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A STUDY OF GOOD PRACTICES IN CLASSROOM LIBRARIES
KINDERGARTEN THROUGH SECOND GRADE

by
Michele Boniscavage

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
August 30, 1999

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved Sept. 20, 1999

ABSTRACT

Boniscavage, Michele. A Study of Good Practices in Classroom Libraries: Kindergarten through Second Grade. 1999. (Under the direction of Dr. Holly G. Willett, Program in School and Public Librarianship).

A study of six classrooms was made, two kindergarten, two first grade and two second grade. The purpose of the study, conducted by a school librarian, was to identify and share good practices in classroom libraries. Teachers in an urban district and a suburban district were interviewed about their acquisition methods. Methods of acquisition included book fairs, participation in professional activities, discarded library books, donations, yard sales and school purchases. Students were interviewed about their usage habits, borrowing books, and their favorite books. A description of each library is given including arrangement, displays, furnishing and shelving. The number and type of books in each classroom library was calculated. The average classroom library contained 400-500 books, made up of equal amounts of paperback and hard cover books and a small number of big books. Results showed that the classroom library was generally not funded by the school, yet was an important part of the daily routine. Unique practices concerning book selection were revealed. The influence of the Children's Learning Initiative on the urban school is described.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Boniscavage, Michele. A Study of Good Practices in Classroom Libraries: Kindergarten through Second Grade. 1999. (Under the direction of Dr. Holly G. Willett, Program in School and Public Librarianship).

A study of six classrooms was made, two kindergarten, two first grade and two second grade. The purpose was to identify good practices in the classroom libraries. Teachers were interviewed about their acquisition methods. Students were interviewed about their usage. Some unique practices and programs are revealed about each library.

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer my most sincere thanks to those who graciously participated in this study,

Annetta Braxton

Janice Lutz

Kim Mueller

Robin Baumgarten

Nadine Tribbett

Jeanette Reichert

Mrs. Martinez

and especially Cynthia Sleeth.

To Dr. Holly Willett, my professor, and Pierre Oneid, my fiancé, who helped me to juggle my life, career, and education during this time, I cannot repay you.

And to the children whose lives we all have touched.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Importance of Classroom Libraries

In almost every elementary school classroom you will find a classroom library. Ironically, the school does not generally fund it and it is usually not considered a significant part of a teacher's evaluation. Classroom libraries exist because of necessity. Children use the classroom library as a practical and educational way to fill free time. Teachers enjoy immediate access to favorite and familiar books to read to their students. This is the basic function of a classroom library. The more formal school library cannot fill these needs because it is more than an arm's length away.

From the perspective of the school librarian, there are ways that the functioning of a classroom library can be improved to support the functioning of both the school library and classroom library. Unmarked classroom library books may be taken to the school library where they may be discarded. For example, an unmarked, musty and yellowed book once was returned to the school library. It was immediately discarded. Later that day, a teacher came by to see if one of her students had accidentally returned a book from the classroom library. The book was apologetically removed from the garbage and returned to the teacher. School library books are easily misplaced in the classroom library. A disorganized classroom library may harbor wayward school library books. Countless parents have insisted to the librarian that their child has returned his or her

library book, only for it to be found among the teacher's books at the end of the school year.

An organized classroom library and a simple name marking the owner of the book can prevent these things from happening. From the perspective of the classroom teacher, there are many more worthy practices that can improve the functioning of the classroom library.

Thesis Objectives

The intentions of the research were to identify and share good practices in six classroom libraries, kindergarten through second grade, in order to improve their functioning and create a collaborative climate between librarians and teachers. Through interviews and observations, data was collected on the number of books per student, types of shelving, proportion of paperback to hard cover books, available space, acquisition of books, utilization, and organization.

Literature Review

Using Rowan University's Search Bank and other on-line databases, a thorough search of journal articles written on the subject of classroom libraries was completed. Articles considered for inclusion were dated from the early 1980s through the 1990s. Selected articles were usually more current and written by practitioners. They provided a wealth of information on various aspects of the classroom library, though not refereed or peer reviewed. The Internet did not prove to be a useful source of information on the subject; the information duplicated what was already found.

Data Collection Objectives

The purpose of a classroom library was defined through teacher interviews. Attributes that were important to the users were defined through student interviews. Descriptive statistics of classroom libraries in the area of size, proportion of paperback to hard cover, acquisition of books, and number of books per student allowed for standard comparisons. Identification of good and poor practices resulted from the comparison of all the data collected from the six libraries. Following the recommended strategies will lead teachers to a more effective classroom library.

Participation Criteria

Two schools were included, F. L. Walther Elementary School, Lumberton, NJ, kindergarten through second grade, 460 students, and Cramer Elementary School, Camden, NJ, kindergarten through fourth grade, 400 students. Classrooms had to have a functional classroom library. Participation was voluntary on the part of schools, teachers, and students. No reimbursement was made for participants other than an offer to share the results of the study.

