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# Public Libraries in the Lives of Young Readers: Past, Present and Future

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## Public Libraries in the Lives of Young Readers

*Past, Present, and Future*

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Youth services in public libraries have always been characterized by good intentions and commitment to patrons' personal choice: to select, to question, and to know. The public library has changed and grown since its Progressive Era beginnings, and the leadership for much of this change has come from youth services librarians in their work on behalf of young library users, whether this involves summer programming or digital media development. This chapter's three scholars bring a wealth of public library experience to this endeavor, as they describe the past, present, and future of public library service to young people in the United States and Canada.

For over a century, young people's literature has been a central focus of public library service to youth. In the past, youth services librarians' leadership in supporting and facilitating young people's reading and use of literature has focused on texts in the traditional print-on-paper

format. The young people of today and tomorrow will continue to read and connect with texts in traditional formats. However, with the rapid expansion and growth of electronic resources in the virtual online environment, young people are becoming "digital natives" who look

to online resources to meet their informational and recreational reading needs. The public library has taken a leadership role in facilitating overall public access to the internet and online resources.

Public library youth services have taken a similar leadership role in enabling young people to connect with literature as it exists in the online environment's virtual world. Although the actual and virtual worlds are increasingly intertwined, Part 1 of this chapter focuses on the history and foundational roles that the public library has played in facilitating young people's connections with literature. Part 2 focuses on the present and future worlds of young people's literacy and literature as resources in the virtual world of information-seeking and social networking, dubbed the "kid-blogsphere," are used, created, and directed by youth themselves.

## Part I: Public Libraries in the United States

Our discussion of the history and roles of U.S. public libraries begins with the numbers: There are more public libraries in the United States than McDonald's restaurants—16,604 public library buildings (Henderson et al., 2009, p. 4) compared to over 13,000 McDonald's outlets (McDonald's, 2008, p. 34). Managed by 9,214 administrative units, these 16,600 plus public library buildings are scattered across rural, suburban and urban areas in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Ninety-eight percent of all U.S. counties have at least one public library, and 97% of the American population has access to a public library. These public libraries are supported primarily through locally generated tax funds. The average total per capita (household) operating revenue for all public libraries was \$37.66 in FY 2007, the year for which we have the latest data. Of that, the majority, \$31.68, was from local sources, \$2.52 was from state sources, \$0.16 from federal sources, and \$3.29 from other sources such as private foundations (Henderson et al., 2009, p. 12).

The governance of each public library "takes place within the interlocking contexts of local, regional, state and national political jurisdictions" (McCook, 2004, p. 107). Eighty-five percent of public libraries are public agencies; the remainder (15%) is operated by nonprofit associations/agencies. The latter are privately controlled but meet the legal definition of a public library in the states in which they are located. Typically, public libraries are governed by elected or appointed citizen boards, commonly known as trustees, but there are also public libraries which are municipal departments or are governed by other elected or appointed boards.

Almost all public libraries offer collections and services for youth, and these services and collections are in continual use. In 2009 the American Library Association (ALA, 2009) reported "children are among the heaviest users of public-library resources" (p. 5). In the same report ALA cited a 2008 Harris Poll that found that 70% of the

respondents saw the public library as a family destination. The latest US Institute for Museum and Library Services survey of public libraries reports the circulation of children's materials was 739.7 million nationwide, or 34% of total public library circulation (Henderson et al., 2009). Children's programs account for 69% of all public programming offered by public libraries. Approximately 59 million children attended the over 2 billion children's programs in 2007. In a 2002 National Center for Education Statistics study, 66% of the households surveyed with children under 18, and 69% of households with a high school student, used a public library in the past year (Glander & Dam, 2007). Numbers are telling us that libraries both define their services as and produce the sustainable support for the literacy access, programming, and community engagement that youth seek. How did such an extensive system for literature circulation and literacy development come into existence?

## History and Development of Youth Services

Public library service to children began in the United States and in England in the 19th century, when both countries experienced the increased urbanization and industrialization brought by the Industrial Revolution. In addition, the United States experienced a large influx of immigrants whose labor was essential to the growing economy and whose assimilation was viewed as crucial to class harmony and national unity. These shifts led to compulsory public education, enhanced the value of childhood literacy, and led to an increase in books and periodicals designed specifically for young readers (Jenkins, 1994).

Early U.S. public libraries serving children existed in isolated instances in New England during the early 19th century, primarily as the result of gifts from wealthy individuals. For example, the founding of the Bingham Library for Youth in Salisbury, Connecticut, in 1803, was "the first instance in which a municipal governing body contributed active financial assistance to public library service" (Shera, 1949, p. 160). Thus, the first American public library, as the term is currently understood, was a library created specifically for young people. Thirty-one years later in 1834, the Peterborough, New Hampshire, Town Library was founded and became a far more well-known claimant to the "earliest public library" designation. Although the Peterborough library was for residents of all ages, Shera notes that more than half of its inaugural collection—approximately 200 books out of 370—were described as "the Juvenile Library," or books for young readers (pp. 64–65). Thus, from the very early years, children have been a significant constituent group of public library users.

Public library service to children as we know it today emerged during the Progressive Era, a time during which the first generation of professional child welfare advocates began supervising children's physical and moral

well-being within institutions like settlement houses, juvenile courts, public playgrounds, public health programs, and public libraries. Advances in higher education for women and waged work for middle-class women led to the development of female-intensive child welfare professions, including children's librarianship. The Anglo-American model of children's public librarianship, as created by the "first generation" of American children's librarians at the turn of the last century, was characterized by several essential elements: specialized collections, separate areas or rooms, specially trained personnel, and services designed to bring children and children's books together, all existing in a network of relationships with other child welfare agencies. This model has proved so durable it became an international standard for library service (Thomas, 1982).

