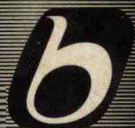


BOOK SELECTION

Fourth edition

DAVID SPILLER



BOOK SELECTION

AN INTRODUCTION TO
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE
4th Edition

DAVID SPILLER
MLS

*With an introduction by Brian Baumfield
City Librarian of Birmingham*

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INTRODUCTION

'A good wine needs no bush.' This adage can surely be applied to the new edition of David Spiller's 'Book selection'. It ceased to be an introduction to the subject when the last edition was published in 1980, and has been widely used ever since. This new revision will be welcomed both by students and practitioners as an acceptable and thoroughly up-to-date standard work on the subject. About a third of the text is completely new or revised, with more material—inevitably—on automation, data bases, computer software, and bibliometrics. Less finite areas such as user needs and the management of book provision are now included, and university library practice and audio-visual criteria are much expanded too.

Nevertheless, although the book grows more comprehensive with each new edition, first principles have not been forgotten, and it remains essentially a practical manual which puts first things first. In present times, with the real purchasing power of book funds diminishing virtually every year, the need for qualitative judgement becomes ever more important. Book selection remains an art, and cannot, it is believed, be reduced to a logistic method, however much this is dressed up in sophisticated computerized terms. (This is not to say that such practices are of no value, as recent professional literature demonstrates.) The use of data bases for selection purposes is bound to grow, and is already adding another dimension to what has always been a complex business. More and more libraries are having to ensure that their application of professional expertise in this field is cost-effective. This admirable book will help them to do so.

Brian Baumfield
City Librarian of Birmingham

PREFACE

In the interests of continuity, the title of 'Book selection' has again been retained for this present edition. In many ways 'Book provision' would make a more appropriate title, indicating a broader approach to all of the processes involved in making stock available in the library.

This is the fourth edition of a book first written 15 years ago. Its main aim is still to provide the practising professional librarian with an introduction to principles and practice. I also hope that the inclusion of many references to existing literature will make the book of value to students.

A work of this nature owes a good deal to colleagues for ideas gained from everyday associations and background reading. I am grateful to Peter Lewis, who gave generously of his time to discuss recent developments at the *British national bibliography*. I would also particularly like to thank Brian Baumfield, who has been associated with all of the editions of the book, and has made many valuable suggestions from a wide knowledge of the subject. He has in addition contributed a characteristically generous introduction to this fourth edition.

David Spiller

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ONE

POLICY

DEFINITIONS

Terminology in the literature of book provision is by no means generally agreed upon or consistently applied. The following notes attempt to describe how terms are used in the present book, plus any alternative uses that have some currency.

Book provision An umbrella term used here to cover a number of activities relating to library stock, including its selection, revision, weeding and interlending. It cannot be stressed too highly that the different aspects of book provision—whilst described separately in the following chapters—must in practice be treated as integral parts of a single process. They cannot usefully be regarded as isolated functions in themselves.

Selection The term is usually used in a specific sense to mean evaluating and choosing material to add to stock.

Weeding Removal of stock from library shelves, either for withdrawal, or (known as relegation) for moving to reserve stock or remote storage. Weeding forms part of the stock revision process, but is also often carried out independently.

Stock revision In-depth treatment of stock, taking a single subject field at a time. It involves examining and weeding existing stock on a subject and studying the pattern of use, then identifying and selecting the most important works in print in the subject bibliography. Sometimes also referred to as *stock editing*.

Stock logistics The quantitative aspects of book provision. These include study of the number of readers and the distribution of their interests as expressed in use of the stock, and analysis of the number of additions required in each subject to

ensure sufficient choice of stock. Sometimes also described as *stock analysis* or as *systematic bookstock management*.

