The importance of a collection development policy for the school library

By Kumari Macdougall

Snapshot

Kumari Macdougall, a librarianship student at Charles Sturt University, explores the importance of creating a collection development policy to assist in the smooth running of the library service. Kumari describes the impact of a CDP and its relevance to all areas of the library's operations.

What is a Collection development policy?

A library's collection conforming to the **IFLA/UNESCO School library Manifesto 1999** (international) and **ALIA Free access to information** (local) standards provides users best access to their various information needs. Therefore, a library's collection is one of its most important assets. A Collection Development Policy (CDP) lends the framework for development and maintenance of both physical and digital sections of the collection. A CDP may include components relating to a collection such as its mission, purpose, scope, selections, acquisitions, weeding, evaluation, disaster management and preservation. When writing the CDP, it is essential to include only the sections which are relevant to the library's collection, for example, a library may not have a digital collection due to its limited budget. Therefore, setting a selection criterion for e-resources may not be necessary, and can be amended in the future if a digital collection is added. The CDP is a document prepared by a Teacher Librarian or Librarian and signed off by the senior management of the organisation. A CDP is a cohesive and easily understandable document that details how the collection is built and maintained, and why some difficult decisions are made by the staff, such as not accepting some donations.

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Why is it important?

A CDP provides staff procedures and guidelines to follow at various stages of the collection's life cycle.
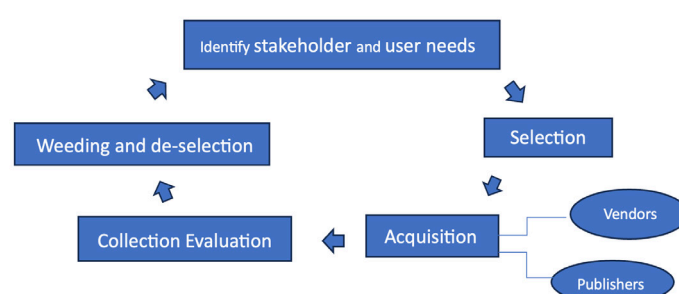

Figure 1

By providing these guidelines, a CDP assists staff uniformity in decision making through consistency in selection, acquisition, de-selection, and weeding of resources as well as protection, preservation, and disaster management.

The case study at Mzuzu University Library highlights the adverse effects of not having a CDP in the library. In this case study, researchers found that the absence of guidelines or procedures for staff to consult at selection, acquisition, weeding and preservation, had negatively impacted the processes in collection development and maintenance at the university library (Chaputula & Kanyundo, 2014). Furthermore, it was found that when selecting resources, staff had created their own criterion for acquiring resources. This inconsistency in selecting and purchasing resources and decision making was due to a lack of set guidelines. It also affected the collection by accepting donations of outdated resources. The existing collection did not meet the user needs due to not identifying the users and stakeholders. Additionally, this study found that there were no set guidelines in weeding and de-selection of the collection, hence the inconsistencies in the process included staff weeding on impulse or weeding without understanding the process.

Now that we understand the impact of not having a CDP, we must consider how each component make the CDP important to a library. CDP is the device which connects the library to its **parent organisation's overall vision, goals and objectives**. Example, linking the school library's mission to the overall school's assists the library to clearly focus on how to support the school in achieving its vision.

Defining the **purpose** of the collection in the CDP provides guidance on what it must achieve overall and gives 'the reader a realistic expectation of the application of the policy' (Levenson, 2019, p.212). For instance, a school library may aspire to maintain a current and relevant collection to meet the information demands of students, staff, and the wider community.

Establishing the **scope** of the collection in the CDP identifies who this policy applies to and the person responsible for the collection, which in a school library would be the library manager.

Identifying library **users** in the CDP is critical to building the collection. We build the collection to satisfy users information needs, wants, and demands. In 2019, Okwu and Echem in their study, *The influence of CDP in user satisfaction*, found that a 'CDP could enhance the user satisfaction and recommended that it should guide in selecting resources to ensure user satisfaction' (p.15). Therefore, users or user groups should be determined early on and their applicable diversity (such as cultural or linguistical) should be considered, to assist in assessing their educational, recreational, and social information needs. Assessing user needs benefits in narrowing the selection and acquisition of resources to what is needed and ultimately reduces associated costs. Allocating funds to much-needed areas would aid in building a substantial equitable collection.

Identifying **stakeholders** is also essential to developing the collection. Stakeholders may or may not be users but will influence the way the collection is built. An example is in a school library, teachers, parents, the Department of Education, school council and donors would be stakeholders who may influence the building and maintenance of the library's collection.

