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## The Effects of Book Location on the Selection of First Readers by Elementary Students

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**The Effects of Book Location on the Selection  
of First Readers by Elementary Students**

**A Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the  
Division of Library Science  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts**

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**by  
Tracy Merfeld  
July 1, 1993**

## Abstract

167 kindergarten, first and second graders at Garfield Elementary School in Boone, Iowa, and 470 first reader books were used to investigate whether justification can be given to shelving first reader books in a separate section. An increase in the number of charges of first reader books might demonstrate a need of students to have this type of material readily accessible.

The study was conducted over two 45 day cycles. During the first cycle, first reader books were identified, marked with a red dot and interfiled with picture books. A first reader section was created for the second cycle. All first reader books were shelved alphabetically in this section of the media center. The total number of charges during each cycle was used in a chi-square analysis which indicated the establishment of a first reader section had no statistically significant effect on the circulation of first reader books.

**This Research Paper by :** Tracy Merfeld

**Titled:** The Effects of Book Location on the Selection  
of First Readers by Elementary Students

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Horn books, New England Primers, McGuffey Readers, and basal reader series have all been the materials used over the years to teach generations of Americans to read (Aukerman, 1971). Recently trade books have come into their own as a source of beginning readers. Chall (1990) found that the use of trade books for instruction were especially related to reading comprehension and vocabulary gains. Publishers have responded to research support for the use of trade books in reading instruction by issuing beginning reader series, such as "I Can Read" and "Rookie Readers."

In the Boone, Iowa, elementary schools, teachers use beginning readers as part of their whole-language curriculum; therefore, there is a special demand for the "first readers" books by teachers and students. They want to gain quick access to the first readers, which in the Boone elementary library media centers, are interfiled with the picture books. Teachers and students may not identify first readers by the books' label alone, thus prohibiting patrons from finding quickly the needed resources. A special marking and placement in the library media center may increase the circulation and use of these materials and inform teachers and students of the number of first readers the library media center holds in



its collection.

### Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to find out if justification can be given to shelving first readers in a separate section. An increase in the number of charges of first readers may demonstrate a need of students to find this type of material. Media specialists may want to consider evaluating their shelving and promoting of this type of book.

### Problem Statement

Will the number of charges of first readers by kindergarten, first and second grade students be affected if these books are filed together and placed in a separate section as opposed to being interfiled with picture books?

### Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference at the .05 level between the number of charges of first readers when interfiled with picture books and when those books are moved to a separate section.

### Assumptions

The researcher assumes that students have a continuing need for first readers and the first readers are appropriate materials in a library media center collection. The researcher also assumes that a first reader section

will not hinder other library media center uses. A third assumption is that location and identification of materials affects access to materials.

### Limitations

This study did not investigate the number of charges of first readers by teachers or other school staff. This study was done in only one school in one district.

### Definitions

First Reader - For the purpose of this study, first readers were identified by the following criteria:

1. Recognizable format
2. Generally belong to a series
3. Controlled vocabulary - words of few syllables
4. Large print
5. Short sentences
6. Limited amount of print per page. (Barstow and Riggle, 1989 and Cain, 1990).

Researchers and educators also refer to first readers as beginning readers or early readers, or series readers.

Everybody Section - The term used to identify the picture book section in the library media center of the Garfield Elementary School, Boone, Iowa.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Young library users have special needs and interests. The purpose of the school library media center is to provide resources that reflect students' interest, recreations, and hobbies, and to stimulate imagination, creative and critical thinking (Ray, 1979). School library media centers play an important role in supporting the school's curriculum and should serve students and teachers in the best ways possible.

In the early education of children, reading plays an especially important role; therefore, elementary library media centers need to make trade books for the different levels of reading available and easily accessible to students. Some researchers and educators refer to these books as beginning readers, early readers or rookie readers.

In addition to formal instruction in reading skills, students need an opportunity to practice reading on their own time. According to Durkin (1989) the benefits of independent reading are (1) allow for the consolidation and realistic use of what has been taught, (2) move attention away from individual words to the meaning of connected text, (3) foster good habits insofar as rate is concerned, (4) add to the reader's knowledge of the world, and (5) promote self-confidence and, with it, a

greater interest in reading (p. 186).

In making these books, first readers, more accessible to students, library media specialists may want to try special display techniques. Langhorne (1987) developed a study applying book store marketing techniques to a middle school library media center. The tips she received from the book store personnel included: (1) displaying related items, (2) clearly labeling each area with posters and signs, and (3) making items visible to consumers. Langhorne arranged her paperback collection by genres and placed labels indicating the book's category on the spine label. In evaluating the effectiveness of this technique, Langhorne distributed surveys to all students one week prior to the changes, and three weeks after implementation. She asked students to rank the following questions on a scale from 0 to 4; the last question required a yes or no answer: (1) Is it easier to find hardcover or paperback books in the library? (2) Do you like the way paperback books are arranged in the LMC? (3) Have you located any new books of the type you like to read in the library during the past three weeks? The questions ranked students' approval of the changes made with the paperbacks. Although the survey showed a significant difference between all three student answers before and after the changes, circulation statistics did not. "While our average weekly

paperback circulation for the three weeks after we made the change increased by 30 titles per week, as compared to the circulation two weeks prior to the change, it remained fairly constant with our average weekly paperback circulation for the year" (p. 153).

