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Supporting reading curriculum without restricting access to library materials: Resources for teacher librarians

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Abstract

External pressure upon teacher librarians to arrange library book collections by level and to limit students' choices to books within their level is complex due to the interwoven but sometimes conflicting demands of providing quality reading instruction, resources for independent reading, and relevant readers' advisory. The school library and its teacher librarian are positioned squarely in the middle of this dynamic topic. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and policies teacher librarians use to support reading instruction without restricting students' access to library materials. This study revealed that through the use of focused instruction, adaptable policies, and staunch advocacy teacher librarians can create a school library environment that both supports reading instruction and promotes literacy without restricting students' access to library materials.

SUPPORTING READING CURRICULUM WITHOUT RESTRICTING ACCESS TO

LIBRARY MATERIALS: RESOURCES FOR TEACHER LIBRARIANS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

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Tricia Carty

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ABSTRACT

External pressure upon teacher librarians to arrange library book collections by level and to limit students' choices to books within their level is complex due to the interwoven but sometimes conflicting demands of providing quality reading instruction, resources for independent reading, and relevant readers' advisory. The school library and its teacher librarian are positioned squarely in the middle of this dynamic topic. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and policies teacher librarians use to support reading instruction without restricting students' access to library materials. This study revealed that through the use of focused instruction, adaptable policies, and staunch advocacy teacher librarians can create a school library environment that both supports reading instruction and promotes literacy without restricting students' access to library materials.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A group of 25 primary grade students energetically bound into the library for book checkout. However, excitement quickly turns into chaos as those same 25 children race all over the library to find books. Some quickly make selections and hurry to checkout and get started reading while others aimlessly wander around the library, shelf marker in hand. Others are sent back to the book shelves by their teacher to search for new books because they don't have a "just right" book or have exclusively selected texts too challenging for them to decode or comprehend.

The teacher librarian is caught in the middle of conflicting goals -assisting students attempting to find books that they like and are interested in reading while also meeting the parameters set forth by the classroom teacher. However, it is not possible for a single teacher librarian to individually conference and assist all 25 students during a single 20 minute checkout period. Teacher librarians often struggle to promote student choice in independent reading while balancing the need to support literacy instruction and its requirements of appropriately leveled texts as stipulated by the classroom teacher.

Problem Statement

Many elementary school librarians are positioned at the intersection of literacy curriculum book leveling practices and independent student reading choice interests; if unresolved, this intersection may inhibit the teacher librarian's role as a literacy instructional partner and their provision of reader's advisory services. According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2009), the mission of the school library program and the school librarian leading it, is to "instill a love of learning in all

students and ensure equitable access to information" (p. 7). Additionally, the AASL (2011) Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels explicitly states, "It is the responsibility of school librarians to promote free access for students and not to aid in restricting their library materials." Therefore no student should be restricted to accessing only books in a certain location, genre, or level within the library.

The Emergence of Readability Scales

Guided reading programs are frequently used in elementary classrooms to facilitate individual reading growth via a combination of small group and whole class instruction crafted around texts leveled by readability (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Various readability scales can be used, including the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Fountas and Pinnell, and Lexile (Gillet, et al., 2012). As part of the Guided Reading program, students become aware of their independent reading level during individual conferences with the teacher (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). This level, as coded by letters, numbers, or colors, indicates the readability level of a "just right" book for that particular student. "Just right" books are texts that fall within the independent reading level for a student because they provide appropriate amounts of support and challenge to the reader (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Reading and comprehending these texts should encourage reading development because they are not too difficult, but yet still include vocabulary, writing structures, and ideas that will foster student reading growth. According to Fountas & Pinnell (2010), "teachers need to closely match texts to readers in order to help them experience effective reading" (p. 6).

Support for Student Choice in Reading

Finding just right texts that are appropriately matched to the reading levels of students is simplified in classroom libraries by the use of a visual coding system like colored dots or book bins. However, this practice directly contrasts the AASL's (2011) position statement advocating that school library materials not be labeled by reading level in order to preserve a patron's right to privacy and a patron's freedom to read. According to the American Library Association's (ALA) Library Bill of Rights (1996), "Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves" (para. 2). This reinforces the essential role libraries play in providing access to information on topics of interest to patrons. Therefore, when students come to the school library to find reading materials, they should not feel trapped by having to choose between reading texts at a specific level and reading texts on a topic that interests them.

A large body of evidence exists to support the positive impact engaging and compelling texts have on student reading achievement. Stephen Krashen (2004) has authored many of the texts outlining the essential role free voluntary reading plays in reading skill development. This type of reading provides the foundation for achieving higher levels of proficiency. During free voluntary reading, students read self-selected materials engaging to them as individual readers. School libraries "are often the only source of books and other reading materials for children...and they are a potent source" (p. 38). Therefore, by advocating for the principles of the Library Bill of Rights, school libraries are also providing the reading materials students need to develop as readers.