Measurement

Data was collected through a variety of exploratory methods including interviews and observations. Measurement was a comparison of the results to a combination of recommendations found in the literature review. Teachers were asked such questions as, how do you acquire your books? Do you allow children to take books home? When can children use the library? How often is the library used? Is there any organization? Are your books marked in any way to identify them as yours?

Descriptive statistics were included, such as the number and kind of books in each classroom library. Also included was a survey of the opinions of the students. Because of their age, questioning was adapted to the students' abilities. Conclusions drawn from this data indicated familiarity with the classroom library. However, children were unable to elaborate in open-ended questions.

Definitions of Terms

Acquisition Methods: Techniques employed by teachers to increase the number of books in their classroom library.

Classroom Library: A teacher's collection of books housed in the classroom for use by students. This can include books from the school library. It does not include books stored at home, books in areas inaccessible to children, the teacher's professional books or students' current textbooks.

Focal Area: The part of the classroom set aside for the classroom library, not including shelving. The focal area may or may not contain furniture.

Hard Cover: Pages in a protective hard covering, bound together on one side.

Paper Back: Pages in a protective paper covering, bound together on one side.

Shelving: Any place books are stored such as open face shelves, bins, windowsills, chalk board ledges, standard bookshelves, rotating shelves, etc.

Big Books: A picture book of very large dimensions, generally for use when reading to a large group.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This chapter describes selected literature on classroom libraries. It is divided into five main categories.

Proof That Classroom Libraries Promote Reading

One way of developing reading skills and cultivating free reading among elementary students is to operate libraries in the school. Fortunate schools can provide a central library. With or without a central library, some teachers also believe in providing classroom collections, so as to increase children's exposure to books and reading. The reading habits of 301 fourth-grade students in Israel were examined in one study. Reading was measured by amount of reading, average number of hours per day devoted to free reading, and having library-borrowed books at home. The students in schools with both class and central libraries scored the highest on amount of reading; schools with class libraries but no central library were the second highest. The research concluded that a class library is not a substitute for a central collection, with its variety and different levels of material, and the services of a professional librarian. A class library can only constitute one approach among different approaches that can encourage children's reading (Snunith, 1997).

In Texas, a study explored the status of 183 elementary classroom libraries. The results assert that classroom libraries can promote voluntary reading and provide suggestions on how teachers can design excellent classroom libraries (Fractor, 1993).

Another study examined the role of school and classroom libraries in motivating supplementary reading among reluctant readers. Subjects were 130 sixth graders at a middle school in a district in the Southwest. The study contained a question and answer format interview with a reluctant reader. All of the books he was interested in reading were checked out, but he was persistent; other reluctant readers are not. His teacher had labeled him as unfocused. Surprisingly, he had an intense interest in reading books that were generally unavailable in the library, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*, *Goosebumps*, and comic books. The habits of many other reluctant readers in the classroom and library are also described. It was concluded that these reluctant readers, frequently disadvantaged, were at the mercy of the school to provide their favorite reading materials, unlike students who can afford such pleasures. Results indicate that schools can foster voluntary reading and positive attitudes by providing choice for students in instructional reading and recreational, including frequent opportunities for students to read for enjoyment, providing materials that students enjoy, providing access to books, and allowing opportunities for librarians and teachers to meet in order for them to pool their resources and expertise (Worthy, 1996).

Setting Up

A few authors have advised teachers on how to establish a classroom library. Jeff Lowe (1998) says teachers should begin by assessing their needs. Primary steps for creating a classroom library include creating a space, finding shelving, acquiring books, and innovating. Photographs from Lowe's article, "Creating an A+++ Classroom Library" show desirable open shelving, where children can view the covers of books. Other recommendations include making the classroom library a focal point, setting

boundaries, and making attractive displays (Fractor, 1993). Various types of shelving can be an advantage when separating books into categories.

Acquisitions

Teachers and librarians use various values and criteria when making book selections. Classroom library books tend to be unmediated; school library books are mediated. Wendy Saul (1993) examined the differing frames of reference and world views of classroom teachers and school librarians. Twenty teachers, in a think-aloud taped protocol, referred to ways in which a factually incorrect, poorly illustrated, or conceptually misleading book could be used to the advantage of the class. They said children could draw their own pictures for these unmediated texts. These texts could be used to show that we need not believe everything that we read. Or the children could write letters to the author about the book. On the other hand, librarians seek to provide only the best books available. Many schools systems require at least two positive reviews from respected journals with each book order. Both teacher and librarian benefit when the process of book selection is shared.

Although librarians have book budgets; teachers do not. In order for teachers to build a classroom library, they must consider garage sales, library discards, book clubs, and grants. Beth Chayet (1994) also suggests using restaurant menus, phone books, travel brochures, user manuals, clothing catalogs, recipe books, newspapers, bound student work, obsolete texts, government documents, shopping at used book stores and even creating your own books on tape to enhance the classroom library.

