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# "As long as they read": Norwegian School Libraries and the Literary Canon

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how nine Norwegian school librarians in public upper secondary schools think about collection development and how school libraries affect the formation of a literary canon. Libraries are arenas for literary consumption, and decisions related to acquisitions and collection development affect canon formation. The nine interviews show that the librarians have a user-based approach to collection development, where they focus on providing students with the literature they find engaging and interesting. This comes as a consequence of a general decline in young Norwegians' reading habits. Ultimately, their collections of English fiction are very different, with 78% (2758 of 3536) of titles only appearing in one library. Even though the librarians are the ones who make the decisions of how their collection is developed, they are influenced by many factors, both within the industry and outside. Even though the librarians have much power in canon formation, they choose to focus on creating specialized collections that their students find engaging, thereby creating local canons. Essentially, the librarians are happy as long as the students read.

## Samandrag

Denne oppgåva tek føre seg korleis ni norske skulebibliotekarar i offentleg vidaregåande skule tenker på samlingsutvikling, og korleis skulebibliotek påverkar danninga av ein litterær kanon. Bibliotek er arenaer for litterær påverknad, og avgjerslene bibliotekarane gjer angående innkjøp og samlingsutvikling påverkar den litterære kanonen. Dei ni intervjuar viser at bibliotekarane har eit brukarbasert syn på samlingsutvikling, der dei fokuserer på å gje elevane tilgang til litteratur dei tykkjer er engasjerande og interessant. Dette er mykje på grunn av søkkande lesevaner blant norske ungdommar. Dette har resultert i veldig ulike samlingar av engelsk skjønnlitteratur, der 78% (2758 av 3536) av titlar berre er å finne i eitt bibliotek. Sjølv om det er bibliotekarane som tek avgjerslene knytt til samlingsutvikling, er dei påverka av fleire faktorar, både innan og utanfor den litterære industrien. Sjølv om bibliotekarane har mykje makt i kanonutvikling, vel dei heller å fokusere på å lage spesialsamlingar tilpassa deira elevar, med litteratur dei likar, og på denne måten dannar dei lokale kanonar. Bibliotekarane er glade så lenge elevane les.

## **Preface**

I have always been fond of libraries, and when I needed to decide on a topic for my master's thesis, I was determined to focus on libraries in some capacity. As a future teacher, it was wonderful to get to work on school libraries, on which we need more research. This thesis might include more charts and tables than what is usually the case for a master thesis in English literature (especially section 2.5). However, because of my background in mathematics, I enjoy working with data, and I could not pass up the option of working with numbers in some way.

I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Yuri Cowan, because without you my thesis would have no direction. Your feedback and questions have been invaluable throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the friends I've made at NTNU, who has made my student years not just enjoyable but filled with great memories I will look back on with affection. A special thanks to Astrid for never doubting my ability to produce a thesis, and Malin for great conversations, entertaining my many questions, and for letting me think out loud.

Thanks are also due to the lovely librarians whom I had the pleasure of meeting. This thesis would never have happened if you did not take time out of your day to let me pick your brains.

Finally, I also need to thank my family for always supporting me, especially Mamma, for reading to me when I was little and introducing me to all the great worlds you can discover through reading.





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## Introduction

Norwegian students participated in the PISA test for the first time in 2000. The response to the results has been labelled the “PISA-shock”; it turned out that Norwegian students were not competing at the top but had quite average scores. Since then, several promotions and programmes have been implemented to enhance students’ results (Koren). However, scores on reading literacies are not improving, and there is an overall decline in 15-year-olds reading engagement (Roe). School libraries have a significant role as a “centre for project-based education, information literacy and reading” (Koren 72). The school libraries provide access to literature in multiple ways. Firstly, the Education Act §9-2 requires students to have access to a school library, which means that they are situated in close proximity to students’ everyday lives. Secondly, the library provides intellectual access by promoting literacy and providing literature for all reading competencies. The third aspect of access is visible in how libraries are arenas for literary access and social mobility. They are giving students of all backgrounds the possibility to read literature considered to be of high social importance. Therefore, it becomes important to consider what literature is available on the shelves and how librarians think about their collection development.

This is connected to literary canons and whether school librarians have a shared understanding of what literature they consider valuable. To explore the role school libraries have on canon formation, I conducted nine interviews with school librarians in Norwegian upper secondary schools and examined their databases. The school libraries are not exercising their power in canon formation as much as they could have because they are focusing on reader engagement. “As long as they read” becomes the overarching goal for many librarians today. Cleanth Brooks hyperbolically states: “One might say that if the reader cannot truly read well, it hardly matters what he reads” (352). This notion is shared by the librarians as their first goal is to enhance readers’ literacy skills so that they in the future will become more competent readers. Then, the students will hopefully get more joy from reading overall. With the decline in reading engagement, librarians are desperately trying to find engaging material for their students in an attempt to help them find enjoyment in reading. If students have a wide variety of literature from which they can choose freely, they may develop a motivation for further reading and find enjoyment in it, which will increase their language proficiency and develop their literacy skills (Ørevik 142). Libraries, therefore, focus on providing the students with broad selections tailored to their student’s interests. This has resulted in diverse

collections, with only a handful of titles appearing in most of the participating libraries. Of the 3536 unique titles, 2758 (78%) are only found in one library. There are 33 novels that appear in seven or more libraries, but to claim that these novels constitute a Norwegian canon of English fiction is too simplified. Rather, these books are an amalgamation of past collection habits, present deaccession habits, and popularity.

The theoretical aspects of the canons and how canons and libraries intersect are the topics of the first chapter. This chapter comments on how we can define a canon and how a canon in this thesis is more about whether the libraries carry the same set of novels or share opinions of which books are of value in the school library. Included in this section is also a historical framework and how the modernization of canon formation is based on material and social changes, modern nation-states, and secular university programmes dedicated to the study of English literature. Lastly, this chapter also discusses the sociological approach to canon formation and the library's role as a social institution. The librarians are the ones who examine and determine whether a novel is fit for their collection, and their opinions on acquisition habits affect what literature the students have access to. Presently, there is much focus on providing users with what they want to read. "Long tail" searches, the concept of users being more specific in their internet search prompts, affect library acquisitions in how readers are now presented with different answers for slightly different prompts. This makes librarians subject to targeted recommendation strategies and niche markets. Subsequently, BookTok and its subcommunities also have a role in collection development as viewers are scattered into different subcommunities based on their engagement.

Chapter 2 presents the findings from the interviews and the database analysis. Overall, the school librarians have a user-based approach in their collection development and want to provide the students with literature they are interested in. Even though they all agree that the school library is there for its students, there is some disagreement on how they approach and think about books of high literary quality. In their acquisition work, they are influenced by requests and other industry professionals, such as other libraries and librarians, publishers, and bookstores. BookTok has an impact on librarians, who have mixed emotions about its influence. The databases support the librarians' goal of being specifically curated for their students, as there are very few novels that appear in half or more of the libraries (3%). In comparing the frequencies of titles published prior to 1975 to those published after 2012, we can see that there is a slightly higher degree of agreement on the older novels. However, when it comes to authors from the same time periods, there is significantly more overlap.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the findings with a focus on what role the school libraries have in connection to canon formation. First, by formation, I mean the continuous decisions the librarians make on what literature they provide their students. As authorities, the librarians are solely responsible for their collection. Consequently, they hold much power over what literature to include. The new national curriculum also creates more freedom as there are fewer specific guidelines on what literature students are required to read. However, the librarians are influenced by other social and institutional factors, so they are not exercising their authority in a vacuum. The librarians are also the ones who decide what literature to deaccession. In general, they use user statistics to see what titles are no longer borrowed by the students. However, these statistics are not always followed religiously, and works that are considered classics or specifically valuable to the libraries are often exempt from weeding. High literary value is also something of different importance to the librarians, where most view it as a perk but not a requirement. Further on, the different aspects of access are discussed in more detail, because this is where school libraries' impact on canon is the most defined. Lastly, I examine what characterises the novels that appear more frequently across libraries. I also look at how BookTok is influencing what literature is acquired in the collections and how its subcategories are enhancing the "long tail" divisions.

### *Method*

The data collected for this thesis is twofold. The first consists of qualitative interviews with current school librarians who work in upper secondary schools. This method of data collection was chosen as it can give insight into individual school librarians' habits and thought processes regarding acquisitions and collection development. I had an interview guide that the participants were sent in advance. The interviews followed the same structure, but there was room for follow-up questions if necessary. The interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after the interview. To protect personal information, the transcriptions and the data material have been anonymized, and as such, they will be referred to as Library or Librarians A through I. Even though some schools have more than one employee at the library, only one librarian from each library participated, except for Library I, where both librarians participated in the interview. As the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, all quotations included are translated as closely to the original meaning as possible, with the original quote as a footnote. After the transcription, the interviews were coded and categorized into the following categories: Norwegian students' relationship to English fiction;

the purpose of the library; influences on acquisition habits; guidelines; weeding; and the future of the library collection.

The second part of the data collection is the participating school's database of English fiction. All the participating libraries use a web-based database that makes it possible to search their collection for printed fiction in English. This includes books, comic books, graphic novels, graphic adaptations, anthologies and collections, and books adapted for readers of lower proficiency levels. These entries were copied to Excel and are available to be read online<sup>1</sup>. As some collections and anthologies are listed in the school database with one main author and others with several authors, wherever possible, these were entered either listed as anthologies or with the editor as the author. This means that the individual authors in these collections are not included in the frequency count. Because certain works have several editions, I also found the year the work was first published (or the period where an accurate year is not available) so that the results can be compared to other libraries regardless of what editions were present in the libraries. For example, in the eight libraries that carried George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, there were eleven different editions. The databases were then merged to see the frequency of both titles and authors, as well as the distribution of years the books were first published. This also makes it possible to compare titles and authors within certain time periods. Keep in mind that the libraries' collections are constantly changing, but the data was accurate as of the time of the interview in the fall of 2022.

When deciding what schools to include in the study, I narrowed my search to public upper secondary schools in three different regions in Norway. I wanted to look at libraries from different areas to investigate similarities or differences in small and large schools, rural and urban schools, and schools that provide varying education programmes. Therefore, I chose to focus on schools in Oslo, Trøndelag, and Troms and Finnmark. The schools also needed to have their own school library. Consequently, schools that use a combination library with the local public library were excluded. Additionally, I chose schools with at least one school librarian or a dedicated library administrator. In relation to their collections and collection sizes, schools needed to have a collection of over 100 books listed as English fiction to be considered.

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<sup>1</sup> All individual databases and the merged database are available on the following link:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jN6mz4XY\\_hzxgYUyS5i02O0CCpSFUp7AjSvmfIVDrZs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jN6mz4XY_hzxgYUyS5i02O0CCpSFUp7AjSvmfIVDrZs/edit?usp=sharing)

When looking at the sample size, I needed it to be large enough to detect trends without being too large for the scope of this thesis. Because I had three regions to focus on, it seemed manageable to have three libraries and library databases for each region, which gives a total sample size of nine libraries. Even though I tried to have an even distribution of schools in the different areas, difficulties in finding participants resulted in three schools in Oslo, four in Trøndelag, and two in Troms and Finnmark. Because the schools were in such different geographical areas, some interviews were conducted digitally, but I also had the pleasure of visiting several in person. With 297 public upper secondary schools in Norway, it is not to shy away from how small a sample size of nine school libraries is. One should be careful to draw generalized conclusions from a smaller sample size. However, with schools of varying sizes in different regions covering many study programmes and librarians with different backgrounds, ages, and seniority, it is possible to see trends in the results.

By using a combination of qualitative interviews and database analysis, the thesis can give insight into how librarians think about their acquisition habits, their process of collection development, and compare that to the reality of what is on the shelves. The database analysis will show where the different schools' collections overlap and vary, thereby showing how different the collections are, even if the librarians have similar goals with their collections.





