FICTION SELECTION PRACTICES BY GREEK PUBLIC LIBRARIES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

As fiction reading arguably has multifarious beneficial effects to children's development, the public library has proven to be one of those places, which can largely instill this habit to them, first of all by selecting appropriate material. Since there has been a considerable lack of research on the selection practices by Greek public libraries for children's fiction-let alone other aspects of public librarianship-this study intended to illuminate those from the scratch.

To this end, a literature review was conducted to encapsulate the selection practices of UK public libraries and of other countries'-where appropriate-and to offer thus as a pattern upon which the research was to be based and compared. Its main objectives were to investigate the criteria and the mechanics of selection, the selection policies and the level of professional knowledge and development of the staff. The research was based solely on qualitative data and the methodology adopted was that of interviewing with Greek public librarians.

The research came up with interesting findings in all areas. In the criteria of selection, content was considered of prime concern by all authorities and was sought to be at one with children's interests. These were very much valued and to this end popular readings were provided along with quality ones, since general reading was regarded more important than selective reading. In the mechanics of selection, it was proved that the complex political and unstable financial status of libraries along with bureaucratic constraints do not allow for an effective selection system. This was rather confined to a merely material providing process through bookshops rather than an essential informative and cost-effective method. In the selection policies, authorities did not possess any such documents basically due to the lack of knowledge and expertise on the issue. Finally, in staff professionalism, there was a lack of specialty in children's services due to staff's inadequacy and there was a cry for more staff development opportunities.

These concerns provided a series of recommendations, which mainly range over the development of a national strategy for public libraries and the clearing-up of

their complex political status, the taking-up of an active and leading role from the Library Association and other bodies, the existence of more training opportunities for staff and the development of a more effective and supportive selection system.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The importance of pleasure reading to children

The beneficial effects of imaginative literature to children's development have long been explored and identified whether on physical, intellectual, emotional, linguistic or social grounds (Spink 1989; Elkin et al. 2003). Given moreover the fact that ICT skills are vital to children's learning today, reading literacy becomes clearly the prerequisite of information literacy (Eyre 2003).

With regard to fiction in particular and its impact on children, Ray (1979) stresses the importance of the learning knowledge to individual values, self-awareness and human behaviour while Lewins (1991) underscores that of the learning experience as a tool to experiment with different situations.

1.2. Public library's role

Given the importance of reading for pleasure to children, public libraries are institutions where the reading habit can be cultivated and developed into children already from a very early age. Obviously, in achieving this goal, one of the core tasks of the library should be the provision of the material and more specifically the selection of it since children's reading has clear relations to what material they are provided with.

Cummins cited in Bauer et al. (1997: 83) states accordingly: *"All youngsters need physical nurturing at home, but it is librarians who nurture a love of reading through a well-stocked library that feeds young minds, and who make the connection between lifelong learning and books"*.

Research in the UK has shown that libraries can and should play that role at large (Departement of National Heritage 1996; Lonsdale 2000; CILIP 2002) whereas the need of more appealing books for young people has also been expressed in the UK's governmental strategy for public libraries *Framework for the Future* (2003).

1.3. The situation in UK Public libraries

In the UK there has been quite a lot of evidence over the last years of the practices that public libraries apply to select fiction titles for their children's collections (British Library research and innovation report 1998; Chambers and Stoll 1996; Lonsdale 2000). Much guidance and support have also been documented from either CILIP (formerly LA) and SLA or the government (PLSs and Best Value) that have largely assisted libraries in reconsidering their role and adopting more effective policies of provision to children's reading.

1.4. The situation in Greek Public libraries

According to their legal status, administrative responsibility and target group, Greek public libraries are divided into three categories: the "dimosies" (46 in total governed by the Ministry of Education), the "municipal" (686 in total governed by the local authorities) and "children's libraries" (also governed by the Ministry of Education) (Public Libraries Gateway 2005; Calimera Country Report 2004). The first two have had a long tradition of services to children since they maintain separate children's collections in their premises but the third (25 in total) have been established exclusively for children and young adults in rather rural areas, enhancing thus their learning and reading opportunities (Public Libraries Gateway 2005; Papazoglou and Semertzaki 2001).

The absence, however, of a governmental communal authority and therefore of a communal policy-as also confirmed by the recent Act on "dimosies" libraries-has been a major barrier for the development of and the cooperation between public libraries at national level.

What is more, there has been a considerable lack of research and therefore of knowledge of the actual level of and the current situation in children's library services offered throughout the country, let alone the selection practices for fiction titles. Given the importance of libraries' role in children's reading development, there is a clear need that these practices should be illuminated so that potential barriers to children's fiction selection may be brought to light and further

improvements may be suggested. In doing so, it is hoped that similar investigations may be conducted in favour of children's or public library provision in Greece.

1.5. Aim of the investigation

The main aim of this investigation is therefore to identify the practices and patterns by which Greek public libraries select fiction titles for their children's collections.

1.6. Objectives of the investigation

With regard to the above aim the following objectives are to be explored:

1. *To determine the criteria of selection Greek public libraries apply to children's fiction as well as to investigate their attitudes towards issues of quality*

2. *To determine the mechanics of selection-that is the sources of information public libraries use to select children's fiction*

3. *To explore whether stock selection policies are in place and what the librarians' views on their impact on the selection process are*

4. *To investigate the level of staff's knowledge and development on children's fiction and its selection*

The objectives set up above have been very thoughtfully selected as they all involve key aspects of library book selection. In order for these to be fulfilled a series of semi-structured interviews with librarians was carried out in dimosies and municipal libraries, ranging over the island of Crete and Athens.

1.7. Limitations to research

This investigation is to be carried out solely through qualitative data by interviewing the librarians in charge of selecting children's fiction. It is clear that a triangulation of methods incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data would be more appropriate for this study but this direction was opted out due mainly to time constraints. It was also thought that since there has not been much research in Greek public libraries so far interviews alone would allow for a deeper understanding of the research problem and offer the opportunity for possible misunderstandings to be cleared up on the spot whereas questionnaires could have been rather treated with neglect and generated ambiguity.

It is also clear that a broader geographical area may have been selected, allowing thus for the results to be much more generalisable but this was impossible due to both time limits and the cost of the estimated resources. However, since this research is one of the first attempts to illuminate the level of children's library services in Greece it was thought that the important thing was to record the general feeling of the situation, achieving as much more understanding as possible.

It should also be mentioned what is meant by the term "children's fiction". This research will mainly focus on children of the late primary school years (7-11) as is within this age range that children start to engage with works of fiction. It should be made clear that minority groups such as children with special needs or children with other cultural backgrounds could not have been included because that would very much have expanded the aim of this study. By the term fiction on the other hand it is meant all genre children's fiction (fantasy, adventure, horror etc.), classical and historical fiction and series of fictional works. Graphic novels, comics or other illustrated works are not examined in this study although they did offer as a positive stimulus for the selection debate.

Finally it should be made clear what the term "book or fiction selection" applies to for this piece of research. This concerns only the selection process through which children's librarians acquire new titles of fiction and therefore this study does not include issues of stock revision. Moreover, it should be said that other issues of

interest in collection development such as the acquisition process, the preservation, the conservation and the promotion of stock are not examined.

Within the purposes of this investigation was that the interviews were to be conducted exclusively with children's librarians. Unfortunately this was not the case, except only for the children's library. The shortage of staff in Greek public libraries made all other librarians deal with the provision of both adult's and children's collections.

1.8. Structure of investigation

The next chapter (2), comprising the literature review, encapsulates the children's fiction selection practices mainly of UK public libraries and the views on the subject expressed by professional librarians and other specialists. It is structured along the objectives of the research.

Chapter 3 deals with the methods applied in conducting the research and the limitations of data.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study with the analysis and the discussion of those in juxtaposition with the views expressed in the literature review.

Finally, chapter 5 concludes with the main points of this study, provides recommendations for future practice and suggests further areas of research in the field.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The criteria of selection

Provided that today children's publishing industry is huge as statistics indicate, (The Publishers Association 2005)[1] the selectors' role has become far more difficult, considering also that their decisions have to be confined within certain budget allocations.

Professional bodies such as the LA and the SLA in the UK, through their published guidelines, (Blanshard 1997a; Lemaire 2001; School Library Association 1992) and series such as *Books to enjoy* (categorised by age) have always provided assistance in this respect. In addition, international support to libraries concerned with children's services has come from UNESCO (UNESCO 1994) and IFLA (IFLA 2003), which have greatly contributed to this direction alike. The question, however, of "what libraries should choose for children" becomes more complex because these operate within different organisational cultures and different communities.

2.1.1. Book-related criteria

In judging the appropriateness of fiction titles, selectors have for one thing some certain criteria at their disposal. These usually refer to what the book itself can reveal as both a physical object and an identification tool. The former involves things such as format, cover, illustrations, jacket, and quality of the binding or paper of the material. The latter connects to the more informative elements of a book such as author, publisher, date of publication and blurb.

Truly, elements as those, have been used by librarians at large since they are readily accessible as long as an approval system is in place or they visit venues where books are stored (bookshops, library suppliers etc.). These can establish a

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[1] The number of new and revised children's book titles for 2001 and 2002 was 10,784 and 10,519 respectively. The title figures of 2003 and 2004 were not available.

first-hand approach to selecting material but as Esson (1991: 5) states, "*contents…are the prime consideration when reviewing books for purchase*".

More specifically, the physical state of a book is an important point librarians pay attention to because books should "*stand up to the wear and tear of library use*" (Chambers and Stoll 1996: 16). The quality of paper and of the overall production is also at issue since, when it comes to children, a well-looking and appealing stock has a bearing on their coming to the library (CILIP 2002). However, Egoff (1972) criticizes the fact that librarians often stick to the physical features of the book at the expense of the indisputable value of content.

The cover and the blurb are also much used when other information is limited or absent to the selector and children's librarians often choose by the cover as if they were in their young users' stead (Chambers and Stoll 1996). It has been proved that children are much influenced by the jacket and cover design in choosing their books and librarians have used this information to promote good quality books to them (Williams 1996). However, Dixon (1986: 152) asserts that the cover is much seen "*as a prime selling-point*" and that "*the librarian should not always go along with the artistic inappropriateness of the cover*". He continues (ibid. 1986: 152) on blurbs that "*most have fallen into a formula and are meaningless and unhelpful*".

Research has shown (British Library research and innovation report 1998) that author's and publisher's reputation is another issue librarians take into consideration when judging a title. As to both, librarians "*have strong impressions of the quality of various publishing houses in terms of the way the book looks as well as the reputation of their writers*" (Chambers and Stoll 1996: 15) with this being particularly true for series titles. However, at the same time they are wary of them as styles and traditions are changing over time, not to mention the appearance of new publishing houses on the foreground (Dixon 1986). Spiller (2000:21) points out that "*the individual titles of a well-known novelist are rarely uniform in quality*" and that publishers are more likely to be interested in the marketability rather than the quality of their products.

2.1.2 Children-related criteria

Identifying the reading preferences of the community is one of the most important tasks public libraries need to address. In addition, libraries should generally be in position to recognize the reading habits of today's children as well as their current popular culture (CILIP 2002). To this end, feedback from children on their satisfaction of the stock is necessary either unobtrusively by circulation statistics, observation and discussions with educators or more formally by community surveys (e.g. PLUSs initiated recently in the UK public libraries), focus groups and suggestion forms (Farmer 2001; Spiller 2000). Reading groups and book clubs where discussion on books can bring about much awareness are also very important (Blanshard 1998). Reaching out to community groups that serve youth or to areas that children gather could be another possible way of learning their recreational interests (Farmer 2001).

Surveys though are not without problems in that they require training in data collection and analysis as well as they may depict only a part of the real picture since the non-users may be excluded from the survey (Lonsdale 1996).

Blanshard (1998: 51) stresses the importance of involving children in the operation of library services: "*Children's observations and statements must be taken seriously for the sake of their development and of our own understanding. A child's view is different from that of an adult most of the time. We need to discover what their views can offer us and in what circumstances*" This is important because over their development children are changing all the time and libraries should go along with these changes (ibid. 1998).

2.1.3 Librarian's attitudes

The need for librarians to focus on the child's interests has been very often stressed and debated in the literature. The controversy refers to the fact that librarians often judge those interests according to their own standards since they tend to take on a rather patronizing role towards children (Hill 1973) with this resulting in conflicts

among them over which books should be bought (Chambers and Stoll 1996). Issues of quality are therefore of much consideration to them as "*they have a much stronger educational as well as moral sense to their aims*" (ibid 1996: 32). In this respect, Hill (1973: 118) points out the difficulty of meeting children's wants as opposed to the much easier role of the librarian as a "*custodian to a neat, well-balanced collection of good children's books*".

