June 2005

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Deborah Duke

Fort Worth Public Library System, dduke@fortworthlibrary.org

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Recommended Citation

Duke, Deborah (2005) "The Story of the Stool and the Legs; or, Collection Management in the Fort Worth Public Library System," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 8.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4877>

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The Story of the Stool and the Legs; or, Collection Management in the Fort Worth Public Library System

by **Deborah Duke** (Collection Management Administrator, Fort Worth Public Library System)
<dduke@fortworthlibrary.org>

Eleven years ago, on my first day as manager of another library's newly-formed Collection Management Department, the Head of Acquisitions led me to her area of that library's block-long Technical Services room, drew an imaginary line on the floor with her foot, then pointed across the room to where the catalogers were working. "That's Cataloging down there," she said. "This is Acquisitions up here. They don't come over here. We don't go over there. We never cross this line." As I began erasing her imaginary line with my foot, I smiled and promised her we'd fix that. Obviously her statement hadn't been quite true because somehow the trucks of received materials had made their way into the catalogers' area. But she had succinctly described a technical services worldview whose time was coming to an end.

She had come up in the days when each step of the selection-to-shelf process could be carried out in relative isolation. Communication tended to be about fixing something one group had "done" to another. Collection development librarians would pore over review journals, write up order slips, throw them over the transom into Acquisitions, and hear nothing until months later when either the book or a cancellation notice arrived. Acquisitions staff would verify the inaccurate and incomplete titles as best they could. Then they would arrange the order slips into little piles sorted by "vendor most likely to fill," type up the purchase orders, and mail them to the vendors. Weeks or months later, Acquisitions would receive the materials or mail a claim. Several more months might go by before the first vendor cancelled the order, at which point Acquisitions staff would start the whole process over again. Every so often they would generate fund reports for the collection development librarians, who were in a constant state of budgetary confusion because their records never "synced" with what Acquisitions said.

When shipments arrived, Acquisitions staff received them, sent the materials to Processing or Cataloging, and processed the invoices. New-to-system books sat on the cataloging shelves, waiting to be given a catalog record that reflected years upon years of local practices. Duplicates took their place in line behind the backlog of materials waiting for spine labels, stickers, dots, dust jackets, property stamps, instructional stamps, warning stamps, accession numbers, barcodes, copy numbers, pockets, author/title labels, inscriptions on the title page, and special inscriptions on the secret page just in case anything ever happened to the barcode or title page. New formats waited on special shelves for someone to create new local practices for them, decide how to process them, and order the supplies. When new materials finally arrived in their units, the collection development librarians would pull their copies of the order

slips out of their shoeboxes, check the items against their order slips, and if all was well, set them on the staff review shelf for 2 weeks and go back to trying to figure out how much money they really had left to spend. Public service staff only knew about the titles they had selected, and patrons had to rely on librarians to tell them if the library intended to get a book. A three to six month wait for a new book was considered standard procedure. "Street date" was an unknown concept, although many staff were convinced that vendors filled bookstore's orders first.

The advent of automated library systems did not necessarily resolve all of these problems. Each step of the selection-to-shelf process could still be done in relative isolation. Materials vendors were beginning to automate themselves, but selecting the right vendor for your order was still an educated crapshoot because you seldom knew about the vendors' stock. Many libraries did not display on-order titles in the OPAC because patrons might want to put those titles on hold, and there was no guarantee the books would ever come in. Public service staff did not always have access to acquisitions records. Acquisition's technological giant step, **BISAC** orders, had nothing to do with **AACR**. Any author/title record Acquisitions staff added to the database for purposes of placing an order was immediately dismissed (usually with good reason) by the catalogers, who either retrieved a **MARC** record from a bibliographic utility and customized it to reflect years and years of local practices, or created a new one from scratch. Collection development staff continued to check newly arrived materials against the order slips in their shoeboxes, and remained confused about their budgets.

Fast-forward ten years, invent the Internet and the World Wide Web, downsize and/or outsource technical services, centralize selection, and legitimize library customer demand.