However, despite its centrality within American public librarianship, service to children has been largely ignored in the profession's research agenda. Like many other activities involving children, and carried out primarily by women, library service to young people has been simultaneously revered and ignored (Jenkins, 2000, p. 104). Librarians gather and report quantitative data on youth services (circulation of children's materials, in-library use of children's materials, children's program attendance, etc.), but research utilizing qualitative or mixed methods to investigate research questions is still less common.

## What Happens in Public Libraries?

What happens for children and teens in public libraries? Pretty much everything from homework help to story hour to craft programs to video game contests. Authors visit. Musical groups perform. Parents select books, records, and DVDs with their children. Or children and teens come in alone to read magazines, access the Internet, check out materials, ask questions of staff, meet and work with or enjoy their friends. Teens put on programs and serve as Advisory Board members. Librarians and other library staff advise and assist the children and teens. Through their collections and all these activities, collectively called "services," public libraries encourage children and teens to connect with books. Both collections and services are developed in response to one core principle: personal choice.

Walter (2010) identifies six principles and values derived from over 100 years of the practice of public library youth services:

1. Reading good books contributes to a good life.
2. Readers' advisory services, storytelling and booktalks are the key strategies for promoting reading.
3. The individual child is the primary user of children's library service.
4. The library children's room is an integral element in library service to children.

5. Children's librarians are the appropriate specialists who can best deliver library service to children.
6. Children's librarians are advocates for library service to children. (pp. 22–23)

Walter (2010) further identifies two themes that have emerged more recently: (a) Libraries provide children with information as well as pleasure, and (b) Library service to children can be optimized through partnerships and collaborations (p. 23). In the same review, she also identifies two themes that have "waxed and waned" over the years depending on views of the social role of the public library and current conditions: (a) library use is a civic activity, and (b) Americans and American libraries have a responsibility to look beyond their borders and to adopt a global perspective (p. 23). All of these themes to varying degrees are present in the six core public library youth services functions we will discuss for the remainder of this chapter.

**An Aside: Public Library and School Library Practices**  
Before continuing with this section on public libraries, it is important to clarify the distinction between public and school library services and practices. Natalie Reif Ziarnik's (2003) *School & Public Libraries: Developing the Natural Alliance* offers a comparison of the strengths of both facilities. Ziarnik recognizes, for example, the differences in guidance related to youth and adults: School libraries offer frequent librarian-teacher interaction while public libraries offer frequent librarian-parent interaction. The categories of difference most significant for understanding a youth perspective, we believe, have to do with the relationship between learning and community engagement that school and public libraries offer.

School libraries tie literacy skills to daily schoolwork and the library collection and instruction are strongly connected to a school district's specific educational goals. In contrast to, (and increasingly in concert with) school libraries, public libraries encourage self-directed learning and discovery, opportunities to witness modeling of library use by people of all ages, and a library collection and programs that are strongly connected to a local community's needs.

## Six Core Functions of Youth Services Librarianship

There are six core functions common to youth services librarianship: collection development, reader advisory service, reference service, summer reading program, year-round programming, and space. At the basis of everything that youth services librarians do is the evaluation of books and other materials to provide collections chosen to reflect the community and a particular philosophy about children's and teens' reading. This philosophy is typically stated in a collection development policy approved by the library's board of trustees or other governing body. Librarians generally refer to this process as book selection or collection development.

The second core youth services function is called read-

ers' advisory services. Librarians and other staff members advise children and teens, their caregivers and other adults, on books that will meet specific reading needs or on other materials that will be of interest to the individual library user. They may do this through one-on-one encounters, or by producing reading lists and guides, displays, etc., either in the library, on the web, or in some community venue.

Youth services librarians and other staff also answer informational questions, a function termed "reference service." This may be done in the library, over the phone or via the Internet through email or chat. Both advisory and reference questions may be motivated by the child's or teen's personal interests (self-generated) or come from an external agent (imposed queries) such as a teacher (Gross, 2006).

Almost every public library offers a summer reading program, a series of enrichment activities, often with small rewards built in, designed to keep children reading during the summer vacation from school and thereby lower "summer learning loss." In addition to the summer reading program, library staff develop programs throughout the year respond to the specific needs and interests of the age range they serve. The purpose of these programs, which include storytelling, craft activities, baby lapsit programs, booktalks, etc., is to promote reading and encourage library use. Finally, the spaces set aside in public libraries for children and teens are important community resources for youth in and of themselves.

In addition to these six core functions, many public libraries develop specialized programs such as homework assistance, support for home schooling, and parent or teacher resource centers. More and more public libraries are also engaged in teaching information literacy, computer and library use. As Walter (2010) notes, this instruction may take place informally (in contrast with the formal programs offered by school libraries), but is a conscious concern for public library youth service librarians.

### **Collection Development**

Children's literature scholar Anne Pellowski (1968) notes "the history of U.S. children's libraries cannot be separated from that of children's literature" (p. 391). Collections predate the other elements of youth services librarianship, and the librarians' knowledge of the books and other materials in their collections is the bedrock of expertise upon which the profession rests.

Young people have varying needs based on age, ability, educational needs, and reading interests. Building and maintaining relevant collections to meet the needs of young library users is one of the key missions of the youth services librarian. Librarians receive guidance in their selection decisions from the library's collection development policy which will reflect the mission of the library; outline the types of materials that will be available and general selection criteria; and provide guidance for dealing with challenges to library materials, with materials that are

worn or outdated, with materials that come to the library as gifts, and so on (Cerny, Markey, & Williams, 2006).

The librarian makes decisions based on reviews, reader requests, community needs, and other criteria that go into creating a collection that reflects the information and recreational reading needs and interests. Books are evaluated for their individual value, their value in relationship to other materials in the collection, and for their potential for use by library users. The goal is "a balanced collection" that includes a range of subjects and a range of points of view (Walter, 2001, p. 23). As stated in ALA's (1999) treatise, "Libraries: An American Value": "We celebrate and preserve our democratic society by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas, so that all individuals have the opportunity to become lifelong learners—informed, literate, educated, and culturally enriched."