Another stakeholder group is vendors and publishers. This group is especially influential when a library allows a vendor to select resources on behalf of the library.

Setting a **selection** criterion in the CDP, for both physical and digital resources, guides staff to select quality resources to satisfy users' educational, recreational, and social information needs, and assists in building an equitable collection. When setting a selection criteria, consider the Canadian School Libraries (CSL) '**Equity-informed selection**' (2023,-a) to assist in building a diverse collection. A suitable selection criterion would overcome and mitigate the challenges such as censorship, bias, individual opinions in selection and be objective, a recent example being the censorship of Roald Dahl books. Hartsfield & Kimmel, (2021) recommends six selection principles which could be used in selecting books to minimize the number of controversial books in a library collection. When selecting a book, the librarian could check whether the content -

> 'support[s] the curriculum, [is] interesting to children, address[es] the developmental needs of children, represent[s] the academic excellence, authority & accuracy, and provides varied aspects of the topic of subject' (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2021, p.422).

Another advantage in setting a selection criterion arises when a patron requests a controversial resource(s), staff have a valid and authoritative reason to reject or refuse the request. Levenson (2019) states that a CDP assists staff to refuse or reject acquiring the resource on the grounds of the policy (p. 210). Conforming to local standards assists in selecting resources such as movies and games as we must be guided by the **Australian Classification ratings** (AGCB, n.d.).

The staff should also determine the selection criterion for e-resources. In 2018, Okogwu & Ekere found in their study, *CDPs of e-resource collections in academic libraries* in East Nigeria, the importance of a CDP which includes a selection criterion for e-resources as it assisted in maintaining a quality e-resource collection (p.23). The E-resource collection could patron driven (based on user needs and requests) or vendor driven selection. In a vendor driven selection, a vendor may drop a catalogue of books to the schools' online environment at a set time. Monitoring the download frequency of a resource would assist in deciding whether to keep the respective resource.

Guidelines should be set in the CDP as to 'what to do' with well-intended **donations and gifts**, whether it may be physical items or financial contributions. This will help staff avoid tricky situations, build positive relations with patrons, and promote the image of the library. It is better to determine a criterion in advance for donations rather than not accepting any donations, because donations such as books in good condition or some rare books for the school's archive would help save much needed funds. Financial donations can help expand the collection or the library programs, and by not accepting any donations, this valuable help would be unavailable.

In the CDP, establish guidelines and criterion for **purchasing**, and **engaging vendors** and **publishers**. Identifying primary and secondary vendors and publishers to engage, also whether to maintain standing orders. Decisions in these areas would provide staff clear guidelines when purchasing library resources as these are important decisions in the acquisitions process. The CDP can support staff as they negotiate which vendor to engage. Choices might be made between a local bookshop where a library could purchase fewer, more select resources at a higher cost or the alternative of engaging a popular low-cost national or international vendor. These are important decisions to make when building collections with limited budgets. The CDP encourages library staff to engage with vendors and publishers who are satisfactory and offer advantages to the library. This builds positive long-term relationships with them.

When 'purchasing' e-resources including e-databases, libraries only get 'access' to the content. Therefore, it is important before entering a contract to consider individual licensing agreements. Licensing agreements may contain usage, rights and obligations of each party, copyrights, and warranties and indemnities and the contract period. Before signing the contract, staff must first read these documents carefully and clarify with the vendor whether 'what is included' matches the 'what is needed' by the library. It is also important to review the agreement carefully before renewing at the end of a term. Setting these guidelines in the CDP assists staff to make better decisions when purchasing e-resources.

Evaluation of the collection is a critical step in developing and maintaining a meaningful collection and it is an ongoing process. At the time of evaluation, it is beneficial in identifying current user needs, weaknesses and strengths of the collection and users' accessibility to the collection. Results of this process could identify and define the collection's future and assists collection mapping. Evaluation could be based on user-centred methods, collection-centred methods or could be a mixture of both. For either method listed, collecting data could involve either quantitative or qualitative methods. When evaluating the general collection, '**Diversity Audits**' compiled by the Canadian School Libraries would be a good resource to follow to maintain an equitable collection (2023-b). Remember, it is important to evaluate the digital collections, too. In Okogwu & Ekere (2018) study of e-resource collections, they found that e-resources should be evaluated based on the 'quality & usage, access, cost-effectiveness, breadth, audience and

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uniqueness of e-resources' (p.22). Evaluating the digital collection assists in determining the cost-effectiveness of existing vendors and publishers by examining whether the library is getting value for money, adequate usage and accessibility of the online content. These areas should all be reviewed before renewal.

