Reference Collection Analysis

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The reference collection that I am analyzing is that of the Pittsfield Elementary School. It is where I will be working in the fall as the Library Coordinator after the staff member who held that position left in January and the long-term substitute took a position in another district for next year. I did not get to access any collection statistics such as age of collection or how well-covered each Dewey category is because of database/software issues. This school’s library does not have an online presence and I was unable to determine which online databases are available or recommended for their students. In a separate section of the library are multi-copy book selections that seem to go with grade level science curriculum. I’m assuming that the books would be reading level appropriate for the specific grade but I will have to check that later. I’m also not sure how many different titles are available for each subject and whether the books are available for checkout independently (or if there is another copy in the stacks.) I plan to spend the next few weeks getting to know the library, its collections, the school, and the town, so at this point I can’t say if the collection reflects the diverse needs of students because I just don’t know enough about this school population. The books I did look at appeared to be relatively new and engaging, on the readability scale I would expect in an elementary school. The collection appears relatively new in many places with many non-fiction series being represented. There appears to be a major emphasis on the 900’s and 500’s with almost no books in the 100’s or 400’s. There is a much smaller 398.2 collection than in the library where I did my practicum. There are lots of dinosaur books which could be expected in an elementary school library. The 740’s seemed to be a bit light and not in the best shape or newest offering. I would guess that the former librarian used publisher series when it came to selecting books given the numerous examples of series availability in the collection. This school has about the same number of students as the school where I did my practicum, but I do believe their library/media center area is smaller with much less shelving space. The bookcases on all outside walls are only two shelves high with some groups of books in baskets on top and there is one shelving unit that runs parallel to one wall that is three shelves high. The configuration produces a nice, airy feeling but does lead me to question if the collection is large enough especially given that few shelves are almost too full and most are only about half full. There is a much more lenient checkout policy where 6th graders can have out 3 books and 3-5 can have out 2 books while my practicum school only allows 1 book per student until 5th grade and then they can have 2 books. Given the equivalent enrollment size but the increased potential checkouts, I would want to investigate if there are indeed enough books for everyone. This district is in SINI status and I know from their website that there is a big district redesign so I need to look at what influence that has played on the reference collection choices that have been made and try to gain access to information related to the new year’s budget and prior years’ spending.

In subsequent visits, I have more fully looked at the reference resources. For general encyclopedias there are two versions each of World Book (1994, 2003) and New Book of Knowledge (1992, 2008). There are several other encyclopedia sets including: Young Scientist (World book, 2001), Child Craft (1988), UXL Encyclopedia of Science (Gale Group, 2002), I Wonder Why (Kingfisher, 1997), and Encyclopedia of World Geography (Andromeda Oxford, 2002). Without knowing which, if any, online encyclopedias are being utilized it is difficult to say if this is adequate. I would not want to advocate for purchasing new print encyclopedia sets due to the expense and fact that they become outdated very quickly but would instead try to secure access to two or three online encyclopedias from reputable providers.

Dictionaries include a set of 19 Thorndike Barnhart Intermediate Dictionaries from Scott Foresman (1997), 4 Thorndike Barnhart Beginning Dictionaries from Scott Foresman (1993), 1 American Education Publisher’s Children’s Dictionary (Wordsmyth for Books are Fun, 2003), Scholastic Thesaurus (children’s – 1998, student – 2002 (4 copies)), 1 Visual Dictionary (Fog City Press, 2003), along with a dictionary of quotations and dictionary of cultural literacy. I feel comfortable with this part of the collection given that most student needs will be met by these volumes. I would want to make sure that several online dictionaries appropriate for elementary students are bookmarked and included on my new webpage for easy access.

Most of the collective biographies are in the circulating collection. Harcourt-Brace provides a series of volumes focused on writers, extraordinary women, musicians, and athletes. Troll’s Real Lives series include: leaders, heroes, women, and adventurers. There is also a series called Great Black Heroes that includes volumes on inventors, scientists, freedom fighters, and explorers. This is a breakdown of the rest of the titles in the 920 section:

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| --- | --- |
| Topic | # of different titles |
| American Revolution | 2 |
| Presidents | 4 |
| Women | 4 |
| African Americans | 4 |
| Explorers | 2 |
| Pop culture | 2 |
| Kids | 1 |
| Kings | 1 |
| Misc | 1 |

I definitely see some gaps in the collective biographies. I would look at including: activists, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans to start and would like to create an index that would be shelved in the collective biographies section of different categories of individual biographies that would help students who did not have a particular individual in mind narrow down the biography collection to make finding material easier. For example, if they have to read a biography and decide they want to do a sports star, they can look through the index to see what materials are available for sports star and then they can make their decision from that narrowed list.

Now we come to Atlases which next to science and technology can be extremely quick to become outdated. For world atlases, there were 5 separate offerings ranging from 1981 to 2000. At least one referenced the USSR and I need to check on the accuracy of the newest volumes given the volatility in the Middle East and some of the African countries. I definitely believe that this is a case of using the online resources to access up-to-date data. US atlases (4) range from 1978 to 1994 and while the US is pretty static, I need to check on the accuracy of the representations and statistics provided. There are a few other atlases such as the Civil War Wall Chart (Publications Intl Ltd., 1998), the Ultimate Atlas of Almost Everything (Sterling, 2001) and the Children’s Atlas of the Universe (Reader’s Digest, 2000). Sadly, all the atlases are stored in a table unit with horizontal shelving rather than vertically so I’m not sure if the students even realize there are books there or how interesting those volumes are.

The last category of Almanacs is more recent with 10 copies of the 2000 DK Wold desk reference and 14 copies of the World Almanac for Kids from 2012. There are also several record books from 2010-2013 that circulate. I think this could be strengthened by added different categories of almanacs that are more narrowly focused topic-wise and I would want to continue to add the most current volume of the general record books with a possibility of replacing the World Almanac for Kids in the next year or two.

I believe the collection is strong and balanced with materials in good shape but showing signs that they are used by students and that the students are well-served by the collection available to them.