
The creation of a German Language Children's Literature Collection

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Abstract

This article concerns the development of a German Language Children's Literature Collection at Louisiana State University (LSU) that is used in conjunction with the German Language Program at LSU. The article discusses the rationale behind such a collection and provides the tools and selection criteria necessary to develop a successful collection. Also included are sample titles chosen using the process that is discussed during the course of the article.

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In the Fall of 1998, Louisiana State University (LSU) Libraries began plans to create a German Language Children's Literature Collection to be used in conjunction with the German Language Program at Louisiana State University. Books were ordered in the Spring of 1999, and by 2000 most were in place and the collection in use.

But the process was not a simple one. As there were no models to draw from, collection tools and criteria had to be developed before the ordering could begin. First, we had to clarify our goals. How would this collection be used? What books should we select, and by what criteria should we select them? And finally, where can we order German language children's books? All these questions had to be answered before the collection could be amassed and put in place. This article will deal with the why and the how involved with creating such a collection. Based on our experiences here at LSU, such a collection is a goal worth repeating at other institutions. I will also provide the specific tools and criteria I developed to create our collection, as well as a select list of books with which a library might start. I have also updated the Web based resources used in this project to reflect their current status, as constant change is always implicit in the very nature of the Web.

Purpose and rationale of collection

The items selected for acquisition were assembled with the primary goal of supporting the needs of the German Language Program at LSU; therefore, a profile of the German Department at LSU was essential. The German program, which comes under the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at LSU, has presently an undergraduate degree program only and serves to provide a foundation for those students training to be German teachers. In addition, it serves as a preparation for advanced degrees in almost all major fields, including those as diverse as math, music, philosophy, science, and business. In Fall 1998, when preparation for the collection was begun, enrollment was 197, with more than 30



students majoring or minoring in German. Faculty currently consists of two professors, one associate professor, and two instructors.

The needs of this program can be stated as thus: first, to facilitate and further the acquisition of a second language; and second, to develop lifelong readers in the second language in question. The collection being offered below is designed to launch a German Language Children's Literature Collection to meet these very needs, and to do so in a manner approved and supported by the faculty of the German Department.

To address the question of why the acquisition of children's literature for the use of foreign language programs – and this is necessary in understanding the criteria employed in the selection of individual works – we must first speak of the benefits of what is called in pedagogical terms, free reading. Simply put, free reading is a method of teaching that allows students of a second language to choose their own reading material in this new language, stressing reading for pleasure. The immediate goal is improvement in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and motivation. The ultimate goal, however, is the development of a strong reading habit through a love of reading which will enable the student to proceed to the more advanced levels. Summarizing research results in his book, *The Power of Reading*, Krashen reports, "In-school free reading studies and 'out of school' self-reported free voluntary reading studies show that more reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development" (Krashen, 1993). As Dupuy *et al.* state in their article, "Bringing books into the classroom . . ." (Dupuy *et al.*, 1996), this often comes as a surprise to the students themselves, when confronted with the documentation showing that reading for fun will actually improve their language and literacy skills to a degree far surpassing that of more traditional methods employed in foreign language studies.

The question at hand now becomes, why children's books? What is the rationale behind their use, even in a free reading program? As Dr Robert Lafayette so aptly stated in a speech (Lafayette, 1994) a few years back, there are at

least six major points arguing for the inclusion of children's literature in foreign language instruction involving reading programs:

- (1) The material in children's literature is authentic and as such, a source of firsthand cultural information. In addition, it provides us with original text often fusing art with literature.
- (2) Listening comprehension skills are greatly enhanced through the many storytelling opportunities provided by and through children's literature.
- (3) Children's literature provides abundant opportunities for "free reading", which has been shown to improve vocabulary comprehension and retention with only 20 minutes a day of such activity (Stowell-Ruzicka, 1991).
- (4) "Children's literature expands esthetic and semiotic sensitivities and has the potential to foster a greater appreciation of literature" (Lafayette, 1994).
- (5) Children's literature is multicultural, spanning the cultures often in tales whose origins can no longer be traced, but which simply appear over the centuries in many different cultures – a phenomenon occurring in many folktales. Other newer books often cross the ocean, literally and figuratively, and are accepted and translated into the languages of other cultures, thus once again helping to bridge the gap between continents and peoples.
- (6) Children's literature is motivating due directly to the pleasure factor.

