Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

„FOLIA BIBLIOLOGICA" (2016), VOL. LVIII
DOI: 10.17951/fb.2016.1.119

Beata Anna Cessak-Obydzińska
Monterey County Free Libraries

FLOATING COLLECTIONS – AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT IN LIBRARY COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Abstract: The article is about an alternative concept in library collection management – floating collections – very popular in American public libraries nowadays. Selected literature is presented, the history of approach and a case study from Monterey County Free Libraries (MCFL) where the author of this article works. Potential benefits and challenges of floating collections are presented as well.

Keywords: floating collections, collection management, public libraries

S.R. Ranganathan (1892–1972), considered by some to be the father of library science, coined the Five Laws of Librarianship in 1931: (1) Books are for use, (2) Every book its reader, (3) Every reader his book, (4) Save the time of the reader, (5) The library is a growing organism. These laws are still applicable to modern library practice when "the book" can be understood broadly to include audio books and digital formats. Moreover, according to the editor of „Public Libraries: Perspectives", Nann Blaine Hilyard, floating collections support these five laws[1]. What, then, are floating collections?

Definition of Floating Collections

Floating collections is an alternative concept in library collection management where materials move freely between branches and are not returned to their "home"

[1] J. Johal, T. Quigley, W. Bartlett, T. Kressler, J. Gafiney, C. Bartel, D. Cropper, *Take the plunge! Implementing floating collections in your library system*, "Public Libraries" 2012, 51 (3), pp. 13–20.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

locations because the entire library system is their "home". Floating collections are materials that are shared throughout all branches and are shelved at the location to which they are returned. The implication is that in a multi-branch library system, there is one shared collection and not separate collections assigned to different branches. "Items can go where they are needed and wanted, creating an efficiency over the 'just-in-case' model of a traditional collection, wherein items are purchased for every branch, large or small, on the chance a patron might want them"[2]. In order to make floating possible, the Integrated Library System (ILS) must be able to place holds. Only materials that patrons actually want pass through delivery.

Selected Literature

Wendy K. Bartlett, collection development manager for the Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Public Library, is the author of the only book currently available on floating collections, *Floating Collections: a Collection Development Model for Long-Term Success*[3]. Although clearly an advocate of this practice, the author discusses both the pros and cons of floating and the multiple challenges that libraries might face. She argues that floating is a service to communities, that it is fiscally responsible for budget-strapped systems, and that it benefits library staff. The book offers tips on how to approach staff with the new practice, how to ready facilities and collections before floating, and how to manage floating collections. A list of larger systems in the U.S. that utilize floating collections is included.

Kate E. Weber, in her Master's thesis *The Benefits and Drawbacks of Working with Floating Collections: The Perceptions of Public Librarians*[4], focuses on the views of library staff based on information gathered through an anonymous online survey. The results indicate that while there are benefits to working with floating collections, not all libraries experience these benefits to the same degree, and that the drawbacks are significant. Problems with redistribution, collection knowledge, and the ability to serve all patrons well emerged as major difficulties. The perception put forth by the subject literature – that the benefits are widespread and the drawbacks both temporary and easily overcome – is not supported by the survey.

[2] W.K. Bartlett, *Floating Collections: a Collection Development Model for Long-term Success*, Santa Barbara, C.A 2014, p. XIV.

[3] *Ibidem*.

[4] K.E. Weber, *The Benefits and Drawbacks of Working with Floating Collections: The Perceptions of Public Librarians*. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. 2014 [online] https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:8dcb9639-47a0-4bb4-80c6-0e38e56b3ed0 [accessed:15.11.2016].

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

In addition to the above works, several articles have been published involving case studies. The most influential and most often cited are the articles by Ann Cress, Director of Jefferson County Public Library (Colorado), *The Latest Wave,* published in 2004 in "Library Journal"[5], and *Take the Plunge! Implementing Floating Collections in Your Library System,* a collective work published in 2012 in "Public Libraries"[6]. And recently the article against floating by Noel Rutherford from Nashville Public Library in "Library Journal"[7]. Significant information is also available online[8].

