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Source: *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 73, No. 3/4, Literacy Education in the 21st Century (1998), pp. 228-252

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1493206>

Accessed: 25/07/2011 22:00

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Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?

Carol Lynch-Brown
Carl M. Tomlinson

Factors affecting the development of children's literature in the United States include (a) the stance of our society toward childhood and the resulting role of the child in society, (b) the federal government and its social and educational programs, (c) the nature of the library and publishing groups responsible for developing and promoting this body of literature, (d) commercial interests in the sale of children's trade books and textbooks, (e) the mass media, and (f) the view of our society and positions taken by educators toward reading materials and the teaching of reading. In this article we show how society, government, librarianship, commerce, the media, and education directly influenced the evolution of children's literature in this country. We then predict what part these and other, newer institutions will play in the future of children's literature.

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Prior to the 20th Century

Children's books in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries were mostly didactic and moralistic, a reflection of society's general view that children should be quiet, hardworking, and intent on learning to be good. The purpose of this early literature was to provide edification and to teach morals to young people. Illustrations were expensive to publish and considered unnecessary or simply decorative extras; they were, therefore, infrequent. Many children had no access to books tailored to their interests and needs prior to the 20th century. Because America produced few children's books of its own in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, the majority of the books available to American children in those days originated in Europe. Therefore, international children's literature—that body of books originally published for children in a country other than the United States in a language of that country and later published in this country—had a presence since Europeans first settled here.

During the earliest years of our nation, many children had no schooling and could not read. Those who could read often read works intended for adults, such as Jonathan Swift's (1726) *Gulliver's Travels*. Reading was considered to be unimportant for many in an agricultural society, a sentiment that persisted into the early years of the industrial society. Only the need for a literate work force in the new industrialized society of the late 1800s caused time to be set aside for children's education and more attention to be paid to books intended for children. By 1900 a substantial body of literature for children was emerging.

By the end of the 19th century the system of public education was well established in the United States. Materials for early reading instruction had taken the form of graded school readers as early as the 1830s (Smith, 1965). Perhaps best known among these materials were the McGuffey Readers, which first appeared between the years 1836 and 1840. Reading instructional materials such as these were often developed with little regard for literary quality primarily by educators working in the public schools. In reaction to the poor quality of these materials, Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University, advocated in 1891 the exclusion of the readers from the schools and the use of literature in their place. He said:

It would be for the advancement of the whole public school system if every reader were hereafter to be absolutely excluded from the school. I object to them because they are not real literature; they are but mere scraps of literature, even when the single lessons or materials of which they are composed are taken from literature. But there are a great many readers that seem to have been composed especially for the use of children. They

are not made up of selections from recognized literature, and as a rule this class is simply ineffable trash. They are entirely unfit material to use in the training of our children. The object of reading with children is to convey to them the ideals of the human race; our readers do not do that and are thoroughly unfitted to do it. I believe that we should substitute in all our schools real literature for readers. (Smith, 1965, p. 120)

Despite Eliot, basal readers remained firmly entrenched in the educational establishment, and they came to even greater prominence in the 20th century.

Twentieth Century: 1900–1945

The 20th century saw the establishment of a professional field of literature for children and young adults. Professional associations and professional journals were started. For example, in 1900 the American Library Association (ALA) opened a division for children's materials and services, and at about the same time, some library schools began offering courses focusing on children's books. Public libraries added children's rooms that were staffed by children's librarians, and in 1924 the first review journal devoted exclusively to children's literature, *The Horn Book Magazine*, was founded. By the 1920s a class of professional writers devoted solely or almost solely to writing literature for children—as opposed to moral reformers, teachers, and clerics as authors—produced a larger quantity and better variety and quality of children's books than had been seen to that point. This development was hastened by the establishment in 1922, under the auspices of the ALA, of the first of the great American children's book awards, the Newbery Medal. In 1938, with the establishment by ALA of the Caldecott Medal for illustration, more and better artists were encouraged to enter the field of children's books as well. For the remainder of the 20th century, book award programs were effectively used to create interest in children's books generally and to promote awareness of specific types of books. Competition for the most prestigious awards resulted in better, more original works.

As children's literature gained in stature, publishing houses began to open children's divisions, with Macmillan and Doubleday the first. Journals and newspapers, such as *The Bookman* and *The New York Herald Tribune*, began to publish critical reviews of children's books in addition to *The Horn Book Magazine*, which served to tie together the growing network of librarians and publishers. It is important to note that institutional support for children's literature during this period came from the library community and, significantly, not from the education community.

As the field grew, so did the variety of children's books published. Known genres were expanded, and seeds for new genres were planted. Helped by increasingly advanced printing technology, the picture book genre blossomed. Wanda Gág, Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaire, and Robert McCloskey created such picture book classics as *Millions of Cats* (1928), *Abraham Lincoln* (1939), and *Make Way for Ducklings* (1941), respectively, during this era. Historical fiction, a rather lackluster genre for children in earlier times, added to its roster such classics as *Little House in the Big Woods*, first in a series by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1932–1943); *Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink (1936); and *Johnny Tremain* by Esther Forbes (1943). Paralleling society's growing interest in technology, science fiction for children (primarily boys in these early works) made its appearance in this country in 1910 with *Tom Swift and His Airship*, first in the series by Victor Appleton (pseudonym for Edward Stratemeyer).

