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Teacher librarian influence on students' self-selection of books

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Abstract

This qualitative case study reports the influence of the Teacher Librarian on students' book selection strategies in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally-staffed school library. This study consisted of 57 seventh grade students from a large suburban middle school in Iowa. During regularly scheduled library visits, students were presented with three book promotion strategies: book talks, book displays, and student-produced visual book suggestions called shelf-talkers. Three themes emerged over the six weeks of the study in response to the research questions. Theme 1 is Ask a Friend: Over Half of Students Are Influenced by Social Interaction to Share and Seek Feedback about Books Among Peers. Theme 2 is It's a Good Starting Place: Over Half of Students Feel Drawn to Their Favorite Genre When Browsing, and Theme 3 is Putting It All Together: Teacher Librarian Book Promotion Efforts Are What Make Social Browsing and Genre Browsing Successful. The preferred method for selecting books for 56% of the students was browsing and conferring with a friend or classmate. Browsing in one's favorite section of the genrefied library was preferred by 65% of the students. Of the teacher initiated book promotion strategies, shelf-talkers were most preferred by students, with 50% of students responding positively, further supporting the students' desire for social interaction, even through peer recommendations, when selecting books for pleasure reading.

TEACHER LIBRARIAN INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' SELF-SELECTION OF

BOOKS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of School Library Studies

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In Partial Fulfillment

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by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study reports the influence of the Teacher Librarian on students' book selection strategies in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally-staffed school library. This study consisted of 57 seventh grade students from a large suburban middle school in Iowa. During regularly scheduled library visits, students were presented with three book promotion strategies: book talks, book displays, and student-produced visual book suggestions called shelf-talkers. Three themes emerged over the six weeks of the study in response to the research questions. Theme 1 is Ask a Friend: Over Half of Students Are Influenced by Social Interaction to Share and Seek Feedback about Books Among Peers. Theme 2 is It's a Good Starting Place: Over Half of Students Feel Drawn to Their Favorite Genre When Browsing, and Theme 3 is Putting It All Together: Teacher Librarian Book Promotion Efforts Are What Make Social Browsing and Genre Browsing Successful. The preferred method for selecting books for 56% of the students was browsing and conferring with a friend or classmate. Browsing in one's favorite section of the genrefied library was preferred by 65% of the students. Of the teacher initiated book promotion strategies, shelf-talkers were most preferred by students, with 50% of students responding positively, further supporting the students' desire for social interaction, even through peer recommendations, when selecting books for pleasure reading.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Justification of Problem

School librarians implement a myriad of techniques to engage students in reading. Book talks, book displays, and reader's advisory are all attempts at encouraging students to check out and read books for pleasure (Batchelor & Cassidy, 2019). Regardless of these efforts, some students will not select or read the books that are presented to them. Research has shown that "by eighth grade there is a 50 percent decline in reading for pleasure" (Gander, 2013, p. 20). According to Zebroff and Kaufman (2016), the amount of time that adolescents spend reading, in the traditional sense, is declining as more teens gain access to text messaging and social media. Because of this change in reading habits, teacher librarians must consider the strategies they use to engage students in selecting and checking out books for pleasure reading. The terms pleasure reading and independent reading, used interchangeably in this paper, refer to reading that "students choose to do on their own" and "is done for pleasure" (Cullinan, 2000, p. 1).

AASL Standards and the Importance of Reading for Pleasure

According to the Iowa School Library Program Standards, Teaching and Learning 2 (Iowa Department of Education, 2019), the school librarian is "a catalyst for igniting a passion for reading in every student" (p. 3). The American Association of School Librarians [AASL] (2018) Position Statement on the Role of the School Library Program states that creating a passion for reading is accomplished by encouraging students to read

widely and deeply, curating a high-quality collection of materials that reflects the interests and needs of the students, and by organizing literacy initiatives that encourage students to become lifelong readers (p. 228). Literacy initiatives suggested in the Iowa School Library Program Standards include promotional book displays, book talks, and student-produced work such as book trailers and reviews (p. 3).

