The Degree to which Student Self-Selection of Literature from a Variety of Genres is influenced by Teacher-Led Book Talks

Shawn L. Ranney

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THE DEGREE TO WHICH STUDENT SELF-SELECTION OF LITERATURE FROM A VARIETY OF GENRES IS INFLUENCED BY TEACHER-LED BOOK TALKS

By
Shawn L. Ranney

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2002
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05/15/02
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05/22/02
Date

Second Faculty Reader
05/15/02
Date

Director of Graduate Studies
05/23/02
Date
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of teacher-led book talks in positively influencing students to select literature from a variety of genres. The subjects of this study consisted of twenty-four fifth grade students from a suburban elementary school in western New York who were exposed to teacher-led book talks designed to present a variety of literary genres.

Within a weekly cycle, participants were exposed daily to teacher-led book talks, a whole class brainstorming session, and a journal prompt intended to guide their reflections on a particular genre. The teacher-led book talks were comprised of oral readings from a selection of literature that represented major literary genres including non-fiction, fiction, fantasy/science fiction, folktale, and poetry. The whole class brainstorming session offered students an opportunity to record commonalities discovered within a genre, thereby enabling them to effectively classify literature they choose to read. The journal reflection provided students an opportunity to draw upon their weekly genre study linking knowledge to appreciation.

Utilizing the school library's electronic database, a comparative analysis of literature selections pre- and post-book talk sessions determined the effectiveness (influence) teacher-led book talks have had on self-selection of literature. The data indicate that genre selections broadened for some students, but not all.
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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Overview

Schema is based on our background experiences. It is a generic concept composed of our unique understandings of a concept or idea. Grunning (1998) goes further in stating “the richer our experiences and the better organized they are, the richer and more useful are our schemata” (p. 309). Schema theorists presume that concepts are organized in our minds in groups that have an understandable, relational network.

Smith (1991) believes the analysis of different types of literature promotes cognitive development, “by giving students an opportunity to apply similar skills and strategies, such as identifying themes discussed in one genre - realistic fiction, for example - to other genres like poetry, reports, descriptive pieces, and plays.” (p. 441)

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of teacher-led book talks in positively influencing students to select literature from a variety of genres.
Question to be Answered

To what degree is student selection from a variety of genre influenced by teacher-led book talks?

Need for the Study

It is not necessary for children to define every piece of literature that they read, though the elementary school certainly should provide a wide range of genres. The range of types assures the exposure of students to the scope of materials available to them, but also of offering children the opportunity to feel the experiences of life through semantic and syntactic diversity. Each type of literature presented to a young reader serves many functions. One of which is to develop a schema (schema theory) for the particular literary genre. Another function is to encourage the application of thinking skills in a variety of literary engagements (purposes).

While self-selection of books has been an option for many years in recreational reading programs, such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), it is less likely to occur in the instructional reading program. Kragler (2000) proposes, “as teachers begin to use literature more often than basals as the foundation for their instructional reading programs, it becomes important to allow students choice and freedom in selecting some of their reading
material” (p. 133). Given the research findings on student literature selection, how does a teacher promote “choice” while also guaranteeing a “wide range” of literature exposure?

**Definition of Terms**

*Personal Literature:* Books chosen by students to read in their free time, chosen according to their own interests, not for school purposes.

*Genre:* A relatively broad classification of literature based upon similar story elements, semantic patterns, syntactical patterns, character development, and lexicon.

*Sub-Genre:* A sub-classification of literature within a broader set.

*Genre Blending:* The merging of elements generally unique to one genre with that of another genre, making it further difficult to categorize piece of literature.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Overview

Literature serves numerous purposes and provides the reader with countless rewards. First and foremost, literature provides pleasure. We choose literature that promises entertainment and, sometimes, escape. Literature provides a second reward: understanding. An exploration into the human condition. A revelation of human motives for what they are, inviting the reader to identify with or react to a fictional character. Literature can unveil nature as a force that influences us. In Hatchet, Gary Paulsen shows a tenacious Brian clinging to life as he struggles to survive, separate from civilization. Literature provides vicarious experiences. It is impossible to live any life but our own, in any time but our own life span, or in any space or place but our own. However, literature makes it possible for the reader to live in the time of the Aztecs, or during the days of the American colonies.