Leeson (1985) imputes this latter practice to adults' traditional misconceptions of children and their literature, which generally have deemed those as "inferior". The result was that children have been excluded from the evaluation of their literature, which has initiated the striking discrimination between popularity and quality. This cultural segregation, however, "*has been criticized as being elitist, pandering to the needs of the intellectual child and at the same time deterring the poor and reluctant reader*" (Lewins 1991: 52).

2.1.4. High and popular literature

"High" or literary fiction which does not need to be long (Cart 1993) or heavy-just readable (Egoff 1972)-usually comprises a story which features a good plot, characterization and style; provides information, helps the reader to escape from daily concerns and is meaningful (Spink 1989); provides interactivity, stimulation of imagination and thought" (Cart 1993: 106); gives realistic and acceptable social values, presents success and achievement as a result of hard work and a sense of optimism (Ray 1979). However, Lewins (1991) underscores that often "quality" literature is associated with readings that are dull and unattractive to children.

On the other hand "low" quality or popular fiction (e.g. comics, abridgements of classics, series, TV tie-ins, etc.) usually refers to readings, which mainly encompass the popular culture of children and may be not so thoughtfully produced resulting in easier syntax, simpler vocabulary or unrealistic content and according to Chambers (1973:121) readings that "*lack any artistic, moral or educational value*".

2.1.5 What to offer?

The controversy which concerns librarians, educators, parents and children's specialists alike, usually takes the form of what comprises quality and what not, whether children should be provided with only quality material or should additionally be exposed to the whole range of their literature.

Lewins (1991) and Genco (1988) admit to the fact that children need a wide-ranging reading to determine their preferences and develop skills of discrimination but on the other hand stresses the role of the library as provider of better-quality fiction since mediocre readings are everywhere and therefore easily accessible. Egoff (1972) furthermore points out that good literature is not just a matter of achieving literacy but it is rather one of an individual's development. She continues by saying that mediocre literature underestimates even the reluctant reader's abilities and expectations and cultivates laziness into children (ibid. 1972). Cart (1993) also believes that young people should be provided only with the serious works of fiction because thus they will become complete individuals and stresses the importance of the librarian in guiding them to recognize the good books.

Despite, though, the superiority of good literature easy readings are necessary for one thing in support of the backward reader (Ray 1979). Furthermore Genco et al. (1991) assert that librarians cannot just ignore the children's interests, which show a tendency to popular readings and that the power of good literature is "*to give to and take from popular culture*" (ibid. 1991: 259). Chambers (1973: 121) moreover believes that "*it is always better that children read something than that they read nothing at all*" and that "*children must be allowed to discover for themselves*" (ibid. 1973: 122), underscoring the importance of browsing as an indispensable learning experience to compare, asses and select.

The reconciliation of quality with popularity is for Leeson (1985: 147) a task that librarians should seek to complete because "*survival of the literature depends upon expansion, upon winning new readers. Filling the shelves with the best may simply be placing books in a time capsule for future archaeologists...a literature which exists in despite of its readers, which cannot reconcile quality with popularity,*

is asking to be discarded". What is of most importance to libraries is to consider the child, to consider the story and how that speaks to children, not the style, which is just the way the author chooses to write (ibid. 1985; Eccleshare 2004).

Some problems may arise with classical literature and its linguistic appropriateness to children, especially when it comes to televised readings which are not as childlike as they seem (Ray 1979). To this end well-produced abridged versions of these stories can be sought but not as such as to "*de-vitalize the language of a great book*" (Hill 1973: 120).

Children, particularly of the age range of 7-11, begin to develop their own personalities and to separate themselves from the standards set by adults (Ray 1979). To this end *"[librarians] should know that a children's book which is enjoyed almost exclusively by adults cannot be acclaimed as a successful book for children, whatever its literary merit*" (Hill 1973: 130).

2.1.6. Controversial material

Issues of content are getting even more controversial when it comes to themes, which are commonly considered obscene and by and large not generally accepted by the public social morality. It is considerable that issues like those have always provoked strong backlash among parents, teachers or librarians, with some cases even having gone to courts (Jones 1983). The subjectivity around "inappropriateness" or "obscenity" has not allowed for a clear legal or professional framework so far that would help librarians in their decisions, so the problem springs literally from its definition (Curry 1997; Malley 1990).

To what extent however, can the axiom of intellectual freedom be applied to children? The proactive intervention of librarians to children's reading, mentioned above, takes an even more striking form when issues such as sex, racism, violence etc. come out. According to Dresang (2003) an attitude of this sort has its roots in the ideology of childhood as both innocent and depraved. By contrast, today children are rather interactive, independent and more demanding learners that need to be seen in partnership with adults rather than in protection of them (ibid. 2003).

Choldin (2001) stresses the importance for librarians to place this kind of material on the shelves in an active, thoughtful and responsible way. Setting "obscene" or "hate" literature into context, educating our children to deal with such texts by reading with them and discussing about them, these "*become not a threat, but, rather, an opportunity to think individually and collectively about terribly important issues*" (ibid 2001: 156…). For "*How can a child be safe who does not recognize danger and know how and where to get help?* (Dresang 2003: 28)…"*adults must not force young people to pretend not to know what they do know (but may not understand)*" (ibid. 2003: 28). Broderick (1986) cited in Seney (2002: 29) states: "*A major reason we want children to become dedicated readers is so they will develop judgment, the ability to discern the good from the bad, the superior from the shoddy*". When children are given the opportunity of being faced with a controversial subject they can "*learn strategies for dealing with it in real life*" (Dresang 2003: 29). After all, children's right to access is both supported by the legal and professional framework of each country and at international level (e.g. IFLA's Guidelines, UNESCO's Public Library Manifesto, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) (Koren 2000).

Of course the exposure of children to controversial material is not a situation where they will have access to books with themes, which are considered-and obviously are-legally and socially unacceptable such as porn, raw violence, racism etc. After all, selection has to operate within the legal and professional framework stated above, which also stresses the duty of the information provider to prevent children from accessing harmful material (Koren 2000). What is needed is clear policies (Choldin 2001), cooperation with parents, who seem to have larger share of responsibility (Goldberg 1995; Sutton 2001) and build strong links between the library and the community (Dresang 2003).

2.2. The mechanics of selection

This comprises the sources of information selectors use in order to make as fair a judgment as possible on whether a title should be stocked in the children's collection. As Spiller (2000) points out not all information on a book is available at the same time and although selection can be more cost-effective if made after the

date of publication pressures of user's demand should also be taken into consideration.

2.2.1. UK public libraries' practices

Five case studies undertaken in British public libraries in 1989 (Blenkin and Lewins 1990) revealed that they all highly used collections of approval copies, sent regularly by library suppliers with reviews or trade bibliographies less being used. The CPI research (British Library research and innovation report 1998) just confirmed that public libraries are highly dependent on suppliers' information on junior titles with reviews playing also an important part in their decisions. In the *A place for children* project (Lonsdale 2000: 57) "*library suppliers' approvals [were] both rated as important and used by a very high percentage of libraries*". It is considerable in the same project that although all other sources were largely used (national, trade and selective bibliographies, suppliers' lists and CD-ROMs, internal and journal reviews and publisher's lists) they were rated as less important. Chambers and Stoll's (1996) research on the other hand showed that libraries used the shared reviews of the librarians themselves as a standard method of selection which was kept for future reference in case of an already reviewed author.

2.2.2. Suppliers

The high use of suppliers' approvals may reveal that, despite the low cost-effectiveness of this system, children's librarians want to familiarise with the stock and is a way that can provide new staff with valuable experience (Lonsdale 2000).

Suppliers offer today a whole range of services (Langston 2002): quick ordering and invoicing over a whole range of newly published titles, databases with both current and backlist titles available either online or through hardback copies; considerable discounts; and bibliographic information for the acquisition process.

To save time and money many libraries have opted for providing suppliers with certain criteria upon which the latter should choose for them (Chambers and Stoll 1996). However, as recently revealed, library suppliers are not satisfied with

this system, mainly because it lacks clarity of information on the libraries' part with its style and comprehensiveness being very poor as well.

The broad use of library suppliers, however, has raised concerns on their effectiveness. Spiller (2000: 20) wonders whether in the approvals system "*there can be any meaningful communion-in a five-minute inspection-between a librarian and a novel*". What is more, supplier's information can severely limit the availability of material, predetermining thus the librarians' selections (Dixon 1986) while "*using only inventoried titles as a source for selection will therefore not identify significant backlist titles, which may be superior to some of the new releases*" (Langston 2002: 30). Advanced ordering ("standing orders") for certain titles as often happens in the case of series or annual publications, is also a moot question since "*the quality of individual titles in a series can vary so much*" (Spiller 2000: 20). One possible solution to this problem might be the practice of CD-ROMs approvals, which provide comprehensive information on and evaluation of children's fiction titles while being a highly cost-effective method (Blanshard 1997b).

2.2.3. Reviews

Reviews on journals or newspapers, on the other hand (e.g. Books for Keeps, The School Librarian, Carousel, Times Educational Supplement etc.) have proved to be another important means for librarians to choose children's fiction titles which possibly shows that they are comprehensive in coverage (Lonsdale 2000). It is also positive that the majority of journal reviews includes bibliographic and ordering information (author, title, ISBN etc.) as well as "recommended" titles, saving up the librarians' valuable time (Bishop and Van Orden 1998).

However, reviews also present weaknesses of which librarians should be aware. These are most associated with their coverage measured with the total number of books of interest to the library, delays in their appearance and difficulties in tracing them when they are published (Spiller 2000). The important thing with reviews is according to Dixon (1986) whether they devote enough space to titles, not least of different categories. What is more, most reviews do not pay very much attention to illustrations, have differences in pages or price of the same title, are not

very comprehensive in assessing the literary virtues of books and overall provide more descriptive rather than evaluative comments (Bishop and Van Orden 1998).

Studies (ibid. 1998 and Wilson and Bishop 1999) revealed that no single journal is without cons, which means that librarians should take notice of more than one reviewing source. In addition Saricks (1998) and Bishop and Van Orden (1998) mention that there can be a great difference among reviews on the same titles since they are highly subjective in nature, although Dixon (1986: 135) asserts that this "*is a strength in the reviewing system and indicates that a book says something positive and causes a strong reaction and that it should be made available for library readers to form their own judgments*".

A final point of controversy is the actual competence of the critics themselves. Questions have been raised over their tendency of clinging to literary values rather than considering children themselves and their interaction with the book (Leeson 1985; Eccleshare 2004). Their frequent refusal to deal with more controversial titles has also put their competence at stake (Dixon 1986).

2.3. Selection policies

Public library services have to continually prove their value to both users and political authorities so to ensure appropriate funding. This is largely associated with the effectiveness of the service with money spent as thoughtfully as possible, and to this end a clear policy is necessary (Lonsdale 1996). A policy operates better when it is written down because thus it is "*more clearly thought out and more effectively communicated to its potential users*" (ibid. 1996: 136).

2.3.1. Selection philosophies

Hill (1973) notes that a book selection policy is "essential" as long as it works within a certain philosophy. This is further analysed by Cole and Usherwood (1996: 124) who assert that in order for a policy to be workable it should address the "why" of its existence so to "*prove worthwhile in the areas of accountability, responsiveness, staff training and professional standing*"; otherwise it can not

determine any significant difference from those authorities that do not posses one. According to Spiller (2000: 9-10) policy documents can remain sheer generalizations without any essential purpose unless they "*define priorities and services in a way that is meaningful to both policy makers and policy executors*". In addition since collections are dynamic in nature, policies should therefore be revised periodically, reflecting the changes in society, in communities and national and local priorities (Lonsdale 1996).

2.3.2. Professional and legal framework

Library policies, though, should operate within a certain professional and legal framework, that is to say the library associations' statements and the law of the country, in order for libraries to ensure a standard and justifiable service (Cole and Usherwood 1996). It is very important, however, that these frameworks and their emanating policies echo the current social and political scene. Cole and Usherwood (1996: 125) state accordingly: "*If libraries are to work according to stock management policies, then these policies need to incorporate a philosophy of access that is relevant in the 1990s*".

2.3.3. Parts of a selection policy

According to LA guidelines (Blanshard 1997a) a policy should cover: the recognition of children's stock demand; a judgment of children's needs; a knowledge of materials; the selection criteria and the recognition of the value of feedback from children themselves. It is really considerable that such professional guidelines have had a great impact on the development of collection development policies by public libraries (Stephens 1998).

Alabaster (2002: 28) states that there should be two kinds of collection development policy statements: one that is used as mission statement and operates as a communicative tool to the public, justifying "*in a very general way*" the existence of the library stock in place. This should be considered within the professional and legal framework, stated above, so that potential concerns from the public could be

dealt with in advance. The other is actually for the use of the library staff and outlines the detailed procedures through which selection should be carried out.

