Jennifer Archuleta

September 7, 2013

LIBR-268: History of Children’s Literature

Unit 2 Discussion Post

**Discussion prompt:** ***After reading the two articles about the early days of library service for children, identify a policy or principle that, in your opinion, the pioneers got right. What policy or principle doesn't hold up when viewed through a contemporary lens? Anything surprise you?***

Early Library Service to Children

I really enjoyed reading both articles about the concerns and practices of early librarians. I was surprised to learn about the extent of power early librarians had in regards to the children’s publishing industry and what children read. Additionally, I was very surprised about the results of the “survey” sent to libraries across the country from *Report on Reading for the Young* from 1894. I’ll admit that I went back a couple of times to our unit task list to verify the year that this document was published, because honestly many of the same concerns and discussions happening over a hundred years ago are still being discussed and worked on in youth librarianship today. For example, the very first question addresses the topic age limits for borrowing books. Anne Carroll Moore famously abolished age limits at the NYPL by allowing children who were able to sign/write their names to receive cards. My library had the exact same policy up until about a year ago when after much deliberation by the children’s librarians and administration, it was decided to remove that requirement, allowing children of any age to get a library card to check out items. It was refreshing to see that though some libraries had age limits in 1894, many of the “progressive” libraries were paving the way to abolishing them. Until our readings this week I never understood the great historical link our former policy had, and that until only very recently the tides changed enough to update it to make our collections more accessible to all.

One of my favorite lines from the 1894 document is, “No assistant should be employed in the circulating, reference, or reading-room departments of a library, who will not give a child as courteous and considerate attention as she would a member of the Board of Trustees” (page 82). While it was obvious from the surveys received for this discussion that not every library in the country believed or practiced this sentiment, I believe this is a foundational tenet of youth librarianship that is honored and can easily be understood today. Another sentiment just touched upon in the ALA 1894 document was the idea that, “Besides study and class rooms, the modern library should contain a hall, to which children may come for instructive and entertaining lectures” (page 87). Though lectures may not necessarily be very appealing to the youth of today, I take this overall quote to be a precursor to the idea of libraries providing quality programming for children, in addition to materials and other services. This principle is practiced in libraries throughout the country when they provide informative, entertaining, and quality programs for the youth.

We owe much to the librarians and publishers who helped to establish children’s literature as a viable and important part of libraries and our culture. At the same time, as evidenced throughout the 1894 ALA discussion document and the New Yorker article, there was prevalent idea of librarians as gatekeepers and protectors of morality and proper thought and behavior. Today, I believe there has been a great shift away from censorship of ideas thought to be harmful, towards ideas of intellectual freedom and the right to read. That is not to say there is not still much similar debate over these issues today, but I feel that these have shifted a bit from books to other popular media such as video games and the Internet. In the ALA 1894 document there was much talk about shifting children away from dime-store novels, which were believed to be deleterious to their minds (especially to young boys). I laughed after reading some of these statements, but then realized these same arguments are still often made about popular series books, comic books/graphic novels, and other media like video games and television. I am a big comic book and graphic novel fan, reader, and proponent, and I have done some research during my time in SLIS and I have seen much evidence that there is still a fight towards the legitimacy of graphic novels as worthy materials for libraries and schools. While I think many of us agree that the sentiments of graphic novels as worthy materials for libraries and schools. While I think many of us agree that the sentiments of librarians about the dime store novels may seem ridiculous today, can we all agree about the merits of maintaining video game collections or comic books collections in our libraries today? Though I think we have come a long way to making more materials available to children, I believe the struggle about what is good/bad and right/wrong still continues to this day.

Also as witnessed in the story in the New Yorker article, though many believed *Stuart Little* to be a great work (especially many children), the great influence of Anne Carroll Moore over what could carried in the library still had a great impact on the reception of the book and it’s placement (or non-placement) in many libraries. Reading that story saddened me greatly, because though Moore created so many milestones in our area of work, she allowed her personal beliefs and power overshadow her service to children. Though I understand the historical context of her story is important, and morality was viewed differently than it is today, I still can’t help but read her story as a cautionary tale.