

Strategies for Weeding the Small Library Collection

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Description: Ms. Freiband will discuss the following in her presentation: the justification, rationale and benefits of weeding; qualities or skills useful in carrying out a successful weeding project in the small library; what is needed to know about the collection in order to carry out a weeding project; planning the weeding project and who should be involved; key decisions to be made, what should be documented and how; the connection between weeding and other aspects of collection development; specific techniques or strategies used to weed the collection; follow-up to weeding, including disposal of weeded items, and options available.

Dr. Susan Freiband is a retired librarian and library educator. She currently does volunteer work at Beth El Hebrew Congregation Dimond Library, Alexandria, VA. Dr. Freiband is also a volunteer librarian at the Arlington Country Public Library and at Green Spring Gardens Horticultural Library. She taught at the library school, University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras, for twenty-one years before retiring in 2008. She has her PhD in library service from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ and her Master's in Library Science from Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, TX. Besides working in Temple libraries, she has experience working in academic libraries. She is a member of ALA and AJL.

I. Introduction

A. Aims

1. To present useful ideas about weeding a small library collection.
2. More specifically, to explain the rationale for weeding, skills needed, planning a weeding project, techniques used for weeding, weeding procedures, disposal of weeded items.
3. To encourage librarians to consider weeding a necessary, important part of collection development, a means of renewing and revitalizing the collection.

B. Scope, Limitation

1. Broad scope, including Temple and synagogue libraries, Jewish community and school libraries, with collections not over 10,000 titles.
2. Focus is on print collections, particularly book collections, traditional libraries, rather than online materials, digital or virtual libraries.
3. Focus is on techniques or strategies carried out by librarians or library workers rather than online materials, digital or virtual libraries.

C. Basic Definitions

1. “Weeding”: the process of removing items from the collection no longer relevant or appropriate, not used, obsolete, in poor physical condition, duplicates.
2. “Collection”: print and other type of resources physically available and freely accessible in a library, for use by patrons.
3. “Collection development”: cyclic process of forming a library collection, including selection, acquisition, evaluation, and weeding.

D. Relation Between Weeding and Other Aspects of Collection Development

1. Vital step in developing and managing a library collection.
2. Closely interrelated with evaluation or assessment of the collection.
3. Flip side of selection and acquisition, based on similar criteria.

E. Basic Assumptions Underlying the Presentation

1. That the collection is active and growing, not static, not existing for preservation, research or archival/historical purposes.
2. That space for housing the print collection is fixed and contained.
3. That the collection exists to serve the informational, recreational, educational, cultural needs and interests of its user community.
4. That the collection is used by a variety of patrons, in different ways, for different purposes, which may change.
5. That these patrons can freely browse the collection, which is open and accessible.

II. Justification or Rationale for Weeding

A. Reasons for Weeding

1. To remove unwanted, unneeded, unusable or inappropriate items from the collection.
2. To free space on the shelves, make room for the collection to grow.
3. To allow users to more effectively browse the collection; find the items they need.
4. To update, upgrade and improve the quality of the collection; revitalize it.
5. To insure that the collection reflects the guidelines and criteria included in the collection development policy statement.
6. To make possible the renewal and expansion of the collection, in accordance with library planning, including the library aims and goals.

B. Benefits or Value of Weeding

1. Eliminates items in poor physical condition, out of date or obsolete, not within collection policy guideline; not satisfying user needs and interests.
2. Allows space on the shelves for the collection to expand, grow.
3. Makes the collection more accessible, finding specific titles easier.
4. Results in a more up-to-date, relevant, useful and accessible collection.
5. Helps insure that the collection reflects stated guidelines and criteria included in the collection development policy statement.
6. Facilitates renewal and expansion of the collection.
7. Facilitates staff's understanding and knowledge of the collection.
8. Provides a means of enhancing cooperation between libraries.
9. Provides a possible source of revenue for the library.
10. Offers users the opportunity to obtain or purchase books at reasonable prices, fostering good public relation with the community.

III. Qualities and Skills Useful in Weeding

A. Important Qualities

1. Critical thinking, good judgment, common sense.
2. Insight and perception; empathy with staff and users.
3. Knowledge of user needs and interests, as well as their use of the collection.
4. Knowledge of the collection, its strengths and weaknesses.
5. Knowledge of library plans and policy, past, present and future.
6. Knowledge of actual and proposed library programs and services.
7. Understanding of library fiscal situation, budget and budgetary constraints.
8. Knowledge of present and future changes, internal and external.
9. Understanding of interior design, space considerations and needs.

B. Useful Skills

1. Good planning and project management skills.
2. Accurate observational and data collection skills.
3. Good organizational and time management skills.
4. Ability to collaborate and coordinate effectively with staff and users.
5. Good written and verbal communication skills, including interpersonal communication skills.
6. Ability to make connections; put plans into action.

