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COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT OF NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY BOOKS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES

by Kelly Bigley Craig

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University May, 16, 2003

Approved by____

Professor

Date Approved May 16, 2003

ABSTRACT

Kelly Bigley Craig COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT OF NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY BOOKS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES 2002/2003 Dr. Marilyn Shontz Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

While many Christian holiday books for children for children are widely reviewed and available from mainstream publishers, it is more difficult to find and evaluate books about non-Christian holidays. Elementary library collections may under-represent non-Christian religious books because of a lack of school library media specialists' personal knowledge about non-Christian holidays. This study surveyed school library media specialists through a written questionnaire about the variety and size of their library's current collection of non-fiction books about non-Christian religious holidays, and determined how school library media specialists approach collection development in this area. The sample and population consisted of 124 elementary public school librarians in Atlantic, Ocean, and Cape May Counties.

Results showed that the collections of non-fiction religious holiday books were not very diverse, with more than half of the books owned reflecting Christian holidays. A large number of school library media specialists considered treatment of material and reading level as important criteria when selecting non-fiction books about religious holidays. Follett's Titlewave was the most commonly used selection source for nonfiction religious holiday books, with almost 80% of respondents using it.

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The United States has always been a melting pot of cultures, races, and religions. The recent events of September 11, 2001 have made Americans more aware of diverse religious groups, while emphasizing the need to understand others' differences. The rise of multiculturalism and understanding among religions has re-emphasized the need for a balanced collection of books about religious holidays in elementary schools.

The American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights states that "books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation" (www.ala.org/alaorg/policymanual/intellect.html). It is the responsibility of the library to provide balanced information, without excluding certain religions, even unintentionally. A variety of religious holidays should be represented in public elementary school library collections.

While many Christian holiday books for children are widely reviewed and available from mainstream publishers, it is more difficult to find and evaluate books about non-Christian holidays. Elementary library collections may under-represent non-Christian religious books because of a lack of school library media specialists' personal

knowledge about non-Christian holidays. Non-Christian books may also be underrepresented because fewer books are published and those published may not be widely reviewed in review sources commonly used by school librarians.

Significance of the Topic

It is important to have religious holiday books that reflect all viewpoints of the library's user population. It is also important to have books available to teach all young students about religions and their different holidays. It is the responsibility of the library to have a variety of books available for patrons. Having books from a variety of viewpoints can help readers understand diversity. Gaining knowledge about unfamiliar groups can help shatter stereotypes.

There is very little research in this area, so this study will attempt to answer some questions about current collections and collection development for non-Christian holiday books in elementary school library media collections.

Purpose of the Study

This study surveyed school library media specialists about the variety and size of their library's current collection of non-fiction books about non-Christian religious holidays, and determined how school library media specialists approach collection development in this area. Specifically, the questions asked them to examine the books classified in numbers 290-299 and 394.2, according to the <u>Abridged Dewey Decimal</u> <u>Classification and Relative Index, Thirteenth Edition</u> (Dewey, 1997).

This study answered the following research questions concerning non-Christian religious holiday books in elementary schools:

- 1. How diverse are the current collections? How large are they? How many different religions are represented?
- 2. What non-Christian religions are/ are not represented?
- 3. What criteria do school library media specialists use to select books?
- 4. What selection sources do school library media specialists use to select books?

Definition of Terms

Elementary schools: For the purpose of this study, elementary schools are public schools that serve students in grades pre-kindergarten or kindergarten to four.

Holiday books: For the purpose of this study, any books classed in the Dewey Decimal sections 290-299 or 394.2 in elementary school libraries. If a book contains information about holidays, and also contains other information, it is considered a holiday book. Non-Christian religion: For the purposes of this study, non-Christian religions are religions that would be classed in Dewey sections 290-299, according to the <u>Abridged</u> Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index, Thirteenth Edition.

Non-fiction: "books other than novels and stories for children" (Thompson, 1971, p. 91).

School library collection: For the purposes of this study, school library collections are the collection of books housed in the school library media center for use by teachers and students.

School library media specialist: "a person with appropriate certification under state requirements and broad professional preparation, both in education and media, with competencies to carry out a media program" (Young, 1983, p. 143).

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption made in this study was that the school library media specialists would respond honestly to the written questionnaire. Another assumption was that elementary school libraries should collect non-Christian religious holiday books. It was also assumed that librarians have experience selecting books, and have specific experience selecting nonfiction non-Christian holiday books.

