

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

**INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS' SELF-SELECTED,
RECREATIONAL READING MATERIAL**

BY

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Running head: STUDENTS' SELF-SELECTED, RECREATIONAL READING

Influences on Students' Self-selected, Recreational Reading Material

Capping Exercise

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Influences on Students' Self-selected, Recreational Reading Material

Introduction

“Know any good books to read?” Students ask me this deceptively simple question many times a day in my position as teacher librarian at a Kindergarten to grade 8 school. However, suggesting books to students that they will like is a very complicated task. What can I recommend to students that they will enjoy reading? How can I suggest reading materials to students in a manner to which they will be receptive? Male and female students read different material than each other and than adults. They also are influenced to choose it in different ways. Can I, or indeed any teacher-librarian, successfully predict what reading materials students will like? In this study both young people and teacher-librarians are asked how they select books. What influences young people’s choice of reading material is then compared with what adults *think* those influences are. The findings, examined by grade and gender, will supply information that teacher-librarians can use to successfully match the right book to the right young reader in the right way.

Purpose

This study examines to what extent the influences on self-selected recreational reading material by male and female students in grade six are understood and employed by teacher-librarians in their selection and promotion of similar materials for these students.

1. How do students in grade six choose recreational reading material? What influences their choices? How does the gender of the students affect these influences?
2. How do teacher-librarians choose books for students to read for pleasure?

3. What are the similarities and difference between the two groups? What implications can be drawn from this information that would assist teacher-librarians in choosing and promoting recreational reading materials that appeal to students?

Definitions

Self-selected, recreational reading material: all types of reading material, books, magazines, graphic novels, comics, newspapers, etc., chosen by students to read for pleasure in their leisure time, not materials used in or assigned for school work.

Grade six students: the target population is students enrolled in this grade level, participating students are from 10 to 12 years old

Adults: the target population is teacher-librarians in elementary schools with a student population from Kindergarten to grade 8

Teacher-librarian: “A professional teacher with a minimum of two years of successful classroom experience and additional qualifications in the selection, management and utilization of learning resources, who manages the school library and works with other teachers to design and implement resource-based instructional programs” (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 84).

Review of Literature

In order to better understand this research project, this literature review will explore research and professional literature in several areas.

Influences on student reading choices

Several articles show the importance of influences like series books, the Internet, non-fiction, Accelerated Reading programs, and cover art on students' reading choices. An article by Truby (2003) states that series books are particularly important for novice readers who have not

yet developed confidence in their ability to make book choices. Series books reduce the risk of book selection because they provide reassuring, familiar, consistent and patterned choices.

Braun (2002) highlights the importance of selecting and evaluating book review sources through a discussion of online book review websites for young people. Braun included the idea, from the Reader's Robot site, that there are four aspects to book "appeal": the genre of interest, preferred book length, reader's mood, and character development.

Kies (1995) examines the appeal of cover art to teens and first level buyers like booksellers, librarians, and teachers. She uses the changing style of cover art on subsequent editions of Lois Duncan thrillers to illustrate her point that covers must be current to be appealing. Rinehart (1998) discusses what aspects of the cover grade eight students use for choosing books. Adolescents value back-of-the-book summaries (BOB summaries) that are accurate plot summaries and that lead to a sense of what the book will be about. The BOB summary is the most commonly used element on the cover.

Moss and Hendershot (2002) examine the selection of nonfiction trade books by sixth grade students. They find self-selection, having choice in reading material, and having nonfiction books available are powerful motivators to read. They arrange motivating factors into six categories: (a) "I wonder" or curiosity about a topic, (b) visual features of the text, (c) knowledge of authors and intertextuality, (d) knowledge of book awards and genre, (e) personal connections, and (f) other readers.