Organization

Holly Brooks (1993) and Laurie K. Cooper (1994) suggested organizing the library by arranging the books in sections, putting them into a computer database, and involving student librarians in the management and maintenance of the library.

Organizing a classroom library taught students real-life applications and gave them responsibility. Holly Brooks (1995) explains how to use computers to create an electronic catalog including section, title, author, and subject fields on a database and putting spine labels on books.

Student Usage

Having books explicitly for the students' reading level, especially at the kindergarten level, improves usage, too. Children can sometimes make poor choices in the central library where the selection is larger. In a three-year study of emergent readers in kindergarten classroom, in order to foster voluntary reading, children were given extensive opportunities to participate in holistic, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate reading. "Kindergarten children show more advanced reading behaviors with familiar, predictable books" (Martinez, 1988). These books are more likely to sustain their attention.

A process called "Get Acquainted with My Books" introduces children to the books in their classroom library by having them write reviews. This program has proven successful in getting reluctant readers interested in reading (Prill, 1995). A study of sixth grade reluctant readers identified factors that served as barriers to the students' voluntary reading habits. Results were varied and complex. The author points to several areas in

which schools can promote voluntary reading, including choices in instructional reading, opportunities to read for enjoyment, and access to high-interest materials (Worthy, 1996).

Summary of Literature

These articles on the subject of classroom libraries provided a foundation for the research. They also provided interest in other areas needing research.

Chapter Three

The Methodology

Introduction

A teacher's classroom library is a very personal creation. It can reflect the values the teacher places on reading, her number of years teaching, her creativity in acquiring books, and her personal taste in reading. Maintaining a classroom library is usually not a requirement because of lack of space and funding. There can be a wide variety in what is found. This study was designed to identify good practices in two schools.

Description of Methodology Selected

The key to identifying a useful classroom library is to ask the users themselves. However, in this case the users are between five and eight years old. None of the studies in the literature review attempted to solicit the opinions of the child users. Although children have little or no motivation to allow an adult to learn the true contingencies by which their group operates (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988), the children interviewed in this study, five from each classroom, were eager participants. Each teacher selected and sent five students, with various skill levels, one at a time into a semi-private area for the interview. Each interview took less than five minutes. The first question, whether or not they had a library in their classroom, helped children to focus on the subject of the following questions. Easy questions helped to relax children when they realized that this was not a test of subject matter, but an actual opportunity to express themselves. Questions continued to become more detailed and ended when students were no longer

able to answer, usually when open-ended questions were met with single word answers and an attempted to clarify resulted in an “I don’t know” response. Answering just the preliminary questions ensured that children were, in fact, using the library. Their responses were immediate and allowed no time for formulating answers other than the truth. Children would clarify their initial responses automatically when needed, showing thoughtfulness.

Teachers’ interviews provided a fuller scope of the classroom libraries’ purpose and personal intentions. Teachers were asked the following questions about the number of years teaching and number of years at the present grade level, number of students in the class, acquisition methods, if they allow children to take books home, when do children use the classroom library, are the books organized in any specific way and are the books marked to identify them as belonging to their library? Preparation for the interview was difficult. Research took place during school hours and available time was limited. However, the final outcome was that the teachers, as well as the students, were proud to be selected for research and shared their experiences generously.

The final method of data collection was observation. The information gathered in the interview helped to support what was observed. Books and types of books (big books, paperbacks, hard covers, etc) were counted. It was determined if a focal area existed and visually estimated how many students could fit comfortably. In many cases, furniture was present for use in this focal area. Finally, all types of existing shelving were noted.

Most statistics were obtained through the inspection of the books contained in the classroom library. Furniture and comfort level of students was observed. The

combination of data collected through observation and interviews combined to create a clear picture of a useful classroom library.

Design of Study, Sample and Population

The two schools were selected for similarity in grade level and size. Walther School is kindergarten through second grade with approximately 460 students. Cramer School is kindergarten through fourth, 400 students. There are six to seven teachers at each grade level at Walther and four to five at Cramer. The differences in location, urban and suburban, helped to increase the variety of acquisition methods. School librarians and teachers within each school gave recommendations for sample classroom libraries. Chosen teachers expressed a special interest in books and used them in a variety of lessons beyond what was typical in each school. They also expressed an interest in participation in the study.

Chapter Four

Classroom Library Snapshots

The purpose of this chapter is to present a sketch of what was observed in each classroom combined with the data from teacher and student interviews. Qualitative data about the classroom libraries themselves is presented in charts and figures.

Kindergarten, Cramer School

Here, a female with 21 years of experience, all at the kindergarten level, taught 22 students. The library included 101 big books, 181 hard cover books, and 32 paperback books.

