

Leading Forward By Looking Backward

By Betty Carter

Collection development is the one professional activity that allows librarians to define the coin of their realms: the content and kinds of materials they can offer the patrons they serve. Collection development begins with a collection development plan that underscores the mission of both the school library and the school system within which it operates, the goals and objectives of the two organizations, and the role of the librarian. The collection development plan defines the patrons, addresses budget allocations, and outlines procedures for selection and

to fill that space with merchandise) will be devoted to refrigerated items, to meat products, to personal grooming items, and the like. And stores make decisions about removing items from the shelves, using such guidelines as use-by dates or seasonal demand. Their collection development plan is the blueprint that also guides so many other decisions such as hours of operation, staffing, marketing plans, and service.

Commercial grocery stores enjoy (or tolerate, as the case may be) numerous stakeholders such as financial partners, architects, customers, and food and

potential of each student” or “provide students with the tools to become productive citizens.” Others, particularly private schools, may operate with a mission to establish certain values. Each kind of statement speaks to the kinds and numbers of materials librarians will have in their collections.

For example, educators recognize that youngsters can never realize their educational potential if the only materials available to them is a single textbook in each class. Consequently, materials that directly support classroom teaching in terms of subject (Caroline Arnold’s *Pterosaurs: Rulers of the Skies in the Dinosaur Age* details many of the over 100 species of “winged lizards”) and process (Dr. Karen Chin and Thom Holmes’s *Dino Dung: The Scoop on Fossil Feces* stresses one way in which scientists study animals long since extinct) would both complement a fourth grade curriculum study of dinosaurs. But fourth graders, and all other students, can only realize their educational potential if they also have opportunities to practice the skills developed in the classroom, if they read for pleasure or engage in mathematical or literary constructs, for example. And although for many *Pterosaurs* and *Dino Dung* may represent pleasure reading, for others books such as Carolyn Coman’s *The Big House* (it’s highly unlikely that the curriculum directly covers subjects such as freeing a family of charlatans from prison) or Blue Balliet’s *Chasing Vermeer* (while pentaminoes are frequently identified, their roles as addictive mathematical puzzles typically receive a short shrift) or Polly Horvath’s *The Pepins and Their Problems* (with strong meta-fictional elements typically outside fourth grade language arts inquiry) will bring the joy that encourages youngsters to engage in further reading on their own. These books more than likely lie outside the confines of the curriculum, but they have the potential of extending the skills taught therein or of introducing others seldom mentioned.

“Curriculum mapping alone cannot give the necessary information for a complete collection development plan”

de-selection of materials. Good libraries have adequate collection development plans; great libraries have strong ones.

In many ways creating a collection development plan can be compared to establishing a grocery store. Prospective store owners decide on their mission and their clientele (from pick-up shoppers purchasing gas and convenience items to high-end shoppers looking for exotic spices and the finest cuts of meat to shoppers primarily interested in buying basic food items for family meals) when they establish their businesses. That’s why we can find the highest concentration of snack foods at corner convenience stores, sweetbreads at the specialty store, and a large supply of chicken breasts at the family-oriented store. The products or holdings of each establishment define both the store’s mission (such as convenience or specialty) and the individuals (from commuters to chefs) it serves. The stores have also made budget decisions: how much space (and consequently the funds

drug policy administrators at all levels. Their development and marketing plans involve each just as a librarian’s collection development plan considers a number of individuals and policies: administrators, parents, teachers, students, budgets, the district selection policy, and the like. Without considering these individuals and conditions, librarians will wind up creating fine plans on paper, but plans unworkable in the particular schools they were designed for.

As you begin formulating a collection development plan, think of yourself as opening a store. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What is my mission?

First look at the mission statement of the school or district. These aren’t empty words, but are the backbone of your program. Often statements will have terms such as “encourage lifelong learning” or “realize the educational

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The mission statements of both an individual school and the district in which it resides should be a part of your collection development plan. In realistic terms, these kinds of statements will allow the librarian to focus on certain materials. Books for preschoolers would, at first glance, appear to be out of context in a high school library, but if that high school has a mission (and a corresponding curriculum) to prepare students to work as caregivers for the young, then such books are a natural fit within the goals of the school. In this case, a book such as Marc Simot's *The Stray Dog* isn't purchased because the librarian likes dogs, or even because it is a Caldecott Honor Book, but because it allows students opportunities to evaluate materials in their chosen careers and practice that all-important skill of reading aloud.

