

Assignment 3 - Reference Collection Evaluation Plan

Current State of the Collection

The reference collection in my elementary school library includes the following items:

Print

- Two World Book encyclopedia sets. One from and the other from.
- Several dictionaries and thesauruses including:
 - The Canadian Junior Dictionary, 1979
 - The World Book Dictionary, 1990
 - Scholastic Children's Dictionary, 1996
 - The Oxford Elementary School Dictionary, 2002
 - Gage Canadian Thesaurus (class set), 1995
- Several Atlases including:
 - The Reader's Digest Children's Atlas of the World, 2000
 - The World Book Atlas, 2000
 - Rand McNally Classroom Atlas of Canada and the World, 2008
- One globe 1958 - outdated and in poor condition
- Canadian Geographic Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada from 2019 and in excellent condition
- Sto:lo - Coast Salish Historical Atlas, 2001
- Being Ts'elxwéyeqw: First Peoples' Voices and History from the Chilliwack-Fraser Valley, British Columbia, 2018
- Several Encyclopedias including:
 - Wildlife of the World Encyclopedia (full volume set) by Marshall Cavendish, 1994
 - The Encyclopedia of British Columbia, 2000
 - The World Book Student Discovery Encyclopedia, 2000
 - The World Book Encyclopedia full volume set, 2001 and 2004
 - World Book Encyclopedia of Flags (full volume set), 2007
 - World Book Discovery Encyclopedia, 2009
- Reader's Digest, How Was It Done: The Story of Human Ingenuity Through The Ages, 1995
- Reader's Digest, How Did It Really Happen? Decide What You Believe About History's Intriguing Mysteries, 2000

Digital

- Unfiltered and stable access to the internet and a variety of reference websites such as Wikipedia and the Internet Public Library from over 60 school-owned devices as well as the freedom to use personal devices.
- Criterion-on-Demand - access to educationally relevant feature films and biographies used in Canadian educational institutions.

- Access to BC Digital Classroom including:
 - Learn 360 - an interactive media-on-demand service for K-12 teachers
 - World Book - Early Learning, Kids, Discover, Science Power, Advanced, Student, Timelines,
 - Know BC
 - Gale - Global Issues in Context, National Geographic Kids, Power Search, Science in Context, Canada in Context
 - Novelist K-8 Plus
 - Magazines - General, Kids, Teen
 - EBSCO Experience - Explora Middle, Explora Secondary, Consumer Health Complete
 - Canoe Kids

Evaluation

According to Riedling, “A good reference source is one that serves to answer questions, and a bad reference source is one that fails to answer questions” (Riedling, 2013). For the purpose of this assignment, I will evaluate my school library’s reference section using some of Riedling’s key evaluation areas:

- Scope - considers the purpose of the source and its intended audience
- Accuracy - considers the reliability of the facts, the age of the information, as well as insight into the creator of the content
- Bias - evaluates articles for objectivity and fairness as well as obvious biases
- Accessibility and Diversity - the understanding that reference materials should be accessible to the entire student population regardless of limitations and the collection must provide the school community with inclusive information from different cultural perspectives
- Cost - the cost of print v digital materials

Scope

With respect to the print material in the library’s collection, many students in the school simply cannot access the material, either from the perspective that they cannot read the material, can read the material but have limited ability making sense of it, or don’t know how to use the material in effective ways. For example, understanding that entries in an encyclopedia are listed alphabetically. A small number of students in the school can independently access and process material currently held in the print reference section. With respect to the two volumes of World Book Encyclopedia, the years 2001 and 2004, housed in the school library, are inaccessible for large numbers of the school population and lack contemporary content. They do, however, contain subjects that are uniform from discipline to discipline.

Concerning the digital reference content in the library's collection, more students can access the material when compared to the print options available. The digital encyclopedias, dictionaries, and databases we have on offer are curated in ways that appeal to different age groups. Some contain more pictures and fewer words on a page, while others offer external links that leads to a deeper understanding of the subject. Contemporary issues are easily and quickly added to digital versions that were not possible under print conditions and the subject coverage remains uniform from topic to topic.