This classroom was bilingual, Spanish and English. The teacher repeated everything in both languages. Her collection appeared large and varied due to her long career and dual languages. Many books had to be taken home for lack of space. They were brought back to school as needed for thematic units.

Every type of shelving existed here: open faced bookshelves, regular bookshelves, bins, and rotating shelves. There was a focal point where most books were kept, but no furniture. The thick rug seems to be enough comfort for this eager group. The bins were thematically labeled: math, Christmas, holiday, pop-out, science, animals, etc. Spanish or bilingual books were included in every section. Formerly, popular bilingual books were scarce and hoarded by the teacher, but recently they had become more readily available and enthusiastically shared. There were activity stations around the room, and every station included a few appropriate books. Children had free time to look at the books every day. A program where these books were to be circulated home was about to begin.

The teacher, due to the language barrier, conducted the student interviews. She asked the class as a group to identify their favorite books from the classroom library. Their responses included *Curious George*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Miss Nelson is Missing* (Spanish), *Lilly and the Purple Plastic Purse*, *Where the Wild Things Are* (Spanish), *Oliver the Pig* (Spanish), and *Abuela*. There was a small listening library in this classroom with a variety of recordings and a mirror for children to practice speech.

Kindergarten, Walther School

Here, a female with five years of experience, all at the kindergarten level, taught 21 students. The library included 162 hard cover books and 110 paperback books.

This was a bright, airy classroom with an area reserved for reading and a rocking chair for the reader. All books were placed on regular bookshelves. The teacher spent a significant sum of her own money purchasing books for her classroom. Two students named their favorite books as being the Sound Box books. During the teacher's interview it was revealed that the entire set was purchased at a thrift store, only missing one volume, the letter M. The students liked these books because they are designed for beginning readers. She marked the inside of her books with her name, date, price and year. This was done in order to keep track of how much money she spent each year. She laughed and confessed that she has never tracked her spending. However, she estimated \$50 a month.

Some books were separated into seasons and holidays. All dinosaur books, a 9-week long, cross-disciplinary unit for this classroom, are kept separate. Other than that there was no formal organization. She did not permit books to go home with children, but said that if anyone ever asked she would most likely allow it.

First Grade, Cramer School

Here, a female with four years of teaching experience, three years at this level, taught 23 students. The library included 8 big books, 118 hard cover books, and 172 paperback books.

This classroom library was filled with new hardbound books on 10 open face shelves. These book displays were the most noticeable part of the classroom. The focal area included carpeting and furniture for about six to eight children. Children could use the classroom library as reward after finishing their seatwork. A sophisticated circulation system (cards and pockets) was used to allow children to take home a different book every night. Both the teacher and the students reported that children do in fact take home books overnight. One student very disappointedly admitted, during his interview, that he had lost those special privileges for losing a book.

First Grade, Walther School

Here, a female 15 with 15 years of teaching experience, first year at this level, taught 22 students. The library included 29 big books, 144 hard cover books, and 264 paperback books.

This classroom was a combined special education and regular education classroom with two teachers instructing one class. The special education teacher was interviewed about the classroom library in which both teachers' books were intermingled. The large collection of hardcover books reflected a discriminating taste. She had been collecting books appropriate for this grade level since college. Each book had her nameplate and date stamped in it. Selection was based on her own criteria of content, author and readability. In general, children could not take books home, but she had

allowed it in the past for special children on special occasions. Children had the opportunity to read twice a day, on average. With essentially two classrooms operating in one, there was not much room for a focal point. This did not effect children's access to books. There were meticulously created displays around the room that included signage and props. The featured author display received the highly visible location on the chalkboard ledge. It was changed monthly. This display included books from both teachers and the school library. There was a display of suggested readings from their reading text on the windowsill. Another display included a number of books about the rain forest in a bin. The table itself was covered with rain forest plants and animals. Some of the children's favorite books include *Kinder Kittens*, *A Look Inside the Rain Forest*, *Arthur*, and *Today is Monday*.

Second Grade, Cramer School

Here, a female with 3 years of teaching experience, first year at this level, taught 21 students. The library included 16 big books, 115 hard cover books, and 98 paperback books.

Compared to the small size of this classroom, a fair portion was dedicated to a classroom reading area. This focal point contained a small stack of two bookshelves. These books were the oldest in the collection. This classroom had the fewest books over all. New books, prominently displayed on attractive open-face shelving, made up the larger portion of the collection. This easy access made up for the lack of books in general. Displays were categorized into insects, folktales, and favorite authors. The collection could have been larger because of books received for participating in a summer reading program. However, those books had to be left in her former classroom. The

present library contained books given to her by former teachers, books she inherited with this classroom, discarded library books, and donations of new books from charitable organizations in the area. Most displayed books were the result of a new reading program. A local fraternal organization also made a book contribution to the library. She would have liked to receive more donations to increase her collection.

