

# What Practicing School Library Media Specialists Say about Collection Development

by Ramona Kerby

This concludes the 2001-2002 series of articles on collection development. Collection evaluation, curriculum charts, weeding, and selection sources have been described. To round out the discussion, school library media specialists from around the country share their thoughts about different aspects of collection development.

## First-Year Experiences

"The first year you are at a school, you have to take a deep breath and live with the collection, because it's a mistake to order before you know your children."

—Pam Lichty, Owings Mill Elementary School, Owings Mills, Maryland

"Life for me as a first year media specialist is often like riding a roller coaster... Last week, I felt I had really accomplished something when I had pulled forty African American biographies for a teacher and weeded ten outdated sports biographies, all before 8:00 a.m.

"I work on orders at home. To me, looking through book reviews is like hunting for buried treasure. If only a genie would appear and weed those old science filmstrips for me."

—Kathy Ginsburg, Monocacy Elementary School, Frederick, Maryland

"As a new media specialist, I was overwhelmed with the feeling that there were so many books in the collection that I would never be able to help anyone find information. It must be truly overwhelming to the new media specialist today to develop a collection. Despite those who prophesy the demise of the printed page, a core collection of carefully selected, reliable material accessible through a thoughtfully arranged collection will still be the nucleus of a sound research process."

—Floyd Pentlin, Lee's Summit North High School, Lee's Summit, Missouri

## Importance of Cataloging

"The library media specialist cannot be expected to have total recall of the maze of information and ideas found in each individual library media center. But if the school catalog is not accurate and current, then the library media

specialist must fill the role of guide to the collection.

"Bibliographic records are essentially patterned sets of clues leading to items. A book's title is one clue to its content, subject headings provide others, notes add more detail and depth. Students need good bibliographic records if they are to become intelligent users of information.

"Such records also help in collection development. Good catalogs:

- prevent duplication, including works issued under more than one title.
- identify gaps by subject, author, language, date, and award.
- identify strengths.
- identify similar materials by author, title, subject, and date.
- identify age of collection.
- identify presence of added physical formats of works."

—Joanna Fountain, Texas Library Connection, Texas Education Agency, Austin, Texas

## Selection Criteria

"In any school library media center, the selection criteria are quite naturally tailored to the curriculum that, in our school, teachers develop over the summer. Some themes repeat, but usually with a new spin. For example, in our study of the Southwest several years ago, we included a unit on the Hopi and Navaho. This year, we're focusing on "The Shape of Time" in terms of geology and archaeology. How do archaeologists date artifacts or use tree rings to learn about the climate and culture of the past? After we return with our students from Mesa Verde, we'll examine the concept of time—in music, historical fiction, or fantasy; how different cultures deal with time; the evolution of the measurement of time; and so forth.

"As a school for the gifted, we assiduously collect fiction about gifted children. In addition, we tend to select more adult material and material for older students than one might for a heterogeneous K-8 population. Nonetheless, we're careful not to confuse intellectual prowess with social and emotional maturity—particularly in the area of fiction.

"Lastly, we see the parents as our partners and choose material to help them understand the nature of gifted students. We have a program called Literary Club in

which two trained parents (or a parent and teacher) meet weekly to discuss a book with a small group of students. Our fiction collection includes many titles that we believe to be provocative and discussable, so that we can suggest them to leaders who are selecting books for their group."

—Debbie Abilock, The Nueva School,  
Hillsborough, California

"I have a selection policy and I tend to focus my purchases on areas of curricular need, then areas of student interest. It's a happy event when those two areas converge! I have to consider so many variations in ability and learning styles—we serve grades eight through twelve, with a great number of students identified as gifted and others with serious learning issues—and I buy audio and video, as well as print.

"I also consider purchases with teachers' instructional styles in mind. For instance, some prefer primary sources, some like simulations, while others use fiction around historical or scientific themes.

"I consider my webpage as a 'collection annex' and I extend my collection development in my selection of links from the free web, the invisible web, and the subscription services I select.

"I tend to look at VOYA, *School Library Journal*, *Book Report*, and *Booklist* for reviews. I'm attracted to the new items in vendors' catalogs, and I get excited when I can actually touch these at conference exhibits. I have accounts at local and Internet bookstores to meet unexpected and urgent student needs."

—Joyce Valenza, Springfield Township High School,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"My selection criteria are readability and curriculum. It also has to have a good visual impact or the students won't bother to pick it up."

—Jeanne Mayo, Banneker Middle School,  
Burtonsville, Maryland

"When a student brings home an item, whether it's physical or virtual, the library media specialist should be prepared to defend the selection—and thus recommend it—according to these four criteria:

**Content:** Is this material appropriate for the age, emotional development, ability levels, learning styles, and social development of the students in this school, at this time?

**Curricular Correlation:** Does this material complement, enrich, and extend the educational goals, philosophies, and curriculum of the school and the district?

**Community:** Does the material meet accepted evaluation standards, and does it provide/present diverse points of view of our pluralistic society?

**Cost and Container:** Can the price of this material—in this format—be justified, according to its probable or continued use in the school?

"Finally, remember the definition of weeding: eliminating that which is useless, inadequate, harmful, or unsightly. There is a reason why weeding is both a garden-

ing and a library term—both require care, attention, nourishment, and sometimes ruthless decisions. Your collection should be a living garden, blooming through a constant process of preparation, planting, and pruning. Every blossom should please the senses."

—Alice Yucht, Heritage Middle School,  
Livingston, New Jersey

(Used from Yucht's article with permission: "Collection Development Considerations" *Teacher-Librarian*, November 2000.)

## Selection Sources

"My favorite tools for selection are *Booklist* and VOYA. I also use recommended book lists from other libraries or organizations. Another important source is the student. We encourage our students to submit suggestions of titles they want to read or titles they recommend to their peers. Although we can't always honor their requests, we try to purchase as much as we can from their recommendations."

—Linda Stevens, Birdville High School,  
Fort Worth, Texas

## Weeding

"Weeding is an essential component of a good collection development plan. It keeps media collections relevant, accurate, and useful. It also facilitates more effective use of space in the library media center. So despite decreasing budgets and my natural inclination to save everything, I use these guidelines to determine what media materials should be weeded. Materials are considered for withdrawal if they are:

- In poor physical condition
- Seldom circulated
- Mediocre or poor in quality
- Duplicates of titles that are no longer in demand
- Titles that have been superseded by new or revised editions
- Materials with outdated or unattractive covers, formats, or illustrations
- Titles that are inaccessible because the book lacks an index or table of contents
- Outdated in content, use, or accuracy

"Copyright date is important in subjects such as computers, science, and technology. However, in most areas the decision to weed is not based solely on copyright date."

—Lorraine Brunn, Olney Elementary School,  
Olney, Maryland

## A Dream

"I have to tell you of a dream I had. I was in the Saudi Arabian desert with a whole platoon of Marines all on horseback. We were getting ready to go out on a mission across the desert in search of Osama bin Laden.

"The leader of the group was issuing orders, and when he noticed me, he asked, 'What are you doing here?'

"'I'm the Librarian!' I said.

"So off we went. I don't know how it ended up, but it was fun—a real Laurence of Arabia spectacle."

—Debbie Knipe, Valley Elementary School,  
Jefferson, Maryland