Acquisition This term is commonly used in two quite different ways. In the present work, 'acquisition' is described simply as a technical process for obtaining materials, following the selection process. A list of duties which can be included in the job specification of an acquisitions department is given in Stephen Ford's excellent monograph *The acquisition of library materials* (2nd edition by R. M. Magrill)¹⁸⁵ as follows: 'maintain ordering tools (bibliographies, publishers' catalogues); maintain on order files; perform pre-order bibliographical searching; select booksellers; receive packages of new books; approve invoices; accession new books; supervise subscriptions and standing orders; send booksellers' chasers; search for out-of-print materials'. These duties are markedly different from those involved in selecting, revising, weeding, etc stock, and in most libraries are carried out by different (often non-professional) staff. Acquisition procedures in this sense are not covered by the present book, except in a few instances (for example, in the area of second-hand books) where 'selection' and 'acquisition' are difficult to separate.

However, many writers and commentators—particularly from university libraries—use the term 'acquisition' in a much broader sense, to cover the whole area of book provision, in addition to the process of obtaining books described immediately above. The alternative usage is understandable, for in a specialized field much of the meaningful work in obtaining books is related to tracing recondite materials, rather than simply making a selection decision. The outcome of this for the reader is that he cannot ignore literature referring to acquisitions systems, since it may well contain material which is relevant to the book selection process.

THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE BOOK PROVISION

It is often said that library and information science is not a subject in itself but a collection of related subjects drawn from other disciplines. The librarianship profession's perception of that collection of subjects has changed dramatically in size and scope during the last 15 years—taking in developments from computer science, the social sciences, management and many

other areas. Nevertheless there remains the valid concept of a core of professional activities which distinguish library and information work from other occupations, and with which most practitioners working from a library service point will be involved on a day-to-day basis.

Provision is one of these core activities. It is concerned with selecting, acquiring and maintaining the library's resources (books, periodicals, audio-visual materials etc). The other core activities are arranging the resources (classification, indexing) and using them (reference and information work, current awareness services, etc). It may be seen that these three activities necessarily take place in the sequence given above, with selection executed first, and to that extent it can be argued that provision is the most fundamental of all library activities. So, a sophisticated system of information retrieval is of no use unless it affords access to the right documents. A highly trained information staff is ineffective if it lacks the necessary sources. For that matter, an elegant library building becomes a white elephant unless it houses material appropriate for its users. And so on.

This seems self-evident, and yet for many years there has been an extraordinary lack of interest in the profession in researching and developing methods of book provision. This may be observed in library practice, in library education, in the literature and in research. The impression of neglect may largely be a matter of approach. Because of its fundamental importance, book provision affects most areas of library science — as a glance through the chapter headings of this book will show. A good deal has been written upon these subjects — as the bibliographies also show. However, because 'library science' is an amalgam of disparate disciplines there is a corresponding need to examine these disciplines *in terms of* end products. Book provision is clearly a fundamental end product, yet rarely features as the focus of professional discussions. Ironically, supporting activities such as 'management' or 'the application of automation' — which are intended to enhance the areas of 'core' professional work — seem all too often to have been developed as end products in themselves. Certainly very few of the numerous developments in library management and automation, to take these two examples, have generated useful applications for book provision purposes.

In library education, most courses on book provision — if they exist at all — are relatively brief and low-profile affairs. In the rush to graft onto their syllabuses the more prestigious peripheral subjects, many library schools have failed to clarify for their students the fundamental objectives of library service; without a genuine understanding of fundamentals the student may fail to relate techniques to the overall purpose. Yet for all the emphasis on techniques, those relating to book provision — weeding, stock logistics, selection — are rarely taught in any detail.

In the literature too, works written from a book provision point of view are unaccountably sparse, particularly in the positive areas such as selection and stock revision (while, curiously, the literature on weeding and relegation is quite substantial). Similarly, little research work is directed towards the needs of book provision, although a very long list of worthwhile projects could be suggested. Even in automation areas, where research projects abound, and where there are obvious applications for book provision, few proposals are put forward.