Furthering Past Research Regarding Book Selection

A study by Taylor et al. (2017) examined how students selected books within a genrefied library. In order to understand how students select books for pleasure reading, this study is following Taylor's suggestion for further research. As such, the current study gives attention to the influence of strategies and techniques used by school librarians to promote books to students for pleasure reading.

Rationale For Leadership in Promoting Pleasure Reading

Librarians and teachers will benefit from this study by providing a better understanding of how book promotion strategies developed by the librarian influence students when selecting books to read for pleasure. The researcher may share the resulting understandings with librarians and teachers through professional development about how student-produced book promotions, such as shelf talkers, brief hand-written book recommendations placed on a shelf near the book, or student interactions, such as conferring with peers, may be successful in encouraging readers to select books for pleasure reading.

Summary of Problem Statement

Although many developments in education have studied means to assist students in finding books of interest to them and thereby increasing the amount they read, there remains a need for further study into how book promotion efforts of teacher librarians influence students' reading selections impacting the amount of reading they do.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine teacher librarian influence on students' book selection processes within an environment rich with teacher librarian book promotion strategies, specifically book talks, student-produced book promotions, and book displays, in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally staffed school library.

Research Questions

1. What strategies for book selection do students demonstrate when selecting a book for pleasure reading within a school library programming environment rich with teacher librarian-led book promotions?

2. How do teacher librarian book promotional strategies influence students when selecting books for pleasure reading?

Assumptions

This study assumes that students are motivated through personal and school reasons to select books for independent, or pleasure, reading through the school library and that they have opportunities to do so in a well-resourced and professionally-staffed school library.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine teacher librarian influence on students' book selection processes within an environment rich with teacher librarian book promotion strategies in a well-resourced and professionally staffed school library. The three areas of previous research that inform this study are the variables that influence students book selection, reading engagement, and reading for pleasure.

Student Book Selection

Using a multiple case study design, Taylor, Hora, and Krueger (2017), analyzed how 16 sixth graders approached book selection for independent reading in their newly genrefied intermediate school library. The researchers gathered data through observations and video recordings, interviews with the students, and library circulation rates to address the question, "What information behaviors do students demonstrate when selecting a book for pleasure reading within a genrefied library collection?" (p. 5). Using the constant comparison method when analyzing data, researchers identified emergent themes in regards to browsing, social interactions, and prior knowledge of genres gained from literary instruction, which also aligned with the students' responses to the interview questions. The students identified having an easier time selecting books to read for pleasure while browsing their preferred genre sections (reported by 6 of 8 students interviewed) and sharing recommendations with a friend (reported by 6 students). This led to an increase in library circulation among seven of the 12 identified genres (p. 9). Overall, the data

collected by Taylor, et al. confirmed that in order for students to find success with independent reading, they needed time to browse the collection, confer with their peers or teacher, and utilize prior knowledge; and while the genrefication of the school library made finding a specific or new genre easier, it is not the only key to success.

Like Taylor, et al. (2017), Elliot (2015) also conducted research to determine the factors that impact how middle school students select pleasure reading materials using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with a focus group of 25 eighth graders. Deductive content analysis was used to analyze data collected from surveys and focus groups to ascertain what influenced the middle school students when selecting their pleasure reading materials. Results showed that the most powerful influence that impacted the students was peer recommendations, reported by 88% of the respondents. More than half of the students (52%) responded that teacher recommendations influence their book selection and 48% of the students responded well to recommendations made by the school librarian. Most students responded that visual aspects of books, such as book covers, books on displays, and book trailers, influenced their book selections as much as teacher recommendations. Elliott concluded that further research could be conducted to determine if these results remained consistent with a larger group of students or with students from other grades, or if the same research were conducted in a genrefied library.