Children's literature is not just fun reading, but rather an important stage that helps students advance to a truly literate stage that is coupled with a love of reading. This has been confirmed by Dr Victoria Rodrigo in her dissertation dealing with the three stages in the process of developing literacy (Rodrigo, 1995). Children's literature, as a component of the second stage, helps bridge that gap currently existing in foreign language programs – that between the first introductory stage and the advanced stage already requiring a high degree of reading skill.

We have, then, established as our main criteria the selection of books which are entertaining, which are diverse in content, and which provide various levels of reading challenges such that one can always find a book that can be read and yet that provides room for and the means for progressing to ever higher levels. The focus with this collection ranges from the beginning levels to the intermediate levels, or in children's book terms, "picture books" through first language 12-year-old capabilities.

Literature review

This project proved to be a challenging one due to the nature of the materials being collected – German children's books physically selected from within the American continent – and the scarcity of existing tools providing guidance for the collection of them in these circumstances. Searches were done in *Library Literature*, *Reader's Guide*, and *Preisgekrönte Kinderbücher* (Children's Prize Books – International) for information concerning sources for gathering German children's literature materials for a user community such as the one presented here. Nothing was found exactly fitting our needs, but indirect sources were located, providing at least a measure of guidance. By indirect, I mean sources which indicated books of merit within the genre sought but, as would be expected, had no criteria that would apply to this project. Even within this realm of actual book lists, however, material was scarce. Nevertheless, my search did lead me to sources which could be of use for future purchases in this area, whether by LSU Libraries or other institutions.

For future and present collection developers in German language children's literature, I would recommend the Web site of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek (International Youth Library – IYL), located in Munich, Germany (see "Selection tools" below for URL). From here, one can obtain yearly updated lists of the White Ravens' catalog, a list of notable books selected each year by language specialists of the International Youth Library.

The books are organized by country of origin and, within these categories, arranged alphabetically by author. A brief synopsis is given of the book along with the recommended reading ages. Although the lists are not meant in any sense to be exhaustive, they are most helpful.

In addition to the above site, I recommend highly the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis site (see "Selection tools" below for URL). Here one can find the nominees for the various categories for the current year, past winners of the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (German Youth Literature Prize), and updated information concerning children's literature discussion groups and recommended books emanating from these.

Another major tool which I used in selecting books for the German project – and indeed, perhaps the most important one – was the input and recommendations of the German faculty itself, who stand both to benefit directly by such a collection, and who will be utilizing it the most. Their input, then, is paramount to the success of this endeavor, given the above factors, not to mention their intimate knowledge in the area being researched.

Selection criteria

As the mission of the foreign language program is not one of moral instruction at this level (university), many of the criteria used for judging and reviewing children's literature will no longer apply. Primary considerations will be entertainment value and choice, i.e. sufficient quantities of appealing material to read. Thus, selection criteria, given both the nature of the community and program this collection will serve and the materials available as selection tools (or not available, as the case may be!), can be delineated as follows:

- (1) Will the collection serve the needs of the user community, thus fulfilling the function of providing sufficient materials of entertainment value to second-language students?

- (2) Is a sufficient variety of reading levels represented, thereby enabling the beginning reader to progress to ever higher levels while maintaining his/her interest?
- (3) Have faculty recommendations/requests for material that will be used in the classroom been given adequate consideration?
- (4) Is the literature of high quality, as potentially reflected through the following characteristics, any or all of which may be present in the work in question?
- prominence or status of author/illustrator within the genre of children's literature.
 - recommendations by respected associations or organizations such as the Internationaler Jugendbibliothek München.
 - recipient of awards for children's literature, e.g. from the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (authorship or illustration).
 - published by respected or major publisher in the field.
- (5) Does the selector have personal knowledge of a given work, which may take into account any of the aforementioned criteria?

Any or all of the above criteria may be used. Final judgment for inclusion of any given work should rest in the hands of the selector, for it must ultimately be through his/her knowledge of the field (particularly as concerns what is available and potentially of merit) in combination with a knowledge of the wants and needs of the user community which will ultimately provide grounds for the inclusion or exclusion of any given work.

