Christy Scott

Library Management for the Small School in Four Steps:

Evaluating

Planning

Purchasing

Organizing

Teachers in small Seventh-day Adventist schools are frequently required to be proficient in instruction of both traditional disciplines and other aspects of a student's education, including art, music, physical education (PE), as well as library management. A review of teacher-training programs throughout North American Division (NAD) Adventist universities revealed that while art, music, and physical education are frequently addressed in individual teacher-training courses, no such course exists for library management. This omission suggests that teacher training may provide inadequate instruction in areas traditionally covered by school librarians since the assumption is that schools have trained librarians; however, in small Adventist schools, there is no librarian.[1] Researchers in the area of library and information sciences have noted a lack of knowledge among pre-service teachers surrounding the term *information literacy* and uncertainty regarding how to select books for their classroom libraries.[2]

Yet the importance of classroom and school-wide libraries is consistently demonstrated in the research. School librarians and strong library programs are indicators of better reading scores across all grade levels. One study revealed that strong library programs could predict higher math scores in elementary and middle schools. Data from more than 30 national studies (U.S.)[3] illustrate a connection between strong library programs and improvement in standardized test scores, while one review of international studies found support of the positive impact of libraries on student achievement throughout studies from Australia, the U.K., Canada, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Uganda, and Pakistan.[4]

Visually attractive classroom libraries can increase motivation for reading, and students with access to such environments tend to read more.[5] Unsurprisingly, quality library programs and access are strongly correlated with higher student test scores, and school library use has a strong relationship to reading attainment,[6] suggesting the importance of tackling school-library management in every school.

For teachers without formal training in library science, the process of creating, maintaining, or using a currently existing library may feel daunting. However, the process can be broken down into four basic repeatable concepts—evaluation, planning, purchasing, and organizing. This article will walk teachers through what each concept covers, why it is important, and provide suggestions for beginning the process.

Throughout this article, we will refer to the library as the "school library," but for teachers in multi-teacher schools, the four steps can also be applied to classroom library if these are separate collections.

EVALUATE – What Do I Have?

Whether starting from scratch or with a pre-existing collection, evaluation is essential for a positive student experience. How many books are in the library? What is their condition? What is the quality of the story books? What is the quality of reference books? Are the books relevant to the classroom, various reading levels, and students' interests? Is the information presented in the books accurate and up to date? Are there multiples that are out of date or not being used? What is lacking? Do you have books for student interests and reading levels, and for the various curriculum area? Teachers can apply similar questions when evaluating existing software databases including questions such as, Is it in a format that can be accessed?

If you are working with a pre-existing collection, a good first step is to locate and remove out-of-date or damaged books. In an existing collection, large numbers of inappropriate or irrelevant books serve as clutter that keeps the best books from being found for reading and research. One library volunteer shared a story of the church library being combined with the elementary school library and finding that there were five copies of a mid-20th century Pacific Press title topically of interest for adults. The title was never circulated to students but took up space on the shelf. Reducing or removing such titles may feel controversial but means saying "Yes" to a library that supports student success. Using a collection-management policy or having clearly stated goals for the collection that have been approved by shareholders can help reduce controversy surrounding weeding of materials.

Another initial step is to look for outdated information. Books that reference the Soviet Union or other countries that no longer exist may be discarded, and if necessary, a notation made to replace them. Books that refer to Pluto as a planet, or older books about science topics such as biology, dinosaurs, physics, and astronomy, should also be evaluated. In her CREW (Continuous, Review, Evaluation, Weeding) guidelines, Mona Kerby recommends reconsidering any title older than five years in most science and geography topics, and utilizes acronym WORST (Worn out, Out of date, Rarely used, Supplied elsewhere, or Trivial and faddish) for multimedia items such as software or databases.[7]

> Books for the school library should contain high-quality illustrations and text, support the curriculum, and be appropriate for the community culture. Teachers can also consider current student interests when selecting books or other materials.