The climate of apathy towards book provision matters appears illogical when seen against the broader background — a period of time during which more books are being published, at increasing prices, while bookfunds in nearly all educational and public library sectors are being cut back. In such circumstances the need for a re-evaluation of provision policies and methods in order to make best use of limited funding is self-evident. This is particularly so where libraries have also suffered staffing cuts, and where users are therefore more reliant upon a self-service approach from stock and open shelves.

It is reasonable to ask whether book provision will remain a subject of major importance in view of the rapid developments now taking place in computerized information systems. No-one knows the extent to which traditional materials of communication will be replaced by computerized systems, though everyone has fun guessing. At the present time printed materials are by far the most common source of information in most types of library. There would be fairly general agreement that within the foreseeable future they are likely to remain so for certain purposes (recreational, cultural and educational reading, as well as for

many forms of reading for information). The techniques required for effective book provision will therefore remain an essential part of the librarian's professional equipment — particularly in public libraries.

Nevertheless, in all kinds of library there will be considerable changes in the format of some materials, and in very specialized research libraries — where even now book provision is of limited importance — the kind of material held in the library is likely to change radically. Information sources will be increasingly affected by computerized systems. For instance, it is probable that from the present output of printed materials, bibliographies, many reference works and — eventually — a considerable proportion of research findings will be available only through access to electronic media. The last of these, with present developments at a relatively early stage, is the hardest to predict. However, the numbers of such data bases can only increase, to become an important component of the services offered as a matter of course by a variety of different kinds of library. Libraries will not physically hold such material in their buildings, and to this extent the nature of provision will differ. However — and this is a key point — as the number of electronic data bases increases, so too will the need to evaluate their content and format in order to select between them. Already there are very necessary developments in the bibliographical control of data bases, and the need for evaluation of content is an urgent one. (For some reason, people tend to have more implicit faith in the content of electronic media than in conventional print media — though of course in neither case is confidence necessarily justified.) A section of this book, in chapter 14, discusses the evaluation of data bases in more detail. The general point to make here is that the whole process of evaluating user needs and matching these to existing sources of information remains — whatever the format ultimately used to satisfy these needs.

THE FUNCTIONS OF BOOK PROVISION

Motivations for reading are notoriously difficult to discover. It is complicated enough that different users may require entirely different services from their library. In addition to this the same users, on different occasions, may also require different kinds of

material. To try to simplify the overall picture such motivations are arbitrarily grouped below into a few categories, viz:

Information The information function is common to public, academic and special libraries. In academic and special libraries information needs are capable of reasonably clear definition, and the librarian provides material for courses, research projects or programmes of activity in response to specific directives from his governing organization. Quite often in such organizations the librarian may acquire documents earmarked for individuals and relating to a library profile of the individual's information needs.

In public libraries information needs are more diffuse, and the librarian often anticipates needs—expressed or unexpressed—by providing an overall *coverage* of stock in most of the main subject areas.

The need for information is often urgent, so that stock must either be already available on the shelves, or obtainable quickly (through interlending systems). The former alternative is preferable, especially for the casual public library enquirer who may lack the motivation to follow up his initial enquiry—much as he needs the information. It is not, however, always possible.

Most library stocks are arranged in a way which facilitates the 'information' user approach.

Culture The provision of 'cultural reading' is a major function of public libraries. Some university librarians also consider it to be one of their responsibilities. A precise definition of the term 'cultural reading' is notoriously elusive. Bengt¹⁹⁴ refers to reading which is 'useless in any direct sense, but always very important in any society. It involves the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, truth, beauty or goodness, even though it is always mixed up with other motivations such as the search for social importance (knowledge is power), or for status and acceptance, or for the comforts of a dream world, or for the individual self-realisation which involves the establishment of a personal identity.' Such reading is usually judged to include works of literature, art and philosophy and may also cover history, biography and topography.

Library users often choose their cultural reading by browsing. The strict subject arrangement of books which is suitable for information purposes is less appropriate for the browsing

approach. In a public library, cultural provision is usually supported by a range of other library activities such as lectures, exhibitions, films and concerts.

