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# The Pedagogical Context of Women in Children's Services and Literature Scholarship

ANNE LUNDIN

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## ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE PERSISTENCE OF children's book pioneers in the current practice of children's literature and services curriculum in library and information science programs. The article draws on the theoretical work of the feminist philosopher Elizabeth Minnich (1990) who, in her book *Transforming Knowledge*, explores why it matters who is, and who is not, included in the curriculum and presents the necessary tasks of *critique*, *re-membering*, and *creation*. These conceptual functions are applied to the place of women pioneers in children's librarianship within the library and information science curriculum. The results of a survey taken of current children's literature faculty of library and information science programs reveal the quandary of those interested in critique, remembering, and creation of women's history while simultaneously communicating current literature and services to children. The article offers suggestions for incorporating the contributions of women pioneers in the children's book field within the curriculum of library and information science programs. The reconstruction of a children's literature and services curriculum would embody what Jane Anne Hannigan calls "a feminist paradigm for library and information science" (Hannigan & Crew, 1993).

## INTRODUCTION

Minnich (1990), in her provocative book *Transforming Knowledge*, argues broadly for the transformation of culture by the inclusion—i.e., the incorporation—of gender issues into the curriculum of higher edu-

Anne Lundin, School of Library and Information Studies, White Hall, 600 N. Park Street, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706

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cation. Minnich is professor of Philosophy and Women's Studies at the Union Graduate School of the Union Institute and is distinguished in the field of women's studies and education. Minnich is passionately and persuasively involved in the task of recovering women's stories within the complex intellectual traditions of higher education. In her words: "The tellers of our tale have not had the advantage of 'standing on the shoulders of giants' who preceded them" (p. 1). While a brave few tell women's stories, these accounts are often erased by discontinuity and disruption.

Minnich's book not only challenges the question of gender as part of curriculum but as essential to epistemology—i.e., not only *what* but *how* we think. The distortions in the telling of women's stories limit our thinking and thus knowledge of ourselves and the larger world. Her view is that the feminist movement has so radicalized education—indeed, the whole perception of knowledge and truth—that it is imperative that gender be part of the fabric of curriculum. Minnich passionately states the significance of the curriculum: "It is in and through education that culture, and polity, not only tries to perpetuate but enacts the kinds of thinking it welcomes, and discards and/or discredits the kinds of thinking it fears" (p. 5). The curriculum becomes a "text" from which the constructions of a whole culture could be read in all of its errors of thinking and logic. Because the few are taken to be the inclusive term, the ideal whole fields of knowledge are defined as universal and not particular in terms of subject and object.

Women and their contributions are most conspicuously absent from the curriculum. The curriculum in higher education has not only omitted but excluded the voices of women congruent with similar practice in other institutional expressions in political, economic, and legal systems. Bounded disciplines result in only partial knowledge that defines the field. What is invisible in the curriculum continues to be devalued by the culture. Minnich writes:

Our educational institutions—those inspiring, impossible, frustrating, appealing, appalling systems within which we usually try simply to find the space and time to do our work of teaching and learning—are, not alone but preeminently, the shapers and guardians of cultural memory and hence of cultural meanings. Here too, then, we must do our work of critique, re-membering, creation. (p. 12)

Critique, re-membering, and creation are the work of the curriculum of children's literature pedagogy, a transforming of the knowledge of the larger field of librarianship as well as children's literature and services.

### CRITIQUE

The task of critique involves the radical examination of a tradition that is premised on the exclusion of its history, especially the history of women in librarianship. As Suzanne Hildenbrand (1985) states succinctly:

"Women library leaders and library women generally have received unsatisfactory treatment in library history" (p. 185). Many of the notable women library leaders have been concerned with children's literature and services. Children's literature and the whole field of children's services have been handicapped by their specialization, which, in addition to its subject matter and audience, have diminished its status. As Minnich notes, the existence of curricular particularity—the prefixing of studies such as *Children's Literature* or *Women's History*, instead of *Literature* or *History*—has distanced these fields from what is perceived as essential and ideal. As Minnich writes: "The more prefixes, the further from the real, the significant, the best" (p. 42). So, at best, children's literature and services suffer from a perceived sense of irrelevance, which further isolates the history of the significant women pioneers within the field.