2.3.4. The importance of policies to public libraries

The need of a policy has been broadly recognised in the literature for one thing in order for the library to support children's reading. Selection guidelines should be part of the broader collection development policy of the library authority, be agreed between library management and selectors and echo the local authority's broader policy as well as the needs of the local communities. (Blanshard 1997a).

The usefulness of such a policy lies according to Evans (2000) in that it provides information on the nature and the scope of the collection and on the collecting priorities, generates a sense of commitment to organisational goals, standardises the selection process so potential bias is avoided, is a training tool for new staff and provides consistency and a reference standard for dealing with complaints and budget allocations.

Especially, in the case of controversial material, a policy can be of valuable help to staff's selection decisions and on the other hand serve as a wonderful political instrument to external pressures and complaints. (Choldin 2001; Cole and Usherwood 1996; Jones 1983).

Within this framework, though, the responsibility of the librarian is still important because "*decisions have still to be made*" by them (Lewins 1991: 55). Lonsdale (1996: 137) points out that policies should not be seen as "*mechanically applied directives*" but as useful guidelines and that there is a need for the development of such documents for children separately.

Despite however the importance given to the existence of selection policies, it is still questionable whether public libraries own such documents, let alone separate policies for children's collections. In the UK a survey (Lonsdale 2000) showed that this was not always the case with almost half of the respondents indicating that they

possessed a written collection policy and with only a 8% of them having one for children's reading separately.

2.4. Staff knowledge and development

Staff awareness and professional skill is quite an issue, particularly when it comes to children's books and reading. As noted previously a policy statement gives an agreed pattern to all staff upon which selection can be based and provides an excellent training tool for novice selectors. This however, as Lewins (1991: 55) states, "*does not take away the responsibility for selection from the librarian*" and "*once policies are in place, librarians need to side with the children and their right to read*" (Mavrogenes cited in Bauer et al. 1997: 89).

Hill (1973: 103) addresses this responsibility ranging over "*a mixture of imagination, common sense, intelligence, firmness, organising ability, professional skill, knowledge of children and books and awareness of the society within which the librarian operates*".

2.4.1. Staff awareness

Eccleshare (2004:1) determines the role of children's librarians as that of "*keeping alive the notion of reading for pleasure*" but in order to do that they should previously have developed a sound knowledge of what a good children's book is. So she stresses the importance for them to read books to become sound critics: "*Good criticism relies on an informed response to a close reading of a text. Good critics bring an informed opinion to that response through their previous experience*". Hill (1973: 106) also points out that in order for the children's librarian to "*develop a sound judgment*" reading children's fiction should be part of the in-service training system of the library. This does not only assist the librarian in extending their knowledge of what is a good or a bad book but is also an excellent tool of "selling" the reading product to children (Genco et al. 1991). The latter need help in choosing books from the library and staff should not fall short of their expectations (ibid. 1991; Cart 1993).

Saricks (1998) discusses the ways by which selectors can develop a good knowledge of and gain valuable experience on the selection process. According to her (ibid. 1998: 12), "*selectors should work the desk*" which involves shelving material as well, identifying thus at first hand the users' needs and developing a knowledge of what is popular with the public because "s*electors can no longer afford to isolate themselves and purchase only what they think best for their fiction collections*". (ibid. 1998: 27; Esson 1991). Talking to children and learning about their interests so closely is an advantage that only librarians have in the children's book world (Hill 1973) and this is very important because "*the library's reading public are more comfortable seeking [the librarians'] assistance, because they know [they] value their opinions*" (Saricks 1998: 27-8).

Within this framework, the sharing experiences and knowledge among all staff are quite significant because thus they extend their reading knowledge and learn about new books, which may be of value to users (ibid. 1998). "W*hen all staff feel empowered to suggest, and suggestions are solicited from patrons as well, a well-balanced collection is more likely to be the result*" (ibid. 1998: 14). On a more formal basis, regular group discussion and meetings among staff could be also valuable in building knowledge of children's books and the approvals system has offered such an opportunity as research showed (British Library research and innovation report 1998; Lonsdale 2000).

As previously seen, some librarians have also practiced doing reviews on the books on their own and using them later for future reference (Chambers and Stoll 1996; Dixon 1986). The importance of such practices lies according to Dixon (1986) on the point that staff familiarizes with the stock and thus can exploit it better for the sake of the users.

2.4.2. Staff development

Stock selection training can be basically provided at two levels: the first takes place in library schools, where collection development coursework is examined as part of the degree curriculum; the second is provided through seminars and workshop sessions over one's library career.

According to Olson (1998) book selection in library schools should always be examined in conjunction with reader's advisory services since the latter largely draws upon the knowledge of how books are selected. However, as Saricks (1998) states fiction selection is a job learnt in practice and not in a library school.

The latter relates to the controversy over who should be involved in book selection for children with questions raised on the competence of the non-professionals as opposed to the professional children's librarians (Lonsdale 2000). Although it could be said that the use of non-professional staff diminishes the professionalism in the field, in some cases experience with working with children and their carers is far more important than professional qualifications (Lonsdale 1996).

On the other hand, professional training and development should be part of every library's mission. As Esson (1991: 4) points out "*trained and informed staff will be more motivated to provide an effective service*". Seminars, workshops and professional guidance have been always of much value to librarians and the existence of various professional organisations (LA, YLG, NAG, Opening the Book to mention a few) as well as the government's provision to libraries through DCMS/Wolfson funding in the UK (CILIP 2002) have provided excellent training and development opportunities with regard both to children's literature and fiction selection issues.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

As this study seeks to reveal the practices applied by Greek public libraries for children's fiction selection it was decided that the views of the staff in charge should be illustrated on the issue. Consequently, the research is entirely qualitative in approach because "*qualitative researchers seek to understand what people believe, how they feel, how they interpret events*" (Gorman and Clayton 1997: 25). Since the study starts with a problem (which are the selection practices?), no hypothesis exists. This means that the approach is inductive, allowing themes to emerge from the data as they are collected and interpreted (Patton 1990). According to Bailey (1982: 56) the analysis of the empirical data ("*empirical level*") will define the concepts ("*conceptual level*") of the study, which forms the "*grounded theory*" approach.

As already mentioned in the Introduction, although a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methods would be ideal, it would also prove very time-consuming for this piece of research. In addition, due to the considerable lack of similar projects in Greek librarianship, it was thought that a qualitative approach would be thus more appropriate for illuminating an unknown research area because "*it allows complexities to be elucidated by those who are directly involved, rather than studied from a distance by remote researchers*" (Gorman and Clayton 1997: 31). Although this approach "*makes the findings difficult to generalize to another time or place*" (Bailey 1982: 59), the main purpose of the study is to "*understand the process of events-how ideas become actions…and the various components of the process*" in their natural setting ("naturalistic enquiry") (Gorman and Clayton 1997: 25). Namely, as Patton (1990: 424) states "*the emphasis is on illumination, understanding, and extrapolation rather than causal determination, prediction, and generalization*".

3.2. Method of investigation

Marshall and Rossman (1989) divide the purposes of a study into four types suggesting research strategies for each one of them. It was decided that the most

suitable method for this investigation would be interviewing individuals in charge of children's fiction selection because thus "*in-depth information*" can be obtained "*from subjects who know a great deal about their personal perceptions of events, processes and environments*" (Gorman and Clayton 1997: 44-5) and in a very short time-span (Marshall and Rossman 1989). Interviews, through interaction, allow for resolving any ambiguities, offer insight to the problem and enable to explore causation (Gorman and Clayton 1997).

3.2.1. The type of interviews

Patton (1990) states three different approaches to interviewing-the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide and the standardized open-ended interview-with each one serving different research purposes. The first, despite offering in-depth communication, it is very time-consuming because it makes the data quite difficult to manage and analyse. The second, for its comprehensiveness provided by the general outline, the flexibility in sequencing and wording questions can reduce the comparability of the responses. For saving valuable time and collecting data in a systematic and thorough way the standardized open-ended interview was opted for. Because all interviewees are asked exactly the same questions the level of variation and bias is reduced as well as responses are easily organized, analysed and compared (Patton 1990).

3.2.2. Limitations to interviewing

Despite though the admitted advantages of interviewing there are also some weaknesses relating to this method. First of all conducting quality interviews depends largely on the willingness and the cooperation of the participants, who sometimes may not reveal their true beliefs (Marshall and Rossman 1989). Moreover, interviews can prove very time-consuming especially in the process of transcribing the records and the large amount of data collected can make their organisation and analysis quite onerous (Gorman and Clayton 1997), a fact the present research was faced with. Personal bias of the interviewer is also an issue as it can affect the reliability and validity of the findings (ibid. 1997). Neutrality of the researcher is necessary to this end and can be achieved as Brenner-cited in Gorman

and Clayton (1997)-states by nondirective questioning and by facilitating the participants in a nonjudgmental and supportive way.

3.2.3. Structure of the interview

The interview schedule (Appendix A) forms a standardized set of open-ended questions for each one objective separately. As previously explained this approach was used both for quickening the interview process and combating potential bias in the responses. Although predetermined, open-ended questions "*permit respondents to respond in their own terms (Patton 1990: 295)...to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want*" (ibid. 1990: 297). In dealing with misunderstandings probes or follow-up questions were also used so that all themes were well clarified and covered (Bailey 1982).

3.2.4. Sampling

In order for a research to be as much generalisable as possible the sample for investigation should represent the range of data in the population (Bailey 1982). According to Dobbert-cited in Marshall and Rossman (1989: 55)-"*the best compromise is to include a sample with the widest range of variation in the phenomenon, settings or people under study*". What is important moreover is that, no matter the sampling strategy used, the underlying principle should be the selection of information-rich cases (Patton 1990). In selecting sites and participants it is equally important that these meet the desirable characteristics required by the research (Gorman and Clayton 1997). As for the size of a sample, this as Patton (1990: 184) states "*depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources*".

For the present study a set of rather mixed sampling strategies were used, featuring convenience, quota, dimensional and purposive sampling (Bailey 1982). More specifically, since the research focuses on Greek public libraries, the selected sample included both one "dimosia" library and four municipal libraries with one of them being a branch children's library. The separate institution of "children's

libraries" was not included in the investigation because these, although related to children, are rather a special type of libraries (see Introduction) whose role would need investigating in a separate study. Besides, due to their remoteness, they were very difficult to access, anyway. Of the five authorities visited, three were in the island of Crete and the rest two in Athens ranging thus over a fairly broad geographical area. The interviews were all conducted in July during one-week time. All sites were selected on the base that they had rich children's fiction collections and appropriate staff dealing with those.

3.2.5. Recording the results

In conducting the interviews a tape-recorder was used. This not only increases the accuracy of the data but also "*permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee*" (Patton 1990: 348), which could not have been achieved by note keeping. Despite the obvious advantages of this method tape-recording has weaknesses as well (Gorman and Clayton 1997). Sometimes interviewees do not feel at ease with a tape-recorder next to them and this can prevent them from expressing themselves freely. Background noise or other intrusions can also affect the interview process negatively, a fact confirmed by the research in at least one case. But the most difficult part in their use is transcribing the material alone. This lagged very much the research because it proved a very time-consuming process.

3.2.6. Organisation and analysis of the results

After collecting a large amount of data, it was attempted to bring "*order, structure and meaning*" (Marshall and Rossman 1989: 112) to those by identifying relationships among them. This was done both through case and cross-case analysis, namely by transcribing first each case separately and then editing and grouping together different cases (Patton 1990). More specifically, content analysis involved classifying the data into categories and themes, which emerged from both the research questions and the data (Mason 1996; Patton 1990). This was very important in keeping track of which the key issues of the research are and in facilitating the comparison and analysis of the data (Mason 1996). Once themes were emerged, the

research processed to the analysis and discussion of the data in the context of the literature review.

3.3. The Literature Review

The review of related literature was fundamental in conducting the research. This was confined mainly to British librarianship theory and practice with cases from other countries being also cited where appropriate. The literature review serves for one thing in that it brings out the key assumptions and values that form the theoretical framework on which research should be based (Marshall and Rossman 1989). It also helps in choosing appropriate methodology (Gorman and Clayton 1997) and in forming the research questions, the objectives and the research method (interviewing) used (Marshall and Rossman 1989).

In conducting the literature review, a number of sources were used such as online databases (LISA, ERIC and Web of Science), the Internet and searching for related titles on the library shelves.