Selection tools used – annotated bibliography

- Braun, G. (Ed.), "German books for children", edited by *Booklist*, May 1, 1992, p. 1613.

Contained helpful information in the form of a list of recommended books, emerging from

discussion groups comprising children and young adults from ages 8-18 as well as adults in the International Youth Library (Munich, Germany). Recommendations then provided perspective both from the intended market as well as the adult critique. The only problem with this list is the frequency of publication – this 1992 list of German books for children is the most recent made available by *Booklist*. The source of the recommendations from which this list was derived (*Internationale Jugendbibliothek*, München – see entry below) proved to be the most helpful material gleaned from this article, as regards a long-term source of recommendations for German children's books.

- Jackson, G. and Robertson, M., "Building multicultural-multilingual collections", *CMLEA Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 1, Fall 1991, pp. 11-13.

This article was actually only of very limited help in this particular project, due to the language being collected and the needs of the program itself. The focus of the article tended to be on multicultural literature and selection criteria for such in a public or school library setting. The only tips provided for second language acquisition programs were that the material collected should support the program being served, a point already central to our own criteria.

- Extensive discussions with Professor Tom DiNapoli from the LSU German Department Faculty, whose area of expertise is German Children's Literature.
- *Internationale Jugendbibliothek*, Schloß Blutenburg, 81247, München, Tel: 089/8 91 21 10; Fax: 089/8 11 75 53, e-mail: bib@ijb.de; Web address: www.ijb.de/

According to the IJB itself, it "is the largest library for international children's and youth literature in the world. Ever since it was opened in 1949 by Jella Lepman, it has been continuously expanded to an internationally recognized center for the world's children's and youth literature" (www.ijb.de/index2.html, "Self-portrait" link in left column; or www.ijb.de/wir2.htm frame).

“The heart of the International Youth Library is the collection of nearly 500,000 books, with 470,000 volumes of children's and youth books in more than 130 languages and nearly 30,000 titles of secondary literature. 1,000 publishers from around the world send sample copies of their latest titles to the library each year. Approximately 9,000 books are cataloged annually. At present the International Youth Library has language area specialists («Lektoren») for Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Romanian, Turkish and the Iberian, Scandinavian and Slavic languages” (www.ijb.de/index2.html, “Collection” link in left column; or www.ijb.de/sammlung2.htm frame).

Publications provided by this library of use to the selector of international children's literature include *The White Ravens*, a list of notable books from around the world selected by the language specialists of the International Youth Library. This list provides a good starting guide for the selector trying to negotiate his/her way through the maze of international children's/youth literature. This list, including past lists from 1996, is now available online at the following url: www.ijb.de/ (Click on the link to *White Ravens* in the left column. For an English version, click on the British flag at bottom left of screen).

- *Bookbird*, Basel, Switzerland: IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People), Quarterly, ISSN: 0006-7377. Excellent source for information on international children's books of note. Contains regular feature in each issue entitled, “International children's books of note,” which focuses on different countries each time, often including Germany. Also provides articles on special authors of note around the world, again featuring many distinguished authors of German language children's works. Excellent articles on children's literature in general. Each year following the announcement for the winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Author and Illustrators Awards, provides articles on the year's winners and nominees.

- *International Board on Books for Young People* (www.ibby.org/).

The Arbeitskreise für Jugendliteratur is the German section of this organization. Information about the Hans Christian Andersen awards (see above entry) and the IBBY Honor List can be obtained from this site using the link to *IBBY Activities*. This is also the organization responsible for publishing the journal, *Bookbird*, spoken about above.

- *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* (www.jugendliteratur.org/start.cfm) – Web site for *Arbeitskreise für Jugendliteratur*.

Important site carrying detailed information concerning the current year's prize winners as well as the nominees in the categories of Picture Books; Children's Books; Young People's Books; Special Subject Books; and the winner of the Sonderpreis for the current year, featuring the ruling of the jury, biographical information on the author, and a listing of the author's works, as well as their availability, i.e. whether in print or out of print. Important tool for selecting amongst the notable German children's books for any given year. Also links to the Archives, which contain a list of titles for each year's winners, as well as the category, authors, and publishers of those titles.

- *Kidnet.de Homepage* (www.kidnet.de/) (note: Web page works only under IE and not under Netscape).