Children were allowed to use the classroom library during their free time. They could take them home, although the children reported they did not do so. During the Friday book club children shared the books and read to each other. Some of their favorite books (as reported by the children) included *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, animal stories, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, *Cat and the Hat*, and the *Haunted House* pop-up book.

Second Grade, Walther School

Here, a female with 19 years of teaching experience, 10 years at the second grade level, taught 21 students. The library included 35 big books, 476 hard cover books, and 647 paperback books.

Included in this teacher's experience were five years spent as a school librarian. She held New Jersey certification as an Associate Educational Media Specialist. This was surely reflected in the enormous size of her library, almost 1200 volumes. She was a highly motivated teacher and received the Teacher of the Year Award for Walther School in 1999. Her classroom library was set up as a formal library with a reference section, a fiction section, and a non-fiction section. The reference section included encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, and thesauri. This was the only classroom with a set of encyclopedias. The focal area contained chairs and a desk for children between two large stacks at 90°. Her books had pockets and children filled out cards and left them on the

desk when they took books home. Each book was clearly labeled on the cover with her name. Her students named as favorites, *Arthur's Tooth*, hidden pictures books such as *Waldo*, *Arthur's Halloween*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, and *D.W. The Picky Eater*.

She spent about \$40 a month on books and in 1998 received a total tax deduction of \$1200 for school supplies. Her collection methods included garage sales, discarded library books, books from book fairs, her children's and nephew's outgrown books, and books hand made by students, which were laminated and spiral bound. She also participated in a reading council for the county where new books are shared, reviewed, and kept by the participant.

Information Presented by Children

Of the 30 children interviewed, all but two quickly reported that they did in fact have a classroom library. One of those children, after a brief explanation, quickly changed his answer and agreed that there was classroom library in his classroom. The other responded, "Well, we just have a lot of books." All children reported that they frequently use the classroom library during their free time and that their teachers read them books from their classroom library. Childrens' quick and confident answers to these questions assured that the classroom library was indeed an important part of their classrooms. Many students' answers as to whether or not they could take home books from their classroom library differed from their teacher's answer. No students claimed to have taken books home from classrooms without a formal circulation system. Overall the children's responses indicated an enthusiasm for books, if not reading.

Quantitative Data

The volumes in each library were counted and divided into three categories: paperbacks, hard covers, and big books. Included in these totals are multiple copies and sets (counted individually), handmade books, and former textbooks, all of which fell into one of the three main categories.