While not exhaustive, the preceding list provides an examination of the varied purposes and rewards for reading a mixture of literature. Lukens (1990) supports the many purposes of literature in stating, "Words are merely words, but real literature for any age is words chosen with skill and artistry to give the readers pleasure and to help them understand themselves and others" (p. 10). Clearly, we as adults understand that childhood may not hold
the same experiences for all children. Differences that include economics, geography, and cultural norms exist, forming chasms that separate us, children and adults alike. Giorgis and Johnson (2001) explore this power of creating commonalities among children in stating,

Literature presents familiar situations and predicaments to which children can relate. Some of these include an interest in play, the ability to imagine, the experiences of school events and traditions, and the challenges inherent in growing up. (p.540)

At the elementary level, educators have long recognized the value of having this common ground, by which to scaffold student learning from a foundation that is highly experientially based.

**Schema Theory**

The study of mental organization attributed to the Gestalt psychology movement of the early twentieth century, provides the historical precedence for what Bartlett (1932) referred to as "schema", in the sense that it is used today. He theorized that knowledge is incorporated in abstract structures that have certain properties. He used the term schema to denote these structures, borrowing the phrase from the work of Piaget (1928). While never clearly identifying each component of his theory, Bartlett’s work does indicate a top-down influence. Anderson and Pearson (1984) suggest that Bartlett’s work was largely ignored until the late 1970’s when it was revived.
by computer scientists performing simulations of human cognition. It was then "...that ambitious statements of schema theories began to emerge and to be applied to entities like stories and processes like reading" (Anderson & Pearson, 1984, p. 259).

The characteristics of schemata which enable the information processing to take place are set out by Anderson and Pearson (1984). The first of these characteristics is that schema is abstract in its summary of knowledge about a variety of generalized cases that each differ in the manner of their variables. An example of this would be the schema for NOTE. This schema could include three variables; the author, the text, and the recipient. The values of these variables differ depending on contextual or situational factors, however the internal relationship within the NOTE schema remains the same. Regardless of the environment, the author will write the note to the recipient.

The second characteristic is that schema is structured in that it represents the relationships among its component parts. A schema can be a diagram, an outline, or a mental image. For example, the MATTER schema contains within it a network of subschema representing mass, space, observable properties, atoms, etc. These in turn would each have their own subschema. The atom would have a subschema of electrons, protons, and neutrons. Anderson and Pearson (1984) propose that these subschemata are instantiated with particular information when one’s schema gets activated and
is used to interpret some event or concept. Schema theorists presume that concepts are organized in our minds in groups that have an understandable, relational network. Figure 1 provides a possible structural representation for the schema MATTER.

![Diagram of MATTER schema]

Figure 1
Schema for Matter

A third characteristic is the fluid nature of schema. One’s knowledge is organized in the mind according to a person’s current understanding. This knowledge is assessed as additional variables (or instances) are introduced to one’s knowledge base. This change in one’s schema would include the levels of abstraction, ranging from basic perceptual elements to higher level conceptualizations within a concept or idea. An example of this change could be represented by comparing an individual’s schema for WORK at age five and the same individual’s schema for WORK at age thirty-five.

While based upon our background experiences, schema, it is more than
a generic concept composed of our unique understandings of a concept or idea. Gunning (1998) goes further in stating "the richer our experiences and the better organized they are, the richer and more useful are our schemata" (p. 309).

Schema theory offers a theoretical base to explain this factor of background experiences that influence learning and reading comprehension. Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz (1976) asked two groups of college students to read one of two ambiguous passages, written to permit a variety of interpretations. One of the passages could be perceived as describing either a prison escape or wrestling match, while the other passage could be perceived as describing friends playing cards or a wind ensemble preparing to rehearse. One group of subjects consisted of physical education majors and the other consisted of music majors. The results of comprehension testing indicated that there was a significant relationship between the subjects' background experiences and their interpretation of the reading passages. Durkin (1981) qualifies this study by concluding "a major tenant of schema theory is that (reading) comprehension is as dependent on what is in a reader's head as it is on what is printed" (p.25).