## Chapter 1: Canons

There are as many definitions of the canon as there are scholars writing about it. Julianne Buchsbaum defines the canon as literary works with “a kind of aesthetic beauty, timelessness and universality” (2). Furthermore, she describes canonical work as having a topic that is not “too ephemeral or narrowly restricted to the culture of its time but that it transcends its own conditions and brings pleasure and enlightenment to people regardless of time period, gender or culture” (2). The canon can be described as a collection of highly esteemed works with such significance that others should care for their longevity. This idea of the canon being passed from generation to generation is also highlighted in Ann Thompson’s definition of the canon as “that which is worth preserving and passing on from one generation to the next” (60). Richard Ohmann’s definition of the canon as “a shared understanding of what literature is worth preserving” provides a concise and clever understanding of the topic (219). It includes both the social aspect of the canon as a shared understanding and the historical sense of preserving it.

Some might argue that canons are a thing of the past. Christopher Braider argues that contemporary postcolonial studies have “completed the critical dismantling of the inherited literary canon” in favour of more focus on a world literature (161). On the other hand, David Damrosch criticises the idea of a vanished canon. He remarks how “we do live in a postcanonical age, but our age is postcanonical in much the same way that it is postindustrial” (Damrosch 44). He explains, “Shakespeare and Joyce aren’t going anywhere” (46). Even though the literary field might have changed in some way, “it’s clear that the larger structure of the field doesn’t look as different as one might have expected” (Damrosch 48). So even though many discussions in later years have focused on opening the canon and giving a larger role to marginalized or often forgotten voices, the foundational canonical writers still have large audiences. Furthermore, Buchsbaum claims that “a canon of some sort is inevitable” and highlights how a canon can be useful for librarians in their collection development (3). Because it is impossible to carry all works that might interest the library’s users, she argues that a canon is a useful tool to include works that have been considered engaging and valuable. Librarians are unable to critically read and subsequently evaluate every novel in their collection, so to some degree, they need to rely on already established works of good literature.

Instead of focusing on a canon as a set list of works, I am considering whether the libraries and librarians, both explicitly and implicitly, have created collections that carry a significant amount of the same literature, when also considering the librarians' own goals for their collections. Explicit would mean that there is an agreement among the librarians that these novels are of high value in school libraries. An implicit canon collection would be if the libraries had no agreed-upon set of novels, and might also have different focuses in their acquisition habits, but still ended up with a very similar collection.

This chapter first focuses on canons from a historical perspective to how the modern literary canon was first formed. The literary canon would be used to further a political agenda of national ideologies through shared experiences with selected literature. Moreover, this chapter also presents the role of the library in canon formation. How librarians determine valuable literature affects their decision of what to acquire in their collection. Two different approaches to collection development is also discussed: the "give them what they need" and the "give them what they want" approaches. If the purpose of the library is to provide its users with great literature, the librarians would focus on what the users need to read. However, because of a decline in reading engagement among young Norwegians, libraries are heavily focusing on the "want"-approach. Furthermore, internet usage and social media, especially BookTok, shape how users find their next read. Because these platforms are subject to "long tail" searches, interests are diversified into more niche markets. In turn, when librarians focus on what the readers want, and what the readers want are diverse and niche titles, the libraries' collections become different.

### *1.1 History, Function, and Formation*

Historically, the canon can be traced back to antiquity, to the Greek sculptor Polykleitos of Argos and his sculpture of the Doryphoros (Kolbas 12). This sculpture demonstrated such a high degree of craftsmanship that it was used as an ideal model for later artists. Subsequently, the sculpture was called the Canon, which is Greek for "rule". In relation to writing, people started to distinguish between "ancient" and "modern", as well as major and minor authors during the start of the first millennium. Eventually, this resulted in a collection of texts which would be the first explicit distinction of a literary canon (Kolbas 15). The canon would act as a standard or a "rule" for other authors as they wrote their own works. They would, for example, mimic the style of canon writings, reference or use elements from the works, or create their own retellings of them.

Canon, as a term, has both a religious and secular history. The religious canon is used to describe religious texts that are recognized by the religious authority. The texts the religious leaders accept as genuine and authentic are considered canonical, a part of their holy scriptures (Baldick 33). The literary canon is a secular direction, but there are still several similarities between them. For instance, there is a need for some authority to decide what is included or not, be that religious leaders or literary critics, and when a work is considered canonical it comes with a status as being of high importance. However, while the modern religious canon rarely changes the literary canon is always evolving.

E. Dean Kolbas explains how three factors separate how we look at literary canonization in modern times as opposed to ancient and medieval canon formation: first, how certain material and social conditions developed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and made people question the classical canon; second, the development of the modern nation-state with a need for common national identities and ideologies; and third, the creation of specific courses dedicated to the study of secular literature in schools and universities to teach this national ideology to students (17).

Firstly, more and more people were becoming literate from the sixteenth century, which created a new demographic of readers. As for the development of material changes, it is hard to shy away from the importance of the printing press. With a reading public and a way to produce larger quantities of written material, the publishing industry emerges. Subsequently, professional writers are needed to supply the publishers with material to publish, and professional critics need to decide what books are worth publishing. There would be more money in popular books that would be widely read, which led to a commercialism of literature (Kolbas 19). Also, because of how the publishing industry needed to determine what books would be well-received, Kolbas explains how literary criticism would be another by-product of this process, which in turn led to the modernization of the canon.

Secondly, with the development of modern nation-states, there also came a need for the different nations to develop a national identity and consider what ideology and values were important in the given nation. Kolbas explains how the “*national* significance of literature has perhaps been the single most effective means of reinforcing a specific literary canon in the modern era” (19, original emphasis). A national literary canon would be a way to highlight authors from the given nation who, in their writing, would support the national ideology and values. For example, national literary canons in France and England began to come together during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “when the economic power

and national identities of France and England were becoming established” (Kolbas 19). National canons are still relevant today, as an official Danish literary canon was developed in 2004 (Kanonudvalget "Dansk Litteraturs Kanon"). More recently, a Swedish literary canon has been proposed, modelled after the Danish version (Malm). Chris Baldick also highlights national canons in his reference guide definition: “The canon of a national literature is a body of writings especially approved by critics or anthologists and deemed suitable for academic study” (33). The focus on critics and anthologists gives support to the idea of authority. Here, they are specified as people considered experts on the topic, as well as professionals within the literary world.

Baldick’s mention of academic study brings us back to Kolbas’s third feature of modern canonization: dedicated courses for literature in schools and academia. University courses would be a place to study the canon and ensure that it prospered. Andrew Sanders remarks how introducing English as a university subject is argued to be “the most important attempt to fix a canon of English literature” in the nineteenth century (7). Throughout the nineteenth century, a small number of universities in England would sporadically study English literature, to either “illustrate the history of language or as a means of ‘social improvement’” (Kolbas 20). The national canon did not have a place in English academia before Oxford successfully established an Honours School in English Literature in 1894 (Kolbas 20). A study of English literature would then be the opportune setting to reinforce the national literature and the values portrayed in the chosen material. Even for Norwegian upper secondary students, English is a mandatory subject for one year, and a popular elective for students in their second and third year in the general studies programme. Even if these students were to study a national canon it would not be for the purpose of becoming a part of the national identity. Instead, the national canons would be a tool for teaching students about (anglophone) ideologies and culture through literature.

When it comes to canon formation, scholars such as Ohmann and Kolbas are very clear in emphasizing its political nature. Constructed national canons, such as the Danish one, are examples of where the canon is at its most fixed. I use “constructed”, as for these instances there has been a hand-picked group of people with the task of selecting what works to include in a fixed list. In Denmark, Kanonudvalget were the ones who decided what literature should be considered the best and greatest of the Danish literary cultural heritage (Kanonudvalget "Den Store Danske Kanon"). Kanonudvalget explains the function of the canon as literature to be used as support in the education of Denmark's long and complex cultural history. Even though, traditionally, the literary canon would be carefully selected to

show certain values or attributes that were supposed to coincide with the national identity, the committee explains that the purpose of the canon is not to “discuss and defend national values”. On the other hand, it is supposed to give its readers “insight and experiences in their meeting with the nation’s cultural challenges as a committed citizen” (Kanonudvalget "Den Store Danske Kanon"). Canons can in these instances be used as tools for cultural hegemony, where the ones in power are deciding what values and ideas the rest of society should have. Again, this is a study of English fiction in Norwegian schools, but how institutions decide what literature the general public should appreciate is still a relevant question in this case.

In a discussion of literary canons, it is also worth considering literary classics, as the librarians talk more about including classics in their collections than canonical work. If defining a canon is hard, the matter does not become easier in regarding classics. For Thompson, classics are highly connected to canons. She suggests that calling a novel classic is “of high praise” which should be “applied to a work of literature which is not only in the canon but at the top of the canonical hierarchy, a ‘great’ work perceived as having special value for its culture” (60). Classics are, for her, individual titles that comprise a canon. Where a literary canon can be hard to determine, it is easier to determine the individual importance of classics. Italo Calvino, in his novel *Why Read the Classics?*, presents 14 aspects of what a classic is, many of which are highly subjective. For example, he describes novels that “imprint themselves on our imagination as unforgettable” or “a book to which you cannot remain indifferent” (4, 7). Of the more generalizable aspects he focuses on a classic as inexhaustible, that each read will open up for more interpretations, and that they generate critical discourse (5, 6). Similarly to the canon, classics are considered novels of high literary quality, longevity, appeal and influence.

### *1.2 Canons and Libraries*

Although there are debates over what should be a part of the canon and whether we can, or should, change the canon, there is an agreement on the fact that canons *are* changing. A sociological approach to canons looks at how institutions, such as universities, publishers, and reviewers, affect the formation of a canon. The creation of a canon is, as Buchsbaum argues, “very much a socially mediated process” (2). As Barbara Smith explains, value is not universal but dependent on both the reader and the purpose of reading. It is the people at social institutions that evaluate and determine the specific literature’s status (Dijk 122-23). Libraries are one such institution. The books that appear in the libraries are subject to the

judgement of the librarian, who ultimately decides what literature to acquire, display and promote to its users.

An example of the library's role can be seen in Thomas Staley's exploration of the research library in the United States. He argues that librarians and their acquisition habits, in the company of literary criticism, impacted the formation of a canon of contemporary literature. After World War II, expanding universities in America were concentrating their acquisitions on the literature of the twentieth century, which in turn was picked up by "dissertation students hungry for new topics" (Staley 13). As a result, "the number of dissertations being written on Joyce, Faulkner, and Hemingway had, in a few short years after World War II, surpassed the number being written on Shakespeare, Milton, and Johnson," showing how availability affects the focus of literary criticism (Staley 13). Consequently, the librarians' acquisition habits participated in forming a literary canon.

However, Staley is quick to mention that availability is only one of many factors to consider. He also attributes the interest in contemporary literature to changes in literary teaching methods in the US. With the emergence of New Criticism, the intrinsic value of literature would separate the work from its historical and biographical factors. The value of an already established canon would not be elevated above that of contemporary literature just because of established historical and biographical significance. Contradictory, Staley's concept of a contemporary canon, would not have been accepted by Kolbas. He argues that "canon formation is an historically cumulative process" (60). A few years of literary criticism, even in as high numbers as Staley reports, would not be considered a canon from Kolbas' perspective. It would be necessary for any given work to have "continual social confirmation" in order to be considered a part of the canon (Kolbas 60). Following Kolbas' argument, it would be impossible to determine the role of contemporary libraries in canon formation.

At the same time, it is still possible to see how their collection habits determine what literature is available for consumption. John Guillory speaks of canon formation as decisions relating to literary production and consumption (ix). I am considering whether the libraries and librarians, both explicitly and implicitly, have created collections that carry a significant amount of the same literature. Going back to Ohmann's definition, a canon of English fiction in Norwegian school libraries would be of shared understanding as several individual librarians would have decided to acquire the titles. With a small change in Ohmann's definition, a canon of English fiction in Norwegian school libraries will in our case be a shared understanding of what literature is worth *acquiring*. Libraries have an undeniable role

in providing readers with material, and how librarians work with acquisitions and deaccessions highly affects what literature is available for consumption.

