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Media center magic

In their quest to become Media Center Warriors, students at Waverly-Shell Rock Middle School have been reading through the genres in a gamified reading program created by district teacher librarian and current UNI School Library Studies student Lyndsi Luck. The program features intrinsically motivating challenges for fifth and sixth graders to complete after reading a book.

For example, students reading in the genre of pop culture can earn 1,000 points by filming a personal attempt to break a world record. As part of a sports challenge, students earn points by contacting a sports professional and receiving a personal response. When Brody Kuhse (left) contacted UNI wrestler Bryce Steiert, Steiert offered to meet him in person. On April 19, Steiert (center) had lunch at school with Kuhse and his friend Jonah Nelson (right) and told them how he chooses reading over social media.

Luck presented her reading program at an Iowa Association of School Librarians (IASL) Conference session entitled “Books + Gamification = Media Center Magic”.
According to Kerry LeWarne, teacher librarian at St. Francis of Assisi School in West Des Moines, Iowa, “Audiobooks are a passion, not only of mine, but my students as well.” When asked how audiobooks have helped her 700 K-8 students, she exclaimed, “ALL my kids are reading!” Eager readers use audiobooks to attempt more challenging texts and indulge in their favorite storytellers. Reluctant readers are saying, “I finally get it!” after using an audiobook and following along with the printed page.

To help other teachers find and use audiobooks, LeWarne (M.A. 2016) created an online guide to using audiobooks in Iowa. The guide, created as part of her master’s research project, explains how to access audiobooks, such as Playaways, through AEAs and public libraries and includes links to research and other resources. More information on how LeWarne and her students are using audiobooks is available here.

Three ways to grow readers

What is the recipe for growing readers? According to School Library Studies alumnae who presented their master’s research at the IASL Conference on April 3 in Des Moines, “Combine the handheld and electronic book; add supportive policies and reading promotions; and mix access, intellectual freedom and passion.”

Nicole Guldager (M.A. 2015) shared the role of reading promotion events in encouraging pleasure reading. Kristen Downes (M.A. 2015) explained how libraries can expand the number of books younger students check out, without leading to a significant increase in lost books. Kerry LeWarne (M.A. 2016) shared resources related to audiobooks (see above).

SLS faculty Dr. Joan Bessman Taylor and Dr. Karla Krueger co-authored a Teacher Librarian article based in part on Guldager’s research and joined in
the IASL presentation. Downes will share her research in an upcoming Teacher Librarian article co-authored by Krueger and Taylor. (Pictured from left are Krueger, Downes, LeWarne, Taylor, and Guldager.)

A borrower and a lender be

For Christine Jacobs, district librarian for Hampton-Dumont and CAL school districts, coordinating with libraries around the state is a key part of her collection strategy. “We can't possibly keep within a tight budget and still have access to what we need, unless we choose to participate in Enrich Iowa," said Jacobs (M.A. 2008). Interlibrary loan systems—including the AEA and Enrich Iowa—have allowed her to obtain graphic novels, book sets for literacy circles, and nonfiction texts to support history units such as the Civil War.

By sending her requests mostly to libraries close to home, she keeps mailing costs low. She also sends books from her collection to other libraries and receives some compensation from Enrich Iowa in return. Jacobs shared her approach in an IASL Conference presentation entitled “Using Interlibrary Loans (Across the State) to Stretch Your Budget!” “Nonfiction titles may not be used year after year and may become obsolete,” she noted. She suggested that school libraries with small budgets focus on buying popular fiction titles and use interlibrary loans for most of their nonfiction needs.

Reaching out as a teacher leader

As a teacher librarian at Prairie High School, Deanne Thiede (M.A. 2008) focused on coaching both students and teachers. As the Teacher Leadership Program Lead for the College Community School District in Cedar Rapids, she now coaches those who coach teachers. She supports 23 full-time teacher leaders in the College Community School District, as well as Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and teacher leader stipend positions.

Thiede, who also has elementary and middle school classroom teaching experience, said her collaborative work as a teacher librarian prepared her for
the daily work of building positive relationships with teachers and administrators. In fact, her challenges as a teacher leader sound very familiar to teacher librarians. "Balancing efforts to move practice forward while being non-evaluative is sometimes a struggle, but building relationships and developing trust must come first," she explained. “Working side by side, supporting, and helping is paramount to our success as teacher leaders.”

Looking for alumni

If you know a graduate of the School Library Studies B.A. or M.A. programs who is not receiving this newsletter but would like to in the future, please let us know. Send his or her email (and information about current job position if applicable) to librarystudies@uni.edu. We would love to stay in touch.