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# Deafness-Related Materials: Collection Development and Information Retrieval

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## ABSTRACT

BUILDING A WELL-ROUNDED COLLECTION of materials related to deafness requires matching patrons' needs with books and audiovisual items that will fill these needs. This article will discuss a variety of needs and offer some information and sources that can facilitate the acquisition of information and materials.

## INTRODUCTION

Collection development—the planned growth of a library collection—could be labeled the first active step in fulfilling a library's stated philosophy and goals. It stands immediately after the thoughtful stating of a library's aims and certainly before any books can be purchased, cataloged, and used. Without a well-chosen collection of library materials, patrons will be frustrated in their searches for desired books and/or information, and reference librarians will lack the tools necessary to help them. Factors influencing a collection policy, use of bibliographic tools in both book and serial forms, contacts with organizations and other libraries, and use of nationwide databases can all play a role in achieving a library's goals.

## DEFINING A COLLECTION POLICY

Within the wide range of types of libraries, the two basic components that guide and define a collection policy are the needs and desires of patrons and financial possibilities and limitations. Once

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these factors are recognized, then the process of pinpointing books, serials, videotapes, and other materials can begin in earnest.

The variety of patrons, as every librarian knows, can be wonderful. The professional, whether hearing or deaf, seeking material for work or research has needs vastly different from the hearing person who wishes to learn sign language and to learn more about the "deaf world." The deaf patron wanting books or serials with which he or she can feel a connection is different from the parents wanting to be better equipped to raise their deaf children. The child curious to learn sign language is on a different level from the college student seeking information for a class in special education.

Any librarian today must be cognizant of financial aspects of collection development. Some librarians may work more closely with their library's budget, such as deciding what percentage of the available funds goes to each budgetary need. But every librarian is aware of fiscal responsibility and tries to use his or her allocated share to the best advantage. The rule of thumb is usually that the more technical or professional any item is, the more expensive it will be. A medical treatise will usually cost more than a novel with a deaf character; a book on psychosocial aspects of deafness will cost more than a child's book on deafness. Also, the more complicated and sophisticated a format is, the more expensive it will be. A videotape teaching sign language will be more expensive than a sign language dictionary.

Being aware, consciously or subconsciously, of these facets of collection development, the librarian then must seek materials that will best accomplish the library's mission. Pinpointing bibliographic data and locating purchasing outlets can be, paradoxically, both easy and difficult. Some tools, usually giving comprehensive lists, may be up to date but lack any sort of review or analytical information to help the librarian determine which book is best bought. The mere fact that a book is about deafness does not mean that it is well written or that its information is correct or up to date. And often reviews are difficult, if not impossible, to locate. In addition, strong views on controversial issues, such as methods of communication and of education, may not be clearly indicated by the book's title, advertising blurb, or even review.

These facts may lead to some interesting confrontations with patrons. The acquisitions policy of the Gallaudet University Library for its deafness-related collection is quite simple—acquire all materials related to deafness except in-depth medical works. This broad policy of acquisitions can lead to confusion on the part of patrons. Recently a graduate student became very upset by a book that discussed cued

speech incorrectly—in her judgment and from her experience of working extensively with cued speech. She could not easily understand why the book could not be removed from the collection. Barring that step, she suggested that the library have a disclaimer typed and pasted in the front of the book. A long discussion was necessary to calm her enough so that she could understand the purpose of the library's acquisition policy and about the legal seriousness of placing uncomplimentary statements in books.

A library with a more flexible acquisitions policy would have had no such problem. Upon due consideration, such a book might have been removed from the collection. Or, if the book could have been scrutinized in some way before purchase, it might never have been acquired. Such a situation must be faced and judged on all angles pertaining to it. A fiction book, well-written in every way except that it continually refers to "deaf-mutes," shows a woeful lack of understanding of current mores. Such a book, for most libraries, would not be purchased or would become a ready candidate for the nearest trash bin.

#### ACQUISITION TOOLS

*Books in Print (BIP)*, that all-around acquisitions standby, is probably the acquisitions tool that is easiest for most librarians to use, as they usually have ready access to it. Deafness-related books are listed under such subject headings as: *Deafness, Deaf—Means of communication, Hearing disorders*, and *Deaf, Books for the*. *Books in Print*, unfortunately, does not have a heading for fiction books with deaf characters.

