

At the heart of any great school, you will find a great library. At the heart of any great library, you will find passionate individuals who understand the true scope of their position as a teacher-librarian.

At Sir Wilfrid Laurier Collegiate Institute, this passion led to an exciting revitalization project involving the whole staff for the 2008-2009 school year.

With the support of our administration, the library team approached the Curriculum Leaders and Assistant Curriculum Leaders and proposed that representatives from their departments come down to the library and help us delve into the different subject areas. The staff agreed to assist with “The Weeding Project” and with nearly every department participating, we were able to discard books that were no longer relevant to the subject areas. Coaxing many into realizing that books could be discarded without guilt was one of the more interesting facets of the project. We were able to weed out over 4,500 books from our library, and also undertook a gap analysis.

Collaborative Weeding

Kenneth Kosowan

By determining what the library was missing, we were able to plan how best to allocate finances towards non-fiction book buying and plan for future purchases.

This collaboration has led to increased interest and excitement in the library. Teachers are booking in greater numbers and are assisting with book talks, as they are now well versed in the great resources that they helped find. Additionally, students are better able to find quality resources on the decongested shelves.

The library has undertaken several other collaborative projects when it came to purchasing resources. By taking the English department to Chapters on a fiction-buying journey (followed by food at a local restaurant), our library now enjoys exciting new fiction selected by nine highly-motivated English teachers. The French department was also eager to work together to purchase resources to revitalize the French collection.

The end result of this collaborative action has been a repositioning of the library, with its revitalized collection, as the heart of the school. The library has classes chomping at the bit to dive into our new and better resources.

Parameters of “The Weeding Project”:

Timeline: About 4–6 months, depending on the size of your collection (Our collection was 17,000 titles, with an average copyright date of 1987.)

It took a whole semester to finish the first five phases of this project. Phase Six should be ongoing and be revisited yearly. At this point, we are hoping to have our subject experts commit to weeding their area every two years. This will ensure that our collection remains fresh, and that it is adequately serving the students under any updated curriculum.

Phase One: Approaching the administration

A project that involves many staff members and a long-term commitment requires strong administrative support. Our administration agreed to provide on-call coverage to teachers who were helping with the weeding project. However, very few on-calls were ever generated, as many teachers were excited to come into the library to ensure that their subject areas were best served.

Informing the Parent-Teacher Council of plans to weed is also advisable to help parents and the community understand that only carefully deselected books will be making their way into the recycling bin.

Phase Two: Selling the plan to the experts

The best way to get the support of the staff was by going through the Curriculum Leaders. In the cases of large departments, the leaders divided the task between teachers who knew their subject areas best. (For example, in Social Studies, there were representatives from History, Family Studies, Geography and Philosophy.)

Phase Three: Scheduling the visits

Phase Four: Weeding with the experts from each department

As difficult as it is, the project is best served when the process can be done with minimal interruption. For this to be possible, we closed the library during weeding.

Phase Five: Gap analysis

During the weeding process, you and the subject expert should be compiling a list of gaps in the collection. By determining gaps in the collection, as well as collaborating on the development of purchasing plans, purchasing strategies can be devised as a team to far better meet the needs of departments than any teacher-librarian could develop alone.

Phase Six: Making the most of our money

Once gap analyses are completed for every section of your library, prioritize the list of resources and develop a purchase plan. ■