History of the Approach

The concept of floating is not new. Fraser Valley Regional Library in Canada pioneered the floating collection in the 1930s. It originated "not as innovative approach to housing […] collections but as an organic outcome of serving patrons in geographically challenging areas on limited budgets"[9]. Many libraries in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have been floating their collections for years. Among the first in the U.S. were: Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado; Jefferson County Public Library, Colorado; Rockford Public Library, Illinois; Hennepin County Library, Minnesota; and Gwinnett County Public Library, Georgia. A well-documented example of successful floating was provided by the Jefferson County Public Library[10]. When JCPL announced a 67% reduction in the volume of material moving among its branches after floating its collections, the concept became very appealing to other libraries, including the Monterey County Free Libraries (MCFL) in California.

Floating Collections in MCFL

MCFL consists of seventeen branches and two bookmobiles, and serves over 220,000 residents in urban and rural areas of Monterey County on the central

[5] A. Cress, *The latest wave*, "Library Journal" 2004, 129 (16), pp. 48–50.

[6] J. Johal, *op. cit.*

[7] N. Rutherford, *To Float or Not To Float. Inside Nashville PL's examination of the method's performance*, "Library Journal" 2016, 141 (6), pp. 46–48 [online] http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2016/04/collection-development/to-float-or-not-to-float-collection-management/#_ [accessed: 15.11.2016].

[8] *Report on Issues Regarding Possible Implementation of Floating Collections in the Contra Costa County Library*, 2005 [online] http://ccclib.org/libinfo/Commission/Meetings/2005/May/doggedretrieversfinal.pdf [accessed: 15.11.2016].

[9] W.K. Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[10] A. Cress, *op. cit.*

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

coast of California. The county has a total area of 3,771 square miles (9,770 km^2). Patrons can borrow library materials from, and return them to, any branch or bookmobile. In the past, items were returned to their home branches by delivery van, which kept them in transit for brief periods of time. In 2005, MCFL implemented the floating collections concept starting with large-print books, talking books, and DVDs. At the same time, the library stopped the practice of rotating batches of VHS tapes to the branches every few months, a very time-consuming process. The practice of floating exposed the branches to a wider variety of books and films. Over time, more floating collections were added. Young adult, Spanish, and mass-market paperbacks, being predominantly browsing collections, benefitted from floating and did not cause major issues. The only exception was graphic novels, which congregated in some branches and disappeared from others. Currently, most of MCFL's collections float. Juvenile and adult nonfiction, as well as special collections such as reference, professional, periodicals, microfilm, Californian, and Korean and Vietnamese materials, do not float at this time, pending further discussion. The goal of the 2013–2016 Strategic Plan was to "expand floating collection to 80% of circulating materials to offset the limited collection development budget. Special collections, which will be defined, will remain exempt from floating (25% of targeted collections will be converted each year; changeover will be completed by 2016)"[11].

Floating and the Five Laws of Library Science

When collections float, it is more likely that the books will be read rather than just sitting on the shelves (first law), that the needed books will be delivered to their readers (second law), that it will be easier for readers to find what they need (third law), that not only the reader's, but also the librarian's time will be saved (fourth law), and that, since the materials float freely between branches, the collection will no longer be static but dynamic like a growing organism (fifth law).

Does reality correspond to these five laws? Let's take a closer look at floating mechanics: A book (or a DVD) is sent from branch A to branch B by delivery service to fill the hold of patron X. When it is returned to branch B, it stays there instead of being sent back to branch A. The rationale behind this is that patron Y from branch B might discover this item in their own branch and find it interesting. Thus, the library is saving on unnecessary delivery and on the cost of the item (the

[11] J. Addleman, Monterey County Free Libraries Strategic Plan 2013–2016, 2012, p. XVII [online] http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/library/2013StrategicPlan.pdf [accessed: 15.11.2016].

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

library system does not need multiple copies of the same title). If patron Z from branch C wants this item, they can always place a hold in the online catalog and the item will be sent to their branch. This concept was invented in the 1930s by a library with multiple remote locations during harsh winter weather. At the time it made sense to avoid sending the books back; if one person wanted the book in that particular branch, then another might want it as well. It all sounds very logical and the merits of this concept are undeniable. The problems begin when patron X in branch A starts placing holds for all the books in the system that correspond to their unique interest so that all these books remain at their branch, filling or even exceeding the allocated space. Librarians have to come up with solutions for such situations. Rebalancing the floating collections may become a new routine for library staff and the time needed to rebalance collections may – but does not have to – outweigh the time saved through reduced deliveries of library materials between branches.