Basal readers retained their status as the main, and usually sole, material for teaching reading in the early years of the 20th century. The orientation toward these graded basal readers came from educators of a more "scientific" bent who approached the development of school materials from a silent reading approach in which workbooks and teacher manuals came to be standard components (Smith, 1965). The stories in the school readers were selected for factors such as length and difficulty of stories, paragraphs, sentences, words, and the recurrence of vocabulary and sentence structures. These factors took precedence over children's individual reading interests and literary quality. Except for the fact that together they provided what reading material there was for young people, children's literature and reading instruction remained separate entities.

Twentieth Century: 1945–1960s

This postwar era began auspiciously with the establishment in 1945 of the Children's Book Council, an organization of children's book publishers, with the purpose of promoting Children's Book Week and disseminating information about children's books more widely. World War II affected children's book production in many ways in the United States. Some of Europe's best illustrators immigrated to the United States before and shortly after World War II as a result of religious persecution and limited opportunities for free creative expression. Esphyr Slobodkina, the author and illustrator of the modern classic, *Caps for Sale*, immigrated from Russia and, together with many other transplanted artists, helped advance the development of the picture book in the United States.

The United States enjoyed great prosperity and was recognized as a world power in the era following World War II. The social and moral val-

ues of the period remained conservative and were reflected in many “happy family” stories for children, such as Beverly Cleary’s (1950) *Henry Huggins*. In these stories, adults, and especially parents, were positively depicted as caring and protective of children. The books portrayed almost exclusively middle-class, White families and lifestyles. E. B. White (1952) authored the now-classic animal fantasy, *Charlotte’s Web*, which has a happy, middle-class farm family as a backdrop for the story of Wilbur, the pig, and Charlotte, the spider. Maurice Sendak’s modern classic, *Where the Wild Things Are*, published in 1963, is an example of the four-color picture books that began to appear in increasing numbers as a result of the strong economy in this period of national prosperity.

Series books, often referred to as formula fiction, continued to grow in popularity and helped establish reading as an important leisure activity. Heroes and heroines in these books, such as Tom Swift, the Hardy Boys, and Nancy Drew, were cast in the predominantly White, conservative, clean-cut, successful mold, in line with the prevailing political stance of the time.

Widespread public broadcasting of television began after World War II and by the 1950s had national coverage and popular acceptance. The advent of television resulted in dramatic social, political, and educational changes. One outcome was a move away from regional values toward more commonly held national values. The portrayal of affluent lifestyles set up new expectations among young people. For preschool-age children, some educational programs offered greater language exposure and learning. However, many children were exposed to violence and strong language earlier than ever before. Despite some of these drawbacks, many adults and school-age children began to seek their leisure entertainment through substantial television viewing, often to the detriment of time spent in leisure reading.

Possibly as a reaction to the lack of cultural exchange during World War II and due to an awareness of the need to promote international understanding and world peace, the end of the war saw two developments that had far-reaching effects on the children’s book field. The first was that children’s books in translation began to be published in unprecedented numbers (Carus, 1980). The second was that in 1953 the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), the international organization for the promotion and advancement of children’s literature, was founded. In 1956 this organization established the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the first international award program to honor authors of children’s books. A companion award for illustrators of children’s books was added in 1966. During this same year *Bookbird*, a quarterly journal devoted to the international exchange by scholars on issues related to children’s books, was

founded by IBBY. In the United States, the Mildred L. Batchelder Award was established by the ALA. This award, which annually honors the U.S. publisher of the most distinguished translated children's book published in the preceding year, encourages translation and publication of international books for children in the United States. This period was therefore an important one in expanding institutional support for the children's book field to an international level. During this period, a number of international books were written that have achieved the status of modern classics, such as *Pippi Longstocking* by Swedish children's author Astrid Lindgren (1950), and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis (1950), the first of seven books in the British Narnia stories, a high-fantasy series.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, a few children's books appeared that described the struggle of African Americans for equality and acceptance. *Mary Jane* by Dorothy Sterling (1959) and *Call Me Charley* by Jesse Jackson (1945) are examples. Books such as these were rarities, however. Children of Color were not often represented in books for young people. The civil rights movement of the 1960s focused attention on the racial injustices that prevailed in the United States, including the nearly complete lack of children's books by and about people of Color. The spirit of the times resulted in two landmark publications for children. The first of these was the greatly popular picture book, *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats (1962). This was the first Caldecott Award-winning book with an African American protagonist. The second was a powerful article in the *Saturday Review* in 1965 by Larrick titled "The All-White World of Children's Books." Larrick reported that in nearly all U.S. children's books, African Americans were omitted entirely or scarcely mentioned. Publishers took note, and in quick succession works by African Americans and Asian Americans were published and their authors recognized for their outstanding literary and artistic efforts. Particularly memorable among these are *Stevie* by John Steptoe (1969) and *Zeely* by Virginia Hamilton (1967). The Coretta Scott King Award for the most outstanding writing for children by African Americans was founded in 1969, with a companion award for illustration added in 1974. This award is now under the auspices of the ALA.

