

Book Selection Methods in School Libraries— A Survey of Practices in North Carolina

Mary Strowd Ward Riggsbee

Recommendations by the American Library Association state that schools with an enrollment of as many as 250 students should have one full-time professionally trained librarian. However, a public school in North Carolina has a librarian only if the school system decides to use an allotted classroom teacher position for the library, or if the local system finances that position.

The librarian has to plan and perform all of the activities that occur in a library or oversee assistants in their performance of them. (In addition, the librarians may have tasks neither professional nor library-related, such as monitoring study-hall.)

One professional activity, materials selection, is particularly essential to the success of the library. Materials must be available for study and for pleasure. Wise and proper selection of books is enormously time-consuming, and the school librarian cannot consistently make good choices without sufficient aids. The librarian, of course, cannot read every book before purchasing it; therefore, one must rely on the recommendations of professional reviewers. By using these aids one can also benefit from several informed opinions concerning a book.

The purpose of this study is to investigate *how* librarians in North Carolina public schools use review media when making book selections for their libraries.¹ It determines (A) *which* review media they use, (B) *how many* they use, (C) *to what extent* librarians depend on the reviews, and (D) indicates *other techniques* that are used and the degree to which they are used.

During November, 1978, this writer mailed questionnaires to 66 public elementary and high school librarians in North Carolina who were chosen by systematic random sampling from a list of the 2,034 public schools. Of the 66 librarians contacted, 55 (83 per cent) responded.

According to the responses, they use a variety of review media. The largest number of librarians use *at least* sometimes *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *North Carolina Libraries*, and *Horn Book*, respectively. Of the thirteen professional journals listed on the questionnaire, the 10 most used are used by 40 percent or more of the librarians. (See table 2.)

The journals that are used *regularly* by the largest number of responding librarians are *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Horn Book*,

Table 1

Percentages Showing Degree to Which North Carolina Public School Librarians Use Book Selection Aids

Book Selection Aids	Number of Librarians Replying	Percent That Use Regularly	Percent That Use Less Than Regularly	Percent That Never Use	Total Percent That Use
Professional					
School Library	52	46%	42%	12%	88%
Journal	44	36%	55%	9%	91%
Booklist	44	23%	48%	29%	71%
Horn Book	43	26%	56%	18%	82%
Library Journal					
Elementary					
English	42	7%	55%	38%	62%
North Carolina					
Libraries	42	5%	71%	24%	76%
Wilson Library					
Bulletin	42	17%	45%	38%	62%
Book Review					
Digest	41	10%	51%	39%	61%
Bulletin of the					
Center for					
Children's Books	40	13%	43%	45%	56%
Choice	38	3%	34%	63%	37%
Appraisal	37	0%	35%	65%	35%
School Libraries	36	11%	50%	39%	61%
Science Books	36	0%	53%	47%	53%

This table contains percentages of the number of librarians who replied to each question. Because of rounding, some statistics do not equal 100 per cent.

and *Library Journal*. (See table 1). *Publishers Weekly* is the trade periodical that shows the highest percentage (52 percent) of users. (See table 2). In the general periodical grouping, the largest number of respondents (46) answered the question regarding local newspapers: 85 percent of the librarians use these reviews; 11 percent use them regularly. (See table 2.)

There is a wide range in the number of media used by each librarian. At one extreme, there are ten librarians, each of whom reported using 20 or more different media.

One uses all 23 media, plus 2 that are unlisted. The modal number of media is a tie of 13 and 14. (Five librarians use 13 titles, and five use 14.) Four librarians use 11 media, which is also the mean and the median. Three librarians use 5 media, and nine use fewer than 5, including one who apparently does not use any review media at all.

Of all the librarians who returned the questionnaires, more use (1) review media and (2) requests by students and faculty than use any other selection technique. Both of these two selection techniques earn 52 adherents (95 percent of the 55 returned questionnaires.) Requests influence 34 librarians (65 percent) regularly; review media influence 24 (46 percent) regularly; and there are 21 (42 percent) librarians who report that they personally review books regularly.

Book clubs also draw a large number of replies (51), of which 67 percent of the responding librarians indicate being influenced by them. Only 10 percent of the respondents are influenced by them regularly, however. All 50 of the librarians who answered the question about personal reviewing indicate they do review, 42 percent of them doing so regularly.

