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Examining student selection behaviors with library fiction collections

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Examining student selection behaviors with library fiction collections

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Abstract
Past studies have shown that students tend to select materials quickly and often rely on displays, peer advice, or help from a specialist (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011; Elliot, 2015). What these studies have not addressed is whether or not the library organization is also an inhibiting factor to students’ reading selections. The purpose of this study was to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interacted with a fiction collection partially organized by genres compared with a collection organized by author to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting independent student selection of books. This mixed methods case study examined the practices of seventh and eighth grade students as they selected pleasure reading books in these two different library organizational systems. Students also filled out a reading log which included questions about how they chose their selections. Based on these data sources, student behavior remained relatively consistent in different library fiction collection organizational systems. Many students preferred to explore collections independently initially, while others relied on recommendations and displays for guidance. Students also preferred to use a multitude of strategies before selecting a pleasure reading book and enjoyed the social aspect of the selection process.
EXAMINING STUDENT SELECTION BEHAVIORS WITHIN LIBRARY FICTION COLLECTIONS

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
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Katie Delaney
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This Research Paper by: Katie Delaney
Examining Student Selection Behaviors Within Library Fiction Collections

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
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ABSTRACT

Past studies have shown that students tend to select materials quickly and often rely on displays, peer advice, or help from a specialist (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011; Elliot, 2015). What these studies have not addressed is whether or not the library organization is also an inhibiting factor to students' reading selections. The purpose of this study was to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interacted with a fiction collection partially organized by genres compared with a collection organized by author to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting independent student selection of books. This mixed methods case study examined the practices of seventh and eighth grade students as they selected pleasure reading books in these two different library organizational systems. Students also filled out a reading log which included questions about how they chose their selections. Based on these data sources, student behavior remained relatively consistent in different library fiction collection organizational systems. Many students preferred to explore collections independently initially, while others relied on recommendations and displays for guidance. Students also preferred to use a multitude of strategies before selecting a pleasure reading book and enjoyed the social aspect of the selection process.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It’s the first week of school and Mrs. Lentz’s 7th grade class has just walked into the library for the first time all year. Upon entering the brightly lit and colorful library, many of the students immediately veer off in excitement. Some of them head towards a spot on the shelf where the works of their favorite author are located. Some of them beeline to the display that has the newest books arranged on it. Within a minute, most of the students have gone off in energetic exploration, hoping to locate something that is both interesting and at their reading level. As Mrs. Lentz watches them scatter enthusiastically, she notices that one of her students, Quinn, has been walking back and forth between several shelves looking confused. Mrs. Lentz starts walking towards Quinn to provide assistance, but is called away by another student with a question. With the flurry of excitement that is the first week of school, Mrs. Lentz forgets to come back to Quinn and he simply chooses a random book off of the shelf closest to him before rejoining his peers.

Later on in the class period, Mrs. Lentz circulates the room while students are reading and notices that Quinn seems to be less engaged in his book than others. She walks over and notices Quinn’s book choice of QB#1. She asks him why he picked that book and he tells her that he just randomly grabbed it. When she asks him why he did that, he explains to her that he was trying to find a science fiction novel he had heard about and was really interested in reading, but he couldn’t remember the author. He
thought he might be able to find it by scanning the shelves, but after looking for so long, he just gave up and grabbed something else. As Mrs. Lentz proceeds to help Quinn do a little research to identify the author of the science fiction novel, she wonders how often students struggle to find books and how many students out of frustration end up making choices similar to Quinn’s.

**Problem Statement**

According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2009), there are four primary roles embedded in the job of a teacher librarian. Those roles include teacher, information specialist, instructional partner, and program administrator. Within each of these roles, there are a multitude of daily demands and responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is supporting opportunities for independent reading. Teacher librarians support independent reading through providing access to literature, through the positive promotion of reading, and through reader’s advisory services. While ample studies demonstrate the correlation between independent reading and student success (Cullinan, 2000), teacher librarians report having minimal time to devote to reader’s advisory services. In consideration of this, and the struggle some students go through selecting books independently, some teacher librarians are considering changing the organizational system within their school library to a genrefied, or genre-based, system without knowing how this system will impact student selection (Buchter, 2013).

The Iowa School Library Study (Hanover, 2015) annually documents the average amount of time teacher librarians have for reading and literacy activities. According to the 2014-2015 study, many school libraries report assignment to additional buildings and districts giving them a limited amount of time available for students to receive help with
reading guidance or reader’s advisory. Due to inadequate library staffing levels and a wide range of other responsibilities that demand the Teacher Librarian's time (i.e. library instruction, co-teaching and collaboration, technology integration, leading professional development, technology troubleshooting and other duties) Teacher Librarians in the 90th percentile reported having only 6.5 hours available per week to spend on reading and literacy activities (p. 10). Schools below the 90th percentile reported spending anywhere from “3 to 0.3” hours a week on these reading and literacy activities.

