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Scheduled library visits and reading achievement

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure the correlation between the number of materials checked out from the school library and students' achievement on two reading assessments. Students in a setting with a flexible library schedule had a fixed visit scheduled with their literature classes so that all students could regularly visit the library. A quantitative bibliometric method was used to analyze the number of books checked out by students and how often their classes visited and compare the data with their achievement on two reading assessments. Results showed students that checked out more material did not have significantly different growth on their reading assessments. Classes that visited more often did not significantly differ on reading assessments from classes that visited less often.

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SCHEDULED LIBRARY VISITS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
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by
David Stanfield
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This Research Paper by: David Stanfield

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ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We know the adage that tells us we can lead a horse to water, but we can't make it drink. The catch is, if we don't lead it to water it may not find anything to drink at all. We need to lead students to libraries and hope they will choose to read.

The bridge to middle school brings a change to many students' library visits. They leave the elementary world with a fixed schedule where visits to the library are routine and regular and enter a place where the only time they may go to the library is under their own power. A 2000 study showed that 95% of public secondary school libraries use flexible scheduling, up 35% from elementary libraries. A 2001 study in Texas showed flexible scheduling rising from 33% in elementary to 72% in middle school and 82% in high school (Creighton, 2007).

Having access to material at the point of need is often an argument for flexible scheduling. The American Association of School Librarians (1998) suggests that having such a schedule allows the library program to have "flexible and equitable access to information, ideas, and resources for learning" and also "encourages free, timely, and easy access to the library program's services, resources, and facilities for the learning community" (p. 89). While this may be beneficial in allowing better collaborative teaching to take place with a teacher librarian and classroom teacher, it may actually reduce the access a student has to visit the library to gain independent reading materials. "For flexible scheduling to meet its promise, there must be a system in place to ensure that the learning opportunities arise, that children have appropriate access to the library

resource center and we can articulate what it is we want them to learn” (Van Deusen, 1995).

Studies have shown that the amount of time students spend reading independently decreases with age (Cullinan, 2000). While our library scheduling practices are moving towards a more flexible approach in these older grades, the reading practices of these students are showing they are reading less. Research also shows that spending more time reading voluntarily can increase reading proficiency (AASL, 1999). The change in scheduling could be contributing to the decline in the amount of material students at this level read. This raises the concern that the lack of independent reading could cause them to make less progress in their reading abilities. If we can provide older students with a routine time to visit the library, they may be encouraged to check out books when they otherwise would not. They may read material that they would not have read otherwise. They could be introduced to books that may cause a spark to ignite them as readers, a spark that would have burned out without a visit to a library.

Problem Statement

Flexible scheduling practices may deter students from visiting the library more frequently, and the number of books they read could lessen. This decline in library visits could result in lower growth in reading.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to measure the correlation between the number of materials checked out from the library and students’ achievement on reading assessments. Students can visit the library with their literature classroom every six days with the sole purpose of checking out books for independent reading. With the support of library

support staff, this fixed schedule can be carried out while the teacher librarian still remains flexible with other classrooms and teachers. In the school district where this study will take place, elementary students are brought to the library regularly for lessons and opportunities to get reading material. When they enter middle school in seventh grade, there has previously been no scheduled opportunity for them to visit the library. They have only visited the library when they chose to as individuals for the purpose of getting reading material. For reluctant readers, the library may be just another room in the building that they avoid and will never enter. In those cases, the possibilities of seeing shelves full of books, being introduced to new book arrivals, and having a librarian assist them and give advice are gone.

Hypothesis 1

Having a combination of fixed and flexible scheduling practices will cause student book checkouts to increase.

Hypothesis 2

Students in the top 10% of number of checkouts will show more growth in the area of reading on a fall and spring MAP assessment than students in the bottom 10%.

Hypothesis 3

Students in the top 10% of number of checkouts will show more growth from the previous year on the reading portion of the Iowa Assessment than students in the bottom 10%.

Hypothesis 4

Students belonging to a literature class that visit the library regularly will show greater growth in reading portions of both the MAP assessment and the Iowa Assessment than students belonging to a literature class that does not visit the library regularly.

Assumptions

The assumption is made that students with a higher number of book checkouts are actually reading more material and a greater variety of material than students with a lower number of book checkouts. It is also assumed that the different literature classes are constructed similarly and cover the same material. Each class has a mixture of students and they are not organized by the level of their reading ability.

Limitations

The number of books a student checks out is not always an indicator of how many books were read. Books may be checked out without being read or not read completely. Students not checking books out from the school library may be reading books from other sources such as home or the public library.

