

WEEDING
A PRACTICAL MANUAL FOR LIBRARIANS

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JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

“Weeding” is the important and constructive process of clearing library media center collections of materials that have outlived their usefulness. This term comes from gardening and means the same thing—eliminating the unsuitable or unwanted. It is a carefully planned procedure that is as important as selecting and acquiring new quality materials, both print and non-print. Weeding should be done on a regular, continuous basis.

A balanced, up-to-date collection of materials is essential to a quality school library media center. Materials are to be carefully selected, and the collection tailored to the needs of students and curriculum. Constant evaluation of materials will result in a highly effective and quality collection. Therefore, weeding is a valuable and integral part of the selection or collection development policy, and one of the best techniques available for the long-range building of useful collections.

When approaching weeding, it is well to remember that numbers aren’t everything. Selectivity is as important as abundance. It is useless to have the collection clogged with deadwood that obscures materials that attract students and teachers, while usurping shelf and storage space needed for new media. Weeding requires judgment; it is more than setting books and other media face to face with a set of objective weeding criteria. Conversely, purely subjective weeding criteria tend to be contradictory, invalid and a poor approach to the problem of weeding.

Current literature on the topic gives the following reasons for weeding:

- To utilize the space in your library media center in the best and most efficient way relying on other sources such as your nearest public library or public library branch for those little used materials which would crowd your shelves or strain your budget.
- To give your library media center a reputation for reliability by having a collection that is current and up-to-date.
- To remove an outward illusion of a well-stocked library media center in the eyes of those who do not use it and who may oppose your pleas for a budget increase for new materials.
- To cull books and non-print materials which need repairing, rebinding or replacing.

- To make room for new technologies.
- To be able to give the best possible service through a collection of quality materials.

In developing standards for weeding, a goal of retaining a core collection (i.e. the useful part of the collection) that is likely to meet 95% to 99% of future demands is recommended. For collections that have been in existence for a few years, it is recommended that approximately four to five percent of the collection be weeded annually. However, one must consider the unique space, budget, curriculum requirements and user needs of each library media center when deciding how rigorous and how often to weed. Bear in mind that the useful life of all library media is limited by one factor or another. Media can become educationally outmoded and physically worn. Curriculum and student enrollment pattern changes render some materials no longer pertinent. It is well to remember that today school libraries have no responsibility to preserve national or local heritage, to be comprehensive resource centers, or to be complete or comprehensive in any subject or interest area. Remember the primary purpose of a school library media center is to support the school's curriculum.

CRITERIA FOR DISCARDING

In general, the following criteria should be used in weeding out undesirable materials. These criteria are presented as guidelines, rather than as laws or an infallible formula. It is important that librarians apply them with judgment while carefully considering their school's curriculum, collection, and clientele. See Appendix A for a chart with guidelines and recommendations for specific Dewey sections.

Record of use- If an item has not circulated in three to five years. Shelf-time periods (i.e. the length of time the book or item remains on the shelf between circulations) that reflect a declining or non-existent pattern of use. Remember that seasonal, monthly or some similar patterns of use exist in school libraries and these patterns must be taken into consideration when establishing shelf-time cut-off periods for weeding. Many consider the shelf-period criterion to be accurate, valid, and by far the best since it does not reduce circulation.

Currency of content-If the subject matter is out-of-date, factually inaccurate, or no longer relevant to the educational program; if illustrations or content are outmoded or perpetuate sexual, racial, or cultural stereotypes.

- Has the material been superseded by better, or more up-to-date material, even though it is only a year or two old?
- Has the curriculum changed to the point where the material is no longer pertinent?
- Is it obsolete in content, style, or theme?
- Is the approach no longer appropriate (word choice and style of writing a generation or two ago leave today's youngsters guessing instead of helping them to understand).
- If it no longer appears in standard listing, such as H. W. Wilson's Children's Catalog, Middle and Junior High School Library Catalog, etc.

Technical quality- For non-print media, if visuals are poor, faded, off color, or scratched; if black and white, has it been superseded by a clear color edition? If sound reproductions are faulty or inferior. **Do not retain reel-to-reel tapes, laserdiscs, phonograph records or filmstrips regardless of their technical quality.**

Physical condition- If it is worn, torn, soiled or generally ragged; if pages or parts are missing. If the pages have very fine print or yellowed paper. (Classics with such make-up have no place on school library shelves).