In 1957, books designed for the beginning reader were developed and published. These books, published for the child who has mastered first-grade reading instruction, have limited vocabulary, short sentences, and large type similar to the reading material found in primary-grade basal readers. *Little Bear* by Else Minarik (1957), illustrated by Maurice Sendak, and *Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss (1957) were the first of these books usually referred to as easy-to-read books. This type of book met a need of children being taught to read through very controlled vocabulary and syntax found in their school reading materials. The development of inexpen-

sive paperback books for children and paperback book clubs in the late 1950s were positive forces in encouraging wide reading and a favorable attitude toward reading in children by permitting self-selection of book titles and book ownership.

In 1965 the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act made federal funds available for a school library media center, books, and instructional equipment for every elementary school. As research on children's development was providing more evidence concerning the importance of the preschool years in the cognitive, affective, and language development of young children, this period was one of interest in the education of the very young child. Evidence presented in *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* (Bloom, 1964) indicated that the early years of childhood are the most crucial in educational development. This body of research began to pave the way for the establishment of more kindergartens and preschool programs receiving federal and state funding. For example, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 authorized the establishment of Head Start Child Development Programs. This important program, first offered in the summer of 1965, was designed to prepare economically deprived children of preschool age to enter public school. Attentive publishers saw a large new market and began publishing a variety of books aimed at the very young child. Baby books—simply designed picture books printed on heavy cardboard for use with children ages birth to 2—became popular with parents who were seeking to give their children an early start. Alphabet books, counting books, word books, and concept books that explore or explain an idea, object, or activity rather than tell a story proliferated. Richard Scarry's word books became as common in nurseries as rocking chairs. Interactive books, a type of book that stimulates a child's verbal or physical participation as the book is read and that is especially appropriate for children ages 2 to 6, were also seen in greater numbers.

During this period, schools continued in their almost exclusive use of basal readers as the main instructional reading material for elementary-grade children. Chall and Squire (1991) stated that more than 95% of all elementary teachers used basal readers in their classrooms in the mid-1960s and that this remained the case in 1980. However, a significant movement began in the mid-1950s that proposed using trade books in the teaching of reading, replacing the basal reader textbooks. This movement, referred to as "individualized reading" or as the "personalized reading" approach, generated great excitement and enthusiasm among its many proponents (Barbe, 1961; Darrow & Howes, 1960; Miel, 1958; Veatch, 1959). This approach promoted the idea that children should be taught to read using trade books that the students themselves have chosen because they wish to read the books. Other key components of this approach in-

clude regular, individual conferences with the teacher to note individual student needs and to give appropriate help and grouping of students with similar interests or needs, when warranted. Criticism of the quality of selections in basal readers began during this same period.

Although the notion of using real literature in teaching reading held an important appeal for many teachers and teacher educators, this movement subsided by the late 1960s. One reason suggested for this fairly rapid demise of the individualized reading approach is the difficulty of making a radical change in teaching methods and materials and succeeding on a large scale. Another reason suggested is political opposition from within the educational community. Many prominent and influential reading educators were commercially involved with the publication of the major basal series of the period (Veatch, 1986). Despite its decline, the individualized reading approach continued to have strong appeal for many teacher educators and elementary school teachers long after the demise of the movement.

The turbulent, antiestablishment, sociopolitical scene of the 1960s, led by the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the women's rights movement, ushered in a period in children's literature called "The New Realism." Life was depicted as it really was rather than as ideal or nearly ideal, as it had been portrayed in earlier works of realism for children. Parents were often found to be imperfect, absent, or at times abusive. Topics such as war, death, divorce, poverty, and abandonment were addressed frankly. Language was sometimes harsh. Perhaps the children's book most often cited as the harbinger of this change is *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh (1964). It is important to note that these same changes did not appear in basal readers, which continued to feature stories in which White characters followed traditional gender roles and did not think or talk about troubling issues.

Twentieth Century: 1970s–1998

The trend toward greater realism in children's books continued to unfold in the 1970s, portraying the attitudes and mores of the present culture. The relatively liberal political administration and national mood of the time encouraged diversity in book publication. Books such as *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume (1970) presented a frank discussion of developing sexuality and religious doubts, both fairly taboo topics in children's literature prior to this time. As current societal issues such as racism, alcoholism, poverty, divorce, mental illness, and the changing roles of women and men in society began to be addressed in children's books, inevitably censorship of children's books began to increase. Although few adults could

claim that harsh reality was rare in the lives of many children, some wished to protect their children from exposure to these realities.

Agencies such as the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom that monitor censorship attempts on children's literature in this country report that these attempts are growing in number with each passing year. This is due, in part, to the influence of more politically active, conservative religious organizations and more publicity surrounding censorship itself, as well as various troubling issues such as child abuse, violence on television, and pornography on the Internet. As textbook publishers began to include more literature selections in their basal readers, censorship attempts were made against textbook series, such as the well-publicized case against the Impressions series in 1992.

The 1970s and 1980s showed an increased interest in poetry, particularly the light and humorous poems of Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky. Perhaps the way was paved for the great success of these two poets by the liberalizing events of the 1960s. At any rate, their irreverent, broad-humored verse suited the mood of the times but would hardly have been tolerated a decade earlier. Silverstein's (1974) *Where the Sidewalk Ends* was listed on the *New York Times* Best Seller list for 3 years, a first for a work of children's literature. The Excellence in Poetry for Children Award, established by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1977, promoted the works of other worthy children's poets, although none has achieved the popularity of Silverstein and Prelutsky.