Teacher Librarian Instructional Partner Role

One essential role teacher librarians fulfill is that of an instructional partner as outlined in *Empowering Learners* (AASL, 2009). They work collaboratively with classroom and support teachers to meet the learning needs of students in a variety of content and skill areas. Teacher librarians collaborate with classroom teachers to support reading achievement and literacy instruction by providing access to and reader's advisory on high quality reading material in the school library collection. Reader's advisory is an essential element of how a teacher librarian supports the literacy curriculum of a classroom. Kimmel (2012) asserts, "Reader's advisory is one of the most significant services we provide to our students in school libraries" (p. 44). This service can allow students to engage with the reading process because "the librarian's role in reader's advisory is to reach the personal interests and needs of the individual student" (Brodie, 2013).

Readers Advisory Best Practices

Reader's advisory is one of the many tasks teacher librarians complete on a regular basis. "Reader's advisory is that age-old responsibility of the librarian to make the best effort to connect the right book to the right student at the right time" (Brodie, 2013, p. 18). By utilizing successful reader's advisory techniques, teacher librarians can guide students towards engaging and meaningful texts to be read during voluntary reading times both inside and outside of the school day.

One approach that can be used in reader's advisory is book matching (Brodie, 2013). Book matching requires that teacher librarians ask questions revealing other books and topics in which students show interest. Then, this information is used to provide

some suggestions about similar book "matches" from the library's collection. Another strategy teacher librarians can use is to ask a series of questions revealing the appeal elements of texts. Kimmel (2012) describes appeal elements as relating to the "literary qualities of a book and also to the essential interactions of readers and print" (p. 44). This technique uses the emotions and experiences created by texts as the basis for finding new texts that meet the needs and interests of readers. Teaching students how to use these appeal terms in a reader's advisory context allows students to think about texts, characters, and stylistic elements in ways ultimately opening students up to new reading possibilities (Nesi, 2010).

School librarians are squarely positioned in the crosshairs of the debate between reading leveled just right books promoted by literacy curricula and advocating for students' freedom to read self-selected materials from the school library. There is little established research on how to pragmatically synthesize the important aspects of promoting reading development through guided reading and supporting a student's unrestricted freedom to read within the physical context of the school library. Questions remain as to what administrative policies and strategies for organization, instruction, and signage can be utilized by school librarians to promote a love of reading based on interests while simultaneously supporting reading achievement.

Summary of Problem Statement

Many elementary school librarians are positioned at the intersection of literacy curriculum book leveling practices and students' independent interest based reading selection. If unresolved, the tension created by having to follow one route or the other

may inhibit the teacher librarian's role as a literacy instructional partner and reader's advisor.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine how school libraries and teacher librarians can support guided reading instruction without restricting access to any library materials.

Research Questions

1. How might the organization and signage of a school library promote efficiency in elementary students self selecting both just right books and interest based choice reading materials without restricting access to either?

2. How might teacher librarians' instruction on book selection help students learn where to find both just right books and interest based choice reading materials without restricting access to either?

Assumptions

This research assumes that teacher librarians will be knowledgeable of the Library Bill of Rights, AASL position statements against labeling, and the benefits of students choices in reading. This also assumes that librarians will be aware of the large body of credible research behind the structure, philosophy, and implementation of using leveled texts as a part of guided reading programs, which successfully foster reading achievement in students.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the perspectives, professional preparation, and district professional development of the individual teacher librarians interviewed for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine how school libraries and teacher librarians can support guided reading instruction without restricting access to any library materials. Prior research into this topic centers around four areas that span the issues of teacher supported leveled reading and librarian supported inquiry and free choice reading: the emergence of readability scales, support of student choice in reading, teacher librarians as instructional partners, and best practices in readers' advisory. These topics combine to provide research perspectives regarding the issue of leveling the library faced by many teacher librarians. The school library is uniquely positioned to support curriculum, student interests, and access to resources, but recent implementations of leveled reading requirements have created a disconnect in approach to serving student needs.

The Emergence of Readability Scales

Teacher librarians must be familiar with the specific curriculum, standards, and assessments in curricular areas in order to support, extend, and collaborate on curriculum to benefit student learning. Reading achievement and instruction are areas of curricular focus in the Common Core State Standards. In 1997, Congress commissioned a panel to study the effectiveness of multiple components of reading instruction and to make recommendations about best practices in those areas. Consequently, the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) comprised of 14 individuals (reading researchers, collegiate educators, teachers, educational administrators, and parents) was formed. Its report, submitted to the Labor, Health, and Human Services U.S. subcommittee in 2000, synthesized its findings based on a comprehensive review of research studies in each of

the subcategories outlined by the panel. It also provided recommendations for instructional practice and areas needing additional research.

One purpose of the NRP (2000) was to review "the effectiveness of two major instructional approaches to fluency development" (p. 3-1). Guided reading and formal efforts to increase the amount of students' independent or recreational reading were the two primary approaches studied in this component of the NRP. Guided reading was one of the instructional approaches reviewed under the fluency subgroup. In order to perform this systematic review of literature, the Panel used two databases, PsychINFO and ERIC, to search for articles that used experimental procedures, were conducted with students in kindergarten through grade 12, appeared in a refereed journal, and focused only on English language reading. Each study meeting all criteria was summarized and coded.