Among the many considerations for librarians as they develop their collections is the age-old debate between quality and popularity. On the one hand, there are the high-minded aims of literature for children held by children's librarians of the past, as reflected in Walter de la Mare's oft-quoted "only the rarest of best in anything can be good enough for the young" (Silvey, 2004, p. xv). On the other hand, the popularity of mass-market series with many young readers is undeniable. In earlier days, libraries would have refused to purchase *Tom Swift and His Photo Telephone* (Appleton, 1912) or *Nancy's Mysterious Letter* (Keene, 1932). Collection policies have changed since then, however, and children's rooms will have whole shelving units containing full sets of series books arranged in numbered order.

Researchers have been asking specific and general questions about library collections for as long as there have been libraries. Fortunately, from the card catalogs of yesterday to the online catalogs of today, many questions about books and collections may be studied through the readily-available data found in these catalogs.

### **A Number of Questions**

For example, librarians use book reviews to make selection decisions. Indeed, at one time it was common for libraries to require at least two positive book reviews before a book was acquired for the collection. So what impact do reviews have on the collection development process? One factor is number of reviews a book receives. But what if the book receives negative reviews? Are they less likely to be added to library collections? This question was investigated by Judith Serebnick, (1981) who found that the more reviews a book received—whether they were positive or negative—the more likely it was to be added to the public library collection.

### **Readers' Advisory Services**

Joyce Sarricks' (2005) definition of reader advisory services was developed through her work with adults but



is equally applicable to work with children and teens: "A successful readers' advisory service is one in which knowledgeable, nonjudgmental staff help fiction and nonfiction readers with their leisure-reading needs" (p. 1). According to Walter (2001), "children's librarians have elevated readers' advisory, or reading guidance, almost to an art form," (p. 29) by melding knowledge of children's developmental stages and children's books so that the individual child finds a book perfect for him or her, a book that is engaging and at the right reading level. This may be a book like another in pacing, plot, underlying emotional theme, setting, characterization or style, known as a "read alike." Or it may be a book on a personal passion like dinosaurs or Disney princesses (no other princesses will do) or a "good book," a "thin book," or an "easy book" to meet a school assignment.

Children's librarians practicing the art of readers' advisory make the connections between the book and the child, or the adult acting on behalf of the child. They learn when to push and when to pull back, when to just

leave a pile of books on the table for a child to examine with no pressure at all, when to reassure a child that it won't hurt their feelings if he or she doesn't take any of the books they recommended. They learn to know the "regulars" who gobble up books like popcorn and which children are still unsure of their reading skills or unconvinced about the pleasures of literature. They learn which parents worry about violence in children's stories and which ones need to be weaned from some limited understanding of the definition of a "classic." They learn which teachers will take a risk on a controversial new title and which ones cannot be budged from a very literal-minded, objective view of the world and the curriculum. They learn, too, if they are very good at this, to listen for the silent, "unasked" questions that children sometimes pose. Children don't formulate questions well, and they usually aren't aware of their own deepest and most important information needs. (Walter, 2001, p. 31)

Heather Booth (2008), author of the first book-length treatment of readers' advisory work for teens, sees that "many of the issues relevant to readers' advisory for children are also applicable to working with teens, such as the need to assess reading level, working with proxies (parents or caregivers), and the distinction between reading for recreation and reading for school" (p. 100). Angelina Benedetti (2001) admonishes that "before a librarian can become a successful reader's advisor for teens, he or she must have some connection to the literature published for young adults, to what teens actually read, and to the library's collection" (p. 239). Benedetti also points out that many U.S. public libraries have no designated Young Adult or Teen Librarian, and if they do, that person or persons are not always available, so reader advisory work with teens is more likely to be done by a librarian with another age specialty or someone who is a generalist.

Booth (2007) also reminds librarians that:

readers' advisory for teenagers differs from readers' advisory

for adults not just in the selection of materials that we offer but also in the manner in which we conduct ourselves. Whereas an easy rapport may form between two adults discussing a book, we must remain aware that because teens most often encounter adults as teachers, parents, or supervisors, they may be caught off guard or surprised by our usual manner, be it poised professionalism or more laid-back joviality. (p. 28)

In readers' advisory work with both children and young adults, as in reference service, librarians deal with the issues of "imposed queries" and "proxy inquiries." In her review of children and young adult readers' advisory services, Jessica Moyer (2008) notes that librarianship tends to draw on the literature of education for research on reading. Because of the high value placed on personal choice in public librarianship, youth librarians have embraced as their own *The Power of Reading* by Stephen Krashen (2004). With his emphasis on choice and reading for enjoyment, known in educational circles as "Free Voluntary Reading," Krashen justifies and affirms what public librarians have been doing for years and provides a guide to understanding and translating the educational research into public library practice.

Because of the reliance on education research, public youth services have "only a limited amount of research... conducted on how youth services and young adult librarians provide readers' advisory for their patrons" (Moyer, 2008, p. 77). Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer (2006) reviewed the education research from a library perspective in *Reading Matters*. They point out that "The research... indicates that pleasure and free choice are both key elements in the making of readers.... With their large collections of books and magazines and newspapers that are free to all, promoting leisure reading for all ages is a role that public libraries are ideally suited to fill" (p. 7). Despite the paucity of research on youth reader advisory services, youth services librarians have been talking and writing at the practice level about "getting the right book for the right reader at the right time" since the beginning of public libraries and this is a fruitful area for further examination.