Croy (2002, a) tests the influence of giving book talks to students and the influence of the Accelerated Reader program on students' choice of books to read. The study arose from the author's concern that students were only reading the Accelerated Reader books for extrinsic rewards and not choosing material of genuine interest to them. Croy found that students chose

books to read for which she had given book talks even if they were not Accelerated Reading selections. Having heard about a book had a very strong influence on whether students chose a book to read. Her findings convinced her that we should “continue to investigate ways to promote reading for pleasure and not just for points” (Croy, 2002 b, Discussion, para. 6).

Influence of gender on reading choices

Doiron (2003) examines the content of elementary classroom and school libraries and considers gender differences in students' personal or independent reading. Doiron concludes that educators are doing well at presenting and promoting the reading of fiction. His findings show boys read a balance of fiction and information books, but girls read predominantly fiction and need more encouragement to diversify their reading choices.

Dutro (2001) discovers that male fifth grade students became very anxious when faced with the necessity of reading series books they viewed as “girl” books such as Babysitters Club and American Girls. There is a general tendency for girls to read across gender boundaries although some girls read only books considered highly gendered as female.

Blair and Sanford (1995) have spent years examining gender differences in education. They found girls read fiction more than boys and also read novels with both genders as main characters. When one of the girls in their study was asked to explain why she thought that boys don't read books with both genders as main characters, she replied, “‘Well, it's like girls wear both blue jeans and skirts, and boys wear only jeans.’ Girls are in her mind, more versatile in their reading than boys.” (Blair & Sanford, 1995, p. 52)

Blair and Sanford (2003) have recently focused on boys, male interests in reading and writing, and created a Boys and Literacy website to highlight their research. They state that literacy for boys is a social practice which shapes their identities and helps them to develop and

maintain relationships with peers. Boys tend to interact socially over non-fictional texts, magazines, newspapers, Internet sites, and videogames. They choose reading material to help inform their interests and those of their peer group. Their common choices of books are “how to”, informational, and fantasy. In contrast, girls’ literacy practices align more closely with the narrative texts, types of assignments, and assessment methods traditionally used in schools.

Boys are adapting and reshaping or “morphing” the traditional academic literacy skills they are learning at school to apply to new literacies that appeal to them: sports, computers, video games, and chat rooms. Blair and Sanford (2004) outline five reasons boys read and write: personal interest, action, success, fun, and purpose. Boys also adapt school assignments to suit them better. Boys “are resisting many school-based practices by transforming the assigned literacy work into something more personally fun, engaging, meaningful, humorous, active, and purposeful” (Blair and Sanford, 2004, p. 453). Purchasing fiction resources may meet the needs of female students. However, a resource centre catering to male students must also have an interesting non-fiction section, subscriptions to a variety of magazines, and computer access. As examples of newspaper articles from the National Post (Smyth, 2003) and the Globe and Mail (2003) show, the press is calling for rethinking how we teach boys. These articles suggest using more popular culture materials of interest to boys in the classroom.

Shultheis (1990) studied the relationship between genders and reading preferences. She found that boys do not enjoy reading fantasy. She also concludes that both males and females prefer reading about a male protagonist. Johnson & Peer (1984) asked students in grades four to ten about their preferences regarding the main character in stories. Like the Shultheis results, their findings show that both boys and girls prefer a male protagonist. This study showed that boys in lower grades prefer male characters considerably more than girls do. At higher grade

levels, female characters were preferred more by girls than by boys. These are controversial findings in light of present trends. Since both studies are becoming dated, this issue calls for a closer look to be undertaken through current research.

Lewis (1999) states that girls tend to choose books based on suggestions from others and that their choices emphasize character. In contrast, the boys tend to choose by genre and, if considering fiction, look for action with some violence. According to Lewis, girls are learning how to operate in heterosexual relationships, whereas boys are learning about themselves in relation to authority, power and aggression. She feels that “independent reading” and “free choice” are actually misnomers because it is through these activities that students are learning social identities from the surrounding culture. A study from Jamaica by Shelley-Robinson (2001) corroborates these findings.