Such fiction is a much desired genre for many libraries. Fiction books, while being fun to read, can also teach. Many readers who would not touch a sociological treatise on aspects of deaf culture will readily pick up a fiction book from which they can, unknowingly, learn many things. It is at this point that bibliographic books with discussions of their included items come, somewhat, to the librarian's rescue. These books give the librarian an insight into the discussed titles, although those titles may be difficult to locate by the time the bibliographic book is published.

Most of these bibliographic books discuss literature that includes characters with all types of disabilities, and deafness is a partial subject. Barbara Holland Baskin and Karen H. Harris have written a very helpful book, *Notes From a Different Drummer* (1977), with an updated edition, *More Notes From a Different Drummer* (1984). An English publication, *Disability in Modern Children's Fiction*, by John Quicke (1985) also includes a substantial number of deafness-related titles. *BOSC (Books on Special Children)*, an irregularly

published bibliography, often lists deafness-related books. These items are only examples, as it is certain that many bibliographic tools will include books with deaf characters.

Trent Batson and Eugene Bergman, teachers of English at Gallaudet University, have compiled an anthology which focuses on short stories and which contains excerpts from longer works. Each of the three editions has a different title—the 1972 edition is titled *The Deaf in Literature: An Anthology*; the 1976 edition, *The Deaf Experience: An Anthology of Literature*; and the 1985 edition, *Angels and Outcasts: An Anthology*.

While these anthologies are helpful with fiction books published in the past, there is no such help for currently published fiction books with deaf characters. A habit of continually checking serials that regularly give bibliographic information about new publications is desirable. This habit is already part of most librarians' routines. Leafing through magazines or newspapers published for the deaf community will help in spotting ads or reviews. Also, the lists of books in various library journals may identify books with deaf characters. Bibliographies from the educational institutions with deaf students may be helpful. Finally, library "spies" in the deaf community can be quite informative. Several deaf colleagues at Gallaudet University are always surfacing with good suggestions and information for acquiring materials.

After some time spent in searching for books in any particular area, the selecting librarian learns that certain general publishers often offer titles in the desired field. Charles C. Thomas and Erlbaum Publishers are only two examples of this group who publish fairly regularly in the area of deafness. There are also publishers, such as Dawn Sign Press and T.J. Publishers, that specialize in deafness-related items and that offer books, videotapes, and realia, such as sign language jewelry. It behooves the selecting librarians to have their names quickly added to these publishers' mailing lists.

Most of the preceding tools or groups have been based, primarily, with the "hearing world" and have only had some part of their work connected with the "deaf world." Certain publications and institutions will have their main base, if not their only base, in the deaf community.

As doors into this community, three extremely helpful directories are the *American Annals of the Deaf* annual reference issue, the *Hearing Journal* directory issue, and the Deaf Missions catalog. Organizational, institutional, and publishing information from these directories can greatly benefit the librarian.

The *American Annals of the Deaf* began publication in 1847 and is definitely one of the essential journals for any educational

institution which has deaf students and, perhaps, for other libraries with deaf clientele. The *American Annals of the Deaf* is published jointly by the Conference of Educational Administrators Serving the Deaf (CEASD) and the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf (CAID) and naturally is concerned with the professional aspects of education of deaf students. However, the annual April reference issue could also be of value to many noneducational libraries. The bulk of that issue is devoted to a directory listing schools, colleges with deaf students, colleges for teacher and other professional training, professional associations, and offices and organizations on the local, state, and national levels. Educational statistics and Canadian information are also included. The directory is invaluable and may be purchased independently from a subscription to the journal.

The *Hearing Journal* is a professional journal for those involved in hearing care and technology. Its general timbre is, therefore, aimed at such professionals. The annual December issue is a world directory of the hearing health industry, listing suppliers, distributors, and manufacturers of products that might be used by deaf persons or by professionals associated with deaf persons. Such products go beyond just hearing aids and include practical items for daily living, such as alarm and alert systems. Information about associations, including some of a nontechnical nature, is also included.

As may be supposed from its name, Deaf Missions is a religious organization, but this should not deter librarians from purchasing its thick and informative catalog. The catalog lists a vast array of nonreligious materials and can be extremely helpful in locating items in print and in a variety of media forms.

Educational institutions can often be helpful, in several ways, to acquisitions librarians. Bookstores, college presses, and other publishing units will be only too glad to send catalogs or lists to any requestor. Naturally, publishers will only send information about their own publications. But bookstore catalogs will include materials from many sources.

