

Dissertation Proposal

The Reading of the Young Reports and the Professionalization of Library Services to Youth in the United States from 1876-1900

Kate McDowell, May 11, 2005

Abstract:

This dissertation will examine the cultural foundations of youth services through analysis of the content and context of the Reading of the Young reports, a series of eight national surveys published in *Library Journal* and reported at American Library Association (ALA) and other major professional library conferences from 1882-1898. The Reading of the Young reports have been overlooked in histories of youth services as a set of documents that detail the increasing formalization and professionalization of library services to children. The central research question for this proposed dissertation is: What was the cultural context of the earliest services to young people in libraries in the United States? The proposed analysis of the cultural context surrounding libraries in the late nineteenth century, from about 1876-1900, centers around three main historical questions: What were the professional connections of the librarians who undertook these surveys? How were children and childhood understood by the librarians who provided them services? How was the process of professionalization of youth services reflected in these surveys? Through analyzing these reports and other documents, this dissertation will examine the process of professionalization of youth services as a gender-specific profession through the cultural context in which this profession evolved.