Education Educational reading in a formal sense is the concern of librarians from colleges, polytechnics and universities, and often takes the form of textbooks ordered from reading lists provided by course tutors. The provision of educational textbooks is not normally seen as part of the public library's terms of reference.

However, in the sense of 'self-education', self-development, or permanent education (or whichever other term is used) the provision of educational material has always been very much part of the public library's brief. A considerable proportion of a public library's stock will be for users who require general introductions or standard works on a subject, even though the same users' formal education may be highly advanced in another field.

Recreation Reading is frequently undertaken as a pastime, by which the reader fills in time pleasantly. In Britain and the United States (though not in many developing countries) most public library users read recreationally at one time or another, and large numbers of people read in this way almost exclusively. In Britain well over half of public library issues are of material which can be termed recreational—thrillers, romances and other popular fiction, and a range of popular non-fiction—and the provision of this kind of reading has become an increasingly important function of public libraries since the demise of the subscription libraries after the second world war. Despite the importance of such reading in quantitative terms the physical arrangement on the library shelves of fiction, and especially of popular non-fiction, is rarely ideal for the kind of browsing approach which most recreational readers desire.

Research In all university libraries and in a large number of special libraries the provision of material for research purposes is an important function. The use of public libraries for research material varies a great deal according to the size and quality of the individual public library's collection. However, even in the large city collections research use is unlikely to exceed 10% of total use, and in most of the former county public library

authorities it constitutes a much lower proportion. Research material provided in the latter will often come from a central collection, a store, or through the interlending system, rather than as part of the open shelf provision at service points. It is unhelpful, however, to generalize. In the pure sciences the bulk of material required by researchers is to be found in the archival literature of periodicals and reports, stocked by university and special libraries but less commonly by public libraries: but in the social sciences research literature may consist of a very broad range of printed material, including articles in newspapers and popular periodicals.

The library as a repository A small number of libraries serve as repositories, in which books are stored against the possibility of their being required in the future and regardless of current demand, or lack of it. Such collections are most commonly designated as national libraries. Selection is normally straightforward because the ground rules stipulate the purchase of *everything* within defined areas (of language, level, subject, etc). Few libraries however are entirely relieved of the responsibility to select—even national bodies of the size of the British Library or the Library of Congress being required to make selective purchases of literature in foreign languages.

PRIORITIES OF PROVISION: ACADEMIC AND SPECIAL LIBRARIES

In any particular library effective book provision is scarcely possible unless the library's functions are made clear in a policy statement, and any priorities amongst these functions are stated and clearly understood by all staff involved in book provision.

Assigning priorities is a far more complex process in public libraries (see below) than in academic libraries. Nevertheless some problems do remain in the academic field. Funding decisions must be made between departments and subject fields—not necessarily synonymous—and the background to such decisions is touched upon in chapters 3 and 4 of this book.

The other controversial decisions upon priorities in academic libraries often concern the proportion of funding granted for undergraduate textbooks on the one hand, and research and para-research material for post-graduate students, lecturers and

research staff on the other. Although the reading needs of these various groups overlap more than is sometimes thought, the two functions themselves (teaching and research) are fairly distinct. Indeed most university libraries provide facilities for two separate collections—the main stack research collections, and a quick loan or reference collection of multiple copies of texts and other well-used materials. A statement of priorities between these two functions is rarely spelt out. Nevertheless, working guidelines are bound to reflect priorities, expressed, for instance, in terms of the maximum number of undergraduate texts permitted, or a limit on the number of copies of research material (restricted, in many university libraries, to a single copy of each title).

Tucker's article¹⁸ on developing research collections in the new universities is one of the rare pieces of writing to give the actual feel of collection building in an academic setting. He makes the point that a university's research collections often owe something to chance in addition to the institution's priorities. Special collections purchased from private and public sources may form the bulk of a university's overall holdings of research materials, and the acquisition of one special collection may—if it is properly maintained—lead to the offer of further special collections in the same field. No UK universities (possibly excepting the largest three or four) can hope to amass all the relevant documents relating to their research interests, and it is accepted that scholars must move around for material. In any case universities do not normally have research policies as such, and the librarian therefore receives little guidance over new directions for collection development.

