Laurie Henry

Who Gets to Run the Zoo?: a Reaction to “Cataloging Juvenile Monographs in an Academic Library,” by Vickie Frierson-Adams

When my brother and I were five and eight, our mother used to deposit us in the education section of the college library while she attended classes, so I learned early that libraries at colleges with education programs are likely to have a stash of children’s books somewhere. Of course the users of children’s literature at academic libraries, fortunately for the librarians and other patrons, are generally not children but education or library-science students. It’s hard for me to understand, however, exactly how the difference between users in a public library (children and parents) and users in an academic library (college students) would affect the cataloguing of children’s books. Hence, I don’t completely understand the title of Vickie Frierson-Adams’s article. Do college students need more, or less, in the way of bibliographic description than children or their parents in a public library, or children in a school media center? Frierson-Adams is adamant that “in describing the material to be catalogued, second- or third-level descriptions must be followed,” and her point is well taken. Cataloguers must be especially fastidious in their work when the end users of the material—children—are so in need of special guidance.

It seems to me that the “Audn” field in the MARC record is especially important, and the cataloguer’s ability to narrow that field down to a code more specific than a simple “j” for “juvenile” is always going to be valuable, not only for teachers and librarians, but also for book-buying parents. One special challenge in the cataloguing of children’s materials is that frequently there are differences between a child’s reading level and his or her developmental
level. A gifted child, for example, could be capable of understanding books written for adults, but not interested in their subject matter. High interest/low vocabulary books also cause special difficulties for cataloguers (although that category of course is often indicated by a MARC record note).

Careful, standardized guidelines are necessary so that common-sense errors are not made in assigning a reading level to a book. The Accelerated Reader program, for example, used as an instructional tool in many elementary schools, places Dr. Seuss’s *If I Ran the Zoo* on a 3.9 (grade level) reading level, and Beverly Cleary’s *Ramona the Pest* at a 5.5 reading level, although their actual audiences, given the subject matter of the books, are likely to be much younger. A community-college student of mine who works in a school media center reports that Judy Blume’s adult novel *Wifey* was until recently shelved next to the third-and-fourth grade Judy Blume books, although the subject matter (although, interestingly, not the Accelerated Reader-assigned reading level) was inappropriate for that age group.

Frierson-Adams makes it clear that everyone involved in the cataloguing of children’s literature approves of increased standardization in the cataloguing process, and that one reason this is difficult is because adult subject categories are often not appropriate for juvenile literature. The subject heading “monsters,” for example, conjures up different concepts when related to children’s literature than it does when related to works written for adults. Thus, entirely new subject categories must often be invented for the cataloguing of children’s literature. “Although subjectivity will never be fully controlled when choosing headings for juvenile books,” Frierson-Adams writes, the ways in which children’s books are different from adult reading material make it very important that cataloguing be done differently for children’s books than for adult materials.