

Big Tips: Experienced Librarian

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updating the reference and the fiction collections first as these changes tend not to ruffle too many feathers. The reference books should be organized by Dewey and easily accessible as they are for quick consultation and the first step in research. She believes the Reference books anchor the whole collection and should be a focal point for the library and close at hand for teaching purposes. At one library, the reference collection was hidden away in a locked seminar room and at another, it was organized by size of book. Textbooks and expensive books should not automatically qualify as “reference” material. As all libraries have reference sections, it is important that the students learn how to use it.

One easy and cheap overhaul to the fiction collection is to organize it by genre rather than Dewey. Display it on browsable spinners and use some of your book budget to buy appealing fiction to use as a hook to attract people into the library. Students will be able to browse a collection organized by genre (horror, sci-fi, romance, etc) and are therefore more likely to read another and another. Promote your fiction collection to staff by hosting “Books and Bagels” events and describing new acquisitions in the staff newsletter.

Weeding is important. The TDSB’s deselection guidelines state: “Readers, both young and old, are encouraged to read when the library collection contains the best and the most up-to-date materials available. ... All materials should be accurate, current, and relevant to the curricular and recreational needs of students and staff.” In bold, the document states that libraries should not be used for archival purposes. Weeded material should fall into one of three groups: (1) redistributed to classrooms or other libraries, (2) recycled, or (3) recycled or distributed freely to the community. Maureen described one library where books dated back into the 1960s and others that contained statements such as, “AIDS is a homosexual disease.” Clearly, material that is offensive, exclusive, politically incorrect or just plain out-of-date should be weeded and discarded. However, she cautions that weeding should not be limited to a particular cut-off date, as some material, such as history or Canadian content, can still be relevant. The size of any particular collection should

be influenced by the size of the school, the physical space available and the curriculum. If you are new to a school community, it’s good to wait for a full year before weeding the non-fiction collection. Until curricular needs are known it is wise to wait. Starting with fiction and reference is best.

Another factor is where to put the books. The physical arrangement is key. Clear sightlines are a main concern for two reasons: for security and so students have clear choices and become independent library users. It’s good to organize the library into definable areas such as computers, silent study, reading area, fiction and classroom area. This allows the person walking into the space to choose which area suits their needs. Maureen likes it when art books end up near the windows so they can be viewed in natural light.

I asked her about her present school and what changes she has spearheaded. These included replacing the old, dirty carpeting with tiles, consolidating the fiction to one area by genre, updating the computer lab area, weeding almost 30% of the books, creating a silent study room, a professional library room for teachers, and a book processing room, and expanding the classroom area by decreasing the shelving for Dewey books by using wall shelves. The last change was creating a relaxing reading area with leather couches, wing back chairs and a leather ottoman. This has become a favourite spot for staff and students alike to relax, read magazines and books. Two walls were faced with brick veneer to create a cozy, restful nook. As Lisa Wilson points out in an article describing the opening of a brand new school library, “Consider the comfort of your patrons. Soft seating sofas and chairs create a welcome reading retreat.”

Finally, some last words of advice: “The essential element in all library updates is to use your professional judgment to help the library play an indispensable role in staff and students’ quest for success.” □

References

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