Due to additional building assignments and other responsibilities decreasing the amount of time teacher librarians have with students, students are often left to locate materials on their own. Locating materials without assistance can be challenging for many students, especially elementary and middle school students just learning to navigate and utilize the various features of a library (Buchter, 2013). For students who struggle to use the traditional library system, locating a book can become a frustrating task (Moreillon, 2013).

The American Library Association (2010) states, “a primary goal of the school library program must be to create life-long readers. It is imperative that school librarians work with teachers and parents to find ways to instill in students the joy of reading while helping them build the reading habit” (para. 2). In consideration of this goal, and the struggle that many students go through in the absence of reader’s advisory, many school librarians have looked for tools to support student selection. One tool that teacher librarians are exploring is an organizational system called “genrefication” (Buchter, 2013). With the re-emergence of the genrefied, or genre-based, organization of books, however, school librarians find themselves facing the challenge of trying to decide
whether an organizational system using fiction arrangement by genre might better serve the needs of students for independent browsing. The Kansas Association of School Librarians expressed their concern to the American Association of School Librarians, "Many School librarians are questioning the method of arranging their library collections" (Jameson, 2013, p. 11). Very little research is available about this trend in library classification, and this lack of research inhibits the ability of the teacher librarian to evaluate its possible effectiveness for supporting reader’s advisory and student selection within a professionally staffed school library, or in scenarios of independent student browsing (Hora, 2015).

Considering the continued importance of encouraging students’ free reading, coupled with the ever-demanding and changing roles of the teacher librarian and the amount of time students spend in the library independently searching for books, there is a need to know whether or not a genrefied organizational system supports students’ independent browsing. Specifically, the following research may benefit teacher librarians who are thinking of organizing their collections in a different way (such as with a genre-based classification) and are unsure about how a change might impact students. Past studies have shown that students tend to select materials quickly and often rely on displays, peer advice, or help from a specialist (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011; Elliot, 2015). What these studies have not addressed is whether or not the library’s organization is an inhibiting factor to students’ reading selection. The current study will compare the selection behaviors of students within a fiction collection that has been partially organized by genre and a fiction collection that has been organized by author. It
aims to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting students’ independent book browsing and selection.

**Summary of the Problem Statement**

Due to added buildings and responsibilities decreasing the time teacher librarians have available for reader’s advisory services and acknowledging the struggles students face selecting books independently, some school librarians are considering reorganizing their library collections. However, they are unsure of what impact an organizational change might have on students’ independent selection of books.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interact with a fiction collection that has been partially organized by genre in comparison with a collection organized by author to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting students’ independent selection of books.

**Research Questions**

1. How do students select pleasure reading books in a traditional middle school library as compared to a genrefied public library setting? What strategies do they use to locate pleasure reading books?

2. How frequently do students show interest in varied genres in a traditional middle school library as compared to a genrefied public library fiction collection?

**Assumptions and Limitations**

One assumption of this study is that students often locate materials without adult guidance or assistance. The study was limited to one school and one public library in Northeast, Iowa.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interact with a fiction collection partially organized by genre in comparison with a collection organized traditionally by author in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting book selection. Prior research related to this topic fits into three categories that provide a contextual framework for the current study: independent reading in the school context, student reading motivation, and student reading selection behaviors.

Independent Reading in the School Context

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) designed a study to examine which features of middle school reading instruction help foster student engagement with reading. In order to highlight student voices, the researchers administered a survey to 1,765 sixth-grade students in 23 schools. The survey consisted of open-ended response questions, short answer questions, and checklist items. Ivey and Broaddus also conducted follow-up interviews with 16 girls and 15 boys from three diverse classrooms to collect more explicit information and gain a better understanding of the trends they identified from the survey. The trends identified were organized into three categories: (a) What students valued most in their reading or language arts classes; (b) what students said motivated them to read; and (c) how middle school classrooms measured up (p. 359). Ivey and Broaddus determined that most participants preferred free reading time above all other literacy activities. Student reported valuing independent reading time because they were allowed to choose their own books. Students also said that having choice in the selection
of the reading material was one of the factors that most motivated them to read. The researchers also found that students were more motivated to read in classrooms with a variety of books and a wide selection of diverse reading materials. Participants reported that most classrooms did not have a diverse selection of books available. Overall, Ivey and Broaddus discovered that classrooms that offered students more free reading time, choice in their selection of reading materials, and access to a variety of materials, had a higher percentage of motivated readers and a higher percentage of student reading success.