Library collection development is not arbitrary. There is always someone in charge of creating and maintaining a collection. As will become apparent in Chapter 3, the Norwegian librarians are the ones responsible for making decisions regarding acquisitions, without involvement from the school administration. How librarians think about collection development could therefore be very varied. Professor and librarian Vicky L. Gregory argues that the library is there to serve its community, and it is therefore important for librarians to create a collection with the community in mind. She proposes two different perspectives on collection development: the “give them what they need”- and the “give them what they want”-approaches (51). The “give them what they need” would be a librarian picking up what they believed to be the best choices for their readers and community. It might be based on what the librarian sees fit to acquire or what they deem valuable literature for their readers. A “give them what they want”-approach means that the librarian would supply the users and the community with books that are popular with the general public, and specific requests made by the users. This approach would include looking at best-seller lists to determine what the general public “wants”. Chapter 3 will show how participating librarians have an overarching focus on the “want”-approach, with some elements of the “need”.

The “want”-approach has become more popular in later years, but in the past, there were more focus on how the librarian’s task was to provide the public with good literature. Gregory uses Helen E. Haines’ collection manual from the 1950s to show how the priority was to provide the community with “great works of literature” (Gregory 51):

When the first convention of librarians ever held met in 1853 in New York City, their purpose was concisely stated by Charles Coffin Jewett. “We meet”, he said, “to provide for the diffusion of a knowledge of good books and for enlarging the means of public access to them”. (Helen E. Haines as qtd. in Gregory 51)

The intention and purpose of the libraries were to give the public access to the great books, as determined by the librarians. The librarians would consequently have much power over what literature the users met. Haines explains how these great works of literature were considered “foundation stones” in the library, because of their “permanent value”. In her opinion, libraries should always have a permanent selection of these works, “whether or not they will be widely used” (Haines as qtd. in Gregory 51). In Chapter 3, I will discuss how even though

user statistics is the major factor for how librarians decide what titles to weed from their selection, there are some exceptions. Usually, these are novels considered to be classics, much because of the same reasoning as Haines provides, namely that they are considered books that have permanent value.

Even though the “give them what they want”-approach has taken a larger role in collection development in later years, Gregory suggests that modern collection development should use a mix of the two approaches. In her reasoning, she brings up the internet phenomenon of “long tail”. A “long tail” is a term used in internet markets to explain how more revenue in internet retailers comes from more niche products than one bestseller (Brynjolfsson et al.). Because people are being more specific in their searches, e.g. “buy blue socks for running” instead of “buy socks”, users are directed to more niche markets. Consequently, the most revenue is not coming from the best-sellers, but from the many different niche products available. For libraries, this would mean that best-sellers will no longer be the books which generate the most loans overall, as the library users will gravitate to different genres, sections, and niches for their reading. As a middle ground, Gregory emphasizes that it is important for librarians to monitor the readers’ needs and priorities while at the same time being able to offer and recommend the best materials (52). This will create a collection the community will want to use while simultaneously building a foundation for positive reading experiences and building their literacy skills. As we will see in section 2.3, school librarians actively encourage student requests and have a low barrier for approving them and are therefore susceptible to the long tail. Because individual students will have different reading preferences, more niche novels might be requested and later added to the collection.

Social media has also made it easier for users to find communities with similar interests. One platform that has outshined any other platform’s influence on the reading industry is TikTok and its easily accessible subcommunities. The app features short videos in a continuous and never-ending flow. Hashtags make it possible to create collections of similar content on the app, and the subgroup #BookTok “has become a sustained and powerful force in the world of books” (Harris "How Tiktok Became a Best-Seller Machine"). Books that have been off the bestseller lists for years will suddenly make a reappearance after users promote them on BookTok. Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo write about recommendation culture and how readers rely on “trusted others” in their search for future novels to read. Over time, the trusted others have evolved to include more and more digital platforms (17). BookTokers, Fuller and Rehberg Sedo argue, “exercise authority as expert



readers and trusted others within a recommendation culture where knowledge accrued through a combination of formal education and extensive and intensive reading practices is highly regarded” (45). Even though no questions in the interviews mentioned BookTok, all librarians brought it up, which shows the platform’s great influence.

In their master thesis, Omdahl and Kleppestø explore literature promotion on BookTok and its influence on reading culture. By looking at different communities in the app, they created a list of the novels with the most engagement. Chapter 3 will go in more detail on this list and how often certain novels appear in the libraries. In short, some novels, such as Colleen Hoover’s *It Ends With Us* and E. Lockhart’s *We Were Liars*, are popular books to have in the library (appear in eight and seven of the nine participating libraries, respectively). In contrast, *The Unhoneymooners* by Christina Lauren, *Malibu Rising* by Taylor Jenkins Reid and *Beach Read* by Emily Henry do not appear in any. The use of hashtags on BookTok also makes it possible for readers to create specific categories and communities centred on tropes, further introducing more niche novels and communities to the users. Especially young avid readers will go online to seek advice from social media influencers on what they should read next (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 33). Consequently, BookTok is highly influential in what young readers want to read, and the subcommunities work as a generator for long tail searches and requests.

Another reason why the “give them what they want”-approach is taking a larger role in current acquisition habits is the librarians’ focus on a need to increase reading engagement among teenagers in Norway. Roe has examined Norwegian students’ reading habits and reading attitudes. By exploring the results of the 2018 PISA test, she reports that half of the students answer that they do not read for leisure, and the number of kids that do not read has never been as high as it was in 2018 (112). Furthermore, of the 37 OECD countries, only the Netherlands scores lower than Norwegian students on reading engagement (Roe 117). Students that answer that they do not read for leisure, have much weaker results on their reading test than the students that read, regardless if they read half an hour a day or two hours (Roe 114). Libraries are therefore important arenas for creating reading engagement and positive reader experiences with their close proximity to the students’ daily lives, as well as a collection specifically created with the students in mind.



## Chapter 2: What do the interviews and databases show?

In general, the interviews show that the librarians are mainly focused on providing students with the literature they want to read, mainly to make up for the student's decline in reading habits and proficiency. Librarian A explains how "as long as [the students] read,"<sup>2</sup> she will give the students whatever they want. If students show particular interest in a certain genre or author, the librarian takes notice and will make sure to have books the students want to engage with readily available. If a student were to request a book specifically, the librarians will generally purchase this title. Similarly, Librarian G explains that it is "more important just to get the students to read anything at all."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, librarians continuously decide what literature they purchase and display in their collections.

What follows are the reflections and deliberations of the school librarians, divided into the categories of Norwegian students' relationship to English fiction, the purpose of the library, what influences the librarians' acquisition habits, how librarians work with weeding, and what the databases show. Overall, the Norwegian students show no issue in reading English fiction. On the contrary, many teenagers prefer to do their leisure reading in English. Consequently, the librarians find it important to have a good collection of English fiction. There is general agreement on what a good collection is, as they share a user-based approach. The overarching purpose of the library is to get students to read and to give them pleasant reading experiences. This means that they focus on the students and try to create a collection that is interesting and engaging for the students. A discussion on the importance of books of high literary value emerges, where one librarian places more focus on this than the others. The librarians are the ones who make the decisions on what books end up in the shelves, as there are little to no formal guidelines provided. For the most part, the librarians make their own guidelines for acquisitions based on what purpose they give their library.

Further on, the librarians discuss what influences them in their work on collection development. In addition to student requests, lists developed for and of librarians, booksellers and publishers, BookTok has certainly affected librarians' decisions. Even though I had no questions related to BookTok and its influence on the librarians, or their students, all librarians mentioned it. Some have taken its influence to heart, while others are reluctantly

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<sup>2</sup> «Så lenge dei les»

<sup>3</sup> «Det er viktigare å berre få elevane til å lese kva som helst»

paying attention to what trends on BookTok. They are also affected by their budget, and while some manage fine with their budgets, others struggle with theirs. Furthermore, this chapter also includes a section on weeding, or deaccessioning. User-statistics are the most common answer when it comes to deciding what to take off the shelves, but one the interesting aspect to weeding, is what books are exempt even if they have not been read in many years. Lastly, an analysis of the databases of English fiction in the libraries show that their collections are very different with only a small selection of novels and authors that appear frequently.

### *2.1 Norwegian students' relationship to English fiction*

Even though English is a second language for most Norwegian students, the school librarians reveal that English seems to be the favoured language for most students when it comes to reading for pleasure. Students in general read very little, but Librarian E mentions that the exception lies in “the trend from TikTok with BookTok. We have a group of girls, especially, that reads a lot, and it’s mainly English paperbacks, because most of BookTok content is in English.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Librarian H explains that “I have some leisure readers that come in to borrow books at times, but then it is mostly English books, and I think that is because of BookTok.”<sup>5</sup>

As such, BookTok influences *what* the students read, and also in which language they prefer to read. BookTok primarily showcases English fiction which invites the students to read more English. Additionally, many students seem to prefer it over Norwegian translations. “There’s a crisis if I tell them that I have the book in Norwegian - ‘no, I want it in the original language’”<sup>6</sup> (Librarian E). The same phenomenon is found at Library F: “If I have some books in Norwegian, but then I buy the same book in English, the English book gets borrowed, while the Norwegian version stays put.”<sup>7</sup> The issue is not that the book is unavailable in Norwegian or that the library has the English version first. As Librarian F

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<sup>4</sup> «Det finst eitt unntak [av elevar som berre les ved tvang], og det er den trenden frå TikTok med BookTok, og vi har ei gruppe med jenter spesielt, som les veldig mykje, og då går det i en del engelsk pocket, for det som stort sett ligg på BookTok er engelsk»

<sup>5</sup> «Eg har nokon lystlesarar som kjem for å låne innimellom, men då er det engelskbøkene som går, og det trur eg er BookTok som...»

<sup>6</sup> «Det blir krise viss eg då seier ‘men eg har den jo på norsk’, ‘nei, eg vil ha det på originalspråket’»

<sup>7</sup> «Sjølv om eg hadde nokon bøker på norsk, men så kunne eg kjøpe inn same boka på engelsk, så blei engelskboka lånt ut, mens norsk boka blir liggande»

explain, even if they have the translated novel first, once the English novel is available in the library, this is the edition the students want.

A preference for reading in English can also be seen at Library C, where “most students choose to read in English now.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, at Library F, the librarian explains that “I’ve been prioritizing buying literature in English because I have realized that this is what the 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old teenager reads.”<sup>9</sup> Norwegian students reading in English is not a local phenomenon only experienced by the most urban schools. As a trend, leisure reading by Norwegian teenagers is commonly done in English for all participating regions. The topic is also discussed on larger forums, such as a regional library meeting where “it was noted how it looks like leisure reading will be more and more in English”<sup>10</sup> (Library I). Not only are the number of students who read for fun declining, but the ones who do read are now showing a preference for English fiction. The future is difficult to predict, but if it is correct that more and more leisure reading will happen in English, the school libraries have a clear role in providing students with this material. Therefore, it is important to be aware of what reflections and decisions the librarians make when they are preparing a collection for more and more readers of English literature.

