

Assignment #6:

Final Reflection

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LIBE 463  
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April 10, 2011

Posted to BLOG

## Introductory Thoughts

Over the past three months at UBC, I have become a Teacher-Librarian. Well, technically this is true, but in reality, I have filled that role at a variety of schools since 1998 (13 years ago?). At my first school, I was asked to take one class of grade 1 students as part of my teaching load. Although it was "only" library prep, I still retain a lasting memory of that experience. One day, I had decided to bring my own copy of "[One Flew over the Steamy Swamp](#)" by British author Paul Geraghty. I felt that students, like my own son who was five at the time, would probably enjoy a book that depicts a number of jungle insects, animals and a white hunter preparing to pounce on one another. I still enjoy the book for its relentless alliteration (dismayed dragonfly, flabbergasted frog, horrified heron) and the way each suspenseful scene of the book builds on the previous page and leads the reader to anticipate what will happen next and want to read right to the end of the story. At the time, however, I hadn't considered the benefits of this story in such detail - I had enjoyed the book - the students loved it - end of story!

Today in 2011 as I complete the final requirements for LIBE 467 on the study of selection of learning resources, I have a more global understanding of the school library, and of the challenges facing the Teacher-Librarian when selecting materials for students. It is much more than just finding "a good book".

## Evaluation and Criteria for Selection of Materials

As a result of taking this course, I now feel compelled to justify the inclusion of an item in my library. If I were to reconsider the "Steamy Swamp" book, and evaluate it based on standard selection criteria such as those in the reference book *Achieving Information literacy: Standards for school library programs in Canada* or in chapter 7 of the Bishop text, I would likely retain my positive evaluation of the time, but would also consider possible negative aspects and am not certain whether this book would "make the cut". Criteria would include **authenticity** (In today's society, is it standard practise for a hunter to stalk a lion?), **Appropriateness** of content to users (Is a book that includes reference to threats of violence a good choice for six-year-old children? Is it a good fit for an elementary school library?) and **treatment** (The story is set in Africa - is it reasonable that the only human character in the book is white?). If one small picture book merits such careful consideration, I anticipate that it will take significant time to evaluate hundreds of items each year.

The selection assignment, and reading chapter 8 in Bishop on selection criteria specific to the format of an item also led me to realize the complexity of choosing materials. At the beginning, I wondered why the author had not first organized the chapter into common selection criteria, and then outline other considerations that apply only to certain formats. For my own purposes, I believe that I will generally follow a single means of evaluation for all items, and then will keep a relatively small list of criteria in mind for audio, video, pamphlets, magazines and other materials. One

selection list that I appreciate are the forms available from the BC Ministry of Education. It is always easier to adapt an existing document rather than to create one from scratch, and I was able to explore some options while working on the selection part of the course. As for the information in the text, it helped me somewhat in how I will select materials, but I found that a large part of the chapter on other formats was out of date - schools in Vancouver generally do not retain cassettes or VHS tapes, and we are being asked to avoid DVD purchases in favour of streaming media linked from [Webcat](#), our online catalogue.

## **Policies and Procedures**

My personal opinion about the management of our school library will be important, but the librarians do work with colleagues and students who also may have an interest in issues related to the library and its collection. To avoid conflict between what we believe and what they want, or at least to avoid confusion about how things are done, I will need to find and become familiar with the current policies, or more likely, need to help develop a policy if one does not exist. Even without an existing manual, two areas that will immediately need to be defined: policies for weeding and acquisition.

Weeding can be a difficult procedure - it seems so wasteful to discard an item that is still in good condition. In order to take away the emotional attachment to expensive resources, it is absolutely necessary to have a general rule about how long to keep certain items and then follow up with specific procedures on how to discard them. For this purpose, table 10.1 on p. 122 of the text will be a useful starting point when creating a policy on weeding. If procedures that are clearly followed, the next step will be for the library to acquire replacement resources - the other side of this policy.

Selection policy demands that in some way, all stakeholders be involved in the process. This does not mean that the T-L will personally consult with parents and teachers on every acquisition, but that the T-L must consider the needs of students and staff along with the community of the school. In an early part of this course, when asked to do a "community analysis", my first impression was that the assignment had little to do with a school library. However, I learned much about the school through

visiting the local public library and walking through the school's neighbourhood and this knowledge will certainly have an influence on my choices.

In chapter 6 of the text, Bishop outlines the steps involved in deselection and selection of resources. I would definitely include a version of the "Request for reconsideration of library resources" from page 48, because it provides an objective means for anyone to give feedback about a resource in the library. In the past, I would not have considered such a thing because it adds yet another paper form and another level of bureaucracy to the school library. I would have suggested that a parent or teacher simply talk to the T-L about the "inappropriate" resource, who would then review it and get it out of the library. There are a number of reasons why this would not be a good procedure, the most important of which is that we don't want to prevent access to an item simply because one person raises an objection. From this part of the course, I learned about some key ways to handle complaints from the community - a situation that I have not yet experienced but that I am sure to encounter some day. Although some of the points on pp 46 and 47 are common sense, ("listen calmly and with courtesy"? Of course!) they do provide a framework for handling a complaint about an item. Perhaps such a process does make it more difficult to remove an item from the collection, but I think that the purpose is to prevent a strong parent, group of parents or community group from having the ability to make school policy. By taking initiative, involving a committee that includes a school administrator, the T-L remains the autonomous manager of library resources with input from members of the community.

## **Access**

Further to considering what resources we accept and reject, the T-L role includes deciding how to best make each item accessible to those who will use it. I see two major parts to this decision-making process: physical location within the library (or on a server in the case of a digital resource) and promotion of reading in general, and of available resources.

Like the selection process, positioning materials for easy access means considering the school community, and how it will find and use those resources. Much more than just finding the shelf space, the T-L needs to ensure that there is clear signage and that he or she makes creative use of the school newsletter and staff bulletins in order to get the word out about exciting new items. Another idea to consider is creating a prominent display of featured books near the front of the library. To maximize access, it should be clear that these items are not just on display, and that they are expected to circulate. For electronic resources, their availability at any time via the Internet must be promoted in the same way.

The second aspect of access involves reaching out to all groups within the school and promoting reading in general. For this purpose, pages 136-137 are the most valuable pages of the Bishop text. She presents many ideas for events, displays and parties and also points to further articles on this topic. What T-Ls can do to promote literacy to the entire school is limited only by imagination - Bishops examples can be adapted to suit almost any school community!

## Final Thoughts

After completing the final module, and hearing the final podcast of LLED463 on the topic of cultural authenticity, I have come to realize that I now look differently both at written works and at my role as the school librarian. For example, the final discussion on the "insider-outsider debate" (for a cultural topic, which is better - an author who is an expert non-member, or a knowledgeable member of that culture) resonates strongly with me - it demonstrates that the T-L deals with "the big picture" more than any other member of the school community. It exemplifies the *Critical Literacy* that the T-L, having studied language, literature and library science, is most equipped to teach.

In the end, thanks to my participation in LIBE 463, I now have the confidence that I will make a difference to the students, staff and community of my school.