Significance

Students in a middle school setting where only a flexible schedule for library instruction takes place may visit the library less often for the sole purpose of getting reading material. A flexible schedule approach is different from the fixed schedule they may be used to where library instruction and book checkout time are combined in regular visits. While flexible scheduling has the benefits of being driven by class activities and involves collaborative planning with teachers, the benefits of students regularly visiting a library can become lost. A teacher that does not collaborate with the librarian may never

schedule a visit and students with that teacher would only visit the library on their own. Reluctant readers could avoid visits and be more inclined to read less. Librarians can't work with students with whom they never have contact. Promoting reading is part of the duty of librarians. Having students visit the library regularly allows librarians the opportunity to fulfill that duty (Johnson, 2001). Although taking students to the library does not guarantee they are going to read, they are at least provided more opportunities to gain access to materials of interest. A teacher librarian also has more contact time with students to learn their reading interests and advise them on materials. A schedule that incorporates a fixed component will provide those opportunities more often. Research suggests that if students read more, their reading abilities will improve. Improved test scores in reading is a goal of many schools today.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between the number of books checked out from the library and achievement on reading assessments. The research will examine growth on reading assessments for students who check out the highest number of materials and the least. It will also examine reading achievement scores of classrooms to determine if classes that visit the library regularly will show more growth on reading achievement scores than classes that do not. When students visit the library regularly, they may be provided with more opportunities to get books and receive reader advisory they may otherwise not receive. This may help encourage these students to read more.

Reading More Makes Better Readers

It has long been known that the more someone reads, the better reader he or she becomes. Aronow (1960) conducted a study to examine the effect of individualized reading. The question Aronow sought to answer was whether individualized reading had any effect on standardized reading test scores. It was hypothesized that the group of sixth grade students studied who received individualized reading in both fourth and fifth grade would not obtain a significantly different test score than students who did not. A group of 351 children were selected who had received individualized reading in fourth and fifth grade. The children were from 102 classes in 52 schools from all parts of the city. Students had various levels of IQ scores, were from various socio-economic levels, and were split equally in gender with 176 boys and 175 girls. After the sixth grade test was administered, average scores of the individualized reading group and the rest of the

student population were compared. It was found that the individualized reading group scored a higher average. Limitations in the study results include unseen differences in available reading materials, differences in time available for reading instruction, or other differences in classroom practices.

Later, Farris and Hancock (1991) looked further to investigate the relationship between literature and reading achievement. The researchers hoped to find how classroom reading programs, library availability and circulation, and the book club participation influenced reading achievement. A survey was used to gain information on the school and achievement data. Questions covered enrollment, library statistics, the availability of students to purchase books through book clubs, how reading was taught, and reading achievement information for sixth graders. Scholastic books provided a list of rural elementary schools with less than 500 students. Surveys were randomly mailed to schools that reported reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Forty-six schools in 13 states provided data. The results showed that three types of programs were used to teach reading: totally literature-based, a basal series, or a combination of both. Most schools used a combination approach, but no difference was found between the program used and achievement in reading comprehension. In regards to the use of book club participation, there was also no difference found in reading comprehension achievement. The one area of the study that did show a difference in reading comprehension achievement was library circulation. Students who circulated more than 30 volumes per year had higher achievement than those who circulated fewer.

Most Children Like To Read

Schatz and Krashen (2006) posed to elementary school children the question, “Do you like to read?” They believed that many questionnaires used to study reading attitude were misleading because of the questions posed. Children in grades one through six were asked the question and asked to answer by choosing “a lot,” “kind of,” or “not at all.” A total of 812 students in four elementary schools were given the question as part of a longer survey. The elementary schools surveyed varied in the number of students limited in English proficiency (ranging from 4% to 31%) and students receiving free or reduced lunches (ranging from 33% to 72%). The results showed that there was little dislike of reading at any grade level, despite poverty levels or the number of English language learners; however, the study showed a steady decrease in the upper grades of students liking reading “a lot” and an increase in those who chose “kind of.” The study did not address the specific topic of voluntary reading, and students may have kept only assigned reading in mind.