Look at the service enhancements our major materials vendors provide now. They can supply high-quality full **MARC** records, customized to meet any local practices the library retains, with 9XX tags that generate complete item records in the library's automated system. Vendors can provide all the stamps, stickers, labels, pockets, and other processing the library can afford. Shelf-ready materials arriving in acquisitions can be sent immediately to the branches, skipping the traditional stop-offs in Cataloging and/or Processing. Or they can be drop-shipped directly to the branches and bypass "technical services" completely. EDI handles the claims and processes the invoices. Soon, a simple scan of the packing slip barcode

will create receipt records in the automated system. If your vendors do their job right, most of your technical services staff will never see many of the new materials coming into the library.

Vendors' Websites offer reviews, collection development lists, on-hand and on-order stock information, news about publicity and forthcoming titles, links to OP dealers and print-on-demand services, and powerful searching, limiting, sorting, and selection list building capabilities. Pre-pub alerts enable us to order materials months before publication, and most libraries now encourage the public and staff to see what is on order. Standing orders aren't just for reference books anymore. Vendors now offer an array of standing order plans for bestselling authors, children's and adult paperback series, travel guides, computer books, large-print books, audio books, film series, Billboard hits, award-winners, and more. Some plans let the library select specific titles, others let the library select general categories and the vendor selects the titles.

While these services have all helped change the way selection is done in libraries, they have also blurred some distinctions between traditional selection, acquisitions, and cataloging activities. Previously, Acquisitions staff decided which vendor to use. Now it is more efficient for the selectors to make that decision as they search vendor Websites for titles. As they identify titles on these sites, a few clicks let them create selection lists and import the bibliographic records into the automated system to use when creating the order.

But even better, recent cooperative efforts between the materials and ILS vendors have finally made it practical to create orders directly on the vendor's Website, complete with number of copies, the funds to use, the list of items going to each branch, and any special processing requirements. Most vendors can now send back files that generate complete order records in the acquisitions module, down to creating on-order item records and encumbering the money. Instead of selectors somehow relaying information about quantities, funds, and copy distribution to an order clerk, it is a small but efficient next step—and further blurring of the lines — to let selectors input that information themselves while in the vendor's site.

Today at **Fort Worth Public Library**, we, too, have a Collection Management Division. It includes the system's two materials selectors, seven acquisitions and serials staff, three catalogers, and seven processing staff. Together, CMD staff provide collection direction and support for 14 branches and the Central library, and

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help ensure that the library's collection policies and procedures are followed. The two selectors are responsible for selecting all new materials for the system. They also review and approve additional orders sent in by branch and Central staff. They help public service staff evaluate collections and develop collection plans, coordinate collection replacement and upgrade projects, and provide ongoing guidance with weeding, merchandising, and special collection projects. Acquisitions staff order and receive materials, process invoices, input and monitor the materials budget, and manage claims and cancellations. Acquisitions staff also manage the system's periodicals and standing orders. Cataloging staff maintain the bibliographic database. Processing staff create and link item records to the bibliographic records, do the physical processing for new materials, handle materials for the commercial bindery, and repair damaged materials.

While this may sound like a fairly traditional separation of responsibilities, each unit's work is actually so interconnected that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a decision in one area that does not affect another. We tend to think of selection, acquisitions, cataloging, and processing as four legs of the same stool — alter one leg, and the whole thing wobbles. Changes in budget allocations affect the order cycles and product mix, which in turn affect the workflow through the Division. If selectors bring in new formats, cataloging and processing procedures must be amended. If they place too many "rush" titles (which we order unprocessed), Processing staff get slammed. If Acquisitions wants to try a new vendor, its title mix and cataloging/processing services must be evaluated. If Processing repairs every item staff send in, the collection begins to age. If Cataloging creates new collection codes, it changes the selectors' circulation statistical reports and Processing's daily routine.

Obviously, changes or problems in one area have always had an impact on the others. But our reliance on vendor services have tightened the links among all the tech services areas even more. In the past, Acquisitions staff handled the bid specs and contract negotiations because the library was simply looking for the vendor that promised the best title mix, best turnaround, best fill rate, and best discounts. Consequently, Acquisitions staff were the ones who developed the relationships with the vendors. Now the contracts include cataloging and processing standards, online access options, collection de-

velopment services, and guaranteed delivery of bestsellers by street date. Vendors find themselves dealing with selectors, cataloging, and processing staff as frequently as they deal with the acquisitions staff. While Acquisitions still takes the lead in writing the bid specs, all units are deeply involved in developing requirements, evaluating responses, and monitoring compliance.