3.4. Ethical Issues

Since the research involves human participants, ethical considerations should not be a least priority. For one thing participants should be clearly aware of the nature and the purpose of the study and this should process only with their approval. This is important to be gained not only on an informal basis but also in the way of an "Informed Consent Form" (Bailey 1982). Such a document is presented in Appendix B and should more or less include: the identification of the researchers, the purpose and the procedures of the study, its potential benefits or discomforts to participants and their organisations, the opportunity for them to ask anything or even withdraw from the process at any time and an assurance of confidentiality of subjects and sites.

For the present study anonymity was kept by referring to each library visited as Authority A, B, C, D and E. Each was also provided with a Participant Information Sheet and a Participant Consent Form to sign (Appendix B).

3.5. Limitations of data

As already mentioned (Introduction), a broader geographical area may have been selected, incorporating other Greek regions but this was practically impossible due to time and cost limits.

Despite the importance of a pilot study to the research (Gorman and Clayton 1997), this was opted out, again because of the very limited time frame.

As the fieldwork went on some questions proved to be of more relevance than others. For instance questions relating to issues of supplying and of selection policies were rather dealt with embarrassment and reservation, which made the research difficult in the outset. However, this gave further motives for the research to explore the reasons under which long-standing models found in the literature do not apply to Greek public libraries.

Very often participants eluded from the concept of children's fiction and got to the more general of children's books. When this happened they were admonished that their attention should be to fiction alone.

Tape-recording, though proved to be of invaluable help, made some of the participants more reserved and less comfortable to speak (Gorman and Clayton 1997). This was obvious in the end of conversations when they got more extravert and open to discuss related issues.

Finally, every effort was made on the researcher's part not to interject any personal bias or convictions to the data. The interview process was rather conducted in a non-judgmental and supportive manner, facilitating the flow of the discussion.

4. The Results

In this chapter the results of the interviews are presented in the order set up by the objectives of this study. These are further structured into themes, emerged both from the questions of the interview (Appendix A) and the responses to them by all five authorities. The classification of the raw data into themes allowed for them to be easily compared and analysed. In order for the study to achieve deeper understanding for the reader, the discussion of the results is presented at the end of each subchapter comprised by the objectives. Since the interviews were conducted in Greek language, the translation of the responses below was made to the best of the researcher's ability.

The selection process

The first section of the interview schedule was intended to get a broad view of how the selection process is made in the libraries. It was rather used as an enrichment of the data in the main following section and therefore the responses to this question are widespread within it where appropriate each time.

4.1. The criteria of selection

4.1.1. Book-related criteria

Authorities were asked to prioritize the criteria they use when judging a book. Contents, authors and publishers were among the most used.

Content

Content was thought as the number one criterion and it is considerable that it was associated with children's interests:

First of all is the content itself...there are some themes such as mystery or detective stories (e.g. Alfred Hitchcock's Mysteries), which are very popular with children, and we provide them all (Authority B).

Above all I would say the content is of our first priorities in children's books; you cannot but buy a historical fiction, fantasy or adventure literature...all those subjects children like to read; you cannot buy on the other hand for example horror fiction which would scare children (Authority C).

A children's story should discuss contemporary issues such as drugs, racism, family issues (e.g. divorce), children with special needs, which can attract them (Authority E).

Sometimes content was connected to authors or publishers:

Of course above all is content in its own right and usually a known writer/illustrator or publisher can guarantee the quality of the content of a book (Authority D).

Other times to the title or a good translation:

We look basically at the titles...if it comes to a foreign book we look at the translation itself (Authority A).

Authors/illustrators/publishers

These were invariably used by all authorities. particularly when it came to known names:

We look whether it comes to a reliable publisher...Author is also of consideration to us despite the fact that children's authors today are so many that it is difficult to keep pace with (Authority A).

We consider successful authors such as Zorz Sari, Kontoleon etc. We do not actually look at specific publishers (Authority B).

After the content, I would vote for the author; if it comes for a book of a known and reliable author, say, Kontoleon or Trivizas, we buy it blindfold. Then it comes the publisher (Authority C).

Certainly we would look at a known writer whose value in children's literature has been tested; of course, the publisher as well (Authority E).

The writer especially when they have proved their value e.g. Trivizas, Iliopoulos (Authority D).

One pointed out that there are less known publishers, which may be of equal value:

A good publisher which does not necessarily mean the known ones; there are several others of a lower marketing profile who produce high quality children's literature (Authority D).

Cover/illustration/format

Some regarded these as important and relevant to children:

The cover and illustration are also a major factor that we look at since children themselves look at them as well...Papadopoulos and Angyra have made great efforts on that field... (Authority A).

The illustration is of great importance in children's books (Authority C).

Illustration both on cover and content is quite important; (Authority D).

Of course the illustration, although children may not be easily deceived by a fancy cover when the content is bad (Authority E).

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But others didn't pay any attention:

We don't care for the cover or the format of the book...whether it has a stunning or a simple cover, paperback or hardback, with few or many pages, small or large sized etc.; we do not mind...above all content comes first (Authority B).

4.1.2. Children-related criteria

This section sought to determine the children's role in librarians' decisions. The ways of engaging them into those decisions were also asked.

Children's role

All authorities regarded children as a major force guiding their decisions:

If a child has a particular preference for a title we try to satisfy that after checking it out...its appropriateness etc. (Authority A).

The information comes basically from children themselves (Authority B).

Rarely miss the children their choices out, particularly the experienced readers and we generally give prominence to those choices (Authority C).

We highly value our children's opinions. We tell them constantly that it is their own right to suggest and choose books for the library (Authority D).

We base much on children's views because they are those that all is about...and we try to follow their reading pleasures e.g. Rowling, Tolkien, adventure, science fiction stories etc. (Authority E).

Ways of engaging them to selection decisions

Most authorities did not practice any formal way of getting feedback from children, although they considered that of value to them. The usual way was discussion with the librarian and in-service use:

Unfortunately we do not receive much information from children themselves… we do not have a formal way of learning about their reading preferences such as surveys etc. basically due to the fact that we do not have appropriate and adequate staff for that. It is important though to have a more systematic way to learn what children want to read, because after all it is those that books are about…(Authority A).

We look at what they read through in-service use and statistics from the library's catalogue, which books are most borrowed etc. We also take into consideration the requests made either by children or their teachers (Authority B).

Children can suggest books whenever they come to the library. I think, though, that more formal ways such as surveys and statistics on children's reading habits would be a positive addition to our job (Authority D).

One however stressed the fact that their relationship with the children within the library could not have been awfully assisted by surveys or other methods:

We mainly get feedback from children on an informal basis through their suggestions and requests on the counter; then we get to the bookshop and look at the contents, the writers, the publishers…I do not believe that a formal way of learning about children's reading preferences would change our views dramatically. Surveys conducted by libraries would probably have a point in large cities where users come and go. We, on the other hand, operate in a small town where our strength is our relationship with children developed within a climate of mutual trust. We know our children and thus we know what they want (Authority C).

One quitted their request forms because it greatly committed them towards children:

We provided a form but we quitted that because we couldn't satisfy every request mostly due to financial reasons. Thus the information on their preferences has taken the form of informal discussion with them and with their parents in the library (Authority E).

Cooperation with schools was another useful way of learning what children want:

At the moment we run some programmes in cooperation with schools where we have the opportunity to exchange views with children and learn about their reading needs (Authority D).

In addition we have established very good relationships with schools and the teachers; it is a very good way of learning what children want to read (Authority E).

4.1.3. What is a good children's story?

This question was asked to identify what librarians regard as quality fiction.

Elements of a good children's story

Most authorities referred to the content, the language and the plot:

In principle the first thing a book should have (and which the child looks at) is good illustration. Easy language is another element e.g. for a 8-10 year old child it is important that the book is comprehensible and accessible. The quality of a book appears in its giving the meanings through simple language; a good translation for foreign literature and most of all the content of the book... (Authority A).

First of all I think it is the language; there are some books, which are badly written...the content...it could not be, say, of any racist or propagandistic attitude (Authority B).

For one thing it's content; the way it is written, namely, the story runs on, it does not get children bored...it has a consistency throughout the plot and it is constantly evolving...this excites them the most and incites them to finish it up (Authority C).

Something that is fresh! That is directly connected to the way we live today. Then of course the language is important for them to learn to read properly, the plot should be fast and striking...good characterization...a story that has a beginning, a middle and an ending part (Authority D).

One authority focused on the impact that a good book should have on a child:

First of all is the subject of the story, the language, what it offers to the child...a book is more than a pure recreational tool...it should give them something more, not necessarily an ethical lesson but rather a positive impression even through the popular readings of adventure or fantasy (Authority E).

4.1.4. Read something or read nothing?

In this section authorities were asked whether they agree with a statement coming from the literature: "*A child is better to read something than to read nothing at all*".

All agreed with this statement. They expressed the conviction that reading is the important thing and as long as children are introduced into this habit, no matter how, it is to their own avail. There was also a consensus that popular readings can serve as an indulgence to books and libraries and can pave the way for quality to distinguish on the shelves:

I believe that it is very good for a child to start to read something-whatever this may be-and just finish it and then there will be sometime that they bump into the good ones…reading is a good habit in general (Authority A).

I definitely believe that reading something is better than reading nothing. I do not of course mean that children should read even trash! Here we provide for example some of Disney publications, which are already known to children from the TV series; these have the use of an attraction…and by the time that children have read these they will have learnt to go to the library and it is a matter of time to choose something else from the shelves (Authority B).

Truly I believe that. We for example own fiction of Blyton, which are easy and very readable for children. Parents themselves prod us to buy those readings to draw their children's attention. If we provide a child with something easy or of low quality we do not expect them to get something valuable but we put them into the reading habit; after all I do not think that there is a single book which would be meaningless for a child; when this happens, some day they will get the quality ones (Authority C).

One pointed out that light readings should not override quality literature:

Yes. I would agree with that but not at the expense of quality literature. There are times when I recommend parents allow their children to read books such as comics, illustrated stories etc….it is a way of approaching the book. I believe that no matter what a child reads there is something going on, the cog starts to move the whole machine. Some day they will take the quality fiction off the shelves; (Authority E).

An authority suggested that sometimes low quality readings is better to be read with an adult:

I would not consider popular readings such as series like Harry Potter, comics, etc. as a don't in children's reading and it is not good for a child not to be allowed to read those. However, I believe that children when reading such literature,

they had better do this with the librarian or the parent who will explain and discuss with them the content of such readings (Authority D).

4.1.5. Quality vs. Demand

Questions were asked on which the proportion between low and quality literature is in the library and what the librarians believe about that.

The general feeling was that libraries give precedence to quality literature but they cannot ignore the popularity that light readings have among children. There was also the common belief that quality literature will some time excel the mediocre or the bad:

Generally the philosophy of the library is to give prominence to good literature and to promote quality books to children e.g. we provide classical literature either Greek or foreign, classical fairy tails, themes from Greek mythology, writers such as Julio Vern whose works are always catered for. However, we provide less quality books such as comics (e.g. Ten-ten) and popular literature like Harry Potter as "touters" in order to approach those interested in them; children could find a lot more quality books in their searching for Harry Potter on the shelves... (Authority A).

Yes. We provide popular readings as well. We own some detective stories which are certainly not of first value but we provide them to get children into the library. If you place those readings next to, say, Julio Vern, some time the child will move to Julio Vern (Authority B).

One stressed the fact that every child is different and so have their books to be different and of various kinds:

Yes. We provide both easy and difficult readings, pleasant and more dramatic, fantasy, adventure, TV tie-ins, comics...all sized books...we provide books for all types of readers, because children are different, we cannot expect them to read alike nor to like the same genre (Authority C).

Some underscored the fact that library is the melting pot of all ideas:

I believe that the library should own everything…because knowledge applies to everything readable (Authority A).

We provide the majority of books since I believe that our mission is to offer the child the whole range of ideas through books (Authority B).

It is considerable that financial constraints forced libraries to focus on quality books:

I would not say that we have a balanced collection between popular and high quality readings. We provide the former but not in quantity. After all I believe that the quality ones are much more in the market. Comics we get from donations, we do not buy them. What is more when your budget is limited you naturally tend to buy quality literature, that will stand the time, not comics! (Authority D).

One stressed the librarian's responsibility to feed the child on quality readings:

Yes. We provide such readings as comics and those that one can find in a supermarket but we do not have a balanced collection as compared with that of the quality fiction. We cannot ignore the fact that children want such readings but we cannot on the other hand ignore our responsibility towards them…they deserve the good ones. (Authority E).

Classical literature and abridgements

There was a positive attitude towards abridgements of classics provided that these were well produced:

As for abridgements we try to provide them as much as possible…if an early-aged child read e.g. the Three Musqueteers in an illustrated, abridged version, provided that this is a good and appealing one, it can motivate them to read the

original at a later age; after all it is difficult for a child to read a book of 500-600 pages in a language that they cannot either understand...it dismays them (Authority B).

