
‘How should Library Information Services reimagine today’s young adult services in today’s diverse and postmodern world? So begins both a challenging and stimulating enquiry in Transforming young adult services, edited by Anthony Bernier and a group of committed, experienced practitioners working in the sectors of education and libraries. Readers will discover a collection of research articles and essays that challenge prevailing LIS approaches. Specific topics covered in the book offer both theoretical and practice-based reflections on topics such as intellectual freedom, young adult (YA) space and identity, YA materials and collections and professional ethics.

Bernier and his team have undertaken a systematic examination in the LIS field and believe that it has failed sufficiently or clearly to define its core audience of YAs. One reason for this is because LIS has too long relied on other professions and disciplines to identify who young adults are and what they need. For example, education labels them 'students', psychology as 'research subjects' and criminal justice as 'suspects', and LIS has followed these views for its YA users rather undertake research specific to YA information service needs.

These views are not new. Back in 2007, Bernier published the lead essay in Youth information-seeking behavior II, in which he argued not only that LIS had largely ignored YA research but also that a ‘forward-looking research agenda should start asking its own questions about young people rather than relying on paradigms emanating from other disciplines’.

The book asks hard and even uncomfortable questions about the definition of best LIS practice. Accomplishment does not necessarily qualify as a model, and success does not occur simply because something happened. The editor acknowledges that there are broad generalisations in the essays, given the complex subject matter; but here is little doubt that the research in this book is a breakthrough in library information service beliefs and practices regarding YA patrons.

Current research literature in YA library services is founded on the idea of meeting teens’ needs and interests, yet an adult-centred perspective dominates both the research and practice in this area, and data or input directly from teens is not gathered. This somewhat provocative view is supported by an analysis of recent professional literature as proof of the prevailing adult-centred perspective. The editor has written extensively on the subject and believes that we need to see teens as individuals rather than a demographic group, and that teens themselves need to become sources of data about YA needs.
The views set out by the contributors and consolidated by the editor are stimulating and fresh. They are not afraid to challenge the status quo and claim that in the past LIS has been constrained by limitations and narrow scope of research. To return to the question of the library in the lives of young adults, the resounding message in the book is that LIS must drive toward a more LIS-specific vision of young adults if we want this unique group of individuals to imagine libraries in their world.

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