While Ivey and Broaddus (2001) focused on student reading preferences within the classroom, Daniels and Steres (2011) set out to explore how the adults at one middle school developed a school-wide reading culture that led to increased student engagement with reading over a five year span. The research was conducted in Parkdale Middle School, located in urban California with a population of 1,356 students. Daniels and Steres analyzed the success of their school reading culture through conversations with sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and their teachers. Of the 108 student participants, 18 students were selected for one-on-one interviews and the remaining 90 students participated in class discussions facilitated by the researchers. Seventeen teachers and administrators were also interviewed about the structured reading program and their observations concerning changes in students’ attitudes. The researchers were able to identify three conditions that contributed to the increased student reading motivation: “(a) making reading a top priority, (b) modeling by and support from the adults in the school, and (c) the creation of motivating learning environments” (p. 6). Within these reading environments, students identified themselves as readers. Students
also read more frequently because time was provided for independent reading and they knew it was valued by teachers.

In a more recent study about in-school reading habits, Hall, Hedrick, and Williams (2014) examined how providing students with choice during independent reading time increased their involvement in reading. The research was conducted over a four-week period in a third-grade classroom in a school where 75% of the student population received free or reduced lunch. Twenty-one students (16 boys and 5 girls) were observed in an experienced teacher’s classroom during ISIR (in-school independent reading) time. During the study, students were encouraged to choose what they read, allowed to listen to tranquil music, and provided access to high-quality, appealing books. It was determined through field notes that students were highly engaged during their independent reading time. The power of choice made the students more motivated to read and encouraged them to have more discussions about their book selections. This study demonstrated that allowing students to have choice in what they read can have a positive impact on motivation and learning. Overall, the three studies examined reinforced the importance of allowing students to have choice in their book selection, providing access to a variety of reading materials, and creating an environment that nurtures and values independent reading time within the school context.

**Student Reading Motivation**

Multiple studies have investigated the factors that motivate students to engage in reading. Hopper (2005) designed a study to explore adolescent reading patterns with the goal of informing and improving teaching practices to increase student motivation. Thirty student teachers and 707 students from schools in the south-west of England
participated in the week-long project. The participants were selected from the student teachers' placements and were between the ages of 11-15 years old. Hopper gathered data through a five-question self-assessment completed by the students. The questions related to the reading habits of the students (genre, amount, location of reading), perceptions of self as a reader, and suggestions for what might improve reading motivation. As a result of the study, Hopper identified many trends in student reading habits and choice relating to genre. A study of the popular texts in the study indicated that students had a significant interest in a particular choice of genre rather than a specific author. Additionally, students reported that interest in a genre was a motivating factor for them and ranked genre within the top five reasons for choosing a book for independent reading, along with other reasons such as prior knowledge of the author, appearance of the book, if the book was recommended, and if the book had been made into a television series or film.

In another study, Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) set out to identify what factors motivated children to read by having conversations with the students themselves. The research was conducted in an elementary school with a student population of 831 students in grades pre-K through 5, with 74% of the students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch. Of those 831 students, 16 fourth grade students were selected from the following teacher-created groups: Motivated Above-Grade Level (3), Motivated On-Grade Level (3), Motivated Below-Grade Level (3), Unmotivated Above-Grade Level (1), Unmotivated On-Grade Level (3), and Unmotivated Below-Grade Level (3). Each student was interviewed using the Conversational Interview portion of the Motivation to Read Profile by Gambell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996) which consisted of 14
questions relating to reading. The data was then organized and analyzed using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. Through the conversations with students, the researchers were able to identify six categories of factors that motivated students to read. Within these categories, one of the findings particularly relevant in the context of the current study was that students preferred to select books of interest for themselves. Often the students had a particular type of book they favored, and finding a book with similar characteristics motivated them to read more. Another finding was that student motivation for reading increased when students frequented the school library. The student responses indicated that the exposure to a variety of books inspired them to explore new topics and interests, while the library environment also supported their current reading interests and habits.

Unlike Edmunds and Bauserman (2006), Dali (2014) designed a study to explore and redefine the concept of reading appeal. The researcher also sought to investigate the role of reading and the two-dimensional nature of appeal. The qualitative exploratory research focused on a group of fourteen Russian-speaking avid readers. The participants were asked to complete a survey and they also took part in an in-depth interview which asked them questions related to their reading habits and the most memorable books they had read. Of the 12 central conclusions reached by Dali, several of the findings have implications for the current study. Based on readers’ views, book-related appeal consists of eight variables, the foremost of which is type of book or genre. Study results show that readers still consistently take into account what aspects or genre features a book employs when searching for reading materials. Dali also noted that an important part of reader-driven appeal was advice from friends or specialists, such as the librarian.
Students felt more engaged or motivated to read books that had been recommended by these individuals. As was indicated by researchers within all three studies, specific book appeal aspects, such as genre, and conversations with librarians are highly motivating factors for readers.