We also provide abridgements of classical fiction, provided that these are well produced (Authority C).

For abridgements, I have no objection, provided that these are well produced or translated. For how else can an 8 year-old understand, say, Dickens or Twain? (Authority D).

For abridgements of classics I would say that as long as they are of high quality children should certainly read them; there is no reason why a child should be deprived of so important texts though simplified (Authority E).

One authority criticized the fact that adults very often push children to read the classics jostling their real interests off:

Many times parents force their children to read classical writers such as Loudemis, Papantoniou, Karkavitsas etc. but these are not always what children want to read. I believe that children as inexperienced readers are very natural to choose to read books of their time and of their popular culture. When they will have grown keen readers they are more likely to read the classics, which then will give their full contribution to them (Authority E).

4.1.6. Intellectual freedom

The question here was to identify the librarians' attitude towards the relationship between children and controversial issues.

Issues of controversy and children

All authorities agreed that intellectual freedom is important for children and that controversial themes should exist in the library and be available to them. This

was explained on the grounds that these help children understand the world they live in:

Books with themes such as sex, AIDS, drugs, racisms, ethnicism etc. are very important to exist in the library because the child needs to and should know about certain things...it is a way for their questions to be answered and elucidated (Authority A).

Personally I believe that children should be free to read what they want (Authority B).

I think that the library should have books on controversial issues; it is after all a place where all ideas should co-exist and circulate. Children are better to read them openly in the library rather than in secret away from their parents. There are many wonderful books which deal with and explore such subjects in a way that help children understand their world around them; for children will sooner or later face those themes in their lives...so why not know about them in advance? (Authority C).

Some stressed the intervention of the librarian as an educator and guide to children:

We provide many books on various themes such as racism, sex, violence, and we recognize the fact that we live in a multicultural society. It has been observed that when it comes to such issues, children giggle or hide in groups as if in conspiracy. My experience has shown that when you tell children that these are books like all the others-that's why they are on the shelves-and there is no reason to feel guilt for reading them, then they start dealing with them in a much different and more mature way (Authority D).

I think that over the last years there have been many good books written on such issues and they have helped children a lot. These books should be part of the library collection; they certainly give them a proper view of reality; they discuss real situations, which children cannot ignore because they will be faced with them in the future. When it comes to such topics, children begin to smile in secret and to feel

embarrassed; we, as librarians, intervene, explaining them that these books are to be read by them and not to remain intact on the shelves. (Authority E).

Adults' role

This was stressed very important by all five authorities:

Parents could help by approving their children's choices and trying to offer them these books in a less patronizing or compromising manner (Authority A).

Children should read with some guidance when it comes to controversial issues such as racism etc. (Authority B).

It would be better if children had the support and assistance of their parents when they bump into themes of sex, racism etc. (Authority C).

The support either of the parent or the librarian to give answers and explanations on these issues is very important (Authority D).

Especially for small ages, themes like sex, drugs, racism etc. would be better if read with a parent so that questions or phobias that children can be loaded with may be sorted out on the spot. Besides we have not yet experienced in the library a child borrowing such a story on their own without their parents' supervision (Authority E).

Complaints from the public

There had been quite a few occasions when an adult complained about a particular book. However, when these occurred they were dealt with discussion, without withdrawing the particular books off the shelves:

Once we dealt with a parent whose 12 year-old child borrowed a title with erotic subject from the adult's collection. I do not think that such an incident did any

harm to that child...it is not the end of the world...children today may be much more harmed from several other things than a single book... (Authority A).

There have been once complaints about Harry Potter in the library, that it largely promotes sorcery and is against Christian ethics, but that has not made us withdraw Harry Potter off the shelves (Authority B).

We once dealt with a parent's complaint on a book about sex; we did not withdraw the book and we resolved the raised issue with discussion with the parent. Sex education has been lately introduced as a core module in schools...why not be offered in libraries? (Authority C).

4.1.7. Discussion

All five authorities admitted to the superiority of the content against all other book-related criteria as witnessed in the literature (Esson 1991), which also relates to the role of children's librarians as custodians to and conservators of quality (Hill 1973; Chambers and Stoll 1996). It is considerable though that content was largely sought to be in line with "*all those subjects children like to read*" (Authority C) e.g. fantasy, adventure etc., which shows that librarians do consider the child and their interests (Eccleshare 2004; Genco et al. 1991; Leeson 1985); for after all "*[children] are those that all is about*" (Authority E). Authors and publishers on the other hand were also of high use, particularly when it came to a known and reputable name. In this respect, reliability was not an issue for consideration despite the fact that publishing or writing styles can change (Dixon 1986; Spiller 2000). As for the cover and the format of books, some regarded those as important in that "*children look at them as well*" (Authority A), an attitude also found in the literature (CILIP 2002; Williams 1996); by contrast, one did not pay any attention to them, with content being its first priority (Authority B), a practice supported also by Egoff (1972). This latter difference is rather the result of librarians' different values than of different policies.

Children played a significant role in all authorities, which overtly value their opinions in their selection decisions. One pointed out the fact that "*rarely miss the*

children their choices out" (Authority C) while another stressed that [children] "*are those that all is about*" (Authority E) which parallels the view of Blanshard (1998) that "*Children's observations and statements must be taken seriously for the sake of their development*". The ways, however, of getting children's feedback were rather those of free discussion on the counter or of the in-service use. More formal ways of approaching children and of learning about their needs (e.g. surveys etc.) were not mentioned, although the cooperation with schools in some cases has provided broader views in this respect. The absence of such formal practices was the result in one case of the inability and insufficiency of the staff, a fact stressed by Lonsdale (1996), while in another case that of the great commitment suggestion forms had brought. It has to be noted that one imputed the lack of such methods to the fact that "*surveys conducted by libraries would probably have a point in large cities where users come and go*". By contrast, in small communities librarians "*know [their] children and thus [they] know what they want*" (Authority C), a practice, however that may exclude the non-users.

As for what comprises a good children's story, not surprisingly the responses ranged over the content, the language and the plot. It was voiced that subjects should be "*fresh*" and "*directly connected to the way we live today*" (Authority D), which parallels Ray's (1979) emphasis on realistic and social values. On the other hand, the dynamics of the language should not only lay in making a story "*comprehensible and accessible to them*" but also in giving the meanings of it (Authority A). As far as the plot is concerned, this should be "*constantly evolving*" and "*not get children bored*" (Authority C). Overall a good story-no matter its subject-should leave the child with "*a positive impression*" (Authority E). It is notable that all these comments were made with children in mind, exempted from their own standards (Hill 1973).

Authorities were asked to express their views on whether children are better to read something-even of bad quality-than nothing at all. All of them agreed that reading is the important thing and as long as children are introduced into this habit, no matter the way, it is to their own avail: "*If we provide a child with something easy or of low quality we do not expect them to get something valuable but we put them into the reading habit*" (Authority C), although Egoff (1972) asserts that mediocre readings cultivate laziness into children and undermine the ability of all readers. As

broadly expressed in the literature (Lewins 1991; Genco 1988), through wide-range reading children develop skills of discrimination and therefore "*there will be some day that they bump into the good ones*" (Authority A).

In this sense popular or low quality readings (comics, fantasy, science fiction etc.) were provided by all authorities because "*these have the use of an attraction*" (Authority B), or of "*touters*" (Authority A) that will get children coming into the library. This is important because "*survival of the literature depends upon expansion, upon winning new readers*" (Leeson 1985: 147) and this happens by reconciling popularity with quality. The last connects to the general view expressed that children's interests cannot be ignored (also found in Genco et al. 1991, Chambers 1973 and Eccleshare 2004) and that children should be exposed to the whole of their literature. What is more, it was voiced that libraries should provide books for all kinds of readers "*because children are different, we cannot expect them to read alike nor to like the same genre*" (Authority C), a view also expressed by Lewins (1991) and Ray (1979).

However, the patronizing attitude of librarians (Chambers and Stoll 1996) was obvious among some authorities: "*we cannot ignore our responsibility…which is that [children] deserve the good ones*" (Authority E) while another expressed the need for these readings to be read with librarians or parents (Authority D). The practice of checking books out for their appropriateness in the bookshops also confirms this attitude at large.

For abridgements of classics, all authorities stressed the importance of such readings to be on the shelves because they provide the opportunity for children to experience themselves with literary treasures, which cannot otherwise be approached or understood. It was voiced, however, that these should be of quality production, as also Hill (1973) points out.

All authorities expressed similar thoughts to those from the literature (Choldin 2001; Dresang 2003; Seney 2002) that children should be exposed to controversial themes because thus they will achieve an understanding of the reality they live in and be well prepared to deal with those in their lives. But at the same

time the responsibility of adults, whether be librarians or parents, was voiced as extremely important not only for guiding them and providing explanations to their questions but also for disengaging them from their compromising feelings towards such themes. This coincides with Dresang's (2003: 28) view that "*adults must not force young people to pretend not to know what they do know (but may not understand)*". Complaints from the public were not thought to be an issue in all authorities and when these once occurred they were dealt with discussion.

4.2. The mechanics of selection

4.2.1. Sources of information

Librarians were asked which sources of information they use for selecting children's materials and which they consider the most useful.

Most authorities made use of a mixture of publishers' catalogues, trade bibliographies, journal or newspaper reviews and their own checking books in the bookshops:

The main source of information is the publishers' catalogues and the trade bibliography of BIBLIONET (available online); the last is of most use when we are to choose according to subjects e.g. fiction related to ancient Greece etc. Articles appearing on newspapers and journals are also of considerable use to the library (Authority B).

We mainly consult critiques appearing on journals, newspapers and on the Internet. Because reviews are not always objective, I personally go to bookshops with my list of books on hand and check those out on the spot. BIBLIONET (an online trade bibliography) is also of some use (Authority A).

The selection of material goes through the staff's research into the local bookshops after getting the necessary information on the books from publisher's catalogues, which they send us regularly. There we look extensively at the books themselves, the covers, the blurbs, the text etc. (Authority C).

Our main source is the publishers' catalogues and the Diavazo journal with its literary prizes and critiques on children's books. The Bima newspaper also devotes some space to those (Authority D).

We consider first of all the reviews, whether on journals such as Diavazo and Diadromes (where illustrators are also represented) or on newspapers; the latter we display on the library tables...then the book exhibitions and our visits to publishing houses (Authority E).

One stressed the need for more and objective information from the media:

The media (TV, radio etc.) could sometimes be of some help but you should always further elaborate what you watch or hear because of marketing reasons (Authority A).

An authority among others mentioned its supplier as a good addition because of its expertise in children's books:

Sometimes and on an informal basis, our supplier provides us with valuable information on titles since it has a very good knowledge on children's books (Authority D).

One authority pointed out that the selection system is rather a matter of whether one cares for their job:

I think that it is rather subjective which source every librarian looks at and it mostly depends on whether there is a sheer interest and love under what you are doing (Authority A).

Reviews

The specific role of reviews in selection decisions and the librarians' attitude towards them were both sought.

Generally these were thought as valued sources. However, it was voiced that they should always be looked at with reservation:

We use reviews. This does not mean that we are blindly guided by those. Sometimes reviews are not objective or very evaluative (Authority A).

Critiques we take into account before buying the book; not that they are all objective…every critic has their own preferences and views on a book (Authority D).

Only one made low use of reviews:

We do not consult critiques very much. I guess this happens because the library deals exclusively with children's books and we have gained the experience and the expertise to evaluate those. Besides a lot of them are not objective (Authority C).

Specific journals or papers that have proved their value were preferred:

Critiques on journals and newspapers can help us but this largely depends upon the specific type of journal or paper that you get the information from e.g. "Diavazo" journal or the "Library" section of the Eleutherotypia newspaper are very reliable sources and therefore necessary (Authority B).

In one authority reviews had a high satisfaction rate and therefore a quite important role:

Reviews are very important to us because they are very analytical and their presentation of books is many times by subject e.g. the child and either its environment or family issues, death etc. I think that they are fairly evaluative and objective in their judgments as well (Authority E).

4.2.2. Who do you get the books from?

This question sought to find whether libraries had dealt with any supplier and if so its impact on the selection process.

Suppliers or wholesalers

Out of all five authorities only two dealt with a supplier but this was rather either a franchise or a large bookshop business than a library supplier or a wholesaler. The others got their books from local bookshops:

Authorities, which used local bookshops:

We do not deal with any supplier. Because the library is municipal we decided to support the local bookshops…thus we buy the books from the one, which will give us the biggest discount (Authority A).

The method is to buy from the bookshop, which will offer the books requested at the lowest price. We do not use any supplier (Authority B).

We do not use a supplier. We buy the books from the bookshop with the most cost-effective offer to us. This is a way also of supporting the local bookshops of our town. (Authority C).