Provides recommendations for children's and youth books. Look under the category, *Gelesen & Gehört*. Each suggested book links to Amazon.de, the German version of Amazon.com, where the book can be purchased.

- *Das Bilderbuch Schaufenster* (www.bilderbuchschaufenster.de/).

This is a commercial site which at least provides access to new picture book titles, including summaries, which are useful in determining a book's potential worth to this sort of collection.

- *Buch+medien Online* (www.buchhandel.e/).

Online offerings of organization of German language bookstores and publishers. Offers good selection of literary reviews/discussions as well as much other trade information with regards to German language publications. Also offers access to a huge database for searching for bibliographic information and verification of items.

- *TESOL Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 4, 1996, pp. 10-15.

Important source for defining needs and goals of curriculum being supported. Important research on developing lifelong readers in a second language. Supports research done by Krashen in this area (see entry below).

- Krashen, S. *The Power of Reading*, Libraries Unlimited, Englewood, CO, 1993).

Details not only the importance of reading, but more specifically the importance of reading for enjoyment in developing lifelong readers. Important research and theoretical information supporting the program being developed here.

- *Buchkatalog.de* (www.buchkatalog.de/).

Largest European database for verification of book titles and availability. Excellent source of bibliographic information about books as well as summaries of many of the titles. Excellent search mechanisms. Easy user interface. (Note: Searching requires use of German characters such as umlauts.)

- Another good site is the *Deutsche Akademie für Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (www.volkach.de/kultur/akademie.html), which recommends a book each month in the categories of picture, children's, and youth books.

- *buchtip.de* (www.buchtip-online.de/auswahl.php3?bereich=Kinderbuch&sid=20T7B1018242146).

Under the category of *Kinder & Jugend*, one can look at new recommendations from this commercial site. Allows ability to purchase, but more importantly, to look at brief synopses of the books.

- *libri.de* (www.libri.de/).

This site offers the ability to search for new books by category. Look under Stöbern, on the

left side of the screen, then select Kinder und Jugend, then click on Los. On the following screen, one can choose from narrower categories within this major grouping. The two subcategories, *Neuerscheinungen* and *Bestsellers*, both have the following groups to search within: *Bilderbuch*, *Romane*, *Sachbuch*, and *Erstlesealter*. Within the category, *Weitere Themen*, one can look under *Jugendliteraturpreis* or *Leanders Leseliste*. Provides synopses of books that are appearing in publication and ability to purchase.

- *Handbuch für Autorinnen und Autoren, Kinder- und Jugendbuchverlage – Adressen von Verlagen, in denen Kinder- und Jugendbücher erscheinen* (www.uschtrin.de/kinder.html).

This site from Uschtrin Verlag, though strictly in German, provides Web and physical addresses and complete contact information for all publishers of German children's and youth literature. This is most helpful when trying to track down a particular book.

Annotated bibliography of selected monographs

The 12 books listed below have been selected to represent merely a cross-section of the kinds of books that were and can be selected with the tools and selection criteria discussed in this article. Included is a brief iteration of the criteria used in each case as well as a summary of the book. (The summaries come from the catalog record of each book.) Most of the books can be found either through retail dealers or the publishers themselves.

- (1) Busch, Wilhelm. *Max und Moritz*. Diogenes, 1990. ISBN 3-257-00567-9. 66pp. *Selection criteria*: classic work; faculty recommendation.
- (2) Hacks, Peter and Uwe Häntsch. *Der Hof zieht um*. Eulenspiegel Verlag, c1998. ISBN: 3-359-00907-X. 32pp. *Selection Criteria*: faculty recommendation; award winning author. Summary: a king decides to move his court among his subjects in the city, but the move creates such a