Reading Engagement

Merga (2020) conducted a content analysis of in-depth interviews of 30 Australian teacher librarians from a variety of different schools to determine the techniques used to foster reading engagement. A predetermined set of interview questions was used to learn how "teacher librarians fostered engagement in literature and literacy, and how they encouraged their students to read books" (p. 24). Merga determined that book recommendations from peers, through social discourse, were popular among students, were encouraged by the respondents, and were believed to be an effective motivator, especially for reluctant readers (p. 25). Teacher and student-led book talks and discussions facilitate student choice and foster a love of reading through social discourse. Lastly, encouraging students to participate in the collection development process ensures a quality collection that reflects the students' reading interests. Merga suggests that further research could explore students' perceptions of the different types of book discussion to determine what has the most positive impact on their attitudes toward pleasure reading.

While Merga (2020) researched the techniques used by teacher librarians to foster reading engagement, Wilkinson, Andries, Haworth, Bonsall, Sabeti, and McGeown (2020) looked at the individual and personal factors that impact a student's motivation to read. Wilkinson, et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative research study of 39 high school students in the United Kingdom to understand adolescents' motivations for reading and to identify their reasons for reading or not reading. Interviews were conducted to determine if the students saw themselves as readers and to learn why they do or do not read and how

reading makes them feel. The adolescents in this study who identified as readers indicated that they read for pleasure to relax, learn, and empathize which fulfilled their need to escape from their daily lives. The teens who did not identify as readers stated that time taken by jobs, socializing, and extracurricular activities, as well as difficulty finding books that suit their interests, interfered with their decision to read or not to read for pleasure. Both these findings suggest that achieving reading engagement among adolescents, for both readers and non-readers, is dependent upon connecting adolescents with books that resonate with them (p. 163). Researchers concluded that to increase reading engagement, resources, such as a trained teacher librarian, need to be available to support book choices that align with the reading interests of teens.

Reading for Pleasure

Churchill (2020) used a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study approach to identify the connection between pleasure reading and book selection decisions of eleven fourth and fifth grade gifted students. To determine how to best support gifted readers and to encourage pleasure reading, Churchill endeavored to learn how outside sources influenced her students' reading choices. Survey results showed that the one of biggest impacts on the students' book selection was their peers; however, the students themselves had the greatest influence on book selection for pleasure reading. Regardless of what their peers were reading, students most often selected books that appealed to their own interests. Book genre also impacted student choice when selecting books for pleasure reading with students frequently citing fantasy, science fiction, and books in a series as enjoyable reading choices. Churchill concluded the results of this research warranted

further study into the role the school librarian could take in encouraging pleasure reading by increasing awareness of what the library has to offer and by working with students to find reading materials.

Churchill (2020) analyzed the connection between pleasure reading and book selection while Kavi, Tackle, and Bugyei (2015) analyzed how many junior high students, out of the 87 interviewed, voluntarily participated in pleasure reading. Through a case study, questionnaires were administered to determine whether or not students read for pleasure. Kavi et al. found that the majority (66%) of the students did not read daily for pleasure, for personal development, or to be informed; students typically only read to pass their school class assessments, often only reading textbooks. Of those who read daily, 56% read between one and two hours while 33% read less than an hour per day. The reported hindrances keeping students from reading were: television (51%), other school work (36%), and sports (11.5%). Kavi et al. concluded that reading promotion events and having more access to reading materials would provide the most motivation to students in reading for pleasure.

Summary

Two of the studies addressed the factors that influence students when selecting materials to read for pleasure such as book suggestions, book displays, and social interaction around books (Taylor, et al. 2017; Elliot 2015). Taylor, et al. found that peer interaction and discussion of books when browsing in the library played a large role when selecting books for pleasure reading, and Elliott found that peer interaction had the greatest influence on book selection, linking the role of social interaction in book

selection with a student's willingness to read for pleasure. Merga (2020) analyzed the actions taken by the teacher librarian to increase student engagement in reading for pleasure, finding that, again, book talks conducted by the teacher librarian, peer interaction while browsing for books, and book recommendations made by peers were all motivators in teens choosing and reading books. Research conducted by Wilkinson, et al. (2020) analyzed the perspectives of students who saw themselves as both readers and non-readers to determine ways to increase engagement among the non-readers, finding that the inability to find books of interest was frequently connected to students choosing not to read; however, with the support of a trained teacher librarian, more students were able to find books of interest. Kavi, et al. (2015) and Churchill (2020) conducted research on reading for pleasure among students. Kavi, et al. (2015) determined that students frequently do not choose to read for pleasure when other activities, such as sports, interfere, but book promotions and access to the school library would encourage more reading. Churchill (2020) looked at the ways that students selected books to read for pleasure to determine how to best encourage them to continue reading; this shows again that students' book selection processes are inextricably linked to increased reading engagement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher librarian influence on students'
book selection processes within an environment rich with teacher librarian book
promotion strategies, specifically book talks, student-produced book promotions, and
book displays, in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally staffed school library.