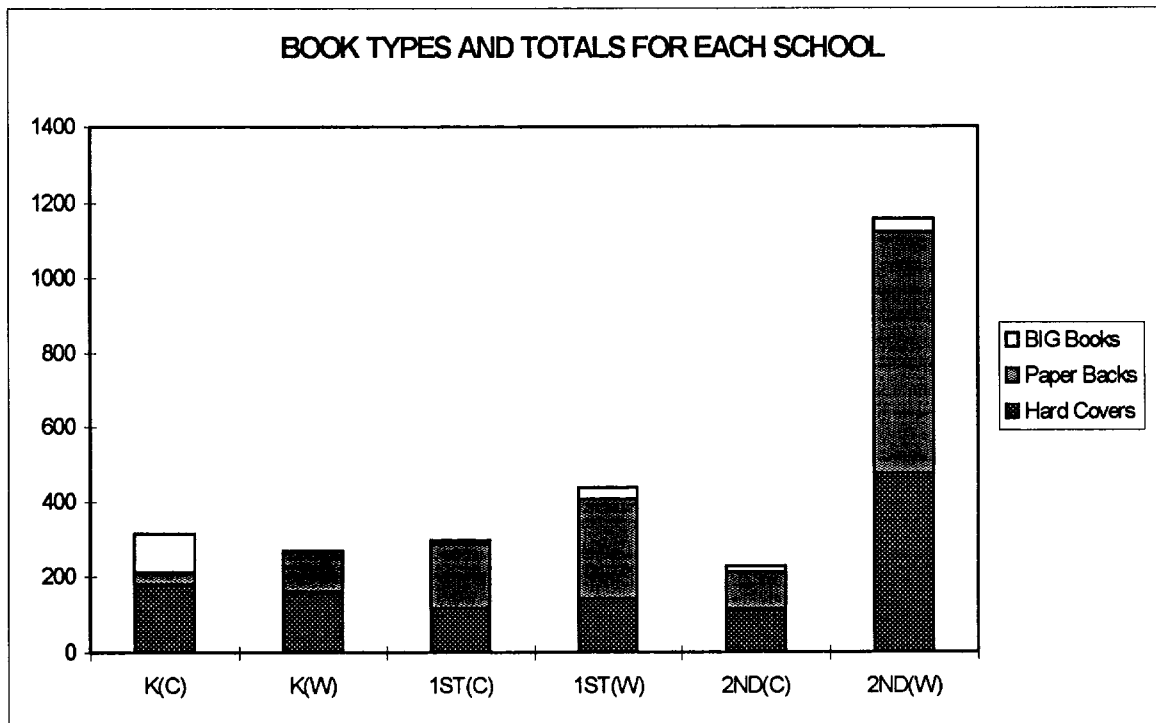


Figure 1. Types of books. Note W stands for Walther, C for Cramer. The former school librarian clearly had the largest classroom library. Among the collections in general, paperbacks and hard cover books were represented relatively equally. At each grade, Walther School, the suburban school, led Cramer School, the urban school, in a combination of paperback and hard cover books. Children can more easily manipulate these normal sized books than they can the big books. The big books, which are

generally used by teachers when reading to the class, added significantly to the collection in only one case, Cramer's kindergarten class.

As for acquisition methods, teachers tended to acquire books in any way possible. Only Walther's first grade special education teacher expressed any sort of selectivity. For all other teachers, anything on the elementary level was acceptable. No one expressed a concern regarding the condition of a book, and observation showed that it was not a problem. Books were in fair to good condition in all libraries.

According to the data obtained in this study, the teacher, not the school, supported her classroom library in the suburban school. In the urban school, funding was a

Table 1

Acquisition Sources

<u>SOURCES</u>	<u>K(C)</u>	<u>K(W)</u>	<u>1st(C)</u>	<u>1st(W)</u>	<u>2nd(C)</u>	<u>2nd(W)</u>
Book Fairs and Clubs*		x		x		x
Garage Sales*	x	x				x
Thrift Stores*		x				
Book Stores*				x		
Students						x
Relatives	x					x
Charitable Sources			x		x	
Prof. Activities					x	x
Library Discards						x
School Purchase	x		x		x	
Community					x	x

Note. * means teachers bought books with personal funds.

combination of school funds, teacher's personal contributions, and major donations from charitable sources (see Table 1).

Book fairs and clubs were popular methods of acquisition for teachers in the suburbs. They included Troll, Scholastic and Golden. Teachers earned points for

purchases made by students. They could have used these points to purchase books for personal use; however they all reported using the points toward books for the classroom library. The other methods of acquisition were common to both schools.

Fractor (1993) makes nine recommendations for classroom libraries. Table 2 displays how the six libraries in this study matched the recommendations. All of the libraries in this study greatly exceeded the recommendation for books

Table 2

Comparison to Fractor's Recommendations

<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Fractor</u>	<u>K(C)</u>	<u>K(W)</u>	<u>1st(C)</u>	<u>1st(W)</u>	<u>2nd(C)</u>	<u>2nd(W)</u>
Focal area	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes
Partitioned and private	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes
Books per child	5-6	14	13	13	20	11	55
Variety of genres/levels	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Children accommodated	5-6	6-8	20+	6-8	no	no	3-4
Seating for children	yes	carpet	carpet	carpet	no	no	yes
Variety of shelving	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Displays and props	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no
<u>Organized into categories</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>

per student. Every library also met the recommendations for having various kinds of shelving, and a variety of genres and reading levels. All libraries had some form of organization.

Libraries fell short in some areas of the recommendations. A focal area was missing from two classrooms. Only one classroom had furniture for children to sit and read. Displays with props to accompany literature existed in only one classroom. These shortcomings did not seem to affect the children's use of a classroom library.

Teaching experience was another piece of quantitative data gathered. This appears to have had some effect on the number of volumes in a classroom library, considering that two of the teachers with the most experience mentioned their own children and other families members' outgrown books as a major source of acquisition. The data from the six libraries is somewhat inconclusive as show in the following chart.

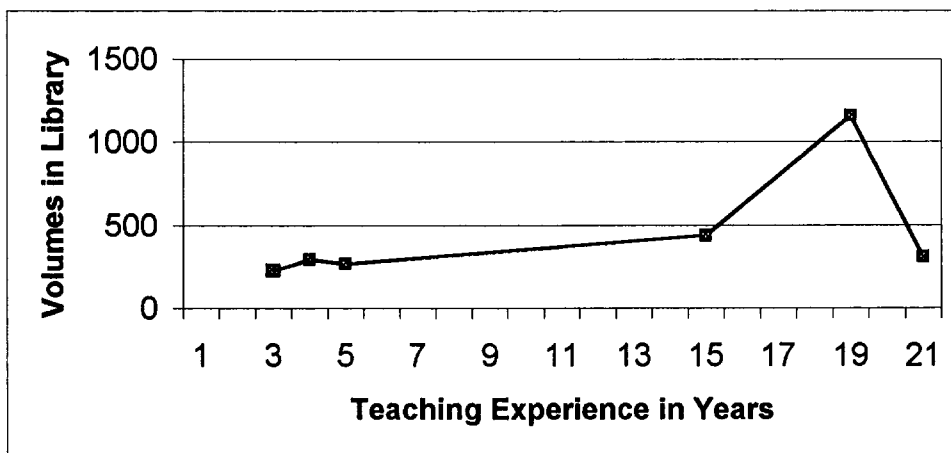


Figure 2. Experience vs. volumes. In summary, the teachers in this study appeared to have designed classroom libraries that met more than the basic needs of their students for number and variety. Acquisition methods varied greatly. Organization, for the most part was adequate. Overall, children seemed to enjoy and appreciate their classroom library.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