This study was limited to school library media specialists in the three New Jersey coastal counties of Atlantic, Ocean, and Cape May. These library media specialists serve in libraries at public elementary schools with grades pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through four.

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CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Although no research studies regarding collection development of non-Christian religious holiday books in public school libraries were found by this researcher, collection development studies exist in other subject areas. Religious books in public school libraries were not discussed often in professional literature. When religion was discussed, it was usually referring to Christian religions. Non-Christian holidays and any religious holidays were typically not discussed in the literature.

Miller (1982, 1983) and Avallone (1984) informally surveyed public librarians in three annual surveys about selecting religious books for adults, as reported in <u>Library</u> <u>Journal</u>. Librarians were asked about the use and purchase of religious books. They were also asked about collection policies, including books about all religions, accepting gifts, and balancing collections on issues. The results were anecdotal, and no children's books were discussed. Most of the responses were referring to religious Christian books. According to Miller's 1983 survey, "Religion Revisited," some public libraries complained that books on Eastern religions were harder to collect because they were not reviewed as often. Librarians stated that good titles of religious books were hard to find. Also, major publishers have determined that religious books do not sell as well as nonreligious ones. The American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights (<u>www.ala.org/policy</u> <u>manual.intellect.html</u>) affirms that controversial issues need to be presented in a balanced way. It states that libraries should "provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues." It also states that "books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves." These statements apply to collecting books about a variety of Christian and non-Christian religious holidays.

In writing about Asian-American books in schools, Pang, Colvin, Tran, and Barba (1992) wrote that literature was the means by which all children come to understand the stories of others. They learn to embrace the rich diversity of our schools, and of the world. The authors asserted that teachers need to choose books for children that do not reinforce stereotypes. These principles apply to books about religious holidays, leading to the readers' understanding of diversity, without stereotypes.

History of Religious Materials in Schools

Although the First Amendment to the United States Constitutions forbids the establishment of religion, religion has been an element of American public schools since our country's founding. Protestant Christian beliefs and morals were taught through Bible reading and prayers as an assumed part of the curriculum from colonial times through the mid-twentieth century (Howard, 1986).

In the 1963 Shemp decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that religious exercises represented an "advancement" of religion and were unconstitutional. This decision only ruled out government-sponsored exercises, not teaching about religion. This led to an increase in courses teaching about religion. A 1979 national survey found 24 percent of

secondary schools offered a religion course (Howard, 1986). By the 1980s, the public's understanding of the distinction between "advancement" of religion and "teaching about" religion was less clear (Howard, p. 266).

Through the United States' history, the people have become more diversified. The United States is more and more involved with other parts of the world that are non-Western and non-Christian. Schools need to approach religion to help students to understand the nature of history of religion without forcing them to abandon, change or adopt a faith stance (Howard).

Whether there is reading of sacred texts in schools or comparative religion courses taught, the library media center should have a supply of books about a variety of religions. Reading is essentially a private act, and students can choose books from their library that reflect their beliefs or interests.

Collection Development Studies

Three collection development studies show methods for evaluating library collections in specific topics. Although the topics of these studies were science and alcoholism, the methods could apply to a study of religious holiday books in public elementary schools.

Janet G. Webster (1998) described her collection development study in "Where are the Whale Books? Evaluating and Improving Juvenile Marine Science Collections." This study examined ten public libraries on the Oregon coast to see if their juvenile collections had good science books about their backyards. These backyard books covered science topics such as plants and animals native to Oregon. Since an adequate collection was difficult to define, she used "best books" lists to evaluate their collections.

The "best books" list was compiled from three journals and four annual lists of outstanding science trade books. Her study accepted these eighty-five books as readily accessible, scientifically accurate, readable, and appropriate to the audience. Each book was searched by title in the libraries' electronic catalogs, accessed via Telnet. In addition, collection staff at eight of the ten libraries were interviewed by phone about the tools they used to identify and purchase science books. They were also asked about their collection budget, budget allocation, and the selection process. The library staff members were also asked about problems they encountered when selecting children's science books. Adequacy of the collection was defined in five different ways: coastal/noncoastal comparison, collection level, budget allocation, quality, and diversity.

While Webster's study concerned only science books, the two-step method of checking books in the collection and asking librarians questions about the selection process served as a model for this study.

Morrison, Fox, Guarin, and Shannon (1994) also studied collection development in science in "School Library Snapshots: A Brief Survey of Illinois School Library Collections in Three Areas of Science." This study was designed to document the needs of school libraries, to emphasize the importance of providing resources to match the curriculum, and to offer libraries a collection assessment tool. The questionnaire asked general information about each library, and asked for detailed counts of the numbers and ages of books in three specific fields: astronomy, general biology, and human anatomy.