### Reference Service

The informational needs of youth were not given much attention in public library youth services literature and research until the 1990s despite the fact that youth librarians have been building reference collections and answering informational questions for years. Reichel's (1991) book, *Reference Services for Children and Young Adults*, marks a sharpened focus on meeting the informational needs of children and the articulation of techniques for doing this akin to those developed in the larger literature of reference service to adults. In a later analysis of reference services, Walter (2001) contends that children "ask for more help at the library reference desk than grownups do" (p. 29) and further notes that "the conventional wisdom is that most

children making use of public library reference services today are there for homework purposes” (p. 31). In offering practical advice for public library staff not trained to work with children, Steele (2001) posits that the “people skills” and “professional expertise” needed to work with youth and adults are the same. “Good reference service to children differs only slightly in approach and communication” (p. 12). But these services are more complex than Steele suggests.

The nature of children and childhood, teens and adolescence, adds complexity to the already complex communication process known as the “reference interview,” the questioning approach librarians use to assist library users in person, over the phone or online, and to meeting the information needs of youth. Working with British youth, Shenton (2007) found five reasons why children and teens failed to find the information they needed: (a) need-source mismatch or inappropriate source, (b) knowledge deficiency or inability to formulate a search based on lack of knowledge, (c) skill shortcomings, (d) psychological barriers such as being overwhelmed, and (e) social unease and inhibition that makes it difficult for the child to approach an adult (pp. 328–342). Shenton particularly emphasizes the psychological dimension in developing strategies for assisting young people to find information.

Jones, Gorman, and Suellentrop (2004) take a similar approach to teens in their practical advice manual: “[D]evelopmental tasks play a huge role. The self-consciousness of YAs (young adults) is a major barrier; after all, a reference question is admission of not knowing a particular element” (p. 78). Focusing on electronic resources, Druin (2005) notes, “Today’s digital landscape can also be problematic for young people. Children see the world differently than adults; they have very different needs for technology and are quite diverse in their abilities, even in the age span of a few short years” (p. 173).

Also complicating the youth reference process are what Gross (2006) terms “imposed queries,” when a child’s information need is generated externally, typically a school assignment, and “double imposed inquiries” when a parent seeks information on behalf of his or her child, again typically for an assignment. Gross distinguishes these queries from “self-generated queries” where a child’s or teen’s personal interests motivate the question. Shenton (2007) found that for both “older and younger informants when information was being sought on matters of personal interest” (self-generated queries) the results were “markedly more effective” than for the imposed queries (p. 352). In discussing “double imposed inquiries” from a practical perspective, Jones et al. (2004) acknowledge that

almost universally, the one type of patron loathed by many librarians, is the parent doing research for their child.... Often the parent will come in with the child, but the parent will do all the talking. Focus your eyes on the student and ask him or her the follow-up questions, because that is who will help you complete the reference transaction. (p. 345)

Youth needs for school related assistance are not new. Mediavilla (2001) notes that as “early as 1898...Linda Anne Eastman admonished that (for public librarians) one of the requisites for working successfully with children was a thorough knowledge of the school’s curriculum” (p. vii). Public library youth service literature is full of tips for working with teachers and school librarians to get information about homework assignments. Many public libraries have set up “homework centers,” programs “dedicated to meet the curricular needs of students by providing: staff or volunteers who are trained to assist students with their homework, space designated for student use during specific days and times, and a multiformat collection of materials related to the curricular needs of students” (p. x). To this must be added web-based services typically made available to a public library’s constituency through a contract with a commercial service such as Tutor.com. (Tutor.com, 2010). However, as Walter and Mediavilla (2005) found, there are significant limitations in these contract services when judged using the standards for effective reference service.

Research in the area of public library youth reference service and youth information needs has been steadily underway since the publication of Reichel’s (1991) groundbreaking book on reference service to youth. Chelton and Cool (2004, 2007) have ably charted this growing research agenda in their two editions of *Youth Information-Seeking Behavior*. The 2005 issue of *Library Trends*, edited by Druin, focuses on Children’s Access and Use of Digital Resources, an important area of research in youth reference service. This is an area where significant work can be done on the information needs of children and teens at various developmental stages, effective communication strategies for helping children and teens articulate those needs and develop successful search strategies, and appropriate resources and services to meet these needs.

### **Summer Reading Programs**

Summer reading programs have been a core public library function almost since the inception of youth services in the late 19th century. Carolyn Hewins, a pioneer of youth services, for example, began a summer program of book talks at the Hartford Public Library in 1898 (Locke, 1988). A similar program at the Cleveland Public Library included a letter to teachers from the library director, lists of books read during the summer, and bookmarks with suggested titles (Eastman, 1897; The library in vacation days, 1898). The purpose of these early programs was to encourage children to use the library, read during the summer, and develop a lifelong habit of reading. And this purpose has remained remarkably consistent over the past 110 years. However, public librarians now emphasize educational benefits and cite research on summer learning to justify the programs (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Today 95% of all public libraries offer some sort of

Summer Reading Program (National Center, 1995). This program is such a hallmark of American public library youth services and requires such a high level of planning and commitment from the youth services staff that we believe it to be a core function separate from the broader year-round programming function in public libraries. In his handbook on public library youth services, Sullivan (2005) characterizes the Summer Reading Program as “the most intensive period of activity for children’s services, and for the library as a whole” (p. 166). In many public libraries the Summer Reading Program has spread from children to teens and in some libraries includes adults as an audience.

Walter (2001) identifies three typical elements of the Summer Reading Program: theme, reading incentives, and programming. We believe that partnerships have also become a key element of successful summer reading programs. While many libraries carry out their functions on their own, partnerships and collaboration are increasingly essential to serving children and teens in a community setting. Walter (2010) identifies two reasons that collaboration will continue to be of importance to youth services librarians: (a) the funding climate and (b) the fact that these librarians “are still passionate advocates and missionaries who believe so strongly in the importance of their work that they will usually leap at any opportunity to develop alliances to spread the good word” (p. 47).