Historically, literature has served a primary role in the development of understandings in our schools. Reading comprehension involves using complex strategy systems to construct meaning. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) note the power at which background knowledge influences comprehension in stating,
Schemata influence reading comprehension in three ways. First, schema provides a framework for learning that allows readers to seek and select information that is relevant to their purposes for reading... to make inferences... anticipate content and make predictions. Second, schema helps readers organize text information... [to] retain and remember. And third, schema helps readers elaborate information. (p. 357)

Smith (1991) believes the analysis of different types of literature specifically promotes cognitive development, "by giving students an opportunity to apply similar skills and strategies, such as identifying themes discussed in one genre - realistic fiction, for example - to other genres like poetry, reports, descriptive pieces, and plays" (p. 441).

Responsible for the growth and development of student literacy levels, educators are genuinely tied to the goals set forth by our individual communities and states. Within the New York State Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Framework for Language Arts (1994), the Regents of New York State have proposed,

...students [should] read literature from many literary periods and genres in order to understand the culture represented, to speculate on the ideas and the imaginative vision, and to speculate on the nature and use of the language that is the medium of the artistic expression. (p.10)
Genre Theory

The goal of genre theory is to construct useful similarities between different texts. With this in mind, Lemke (1993) further distinguishes the goal of genre theory as "the meaning-making practices of a community, and particularly its system of intertextuality, that determine which possible similarities will count as significant" (p.257). There are many grounds for saying that one text is somehow relevant for the interpretation of another, and one of these is that the texts are instances of the same genre. Furthermore, construing a text as being of a certain genre also activates expectations about that text for readers in a particular community.

The discussion of genre in literature must begin with an effort to define the term. This is not a simple task. A genre is a kind or type of literature in which the members share a common set of characteristics. One may, however, readily discover many such similarities and differences among any two pieces of literature. Classification is easiest when each class or group possesses clear-cut, unchanging characteristics. Herald (2000) accentuates the problem in acknowledging recent trends in writing towards more "blending of genres; where one may find a romance tale that involves a mystery or detectives who solve crimes in futuristic societies" (p. vii).

For the purposes of this study, the term "genre" will be used in a way that is clear and useful. All elements of literature are included in each of the major genres of fiction, but within each type, one element may be more
significant than another. In some cases the genre demands that a particular element be strong or well developed; without it, Lukens (1990) claims, “the credibility of the story may be in question” (p.14). Beyond this study, one may conclude it wise to view genre, less as a means of exclusively cataloging literature and more as a resource for making connections across literature.

**Reading Habits**

As outlined by the New York State English Language Arts Resource Guide (1994), educators are expected to guide students’ literary response skills including the ability to, “evaluate literary merit based on an understanding of the genre and the literary elements” (p.4). While the value of such a goal is viewed by most educators as having merit, exposing children to a broad range of genres, at a variety of independent levels remains a challenge.

Interest and motivation are two important factors to be considered when discussing student literacy. Interest refers to a student’s feeling of curiosity, fascination, or absorption. Motivation refers to an incentive, inducement, or motive. The importance of student interest is duly noted with Dreher (1999) revealing, “that interest can override difficulty, especially for mature readers” (p. 414).

The premise that children select literature with purpose is supported by numerous studies that have investigated the implications of age, gender, reading proficiency, and socio-economic status. Higginbotham (1999)
examined the correlations of reading interests for middle school students by gender. She found that, “females showed a much stronger preference than the males for romance, adventure, animal stories, friendship, and historical fiction... while males reported stronger preferences for the non-fiction categories of sports and sciences, as well as adventure” (p.109).

The power of reader interest can and will influence the selection of literature that is clearly not at the reader’s independent level. Boulware and Foley (1998) found, “these fourth grade students frequently bypassed the librarian’s recommended offering in favor of finding a topic of personal interest... even if it meant selecting a picture book that contained few words” (p.221).