Implementing Floating Collections

As often happens with new ideas, implementing the floating concept can be challenging and will require changes in the Integrated Library System (ILS). Originally, not every ILS supported floating. For example, MCFL started with Dynix and floating was possible by collections only. Five years later when MCFL was preparing for ILS migration, the team of librarians in charge of evaluating potential ILSs for adoption made sure to note if any given ILS supported floating. Interestingly, the floating feature is no longer an issue today because it is compatible with all systems, whether proprietary or open source. Still, a basic infrastructure must be in place with a convenient delivery service, an easy and user-friendly way of placing online holds, and software support from an ILS vendor. Polaris, MCFL's new ILS, enables floating on both the collection and item levels.

Before implementing floating, many libraries choose to reconsider the shelf space allocated for specific collections in their branches. In fact, an entire process for managing shortages and overflows will have to be prepared and procedures created to facilitate the process. Inventory of the entire collection and major weeding are suggested in order to prevent items in bad condition from being floated for holds.

Besides the technological issues, there can also be social challenges when staff has reservations about floating. Some staff members may feel insecure because they no longer know their collection and are not able to provide readers' advisory the same way they did before. Some staff members perceive floating as a threat to the

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

careful development of local collections and have problems with embracing the "one library" philosophy[12].

Potential Benefits of Floating

The literature mentions various benefits of implementing floating collections:

- Reduced delivery costs due to fewer deliveries of materials. Delivery volume drops and items spend less time on delivery trucks, so materials are more likely to be on the shelf for people to check out.
- Continually refreshed collections are better for browsing. Usually the results of floating are invisible to patrons, especially those who are already used to placing holds online and visit the branch only when picking up holds. For those who do come to the library, however, the joy of browsing is enhanced by the constant renewal.
- "Patrons who forget to pick up their held items in a timely fashion are *delighted* to find that the item has not shipped back to an owning branch but is instead awaiting them in their home branch collection"[13].
- Savings to the materials budget because high-demand collections are more available without the necessity of buying more copies. This is especially true for costly unabridged books on CD and multi-volume DVDs. Fewer copies of the same title are required to please more customers in different branches.
- Floating items with plates recognizing donors (like Friends of the Library) advertise the generosity of the donor and may encourage others to do the same.
- Reduced wear and tear on items due to less frequent physical handling and delivery (applies mostly to audiovisual materials).
- Faster transit times for materials so that books reach patrons more quickly.
- Time-savings for staff.
- Increased circulation.

Challenges of Floating for Users

Usually patrons are not aware of floating and some libraries choose not to advertise the shift. However, there will always be some patrons with an attachment to

[12] A. Canty, L.C. Frolek, R. Thornley, C. Andriats, L. Bombak, C. Lay, C., M. Dell, *Floating collections at Edmonton Public Library*, "Evidence Based Library & Information Practice" 2012, 7 (1), pp. 65–69.

[13] W.K. Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

specific books in their home branches who will notice that their favorites are no longer there. Hopefully, they will start using the online catalog more frequently to browse the entire collection and place holds. More serious issues may develop regarding the Friends of the Library or foundations who allocate monetary support to specific branches. Once they learn that items purchased with their money are no longer permanently shelved in their branches, they may pull funding. One option is to exempt these items from floating; another is to persuade the Friends that floating has benefits even for them. In the Montana consortium, floating became an issue when it was realized that materials purchased with local taxes for their library would be shelved elsewhere[14]. In anticipation of such problems, MCFL held meetings with Friends groups and published articles in the Friends' newsletters explaining the advantages of the concept.

Some categories of patrons who for a variety of reasons do not place holds for materials may be affected negatively by the absence of their desired materials on their branch's shelves. As one respondent in Weber's study stated, "Non-fiction floating is the worst, especially in the juvenile collection as we cannot tailor it to meet curriculum demands"[15]. Children, older people, the visually impaired, low-income families, minorities – all those for whom the public library is vitally important – are the most likely to be affected. According to Weber, "If floating collections cannot serve these groups as well as they can the affluent and tech-savvy, then that becomes more than just a drawback of working with floating collections – it becomes a substantial argument in favor of traditional collections"[16].