## *2.2 Purpose of the library*

As a rule, the librarians explain that they are a library for the students. Even though there might not be too many students that use the library as a literary resource, the librarians express that they are there to serve them. Librarian B explains that they want the library to be a “bruksbibliotek”, i.e. a library of use. Likewise, Librarian C remarks how “it’s pointless to have a collection that no one cares about”<sup>11</sup> and that “it is important for me (...) that this is a specialised collection for my students.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Librarian E recounts how “we try to keep a close eye on where the students show interest.”<sup>13</sup> Librarian F explains how they want the library to be “lavterskel”, directly translated to “low threshold”, meaning that they want

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<sup>8</sup> «mange no les oftare på engelsk»

<sup>9</sup> «Eg har sett litt meir fokus på å kjøpe inn meir litteratur på engelsk fordi eg har skjont at det er det dei yngre lesar i alderen 16,17,18»

<sup>10</sup> «Det vart kommentert at det ser ut som at lystlesing meir og meir blir på engelsk»

<sup>11</sup> «Det er ikkje vits å ha ei samling som ingen bryr seg om»

<sup>12</sup> «Eg er litt opptatt av at, i alle skulebibliotek, at dette skal vere ei spesialsamling for mine elevar»

<sup>13</sup> «Vi prøver å vere veldig på der elevane er interessert»

the library to be accessible, informal, casual, and approachable for the students and their needs. This is not to be confused with the term “lowbrow” denoting something of a lower culture or lower sophistication. A library with a low threshold is not primarily connected to what literature is on the shelves, but more of the library’s and librarians’ approach in promoting literature to the students. Any student, with any reading preferences are welcome in a library of low threshold, be it bestsellers, classics, literary fiction, genre fiction, or non-fiction. The librarians are more focused on creating a collection that the students find engaging, and hopefully encourage the readers to keep reading.

When it comes to the librarians’ viewpoints on literary quality, there are differences of opinions on how important it is to include books of high literary quality. Librarian C remarks how “our task is to give [the students] access to the good literature that encourages further reading experiences”<sup>14</sup> and explains,

the students should get what is good. I believe [the books] need to be of a certain literary quality, and not all books are. There is so much crap, and I don’t want that to be what the students associate with reading literature.<sup>15</sup>

On the contrary, Librarian G considers good books, or novels of high literary quality, a perk rather than a requirement for acquisition. They explain:

I don’t have any rules on whether it needs to be of a set literary quality. I purchase items for there to be something for all types of students. Clearly, if [a novel] generally has good reviews and good criticism, that doesn’t hurt, so I oftentimes select these.<sup>16</sup>

In the same lane, Librarian F talks about how it is important to have good literature, “but at the same time it would be stupid to only have books you know are good, for then I wouldn’t

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<sup>14</sup> «Vår oppgåve er å gi dei tilgang til den gode litteraturen som kan vere med på å opne opp for vidare leseopplevingar»

<sup>15</sup> «Elevane skal få det som er bra. Det må jo ha ein viss litterær kvalitet, tenker eg, og det er ikkje alle bøker som har det. Det finst så mykje drit, og det vil eg ikkje skal vere det dei forbinder med å lese litteratur»

<sup>16</sup> «Eg har eigentleg ikkje noko om at det skal vere av ein veldig litterær kvalitet, eg kjøper inn for at det skal vere noko for alle typar elevar. Det er klart at dersom det er noko som får generelt sett god omtale og god kritikk så er det ikkje noko negativt, så det blir ofte til at ein vel ein del av det»

have 90% of this collection.”<sup>17</sup> For one, this comment raises a discussion of what is considered good, and it is possible to interpret Librarian F’s statement as there being many works in their collection that they do not consider to be of good quality. On the other hand, Librarian F also questions how librarians can *know* whether something is of high quality or not. Librarians are not able to read every book they purchase and are dependent on other influences to help them determine the quality.

As a middle ground, Librarian B remarks that “the administration wants me to not only focus on books of high literary quality. They want me to also offer books that appeal widely.”<sup>18</sup> They clarify:

When I came from [previous employer], I was probably a literature snob and thought it was important to read things of high literary quality. There were a lot of things that I thought ‘aah, do we need to have this? This is so bad.’ But now I am a bit more omnivorous with what I purchase. I see that it is more important that I appeal widely. You cannot start to read Hemingway as the first thing you read. I have seen the importance of being allowed to try out other things first.<sup>19</sup>

The aspect of having a broad selection is shared among all librarians. They explain that it is important for reader enjoyment to have a broad selection from which the students can choose from freely. The librarians from Library I observe: “We need to appeal to so many. There are so many different interests when students get to choose freely, which means that we need to think as broadly as possible.”<sup>20</sup> Librarian H adds: “the ones that read for pleasure should get a

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<sup>17</sup> «Men samtidig så hadde det vore dumt å berre ha bøker som ein veit er gode, for då hadde eg ikkje hatt 90% av samlinga her»

<sup>18</sup> «Det er eit ønske av leiinga at eg skal ikkje berre fokusere på bøker av høg litterær kvalitet, men dei ønsker at eg også har bøker som fenger bredt»

<sup>19</sup> «Då eg kom frå [tidlegare arbeidsplass] var eg nok ein litteratursnobb og var det var litt sånt at det var viktig at [elevane] lesar ting av høg litterær kvalitet, og det var ein del ting som eg tenkte ‘aah, skal me ha dette her? Det er så dårleg’. Men no er eg litt meir altetande med kva eg kjøper inn. Eg ser at det er mykje viktigare at det famnar breitt. Ein kan ikkje begynne å lese Hemingway som det første ein lese liksom. Eg har sett litt på viktigheita av ein får lov til å smake på ein del ting først»

<sup>20</sup> «Vi skal jo treffe så mange. Det er jo så mange elevtypar når dei får velgje fritt så då må vi jo tenke så breitt som mogleg då»

broad selection to choose from.”<sup>21</sup> They all agree that they want to create positive reading experiences for their students. However, Librarian C is of the opinion that these experiences are more likely to happen if they have access to material of high literary quality. On the contrary, Librarian B argues that these books might be too unapproachable for students with low reading engagement. It is after the students have already found pleasant reading experiences elsewhere and have developed their literacy skills that they are able to approach high-quality literature. To find enjoyment in quality literature, the reader needs to have a higher degree of literacy skills than to find enjoyment elsewhere. As Cleanth Brooks suggests, in order to understand and enjoy literature, you need to have the skills to read them properly.

In four interviews, the librarians explicitly mention their collection in relation to the pedagogical work at the school. While Libraries E and H briefly mention how their collections should also connect to the curriculum in certain ways, the librarians from Library I explain that they use the library collection to support the teachers’ work with interdisciplinary topics. They “continuously consider how [the books] we purchase suit the pedagogical work [in the school], and that they are useful”<sup>22</sup>. In the same way, Librarian C talks about how the literature “should connect with the curriculum. You need to have literature that supports what is done in the school.”<sup>23</sup> Chapter 3 will look more into how the pedagogical framework for what literature is read in the classroom changed in 2020, but of the titles that appear more frequently across libraries, many are novels that are promoted as suitable for use in classrooms.

Furthermore, Librarian C also remarks how it is important for them to include books that are “important nowadays in one way or another, or addresses important issues.”<sup>24</sup> This is also mirrored when Librarian H remarks how they are “trying to follow social trends.”<sup>25</sup> Library I also explain how they “pay attention to lists of what books are banned in certain states in the US, so we have all of those. And we take good care of them.”<sup>26</sup> They want to

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<sup>21</sup> «Dei lystlesarane må jo få eit breitt utval å velgje mellom»

<sup>22</sup> «Heile tida ein tanke om at det skal kjøpast inn av ein pedagogisk [grunn], og at det skal vere bruk for det då»

<sup>23</sup> «Det skal henge saman med læreplanane. Du må jo ha litteratur som støtter opp under det som blir gjort på skulen»

<sup>24</sup> «Viktige i samtida på ein eller annan måte, eller tek opp viktige problemstillingar»

<sup>25</sup> «prøver å følgje litt samfunnstrender også»

<sup>26</sup> «Vi har jo følgt med på slike lister på kva bøker som er forbodne rundt om kring i ulike statar i USA, så vi har jo alle av dei då. Og dei tek me godt vare på»



provide Norwegian students with literature that is banned elsewhere in the world. These can be considered important for current political debates on what is appropriate to have on the shelves in a school library. published a list of. Many of the novels that appear on PEN America's list of the most banned books in US school libraries frequently appear in Norwegian school libraries. This includes titles such as *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (9 libraries), *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (7 libraries) and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (7 libraries). One reason to purposefully take care of novels like these might be to protect free expression. Another reason might be how reading something that is banned in the US in and of itself creates engagement among teen readers. According to Alyssa Niccolini, "nothing sparks more interest in a book than mentioning it's been banned" (23). In this way, international literary debates impact the collections in Norwegian school libraries.

None of the librarians mention any specific guidelines they need to follow, except for Librarian E who brings up general guidelines for the library sector, such as the Public Libraries Act, and how they should "try to show the complete picture, also when it comes to fiction, without censorship while at the same time not support."<sup>27</sup> Despite a lack of formal guidelines, almost all librarians explain that they have their own personal guidelines. Librarian A explains that they have a mandate in accordance with the freedom of speech, and "we think it is completely fine to provoke a little."<sup>28</sup> Librarian B describes how they want to present "a broad selection that can suit many, and I also want to have a good collection of LGBTQ+ literature to show that this is nice and completely acceptable, but also to expose the students that need to be exposed to it,"<sup>29</sup> and consider themselves a liberal librarian. Librarian H wants to "mirror society at large" and want to have a "balanced collection"<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, Librarian C wants there "to be something for all students, and I want them to feel accomplishment". They also highlight how "you shouldn't underestimate teenagers who read. That is very important."<sup>31</sup> Even if leisure reading is on the decline among teenagers, the ones

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<sup>27</sup> «Prøve å vise det heile bilete, det gjeld også skjønnlitteraturen, utan å sensurere men samtidig så skal vi ikkje støtte»

<sup>28</sup> «Vi syns det er heilt greitt å provosere litt»

<sup>29</sup> «eit breitt utval som skal famne mange, og at eg skal ha ei god samling med LHBTQ+ litteratur for å vise at det er fint og at det er heilt innafor, men også for å eksponere dei elevane som treng å eksponerast for det»

<sup>30</sup> «Spegle samfunnet», «balansert»

<sup>31</sup> «Eg vil det skal vere noko for alle elevar, eg vil at dei skal føle meistring», «Ein skal ikkje undervurdere ungdom som les. Det er veldig viktig»

who read should not feel limited by the selections on the shelves. There still needs to be literature that challenges them.

In general, the librarians' thoughts on their purpose can be summarized with Librarian E's statement: "We need to make ourselves relevant, that is what it's all about."<sup>32</sup> From a pedagogical perspective, the librarians include books suitable for the educational work done in the classrooms. From a reader perspective, they want to provide interesting, engaging and relevant literature to create positive reading experiences, which in turn might invite further reading.

### *2.3 Influences on book acquisition*

The librarians mention many of the same influences when discussing their acquisition habits. They value the opinions of their peers and look to other professionals within the same field for recommendations. Seven librarians talk about how they are influenced by other libraries, librarians, or lists specifically developed by librarians for libraries. Two librarians in the same region mention that they use social media to talk to other librarians in the area "because what the students at [another secondary school in the region] like, most likely my students will also like"<sup>33</sup> (Librarian E). Librarian A is "sneaky"<sup>34</sup> and explains how they "steal" from the local public library and its list of new books. Two librarians also mention using international library lists, such as the New York Public Library. Additionally, five librarians state that they use lists developed by Biblioteksentralen (The Norwegian Library Bureau), a non-profit organisation owned by Norwegian municipalities and county authorities to provide books, data and services for libraries.

Furthermore, other literary institutions are also influential. Five librarians mention that they look to bookstores and publishers. Three specifically mention that they look at book reviews, but they do not provide more information on whether these are reviews from industry professionals or the general public. Two librarians also mention that they follow literary awards, such as the Booker Prize. Additionally, three librarians keep an eye out for series or movies adapted from books. As already mentioned, librarians are unable to read every book and determine for themselves whether a novel is valuable for their library, so they rely on recommendations from others.

