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How does changing the organization of the fiction collection to a genre based "bookstore" model affect circulation?

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BACKGROUND

Alice D. Contreras is a Title I campus located in south Fort Worth. Of the more than 650 students, 89% are classified as economically disadvantaged.

Currently the library is organized with the Dewey Decimal System, with fiction being separated into four general categories.

1. Beginning books (determined by their Accelerated Reader level) are shelved in a low bin for easy browsing by the pre-k and kindergarten students.
2. Picture books are shelved on low shelves and arranged alphabetically by author.
3. Chapter books are shelved on taller shelves and arranged alphabetically by author.
4. Chapter books that are part of a series are shelved separately and arranged alphabetically by author.

The decision to separate chapter books into series/non-series shelves was made after the librarian observed that students were very interested in series and were often looking for the next book. Even with this separation students still lose a great deal of time browsing the shelves before finding what they need. The amount of time available for students to browse is very limited. Students in PreK-1st grade have an assigned half hour in the library each week, which includes a read aloud and student check out time. These students typically have around 5-10 minutes for the entire class to make their selections and check out. Frequently students who have a hard time choosing end up having to just grab whatever is closest when their time runs out, whether they are actually interested in it or not. Students in 2nd-5th grade can visit the library for checkout independently, at their teacher's discretion.

Due to the fact that the majority of students are economically disadvantaged, visits to the school library may be the only time that they are able to access and explore literature. These students have a high need for reading material that is of interest and is easily accessible in order to develop into readers who have a love of literature.

Research Questions

The primary question being addressed by this research proposal is: How does changing the organization of the fiction collection to a genre based "bookstore" model affect circulation?

Additional questions to be considered:

1. How does changing the organization of the fiction collection affect student satisfaction with the collection?
2. How does changing the organization of the fiction collection affect the amount of time students spend browsing the shelves?
3. How does changing the organization of the fiction collection affect teachers' opinion of the library collection with regards to the ease of locating materials for thematic units?
4. How does changing the organization of the fiction collection affect the amount of time the librarian spends on shelving books and assisting students locate titles?

LITERATURE REVIEW

An early adopter of classifying the fiction section by subject wrote about her experience reorganizing a middle school library (Briggs, 1973). In her time she did not have an electronic catalog system, so the shift required going through a card catalog and color coding all of the cards to match the new eight category arrangement. It took two librarians two weeks to reorganize a collection of 3,000 titles. After two years Briggs surveyed students who had experience the library both before and after the change. She separated the responses of students who also used the public library, which was still organized alphabetically, from those whose experience was solely with the school library. She found that 78% of the public library users felt that the subject classification of the school library was easier to navigate, and 88% of the students who did not use the public library agreed (p. 36).

Maker (2008) argues against genre or bookstore style classification in the adult fiction areas of the public library on the grounds that the function of organization of a bookstore is fundamentally different than the function of a library. In bookstores, he notes, genre categories are a marketing category intended to sell books (p. 169). He points out that genre classification is rather subjective, as different catalogers might put the same book in different genres. Books that could be considered multiple genres, or crossover titles, can be difficult to shelve and for readers to find. The argument against the bookstore model that has the most weight in the school library is the problem of readers only browsing genres that they are comfortable with and not giving titles in other sections a second glance. Maker describes this as using genre classification "not so much as a tool for selection of titles, but rather as a means of rejecting titles" (p. 171).

Fialkoff (2009) asserts that it is not about copying bookstores, but borrowing the aspects that work to make libraries more accessible. User accessibility is highlighted by the experiences of three different librarians collected by Hill (2010). The first librarian noted that 75% of library patrons were more interested in browsing than locating specific items (p. 15). Organizing the library into "neighborhoods" based on subjects was a decision driven by feedback surveys and resulted in high user satisfaction, increased circulation, and library growth (p.16). The second librarian found that organizing the children's section into collections based on categories that interest children (e.g. nature, transportation) increased circulation by 569.15% in the first year (p. 18). The third librarian explained how related fiction and non-fiction topics (e.g. mystery/true crime, graphic novels/how to draw) were inter-shelved to capitalize on the overlap of interest readers have in the related topics. Overall that library experienced a 70% circulation increase and the public response was very positive (p. 20).

