

School Library Collection Development Policies in Indiana (1975-1985)

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There are four major pieces of literature in our field which set the framework for this descriptive report on the past, current and future changes in policies related to collection development in school library media centers. The authors are Judith Myers¹, Helen R. Adams², Frances M. McDonald³, Jacqueline C. Mancall, and Christopher C. Swisher⁴. Each of these writings should be studied in relationship to what is reported here in order for the library science student, teacher, researcher, or school media specialist practitioner to grasp the changes which are upon us. Some district level media supervisors are in the process of evolving from individuals who duplicate standard policy statements which are limited to general selection procedures and specific defensive steps in reaction to reconsideration challenges, to leaders in local policy negotiation resulting in written documents which reflect plans for future action through collection evaluation, resource sharing, and curriculum support.

Meyers writes that, "Policy is a rationale for decision making and action. (Policies) are said to point to

desirable courses of action, while leaving flexibility for pursuing many avenues as long as they are in keeping with the spirit and the intent of policy." Adams has given us a constructive method for developing policies on a local basis. She clearly shows that written policy, negotiated with the School Board and other necessary community members and educators, fosters not only "continuity and stability" but serves to educate decision-makers in the purpose and future of the school library media program.

McDonald has outlined the specific components of the standard selection policy document found in most schools which have adopted a written plan. Emphasis is on a definition of the "criteria for selection" and "procedures for reviewing challenged resources." Mancall and Swisher have described trends in collection development which demand new components be added to policy statements. These trends raise the following areas of concern for policy development, just to mention a few: "community analysis," "copyright," "circulation analysis," "expanding microcomputer and video instructional media," "weeding

and evaluation of collections," and "interlibrary loan networks."

Content Analysis of Indiana Policies

In 1985, a letter was sent to each school district in Indiana requesting a copy of the current "district level school library media center selection or collection development policy." One hundred and forty-one policies which could be matched with district policies on file with the Indiana State Department of Education were received at Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science. Until the mid-1970s the State had been required to have a policy statement on file for each district which received Federal funding.

A content analysis comparing the 141 districts which could be matched allowed for identification of the following changes in selection policy content from 1975 to 1985.

1. In 72% of the districts, a majority of the policy content had clearly been revised or a totally new policy had been written.

2. The average length of the policy had increased from 410 words to 766 words, or from two pages on the average to four pages.

3. The most common document used to justify selection decisions in policies from both time periods was the "School Library Bill of Rights" (cited in at least half of the policies). "The Right to Read" and portions of the AASL/AECT standards were cited in fewer than 10% of the policies in either year.

4. In 50% of the 1975 policies a statement which indicated that the collection was built in relationship to the school's curriculum could be found. Such statements were found in 80% of the policies in 1985.

5. Statements which concerned "weeding" were found in 17% of the 1975 policies and 35% of the 1985 policies. In only a few isolated cases, however, was there description of the weeding **method** or **process**.

6. Statements which concerned "how to handle gifts" were found in 18% of the 1975 policies and 42% of the 1985 policies.

7. The percentage of policies which contained a statement to the effect that "the responsibility for selecting materials is delegated from the Board to the Librarian" increased from 27% in 1975 to 58% in 1985.

8. The terms used most frequently to describe criteria for selection of quality materials in both time periods were "authoritative-ness," "accurate," "unbiased," "meets curricular need," "reputation of the author," and "reading level." Seldom were such terms defined or examples given.

9. In under 5% of the policies from both time periods were separate selection criteria described for nonprint materials. Methods for previewing nonprint materials were never mentioned.

10. 58% of the policies in 1975 included a process for reconsideration of materials, or "what to do when there is a challenge." 80% of the written policies in 1985 had such procedures outlined.

11. In 1975, the principal or the superintendent were given most frequently as the first person to contact if one were to issue a formal challenge to any library materials. By 1985, the school librarian was given more frequently than the superintendent as the first contact, but still less frequently than the principal.

12. None of the policies in 1975 contained statements which established what would happen to challenged materials while the review or reconsideration process took its full course. In 1985, 22% of the policies had specific statements that "the challenged materials will remain available for circulation" while the review proceeds.

13. A dramatic growth in the number of policies which gave space to description of "specific tasks of the review or reconsideration committee" took place over the ten years. 15% of the policies outlined such items as committee membership, when the committee would meet, how hearings were to take place, when the Board would become involved, etc. This increased to 55% of the policies in 1985.