Potential Challenging Outcomes or Flaws of Floating for Staff

As items float freely between branches some shelves will be full while others will become empty. The branch with several patrons interested in organic gardening or watercolors may be inundated with items on these subjects, or a branch with several homeschooling families may keep receiving books pertaining to their curricula that stay there after being used. It is also possible for many copies of the same novel to end up in a branch after the local book club has discussed it. There are two ways to rebalance a collection: **customer-directed redistribution** in response to customer holds, which reflects the unique collection needs of each community,

[14] C. Glover, C.G. Langstaff, *Floating collections within a consortium: Or, does it matter where the materials are shelved?*, "PNLA Quarterly" 2006, 71 (1), pp. 12–13.

[15] K.E. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 53.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

and **staff-directed rebalancing** in response to overflows or the need for more items in a specific part of the collection. Challenges include:

- Uneven distribution of materials among branches (one customer in one small branch may be an avid reader of medieval mysteries, so that all the books in this genre end up at their branch but are not picked up by others).
- Inconsistent weeding patterns in branches (even with clear directions, policies, and procedures, some branch managers will weed instead of float or float items that should be weeded).
- Rebalancing collections becomes a new task for staff. Staff may find it difficult to accept changes in workload and workflow that appear to defeat the purpose of floating[17].
- The number of volumes in transit may not decrease as expected because many items will be rerouted from one branch to another due to overflow. What originally seems to be a gain (fewer items in transit because they do not have to return to home locations) becomes a burden because boxes of items float from branches that are overwhelmed by too many items to branches with space.

The most challenging parts of working with floating collections include: weeding, redistribution of materials, conducting readers' advisory, getting materials to patrons in a timely fashion, maintaining a general knowledge of one's own collection, and meeting patrons' needs with available materials[18].

Some problems could be avoided if, as noted by Edmonton Public Library, Collection HQ was implemented and an inventory of the entire collection performed before floating[19]. Also, problems with inadequate shelf space could be avoided if each branch analyzed its shelving potential and allocated a certain number of shelves for specific floating collections, preferably before floating. In the case of MCFL this potential was created by eliminating obsolete formats, such as audio cassettes and VHS tapes. Empty shelves had to be assigned to other collections. If these were floating collections, it would have helped to avoid overflows.

Interestingly enough, in the survey of librarians conducted by Weber asking them about their satisfaction with floating collections in their library, 36% were either "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied", while 40% were either "Very Dissatisfied" or "Dissatisfied". Only 16% were neutral[20].

[17] A. Canty, *op. cit.*
[18] K.E. Weber, *op. cit.*
[19] A. Canty, *op. cit.*
[20] K.E. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

Collection Development

It is easier to implement floating for libraries using centralized collection management. A librarian selecting materials for the entire system does not have to assign branch locations for bestsellers because these books will have holds and start floating immediately. Floating libraries may adjust their collection development policies; one option is to reduce the number of copies. Some will argue that catering to local needs is lost in the process, but it is assumed that customer-directed redistribution will take its place.

Floating and Physical Processing of Materials

When items float, branch locations no longer have to be stamped or written on any items. When items belong to specific branches and return after being used elsewhere, it is possible to maintain branch-specific labels for genres, formats, holidays, etc. However, if items float freely between branches and the system wants to keep labeling uniformity, some changes will have to take place. Vendors of book genre/format labels tend to change designs periodically and it is very difficult to maintain uniform labeling in multi-branch systems over the long term. There may be two or even three different labels for mysteries, science fiction, and large print. On the other hand, old labels indicate old books and may become a tool for weeding.

Collection Maintenance – Redistribution and Rebalancing

Collection maintenance is a regular part of branch staff duties. Staff must regularly scan the shelves to see where there may be gaps in the collection. Weeding becomes a daily routine and a necessary part of collection maintenance.

Redistribution of materials among libraries within a system is reported as the greatest and most widely experienced drawback of floating[21]. Seventy-five percent of respondents to the survey found it more or less challenging[22]. What many librarians find frustrating is the imbalance in the collection due to the excess of one subject or author, gaps in the collection, and having to deal with duplicates and space issues related to overcrowding of materials[23]. Saving staff time is considered a benefit in the literature, but in practice it does not always happen.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 27.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 29.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

Staff-directed rebalancing requires special procedures and clear communication between branches. Some libraries choose to assign one person per branch to monitor floating. Internal communication among branches must take place. Whenever an overflow of certain kinds of materials is reported by one branch, it is expected that another branch with a gap in this area will pick it up. If not, some weeding may be required. When a culture of sharing is well developed within a library system, this process runs smoothly. Sometimes, however, redistribution issues become major challenges affecting overflow. Also, weeding presents its own challenges. It may be true that some libraries that use floating, can save time by having paraprofessional deal with delivery, but more librarians' time is spent on activities involved in redistribution.

