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Developing a University Children's Collection for Pre-Service Teachers Using PLACID

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Abstract

Not all academic librarians who oversee children's collections for pre-service teachers have backgrounds in K-12 education. To develop a robust collection, the St. Cloud State University library reached out to an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Development to help weed their children's literature collection and recommend new titles because of their dual expertise with both libraries and schools. This commentary paper will outline the development of a children's collection for pre-service teachers from the perspective of a faculty member with school library media expertise using an acronym they have deemed as PLACID: Pleasure, Levels, Awards, Curriculum, Illustrations, Diversity.

Key words: children's literature, pre-service teachers, library collections, diverse literature, PLACID

Introduction

As a faculty member of at St. Cloud State (SCSU), a regional comprehensive university, my role and relationship to academic libraries is unique. I am the Graduate Director of the School Library Media Program within the Department of Teacher Development. My main focus is to train candidates who will serve as teacher librarians in K-12 school library settings. Prior to my career in higher education, I spent 11 years working as an elementary school librarian. I selected and weeded materials as well as recommended books to students. I currently teach courses about the selection and evaluation as well **as reading, viewing, and listening** guidance of resources and materials both for elementary and young adult audiences. Due to my background with juvenile literature, the university library where I worked asked me to help analyze their collection and then make recommendations for de-selection and acquisition.

Approximately 30,500 books are included in the juvenile collection at SCSU. Books are arranged using the Library of Congress classification system. The collection contains both fiction and non-fiction materials. No other materials, such as ebooks or educational manipulatives, were included in my collection analysis. There is one special collection of over 600 books housed within the juvenile collection which contain books for children that address the topic of disability.

In order to analyze the collection, the acronym MUSTIE was utilized. MUSTIE stands for Misleading, Ugly, Superseded, Trivial, Irrelevant, Elsewhere when considering the deselection of materials from a library. It was developed by Texas State Library and Archives' CREW (Larson 2008).

- Each book in the juvenile collection was examined carefully to determine if the information was "misleading". Some critical questions included *How are people groups represented in the text and through images and photographs? Is the book objective?*

- The appearance ("ugly") of the book was also considered. *Is the binding still intact? Does the book smell? Has the book been rebound or repaired? Are the images and language used dated or current?*

- Currency ("superseded") was also a factor.

- "Triviality" and "irrelevancy" were contemplated especially when books focused on trends that were popular for only a short time and are no longer prominent. *Would the audience today find this topic meaningful? Is it topic still important in today's society?*

- Finally, "elsewhere" is an important factor to consider when analyzing collections. With limited budgets, materials that are de-selected cannot always be replaced with a current substitution. Some questions to consider are: *Is this information available online? Is this information available from another library that could be loaned to a patron if needed?*

MUSTIE is a useful acronym that can be applied to collections on virtually any subject. It was helpful in my analysis; however, it did not address the unique needs of this collection. The primary users of the juvenile collection at SCSU are not the children for whom the books are written, rather those who will be teaching children in early childhood and K-12 school settings. That is to say, pre-service teacher candidates are the primary patrons. An additional acronym must be applied when analyzing collections of this nature which takes into account the educational context. After analyzing the juvenile collection at SCSU, I would like to introduce and describe another acronym for collection analysis that I have called PLACID. PLACID

stands for Pleasure, Levels, Awards, Curriculum, Illustrations, Diversity. A detailed description of each component along with support from professional literature follows.

Pleasure

Could this book be recommended by educators to children or young adults for pleasure reading? It is well known that reading for pleasure supports academic achievement (Parry and Taylor 2018; Torppa et al. 2018). Reading for pleasure also encourages independent reading and supports childhood literacy (Miller 2014). The work of Wilhem and Smith (2016) suggests that teenagers who read novels of their choice, experience higher levels of engagement, development, and specific kinds of joy in their reading. Realizing reading's many benefits, it is important to foster free reading time at school and within the school library (Woolls and Coatney 2018).

When considering university level collection development for pre-service teachers, future educators and teacher candidates need access to a wealth of quality, popular literature which they can place into the hands of children and teenagers who are developing a love for life-long reading. Books in your collection should include the following characteristics:

- Popular authors: retail spaces, best seller lists, and books made into movies are good indicators of who is in vogue.

- Complete and popular series: Collections that only contain a few books in a series are incomplete. Analyze your collection for missing titles. School library retailers such as Follet and Mackin maintain lists of recent publications within a series.

- Graphic and illustrated novels: Kids and teens love this format! There is a large variety to choose from including comics, historical fiction, and classic literature. Graphic and

illustrated novels are not as simple as they may first appear. Graphic novels contain a variety of media within them: pictures, graphics, texts, headings etc. which can be complex and beneficial for readers to experience (Smith and Pole 2018).

