

Management Matters. Ann Plans to Restore Order to Collection

Article

The assistant principal (AP) escorted Ann to the library a few weeks after she accepted her job offer. Fresh out of library school, she couldn't wait to see the library in this K-3 school. Raving about the collection, the AP opened the door.

A large collection crowded the shelves. Spines of well-used items had been mended with black and red electrical tape, obscuring titles. But reading levels were clearly evident, as the books had been labeled and shelved to support the school's use of a computerized reading incentive program. A separate shelving area displayed materials accessed through a locally developed classification system, abandoned at least ten years before.

What Should Ann Do?

Ann evaluates the collection against librarianship's ethical positions, core competencies, and technical systems. ALA's Code of Ethics states "We provide the highest level of service...through...usefully organized resources" (ALA 2008). AASL's interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights deplores barriers such as labels and age restrictions (ALA 2014). Ann suspects that many items have outlived their usefulness and plans to run usage reports to determine what to remove from the collection first. Although there is a lot of buzz in school libraries about shelving books in reader-friendly patterns, she knows the system in place is not working for students. Items with different reading levels in popular series do not stand together on the shelf. Fiction and nonfiction titles sit side-by-side regardless of topic, so topical browsing is impossible. Ann decides to return the collection to standard Dewey order to place similar items together. She will show the school community how to use the catalog to find items by reading level, topic, or other criteria.

Ann outlines her vision of what the collection should look like and a one-page action plan. She prepares a 30-second statement about why change is necessary to promote independent student choice and make the collection more useful for different instructional purposes. After gaining her principal's approval, Ann invites several teachers, a parent, and an administrator to form an advisory committee to help her explain why the changes are important and find the manpower needed to help with shifting and weeding the collection. Her plan addresses weeding, shelving, and disposal of unneeded materials.

Weeding Plan

1. Create an empty staging area by weeding old print encyclopedias, badly mended items, and items with nonstandard cataloging.
2. Pull nonfiction items and shelve in call number order in the staging area. Invite teachers to help with evaluation.
3. "Select" items to keep if they are current and support the curriculum. Use age and usage reports, and weeding guidelines to identify items for removal.

Shelving Plan

1. Measure the collection. Calculate the total shelving capacity of the library. Estimate the linear feet of shelving needed using standard formulas.
2. Mark the starting point for each classification: fiction, picture books, and other media.
3. Create the fewest separate collections possible. Shelve all nonfiction together; do not create an "Easy" nonfiction section. Fewer call number runs are easier to maintain and permit unobtrusive differentiation.
4. Shelve formats separately only if it improves the student's ability to find materials quickly. Can kids easily find early readers if they are shelved with picture books? Why shelve hardcover fiction separately from identical paperback titles?

Disposal Plan

1. Find the school or district policy for disposing of outdated materials and follow it explicitly.
2. If no policy exists, seek out a charity or recycling vendor that can pick up the items. Gently used, current books may be donated; outdated, culturally insensitive, dirty, and ragged items should be recycled for pulp.
3. Do not dispose of items in a dumpster. This is a potential public relations nightmare.

Documentation

At the beginning, middle, and end of the project, document conditions with photographs, diagrams, library management system reports, and interviews with students and teachers.

1. Reports could include circulation measures, aged titles, non-circulating titles, and heavily circulated items which should be replaced.

2. Ask students how they choose materials to read, what frustrates them, what they like.
3. Collect evidence to inform a collection development policy. Which items are heavily used but in poor condition? What sections need additional materials to support student interest and the curriculum? Is the school ready to shift some funding to electronic databases?

Finally, assess the impact of this change on student learning and celebrate success!

Works Cited

American Association of School Librarians. *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. American Association of School Librarians, 2009.

American Library Association. *Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*. American Library Association, 1986; amended 1990, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2014.

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Read part two here: "Ann's Plan, Part 2: A Cataloging Backlog"

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