The NRP (2000) found that guided reading is an effective instructional technique to use in improving reading fluency and overall reading achievement. The review of literature revealed that guided reading had a positive impact on "word recognition, fluency, and comprehension as measured by a variety of test instruments and at a range of grade levels" (p. 3-3). These findings provide the basis for the Panel's support of guided reading as a means of improving reading fluency and achievement.

Wilson, Martens, and Arya (2004) sought to further examine the implications of the NRP report. They designed a study to examine the impact of three different reading programs on the reading processes of three second grade classrooms in a singular metropolitan area. To perform this comparison, the researchers collected and analyzed data from 84 low-socioeconomic status children living in an urban area. None of the students were identified for special education or English as a Second Language services.

Students all received instruction in one of the three reading programs in first grade. While in second grade, students read books to the researchers aloud. A miscue analysis was performed by researchers during the read alouds. Students were then asked to retell the story and complete short interview questions with the researchers. Children then took a standardized phonics test from the *Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery*. The researchers also conducted additional interviews with principals and teachers regarding their perceptions of reading program use and observed classroom language arts instruction.

Wilson et al. (2004) used this data to compare both phonemic awareness and students' comprehension of meaning. This study revealed that the guided reading program, utilizing leveled texts and small group instruction, produced students who were strategically reading for meaning beyond just the literal level more often than students who were taught using the two other exclusively phonics based programs; this difference was significant. On the other hand, scores on the phonics assessment did not reveal a statistical difference among the three student sample groups. Therefore, these findings led the researchers to conclude that even though students may score well on a scientifically based phonics test, only utilizing phonics instruction can lead to readers not truly reading for meaning; whereas, a guided reading program can develop readers who demonstrate both phonemic awareness and critical comprehension skills.

Both the NRP (2000) and Wilson et al. (2004) provide a clear research base for the implementation of guided reading as an instruction approach for increasing reading achievement. Using leveled texts that are accessible but not too challenging for students is an essential component of guided reading programs (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Therefore, the adoption of guided reading curricula created an emphasis on identifying texts by readability and matching students to texts by that defined level in both school and classroom libraries.

Support for Student Choice in Reading

Providing access to high quality resources from which students can select reading materials is an important task of a teacher librarian. Allowing students to select texts that are personally interesting is a means of engaging students with learning tasks which can lead to increases in reading achievement. Stephen Krashen (2004) performed an in-depth scientific review of research connected to reading instructional practices, particularly that of free voluntary reading (FVR), defined as reading "because you want to: no book reports, no questions at the end of the chapter" (p. 1). In completing this research review, he referenced, analyzed, and presented the results of research completed from 1897 through 2003 which sought to study the effects of various components of reading and language arts pedagogy. Krashen's (2004) interpretation of the data presented by these studies focused on support for FVR and noted the ineffectiveness of the alternative to FVR, direct instruction.

Krashen (2004) found a strong link between FVR and achievements in literacy. In summary, "In-school free reading studies and 'out of school' self-reported free voluntary reading studies show that more reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development" (p. 17). Emphasizing free voluntary reading as a means of fostering reading achievement, schools must provide access to high quality, engaging reading materials. The school library is a means of accomplishing this. The school's teacher librarian must develop a collection of resources

that matches the reading interests and abilities of students in order to provide choice for students in selecting materials they simply want to read, not materials they must read because a teacher requires it.

The concept of providing choice for students has been studied by many educational researchers. Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008) performed a meta-analysis of 41 studies connected to student choice in the classroom. Both published and unpublished studies involving only students in general education populations in the United States and Canada were included in the analysis. Only studies which involved the manipulation of choice, required participants to make a task choice, and measured motivation and related outcomes were included in the analysis. The researchers assessed the effect of choice on related outcomes by collecting, coding, and analyzing information from the 41 studies.

Patall et al. (2008) found that choice can have a positive impact on intrinsic motivation and a "number of related outcomes including effort, task performance, perceived competence, and preference for challenge" (p. 294). This analysis in addition to Krashen's (2004) research review, demonstrated a strong research base for providing choice to students as a means of increasing engagement and consequently achievement. The school library serves as a place where students make choices about reading materials in order to engage with texts that are meaningful and relevant to them. Teacher librarians can support students and their self selection of materials through collection development to meet students' needs and readers' advisory to connect students with reading materials.

Teacher Librarians as Instructional Partners

Serving as an instructional partner is an essential role for teacher librarians because it can benefit student learning. To examine the impact teacher librarians have on student learning, Achterman (2008) performed a descriptive study analyzing the connection between school library staffing, services, and access and student achievement as measured by the required state STAR assessment. To perform this study, Achterman (2008) used data from California's statewide criterion referenced tests, school and community demographic data, and the state school library survey. Data from all grades levels was analyzed to study any similarities or differences by grade level.