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<sup>32</sup> «Ein må gjere seg relevant, det er det det heile handlar om»

<sup>33</sup> «For det som elevane på [annan VGS-skule i fylket] likar, er det ofte at dei likar her også»

<sup>34</sup> «Sleip»

In addition to influences from outside the school, all the librarians are also influenced by requests from within their own schools, either from students or from teachers. When students come with requests “it is enough with one, I’ll buy it. As long as it isn’t terribly peculiar”<sup>35</sup> (Librarian A). The question of peculiarity lies in how difficult it is for the library to purchase the title and if it can be of interest to other students as well. If the novel is particularly hard to get hold of, out of print, exceedingly expensive and only interesting to one student, the librarian will focus their attention on other titles. Even though the librarians use their professional ability to make the final decision, very few report that they have ever needed to decline a request, and if they have, it is very rare. The two librarians from Library I can only remember declining one request for a graphic novel they regarded as pornographic and discriminatory, setting the bar for fulfilling students’ requests very low.

The reason for fulfilling students’ requests lies in the decline in leisure reading among young Norwegians. Librarian G explains that “the reading habits are noticeably declining, so now the focus is mainly on just getting them to read. If someone comes with a request to read something, you spend money and buy it, almost uncritically.”<sup>36</sup> However, even if the librarian is happy to fulfil the students’ requests, several librarians experience that this is not a frequent occurrence. Librarian C explains that “generally, I always buy it because it is not often they come with requests.”<sup>37</sup> Another librarian explains that they want to purchase as many of the requests as they can to build trust between the library and its students. This teaches the students how to use the library as a resource. Two librarians also mention that they actively seek requests from their students or other teenagers in their lives to find titles the students might be interested in.

Another big influence on collection development in later years has been the rapid popularity of BookTok. Some librarians have created their own TikTok accounts to follow the trends, even if it was “against my own will”<sup>38</sup> (Librarian A), while others follow the trends through a third party. Some librarians admit that they themselves try to keep up with the trends, but that the students are usually more updated than they are, “and they help me stay

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<sup>35</sup> «Det held med ein, då kjøper eg inn. Såframt det ikkje er frykteleg sært då»

<sup>36</sup> «Lesinga er jo merkbart avtakande, så no er det jo berre stort sett å få dei til å lese. Er det nokon som kjem med eit ønske om å lese noko, så er det ho berre å bruke pengar på å kjøpe det inn, nesten ukritisk»

<sup>37</sup> «Som regel kjøper eg alltid in det, for det er ikkje så ofte dei kjem med ønsker»

<sup>38</sup> «Også har eg mot mi vilje oppretta TikTok-konto for å følge med der»

updated on English literature that girls aged 16-19 are interested in”<sup>39</sup> (Librarian B). Librarian G adds that the students’ requests are most often titles from BookTok. Books promoted at BookTok are also mentioned to be the most popular books at the moment, with Colleen Hoover taking first place at several libraries. One of the librarians from Library I adds how “suddenly, everyone is interested in the same thing at the same time”<sup>40</sup> because of BookTok.

Librarian F suggests that “maybe the easiest way to reach a student is through what is popular on TikTok.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Librarian C recounts how BookTok has become the authority on good books: “If they have heard about it there, then it is okay”<sup>42</sup>. Librarian B anecdotes how they tried to recommend Alice Oseman’s *Heartbreaker* series to a reader before it got popular on BookTok, but the reader showed no interest. Six months later, when the series gained traction on BookTok, the reader came in and requested the series themselves. Nonetheless, Librarian C is taking a step back from BookTok,

I am decidedly working on an alternative [to BookTok-books] because I think they get so much –, they are so exposed to the same ten books on BookTok that I don’t need to do anything with that. I notice and pay attention to what is there, but it’s not like I’m buying it on account of it being promoted [on BookTok].<sup>43</sup>

While several of the libraries have their own displays with books that are popular on BookTok, Librarian C has an alternative route. They use the BookTok-books to introduce students to other titles, in an “if you like this book, you should try these”-manner, to promote other titles that are in the library’s collection.

One formal aspect that undoubtedly influence the librarians’ acquisition habits is their budget. Two libraries express distress over insufficient funds to maintain an updated and broadly selected collection. The other seven libraries explain that they manage with their

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<sup>39</sup> «Eg har elevar her som følger veldig med på BookTok-kontoar, dei er oppdatert og dei hjelper meg med å halde meg oppdatert på engelsk litteratur som jenter i alderen 16-19 er interessert i»

<sup>40</sup> «Plutseleg så er alle saman interessert i det same samtidig»

<sup>41</sup> «Kanskje den klassiske og lettaste måten å nå ein elev på, er det som er populært på TikTok»

<sup>42</sup> «Viss dei har høyrte det der så er det greitt»

<sup>43</sup> «Eg køyrer faktisk litt hardt på eit alternativ der, fordi eg tenker at dei får så mykje, dei blir så eksponert for dei ti bøkene på BookTok at det treng ikkje eg å gjere noko med. Eg plukkar opp og følgjer med på det som er der, men det er ikkje slik at eg kjøper inn på bakgrunn av det»

allocated budgets, but many still would like more funds so that they can offer the students the collections they deserve. This is often followed up by clarifying that much of the budget goes to textbooks and digital licenses.

#### 2.4 Weeding

Acquisition habits are not the only aspect of collection development. Weeding, also called deaccessioning, is the important task of deciding what books to discard from the library. Most of the librarians do not show sentiment or nostalgia over certain books and have no issue weeding out books that are no longer relevant or in use. While two librarians mention that they use the CREW-manual<sup>44</sup> when they weed, most of the librarians explicitly state that they use statistics on check outs. However, as Librarian D illustrates:

I continuously make exceptions. When it comes to classics, because certain books become classics for one reason or another, I can't throw them away. Even if no one has borrowed it in five years. Suddenly someone wants it again, and then you need to have it.<sup>45</sup>

Likewise, Librarian G explains that books “with high literary quality are items I may leave on the shelves, while I’m more lax when it comes to other items I have purchased that just sit around.”<sup>46</sup> The librarians from Library I also add that they throw out books “that have become old without becoming classics in a way, they have just gotten old”<sup>47</sup> and add that they could never get rid of the classics, and specifically mention Jane Austen and Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*. This shows how these librarians think of classics. Even if these novels are not currently read, their universality and timelessness will make them appealing to someone in the future. However, Librarian B explains that in their library, if the books are not in use,

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<sup>44</sup> The CREW (Continuous Review, Evaluation and Weeding) manual was developed by librarians in Texas. They promote continuous weeding, and the manual provides a guide to when and how librarians should weed their collections.

<sup>45</sup> «Eg gjer jo bestandig ein masse unntak der, ikkje sant. For det som er klassikarar, det er enkelte bøker som blir klassikarar av ein eller annan grunn, dei kan ein ikkje kaste. Sjølv om det ikkje har vore nokon som har lånt den på fem år, så plutselig står det nokon der igjen, og då må du ha den»

<sup>46</sup> «Eg ser at det med høg litterær kvalitet er jo kanskje ting som eg vel å la stå, så er eg litt meir lemfeldig med noko av det andre som eg har vald å kjøpe inn, som berre har stått der»

<sup>47</sup> «Bøker som har blitt gamle utan å ha blitt klassikarar på eit vis, dei har berre blitt gamle»

“they don’t have the right of life in my library.”<sup>48</sup> Librarians prioritize novels the students want to read and find engaging. Having unread novels there is of no interest because it is taking up space on the shelves that could be utilized better. Librarian B freely admits that they do make mistakes. Sometimes they deaccession a title which would later be requested, but they explain that in these cases it is no trouble buying a new copy.

In discussing classics, Librarian C mentions how “I think that not all classics are suitable for upper secondary students either.”<sup>49</sup> There also seems to be a division between generations when it comes to classics in the library. Librarian D elaborates:

What we have a lot of in the English section is classics. [...] It seems that there used to be a different thought process on books you acquired in [the late-90s] when they started [this library]. So many of those books, they are probably good books, but this is not the right library to have them in.<sup>50</sup>

The same explanation can be seen in Library H, where it is stated that “The person I took over for worked until they were retired, and she was super good at classics right, but probably didn’t follow BookTok and that so closely”<sup>51</sup>. We see here how the current libraries have a more user-based focus on their collection developments than their predecessors.

### 2.5 What do the databases show?

In total, the nine libraries carry 5005 books. The most extensive collection in the study had 1070 books, while the least had 292 books. The median English fiction collection had 396 books, while the average had 558 books. Of these 5005, 3536 of the books are unique, meaning that the nine libraries carried 3536 unique titles. There are also 1865 unique authors. Figure 1 shows how many novels that appear in a given number of libraries. Only six titles can be found in all nine libraries, J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* (1-3), William Golding’s *Lord*

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<sup>48</sup> «Er det ikkje i bruk så har det ikkje livets rett hos meg»

<sup>49</sup> «Når det gjeld klassikarar, så tenker eg at det ikkje er alle klassikarar som er eigna for vidaregåande elevar heller»

<sup>50</sup> «Det vi har veldig mykje av i engelskseksjonen er klassikarar [...] Det verkar som det var ein annan tankegang på bøker ein tok inn på [seint 90-tal] då dei starta. Så mange slike bøjer, dei er sikkert bra bøker, med det her er ikkje riktig bibliotek å ha det på»

<sup>51</sup> «Ho var supergod på klassikarar ikkje sant, følgde kanskje ikkje like mykje med på BookTok og sånn»

of the *Flies*, Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Steven Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. At the other end of the scale, 78% (2758) of the titles only appear in one library.

**Figure 1: Frequencies of titles in school libraries**

Appears in # libraries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
# of titles	2758	467	162	44	41	31	15	12	6

**Figure 2: Frequencies of authors in school libraries**

Appears in # libraries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
# of authors	1285	314	128	47	33	20	16	14	8

Similarly, Figure 2 shows how many libraries the different authors appear in. The authors of titles that appear in all nine libraries naturally also appear in the list of the most frequent authors. In addition to the four already mentioned, works of George Orwell, Neil Gaiman, Colleen Hoover, and J. R. R. Tolkien also appear in all nine libraries. For these authors, all libraries carry at least one of their titles, but not necessarily the same one. For example, five libraries carry Gaiman's *American Gods*, while some carry *Coraline*, or *Stardust* instead. Neil Gaiman has a total of twenty titles distributed among the nine libraries. Overall, we can see how very few titles and authors are present in multiple libraries. Figure 3 includes all titles that appear in seven or more libraries. The complete list of frequencies of both titles and authors, as well as the individual libraries collections at the time of the interviews, can be found by accessing the link in the footnote<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> These lists add up to over 80 pages, and are therefore not attached as appendices. However, they are available on the following link:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jN6mz4XY\\_hzxgYUyS5i02O0CCpSFUp7AjSvmfIVDrZs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jN6mz4XY_hzxgYUyS5i02O0CCpSFUp7AjSvmfIVDrZs/edit?usp=sharing)