- Genre variety: Public librarian, reading enthusiast, speaker and author Nancy Pearl (2012) describes how readers enter stories through four doorways on her website, "story, character, setting, and language." Collections need to include a variety of fiction and non-fiction materials so that teacher candidates can get a sense of how the readers in their classrooms might engage with the books they are reading.

Levels

Does the book contribute to a collection that has materials available at various reading levels? Children must have access to books within their zone of proximal development. It is common practice within schools and school libraries to include the Lexile level of a book both with the school's catalog and on the spine of the book. Kachka (2012) explains that a Lexile measures how challenging a text may be to a reader. Readability is based on sentence length and a count of how many times a word appears within a text. The Lexile measure of a text ranges from 200-800, but do not necessarily correspond with a reader's grade level in school. The professional literature on this topic **appreciates the inclusion of other points of view** towards the use of Lexile measures, both in terms of steering children towards books based on their reading ability and the decision whether or not to organize collections based the level of a book's difficulty (Moreillon 2013; Forcht 2012; Grigsby 2014; Kachka, 2012).

Some practitioners believe Lexile levels can be one useful tool when used in concert with others to help guide teachers and students towards developmentally appropriate materials; Lexiles can also be helpful with collection analysis (Kachka, 2012). Others raise the concern that a book with a certain reading level may not indicate developmental appropriateness on its' own. Moreillon (2013) gives the example of *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak which measures at a 730 Lexile. This indicates a reading level of difficulty for upper elementary readers. The book, however, was originally written for an adult audience and contains mature themes of the Holocaust. Grigsby (2014) raises the comparison between *The Porky Little Puppy*, a Golden Book Classic by Janette Sebring Lowrey and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple.* Both books have very similar Lexile levels but are not comparable in their intended audiences. Still others, like Frocht (2012) raise the concern that directing students towards books with a specific reading level may hinder their love of reading.

University collections tend not to label their books with Lexile levels on the spine and may not include a Lexile level within the book's cataloging record. When developing a juvenile collection for pre-service teacher candidates, consider the following suggestions:

- Purchase books for your juvenile collections with a wide range of Lexile measures. Teacher candidates will encounter students with various reading abilities in their future classrooms. Even if school collections are not organized based on reading level, it is still helpful for pre-service teacher candidates and student teachers to have access to a wide range of texts, so they get a sense of the differences of reading difficulty within fiction and non-fiction materials.

- Include Lexile measures within your online catalog records so that they are searchable by patrons. This will allow pre-service teachers and student teachers to view developmentally appropriate materials without the collection having to be relabeled.

- Connect with your literacy professors to identify if they teach about leveled books and Lexile levels within their curriculum. Determine if it would be helpful for a section of the juvenile collection within the university library to be organized by reading level in order to support the instruction within pedagogy courses.

Awards

Has the book won an award either from the ALA or at the state level? The awards given annually from the American Library Association (ALA) are an essential starting point to include in a collection. Several states have youth reading awards for both elementary and middle school students who read nominated books and vote for the winner. Future teachers who are aware of these awards can use them as vehicles to help promote literacy and support common core standards in their classrooms and schools (Lamb and Johnson 2008; Giorgis 2013; MacKay, Ricks, and Young 2017). When building your collections to include award-winning books, consider the following:

- Research what children and YA Awards are specific to your state. A complete list can be found at this site: https://cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit-resources/read/awards/stateawards/ Many states have advisory boards and are in need of people to read books each year and make recommendations for nominees.

- Make it a priority to purchase all of the ALA books that have been nominated for awards and the honor books. Beyond the Caldecott and the Newbery, purchase books that have

earned other ALA awards including the Pura Bel **Pré** Award (**Latinx**), Coretta Scott King Award (African American), Schneider Family Book Award (Disability) and Stonewall Book Award (LGBTQ).

- Review your current collection and determine if duplicates of award winners need to remain on the shelves. Evaluate the condition and circulation statistics of your award winning books to decide if books need to be replaced with a new copy.

