



Editorial ? July 1995

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News and comment from the Editor.

If It Ain't Broke ...

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... don't fix it. This, overwhelmingly, was your response to the Reader Survey we included in our March issue - in a number of cases using those very words. More than ten per cent of our mailing list made a return (statistically very respectable) and every indicator in the questionnaire suggested a readership quite prepared for minor adjustments but very anxious indeed to avoid major alterations. 'We like **BfK** the way it is?' seemed to be the message. 'don't make changes just for the sake of change.'

Well, thanks. As a vote of confidence, the survey had us beaming from ear to ear. Our motive in launching it really wasn't sinister, though ... simply a feeling that, fifteen years on from our first issue, we should check that we're continuing to offer the right sort of children's book information in a form that remains convenient, appealing and appropriate both to the books themselves and the real-life context in which they're mediated. We'd be masochistic, or just plain daft, to ignore the resounding 'yes' we got as an answer.

Is that it, then? Cosy self-congratulation all round?

Not a bit. For a start, two facts emerged from the survey which could be crucial to any future expansion of **BfK**. The first confirmed something we've always suspected: that our actual readership extends well beyond our subscriber base since most issues are passed on to others within a particular institution. According to the figures we now have to hand, we're read by somewhere between 35,000 and 50,000 people. Secondly, and this was something of a surprise, more than 70 per cent of subscribers use BfK specifically to help them *buy* books not simply evaluate them. Potential advertisers, please note. After all, it's only through increased advertising and/or increased subscriptions that we'd be able to fund the standard 40-page issue, preferably monthly, which reader after reader urged on us.

What the survey also made clear was the need to keep the service we offer constantly under review. Warmly supportive though the questionnaire turned out to be, we still received plenty of suggestions for raising our game. All those have been carefully logged for further consideration. Among the most prominent topics you raised were

* pages for children or by children

* our reviews section ... too many books? Too few books? Too up-beat? Too professionally orientated? Not professionally orientated enough?

* a correspondence page

* theme- or topic-based book selection

* an expansion of our news coverage

... and so on. Admittedly, we've already tried out some of these and encountered difficulties but that's no reason to avoid a re-think or the devising of a fresh approach.

Of course, we can't hope to please everybody. This was brought sharply home by our enquiry concerning CD-ROM. For every two readers who wanted us to find room to review such material, there were three who gave it a flat, unequivocal veto. Similarly, the reader who congratulated us on our bigger, better illustrations of late and our 'more imaginative use of white borders' was countered almost at once by another who complained of over-size pictures taking up much needed reviewing-space. **BfK** subscribers may have a common interest in children's books but it doesn't follow from this that they all think alike ... or, indeed, approach the magazine from the same viewpoint as the following quotation makes clear:

'I think there are not nearly enough lavish articles in praise of Colin McNaughton and his books - a *whole* issue or indeed a whole series of issues should be devoted to this modest and unassuming man.'

So said ... Colin McNaughton.

He was joking, of course ... we think. But Colin's remark was a lovely, tongue-in-cheek example of a general tendency for readers to prioritise their own immediate concerns - for teachers to want more teacherliness, librarians more librarianship, scholars more scholarship, publishers more on publishing, booksellers more on bookselling, bookish parents more on bookish parenting, etcetera. Now this is entirely fair and completely understandable. To shift our balance disproportionately towards any particular set of interests, though, would threaten what's surely one of **BfK**'s great strengths: it's a forum where *all* constituencies in the children's book world can meet and find out more about each other. Our aim, it seems to us, should be to supplement and contextualise other more specialist publications in the field rather than strive to replace them.

Wouldn't you agree?

On second thoughts, don't answer that. We've got quite enough data to cope with for the time being. What's more, I'd better take heed of the reader who demanded less editorial 'waffle'. Since I'd been preening myself a bit after an earlier comment on how well the editor's page set the tone for the magazine as a whole, this sorted me out, I can tell you!

Enjoy the issue.

Chris

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