This study was conducted by the Illinois School Library Media Association, as a survey of its members. To assess the astronomy section of the library, 800 respondents were asked to count book titles in the Dewey categories of 520-523 and 629 by date of

publication. To assess the general biology section, respondents counted books in the Dewey categories 333, 363, 574, and 591. Human anatomy books were examined in Dewey numbers 611-613.

The questionnaire also asked general questions such as what kind of school, number of students, book volumes owned, periodical titles owned, film and video titles owned, CD-ROM titles owned, and laser discs owned. It asked about expenditures per student and sources of funds. The questionnaire asked if science classes use the library, and whether or not students select science books and magazines when they have choice of reading materials. It also asked if the librarians felt that their library's science collection supported the four Illinois Education Goals for Biological and Physical Science.

Again, this study used a two-step method that served as a model for this study. Counting books in specific Dewey categories was selected as a useful procedure.

Degnan (1994) evaluated the efficacy of major journal reviews as a selection tool for a special topic in "Tracking Specialized Book Selection: Books for Adult Children of Alcoholics." Degnan examined thirty books recommended by four national organizations that assist adult children of alcoholics. She checked for their reviews in six review sources and their presence in 120 public libraries. Those books with more reviews were found in most libraries and those with most reviews were from major publishers. This study highlighted the difficulty with collecting books on specialized topics, such as non-Christian religious holiday books.

Summary

It is clear that books about religious holidays need to be an important part of a public school's library. It has been noted that books and reviews about non-Christian holidays were more difficult to find. No research studies about collection development for this subject area were found.

The methods used in other collection development studies included counting books by Dewey number, comparing the collection to a "best books" list, and listing journal reviews used. For this study about non-Christian religious books, a "best books" list would not work well because of the emphasis on Christian religions in most public library collections and professional selection sources. A combination of counting books by Dewey number and listing selection sources was selected as best for this study.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overall Design and Justification

This study of non-fiction non-Christian holiday books in public school elementary libraries used applied research. According to Powell, "applied research tends to be more pragmatic and emphasizes providing information that is immediately usable in the resolution of actual problems" (1997, p. 44). Results of this study offer librarians an awareness of the variety or lack of variety in their religious holiday book collections. The results also show librarians what selection sources others use, and what criteria other librarians use to select non-Christian holiday books. This information could help resolve problems for librarians who need guidance in evaluating and selecting non-Christian holiday books for their elementary libraries.

This study was survey/descriptive, which "is a group of research methodologies commonly used to determine the present status of a given phenomenon" (Powell, 1997, p. 57). Because survey research is used to examine contemporary situations, a survey/descriptive study is appropriate for examining school libraries' current collections and librarians' current methods of choosing books.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study surveyed school library media specialists about the variety and size of their library's current collection of non-fiction books about non-Christian religious

holidays, and determine how school library media specialists approach collection development in this area.

This study was based on the following research questions concerning non-Christian religious holiday books in elementary schools:

- How diverse are the current collections? How large are they? How many different religions are represented?
- 2. What non-Christian religions are/ are not represented?
- 3. What criteria do school library media specialists use to select these books?
- 4. What selection sources do school library media specialists use to select these books?

Sample and Population

The sample and population for this study were the same. The sample and population consisted of all elementary public school librarians in Atlantic, Ocean, and Cape May Counties. These three southern coastal counties in New Jersey have many economic and geographic similarities. One hundred twenty-four librarians were surveyed. The addresses of the elementary schools in these three counties were obtained through the New Jersey Department of Education website.

Variables

The independent variables in this study were the size of the collections and the diversity of collections, as shown by which religions were represented, which were not represented and in what quantities. Dependent variables included the selection sources used and the criteria for selection of non-Christian holiday books.

Data Collection

Public elementary school librarians from three New Jersey coastal counties were mailed a written questionnaire (see Appendix A). A mailed questionnaire was used, rather than an online or phone survey, so that all selected librarians would have access to it, and they would have ample time to complete it. The librarians were given approximately three weeks to complete the questionnaire and return it in the stamped return envelope. A cover letter (see Appendix B) explained the purpose of the study and guaranteed confidentiality.