Authorities, which used a franchise or a large bookshop:

We receive the publishers' catalogues and make our list of books for order; then we go to a large bookshop which supplies us with the books; there we spent even days checking the books out to decide if they are appropriate for the children's collection (Authority E).

We deal with a supplier and we order our books from it. It is rather a franchising bookshop business, which has also taken the role of supplying rather than a single supplying system. Our supplier has a great knowledge on children's

books and many times they have given us valuable feedback on book issues. We give them our list of books from various publishers through the library-automated system and they send us back the books asked in the same order; this greatly facilitates my job of processing their checking in and cataloguing, although the system does not provide any bibliographic information. (Authority D).

The lack of library suppliers in Greece was justified mainly due to the low economic status of public libraries:

It is difficult for public libraries to deal with such sources because the scant of those that exist have set up their businesses remotely (mainly in Athens) and libraries cannot afford the cost of such dealings (Authority B).

I never have considered the possibility of dealing with a supplier nor have I ever thought the benefits of it. As I can imagine the establishment of a supplier's business would not do if we consider that Greek public libraries buy books twice a year at most and that the costs of shipment would not be affordable for them; the unstable economic status of public libraries would risk a supplier's money (Authority C).

We do not deal with any supplier although we would like to do so, but the concept of supplier in Greece is rather non-existent. The low economic status of municipalities makes this a difficult possibility. In the past we dealt with a book wholesaler but our contract ended because we couldn't pay for the books. When your budget is uncertain you therefore cannot claim a value for money order (discounts are less favourable) (Authority E).

4.2.3. Satisfaction of the selection system

Here the librarians' opinions on their satisfaction with the existent selection system were asked as well as the potential of its improvement.

Satisfaction

One authority pointed out the barrier of bureaucracy in the selection process:

The existent system is not flexible. Since funds for books come from the municipality there is always the barrier of bureaucracy many times resulting in not getting the books you want; namely, we voice our stocking needs and the municipal council approves a budget which is not always the desirable one; then ordering has to go though the municipal council again; this lags very much the whole process and many books are not available any more in the bookshops. The fact also that you buy quite a few books once or twice a year at most gets the situation even worse (Authority A).

Another stressed the ineffectiveness of publishers' catalogues and trade bibliographies:

I am not satisfied with the system. Although most of the time publishers' catalogues or BIBLIONET are fairly descriptive these are not very thorough sources resulting many times in our wasting money to useless material e.g. you may see a normal book on the catalogue but reality can take you by surprise (a book with a money box attached to it!)...publishers do not care but to sell their products (Authority B).

Local bookshops also did not provide the whole range of books available on the market:

We do check books out in bookshops at first hand but there, there is a very small percentage of those, which we want to buy...the majority we pick up from catalogues (Authority B).

Bookshops are not always good because if I ask for, say, 20 titles there is the possibility to get far less than that on the grounds that the dealer may not find all of them in their stock (e.g. out of print titles). This can prove very onerous because the process is not very easy to repeat (Authority A).

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Only one was satisfied with the system and its support from the local authority:

I am satisfied with the existent selection system in our library. Because we deal only with children's books, we focus on them and our job is not huge as of other libraries dealing with various collections. The municipality also supports us as much as possible (Authority C).

Thoughts of improvement

Suggestions were made on the basis of:

A less bureaucratic and flexible system:

A status of a less bureaucratic system and with a fixed budget in place would be of much progress in the book selection process. (Authority A).

An improvement of publishers' catalogues and cooperation with school libraries:

I believe that the situation would be much better if the publishers themselves improved their catalogues in terms of their thoroughness (a small extract of the text would be useful). A co-operation with school libraries would possibly sort many problems out as well, not least in the selection system (Authority B).

The existence of a supplier:

A supplier could certainly add value to our selection decisions since it would have a broader knowledge of children's books market and children's preferences (Authority E).

The provision of bibliographic and ordering information on the supplier's part:

I think the system could definitely improve in terms of providing information on cataloguing, classifying and indexing…it would save me up so much spare time to do other more important things such as the promotion of books to children and reader development issues (Authority D).

Guidance from the Library Association:

I think the Library Association could play an important role in informing public libraries on the practices used in other countries of Europe or even USA; this could take the form of international conferences or seminars where Greek librarians would have the chance to learn about new methods of selecting material (Authority D).

More and extensive support by the media and a governmental policy:

The media (TV, radio, papers etc.) could assist us with discussions and presentations on children's books separately. More journals should also have existed; at the moment there is only one e.g. Diadromes for children's books which is really nothing. Moreover, I think that the whole supplying and selection system is largely influenced by the lack of a formal governmental policy and the National Book Centre could play an important role to this direction (Authority E).

4.2.4. Discussion

The sources of information in support of Greek public librarians were basically confined to publishers' catalogues, trade bibliographies, reviews and their own visits to bookshops. These are considerably very few compared with those used by their British counterparts, a fact that very much impedes the selection process. The usual procedure was as follows: they first receive the catalogues with the new publications and in a few cases consult a trade bibliography; then reviews on journals and newspapers have their impact but the final decision is not made unless librarians go to the bookshops to look at the books by themselves.

We saw that in the UK the suppliers' system has greatly developed and been long used by public libraries (Blenkin and Lewins 1990; British Library research and innovation report 1998; Lonsdale 2000) but in Greece this has not been the case. Usually, when it comes to small town-libraries the supplier's role takes a local bookshop, which can give the most profitable bid. "*This is a way also of supporting the local bookshops of our town*" (Authority C) a librarian mentioned; but this role is just of providing the books, not of giving information on them nor of sending approval copies to libraries nor of making the processing of material much easier as seen elsewhere (Langston 2002). Unfortunately, many times this system is totally ineffective because a local bookshop has a very limited inventory compared to what is published every year. There were also two cases where larger or franchising bookshops were used, which generally were thought as more supportive. In one of them (Authority D) the library sometimes got valuable information on purchasable titles based on the extensive knowledge of the supplier, which also facilitated somehow their processing. When authorities were asked about the lack of a supplier in Greece this was justified either because of the unaffordable cost of such dealings (Authority B), or of the infrequency that they buy books or of their "*unstable economic status*" (Authority C). This further shows that the existence of a supplying system similar to that in the UK and elsewhere is rather dependent on the policies and the priorities of the governmental bodies to which Greek public libraries are subject. Two librarians thought however that a supplier would greatly add to their job either due to its knowledge of children's books and market or to its potential of facilitating the processing of the material.

As for publishers' catalogues and trade bibliographies these were not considered of important use as also proved by libraries in the UK (Lonsdale 2000). Most of these sources were thought as largely descriptive and subjective, not providing essential assistance in selection decisions.

Reviews on the other hand were thought as more reliable sources, with specific journals or papers being used most of the time, although there were some doubts regarding their objectivity as also seen in the literature (Dixon 1986; Bishop and Van Orden 1998): "*sometimes reviews are not objective or very evaluative*" (Authority A) and "*every critic has their own preferences and views on a book*"

(Authority B), as also stated by Leeson (1985). The fact however that the reviewing sources for children's books are scarce puts serious doubts on their effectiveness and objectivity. It is considerable that one authority (C) had such a confidence in children's books that reviews had not a significant role in their decisions. This possibly was the result of the great expertise of the staff working in a children's library.

A major barrier to the selection process was thought to be the unstable economic status of libraries-particularly the municipal ones-which are fully dependent on the municipalities themselves (Calimera Country Report 2004). This dependence had many times resulted in lagging or even canceling the whole process of selection and bureaucracy had not had a least share of responsibility. On the contrary, financial or bureaucratic constraints were not mentioned by the "dimosia" library visited, which may relate to the clear governmental status of "dimosies" libraries in Greece (governed by the Ministry of Education).

Thoughts of improvement were expressed around the need of a less bureaucratic and more flexible system, more thorough publishers' catalogues, cooperation with school libraries, the existence of a more effective supplying system, guidance from the Library Association, a more effective role of reviews and the media in general and the generation of a governmental policy.

4.3. Selection policies

This section sought to find whether Greek public libraries own any stock selection policies; if not, for which reasons and the potential of constructing such documents in the future.

4.3.1. Existence of a selection policy

No single authority possessed a policy for selecting material, let alone a policy for children's collections. The main reason was that a policy would have greatly constrained librarians' selection decisions:

We do not own such a document. I really do not see the reason for its existence. Personally speaking, book selection is a process I have learnt by working in the library and through seminars and workshops over my career. I think that a policy would not give flexibility to the librarians' decisions and there are some certain things, such as the author, the language, the publisher that are of undisputable value (Authority A).

No. We do not have a policy of that sort. The library's philosophy is to buy everything, which supports the axiom of freedom of ideas...I think a policy would much confine this philosophy (Authority B).

No. We do not posses such a policy (Authority C).

Users' requests or interests could not have been incorporated into a formal document because these are fluid:

To give an example I personally dot not choose books from Empeiria Ekdotiki (publisher) which I regard of bad quality, but I provide some of those if I am asked by the users. Could a policy of any sort define this decision (Authority A)?

No. We do not have a policy of selection in the library. Our "policy" has been determined by the users themselves, with whose preferences we go along (Authority D).

Another stressed the unsteady financial status of libraries as a great barrier:

No. We have not got such a document because it cannot represent the libraries' reality in Greece. For the existence of a policy things should have been more certain and stable mainly in terms of funds, that is to say that every year I will be provided with no less than, say, 500 books. By contrast, there have been times when we were unable to buy at all and other times that we bought a scarcity of what is being published (Authority E).

The complex political and legal status of municipal libraries made the situation even more difficult:

Municipal libraries, unlike dimosies, are not governed by a mutual and direct governmental body but are subject to the municipalities they belong; municipalities, although administered by the Ministry of Internal Relations, are fully responsible for operating the library service but each one has different policies and priorities-if any- for them; this makes the situation even more complicated and uncertain (Authority E).

4.3.2. Potential of constructing a policy

Only one out of five authorities had thought of the potential of constructing a policy in the future.

Authorities that did not plan to create a policy:

It was voiced that the every day contact with children was stronger than a policy:

No. It is not in our plans to construct a document like that. We have been operating for 20 years now and it has never occurred to us to create a policy for book selection. We are a lively area where children come every day and everything operates according to their being served in the best possible way. These are the ones who move us forth. Demand and taste are constantly changing and a policy would greatly constrain us (Authority C).

I do not think that we are going to create such a document. So far our job has been done quite well and we have not felt the need for a policy. The scant of complaints made so far on the content of some books have been resolved through discussion. Selection decisions are actually made on the basis of the use of books and the experience we gain every day in dealing with the users; they are not dependent on a policy (Authority B).

No. To be honest we have not ever thought of that potential. When someone asks us how we choose books we just tell them about it. We are daily exchanging views with children and adults and we get their feeling about what to stock the library with. Our experience of selecting books in the library has been an asset to that (Authority D).

Some expressed the incompetence of the staff to create such a document and the lack of information on such an issue:

We are not due to construct such a document. I believe that we are not able to do that because we do not have the professional expertise. There should be clear guidance to this direction and either the municipality or the Library Association or the National Book Centre have not acted this way so far. (Authority A).

The Library Association, which logically could play an advisory and supportive role to this direction has not done anything and has not been of considerable help to public libraries so far (Authority B).

Professional assistance in this respect has been absent so far (Authority D).

We have not received any information or guidance from professional organisations (Authority C).

Another expressed the difficulty of creating a policy because of the range of collections public libraries deal with:

Public libraries deal with every single type of human knowledge and in this sense it would be difficult to construct a policy for every collection (in comparison with a University library where fields are fairly limited) (Authority B).

Things in public libraries are less strict and their profile is much lower than that of academic libraries:

I think the existence of a policy is also connected to the fact that the public does not know what to ask from a public library; things are less strict than they are in academic libraries (Authority D).

<u>Authority that was likely to create such a document in the future:</u>

Yes, we have thought of this potential (Authority E).

It was voiced however that certain circumstances should exist in order for a clear policy to be constructed:

There have been some efforts lately by municipal libraries and the Library Association to discuss the potential of constructing a mutual governmental policy for them and I think that these will bear fruits. After that it is likely that we will construct our own policy because this should resonate a broader legal framework (Authority E).

First of all the political status of public libraries should be resolved so that there will be a common political framework that all public libraries can address to and the Library Association has recently been concerned with this issue. However the recent change of the government has greatly lagged the process (Authority D).

4.3.3. Recognition of the importance of a policy

However there was a mutual recognition of the significance of a policy in guiding new staff, in offering consistency to selection decisions and being a reference political tool to the public:

I admit to the fact that it could function as a reference guide to new appointed staff (Authority C).