Different Levels of Floating

Some libraries choose to float their entire collections with a few exceptions, such as periodicals, multi-volume sets, and local history. In most cases, however, libraries implement floating in stages, floating a collection or two at a time depending on the situation. A newly opened branch library may want to float the entire collection, or perhaps not. A large system with multiple branches may initially float part of the collection to determine if it is a good fit. Floating can be limited to certain types of material or certain branches can be exempted for local reasons. System Administration of any ILS gives many options to choose from and it might take some experimentation before the final decision can be made.

Floating is mostly used by libraries with multiple branches, but it is possible to implement floating in consortia as well. Two very interesting cases of floating by consortia in Alaska and Montana were documented by Glover and Langstaff[24]. The National Circulation Interchange Protocol (NCIP) and the Z39.50 protocol are being used to allow the sharing of materials between libraries with different ILSs. A pilot project started in 2006 in Montana is still in place almost ten years later. Partner libraries can choose to participate in floating collections, thereby sharing items between them for extended periods of time. Owning libraries may choose which items to float and where they will float to based on policies specifically created for this process. Some libraries may float their newest adult fiction, or float it only within their own branches. An item can be taken off floating status whenever the owning library wishes to recall it, or when a participating library no longer wishes to house it. Floating within a consortium can be specified on the collection

[24] C. Glover, *op. cit.*

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

or item level. Most often, floating is on the collection level (e.g. all DVDs or all large print books). According to Bartlett, "Many library decision makers have steered a more moderate course and floated only part of their library's collection. Some libraries, for example, do not float the main library's collection. Some float only the most popular materials – movies, music, and bestselling fiction and nonfiction from all the branches and main library. Some float everything except children's or adult nonfiction"[25].

Guiding Standards and the Academic Teaching of Floating

Floating is often mentioned as one of the collection-development and management remedies for budget cuts[26]. According to Hedlund, the RUSA (Reference and User Services Association) CODES Collection Development Planning, Education & Assessment Committee is about to update the ALA's Guide to Collection Development Policy Statements from 1996. As of early 2016, the ALA/RUSA website is still using the old version of the document. Librarians and educators seeking actual standards dedicated to collection development practices have to wait for official updates, in the meantime relying on research articles that are not abundant. Potential participants for the study conducted by Hedlund were solicited from institutions that are members of ALISE, the Association for Library and Information Science Education. Participants were asked what current collection development trends are being included in curricula to help develop strategies for dealing with budget constraints. Trends included: cooperative collection building, participating in consortia and automation programs, just-in-time or patron-driven acquisitions (PDA), floating collections, pay-per-view article acquisitions, unsubscribing from "Big Deals" or reducing journal/serial subscriptions, selecting paperback rather than hardback editions, seeking donations and grants, etc. According to the study, floating is taught in 63% of classes. Overall, the study shows the disconnect between what is being taught in collection development courses and what actually occurs in libraries around the country. Similarly, there has been a lack of guiding standards from professional organizations[27].

[25] W.K. Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[26] A. Cress, *op. cit.*

[27] O. Hedlund, *A. Copeland, Collection Management and the Budget Crunch: Are We Adequately Preparing Library Students for Current Practices?*, "Collection Building" 2013, 32, pp. 128–132 [online] https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/4586/hedlund-2013-collection.pdf?sequence=1 [accessed: 15.11.2016].

