Censorship, Young Readers and the Role of the Librarian

Mari Bettineski
INFO 522
Final Project
December 9, 2009
Introduction

This bibliography is intended to inform, prepare and encourage educators who will experience acts of censorship against the materials they provide and the first amendment rights of those whom they serve. Censorship is an age-long battle and it continues to gain momentum. The best defense for librarians and teachers is to be well informed and prepared when they face these unique challenges and to help educate the community about their selection process. The following 12 articles were published between 1986 and 2009.

Description

In order to appropriately respond to censorship, a librarian must have an understanding of the library’s selection process, they must support open access to their collection, and they need to be well informed about the rights of the library and of the patrons. This bibliography will serve as an introduction to the issue of censorship and what librarians and teachers need to know to help prevent or prepare for censorship issues, especially when dealing with children and young adult collections.

Censorship has been around as long as people have expressed ideas, but the issue becomes especially heated when it comes to exposing children to challenging ideas. Be it for language, violence or sexuality, censors have made it their personal goal to prevent children from being exposed to unsettling concepts. Children are often viewed as blank slates, and these dangerous ideas will either serve as “how to” manuals to impressionable minds, or they will be deeply distressing to those who are to be protected from the harsh realities of life. The sources listed in this bibliography contradict those assumptions and instead suggest the idea that books offer children a safe way to formulate opinions about unsettling subjects, so that they will be better prepared when they have unsettling encounters in real life.
When it comes to children and literature, conflict arises when there is a perceived difference between protecting the children and respecting their intellectual rights. Some may call it the difference between indoctrinating and educating children. Books allow children to be exposed to stories of true emotions, relationships, beliefs and truths. Books allow them to think critically on challenging issues, make informed decisions and develop empathetic relationships. Challenging literature provides a safe place for readers to formulate ideas about unsettling and dangerous concepts and teaches them how to think critically, so that when they are challenged with new ideas, they don’t passively accept any truth or be closed-minded. Good literature will help young adults make up and defend their own minds.

Summary

To help protect the library, its collection and its young patrons, the following articles offer suggestions and guidelines to librarians. Based on the findings from these articles, I have prepared a list of questions that librarians must ask themselves to help prepare for challenges will likely occur during their career. These questions help summarize the issues addressed in the articles, and will hopefully encourage further research.

What are librarians and teachers doing to ensure that young adults are able to stretch their minds and explore the world in these safe environments? Do librarians know when they are acting as censors? When Collection Development chooses to not buy a title in order to avoid conflict, do they realize that is an act of censorship? What is the selection policy for new materials? Does the library continually revisit the policy to guarantee balance within the collection? What is the library’s policy for dealing with challenged books? Would a library remove or relocate a challenged book, or would they prefer to continue providing open access?
The question that every librarian must ask is, “How well do I know the history of censorship?” Particularly when it comes to the understanding of court rulings and how those rulings now apply to libraries and patron rights. Do librarians know what is protected under the first amendment? Do they know how to defend those rights? Librarians will be called upon to protect free speech, how well prepared are they? Do they understand the difference between book burning and book banning? Have they considered the motivation of the individuals and organizations challenging their collection?

The following articles will address these questions, but they do not provide the final answers. Censorship is an ongoing issues and it is unlikely to be resolved any time soon. The best librarians and teachers can do is to stay current on trends and developments in censorship cases, and to put policies in place that protect the library and those it serves. It is imperative for librarians to know their rights and the rights of the youngest patrons they serve.

**Search Method:**
I utilized some of Dialog’s controlled vocabulary that was associated with censorship on this search. I explored the moral aspects of censorship, but due to the amount of results, I had to limited the search to just journal articles. I found some great results with this search string, and several are contained in this bibliography.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
"Moral Values" and censorship and dt=journal articles

**Abstract:**
One's commitment to intellectual freedom is manifested not just in the creation of a strong and clear selection policy or the celebration of Banned Books Week but by his or her willingness to examine his or her practices openly with others. In this article, the author proposes four questions to explore in one's teaching and in professional discourse: (1) Why should I make my selection process transparent? (2) What can I do to protect both students and the First Amendment? (3) How can I help students understand global censorship without imposing American values? (4) Why must I confront my deeply held beliefs?