Research Design

A qualitative case study was used for this research because "case studies are more
suitable for the exploration, classification, and hypothesis development stages of the
knowledge-building process" (Wildemuth 2017, p. 52). For this case study, "the
phenomenon is examined in a natural setting" as students visit the library with a class;
therefore, "no experimental controls or manipulation are involved" in this research study
(Wildemuth, 2017, p. 52). Additionally, Wildemuth claims that case research is
appropriate "in the use of 'how' and 'why' questions" (p. 52) and when "data are
collected by multiple means" (p. 51).

Participants

This study took place in a large suburban middle school in Iowa. The research
participants included 57 seventh grade students. Thirty-five of the students self-identify
as avid readers while 22 claim to not enjoy reading for pleasure. All of the research
participants visit the library on a bi-weekly schedule.

Procedures

Data Collection

Data was collected through participant observations, an individual student questionnaire, and focus group conversations. These three methods were useful because data was collected in varied formats offering a wide range of responses and perspectives. Participant observation is "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture," (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 219). Wildemuth states that this method leads to "a better understanding of the people and social processes that occur within that setting," (p. 219). Field notes of the student participants, formatted using a template (see Appendix A), were collected during three scheduled library visits over a six week period and included the researcher's observation of how the students interacted with each other while selecting books and how they reacted to various book promotion techniques. Individual student questionnaires (see Appendix B) were given after students selected books to collect "a variety of data, including the beliefs, opinions, attributes, and behaviors of the respondents" (p. 272). During each library visit, focus groups of the 57 students were asked questions about their perspectives regarding the book promotion strategies and their personal book selection processes (see Appendix C). A focus group is "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research," (p. 258). Wildemuth states that focus groups are a good choice for data collection if it is believed that "value will be obtained in the participants' interactions with each other," (p. 270).

Data Analysis

This study used qualitative content analysis of the data. As the researcher, I used the eight steps of qualitative analysis (Wildemuth, 2017, pp. 320-323). Following step one, I prepared the student questionnaire, focus group questions, and field note format to document how students selected books. For step two, "Define the Unit of Analysis," I gathered data from the student questionnaire responses, the notes taken during focus group conversations, and the field notes taken during participant observations and organized the data using five initial codes (see Appendix A) such as *select a book from a display* and *browse for a book with a peer* from past research by Taylor, et. al (2017), Elliot (2015), Merga (2020), Wilkinson, et. al (2020), Churchill (2020), and Kavi, et. al (2015). In step three, I developed three broader coding categories from the five initial codes. For step four, I tested my broader coding scheme by looking at data from the student questionnaire responses, focus group conversation notes, and observation field notes. I ensured that the categorized codes, Peer Interaction, Preferred Genre or Author, and Book Promotion, were apparent and determined that no additional codes needed to be added. In step five, I coded all the data from the questionnaires, focus group discussion notes, and field notes. During step six, "Assess Your Coding Consistency," I checked for human errors in coding consistency and moved items that fit better under other codes. For step seven, I drew conclusions from the coded data and began looking for patterns that were emerging. The new patterns that emerged are my chosen themes. And finally, in step 8, "Report Your Methods and Findings," I reported my methods and findings

concerning the coding process, as well as the steps I took to establish the trustworthiness of my study.