Accessibility is not the only variable that has an impact on student selection of books to read. Consumers of all types of products, not just library materials, are overwhelmed with the choices and decisions facing them. When the human limits of processing a massive amount of information are reached, consumers tend to become confused and dysfunctional and in most situations, a decision needs to be reached in a short amount of time (Jacoby, Speller and Kohn 1974, p. 63). This means that media specialists should develop strategies to help patrons cope with these frustrations (Baker, 1986 p. 318). As in the Langhorne study, media specialists need to be continually aware of patrons' strategies in selecting materials. Some strategies patrons may use to limit their choices include: (1) channeling or focusing their attention more narrowly, by tuning out peripheral and tangential stimuli, (2) grouping information into categories then ordering the categories by importance (Baker, 1986), (3) using past experience to eliminate one or more groups of choices, and (4) simply ignoring a great deal of information (Bettman, 1979).

Browsers need, want and will use some type of guidance to narrow their book selection so library media specialists can and should help browsers to focus attention on a smaller number of titles (Baker, 1986). The arrangement of books on the shelves is important in making them accessible to readers and staff (Hubbard, 1981 p. 3). "Present day trends, reflected in the planning of many new large libraries, indicate that a much higher percentage of the books will not be in isolated bookstacks, but will be made available to readers on an informal basis" (Ray, 1952, p. 4).

In some school and public libraries reader interest classification is used to group books on the shelves in such a way as to reflect presumed interest and use (Rutzen, 1957). Fiction can be and often is shelved by type, such as detective and mystery stories, westerns, romances, or short stories. Students in school library media centers usually like to have fiction grouped by type, such as mystery or animal. "Fiction books should be arranged in such a way that children can find books at the right level for their reading skills" (Ray, 1952, p. 5).

Referring again to the importance of the elementary school library media center in the development of reading skills, very little of the literature refers to special treatment of first readers. Lushington and Mills (1979) suggest book bins "for picture books, beginning to read, early

reading" (p. 170). Grouping together picture books and first readers is a practice commonly found in school library media centers. Ray (1979) suggests the following shelving procedures for children's material:

Picture books are usually arranged in one section for reasons of format, but should be divided between those which are intended mainly for reading aloud by adults (and the majority of picture books make few concessions to the child who is learning to read) and those 'easy readers', which are suitable for the child who is a beginner at reading, where the vocabulary and the sentence structure are simple, as in the 'Dr. Seuss' and 'I can read' series. Since these two categories of picture books are not easy to distinguish between at first sight, the books should be marked by either a color or letter code, during the initial processing, so that they are always shelved correctly by busy staff.

Once children have got past the stage of learning to read, they need plenty of practice before moving on to the whole range of children's fiction, so there is a need, in all but the smallest libraries, for a section of books for younger children which will be made up mainly of the many series books published for five to eight year olds. (p. 27)

Much has been published about shelving techniques for adults and even high school students. A study is needed to investigate the best methods of shelving books for elementary-age children, particularly those students beginning the reading process. Not only will this be supplementing the curriculum, but by providing students with books they are able to read, it will make them more excited about library media centers, books, and reading.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted over two 45 day cycles. The number of students involved were 167 and consisted of optional kindergarten, kindergarten, transitional first, first, and second grades at Garfield School in Boone, Iowa. The study focused on the placement of the entire holdings of first readers which consisted of 470 titles.

Currently, the first readers are interfiled with the picture books, or "everybody" section as it is labeled at Garfield School. Some type of marking system was used in the past to identify "easy readers" because there are red dots on some of the first readers, however, this system has not been continued. This marking system used in the past is not similar to the system planned for this study with the first readers. One difference between the systems is that the old system marked wordless picture books. This study treated wordless picture books as "everybody" books.

The first readers identified for this study were determined by the following criteria: (1) recognizable format, (2) generally belong to a series, (3) controlled vocabulary - words of few syllables, (4) large print, (5) short sentences, and (6) limited amount of print per page (Barstow and Riggle, 1989 and Cain 1990). This type of book was chosen



because of the high demand placed on them by students and teachers. The reading curriculum in the Boone school district places heavy emphasis on independent reading and first readers seem appropriate for that purpose at this time.

The population for this study were all grade levels at Garfield Elementary School in Boone, Iowa. These grades include optional kindergarten, kindergarten, first and second grades. The school population composes about one-sixth of the total elementary school population in the district.