In addition, the preoccupation of the profession with current technology and practice has further obscured attention to history. Joanne Passet (1994), in reviewing the current literature of American library history, notes the prevalent concern "about our profession's general ambivalence to its past" (p. 415). James Carmichael, Jr. (1991) argues that librarians' esteem problems stem from their lack of history. He attributes this ignorance, in part, to the prevalence of women luminaries: "Like other professions in which women predominated, librarians had been so invisible to outsiders that their work had been taken for granted, and it was therefore hard to generate interest from either without or within the profession" (p. 331). Michael Harris and Stanley Hannah (1992) critique the ahistorical approaches to a paperless society as a historical interpretation in itself, "heavily freighted with ideological baggage" (p. 129). The authors call for a "conscious attention to the history of library and information services" (p. 129).

The literature in the field reveals some of the light or darkness shed upon the subject. The historian R. Gordon Kelly (1973) writes about the history of children's literature and services:

The history of children's literature has received comparatively little serious or systematic scholarly study in this century, not only because the significance of children's books as a field for scholarly study has not been very persuasively demonstrated, but also because literary scholars, and, to a lesser degree, historians have tended to define the concerns of their discipline too narrowly to include the study of children's books. Unfortunately, those who have contributed most to the field, educators and librarians, have too often ignored or remained unaware of work in history, literature, and sociology that might have materially improved the quality of the relatively modest amount of historical knowledge about American children's literature we now possess. (p. 89)

In the same year, Margo Sassé (1973), in a seminal article in *Library Journal*, calls for a reordering of priorities, whereby "if the service is significant,

then the significance of its practitioners must be recognized" (p. 217). In a fictional work, Alison Lurie (1984), a professor of children's literature and author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Foreign Affairs*, describes children's literature in academia as a "a poor relation," a Cinderella who "sits in the chimney-corner" (p. 6).

Curiously, those in the field as educators and librarians have not made significant progress in the following decades. While the field of children's literature scholarship is rife with texts about classic or contemporary children's books and parental prescriptions on children's reading, it is remiss in its history—i.e., the authors, editors, librarians, and educators who shaped the field.

### RE-MEMBERING

Minnich's second task for feminist scholarship in *Transforming Knowledge* is "Re-membering," which entails the act of memory and reconstituting the history into the present body of knowledge. Joan Atkinson (1986), in her study of pioneers in youth services, notes that remembrance is not nostalgia, a wistful view backward to a simpler time, but is empowering, in Henry Steele Commager's phrase, as "a usable past" (p. 27). What does it matter if current children's literature and services students know the history of those who have come before? What is the difference if women's history is included or excluded?

Minnich's work provides insight into the question of the inclusion of women's history into the curriculum of children's literature and services. Children's literature as a field is distinctive in its cross-breeding. Women librarians often became children's book editors. This confluence inspired Batchelder's (1984) article in *Stepping from Tradition: Children's Books of the Twenties and Thirties*, entitled "The Leadership Network." In this lengthy essay, Batchelder stresses the interconnectedness of professional women in promoting literature and services to children and youth (p. 71).

Women librarians have often also authored works themselves. The first *Children's Library Yearbook* (Committee on Library Work with Children of the American Library Association, 1929) includes a listing of children's librarians as contributors to the field of children's literature: a litany of nearly forty figures who served as authors or editors of some eighty-eight titles in addition to a voluminous number of critical articles (p. 77). Bertha Mahoney Miller, founder of the *Horn Book*, noted in that journal in 1936 that the boom in children's book publishing was attributable to "the American heritage clamoring for expression, to the development of children's rooms in public libraries, and to the emergence of an outstanding group of women editors" (p. 200). American women authors and librarians have often been recruited as editors, such as Louise

Seaman Bechtel, May Masee, Ursula Nordstrom, and Charlotte Zolotow. Educators like Effie Power, Charlotte Huck, and Zena Sutherland created the pedagogical texts for training new professionals in the classroom and library.