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

Floating and Readers' Advisory

One of the concerns raised by some librarians is the effect of floating on readers' advisory. Many librarians, especially small and medium-sized public libraries, feel the need to know their collections well so that they can provide reading recommendations on the spot, taking the patron to the stacks and immediately delivering the item. When collections float, staff can no longer rely upon their memory because the recommended titles may have floated to another location. A significant number of respondents to Weber's survey felt that knowledge of one's own collection while floating becomes challenging and negatively affects the librarian's ability to provide high-quality readers' advisory[28]. Bartlett, on the other hand, points out that not only librarians, but also some patrons tend to memorize their collections and when they do not find anything new and interesting on their favorite shelves, tend to rely solely on the new book section. Floating gives them another opportunity: a "just returned" section might be full of "new" items never seen in their branch before that were brought there from other branches in response to holds. Bartlett encourages libraries to make just-returned items freely accessible for patrons' browsing instead of shelving them immediately. Floating enables librarians to make surprising discoveries; although they thought they knew their customers' tastes, they suddenly find books from unexpected genres floating to their branches, such as romance or urban fiction. This motivates librarians to expand their reading as well as to monitor their customers' interests. As Cress mentioned, "Trends that might remain unnoticed by staff dealing with questions at the service desks are revealed through the holds activity of patrons who never ask a question"[29].

Floating and Collection Analysis

As early as 2004, Hennepin County Library developed a "semi-automated method identifying surplus and deficit collections based on system-supplied shelf counts. The float manager software directs staff in designated libraries to pull a specific number of materials and route them to specific libraries – based on item count, not content"[30]. Edmonton Public Library in Canada is using the collection management system Collection HQ, which takes an evidence-based approach, allowing intelligent redistribution of materials across the system[31]. Some libraries take their

[28] K.E. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[29] A. Cress, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
[30] *Ibidem*, p. 50.
[31] A. Canty, *op. cit.*

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

floating collections to the next level and combine them with a detailed collection analysis provided by their ILS. In 2013, Innovative Interfaces Inc. released a new module for their Millennium ILS and Sierra Services Platform. The module helps librarians manage floating collections across multiple branches and anticipates the demand for new titles. It also helps optimize collection sizes for locations, and can even help create profiles of the branches by generating collection use and subject use reports that include available space and popularity of various genres in different branches. Tulsa City-County Library was a beta tester for this module. They started by solving their own problem of one branch that was without adequate shelving being constantly inundated with returns of picture books from other branches[32].

Collection management systems like Collection HQ can provide an alternative solution to floating. This was the case at Nashville Public Library in Tennessee, which moved away from floating. It appears that Collection HQ, which distributes materials based on past usage data; drives material placement decisions more effectively than the patron floating method[33].

Maximizing the Benefits of Floating

It is possible for a library to float its collection and not experience benefits. This happens when the same number of copies are ordered as before floating (no money savings), or when the most popular just-returned items are kept on carts in the back rooms or reshelved too quickly. Too much rebalancing could also negate the benefits of floating.

Ways to maximize the benefits and minimize drawbacks of floating:

1. Perform a thorough inventory and weeding of all collections in all branches, preferably before floating starts. This prevents staff members' frustration when they receive a book in bad condition from another branch to fill patron's hold and prevents patrons' frustration when they place holds on nonexistent items.
2. Prepare appropriate shelving in each branch, anticipating that some shifting will be necessary later on. If floating starts at the same time that some obsolete formats are being discarded, those vacated shelves might serve as a remedy. According to Bartlett, "Branch librarians need to resist the urge to weed the collection to fit the space that collection held in a traditionally housed model"[34].

[32] M. Enis, *Industry: Decision Center Releases Floating Collection Module*, "Library Journal" 2013, 138, p. 21.

[33] N. Rutherford, *op. cit.*

[34] W.K. Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

3. Keep statistics on the prefloat percentage by branches and recheck every year or every six months. This will help to monitor success and make corrections, if needed.

4. Centralize ordering of materials to reinforce the treatment of the entire system as one collection and to generate savings by purchasing fewer copies of specific books, movies, etc.

5. Centralize physical processing of materials to avoid inconsistency in labeling, etc.

6. Centralize weeding to remind branch managers that "their" collections are part of the system and to avoid unnecessary discarding of important items. According to Bartlett, "Some degree of centralized weeding ensures that the collection as a whole is being managed well, leaving less room for branch-to-branch discrepancies in the level and quality of weeding being undertaken. Also, centralized weeding can help with rebalancing efforts, maximizing the opportunities to fine-tune each branch's collection to meet its patron's needs"[35].

7. Pay special attention to core collections to avoid weeding items essential to collection integrity, as well as to items that are difficult to replace and to different editions of books, especially legal guides and tests.