I do recognize that a policy could work on the one hand as a informational and training tool for new staff and on the other hand as a reference to questions and complaints from the public. In addition it would sometimes reduce the level of

subjectivity in librarians' choices and would mean that things are not done at random...it would validate our choices. I suppose it would be good if we started thinking about the potential of constructing such a document. (Authority D).

This first of all would ensure that certain funds are allocated to the library for its needs; if there is a policy it could not be violated. Then I can recognize its potential of educating and guiding new staff in the library, of offering consistency to our decisions...and certainly as a political tool to possible questions and complaints from the public (Authority E).

4.3.4. Discussion

No single authority possessed a collection development policy, let alone one for children's collections separately. It is considerable that most of them had not actually ever thought of such a potential, due to the lack of knowledge and information on the subject, which puts serious doubts on the role of the Library Association and of other professional bodies in this respect e.g. "W*e do not have the professional expertise. There should be clear guidance to this direction and either the municipality or the Library Association or the National Book Centre have not acted this way so far*" (Authority A). But they asserted as well that a policy would have greatly constrained librarians' decisions and have given inflexibility to the whole system. Some of their comments are worth mentioning: "*the library's philosophy is to buy everything...I think a policy would much confine this philosophy*" (Authority B) or "*our policy has been determined by the users themselves, with whose preferences we go along*" (Authority D) or "*[children] are the ones who move us forth*" (Authority C) or "*selection decisions are actually made on the basis of the use of books and the experience we gain every day in dealing with the users*" (Authority B). Although all these comments determine a policy as a barrier to selection, this can offer great flexibility and effectiveness to decisions when constructed and used properly (Lonsdale 1996; Cole and Usherwood 1996; Spiller 2000). A policy was also thought that it could have not represented "*the libraries' reality in Greece*" (Authority E) because since funding had not been assured most of the time, a policy would have had no meaning at all. In addition the complex political status of Greek public libraries with the lack of a national authority

in charge of them was another barrier that did not favour the construction of policies. It is considerable that most interviewees in municipal libraries were uncertain on whether there was a municipal act addressing their functions whereas the respondent in the "dimosia" library did not actually know the recent act issued by the Ministry of Education for "dimosies" libraries. This puts forward again the role of the Library Association, which should have spanned communication and contact between the libraries and their governmental bodies. Finally, it is interesting that the absence of a policy was connected to the low profile of public libraries to the public, which do not actually know what to expect from them (Authority D).

Although the general feeling towards policy documents was not very positive, some admitted to their usefulness either as a guiding reference to new staff or a tool to the consistency of decisions or a political instrument to external pressures (Evans 2000). Moreover it was recognized that with a policy "*certain funds will be allocated to the library for its needs; if there is a policy it could not be violated*" (Authority E) echoing Evans' (2000) views. In this sense some expressed the view that this could be a reality for the library in the future, provided though that the political status of libraries is resolved: "*after that it is likely that we will construct our own policy because this should resonate a broader legal framework*" (Authority E) "*the Library Association has recently been concerned with this issue*" (Authority D). As shown by Cole and Usherwood (1996) this framework is essential for the existence of a policy as also is its relation to societal changes.

4.4. Staff knowledge and development

This section sought to find the level of knowledge and professional development of public librarians regarding children's fiction and its selection.

4.4.1. Professionalism

Questions were asked about the librarians' professional qualifications and how much these have assisted them in their job.

Of all librarians two had no professional qualification, say, a degree in library science:

I have got no professional qualification, say a degree in Librarianship, but over my career I have participated in about 15-20 seminars (Authority A).

I am not a professional librarian in that I have not done any librarianship degree. When I got into the profession there was not even one school! (Authority E).

The other three graduated from a University library school. Of those, however, only one regarded this as something valuable to her job:

As far as I remember we did a module for collection development in University but none for children's books and literature. I think this has benefited me a lot because I became aware of the importance of learning users' needs and of community analysis to our profession (Authority D).

Practice and every day experience was thought of greater importance:

I am a professional librarian and we did coursework in University dealing with collection development both for adults and children. Although it gave me an idea and a basic background on the field, practice differs greatly from theory; therefore I think that it has not added very much to my development as a selector (Authority B).

In University I did a module for children's books and literature but as far as I remember none for book selection. I think, that benefited me...it gave me some idea...although practice is the best ally you have (Authority C).

4.4.2. Knowledge of children's literature

The level of librarians' knowledge was sought by handing them in a Likert Scale card (Appendix A). Four of them rated their knowledge as "good" and one as "mediocre":

I consider my knowledge just good. I cannot say that I have extensively dealt with children's books and literature (Authority A).

I would say I have a good knowledge on the subject after 20 years working in children's library services. Very good or excellent is a hard word to say since I think that no one could ever claim that they are an expert in children's literature (Authority C).

I would say "good" not "very good" (Authority D).

I would say I have a good knowledge on children's books, since I daily come into contact with children and I try to keep up-to-date with the literature on the subject. In addition, I read constantly children's fiction, which I consider very important (Authority E).

I would evaluate my knowledge rather mediocre; I cannot say that I have read everything and that's why I cannot say that I am an expert. Continual reading and searching for good children's books is a very good method of becoming an experienced selector (Authority B).

Level of confidence

Librarians were further asked to comment on their confidence in assisting a child to choose a book:

Two did not feel very confident:

When a child comes to me and ask "what to read next?" I do not feel very confident in giving some advice. Children's books and children's services are not my exclusive duties in the library. Because I work both on the adult's and the children's section, I do not have the time to focus exclusively on books for children. Due to staff constraints I have to deal with many other things, part of which is book selection (Authority A).

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I do not feel confident in advising a child what to read because my personal readings as a child differs to a great extent from those children like to read today e.g. Alexandros Doumas was one of my favourites but children today do not find in him the pleasure I did. Time has changed and this is what makes our decisions most difficult...what appeals to me does not mean that it will appeal to children as well (Authority B).

The rest justified their confidence in the experience they had gained in children's services:

I feel very confident in assisting a child to choose a book, whether they would like an adventure, a historical fiction, a fantasy or whatever. It is a matter of experience you gain from your daily contact with children...here we look every reader as a separate individual; we have really developed a personal relationship with every single child coming in the library; we have been observing our children from primary years to high school. Since there is such an emotional bond between children and us it is far easier to approach and advise them what to read. We know what every child wants to read and we constantly ask them "Did you like that?" "Why or why not?" (Authority C).

It is a matter of how you approach the child:

I think I feel confident when advising a child what to read and I see this in their reactions and impressions when they return the books to the library. When you instruct a child to read something it is likely that they won't read it, but when you say to them "start reading it and if you don't like it give it up", they deal with their reading differently (Authority D).

4.4.3. Staff professional development

Here questions were intended to determine the level of staff training as well as which the most effective way of staff professional development was regarded.

Two authorities asserted that training sessions along with the daily experience in the library is the best way of professional development with the one propping the other up:

I believe that it is very important to receive professional training, especially when it comes to children's services. The majority of seminars and workshops I've done have dealt with reader development issues and the promotion of stock to users. The experience also you gain every day in the library is very important. You take an awful lot of knowledge from servicing the children in reality. (Authority A).

Personally, I have not attended so many seminars and training sessions, but there have been quite a lot every year either by the Library Association or the National Documentation Centre or some local library. I think, besides the knowledge to be gained, these are a very good opportunity for librarians to meet each other, discuss the hot issues of their profession and exchange their experiences; this is very important. The experience you gain every day in the library and by reading books is also invaluable (Authority C).

Only one rated seminars as less important to experience. It was rather voiced that continuing school library programmes would much more upgrade the level of staff knowledge:

Every day experience with working with children and communicating with them is the first way of professional development in our profession. There is no question about it. Seminars also have their impact. I believe though that some sort of vocational or University post-graduate programmes should have existed which could further extend our professional knowledge and resolve questions and issues emerging from our daily experience; Seminars are usually organized within a very limited time range so they are not as effective as they should while conferences are usually more of an academic hue rather than concerned with the practicalities of our profession (Authority B).

The other two regarded seminars as a prerequisite and more important to experience:

In my professional career I have attended few workshops themed in children's literature or book selection. I regard these very important because the librarian is constantly motivated and learn new methods of approaching children who are the most important readers of the library. Practice and experience are important but seminars I think come first because they give you the opportunity to learn new practices about your profession which you discuss with your colleagues; then you try to apply them to your library; last year for example we were trained on a project initiated by the National Book Centre titled "Relay race reading" and it really went very well in our library; if you have not a former knowledge how else can you approach children? (Authority D).

I have gone through lots of seminars and training sessions, but scarce on children's library services. I did a workshop, not very recently, titled "Blue sack" about how librarians can promote books and reading to children. In this way, not only learns one new techniques in the profession but you exchange your views with other colleagues; it would be beneficial also for writers and publishers to take actual part in all these. Daily experience and reading in the library are of course indispensable ways of self-development but this is rather subjective knowledge. Seminars and training sessions are more objective and open up new horizons. For example my personal view on a book I read could not be the right one which may result negatively in the selection and promotion of it (Authority E).

An authority stressed the benefits gained from its cooperation with schools:

The good cooperation we have with schools and teachers has also benefited me a lot (Authority E).

Some barriers:

However, there are times when we cannot attend such sessions either because these are made remotely (Athens) or you are not offered the resources to do so. I believe that the government does not give enough motivation to those who care for

and serve the book to develop themselves as professionals and to raise their profile to the public (Authority A).

The Library Association has not done very much in this respect although its role should have been of considerable influence (Authority B).

As far as I know there have been quite a few training sessions on topics of that sort and it is really pity (Authority D).

I strongly believe that training on children's library services should be given more prominence. More conferences should also be organized (Authority E).

4.4.4. Discussion

It should be said that of all the librarians interviewed only one was exclusively in charge of children's services and this was because she worked in a children's library. The other four were dealing with both adult's and children's collections, due to staff insufficiency. This fact puts in its own right serious doubts on the professionalism and the level of expertise of public librarians dealing with children's collections in Greece. This may be connected to their evaluation of professional knowledge as "good" in most cases and as "mediocre" in one, because they have not sufficient time to deal with children's books. The last further results in their little confidence in assisting a child to choose: "*children's books...are not my exclusive duty in the library.*" (Authority A). Concerns were also expressed on the basis that "*my personal readings as a child differ to a great extent from those children like to read today...what appeals to me does not mean that it will appeal to children as well*" (Authority B). On the other hand though it is encouraging that some had gained their confidence from their daily contact with children and how they approached them (Saricks 1998; Hill 1973): "*we know what every child wants to read and we constantly ask them, Did you like that? Why or why not?*" (Authority C) or "*when you say to them start reading it and if you don't like it give it up, they deal with their reading differently*" (Authority D).

In gaining confidence on children's books and literature, continual reading fiction was thought as a very important and enriching practice, also stressed in the literature (Eccleshare 2004; Hill 1973; Genco et al. 1991): "*continual reading and searching for good children's books is a very good method of becoming an experienced selector*" (Authority B).

There were two cases that interviewees possessed no professional qualification, say a degree from a library school, partly justified by the fact that library education in Greece has been a reality only since 1977 and even by now there have been just three institutions that offer such degrees (Papazoglou and Semertzaki 2001). In this respect, one stated: "*When I got into the profession there was not even one school!*" (Authority E). It is interesting though that the majority of those who went to University did not regard this as very important on their professional development in children's services. Practice and every day experience were thought of much more value: "*practice is the best ally you have*" (Authority C) or "*practice differs greatly from theory*" (Authority B), a fact that coincides with Saricks' (1998) views on the subject.

The general feeling was that both formal training sessions, conferences and every day experience are the best way of staff professional development in children's services. It is considerable though that despite the expressed need of and the importance put on seminars and workshops, it was made clear that there had been quite a few of those, especially on children's services issues, let alone fiction selection, a fact which undermines the Library Association and other bodies' role. Their importance was either based on offering a meeting opportunity for librarians to exchange views and experiences on their profession or providing them with motivation and information on the new practices on the subject or giving objective knowledge. The latter was contrasted to the subjective knowledge that may result from the every day experience and the personal readings of the librarian.

Complaints were also expressed about the passive role of the government or the Library Association with regard to professional development issues so far, which both, by contrast, have been of major impact in the UK (CILIP 2002): "*the Library Association has not done very much…although its role should have been of*

considerable influence" (Authority B) or "*the government does not give enough motivation to those who care for and serve the book to develop themselves as professionals and to raise their profile to the public*" (Authority A).

4.5. Additional Comments

This last section was devised so to give librarians the opportunity to put emphasis on whatever they wanted or comment on anything they felt that they should. This helped for useful recommendations to be drawn on the research issues.