The Summer Reading Program theme may be locally generated, developed at the state or consortia level, or purchased from a commercial outlet. The theme may generally promote books and reading such as the 1992 state of Missouri theme “Leap into Books” (Fiore, 1998, p. 150), connected to an event like the Olympics, or appealing to the current interests of children or teens such as the 1996 Florida state theme “Rhythm and Books — Feel the Beat!” (p. 54). A good theme gives a focus to what otherwise might be unconnected activities and also aids in publicity that preferably reflects the life of children who will participate.

The effort it takes to develop and support an annual Summer Reading Program, including designing and producing materials, has led many public libraries to work together. The Collaborative Summer Reading Program, a grassroots consortium of states, contracts with a vendor to produce materials and resources. Their children’s theme for 2010, with materials designed to prepare “children for continued success through the development of early language skills” is “Make a Splash — Read!” The teen theme with activities and materials designed to integrate “differentiated literacy activities to motivate young adults to read and discuss books” is “Make Waves at Your Library” (Collaborative summer reading program, n.d.).

Reading incentives or prizes for completing all or part of the Summer Reading Program are “a touchy issue” according to Sullivan (2005, p. 163). Those opposed to prizes generally believe that reading should not be competitive. Some are also opposed to the commercialization of the

Summer Reading Program. Sullivan argues that more reluctant readers will be attracted by prizes. Fiore (1998) suggests that “rather than thinking of incentives as prizes, think of them as another means of promoting” (p. 78) the Summer Reading Program. And Walter (2001) notes “most librarians now prefer to avoid the kind of competitive summer reading program that rewards the children who read the most books” (p. 34); thus many programs encourage participants to set their own goals relative to an overall completion goal. In addition, incentives can be tied to a community goal such as the “Read a Ton” program Sullivan (2005) describes, where books read were weighed to contribute to a community goal (p. 164).

Programmed activities during the Summer Reading Program may have several purposes according to Walter (2001): an end in itself, providing educational or cultural enrichment, motivation to read, or a means to generate publicity. Some programs suit all of these purposes. The 2006 Summer Reading Program partnership between the Chicago Public Library and the Field Museum of Natural History, called “Wrapped Up In Reading,” celebrated Ancient Egypt, highlighting the life of King Tut, and included a free visit to the Tut exhibition for the families of children who completed the program.

More and more, the successful Summer Reading Program for youth is characterized by community partnerships. Public library staff may visit classrooms or assemblies, materials for teachers and school librarians who will promote the program, work with school librarians and teachers on reading lists, inform principals of children and teens who complete the program, and meet with the local school parent organization (Minkel, 2003). Local business partners provide fiscal support for the program often in the form of incentives or prizes to motivate reading. Partnerships with other community organizations such as parks may take the program outside of the library building. Partnerships with local church and other youth groups provide readymade programs for these organizations.

Successful Summer Reading Programs for teens partner with the teens themselves. Jones et al. (2004) advise that “a summer reading program for YAs should allow participating teens to be directly involved in the creation of the program, providing an opportunity for teens to provide input during the developmental phase as well as during the program itself” (p. 230). They also identified five common characteristics of successful Summer Reading Programs for teens: (a) keep it simple, (b) make it possible for teens to get involved on many levels, (c3) allow free choice when it comes to selecting reading materials, (d) incorporate the Internet in some way, and (e) have great prizes that teens would enjoy (p. 230). Fiore (2005) also suggests the incorporation of online participation options in Summer Reading Programs for all ages of youth with online reading logs and reports and online incentives, making it possible to participate in the Summer Reading Program without coming to the physical library.



The key research question for all the Summer Reading Programs is how effective are they? Fiore reviews Summer Reading Program effectiveness research and public policy responses to summer learning issues through 2005; Shin and Krashen (2008) review the research from an education perspective but do acknowledge public libraries in *Summer Reading: Program and Evidence*. All research concludes that summer reading results in better achievement for students but there are significant differences based on how readily available reading material is for children and teens and how much their personal choice enters into reading.

In a frequently cited study of Pennsylvania public libraries, Celano and Neuman (2001) found that children who attend library summer programs spend significant amounts of time with books—a first step toward reading. These programs also encourage parents of these children to play greater roles in their child's literacy development—another factor leading to reading achievement. They conclude that, “children who attend library summer reading programs read significantly better than those children who attend a camp program, suggesting that time spent in the library significantly enhances children's reading achievement when compared to activities more purely recreational in nature” (p. 48).

Dominican University Graduate School of Library and Information Science (Dominican, 2009) is just completing Institute for Library and Museum Services funded research focusing on third and fourth graders addressing the question: “Do Public Library Summer Reading Programs Impact Student Achievement?” (IMLS National Leadership Grant). Preliminary findings indicate that Summer Reading Program participants, who are more likely to be girls, are engaged and active readers with books in the home and parents involved in their reading and other literacy activities. Despite research advances there remains a myriad of questions to be addressed about Summer Reading Program impact.

### **Year-Round Programming**

It is safe to say that the majority of the literature of public library youth services librarianship, whether monograph or periodical, consists of practical advice on, tips and guides to, and resources for programming. Unlike services such as reference and readers' advisory, which are available to individuals on demand, programs are typically scheduled events. Jones et al. (2004), in their essential “how-to-do-it” manual for teen service define programming as “a library-sponsored activity that takes place outside the context of reference service (and we would add readers' advisory service) and is designed to inform, entertain, or enrich users, as well as promote the use of the library and its collection. With teen users, put the accent on entertain and add the word ‘fun’” (p. 219).

