

Deselection Journal: Out With the Old to Make Room for the New

Introduction

Weeding is the act of re-evaluating items in the collection and removing any that are inaccurate, out of date, misleading, inappropriate, unused, in poor condition, or otherwise harmful to students. It is something all librarians and library media specialists must do regularly if they want to maintain the best possible collections for their school communities. It is a professional responsibility that cannot be taken lightly (Baumback & Miller, 2006).

This call to action is welcomed by some librarians and dreaded by others. As a part time librarian for an elementary school library, I experienced the trials and triumphs of a recent weeding project first-hand. This journal will reflect on our deselection process, from its conception to its implementation, and report on the impact of the project on the collection.

The Library

Kainalu Elementary School Library serves approximately 500 Pre-K through 6th grade students in the town of Kailua, HI. Its collection approaches 10,000 items, predominantly print material, and includes fiction, non-fiction, biography, reference, and professional development holdings. The materials support the curriculum and provide recreational reading for students and teachers. Kainalu uses LS2, managed by The Library Corporation, as its integrated library system (ILS). Additional library services include: story time for Pre-K and K, informational

literacy, tech support, monthly programming, and access to online materials with its 33 station computer lab. The library staff raises funds for the school reading program through annual book fairs and grant writing. At one time, the library was operated by a full-time, certified librarian but in the last decade has been run by classroom teachers, a part time librarian, and parent volunteers. The library is currently staffed by 2 PTT employees, a co-worker and myself. The future of the library is uncertain. After this school year, the administration's plans for library staffing are unclear.

The Project

Dubicki (2008) recognized common concerns about weeding (a desire to maintain the size of the collection, lack of time, lack of experience, and the belief that a book may be needed sometime in the future) while asserting that collections “need to reflect *current* requirements and desires of user community.” These conflicting motivations were valid considerations as we prepared for our project. Though we immediately recognized the need to weed certain sections of the library upon our hiring, it was Dubicki's concerns that led us to postpone a major deselection project until recently. With 3 years' experience, we were familiar with the collection and with the generally accepted guidelines for deselecting (see “The Process” below). We were attuned to our user community's needs and felt confident that the project would ultimately improve access to the collection. Our administration gave us the support and latitude to make the nuanced decisions that a weeding project requires. Though we could have weeded several sections of the library, we decided to focus on the fiction collection for the following reasons:

- The former librarian had begun a fiction weeding project but left it unfinished.
- Much of the fiction collection was dated and/or in poor condition.
- Recent fiction purchases necessitated shelf space for newer items.
- We wanted to re-label spines which required handling most of the fiction books.
- We wanted to enhance the utility of the fiction section before our employment ended.

The Process

Dubicki (2008) also promoted having a deselection plan in place before starting a project. She stated that while librarians tend to avoid deselecting materials, most collections benefit from a carefully considered weeding project. Creating a schedule, we planned to weed on days when both of us were working so that we could share deselection decisions. We consulted the HIDEOE weeding policy (Materials selection..., 2015) and various sources for guidance about how and what to weed (Allen, 2010; Baumbach & Miller, 2006; Dubicki, 2008; Evans & Saponaro 2012). We considered, as did Slote (1997), that weeding procedures are based on a combination of objective and subjective measures, with shelf time and circulation statistics often being major factors in considerations. We intended to use circulation records as one of our objective measures, but a recent change in our ILS meant that we had no access to historical statistics. Before the change in ILS, I printed out a list of items that had not circulated in the last 10 years but the list was so extensive as to be minimally helpful. Therefore, we used the following criteria: multiple copies, condition (wear, dated cover art, and format [e.g. paperback]), part of an incomplete series. If an item fit these criteria and also was not circulating (by subjective measurement) it was weeded. We chose to preferentially retain items that might otherwise be

weeded but had multi-cultural value or were award winners or “classics.” We identified items to re-order for retrospective collecting as well as possible new items to be ordered (e.g. additional books by popular or notable authors). If there were certain items that we were having a hard time deselecting, we made a “book purgatory” for them, pulling them off the shelves but retaining them out of sight in case someone requested them. As part of our plan, if no one asks for those items by December 2015, they will be fully weeded from the collection. My colleague deselected books from a series that were written by a “ghost author” and therefore deemed (by her) to be less desirable. In total, 361 items were considered for deselection. Of those, 36 were placed in “purgatory”, 14 were reconsidered and put back on shelf either because they were multi-culturally valuable or because the book was out of print and too expensive to replace. 43 were left on shelves because, despite their condition, they were still circulating. In those cases, replacements were added to the order list and the worn items will be pulled when a newer title arrives. 268 titles were weeded outright and donated to either to classroom teachers (61 items) or to our Friends of the Kailua Public Library (201 items). As suggested by multiple sources, we completed the deselection process by recording the items that were deselected, deleting them from our OPAC, removing identifying stickers and labels, and stamping each book with DISCARD before donating them (Allen, 2010; Baumbach & Miller, 2006; Dubicki, 2008; Evans & Saponaro 2012).

The Impact

Kainalu library’s fiction section was dramatically improved by our deselection project. Roomier shelves welcomed newer, more appealing materials. Shelving and straightening became

easier which made the library neater and more organized. Since the project also included upgrading spine labels, all the fiction books are consistently labeled making it easier for users to find materials. This may be critical next year if a gap in library staffing requires that teachers, students, or volunteers shoulder some of the shelving responsibilities for the collection. Though we expected to see these improvements from the sources we consulted in our planning stages (Baumbach & Miller, 2006; Dubicki, 2008) it was extremely satisfying to see immediate results. Too, our project allowed us to become even more familiar with the fiction collection; alerting us to gaps in the collection that hopefully will be filled in the future. Having individually handled the entire fiction collection, I feel prepared to answer reader advisory questions about the fiction collection. Though one could normally utilize the OPAC to answer advisory questions, errors and omissions in our new ILS cataloging metadata mean that staff and users often can not search for particular genre or subject matter. For our library, familiarity with the collection is a necessary back up to the computerized ILS.

Conclusion

Though we put off this project for some years, I found the weeding process to be relatively pain free. Constructing a plan and developing a systematic way of deciding which items were candidates for deselection eliminated much of the mystery of weeding. The planning time was time well spent. I am also thankful that I was able to complete the project with a co-worker since the burden of decision making was shared by both of us. Weeding may not be one of my favorite library tasks, but it is a necessary one, and I certainly do not fear it as much as I once did.

References

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