Given the powerful nature that student interest weighs in the selection of literature, would it not benefit classroom teachers to use what they know about their children’s interests to their advantage? This particular research question has been investigated by Stoefen-Fisher (1990) as she examined the accuracy of teachers’ judgments of their students’ reading interests in comparison to students’ responses on a reading interest inventory. The study required the students to read 54 annotated texts of varied genres, each one paired with a contextual illustration. After reading each text, students were asked to report their level of interest on a Likert scale. Interest scores were averaged according to genre and ordered from highest (first choice) to lowest (last choice). Classroom teachers were then asked to judge their individual
students' top two interest categories. Stoefen-Fisher discovered that, "teachers were only moderately successful in identifying their students' generalized reading interests" (p. 225), as long as the preference order was not a criterion for accuracy.

Working with the International Reading Association and The Children's Book Council, publishers have long recognized the important role children play in the critiquing and subsequent recommendation process of a good book made by children in classrooms every day. "Each year, thousands of school children from different regions of the United States are encouraged to read and vote on the newly published children's and young adults' trade books that they liked best" ("Children's Choices for 2001"). The results of the Children's Choices for 2001, published jointly each year by the editors of The Reading Teacher and the International Reading Association, provide a montage into the minds of student interest.

Moorman, Turner, and Worthy (1999) question the validity of student access to literature of their interest. Having acknowledged the suggestion that students who have access to materials of interest are more likely to read and thus to improve their reading achievement and attitudes, their study examined the reading preferences and access to reading materials of sixth grade students. While their findings revealed more similarities of reading interests regardless of gender than did other studies, the source of student reading material raises concern. Of the students who responded to the
question, Where do students obtain their reading material? 56 percent said they typically get their reading materials through purchased sources, while 44 percent borrow materials from the school, classroom, or public library. After revealing the results of student reading interests, "many teachers and librarians objected to specific materials ranked highly by students on the grounds that they contain explicit sexual content (e.g., some teen magazines) or graphic descriptions of violence" (p. 21). The degree of censorship exhibited by the availability of literature in public schools and libraries will no doubt become an issue tackled by the representatives of groups with polarized viewpoints and agendas.

Although generalizations about the reading habits of elementary school students can be helpful, classroom teachers, parents, and librarians should realize that each child is unique in his or her interests.

One of the best ways to help children become fluent readers is to make sure that books are nearby at all times. Having access to literary collections at home, in the classroom, and libraries does not guarantee that children will choose reading as a leisure activity. Finding the "right" book is a dilemma faced by new and experienced readers alike. Castle (1994) explores the need for guiding children with their book choices, in stating "if [text] mismatches are frequent and persistent and make choosing too time consuming, too much work, and, most important, too damaging to feelings of self-worth, they may simply give up reading altogether" (p.155).
Summary

There is research that supports the positive relationship between students being exposed to a variety of literary genres and their cognitive development. While reading serves many purposes, research indicates that the extension of knowledge added to a reader’s schema enables children to be academically successful. The construction of meaning through literature is not a passive activity. Rather, the reader brings his/her schema of current understanding. This understanding is personalized by experiences, real or imagined, lived or read. Based upon this review, educators should strive to broaden children’s schemata. Exposing children to literature of differing genres enables them to expand the foundation upon which so much learning has yet to rest.
CHAPTER III
Design of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of teacher-led book talks in positively influencing students to select literature from a variety of genres.

Research Question

To what degree is student selection from a variety of genre influenced by teacher-led book talks?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects consisted of 24 fifth grade students (15=male, 9=female) from a suburban elementary school in western New York. All of the students were in the same classroom and students were grouped heterogeneously.

Materials

The school library is equipped with an electronic database that is capable of providing a history of materials loaned to each research participant.
This researcher did not have access to specific student names. To ensure confidentiality, each "participant" was assigned a first name (not their own) for the purpose of the reporting out of results.

**Procedures**

The participants were scheduled to go to the school library once every six days. This researcher collected a history of participant literature selections from the school library database beginning in September 2001. This history was categorized within a specified set of genres to determine what types of literature were currently being chosen by the participants. Beginning in November, the researcher began to introduce book-talks featuring literature from a different genre each week. The book talk cycle took place throughout the week before the participants would go to the library and was followed up by a journal prompt to reflect on the genre the evening before going to the library. The genres selected for this study included non-fiction, fiction, poetry, folklore, and fantasy/science fiction. These selections represent the major literary genres outlined within the English Language Arts Resource Guide, published by the New York State Department of Education. The library's electronic database was utilized for continuously updated literature selection histories.