What is so significant among these early pioneers in literature and services to children is that they radically changed the concept of the rights of childhood. They helped to raise reading and literature to a higher level and allowed children not only access to books, but also to guidance and stimulation of their right to read. Children had been long excluded from the designs of library founders, who perceived that questions of cleanliness, reading sensational novels, and loitering would be the consequence of children underfoot. This new approach to children, which entailed respect, pleasant surroundings, and a sympathetic and knowledgeable adult presence, created a new environment for children which celebrated their natural and intellectual needs. Frances Clarke Sayers (1972), in her biography of Anne Carroll Moore, relates that this approach led beyond the library walls to the schools and finally to other countries such as England, France, Belgium, Sweden, Russia, India, Japan, and other countries of the East, as well as Latin America (p. vii). This uniquely American innovation resulted from creative librarians who developed a new profession within the field and inspired a publishing market to respond to their agency, to their powerful connection of the child and the book. Their work was touted by Robert Leigh (1950) in his study of the public library system as "the classic success story of the public library" (p. 100), and their philosophy of practice is still successfully followed today.

Early children's librarians are thus distinguished not only through their institution of services for children and in its promotion within institutional settings, but also by the visibility of librarians as authors and reviewers of the literature. Of these librarian-authors, Anne Carroll Moore stands out as an individual who influenced the fields of teaching, librarianship, and publishing. As children's librarian, author, editor, reviewer, and critic, Moore presented a paradigm of service in the children's book field, which could be interpreted in lines of the service model of educator Margaret Monroe: the roles of information, instruction, guidance, and stimulation (p. 13). In Moore's influence on noted current writers and editors, such as Marcia Brown and Margaret McElderry, there is a suggestion of a continuity of tradition that still exists today and invites reflection.

#### CREATION

Minnich's final challenge in *Transforming Knowledge* is "creation." While her work offers questions more than answers, she stimulates all of higher education to ask hard questions and to ponder new possibilities. Her challenge is particularly fitting for those in the feminized field of

children's literature and services. Supposing that faculty decide to make the history of women pioneers more central to library education pedagogy, what then? How can these changes in a basic sense of curriculum be possible? How can the knowledge of the field of children's literature and services be transformed?

Feminist criticism offers another way to view these women pioneers of children's literature and services. They demonstrate the agency of women as maternal creators and constructors of a profession, or, in the words of Gerda Lerner (1977), "institution builders" (p. xxxi). The maternal metaphor draws on the provocative work of Sara Ruddick (1989), who presents creation as a continuous process of nurturing, of helping creation develop to maturity. Maternal creation starts before birth and works toward an equal and self-sufficient creation through collaborative and interactive relations. In Ruddick's words: "Mothering is a sustained response to the promise embedded in creation" (p. 49). This is a feminist endeavor, as defined by Nancy Miller (1988), "to articulate a self-consciousness about women's identity both as inherited cultural fact and as a process of social construction" and "to protest the available fiction of female becoming" (p. 7). The example of these authors, editors, educators, and librarians, who cleared the path for contemporary children's literature and services, subverts expectations of domestic women and suggests instead a dynamic image of powerful women working to construct a maternal paradigm of literature and service. Power is a word often denied to women's library history but is a force defined by Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) as "the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (p. 18).

Feminist scholarship, in its openness to methodology and its inclusiveness of content, provides a theoretical base to question the authority of canon. In her seminal article, "A Feminist Research Agenda in Youth Literature," Vandergrift (1993) argues for feminist philosophy to be foundational to literature classes. She suggests that feminist literary criticism, in its inclusive and nonhierarchical perspective, entails a reconstruction of the curriculum. The first step is to question the canon: to rediscover, reconstruct, or reevaluate what is taught—not only the books selected for readings but the whole approach to the subject (p. 23).