**Student Reading Selection Behaviors**

In addition to motivational factors, Mohr (2006) designed a study to investigate student preferences, selection rationales, and processes for selecting a book. One hundred ninety first grade students were observed as they picked their favorite book from among nine different choices that included a variety of topics, media, and genres. Additionally, 122 students answered ten questions in an interview to help the researcher gain insight into how they made their choice. The questions related to which book the student picked and the thinking process behind the selection. Mohr concluded that most students were able to identify the genre of the book they selected, but seemed unfamiliar with other terms and features related to genre. It was also concluded that one of the strongest general selection criteria for students was topic, indicating that once students had found a set of characteristics they liked, they looked for books with similar features/characteristics.

Organizational systems are another important factor in how students seek information. To examine this, Connaway, Dickey, and Radford (2011) created a multi-year study to discover how and why people chose to use specific resources and what factors contributed to those decisions (p. 179). The researchers collected data through online surveys and telephone interviews with 307 randomly selected subjects from the Midwest. Of the 307, 78 participants were selected to participate in a focus group
interview, and 15 participants also completed follow-up interviews. It was determined from the interviews that convenience was the main factor participants identified as a reason to choose a resource. This data was consistent for all demographic areas including age, gender, and academic role. Participants noted selecting sources that were “good enough” rather than continuing to look for materials. Ease of access was also identified as the second measure of convenience and participants noted this as a factor for consideration when deciding whether or not to use the physical library. The researchers recommended that libraries attempt to mimic the web practices of providing services to individuals in comfortable and convenient ways. Connaway, Dickey, and Radford also suggested that librarians modify the services they offer to better meet the needs of a variety of users.

In a more recent study, Elliot (2015) explored the various aspects that influence students when selecting leisure reading materials in school. Additionally, the researcher wanted to identify any significant differences between how male and female students selected books. Elliot hoped to examine the findings to determine ways to “create a library program and environment that caters to the unique needs of the patrons it serves” (p. 3). The study involved 25 students, 11 male and 14 female, who were organized into mixed-gender focus groups, each consisting of five students. Each group was given a scenario related to their book selection process. After discussion of the scenario, each participant also took part in a five-question survey which asked them about the factors that influenced their selection. Focus groups met once for approximately 15-20 minutes. At the conclusion of the study, Elliot noted that students’ selection of leisure reading materials was greatly influenced by social and visual factors such as recommendations
from peers and displays created by librarians. Additionally, Elliot discovered only minor
differences between the selection processes of male and female participants, including
that male participants tended to find an author they liked to read while female participants
found a genre of interest and sought out books that fit into that category. Overall,
researchers were able to determine that only minor differences exist between male and
female selection habits, most readers look for books with similar characteristics, and
convenience plays a major role in selection.

Summary

Many studies have been conducted to examine and explore the various aspects that
affect and influence student reading. Studies indicated that students are more successful
in environments that acknowledge their desire for choice (Hall, Hedrik, & Williams,
2014; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001) and also show they value independent reading time
(Daniels & Steres, 2011). Research has also shown that specific book appeal aspects
(Mohr, 2006), genre (Hopper, 2005), and conversations with librarians are highly
motivating factors for readers (Dali, 2014; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Finally, the
studies relating to selection methods and rationales reinforced the concept that students
seek out books that have similar characteristics to previous books they have read and that
convenience (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011) and visual displays play an
important role in how students select books (Elliot, 2015). The current study will further
explore student selection habits in two different library organizational settings (traditional
and genrefied) with the hope of examining whether or not the library’s organization acts
as an inhibiting factor to students’ book selection.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interacted with a fiction collection partially organized by genre in comparison with a collection organized traditionally by author to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting students’ independent selection of books. The researcher focused on examining students’ experiences in these two collections in an effort to answer the following questions:

1. How do students select pleasure reading books in a traditional middle school library as compared to a genrefied public library setting? What strategies do they use to locate pleasure reading books?

2. How frequently do students show interest in varied genres in a traditional middle school library as compared to a genrefied public library fiction collection?

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed methods case study to examine student interactions with two different library collections: one partially organized by genre and one organized by author. Wildemuth (2009) explains, “Case studies are more suitable for the exploration, classification, and hypothesis development stages of the knowledge-building process; the investigator should have a receptive attitude toward exploration” (p. 52). This research method was appropriate for the current study due to the exploratory nature of the comparison of student interactions within each collection. Wildemuth also states “that the evidence collected in case studies may be either qualitative or quantitative, or
both. In particular, the combination of both types of evidence could contribute to the validity of the method” (p. 52). Through the evidence collected by direct observation and surveys, this study provided data regarding student selection behaviors within library fiction collections which have been organized by genre and author.

Participants

The participant population of this study was 20 seventh and eighth grade students from one K-12 school in a rural mid-eastern Iowa district with a student enrollment of approximately 221 students in grades 6-12. The researcher acquired approval from the University of Northern Iowa’s Institutional Review Board. After gaining approval from UNI and from the school administration and public library director, the researcher also gained parental permission to observe students during check out and to analyze student survey results.

