

Divine Design in the Library II

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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In the fall, I shared the process of redesigning the physical space of my school library. As I shared in the last article "Divine Design in the Library," the physical change of the space was perhaps the easiest part of the change in the library. We now have an inspiring, comfortable and collaborative space that suits the learning needs and styles of students. The most difficult aspect of our library transformation was switching up the organization of the collection. The goals were to allow our students to become more independent in the library, showcase more of the collection in a way that worked for kids and to increase our circulation.

Do you have...

If you've worked in a library or taken a class of students to the library, you are used to the chaos that often ensues. "Where are the shark books?" "Where are the mystery books?" "Do you have any funny books?" "I want a Clifford book." Rather than acting as a traffic cop and directing students this way and that, I prefer to spend the time I have with students talking about books and series and helping them to grow their reading lives. I needed to find a way to make students in my library much more independent. The other trend I noticed was that students often just pulled a book off the shelf at random or the pulled the same book off the shelf time and again. I needed to help them see all the other fantastic books that were just sitting and waiting to be read!

Do I dare?

I began to read a number of blog posts and articles about collection organization and to think about how I could incorporate that in our school. I found an article in the School Library Journal titled ["Are Dewey's Days Numbered: Libraries across the Country are Giving the Old Classification the Heave-Ho"](#). I read a blog post by Tiffany Whitehead, whom you may know as Mighty Little Librarian entitled [Ditching Dewey](#). In this post, Tiffany talks about genre shelving her fiction section. I also read Shannon McClintock Miller's post [We Spiced Up the Shelves...And Ditched Dewey](#) as she wrote about her thinking around how traditional library organization worked with

students. Much of her thinking and experience echoed my own. I knew that despite doing lessons about library organization and the much revered Dewey Decimal System, it wasn't working. Students were still dependent on an adult to find books even when more signage was added to the shelves. In 2013 the SSLA invited Jessica Cammer and Claire Isaac with the Regina Public Library to give a presentation on the changes they made in their library entitled *The New Non-Fiction Experience*. Hearing about their experience and the positive changes that resulted, I was more determined than ever to make the shift!

Getting Started

I began with the picture books thinking they might be the easiest. (I laugh now at my naïveté). In this area, I wanted kids to see the books they might not otherwise see and to be able to look through a large number of books with ease, as the whole shelf-marker system was not working with the little ones. There wasn't any money to buy new shelving units that might make better use of face out display, nor space to add to what we had, so I decided on baskets that kids could pull down and flip through. I used Regina Public's list of categories as a starting point, examined my own collection to see what kinds of categories fit most books, and compared it with [BISAC](#) and [Metis](#), an organization system based on research of how children think. I also thought about student interest (a funny basket was a must), and curriculum ties. In the end, we came up with categories that were theme, character, and author based. With a little help from my friends, we began to sort.

Besides more labelling, I realized that I needed a system that was not dependent on words for those who were struggling readers. I found pictures to suit and put a picture on the basket with a matching picture on the front of each of the books, just beside the spine label. This allows students to know where books should go and what kinds of books are in the basket even if they cannot read the label.



You will be thinking, “But what about books that fit in to more than one category?” as so many do. I decided to take the advice of Regina Public’s Cammer and Isaac and followed the rule “Put it where it will be the most popular.” So, the books on dinosaur counting went in Dinosaurs, and not Counting and Numbers. I recognized that not everything was going to be neat and tidy; however, I was comforted by the thought that this same problem happens with Dewey as well. As we have evolved, we have also decided that when we have multiple copies of a book and they logically go in multiple places, we do so to accommodate the different ways people think about topics and where they look.

From picture books, I moved in to some of the more popular areas of non-fiction such as Transportation-Cars, Pets-Dogs, Animals-Sharks. Due to time constraints I didn’t do the entire non-fiction section as that would be a summer long job, and I wanted to involve students in the process. I did the most popular sections only. I also didn’t want to have the whole of non-fiction section in baskets, and I needed to purchase different signage that would work to designate the areas.

Things were going well with the new system, but I was getting a lot of “Where are the mysteries?” “Are there any more Diary of a Wimpy Kid books?” So last summer, I decided to put the fiction chapter books in to genres. I began in June and had students help with figuring out where some books should go. Is Geronimo Stilton a funny book or a mystery? Our students decided it was a mystery. This required some teaching about genres at the beginning of the year, but was really a smooth transition and has been very popular.