Sturm (2003) asked two thousand young people between the ages of two and eighteen to express their preference for information while visiting a library. Young people were asked, “What do you want to know more about?” In other words, they were asked to state their areas of interest or their desire for information. This may or may not be the same as what children would choose for pleasure reading. However, Sturm felt that knowing children’s interests and preferences would help teachers and child psychologists. As well, libraries could use this information when planning reference services, reader’s advisory, programming and marketing. The primary male interests were transportation, sports, and war. The female choices were mainly horses, mystery fiction, romance fiction, and fine arts and crafts.

Strategies for choosing books

Ross & Chelton (2001) studied “heavy” or avid readers. The study reveals five considerations these readers employ for choosing books: the type of reading experience wanted, sources used to find new books, elements of the book, clues on the book itself, and the cost in time and money to access the book. Avid readers, according to Ross (1999), develop a system for choosing books that involves many interrelated considerations: previous experience, knowledge of the book world, and networks for recommending books. Two elements are the mood the reader is in (What do I feel like reading?) and the “cost” in time or money involved for readers to get intellectual or physical access to a particular book. The latter includes:

- intellectual access (previous knowledge of content or of literary conventions needed by the reader to make sense of the text),
- physical access (time and work required before the reader can lay hands on the book itself)
- length of time required or degree of cognitive and emotional commitment required by the book itself (easy quick read vs. long demanding read) (Ross, 1999, para. 5)

There is no indication that the book selection strategies identified generalize to all readers.

Even though the publishing industry has been targeting this age group in recent years, Mackey and Johnston (1996) state that teachers are not knowledgeable enough about young adult fiction. They list ten descriptors to help in finding books for inexperienced and reluctant teenage readers. Included in this list are a gripping opening, a fairly short length, an engaging cover, characters as old as or older than the readers, and a recognizable, contemporary setting. They maintain that students need to be given time to read purely for enjoyment and be shown possible

routes to successful book selection. They give fourteen tactics, in descending order of popularity, as:

following an author

browsing, talking to a friend

following a genre

seeing a book cover

starting one book in a series

seeing someone else's reading

following a topic

talking to a teacher or librarian

doing a novel study

receiving a book as a present

using a book club list

working on a school unit such as mythology, poetry, mystery

finding a title appealing

forced reading – picking up any book in a hurry if you forgot yours (Mackey and

Johnston, 1996, 31).

Choosing for special needs students

Swartz and Hendricks (2000) state that students with special needs, like those in the Learning Disabilities Programs and Developmental Centres, like the same kind of books as other students and should be allowed to choose their own books for pleasure reading. They highlight self-selection and choice as having a positive impact on learning to read and becoming lifelong readers. According to this study, the factors children use to make book selections, topic/subject

matter, author, writing style, cover/illustrations, characters, and back-of-the-book summaries, are used by special needs students as well. These students also used the additional strategies of title, length of book, movie/TV adaptations, and a friend's recommendations to help choose books. The researchers suggest teachers implement lessons on how to select a book and warn them not to "dumb down" (Swartz and Hendricks, 2000, 10) reading lists for students with special needs. Their research demonstrates that special needs children want to read the same books as students in regular programs.

Adult choices versus student choices

Hill, White, & Brodie (2001) examine the criteria considered by the selection committees for the Newbery and Caldecott Awards and six other awards programs. They caution that, although teachers and librarians select and promote award winning books, the awards are "given based on specific criteria that may or may not always meet the reading needs or appeal of every child" (Hill, White, & Brodie, 2001, p.3). The Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards website gives their selection policies. Their stated selection criteria make no mention of the characteristics research reports children and young people seek in their recreational reading material. The selection committee does not include any young people although they can suggest books to a committee member before the first meeting. There seems to be no similarity between the criteria for selecting award winning books and what influences students' choice of recreational reading material.

Miller (2004) reports on the choices teachers make of young adult "problem" novels. These novels treat teenage problems such as abuse, suicide, pregnancy, family problems, grief, illness, and death. Although just a partial sampling of young adult books, these books are usually chosen for study by teachers and awarded prizes by committees of adults. She feels this

predilection for gloomy, depressing books overlooks the funny, imaginative novels most students prefer.