**Critical Annotation:**
This is a great follow-up to Boardman's 1993 article, in that Abilock offers practical solutions to avoiding censorship (or personal bias) when it comes to collection development. She brings to light some of the unconscious ways that librarians restrict access to books, be it through excessive influence or improper labeling. Abilock reinforces the idea that it is important for libraries to present a variety of viewpoints on controversial issues, and offers creative solutions to help round out a collection. A very useful article for any Collection Development Librarian.

**Search Method:**
In Dialog, I decided to explore more of the controlled vocabulary associated with censorship. I wanted to explore the concept of “intellectual freedom” and how it is protected or restricted in different educational settings.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
Censorship AND “intellectual freedom” AND “secondary education”

**Abstract:**
Presents advice from the author about the meaning of censorship in public school libraries and what school librarians should do about it when circumstances beyond their control force it upon them. How all school librarians for a variety of reasons are guilty of it sometimes; Tremendous pluralism in the public that libraries serve; The problem of budget constraints; More.

**Critical Annotation:**
Boardman appears confused in her opinion of censorship and the role/responsibility of the librarian. She discusses the idea of censorship occurring due to budget restrictions and avoiding materials that may be objectionable. She identifies the common fear of violating children’s intellectual freedom. Then she suggests that censorship battles undermine the effectiveness and credibility of librarians. It appears that Boardman is more preoccupied with the notion of avoiding conflict than she is about protecting the first amendment rights of her users. However, this article serves as a stern warning to Collection Development Librarians: censorship often happens when a library decides what to not add to its collection, librarians can also be censors if they are not careful.

**Search Method:**
I wanted to find recent articles on the issue of banned books so I began my search on Dialog. Using ERIC’s thesaurus to find controlled vocabulary, I looked for terms related to “banned books” and realized that the term “censorship” had more results than “banned books”. I intend to utilize the other related controlled terms (academic freedom, intellectual freedom and information policy) in other searches.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
s censorship AND book?

**Abstract:**
Censorship is about restriction and control of intellectual development, and the danger when educators fail to investigate what censorship truly means--for example, by attaching it to metaphors with abundant entailments--is that people will merely "shrug off" the removal of books from libraries and classrooms and fail to see challenges of books as a violation of First Amendment rights. The authors address their concerns about censorship by using three metaphors to clarify the dangerous nature of censorship and book challenges. With this abstract knowledge, educators will be able to move forward with information that may elicit thoughtful responses to challenges that limit teachers' professional decision making and students' paths to a truly democratic society.

**Critical Annotation:**
This article cleverly illustrates the purpose behind censorship and how it hinders the worldview and understanding of students. Using the metaphors of censorship as a barbed wire fence, a patina and a tight rope walk, Boyd and Bailey demonstrate how censorship limits students' views of the world (as tolerance and the ability to respect differences must be taught) and creates a slippery spot for teachers who may select “safe” books to avoid the “hassle” of challenging parents. The article
claims that censors are trying to maintain a sense of reality that does not exist and their efforts to protect children will only cause more harm.


**Search Method:**
I was intrigued by the journal that printed the 2002 Saltman article I researched because the *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* relates to the field that I am trying to investigate. So, I browsed the journal title, looking for articles that contained the keyword phrase “banned books”.

