
Library Education for Children's Services in North Carolina

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Children's librarians for public libraries are currently very much in demand. In spite of the fact that salaries have improved in many states nationwide, including North Carolina, some public library leaders fear there is to be a continuing crisis in the availability of children's librarians. This concern is developing from several factors. Public libraries have been affected by the growth of career options for women, options which have provided increased salaries and opportunities to use their administrative and managerial skills. Traditionally, higher salaries and administrative opportunities have not been possible for the majority of women who want to continue working with children in public schools and libraries. What makes it even more difficult for those who wish to work with children in public libraries is that salaries for teachers continue to outpace those for children's specialists in public libraries.

Public children's librarians have been further plagued by national debates that have called into question the survival of their specialty in the field. Some researchers and many writers in the seventies publicly debated whether children could be best served in the school or in the public library. Throughout all of the debates in the library press and the dire predictions at national conferences, children's services are surviving in public libraries. Thankfully for the children and society, public library directors have continued to support children's services as a valuable part of total public library service to their communities. Although there are jobs for children's librarians, it should be pointed out that many library directors have quietly and persistently eliminated professional personnel and special services dedicated to young adults. Many have in essence served notice

that special library service to teenagers is the responsibility of the schools.

The documented move away from the quality support of youth services programs in many ALA-accredited library school curricula is another discouraging trend. School libraries can survive this trend because, historically, education officials have required only state certification. Certification courses can usually be provided within a state in single-purpose programs offered by colleges, schools, or departments of education. (The overall quality of these programs, nationwide, is a topic for another paper.) This is not so for the public library children's specialist because most library directors seeking a professional children's librarian ask for the minimum preparation in an ALA-accredited MLS program.

The job qualifications are changing for children's librarians, however. Job advertisements still describe candidates with organizational skills, the ability to communicate well orally and in writing with parents and with children of all ages, supervisory skills, programming abilities, and extensive knowledge of children's literature. Employers are also asking for management skills: the ability to plan, supervise, and direct programs and departments. A few, looking ahead to providing access to electronic media for the total community, are asking for computer skills and knowledge of other elements of electronic communication technology.

National personnel trends are evident within North Carolina. There are unfilled jobs for qualified professional children's librarians; but some library administrators, despairing of attracting those with the MLS, have returned to appointing those without the professional degree. Some library directors have eliminated the MLS entry level position for children's services. Although starting salaries have increased for public librarians in North Carolina, these salaries and accompanying benefits are still lower than those for

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public school teachers, who, in addition to higher salaries, work only ten months of the year.

At the same time, it must be pointed out, however, that in North Carolina the number of full-time public library children's staff has never gone above 139 in the last five years for which we have documentation. (See Table 1) These 139 children's librarians work in 76 systems representing 367 buildings and service to a potential clientele of approximately three-quarters of a million children. The percentage of those 139 positions filled by persons with the MLS has never gone above 49%. North Carolina has a tradition of keeping professional public library service to children at a minimal level.

TABLE 1.
North Carolina Professional Children's Librarians
Full-time Children's Services

Year	Staff	
	Number Employed	Percent (%) with MLS
1973	18	39
1980	105	47
1982	88	41
1984	102	49
1985	139	43

Source: "Youth Services in North Carolina Public Libraries." Department of Cultural Resources, Division of State Library, 1986.

Educational Preparation in North Carolina

The state of North Carolina is unique in the sense that opportunities for library education at the master's level are available at five institutions. These library programs leading to the master's degree are established at Appalachian State University (ASU), East Carolina University (ECU), North Carolina Central University (NCCU), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G). Common to all curricula is a core of required courses. Courses appropriate for the educational preparation of children's and young adult librarians are likewise consistent. Such offerings include the standard materials courses—children's literature and young adult literature—and methods courses such as storytelling and reading guidance.

Beyond these common features, the library education programs in the state offer some variety for specialized vocational goals. Only one program, UNC-CH, offers a course specifically concerned with the administration of public library work with children and young adults. Other significant course options include the Early Childhood Specialist program at NCCU which is

designed to prepare persons to work with preschool children in public and school libraries. Finally, the Appalachian State University program includes a materials course entitled "Multicultural Literature."

The courses in research methods which require completion of a research project and those library school programs requiring a master's paper provide opportunity for further exploration of children's librarianship. The doctoral program at UNC-CH, the only one in the state, offers even greater opportunity to pursue research in children's and young adult librarianship.

To broaden the perspective of children's library work, students may be encouraged to enroll in courses in other disciplines. Although none of the programs require cognate hours, courses in other disciplines which may prove useful are childhood and adolescent psychology and audiovisual technology and production.