Dispensability- If it is a duplicate copy where multiple copies exist of a title that rarely circulates or if it duplicates materials no longer needed in the collection. If it is a textbook which is no longer useful for reference purposes.

REASONS FOR NOT DISCARDING MATERIALS

Here are some reasons for not discarding materials, even if they meet the above listed criteria.

- If it is a work of historical significance in the field of children's literature.
- If it has unusual illustrations or illustrations done by a well-known artist.
- If it is a work by a local author, illustrator, or editor.
- If it describes local history or personalities.
- If it is a memorial gift.
- If it bears a significant relationship to other books or materials on the same subject.
- If it has possible usefulness to some special group or individual in the school.

MAINTAINING THE COLLECTION

These suggestions come from a survey of the literature and from actual, practical experiences in weeding libraries. They are offered as hints that might be helpful. Individual discretion and judgment should be exercised in their use.

In selecting for purchase, consider each new title or acquisition in relation to the total collection, and consider the possibility of discarding one already in the collection.

If a new title supersedes an older one, withdraw the older material when the new is received. The exception might be to retain such items as atlases, almanacs, periodicals, etc., to use for instructional purposes. While not useful for information, out-dated materials of this type retain usefulness for students learning how to use such tools. However, such materials should be stored out of sight, and used only for instruction.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Books and other media in which any significant portion of the information is out-dated should be considered out-dated and withdrawn from the collection. It is better to have no information about a particular topic in your collection than it is to provide misinformation.
- The textbook adoption cycle (See Appendix B) can provide a guide to weeding. In other words, weed those areas of the collection in which textbooks are being adopted.
- When in doubt about the currency of a particular content area, consult a teacher or other colleague with expertise in that area.
- Retain good examples of weeded titles to share with administrators, staff, and parents to demonstrate the need for weeding.
- Un-indexed periodicals should be kept no more than a year.
- Filmstrips, laser discs, and phonograph records are obsolete, so should be discarded (equipment on which to play is not likely to be available). Cassette tapes and VHS tapes are almost in the same category.
- The same weeding guidelines apply to audiovisual materials as to print. Be aware that older AV materials may have been re-recorded (i.e., transferred by the production company with no updates from VHS to DVD) and given a more current copyright date. Updating the format does not update the content.
- Pictures and study prints quickly fade and become dated. Countries, means of transportation, and space travel are inherently dated and quickly become obsolete.
- Reference collections: the tendency is to leave materials once they have been placed in reference. General rule is that reference materials should contain the most recent and up-to-date information.
- Replace weeded materials if their content is still significant.

THE WEEDING PROCEDURE

It is best to develop a long-range plan for weeding the collection. Use the textbook adoption cycle and/or the Collection Analysis Report to determine priority areas for weeding.

Weeding requires physically handling and examining each book or piece of library media. Check the physical condition, the copyright date, the content and the shelf-time period of the item against the criteria for removal. In most instances the decision to weed or to keep is easily made. Discards are set-aside on a waiting book truck, while those to remain are replaced on the shelf. Items to be retained that are in need of repair should be set aside.

DISCARDING PROCEDURES

Do not give discarded books to students or teachers or donate them to book drives, paper drives, rummage sales, garage sales, organizations or institutions where they are likely to surface again as public property. Some citizens do not understand that when a school library media specialist removes old, outdated books, they no longer have valid instructional purposes. It is best to dispose of discards with as little fanfare as possible.

Update all inventory records. Delete holdings and/or bibliographic records from electronic library administrative system. Note any titles to be replaced and subject areas which need additional materials.

Stamp discard on items, and/or deface the ownership marks. Remove the book pocket, if one. Tear out title page plus enough pages to render the book useless.

Compiling a summary of discards is sometimes helpful, especially when large numbers of volumes have been removed in a short period of time. A form for this purpose is available from Library Media Services.

Place print discards in cardboard boxes (available at no charge from the Warehouse). Do not use large boxes as the Pony service will refuse to transport them. Label each carton: Ms. Grinder, c/o, Roger Mercer, C. B. Young Service Center. In the case of a large number of discards, please call Roger Mercer's area (3362) to arrange for a special pick up.

Place boxes in same location used in your school for the pickup by the JCPS Pony. Boxes will be transported to C.B. Young Service Center for disposal.

References

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