

Policy Statements For The Selection Of Library Materials¹

By

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This is a *time for decision*. I am sure you have heard many times that today our country is in a time of transition. The old order is changing. Long established traditions are giving way to new ideas.

We as a nation are constantly called upon to make difficult decisions. Paralleling this state of flux is the status of the teaching profession. It, too, is confronted with the necessity of adaptation and change. We know its course will profoundly affect the future of our nation. Just this week the National Education Association released this statement: "The quality of education in the schools in the United States depends to a greater degree on the quality of teachers than on any other factor."

John R. Emens, president of Ball State Teachers College in Muncie, Indiana, summed up the situation at a recent Classroom Teachers National Conference when he said, "What happens to American education will eventually happen to America." If this is true, the future of our children, of our community, and of the nation depends to a great degree on how effectively we cultivate the nation's greatest asset—an educated citizenry.

Why do you suppose education has been given so much emphasis? As most of you know, education has come through a long, slow process to reach this point, and has had good and bad publicity through this process. U. S. Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel thinks that perhaps four men in the last 15 years have been responsible. He says:

"You might think of the history of the last 15 years in education in the United States as being profoundly influenced by four men, probably more unlike than most men in the world. The first is the late Robert Taft, who, I think, probably persuaded the American people that you could use federal tax money for primary and secondary schools without immediately ending in perdition. He himself proposed such bills; they never passed, but he got the thinking going. The second, not precisely like Mr. Taft, is Mr. Khrushchev, who scared the daylights out of us; scared us that the schools were not any good and we had better compete. The third is Pope John with the ecumenical movement, and the fourth is Lyndon Johnson. Can you think of a more unlikely batch? To me they symbolize, those four, the intellectual influences that have gone into the passage of this recent legislation."

Whether or not this unlikely quartet has really influenced education is not the question. The question is, "What are we going to do?" For years, teachers, librarians, and even administrators, have been saying, "Oh, if we only had the time and the money to do this or that." These professional people are sincere and really mean what they say. Their enthusiasm lasts and, even though it is met by barriers, is awarded by accomplishments.

Then there is a group of educators who make up what I call "The Can'ts." These "Can'ts" are educators who say that if only they had so and so, they would be able to do thus and so—but can't because . . .

But, now, suddenly even the Can'ts group has an opportunity to accomplish great feats!

In which group do you belong?

Edwin Castagna, past president of ALA, told the 1965 Conference in Detroit last summer that the nation's public school libraries were operating far below minimum standards.

1. Address delivered to N. C. Assn. of School Librarians Nov. 5, 1965.

2. Miss Justin is assistant executive secretary, AASL.

Librarians now have an opportunity to do a better job. Years ago, when the school library consisted of a small place for a few books, the librarian may or may not have been a professional person. The selection and purchasing of library materials was a fairly simple process.

Today, with all the emphasis on libraries from your local professional organization, your state professional organization, your national organization, with emphasis from community groups who are awakening to the fact that libraries are important, with emphasis from the Federal Government, giving librarians the responsibility for spending more and more money, with emphasis from censors, it becomes increasingly complex and difficult to select and purchase materials for the school library.

I suppose censorship of books probably is one of the reasons for bringing selection policies to this point, and yet censorship has been a part of the Western world since before the birth of Christ. But in the last few years there have been numerous examples of it within our country.

Lester Asheim, director of the ALA's International Relations Office, says the difference between selection and censorship is that selection begins with a presumption in favor of control of thought. Selection's approach to the book is positive, seeking its value in the book as a book and in the book as a whole. Censorship's approach seeks to protect, not the right, but the reader himself from fancied effects of his reading. The selector has faith in the intelligence of the reader, the censor has faith only in his own.

Censorship has probably made librarians more aware of the need for defending their purchases, while the responsibilities of spending more and more money, the responsibilities of meeting the demands of education, have awakened librarians to the need of a policy statement that will do more than defend their purchases. Yet, every policy statement must have a clear and precise procedure for handling complaints. Complaints should be in writing, and the complaint should be properly identified with a precise procedure to follow.

The need for quality libraries demands quality selection. Selection policies have become channels for quality selection as well as channels for purchase of all materials. Many state associations, such as yours, have been urging this adoption.

In the light of this urging, it is surprising how few schools can point to a selection policy. Let me give you some statistics that were found when schools applied for selection by the Knapp School Libraries Project. Out of the 59 schools which survived the initial stages of elimination, 25 reported that they had selection policies, but eight of these policies were so *brief* (only one, two, or four sentences) and so *general* that they were very weak reeds in supporting the library's stand in the purchase of materials. It is interesting to note that seven of the schools reporting policies for the selection of materials were in California, where censorship battles have been fought rather frequently.

California was probably one of the first states to write policies for its own protection. Several other states are urging their local school districts to formulate selection policies. Sometimes it takes a censorship battle to make this point. May I suggest that you go back to your schools and involve your teachers and administrators! Don't wait until censorship pushes you to do this.

If a book selection policy is properly formulated, it will do several things for you:

1. IT WILL INVOLVE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS.

A committee consisting of vitally interested teachers and administrators (not more than one from each department) should be formed. Some committee members should be appointed for terms longer than one year to insure continuity.

2. IT WILL GIVE LIBRARIANS, TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ MORE WIDELY.

A small committee should be formed for book discussions. Personal knowledge of books recommended is highly desirable. As you know, reputable lists are needed, but they are never the final authority.

3. IT WILL GIVE THE LIBRARIAN THE ASSURANCE THAT THE LIBRARY CONTAINS A QUALITY SELECTION OF MATERIALS.

The involvement of teachers who care and are interested, and of administrators who see the need for a well balanced, quality collection, assures the development of selection policies which will be written with care and thought and which will serve a useful purpose.

