that she/he has impact on decisions made about such services.
2. Support. The extent to which the young adult librarian feels that mutually supporting relationships exist within the library.
3. Democratic Governance. The extent to which participatory management and shared decision-making are emphasized in the library.
4. Innovation. The extent to which a library is perceived by the young adult librarian to be ready to engage in innovative practices and services.
5. Freedom. The extent to which librarians in the institution are perceived as able to speak their minds and to exercise their own judgments.
6. Esprit. The extent to which there is a feeling of shared purpose in the library as perceived by the young adult librarian.

Table 1 presents summary scale scores with the number of questionnaire items for each scale and means for Groups I and II.

Further analysis for Group I ($N = 142$) determined correlations between all variables. Significant relationships ($p < .05$) were found between young adult librarian decision-making impact and young adult collection diversity (.21) and young adult service diversity (.31). The major finding of this study was that the single most important factor related to YA service diversity in the randomly-selected libraries was the extent to which the young adult librarian felt that she/he had impact on decisions related to services, collections, and future planning regarding young adult services in the library.

An assumption in this study was that collection and service diversity were desirable attributes of libraries attempting to serve the rather broad needs of a population as diverse as today's young adults. The directions which those collections and services take depend quite evidently upon the degree of visibility which young adult patrons have as the library decides upon its roles and identifies its objectives. Librarians serving young adults have a major responsibility to provide informational input to decisions libraries make regarding roles as specified in Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries or in other planning approaches. The following are decisions which should be addressed in this process.

Define Young Adults in Terms of Your Community. The Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association has defined

TABLE 1
SUMMARY SCALE SCORES

Scale Name	No. of Items	Mean (N = 142)	Mean (N = 19)
YA Collection Diversity	5	1.7	2.8
YA Service Diversity	18	4.9	8.9
YA Decision-Making Impact*	3	16.0	17.9
Support	9	6.5	6.3
Democratic Governance	13	10.9	10.9
Innovation	11	9.5	9.9
Freedom	9	7.8	7.9
Esprit	11	9.9	9.8

*Scale consisted of three items measured by a Likert scale numbered 1 to 7 thus a maximum score was 21 and a minimum was 3.

young adults as those aged 12 to 18. A local community may want to consider younger and older patrons within the scope of young adult services if they are not adequately being served by children's or adult services personnel. Models for library services for early adolescents clearly are different than those for children; local libraries need to make certain that these youth are provided collections and services to meet their needs.

Survey Young Adults Using the Best Practices of Needs Assessment. If surveys are done of the community at large, make certain that youth are systematically included. Cluster sampling of school homerooms is an easy method of gaining input from youth.

Establish Formal Understandings with Schools Regarding Methods of Cooperation, Areas of Overlap of Services and Collections, and Areas of Responsibility. Specific, well-publicized definitions of curriculum support absolutely must be made and revised as needed. A point should be made to those libraries which select the reference library as a role and support residents in their support of job-related interests. For most young adults, going to school is their primary job.

Examine the Library's Statements of Goals and Objectives and the Library's Collection Development Policy. Develop a goals statement for youth services and a collection development policy for young adult collections. Make certain that administrators and staff understand and support these policy statements.

Establish Short-Term and Long-Term Objectives to Meet Goals. Make certain that you are anticipating appropriate evaluation measures in this process.

Identify Appropriate Strategies. Young adult input can be particularly appropriate here as well as in all other phases of this planning process. Additional assistance can come from guides such as *Young Adult Program Guidebook* (New York Library Association 1983), *Young Adult Services Manual* (State Library of Florida 1986; Young 1987, pp. 124-26), and *Library Program Ideabook for Adults and Teens* by Cindi Youngblut and Julie Huiskamp (1987). Table 2 indicates the types of services reported by the randomly-selected libraries in the study described earlier which were directed to young adults. In these libraries, the mean percentage of the respondents' time allocated to young adult services was 42 percent.

Establish Information Networks with Other Community Agencies Serving Youth. Provide access to these agencies through subject reference in the card catalog, through community resource files, etc.

Consider the Feasibility within Your Library of Having Separate Budget Allocations for Young Adult Collections and Programs. Make certain to secure adequate funding for promotional materials.