Agnew (1996) offers her perspective from the publishing and book selling industry. She expresses her opinion that adult perceptions of children's books differ significantly from the children for whom they are buying the books. She has observed that, whereas children look for enjoyment, adults choose books for their educational value and how much they will contribute to children's progress in reading. Agnew states that adults analyze children's books according to criteria they consider important and feel qualified to do this because they were children once themselves. She highlights the need for finding out what influences children's reading selections given the following situation:

Much of the decision-making about what children read is done by adults. Where adults are not actively selecting a particular book for a particular child, they are often at work behind the scenes; classroom book boxes are almost always chosen by adults; libraries and bookshops are stocked by adults; and information about children's books often comes from adult sources. (Agnew, 1996, p. 35)

Agnew is skeptical about whether some kind of checklist can be developed for choosing children's books more effectively. She advises adults to listen to children more and value what they say.

Conclusion

This literature review provides background information to help situate the research question which is to what extent the influences on self-selected recreational reading material by male and female students in grade six are understood and employed by teacher-librarians in their selection and promotion of similar materials for these students.

Method

Introduction

This study surveyed students in grade six in an urban, public, elementary school about what influences their choice of self-selected, recreational reading material. Individual students were interviewed about reading habits. This information is compared to adult data collected by interviews of teacher-librarians in this same school division. The researcher has just completed the second year as a part-time teacher-librarian at a Kindergarten to grade 8 school in an urban, public school district. It is the largest district in the province, enrolling 22,000 students in 51 elementary schools and 10 high schools. At the time of the study, each elementary school had either a half-time or full-time teacher-librarian on staff. The school district is located in the capital city of one the Western Canadian provinces.

Participants and Procedures

Elementary school teacher-librarians in the researcher's school district were asked at one of their regular meetings to volunteer to be interviewed. The sample population, therefore, is likely to be more knowledgeable about books and young people's reading habits than a general population because they have taken an interest in the study and volunteered. Teacher-librarians not interested in these issues likely did not volunteer. Three of the teacher-librarians have five years or less experience in their positions. Five others have between ten and twenty-six years experience. All are female. One is less than thirty but the others are between forty-eight and fifty seven years of age. The participants have Bachelor of Education degrees, some with undergraduate classes in teacher-librarianship, one has a post graduate diploma and two are currently working on Masters of Education degrees. At the time of the interviews, seven

participants were full time teacher-librarians at elementary schools although two divided their time equally between two schools. One participant works half-time.

Students in grade six were sampled from a suburban elementary school of 650 students from Kindergarten through grade 8 in dual streams (English and French Immersion). The school is located in a neighbourhood populated by mixed ethnic, professional families. The researcher visited the class to explain the study. When asked how many minutes a day outside of school hours that they typically spent reading, most students in the class estimated between thirty minutes and two hours. Eighteen willing students who had permission from their parents were interviewed. Fifteen interviews were transcribed and considered, seven from male students and eight from female students. Three recorded interviews weren't transcribed. Two students spoke so softly that transcribing accurately was impossible. One student gave single word answers and the researcher wasn't able to encourage more detailed comments or opinions from her.

Questions

Questions for student interviews are attached as Appendix A and for the teacher-librarians as Appendix B.

Results

Students' preferred reading material

The girls interviewed claim mysteries most often as their preferred reading material although romance, fantasy, science, historical fiction, and diaries were also mentioned. They also enjoy reading magazines about teen issues and pop culture people. They dislike reading non-fiction, science fiction, and "boring" historical fiction. The boys also like mysteries and novels with sports, adventure, fantasy, and action. One boy states a strong dislike for fantasy and

preferred realistic fiction. The boys read magazines about people of interest to teens and sports magazines. More boys than girls say they would read non-fiction for recreation and not just research.