## OTHER SOURCES

### *Libraries*

Educational libraries can also be a help to other libraries. Librarians, by the very nature of their profession, wish to be as helpful as possible to any information seeker. Usually the larger libraries with an interest in deafness-related areas have more staff and, therefore, more time to respond to a call for information. Librarians in schools for deaf students generally are trying to cope with a multitude of duties with a minimum of staff; such librarians,

understandably, may not have time to answer many reference or acquisition questions from distant patrons. This is not to say that school librarians have not and do not cooperate with other librarians above and beyond the call of duty. This is merely a warning to respect the burden already on school librarians.

College, institute, university, and some public libraries will traditionally have larger staffs and can help in a wider range of situations. Requests for bibliographic and other types of information may be received from patrons all over the country and even from foreign countries. The San Francisco Public Library, the Free Library of Philadelphia, and the Cuyahoga County Public Library (Cleveland, Ohio) are some of the libraries that have compiled some valuable lists of books and other materials. The Prince Georges County (Maryland) Library was one of the first, if not the first, to offer in its children's supplies a doll wearing a hearing aid. Library staffs at the Rochester Institute of Technology and at Gallaudet University regularly publish lists of recent acquisitions in deafness and will send such lists to anyone who requests them. In addition, both staffs will respond to reference letters and phone calls with information, referrals, and bibliographies of items on specific subjects cataloged in their collections. *Perspectives in Deafness: A Selected Bibliography of the Literature* (Norton & Kovalik, 1991), *Employment of Deaf Persons: An Annotated Bibliography* (Kovalik, 1991), and *Deafness: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Basic Materials* (Kovalik, Norton & Meck, 1992) are substantial annotated guides to literature in the field of deaf studies.

### *Organizations*

Organizations will often respond to information requests by sending general bibliographies and lists of their own publications and writings. Names and addresses can be gleaned from the *American Annals of the Deaf* reference issue. When purchasing materials, the librarian should remember that some of these groups will have differing philosophies and that librarians should strive for a balanced collection showing all viewpoints. Without doubt, any librarian interested in building a deafness collection should ask to have his or her name put on the mailing lists of the National Association of the Deaf and the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf. Other national organizations may also be approached, depending on the particular library's needs.

Local, state, and regional organizations will often publish newsletters, magazines, and journals. If the librarian sees a need for this kind of publication, these groups may be approached. Sometimes asking a deaf patron for this information is the best path to discovering

materials. Not even the *American Annals of the Deaf* reference issue attempts to list all the social clubs across the nation, so local contacts will be necessary for some kinds of information.

### SERIAL ACQUISITIONS

The most comprehensive bibliography of serials is the *International Directory of Periodicals Related to Deafness*, compiled by Steven Frank (1992). It is a list of all the serial publications owned by the Gallaudet University Library, regardless of importance, place of origin, philosophy of publisher, or any other consideration. Each entry's information includes publishing and acquisitions data, price (as known at the time of the directory's publication), and sometimes a brief statement about the serial's contents, e.g., "contains book reviews."

Each library will need to determine which of the local, regional, and state deafness-related publications the library should and/or desires to have. Of course the same statement must be said about serials published for a nationwide audience.

However, of the general serials, three titles stand out as being very desirable for libraries to own: the *Frat*, *Silent News*, and *Deaf Life*. The *Frat* is the oldest of the three publications and is the official publication of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf. This magazine is bi-monthly and contains articles of general interest and specific information pertaining to the society. *Deaf Life*, a monthly magazine, and *Silent News*, a monthly newspaper, are newer publications. Since neither is attached to an organization, both will have items of general interest to the deaf community. In addition to being read by patrons, these serials should be scanned regularly by any librarian interested in keeping abreast of deaf-related publications.

In the educational journals, the *American Annals of the Deaf* and the *Volta Review* are two absolutely required titles. The *American Annals of the Deaf* has already been discussed earlier in this article. The *Volta Review* is published seven times a year by the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf. No library involved in education of deaf students can hope to get by without both of these journals since, between them, they present articles of educational information and both sides of the great communication controversy.

This controversy debates the merits of using manual communication (in a variety of forms and combinations) or using strictly oral communication (speech and speechreading) and has been raging for more than a hundred years. Oralists maintain that only the use of speech and speechreading can successfully integrate deaf people with hearing people in our society. They feel that oral communication

should be used at all times in familial, social, and educational settings. Some oralists may accept the use of cued speech, which supplements speech with a system of hand positions cueing the speechreader as to phonemic sounds. Unlike sign language, cued speech is not a language but must be used in tandem with a spoken language. Advocates of manual communication may prefer any number of manual systems, such as American Sign Language (ASL), Signed English, or a few lesser-used systems. Librarians, who may be caught between and/or by supporters of these communication methodologies, may need to remember themselves and remind others that presenting information from all sides of a question is an honored function and tradition of libraries.