Achterman (2008) found that the level of certified teacher librarian and non-certified support staff in a school library are strongly related to the level of services a school library provides. Additionally, increases in the level of services a school library provides is significantly related to increases in test scores on the state mandated assessment. The results of the study also showed distinct differences in the staffing levels and access to libraries between elementary and high school libraries. When analyzing the library services which contribute to the increase in student test scores, Achterman found the instructional role of the teacher librarian was an essential element of student success.

Achterman (2008) provided data to support claims that library programs staffed with trained and certified teacher librarians provide services correlated to student achievement. One example Achterman found among library services was higher levels of readers' advisory and book selection instruction conducted by the teacher librarian in collaboration with classroom teachers benefitted student learning, as indicated through students' reading test scores.

The Idaho School Library Impact Study--2009: How Idaho Libraries Teachers, and Administrators Collaborate for Student Success (Lance, Rodney, & Schwarz, 2010) examined the relationship administrators and teachers have with teacher librarians, their perceptions of school libraries and teacher librarians, and how those factors impact libraries and thereby the academic achievement of students. This study surveyed 176 administrators, 668 classroom teachers, and 146 teacher librarians. Their responses were analyzed by frequency of response, cross-tabulated by predictors of response, and compared to measures of test performance on the statewide assessment (ISAT).

The study (Lance, et. al, 2010) found that nearly 90% of administrators viewed collaboration on instructional design and delivery as essential or desirable. However, the researchers also found that implementation of collaborative planning and instruction between classroom teachers and teacher librarians rarely or never occurred for almost 50% of classroom teachers. Therefore, "where teachers experience librarians as instructional colleagues and technology integrators, students are more likely to excel academically" (p. v). The report also noted that advanced scores on the state Reading and Language Arts tests are more likely when collaboration occurs between teacher librarians and teachers in a school community where the administrator values collaboration. Thus, this state impact study and Achterman's study (2008) provided clear evidence of the benefits of collaboration between teacher librarians and classroom teachers on student learning. Therefore, as a means of increasing student achievement, teacher librarians collaborate with classroom teachers in a variety of areas; one means of collaboration is through the support of the independent reading of students, or reader's advisory.

Best Practices in Readers' Advisory

The concept of readers' advisory is a historically established practice in both school and public libraries. However, little empirical research exists focusing specifically on readers' advisory in school libraries. There is a large body of literature centered on practical implementation of school library readers' advisory, but there is a clear need for more empirical studies on the effectiveness of such practices. Many of the recommended readers' advisory techniques and strategies are rooted in the research regarding the reading motivation and interests of students.

Hughes-Hassell and Lutz (2006) examined the leisure reading attitudes, preferences, and habits of middle school students to determine what factors influenced those items in a positive or negative manner. They studied 214 students in grades six through eight using a 20 item questionnaire that included open ended items. Hughes-Hassell and Lutz analyzed the response percentages of each objective question answer choice.

Notably, Hughes-Hassell and Lutz (2006) found that students were actually reading independently, contrary to the widespread belief that students simply did not read. Consequently, they noted schools need to provide access to reading materials that are interesting and engaging to students. Hughes-Hassell and Lutz also demonstrated the importance of school library resources and "the role of the school librarian in promoting new and appropriate materials, both to students and as a collaborating member of the faculty" (p. 43). Therefore, teacher librarians are positioned to engage with students in a readers' advisory role in the school library.

McKool (2007) investigated the factors influencing student reading outside of school. The purpose of this study was to investigate why some students choose to read outside of school and others choose not to read. McKool explored research questions connected to the impact of after-school activities on independent reading and what impacted avid and reluctant readers. A group of 199 fifth grade students completed surveys and a subset of that group was also interviewed over the course of four months. The surveys addressed questions of attitude towards reading and motivation to read of students reading on or above grade level as measured by a standardized state reading assessment. This study used multiple measures to analyze the data collected from the student surveys and interviews.

McKool's (2007) results showed that many students, particularly reluctant readers, do not spend a lot of time reading outside of school. In addition some factors that appear to negatively influence time spent reading outside of school include after school activities. However, students also mentioned a preference for spending class time reading self selected material based on personal interests. They also showed a preference for informal book discussions, reading aloud, and sharing of book recommendations during class. These results yielded some specific implications for educational practice in connection to how school librarians can promote reading for both avid and reluctant readers.

Students in McKool's (2007) study showed an interest in teacher recommendations and a desire to read and informally discuss texts with teachers. They "made it clear that teachers could promote voluntary reading by finding out what students are interested in reading and then providing access to those materials" (p. 127). Teacher

librarians can use this information to make decisions throughout the readers' advisory process. The results emphasize the need for teacher librarians to get to know the personal reading interests and needs of students in order to positively impact their reading choices.