Influence of the book itself on students

Both genders agree that a cover picture should be bright, colourful, and attention grabbing. However, the back-of-the-book summary is much more influential in whether students will choose to read the book or not. Most students interviewed say they consult the back-of-the-book summary to assist their decision. Several read the first few pages to help them decide whether or not to continue. Two of the male students say they don't enjoy books that are too short. They prefer thick books with an involved plot that engages them and keeps them entertained longer than a shorter novel does.

The students interviewed are unanimous in their agreement that it doesn't matter to them if the main character is male or female. These statements are in opposition to what is reported in the literature review by Dutro (2001) and Johnson & Peer (1984). When asked about the gender of the protagonist, students appeared either surprised or uninterested in the question and seemed not to give their answer much consideration. When further questioned, they gave the impression that they had not previously considered this and hadn't noticed, at least on a conscious level, the gender of the protagonist when choosing books.

People recommend books to students

Like the findings of Lewis (1999), most of the girls interviewed accept recommendations about what to read from female family members such as mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts. Friends, teachers, and teacher-librarians also suggest books to read. Boys only rarely mention taking recommendations from family, teacher, or friends. Later in the interview, when

describing how they choose a book in the library, many students mention trying a book a classmate has read.

How students choose reading material

Similar to previous research mentioned in the literature review, the majority of students interviewed state that they choose a book to read by selecting the next one in a series, another book by the same author, or a book of their favourite type or genre. They depend on the back-of-the-book summary and comments on the cover to help them choose a book to read. They listen to recommendations from their friends for what is good to read. Only two students mention searching for books on the computerized catalogue. When asked to describe how they look for a book to read in the library, the most frequent answer students gave was to begin searching where they had success in the past. For example, they locate a book or author they had previously enjoyed and look for other books in the same series or by the same author.

Teacher-librarian comments on student choices

The teacher-librarians interviewed could easily list books commonly borrowed by students at this grade level. Most feel that by this grade level not many students are reading non-fiction for recreational purposes, although it is popular with slightly younger students. They mention exceptions to this like how-to-draw books for example. Several agree that historical fiction is not a popular choice for many students with the exceptions being the recent series like *Dear Canada* and *Our Canadian Girl* for female readers.

The teacher-librarians agree that boys prefer to read books with boy protagonists and girls prefer books about girls. Although girls will read something with a male main character, boys will not read material which features a female character. One teacher-librarian mentioned

an exception to this pattern is that boys who read extensively in the fantasy genre accept female protagonists (Teacher-librarian B). Another teacher-librarian said,

Boys will usually turn away from a book that has a main character that's a girl. Girls, I think they like to read stories where the main character is a girl, particularly if it is someone their age or older. But they won't refuse a book if the main character is a boy.

(Teacher-librarian H)

This comment is supported by another teacher-librarian's opinion about the importance of the gender of the protagonist.

The girls tend not to worry as much about it although I think they enjoy or gravitate to books that have a female character, main character in the book. Whereas the boys I think definitely prefer to read a book that has a male character. (Teacher-librarian D)

The teacher-librarians consider an attractive cover a key factor in whether students will choose a book to read or not. One teacher-librarian comments that covers are more influential when students are choosing fiction rather than non-fiction books (Teacher-librarian H). Because they feel students choose according to what is on the cover, many teacher-librarians lament the style of book shelves schools have which show only the spines. They express the importance of displaying materials with the covers showing for students to browse. One teacher-librarian comments on the importance of up-to-date covers.

But I find now a lot of books are being re-issued with a new cover and sometimes the new cover is more eye-catching. It's got a realistic, a real person, whereas before it had a sketch So I'm finding that those are a little more appealing. So that way you can maybe sell an older title you know to today's kids. It's still a good book but it's more appealing because of the [new] cover. (Teacher-librarian F)

Another teacher-librarian compares the lack of appeal of unattractive book covers to unfashionable clothing.