Fort Worth's Collection Management staff cross traditional lines in many ways. For example, Collection Development or Selection Services is not typically included in "technical services," but we have found good reasons for doing so. The selectors' presence helps ensure that the collection needs drive all technical services decisions. Acquisitions, Cataloging, and Processing can plan their work and respond to public service staff more effectively when they understand collection priorities and are aware of upcoming special projects. Special projects go smoother when everyone affected has been involved in the planning. Selectors understand the importance of having the correct bibliographic information on the order slips. They know what is involved in ordering and receiving material. They know the various vendors' strengths and weaknesses. They understand why new-to-system titles are treated differently from duplicates, and appreciate the importance of keeping the orders flowing steadily instead of hoarding them until the last few weeks of the fiscal year. They understand why it's really not OK to create a new recommended reading list with a lot of OP titles, and recognize why copies of the same title cannot be processed 15 different ways to satisfy the peculiar preferences of each branch. They can explain why the fund balances in their own records do not coincide with the financial report generated by our automated system.

The selectors import selection lists and individual bibliographic records from the vendors' Websites. They often decide which vendor to use, create "rush" purchase orders, evaluate standing order plans, arrange for publisher visits, and help plan improvements in cataloging and processing practices. Acquisitions staff check and correct the distribution of titles on the library's various standing order plans, arrange for database trials, change the loan period on books coming off the New Book shelf, monitor the materials budget and move funds when appropriate, select materials to fulfill honorarium and memorial gifts, check the quality of shelf-ready books and send them to the branches. In the near future they will select and import OCLC records for ordering. Processing staff evaluate gifts and items sent in for repair and help receive shipments. Cataloging staff established the library's e-branch, set up access

to the netLibrary collection, and initiated the use of "Weed Previous Edition" notices. They generate circulation and holdings reports, and help public service staff select parameters for dusty book reports and other weeding lists.

The two selectors, the Cataloging, Acquisitions, and Processing unit managers, and the CMD Administrator meet weekly. We discuss vendor anomalies, evaluate possible workflow changes, plan the implementation of new formats and other service enhancements, discuss changes recommended by public service and CMD staff, and prepare for upcoming events such as the next *Harry Potter* release. This group also develops and monitors progress on the Division's annual Business Plan and materials budget. All CMD units review each other's general announcements about procedural changes or service improvements. By taking this holistic approach to managing the collection, we are able to anticipate how changes in one area will affect the work in another and avoid unexpected problems.

Consider how many lines are criss-crossed when we plan to add new formats such as fotonovellas to the collection. What kinds of plans do the vendors offer? Do they have the titles and genres we want for both children and adults? How reliable are these vendors? Should we use more than one vendor? Do we get a discount? What fund will we use to purchase them? Should we treat them as periodicals or can we put them on standing order? Will customers search for them in the catalog? If so, do individual titles need to be in the catalog or is the series title sufficient? Do they need subject tracings? Will anyone care about the author? What kind of call number should they have? How do we capture the circulation statistics? Do they need barcodes, pockets, and security targets? Can the vendors do this for us? What will be the overdue fines? How much should we charge if they're damaged or lost? Will we allow customers to place them on hold? Which branches should have them? By involving all CMD units and public service staff in these discussions from the beginning, staff could weigh the pros and cons of each option, gauge each option's impact on the different units, and devise a scheme that made this popular format easily available with the least impact on cataloging and processing.

Fort Worth's Collection Management Division works well because the staff in each unit are not territorial. They know their own jobs and do them well, but they are also interested in what the others are doing, and are willing to do something different if it will make the entire process work better. They all share the goal of making the collection as customer-responsive as possible. As we go through training on our new integrated library system this May, cataloging staff are planning to monitor the acquisitions classes and go through the serials training. Acquisitions staff will monitor the cataloging classes. Selectors will go through the acquisitions training and monitor cataloging. Staff from all units will monitor Circulation and OPAC training. Everyone will be looking for new ways to blur the lines even more, streamline the Division's workflow, and improve customer service.

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Did we tell you about the dedication of the

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