Both studies (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006; McKool, 2007) show that readers' advisory practices of teacher librarians impacted the reading habits and choices of students. However, more empirical studies analyzing the most effective practices teachers librarians implement in readers' advisory are needed. Many recommendations appear in professional literature, but hopefully researchers will begin to study the statistical effectiveness of those strategies to provide teacher librarians with a research base to continue and expand or alter and adapt elements and techniques of readers' advisory programming in the school library.

Summary

Teacher librarians are uniquely positioned to both support reading instruction but also encourage students' reading interests in the school library. These two components, however, can philosophically oppose each other in the daily practice of schools. The research shows that guided reading can benefit student instruction (NRP, 2000; Wilson, et al., 2004) and that student choice in the selection of free reading material can benefit reading growth (Krashen, 2004; Patall et al., 2008). These are important findings as they provide the evidence needed to support the use of both readability scales and interest based reading materials in reading instruction and development. However, more research is needed on how school libraries can best support each of these philosophies without restricting access to resources.

A school library is uniquely positioned between the two philosophies of reading development. Therefore, teacher librarians can collaborate with classroom teachers to benefit student learning as demonstrated by Achterman (2008) and Lance et al. (2010). One way teacher librarians can act as instructional partners is through the implementation of readers' advisory. Studies show (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006; McKool, 2007) that students value readers' advisory experiences, but there is still a definitive need for more research on readers' advisory techniques and their effectiveness in school libraries. This type of empirical data would provide teacher librarians with evidence by which to implement strategies, techniques and programs that support reading instruction and student choice without limiting access to materials.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

School libraries are tasked with both supporting curriculum and providing reading choices for patrons. However, philosophies about these two concepts can contradict each other and cause operational and philosophical challenges for teacher librarians. Support for the use of leveled texts in guided reading instruction and the benefit of interest based free reading choices is supported by scholarly research. The purpose of this descriptive study is to examine how school libraries and teacher librarians can support guided reading instruction without restricting access to any library materials.

Research Design

This qualitative study is designed around a case study model of currently practicing teacher librarians. Wildemuth (2009) states, "a case study approach can...be used in descriptive research to depict comprehensively the phenomenon of interest" (p. 52). This method will be used because it allows the researcher to study patterns and themes connected to a single topic of interest. A small purposeful sample of teacher librarians allowed the researcher to gain detailed, in-depth information regarding the participant's experiences with the research topic. Participants were identified by their response to a district-wide professional development survey for teacher librarians indicating they had engaged in conversations with administrators and or other teachers regarding leveling practices in the school library. These individual case studies were then examined comprehensively to analyze any patterns or themes that exist across cases to determine what strategies and operational procedures allow teacher librarians to support guided reading curriculum without restricting access to materials.

Participants

The population in this study is a purposeful, convenience sample of teacher librarians. All participants have been involved in formal discussions with administrators or other teachers regarding leveling practices in the school library. The sample includes three elementary school teacher librarians from eastern Iowa school districts utilizing guided reading as part of the adopted literacy curriculum. Each school serves students in grades kindergarten through sixth grade. Participants were contacted by email regarding voluntary participation in the interview.

Procedures

Data Sources

This descriptive study utilized semi-structured interviews. Wildemuth (2009) describes this technique as a method of data collection that allows, "less rigidity and more leeway than structured interviews but are more organized and systematic than unstructured interviews in developing conversation" (p. 233). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask all participants similar questions but with the opportunity to explore some responses more in-depth with follow up questions. The use of interviews in this descriptive study allowed the researcher to "understand a phenomenon in more depth" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 27).

The interviews for this study included a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix A). At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher also collected a series of digital images documenting the physical organization of each participant's school library.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. As described in Wildemuth (2009), qualitative content analysis is a systematic examination of "characteristics related to the hypothesis or research question (p. 298). To complete this, each interview was recorded with a digital audio recorder, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The researcher looked for themes, patterns, and similarities in the responses of participants and images of library spaces. These were identified by using qualitative/thematic content analysis which, according to Wildemuth (2009), results in "textual description, typologies, and descriptive models" (p. 298).

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Limitations

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One limitation of a qualitative study is the possibility of researcher bias. In this study, the researcher is employed by the same school district as some of the participants. Consequently, the researcher must be aware of any potential bias during data collection and analysis. Another limitation of the study is the small sample of interview participants. Within the sample, various perspectives, professional preparation backgrounds, and district professional development experiences will exist.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to examine how school libraries and teacher librarians can support guided reading instruction without restricting access to any library materials. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with three practicing teacher librarians and captured digital images of the physical library spaces within which the participants work. All participants work at elementary schools of different sizes within a single urban school district in Iowa. Each teacher librarian will be referred to as Participant A, Participant B, and Participant C working in Library A, Library B, and Library C, respectively.