Limitations

This study was limited to seventh grade students in one middle school in Iowa. Also, there was only one researcher taking field notes during participant observations limiting the amount of data collected during each library visit.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teacher librarian influence on students' book selection processes within an environment rich with teacher librarian book promotion strategies, specifically book talks, student-produced book promotions, and book displays, in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally staffed school library. A qualitative content analysis was used to examine the data collected through participant observations, an individual student questionnaire, and focus group conversations. The findings are organized using the research questions.

Research Question 1

Theme 1: Ask a Friend: Over Half of Students Are Influenced by Social Interaction to Share and Seek Feedback about Books Among Peers While One Fourth Are Not

Research Question 1 asked what strategies for book selection students demonstrate when selecting a book for pleasure reading within a school library programming environment. Each of the three library visits of three classes (with approximately 18-20 students per class) were observed while browsing for books. With each class, more than half of the students, between 12 and 14 children, were observed browsing for books in groups of 2-3. One of the groups observed took copies of the same book off the shelves, read and talked about the synopsis together, and returned the book to the shelf. They then repeated this process and took the book with them. Several groups, 1-2 per class, asked the teacher librarian for suggestions of books with multiple copies available that they could read together. One pair of students was observed making recommendations to each other based on books that they had read previously. One student said, "That book was so

good. You should read it," and "I love April Henry. She's my favorite. You should read

Girl, Stolen." Fewer students, between 5 and 7 children per class (25-35%), browsed for

a book alone, and these students did not ask the teacher librarian for a book suggestion.

The Individual Student Questionnaire (see Appendix B) asked students to describe

the process they use to select a book for pleasure reading. In response to the question,

"Did you choose to browse for books by yourself or with a friend during today's library

visit," more than half (36) of the students (56%) wrote a response on the questionnaire

that they chose to look for a book with a friend, which is consistent with the numbers

noted above in the observation. One student wrote, "I browse with a friend so I can get

some feedback and see what they like and discuss different books." Another student

wrote that, "I usually ask my friends for book recommendations and I use their input

most of the time." A common concept that emerged is that students enjoy looking for

books with friends. A student wrote, "It's more fun to browse with a friend. I choose to

look at books with friends because they might have a book that they really liked that I

could try out reading." Not all the students shared that they prefer the social intersection

when looking for a book; approximately 5 students per class (25%) wrote a response to

the question about their process to select a book with an indication that they choose

books all on their own. One student wrote, "I normally like to browse by myself because

it can take me a while, or like 2 seconds, and I don't like waiting for people." A different

student stated, "By myself because I feel like it gives me time to think about what I want

to read." Overall 4 students (20%) stated that they seek the advice of a teacher librarian

or other adult. "I usually look around for a few minutes and if I can't find anything I ask

you for help," responded one student. Another wrote, "I ask the librarian first and then go check the sections of the library I like."

During focus group conversations when asked how the students select books for pleasure reading, not all 57 students shared. However, approximately 26 students volunteered that they prefer to look for books with peers. One student shared that, "I ask my friends if they have any suggestions and then I ask my teacher." Another student shared that when looking for a new series to read, "I always ask my friends for advice first." When asked if the students normally browse by themselves or with a friend, one student stated that, "I like to read the same books with a friend so we can partner read. It's more fun," and another student said, "If I have to do independent reading for class, I might as well read the same book as my friends so we can talk about it." Approximately 11 (20%) of the 57 students from this study stated they are more motivated to read independently when they choose the same book as a peer so they can have discussions about their reading.

Theme 2: It's a Good Starting Place: Over Half of Students Feel Drawn to Their Favorite Genre When Browsing, and a Fourth Do Not

In relation to research question 1, students also reported that they choose books for pleasure reading by browsing their preferred genre section in the library. With each class, 14-16 students (75%-80%) were observed walking to a genre section when dismissed to look for books. The remaining students, 4-6 per class, started browsing by looking at a book display or by asking the teacher librarian for a book suggestion.