If it's an unattractive cover, unless it's a book that is popular by virtue of other people having read it or there's a lot of hype surrounding the book, students are no different than adults. I mean, I'm not attracted to a dowdy looking dress on the racks in a store. Why would kids be any different in choosing books? (Teacher-librarian G)

This teacher-librarian mentions how difficult it is for reluctant readers to select a book when faced with the style of shelving which presents only the spine of the book.

And they want to be able to see the cover before they pick it. To choose from the spine is really, really difficult for those kids. (Teacher-librarian D)

The teacher-librarians recognize the popularity of books in a series. Series provide predictable, safe choices for students who are looking for books to read. These teacher-librarians seek out quality series and are happy to purchase successive volumes because they know students enjoy them. This teacher-librarian comments that she actively seeks out new series to purchase.

And I must admit I'm always on the look out for something that's well written, good characters, and is a series so that if they read one you can know that there will be a couple of others that you can point them toward. (Teacher-librarian B)

This teacher-librarian suggests that because students are so interested in reading books in a series, it would be convenient to allocate a section in the library to series books.

I think we should just have a section called "series", maybe have them shelved alphabetically by title of the series and it would save a lot of [time spent hunting for them]. (Teacher-librarian A)

Another teacher-librarian makes the point that reading books that are part of a series is a comfortable, easy choice for students.

They just want to read whatever is still in the series. You know what I mean? I think they're safe. They feel good with it and they like series. (Teacher-librarian E)

People who influence student choices

Several of the teacher-librarians say that classroom teachers have a great influence on what students borrow, especially if they place restrictions on library usage. Some teachers require students to borrow both a novel and a non-fiction book, for example, or don't allow magazines to be read in class, or verify that students are choosing materials at their reading level. One teacher-librarian said,

I think their classroom teacher has a lot of influence. There are some teachers in this school who are very good at directing their children to appropriate material. And some of them really pay attention to the reading level and make sure that they are only taking a book that they are capable of reading or that is challenging to them but not to the point where it is going to be frustrating. (Teacher-librarian G)

The teacher-librarians feel that they influence student reading choices by giving book talks and displaying materials in an attractive or easily assessable manner. They say that students will read a book if their attention has been caught by an interesting introduction to it. Several commented that they need to have read the book themselves to do a good job of book talking and that shortage of time is a limiting factor in book talking. One teacher-librarian comments, "*Book talking is the best[way] to get kids going into books because it usually spreads from there.*" (Teacher-librarian H) Another said, "*I know if I do book talks, those books are flying off the shelves.*" (Teacher-librarian D)

The teacher-librarians try different ways of grouping or displaying books in the library in order to attract students. Ideas mentioned were books collected in baskets, a new acquisitions display, a special shelf of non-fiction for primary grades, and an area called “My Picks” where the teacher-librarian selects her recommendations for a class before they come in for book exchange (Teacher-librarian F). One teacher-librarian observes students choosing books from baskets she had filled, “*And so I’m seeing their reading habits change just because of how I set things up.*” (Teacher-librarian C) Another teacher-librarian participant notices that boys seem to need more help than girls in choosing books to read (Teacher-librarian F).

The teacher-librarians feel that peers have a great influence on student recreational reading choices. Although students will try a book based on a teacher-librarian’s recommendation, the suggestion is more effective if made by a peer. Teacher-librarians comment that books get passed from student to student during book exchange times and that frequently students are searching through the return bin for books read by their classmates. One teacher-librarian even gave the example of two girls who insisted on reading the same book at the same time (Teacher-librarian B). She said their choices were limited to books for which there were two copies in the collection. The role of classmate recommendations on reading choices is illustrated by this teacher-librarian’s comment.

Peer group also has a big influence. You’ll find that if one book is really enjoyed by one particular student then it starts making the rounds around the classroom. (Teacher-librarian G)

Another teacher-librarian’s comment reinforces the importance of peer influence.