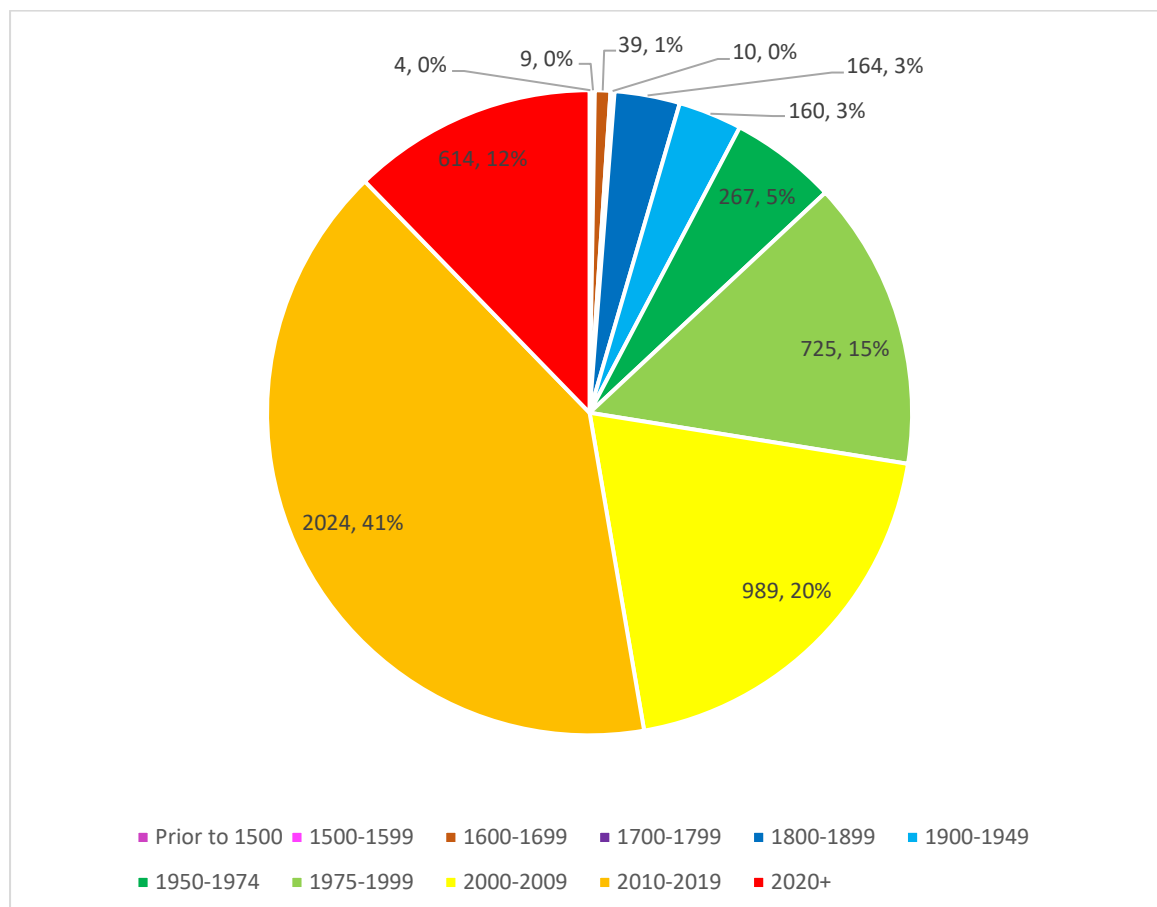
**Figure 3: Novels that appear in seven or more libraries**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date published</b>	<b>Appears in</b>
Harry Potter Series	J. K. Rowling	1997-2007	9/8 <sup>53</sup>
Lord of the Flies	William Golding	1954	9
The Hate U Give	Angie Thomas	2014	9
The perks of being a wallflower	Steven Chbosky	1999	9
Animal Farm	George Orwell	1945	8
It Ends With Us	Colleen Hoover	2015	8
Looking for Alaska	John Green	2005	8
Of Mice and Men	John Steinbeck	1937	8
The Catcher in the Rye	J. D. Salinger	1951	8
The Handmaid's Tale	Margaret Atwood	1985	8
The Hobbit	J. R. R. Tolkien	1937	8
To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee	1960	8
1984	George Orwell	1945	7
About a Boy	Nick Hornby	1998	7
Frankenstein	Mary Shelley	1818	7
Paper Towns	John Green	2008	7
Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen	1813	7
The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian	Sherman Alexie	2007	7
The Call of the Wild	Jack London	1903	7
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time	Mark Haddon	2003	7
The Fault in Our Stars	John Green	2012	7
The House on Mango Street	Sandra Cisernos	1984	7
The Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini	2003	7
The Old Man and the Sea	Ernest Hemingway	1952	7
Turtles All the Way Down	John Green	2017	7
We Were Liars	E. Lockhart	2012	7
Wuthering Heights	Emily Brontë	1847	7

<sup>53</sup> The first three novels in the series appear in all 9, while book 4-7 appear in 8.



**Figure 4: Distribution of when titles in school libraries were first published. Both values and percentages are given.**



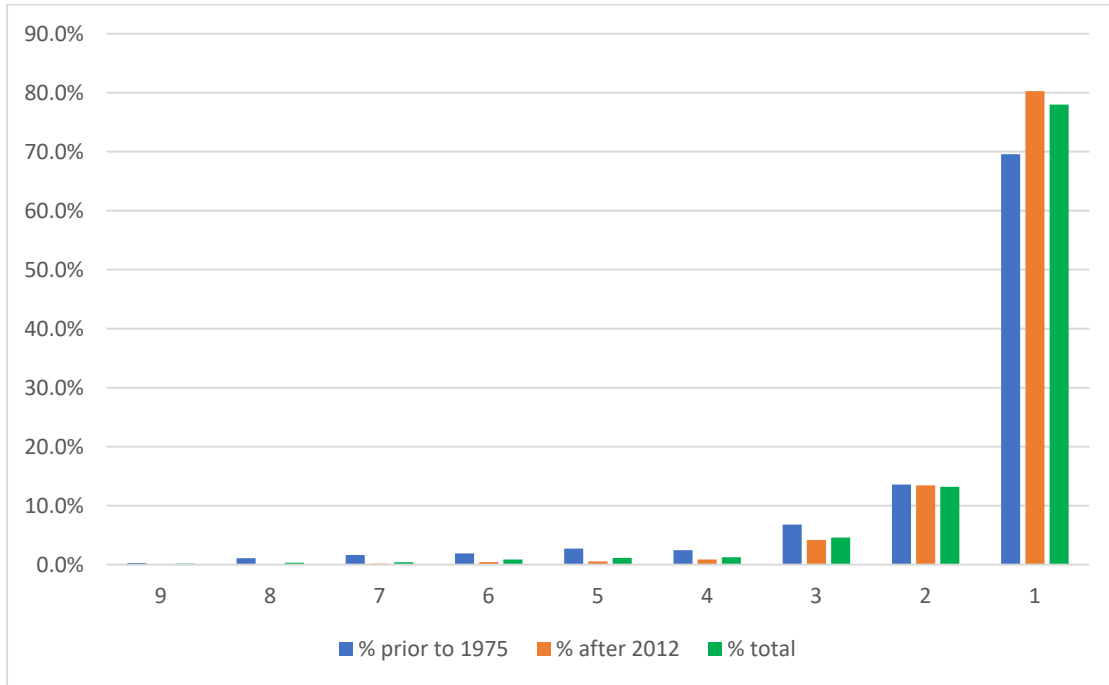
In addition to data on titles and authors, Figure 4 shows the distribution of when the works in the school libraries were first published. This table includes all 5005 works, not just the 3536 unique titles. The years have been divided into non-homogenous time periods to better display the distribution. By doing this, we can see that almost 75% of the books in the school libraries were first published after 2000. There is approximately the same number of books included that were first published prior to 1975 and after 2020 (12%, 654 and 614 titles respectively). The four works from before 1500 are *Beowulf*, Shikiou’s *The Tale of Genji*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, and Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*.

I was interested to see if there were more consensus among older titles, such as classics. Figure 5 shows how many titles a certain number of libraries carry, similar to Figure 1. The difference here is that Figure 5 shows the distribution for three time periods; the blue bar is for titles or authors published prior to 1975, the orange is for those published after 2012, and the green shows all years. To make these distributions comparable, the values are

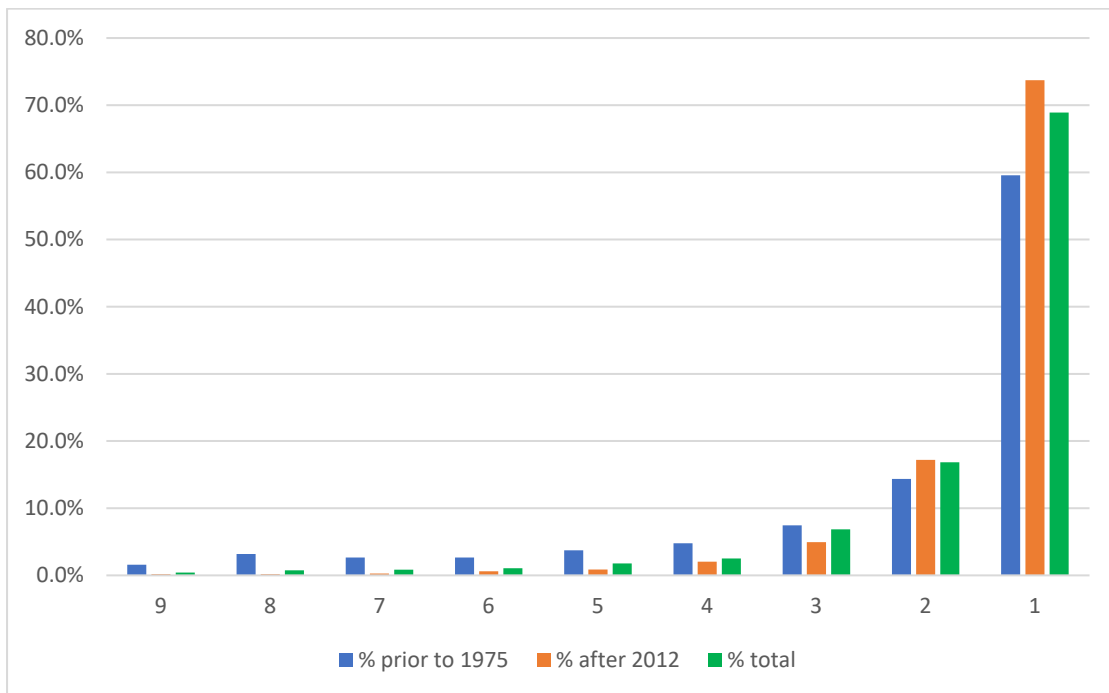
displayed in percentages. For example, of all the titles published before 1975, 70% appear in only one library. The same is true for 80% of books published after 2012 and 78% for all years. Not surprisingly, there are fewer and fewer books that appear in more and more libraries. However, there is very little difference in how this de-escalates in the different time periods. There are only slightly higher values for the titles published before 1975, indicating slightly more agreement among the libraries that these are important titles to have in the collection.

Figure 6 is created very similarly to Figure 5, but instead of showing titles, it shows how many libraries the different authors appear in. Again, the blue bar shows authors published before 1975, the orange is for authors published after 2012, and the green shows the data for all years. Similar to Figure 5, the de-escalation follows the same pattern for all three time periods. However, there is a visible difference between authors published before 1975 and after 2012. 14% of authors published before 1975 appear in five or more libraries, while this only applies to 2% of authors published after 2012 or 5% for authors of all years. This shows how there is more agreement on which authors published before 1975 that are valuable to include in the libraries.

**Figure 5: Frequencies of titles published prior to 1975, after 2012, and all years; a comparison in percentages.**



**Figure 6: Frequencies of authors with published titles prior to 1975, after 2012, and all years; a comparison in percentages.**





### **Chapter 3: How School Libraries Affect the Formation of a Literary Canon**

First of all, the aspect of formation suggests that the canon is not already an existing entity and implies an end product, most often thought of as a list of books. However, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, canons are always evolving. As such, the canon is continuously reformed. In libraries, this is a key aspect of collection development, as the librarians are continuously examining their collections and deciding what literature is missing and what literature to keep on the shelves. This chapter will look further into key aspects of the canon and how these aspects present themselves in school libraries, such as the ideas of authority, longevity, and literary quality. Additionally, canon formation can also be described as decisions involving access to literary production and consumption. Libraries provide access to literary consumption in several ways, such as intellectual, physical, and literary access. Lastly, this section will examine how the libraries have created specialised collections.