The questionnaire asked librarians to follow a two-step procedure. First, they completed a table that asked them to count non-fiction holiday books in their libraries that reflected each religion. Non-Christian religions were all religions that would be classed in Dewey sections 290-299, according to the <u>Abridged Dewey Decimal</u> <u>Classification and Relative Index, Thirteenth Edition</u>. The list on the survey included six major religions and a category for other religions. <u>The CREW Method: Expanded</u> <u>Guidelines for Collection Evaluation and Weeding for Small and Medium-Sized Public</u> <u>Libraries</u> (Boon, 1995, p. 34) lists six major international religions that were listed on the questionnaire. In the second section, respondents answered questions about how they select non-Christian religious holiday books. They indicated which selecting these books. They were given the opportunity to write about problems they have encountered when selecting non-fiction non-Christian holiday books for their elementary school libraries.

Validity/Reliability

The questionnaire was determined to reliable after a pretest administered to selected school librarians who were not part of the study sample. After revisions to the questionnaire, this study should be repeatable in another situation and obtain consistent measurement of data. This study has content validity, because the questions in the survey were objective, clear, and deal with the content accurately.

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CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Responses

To gather data for this collection development study of non-fiction religious holiday books, 124 questionnaires were mailed at the beginning of February. Forty-four questionnaires were returned by March 7, 2003, with a return rate of 35%.

Statistical Analysis

The counts of holiday books were coded using a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel.

The counts of selection sources used and criteria for selecting books were hand-tallied

and then entered into Microsoft Excel. All charts were created using Microsoft Excel.

Results

Research Questions 1 and 2

Out of 44 returned questionnaires, 43 (98%) were usable to collect data to answer research questions 1 and 2: How diverse are the current collections? How large are they? How many different religions are represented? What non-Christian religions are/ are not represented? This part of the questionnaire asked librarians to count the number of books for each religion. One respondent did not follow directions in counting books, and simply listed holidays for each religion instead of counts of these books, which made that portion of the questionnaire unusable.

Respondents counted the non-fiction religious holiday books in their collections. As shown in Figure 1, Christian holiday books represented more than half of the religious holiday books in these collections, with 56% of the books. The second most common

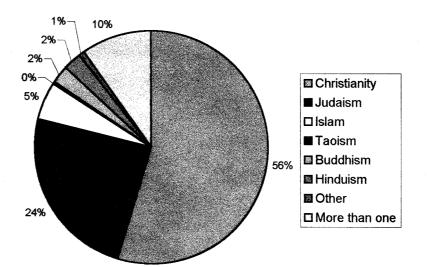


Figure 1: Percent of Religious Holiday Books by Type of Religion

religion represented was Judaism, with 24%. Ten percent of the books counted contained information about more than one religion's holidays. Religious holiday books about Islam made up 5% of the collections. Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism made up a small percentage of the collection. Taoism had less than 1%, and Buddhism and Hinduism had 2% each. Other religions that were mentioned on the surveys included Jainism, Native American, Sikh, Shintoism, Rastafarian, and Confucianism.

The mean numbers of holiday books in each library collection is shown in Figure 2. Libraries had a mean of 26.5 books about Christian holidays and 11.7 books about Jewish holidays. Libraries had an average of 2.6 books about Muslim holidays. Taoism was represented in a mean of 0.1 books, and Buddhist holidays had a mean of 1.1 books.

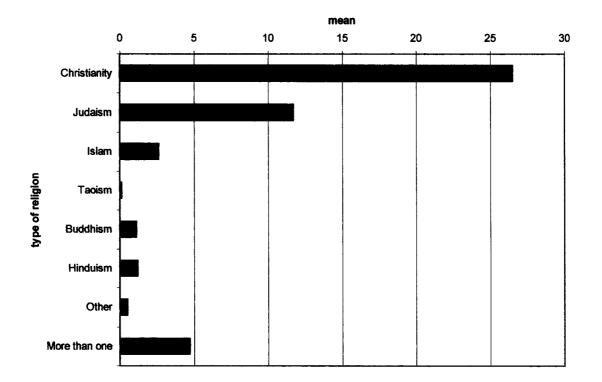


Figure 2: Mean Number of Holiday Books by Type of Religion

Libraries had an average of 1.2 books about Hinduism. Other religions had a mean of 0.5 and libraries had an average of 4.7 books about more than one religion's holiday.

Research Question 3

All 44 questionnaires (100%) had usable data for the question reflecting the criteria used for selection: What criteria do school library media specialists use to select these books?