The civil rights movement continued to have an impact on society in the 1970s, and more books by and about people of Color were published for children. The first book by a minority author to win the Newbery Medal was *M. C. Higgins the Great* by Virginia Hamilton (1974), who later received the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for her entire body of works for children. Verna Aardema's (1975) *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon, was the first picture book illustrated by an African American artist (Leo Dillon) to win the Caldecott Medal.

The politically conservative 1980s saw a slowing down of this movement toward publishing more minority authors and illustrators who were able to reveal the true, unique character of their particular cultures. Fewer books with multicultural characters and themes were published and fewer minority authors won awards than in the 1970s. In response to this dearth of good multicultural literature for children, a number of smaller, alternate presses, devoted exclusively to multicultural literature, were founded in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in multicultural literature. In addition to continued publication of culturally authentic books by noted African American authors and illustrators, the Asian American

presence has come to the fore with the superb picture books of Ed Young, a Chinese American, and Allen Say, a Japanese American. The Pura Belpré Award to recognize Latino American authors and illustrators of children's books was established by the ALA and was first awarded in 1996.

The positive situation with international children's literature seen from the 1950s through 1970s was reversed during the 1980s and 1990s. As our children's book industry grew to become one of the largest and most influential in the world, our dependence on books from other countries dwindled. With recent reports (Bamberger, 1978; Horning, Kruse, & Schleisman, 1996; M. White, 1992) estimating our children's book imports at less than 1% of the books published annually, we now find ourselves at risk of seeming to be literary parochials or xenophobics in an increasingly global society. The mix of domestic and imported literature for children is far greater in most other developed countries. For example, in 1995, imports accounted for 28% of the total children's book production in Germany, 66% in Sweden, and 19% in Japan (Tomlinson, 1998).

Book imports to the United States belong to two main categories: translated books and books from other English-speaking countries. The great majority of our imports belong to the latter category, with the lion's share of these originating in Great Britain. Most of the translated books come from Germany, Sweden, Japan, and The Netherlands. In 1997 the Mildred L. Batchelder Award was given to Farrar Straus Giroux, the publisher of Kazumi Yumoto's (1996) *The Friends*, a Japanese book translated by Cathy Hirano. This book also won the prestigious *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* in 1997, suggesting that culturally authentic international literature can be professionally recognized in the United States. It remains to be seen whether it can achieve popularity with students, teachers, and librarians, and whether it will sell. In the past, international books have seldom achieved commercial success in the United States.

On a positive note, a recent increase in co-publication, by which two or more publishers share initial publishing costs, promises to bring more international books into this country in the future. Continental European publishers such as North-South Books (Switzerland) and British publishers such as Dorling Kindersley have established publishing companies in the United States, and others have established trade agreements with American publishers, such as Sweden's Rabén & Sjögren Publishers with Farrar Straus Giroux. Although co-publication has the potential of bringing a greater variety of books to children, some experts (Jobe, 1996; Whitehead, 1996, 1997) worry that publishers, in an effort to make books acceptable to several cultures, will force authors and illustrators to omit culture-specific features, thus reducing the flavor and impact of their books as well as the benefit of importing them.

The field of young adult literature as a separate and unique area of the publishing industry was not established until the mid-1970s (Donelson & Nilsen, 1997). Prior to the 1970s many novels written for young adults were considered inferior or "problem novels" focusing on trite subject matter and unrealistic portrayals of teenagers (Krickeberg, 1995). However, in the 1970s more high-quality young adult novels such as Robert Cormier's (1974) *The Chocolate War* began to be published. At this time in the United States, the need for specialized education and technical skills training for jobs resulted in longer periods of schooling before independence was gained by young people. Teenagers developed a unique culture featuring their own music, their own clothing, their own movies, and of course their own books. Many more books, and especially paperbacks, were published for these often-affluent teenagers. Schools and libraries began to accept this young adult literature as worthy of students' attention, and some of it found its way into English classes. After a huge rise in the popularity of this literature in the late 1980s, sales of young adult literature books dropped off substantially in the mid-1990s. Possibly this decrease relates to demographics, as there are now fewer young people in this age range than a decade earlier. However, it seems more likely that fewer and fewer young people read books of much length and complexity, as our society has become increasingly more visually oriented. Many college professors of children's literature report that undergraduates find reading longer children's novels "a new experience" or "difficult" (McClure & Tomlinson, 1996).

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, various research studies showed the positive effects of literature on the academic achievement of children. Many of these studies indicated that children whose parents and teachers read aloud to them made gains in early reading achievement, language, vocabulary, and writing (Applebee, 1978; Butler, 1975; Cohen, 1968; DeFord, 1981; Durkin, 1966; Eckhoff, 1983). Other studies indicated gains on reading achievement tests by students who spent more time reading silently (Fielding, Wilson, & Anderson, 1986; Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley, 1981). Positive findings of research studies such as these resulted in greater use of literature in the elementary schools. The practice of reading aloud to students became more widespread and sustained silent reading programs such as Drop Everything and Read were implemented by schools to encourage wider reading by students. Two programs, the Pizza Hut Book-It Program and Accelerated Reader™, were implemented by schools attempting to motivate students to read silently by offering rewards such as food, stickers, books, and computer disks. The extent to which such reward-based programs have resulted in students reading more is not clear, and many educators believe that the rewards of reading are, and should

be, intrinsic. The importance of silent reading, however, seems unchallenged. Because reading at home must compete with many alluring leisure time distractions, many teachers have started to provide more time in school for silent reading.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as the transactional view of response to literature became more widely accepted by literacy educators, greater impetus was given to the interpretation of literary texts in a more individualized manner. Rosenblatt (1978) proposed the transactional view of reading, a view suggesting that meaning emerges from the transaction between reader and text, both necessary parts of a total event. These reader response critics assert that many interpretations of a particular text are possible, and they challenge many of the long-held assumptions about reading instruction and evaluation, especially questioning their normative orientation.