IV. Beginning a Weeding Project

A. What is Needed in Terms of Knowledge About the Collection

1. Aims, goals of the collections, its scope, and areas included and excluded.
2. Strong and weak areas of the collection, those areas most useful and used.
3. Selection criteria used to build the collection.
4. Funds available to purchase books and other materials for the collection.
5. Gifts and donation patterns, other ways of acquiring items for the collection.
6. Patterns of use and users of the collection.
7. Furniture, equipment and space restraints relating to the collection.
8. Future plans and projects relating to the collection.
9. Interlibrary loan, other cooperative or collaborative efforts relating to the collection.

B. What is Needed in Terms of Personnel

1. Involvement of staff in planning and carrying out a weeding project.
2. In a one person library, identification of volunteers who could help.
3. Collaboration with management and users, especially those most knowledgeable about subject matter of the collection.

C. Other Aspects of Project Planning

1. Determining the time frame of the project.
2. Identifying the specific part of the collection to be weeded.
3. Writing down **procedures**: setting goals of the project, determining subject area or part of the collection to be weeded, time frame, specific techniques to be used; separating possible titles for weeding; inviting staff, management, users, scholars to examine these; making final decisions of titles to be weeded; removing records of each title from catalog and shelf list, as well as library ownership marks (book pockets, cards), stamping withdrawn, deciding how to dispose of each title weeded.
4. Assigning responsibilities for carrying out different tasks.
5. Determining costs involved in carrying out the project.
6. Reporting results of the project; when, where, to whom.
7. Evaluating the success of a weeding project: positive feedback from users in terms of improved use of the collection, better understanding and knowledge about the collection, improved ability to manage growth of the collection.

D. Weeding Criteria

1. Poor physical condition: incomplete (missing pages or parts), binding torn or frayed, type small, illegible, paper thin, fragile; mold/fungus.
2. Nonfiction titles; out of date, obsolete, misleading or incorrect information.
3. Duplicate, when there is no reason for more than one copy.
4. Older edition of a newer work which has updated and replaced it; availability of more suitable titles or more current information on the Internet.
5. Content inappropriate for the scope of the library's collection.
6. Written in a style difficult to read or understand; inappropriate for user level; not relevant to user needs and interests; not used or circulated (in three years).
7. Nonfiction titles: lacking important parts, index, table of contents, illustrations (not clear or labeled).
8. Written in a language users can't read or understand.
9. Poor or negative critical reviews; negative user feedback.
10. Qualifications of author, editor, translator questionable or in doubt.

E. Title Generally NOT Weeded (even if they otherwise meet criteria)

1. Rare books
2. Books written by local authors or members of the congregation, books part of the history or archives of the congregations
3. Books considered classics or key/important titles in the field, especially those out of print, costly, difficult or impossible to replace.

V. Techniques or Strategies for Weeding the Library Collection

A. Those Based on Direct Examination: Observation of Books on the Shelves

1. Those in poor physical condition: broken spines, binding frayed or broken, torn or ripped, mold or fungus.
2. Those incomplete, parts or pieces missing.
3. Those difficult to read or use, unattractive, fragile/thin paper, illegible type.
4. Duplicate copies of a single title.
5. Older editions; out of date, obsolete, misleading or incorrect information.
6. Titles not within the scope of the collection, or written in a language that most users can't understand, or at a level that is inappropriate for users.
7. Nonfiction titles over 35 year old, publisher before 1980.
8. Nonfiction titles lacking table of contents or index; poor quality illustrations, not labeled.

- B. Those Based on Examination of Circulation Records, In-House Use**
 - 1. Those not checked out during the past three years.
 - 2. Those not pulled from shelves or used in the library.
 - 3. Those not requested or selected; returned or subject to negative feedback from users.

- C. Those Based on Comparison of the Collection with Guides. Catalogs, Bibliographies, Lists of Recommended or Awarded Books**
 - 1. Checking titles on standard, well known well regarded bibliographies or lists of recommended books.
 - 2. Checking titles on lists of books that have received awards or special recognition.
 - 3. Checking titles against catalogs of similar libraries that are known to have strong collections.

- D. Those Based on User/Professional Input or Guidance**
 - 1. Opinions of scholars, experts in the field, based on their knowledge of the content of the title.
 - 2. Positive feedback from ordinary users about the title after they have read it.
 - 3. Feedback from management or staff about possible value or usefulness of the title in the light of projects, plans or changes in the library.

- VI. Disposal of Weeded Items**
 - A. In house options: library sale of weeded books; give away books for users to pick up; mending; rebinding; replacing with new copy or new edition.
 - B. Other options: donating to other libraries/nonprofit organizations, cooperative sharing (exchange); sale to other libraries/nonprofit organizations, or to book dealers.
 - C. Titles that should **not** be included in either option: books in poor physical condition, incomplete, with outdated, obsolete or incorrect information; recycling; trash.
 - D. Special case: disposal of religious books (siddurim, bibles, sacred texts)

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