However, I do find that kids will tend to want to read something that their friend is reading even if it’s maybe not at their reading level or their interest level. But they will

take it because they think, 'You know, my friend's reading this.' And it's kind of Follow the Leader. (Teacher-librarian F)

How teacher-librarians choose books

The teacher-librarians indicate that choosing materials that students will enjoy reading is not an easy task. They admit there is no easy formula for finding the right books. They mention the importance of knowing the students' tastes and interests. They consult reviews of materials in professional journals and appreciate having recommendations from other colleagues. They try to purchase books having the following characteristics: part of a series, attractive cover, interesting back-of-book summary, solid plot that moves at a quick pace, appealing characters, a well-liked author, not too long, text in a comfortable size font, and favourable reviews.

One teacher-librarian emphasizes the need to know her clientele in order to purchase appropriate materials. *"I listen to what the kids are interested in and I know who my readers are and I know what they like."* (Teacher-librarian F) Another teacher-librarian tells what she keeps in mind when she selects recreational reading material. *"So you first of all you buy your books based on familiar authors, and good reviews but that doesn't necessarily ensure that it is going to move."* (Teacher-librarian H) In an attempt to rank what influences her choices, this teacher-librarian says, *"First of all, based on reviews, based on the author, based on the actual look of the book."* (Teacher-librarian H) But she also mentions considering a factor which is difficult to define precisely, *"I guess the kid and child appeal"* (Teacher-librarian H).

Discussion

Opinions expressed by students in these interviews generally coincide with information uncovered in the review of literature. Back-of-the-book summaries and series books are primary influences on what students choose to read. Girls, more than boys, are guided by

recommendations from friends and family. Research on gender preferences suggests that boys are becoming more involved in alternate literacies not only in reading books. The boys in this study state emphatically that they enjoy reading books. They agreed to magazines as a second choice of reading material only when mentioned by the researcher. None claimed to read on the computer but this may be because of a narrow definition of reading in their minds. In contrast to Shultheis (1990), most of the boys in this study do enjoy reading fantasy. Both male and female students claim the gender of the main character doesn't matter although the literature reviewed said it does matter. Also, the teacher-librarians interviewed observe that, in actual practice, this factor does influence student borrowing. Further research of student reading habits is needed to determine whether students actually do read books with protagonists of the opposite gender to themselves.

The teacher-librarians interviewed in this study have an accurate perception of what influences students in grade six to select recreational reading material. The literature review had led the researcher to expect that there would be a wide discrepancy between what the students said and what the teacher-librarians thought. Because this was a willing group of volunteers who take an interest in this area, they are perhaps not representative of a typical or average teacher-librarian or the total population of teacher-librarians. Their comments compare favourably to the students opinions and show that they are indeed in tune with the students with whom they work.

The teacher-librarians have an accurate understanding of what influences student choices and student likes and dislikes. Both adult and student groups agree on the importance of the physical characteristics of a book, the popularity of books in series and by popular authors, and the importance of having people recommend books to read. A notable exception to this concurrence, as previously mentioned, concerns the gender of the protagonist. The characteristics

that these teacher-librarians look for in books they purchase for young people are remarkably similar to the descriptors listed by Mackey and Johnson (1996) as important to inexperienced and reluctant teen readers.

Knowledge of the importance of the cover, illustrations, and back-of-book summary to students is valuable not only for purchasing books but also for weeding collections. Teacher-librarians need to remove dated, unappealing books and replace older editions with recent, attractive copies. The need for library furniture that allows many books to be displayed showing their covers cannot be overemphasized. Teacher-librarians must seek the support of in-school administrators to facilitate this. One teacher-librarian recommended the use of commercial labels on the spines of fiction books to help students locate genres like mysteries and fantasy (Teacher-librarian B).

Students mention receiving recommendations for what to read from family members whereas teacher-librarians credit peers with being a huge influence on what students choose to read. This is likely due to the fact that teacher-librarians deal with the students in peer groups and observe them interacting in the library setting not with their family members. It is a valuable reminder that reading suggestions and interests also come from the family. It is interesting to note that students say recommendations come from female family members but not a single student mentioned male relatives who influencing their reading.