Programming Skills is one of the seven Association for Library Service to Children 1999 Competencies for Librarians Serving Children and Youth. These skills are

broken down further to address public library children's services:

1. Designs, promotes, presents, and evaluates a variety of programs for children of all ages, based on their developmental needs and interests and the goals of the library.
2. Identifies and utilizes skilled resource people to present programs and information.
3. Provides library outreach programs, which meet community needs and library goals and objectives.
4. Establishes programs and services for parents, individuals and agencies providing childcare, and other professionals in the community who work with children.
5. Promotes library programs and services to underserved children and families. (Association, 1999)

In *Outstanding Library Service to Children: Putting the Core Competencies to Work*, the chapter on programming skills opens with this prideful statement: “Children's librarians in the public library do more original programming than their colleagues who serve other age groups, and they are well known both within the profession and among the general public for the skill sets behind the programming” (Cerny, Markey, & Williams, 2006, p. 50). In contrast, there is no specific set of programming competencies in the seven recently revised Young Adult Library Services Association (2010) *Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth*. Rather programming, as we have defined it, is integrated into: leadership and professionalism, communication, marketing and outreach, administration, and services. Children's librarians most often plan and deliver book programs on their own without significant input from their clientele, while teen librarians often seek to engage their clientele as programmers or through participation in advisory boards.

### **The Concept of Youth Development**

Year-round programming is designed to enrich and engage children and their parents and caregivers, and teens; to promote reading and library use; to provide free organized activities for individual teens, children and their families; and to market the library. This programming is often tied into cyclical events like holidays and sport seasons; known interests of children and teens like games, popular culture, hobbies, or continual areas of fascination like snakes; but can also be tied to community activities or celebrations, or current events. Sullivan (2005) divides programming into two categories: literature based programs that have reading at the core; (a) story hours, book discussion groups, and booktalking; (b) and non-literature based programs which “deal with ideas and information not directly tied to the printed word” (pp. 120–121) such as a fire truck demonstration or chess games. It should be noted that children's librarians will typically try to tie books to all non-literature based programs through indirect methods

like book displays and reading lists. Because of the scope of this volume, we will focus on three types of literature-based programming: storytelling, book discussion programs, and booktalking. While it is possible to offer all these three types of programs to teens, it is more likely that story telling or story hours are offered for younger children, and booktalking and book discussion to teens and tweens.

Walter (2001) notes that “there is probably less storytelling provided for school-age children than there once was” despite the fact that story times are conducted in 90% of all libraries. “Most of these are probably story hours for children under the age of five” with the focus on emergent literacy and infant brain development leading to an increasing emphasis on programs targeting infants and children under ages three to four, the traditional preschool story hour audience (pp. 36–37). Infant programs, sometimes known as “baby lapsit programs” include rhymes, songs, and physical activities and are viewed as a way of teaching parents how to interact with their babies as well as stimulating the children. Programs for toddlers and family groups are short and typically include a variety of activities: picture-book reading, flannel board stories, fingerplays, songs, nursery rhymes, and lots of audience participation. All of these programs are usually broadly based on a theme, as much for program promotion as program continuity.

Book Discussion groups are common for school-age children and teens. Sullivan (2005) cautions that the “composition of a book discussion group for children is more complicated than for adults” (p. 136). Among factors to consider in forming a group are: age-range, reading-level, gender, and whether adults are welcome or not. Jones et al. (2004) identified two types of book discussion groups for teens: (a) everybody reads the same book or (b) everybody reads what they want and discusses the story or genre their books share.

Sullivan (2005) defines Booktalking as standing “before people and telling them why they would want to read a book.... Booktalking is promotion, and especially with children, you must remember that you are not just promoting the book but also promoting reading in general” (p. 141). Writing for young adult librarians, Jones et al. (2004) define a book talk as “a paperback blurb as performance” and admonish “don’t tell, sell” (p. 167). Common types of booktalks according to Sullivan (2005) include: plot summary, character sketch, reading a vignette or dialog, author or media tie-in, or theme based; whereas Jones et al. (2004) suggest booktalks that focus on mood, plot, character and scene.

Walter (2010) notes that booktalks are more typically part of a program for children or teens rather than the whole program. She also notes the significance of booktalking titles while working with individuals in the library, what book sellers call hand selling, a function she sees as integral to reader advisory service.

As with the questions for Summer Reading Programs, all of this effort and engagement begs the question of impact. What works and what does not, according to what criteria?

### Space

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999) devotes a chapter of his landmark survey *The Great Good Place* to the problems of a society that segregates youth and does not provide appropriate spaces for them. In most communities, the public library and the parks are the only two public spaces open year round at little or no cost to all ages. People may think of the local mall, a favorite teen hangout place, as public space but it is not—it is privately owned and operated. Those walking the mall hallways do not necessarily have the same rights as those walking a sidewalk or park pathway. As Oldenburg points out, the mall as shared space also implies a culture of consumerism. While there are often fees for park programs, especially summer activities, this is generally not true for use of the public library or most public library programs. The concept of the public library as a public space, “a great good place” is an increasingly important concept even in the virtual age. In the influential analysis *Better Together*, Putnam and Feldstein (2003) characterize public libraries as “third spaces” not work or school, not home, where people can spend time together. This is true for all ages but particularly true for children and teens who do not have the options adults have for other “third spaces.”

The Harris Interactive Poll of 8- to 18-year-olds (2007) identified two place/space-related variables which impact public library use: 38% of the respondents said they would use the public library more often if “it was closer to where I live,” and, 22% indicated they would use it if “the library had a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere.” Four of the nine responses in the same poll to the question “what do you go to the library for?” were related to space use: 34% go to the library to read, 26% to study, 20% go for events, and 18% go to hang out with friends.

Librarians have always attended to space: “From the beginning, the children’s room was intended to send a clear message to children: this is your space” (Walter, 2010, p. 32). “The children’s corner of the 1890s, specially fitted with low tables and chairs, was replaced in theory and in practice by completely separate reading rooms for children by 1900” (Van Slyke, 1995, p. 176). This clear territorial message is also true of any space set aside for teens after the opening of the first room for young adult adults at the Cleveland Public Library in 1925. “A teen space sends a message, if done right, that ‘this is not your father’s library’ by blowing away the stereotypes of libraries, and librarians, by presenting a fresh, fun, and flexible environment” (Jones et al., 2004, p. 254).

