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The Public Library Experience: Choosing Books to Read from Predetermined Levels and Its Implications

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the implications resulting from experiences in libraries that parents and children face when they come to the public library with externally identified reading levels that restrict their reading to materials with a particular numerical measure. The volunteer participants included 27 parents and their children who frequent the public library searching for books, particularly leveled books. Participants completed a simple, paper survey which was located at the library desk over a two week period. Based on their in depth answers to survey questions, three parents of first and second grade students were asked if they would be willing to participate in a semi-structured interview to provide further insight. The data from the survey and parent interviews showed favorable responses for knowing a child's reading level and allowing the child to self-select the books at their predetermined level. Reading level was the most popular influence on selection of materials among pre kindergartners through middle schoolers with 20 students and their parents choosing this option on the survey. This represents 74% of the sample population. The parents' responses towards leveled readers and their children's comprehension levels did not support the assumption that parents strongly influence their children to choose leveled readers. These parents support their children's reading ability by allowing them to choose books of choice as well as leveled readers.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPERIENCE: CHOOSING BOOKS TO READ FROM
PREDETERMINED LEVELS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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
Amy L. Seufert
December 2015

This Research Paper by: Amy L. Seufert

Titled: THE PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPERIENCE: CHOOSING BOOKS TO READ
FROM PREDETERMINED LEVELS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the implications resulting from experiences in libraries that parents and children face when they come to the public library with externally identified reading levels that restrict their reading to materials with a particular numerical measure. The volunteer participants included 27 parents and their children who frequent the public library searching for books, particularly leveled books. Participants completed a simple, paper survey which was located at the library desk over a two week period. Based on their in depth answers to survey questions, three parents of first and second grade students were asked if they would be willing to participate in a semi-structured interview to provide further insight. The data from the survey and parent interviews showed favorable responses for knowing a child's reading level and allowing the child to self-select the books at their predetermined level. Reading level was the most popular influence on selection of materials among pre kindergartners through middle schoolers with 20 students and their parents choosing this option on the survey. This represents 74% of the sample population. The parents' responses towards leveled readers and their children's comprehension levels did not support the assumption that parents strongly influence their children to choose leveled readers. These parents support their children's reading ability by allowing them to choose books of choice as well as leveled readers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Children, ready to read, step foot in the public library excited to see all of the books. A parent walks into a public library, heads to the children's desk and asks, "My child reads at Guided Reading Level F. What books do you have that are at that level?" A student finds a book about spiders, and then is told by a parent, it is not on his reading level so he should not check it out. Another student does not want to browse for any books because she is ashamed of her reading level and is afraid other students will make fun of her if she chooses a book marked as being at her reading level.

Problem Statement

Students' reading attitudes, parents helping their children find books on a certain level, teachers' pressures for raising students' reading levels, and librarians guided by policies to provide free access to books for students are all concerned with meeting the intellectual and recreational reading needs of young people. Yet, the tendency for students to feel pressured to only read books on a certain level is interrupting the process of creating lifelong readers. This study will focus on student attitudes towards reading books externally identified as being at a particular reading level (i.e "leveled books") and how parents and students may be influenced in the choice of those books.

Being restricted to only select a book from the library if it is identified as being at one's reading level may be detrimental to the students' life-long reading attitude (McKee & Torp, 2011). If students are required to choose a book out of a specific leveled area, they may never find the relaxing joy of reading self-selected books (McKee & Torp,

2011). Public librarians experience serving parents who, in wanting their children to succeed in reading, believe they will do so by finding leveled reading materials for them. This parental perspective of limiting children to books that are at a specific reading level, causes children to browse books that may or may not be interesting to read; and as a result the children may develop a negative attitude towards reading (DeFord & Klein, 2008).

Teachers, on the other hand, are pressed to have their students meet school-wide goals and benchmarks for fluency and reading levels, and encouraging students to read books at their level is one strategy teachers may use toward such (Rog & Burton, 2001). According to the West Des Moines Community School District's website, the First Grade Descriptors for the Pupil Progress Report concerning literacy states that the student "reads on grade level J or above" (p. 2). To meet this requirement, many teachers set-up guided reading centers and have students complete computerized tests, or use other testing methods to calculate reading levels. Students then spend the year working towards raising their reading level to match or exceed the grade level expectation (Brabham & Villaume, 2002). One of the methods used to attempt to raise reading levels is to have students complete a computerized quiz program, like Accelerated Reader. Beckham (2011) asserts that some students are motivated to score well on a computerized reading program quiz when a reward is attached, while others may cave under the pressure caused by the quizzes.