Teacher-librarians feel that it is not enough to stock libraries with good books. Books must be promoted or they are not read. They see book talking and matching readers and books as an important part of their job. If they feel it is difficult to find the time to do this with the other demands placed on their position, they need to promote this aspect of their work when advocating to parents and school administrators. If teacher-librarians are available during book

exchange times in the library, they would have more chances to interact with student borrowers. This would allow them to assist students with book selection and give them valuable information about student tastes to use when they are purchasing books.

Teacher-librarians repeatedly state that peers influence students' choices of reading material. In order to capitalize on this, teachers and teacher-librarians need to design ways to get students book talking for each other, discussing what they are reading, and recommending materials to each other.

I guess the thing that we found is that if we give them the opportunity to share what they are reading then the excitement about reading grows. They have to talk about what they're reading and then other kids will then be more interested in selecting those [books]. (Teacher-librarian B)

When looking for a book to read, students say they return to where they have had success in the past to begin their search. One teacher-librarian observes that non-readers browse more, have more difficulty finding books, and need more help in selection (Teacher-librarian D). Another says we need to teach strategies for finding an appropriate book (Teacher-librarian G). The research literature supports the idea that we need to teach students how to choose books. Based on what these students said in their interviews, we could teach how to examine a book cover, how to follow series or authors or genres, and how to ask family and friends for suggestions.

Students in the schools staffed by these teacher-librarians are well served in their libraries. Unlike the character Wallace in *No More Dead Dogs* by popular young people's author Gordon Korman, these students need not be forced to read books that don't appeal to them. The teacher-librarians strive to furnish them with recreational reading material for their tastes and to

promote it in effective ways. Successfully matching students and books gives the teacher-librarians great satisfaction. This study found a very strong link between how students and teacher-librarians choose books. These teacher-librarians are successfully matching the right book to the right young reader in the right way. The results will be lifelong readers with a love of books.

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Appendix A

Starter questions for student interviews

1. What kinds of books or other reading material do you like to read in your spare time?
2. What is your favourite kind of reading material? Why do you like it?
3. Tell me about what book or books you've enjoyed reading.
4. Tell why you chose to read the book(s) if you remember.
5. Name an author or authors whose books you enjoy.
6. Tell why you chose to read books by this author(s) if you remember.
7. What kinds of reading material do you not like reading? Why?
8. Who suggests books for you to read in your spare time?
9. How does the cover of the book help you choose a book to read?
10. Do you prefer reading fiction or non-fiction materials? Why?
11. Does it matter to you whether the main character in the story is a girl or boy? Why?
12. When you are looking for a book to read, do you look for books by a certain author?
13. When choosing books to read, do you pick books in a certain series? Why?
14. Do you choose books of a certain kind (or type or genre)? How do you do this?
15. Talk to me about how you go about looking for a book to read.
16. What influences or affects what book you will pick to read?
17. Does it matter what mood you are in (or how you are feeling) when you are picking a book? Can you give me an example?
18. Is there any thing else you'd like to tell me about choosing books to read? Is there anything I've missed?

Appendix B

Sample interview questions for adults

Please consider students in grade 6 as you answer these questions.

1. What are popular recreational reading materials for students of this age group and why?
2. Please name some books you feel these students would enjoy reading.
3. Please name some authors whose books you think these students would enjoy reading.
4. What kinds of reading material do students not like reading? Why?
5. Do students prefer reading fiction or non-fiction materials? Why?
6. Does it matter to students whether the main character in the story is a girl or boy? Why or why not?
7. Who has the greatest influence over what students read?
8. How does the cover of the book influence whether students choose a book to read?
9. What influences or affects what books students will pick to read?
10. When choosing books to read, what would you say influences students the most: friends' recommendations, author, series, type or genre, or something else?
11. Describe to me about how students go about choosing a book to read.
12. What do you consider before you choose a book for students to read?
13. What are the characteristics of a good book for students of this age?
14. Is there any thing else you'd like to tell me about what influences students recreational reading choices or how you go about choosing books for students to read?