The interest in free reading continues through teenage years. Mellon (1987) looked to study the leisure reading habits of rural youth. A 28 item questionnaire was constructed to examine what teenagers chose to read on their own. Questions looked to determine if teenagers read on their own time, what and where they read, and where they acquired their reading materials. If teenagers did not read, they were given the opportunity to explain why. The questionnaires were distributed to two rural high schools serving grades nine through twelve. Ethnic groups were close to being equal, and incomes at or below the poverty level were earned between one-third and one-half of the families. Students in both schools were split into five groups for courses of study

including: Academically Gifted, College Preparatory, General, Special Education, and Chapter I. A total of 362 questionnaires were administered in ten English classes at each school including 22 Gifted, 156 College Preparatory, 72 General, 76 Chapter I, and 32 Special Education. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed to conclude how many students claimed they did or did not read in their spare time, both in groups and overall. Readers' answers were studied to determine factors that related to the type of material being read, being purchased, and where and when reading for pleasure took place. Answers from non-readers were studied to examine reasons they did not read. Eighty-two percent of the respondents said they read in their spare time including at least 70 percent of the General and Chapter I student groups. For those that answered that they did not read, the top answers given by over half the respondents were they worked after school or hated to read. The top three types of reading materials mentioned by males were magazines, sports books or sports biographies, and comic books. Females mentioned romance, mystery, and magazines. Almost 90 percent of the student respondents listed the school library as the location where they got their material to read. Gifted and College Preparatory students used the public library heavily, but it was used by less than half of the students in the other groups. Students reported they spent their own money on reading material to buy magazines and paperbacks. Most respondents were positive in their responses to how they felt about reading for fun, but mentioned having too little spare time. One student answered, "I love it, but it's very seldom [that] I have the time to go to the library and take the time to pick a book I know I won't get bored with before I finish it" (p. 29). Students were vocal in their preference of free reading over assigned

reading. Only eight of the sixty-six respondents who said they did not read in their spare time indicated so entirely throughout the questionnaire.

Students Count on School Libraries

Lamme (1976) investigated how reading habits and abilities were related. Lamme looked to see if good readers read more books and books of better quality than poor readers. She also asked if better readers would obtain books from a greater variety of sources. A longitudinal study was administered to 65 children ages ten to thirteen in a rural/suburban school setting. The children were asked to keep reading records for their fourth, fifth, and sixth grade years. The records were compared with scores from reading comprehension and critical reading tests. Lamme concluded that a child's reading level did play a small part in the pleasure he or she found in reading, but there were other motivators that played a larger role. The school library was the primary source of books read by the children in the study, with students getting 68-79% of their books there each year. Classroom libraries were also used, but used most heavily in self contained classrooms and when the contents of the library changed occasionally and the teacher promoted use. The children selected most books on their own, but when choosing books based on suggestions from others, they followed recommendations from friends and teachers more often than from librarians, parents, or siblings. Advice from friends was shown to be a stronger influence by the sixth grade and even showed a positive correlation with test scores. The reading habit that showed the most consistent correlation with reading ability was the habit of finding books by known authors, occurring about 25 percent of the time.

McQuillan and Au (2001) sought to answer questions dealing with access to material and reading ability. They noted a lack of information on how much affect access to materials had on the frequency of free reading. They sought to determine how much access high school students had to interesting reading material, the relationship between reading frequency and reading comprehension, and how access to reading material influenced reading frequency. Twenty-four students at the high school junior level, considered being at grade level and average readers, were selected to participate in the study. The group was composed of ten males and fourteen females. Over a two day period, a biographical survey, a print access and reading habits survey, a comprehension test, and print exposure measures were administered. It was found that in the home, students had close to the reported average number of books in their homes, but that only about one third of them were considered interesting to read. The home could not be considered a good source of reading materials. The students reported seldom using the community library, but visited the school library more frequently. Still, 28% said they had not visited the school library in the past month. The study showed that students who had greater access to print resources read more. "The more times students were taken to the school library by their teacher, the more free reading they engaged in." (p. 244-245). There were several limitations in this study, including having a small population of respondents and not including electronic forms of text.

In low-income situations, an adequate school library is even more important. Smith, Constantino, and and Krashen (1996) sought to show differences in print environments according to a community's mean income level. Three communities were examined: Beverly Hills, with a median income of \$83,000; Compton, with a median

income of \$20,000; and Watts with a median income of \$15,000. Forty public school children ranging from eight years to twelve years who were considered similar to other children in their communities were studied. Home and school visits were conducted to count the number of books in households and classroom libraries. Information on the school and public libraries was gathered by phone, and information on book stores was gathered by the Yellow Pages. The findings clearly showed that children in Beverly Hills had more books available to them in both their homes and their classroom libraries than either the Compton or Watts children. Children from Compton and Watts also had fewer books in their school and public libraries as well as fewer book stores within walking distance. While the children participating in this survey were chosen from a factor of convenience rather than a random sampling, and bias or an atypical representation of the communities could have occurred, the results were considered to be significant enough to show that children from lower income communities have less access to print material both in and out of the home.

Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan (2010) offered an analysis of the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) data from 2006 in hopes of showing that the school library can reduce the effect of poverty on reading achievement. PIRLS administered and analyzed a reading test, collected data gathered from a questionnaire covering attitudes, reading behavior, and classroom practices that is given to students and teachers, and provided data on socio-economic class. Fourth graders in forty countries were studied. In their analysis, Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan covered factors they felt were important predictors to reading achievement and included results from countries where complete data was available. The four predictors they included were socio-

economic status (SES), sustained silent reading (SSR), the school library, and instruction. It was found that students with higher SES scored higher on the reading test. Having time for independent reading in school and having a library with over 500 books showed to positively impact reading test scores. Socio-economic status was the strongest predictor of reading achievement and having access to a school library was nearly as strong. This leads to the conclusion that libraries can somewhat alter the effects of poverty. The school library may be the only place that children with low SES backgrounds have to acquire books.

Flexibility in Scheduling is Still Important

The thought of implementing a fixed portion in the schedule is not to replace flexible scheduling, but rather to provide greater access to library benefits for those whom may not visit on their own. Flexible scheduling has shown to impact circulation and students' access to material. Gavigan, Pribesh, and Dickens (2010) saw a problem with the lack of research to support flexible scheduling. The researchers wanted to determine if the library schedule would have an impact on the per pupil circulation of library materials. An online survey was randomly given to over 600 library media specialists with 176 returning data which could be analyzed. The survey included 22 questions including information on the library schedule, time and frequency of fixed classes, size of the library's collection, hours of access, circulation statistics, restrictions placed on students to limit checkouts, location and type of school, and student socioeconomic status. Statistical software was used to analyze the survey data and determine correlations between the library schedule, school factors, and circulation. The results showed that a relationship did exist between schedules and book circulation. Half

the schools in the study had a partially flexible schedule, and thirty-eight percent of the schools had a fixed schedule. Schools with a complete or partially flexible schedule checked out more books than those with fixed schedules. While a fixed component ensures all students make regular trips to the library, having a flexible schedule allows students to come as often as needed.

This literature review shows that students benefit from access to the school library. Students also tend to use the library more often when they visit it with a class at any grade level. In communities with low socio-economic status, the school library may be the only place where students can obtain free reading material of interest to them. Having a scheduled visit with their classes may help ensure that all students receive the benefits the library can offer them.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

If students do not visit the school library on a regular basis and do not actively visit on their own, the number of books they checkout to read for pleasure may decrease. With regular library visits, students can be exposed to reading material of interest and be motivated to read more. Students who read more have been shown to be better readers (Cullinan, 2000). This study determined the relationship between the number of materials checked out from the library and performance on reading assessments. It also compared yearly growth on reading assessment scores of classes who visited regularly to those who did not.

This quantitative bibliometric study examined circulation records of children along with the number of times their reading classes visited the library and compared them to scores from two reading tests. Beck and Manuel (2008) describe bibliometrics as “unobtrusive; its focus is upon the products of human activity (books, articles, Web pages, and so on), and not on the humans themselves” (p. 167). The research looked solely at the number of books checked out by students, how many times students visited the library with a class, and how they improved on reading assessments. The study assumed that students with a higher number of book checkouts read more material. This study also assumed that classes visiting the library received benefits such as advisory that they may not receive when visiting on their own. This study did not take into consideration the number of visits students make to the school library on their own, if they visited other sources to gain reading material such as a public library, or how much of the material checked out from the school library was actually read.

The population for this study was the academic and library records of seventh and eighth grade students from one public middle school. An application was submitted to the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Research Board for approval to use the student records. Results from both the MAP Assessment and Iowa Assessment were available approximately April 25, 2013. At this time, scores from both tests were pulled from the school district's student information system, Infinite Campus, and circulation statistics were exported from the library automation software, Follett Destiny. Student identifiers were removed from all data to protect student confidentiality. Once circulation statistics were gathered and the top and bottom ten percent of students were identified, only students who were in the district for the entire year and were present for reading assessments were used to examine growth. The total number of circulations was compared to the previous year to see if growth was present. Students who met the selection criteria were compared to see if there was a correlation between the number of books checked out and growth shown on scale scores from the reading assessments. The number of times each of the six classes visited the library was recorded. Comparisons of average growth were made for classes which have a number of visits that significantly differ. Data will determine the efficacy of the hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Students entering a middle school may find themselves in a school with a different library schedule. Visits may become more flexibly scheduled when they have had regular fixed visits in their previous elementary years. Students may find their availability to visit the library to decrease, and because of this read less material. If they do not read as much for pleasure there could be a drop in their reading abilities that could be seen from reading assessments. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of regular library visits and if there was a relationship between the number of materials checked out from the library and how students performed on reading assessments.