For early childhood areas, “size, scale, and access dominate the discussion of the physical environment from the perspective of safety and from the way features

communicate encouragement and welcome” (Feinberg, Kuchner, & Feldman, 1998, p. 31), but this is also true for all ages. Furniture and shelving appropriate to the age level and a welcoming atmosphere are essential parts of the entire children’s room or teen space. Today, this space must accommodate the solitary reader, computer users, group study and assignment needs, children with parents or caregivers or teens with their friends, as well as youth who are at the library because there is no adult at home or they have nowhere else to go.

For children, Walter (2010) identifies three trends that are changing the way we think about library space for children: homework centers, renewed emphasis on early literacy and the library as a destination place like Disneyland. Feinburg et al. (1998) identify the need for active learning in the public library, especially for young children, and encourage the development of family centered and developmentally appropriate spaces where children and their caregivers can learn and interact together. Walter and Meyers (2003) suggest the use of the architect W.G. Clark’s views on physical space, cultural space, and spiritual space when thinking about teen places in the public library. Library building design expert Nolan Lushington (2008) reviews trends in youth services spaces for children with some reference to teens and provides an annotated list of readings on the topic in *Libraries Designed for Kids*.

In a White Paper for the American Library Association’s Young Adult Library Services Association, Bolan (2008) reports “a transformation in library facility design for teenagers” with renewed emphasis on teen space because of increasing use.

This reevaluation of priorities is supported by the fact that kids are not only using the library, they are visiting frequently. Seventy-eight percent of children ages 8 to 18 have library cards.... According to the Public Agenda in June 2006, three-quarters of Americans believe it is a high priority for local public libraries to offer a safe place where teenagers can study and congregate. Equally relevant is the Harris poll response to the question, “I would use my local public library more often if...? Twenty-six percent of the respondents replied, “If there was a space just for teens.” (p. 136)

Bolan (2008), like Walter and Meyers (2003), advocates for young adult involvement in all phases of planning and developing teen space. She argues further “the ratio of teen area to the overall library should be equal to the ratio of the teen population of that community to the overall population of that community” (p. 137). This is not the case in most American public libraries.

For many children, teens and their parents, the public library is viewed as a “safe place.” Some children and teens are routinely told to go to the library after school or on weekends because there is no adult at home. The needs of these children or teens may become a major issue for library staff, but many libraries have developed programs to meet the needs of these youth and policies to aid staff in working with them. There is also a creative tension

between keeping order in space for youth and their free and creative use of this space. Maintaining that balance through space utilization and appropriate staffing is essential to the public library as a “safe space.”

## Conclusion

In 2001 Virginia A. Walter called for addressing two research needs in public library youth service. “One is the codification of best practices in our field. We need more than anecdotal evidence and common sense to determine what works and what doesn’t. The second need is for tangible evidence of the outcome of our work” (p. 120). Although more progress has been made on the codification agenda than on the outcome agenda, both agendas are still relevant today. A later summary of research (Walter, 2003) on public library services for children and teens recognized four “significant and unanswered questions: (a) How have public library services to children and young adults developed over time? (b) How and why do young people use the public library? (c) How can we evaluate the effectiveness of public library service to young people? (d) Why should policy makers fund public library services for children and young adults?” (p. 572). Despite some progress, particularly in the area of historical studies and youth information seeking, these questions remain relevant to the development of a research agenda for public library service to children and young adults. Added to this agenda will be studies on the changing use of online and digital media services, which have altered the access, roles, and guidance youth seek in public libraries.

## Part II: Youth, Literature, Public Libraries, and the Kid-Blogosphere

In recent years, some librarians have moved their advocacy for young people’s literature and for young readers to a variety of online venues. In a chapter that examines the ways that public libraries and librarians support children and young adults as readers, we would be remiss to neglect the webs of influence and advocacy that comprise the “kitlitosphere” (Bird, 2007) on the World Wide Web. From early awareness of the utility of the multimedia online platforms for promoting children’s and young adults’ literature to “live” play-by-play online updates of major awards ceremonies, children’s and youth services librarians appear to have been early and ongoing adopters of interactive internet tools such as blogs, wikis, video-hosting sites, and popular online social networking sites such as Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. In articles published in the professional literature, readers were urged to learn more about these new online tools to investigate new opportunities for working with young people and to promote library materials and services.

Given how ubiquitous and pervasive such tools are today Agosto and Abbas (2009) remind us that sites like



Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook are quite recent entities, established in 2002, 2003, and 2004, respectively. Youth services librarians were among the first in the library world to herald the value of online journals and blogs. For example, Sara Ryan (2002) wrote a short article in *Voice of Youth Advocates* (VOYA) about the value of new online journal and blog hosting sites, allowing teens to connect with others through public writing. In another article published in 2002, this time in *Teacher-Librarian*, Clyde provided concise definitions and samples of relevant weblogs as she introduced the technology and its possibilities to school librarians. It is worth noting that in 2002, Clyde was unable to identify any school libraries that were using blogging software, however by 2009, Agosto and Abbas were able to report that “there were more than five hundred Facebook search results with ‘public library’ in the page name” and that a search “using the keywords ‘public library’ did return 62,000 pages with the phrase included somewhere in the page content” (p. 34). In the span of just a few years, there would seem to be evidence of an impressive attempt to embed libraries into the social networking landscape.

While empirical research on the uptake and effects of the use of such tools in terms of reading promotion is scarce, it is, nevertheless, possible to identify four important trends in the online world of children’s and young adult literature and librarianship: an energetic renaissance in reviewing of and writing about children’s and young adults’ literature spurring online book discussions that cross multiple populations including young people, librarians, authors and illustrators and book industry professionals; digital libraries and the rise of electronic books; interactive sections of more traditional library websites for children and teens including digital booktalks, book trailers, and interactive spaces for youth reviewers and bloggers; and online awards competitions.

