

Abbie Anderson

**L533: Library Materials for Children and Young Adults
Fall, 2002**

Assignment:

Collection Development Philosophy

A Personal Statement

It is my goal to work as a children's or young adult librarian in a public library. Collection development for children and young adults in the public library setting must be based on the interdependent principles of intelligence, balance, and service.

To perform collection development intelligently, I must first be well acquainted on an active and ongoing basis with the broad and ever-changing range of materials available across many media. In addition to reading widely, I will rely on evaluation tools such as *Booklist*, *School Library Journal*, *VOYA*, and *Children's Software and New Media Review*, as well as the more specialized published bibliographies and selection tools. This could be a full-time pursuit in itself, but of course it is only the first step. Secondly, to be intelligent about collections for my library, I must know (or at least know about) the people I am serving. Understanding their needs, interests and tastes, as well as their circumstances, will guide me in collection choices.

I would ask the following questions about the children, teens and families I serve in the library. What are the kids studying in school? How well-funded are their schools, and what are their school libraries like? What kinds of clubs, groups and/or religious organizations might they belong to? How many of them speak English as a second language? How many of them have special needs, such as learning or physical disabilities? What socioeconomic levels do they represent? How diverse is the community? Am I likely to meet resistance in my efforts to balance the collection across a range of backgrounds and lifestyles?

I would develop this understanding in part through personal interaction with those who use the collections, and through collaboration with my colleagues on the library staff and partnerships with local teachers and school librarians. I would draw on demographic statistics for my community, and on surveys of library users (if the library has performed surveys in the past or can afford to do so now), to place interpersonal knowledge in a larger context and a sharper focus.

The principle of balance for collections entails a balance of views, of media, of old and new, of “quality” and “demand”, and of the compromises required by finite space and resources. The American Library Association’s *Diversity in Collection Development* statement (an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights) emphasizes the principle of balance as inclusion: “Intellectual freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored.” As the ALA statement notes, this kind of balance requires representation of *all* views, not just those held by the collections officer. The *raison-d’être* for the public library is free and full access to information. Collections serving young people must embody this principle of balanced access.

I would follow my library’s stated collection policies in balancing media sources and in weeding the collection. The debate of “quality” vs. “demand” continues to rage among librarians, and this issue requires balance as well. As Nora Rawlinson pointed out in 1981, “Being responsive to demand means

providing the classics and perennial favorites as well as that which is currently popular.” (p. 2188) I agree with Rawlinson that it doesn’t have to be an either-or situation—and that we should give library users more credit for appreciating quality as well as seeking less challenging entertainment. Succumbing to “demand” does not mean abandoning all standards of excellence. What it *does* mean is responding to the tastes of users, and comprehending the commercial mechanisms that drive appeal (a.k.a. popularity).

A balanced collection allows librarians to provide both what users come in looking for (the titles the market has trained them to seek), and materials that the librarian (with access to less dollar-driven and more specialized resources) can point out to them that will give equal pleasure and benefit. It is not the collection officer’s job to determine what people *should* encounter, but to make available the materials that will meet their needs, whether that need be (for example) an evening’s entertainment or reliable health care information or a good biography of Abraham Lincoln or “something as good as Harry Potter”.

To my mind, the public library is first and foremost in a position of service. This final principle of collection development necessarily integrates with both intelligence and balance, since it directs both of the other principles toward the ultimate goal of serving the public—specifically, the community of people who use the library. My intelligence must be directed toward making the best, most balanced and comprehensive fit between what is available and what users seek, within the physical and material limits of the library. That is the mission of collection development.

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Source List (Contributing Works)

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<http://acqweb.library.vanderbilt.edu/acqweb/cd_policy.html> 21 Nov. 2002.

Colburn, Nell. "10 Tips for an Outstanding Children's Collection." *School Library Journal* 40, no. 9 (September 1994): 130-133.

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- Harrington, Janet. "Children's Librarians, Reviews, and Collection Development." Betsy Hearne and Roger Sutton, eds. *Evaluating Children's Books: A Critical Look*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993: 27-36.
- Collection Development Policy, Third Edition*. Kitsap Regional Library. <<http://www.krl.org/administration/policies/colldev.html>> 21 Nov. 2002. *Note: Kitsap County is west of Seattle, across Puget Sound. I hope to return to the Seattle area (where I was raised and where my family still lives), and would be delighted to work for KRL.*
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