**Database:**
Library Literature & Information Science Full Text

**Search String:**
Journal of Youth Services in Libraries (Journal Title) AND Banned books

**Abstract:**
A study investigated intellectual freedom and censorship in public libraries. The first part of the study focused on the issue of the relocation of controversial material. Data for this part of the study were obtained from a quantitative analysis of the placement of controversial fiction titles for older children and young adults in British Columbia public libraries. The results indicated that controversial books for older children/young adults were sometimes moved/reclassified to adult fiction sections and that avoiding or defusing censorship challenges was likely the justification for this action. The second part of the study focused on examining why the material was challenged. Data were obtained from 220 challenged books. The results demonstrated that the main reasons for the challenges included profanity, heterosexual activity, homosexuality, sexual activity deemed immoral or illegal, religion or witchcraft, violence or horror, rebellion, racism or sexism, substance use or abuse, suicide or death, crime, crude behavior, and depressing or negative themes.

**Critical Annotation:**
This article investigates how some libraries deal with challenged books by relocating them to more restricted shelves (to quiet a compliant), and explores the various reasons for why a young adult book might be challenged. The information was very useful, but it was the conclusion that was the most encouraging. Curry makes it clear that literature is a safe environment for young adults to learn about unsettling ideas and possibly dangerous activities. It shows the emotions, the motivations and the relationships involved in controversial situations, while still allowing a safe distance for the reader. Curry makes it clear that young adult books, particularly the challenging ones, need to be readily available to the readers that need them and is clearly against relocating controversial books to restricted areas.


**Search Method:**
This is an article I found with the search strategy I employed for the 2007 Abilock article. I located this article when browsing the abstracts that resulted from the search string.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
"Moral Values" and censorship and dt=journal articles

**Abstract:**
Asks whether teachers should teach the art of insightful reading or live in fear of parents and other well-meaning arbiters who may bar Shakespeare and other challenging texts from the curriculum. Examines the meaning of censorship, what censors fear, and the possibility of discussing mature topics with secondary school students.

**Critical Annotation:**
Greenbaum reinforces the idea that literature should educate and not indoctrinate students. This article encourages educators to teach students how to become
intelligent readers so they can make up their own minds and be able to defend their opinions. The article embodies what this bibliography is trying suggest. Skillful and critical reading would eliminate the need for censorship, as individuals would not be swayed by any message presented to them. The impressionable minds that censors fight to protect must learn how to defend themselves.


**Search Method:**
This is an article I found with the search strategy I employed for the 2007 Abilock article. I located this article when browsing the abstracts that resulted from the search string.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
"Moral Values" and censorship and dt=journal articles

**Abstract:**
Defines censorship and differentiates censorship from selection. Reviews the history of censorship and recent research trends. Describes typical censorable content and the consequences of censorship for libraries, books, and authors. Suggests strategies educators can use in dealing with censorship.

**Critical Annotation:**
Provides a different perspective on the history of censorship and makes it clear that complaints come from both conservative and liberal groups. The article makes a clear distinction between censorship and selection and it offers suggestions to educators on how to develop a collection development policies and procedures that will aide librarians when complaints occur.

**Search Method:**
When I discovered the 1993 Boardman article, I realized that several other articles were published in the same issue of *Book Report* that related to censorship. I went to EBSCO to browse the journal in full text.

**Database:**
Business Source Premier

**Search String:**
JN "Book Report" and DT 19930301

**Abstract:**
Presents advice from the author about the meaning of censorship in public school libraries and what school librarians should do about it when circumstances beyond their control force it upon them. How all school librarians for a variety of reasons are guilty of it sometimes; Tremendous pluralism in the public that libraries serve; The problem of budget constraints; More.

**Critical Annotation:**
When addressing the idea of banning books, it is important to include an article on book burning. Kurt looks as frequently cited cases of book burning and compares and contrasts the intent and circumstances of each episode to prove that not all burnings are identical in their mission. Burning is not the same as banning, and a modern act of censorship is not the same as a burning during the 16th century. This article is meant to develop critical thinking when it comes to the topic of censorship, by looking at events in context and exploring the true intent of the book burners.


**Search Method:**
Building on the 1998 Saltman search string, I decided to expand the keyword search from "books" to issues of censorship in educational settings.