Figure 3 shows the results reflecting the criteria used for selection. The respondents were asked to rank their top three considerations out of seven possibilities for selecting non-fiction religious holiday books. Treatment of material and reading level

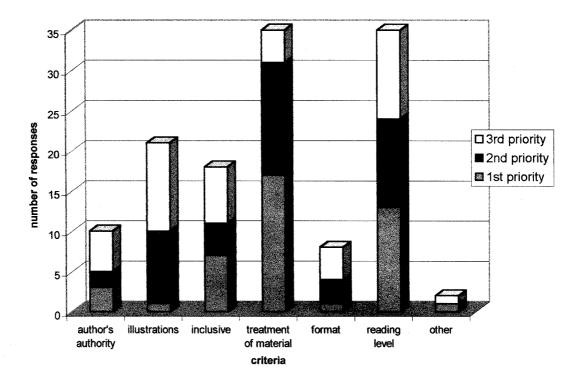


Figure 3: Criteria Used by Librarians for Selection

were the criteria used most often, being selected by 35 respondents as one of their topthree criteria. Treatment of material was cited most often as the first priority. Author's authority and format were used the least, being chosen by 10 and 8 librarians, respectively. However, three respondents selected author's authority as their top criteria for selection and one selected format as the top criteria. Other criteria that librarians listed on the questionnaires included curriculum and cost.

Research Question 4

Thirty-nine of the 44 (89%) questionnaires had usable information about selection sources used to answer the final question: What selection sources do school library media specialists use to select these books? Five respondents did not complete the question about selection sources used. One respondent was not a librarian and noted that she did not select books. The other four respondents did not complete the whole second page of the questionnaire.

The elementary school librarians were asked which selection sources they used to choose non-fiction religious holiday books. As shown in Figure 4, the most popular source for selection was Follett's Titlewave, a vendor-sponsored online purchasing tool with book reviews. Thirty-one out of 39 librarians (80%) used Follett's Titlewave. Other popular sources included conferences and colleague recommendations. Thirty out of 39 (77%) librarians used conference attendance for book selection guidance, and 29 out of 39 (74%) used colleagues' recommendations. Book award lists were used by 67% of the librarians, or 26 out of 39. <u>School Library Journal</u> was used by 64% of librarians, or 25 out of 39. Recommendations from students and commercial best-seller lists were used

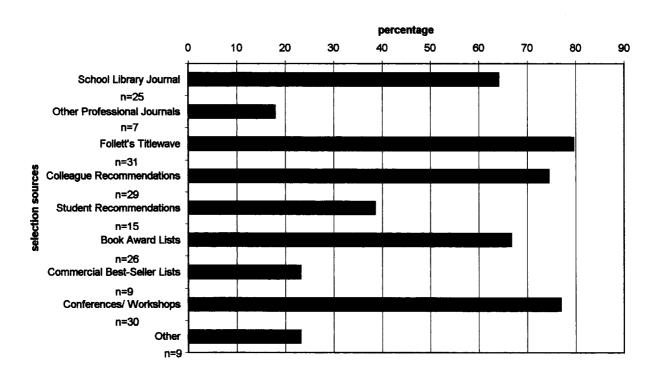


Figure 4: Percentage of Selection Sources Used by Type of Source

less often, with 39% and 23%, respectively. Nine out of 39 (23%) librarians used other sources, citing LMNET, newspapers, catalogs, websites, preview boxes, and Smithsonian magazine. Seven out of 39 (18%) librarians used other professional journals, such as Bookbag, Book Links, LMC, Booklist, Horn Book, and Multicultural Review.

Summary

When given the opportunity to comment on difficulties in selecting non-Christian religious holiday books, some observations were repeated. The most common statement was the difficulty in finding books that were appropriate and interesting for primary students. Another common concern was the lack of funds for purchasing books. Librarians also expressed concern about lack of availability and small selection.

Figures 1 and 2 show that Christian holiday books far outnumber books about other religious holidays. Figure 3 shows that treatment of material and reading level are the most important criteria to librarians. Figure 4 shows that Follet's Titlewave was the most used selection source for non-fiction religious holiday books.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretation of Results

Research Questions 1 and 2

This study answered the following questions: How diverse are the current collections? How large are they? How many different religions are represented? What non-Christian religions are/ are not represented?

The collections of non-fiction religious holiday books in elementary school libraries in Atlantic, Cape May, and Ocean counties in New Jersey were not very diverse. These collections mainly consisted of books about Christian holidays, with more than half of the books owned reflecting Christian holidays. As a whole, approximately one quarter of the collections were made up of books about Jewish holidays. Unfortunately, books reflecting Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, and Buddhism were rarely found in these libraries.