2. Who are my patrons?

In a school library, the obvious answer is students. But even this answer brings up certain questions. In some settings, not all students have equal access to the materials. Kindergarten youngsters, for example, sometimes have limited opportunities to circulate library books. In such a case, the question is: Will the library need as many materials in a noncirculating collection as in one that full access is expected? There are other kinds of decisions about patrons.

Schools that expand the philosophy of promoting learning to the community allow parents to freely circulate library materials. Consequently, the collection development plan should address this population and the kinds of materials that will fall within the school's mission and simultaneously serve them. Does the school fully expect parents

to circulate materials kindergarten children are often discouraged from taking home? Are parents who may not have English as their first language encouraged to circulate English materials that may perhaps enhance their own literacy? Or, are parents encouraged to circulate materials on child care as a way of becoming full partners in the educational system? Reread the mission of your district and your school to decide which services fall within the goals of the institution. If so, acquisition and circulation of such materials must be explicitly stated in the collection development plan. Otherwise, they become noble ideas that exist as tangential pieces to the educational program. Not only will they become underused mini-collections, but they will also be the first eliminated in budget cuts.

Consider teachers. Are materials in the library collected for teachers' professional growth, or is there another site within the district that fulfills this charge? Some librarians collect popular reading material for teachers. The philosophy behind this decision comes straight from the district's mission to encourage reading among the children served. In these cases, librarians have reasoned that it takes readers to encourage readers, and that by offering popular titles in the library they can (1) ensure some teacher traffic and create opportunities to talk about reading and perhaps extend those talks to children's materials, and (2) create a community of readers that may by association foster an environment that encourages everyone to read. With these objectives outlined in a collection development plan, librarians can protect these holdings and contribute to the goals of the school.

3. What kinds of materials will be included in the collection?

School libraries cannot exist with collections comprised completely of



books, nor can they rely on electronic services for all their needs. Conscious decisions must be made about the kind of materials—electronic databases, books (specifying both formats and language), newspapers, magazines, books on tape, DVDs, picture files—that will be included in the collection and which ones will not. Those that will be included should be actively collected, however. For example, if pamphlets are accepted, then that acceptance shouldn't just depend on allowing the stray one to enter into the collection. Decisions about housing and cataloging should be made before-hand; the librarian should have in mind the kinds of pamphlets needed and obtain them. If certain kinds of materials (pamphlets in this example) aren't a visible, active part of the collection, then they are often overlooked in inquiry and discounted as “real” sources or “real” library materials.

Sometimes those considerations may deal with virtual formats. Vertical files, for example, were once a staple in school libraries. Such files, typically organized in a number of cabinets with subject headings, contained clippings, community resources, pamphlets, product descriptions, and other kinds of ephemera related to a particular subject. In today's world, computer folders with appropriate bookmarks frequently replace the row of file cabinets that once stored these paper treasures. Now, as professional compilations of a well-trained librarian, these electronic folders represent a part of the collection. Not only should they be catalogued so youngsters can access them on their own, as they once plundered through drawers of the vertical file, but they should also be noted in a collection development plan. Their inclusion, and their use, give a frame of reference for observers who see librarians spending a great amount of time on the Internet and underscore the advanced searching skills librarians bring to their jobs.

4. How will the materials be selected?

Before addressing this portion of the campus collection development plan, revisit the district's selection policy.

(If there is no district-wide selection policy, there is no professional climate within which to run a library. The situation could be compared to running a school district without a curriculum.) These guidelines are the ones to follow. Perhaps there are problems with the selection policy, such as an iron clad rule that materials must have two positive journal reviews for inclusion. Since such absolutes can, for example, eliminate many locally produced materials and books, librarians may want to amend the statement by letting the professional opinions of two district librarians substitute for a pair of published reviews. Still, these new practices can't begin until the school board approves the amended policy.