Curriculum

What curriculum connections does this book make? When teachers consider the use of literature in their classrooms, they often work within the framework of a text set. Giorgis and Johnson (2002) define a text set as consisting of, "five to ten books on a particular topic or theme. The books are of varied genre, readability, and content. They also present a variety of perspectives for readers to consider" (200). Information presented within the text can then be analyzed for themes and connections drawn out through notes, discussion, and analysis through graphic organizers such as Venn **d**iagrams. Materials can be both fiction and non-fiction. Text sets have been used to support curriculum in all areas including language arts, math, science, and social studies (Laminack and Wadsworth 2006). They can be used to teach specific subjects and ideas such as immigration in the United States (Bersh 2013), social emotional literacy (Harper 2016), and mathematical concepts (Shatzer 2008). Teaching mathematics using picture books is particularly helpful because they can provide practical examples of math being applied in real life; they can also help students see concepts displayed visually, giving them a wider vocabulary for the math problems they find represented in their text books (McDonald and Rasch 2004). Text-sets can be organized by concept and used as a bridge into language arts curriculum

(Shatzer 2008). Laminack and Wadsworth (2006) provide many examples of texts set that can be used across the curriculum. An example given of a mathematical text set teaching a skill like addition might include: "*Dominoes around the World,* by Mary D. Lankford; *Fish Eyes*, by Lois Ehlert; *The Grapes of Math: Mind-Stretching Math Riddles,* by Greg Tang; *Let's Go Visiting* by Sue Williams; and *Math Appeal: Mind-Stretching Math Riddles* by Greg Tang" (44-45). The use of literature to support instruction is not limited to the elementary school classroom. S. L. McElmeel's (2009) book *Picture That! From Mendel to Normandy: Picture Books and Ideas, Curriculum and Connections— For 'Tweens and Teens* describes how literature can be used at the secondary level to teach a variety of subjects including ideas that extend to athletics and the arts. In order to start building a collection that supports pre-service teachers in their knowledge of text sets:

- Visit the Common Core Standards site to view standards that have been adopted in your state. More specific information on standards can be found on your state's Department of Education website.
- Collaborate with your faculty members who teach methods courses within early-childhood, elementary, special education, and secondary content areas. Inquire about how literature is used in their classes and what text-sets could be curated within the collection to support student's learning.
- Examine your collection to determine what materials you have on specific subjects. Keep in mind that "text sets" do not need to only include picture books. They can also include videos, poetry, websites, podcasts etc. Determine what may need to be purchased and what could be curated from online sources.

Illustrations

Are the illustrations captivating? For decades, professional literature has called attention to the need for children to be able to interpret the visual information they find within texts. Galda and Short (1993) were already noting the prevalence of media in our culture in the early 90s and the impact that children's illustration can have on developing visual literacy. They wrote "As children explore illustrations and develop the ability to read images, they will attain deeper meaning from literature and an awareness of how visual images are used in their own meaning making" (506). While meaningful for young children, the efficacy of picture books used for instructional purposes is not limited only to the elementary students. Hodges and Matthews (2017) note several ways that picture books can be used in the middle school classroom, particularly when introducing text structures while pairing them with exemplary books. Such pairings include "cause and effect with *Aliens from Earth: When Animals and Plants Invade Other Ecosystems* by Mary Batten; compare and contrast with *Aaron and Alexander: The Most Famous Duel in American History* by Don Brown; descriptions with *So You Want to be President?* by Judith St. George & David Small; sequencing with *The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos* by Deborah Hellgman; and problems and solutions with *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* by Jen Bryan & Melissa Sweet" (75).

Graphic novels, and by extension comic books, also have many cited educational benefits. Mooney (2005) asserts that graphic novels can assist with illustrating many of the text structures mentioned above as well as serve to motivate reluctant readers. Classic literature is now commonly adapted into graphic novel format and can be a bridge for students to learn more from other sources. When non-fiction graphic novels are created, students can be inspired to read deeper on the same topic using traditionally formatted texts (Mooney 2005). Richardson

(2017) went even further to illustrate the power of the graphic novel when conducting a research study. Fifth and sixth grade students were given a copy of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, some in graphic form and some as a traditional chapter book. Both groups were given a comprehension test following their read of the book. What was found was that students scored the same on the test regardless of format, but those who read their preferred format of the book tended to score higher on a comprehension test (Richardson 2017). Studies like these support the idea that school librarians need to continue to offer a variety of choices to their patrons in order for them to be academically successful.

Finally, wordless picture books have been used successfully to support students in the English Language Learner (ELL) classroom. Wolber (2018), a teacher of ELL, conducted a six week case study where wordless picture books were presented to the class both as a large group and within small groups. Various skills were introduced each week along with books such as *Home* by Jeannie Baker, *A Ball for Daisy* by Chris Raschka, and *The Lion and the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney. At the end of the six weeks, students reported a greater use and confidence of the English language, a stronger command of English writing and reading skills (even though the wordless picture books contained no text), and increased verbal participation and engagement in class.