Research Question 3

This study also answered the question of what criteria school library media specialists use to select books. A large number of school library media specialists considered treatment of material and reading level as important criteria when selecting non-fiction books about religious holidays. Reading level was a concern because the students were in the primary grades of elementary school. The age of the students also contributed the third most common selection criteria, which was the quality of the illustrations.

Research Question 4

Finally, this study answered the question of what selection sources school library media specialists use to select books. Follett's Titlewave was the most commonly used selection source for non-fiction religious holiday books, with almost 80% of respondents using it. This vendor-sponsored free source combines reviews from a variety of professional journals. It is easy and quick to use by librarians who do not have much time for selecting books, or money to spend on multiple professional journals. Recommendations from colleagues and attendance at conferences or workshops were also important to elementary school librarians. <u>School Library Journal</u> was the most popular professional journal used for selection.

Conclusions

Most elementary public school libraries did not have a balanced collection of nonfiction religious holiday books. School library media specialists need to include religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, and Hinduism in their libraries' collections.

The criteria that librarians used for selection reflected the importance of this topic. Treatment of material was selected because of the stereotypes and misunderstandings that can be presented in a poorly written book. Reading level was an important criteria when selecting books for young students.

Most elementary school librarians in this study used Follett's Titlewave for selection, because it is free and easy to use. However, without the time for selection or money for other journals, many librarians are missing books available from publishers not included in Follett's Titlewave. Librarians in these three rural coastal counties also

lack other resources that are not geographically close to them, so the online resource was more valuable.

Significance of Results

These results are important because they outline the need for school libraries to strive for more balanced collections in this area. Since school libraries should reflect all viewpoints of their users, more variety is needed. If schools are teaching about religious holidays and attempting to shatter stereotypes through knowledge, the school library must have books to meet these goals.

The results also showed the limitations of the resources used in selection. The criteria that librarians use for selection show book publishers what qualities are important in a non-fiction book about religious holidays.

Possible uses of results

Librarians can use these results to help them develop an awareness of the need to make their collections more balanced, reflecting all of the major religious holidays. The list of criteria used by librarians in this study can also be used by novice librarians when selecting books in this area. Publishers can use the results to see where the needs are in school libraries, and provide books to fill that need.

Recommendations for Further Study

It would be interesting to study if the results were similar in middle school and high school libraries. Another possible study would be a collection development study for fiction books about religious holidays. This non-fiction study could also be repeated in other areas of New Jersey to see if different socioeconomic and geographic conditions affect the results of this study.

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APPENDIX A

Directions: Please examine Dewey sections 290-299 and 394.2-394.3 in your library's collection. Write the number of nonfiction titles about **holidays** for each religion that is in your collection. If a book contains a variety of information, including holidays, please include it in your count. You can guess. Please don't count duplicate titles.

Name of religion	Approximate number of titles	
Christianity		
Judaism		
Islam		
Taoism		
Buddhism		
Hinduism		
Other (please list)		
More than one religion included		

When you consider selecting nonfiction books about non-Christian religious holidays, which of the following criteria are most important to you? Select only 3 and label 1, 2, or 3 in priority order.

_____ Author's authority

- _____ Illustrations- accurate and appealing
- _____ Inclusive language and illustrations- all races, diversity
- _____ Treatment of material- bias, purpose, objective
- _____ Format- cover, paper, binding, headings, type size/ style
- _____ Reading level
- ____Other (please list) _____

Please mark an X next to following selection sources you use to select nonfiction books about non-Christian religious holidays. Mark all that apply.

What difficulties have you encountered, if any, in selecting non-Christian religious

holiday books?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Kelly Craig 443 Grape St. Devonshire, NJ 08215 dkcraig@att.net

APPENDIX B

February 6, 2003

Dear Colleague,

As a graduate student at Rowan University in the School and Public Librarianship program, I am conducting a research project as part of my Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Marilyn Shontz. The purpose of this research is to determine the current status of nonfiction non-Christian holiday books collection in school libraries, and to determine how librarians approach collection development in this important area.

Your responses will be kept anonymous. Please complete the survey and return it in the enclosed envelope by February 28, 2003. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact me by e-mail at <u>kcraig@att.net</u>. You can contact Dr. Marilyn Shontz at (856) 256-4500 extension 3858, or by e-mail at <u>shontz@rowan.edu</u>.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with this research.

Sincerely,

Kelly Craig