The librarians are certainly authorities within their libraries, but they are not operating in a vacuum and are influenced by student requests and other authorities in the industry. From Baldick's definition of the canon, there is a need for canonical work to be appraised and valued by authorities. All school libraries agreed that they are the ones who are responsible of their libraries and the collection they manage. There is little to no involvement from the school administration. However, this does not mean that the teachers and students are not involved in the process. Their suggestions are welcome, and even encouraged, even if the final decision still lies with the librarian. As Librarian B explains, they are the gatekeepers, and suggestions need to be approved by the librarians. At the same time, the gates are wide, and requests are rarely turned down. If a book can be of interest to more than one student, they will most likely purchase it. The one request that has been denied in Library I was a book considered pornographic and discriminatory. Even though books involving discussions on sex, sexuality, and race are welcome in the library, books that are pornographic, discriminatory, and racist are not. Generally, this means that even though librarians are gatekeepers, the gates are wide and rarely restrict the students from seeing their suggestions on the shelves.

Furthermore, librarians are also affected by other influences in the industry. Librarian H specifies that for graphic novels and comics, their knowledge is limited, and they seek out advice from a specialized local distributor of graphic novels and manga to recommend engaging literature that is suitable for a school library. Even though the librarian

still felt that some titles were crossing their boundaries, they followed the distributor's advice and kept the novels on the shelves. Similarly, Librarian C will approach experts in their fields for specific recommendations. The librarians are looking to other authorities in the industry, such as resources from public libraries, publishers and bookstores. These institutions are all connected. Publishers would not decide to print and sell a book the bookstores and libraries would reject. Furthermore, bookstores and libraries are unwilling to take in books they have no audience for. Ultimately, the audience holds much power, which weakens the authority of the librarians.

A new influence that has taken the publishing industry by storm, is BookTok, a platform which has become an authority on teenagers' interests. A popular social media for teenagers and young adults, BookTok has clearly shown its influence on the reading community in the later years. For example, Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* was popular when it was first released in 2011, it even won the Orange Prize in 2012, but the book sold nine times as many copies in March 2021, after the book became popular on BookTok (Harris "How Crying on Tiktok Sells Books"). As some librarians explain, a student is more likely to read a book they have seen on BookTok than if a librarian were to recommend it. Influencers on BookTok has become "trusted others" for teenage readers. As discussed in Chapter 1, Fuller and Rehberg Sedo label these influencers as expert readers who has authority based on both formal education but also on extensive and intensive reading habits. The BookTok community is considered a peer for the students, and as Librarian B explains, recommendations from peers are more influential than those from adult librarians.

One institutional factor that is prevalent for school libraries is how they are inherently connected to the school and education. The new curriculum in 2020 might also impact how school librarians evaluate the relevancy of canonized literature. Before the Knowledge Promotion in 2020, the highest level of English studies at upper secondary schools was divided into Social English, and English Literature and Culture. One of the competence aims for English Literature and Culture was to "interpret a representative selection of texts from literary periods in English literature, from the Renaissance to today" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training "Subject Curriculum in English - Programme Subject in the Education Programme for Specialization in General Studies (Eng4-01)", my translation). To fulfil this competence aim it would be natural for the school library to provide these texts. As students were required to read English literature from different historical times, the library would need books to supply these classes with the necessary material. These classes provided the libraries with a pedagogical reason to carry classics. However, the English subject was

reorganized with the Knowledge Promotion Reform in 2020, and the two separate classes were combined into one, today English 2. Consequently, the competence aims have also been changed. Today it reads: “interpret and discuss some types of fictional texts in English considering their historical and cultural contexts” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training "Subject Curriculum for English Programme Subjects (Eng04-02)"). There is no longer the same emphasis on literary periods, and there is more freedom of choice for the teacher. This would also make it easier for school librarians to choose different literature than other librarians, which enhances the individual librarian’s authority. Even though the librarians are authorities, in practice they are continuously influenced by other social and institutional factors.

A second aspect of canons, longevity, is presented in the librarians’ work of deaccessioning. Both Thompson and Ohmann describe canonical literature as works that are passed down from one generation to the next and as literature that should be preserved. In libraries, this equates to the novels that have a continuous presence on the shelves, even if they are rarely, or not, read anymore. The librarians report that they usually weed based on circulation and user statistics, where some specify that they use the CREW manual. This manual was developed by librarians in Texas and argues for continuous weeding as it “strengthens the entire collection” when it is done by someone who knows the literature and “the audience the collection serves” (Larson 33). School librarians have expertise in both their collection and the students they serve. Even if some teachers might have sentimental value and abhors the idea of throwing out books, the librarians, in general, have no issues with deaccessions. As Librarian H specifies, the teachers are very pleased when new books arrive, and to have room for new arrivals something has to go.

For both the librarians and the CREW manual, classics and books of high literary merit seem to supersede the criteria of circulation in the weeding process. The librarians generally agree on how a book that no one borrows is not worth having in the collection, or as Librarian B phrases it, they have no right of life. The CREW manual specifies that for young adult fiction, it is important to keep the collection as “current as possible. Anything older than five years should be kept only if it is circulating well; classics should be replaced with newer hardback or paperback editions” (Larson 34). This indicates a difference between old books and classic books, the same distinction that was made in Library I: “the books that have gotten old, without becoming classics”. Even the CREW manual specifies that librarians should “retain works that are in demand and/or of high literary merit” (Larson 77). It would

seem as if once a book is considered a classic or of high literary value it is more difficult to weed these books because of their higher status, even if they are hardly ever borrowed.

When novels are exempt from deaccessioning, the librarians create local canons. We can consider a local canon as books that will remain in the collection even after the one who acquires them are no longer in charge. They are creating a collection of novels that will be passed down to the next librarian. Of the participating librarians, Librarian G has the longest experience in the same library with 17 years, while Librarians D and F have both taken over their collection within the last school year (2021-22). When new librarians take over a collection, they are the new authority and need to make decisions on how they want the collection to look. When they choose to keep the novels the previous librarian acquired, they are agreeing with the previous librarian that these novels are valuable for their collection and thereby worth preserving. There will always be some change when a new librarian takes over, but they are not starting from zero. When some novels are exempt from weeding it is because they are considered valuable to still have in the library, which in turn creates local canons.

The influence of the third aspect of canon formation, quality, is not of the highest priority in libraries today. Librarian C is the one librarian who is more vocal about giving the students books that are good and who values books of high literary merit. When asked to elaborate on what it is that makes a book good or how you determine whether something is good, Librarian C answers:

I believe it needs to be of a certain literary quality, and not all books are. There is so much crap, and I don't want that to be what the students associate with reading literature. I want them to have quality. And you can always discuss what quality is and if it will be the same for everyone. But I don't think it's that hard either. We don't need to make it too problematic. [...] And you can't know [the quality] of every book you acquire [...], but you can pay attention. You can buy books that are nominated for the Booker Prize, that are important in contemporary society, discuss important issues that are connected to English as a subject, or are part of the debate, or that just happen to be good literature.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> «Det må jo ha ein viss litterær kvalitet, tenker eg, og det er det ikkje alle bøker som har. Det finst så mykje drit. Det utlyser så mykje drit, og det il eg ikkje skal vere det [studentane] forbinder med å lese litteratur. Eg vil at dei skal få kvalitet. Også kan ein sjølvsagt alltid diskutere 'kva er kvalitet' og om det vil vere det same. Men eg tenker at det er ikkje så vanskeleg heller. Me må ikkje gjere det for problematisk. [...] også kan ein jo ikkje



Even though it seems hard for Librarian C to explain what a book of high literary quality is, throughout their explanation they become aware of how they look for these books. Similarly to Librarian F, they show that it is hard to evaluate the quality of every novel in a collection, as it is impossible for a librarian to read all of their books. This makes them dependent on other evaluators. A literary canon can in this way be used as already established works of high quality. Librarian C specifies that they use literary awards to determine if a title is of high quality, but they also value books that discuss topics that are relevant to their students. They specifically mention the Booker Prize, of which Library C carries ten winners<sup>55</sup>. Other libraries have between one and three.

Despite being the only librarian who specifically mentions valuing books of high quality, many of the other librarians use the same approach when considering new possibilities. Relevance is a highly regarded trait for several librarians, both in connection to society at large, what they discuss in English class at school, but also in being relevant to the students' interests. For most school librarians, the priority is not on having quality collections but more on books the students want to read. It is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive. However, students' preferences have higher priority than high-quality literature. Literary quality is not a requirement but is rather looked on as an added perk.

Access becomes a highly relevant topic in considering the school libraries' role in canon formation. As John Guillory remarks, canon formation can be described as the decisions relating to literary production and consumption (ix). Access relates to libraries in several ways, such as physical access to literature, intellectual access of being able to read literature, as well as literary access which considers what literature is available for the users to read. Because libraries are social institutions, what is in the library and how the library is used are contributing factors in a canon formation.

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vite det om alle bøkene ein kjøper inn. [...] Men ein kan jo følge med litt då. Også kan ein kjøpe bøker som er nominert til Booker-prisen eller som er viktige i samtida på ein eller annan måte, eller tek opp viktige problemstillingar som kan knytast til engelskfaget eller som er ein del av debatten, eller som berre er skikkeleg god litteratur»

<sup>55</sup> In chronological order: *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (2002), *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga (2008), *Bringing up the bodies* by Hilary Mantel (2012), *A Brief History of seven killings* by Marlon James (2015), *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Sanders (2017), *Milkman* by Anna Burns (2018), *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo (2019), *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood (2019), *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart (2020), *The Promise* by Damon Galgut (2021)

School libraries provide all students with physical access to literature in their proximity to students' everyday lives. Librarian H remarks how many of the students who read do not use the library. They explain that these readers "seem to come from reading homes, so they have full bookshelves at home."<sup>56</sup> These students have access to reading material within their own homes. However, readers from lower socio-economic households will not have the same access to literature at home, and the school library becomes a natural arena for finding literature. Libraries are integral in providing these students with reading material. Additionally, students from low socio-economic households with high reading engagement score similarly to students from high socio-economic households with low reading engagement (Roe 120). Because reading is a basic skill in all school subjects, providing students from low socio-economic households with access to engaging literature is a specific and achievable way to support these students. As Roe explains,

A goal should nevertheless be to give all children and young adults, regardless of socio-economic status and gender, equal access to reading materials and help to find texts they find engaging. Good school libraries can positively contribute to this work. School librarians are professionals with an overview of the literature that is suitable for different groups of students, and they can provide individual guidance, especially to the students that need it most or who cannot get their reading stimulated at home. (Roe 130, my translation)

As such, the library is a primary example of a physical space for literary consumption by providing all students with physical access to literature.

Libraries are also providers of intellectual access. This is related to Guillory's notion of linguistic capital, as well as Brook's statement of how it does not matter what you read if you are unable to read well (ix; 352). The librarians all want their students to be able to find some literature on the shelves that they want to read. As Librarian C mentions, there should be literature for all students so that it is possible for all students to feel accomplished. This is especially important with the decline in reading (Roe). Providing students with literature that engages the readers and can further their literary competency is an important aspect of intellectual access. By continuously reading, the students will develop their linguistic capital.

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<sup>56</sup> «Dei som er lesarar, det verkar som at dei kjem frå ein heim med lesarar, så dei har fulle bokhyller heime»

Librarian B highlights how it is important to give the students literature on their level to advance their literary skills before they can take on and comprehend more complex works.

The libraries are also providers of literary access. Guillory uses the term symbolic capital to describe a “knowledge-capital” which “entitles its possessor to the cultural and material rewards of the well-educated person” (ix). Reading literature becomes a sign of being well-educated. By providing all students with access to literature it is possible for all students to gain symbolic capital. Matthew Arnold also argues that the general public should have access to “the best that has been thought and known in the world” to dissolve traditional class structures (23). These three perspectives on access are all interrelated. The literary canon, arguably the “best” literature, should be accessible to all and libraries are facilitators of access. They provide all students with the possibility to develop their literary skills and find joy in reading.