**Database:**
Library Literature & Information Science Full Text

**Search String:**
Censorship AND education

**Abstract:**
Censorship of school library collections has risen significantly in the last few decades, and such attacks are increasing. American courts have ruled that students in schools have First Amendment rights and some degree of freedom of speech. Courts also have ruled that students have the right to information and to learn and discuss issues of importance within the context of their schools and libraries. This study sought to determine the knowledge levels of a sample of school librarians concerning what they know about and how they support important court rulings that affect students' First Amendment rights. The study also sought to determine predictive behaviors of these librarians in protecting students' First Amendment rights. Basically the study found that the level of knowledge concerning legal rulings is low, but that school librarians in principle support students' rights to information, and that they are willing to advocate for those rights within the confines of their positions. Data also revealed that certain personal and demographic characteristics determine predicative behaviors. The study concludes with suggestions for redefining school librarianship education, emphasizing school library media specialists' professional responsibility to understand freedom of speech issues, laws, and court rulings.

**Critical Annotation:**
This article was significant in that it brings to light an important issue that all librarians will face. How well do professional librarians understand the constitutional laws regarding censorship and how prepared are they to protect the free speech rights of their patrons? The article provides a concise history of court decisions regarding banned books and the implications they have on libraries today. Lukenbill and Lukenbill assert that librarians will be called upon more and more to
defend the freedom of speech and that librarians must be prepared for these challenges. Are MLS programs preparing future professionals enough for this obligation?


**Search Method:**
This is an article I found with a modified version of the search strategy I employed for the 2007 Abilock article. The Abilock search resulted in some great hits, but I was curious to see what would happen when I narrowed the search to articles relating to libraries.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
"Moral Values" and censorship and dt=journal articles AND library?

**Abstract:**
Identifies two types of censors--individuals and representatives of organized groups or crusades--and examines factors that motivate their attempts at library censorship. Factors influencing librarians dealing with censorship are also discussed. Librarians are advised to prepare themselves to live with censorship by learning to understand themselves and potential censors.

**Critical Annotation:**
Of all the articles in the bibliography, this is the most aggressive in its opinions and dealings with censors. It makes it clear that the censors are foes and offers suggestions on how to eliminate the credibility of the censor or their complaints. I did like the article’s suggestion of librarians as politicians, where the constituents must be served, but sometimes the professional needs to be guided by their training and expertise.
  
  *Emergency Librarian*, 25, 8-12.

**Search Method:**
Using the controlled vocabulary from the Boyd and Bailey search, I decided to conduct a keyword search using the terms “censorship” and “book?”. Censorship seems to result in the most hits and I wanted to look specifically at articles dealing with censorship and books. Due to the amount of results from this keyword search, I narrowed the articles to peer reviewed.

**Database:**
Library Literature & Information Science Full Text

**Search String:**
Censorship AND book? (limited to peer reviewed articles)

**Abstract:**
Pressures to censor or ban books for children and young people are increasing in schools and libraries across North America and Canada. The censors believe that the toleration of dissenting opinions somehow endorses those opinions. However, society requires tolerance, especially tolerance in recognizing the rights of others, particularly minors, to make their own decisions about what they read and their right to have access to a broad range of information. Therefore, it is vital that public and school libraries accommodate the assorted interests and needs of youth by providing the widest possible variety of recreational and informational reading materials. Political or religious groups that are completely convinced of the righteousness of their position might want to suppress divergent viewpoints. However, democracy is based on the free exchange of ideas. Intolerance of diverse views in children’s books can easily result in censorship, vigilant tactics, and the suppression of the imagination.

**Critical Annotation:**
This article presents a concise history of the opinions and motivations behind the censorship of children’s literature. It also examines the restrictions favored by both conservative and liberal critics. The most fascinating aspect of the article was the
comparison between Canadian and American censorship attempts. Studies found that violence and cruelty was often ranked lowest in American challenges, while sexuality, profanity, obscenity and morality ranked highest. Saltman reinforces the idea that the exposure to stories of emotional realism, with a diversity of concepts and beliefs, will allow children to cultivate personal value systems and enter into more empathetic relationships with other people.