School and public librarians want to help teachers, parents, and students find appropriate books. They also aim to follow the *Library Bill of Rights* and other policies

set by the American Library Association (ALA, 2006) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) to protect the intellectual freedom of library patrons. The *Library Bill of Rights*, part two in the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, is a set of policies for librarians to guide the services they provide to patrons while advocating for the intellectual freedom of all people. It includes policies that cover equal access to books and other resources and challenges censorship of those resources. The *Library Bill of Rights* helps govern librarians' actions in school and public libraries to ensure provision of a wide variety of books and to preserve equality of access to diverse materials. The third policy states, "Libraries should challenge censorship in their fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment" (para. 3). The *Library Bill of Rights* has been revisited over time to include numerous interpretations including *Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors*. Article V of the *Library Bill of Rights* states, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." The "right to use a library" includes free access to, and unrestricted use of, all the services, materials, and facilities the library has to offer. Every restriction on access to, and use of, library resources based solely on the chronological age, educational level, literacy skills, or legal emancipation of users violates Article V. (ALA, 2014, para. 2).

The AASL offers teacher librarians *Learning Standards and Program Guidelines* to help build a strong library for 21st century learners. If school librarians visually label library collections with reading levels, then students may find success when they are pressured by teachers to read only from a specific level; however, they may have a hard

time selecting books of choice (AASL, 2011). A librarian's goal is to get a book of the students' choice, into that student's hand. The AASL's (2011) *Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels* states that school libraries should not organize books by reading levels. It asserts that students should be able to access books in a consistent arrangement in both school and public libraries in order to maximize students' confidence in finding books. Rog and Burton (2001) agree that children need the freedom to choose books that will be accessible and interesting to them, using self-selecting techniques. The ALA's (2015) *Labeling Systems* states:

Directional aids can also have the effect of prejudicial labels when their implementation becomes proscriptive rather than descriptive. When directional aids are used to forbid access or to suggest moral or doctrinal endorsement, the effect is the same as prejudicial labeling. Even well-intentioned labels may have this effect. (para. 5)

Summary of Problem Statement

A common goal of parents, teachers, and librarians is to suggest age-appropriate literature to students in the hope that they will find enjoyment in reading while also improving their reading skills. Students and parents may be unaware of the intent behind a school district's leveled reading requirement. This disconnect often results in negative experiences in libraries when parents or children reject books that were otherwise of interest after learning the books were not at their identified reading level.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the implications resulting from experiences in libraries that parents and children face when they come to the library with externally identified reading levels that restrict their reading to materials with a particular numerical measure.

Research Questions

1. What influences students' selection of materials in the public library setting?
2. In what ways do parents influence their children's choice of books in the public library?
3. How might public and school librarians encourage students to browse the collection freely and self-select books?

Assumptions

This study assumes that teachers, parents, and librarians share a common interest in encouraging student reading. This also assumes that students want to read books that match their interests and that being required to select books based on reading level counteracts this. A final assumption is that librarians strive to follow the ethics of intellectual freedom set forth in the *ALA Library Bill of Rights* and the *AASL Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels*.

Limitations

This project focuses on elementary students, their parents, and public librarians from one suburban area.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students and parents may be unaware of the intent behind a school district's requirement that all students achieve reading at grade level; this disconnect often results in negative experiences in libraries when parents or children reject books that were otherwise of interest after learning the books were not at the students' identified levels. This literature review examines students' experiences with leveled reading, classroom teachers' attitudes towards student reading, and finally public and teacher librarians' role in reading guidance.

Students' Experiences with Leveled Reading

Nathanson (2011) focused on supporting students' reading levels by providing them with books that they could read fluently and comprehend easily. Data was gathered by observation in 1st-3rd grade classrooms in Western Cape, South Africa during Reading Recovery's running records assessment. This measurement tool records students' reading behaviors and use of strategies by using different levels of text within a predetermined time frame. "Taking running records at frequent time intervals allows educators and researchers to monitor each learner's progress in reading" (p. 286). Nathanson gathered four running records for further research. One student made many errors and was focused on decoding, which led to slower reading. The second student read below grade level and was expected to read third grade text, failing at this because the books were too difficult. The third student decoded text very well, but the text was

pointless to her, which showed she did not comprehend the meaning of it. The fourth and final student was observed reading text that was saturated with pictures and speech balloons, and the student failed to follow the flow of the text correctly. This showed that books for beginning readers should be simple so that comprehension may take place. The study concluded that students who read text that is at their assessed reading level would succeed in comprehension strategies. Thus, this study supported teacher attention to students' reading levels for struggling readers participating in the Reading Recovery program.

A study completed by Kontovourki (2011) examined how the reading of leveled books and assessment of the students' reading levels shaped the way readers and their readings were defined in a large United States metropolitan city public school third grade classroom. Kontovourki followed the class as a whole and one individual reader in particular throughout the school year. Kontovourki was an observer and did not provide the students with any sort of assistance during the day. In part, Kontovourki observed the students during their literacy block in a whole class setting, in small group activities, and during individual work time. He also interviewed students after the observational data was obtained. The findings showed that the classroom was assessment driven, which helped establish reading levels for the students, and that the students observed did not respond the same way with one another when reading leveled books. Some resisted the idea of reading at their level, especially when the level was below grade level. Others were driven by knowing their level and tried to achieve a higher level. Finally some students were not concerned about their reading level. Students that felt "framed by

leveling” would sneak higher leveled books into their desk for the independent reading time, and would voice that they could not read an at level text when in fact it was readable (p. 167). The students who voiced their concerns for others’ choices of books were usually students who read at a higher reading level.

Leveling books for use for school-wide programs such as Accelerated Reader (AR) can also affect students’ feelings towards reading books that are at their level. Thrane (2013) delved into the perceptions of students, classroom teachers, and parents of the AR program and how this program influenced students’ reading attitudes. Thrane surveyed 83 first through fourth grade students, nine classroom teachers in the same grade level, two special education teachers, one Title 1 teacher, and parents of third graders who had provided an email address to the central Iowa rural school district. The researcher used a quantitative analysis tool called the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) for the students’ perspectives and a qualitative Web-based survey that was created in Google Forms and emailed to the teachers and parents. Thrane discovered that the student survey question with the response showing the lowest level of student satisfaction was #2: How do you feel when choosing books in your AR book level? These fifteen students who felt upset or very upset when choosing books in their AR book level included students who were reading below grade level (27% of students), at grade level (33% of students), and above grade level (40% of students). Thrane suggested one possible explanation for these results may be “the restrictions that teachers are placing on their students’ choices of reading materials based on their AR reading levels” (p. 73).

Classroom Teachers' Attitudes towards Students' Reading

Although Thrane's (2013) study focused on the Accelerated Reader program's influence on the reading motivation and attitudes of students, Thrane also gathered qualitative data on the teachers' perspectives of this program within the central Iowa rural school district. The Web-based survey was sent to teachers, and one of the questions asked for information about "the reading materials teachers use with students for Accelerated Reader" (p. 60). Thrane found, "When teachers were asked if their students were allowed to read materials in the classroom not tied specifically to the curriculum or to Accelerated Reader," five (38%) said "they may read 'free choice' selections after their AR point requirements are met for the month" (p. 61). In conjunction with this statistic, 92% of teachers "have over half of their classroom library reading materials leveled for use with Accelerated Reader" and most allow their students to read above level books, but not below level books (p. 61). These two indicators show that these teachers were largely in favor of leveled reading because a low number of teachers (38%) allow free choice reading not tied to the AR level and that most emphasize levels in their classroom libraries. Thrane also noted that teachers noticed that the students read more because of the Accelerated Reader program, however, students enjoyed reading less.

Students should enjoy reading more often to fulfill a classroom literacy need. Teachers in Todd and Kuhlthau's (2005) study found that this need could be fulfilled with help from the school library. In their study 39 schools throughout Ohio had elementary, middle, and high school faculty members participate in a Perceptions of Learning survey. The objective of the survey was to identify and provide evidence of

how the faculty perceived their school library to help students. In observation, 179 of the 614 faculty members reported that the quality of products that students produce through research activities in the library were most successful in helping students. With quality products came choices that students could make as to their own reading choices or multiple books to help support research. Overall, 99.77% of the faculty valued the school library and reported tangible evidence on how the library positively impacted the students.

Even if the library positively reinforces the reading done by students, teachers can inadvertently set a negative tone towards leveled reading and programs such as Accelerated Reader (Smith & Westberg, 2011). This study first surveyed 1,365 Grade 3-8 students in four schools to gather views of the AR program. Then eight to ten students were selected by their teachers from five school sites to meet in a focus group for a more in-depth study of how AR is used and viewed in their schools. The results from the first survey indicated that “most students perceive the AR program as being helpful in motivating and practicing reading skills. However, the older students had significantly less favorable attitudes toward the program” (p. 1). This result might stem from the fact that many teachers used AR in addition to their regular reading programs; in one district the students were “required to earn teacher-assigned point totals each quarter” (p. 4). The focus group expressed negative views towards the AR program noting many concerns and recommendations about the program and how it is implemented in the district. While teachers found methods to promote reading and rewards for completing

required AR quizzes, they were dampening students' self-selecting and enjoyment of reading.

The Public Librarians' and Teacher Librarians' Role in Reading Guidance

A common first experience a preschool child has with literacy activities is when a parent takes him or her to the public library. At the library the child has the freedom to explore literacy in a story time setting and through selecting and checking out a multitude of books. When the child is older, the public library sponsors a summer reading program to help bridge the reading gap that can take place during the summer months. Celano and Neuman (2001) completed a study of *The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development* and focused on the public libraries' preschool and summer reading programs and how they contributed to children's reading skills. To study this role, Celano and Neuman designed and distributed a large-scale survey to Pennsylvania librarians, and received 204 responses representing many different geographic and economic areas of Pennsylvania. Results showed that the summer reading programs' benefits included encouraging children "to read more, develop the reading habit, and learn to love reading" (p. 24). Also, the summer reading program increased the library's circulation of print materials and helped improve students' reading skills. The programs (preschool and summer reading) provided children with opportunities to spend lots of time with books and engage in "rich literacy experiences" (p. 40). Findings from the surveys summarized opportunities for children to develop literacy skills. Examples of the outcomes of the literacy opportunities include programs that encourage children to spend time with books, events that get people into the library, activities that extend the reading

experience, and programs that encourage parents to become involved in their children's reading.

When students return to school after summer break the teacher librarian continues the students' literacy experiences within the school library. The focus of literacy becomes achieving a higher reading level and learning reading skills. Guiding students to choose books at the appropriate reading level is an important role of a teacher librarian as is guiding students to self-select books. Beard (2009) followed below-grade-level readers throughout a year to examine how their reading levels fared during second semester when they were given assistance from the library media specialist to choose appropriate, leveled reading materials. During the first semester students were allowed to self-select books from the library, and second semester the library media specialist assisted the students in choosing books. The 19 fifth grade students were from a suburban elementary school in western Missouri. Multiple assessments were used with the students to evaluate their reading levels at the beginning of the study and during the second semester's intervention with the library media specialist. The self-selecting technique for choosing a book known as "I PICK" was taught to the students (p. 28). The results showed that the students, when given assistance from the library media specialist, became more successful in choosing appropriately leveled books that matched their interests and their reading level. Thus Beard concluded that the role of the librarian served "to match the students' needs and interests, as well as their reading level" and make them more likely to read more often and with a higher skill level in "reading engagement and comprehension" (p. 62).

Summary

These studies encompass and review the issues among students, teachers, librarians, and parents regarding negative experiences in libraries that parents and children face when forced to restrict the child's own reading to externally identified levels. The connection between the students' experiences with leveled reading, the teachers' attitudes and goals for literacy, and finally the role of public librarians and teacher librarians in reading guidance is that everyone is working towards literacy development. Supporting leveled books so that students can comprehend what is being read (Nathanson, 2009) makes sense to teachers who want students to score well on Accelerated Reader quizzes (Thrane, 2013). However the imperative of public and school librarians to provide self-selecting techniques and to guide students in choosing appropriate texts has been shown to improve students' reading engagement and comprehension (Beard, 2009), thus eliminating the need for students' negative experiences with leveled readers (Kontovourki, 2011; Thrane, 2013).

Although prior research demonstrated some negative experiences with leveled readers and some positive experiences with librarians' individual interventions in reading promotion and guidance of students' reading choices, there has not been research to specifically address the disconnect between the directive for leveled reading limitations and the perspectives of parents and students operating within an open choice environment of intellectual freedom in the public library setting.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Parents, students, teachers, and librarians want choosing books and reading to be an enjoyable experience, but many parents and students are having negative experiences in the library when students are forced to choose books of a particular reading level rather than of choice. The purpose of this study was to explore the implications that parents and children face when they come to the library with the child's externally identified reading level and restrict their reading to those materials identified with a particular numerical measure. Specifically, this study asked, what influences students' materials selection in the public library setting, in what ways do parents become involved in influencing their children in choosing books at the public library, and how might public and school librarians encourage students to browse the collection freely to self-select books?

Research Design

This study used qualitative content analysis of surveys and interviews to “examine meanings, themes, and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 308). The researcher analyzed the text of interviews containing closed and open ended questions, as well as narrative survey responses. The qualitative content analysis is intended “to identify important themes or categories within a body of content and to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting” (Zhang & Widemuth, 2009, p. 318).

Procedures

Data Sources

The participants included 27 parents and their preschool and elementary school-aged children who frequent the public library searching for books, particularly leveled books. Participants provided consent following the procedures of the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Research Board by completing simple, paper surveys located at the library desk, along with the informed consent forms. A sign at the desk explained the optional survey and its purpose. At the end of the survey a question asked if the parent were willing to participate in an individual, in-depth interview with the researcher. If so, contact information was requested.

Data Collection

The first instrument that was used to gather data was a closed-ended, paper survey (see Appendix A). The survey had five questions that were developed by the researcher. Collecting data in survey form allowed for a relaxed approach for participants. The survey was intended to gather data on attitudes from parents and students when attempting to choose books to read.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview to be used with a few parents who volunteered to be interviewed (see Appendix B). The semi-structured interview was designed to give the researcher more in-depth, specific reasons for the attitudes about choosing leveled books to read. "Semi-structured interviews give the interviewer considerable freedom to adjust the questions as the interview goes on and to

probe far beyond a particular respondent's answers to the predetermined questions" (Luo & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 233).

Data Analysis

The researcher collected the data through surveys and semi-structured interviews, recorded and transcribed the interviews, read through the data, coded the data by locating text segments and assigning a code of positive or negative, and then coded the text for similar themes to be used in the report. Coding was based on emerging themes from the data, and the researcher "generated categories inductively from the data" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 311). The researcher looked for similar responses which received a positive code, and then compared those to the responses that were different and assigning those responses with a negative code. The majority of the survey questions were closed-ended, which provided a quantitative analysis of frequencies. However, analysis of open-ended questions/answers required analyzing and categorizing before the quantitative analysis could take place (Hank, Jordan, & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 261). The individual semi-structured interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes, guided by a few predetermined questions and by how the patron answered the questions in the survey prior to the interview. Explanation of the feeling of choosing leveled readers as opposed to choice selection of books and the reasoning behind the forced choice of leveled reader books was noted and used in the research. The researcher used an audio recorder, note taking, and a checklist during the interview process.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

At school, many students are assigned a reading level, and then when choosing books at the library, they may limit themselves to a select few books based on those levels. The purpose of this study was to explore the implications that parents and children face when they come to the library with the child's externally identified reading level and restrict their reading to those materials identified with a particular numerical measure.

The volunteer participants included 27 parents and their children who frequent the public library searching for books, particularly leveled books. Participants completed a simple, paper survey (see Appendix A), which was located at the library desk over a two week period. At the end of the survey, parents were asked if they would be willing to participate in an individual, in-depth interview with the researcher. Three parents of first and second grade students who were chosen to provide further insight based on their in depth answers to survey questions agreed to participate in the semi-structured interview.

Factors Influencing Selection of Materials in the Public Library

Survey results yielded three factors of selecting materials in the public library, while the semi-structured interview participants provided additional factors not listed in the survey. Participants included six preschool, three kindergarten, seven first grade, five second grade, two third grade, one fourth grade, and three middle school students and their parents. Figure 1 shows the results from the survey's second question that asked their main criteria for choosing books that day. Reading level was the most popular

factor among all grade levels with 20 students and their parents choosing this option.

This represents 74% of the sample population. First grade students were the most likely to choose reading level as the major factor in selecting books.

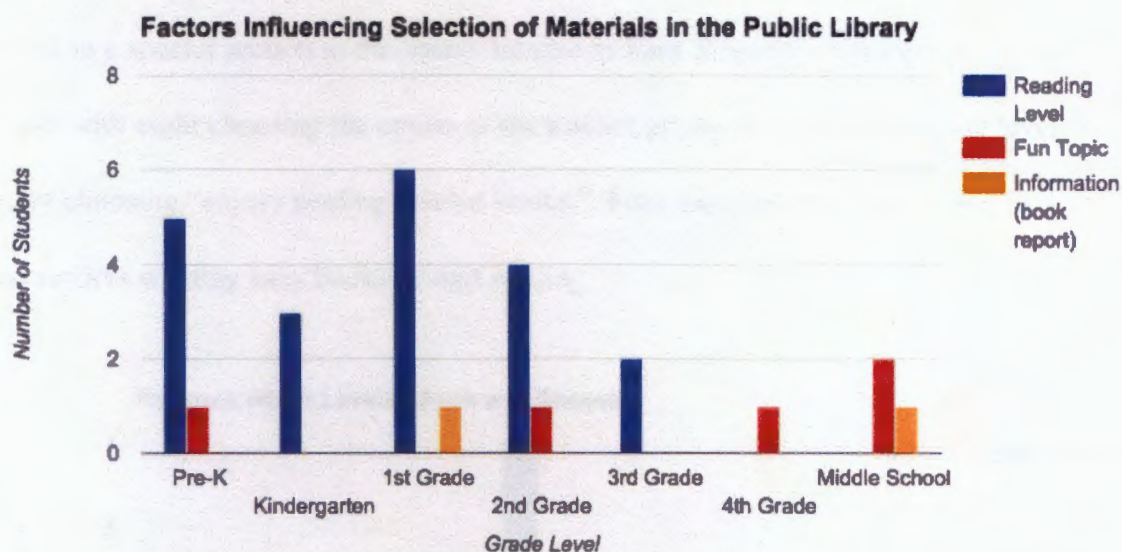


Figure 1. Bar graph showing participants' responses to the question: What was the main factor in the book(s) you have chosen for/with your child?

The parents who participated in the semi-structured interview all listed additional factors that were not included in the survey. Parent A of a second grade girl provided the answer "friends or books of interest" as who or what most influences the child's book selection. Parent B of a second grade boy listed "classmates, parents, librarians and browsing" as influences on the child's book selection. Parent C of twin first grade boys stated that "the picture on the cover" is what mostly influences the boys' book selection.

Figure 2 shows the results of why a leveled reader was chosen among the 20 participants (74%) who chose reading level as a factor when selecting books in the public library. In this library a leveled book is defined as an early reader book that has a high picture support, large print, leveled using the Guided Reading Level system, and is organized in a special section in the library labeled as Easy Readers. Participants' results were split with eight choosing the option of the teacher giving their child a reading level and eight choosing "enjoys reading leveled books." Four participants (20%) chose leveled readers wanting easy books to start reading.

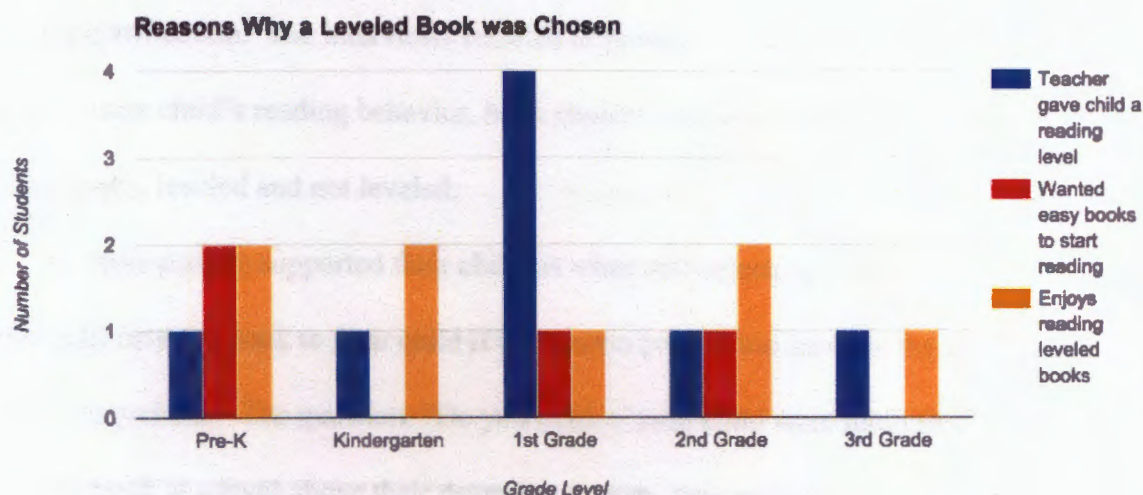


Figure 2. Bar graph showing participants' responses to the question: Why did you pick leveled reading books?

Results from another survey question resulted in 18 participants (90%), of the 20 who chose reading level as the main factor, said that their child would choose the same leveled readers if reading level were not a factor. Leveled readers as a choice for student

selection without any other influences points to the idea that students enjoy reading books that are at their level, as opposed to the assumption that students would not enjoy reading such books.

Parental Influence on Child's Choice of Books

An assumption when starting this research study was that parents strongly influence their child's choice of books, especially when choosing leveled books. This study focused on three parents who all visit the library at least once a week, have first or second grade children and volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview in which fixed questions were asked (see Appendix B) followed by additional questions if needed for clarification. The interviews resulted in positive answers reflecting parental support for their child's reading behavior, book choices, and comprehension when selecting books, leveled and not leveled.

All three parents supported their children when self-selecting books and voiced that they will read the book to their child if the chosen book is too hard for the child to read and comprehend. The question, "Do you think if your child were interested in the topic of the book at a level above their determined score, they would comprehend the book? Or do you feel it would be intimidating for your child?" resulted in the following responses:

Parent A: When my child is interested in a book, sometimes I read it to her or sometimes she reads it to herself. But usually I will at least start her on the book and then see how it goes as far as comprehension. I think for us the most important thing in choosing a book is if it is interesting, and if she has a hard time reading it herself and comprehending then I am here. Also reading is still a family/group activity right now.

Parent B: I feel if they are interested [in the topic of the book] the level would not influence comprehension.

Parent C: I think they'd lose interest rather than being intimidated. If it's a long book I know they can comprehend and its above their reading level, I read it to them. There is some struggle for me because they enjoy being read to, but we're to be working in their skill. And so sometimes I think we're missing the joy in reading.

In asking the additional questions, the parents were all in agreement for allowing their child to read easier and/or harder self-selected books. Since they all visit the library at least once a week, their children have access to and support for a multitude of books. When asked the question, "Do you think your child benefits from knowing their reading level?" all three responded with different answers.

Parent A: No because she is encouraged to read things that interest her. If it is above her reading level we will help.

Parent B: Yes, it builds confidence.

Parent C: I don't think it would have any bearing to my twins.

The parents' responses and feelings towards leveled readers and their children's comprehension levels did not support the assumption that parents strongly influence their children to choose leveled readers. These parents support their children's reading ability by allowing them to choose books of choice as well as leveled readers. If a book is at a higher reading level than their child has demonstrated through testing, they will allow them to read it and help read it aloud if necessary for comprehension.

Encouraging Students to Self-Select Books

How might public and school librarians encourage students to browse the collection freely and self-select books? The AASL's (2011) *Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels* states that school libraries should not organize books

by reading levels. Findings from the survey and parent interviews did not definitively indicate that children were not allowed to self-select books, however many book choices were being made from books that were at the child's predetermined level. An unlevelled collection might not be helpful to the 20 children and their parents who were surveyed because they were choosing leveled readers at the public library. These children were easily self-selecting books that were in their level due to the organization of the books at the public library, and the children were selecting books from different levels in spite of the organization of the leveled books.

Summary of Findings

Fortunately, the data from the survey and parent interviews showed favorable responses for knowing a child's reading level and self-selecting the leveled books. Reading level was the main factor in selecting leveled books at the public library during the survey period. Teachers providing students with their reading level and reading leveled books for enjoyment both influenced the reasons why a leveled book was chosen. Parents surveyed support their children by allowing them to self-select leveled and choice books from an organized, leveled book collection.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Students and parents may be unaware of the intent behind a school district's leveled reading requirement. This interpretation by parents of the school district's intentions, resulting in limiting children to books that are at a specific reading level, causes their children to browse books that may or may not be interesting to read. As a result the children may develop a negative attitude towards reading (DeFord & Klein, 2008). The purpose of this study was to explore the implications for parents and children face who come to the library with externally identified reading levels and restrict their reading to materials identified with a particular numerical measure. The data from the survey and parent interviews showed favorable responses for knowing a child's reading level and allowing the child to self-select from any books regardless of level, but still selected many books from their predetermined level.

Reading level was the most popular influence on selection of materials among pre kindergartners through middle schoolers with 20 students (74%) and their parents choosing this option on the survey. First grade students comprise the majority of the population who chose reading level as their major factor in selecting books. Participants' results were split with eight choosing the option of the teacher giving their child a reading level and eight choosing "enjoys reading leveled books." The specifying of leveled readers as a preferred choice by students without their attending to other influences on selection suggests that students enjoy reading books at their level. This contradicts the researcher's assumption that students would not enjoy reading such books.

The responses provided by parents regarding their feelings towards leveled readers and their children's comprehension levels did not support the researcher's assumption that parents strongly influence their children to choose leveled readers. The parents in this study support their children's reading ability by allowing them to choose books of choice as well as leveled readers. If a book is at a higher reading level than their child has demonstrated through testing, then they will allow them to read it and will help read it aloud if necessary for comprehension.

When public and school librarians provide techniques for self-selecting books to guide students in choosing appropriate texts, it has been shown to improve students' reading engagement and comprehension (Beard, 2009), thus eliminating the need for students' negative experiences with leveled readers (Kontovourki, 2011; Thrane, 2013). Findings from the survey and parent interviews concerning students self-selecting leveled readers were inconclusive, however many choices were being made from the chosen leveled books.

Future Research

Suggestions for future research include a longer period of time to conduct the survey, which may result in a larger sample. An opportune time to conduct a survey might be right after area parent-teacher conferences, which are typically in October. The researcher has observed that there is a higher number of parents searching for books at their children's reading level once prescribed by the classroom teacher at their parent-teacher conference.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY FOR PATRONS WITH SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

This voluntary survey will help gather data for Amy Seufert's research project through the University of Northern Iowa's Curriculum and Instruction, School Library Studies Masters program.

Researcher: Amy Seufert

amy.seufert@wdm.iowa.gov

515-222-3405

1. Age and grade level of child/children
 - a. Ages _____
 - b. Grade levels _____

2. What was the main factor in the book(s) you have chosen for/with your child?
 - a. Reading Level
 - b. Fun Topic
 - c. Information (book report)
 - d. Other _____

*If your choice was reading level, please continue with the survey. If not, thank you for your time.

3. Why did you pick leveled reading books? (Mark all that apply.)
 - a. The teacher gave my child a specific reading level to choose books for reading and/or quiz taking
 - b. My child is just starting to read and wanted easy books
 - c. My child likes reading this level of books, it was my choice
 - d. Other _____

4. Do you think your child would choose these same books if reading level were not a factor?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 Why or why not? _____

5. Are you/Is your child happy with the books selected today?
 - a. Yes. Why?: _____
 - b. No. Explain why: _____

6. Are you (the parent) interested in/ willing to participating in a brief interview about this topic with Amy Seufert?
 - a. Yes and you may *contact me at: _____
 - b. No thank you

Thank you for your time filling out this survey!

Amy Seufert

*Any personal information provided will be kept confidential between participant and researcher.

APPENDIX B
SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Possible interview questions:

START: How often would you say you visit the public library with your child?

What is the usual purpose of your visit?

Would you describe your child as one who enjoys reading?

Does your child enjoy selecting books to read?

Who or what most influences your child's book selections?

Does your child know his/her reading level / LEXILE level? If so, do you believe that having your child read predetermined leveled books will help them comprehend the book and why?

Do you think if your child were interested in the topic of the book at a level / LEXILE above their determined score, they would comprehend the book? Or do you feel it would be intimidating for your child? Please explain.

Addition Questions if not covered earlier:

Do you allow your child to read easier or harder books depending on what they choose?

How often are they allowed to read these self-selected books?

Do you think your child benefits from knowing their reading level, why?

Can knowing a reading level be detrimental to your child's self-esteem?

How do you value reading, for entertainment only or educational value only or both?

APPENDIX C
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
PARENTAL PERMISSION

Project Title: The Public Library Experience: Choosing Books to Read From Predetermined Levels and the Implications for Children and Parents

Name of Investigator(s): Amy Seufert

Invitation to Participate: You have been invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate in the interview.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of leveled readers on parent and student choice of books. Information will then be used to organize leveled readers (or provide resources) so that consistency for finding books will be similar to school libraries in the West Des Moines area.

Explanation of Procedures: During October-November 2015, participants will partake in a short survey if they are seeking leveled readers. From the short survey, participants may volunteer to be chosen for a one-on-one interview that will take approximately 15 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will ask the participant open-ended questions related to what influences them (and their children) when selecting leveled readers. Interview with parents will be recorded using a digital audio recorder for later reference by only the researcher. Recordings will not be attached to interviewee's names and will be kept for six months after the research is complete and then deleted. If any interviewee's quotes are used, they will be kept confidential by not having names attached to them.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to participation.

Benefits: This research will give insight to the children's library staff by discovering what's motivating parents' and children's decisions when choosing leveled books and what we can do as children's staff to give patrons a positive experience when selecting leveled books at the West Des Moines Public Library.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study which could identify you, will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Amy Seufert at amy.seufert@wdm.iowa.gov or the project investigator's faculty advisor Joan Bessman Taylor at the Department of School Library Studies, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2050 or joan.taylor@uni.edu. You can also contact the office of the Human Participants Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process."

Agreement: Include the following statement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date) _____

(Signature of instructor/advisor)

(Date) _____

[NOTE THAT ONE COPY OF THE ENTIRE CONSENT DOCUMENT (NOT JUST THE AGREEMENT STATEMENT) MUST BE RETURNED TO THE PI AND ANOTHER PROVIDED TO THE PARTICIPANT. SIGNED CONSENT FORMS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR INSPECTION FOR AT LEAST 3 YEARS]

APPENDIX D
SIGN FOR THE SURVEY

In an attempt to gather data for a research study through the University of Northern Iowa's School Library Studies program, Amy Seufert is asking for parents who are on the hunt for LEVELED BOOKS to please fill out this short survey.

All entries will only be viewed by the researcher, Amy Seufert and no identifying, personal information will be given out.

Please place the completed survey in the box.

Thank you for your help!
Amy Seufert