Circulation records were pulled from students who attended school the entire year and were present for both the Iowa Assessment and MAP assessment. Records were sorted by the number of circulations throughout the year. The top and bottom ten percent of students were compared on their growth on the Iowa Assessment and MAP reading tests. Classroom visits were also recorded to compare growth on both assessments of a class that visited more than another. Overall circulations were also examined to check for an increase in the total number of circulations from the previous year.

From August 2011 through April 2012 the library had a total of 16, 266 circulations by students. From August 2012 through April 2013 the library had a total of 15, 337 circulations by students. The hypothesis that regularly scheduled visits would increase the number of checkouts by students was proven to be untrue.

A total of 118 student records and test scores were compared to look for growth on the reading MAP assessment from fall to spring of the 2012 – 2013 school year. The

students with the least amount of circulations ranged from zero to five circulations from August to April, and the students with the most circulations ranged from 39 to 165. An independent two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances was used to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups of students and how much growth they made on the assessment, $t(117) = 1.98$, $p = .25$, but no significant difference was found. Students with the least circulations had a mean scale score growth of 2.08 and the students with the most circulations had a mean scale score growth of 3.71

The same 118 student records and test scores were compared to look for growth on the reading portion of the Iowa Assessment from 2012 – 2013. An independent two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances was used to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups of students and how much growth they made on the assessment, $t(117) = 1.98$, $p = .34$, but no significant difference was found. Students with the least amount of circulations had a mean scale score growth of 15.74 and the students with the most circulations had a mean scale score growth of 12.25. These means show students with less circulations showing more growth and may appear to be counterintuitive. Factors that could contribute to that outcome could include the fact that students with a lower reading scale score may check out few books, but have more room to for growth to be made on the assessment. Also, some students with lower reading abilities may enjoy the library, visit often on their own, and check out a greater number of books.

Of the six literature classes the total number of visits ranged from nine to twenty visits. Student scores on the MAP reading assessment and the reading portion of the Iowa Assessment from the classes with the least and most visits were compared to check

for growth. An independent two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances was used to see if there was a significant difference between students from the two classes on the MAP reading assessment, $t(180) = 1.97$, $p = .70$, but no significant difference was found. The class with the least visits had a mean scale score growth of .95 and the class with the most visits had a mean scale score growth of .53. Also, an independent two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances was used to see if there was a significant difference between students from the two classes on the reading portion of the Iowa Assessment, $t(180) = 1.97$, $p = .71$, but no significant difference was found. The class with the least visits had a mean scale score growth of 16.64 and the class with the most visits had a mean scale score growth of 17.77.

Overall, the examination of the data found that no hypothesis was proven true. Circulations did not increase from the previous year, and the number of library checkouts or library visits did not show a significant difference in the reading scores from the MAP assessment or Iowa Assessment.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the loss of fixed scheduling when entering a middle school setting from an elementary school the number of times a student visits the library could decrease. This could affect how much free reading material students check out from the library and also how much students read. An impact on reading achievement may be seen with less free reading. The purpose of this research was to see if a relationship the number of materials students checked out from the library or the number of visits a class had to the library had a relationship with how students performed on two reading assessments, and also if the regular visits would increase library circulation.

Conclusions

Library circulations were expected to increase from the previous year with literature classes making regular visits and every student visiting regularly. Despite the regular visits taking place library circulation dropped slightly. When comparing reading assessment scores belonging to students with the least and most number of library checkouts there was no significant difference. Also, classes with a teacher who visited the library significantly more times than another teacher did not show a significant difference.

Several factors took place in this school setting that could have had an affect on students reading. First, in the previous year the school schedule allowed for a block class for reading and writing. In this school year a change was made to separate the classes into two separate periods. This resulted in teachers seeing students for a shorter period of time, and having less time in their class period for free reading; something that was done

regularly in many classes before. Also, a study hall period was removed from the schedule for most students. This is a time when many students would visit the library on their own and would have contributed to more library circulations. Lastly, the classroom with the least amount of library visits had a teacher placed on long term leave. This resulted in many substitute teachers over the year that may have not known to, or have chosen not to, take the class to the library.

Recommendations

It is recommended that this study be continued to continue to look for the effects of library visits in school settings that have flexible scheduling. It would be beneficial to examine the effect of classes regularly visiting the library together for checkout purposes for a longer period of time and in a setting where the environment may remain more stable. While we know the benefits of having flexible scheduling and the results of this study did not show a significant difference in reading assessment scores; it is important to consider the benefits of including a fixed schedule.

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