#### Design and Procedure

The entire holdings of picture books and first readers in the Garfield library media center needed to be evaluated. As stated earlier, past media specialists and/or library associates placed a special marking - a red dot on the book's spine - on some books. For the purpose of this study, several of these markings are inaccurate. This researcher first evaluated each of the pre-marked books to determine if it was a first reader or a picture book. The first readers were identified by a red dot placed on the spine label above or below the call number. A red marker was used to make a red dot on the book's pocket and check-out card for easier identification of a first reader by the library media staff. After all first readers were

evaluated the same procedure was used on the remainder of the picture book section. Any new books received during this time was immediately evaluated by the researcher.

While the evaluation was being conducted, first readers were interfiled with picture books, as they always have been. After the evaluation of all books was completed, the first 45 day cycle began. The first day actually began on the first Day 1 of the six day cycle after the evaluation was completed.

Each class is scheduled for one 15 minute check out time during a six day cycle. Students are also encouraged to come into the library media center anytime during the school day, when there are no scheduled classes, to check out books. A count of the number of charges occurred at both of these times with the entire population. After students checked out their materials, the library associate or the researcher counted the number of check out cards with red dots on them. Totals were accumulated at the end of each day.

At the end of the first 45 day cycle, all books with red dots, first readers, were pulled from the "everybody" section and placed in their own section at the end of the "everybody" section. Signs identifying the EVERYBODY and FIRST READER sections were placed above the respective

areas. Students were informed about the new section, but no encouragement was given to check out books from that section by the library associate or this researcher. This researcher could not predict if the teachers would encourage their students to use first readers and therefore, this variable was not controlled in the study.

The data gathering procedures followed for the first 45 days were continued for the next 45 days with the first readers shelved in a separate section.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

There were five days of one- or two-hour early dismissals due to scheduled teacher inservice. For the purposes of this study these days were counted as full days. All changes in the school calendar due to inclement weather was accounted for so that each circulation period contained 45 days.

Five new books were added to the first reader section during the period the study was conducted. These books were included in this study.

The data for the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

#### Number of First Reader Circulations During Each 45 Day Period

Shelving Arrangement	Number
First Readers Interfiled	344
First Readers Separated	449
Total	793

chi square = .034, table value = 12.71, 1 df

During the first 45 day period the first readers were intershelved in the picture book or nonfiction sections of the media center. All first readers

were, however, marked with a red dot on the book's spine.

At the start of the second 45 day period all first readers were moved to a new section of the media center named The First Reader Section. Room for this section was made at the end of the picture book shelving. First readers, or all red dot books, were shelved alphabetically in this section.

The total number of circulations for each group was tabulated. During the study, first readers interfiled with picture books were checked out 344 times. When a first reader section was established 449 checkouts were recorded. There was an increase of 105 checkouts of first readers.

A chi-square test was performed to determine if the number of checkouts between the two periods was significantly different. The data in the study yielded a chi-square equal to .034 with one degree of freedom, and the hypothesis was rejected.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

#### Conclusions

A significant difference at the .05 level was not found and the hypothesis was accepted. The researcher concluded that the creation of a first reader section does increase the number of charges by kindergarten, first and second graders at Garfield Elementary School in Boone, Iowa, but not significantly. Establishment of a first reader section assists children in the selection of books, "so there is a need, in all but the smallest libraries, for a section of books for younger children which will be made up mainly of the many series books published for five to eight year olds." (Ray, 1979, p. 27)

Results of this study are also consistent with consumer studies that found too much information or too many choices were confusing for consumers (Jacoby, Speller and Kohn, 1974). Baker (1986) found that patrons, or consumers, use strategies that help limit their choices. Some of these strategies include focusing attention, grouping, and elimination. A first reader section provides students with a section of books specifically designed for them. They can focus their attention on needed materials immediately which helps eliminate some decision making.

Teachers at Garfield Elementary School in Boone, Iowa, made several positive comments about The First Reader Section such as "it is very helpful" and "the students really like it because they can easily find books that they can read." When classes came into the media center for checkout, teachers would refer students to The First Reader Section and point out special or interesting books in that section.

### Recommendations

Another study might investigate the effects of creating a first reader section in a public library. A study such as this would provide a larger population with a greater age range.

A more formal study of teacher reaction to the creation of a first reader section might be an excellent follow-up to this study. Whole-language, developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum needs in relation to a first reader section might be investigated.

Other types of books or materials, such as mysteries, might be used with this study to determine if the number of charges increases when a special section is established. Other types of special shelving may be explored.

### Summary

167 kindergarten, first and second graders at Garfield Elementary

School in Boone, Iowa, and 470 first reader books were used to investigate whether justification can be given to shelving first reader books in a separate section. An increase in the number of charges of first reader books might demonstrate a need of students to have this type of material readily accessible.

The study was conducted over two 45 day cycles. During the first cycle, first reader books were identified, marked with a red dot and interfiled with picture books. A first reader section was created for the second cycle. All first reader books were shelved alphabetically in this section of the media center. The total number of charges during each cycle was used in a chi-square analysis which indicated the establishment of a first reader section had no statistically significant effect on the circulation of first reader books.



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