Clearly, access is a big part of the school library’s role in canon formation. They are vital in relation to students’ literary consumption. Decisions about what literature is available on the shelves affect a canon. Although librarians are influenced by students, other industry professionals, and BookTok, they are still the ones who make the decisions on what is acquired. They have the ability to create their own collections based on their own guidelines and goals. Even if these guidelines are similar in wanting to provide interesting and engaging literature to their students, the collections are different. Because the students are diverse, the collections become diverse. When weeding, the librarians share similar routines in basing their decisions on user statistics. Additionally, they use subjective judgements on what books to keep on their shelves and create local canons when they decide which books will be preserved and passed on to the next generation. These factors have contributed to school libraries having a local canon more than an overall Norwegian canon.

When it comes to the question of how school librarians think about acquisition, collection development is a crucial part of their responsibilities. Some librarians talk about taking over a library that was outdated and in need of renewal, such as Library D and Library I. In Library I the librarians remark how they have probably doubled the English fiction section in the last four years, but that being a part of this project made them more aware of what they acquire and why, “because we don’t necessarily put it into words in our everyday work.”<sup>57</sup> They do talk about how they discuss certain purchases, but more in relation to their

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<sup>57</sup> «Vi setter nødvendigvis ikkje så mykje ord på det i kvardagen»

collection as a whole instead of focusing on singular titles. Librarian C mentions that “collection development is one of the most fun parts of the job at the school library”<sup>58</sup>. The school libraries have a smaller user demographic than public libraries, and the librarians show that they want to be of use to the students and want the students to find books of interest on their shelves.

Even though the demographic might be more limiting, the students themselves are still diverse and have interests across the board, which is reflected in the literature in the libraries. As the databases show, many of the novels are only found in one library. There are certainly some works that appear more often than others, but for the most part, the libraries have created specialised collections. Only 3% of titles and nearly 5% of authors appear in five or more of the libraries. For future research, it would have been interesting to spend more time looking at how exactly these collections differ content-wise, such as author demographic or which genres or topics are more prevalent in some libraries than others. This meta-data was not collected for this thesis and falls outside the scope. However, from the data collected it is, for example, possible to see that Library B has the largest collection of titles published after 2020, with 362 of their 1070 English fiction novels. Library D has the largest percentage of books published in the twentieth century with 47%. It is also possible to see that the same library has the first eleven books of Alexander McCall Smith’s *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* series, which the others do not. In Library I, over a third of their collection is comprised of graphic novels and comic books. This is not to say that other libraries do not carry a good number of graphic novels, but this is certainly the largest ratio.

The titles that appear more frequently (Figure 3) are a mix of popular young adult fiction (YA) and classics. The most recent novels are *Turtles All The Way Down* by John Green (2017) and Colleen Hoover’s *It Ends With Us* (2016). Most of the books that appear most frequently are older titles. These have had more time to become established and widely recognised. The exceptions are novels from well-established YA authors or *the* most popular book on BookTok. Several of the most frequent novels are also books that are, or have been, popular titles to use in a pedagogical setting, such as shared reading in classrooms. Librarian E explains that *About a Boy* is their most borrowed book, but this is attributed to how they have class sets of this novel and it is often required reading. Titles such as *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *The House on Mango Street*, *The Hate*

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<sup>58</sup> «Samlingutvikling er noko av det kjekkaste me gjer i skulebiblioteket»

*U Give*, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* are all recommended by Normann and Williams as suitable literature to use in the English classroom.

By now it should come as no surprise that BookTok is also influencing which novels are included in the collections. Contrary to Braider's assertion of there being more focus on world literature, BookTok has become a major promotor of anglophone literature. The librarians are involved in BookTok at different levels; some are not on social media at all, some reluctantly created an account to keep tabs on it, and others embraced it wholeheartedly and make videos on their own. Despite this, they all mention BookTok in the interviews without being prompted to talk about it, so clearly it impacts how they think about acquisitions. Because their primary goal is to get students to read more, as Librarian F explains, BookTok becomes a good resource for recommendations.

When we examine the list of the biggest communities on BookTok, created by Omdahl and Kleppestø, there is a wide variety of whether the books appear in the libraries or not. Of the top 15, four titles appear in six or more libraries, eight appear in two-to-four libraries, and three do not appear in any<sup>59</sup>. Even though three libraries have taken in Taylor Jenkins Reid's *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, none have taken in *Malibu Rising* by the same author. One explanation could be in publishing years, with the former being published in 2017 compared to 2021 for *Malibu Rising*. Libraries might have chosen to purchase *The Seven Husbands*, which might not have been popular with the students at the school, so the librarians have not seen a necessity for a similar book. The other two books that do not appear in any libraries are both romances that follow adult characters and have probably been passed over in favour of romances with characters closer in age to the teenage audience. This is not to say that adult romances are not available, as Colleen Hoover's *It Ends With Us* is very popular. We can also see differences in how often the individual libraries take in BookTok-books. Of these 15 novels, Library C is among the libraries with the lowest

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<sup>59</sup> In order of library frequency: *It Ends With Us* by Colleen Hoover (2016, 8 libraries), *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart (2014, 7 libraries), *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller (2011, 6 libraries), *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera (2017, 6 libraries), *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig (2020, 4 libraries), *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid (2017, 3 libraries), *Shadow and Bone* by Leigh Bardugo (2012, 3 libraries), *The Selection* by Kiera Cass (2012, 3 libraries), *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* by Holly Jackson (2019, 3 libraries), *Red, White and Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston (2019, 2 libraries), *The Cruel Prince* by Holly Black (2018, 2 libraries), *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas (2015, 2 libraries), *The Unhoneymooners* by Christina Lauren (2019, 0 libraries), *Malibu Rising* by Taylor Jenkins Reid (2021, 0 libraries), and *Beach Read* by Emily Henry (2020, 0 libraries).

coverage of BookTok books, with three. This is perhaps not surprising, as Librarian C explicitly state that they work on BookTok alternatives. However, Libraries D and H also have very few of these with two and three, respectively. This might be attributed to their budgets, as these were the libraries that reported the biggest challenges with low budgets. On the contrary, Libraries E and I both have nine of the fifteen novels in their collections. The differences in how librarians think about BookTok books exemplify how differently they acquire books on a larger scale.

Subcategories on BookTok also guide students into specific and more niche genres, which is an example of how “long tail” affects library collections. Be it a trope, genre, or interest, the use of hashtags on TikTok makes it possible to easily find related or similar content within the given interest. Clearly, there are some novels that are more popular than others on BookTok, and Librarian C claims that the students on BookTok are only exposed to the same ten books. However, the use of subcategories and tropes will divide users based on their interests and engagement. When a user shows engagement with a type of content, it is more likely that the user will be presented with similar content in the future. As already stated, even if the demographic of users of school libraries is limited to students, who are generally between 16 and 19 years old, they will still be diverse and have different interests. If they were users of BookTok, they would most likely end up in different subcommunities based on their interests and get introduced to different books. Consequently, fewer people would read the same novels; the majority of loans in the library is now coming from many individual books rather than one bestseller. Simultaneously, BookTok’s popularity might end up making libraries more similar in the future if the same novels keep being promoted to mass audiences.

There are still many questions left unanswered. Even if the school library carries certain novels, it does not mean that they are widely read. *How* librarians work with promoting literature and *what* they promote are also highly influential aspects of what literature the users see. There is also a mindset among several librarians to think of the readers as girls and friend groups of girls. What the librarians do to promote and encourage more boys to read is also a connected issue. Again, it needs to be highlighted how this thesis examines English fiction in Norwegian school libraries. The conclusions might be different if we considered Norwegian literature or even English fiction in a school library where English is the native language. Because these are school libraries, there is a more targeted focus on teenage readers, which has resulted in a high focus on young adult literature. This would most likely be different from public libraries, which have larger user bases.

What this thesis has shown is that school libraries do have a role in canon formation in how they provide access to literature. The decisions of what literature the libraries provide for their students are dependent on the librarians; they are responsible for building the collections. School librarians are highly affected by the decline in reading engagement among young Norwegians. Consequently, the librarians focus on providing positive reading experiences by filling the shelves with literature the students show interest in, for example through student requests or by what is popular on BookTok. When “long tail” searches have scattered the students’ interests, the librarians need to have diverse collections to provide students with engaging literature. As a result, the school libraries are not exercising their power in canon formation as much as they could have because they are happy as long as they read.





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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### Intervjuguide - Norsk

#### Om deg:

- Kor lenge har du jobba her? Kor lenge har du jobba som bibliotekar generelt?
- Korleis vil du beskrive arbeidsoppgåvene dine?
- Kva utdanning har du?

#### Om samlinga:

- Kven vil du seie er brukarane av biblioteket?
- Korleis ville du skildra samlinga slik den er i dag?
- Kor ofte tek du inn nye verk i samlinga?
- Kva tittel i engelskseksjonen har blitt lånt ut flest gongar? Færrast gongar?

#### Om utveljinga:

- Kven er det som avgjer kva som skal stå i hylla?
  - Korleis er forholdet mellom lærarar, administrasjon, bibliotekar, elevar, evt. andre når det kjem til å avgjere kva som skal tas inn i samlinga?
- Korleis går du fram når du skal velje ut nye titlar?
- Er det retningslinjer du må forhalde deg til når du skal velje titlar? Dersom ja, kan du skildre dei? Har desse endra seg over tid?
- Korleis går du fram når du skal velje kva titlar som skal bort frå hylla?

#### Evt. andre kommentarar:

- Har du andre kommentarar du ønsker å komme med?

### Interview Guide - English

#### About you:

- How long have you been working here? How long as a librarian in general?
- How would you describe your responsibilities here?
- What education do you have?

#### About the collection:

- Who would you say is the users of the library?

- How would you describe the current collection?
- How often do you add new titles to the collection?
- What title in the printed English section have been borrowed the most times? The fewest times?

About the selection:

- Who makes the decisions on what titles to include in the collection?
  - How is this shared between teachers, administration, librarians, students, or others involved in the selection process?
- How do you decide what to add to your collection?
- Are there any policies you need to follow when selecting books? If yes, could you describe them? Have these changed over time?
- How do you decide what titles to take out of the collection?

Other comments:

- Do you have other comments you want to include?

## Appendix B: Relevance for the teaching profession

Issues of reading competencies are highly relevant for the teaching profession. Reading is considered a basic skill<sup>60</sup>, and school librarians are not the only ones responsible for addressing this issue. Teachers also have a responsibility to create arenas for positive reading experiences. There is a reason reading is considered a basic skill, it is required in all classes, language arts as much as maths and sciences. Because all students are required to have access to a school library<sup>61</sup>, they are a great resource for collaboration. The school librarians are experts in their fields, and they are there for a reason. Many of the school librarians reported that they would like more collaboration with teachers, especially when reading projects are started in the classroom. Creating opportunities for the students to read at school shows them that we value reading skills.

In relation to canons, it is important to be aware of what literature we present our students with in the classroom. We should be mindful of whose voices we hear and why. We should help students develop their critical thinking skills by teaching them to question why we have chosen certain literature. School librarians show that they care about providing literature that can be used as resources in the classroom. They acquire literature that deals with current social issues in addition to canonized literature. A heavy focus on providing students with literature they want to read is also a great resource for extensive reading. Letting the students choose freely from a wide variety will make it easier for them to find something they want to read. This will create more motivation for reading and simultaneously develop their English proficiency<sup>62</sup>. In making the classroom a place where we encourage students to read, we are continuously working on developing their literacy skills, a basic skill in all subjects.

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<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Education and Research. "Overordnet Del - Verdier Og Prinsipper for Grunnopplæringen." <https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/>.

<sup>61</sup> Education Act. *The Act Relating to Primary and Secondary Education of 17. July 1999 Nr. 61.* <https://lovdata.no/lov/1998-07-17-61>.

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**NTNU**

Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology