Awards Representation in a Regional Library

Goal

The intention of this study was to conduct a list check survey of the Daniel Boone Regional Library children’s book collection utilizing the nominees, honorees, and winners of several notable children’s awards. I intended to discover how well the library represented those texts that were deemed by several American library associations as being worthy of consideration for awards. By doing this I also hoped to determine how much stock the library might place in these sorts of lists. As the Daniel Boone Regional Library serves Columbia, Missouri public, it would stand to reason that the library’s collection would include several awards nominees as children, their parents, and school faculty would be interested in them.

Important Note

I conducted this study during the Covid-19 quarantine of March 2020. While this did not render the results of the list checking study any different, it did limit the choices of analysis available. I would have liked to perform a direct collection analysis or “shelf scanning” of the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Columbia, Missouri, but as Peggy Johnson explains in her text *Collection Development and Management*, “it involves someone physical examining the collection” (pg. 297). This method of analysis includes going into the actual library to look over the books in a collection to analyze them.

This method would have worked well for my study because as Johnson argues, “Direct collection analysis is most practical when the collection is small or the subject treated is narrowly defined” and she goes on to argue “It is particularly useful as a learning tool for new librarians, who can gain an intimate knowledge of the collection.” (pg. 297). My study, on children’s literature, specifically literature nominated for major literary awards would have fit the specifications. However, visiting the library was inadvisable due to the nature of the infection, and impossible with the indefinite closure of the library due to the quarantine.

Method

Instead, I limited this study to list checking. Johnson explains, “In list checking, the librarian compares lists of titles appropriate to the subject area being analyzed against the library’s holdings.” (pg. 296). These lists can come from a variety of sources, Nisonger suggests there are fifteen common sources (pg. 5), such as faculty, curriculum, or in my case recommended reading lists derived from nominees/winners of common children’s awards. As Thomas Nisonger writes in his article “Use of the Checklist Method for Content Evaluation of Full-text Databases,” “Lists also are straightforward to implement, require little subject expertise, and provide objective data that is easily understood” (pg. 5).

The books on the list are either there in the collection or they are not, but that does not necessarily mean that the results are purely quantitative. As Johnson explains, “List checking is both qualitative and quantitative. The selection by the librarian of the list to be checked is a subjective decision, as was the development of the list, but the result is a statistical report of the number of titles on the list that the library owns. When analyzing the report, the librarian usually converts this percentage to a quality judgement about the collection” (pg. 297). This enables the librarian to judge the quality of the collection based on where in the collection there may be gaps as identified by the list.

Of course, this does not mean that list checking is without its disadvantages, Johnson further explains “Any list prepared by and individual or group reflects the biases and opinions of the compiler. Its validity rests on the assumption that those titles on the list are worthy and that the library needs them to satisfy patrons and support programs.” Furthermore, Johnson goes on to argue that lists will not help the library decide whether to withdraw a text or how to store them (pg. 297). Nisonger also identifies several more weaknesses of the traditional list model: “On the negative side, the collection might hold other resources better than those on the list; all items on the list are not of equal value; appropriate lists might be difficult to locate; held items might not be available because they are checked out, missing, or for other reasons; and many lists focusing on a single subject area do not consider resources from other disciplines. One of the more compelling criticisms is the fact that the checklist approach was developed to test ownership in the traditional model of librarianship and usually does not consider items obtained on interlibrary loan or licensed electronically.” (pg. 5).

As the study was intended to be a simple question of whether or not the nominated books were held in the collection, other forms of collection evaluation would not have been particularly useful for my purpose. Use and user-based surveys could offer some very interesting analysis of the use of some of these books, but were more involved than I needed. A user opinion survey could tell me whether or not patrons liked those books, but it would not tell me, necessarily, if the book was in the collection. Circulation statistics could inform about how often books are actually checked out, but again, not if they are in the collection. As I am unfamiliar with the library holdings of this particular area, and furthermore, unfamiliar with the books marketed towards children, list checking works well because it does not require a high level of familiarity with the subject.

Awards Lists

I chose five major awards and one regional award for children’s literature. The Mark Twain Reader’s Award is awarded by the Missouri Association of School Librarians for books aimed at fourth to sixth grade readers. The Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association awards three of the awards on this list. The Newbery Medal is for children’s literature. The Caldecott Medal is awarded to an illustrator of children’s picture books. The Pura Belpré “is presented annually to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth” (ALSC). The Coretta Scott King Book Award is awarded by the Ethinic & Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table of the American Library Association to African American authors and illustrators. The National Book Award for Young People’s Literature awarded by the National Book Foundation. With the exception of the National Book Award, all lists were for the 2020 awards season. All lists were comprised of both winners and finalists. The inclusion of audio and e-books add some context for what versions of any given book might be available and any given time.

Each text was searched for in the Daniel Boone Regional Library’s online catalog by title and then by author if the title wasn’t sufficient. Some of the texts, such as *New Kid* by Jerry Craft and *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander overlapped between the lists, however, I counted them separately for each list. It is not possible to determine if they were included in the collection due to their inclusion on either list.

The findings are reflected the in Table 1.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Award | Titles in Collection | Titles Missing | Overall Percentage Included | E-books in the Collection | Audiobooks in the Collection |
| Mark Twain | 12 | 0 | 100% | 10/12 | 5/12 |
| Newbery | 5 | 0 | 100% | 1/5 | 1/5 |
| Caldecott | 4 | 0 | 100% | 0 | 0 |
| Pura Belpré | 8 | 1 | 89% | 1/9 | 0 |
| Coretta Scott King | 8 | 0 | 100% | 4/8 | 2/8 |
| National Book (2019) | 5 | 0 | 100% | 3/5 | 2/5 |

Table 1.

Strengths

Overall, the library had a high percentage of the books listed in the awards lists. Only one text was missing; *Across the Bay*, illustrated and written by Carlos Aponte, from the Pura Belpré illustrator nominees list. It is possible the book is still relatively new, or that being a nominee (and not a winner) is not enough to warrant inclusion of the book in the library’s collection. As Daniel Boone Regional Library is a Missouri public library, its high representation of the Mark Twain Reader’s Award seems logical as it would be serving many students in school systems supporting that particular award. That the other awards should also be so well represented is also promising. On a personal note, I reacquainted myself with some of the literature directed and younger readers that are not part a series popular in my own youth.

Weaknesses

Of course, as Nisonger pointed out, a library having the books on any given list does not mean the collection overall is very good. While I believe the nominees on these lists to be of value and place some stock in the ability of these associations to create lists of worth, they are a product of their time and place and my own biases when selecting them. It is entirely likely that there are many books in the collection that are just as worth reading that go unrepresented in these lists. There are several lists that I did not include, not because they are not of value, but I did not think they necessarily fit within the limitations I placed on the study. The Stonewall Award is very prestigious, but I felt six awards was enough for this project. This is a reflection in the failure of the list method; it is only as good as the list being utilized. Furthermore, this is a very limited sample and analysis of the collection. I only look at children’s literature, specifically literature that has been nominated for an award. While this study indicates that the children’s section is fairly robust, that may not be reflected in other subjects.

While I included e-books and audiobooks in my tally, this kind of study usually does not address the lack of e-books or audiobooks. In this case, it may not even be appropriate to include audiobooks as a metric of the quality of the collection as several of these texts are picture books which are not necessarily optimal listening material. This study also does not indicate the overall condition of any of these books, though this is due partly to the inability to go into the actual library to investigate the physical conditions of the books.

Conclusion

I found the exercise itself to be interesting but must agree with the criticisms of this particular form of collection analysis. The benefit of list checking can be directly related to the value of the list itself. If the list is poorly considered then the collection will also suffer. However, list checking can enable the library to directly address the concerns of faculty, groups, or other programs that they serve. I also found this study enabled me to refamiliarize myself with the work that is marketed towards children and that our institutions value.

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