Basal readers continued to be used as the main material for teaching reading during the period from 1970 to 1998, but beginning in the late 1970s the whole language and literature-based reading movements held strong appeal with many teachers and school administrators who looked at the great success these movements had in New Zealand and Australia. They began to use trade books in their classrooms, often in place of the basal readers. Many national and state policymakers began to encourage or mandate greater use of literature in the classroom. California instituted the English-Language Arts Framework that made quality literature the keystone of reading instruction. (For a discussion of this program, see Honig, 1988.) The policy report *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) further recommended literature as vital in learning to read and in teaching reading. National, regional, and state conferences of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English began to devote many sessions to programs about literature and using literature in the classroom, and many more teachers became convinced of the merits of literature than ever before. Teachers Applying Whole Language, a grass roots organization of teachers who meet to share ideas on how to implement a whole language philosophy in their classrooms, grew rapidly in the late 1980s and early 1990s; an emphasis of these sessions was often on learning about good trade books to incorporate into thematic instruction.

The whole language and literature-based reading movements were not unqualified successes in the United States, however. They were misinterpreted and incompletely understood, perhaps because insufficient attention was paid to teacher training for these new directions. In some cases, teachers merely were encouraged to use literature more frequently in supplementary reading activities, such as teacher read-aloud and silent reading programs; in other cases, teachers were asked to use literature instead

of basal readers in reading instruction. Unfortunately, in these latter cases, literature was too often "basalized," and classroom reading instruction, despite the addition of good literature, was business as usual. Veatch (1996) questioned the notion of teachers using a single children's novel for an entire class to read in a basal reader fashion. Recently, California has proposed dramatic shifts in policy modifying its literature-based reading plan (Freeman, Freeman, & Fennacy, 1997), another instance of misinterpreting the aims of literature-based instruction.

Regardless, publishers of basal readers did not ignore these movements, incorporating real literature into reading instruction. Most basal publishers scrambled to include selections written by "real authors" and to assert that their basals were mostly composed of literary selections. Interestingly, many publishers began to avoid the term *basal reader* and began to publish their series as *literature readers* or as *literature-based reading programs*. Even so, problems such as excerpting the actual literature and modifying the language and illustrations remained. These problems were examined in the *Report Card on Basal Readers* (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988). For an interesting discussion of the hold basal readers have had on the education profession and our schools, see D. J. Yarrington's (1978) *The Great American Reading Machine*.

During this period, much more institutional support for the field of children's literature has come from teachers and teacher educators and their professional associations than in any other era. In 1977, the National Council of Teachers of English established the aforementioned award for excellence in poetry for children, and then, in 1990, established the Orbis Pictus Award for excellence in writing nonfiction for children. The International Reading Association sponsored three "choice" award programs: "Teachers Choices," an annual selection by teachers of 30 books deemed excellent and suitable for use with the curriculum; "Children's Choices," an award program in which children read and select their favorite books of the year, resulting in a list of the top 30; and a similar award for middle school and high school students, the "Young Adults' Choices." At professional meetings of these organizations, large numbers of sessions (probably the majority of sessions) were devoted to children's books, authors, and illustrators in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. This was a dramatic shift from the 1970s and earlier.

The children's book industry expanded greatly during the late 1980s and early 1990s, with sales rising at an unprecedented rate. The figures in Table 1 are reported for the publication of American juvenile (paper and hardcover) books in the *Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac* (1997). This explosive rise in numbers is probably the result of a soaring national economy and a rise in births during recent years. The U.S. children's

Table 1
 U.S. Production of Juvenile Trade Books in Hardcover and Paperback: Selected Years

Year	American Book Title Production: Juvenile
1900	527
1930	933
1960	1,725
1970	2,640
1980	2,859
1985	3,801
1990	5,172
1995	5,678

book industry has become so large and influential as to have a major impact on literature for children in other countries as well, as our books are being exported in ever greater numbers.

Most of the increase in the publication of children's literature has been in picture books and heavily illustrated works of nonfiction. The trend in picture books is toward heavy use of color, more pictures taking up more and more of the page, and mixed media used in the illustrations as new technologies make the production of these more affordable. Dresang and McClelland (1996) discussed these changes as well as the trend toward more message conveying images, more complex pictures, and more interaction between pictures and text. As an example, David Macaulay's (1989) Caldecott Medal book *Black and White* has four stories, each with illustration and text covering a half page on each pair of facing pages and each story using different media and colors; these four stories interconnect, and readers can puzzle out a single story after reading the entire book. One explanation for the increased sales of picture books is that bookstores, not libraries, are now a major source of children's book sales, and for some publishers, *the* major source. Picture books and heavily illustrated nonfiction books have a more immediate appeal to adult buyers in bookstores, whereas novels for intermediate-grade students and young adults do not fare as well with these buyers.