In response to the Individual Student Questionnaire (see Appendix B) that asked students to describe the process they use when selecting books for pleasure reading, over half, 37 students (65%), shared that they first browse their preferred genre when looking for a book. However, notably the data also showed that 16 of these students indicated that they do not limit themselves to just one genre or that they will browse multiple genres. One student wrote, "I look for the genre that I like and look until I find a book. If I can't find a book I like in that genre then I go to another and look for one there until I find a book I want to read." Another student stated,"When I look for an interesting book to read I typically go straight to the same section every time. Not because I'm not open to other book genres but because it's a good starting place." A student who shared that they like to confer with a classmate while looking for a book also often chooses to start in their preferred genre section, stating, "My friend and I love mysteries. We start in that genre first and try to choose the same book to read together. If we can't find a book we like, we go to our second favorite, the fantasy section."

During a focus group conversation, when asked how the students select their books and if this technique (browsing their preferred genre) is a technique they always use, 31 students shared that they start in the same genre section each time they come to the library. This was met with nods and affirmative responses from other students. One student shared, "I start in my favorite section [genre] and then if I don't find something, I go to my next favorite." Another student stated, "The genres help me pick books depending on what I feel like reading so I go there first," and later shared that, "I don't spend a lot of time looking for books so I go to the genre that I feel like reading that day."

Research Question 2

Theme 3: Putting It All Together: Teacher Librarian Book Promotion Efforts Are What Make Social Browsing and Genre Browsing Successful

Research Question 2 asked how teacher librarian's book promotional strategies influenced students when selecting books for pleasure reading. During each of three library visits, students were presented with a different book promotion strategy prior to browsing for books. The teacher librarian book promotion strategies used for this research were book talks, book displays, and shelf talkers. Responses to a multiple choice question on the Individual Student Questionnaire asking students to select their most preferred book promotion strategy were varied, with 28 students (50%) that preferred shelf-talkers, 17 students (30%) liked book talks, and 12 students (20%) reported that book displays most influenced their book selection. Data in this section reports on the three book promotion strategies; shelf talkers, which had the highest number of students who preferred this, book talks; and book displays.

Shelf talkers are student-produced book promotions. When a student finishes a book they enjoyed, the teacher librarian invites them to write a brief recommendation for the book on a sticky note or a small piece of paper and place it on the shelf near the recommended book. At the time of this research, there were approximately 50 shelf talkers scattered around the library. During Participant Observation, most of the students, 15-18 per class (90%), were observed looking at the shelf-talkers. The students were

observed stopping at the shelf talkers and taking a few seconds to read the recommendations.

The Individual Student Questionnaire (see Appendix B) asked students if the book promotion strategy presented during their library visit would influence their desire to read the books that were presented. In response to the shelf talkers, one student wrote, "Yes! The shelf-talkers give me a ton of great books to check out. They made me more interested because other students liked them." Another student stated, "I could just look at the sticky notes [shelf talkers] and see recommended books from other students. I like to read what other people are reading." One student also shared, "I usually go to my favorite section and look at the recommendations people make [shelf talkers] then pick my book," showing how the teacher librarian's efforts influenced the student's book selection process even when they prefer to browse within their favorite genre. Of the students who did not respond positively to the shelf talkers, the most common reason given by six students (10%) was that they had already read many of the books being recommended. One student wrote on the questionnaire, "I like them, but I've read all these books already so I didn't see anything new." Another reason given for not using the shelf talkers is that the students prefer to find books on their own. During a focus group conversation when asked if the shelf talkers were helpful, a student stated, "No, because I want to read and do things my own way," and another stated that, "I just like finding books myself and everyone has different tastes."

In response to the questionnaire when asked if the book talk made the students want to read the book that was presented, a student who prefers book talks shared, "Mrs.

Nelson made the book sound really exciting so I would like to check it out sometime,"

and another stated, "It helps to hear live descriptions and ask questions and get a better

understanding of the book I might want to read." One student wrote that, "I would read

the book because she spoke really highly of this book and described it really well. She hit

all the important parts of what it is mostly about instead of telling us a bunch of useless

information." Another student wrote, "Yes, I would . . . That book sparked my mind to

read it." Not all students preferred the book talk. One student wrote on the questionnaire

that, "It did not make me want to read it," and that they would not read the book unless

"it is a World War II book because I only read World War II books," and another wrote, "I

don't want anything about it [the book] ruined for me by you talking about it before I

read it."