Mandate for the Future

What of the future for children's librarianship? It is as true for children's services as it is for all types of library services that the insular library will not survive. The child's need for information for his school work and his personal development and interest is no less complicated than the needs of adults. The child, like the adult, finds himself bombarded with new information as well as the additional pressure of dealing with that information. The child, unlike the adult, has fewer coping skills, and needs adult assistance in organizing and using the information she has or wants. It takes the entire community to help the child acquire and use information: the school, the community, including social and helping agencies such as the library, the police department, the youth oriented agencies, and the church. The children's librarian of the future will best be able to serve the child's total information needs if she or he is aware of community services and makes other community agencies aware of the public library's abilities to provide materials and services to families, teachers, and child-care volunteers and professionals.


We have shadow-boxed the concept of school-public library cooperation long enough. With our move toward resource sharing and networking, school and public library officials and school and public librarians must be more effective in their communication, sharing, and understanding of each other's problems. Knowledge of the school curriculum by public librarians is equally as beneficial as knowledge of public library programming

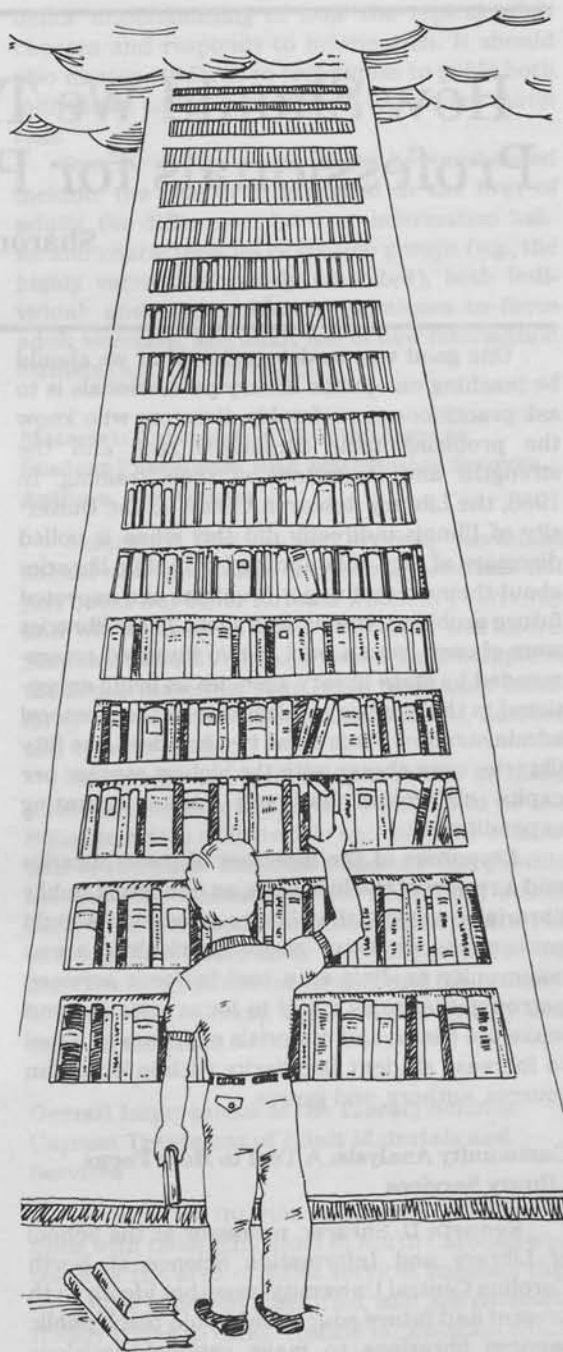
by school librarians. Children's librarians and school librarians certainly have important parts to play in this reciprocal relationship. This brings us back to the children's librarian who sees himself as an integral part of the total library staff and an integral part of community resources. The wise children's librarian will also be aware of adult education, management courses, including personnel management and budgeting, as well as online retrieval courses. While children's literature and storytelling will always be important, they cannot be the only focus of library service to children in an information age.

Relative to the national problem of adult illiteracy is the profession's concern about *aliteracy* among children and young adults. A reasonable explanation for this situation is that the competition from technological media has stifled the motivation to read. The resultant critical condition is a future generation of non-reading adults.

Social demographic data confirm that public libraries need to assess current programming to determine if libraries are qualitatively meeting the needs of the diversified population. The growth of ethnic populations, in particular, necessitates this reassessment.

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The mandate for library education programs in North Carolina is to ensure that students are able to understand the significant role of children's librarians, and to address contemporary issues such as community cooperation; public library-school cooperation and networking; program planning and evaluation through application of managerial skills; literacy; and serving special ethnic populations. In addressing these and other current perspectives, library schools should stress knowledge of educational innovation and social conditions which affect library service to children. This pedagogical approach can be achieved in two ways. First, students should be taught to determine the relevancy and application of other subject content areas to children's librarianship. Second, familiarity with reported research in children's librarianship and its implications for the provision of services would further enhance the educational preparation of children's library professionals. 



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