If students learn that the library has materials that are outdated, in poor condition, or do not match their interests, they will be less likely to use it. Culling old, out-of-date, or damaged books from the shelves will generally increase student library use. Additionally, removing these books offers a better picture of the usable collection, making it easier to answer questions about how many books you have, what reading levels, what curriculum support, and what areas of student interests may be lacking.

One question frequently asked by pre-service teachers is "How many books should a school library have?" The answer will depend upon your student body, the space available, and your curricular needs. A library to support the entire school and all grade levels will need more titles than a classroom library for two or three grades. Catapano, Fleming, and Elias recommend a minimum of 10 books for every child in a classroom library, with a minimum of 100 books. This offers a beginning guideline, but keep in mind that it is essential to offer materials that appeal to a range of interests as well as reading material at, above, and below grade level so that students may select books they can read independently.[8]

Books for the school library should contain high-quality illustrations and text, support the curriculum, and be appropriate for the community culture. Teachers can also consider current student interests when selecting books or other materials. For example, books on training dogs may not support the curriculum; however, if students have an interest in this topic, it is worth investing in several titles for different reading levels. Conversely, if previous students have expressed interest in a topic, but the current group does not, these titles may be among those that can be easily discarded, especially if they are out of date or tattered.

Students should be able to find books that represent them. When selecting materials, teachers should seek to be aware of their own implicit biases and cultural knowledge, and aim to select stories that provide positive representation of diverse backgrounds, including different races and cultures, special abilities, family types, and physical bodies. In homogenous communities, providing diverse stories may be the only introduction a student has to different backgrounds or cultures, making such books especially important in these libraries.

PLAN – What Is My Collection Plan?

Librarians use collection-development plans to guide purchases. These documents provide collection objectives and help librarians advocate for funding, clarify selection or deselection of titles, help support challenged books, and even assist with evaluation for accreditations.[9] National or local organizations may provide collection standards that must be considered, but the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), notes that regardless of access to existing standards "collection development decisions should be based on curriculum requirements and instructional approaches."[10] A collection-development plan with academic and non-academic goals that has been approved by the school board and other stakeholders may save time and prevent headaches later, should a title be challenged. The plan provides a framework for individuals making decisions about the collection. A collection plan considers learners, curriculum, and selection criteria.

Who are the learners using the library? Consider information such as socioeconomic status, cultural backgrounds, languages spoken and read, reading levels, homes with computer access, and what public-library services exist and are accessible in the area. If reviewing a previously completed collection plan, look for any changes in the learners from the last update. These considerations will determine your goals. For instance, if your community does not have a public library, then a stronger fiction collection may be a priority. For example, if a significant percentage of your learners also speak Spanish, you may want to include more Spanish-language titles. If your community has a strong immigrant population from a particular area, then look for titles that connect students with their families' life experiences. Additionally, considering the academic levels of the students in the classroom will help to guide selection.

As a teacher creating a collection plan, you will benefit from a thorough knowledge of your school's curriculum. Consider topics that are taught in each grade and over the course of a year. Detail the ways your collection should supplement or support the curriculum. If students will be doing research in particular areas, a strong non-fiction section to support those assignments and up-to-date reference materials may be a priority.

Finally, selection criteria help to inform which books you will choose and why. The American Library Association (ALA) provides a workbook for putting together a selection policy and includes criteria you could adopt. Selection criteria should be questions easily asked when you are making a purchasing decision for books or media related to the library. Kerby recommends the following four basic questions in her book on collection development.[11]

1. Is the item new, and has it received favorable reviews?
2. Is the item appropriate for your users?
3. Does the item have a pleasing design?
4. Is it cost-effective?

In your plan, be certain to differentiate between instructional materials (those assigned in the classroom) and library titles that are available to students but not required to be read or assigned for research purposes. You can include criteria specific to the community as well as general criteria. A working collection plan can guide your purchasing decisions. Still, before making large purchases, teachers will want to have their criteria approved by the school board or other decision-making group.

PURCHASE – What Will I Buy?