Lack of professional and governmental support:

I would like to say that the book provision in Greece is very much underestimated in comparison with other European countries. The National Book Centre can play a significant role in this respect and give valuable help to libraries in terms of professional development and of providing information on contemporary book issues (Authority A).

I would like to stress that there has not been a clear governmental policy for public libraries so far. This would certainly give libraries a view of how the government thinks of them in the future...a helm that libraries could refer to...and it would greatly support them to their job. This policy lacks, as does any reference to the role of the National Book Centre and its cooperation with public libraries resulting in the underestimation of the book in Greece (Authority B).

A certain and sustained governmental policy about the book and libraries should be established; this is very important if libraries are to play a significant role in children's reading in the future (Authority E).

The role of the librarians:

I would like to say that the Library Association and we who work in public libraries have largely forgotten the child. We have to do more things and focus more extensively on them if we want to win more readers in this country; it would be great

if we could cooperate with other public libraries to this direction. The government has of course its own share of responsibility but I think the upgrade of libraries has to start with us and with our professional allies (National Book Centre, Centre of Children's Books etc.), who know the situation better than anyone else (Authority D).

I just want to say that we as librarians have a major role in serving our children as much and as effectively as possible. The core focus for us should be on them (Authority C).

Sound partnerships should be established with schools:

What we see every day is that children are thirst for books and to this end we should do more things to serve them. I believe that more extensive partnerships with schools and teachers should be established, since, there, children are altogether and can be more easily approached; These partnerships can result in learning the child a lot more and in focusing more on the pleasure a book can give them (Authority E).

4.5.1. Discussion

Authorities were provided with the opportunity to emphasize on important issues concerning children's library provision or more specifically selection practices in Greece. Concerns were expressed either for: a lack of professional and governmental support in terms of professional development and guidance or of a national strategy for Greek public libraries; a cooperation between all public libraries to focus on children's services; librarians' care for and love of their profession; and the need for partnerships between libraries and schools in order to focus more on children's interests. These concerns again put forward the importance of the existence of a national strategy and provision for libraries and on the other hand the need for those to focus on children's interests.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Overall, this research revealed that Greek public libraries have a long way to go, compared with their British counterparts in terms of supplying, establishing policies and developing their services. The general feeling was that public librarianship in Greece is rather underestimated and as a result the profile of public libraries towards their communities is very low. This reality becomes even more considerable when it comes to children's library services, because these are the reading futures of our society.

In selecting children's material librarian's views did not differ very much from those expressed in the literature, which might show that there are some indisputable values determining their decisions. More specifically, content was thought to be of primal consideration when judging children's fiction and most of the time it was intended to comply with their interests. Authors and publishers were considered very important as well, especially when it came to known and tested names. The physical features of books were partly taken into account mainly because of children's tendency to look at them as well.

The role of children themselves in librarian's selection decisions was not understated. Authorities did highly value children's views on titles since libraries should focus on their interests. The latter were identified through open discussion either with them or their carers and in-service use in the library rather than through more formal ways such as community surveys. This was justified due to the lack of expertise of the staff and to the fact that in small-town libraries, librarians develop a close relationship with children and get their feeling about their reading interests, although this practice does not represent the non-users' views.

A quality children's story was considered one of good content, language and plot. It was voiced that stories should address today's children's needs, be fresh and contemporary, linguistically accessible and not get children bored.

Reading something was thought to be the case since what initially counts for a child is to get into the habit of reading and not to read something of quality. There was a consensus that if this happens then it is a matter of time for one to engage with quality readings. In this sense authorities reconciled popularity with quality on their shelves, if not for any reason, for getting the less willing coming into the library, which was thought as the prime and most important step. Besides children are of different abilities and tastes, a fact that should be reflected on their material.

However, librarians cannot escape from their patronizing attitudes towards children. They admitted to their great responsibility to provide quality literature and to supervise their young patrons' reading. This attitude became even more obvious when it came to controversial issues in children's fiction. All interviewees voted for children's intellectual freedom but it was voiced that adults should provide explanations and support to children when dealing with issues of sex, racism, violence etc. Moreover, the importance for adults was stressed of disengaging them from their fears and stereotypes that these issues may evoke.

In getting the information for fiction titles, librarians basically used a mixture of publishers' catalogues, trade bibliographies, reviews and their visits to local bookshops. The supplier's role has been taken on either by small local bookshops, which could offer the most profitable bid to libraries or by larger and franchising bookshop businesses. This role, however, differs very much from that of library suppliers in the UK or other countries in that it does not provide any information on titles nor send any approval copies nor make the processing easier (with the exception maybe of the franchising business). The ineffectiveness of the system was attributed either to the limited inventory of bookshops or to the unstable economic status basically of municipal libraries and the low priorities of their municipalities or to the bureaucracy in the whole process. In addition publishers' catalogues or trade bibliographies were regarded as unreliable sources, which need improving while reviews were rather used with reservation due to their level of subjectivity.

A supplier's system, according to most authorities, would not do because either of the unaffordable cost of such dealings or of the infrequency that libraries buy books or their unstable economic status.

Thoughts of improvement were focused on the generation of a governmental policy, a more flexible and less bureaucratic system, a more effective role of reviews and the media, cooperation with school libraries and guidance from the Library Association.

It is really considerable that no single authority owned a collection development policy, let alone one for children's collections separately. This practice was justified either due to the lack of knowledge and information on the subject coming both from the Library Association and municipalities or to the fact that a policy would have greatly constrained librarians' selection decisions, which go along with the ever-changing users' needs. Further reasons were the financial uncertainty and the complex political status of public libraries. It is interesting that the lack of policies was connected to the low profile of libraries to their communities.

On the other hand, construction of policies in the future was thought a positive change by some authorities for the reasons expressed already in the literature (Evans 2000) but most of all because a certain budget would be allocated to libraries for their stocking needs. Of course for this to happen the political status of libraries should be resolved.

As for the level of professionalism, this was rather at issue mainly because nearly all respondents took on other duties besides dealing with children's collections. This insufficiency of the staff may connect to their low confidence in advising children what to read and their self-evaluation of their knowledge as just "good" or "mediocre". However, every day contact with children in the library and continual reading of fiction were thought as great allies in dealing effectively with children's collections.

Professional qualifications were not the case in all authorities and this was rather the result of the small range of library education in Greece. However, those

with a University degree thought that every day experience and practice were more important.

Generally, the best way of professional development was considered the seminars along with daily experience. The former was thought to offer not only learning opportunities but also motivation and new experiences gained from meeting other colleagues and exchanging views with them. Despite this need, it was revealed that training sessions, especially on children's services, is a rarity and the role both of the government and the Library Association was stressed in this respect.

Overall, a need was voiced for professional and governmental support in terms of professional development, guidance and planning, a more flexible selection system, cooperation between all public libraries and with schools so to focus more on children and their needs.

5.2. Recommendations

The conclusions drawn from the research above raised some important issues that seem to concern Greek public libraries and impede their selection practices. For these to be overcome some basic recommendations were devised:

- Libraries should start to implement more formal methods of identifying children's reading interests such as community analyses and surveys reaching out the non-users as well

- A less bureaucratic selection system should be sought that can provide libraries with more flexibility in buying new material. Thus, valuable time can be saved up which can result in more effective decisions

- Municipalities should readdress their responsibility on library services and offer a clear and effective policy affecting their functions. Additionally, they should prioritize more on libraries and allocate adequate funds for their stocking and human resource needs

- Publishers' catalogues, trade bibliographies and reviews should become more evaluative and analytical in their content as well as focus more on children's books

- Cooperation with schools and teachers should be more extensive and regular since these places provide excellent opportunities for librarians to learn widely about children's reading needs

- The Library Association should take a series of actions to support and guide public libraries in their role. These should take either the form of providing a supportive framework to which they can address or of offering more opportunities for staff professional development and information on children's librarianship or of cooperating with the government in initiating a new feasible strategy for public libraries

- The government should clear up the complex political status of public libraries by generating a new national policy incorporating all of their types so that they can develop at national level and cooperate with each other. This may pave the way for a more effective supplying system to be initiated

- Library education in Greece should become broader and more accessible to those interested, incorporating more post-graduate opportunities

- New staff should be appointed to fill in the gaps thus allowing for specialism in children's services

- More training opportunities should exist for the development of the staff and to this direction should move either the government, the Library Association, the National Book Centre and other professional organisations

It is clear that if some of the above are done the profile of Greek public libraries and of those who work in them will very much raise towards young people who in this way will learn to value these institutions for evermore.

5.3. Recommendations for further research

Public libraries in Greece have not much been researched so far and there are still several issues that need investigating, let alone children's library services. This study revealed that some research areas could be:

- The services offered by the 25 children's libraries alone, recently established by the Ministry of Education

- The role so far of professional organisations such as the Library Association, the National Book Centre etc. to public libraries

- The level of provision in non-fiction or non-book material for children

- The level of provision to teenagers and young adults

Overall, this study can be enriched if a broader geographical area is selected and if quantitative data are also used.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview schedule

General question

- Please describe the selection process for children's fiction in the library

1. *The criteria of selection*

- What are the five most important criteria you use when assessing children's fiction?

- What is the role, if any, of children themselves in taking your decisions? (Do you get any feedback from them? Do you carry out any surveys on their preferences)?

- What would you regard a good children's story?

- Many assert, "A child is better to read something than read nothing at all". What is your strength of agreement or disagreement with this statement? Why?

- Do you provide readings highly popular with children (TV tie-ins, comics, series, abridgements of classics etc.) along with the so-called high quality (literary) ones?

- Do you think the concept of intellectual freedom should apply to stock selection for children? Please give examples of any difficulty areas you have had to deal with so far.

2. *The mechanics of the selection*

- What is your main source of information on children's fiction titles?

- What other sources do you make use of?

- Do you deal with any supplier? What do you think of it?

- What is your opinion on the contribution of the reviews to selection decisions?

- Are you satisfied with the existent selection process? Does it provide enough information to evaluate books?

- How do you think it could improve?

3. *Stock selection policies*

- Have you got any (written) stock selection policy for children's collections?

- Why have you not constructed a collection development policy so far?

- Are you due to construct any such document and if so what are the main issues you are to address?

- Do you believe that such a document would benefit the library in any sense? How?

- What guidance, if any, have you received with regard to stock selection policies?

4. *Staff knowledge and development*

- Was stock selection for children covered in your library school course?

- How do you rate your own knowledge of children's literature? (Likert scale of: not good/mediocre/good/very good)

- Do you feel confident in assisting a child to choose a book from the library?

- Have you received any training in children's fiction selection? If yes, please describe it.

- What do you think is the best way of training and development in children's fiction selection or generally in children's literature? How would your knowledge be best expanded on that issue?

Conclusion

- Do you have any other comments that you wish to discuss?

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

1.   **Research Project Title:**

"Fiction selection practices by Greek public libraries for primary school children"

2.   **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3.   **What is the purpose of the project?**

The aim of the project is to investigate the practices that Greek public libraries apply to select fiction for primary school children. The duration of this project should be three months.

4.   **Why have I been chosen?**

Your library authority has been chosen for its closeness to the researcher's base and for its maintaining children's fiction collections in its stock.

5.   **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Refusal to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits, and without giving a reason.

6.   **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will have to devote about 30 minutes to get through the whole interview. The interview will include tape recording your responses and note keeping on my part in order to have an accurate picture of what is being said and to remember this information long afterwards. To this end it would be helpful if you would respond to the questions as clearly and as fully as possible. If you want further clarification to a question, or anything else that you do not understand during the process please feel comfortable to ask.

7.   **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

 Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will explore the selection methods applied by Greek public libraries for children's fiction so that potential barriers may be brought to light and recommendations for future improvements may be suggested.

8.   **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is disseminated will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

9.   **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results are to be published during next year some time either on a hard copy kept by the Sheffield University Library or on the web. You would be provided with a copy of the results if you would ask for it. You will not be identified in any report/publication. The data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research.

10.   **Who has reviewed the project?**

The project has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee/Departmental Ethics Review Procedure.

11.   **Contact for further information**

Researcher's contact details: Nikolaos Vasilogamvrakis, E-mail: lip04nv@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervisor's contact details: Bob Usherwood, Email: r.usherwood@sheffield.ac.uk

I would like to sincerely thank you for taking part in this research.

The participant will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed Participant Consent Form to keep.

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: "Fiction selection practices by Greek public libraries for primary school children"

Name of Researcher: Nikolaos Vasilogamvrakis

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated:
[   ] for the above project and have had the opportunity to
ask questions.

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am
free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3.   I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.
I give permission for members of the research team to have access
to my anonymised responses.

4.   I agree to take part in the above project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature
(if different from researcher)

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

Copies:

One copy for the participant and one copy for the Principal Investigator / Supervisor.