A related curriculum consideration is whether knowledge of these important women in library history could be assimilated in foundation courses as well as courses specifically geared toward children's literature or services.

## THE SURVEY

The study surveyed library educators to determine the extent to which women's history in children's literature and services is still vital to library education. The intention was to discover if those studying children's literature and other related courses are being exposed to the rich history of women's contributions to youth literature and services in its formative

years in America. Do students perform assignments or readings related to them? How much contextual history do educators provide students within library and information science education? Do faculty conduct research on these figures in women's library history? How important is it to keep women's library history in children's services alive?

Sixty-five surveys were sent in May 1995 to current children's literature faculty in the field, as indicated through the directory of the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE). While children's literature is also taught in education and English departments, it was assumed that library faculty would be the most appropriate audience for inclusion of historically significant library professionals. The survey queried the respondents as to their pedagogical inclusion of forty-one significant pioneers in the field from the turn-of-the-century to the mid-twentieth century. The list of pioneers was referred to by various specialists in the field, who included names of women prominent as teachers, editors, authors, textbook authors, and librarians. The list itself is intentionally eclectic rather than comprehensive—i.e., a sampling of women educators, authors, editors, storytellers, and librarians who have contributed to the pedagogy, to multicultural literature, and to services for children and youth.

Narrative questions followed the checklist of names. The questions were the following:

1. How long have you been teaching in the area of children's/young adult literature and services?
2. What is your opinion of the importance of including these women within our library school education?
3. Please include suggestions of ways to cover these women pioneers within our classes.
4. Are there any other significant women figures from this time period who should be considered?
5. Any other concerns or questions to raise?

In the survey that reached sixty-five faculty members, thirty-five responded (a 54 percent return rate), most of whom indicated some interest in transmitting the history of women pioneers in children's literature and services courses. Whether the other thirty survey recipients would have bolstered this perception if they had responded is unknown.

The study examines the influence of women from a diversity of fields, such as academia, children's book departments in publishing, children's rooms in libraries, authorship, and storytelling. This pluralistic approach reflects the nature of the field: the interrelationships that characterize the authors, editors, storytellers, and librarians in this period of time (1900-1950). The categories constructed in the survey examine the extent of coverage from a mere mention in class, to assigned readings, to assigned student research, and to faculty research. The narrative ques-

tions seek to discover the faculty member's background, rationale for inclusion or exclusion, suggestions for coverage, other significant women figures to be considered, and related concerns or questions.

The survey (see Appendix) of current children's literature faculty in schools of library and information science suggests a strong presence of women's library history—if not sustained scholarship—among those who responded. In terms of the first category, "Mentioned in Class," every individual on the list received some attention in classroom instruction. The women most often mentioned include Augusta Baker (63 percent), Charlotte Huck, May Hill Arbuthnot, Anne Carroll Moore, Zena Sutherland (all 57 percent). Of that group, two are noted textbook authors, and the other two are associated with the New York Public Library in addition to their own distinctive contributions to storytelling, writing, and foundational library work. All have authored works of great visibility.

In the second category, "Assigned Student Research," very few names appear: only seven with one (Charlotte Zolotow) cited twice. This is an important category since it suggests that not much research on pioneers is being perpetuated in library education.

The third category, "Conducted Own Research," is more encouraging in its response by faculty members. The individuals who appear to be most researched include Anne Carroll Moore, Amelia Munson, and Elizabeth Nesbitt. The small numbers reflect little in the way of trends but suggest that interest is heightened on those associated with library education, library service leadership, and national professional roles.