Even as children's publishing boomed, however, developments were fast changing the publishing scene in other, less positive ways. Merger followed upon merger during this time, replacing independent publishers with a few enormous corporate publishers that were primarily concerned with their profit margins. To increase profits, the corporate publishers downsized backlists, causing good titles to go out of print more quickly; published fewer unusual or "risky" books; and favored mass appeal over literary excellence. Children's book publishers, faced with reductions in sales to libraries and the closing of children's-only

bookstores, have been seeking new, more profitable outlets, such as drugstores and toy stores. The buyers in such nontraditional markets are not as committed to quality books (Elleman, 1998). Small presses, with their emphasis on excellence and diversity and their tendency to keep good titles in print for many years, were consequently held in ever higher regard.

The 1990s have been a marketer's heyday for children's publishers. Television spin-offs, sequels, and related products have proliferated. The Little House books have spawned a truckload of questionable "sequels," cookbooks, beginning readers, and picture books. Television shows such as *The X Files* now seem to generate a paperback book for every episode. The American Girls Collection, although of better literary quality than many series, sells far more than books. A recent catalogue from the Pleasant Company, publisher of the American Girls Collection, has clothes, furniture, tea sets, needlework kits, music boxes, trading cards, sweet potato pudding kits, dress patterns, stationery sets, skin care kits, starter collections, full-size (18") pictures of dolls, and even books for sale! Publishers have found ways to make children's literature more profitable and more commercial than ever before. Unfortunately, literary quality is not always the main concern.

Television during the 1980s and 1990s has had a powerful role in people's lives and has expanded its influence through an increased variety of offerings made available through cable channels. Studies during the 1980s (Anderson et al., 1985) indicated that many children watched inordinate amounts of television—up to 7 hr a day. More recently, computers have been competing for time in the lives of children, as many children find the interactive, and often violent, games available on game systems and CD-ROMs for computers more fascinating than television. The Internet also has an important allure for many children as more and more websites are offering programming to appeal to children. These and other advances in technology have made available graphic, visual presentations of entertainment and information.

Such changes in technology are resulting in a more visually oriented, but seemingly less literate, population. Evidence for this statement is found in the following current trends: fewer full-length novels are published for children than in decades past; more illustrations are included in books for all ages; and more short, high-interest, low-reading level novels are written by noted authors for 10- to 14-year-olds. Publishers claim that these are the books that teachers seek for their students who find the long, complex plot novels of the past too difficult or boring. Further evidence might be found in the booming market for formula fiction series books such as *The Babysitters Club*, *Sweet Valley Twins*, and R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* books. These books

offer little reading or thinking challenges to young readers. Their appeal is that they are short, easy, familiar, and trendy.

Bringing change with ever-increasing rapidity, the technology revolution has had an important impact on the field of children's books and librarianship. Changes in the education of librarians away from children's and young adult literature and services toward information science and retrieval, coupled with the closing of many library schools, have caused some library school faculty members in youth services to have serious concern over the future of youth services in libraries (Allen & Bush, 1986; Steinfirt & Bracy, 1996). In some states—Illinois, for example—support for school librarians has been dropped; in other states school librarians report that they have so many technology responsibilities that they have little time to guide readers to good books. Many school librarians serve primarily or solely as technology specialists. Children's school and public librarians are now buying encyclopedias and other children's reference works on CD-ROM because they cost less, are easier to update, are easier to use, are downloadable, and require less storage space. Computer book cataloguing is fast becoming universal, and Dutton Publishers issued in 1996 the first book to be published on (and only on) the Internet, *The End of the Rainbow*, by the Danish author, Bjarne Reuter. Without doubt, technology will continue to influence publishing, the way we learn and play, and perhaps even the way we read. Inevitably, children's literature will be affected.

Children's Literature: Is There a Future?

As the previous sections have shown, children's literature in the United States has evolved along with the publishing industry, the educational system, and the library network. These institutions represent enormous and powerful vested interests that will almost certainly deter any abrupt changes in children's literature in the near future. If current trends continue, however, gradual change will eventually result in significant change, as the following points indicate.

The portability and convenience of books, especially picture books, novels, and other narratives, makes their continued publication highly likely in the near term. This is particularly true of books for children in that parents will continue to view bedtime stories as an important part of family life and the education of their children. Assuming that paper-and-ink books as we know them today survive, access to them will almost certainly be affected by technological advances. Assuming that costs and copyrights could be managed, onsite printing could make virtually any title available to customers in any location, making obsolete

the notion of bookstores (as now operated) and in-print and out-of-print titles, warehousing, and interlibrary loan. Dugan (1998), in an article in *Business Week*, reported on changes in the publishing industry during an interview with a publishing industry executive:

In the bookstore of the future, he [Leonard Riggio, chief executive of Barnes and Noble, Inc., and the subject of the article] says customers could tap into millions of titles and print any part from these works on the spot. He talks of software programs that could point customers to specific lines in various books, threaded by a single topic, or ones that could ferret out and print obscure texts that never made it into book form. In short, Riggio envisions modifying the very concept of what constitutes a published work. "The change in the next ten years," he says, "will be much more profound than what has happened in the last 10." (p. 115)

On June 22, 1998, Cable Network News reported on the buzz about an exhibit at the Chicago Book Exposition: a demonstration of a virtual bookstore, presented through a collaboration of IBM and Ingram Book Co., in which only single copies of books were displayed and single-copy printing was provided. Such innovations due to technology are bound to change the bookstores of the future.