Even with clear-cut district guidelines, librarians balance a number of considerations as they select books. They consider content, curriculum connections, reading interests, and the like. Selecting materials is both an art and a science. Libraries are defined by their collections; librarians defined by their attention to these holdings. In 1999 school librarian Janice Freiheit investigated the selection practices of librarians in one Texas school district. She asked the librarians how they should be selecting materials. Overwhelmingly, they outlined many of the steps discussed below. She then asked them if they were able to follow these principles. Overwhelmingly, they confessed that they weren't. The reason? They were spending so much of their time creating lessons for teachers. She further asked how they were selecting books, and again a large number of librarians responded in kind: They were getting their suggestions from teachers, from lists of books mentioned in professional growth workshops, from subject oriented catalogs, and from word of mouth. There's a lot wrong with this picture.

Librarians have advanced training in selection; they are the one professional group that has adopted policies that ensure focused but well-rounded collections. Yes, they have an instructional role in the school, but that role should never obliterate the skills and responsibilities they bring to

their jobs as librarians. And teachers have specialized knowledge about their subjects that can serve librarians well in selecting materials, but that knowledge should never obliterate the planning and teaching skills and responsibilities they bring to their jobs as classroom teachers. Each should act as advisor and consultant to the other's strengths rather than as a usurper of the other's responsibilities. That said, the question remains: what should librarians bring to the process of selecting materials?

Retrospective Selection

Begin at the beginning. Librarians should have a strong idea of what kinds of materials they are looking for. A number of publishers and jobbers have taken various state curricula, matched them to their offerings, and provided librarians with a matrix of books and media that match these subjects and objectives. So, why not simply order the materials that intersect with the curriculum topics on your campus? Two reasons: (1) the books might have internal problems such as similarity in presentation, incorrect content, or insipid writing, and (2) all subjects and objectives in a curriculum outline do not necessarily receive the same treatment in every classroom or on every campus.

David Loertscher's *Taxonomies of the School Library Media Program* details a plan for curriculum mapping so librarians can ascertain precisely what is being taught on their respective campuses and in what areas teachers wish to make the most use of library resources. Following Loertscher's curriculum mapping, librarians can evaluate sections of the existing collection, order materials to fill in deficiencies, and create a practical collection development strategy, all while using teacher input that relates directly to class instruction. A word of caution: the task of curriculum mapping is daunting, and one that cannot be completed in a single year. Select carefully the areas you wish to examine, prioritize them, and begin a systematic process of matching resources to the content of the classrooms. But remember, curriculum mapping is not a finite

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process: teachers alter plans every year, districts adopt new textbooks, and states require new benchmarks for student learning.

It’s also important to remember that curriculum mapping alone can not give the necessary information for a complete collection development plan. Librarians might attempt a focused analysis of the collection by, for example, selecting every fifth book and categorizing that book by descriptors such as most targeted grade level, a leisure reading/curriculum designation (which may sometimes overlap), genre, or a represented subject. By compiling these rough statistics, librarians will discover other areas to target for collection development.

Through curriculum mapping, a librarian might discover that a fourth grade content study on arachnids will result in a teacher assigning youngsters to select an arachnid and be prepared to identify the features that define it as a member of that class of animals. The librarian will need materials with illustrations, such as photographs, drawings, or diagrams, to make this classroom assignment succeed. According to the teacher in question, youngsters will work in pairs, and classes typically contain about 22 students with varying degrees of reading sophistication. This small project should not necessitate overnight checkouts, so the librarian can estimate that they will need about 15 separate sources. Assuming that there are five computers in the library with Internet connections or access to an encyclopedia such as *World Book* (which at this writing contained only a single diagram of one arachnid, a spider), then at least 10 additional print sources must be found. A quick check of the present collection shows only five such books, so the librarian will need to order at least five additional ones.

The Art and the Science

Here’s where both the art and the science of book selection comes into play. Going back to the grocery story analogy for a moment, put yourself in the role of the consumer. Assume you are trying to eat healthy. You could outline the food pyramid and ask the grocer to send you enough meat, dairy products, and vegetables to satisfy those standards for meals for a family of four for a week. Clearly shoppers disdain such shopping methods, which may result in healthy foods but some strange menu combinations. Even with online shopping services, they want to select the items that will meet their family’s needs, budgets, and tastes. Librarians must do the same.