- disturbance that it is decided that things would be better without a king.
- (3) Holzwarth, Werner. *Vom kleinen Maulwurf, der wissen wollte, wer ihm auf den Kopf gemacht hat*. Wuppertal, Peter Hammer Verlag, 1998, c1989. ISBN: 3-87294-407-X. *Selection criteria*: "International Children's Books of Note", *Bookbird*, Vol. 35 No. 1 (1997), pp. 49. *Summary*: when Little Mole tries to find out who pooped on his head, the other animals show him how they poop in order to prove their innocence.
- (4) Krüss, James. *Florian auf der Wolke*. Hamburg, F. Oetinger, c1981 (1995 printing). ISBN: 3-7891-1641-6. ab 6 J. 58pp. *Selection criteria*: faculty recommendation; award winning author; major publisher. *Summary*: Florian was a cloud gazer, thinking the sky, clouds, and birds more beautiful than anything on earth, but then he gets a chance to ride a cloud and see the world from the perspective of the birds, causing him to accept himself as a human being.
- (5) Krüss, James. *Mein Urgroßvater und ich*. Hamburg, F. Oetinger, 1998. ISBN: 3-7891-0693-3. ab 10 J. 270pp. *Selection criteria*: faculty recommendation; award winning author; award winning book (Deutscher Literatur Preis); major publisher. *Summary*: an autobiographical tale about a ten-year-old child named Boy listening as his great-grandfather, a Helgoland lobsterman, spins for seven days stories and verse that Boy writes down with a carpenter's pencil on wood.
- (6) Spillner, Wolf. *Taube Klara*. Berlin, E. Klopp, c1992. 3rd edition. ISBN: 3-7817-1943-X. ab 10 J. *Selection criteria*: Review, "German Books for Children", *Booklist*, May 1, 1992, p. 1613. *Summary*: On a visit to his widowed grandmother to celebrate Christmas, ten-year-old Hannes is forced by the discovery of his mother holding the lifeless body of a pigeon named Klara, which had been the favorite of his grandfather and a comfort to his grandmother, to analyze the complex relations among three generations of his family.
- (7) Moeyart, Bart. *Blosse Hände*. (Aus dem Niederländischen von Mirjam Pressler) Hamburg, Carlsen, c1997. ISBN: 3-551-55083-2. *Selection criteria*: winner of the Deutscher Literaturpreis für Jugendbücher, 1998. *Summary*: a boy confronts his mother's suitor on New Year's Eve when the boy kills the man's duck and, in a fit of anger, the man kills the boy's dog.
- (8) Maar, Paul. *Eine Woche voller Samstage*. Hamburg, F. Oetinger, 1998 printing. ISBN: 3-7891-1952-0. ab 8 J. 158pp. *Selection Criteria*: critically acclaimed author; nominee for the Hans Christian Anderson Author Award for 1998; *Bookbird*, Vol. 36 No. 3, p. 40. *Summary*: Timid Herr Taschenbier is intimidated by everybody until an insolent creature called Sams comes into his life and changes him into a self-confident person.
- (9) Maar, Paul. *Der Tag, an dem Tante Marga verschwand und andere Geschichten*. Hamburg, F. Oetinger, c1986 (1997 printing). ISBN: 3-7891-1958-X. ab 8 J. 127pp. *Selection criteria*: highly acclaimed author; nominee for the Hans Christian Anderson Author Award for 1998; *Bookbird*, Vol. 36 No. 3, p. 40. *Summary*: a collection of short stories on various themes such as the day Aunt Marga disappeared, a white wolf, an alien planet, a blocked door, etc.
- (10) Schubiger, Jürg. Mutter, Vater, ich und sie. Weinheim, Beltz & Geldberg, c1997. ISBN: 3-407-79748-6. ab 10 J. 106pp. *Selection criteria*: highly acclaimed author; nominee for the Hans Christian Anderson Author Award for 1998; *Bookbird*, Vol. 36 No. 3, p. 40.
- (11) Pfister, Marcus. *Der Regenbogenfisch*. Gossau (Switzerland), Nord-Sud Verlag, c1992, 1996 printing. ISBN: 3-314-00733-7. *Selection criteria*: highly respected author; major publishing company; proper reading level; personal evaluation. *Summary*: the most beautiful fish in the entire ocean discovers the real value of personal beauty and friendship.
- (12) Storm, Theodor. *Der kleine Häwelmann*. München, C. Bertelsmann, c. 1982, 1996 printing. ISBN: 3-570-02789-9. *Selection*

criteria: faculty recommendation; highly respected author; major publisher.

Summary: after his mother becomes exhausted wheeling him around the room, little Häwermann devises a way to keep his crib rolling and, with the help of the moon, rolls out of the house, into the street, to the end of the world, and into the sky.

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