The fourth category, "Assigned Readings," elicited the second most active response. The authors of textbooks, critical works, and handbooks, which are presumably used in class instruction, are prominent here: May Hill Arbuthnot, Augusta Baker, Lillian Smith, Zena Sutherland, Margaret Edwards, and Charlotte Huck (leading with 37 percent). What is striking, even in such a small sample, is that a sizable number of individuals are associated to some extent with storytelling: Marie Shedlock, Augusta Baker, Anne Carroll Moore, and Ruth Sawyer. One respondent added a note that she rarely assigns specific readings since she prompts the students themselves to come up with an individual set of professional readings.

On the narrative questions, the first asked about length of time in teaching. The average length of service was nine years. The second question queried respondents on their perception of the importance of inclusion in the library curriculum. Most answered positively. Some responded that they tended to mention only a few and have, regretfully, ignored many others; that they were reminded now of the importance of the "shoulders of giants"; that they were foundational to our future; that all students—male and female—need to know role models of library history; that they are "important figures in the precepts and underpinning of the field."

Some questioned the feasibility of including much history in a course all too inundated with technological and programmatic emphasis as well as a wealth of contemporary literature. Those who teach undergraduates questioned if their background would permit much in the historical realm. A common response was that, in just one course, little time is left for historical context.

The third narrative question asked for suggestions on incorporating gender history within the curriculum. Suggestions include the following: publishing a text that would include selective readings; producing slide and video presentations, perhaps through the cooperation of the American Library Association (ALA); interjecting their names when appropriate into content being discussed; adding a separate history section of a course; maintaining courses in the history of literature and services; incorporating into public library courses; and encouraging students to do publishable research.

The fourth question explored what other names need to be included from this time period (1900-1950). The names mentioned include Caroline Hewins (considered in the survey to be earlier in time), Margaret Wise Brown, Margaret Scoggins, J. M. Campbell, Harriet Long, Mildred Batchelder, Sheila Egoff, Linda Eastman, Sarah Bogle, Clara Hunt, Jessie Carson, Clara Howard, Gertrude Andrus, Margaret McElderry, Sara Belknap, Dorothy Lathrop, Rachel Field, and, if not too recent, Mary Chelton and Dorothy Broderick. It was heartening to see so many names appear that also deserve recognition.

The last question asked for any other related concerns or questions. Some responses include the following: a concern that students are not receiving "a context and a standpoint within which and from which those entering the field can view what we do"; a question whether ALA can supply photos; greater status given to research in this area by departments rather than to more technological areas; and awards and conferences named for specific pioneers. One respondent expressed a perception that her students would find such gender-specific instruction to be sexist.

## CONCLUSION

While the fields of education, library science, and book publishing today remain fractured into specialties of institution, mission, and market, the years from 1900 to 1950, often considered "the Golden Age in American children's literature," reflect a peculiar synergy. A small network of women, involved in related fields, conjoined in a common enterprise: to provide access to quality books for children and youth. For many of the distinguished names on this list, there is no way to separate them in terms of specialties. Many were simultaneously authors, teachers, storytellers, critics, and editors. Many of the fictional authors offered an early perspective on multicultural literature long before its promi-

nence now. The confluence of writing, teaching, and building library collections and services for children was extraordinary. An apprenticeship, distinctly feminist, existed where a mentor-model instructed another to join in and share the passion for children and their books in whatever format and facility. The mecca was New York City, with New York Public Library experience being the catalyst for clusters of librarians to go beyond the island far afield.

The survey sent to library faculty in children's literature and services revealed many knowledgeable historians who teach in the field. While most noted the pragmatics of one course and much content, many also do include historical figures from the field in their classes. Admittedly, with a 53 percent return rate, many others did not respond, so it is hard to make any generalizations from the survey. The large number of names added for consideration indicates a broad knowledge of antecedents and figures of agency who have shaped the field. The history is clearly alive, although muted in volume and frequency.