Many university authorities feel that in addition to purchasing educational and research material to cover specific courses offered, the university library should also stock a general collection of 'cultural' reading. Provision is sometimes further extended to cover recreational reading, particularly in institutions of further education. The Parry report stated¹⁹⁵ that university stocks 'are essentially comprehensive (except that in the new technical universities there will be special emphasis on certain fields) because they cater for the needs of men and women who are collectively interested in all aspects of human knowledge'.

PRIORITIES OF PROVISION: PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The functions of academic and special libraries appear to be reasonably well defined when compared with those of their counterparts in the public libraries field. Uncertainty over objectives has hampered book provision — and indeed the overall development — of public libraries for many years. The British Public Libraries Act of 1964 is unhelpful in practical circumstances, stipulating that ‘by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books . . . and other materials sufficient in number, range, and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children’.¹⁹⁶ UNESCO’s Public library manifesto¹⁹ gives a similarly broad definition of public library objectives.

The Public Library Research Group¹⁶ attempted a definition of public library aims which read: ‘To contribute to sustaining the quality of life in all its aspects — educational, economic, industrial, scientific and cultural — and promote the concept of a democratic society in which equal opportunity exists for all to develop into true citizens, with whole and balanced personalities leading to an increase in the sum total of man’s happiness and awareness of himself, his fellow men and his environment.’

The policy sub-statement on adult lending services reads: ‘To satisfy the educational, informational and recreational needs of the community through loan collections of books and related materials. To promote use of these collections and an awareness of their value.’ This in turn is further broken up into:

1. to support the formal agencies of education and to assist the independent learner;
2. to meet the general and specialist information needs of the community;
3. to satisfy demand for material to support recreational interests.

Directives of this kind mean in effect that any individual may go to any public library service point in his area and ask for any book, periodical issue, newspaper, etc to be provided. In British public libraries this is, more or less, what happens. It is true that some of the items requested at the ‘lower level’ of provision — out-of-print romances, comics, and so on — are refused, although in

an effort to seduce more readers into their libraries some authorities are increasingly extending their services to include such publications. Most other forms of publication, whatever their level, can usually be supplied on request. However, evenness of accessibility does not imply evenness of provision, and anyone who has been concerned with the practicalities of funding provision in public libraries will know that different emphases are—and have to be—attached to different types of provision. Priorities vary from authority to authority, but the *level* of material is always a large factor in determining its importance in public library provision. The relatively low emphasis given to research level material has already been mentioned above.

‘Archival’ research publications, whilst obtainable through the public library, are not normally provided in any great quantity on the shelves. Without doubt the main emphasis of public library provision in a developed country is on popular introductions, handbooks, surveys, and standard works for the educated layman. A Jones notes in a survey of 12 public library authorities¹⁹⁷ that 20–35% of the material on adult non-fiction shelves was ‘popular’, 33–40% ‘elementary’, 25–30% ‘standard’ and 10–15% ‘advanced’.

One exception should be noted to the low-key provision of research materials, and that is for any public library service which is specifically *local* in character, such as information services to local industries, government officials and historians. The public library is fundamentally a local institution, reliant upon local funds and goodwill, and it is judicious as well as right that intensive service should be provided for any local institution which does not have its own sources of information. Many British public libraries are participating in local information networks in cooperation with technical colleges or special libraries.

In public libraries the difference in approach between the ‘information’ function and the ‘culture’ and ‘recreation’ functions is fundamental, the former operating essentially at national level in response to demand, while the latter attempts to stimulate demand at a local level. Alexander Wilson has called the cultural/recreational role that of the ‘theatre of recorded entertainment’.¹⁹⁸ ‘It is the evangelising role, the exciting role,