8. Decide which collections will not float and back up your decisions with sound reasons.

9. Arrange the float in stages: one collection or format at a time, adding more every year, etc. According to Bartlett, "Another tack taken by many library decision makers is to begin by floating a part of the collection, adding portions as they go along. This very common approach is a good way to test the processes involved and identifies potential risks and roadblocks"[36].

10. Maintain good communication with all staff members throughout the process. Using a central posting board or WIKI might work better than email.

11. Keep just-returned materials within easy reach of patrons for fast circulation instead of immediately reshelving the most popular items where they will be more difficult to find. According to Bartlett, "If daily shelving is not caught and the back rooms are not clear, the advantage that floating brings, of quickly moving popular items around for maximum circulation, will be completely lost" (Bartlett, 2014, p.61).

12. Learn from the float about the specific needs of patrons in each branch and adjust shelves for popular materials rather than immediately rerouting an overflow to other branches. Branch managers should pay close attention to the categories

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[36] *Ibidem*, p. 19.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

of materials that come to their branch and learn from it: these are the materials needed here. According to Bartlett, "It is sometimes hard for staff to understand that a section is not created by the size of the shelving unit but by the needs and dynamics of that particular collection"[37] and "the float is bringing in exactly the right amount of materials customers want and need: it is the current shelving space that is inadequate"[38].

Evaluation

Some libraries choose to keep detailed statistics and periodically reevaluate the floating process. It is always interesting to see the percentage of items that float in each branch and also to survey staff satisfaction with the process. Sometimes it may be worthwhile to reevaluate the process and stay safe by floating only certain collections rather than everything. Floating is definitely an interesting concept and philosophically very appealing. The literature seems to indicate that success is guaranteed for any library that chooses to embrace the concept. However, each individual library must verify whether the promised benefits are being delivered. Libraries must remain aware of potential drawbacks associated with floating and be prepared for the negative consequences that may be experienced by both staff and patrons.

References

Addleman J., Monterey County Free Libraries Strategic Plan 2013–2016, 2012 [online] http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/library/2013StrategicPlan.pdf [accessed: 15.11.2016].

Bartlett W.K., *Floating Collections: a Collection Development Model for Long-term Success*, Santa Barbara, C.A. 2014.

Canty A., Frolek L.C., Thornley R., Andriats C., Bombak L., Lay C., Dell M., *Floating collections at Edmonton Public Library*, „Evidence Based Library & Information Practice" 2012, 7(1), pp. 65–69.

Cress A., *The latest wave*, "Library Journal" 2004, 129 (16), pp. 48–50.

Enis M., *Industry: Decision Center Releases Floating Collection Module*, "Library Journal" 2013, 138 (18), p. 21.

Glover C., Langstaff G., *Floating collections within a consortium: Or, does it matter where the materials are shelved?*, "PNLA Quarterly" 2006, 71 (1), pp. 12–13.

Hedlund O., Copeland A., *Collection Management and the Budget Crunch: Are We Adequately Preparing Library Students for Current Practices?*, "Collection Building" 2013, 32

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 94.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. 75.

Pobrane z czasopisma Folia Bibliologica **http:/foliabibliologica.umcs.pl**
Data: 27/11/2026 09:54:25

(4), pp. 128–132 [online] https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/4586/hedlund-2013-collection.pdf?sequence=1 [sccessed: 15.11.2016].

Johal J., Quigley T., Bartlett W., Kressler T., Gafiney J., Bartel C., Cropper D., *Take the plunge! Implementing floating collections in your library system*, "Public Libraries" 2012, 51 (3), pp. 13–20.

Report on Issues Regarding Possible Implementation of Floating Collections in the Contra Costa County Library, 2005 [online] http://ccclib.org/libinfo/Commission/Meetings/2005/May/doggedretrieversfinal.pdf [accessed 15.11.2016].

Rutherford N., *To Float or Not To Float. Inside Nashville PL's examination of the method's performance*, "Library Journal" 2016, 141 (6), pp. 46–48, [*online*] http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2016/04/collection-development/to-float-or-not-to-float-collection-management/#_ [sccessed: 15.11.2016].

Weber K.E., *The Benefits and Drawbacks of Working with Floating Collections: The Perceptions of Public Librarians*. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. 2014, [*online*] https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:8dcb9639-47a0-4bb4-80c6-0e38e56b3ed0 [accessed: 15.11.2016].