The current trend toward publishing more multicultural literature to compensate for the almost total absence of it as recently as 30 years ago will continue as schools become more diverse, according to demographic projections, and society becomes more accepting of different voices and viewpoints. International literature will expand in this country as co-publication results in a globalization of literature offered to children. Although co-publication has the potential of bringing a greater variety of books to children, we worry that publishers, in an effort to make books acceptable to several cultures, will force authors and illustrators to omit culture-specific features, thus reducing the flavor and impact of their books. We also believe that in the near future the more affluent countries and regions of the world—the United States, Western Europe, and Japan—will continue to be the major exporters of their children's literature, and less affluent countries and regions will continue to be importers. However, we predict that within the next 20 to 30 years, Central and South America and Asia will expand their production in both quantity and quality of children's literature fairly rapidly, as these regions develop economically.

Basal textbooks will remain a predominant feature in schools, but the differences between them and trade books may become less and less dis-

tinct. The role of literature will continue to be an issue of discussion and contention among reading educators. We predict that trade books will have an important presence in most elementary classrooms in the future, although trade books will have a less central role in school libraries. Public libraries will continue to serve young people through ample collections of literature, although the challenges of public librarians serving a radically different population of children will be greater than ever before (Naylor, 1987).

Earlier in this article we stated that children's book award programs have improved the quality of children's literature in general. In the last 30 years, however, book awards have proliferated. *Children's Books: Awards & Prizes* (1996) lists 213 children's book awards, 87 of which are U.S. awards selected by adults, 45 of which are U.S. awards selected by children, and 8 of which are international awards publicized in the United States. Since 1996, two new national awards have been established for children's books. If the number of book award programs continues to increase, their impact and positive influence may be diminished.

The concept of libraries as repositories of books seems to be changing rapidly as libraries are increasingly seen as repositories of information. The school librarian, whose primary responsibility is to lead children to good books and good reading, may soon be a relic of the past. This development is closely tied to technology. Several trends mentioned in earlier sections suggest that informational books, especially reference works, will eventually be replaced by electronic formats, such as CD-ROM and online text. As computers become more powerful and more common, it is likely that information retrieval will some day be managed out of the home or classroom and that information can be called up at will on the computer without the help of librarians. For the foreseeable future, librarians will be indispensable as media experts who must educate the masses, who are kept in constant confusion by new technology. This may, indeed, become the librarian's primary role: media expert.

Information and stories delivered electronically will, no doubt, be made increasingly enticing with interactive text (readers determining their own paths of inquiry or story direction), sound, and animated pictures, but sensory emphasis will be at the expense of text. We fear that these new formats will be detrimental to children's ability to read, reason, and imagine. Moreover, because computers will offer instant change from program to program, children may lose their willingness to remain dedicated to one text for long periods of time, further diminishing their ability to concentrate and think. On the other hand, students will become more visually literate and better able to read, interpret, and interact with pictures—both static and dynamic images.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main sponsoring institution of children's literature, the library field, has successfully nurtured the field of children's literature throughout the 20th century. This sponsorship has resulted in a richer field for children than could have occurred if literature for children had been under the sponsorship of the public schools. Schools by the very nature of dealing with groups rather than individuals have a tendency toward conformity and a limitation of creativity. Because most censorship attacks have been on public school textbooks and public school library books, many school personnel have become overly cautious and have often avoided selecting excellent books for fear of objection. As the century draws to a close, however, literacy educators have also begun to voice their support of children's literature in their professional journals and conferences. Many more English scholars study and write about children's literature for its literary qualities; their voices are also important. Another group, children's book editors, has constantly sought to preserve high standards in children's books, and as a group, they have much to contribute to a national forum.

As vital as their backing has been, it is important to note that the main support groups of children's literature have voiced their support separately. In the future, even more powerful support will result from coalitions of librarians, literacy educators, English scholars, and children's book editors under the aegis of field-neutral organizations such as the United States Board on Books for Young People. The potential of such organizations is enormous, as they cut across political, intellectual, and occupational borders to draw on the strength, energy, and acumen of the library, public schools, universities, and publishing fields in support of children's books. An optimistic future for children's literature will depend on the vigorous, combined support of all who value children's literature.

School libraries and librarians are the heart of any school. Eliminating them or diverting librarians from their work with literature strikes a blow against literacy. Public libraries need to continue to hire librarians trained in children's services and dedicated to selecting the best literature available for young people and protecting the rights of young people to read. Today librarians seldom have time to share literature due to the demands of managing technology, and yet the need for librarians trained in and dedicated to the sharing of stories is as great as ever. The dramatic change in the field of library science toward information technology threatens to remove this support for children's literature that was so vital to the field in the 20th century.