For the statistics of the 1978-79 North Carolina librarians' use of selection aids to have heightened meaning, they were compared with Marjorie Fiske's findings for the 1956-58 California librarians' use of aids.²

The use of Wilson publications could not be included in the comparison, however, because of the difference in the manner of listing them in the two questionnaires. The comparison shows that North Carolina school librarians in 1978 differ in book selection practices from the practices of those California school librarians during 1956-58. The most obvious difference is that there is a larger percentage of reporting North Carolina Librarians than there were California librarians using and relying on (i.e., using regularly) every item listed. In the two studies, there are 38 percent more North Carolina librarians who use *Booklist* than California librarians who used it, and there is a 61 percent difference in the use of *Horn Book*.

Local newspapers, which were not shown to be used in California, are used by 85 percent of the North Carolina librarians and relied on (used regularly) by 11 percent. *Time* is also used by North Carolina librarians (82 percent), although it is used regularly by only 8 percent. It, like newspapers, was not used by the California librarians.

In the North Carolina survey, all 50 people who answered the question on personal reviewing participate in this method of selecting books. Forty-two percent use the method regularly. North Carolina librarians differ most in their use of selection aids from that of California librarians in the area of faculty and

Table 2
Percentages Showing Degree to Which North Carolina Public
School Librarians Use Book Selection Aids

Book Selection Aids	Number of Librarians Replying	Percent That Use Regularly	Percent That Use Less Than Regularly	Percent That Never Use	Total Percent That Use
Trade					
Publishers Weekly	42	2%	50%	48%	52%
Kirkus Reviews	41	2%	27%	71%	29%
Retail Bookseller	40	3%	38%	60%	41%
General					
Local newspapers	46	11%	74%	15%	85%
New York Times Book Review	44	7%	59%	34%	66%
Saturday Review	41	5%	51%	44%	56%
Harper's	40	0%	43%	58%	43%
Atlantic Monthly	39	0%	38%	62%	38%
Time	39	8%	74%	18%	82%
New Yorker	38	0%	47%	54%	47%

This table contains percentages of the number of librarians who replied to each question. Because of rounding, statistics may not equal 100 per cent.

student requests. Fiske's librarians did not discuss student requests and complained about the small number of— and type of— requests that they received from teachers. In contrast to that total absence of use from Fiske's librarians, 52 of 55 North Carolina librarians answered the question, with 100 percent of them saying that they use requests and 34 (65 percent) answering that they use them regularly.

Other comparisons seem to show that North Carolina public school librarians wisely choose the review media that they use. Studies of book reviews and reviewing media were conducted by Alice Lohrer, Zena Sutherland, and Rosemary Weber. Conclusions gained from these three studies are that *Booklist*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, and *Horn Book* are three journals that have especially helpful descriptive and critical reviews.

Weber studied the number of the children's and young adult books that were reviewed in seven periodicals during 1977. These seven reviewing media published a total of 7,611 reviews of the 3,915 books that were studied. *School Library Journal* and *Booklist* reviewed the largest number of those books during 1977 and carried the largest number of reviews of books not carried in other periodicals. The returned questionnaires from North Carolina librarians show that the two leading media in Weber's study are the two media that have the largest percentage of users among North Carolina school librarians. The 55 returned questionnaires, show that 52 librarians answered the question regarding *School Library Journal*. Of these librarians, 88 percent use its reviews; 46 percent use them regularly.

The comparisons made in this study show that North Carolina public school librarians during 1978 used a greater variety of reviewing methods than did the California 1956-58 school librarians. The comparisons also show that North Carolina librarians use all of the aids more regularly than did those in the California group and that the media that are most frequently used by North Carolina librarians are those that, according to Weber's survey, provide the most reviews and contain the most helpful information in those reviews.

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REFERENCES

1. This survey may be read in detail in the Master's research paper entitled *North Carolina School Librarians' Use of Book Selection Aids*. It is located in the School of Library Science, North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina.
2. This is information on the California study of 1956-58, which comes from *Book Selection and Censorship: A Study of School and Public Libraries in California*, by Marjorie Fiske.

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