The teacher-led book talks were comprised of a selection of literature (2-5 titles) that represent a specific genre being introduced to the
participants. This researcher orally read a portion of one or more of these texts. The read-aloud choices were made according to those elements that are unique to that particular genre. Non-fiction selections were comprised of a variety of informational texts including encyclopedia citations, periodicals, and informational books. Fiction selections included readings from *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Patterson, and *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli. Poetry selections were presented from anthologies that included such authors as Robert Frost, Eloise Greenfield and Shel Silverstein. Folktale selections included stories from around the globe attributed not so much to the particular author, rather, to those lessons universally accepted by all cultures. Fantasy and Science Fiction selections included readings from *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. This included the development of the setting within a fantasy or the scene of a crime for a mystery. Having completed the oral reading the researcher then asked the participants to share any familiar titles whose memory was conjured up by the read-aloud.

The day before going to the library, the students participated in a whole class brainstorming session used to discuss what they understand to be important elements of a particular genre. What makes a good... (insert genre) story? was displayed as the title on chart paper for the recording of student responses. While this researcher recorded the student responses on chart paper, the participants recorded the responses in their response
journals.

The evening before going to the library, the participants were given the following journal prompt: “As the director of marketing for Barnes and Noble Bookstores, you are responsible for increasing the sales of (insert genre). Sell (insert genre) Now!”

Analysis

The researcher has utilized a comparative analysis of literature selections pre- and post- book talk sessions. This has determined the effectiveness (influence) teacher-led book talks have had on self-selected literature.
CHAPTER IV
Findings and Interpretation of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of teacher-led book talks in positively influencing students to select literature from a variety of genres.

Analysis of Data

The researcher has utilized a comparative analysis of literature selections pre- and post- book talk sessions. This has determined the effectiveness (influence) teacher-led book talks have had on self-selected literature.

Findings

The following tables contain self-selected literature counts of each student from the school library. Table 1 provides the literature selection history of each student prior to the institution of teacher-led book talks. Table 2 provides the literature selection history of each student after the teacher-led book talks commenced. The total value of each literary genre was examined to determine its percentage of the total number of selections. Students’ real names have not been used.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
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An analysis of each literary genre yields the following percentages selected by students: Non-Fiction 27%, Fiction 42%, Fantasy 26%, Poetry 2%, Folktale 2%. The data confirm the self-selection patterns noted in previous research studies. Students show a clear preference for the genres of fiction, non-fiction, and fantasy.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Nick</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Randy</td>
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<td>Aubrey</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrell</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Totals</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of each literary genre yields the following percentages selected by students: Non-Fiction 57%, Fiction 23%, Fantasy 14%, Poetry 1%, Folktale 5%.
The following changes in self-selection patterns were noted in each genre category:

- non-fiction + 30%
- fiction - 19%
- fantasy - 12%
- poetry - 1%
- folktale + 3%

What stands out from the data is an increase in student self-selection of the non-fiction genre. Within the time frame of this study, the curriculum required the students to produce a research paper on a topic of their choice. While some students completed their research out of the classroom, many did obtain source material from the school library. The increased self-selections of non-fiction literature may be accounted for by the students’ learning needs as they pursued a variety of research topics of interest.

The data found in Tables 1 and 2 clearly identify the literature self-selection patterns of students as they changed over the course of this study. However, these patterns reveal only a partial picture of what occurred over this period of time. Within a sample of subjects, general patterns emerge that reveal those changes for the group. In an attempt to further explore the data, I chose to examine three very different individuals within the sample to provide a context of understanding the literature selections of individual students and their effect upon the overall data. An analysis of the literature self-selection patterns of Rachael, Alexandra, and Andrew revealed data worthy of such commentary.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 1

Rachael represented one of this group's most avid readers. She frequently displayed a passion for learning in all environments and continually strove to increase her understandings throughout the school year. Her love of literature, particularly within the fiction and fantasy genres, was exhibited in Graph 1 by the number of selections she made exclusively within those areas.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 2