In this chapter, the results obtained in Chapter Four are analyzed. Comparisons between schools and classrooms are made and possible factors affecting the differences are discussed. Good practices are identified and recommendations for areas of improvement are included.

Cramer School

This year, two major initiatives affected the number of books in the urban schools. Throughout the Camden City Public School system, schools were required to adopt a plan to improve the school environment. Cramer School adopted the Success for All program. The program included a Friday reading club in which children throughout the school spend time reading to each other and sharing books. This created a need for classroom libraries to receive special attention. Besides the Success for All program, the Children's Learning Initiative (C. L. I.) recently donated over 100 hard cover books to each classroom, along with the open-faced shelving that made for the attractive displays. This possibly doubled the size of the library in the first and second grade. These initial donations were made in good faith that the schools pay a certain amount for upkeep and additional books. All of the books in the classroom libraries that were donated by C.L.I. were marked as being so. In the first grade, these were the only books that were circulated home. It was unclear if the books became a permanent part of the teacher's collection.

The Children's Learning Initiative was in the process of setting up formal circulation systems for all teachers. C. L. I. provided zip-lock carrying bags with handles to protect books. Teachers sent books home nightly with children using a card and pocket system. Two teachers had already begun doing this; the third was waiting for her cards, pockets and instructions from C.L.I. Each teacher was very excited about the new program, which positively affected the research. They were very proud of their new books, an attitude that was reflected in the children's interviews.

From the perspective of a school librarian, the Children's Learning Initiative places a major responsibility on teachers, especially in a district where it is the common practice of school librarians not to allow children to take home library books. Library media center books are kept in the classroom for school use because children frequently stay with baby-sitters or family members and their underprivileged home environments lead to frequent loss and damage of library books. It appears that C.L.I. is trying to circumvent this by providing protective carrying bags and expecting books to be returned the next day, unlike books from the school library that are circulated for a week without any protection. One area of future research would be a study of the C. L. I.'s progress a year from now.

Walther School

Collectively, the three teachers in Walther school have more experience and larger libraries. However, neither the children nor teachers expressed a more useful library by revealing special programs or activities involving the classroom library. Fractor's (1993) recommendation of 5-6 books per student is perhaps a minimal recommendation. An area of future research might be to determine an optimal size for a

classroom library. A closer look could reveal a need to weed and discard many books in these large libraries to improve usefulness.

Classroom Conclusions

Each classroom's exemplary practices are identified. Strategies for improvement are included.

Kindergarten, Cramer School

Overall, this was the most enthusiastic group for books. Children could not escape the presence of literature in this classroom. When children were asked to point out their favorite books, their excitement could not be contained. They popped out of their seats pointing and eagerly moved toward their favorite books in order for them to be recognized and noted. Some of this enthusiasm could be attributed to the introduction of the Children's Literature Initiative, but any school could create what C. L. I. has done with appropriate funding. New shelving, a few new shiny books to fill the shelving, and a formal circulation policy could give any classroom a literature boost. Some school librarians could consider this a conflict of interest because it infringes upon their services to children. Correctly balanced however, more available literature should never be seen as a problem.

Kindergarten, Walther School

Children in this classroom might have learned a special honor for story time, but independent reading may need attention. A rocking chair and room enough for all creates a formal area where absolute respect for the reader is expected and given. Unfortunately many of the classroom library books are out of children's reach. Children had to ask to use many books. Their favorite books logically became the ones to which they had easy

access, Sound Box. Over 200 new paperback books were completely out of access to children in a closet and therefore not included in the total count. These books needed to be brought out of the closet and shared.

First Grade, Cramer School

This classroom's library was still in the development stage. The circulation program was working well and children were observed during their book sharing time. For such a young group, it was disappointing not to see any props or toys accompanying the books. Because classroom libraries are funded mainly by the teacher herself, perhaps with more time and experience, this teacher will develop her collection to include these props to entice more readers.

First Grade, Walther School

This classroom was most unique. Despite the fact that few suggestions from the literature review were observed, such as quantity, a focal point and attractive shelving, something special had been created here. A genuine love and respect for each book was modeled for the children. The key was selectivity. Special care was taken to select hard cover books from bookstores appropriate to the reading level and interests of students. Quality won out over quantity. More research is necessary to support this conclusion, and it might be difficult to convince teachers partial to book fairs and clubs to change their habits.