After evaluating the needs and having a collection plan with selection criteria in place, purchasing books and other materials comes next. While collection plans will vary based upon the individual needs and resourcing of the institution, as well as local or national standard requirements, basic components of a selection policy might include the mission of the school library, statements of intellectual freedom and freedom of information, objectives of the collection (including criteria for inclusion and relationship to the curriculum and identities of its users), who is responsible for selection/purchasing, policies relating to controversial materials, and reconsideration of titles in the collection.[12] In some schools, a particular person, such as the principal or secretary, will purchase selected books. In many institutions, there may be a limited budget. If your school is required to spend a certain amount of funding per student on library materials as part of a state or national accreditation, this may help you deter-

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mine the number of books that you will buy each year.

In addition to books, collection plans should include guidelines for software, databases, and periodicals that might be provided in the library.

If you are starting with no library or have discarded much of the existing library due to age and condition, it may be tempting to buy many inexpensive books, but quality titles that will last through many readings, provide factual up-to-date information, and use excellent language and illustrations to tell stories that students enjoy reading will serve the students best. Beginning with the topics covered in the upcoming year's curriculum will help you add strategically to the collection.

Research has revealed that teachers generally have knowledge of where to buy books in a thrifty way but may struggle with what to buy.[13] The evaluation of gaps, the collection plan, and the curriculum goals for the year will help you make wise selections. For instance, if students are assigned to read a book of poetry during the school year, they will need poetry books covering a range of reading levels below, at, and above where they are currently performing. If the collection evaluation reveals out-of-date books on astronomy and genetics or other subjects, the teacher should discard them and look for replacements.

Subscription trade magazines such as *Hornbook* and *School Library Journal* can help purchasers identify books that have received favorable reviews. Resources such as The Children's Book Review website (https://www.thechildrens bookreview.com/), blogs, and social media accounts are available without a subscription. The American Library Association nominates and selects outstanding books for a variety of awards, including the Newbery Award. Some awards sponsored by the ALA and other organizations, such as the Coretta Scott King Award and the American Indian Youth Literature Award, are multicultural in scope; others may be regional or chosen by young people, suggesting titles students will enjoy.

A 2009 survey of 17,000 pupils in the United Kingdom indicated that the most common reason students used a school library was because it had books that interested them. More than half of the students who did not have access to a school library said they would use one, particularly if it had books of interest. Another important reason given by 50 percent of the students was that the school library is a friendly space.[14] This brings us to the final step: organizing the collection for student use.

ORGANIZE – How Should I Organize My Collection?

Collection organization is an important predictor of the friendliness and accessibility of the library for students. When the library is well-organized, and students are encouraged to use it, this makes it clear to students that teachers consider reading a valuable component of their education. Teachers should select an organization method by considering the goals of the collection and where the books will be located. The resources needed for a classroom collection may differ from those needed for the school library, which has its own dedicated space.

Collection organization should help students think about the ways that books can be categorized, and the method of organization should be clear to the students using the collection. A classroom collection might be organized by category or genre. A larger collection might use Dewey Decimal Classification (most commonly used in public libraries and K-12 school libraries) to help students become familiar with using call numbers to retrieve and organize books. Stickers can help students locate books by genre or reading level. Dollar store bins, IKEA spice racks, and Pinterest book display ideas can inspire ways to attractively display books, even without library-specific display cases.

Creating a friendly space for students means paying attention to the number of books on shelves so that students can easily see and including titles that are of interest to them. Providing seating in the library, whether in the form of a small bench, chairs, a bean-bag chair, or even floor pillows, will enable students to comfortably review potential books. Adding bright colors, posters or pictures, or even a Library Lion mascot or another favorite stuffed animal can help present the library as a welcoming space. Catapano, Fleming, and Elias provide a check sheet for organizing the physical environment that offers additional selections such as a chart for students to vote on or rate books, a display area for recently read-aloud books, or for teacher- or student-recommended books.[15]

Collection circulation is also an important aspect of organization, as it helps teachers keep track of who currently has each book, while allowing students to take books home to read. First, evaluate the needs of your school, and then choose the best method to meet those needs. Simple classroom systems, such as writing the name of the book, and the name of the student who is taking it, on index cards, with the book title and the date it was checked out and placing them in an index card folder with student names, are effective ways of keeping track of the collection. Students may be recruited to help keep a classroom library organized during the school year, and to send reminders about overdue books.