Providing a criterion for **de-selection or weeding** in the CDP assists in facing challenging situations, such as excluding some genres from your collection, censorship, and individual opinions, by making them much easier to navigate. Criterion should include how to identify *what to weed, when to weed*, and *how to discard* weeded items. Identifying items to weed may depend on the library resources, for example, fiction or non-fiction, relevance, or currency of the content. It is also good to determine how to discard these materials ethically and sustainably. These

questions apply to resources in both physical and digital collection. For the items in the physical collection consider whether to donate discarded items to other school libraries locally and or to a charitable organisation to send to a school in a developing country or to send them to the recycling plant to reuse in some form. These decisions assist in reducing waste and disposal in an ethical and sustainable way. When considering this process for e-resources, it is important to discuss with the vendor how to discard these items. Clarify this at the time of entering into the licensing agreement. Sometimes it could be easier to archive or remove the link to the database depending on the Licensing agreement.

Disaster management, preservation and *sustainability* are important components to be included in the CDP. Protection and security of the collection from natural disasters, such as fire, flood, pests, power failure is crucial to the library's continuity. An example is Libraries Tasmania's simple, yet important resource that details items staff should consider in the event of fire, flood, pests, and mould (LT, 2023 June 14). When a disaster response plan or *disaster management* (DM) plan is included in the CDP, in the event of a natural disaster, staff could act fast and save much of the collection. A good DM plan would include who to contact in the event of any disasters, and what actions to take, especially in salvaging the collection such as which area of the collection takes priority. In the event of a disaster, it is also essential for the staff to know whether the library will continue to provide access to its collection. When all these guidelines and processes are set in the DM and included in the CDP, staff can continue to offer library services as the online digital collection, and library management software could be accessed remotely and provide access to its salvaged physical collection. When writing a disaster management plan, there is useful information resources regarding disaster management available at the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). ALIA provide **guidelines** (ALIA, 2016-b), a **template** (ALIA, 2016-c) and **scenarios for staff training sessions** (ALIA, 2016-d) for libraries which could be adopted in preparing a disaster management plan for any library. *Prevention* plays a significant role in disaster management in any organisation. Therefore, it is essential for any library to have their own prevention plan or a checklist. The prevention plan or checklist should be completed at regular intervals to ensure the collection is protected. When considering the protection and security of the digital collection, it is necessary to plan for regular backups, protection from hackers, viruses, spam, and illegal downloading. The protection of sensitive patron information is paramount and there should be safeguards in place to protect these data. Furthermore, the checklist must include necessary actions staff should take if library security is compromised.

Preservation is another vital area to consider in maintaining the collection. Although most of the unwanted resources are discarded during the de-selection and weeding process, there may be some which the library would like to keep. Therefore, having a criterion to preserve these resources and methods of accessing the content in the future is important. Situations that need to be considered and addressed include how to act if a print book, CD or DVD is damaged and if obsolete equipment should be kept ensuring access to content. Addressing these is an essential component of a CDP. For example, a movie may

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be on a DHS DVD and may need a DVD player to access it. Therefore, if the library decides to preserve this DVD for future use, then the DVD player must be preserved too.

It is important to make the CDP available to the community to view and comment upon, as it makes staff decision making transparent and accountable. Further, it provides new staff with an overview of the library's collection development and maintenance. It also aids all staff to cite the CDP guidelines when faced with challenging situations and to keep the difficult decisions more professional than personal.

Selection De-selection Acquisition Users Scope Vendors Donations Weeding Publishers Vision Preservation Security Diversity Evaluation Disaster Management Sustainability

Collection development is a perpetual, cyclic process. Frempong-Kore (2021) recommended CDP must be 'reviewed periodically to ensure the effectiveness and consistency and [staff] must reinforce the use of CDP...' (p.21) to reap the maximum benefits of having a CDP. The importance of having a CDP is much more significant than before as libraries are moving towards *Smart* libraries. *Smart* libraries are based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) approaches such as smart acquisitions and the Internet of things (IoT). Robotic systems may improve traditional library services and captures user needs more efficiently (Bi, et al., 2022). The existence of a CDP which is easy to read and with clear guidelines is vital for any library, even more so when the library has less human oversight.

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Author Note: I would like to dedicate the article to Dr. Jane Garner at Charles Sturt University who instilled in me a passion for 'Collections'.

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