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of online promotion of children’s and young adult literature concerns the rise of review websites and blogs that feature a range of library materials although with a clear emphasis on novels and picture books. There are now a number of bloggers who have made reputations as discerning writers and reviewers and who have a wide and growing readership. Publishers took notice of these renegade, non-affiliated reviewers as concern mounted about the effects that unsolicited, unedited, non-filtered reviews could have in terms of marketing and readership (see Bird, 2009, on challenges and tensions associated with this kind of extra-professional work). Professional divisions such as the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC) also responded to the growing online reviewing practices among its members by implementing policies directly related to the online writing practices of its members: for example, by curtailing reviews of award nominees and contenders (Bird, 2007).

For librarians responsible for collecting children’s

and young adults literature for library collections and for promoting it to library users, there are several other online modes for professional awareness and development aside from blogs. Interactive and collaborative wikis, designed for use with multiple writers and editors are another way that librarians are developing their professional competencies related to children’s and young adult’s literature. For example, the Child Lit Wiki and Book Recommendation Engine (Berman, 2010) invites any user to write and submit book reviews following posted reviewing guidelines. The Children’s Literature Web Guide, a collaborative project of the University of Calgary similarly invites reader-generated additions to a number of categories related to children’s literature including awards, other web guides and book lists, illustrator and author resources and more. The Association for Library Services to Children and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), divisions of the American Library Association, both maintain open wikis for its members and other interested users.

While online fora devoted to children’s literature discussion have grown and diversified in recent years to include blogs and wikis, Facebook and MySpace, notable online antecedents are still active. To name just two examples, PUBYAC (Public Libraries Young Adults and Children) and Child\_Lit are listservs that were established in 1997 and 1993, respectively, and for over 15 years, both have constituted active, informative, and collegial venues for hundreds of subscribers for discussions about children’s literature. However, as blogging advocates will point out (Beaman, 2006), the new online technologies permit a wider readership, reaching people who may not subscribe to more esoteric or professional listservs—children, teens, parents, and those not directly connected to the children’s book industry.

The International Children’s Digital Library (<http://childrenslibrary.org>) is one of the most exemplary digital collections of children’s materials designed for a wide audience of child readers with ongoing attention to both ease and openness of access (see Collen, 2006, for a review of a recent study using ICDL with children). However, digital and multimedia materials for children and teens are being integrated into the most traditional library collections of printed and bound books. Public libraries offer a spectrum of multimedia stories from telephone-based story times for very young children to streaming story videos. For example, in one of her regular *American Libraries* columns Jennifer Burek Pierce (2007) features Tumblebooks and Tumblereadables from an electronic children’s book service that sells subscriptions to public libraries, but allows library card-free access to young people. Electronic books have been on the children and young adult’s literature scene for a number of years but with advances in the design, functioning and portability of digital readers we can expect continued interest in developing e-book access for young people through public library collections.



As public librarians continue to explore the viability of electronic and digital collections for children and teens, there is evidence that library websites are integrating more and more interactive online content for young people as well. Online homework help centers for young people have been offered by public libraries for several years, sites that guide students to useful library resources and to tutorials on how to use them, along with online reference services. However, newer modes of online engagement with children's and young adult literature are supported on library websites as well. Digital booktalks and booktrailers can support multiple literacy skills and reading enjoyment among young people who produce and view them.

In fact, researchers Gunter and Kenny (2008) have found that the production of video booktalks can play a positive role in changing attitudes towards reading among reluctant youth readers. Several public librarians now work with teen patrons on digital booktalks, posting the products of this kind of programming to video hosting sites like YouTube and Google Video. YALSA hosts its own video channel at bliptv (see <http://yalsa.bliptv>) featuring a range of videos including award-winning booktalks of young adult titles. Digital and audio booktalks are just one type of interactive online activity; many public libraries now also dedicate a portion of their library webpages to creating interactive spaces for youth patrons giving them a forum for reviews, feedback, and commentary of library issues and events of interest to them. These spaces can be links to Facebook and MySpace pages or to blogs that feature teen input. For example, Seattle Public Library maintains a teen-run blog, accessible from their homepage called "Push to Talk," along with online homework help and an online newsletter for teens (Seattle Public Library, 2010). Online book discussion groups for young people are gaining ground as well with invitation for youth participants announced on library website homepages. Paulette Stewart (2009) provides a detailed account of one teacher-librarian's experience of developing a virtual reading group with teenagers, reporting on an increased degree of engagement among participants.

In general, we are witnessing a consolidation of established library practices in the online world of children's and young adult's literature, strengthening already existing connections and forging new ones among librarians, authors, illustrators, publishers and young readers and their advocates. Nowhere do we see this more clearly than with the online evaluation related to awards for children's and young adults' materials. In 2006, the Children's and Young Adult Bloggers' Literary Awards (Cybils) was established; it is a singular new award for children's and young adult materials voted on by children's literature bloggers ("There's a new award" 2008; Cybils). Nominations are taken from anyone who submits titles, and then a second round of judging occurs among assigned bloggers who evaluate the short list of finalists to arrive at a winner. Although the Cybils is the only award to date that oper-

ates entirely online, other awards are capitalizing on the interactive engagement made possible with online tools. For example, the Forest of Reading and Festival of Trees comprise the Ontario Library Association's very popular literacy initiative and readers' choice awards. By visiting the association's website, young readers are able to interact with other readers and with authors as well as read online previews of chapters of nominated titles (Ontario Library Association, 2010).

The establishment of the Newbery Medal signaled the arrival of children's literature as a distinct and identifiable presence within the larger field of literature. It also signaled the arrival of children's librarians as those uniquely qualified to determine the year's "most distinguished contribution to children's literature." The Cybil Awards, likewise, signal young people as uniquely qualified to judge their own literature. We are currently witnessing a consolidation of established library practices in the online world of children's and young adult's literature, strengthening already existing connections and forging new ones among librarians, authors, illustrators, publishers and young readers and their advocates.

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