Second Grade, Cramer School

This library is a good example of resourcefulness. All books were received through donations or participation in professional activities, at no cost to the teacher. To continue in this fashion, some good no-cost additions could be menus from restaurants,

phone books, catalogs, student-made books, travel brochures, and on-line information, printed out and bound. This would add needed variety.

Second Grade, Walther School

An actual library in a classroom may sound desirable, but in reality, the purpose is unclear. In this classroom it might be described as a novelty or a monument to a former career choice. Many books, especially the reference books, were in less than good condition. There are computers in this classroom; a new encyclopedia CD-ROM would probably be a more useful addition. Again, a classroom library is a very personal creation; there is much time and care invested in maintaining this particular one. However, some attention to weeding is needed. Since the students are already involved in the circulation process, a natural progression might be to put the library on a database as suggested by Brooks (1993) and Cooper (1994). This would breathe new life into this weary collection and more actively involve the children.

Librarian's Input

Advise teachers as they build their classroom libraries. To be allowed to read a book should be a reward, and that will depend on the available selection. Suggest they take input from children. Many times these books will not be library quality, but more than perfect for the classroom, especially reluctant readers. Let teachers know when a book is published in paperback on a topic dear to their hearts or curricula. They may want them for an individual reader or for multiple copies. Suggest on-line teacher guides for literature.

Share the wealth. Classrooms should have books, and strong support from the school library. Classroom teachers and librarians working together could ensure that

books are checked out to classrooms for a period of time, returned and replenished. This should be possible even with limited funds. Children should get the feeling of living with books, all the time, not just on library day. Free and easy access is the key and the reason classroom libraries exist.

Summary and Conclusions

A classroom library is a great instructional tool. School libraries will never take over the function of classroom libraries, just as a public library does not affect one's personal library. It only enhances it. Teachers should actively seek ways to more effectively use their classroom libraries by encouraging circulation or conducting reading programs around them.

Good practices observed in this study included teachers who were constantly on a search for new books and did not hesitate to pay for them when needed. It also appeared that teachers were more selective when using their own funds, and therefore met the children's needs more precisely. Other good practices include reading clubs and circulation programs.

A lot can be learned from a little observation of the school library. First of all, all classroom books should be clearly labeled, just as a library book. With the owner's name inside, they are less likely to disappear. Fractor (1993) recommends five to six books per student; this is not very many. Weed the library and choose quality over quantity. Books need to be organized in some fashion for retrieval purposes; how to do that is left to each teacher's discretion. Many local bookstores offer discount programs to teachers; they may require a letter of verification letter written by an administrator. Principals can help

support classroom libraries by having a standard letter ready. School media specialists should also offer suggestions, especially in the areas of book repair and knowing when it is time to discard.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol-Teachers

School:

Grade:

Number of years teaching:

Numbers of years at this grade:

How have you acquired the books in your classroom library? List all that apply.

Do you allow children to bring books home?

When do children use the classroom library?

Are the books organized in any specific way?

Are books marked to identify them as belonging to their library?

Interview Protocol-Students

School:

Grade:

Do you have a classroom library?

Does your teacher read her own books to you?

Have you ever taken a book home from your classroom library?

What is your favorite book in the classroom?

If child can continue:

If you could change something about your teacher's library what would it be?

Would you like more books? A comfortable place to sit? More time to read? Would you like your teacher to read to you more? Would you change anything?

Observation Protocol

School:

Grade:

Number of students in class:

Count books and type. Example 15 Big Books, 103 Paperbacks, 90 Hardcover, etc.

If there is an area for reading, how many children fit?

Does it have furniture?

What kind of shelving/how are books stored?

Letter Seeking Research Permission from Cramer School

Annetta Braxton, Principal
Cramer School
2800 Mickle St.
Camden NJ 08105

February 19, 1999

Dear Ms. Braxton,

I am writing to you in order to ask for the participation of your school in a study of classroom libraries. I am a student at Rowan University working on my Master's Thesis in Library Science. The purpose of this study, "Successful Aspects of a Classroom Library" is to identify factors that contribute to a useful classroom library. I have limited this study to Kindergarten, first grade and second grade. The data collected in this study will be submitted as part of my final thesis.

If you agree to participate, I will interview one teacher in each grade, gather statistics on the books contained in their classroom libraries and sample the opinions of the student users. Of course, all the information collected will be confidential. I will share with you the results of my study when completed. I am a friend of Cynthia Sleeth, your librarian, who has also agreed to help me with this endeavor, if you choose to participate. If you do, please sign below and return this letter in the enclosed envelope. I will then contact you to arrange a date for my visit. Thank you for your consideration.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me, or my supervisor at Rowan.

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I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Investigator)

(Date)