As the result of a recent cut to the teacher librarian position, the school district has no teacher librarian staffing. During the first two periods of the day, an associate provides the lower elementary students with an opportunity to listen to a read-aloud in the library and to check out books. Throughout the remaining six periods of the day, there is another associate in the library who monitors middle and high school study hall students. The K-12 school library houses the entire fiction and nonfiction collections for both elementary and secondary students. Within the collection, there are approximately 1,200 young adult fiction titles. The school library’s fiction collection is divided by levels into two primary sections: elementary materials, and secondary materials. While the collection is not separated or organized by genre, students are taught about genre in fifth through eighth grade language arts classes. Students learn about the types of genres,
practice identifying the characteristics of each genre, and also have a genre reading goal in 7th and 8th grade.

The public library is located within the downtown area of a mid-sized city in Iowa with a population of approximately 128,000. The public library provides services for a diverse community population and is visited by roughly 1,800 individuals daily. The public library provides many services for its patrons and has a large collection of fiction and nonfiction print resources to offer. Within the Young Adult/Youth section of the library, the library collection has approximately 8,000 fiction titles, which have been partially organized by genre. The public library is in a town approximately 20 minutes south of this school district, and the seventh and eighth grade students who participated in this study may also visit the public library as individuals outside of school. In addition, the language arts teachers take the 7th and 8th grade classes to visit the public library once each year. Many of the students have never been to the public library before the class visit. The public library director typically gives students a tour of the public library during their first visit as a class that includes a brief mention of the genres. However, other than this tour, students have not received instruction from the public librarians regarding the Young Adult fiction section or genres.

**Procedures**

**Data Sources**

Direct observations during student browsing and check out focused on student selection preferences and strategies in a traditional middle school library and a partially genrefied public library collection. As Wildemuth (2009) states, "This method of data collection is focused on the behaviors of participants in a particular setting" (p. 189).
This method of data collection was appropriate for this study because the behaviors of the students within each particular collection provided insight into how students approached browsing and selecting a pleasure reading book. Additionally, the behaviors themselves changed and shifted between collections, making the descriptive nature of this data collection important for analysis. Students were observed twice: once at the public library in a fiction collection that has been partially organized by genre and once at the school library, which has a fiction collection organized by author’s last name. Each observation lasted approximately 15 minutes and observational data was recorded on the library observation form (see Appendix A). Library observation forms were adapted from previous research conducted by Andrea Hora (2015).

The same 20 student participants also completed a survey, called a reading review, which provided the researcher with specific student data. As Wildemuth (2009) states, “Survey research supports the collection of a variety of data, including the beliefs, opinions, attributes, and behaviors of the respondents” (p. 256). This method of data collection was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to obtain information from the students regarding their individual and unique experiences within the library collections. Students were asked to list their recent library selections by title and author, their general library selection habits, and their reading preferences (see Appendix B). Questions were also modeled on the study conducted by Andrea Hora (2015). All students in seventh and eighth grades completed the five minute survey between one and eight times (or each time they selected a new independent reading book) in English class, but only the data from students with permission slips were analyzed for this study. Personal identifying information was kept anonymous through coding during
data collection and analysis. Pseudonyms were used in the subsequent reporting of findings and interview data.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher used quantitative and qualitative analysis of data to explore the three research questions investigating student preferences in reading selections, student strategies in selecting reading material, and students' interest in various genres. The analysis focused on student behavior when using two library collections, which were organized by genre and by author. Specifically, the researcher analyzed her observation notes recording students' browsing behaviors. For example, the notes included student movement within the collection, social interactions around books, and off-task student behaviors. The researcher also analyzed student survey data using quantitative analysis for tallying the number of different genres represented in the books each student checked out and the strategies students said they preferred in the process of browsing for books. The researcher analyzed qualitative student survey data for analysis of reading preference regarding type of book and ease of use of the library collection. As Wildemuth (2009) states, qualitative content analysis “involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison” (p. 309). The researcher prepared the data, defined the unit of analysis, developed categories and a coding scheme, tested the coding scheme on a sample, coded all the text, assessed the coding consistency by comparing the observational notes to the survey data, and drew conclusions. The researcher then utilized these steps to locate themes, trends, and patterns in the
observation and survey data regarding how students prefer to select pleasure reading books in a traditional middle school library as compared to a partially genrefied public library setting and what strategies students use.