Accuracy

Concerning both print and digital content in the library's collection, "It is rare to discover errors in encyclopedia sets, since editorial standards are high in encyclopedia publishing" (Riedling, 2013). Both print and digital content in the collection is sourced from reliable publishers or vetted by respected consortiums such as [BC ERAC](#) who evaluate and curate resources for k-12 schools, so the accuracy is more than suitable for elementary school. It should be noted that no encyclopedia is free from errors whether it is written by a paid group of qualified professionals from the likes of Encyclopedia Britannica or crowd-developed by like-minded passionate individuals with content expertise. In addition to encyclopedias, there are numerous examples of reference items that are out of date and lack accuracy such as the globe and atlases. In contrast, there exist some strong reference materials of indigenous content written by or in consultation with indigenous leaders that are both accurate and current. These included Sto:lo - Coast Salish Historical Atlas, 2001 and Being Ts'elxwéyeqw: First Peoples' Voices and History from the Chilliwack-Fraser Valley, British Columbia, 2018.

Bias

Bias, in the print section of the library's collection, is most obvious in the World Book Encyclopedias 2001 and 2004. The bias appears in the form of cultural preference over articles and content relating to the United States. One must be aware of this bias when constructing world views, processing important events, and discussing influential people. Students in elementary may develop a distorted view of place and experience difficulty separating USA content from Canadian.

Concerning the digital reference content in the library's collection, biases in encyclopedias like World Book Kids and World Book Students aren't so obvious but are still prevalent. For example, when I enter the search term ' Air Force' the first retrieved entry discusses the United States Air Force. The encyclopedia can't access my location and provide more personalized results based on geolocation.

Accessibility and Diversity

On the whole, the library's digital reference materials are far more accessible and diverse than their print equivalents. Perhaps the most notable difference is that both the digital encyclopedias and databases are voice-enabled and offer screen readers, so even if students experience written output or decoding challenges, the services are still accessible.

In contrast, print versions require a certain level of decoding and comprehension that not all students exhibit in a k-5 school. Furthermore, the text found in print reference material is written in very small font making it almost impossible to read for anyone with a slight visual impairment, pages are filled with reams of text without breaks, which can be overwhelming for developing readers, and few pictures expand on the concepts and content displayed.

Cost

Cost remains a significant barrier to updating and maintaining a print-based reference collection. It is important to have both print and digital options available for students and staff, but one must be selective about which print resources are necessary and which can be replaced by an online, better value-for-money, option. If it is recommended to replace an entire encyclopedia volume every five years as suggested by (Riedling, 2013), then I would forgo this option in favour of a digital option. I would continue to purchase quality indigenous reference material, especially those relating to local indigenous groups, as much of this content does not have an equivalent digital option. Group buying reference items from consortiums such as BC ERAC are viable and keeps the cost down while maximizing the content and quality. Purchases of print-based material need to be made thoughtfully, involve conversations with staff, and be made over time to be financially viable.

Rationale for Change

“Research has shown that students learn best when instruction and resources accommodate individual differences in learning styles, abilities, needs and interests” (BC ERAC, 2008). To effectively meet the informational needs of students, reference items need to be carefully selected and evaluated by a qualified teacher-librarian.

Some important considerations for selecting reference materials include:

- A balance between print and digital reference items
- Carrying outdated, irrelevant, or stigmatizing content may have detrimental effects on the student population
- Extensive knowledge about the school, school community, and input from teachers, staff, and students is vital to the selection and evaluation of reference items
- Collaboration with classroom teachers and staff - drawing on their experience and knowledge can help to determine which reference items are in most need
- Understanding that the selection process is individualized. No two teacher-librarians alike; student needs differ from school to school.

Planning the Change

To update reference items in the library's collection, additional investments will need to be made. I have proposed a budget increase of \$1000 over 4 years to improve the quality of items in this section. I also intend to sit down with the school's Reading Encouragement Group, a group facilitated by the teacher-librarian and focused on promoting and maintaining a reading culture in my school, to determine which materials to purchase and how many. At the end of the four years when the print reference section is in better shape, the group will then discuss how to maintain an acceptable service level with a lower budget. Changes to the reference section will be communicated to parents, staff, and students in a variety of ways:

- Firstly, any major changes will be communicated to parents via the school's monthly newsletter.
- Secondly, the staff will have a chance to discuss the changes during monthly staff meetings.
- Thirdly, students will be notified of changes during reference section orientations and during their daily/weekly library visits.

References

BC ERAC. (2008). *Evaluating, Selecting and Acquiring Learning Resources: A Guide* [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://bcera.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ERAC_WB.pdf

Riedling, A. M., Shake, L., & Houston, C. (2013). Reference skills for the school librarian: tools and tips.