Locating Library Materials

The first research question this study aimed to answer was: How might the organization and signage of a school library promote efficiency in elementary students self selecting both just right books and interest based choice reading materials without restricting access to either? All three participants have fiction books divided into smaller sections in order to help students locate materials independently. The sections utilized for fiction texts in each library are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Library Sections for Fiction Texts

Section Name	Library A	Library B	Library C
Everybody	Yes	Yes	Yes
Early Readers	Yes	Yes	No
Independent Readers	No	Yes	Yes
Fiction	Yes	Yes	Yes
Graphic Novels	No	Yes	Yes

With the exception of graphic novels, each of the sections listed in Table 1 contain texts grouped together in that section because they fall within a broad range of reading level and text complexity. Students will often begin with Everybody books and then progress to Early Readers before transitioning to Independent Readers (commonly referred to as chapter books) and finally fiction texts. All three participants maintain signage denoting specific sections throughout the library as a means of helping students locate books. Participant A's library has section name labels on each shelf. In addition, Participant A has found it beneficial to also have signs marking the location of popular series and popular character books in order to make it easier for students to find interest based reading selections.

The digital images of each library show that each library uses signage on walls or suspended from the ceiling to identify each of the smaller sections. Each library space varied in size and shape. Therefore, no definitive patterns appeared upon analysis of the the physical organization and location of specific sections. Each library, however, did place the Early Reader section in close proximity to the Everybody section and the

Independent Reader section in close proximity to the fiction section. This type of library

design can make it easier for students transitioning from independently selecting texts in

one section to more complex texts in another section to find materials. Using this design,

students do not have to move very far away from an area in which they already feel

comfortable and confident in selecting texts.

Participant B described how she teaches lessons about what books can be found in

a particular section by physically moving students to that section for instruction so they

can associate that physical space with a unique type of book. This shows it is important

for a teacher librarian to explicitly teach students about the characteristics and types of

books available in each section in order for students to effectively browse or find a book

in the library.

All three participants responded that this type of instruction occurs mostly at the

first, second, and third grade level. This practice directly aligns with the reading levels

and content of texts frequently found in the Everybody, Early Reader, and Independent

Reader sections of the library. As students develop their reading skills and progress to

reading more complex and difficult texts, they will need to find those texts in a different

section of the library. Lessons on the types of books in each library section and clear

signage make this process less overwhelming and time consuming for primary grade

students.

Book Selection Instruction

The second research question this study sought to investigation was: How might

teacher librarians' instruction on book selection help students learn where to find both

just right books and interest based choice reading materials without restricting access to

either? All three participants described the importance of teaching students how to

browse the library and then determine if a book meets a student's needs and/or interests.

All three participants responded that most of the instruction on book selection occurs at

the primary grade levels with a brief review of these concepts at the upper grades. Table

2 lists how the participants teach students what a just right book is and how to determine

if a book is a just right book.

Table 2

Strategies for Just Right Book Selection

Question	Responses		
	Participant A	*Participant B*	*Participant C*
Please describe the lessons used to teach students to locate a "just right book" in the library.	● Examine Text Features ● Five Finger Rule ● Reading Section Signs	● Examine Text Features ● Five Finger Rule ● Read alouds in various sections	● Book Sort ● Five Finger Rule ● Book Recommendations

Each participant responded by saying the five finger rule is used as an effective

strategy for helping students determine if a book is a just right text. This strategy requires

a student to read a page of a book and keep track of how many unfamiliar words are

encountered. If the page contains more than five unfamiliar or unknown words, it should

not be considered a just right text at that time. The other frequently used strategy for

finding just right books, as mentioned by two of the three participants, is analyzing the

text features of a book. Text features such as the pictures, text, font size, and spacing are

components of instruction delivered by Participant A and Participant B. Participant A

asks students, "When you pull a book off the shelf, what do you look at?" This then leads into lessons on using the five finger rule and text features as means of selecting just right texts. Similarly, Participant B also explained that she uses a think aloud strategy to model the questions about text features a reader should ask to determine if a book is a just right text. She models this process for students with questions like, "How do I know if this is a good fit book? What do the pictures look like? How many words are on the page? What does the text look like? How much space is between the lines?" When using this technique students see the teacher librarian engaging in the process of effective book selection.

It is also notable that each participant mentioned multiple ways of teaching students to identify a just right book. Participant A specifically mentioned the importance of using a variety of strategies because she doesn't "want them (students) to think that if there are five hard words (in a book), that you shouldn't try that book." This reinforces the concept of a just right text being one that is dynamic and continually changing based on the evolving skills, needs, and interests of a reader. None of the participants use a formal readability scale like Lexile or DRA to identify a just right book for students. Participant B specifically stated, "I've never talked with kids about DRA levels because I just don't promote that." Instead, she teaches students to use text features, the five finger rule, and reading aloud with an adult as strategies for finding a just right book. Likewise, Participant C described both small group and individual lessons focused on teaching students how to find just right books. The use of multiple strategies for assessing a work's suitability for a particular reader illustrates that there is not solely one way to

select a just right book but that a just right text may cover a range of content and

readability measures.