To visit a jobber’s Web site and select all offerings on spiders would be akin to the above example of simply requesting food. The science of selection (searching for materials that fit into curricula subjects) is certainly present, but not the art (identifying and ordering materials at different levels, that contain different examples, and that include different approaches to the subject). A recent examination of Follett’s TitleWave® (<http://www.follett.com>) under the subject of “Spiders,” turned up some fine books such as Seymour Simon’s *Spiders* and Marjorie Facklam’s *Spiders and Their Web Sites*, each with great potential for the assignment. What didn’t show up were three additional titles that appear to have great relevance to this particular project—Melvin Berger’s *Spinning*

Spiders, an entry in the Let’s Read and Find Out About Science Series; Sharon Gordon’s *Guess Who Spins* from the Guess Who Series; or John Townsend’s *Incredible Arachnids* from the Incredible Creatures Series—even though separate title searches revealed that Follett was able to provide those particular books. Products such as TitleWave can prove tremendously helpful as sources for reviews and as ancillary collection analysis tools, but as the sole providers of retrospective selection, they have their weaknesses.

So, where do other titles come from? The Berger book, *Spinning Spiders*, emerged from *Children’s Catalog*, a long-standard retrospective selection aid from H. W. Wilson. *Children’s Catalog*, and the corresponding catalogs for schools serving older children, *Middle and Junior High School Catalog* and *Senior High School Catalog*, identify what a team of respected librarians and critics has defined as a core collection. Every school in a particular district may not need to house a copy of the appropriate catalog, but the catalogs should be available, either in print or online form, to the collective body of district librarians, particularly for use in identifying core books for new areas of inquiry. Not all mentioned books will necessarily complement specific assignments,

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although they are typically considered worthy of library purchase.

The other two books mentioned above, *Guess Who Spins* and *Incredible Arachnids* came from the Spring 2005 issue of *The Horn Book Guide*. *The Horn Book Guide* provides short annotations of the majority of hardcover trade books published in the United States during the previous six-month period. In addition to these annotations, reviewers assign a numerical rating with one indicating that the book is outstanding and six indicating that the book is unacceptable. The subject index allows librarians to search by topic and provides a quick resource for updating areas of need. The books *Guess Who Spins* and *Incredible Arachnids* were neither originally reviewed in *The Horn Book Magazine*, but both received a *Guide* rating of 3, indicating that they were recommended for purchase although not necessarily a first purchase.

Still, librarians must move beyond a single source for recommendations. A check of TitleWave cited additional review sources for librarians to consult. In other words, it takes a village of sources to find, identify, and create a strong collection.

Librarians will, of course, move beyond trade books as they seek other sources. They could bookmark Web sites such as *Everything about Arachnids* (<http://www.everythingabout.net/articles/biology/animals/arthropods/arachnids>) which has photographs and information for some underaddressed animals such as ticks.

In keeping with the old saying, "A librarian's work is never done," the process is far from over. First, keep track of the procedure. This record is but one concrete way in which librarians can begin to quantify the kind of work they do, work that is often overlooked and undervalued.

Second, compute the amount of money spent in satisfying this one area of support. With the average price of a children's/young adult book being \$20.52 (St. Lifer, 2005), the cost for ordering the aforementioned five books is approximately \$146.00.

Spreading the Word

Third, ask other librarians in the district if they could profit from your search; if they can, then share the process with them. And fourth, now look over the collection. It might be heavy in books that satisfy this assignment, but low on tangential areas such as spinning webs featured in Murawski's *Spiders and Their Webs* or in the work of scientists in the field, covered beautifully in Sy Montgomery's *The Tarantula Scientist*. Perhaps books that approach the topic of arachnids indirectly, such as Doreen Cronin's *Diary of a Spider* or Jean Craighead George's *The Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Other Wild Pets*, could also extend this curricula subject. Are these kinds of books also available? If not, then further collection development is in order.

This last activity assumes one critical piece of collection development: the librarian knows the collection. That knowledge can only come through wide reading. The payoff, however, is incalculable. Librarians who are readers, who read beyond their own interests and personal tastes, create students who are also readers. So with a single activity, that of reading the books in the collection, librarians can begin to insure that the materials they house will not only be selected wisely but ultimately used.

Retrospective collection development is only one part of a librarian's accountability. There's also a responsibility to keep the present collection up-to-date, to anticipate needs, and to respond to the reading interests of the population served. But retrospective collection development creates a baseline of stock and makes a statement about the function of the school library. No matter how conscientious a librarian is about selecting new materials, the base provides the framework within which they will be used. ■

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