With the commencement of the teacher-led book talks there was seen a general shift in literature selection patterns by Rachael. Driven by the desire to become a more knowledgeable student, Rachael seems to constantly monitor her learning as well as the feedback provided by her teacher. The data displayed in Graph 2 show a student who has expanded her reading repertoire, supplementing her interest in fiction and fantasy by including portions of the non-fiction and folktale genres.
Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 3

Alexandra also represented one of this group’s more avid readers. Similarly to Rachael, she frequently displayed her passion for literature. The difference between lies in the proximity of the town library to Alexandra’s home. This researcher discovered early in the year that Alexandra frequented this public library, which became the source for much of her reading interests. As displayed in Graph 3, Alexandra’s literature selections are dominated by the fiction genre.
Table 6

Alexandra's Selections After Teacher-Led Book Talks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 4

Alexandra’s Book Selections After Book Talks

With the commencement of the teacher-led book talks there was seen a slight shift in literature selection patterns by Alexandra. The data displayed in Graph 4 show a student who has gradually broadened her reading selections. While clearly maintaining a strong interest in the fiction genre, Alexandra began to select literature from the non-fiction and folktale genres.
Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 5

Andrew represented an average reader within this group of students. Observations made during choice time allowed this researcher to conclude that Andrew thoroughly enjoyed reading. His literary interests were particularly centered around comic books and joke books. Andrew would search out a peer with which to share his newly discovered talent for telling jokes. When queried about his motivation, he frequently responded, "I really like the gross ones!" The data displayed in Graph 5 indicate Andrew's literary genres of interest as being fiction and fantasy.
Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Non-Fiction</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Folktale</th>
<th>Total Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 6

With the commencement of the teacher-led book talks there was seen a dramatic shift in literature selection patterns by Andrew. The data displayed in Graph 6 show a student who has generally discontinued his privilege of selecting literature from the school library. Upon questioning his lack of book circulation, this researcher learned that Andrew had exhausted all of the available literature of greatest interest. Andrew only literature selection was a book used to support his research topic.
Summary

The study found that teacher-led book talks do positively influence students to select literature from a variety of genres. Student literature selection histories were compiled from the library circulation database from before and after the inclusion of teacher-led book talks. This enabled the researcher to create Table 1 and Table 2.

A comparative analysis of literature selections pre- and post-book talk sessions included a variation of percent in the self-selection patterns of literature for these students.

Additionally, Table 3 through Table 8, as well as their accompanying graphs denote the change in self-selection patterns of literature for three individual students within the sample group.
CHAPTER V
Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of teacher-led book talks in positively influencing students to select literature from a variety of genres.

Conclusions

Evidence of an educator’s sphere of influence is often shrouded by the procedures developed within the classroom, the level of affinity children have for their teacher, as well as the academic curriculum. This study specifically sought to determine the level of influence of this classroom teacher on student literature selections through teacher-led book talks.

The most recognized influence exercised by teachers is likely to be found within the daily routines and procedures developed within the classroom. Evidence of this influence is seen in the rules and guidelines of acceptable behavior, the physical layout of student workspace, and the level of responsibility shared by the teacher with the students among others. An effective teacher invests time to communicate and teach reasonable expectations for discipline and procedures. An
effective teacher will also model these expectations throughout the school year, recognizing when students exhibit positive and negative behaviors with appropriate consequences.

The levels of affinity a child has for his or her teacher can influence behaviors, both academically and behaviorally. While some students appear preoccupied by efforts to show a high level of admiration for their teacher, others may be unfazed by the relationships built throughout the course of a school year. As a teacher, I am aware of those students who emulate the modeled behaviors I exhibit within the classroom. These behaviors include my personal reading habits. By recognizing this influence, as a teacher, I regularly join my students during independent reading times (D.E.A.R.), openly enjoying a book.

The academic curriculum designed by the classroom teacher has, perhaps, the strongest influence on students' behaviors. Schools, by their very nature, are institutions of learning. Concepts and skills identified by educators within the community are aligned and presented in a manner to promote a core knowledge base recognized as being important to the community. A well planned curriculum will map out those academic objectives that students are expected to meet, while identifying strategies to guide student understanding.