All participants also teach students strategies for finding interest based reading

selections. These responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Strategies for Interest Based Book Selection

Question	Responses		
	Participant A	*Participant B*	*Participant C*
How are students at your school taught to identify and locate interest based reading materials?	● Book recommendations ● Signage for series books and popular characters	● Teacher librarian modeling ● Personal Examples ● Book recommendations	● Book recommendations ● Read alouds ● Book talks

Each participant expressed using book recommendations from other students, the

teacher librarian, or classroom teacher as an effective way to help students find interest

based materials. The concept of a book recommendation, as discussed by the participants,

is a suggestion regarding a text a reader should consider when determining what to read

next. Participant B talked about using her knowledge of students' reading skills and

personal interests and combining that with her knowledge of the collection to match a

student with a text. She also encourages students to discuss texts with their peers.

Participant C commented that she views the school library's role in the process of literacy

development as "more about exploration and learning, more so than reading at a certain

level." Participant B's techniques acknowledge that sharing book recommendations is

one way of exploring texts and generating excitement about reading while helping to foster a culture of literacy. This type of school library environment aligns with McKool's (2007) research findings that informal book discussions and the sharing of book recommendations are readers' advisory techniques preferred by students.

Participant A expanded upon this to also use signage in conjunction with recommendations to assist in students locating materials efficiently in the school library. Each shelf in Library A is labeled with the section name. As students are locating materials, they can easily see the name of the section which corresponds to the call numbers found in that area. For example, shelves are labeled with categories such as "Fiction", "Everybody", and "Nonfiction". Therefore, if students are browsing shelves or looking for a specific title, there are multiple visual labels at eye level that expand upon ceiling and suspended signage. These labels can help remind students of direct instruction from the teacher librarian during weekly library classes regarding the type of texts that can be found in each particular area of the school library. Library A also utilizes laminated signage to highlight frequently requested series books and those featuring popular characters.

Participant C also described delivering book talks as a way to engage student readers and communicate book recommendations and suggestions. In addition, she provided details on a book review project completed during library class by the 2015-2016 sixth grade students. These interactive projects will be used during the 2016-2017 school year as another resource from which students can acquire book recommendations based on personal reading preferences, topics, and interests. Projects such as this example demonstrate the role of library resources and a teacher librarian in a school's literacy

environment. Hughes-Hassel and Lutz (2006) specifically expressed the importance of this in their research on factors influencing the reading habits of students.

No Restriction of Library Materials

When asked if students are ever prohibited from checking out texts based on reading level, all three participants said that does not occur in their respective school libraries. However, if a student is selecting something he or she would not be able to understand due to their level of comprehension skills or the work's content, each participant said she would encourage that student to look at additional or different items to find at least one text, in addition to the student's self selected text, that would be more accessible. Participant A even mentioned asking a student if he or she "has someone at home who will read it (the book) with you?" This type of question reaffirms the interest based choice of the student but also encourages the development of literacy skills through a reading partnership with an adult. All participants mentioned a desire for students to be excited about reading, and that sometimes this develops through interest based choices, not book selections made exclusively on reading level. Participant C commented that she wants "kids to get excited about the library and experience the pleasure of reading a great book, and sometimes that starts with getting a book and not even reading it."

All participants in this study responded that they do not feel as though their administrators or classroom teachers expect them to help students find texts based solely on the reading level of a student. Each participant described occasional situations where teachers require students to checkout a specific type of text like a just right book or one from a certain genre, topic, or form. However, in those situations all participants advocated for and maintained elements of free choice for students during checkout to

ensure students' personal interests were reflected in at least one of their book selections for the week. Participant B specifically mentioned giving students two categories from which to select books-one just right and between two to four (depending on the grade level) other free choice books. This combination of requirements guides students to find a text that supports the guided reading curriculum, but also preserves students' ability to access materials that they deem interesting, relevant, and/or engaging. Participant C stated, "I always reinforce that one of their (students) books can always be whatever they want but that if their teacher wants them to get an animal book because they are doing research, they need to have that also." Interest based choice in Library A is also promoted as Participant A noted that her building principal is " very open to the library being a free place with independent choice." She also mentioned that primary grade teachers in her building encourage students to ensure that one of the five books they check out be a just right text. This is not a library policy, but rather a flexible guideline that allows for texts to be selected based on students' interests and reading levels.

This type of expandable circulation policy supports the promotion of student choice in free voluntary reading (FVR) as advocated for by Krashen (2004) and Patall, et. al. (2008) while simultaneously promoting reading skill development in a guided reading program. An essential component of the guided reading framework designed by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) is engaging students with texts written at their independent reading level. The policy in use at Library B is one way to encourage and support interest based reading selections in addition to infusing elements of choice into students' search for a just right text.

Summary

The data from interviews and digital images show that teacher librarians can use a variety of strategies to help students find both interest based and just right books in the school library's collection. Teacher librarians can make it easier for students to find materials by dividing the school library into smaller sections and using clear signage for the section name and popular book series and characters. Secondly, teacher librarians can then teach explicit lessons regarding how to browse and/or locate a text by call number in each section so students can become more efficient and confident when searching for texts independently.

