

Collection Development in the Digital Age

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In the digital environment where information is increasingly located by using online databases, it becomes even more important that school library books be current, age appropriate, and of outstanding quality. The presenter will review: (a) professional selection sources, (b) creating a school curriculum chart, (c) weeding guidelines by Dewey numbers, and (d) evaluating a library collection. Other topics will include recommended online reference materials and an explanation of how a Maryland consortium provides basic digital sources for all students in the state. Audience participants will be encouraged to share their experiences and suggestions for creating quality collections.

Introduction

Walk into a school library in the United States in the year 2007 of the twenty-first century, and you'll find students using computers. They are using them to locate materials, to search for answers, and to write. While you'll see books on the library shelves, if you examine them, you're likely to discover that they are out-dated. With students increasingly turning to computers to search for their answers, librarians aren't sure how many books they still need to have. This dilemma will continue to challenge them—as librarians seek to find a good balance between books and databases and how much to spend on each.

The purpose of this paper is to review what librarians learned in library school, to provide practical solutions to help improve the quality of school library collections, and to encourage dialogue on balancing resources in a digital age.

Professional Selection Sources

Short on time, some school librarians are relying on book jobbers and neglecting to read professional review journals. Five basic selection criteria that you can ask for any purchase—book or database—are: (1) Does the book have favourable reviews? (2) Do the book's author, illustrator, and publisher have good reputations? (3) Is the book appropriate for your users? (4) Is the book clearly written? (5) Does the book have a pleasing design? Multiple positive reviews help librarians spend their money wisely. If you don't have time to read all professional selection sources, then here are three I recommend.

Booklist and Booklist Online <www.ala.org/booklist>. Published by the American Library Association, *Booklist* is issued twice monthly September through June and monthly in July and August. Its purpose is "to provide a guide to current print and audiovisual materials worthy of consideration for purchase by small and medium-sized public libraries and school library media centers. A review in *Booklist* constitutes a

recommendation for library purchase.” *Booklist Online*, released in fall 2005, complements and expands *Booklist*. For an additional cost, it will provide access to over 100,000 reviews.

Horn Book Guide <www.hbook.com>. Published in Boston, in the spring and fall, the *Horn Book Guide* reviews some 2,500 titles in each volume. For a modest yearly subscription rate of \$50.00, the two guides give you short succinct—fifty word maximum—reviews for virtually all of the children and young adult titles for the current year. The reviews do not come from the *Magazine*; they are written especially for the *Guide*. Titles are rated from 1 (outstanding) to 6 (unacceptable) and are written by 75 named professionals. All titles receiving a superior rating of 1 or 2 are marked with a triangle.

Children’s Catalog, Middle and Junior High Catalog, or the High School Catalog. <www.hwwilson.com>. Published by H.W. Wilson, these three “catalogs” are goldmines of information. Each hardback volume of *Children’s Catalog* (preschool through sixth) and the *Senior High School Library Catalog* (ninth through twelfth) is published every five years; four annual paperback supplements are to be used with the hardback. The *Middle and Junior High School Library Catalog* (fifth through eighth) is on a four year schedule. All catalogs are available in print or online.

Some 7,000 entries are provided for each level. You’ll find a recommended and “comprehensive list of fiction and nonfiction books, magazines, audiobooks, and Web resources.” Materials are selected by an advisory committee of specialists in children’s and young adult literature. All entries “provide complete bibliographic data, price, subject headings, a descriptive annotation, and evaluative quotations from a review when available.”

Creating a School Curriculum Chart

Knowing the curriculum helps you purchase appropriate materials. But the guides are written in confusing educational jargon and can be thousands of pages. You’ll need to distill this boring information down to the essentials and make yourself a chart. It should be a one-page (two pages maximum) chart of the key topics divided by subject and grade level. Ask one or two teachers in each grade level or subject area to look over your topics and see if you’ve captured everything. You need to know how long teachers plan to spend on a topic, as well as how they plan to teach it.

While the primary reason you are making the curriculum chart is for you to have an easy-to-read buying guide for selecting materials, your principal may want to share it with the faculty and parents. Surprisingly, many teachers don’t know what their colleagues teach. Examples of school curriculum charts can be found in my book published in 2006 by the American Association of School Librarians, *Collection Development for the School Library Media Program: A Beginner’s Guide*.

Weeding Guidelines

While old books are treasures, they belong in historical collections. Young students have a tendency to believe that if it is in print, then it is true as they are still learning how to discriminate between correct and inaccurate information. Here are two charts which I’ve based on professional weeding guidelines such as *CREW, or Continuous Review, Evaluation, and Weeding*.