It has been the influence exercised by the academic curriculum that appears to have had the greatest influence on the self-selection
patterns of literature choice within this classroom. By analyzing the
percentages found in Table 1 and Table 2 of Chapter Four, one sees an
increase in the selection of non-fiction literature. The cause for such a
dramatic shift in literature selection patterns coincides with introduction
of an assigned research paper. These data show the influence
exercised by curricular choices made by the teacher.

Implications for Further Research

Although this study complements previous research in the area
of literature selection, one can only speculate that the teacher-led
book talks were a factor in expanding the genre selections of students
in the experimental group. To more fully support this premise, one
might conduct a similar study that takes into account; curriculum
influences, and ease of student access to a variety of literary genres.

Educators have long recognized the importance of designing
curricula that diligently integrate the core language arts within the
content areas of science, social studies, mathematics, and the arts.
Additional studies that allow for data to be collected over a period of
one school year may control for the weighted influence of one research
report.
The data analyzed within this study were gathered from the experimental group’s school library. This library, like most in the United States, organizes a large component of its literary holdings according to call numbers assigned by the Dewey Decimal Classification System, while an equally large number of literature is organized alphabetically by the author’s last name.

As an educator, I frequently share in my students’ frustration while they browse the shelves attempting to select a piece of recreational literature. I believe much of this frustration stems from a general schema of literary genres shared by most children. Most children and adults understand the category of fiction to include novels and short stories that tell about imaginary people and happenings. A child who searches for such a book is easily confused when told that folklore is located within the 398 category, poetry is located within the 811 category, joke books are located within the 813 category, and extraterrestrials are located among the 999 category. For many a child, each of these choices is fiction. Therefore, there is confusion among children as they search for literature within our libraries. Given the confusion, future studies exploring changes to the Dewey Decimal Classification System are suggested.
Implications for the Classroom

Within a balanced literacy program, educators and parents strive to equip children with those skills that nurture confident, successful readers. The Teacher-Led Book Talk program used in this study was found to be one way to promote choice in reading literature from a variety of genres.

Book talks have been used in classrooms and libraries for many years with varying success. They served as a significant component within this study. As a result, the following suggestions are offered for educators who wish to include book talks within their own classroom.

In and out of the classroom, children regularly examine the commonalities and differences through observations and experiences. They are in effect, gathering information used to develop their schema. Educators can use this natural inclination of collecting and organizing information in the study of literary genre.

This gathering of information often takes place through planned book talks led by the classroom teacher, librarian, or guest readers such as parents. Encouraging students the opportunity to conduct book talks may allow children to more fully understand those elements of literary appreciation that guide their own reading selections, while offering commentary among valued peers.
Record keeping and reflecting in writing are particularly important as children learn more about reading. I would recommend that children maintain a reading journal that contains a minimum of three components.

The first section should be a list of books selected for reading organized by title, author, genre, date, and self-perceived level of difficulty. As children complete each book they should record this information.

The second section should become a list of books a child is interested in reading. This area can include specific titles of interest as a result of a friend’s recommendation, or more generic by allowing students to record topics, genres, or authors that interest them.

The last section should be reserved for reflection. Students should be encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about the book they are reading. These reflections may be related to personal experience or a comparison to other literature. A child may reflect on the author’s writing style. Some children will need a great deal of support for such open-ended writing topics, while others’ writings will flow freely.

For young children, the journal itself may become an impressive accomplishment as it maps the journey they have taken. For older children, it can serve as a link to literary awareness and appreciation.
Summary

The goal of this study was to determine to what degree is student selection from a variety of genre influenced by teacher led book talks. The data indicate that student literary selections did change over the course of the study. Students who had previously limited their book selections within a particular literary genre have now broadened their selections. The data also indicate that student literature selections are more likely influenced by a variety of components within the classroom including curriculum, peer suggestions, and the availability of literature that matches the varied interests of the students.
References


Higginbotham, S. (1999). Reading interests of middle school students and reading preferences by gender of middle school students in a southeastern state. Georgia Southern University. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED429 279)