4. IN CASE OF CENSORSHIP, IT WILL GIVE THE LIBRARY SOME BASIS FOR PURCHASING BOOKS.

Let me give you the key to success of this group—THE KEY IS THE LIBRARIAN. The group will not be effective unless you involve yourself and become a leader. You will gain a great deal by doing this. You will gain a closer relationship with your school. This is one of the values of involvement with such a policy.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A BOOK SELECTION POLICY?

There are many reasons why a school district should have a written statement clearly detailing procedure for the selection of library materials:

1. It will make it easier for all personnel—librarian, teacher, principal, and superintendent.
2. The responsibilities of participating individuals and the limits of their responsibilities will be stated explicitly.
3. If the criteria are clearly defined and techniques for applying them are set forth in unambiguous language, the persons responsible for doing the actual selection will do a thorough and efficient job. Written criteria will serve as a basis for common agreement.
4. Materials selected by such criteria will be much better and more useful.
5. A written statement of policies and procedures is an aid in keeping the community informed on the selection of material. Confidence of the committee in the school will be increased by the knowledge that thorough and reasoned philosophies and procedures underlie the selection of books and materials.

TEN TESTS FOR SOUND BOOK SELECTION POLICIES

Book selection is one of the major professional responsibilities of the school librarian. How well do you meet it? I found this test, and thought you, too, might be interested in it:

1. Do you read widely, regularly, critically?
2. Do you keep a running file of order cards based on your own reading, on suggestions from teachers and students, and on needs uncovered by use of the library?

3. Do you check books by reviews from accepted sources?
 4. Is there a written statement of book selection policy for your school?
 5. Do you apply well-defined criteria to the books which you choose?
 6. Do you select books in relation to a well thought out plan for the development of the total collection?
 7. Do you consider school needs and pupil interests and abilities when choosing books?
 8. Do you encourage wide participation in book selection?
 9. Do you examine books before buying them whenever possible?
 10. Do you compare related books to see which is preferred?
- Here is a sample of criteria to follow in the selection of books and materials:

1. Is the material needed by the school?
2. Is it the best of its kind?
3. Does it fit into or enrich our curriculum?
4. Are substance and format suitable for grade level?
5. Does the book have literary merit?
6. Will it appeal to children or youth for whom it is intended?
7. Does it appear on one or more approved lists?
8. Does it fulfill the responsibility of the school library as expressed in the Library Bill of Rights?

Statements of policies and procedures are not difficult to write. There are many aids or guidelines to help you. Let me give you only a few:

1. The American Association of School Librarians has a LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, which you should have in your library.
2. The AASL has enumerated policies and procedures for the selection of school library materials. This list gives the patterns for policy making, the selection of personnel, types of materials covered, objectives of selection, and some examples of policy statements. You may obtain both of these by writing to the American Association of School Librarians, either at 1201 16th Street N.W., Washington, D. C. 20006, or at 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Ill. 60611.
3. The National Council of Teachers of English has a pamphlet called "Students Right to Read," which gives some helpful suggestions.
4. There are many school districts which already have good selection policies and procedures. Get one, follow it, and write your own! The list is too long to continue further here. Write to the American Association of School Librarians—NEA or ALA.

As part of your preparation for developing your policy statement, get in touch with your state library supervisor. This person can be a real help to you. And the American Association of School Librarians will be glad to send you materials. Write either to me, or to Miss Dorothy McGinniss at ALA headquarters in Chicago.

We are no longer librarians per se any more than we are mathematics teachers per se, English teachers per se, administrators per se. We are now a team working and making a success of teaching. It is with this idea in mind that I think you should establish policies for your library.

It is heartening to know that North Carolina is interested in selection policies for the library. In the final analysis, the winners will be the boys and girls who use your school libraries.

In conclusion, let me say a word about recruiting for librarianship.

Recruitment, more and more, is becoming an important part of the school librarian's professional job. Let me quote from Myrl Ricking, Director of the Office of Recruitment of the American Library Association: "The statistics on a national basis are cold and disheartening, and difficult to visualize; a conservative estimate of librarians needed for secondary schools alone is 25,000 (with at least 100,000 more needed for elementary schools)." Astounding, isn't it? May I urge you to go back to your schools and use your charm, your talents, and your insights on a very vulnerable part of our society—the teenager!

UNC TO OFFER COURSE IN LAW LIBRARIANSHIP

The School of Library Science of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill will again offer the course in law librarianship during the first term of the 1966 Summer Session, June 9 - July 16. Intended for those who are preparing for careers as law librarians and for others who may now be working in law libraries, this course augments the curriculum in law librarianship which the School has been developing since 1958.

Following an introduction to the Anglo-American legal system, course content will be concerned with the objectives, characteristics, services and development of law libraries in the United States, special problems in the selection and acquisition of law materials and their organization for use, the administration of law library services, and law librarianship as a profession. The course will carry three semester hours' credit. Associate Professor Mary W. Oliver, Law Librarian, UNC, will be the instructor.

The course will be open to students enrolled for a graduate degree in librarianship at UNC or at other approved institutions, to those who already hold a professional degree in librarianship, and to others, as special students, with the permission of the instructor. Students who wish to receive graduate credit for the course must be admitted to the School of Library Science as graduate students. Tuition will be \$47 for North Carolina residents and \$117 for non-residents. Fees for room and board are additional.

Enrollment for the course will be limited, and applications to register for it must be submitted by May 1. Application forms and further information may be obtained from Miss Jean Freeman, Assistant to the Dean, School of Library Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C. 27515.

Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me, From mine own library with volumes that I prize above my dukedom.—Shakespeare, *Romeo & Juliet*