**Search Method:**
I was interested in reading more articles by Saltman, so I did an author search in Dialog and included the key word “censorship” to narrow down the results.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
AU=SALTMAN? AND censorship

**Abstract:**
Includes three articles: Harry Potter's Family Tree; What Could Be Wrong with Harry Potter?; Why Do Children Love Harry? that discuss the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling. Highlights include censorship issues; their place in children's literature; relationships to other authors; the appeal to adult readers; characterization; criticism of the series from conservative religious groups; moral issues of good and evil; and reasons for their popularity.

**Critical Annotation:**
I included Saltman’s article in this bibliography as it illustrates a point made in Sullivan’s 2006 article. Saltman’s assessment of the Harry Potter series helps deconstruct the arguments against the series in a way that is civil yet clearly disputes the assumptions made about the books. Since this is the series that is questioned most at my library, this article is immediately applicable on how to handle collection challenges. If librarians are unable to paraphrase what Saltman
suggests, perhaps a copy of this article should be available at the Circulation Desk, for ready reference.


**Search Method:**
Similar to the 1993 Boardman search, I explored more of the controlled vocabulary associated with censorship but I limited my results to issues in the college setting.

**Database:**
Dialog (ERIC)

**Search String:**
Censorship AND "intellectual freedom" AND "Higher education"

**Abstract:**
The author discusses the content in John Milton’s "Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing to the Parliament of England" (1985) and provides parallelism to censorship practiced in higher education. Originally published in 1644, "Areopagitica" makes a powerful--and precocious--argument for freedom of speech and against censorship in publishing. The author cites several reasons why Milton believes censorship is so antithetical to a free and democratic society in a fourfold argument. These include: (1) where there has been censorship there has also been extreme political repression; (2) the reading of literally anything has some basic, beneficial effects, even the reading of error and untruth; (3) prior restraint is not a practical method for achieving the goals of the censors; and (4) licensing the publishers will have a chilling effect on truth-seeking and knowledge creation, much to the detriment of England, particularly in its attempt to remain economically competitive with the rest of Europe. Based on Milton’s arguments, the author discusses the importance of having the great universities allow very wide latitude for their students, faculty, and staff to express themselves freely.

**Critical Annotation:**
When discussing the importance of allowing children to explore their worldview and develop critical thinking skills, it is important that these ideas are fostered in secondary and higher education. Sullivan discusses Milton’s 1644 text on free speech, as it relates to the college experience. The foundation of liberal education is the ability to be open to new ideas and changing of opinions based on good arguments. Intellectual conflict is healthy, in that the difference of opinions results in a better understanding overall. The freedom of speech and the ability to civilly confront those who misuse it is something that must be encouraged.

Conclusion

The Search:

After experimenting with various databases in the context of this course, I enjoyed the experience of utilizing these databases for a subject of personal interest. It was interesting to see how similar search strings could yield such different results depending on the database.

I consulted all the databases we looked at in class, but my best results always came from Library Literature & Information Science Full Text and Dialog. To add more variety to my search methods, I attempted backward citation searching on all the authors cited in the bibliography, but the results were unsatisfactory. Of all the databases consulted in this assignment, I found Dialog to provide the greatest amount of accurate hits.

The Results:

This assignment was insightful and it brought up issues that I will need to address for my professional development. I will likely have to deal with censorship during my career and I need to be prepared. The questions I stated in the summary are the ones I am asking of myself and of my library. From this assignment, I heard the passive and the aggressive approaches to challenges and I have learned from both.
Overall, I am satisfied with the searches I performed and the results I presented in this bibliography. My intent was to educate librarians on the issue of censorship and to help them prepare for challenges through articles that are both informative and supportive.