

Children's Libraries in the U.S.S.R. A Brief Report

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From January 21, 1979, through February 10, 1979, a team of four U.S. specialists in library service to children toured a variety of children's libraries in the U.S.S.R. The tour, sponsored by the governments of the two countries, was part of an ongoing cultural exchange that culminated in the first Soviet Union-United States seminar on library affairs held in Washington, D. C., May 5-7, 1979.

Team members, all representing the Association for Library Service to Children, a Division of the American Library Association, included Mary Jane Anderson, Executive Secretary, ALSC, Barbara Miller, recently retired Director of Library Work with Children, Louisville, Ky. Public Library, Helga Remy, Director of Children's Services, San Diego County Library System, and the writer.

During the three weeks our itinerary took us to Moscow, the Republic of Russia, Kiev, in the Ukraine, and Yerevan, in Armenia. The emphasis of our trip was on children's libraries. There are four major kinds of libraries serving the school age child in the Soviet Union: children's public libraries, school libraries, trade union libraries, and Pioneer Palace libraries. In the space I have I will briefly discuss school libraries and public children's libraries, but a few words about the other two types may be of interest.

Pioneer palaces are after school recreational and educational facilities for children who are members of the Pioneer Youth program. These exist in every district of every city and include in them libraries for children as well as a wide variety of activities. If a trade union builds a Palace of Culture, an educational, cultural, and recreational facility for workers financed by their dues, a library serving adults and one serving children must be included.

School Libraries

Children have the option of going to public school for eight or ten years. If a student opts to go to our comparable trade or technical school, s/he will finish public school at grade eight and move into the special school for four years. Students opting to continue to higher education will complete ten years of public school. There are various emphases and specializations among lower schools, but all of the lower schools have libraries. The number of staff depends on the size of the school. The school library program, administered in each republic by the Ministry of Culture, is in its tenth year of development; therefore, not all librarians are professionally educated. Collections in school

libraries are divided: part serving the faculty and part serving the students. Collection size varies and numbers of volumes reported include many, many paper back titles, pamphlet-sized items, multiple copies of textbooks, and multiple copies of supplementary "required reading". For instance, the school libraries must have enough duplicate copies of *War and Peace* so that when that book is read throughout the country by 13,000,000 students, during the same period of time, the need can be met. Book budgets are allocated by the State Ministry of Culture in Moscow. Currently school librarians receive an annual budget of 25 rubles* per form (grade level). Although enrollments average from 38-42 students in each form, book costs average 46 kopeks (about one-half a ruble), so that quite a few books can be purchased.

The major goal of the school library is to give books to students and to teach children how to use the books. The major goal of the teacher as explained to us is to teach children how to read and to love to read.

Children's Public Libraries

Children's public libraries have developed as separate from the public libraries for adults, and more recently for adolescents. (There now is a slowly developing network of libraries to serve teenagers only, ages 15-20.) Going to the public library, then, is not a family affair. Children go after school to the library which closes near the dinner hour. Three goals of the public library for children were explained to us: (1) to ensure educational process, (2) to provide a place for children after school when they have leisure time, and (3) to stimulate the desire to read. These goals sound familiar, but there are vast differences in interpretation between their programs and ours. Literacy and molding the child are of uppermost importance, so that supporting learning in the school and providing a structured reading guidance program are most important. The small size of the typical Soviet living quarters, and the fact that all the adults in the family work, make facilities like the school, where children may stay the entire day up to the dinner hour, the public library, and the palaces important to the entire child care system.

Programming in Soviet children's libraries tends to be much more structured and much more formal than in the U.S. Storytelling as we know it does not exist, while puppetry apparently occurs most often in professional puppet theatres. Soviet librarians administer library service according to what they call Differentiated Age Service. Basically, books are arranged to serve three groups: the six year old (whom they call the preschooler) through those children in the third form (nine year olds); children in the fourth and fifth forms (10-11 year olds); and a third area for those in the sixth to eighth forms (12-14 year olds). Each area consists of three service patterns: (1) an open access room with perimeter shelving to which children have free access and with space for activities, (2) a reserve room where one copy of each book selected to meet curricular needs is on non-circulating reserve, and (3) closed stacks that only the librarian services.

There were many high points to the trip. Visiting the lovely new 839,000 ruble republican children's library in Kiev was a highlight. Other special events included conversations with authors, illustrators, and publishers, a day at the Lenin Library, and a brief visit to a children's picture gallery in Armenia. And most of all—we enjoyed and appreciated the many enthusiastic librarians we met every where we visited in the U.S.S.R.

*In February, 1979, 1 ruble equalled \$1.52 American money.

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