Kaplan (2013) explains that librarians do not need to choose between using Dewey and using a genre classification system. Dewey was not designed to organize fiction so it makes perfect sense to adopt alternative systems that meet the needs of students and are adapted to how children interact with fiction. When looking at non-fiction, however, Dewey provides the ability to organize collections with hierarchical relationships as appropriate for the curriculum. With adequate signage Dewey is fairly straightforward for students to navigate, especially in the smaller scale of a typical school library as opposed to a public library.

In writing about the decision to move away from the Dewey Decimal System, Buchter (2013) cites the fourth law of the Five Laws of Library Science developed by Ranganathan: save the time of the reader. Buchter presents the argument that today's students are already used to word-

based search systems and that organizing the library based on keywords is more intuitive and promotes greater independence. In changing an elementary school library to a word-based system she found that students checked out more books, checked out more books in categories they previously did not visit, began organically making connections between related fiction and non-fiction materials, and even students in pre-k and kindergarten were able to browse the library independently for books that were of personal interest. Additionally the librarian had more time to devote to collaboration due to the fact that students needed much less adult help locating materials, and shelving in the subject based system took a third less time than shelving in a Dewey system (p.54). Surveys indicated that 100% of the school staff preferred the new system to the old Dewey system (p. 54).

Inspired by student requests and the way that teachers were organizing classroom libraries, Hembree (2013) made the switch to a category based system for fiction books. This change in the library resulted in a 92% circulation increase in the first year and a 366% increase by the fourth year. Additionally the third and fourth grade students that met the standard in the state reading test went up 20% and 24% respectively (p. 65).

It is clear that the majority of those who have written about their experience changing their libraries to a subject based or bookstore model have enjoyed very positive results.

METHODS

Data Collection

Before the fiction section of the library is rearranged baseline data relating to the research questions will need to be collected. This data will include

- Circulation statistics for the fiction collection.
- Student surveys to measure student satisfaction with the collection.
  - Slips of paper with the following two questions will be distributed to each teacher for students to answer. Each grade level will receive different color slips.
    - Do you feel that the library has an adequate selection of fiction books? Yes/No
    - Are you usually able to find a fiction book that interests you when you visit the library? Yes/No
- The amount of time students spend browsing the shelves of the fiction section.
  - The librarian will keep a spreadsheet noting the time a student enters the library and the time the student exits.
- Teacher surveys to measure teacher opinions on the ease of locating materials for thematic units.
  - At a faculty meeting teachers will be provided with slips of paper with the following questions to answer.
    - Do you feel that the library has an adequate selection of fiction titles to meet the needs of your thematic units? Yes/No
    - On a scale from 1 to 5, with one being very easy and five being very difficult, how easy is it for you to locate thematic titles?
    - How long (in minutes) do you estimate you spend searching the fiction section of the library for thematic unit titles per unit?

- The amount of time the librarian spends shelving and assisting students in locating titles.
  - The librarian will keep a spreadsheet noting the time that they start and stop shelving.
  - The librarian will keep a tally log of the number of times a student needs assistance locating a title in the fiction section.

Students and teachers will not write their name, or any other identifying information, on their surveys to preserve privacy. Anonymity will also encourage students and teachers to respond honestly. When the librarian records information about the amount of time students spend browsing they will not record any identifying information about the student except for grade level, which will be recorded in order to compare data between grades.

After the fiction section of the library has been rearranged and students and teachers have had time to adjust and make use of the new system the same data will be collected using the same methods outlined above.

Data Analysis

After the data has been gathered the information collected as the baseline will be compared with the information collected at the end of the experiment. Comparisons will be made and interpreted according to the following procedure.