After students locate a text on the shelves, they must still evaluate the text to determine if it meets their reading level and interest needs. Teacher librarians can provide instruction in a variety of techniques for this. Teaching students how to use the five finger rule, how to evaluate text features, and use book recommendations are effective approaches in selecting free reading materials. Underlying all of the data in this study is the idea that teacher librarians must be staunch advocates for freedom of choice while teaching students strategies to use when making choices related to their reading.

Overall, the topic of levelling in the library is a complex one with few concrete, crystallized answers. Each of the participants mentioned that many situations regarding students' text selection and checkout restrictions require careful consideration and analysis of the multitude of factors, both school and home-based, that impact learning. Classroom teachers are often individualizing instruction in order to ensure students are learning. Teacher librarians should also use elements of individualized instruction when implementing policies and conducting readers' advisory.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of levelling in the school library is complex due to the elements of reading instruction, independent reading, and readers' advisory involved. The school library and its teacher librarian are positioned squarely in the middle of this dynamic topic. This study revealed that through the use of focused instruction, adaptable policies, and staunch advocacy teacher librarians can create a school library environment that both supports reading instruction and promotes literacy without restricting students' access to library materials.

Conclusions

Teacher librarians must implement multiple elements connected to library organization, instruction, and policy in order to effectively accomplish a goal of supporting reading instruction without restricting student access to library materials. Together, these elements can create a comprehensive library environment that fosters a culture of literacy and love of reading for all patrons. Several themes to guide this comprehensive library environment were derived from the analysis of interviews with three elementary librarians. First, teacher librarians need to provide explicit instruction on how to physically locate texts in a library and the strategies to use when purposefully selecting a text. In addition, teacher librarians can implement circulation policies that allow for an adequate number of items to be checked out in order to promote elements of choice, even when a classroom guideline for checking out a specific level, genre, or form is given.

By providing students with a structure in which to checkout materials (like finding one just right text and then multiple other free choice texts), teacher librarians can place emphasis on both student interests and instructional needs simultaneously. Providing guidance and assistance in these areas can also help expose students to new texts, authors, genres, and forms that could spark interest and engagement.

A final theme is that teacher librarians can also use clear signage to help remove barriers students experience when locating a text. Labels and signage regarding section names, series books, and popular characters can make browsing the library a more positive experience and it can encourage students to become more independent during checkout times. This also can minimize students' frustration and aid in fostering a positive and welcoming library culture. In order to maintain this type of school library environment, each participant placed an emphasis on evaluating situations on a case by case basis. By doing this, a teacher librarian can determine how to best meet the needs of an individual learner while upholding the philosophy and daily operation of the school library. Finding the perfect balance of supporting instruction, student choice, and library operation is challenging, rewarding, and continually in flux.

Recommendations

Reviewing previous literature, conducting interviews, and analyzing the data of this study revealed some areas in which future study is needed. This study underscored a need for more research regarding best practices in readers' advisory in a school library setting. Studies exist for public library settings, but little has been completed for work with children and young adults in school libraries. Research in this area would benefit

teacher librarians as they work with individuals, small groups, and whole classes to find texts that meet students' needs and interests.

Additionally, examining the impact organizing a school library collection by genre has on students' abilities and efficiency in locating just right and free choice texts would be beneficial. Research in this area could provide teacher librarians with even more strategies for instruction, policies, and library design that supports reading instruction while encouraging students to read based on their interests. It would be interesting to consider the benefits and negative consequences of this structure as they intersect with elements of reading instruction and free choice, not just circulation.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Does your school library have texts organized or labeled by reading level?

    a. If so, what readability scale is used to label the texts?

    b. Are both fiction and nonfiction texts labeled?

2. Do teachers in your building expect students to check out free reading materials of a specific level from your school library?

3. Do classroom teachers expect you to help students find texts written at a certain reading level during checkout times or readers' advisory?

4. Do building administrators expect you to help students find texts written at a certain reading level during checkout times or readers' advisory?

5. What are your library's policies regarding checkout limits? Please describe if and how these vary by grade level.

6. How often do students visit the library to exchange materials? Please describe if and how these vary by grade level.

7. During checkout time, are students directed or required to find certain level, genre, or format of text?

    a. If so, what are some requirements for primary, intermediate, and upper grade level students?

    b. Who (classroom teachers, teacher librarians, parents, etc.) determines these requirements?

8. Are students ever prevented from checking out materials based on reading level?

     a. If so, who makes the determination that the reading level is not appropriate for a particular student?

9. Does your school have any formal library policies or informal classroom policies regarding what books (just right, a specific genre, level, etc.) are read in the classroom versus what books can be taken home?

10. Please describe the lessons used to teach students to locate a "just right book" in the library?

     a. Can you share or provide copies of any of those instructional materials?

11. How are students at your school taught to identify and locate interest based reading materials?

     a. Can you share or provide copies of any of those instructional materials?