Assign at Least One Staff Member with Primary Responsibility for Young Adults. Keep in mind that all staff will interact with young adults at some point, and certain attributes become essential: empathy for adolescents, nonjudgmental attitude, willingness to preserve confidentiality, a strong commitment to rights of young adults consistent with the Library Bill of Rights, effective interpersonal relations and communications skills, knowledge and appreciation of all resources appropriate for young adults, awareness and understanding of the popular culture, respect for diversity in cultural and ethnic values, and many others ("Competencies for Librarians" 1982, p. 51).

Decide on Space Allocations for Young Adults and the Best Methods to Shelve Materials for Access. The mission and roles of the library will help determine the space needs for services to any age-based clientele. Separate areas for young adults may certainly be an absolute necessity for many libraries. Other libraries may want only to consider separate shelving of young adult fiction or of both. We must always keep in mind that youth who have determined that the children's collection no longer meets their needs may be entirely overwhelmed if all materials outside the children's collection are intershelved. A transitional collection for the early adolescent can be reassuring and minimize frustration in locating relevant informational and reading materials through browsing.

Make Needed Scheduling Decisions. Keep in mind that most young adults can only use the library personally at nights and on weekends for

TABLE 2
INVENTORY OF YOUNG ADULT SERVICES

Services	Percent of Libraries Providing Service N = 142
Reference/Information Services	45
Working with School Teachers	43
Teaching Library Skills	39
Working with School Library Media Specialists	34
Booktalking	26
Displays and Interest Centers	23
Information Referral	15
Book Discussions	15

Additional Services Mentioned at Least Once

YA Book Lists and Book Reviews
Literary Magazine

Clubs: Chess Club (with tournaments), Computer Club, Dungeons and Dragons Club, Scrabble Club, Backgammon Club, Travelers Club, Teen Club

Workshops: Babysitting; Job Training; Word Processing; Art, film, and television production; Other nonprint production; Photography; Grant and Aid; Job interviews; College admissions; Folk dance; Etiquette; Makeup, hairstyling, and grooming tips; Clown; Creative writing; Storytelling; Book talks

Programs: Crafts; Rock concerts; Martial arts demonstrations; Child care; Weightlifting; Frisbee; Dance recitals; Theatrical productions; Film series; Fifties Jamboree (intergenerational); Quiz Bowl; Introduction to adult services

Online searching
Juvenile Hall (incarcerated youth) program
YA librarian member of coalition of service providers from across metropolitan area who share ideas, projects, and programs for YAs
Work with other social and counseling agencies—e.g., Planned Parenthood

much of the year. Also keep in mind that summer months might be an opportune time for young adult programming.

Develop Measures to Evaluate Collections and Services. These should be consistent with those used by the parent institution and should always be useful to staff to measure progress toward goals and to justify the expansion of services to young adults. Among many measures of evaluation available to us we might consider the following: percentage of young adult titles circulated out of total circulation (it should make no difference who checks the titles out); percentage of anticipated attendance at YA programs (to be fair to yourself, set reasonable expectations for attendance. Young adults have as many pressures on their time as do adults, many have as specific interests as do adults, so attendance of fifteen at some events may be the most that can be anticipated); percentage of classes visited; percentage of young adults with library cards; percentage of collection promoted; autonomous success rate; etc.

A highly workable framework for measurement and evaluation has been developed by the Association of Research Libraries (Cronin 1985). Young adult librarians should strive to assess the following for each pertinent service—particularly for collections: user expectations; standards; long-range, short-term, and individual (librarian) objectives; and evaluation measures.

This decision-making process will obviously point out the constraints which any library has. Cooperation with schools, with other libraries in the community, and with other youth agencies is essential. Crossing jurisdictional lines by working with other public librarians can also result in programs which likely would be impossible to carry out in a single public library. One such example is a summer reading program for young adults which was cooperatively planned by librarians in nine different library systems in the states of Iowa and Illinois. The librarians divided the labor and the cost of all materials and program development and were able to have a successful program in their individual libraries in spite of the fact that not one of these librarians was designated to serve young adults more than 5 percent of her time (Chumbley 1987).