Fiction Guidelines

Picture Books	Keep books in good condition that have outstanding stories and illustrations.
Fiction	Keep books that are current, with up-to-date covers, and that are relevant to your students. Hesitate before replacing old classics or old award winners as students may find them dated. Multiple copies of formerly popular titles may no longer be needed.
Young Adult Fiction	Teens ignore books that are 10-years or older. Replace titles with new hardbacks or paperbacks with updated covers.

Guidelines for Dewey Classifications

General Reference	Delete old almanacs yearly; keep only the current year. Weed all encyclopedia sets that are 5 years or older. Rotate the purchase of different encyclopedias so that one set is always new.
000s	Computer books change rapidly. Consider buying paperbacks or using web sources.
100s	Check for dated illustrations.
200s	Need something up-to-date on every religion in the school community and the 6 major international religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism.
300s	As long as custom and folklore look okay, no need to discard. Delete career materials after 5 years.
400s	Discard old dictionaries that don't include new terms.
500s	Evaluate all science books older than 5 years. Pay particular attention to physics, astronomy, environmental issues, dinosaurs and astronomy. Check books on atoms every 2 years. Botany doesn't change often. Keep basic books of significant historical or literary value such as Darwin's <i>Origin of Species</i> .
600s	Medicine, television, space exploration, and cars date rapidly. Popular subjects such as pets and crafts may need replacing because of worn condition.
700s	Consider keeping irreplaceable art books. Consider replacing old books on hobbies with current interests. Sports books wear out and also get dated. Quantity, not quality, is the key criteria for sports.
800s	Books in this section don't get dated. They just wear out.
900s	Purchase books on countries on a rotating basis so that no title is older than 5 years.

Evaluating a Library Collection

If you have an automated circulation system, then you can run a quick report that gives you circulation figures and the average age of the materials by Dewey numbers. Bowker's *Book Analysis System* <[www.bowker's bookanalysis.com](http://www.bowker'sbookanalysis.com)> carries the evaluation process to an even more sophisticated level by comparing your collection to a recommended retrospective selection source. It will tell you how many and which titles match one or all of the Wilson's Catalogs—including *Children's Catalog*, *Middle or Junior High School*, and *High School Catalog*.

You can also compare your collection to a recommended selection source—for free if you're willing to put in a little extra time—by taking a random sample. Carol Doll and Pam Barron have explained the process in their book *Managing and Analyzing Your Collection: A Practical Guide for Small Libraries and School Media Centers* published by the American Library Association in 2002. Here's a brief description.

1. Count every item in the section(s) to be evaluated.
2. Divide this number by 200 to determine the interval size. For example, if there are 1,000 books in the section, divide 1,000 by 200. Since $1,000 \div 200 = 5$, the interval is 5. This means that you will examine every fifth book.
3. To get your starting point, use the last digit on the serial number on a dollar bill. For example, if the last digit is 8, start with the eighth book in the section. Then count forward to the fifth book.
4. Continue to examine every fifth book until you have completed the 200 cards—writing down this information for every book: the title, publisher, call number and copyright year.
5. Compare your sample to a professional retrospective selection source by taking the cards and manually look up the titles in the selection source. Write “yes” on the card if you find the title; write “no” on the card if you don't.
6. Count the “yes” cards. Divide this number by 200. The answer will be what percent (estimated) of your total collection matches the professional selection source. For example, if you have 17 “yes” cards, then $17 \div 200 = .085$, or 8.5% of your collection matched a matched the selection source.

Let's digress, just for a moment. Why would you want to do this evaluation? In your opinion, how many books in your collection should match a retrospective selection tool?

Other Topics

In Maryland, school district library supervisors and other have formed a consortium in an attempt to get fair prices from online databases. As a result of this initiative, basic reference services are available for all students in the state. As can be expected, students in richer districts have more access to online materials. Companies such as United Streaming <www.unitedstreaming.com>, Safari Montage <<http://www.safarimontage.com/>>, and BrainPop <www.brainpop.com> provide films and video through the Internet that that are appropriate for K-12 curriculum. Other databases that can be found in Maryland schools are CultureGrams, <www.culturegrams.com>, TeachingBooks, <www.teachingbooks.net>, Ebsco's Searchasaurus, <http://www.epnet.com/thisTopic.php?marketID=6&topicID=15>, and NoodleTools, <www.noodletools.com>, which was created by school librarian Debbie Abilock and her son, Damon.

In Closing

I hope that this paper has served as a review to the key aspects of school library collection development and that it will stimulate dialogue among school librarians.

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