- The circulation numbers from September-November will be compared to the circulation numbers from January-March. A difference 10% will be considered significant.
- Student survey results from November will be compared to the results from April. A 10% increase in positive results will be considered significant.
- The data on student browsing time recorded in September-November will be interpreted into an overall average browsing time in minutes and will be compared to the average browsing time recorded January-March. A difference of three or more minutes will be considered significant.
- Teacher survey results from November will be compared to the results from April. A 10% increase in positive results will be considered significant.
- The amount of time recorded for shelving in September-November will be totaled and compared to the total time recorded shelving in January-March. A difference of 10% will be considered significant.
- The number of times the librarian was required to assist students in locating fiction materials in September-November will be totaled and compared to the total number of times the librarian was required to assist students in locating fiction materials in January-March. A difference of 10% will be considered significant.

Any anecdotal notes or observations made by the librarian or others involved in the library, such as teacher, student, administrator, or parent comments, will be recorded and taken into consideration when evaluating the success of the program. The program will be considered successful if circulation numbers go up 10% or more and the overall satisfaction of students and teachers, based on the survey results, go up by 10% or more.

Timeline

August:
- The librarian will meet with the principal and the assistant principal to present information about the project and discuss any questions/concerns.
- The librarian will create the necessary spreadsheets for recording data.
- Students will be given an initial library orientation on library procedures and how to locate materials.
- The librarian will begin planning the reorganization of the fiction section (what categories will be used, shelf arrangement, signage, etc.).

September-November:
- The librarian will record monthly circulation numbers and data on student browsing time, shelving time, and frequency of students requiring assistance.
- The librarian will continue planning the reorganization of the fiction section using the OPAC to create a document listing how each title in the collection will be categorized.

November:
- In the second week the librarian will distribute the student surveys to the classroom teachers.
- In the third week the librarian will collect the student surveys and have the teachers complete the teacher survey during the scheduled faculty meeting.
- During the first three days of Thanksgiving break, while the custodians are still opening the building, the librarian and volunteer helpers will do any necessary physical rearranging of the library furniture and begin labeling and relocating materials.

December:
- In the first week the librarian and volunteers will continue work on physical reorganization.
- Students and teachers will be given an initial orientation on the new library organization.

January-March:
- The librarian will record monthly circulation numbers and data on student browsing time, shelving time, and frequency of students requiring assistance.

April:
- In the first week the librarian will distribute the student surveys to the classroom teachers.
- In the second week the librarian will collect the student surveys and have the teachers complete the teacher survey during the scheduled faculty meeting.
- The librarian will begin comparing the data from before and after the reorganization.

May:
- The librarian will present the results of the experiment to the administration, faculty, and other stakeholders.
- Using the results the librarian will plan for adjustments and improvements for the next year.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

When all the data has been collected the librarian will use Microsoft Power BI to create visuals comparing the information from before the reorganization to after. These visuals will be embedded into a Prezi presentation for the librarian to share with stakeholders. The librarian will first present the information to the district library director and the campus administration, then to the rest of the campus staff at a scheduled faculty meeting in May. The librarian will also create a screencast of the presentation to be posted on the school library website, school Facebook page, and the Class Dojo communication app. If the results of the experiment are significantly positive the librarian will also present to the rest of the district librarians at the end of year meeting, as requested by the library director.

CONCLUSIONS

When implementing this research plan the first step will be to gather data. After data has been gathered the proposed change in library organization will be implemented and more data collected. At the end of the experimental year the success of the project will be determined using the criteria identified in the data analysis section of this paper. If the results show that the reorganization has had a negative or neutral impact on circulation and student/teacher satisfaction the librarian will consider possible solutions including adjusting the new system according to observed shortcomings, reverting to the previous system, or exploring alternative systems. If the results of the experiment indicate that the reorganization had a positive effect on circulation and student/teacher satisfaction the librarian will consider adjustments to further improve the system according to observed areas of weakness and will continue the program in the next school year. The library handbook will be formally updated to reflect the change in shelving procedures. If the program continues to be successful in the second year the librarian will explore options regarding publishing the results of the program as well as leading workshops for other district librarians interested in adopting a genre based system in their own libraries.

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