Developing a juvenile collection at the university level for pre-service teachers must include a robust collection of picture books with words, wordless picture books, and graphic novels. Consider the following resources:

- There are several book awards given each year which honor children's picture books. These include those awarded by the ALA as well as other organizations such as The Cooperative Center for the Children's Book at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

(Charlotte Zolotow Award), The Horn Book Inc., (The Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards), and the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation (Ezra Jack Keats Award).

- While there are no book awards specifically given to wordless picture books, many organizations, university, and public library websites have curated lists of recommended wordless picture book titles. Suggested places to look include: Common Sense Media, Reading Rockets, Bloomsburg University **(PA)**, Duquesne University **(PA),** Bloomington Public Library **(IL),** and Pinterest.

- There are many curated lists providing guidance on the selection of graphic novels. Such lists can be found on organizational websites such as Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Berry College **(GA)**, Seattle Public Library, and Publisher's Weekly. Awards given for comic books include the Eisner Award (Comic-Con), Rueben Award (National Cartoonists Society), and Harvey Award (Comic-Con).

Diversity

Is the book inclusionary of diverse people groups? Dr. Rudine Simms Bishop is a Professor Emerita at Ohio State University and is often considered "The Mother of Multicultural Literature." In 1990 Dr. Simms Bishop authored a now famous article where she outlined the need for literature to contain mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. In other words, readers should be able to see themselves reflected in the text (mirrors), they should be able to gain perspectives on other cultures (windows), and even enter into other's worlds through their reading experiences (sliding glass doors). This framework was first applied to multicultural literature, but can be useful when examining all-inclusive literature including books about race, gender, and ability.

The prevalence of diverse literature becoming available to students is increasing in this country with organizations such as *We Need Diverse Books* and the growing #OwnVoices movement calling for books to be written by authors who are representative of the characters presented in the book. Despite these efforts, a study by Lafferty (2014) of circulation statistics of fiv**e d**iverse southern California schools showed that high school students overwhelming choose books written by **w**hite authors living in the United States at "78.3%" (206). This is discouraging as Kovarik (2004) notes that "through multicultural literature, children learn to understand and appreciate sameness and differences of cultures while identifying with and valuing their own culture" (10).

A similar dynamic currently exists in schools regarding LGBTQ literature. Tsabet (2018) notes that young adult LGBTQ literature is noticeably absent is school library collections and surmises this may be because many titles are not available from mainstream publishers and that when budgets are tight, popular literature that is best-selling, trendy, or has been turned into a movie, is often what gets purchased. Further, a study by Dedeoglu, Ulsusoy, and Lamme (2012) of pre-service teachers showed mixed perceptions of the use of LGBT literature such as *And Tango Makes Three* (Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson), and *Molly's Family* (Nancy Garden) and in future classrooms. Some respondents felt using LGBT children's literature in the classroom could be a positive experience used to raise awareness while others cited concerns over age appropriateness and cultural norms.

There seems to be less controversy in schools surrounding books that portray characters with disabilities. Wopperer (2011) notes growth in this area over time stating, "today, authors strive to instill in young readers a positive, accepting impression of characters that have differing

abilities, much like authors of multicultural literature strive to influence readers' attitudes" (28). When selecting books that have characters with disabilities, Lafferty (2014) recommends choosing titles that use person-first **language, contain** accurate information about the disability both through character development and pictures, and holds a universal plot and setting that appeals to all readers. When building a collection of diverse books for pre-service teachers at the university level, consider the following:

- Perform an equity audit on your collection. Entities such as *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* hold online professional development opportunities to help professionals engage in this process. Many collection analysis tools are also available online. When examining your collection, look for characteristics in books that relate to gender, race, country of origin, and disability in both the characters and the author (Bogan 2020).

- Actively look for diverse books to include in your collection. Book lists can be found from a variety of sources such as *Diverse Book Finder, We Need Diverse Books,* and *Lee & Low Book Publishers.*

- Promote your diverse literature by creating displays. Literature on this topic repeatedly advocates the efficacy of book displays to motivate students to check out books (Small et al. 2011), see books within a greater context of a theme, (Wopperer, 2011) and encourages self-expression (Scoggins, 2018).

Conclusion

The MUSTIE acronym is a helpful tool when developing collections on a variety of topics. When developing juvenile collections for designed pre-service teachers it may be effective to overlay MUSTIE with PLACID so that reviews of materials are conducted through the lens of an educator. If an academic library is in need of a reviewer with expertise in education, collaboration with teacher education faculty is recommended.

Remember that the focus of the collection is ultimately not for children but for those who will be one day teaching our youngest learners. Teacher candidates need to become familiar with a plethora of books that follow PLACID. Books that can be read for pleasure, encompass a range of reading levels, have won awards, align with curricular goals, are well illustrated, and contain diverse perspectives, inclusive of all peoples.

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