Following acquisition of the earlier mentioned essential serials, a librarian has a wide range of publications from which to choose. Some, such as the *Journal of Hearing and Speech Disorders*, will be of a technical nature while others, such as *Exceptional Parent*, will have more of a humanistic slant. Some journals may focus on deafness while others may occasionally have an article about deafness. The patrons' needs and the monies available will have to lead the librarian's choices (for a list of addresses of publishers and journals mentioned in this article, see Appendix).

### INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

Computer databases can be wonderfully helpful in locating published materials about deafness. Certain databases can be used in two ways: (1) in providing Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) lists of new publications; and (2) in locating information about aspects of deafness in journals and books. *Books in Print (BIP)* is accessible via computer, and an SDI would keep a librarian informed of all new entries in *BIP*. Of course these entries do not have annotations, so their usefulness may be slightly impaired.

Of all the databases, ERIC seems to have the most deafness-related information. Since the computer database contains two print indexes (*ERIC Resources in Education* and *Current Index to Journals in Education*), a computer search can be considered the equivalent of two manual searches at one time. Nor should searchers be tricked into thinking that only educational items will be retrieved. It is true that the main thrust of ERIC is related to education, but many documents related to sociology, linguistics, means of communication, and other areas are included in the index. ERIC documents may be easily purchased from ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) in either paper or microfiche form.

The search for library materials has been complicated by a debate that began several years ago. Many people felt that "labeling" of



individuals was being harmful to those individuals and that, therefore, no labels should be used. And certainly no one could ever wish for any word or term to insult or harm another human being in any way. But the resulting group of "nonlabels" has led to some confusion, since it is difficult to understand exactly about what and whom the author is writing. The confusion is compounded when previously innocuous words acquire hidden meanings that only an initiated reader understands. Truthfully, it seems that "mentally handicapped" has been replaced by "severely handicapped," an inaccurate label currently in use. The newest phrase for deafness appears to be "acoustically challenged"—a label which alternately angers or amuses members of the deaf community. This situation of confusing terms and phrases has a definite impact on computer searching for deafness-related information.

Since a computer is very literal and will search only for the exact word or words entered, it seems best, at times, to search computer databases with a wide net of words. This means searching free-text and not depending only on formal descriptors. A search strategy for materials on deafness, as used at the Gallaudet University Library, follows for both BRS and DIALOG:

#### *BRS*

- 1 deaf\$ (hard partial\$2) adj hearing
- 2 (hearing aural\$ auditor\$ acoustic\$) adj (handicap\$ impair\$ disab\$ disorder\$1 loss dysfunction\$)
- 3 "or" the two sets together
- 4 combine with desired subject area or areas

#### *DIALOG*

- 1 deaf? or (hard or partial??)(hearing
- 2 (hearing or aural?? or auditor???? or acoustic????)(handicap??? or impair???? or disab? or disorder? or loss or dysfunction??)
- 3 "or" the two sets together
- 4 combine with desired subject area or areas

#### CONCLUSION

Selecting and acquiring deafness-related items is, basically, no different from selecting and acquiring items in any special field. The art of judiciously considering each book or media item becomes second nature to the librarian working in that special field. Happily, the increase of available titles, tools, and sources renders the job easier and more interesting every year. All the different angles—patrons' needs and desires, acquisitions budget, discovering what is available, and locating publishers and sources—fit together in a smooth pattern of library improvement and patron satisfaction.

APPENDIX

ADDRESSES OF SPECIAL PUBLISHERS AND JOURNALS MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE

*American Annals of the Deaf*, P.O. Box 6796, Syracuse, NY 13217

*BOSC: Books on Special Children*, P.O. Box 305, Congers, NY 10920

Dawn Sign Press, 90-80-A Activity Road, San Diego, CA 92126

*Deaf Life*, MSM Productions, Ltd., 85 Farragut St., Rochester, NY 14611

Deaf Missions, R.R. 2, Box 26, Council Bluffs, IA 51503

*Frat*, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, 1300 W. Northwest Highway, Mt. Prospect, IL 60056

*Hearing Journal*, 63 Great Road, Maynard, MA 01754

*Silent News*, P.O. Box 233330, Rochester, NY 14692-3330

T.J. Publishers, 817 Silver Spring Ave., Suite 206, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4617

*Volta Review*, Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf, 3417 Volta Place, NW, Washington, DC 20007

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