**Limitations**

A limitation of case studies is the lack of generalizability of the findings. As Wildemuth (2009) states, “There is no basis for generalizing the findings of case study beyond the setting(s) in which it was conducted” (p. 55). This case study was limited to one public library with a fiction collection partially organized by genre and one school library with a fiction collection organized by author. This case study was also limited to just seventh and eighth grade student interactions with two library collections over the course of four weeks.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Past studies have shown that students tend to select materials quickly and often rely on displays, peer advice, or help from a specialist (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011; Elliot, 2015). What these studies have not addressed is whether or not the library organization is also an inhibiting factor to students' reading selections. The purpose of this study was to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interacted with a fiction collection partially organized by genre compared with a collection organized by author to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting independent student selection of books.

Behaviors and Strategies Used For Selecting Pleasure Reading Books

The first research question aimed at finding out how the 20 participating seventh and eighth grade students selected pleasure reading books within two collections which had been organized differently: by author and by select genres. While the two library collections were organized differently, the behaviors that the students exhibited varied little and stayed mostly consistent during the researcher's observation. Based on observational notes and survey results, student behaviors were categorized primarily into browsing habits, social interactions, and engagement with the collection.

Browsing Habits

The researcher found that students in seventh and eighth grade seemed to prefer "diving" into the fiction collections rather than using directional signs or labeling. At both the public library and the school library, the first thing that many students did was wander over to the shelves and begin scanning the titles and looking at book covers. The
location within the shelves where the students started searching did not seem intentional or targeted in any way. Additionally, survey data indicated that 73.3% of students did not come to either of the libraries looking for a specific book. Thus students neither appeared to look for a particular type of book nor did they state they were looking for a specific title. Instead, the students seemed to enjoy the browsing or discovery appeal of simply exploring the collection. Students wandered from section to section at their own leisure and took their time selecting a pleasure reading book. Browsing time ranged from five minutes to fifteen or more minutes; students who spent a longer time browsing seemed more engaged with the collection, demonstrated by their absorption with what they were reading and the focus they applied to the task.

Once students had begun the process of browsing the shelves, however, most students used two specific strategies before finally making a selection. The first strategy was to view the title and/or cover of the book. Throughout the entire selection process, the researcher observed students scanning the spines of books and also pulling them out to look at the cover art. Students were seen rejecting or putting books back if the cover of the book didn’t appeal, or pulling the books off the shelf for further exploration if the appearance of the book was found interesting. The survey data supports this observation as well. Of the student responses documented, 62.4% of the students said that the cover or the appearance of the book was an important factor in their selection. If the cover or title of the book was found to be appealing enough, student were then observed using the second strategy: reading the book synopsis. The book synopsis seemed to be the deciding factor for students once the book had passed the visual inspection. The students
were noted skimming the book summaries or flipping through the pages to get a feel for if the book was going to be something they would enjoy.

Besides the appearance of the book and the book synopsis, students also utilized the strategy of asking for assistance from a librarian or teacher. While many students chose to initially search the shelves independently, some students chose to seek advice or recommendations from the librarian or teacher in the room almost immediately. Students were observed seeking out advice regarding certain types of books or recommendations based on other interests. Specifically, students were overheard asking for “sport” books, books by a specific author (such as Agatha Christie and Tim Green), and for certain books within a series (such as *Pretty Little Liars*). While observations showed roughly 35% of students (seven students) asked for recommendations or discussed books with teachers and librarians, the survey responses showed only 17.8% of students saying they would seek out adult assistance or recommendations when making a selection. Students sought out recommendations from a teacher or librarian more quickly at the school library than at the public library, possibly due to the level of familiarity with the adults. A few students also used the library catalog at the public library to look up a specific author or to find a title of a book in series. Students did not use the library catalog at the school library.

The third strategy most frequently used by students was utilizing the displays set up around the library, specifically the “New Fiction” display. At both the public library and the school library, several displays were set up to recommend or promote different books to students. At the school library, there was a “New Fiction” display, a bulletin board displaying student favorites, and a board outside the door which encouraged students to
“Choose Their Own Adventure” and select one of the genres written on a balloon. At the public library, there was a “New Fiction” display, and a “Staff Favorites” display arranged, as well as a few select books placed strategically on the shelves themselves. The “New Fiction” book display was the biggest display/visual set up in both libraries. Upon entering both libraries, some seventh and eighth grade students immediately ventured off to the “New Fiction” book displays. Several of the students who explored this display picked books from this section, while others eventually browsed the main shelves as well. Very few students (one or two each time) checked out the other displays for recommendations.

In support of the observational data, survey data suggests that students prefer to utilize more than one strategy when making pleasure reading book selections. Student responses showed that multiple factors influenced how they felt about a book and whether or not they would choose to check it out. The graph below shows what students said helped them make a decision about choosing a book.
Overall, students exhibited similar searching strategies across both libraries. Students preferred searching independently and seemed to value the process of exploring either collection to find a book of interest. The observational findings and the student survey responses varied slightly, with the researcher noting that students utilized the help of a teacher or librarian more frequently than was recorded.