Between four and six students (20-30%) each class were observed looking at the

book displays before selecting a book further supporting the influence of these efforts by

the teacher librarian to promote books for independent reading. In response to the

Independent Student Questionnaire when asked if a book display would influence the

students when selecting a book, 29 students (51%) responded positively to book displays.

One student who likes book displays said, "I usually don't spend very much time looking

at books before choosing one so having a display would help the process." Similarly,

another student wrote, "I would like a displayed book better than A NON DISPLAYED

ONE," and "I also am a visual learner, so it's more fun for my brain to see the book on

display." The students who do not prefer book displays (49%) gave varying reasons. One

student stated that, "I need more information about them and all I knew is they were the

same kind of books [genre]." Another student shared during a focus group discussion that

"If it's not my favorite genre, I'm probably not going to even look at it."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study reports the influence of the Teacher Librarian on students' book selection strategies in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally-staffed school library. This study consisted of 57 seventh grade students from a large suburban middle school in Iowa. During regularly scheduled library visits, students were presented with three book promotion strategies: book talks, book displays, and student-produced visual book suggestions called shelf-talkers. Three themes emerged over the six weeks of the study in response to the research questions. Theme 1 is Ask a Friend: Over Half of Students Are Influenced by Social Interaction to Share and Seek Feedback about Books Among Peers. Theme 2 is It's a Good Starting Place: Over Half of Students Feel Drawn to Their Favorite Genre When Browsing, and Theme 3 is Putting It All Together: Teacher Librarian Book Promotion Efforts Are What Make Social Browsing and Genre Browsing Successful. The preferred method for selecting books for 56% of the students was browsing and conferring with a friend or classmate. Browsing in one's favorite section of the genrefied library was preferred by 65% of the students. Of the teacher initiated book promotion strategies, shelf-talkers were most preferred by students, with 50% of students responding positively, further supporting the students' desire for social interaction, even through peer recommendations, when selecting books for pleasure reading.

Conclusions

The strategies that students used to select books were varied. When developing book promotions, teacher librarians should consider the interests and preferences of their students based on the evidence they can gather through observations, questionnaires, or student interviews. Evidence suggests that when the students' preferred book selection strategies are combined with the teacher librarian's professional efforts to promote books, students are influenced to check out and read books connecting the three themes that emerged during this study.

Research Question 1 asked what strategies for book selection students demonstrate when selecting books for pleasure reading within a school library programming environment rich with teacher librarian-led book promotions. Theme 1, Over Half of Students Are Influenced by Social Interaction to Share and Seek Feedback About Books Among Peers, and Theme 2, Over Half of Students Feel Drawn to Their Favorite Genre When Browsing, emerged during the study in response to Research Question 1. The findings from this study further support research conducted by Taylor, Hora, and Krueger (2017) who found that students had an easier time selecting books to read for pleasure while browsing their preferred genre sections and sharing recommendations with a friend. Approximately 20% of the 57 students from this study stated they are more motivated to read independently when they choose the same book as a peer so they can have discussions about their reading. The evidence gathered from the independent student questionnaire, focus group conversations, and participant observations highlights the importance of the teacher librarian allowing for a social environment when students are selecting books for pleasure reading as over half of the students (56%) indicated that they

are influenced by peer interaction as much as their own interests when selecting books. Yet notably, the teacher librarian should be aware that around 20% said they preferred to ask the teacher librarian about recommendations during browsing time, and 25% of students preferred to browse alone.

Research Question 2 asked how teacher librarian book promotional strategies influence students when selecting books for pleasure reading, leading to Theme 3, Teacher Librarian Book Promotion Efforts Benefit Students Even When Other Influences Are Present. Evidence from this study indicates that the teacher librarian influences students' book selection by increasing their awareness of the books available in the library whether it is through book talks, book displays, or student-produced visual book suggestions like shelf-talkers. Twenty-nine of the 57 students (50%) in this study preferred the peer recommendations made through shelf-talkers, which further supports the research conducted by Elliot (2015) who found that the most powerful influence that impacted students' book selection was peer recommendations. Elliot's research also found that the visual aspects of books, such as book displays, influenced students' book selection as much as teacher recommendation. When any of these efforts are combined with some students' own strategies for selecting books, such as conferring with a friend and looking at a book display or browsing a preferred genre while checking shelf-talkers, students may be more likely and more motivated to select books for pleasure reading.