Develop Cooperative Collection Development and Services Policies with Schools in the Community or in the Neighborhoods Served by the Library. Many school library media specialists are currently evaluating collections and determining selection priorities using collection mapping developed by David Loertscher and May Lein Ho (1986). This process reveals collection depth and quality assessments in relation to specific instructional objectives. If a public library is to serve as a curriculum resource in any way, specific planning with school personnel needs to occur so that acquisitions are the most appropriate for students' instructional needs. More and more schools are using online searching to identify periodical articles for students' information needs. Access to databases extends the potential resources available to students, and most schools and school systems are simply not able to purchase all journals in which students may want information. All librarians in a geographical area should work together so that in a community there is the range of titles most needed by students. Arrangements should also be made for interlibrary loan and other photocopying agreements. We can no longer waste students' time by saying or implying that certain materials are "at the public library" when we do not know that they are. Most students do not understand governance and mission differences between school and public libraries (although they could, if taught); and frustrated information searches have attitudinal consequences.

This joint planning should also address the fact that many students wait until the last minute to complete research projects (as do many adults). Advance notification to students and to librarians of projects which will require public library resources can result in greater success in final projects. A major learning skill for today's students is to plan

and conduct information searches, and students should always be taught that this process may take a bit longer than they anticipate. Teachers should also be made to understand this fact.

Since no one library could ever want or need to be all things to all young adults, informed decision-making must be ongoing. Every library, regardless of size, staff, budget, or roles, should strive to achieve a fine-tuned program of services for young adults which is as meaningful for their needs as can be achieved. Young adults themselves must be made aware of possibilities for them at the public library and also understand the real constraints an individual library has. All librarians serving young adults in a community should work together to ensure that as many of the information, recreational, and other needs of young adults that can be met by libraries are being met. The decision-making process enables us to focus upon our similarities as librarians with the common goal of providing excellence in services to the youth in our community (Miller 1988). They should expect this of us.

APPENDIX
Collection Planning/Public Library/
Young Adult Nonfiction Collection

User Expectations. To find or be able to get in a reasonable time period information on 100 percent of topics of personal interest in print or video format.

Standards. Check collection against recommended titles in *Public Library Catalog, VOYA, Booklist,* and other appropriate standard catalogs and subject reviewing tools.

Short-Term Objectives
1. Conduct needs assessment of young adult nonfiction interests, both subject and title.
2. Compute current subject fill rate for young adult patrons.

Long-Term Objectives
1. Increase subject fill rate for young adult patrons to 100%. This may involve improving document delivery systems.
2. Involve young adults in selection so that changes in interests can be anticipated.

Individual Objectives
1. Become more knowledgeable of publications in three subject areas of interest to young adult patrons.
2. Read the literature on youth involvement in library decision-making.

Evaluation
1. In-house subject fill rate for young adults will increase to 90%.
2. Document delivery will decrease to 100% within 14 days from the current rate of 80% within 14 days.
3. A Young Adult Selection Committee will be organized and functioning within two months.

Collection Planning/School Library Media
Center/Periodicals Collection

User Expectations. To be able to locate and use within a reasonably short time most periodical articles located through manual and on-line searches of indexes in the library media center.

Standards. Students in a nearby school of similar size retrieve 95 percent of needed titles through an interlibrary loan system developed by the library media specialist.

Short-Term Objectives
1. Determine periodical titles most frequently needed during the next two major research projects.
2. Streamline the circulation process for retrieval and shelving of back issues of periodicals.

Long-Term Objectives
1. Purchase new titles based on documentation above.
2. Determine and purchase titles needed on microfiche.
3. Improve document delivery by establishing a system similar to that of the nearby school.

Individual Objectives
1. Make a union list of serials holdings for school, school system, and public library.
2. Write a proposal to principal justifying increase in periodicals and photocopy budgets based on documented need.
3. Expand communication with other libraries in the community.

Evaluation
1. Of periodical articles requested by students, 95 percent can be available within seven days if the student does not wish to visit the library in the community which owns the title.
2. In-house use of photocopy machine and microfiche reader-printer will increase 5 percent in the next two months.
3. Ninety-five percent of students will be able to fill out an interlibrary loan request form correctly.
4. Of teachers whose students used online searching, 100 percent will indicate that periodical sources used were more pertinent than those typically cited earlier.

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