For teachers who want more control, a Library Integrated System (LIS) will offer a searchable catalog and student accounts. The North Pacific Union Confer-

Suggested Further Reading

• Mona Kirby's *An Introduction to Collection Development for School Librarians* (https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/introduction-collection-development-school-librarians-second-edition) is a practical text that includes worksheets and guidelines for evaluating a collection, creating a collection-development plan, and purchasing titles. Kerby additionally covers school library book challenges. While this book is geared toward those with librarian certification and training, it is readable and practical for anyone working in a school setting.

• Catapano, Fleming, and Elias provide a practical perspective on building a classroom library, with ideas that may be useful to those in multigrade classrooms or small-school libraries in the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*: http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/.

• Audrey Campbell and Joy Palmer provided step-by-step details on organizing the small school library beyond the scope of this article in their 2011 article in this journal: https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae20117305
53805.pdf.

• Named one of the Association for Library Service to Children Great Websites for Kids, *The Children's Book Review* is a resource that publishes reviews and book lists of books for kids of all ages: https://www.thechildrensbookreview.com/.

• A subscription is required to access the reviews database, but Reviews of the Week are available for free on the *Hornbook* website, making it another source of book reviews for collection selectors: https://www.hbook.com/.

• The Resources for School Librarians is a website maintained by retired School Librarian Linda Bertland, which links to information about teaching and learning, information access, technology, and program administration. It contains a wealth of practical resources including lesson plans, excellent examples of collection development policies, and ideas for facility designs: https://www.sldirectory.com/index.html.

• *Banning Books From the Classroom: How to Handle Cries for Censorship* published by *Education World* provides suggestions to avoid controversy in the classroom and how to handle controversy when it occurs: https://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/banning-books-from-the-classroom.shtml.

• This page provides an excerpt from the Intellectual Freedom Manual on responding to informal challenges or expressions of concern: https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/respond.

• The above articles, along with other readings and resources are linked on the Library Management in Small Schools LibGuide, which may be accessed at https://wallawalla.libguides.com/educ497.

ence recommends two such systems for automating school libraries: Readerware and Resource Mate.[16] A classroom library or smaller school library could use a site such as LibraryThing (https://librarything.com/), to offer a searchable online catalog and even track checkouts in an online system without teachers having to learn and maintain a larger automated system.

What Comes Next?

Teachers who complete these four steps: *evaluate, plan, purchase,* and *organize* are likely to see an increase in student use of the library collection and space. Once a collection is organized, it becomes easier to evaluate using a particular emphasis, such as a diversity audit, to track books used during a school year and discard those that are not or to review books covering specific topics. The existing collection-development plan can help identify titles currently in a collection that do not match the organization's goals and may also be used alongside the evaluation results to determine which new titles should be purchased.

Creating an organized school library requires time and persistence, but the rewards will be students who have access to reading material to support their course work, are more likely to enjoy reading, and achieve high test scores across the curriculum. ✐

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Christy Scott, MISLT, *is an Associate Librarian at the Peterson Memorial Library at Walla Walla University in College Place, Washington, U.S.A., where she coordinates information literacy in general studies and senior research classes. She holds a Master's degree in Information Science and Learning Technologies from the University of Missouri (Columbia, Missouri, U.S.A.) and a BS in Elementary Education from Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.). Her professional interests include children's literature and services, technology in libraries, and media and information literacy. During her time at Walla Walla University, she has developed sessions to help future teachers develop and work with library collections, as well as reference services and information literacy across the curriculum.*

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