Recommendations for Practice

Three recommendations for practicing teacher librarians were derived from this research analysis of students' book selection strategies.

- First, I recommend spending one of the students' routine library visits explicitly teaching students about the concept of book promotion strategies. Book talks and book displays are a natural part of the library environment; therefore, students may not make the connection that the teacher librarian is actively making an effort to promote books. By teaching the students what these strategies are and the purpose behind them and providing the understanding that these are lessons that were prepared and are being directly taught in the classroom, the students will be more aware of the professional efforts of the teacher librarian to increase the students' awareness of what the collection has to offer.

- Second, teacher librarians should actively involve students in the creation of book promotions. Most students preferred using shelf talkers, a teacher librarian-initiated book promotion strategy that is produced by students, and most students prefer to look for books with friends, stating that their reading motivation increases when they are able to confer, addressing the problem of how book promotion efforts of the teacher librarian influence students' reading selections and impact the amount of reading they do. Including students in book promotion efforts is similar to allowing students to be part of the collection development process, which is supported by research conducted by Merga (2020). Merga found that encouraging students to participate in the collection development process fostered reading engagement and ensured a quality collection that reflects student

interests. Reading engagement and motivation could be increased by involving students in book promotion strategies.

- The final recommendation for teacher librarians is to create an environment in which students are encouraged to interact socially when they are selecting books for pleasure reading as evidenced by research conducted during this study and the study by Taylor, et al. (2017). Allowing students to confer about their book selections could increase a group of around half of the students' motivation to read and their success with independent reading.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teacher librarian influence on students' book selection processes within an environment rich with teacher librarian book promotion strategies, specifically book talks, student-produced book promotions, and book displays, in a well-resourced, genrefied, and professionally staffed school library. For future research, I would recommend altering one aspect of the study. I recommend collecting data and student responses for 12 weeks rather than six weeks. Allowing students six library visits instead of the three visits documented in this study to reflect on their own book selection strategies as well as their preferences could help the teacher librarian prioritize their professional efforts for developing new and interesting book promotion strategies.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT OBSERVER FIELD NOTES

Number of students who:	Library Visit #1	Library Visit #2	Library Visit #3
Selected a book from a book display.			
Selected a book that was part of the book promotion.			
Browsed for a book with a peer.			
Browsed for a book alone.			
Asked for a book recommendation from the Teacher Librarian.			

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. While you were looking for a book to read, what did you do? Please describe your

    process in 2-3 sentences.

2. Did you choose to browse for books by yourself or with a friend during today's

    library visit? _____

    In 1-2 sentences, please explain why.

3. Did the book promotion that you observed today make you want to check out a

    book? In 1-2 sentences, please explain why or why not.

APPENDIX C

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Library Visit #1: What motivates you to read? Do you read for entertainment, relaxation, learning, etc.? When looking for a book, do you normally browse by yourself or with a friend? Why?

Library Visit #2: How do you select the books to read? (book display, peer suggestion, favorite genre, book talk, etc.) Is this a technique that you always use? If not, what other techniques do you use to select books?

Library Visit #3: What book promotion technique (teacher-led book talks, book displays, shelf-talkers, etc.) do you find most helpful when selecting a new book to read?

APPENDIX D

INITIAL CODES AND THEMES

Adapted from the research of Taylor, J.B., Hora, A., & Krueger, K.S. (2017)

Book choice based on:	Summary of Notes from Participant Observations	Summary of Notes from Focus Group Conversations	Summary of Notes from Individual Student Surveys
Peer Interaction (Taylor, et. al, 2017)			
Preferred Genre or Author			
Book Promotion: -teacher-led book talk - teacher-created book display -shelf talker written by student			