Certain institutional constructs limit expansion. Clearly, children's literature and services deserve a historical course, as well as inclusion in children's literature and youth services courses. This history also belongs in other foundational courses in addition to public library courses. It is monumental to think of teaching children's literature today as a whole—i.e., historical children's books, technological access, and other programmatic concepts—within one or even two courses. With such an emphasis on preparing students for their first day of work, much of the philosophy which underlies what they will do on that first day and the second is lost. In many library and information science departments, the priorities are more "science" than "literature" or "library." This trend discourages the exploration of history, even the history of the profession itself. Children's literature and services, perhaps more than any other specialty within the field, has an illustrious past that still instructs; build community, it says, through its various threads that connect.

Minnich's work offers a vision. Critique, re-membling, and creation are enabling ways to transform knowledge in the field of children's literature and services. The challenge to stand on "the shoulders of giants" means different ways of knowing. One of those ways is to validate experience, particularly the experience of brave and talented women who pushed boundaries and broke down walls. The field is responding to such a call with new knowledge transformed. Forthcoming volumes of women's history will be appearing: *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing Women In* (Ablex), edited by Suzanne Hildebrand, and the *Dictionary of Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth* (Libraries Unlimited), edited by Marilyn Miller, which will provide greater impetus for research and recognition.

Hannigan calls for a "feminist paradigm" whereby those in a female-intensive profession critique the constructed knowledge and create anew from a rich reserve of women's history and feminist criticism. For those who teach children's literature and services, which can largely be construed as women's writing and work, the charge is there to look back on the women who have spoken the words of criticism, re-membering, and creation as cultural memory and cultural meaning.

## APPENDIX

## SUMMARY OF SURVEY

	Mentioned in class research		Assigned student research		Conducted own research		Assigned readings	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
May Hill Arbuthnot	20	57		0	0		7	20
Augusta Baker	22	63	1	3	0		10	29
Louise Seaman								
Bechtel	6	17		0	2	6	1	3
Ann Nolan Clark	7	20		0	1	3	2	6
Margeurite De								
Angeli	13	37		0	1	3	2	6
Anne Thaxter								
Eaton	4	11		0	0		4	11
Margaret Edwards	19	54	1	3	3	3	9	26
Mary Virginia Gaver	10	29		0	0		2	6
Virginia Haviland	17	49		0	0		3	9
Alice Hazeltine	3	9		0	2	6	1	3
Frances Elizabeth								
Henne	11	31	1	3	1	3	4	11
Charlotte Huck	20	57	1	3	2	6	13	37
Alice Jordan	7	20		0	2	6	1	3
Louise Latimer	2	6		0	0		0	0
Claudia Lewis	2	6		0	0		0	0
Bertha Mahony	10	29		0	2	6	1	3
May Massee	8	23		0	1	3	1	3
Florence Crannell								
Means	8	23	1	3	2	6		0
Cornelia Meigs	13	37		0	2	6	4	11
Anne Carroll Moore	20	57		0	4	11	5	14
Ameila Munson	6	17		0	4	11	2	6
Elizabeth Nesbitt	10	29		0	4	11	3	9
Ursula Nordstrom	10	29		0	0		1	3
Francis Jenkins								
Olcott	6	17		0	3	9		0
Mary Wright								
Plummer	6	17		0	2	6		0
Effie Power	7	20		0	2	6	1	3
Mabel Robinson	2	6		0	0		0	0
Charlammae Rollins	14	40		0	1	3	3	9
Jean Roos	4	11		0	3	9	1	3
Minerva Sanders	9	26		0	3	9		0
Ruth Sawyer	15	43		0	0		8	23
Frances Clark Sayers	15	43		0	2	6	7	20
Kate Seredy	6	17		0	0		1	3
Marie Shedlock	15	43		0	1	3	8	23
Elva Smith	9	26		0	3	9		0
Lillian Smith	14	40		0	1	3	9	26
Zena Sutherland	20	57	1	3	0		10	29
Velma Varner	3	9		0	0		0	0
Ruth Hill Viguers	6	17		0	1	3	3	9
Mabel Williams	3	9		0	3	9	1	3
Charlotte Zolotow	17	49	2	6	0		4	11

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