14. The most common form used in reconsideration cases is the "1963 Citizens Request" from the National Council of English Teachers. This form, or one developed from the original, was included in 18% of the policies in 1975, and 61% of the policies in 1985.

The content of the typical school library collection development policy in 1985, at least in Indiana, reflected what seemed to be the overriding concern of "defending the collection" or "defending intellectual freedom." While such concern is probably legitimate and written policies can increase the chance of a fair review and increase the probability that the material in question will be retained^{5, 6} (provided the written policy is one which has been reviewed and approved by the librarian, administration and the school board), very little space is given to other issues related to collection development. In the typical policy, over 60% of the document concerns "how will we

defend what we have purchased?" Little or no space is given to "how we plan selection with teachers," "how we weed and update the collection," "how we integrate the resources with the curriculum," or "how we plan with other library collections in mind."

There is merit to the argument that there is a difference between policy and procedures. But most current policies reflect very extensive procedures which have been agreed to in order to possibly defend one book. It would seem that such attention should also be given to the process by which school library media specialists operate at one of their highest levels of professional work, "selecting and promoting the very best teaching aids and reading materials." If selection committees are not defined and activated, previewing procedures not described and enacted, and plans for collection updating and budget allocations not projected in writing, then how can the library media specialist retain a professional standing? Already too many professional decisions have been given over to a routine "check of the acquisition pen" based solely on the impressions gleaned from the review aids.^{7, 8, 9} Most recent surveys of school librarians^{10, 11, 12} indicate that up to half the nation's school library collections have been "developed" without a written policy in place. While a majority of our school library media specialists today can pull from a file a "written selection policy," it is rather unlikely that a written plan for collection development has been locally negotiated to state the direction for the time and money to be invested, nor has guiding educational philosophy been defined which will establish objectives for the plan.

Issues for Future Policies

Several important recent documents clearly give direction to the issues which will have an impact on future collections in school library media programs. Loertscher, Ho, and Bowie have written extensively concerning collection mapping and relationships between the library media center collection and enhancement of the curriculum.^{13, 14} Collection mapping methods may require greater definition of levels of collection development in selected study areas. Policy developers in larger school districts will want to consider the progress in the academic library field as a national online Conspectus has been in the making over the past decade.¹⁵ Although the same details may not be necessary, identification of the various levels of collection commitment for different subject areas can lead to valuable information which must be exchanged if schools and public libraries plan to be involved in networking efforts.

Epler¹⁶ has documented widely the Access Pennsylvania project and the impact of student access to materials through online and CD-ROM systems on the school curriculum. Doll¹⁷ and Weeks¹⁸ have documented the potential for the school library media specialist and the school's collection in future networks with public and academic library neighbors.

Dewing¹⁹ and Scholtz²⁰ have documented the explosion in video titles for library circulation, and the impact is just beginning to be felt at the school library level. Niemeier²¹ has described the need for clearer policies which deal with the copyright issues and their effect on collections. Callison²² has documented the need for local teacher and student preview and evaluation

of microcomputer programs.

Research from Bertland²³, Mancall & Drott²⁴, and Callison²⁵ has established the potential for the use of circulation analysis and citation analysis in collection development decisions. Work in the public library field has shown the value of the community analysis process.²⁶ Such processes also have merit for the school library arena. Outlines of community features, characteristics of the student population, and curriculum mapping,²⁷ are potentially data-rich areas for development of collection policies.

Buckley²⁹ and Davie³⁰ have documented the need for greater awareness on the part of school library media specialists of the resources needed for the "exceptional student," yet very little appears in policies concerning how such collections will be developed.

Collection development policies for school libraries in Indiana have increased in length and in the number of collection issues addressed. A great deal of this increase, however, has been in relation to the possibility of "challenges" to selection. More time and effort needs to be devoted over the next five years to the issues which relate to the actual planning of collections. Many school library material budgets are at a "no-growth" level because of inflation over the past decade. Dated materials need to be weeded from the shelf, and more money needs to be available to replace those materials and, thus, to increase the amount of quality information.

Information access, cooperation and resource sharing, copyright guidelines, curriculum mapping, and clear involvement of teachers in the selection process have all become more critical than the defen-

sive or protective procedures developed over the past ten years. In order to justify more funding for school library materials, school librarians must take the offensive and demonstrate clearly what the possibilities can be through collection planning tied to curriculum development.

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