

Censorship and children's literature: Whose reality?

This session focused on one aspect of the 'Introduction to Children's Literature' paper at the University of Waikato for the Bachelor of Teaching degree and was co-presented by Stephanie Dix and Marilyn Blakeney-Williams.

Following a brief outline of the course contents, we looked at censorship – deciding what is, and what is not acceptable in the library collection.

Occasionally, schools are faced with a title being challenged by a parent or a member of the community. The ALA defines a challenge as a formal written complaint filed with a school or library in an attempt to remove or restrict materials based upon the objections of a person or group. Challenged and censored material usually falls into 8 main categories:

- Sexually explicit (nudity, sex education)
- Political ideologies
- Racism and portrayal of cultural groups
- Religions ideologies (promoting the occult, religious view points)
- Destructiveness of self esteem
- Violence and abuse
- Offensive language
- Teenage angst/social taboos

As a result of further investigation and debate a title may be banned, that is, removed from the collection.

As well as the presenters reinforcing the importance for libraries to have a 'Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials' form available to hand out to a complainant, feedback from the audience highlighted the need for procedures dealing with this issue to be clearly documented.

Before appearing on our library shelves books pass through a series of 'gatekeepers' i.e. the author, agent, publisher, editor, reviewer, and bookseller. As teachers and librarians we also carefully consider the risky or sensitive issues and the values of our school community before purchasing.

It would have been interesting, had time allowed, for feedback from the audience on what books have been challenged or banned from their libraries, and for what reasons.

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