Public schools have been very slow to incorporate good children's literature into their curricula. This is gradually changing through educational movements that denounce basal readers for the poor quality of their literary selections and suggest more effective ways of teaching reading. Change has occurred; more literature of merit is included in basal readers, and more teachers read aloud and provide trade books for independent reading. Discussion of the literary quality of basal reading selections among educators may be the beginning of an important change. Educators now realize that many of today's parents who had little exposure to quality literature during their school years have neither drawn on the resources of their public libraries nor provided their children with books purchased from bookstores. The continued endorsement by prominent educators of the structured, basal reader-oriented, supposedly more "accountable," teacher-proof system of teaching reading is counterproductive to the development of the minds of our children and promises to produce more generations of mediocre readers. The absence of children's literature is especially detrimental to students in Grades 3 through 8, the critical years for turning students from those who *can read* to those who *do read*. At these grade levels the importance of wide reading of excellent quality literature, novels that are often both long and complex, cannot be overemphasized. This is not to imply that excellent, authentic texts are unimportant for primary-grade children. They must also be provided with the best literature available.

Perhaps it is time for teachers and teacher educators to examine the writings and conference papers of high-profile reading educators who promote classroom use of real literature and self-selection of reading materials but readily lend their names to the promotion of basal readers. If the classroom teachers and school administrators were aware of the amount of annual income these educators garnered for such "consulting" activities, they might view their contributions with more suspicion. An amusing, but disturbing, parody of basal readers' teachers' manuals can be found in a recent article by Crawford, Hade, and Shannon (1997). Veatch (1986) and Yarrington (1978) also wrote of the profit motive of professors of reading and publishers of basal readers. The profit motive must become part of our discussions as well.

Programs such as literature-based reading and individualized reading will be recurrent trends that will fight uphill battles with the forces of conformity: the censors who want control, the public who wants accountability, and the educators who want the status quo. These programs or similar ones will continue to resurface because they meet the needs of students and are therefore appreciated by teachers who know their students. Important student needs that are met through literature are:

- The need for students to self-select their own literature to meet their individual cognitive and affective needs within the parameters of well-selected classroom and school library collections.

- The need to read excellent-quality contemporary and classic literature. This literature is often found in books of greater length and complexity than can be found in school readers (by whatever name). Students need to live through the entire experience of a book character. Reading a short story or an excerpt in a basal reader cannot replace this experience.

- The need for extensive reading practice. The amount of practice is almost never sufficient if the sole reading is selections from textbooks. Lengthy trade books and protracted periods of time must be made available if this need is to be met. If schools do not provide substantial periods of time for silent reading of self-selected books, then most students will find the reading of longer, more complex narratives too difficult and too tedious. As students view more (television, computer monitors) and read less, their writing skills, as well as their reading skills, deteriorate.

Concern for lack of reading and time devoted to reading was expressed long ago by Charles Eliot in an address given to the Massachusetts Teachers' Association on November 28, 1890 on the problems he saw in the elementary schools of his time:

I turned next to an examination of the quantity of work done in the grammar school under consideration—and, first, of the amount of reading. ... I procured two careful estimates of the time it would take a graduate of a high school to read aloud consecutively all the books which are read in this school during six years, including the history, the reading lessons in geography, and the books on manners. The estimates were made by two persons reading aloud at a moderate rate, and reading everything that the children in most of the rooms of that school have been supposed to read during their entire course of six years. The time occupied in doing this reading was forty-six hours. ... This test of the quantity of work performed in a grammar school is, of course, a very rough and inadequate one; ... but it gives some clue to the very limited acquaintance with literature which the children get in the entire course of six years. (Eliot, 1909, pp. 185–186)

We have the same concern today due to instructional practices that often do not set aside enough time for silent reading of, and response to, works of literary excellence.

Reading literature should be thought of as a viable leisure activity, but the notion that reading must be “fun” is wrong. Yolen (1997), in an article

raising concerns about the changes she has seen in children's books, stated, "Great books are, by definition, challenging. And they take time" (p. 286). The worthiest works of literature are sometimes difficult and may cause readers to reexamine their beliefs and values. They are often worth rereading to uncover various layers of meaning. Tying books to the sale of gimmicks is a disturbing current trend that holds some dangers in deluding children, parents, and teachers into believing that books are simply a way to have fun, another type of toy. The promotion of gimmicks over quality literature is unconscionable. Books are much more than that.

Publishing more and more facile, banal titles, as found in series books, is profitable for the publishers but does little to improve the moral, cultural, and intellectual levels of our youngest citizens. Publishers need to examine their responsibility toward young people as they select and promote books of mediocre quality to the detriment of outstanding, but less profitable, titles. Popularity of a book should not be considered the measure of its worth, yet the profit motive seems to be at work here as well. Thus, selecting the best books and helping get them into the hands of young readers require that teachers and children's librarians be knowledgeable of excellent literature. That knowledge can only be gained by reading, discussing, and evaluating books with other professionals.

Ultimately, the future of literature will be determined by the importance of story in the lives of humans. Will we continue to be interested in the past and present and curious about the future? Will we continue to ask questions about ourselves, our world, and unknown worlds beyond, and will our answers and conjectures continue to be in the form of stories as they have been since humans first walked the earth? Regardless of the way we receive information, will narrative continue to compel us? The concept of story is intrinsically human. It seems safe to argue that literature, in whatever form, will remain with us.

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