Social Interactions

In addition to varied browsing behaviors and strategies, many students seemed to prefer the social aspect of selecting pleasure reading books. As was observed at both libraries, over 50% of the students searching, did so with friends. Students were noted searching in pairs or in friend groups of no more than three students. The groups seemed
engaged with the collection and were heard discussing favorite authors, books in a series, and genres of interest. For example, students were overheard talking about which book in the *Pretty Little Liar* series they were on and how far into the show they had gotten. One student was overheard recommending a WWII book (*Between Shades of Gray*) to another student who liked historical fiction. Several boys were overheard discussing which of the Tim Green books they had read and if their school library had all of the same ones. Another group of boys was noted discussing a fantasy fiction series that one of their group had just finished. Many other groups perused the shelves similarly, discussing different genres which they needed for their classroom goal, or authors of interest. Students were also noted picking up books for further exploration and a few student groups passed books amongst themselves.

**Engagement with the Collection**

At both libraries, the researcher also noted a select group of students who did not seem engaged with the library collection (three students, approximately 15%). The students who were not engaged exhibited signs of boredom or lack of interest in the library collections. Several of the students complained that there were “no good books” and that reading was “boring.” Other members of this group simply chose a book very quickly off the shelves at random, and found a comfortable place out the way to wait for their peers. None of these disinterested students made attempts to interrupt or distract the other students from their selections.

**Genre Interest**

The third research question aimed at discovering if middle school students showed more interest in exploring different genres when the collection is organized by genre.
The school library Young Adult fiction collection was organized by author's last name, and the students who participated in this study had previously used this library. At the public library, the Young Adult fiction collection was partially organized by genre. The genres that had been selected and categorized into their own sections included graphic novels and manga. The Adult fiction collection at the public library was completely genrefied and include categories such as mystery, science fiction, fantasy, romance, and general fiction.

Given that both libraries were open to the public at the times of the observations and therefore other patrons were present in addition to the research participants, the researcher only recorded her observations by hand and did not video record student activities. Thus while the observational genre data provided an overview of student browsing behavior and genre selections, the researcher could not accurately monitor and record how frequently students visited specific genres. After selecting a pleasure reading book, however, students completed the survey at both libraries, documenting their reading selections. The pleasure reading selections have been sorted into genres in Table 1.
Table 1.

*Library Fiction Check Out Comparison Form*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>School Library Number titles checked out</th>
<th>Public Library Number titles checked out</th>
<th>Difference Between Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paranormal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Novels</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manga</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Classics, crossover, etc...)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 showed that the variety of genres that were checked out by students remained relatively the same across both library fiction collections. The genre most frequently checked out at the public library was fantasy while the genre most frequently checked out at the school library was realistic fiction. The sports genre was also very popular at both libraries. Graphic novels and Manga were not checked out by any students at either library. Between the school library and the public library, the paranormal genre had the greatest difference in numbers checked out by students (four), with the students checking
out more paranormal novels from the school library and not checking any out from the public library.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Past studies have shown that students tend to select materials quickly and often rely on displays, peer advice, or help from a specialist (Connaway, Dickey, & Radford, 2011; Elliot, 2015). What these studies have not addressed is whether or not the library organization is also an inhibiting factor to students’ reading selections. The purpose of this study was to explore how seventh and eighth grade students interacted with a fiction collection partially organized by genres compared with a collection organized by author to identify strengths and weaknesses of various organizational systems in supporting independent student selection of books. This mixed methods case study examined the practices of seventh and eighth grade students as they selected pleasure reading books in a school library collection which was organized by author and a public library collection which had been partially organized by genre. Students also filled out a student reading log which included questions about what influenced their decisions and helped them find a book each time they made a pleasure reading selection. Based on these data sources, student behavior remained relatively consistent in different library fiction collection organizational designs. Many students preferred to explore collections independently initially, while others relied on the recommendations made by teachers/teacher librarians and the displays for guidance. Students also preferred to use a multitude of strategies before selecting a pleasure reading book and enjoyed the social aspect of the selection process.
Conclusions

Based on observational and survey data, student selection behaviors at the junior high level seem to remain mostly consistent within library collections which utilize different organizational methods. At both libraries, students exhibited similar behaviors and approached the process of locating a pleasure reading book in approximately the same way. Choosing to explore both collections this way would seem to indicate that the organizational method of the collection had little impact on selection behaviors.

Student observations show that students seemed to enjoy the process of independently exploring the shelves and discovering what the collections had to offer in an unsystematic fashion. At both libraries, many students chose to explore the library collection by “diving” into what was on the shelves, rather than approaching the collection in a targeted way. The joy of browsing seemed to be a part of what kept many of the students engaged and interested in the process of selecting a pleasure reading book.

Students also seemed to enjoy the social aspect of the selection process. Students were seen walking around in pairs or friend groups and overheard discussing authors they had read, genres they liked, and general books of interest. Since learning is also a social process, allowing students to discuss books, authors, and genres with others only seems to enhance their enjoyment with books and reading.

At both libraries, there was also a small percentage of students who were not engaged with the library collection. The students within these disinterested groups were not the same at each library, but the reasoning behind the disengagement stayed the same. The students claimed that “no good” books existed and that was reading was “boring”.

All of the students who felt this way about reading struggled to motivate themselves to even look for a book and quickly made a selection that they did not seem invested in. As observational and survey data showed, students also utilized a multitude of strategies when making their pleasure reading selections within both collections. Observationally, students were noted most often utilizing the strategies of looking at a book's cover art and synopsis, seeking help or recommendations from a librarian or teacher, and exploring visuals displays most often. Results from the student reading survey showed that students are often influenced by more than one factor, with the cover art being one of the most influential. Overall, students seemed to rely much more on recommendations and conversations with teachers and teacher librarians and displays than they realized. These interactions seem to suggest that students depend on the expertise of librarians to help nurture their love of reading and to promote quality literature based on the knowledge they have of the collection.

Finally, the observational results regarding which genres were most frequented by students could not be accurately recorded due to the researcher's inability to video record students. At both libraries, students seemed interested in finding and reading across genres. The students motivation behind searching for different genres is unclear because students might be impacted by the requirement of reading different genres for their Reading class and also by their inexperience with a collection which has been organized in a non-traditional way. Student searching behaviors might also be somewhat concrete and habitual by the time students reach seventh and eighth grade, and students might be unaware of how to best utilize a collection which has been organized differently than the one they use more frequently.
Recommendations

While this study has shown that student selection behaviors vary only slightly between library collections which have been organized differently, it would be beneficial to conduct future studies to provide more insight into the factors which influence student selection behaviors and student motivation for reading across genres. This study was limited to one school site and one public library site, as well as to a small sample of seventh and eighth grade students. It would be beneficial to conduct this study with a larger population including younger students to see how student browsing and selection behaviors change. Another way to build upon this study would be to conduct student interviews to explore more in depth students beliefs regarding the impact of various factors and strategies that may be more effective in selecting books that they actually read. A future study could focus on identifying how often students complete or finish reading the books they select and what factors are linked with the accomplished reading. Another study could explore how the teaching of genres within the library and the classroom impacts a student’s motivation to read across genres.

Studying student selection behaviors and the factors that influence student reading choices is beneficial for the entire educational field. Reading is a foundational skill that all students need to be successful in the future. Finding ways to enhance a student’s experience with library collections and improve their ability to find reading materials that help foster their reading growth is a goal for teachers and librarians alike and can only be improved upon with further exploration.
REFERENCES


Library Observation Form
Observer: Katie Delaney
Date: ________________________________

Genre Interest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time:</th>
<th>Genres Observed:</th>
<th>Number of students at Genre:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Off-task Students:

Social Interactions:
- Students browsing the selections alone...
- Students talking with a peer...
- Students talking/asking for help from an adult...
- Strategies used by students to locate books...
- Students looking at one/several books...
- Students leaving without a book...
APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Did you have a specific book in mind when you went to the library today?
   YES or NO

   a. If yes, were you able to find it?
      YES or NO

   Title of the book: ____________________________________________________________

   b. What helped you find your book? (Check all that apply)
      □ Looking up the information about the book (author and call #) in
        the library catalog before you left
      □ Talking to a teacher or librarian
      □ Asking for help from a friend/peer
      □ Looking at the directional signs posted around the room
      □ Other: ________________________________________________________________

   c. If no, what did you do instead? Why?

2. What is the title(s) of the book(s) you selected today?

   ________________________________________________________________

Who is the author(s) of the book(s)?

   ________________________________________________________________
3. When you selected this independent reading book, what helped you make your decision about what to read? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Book trailers
☐ Seeing books on display in the library (on top of shelves, pictures in the hallway, etc.)
☐ The cover or appearance of the book
☐ Favorite genre
☐ Author or series you are familiar with
☐ Book is based on a movie, TV show, or video game
☐ Discussion/conversation with a friend, classmate, teacher, librarian, or parent
☐ Other: ________________________________

4. Do you have certain types of books that you like to read more than others? (Ex: Books on a certain topic, a particular genre you like, books written in a certain style, books by a particular author, etc…) 

5. How easy is it to find books you like in this library?

6. How do you learn about books you might like to read in the future? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Book trailers
☐ Seeing books on display in the library (on top of shelves, pictures in the hallway, etc.)
☐ The cover or appearance of the book
☐ Favorite genre
☐ Author or series you are familiar with
☐ Book is based on a movie, TV show, or video game
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☐ Other: ________________________________
### APPENDIX C

**LIBRARY FICTION CHECK OUT COMPARISON FORM**

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