Engaging readers through choice
Encouraging a life long love of reading

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Abstract

School Library Policies usually include, ."the development of a life long love of reading/literature". Choosing a good book to read is like choosing an artwork for your house. It is subject to personal taste, artistic preference and personal experiences. The Teacher Librarian can play a pivotal role in supporting students reading for enjoyment, both formally and informally within the school. By personalizing and developing choice as part of formal reading programs, they can assist students to develop their love of reading and indulge their passion for certain types of literature in a supportive and encouraging environment.

The choice is theirs … or should be

Part of a school library policy usually includes ..."the development of a life long love of reading/literature ..." or words to that effect. The Teacher Librarian (T/L) can play a pivotal role in supporting students reading for enjoyment, both formally and informally within the school. The T/L has a vast knowledge of literature which would suit or work well with individuals or groups. By personalizing and developing choice as part of a reading program or programs, students can develop their love of reading and indulge their passion for certain types of literature in a supportive and encouraging environment.

"The premise that literacy is associated with school achievement, participation in a democracy, and self-fulfillment is widely held. Why then don't students read more? Some suggest that the way reading is taught is not conducive to producing students who love to read. In a study for UNESCO, Irving (1980) found that most respondents made no association whatsoever between reading and pleasure", Cullinan, (2000) in studies conducted by Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding (1988) and Fielding, Wilson, & Anderson (1986) found that the majority of primary aged children spent less than 1% of their free time reading.

Choosing a good book to read is like choosing an artwork for your house. It is subject to personal taste, artistic preference and personal experiences. It is the same when selecting a book to read for enjoyment. When encouraging students to read and enjoy literature. Within a formal framework, an element of choice can give a feeling of control. Tim Frederick (p.2) says when offering choice to his students in a reading program "there was a new energy ... and students were tapping into the excitement we

so often see in little children". See appendix I, Zelman, Daniels & Hyde in Diffily (2001) suggests giving students more choice is recommended to help children learn best. (p.3)

Several elements are required for creating a successful reading program with choice.

1. Choose good literature. Students need stories they can relate to or understand. Very bright readers love complex stories. Recognize, however, that not all "good literature" can be engaging.
2. Access to useful tools for selection.
3. If working with a classroom teacher plan together. If the teacher likes it then the program will be supported.
4. Choose a program and books that will work for the target group, and then promote both.
5. Evaluate and offer ongoing support, encouragement and feedback.

The rewards can be extraordinary!

1. Choosing good literature

There are many ways to choose good literature for developing reading programs with choice. If the program is completely open and students are allowed to choose whatever they want, guidelines could be set in place to help students make good choice.

> "Children need a mixture, a balance between teacher chosen and self-selected materials (Zeleman, Daniels & Hyde, 1998 in Daniels, 2002 p. 20)
> They need their own tastes, curiosities, and enthusiasms in the world of books. In fact, choice is actually a matter of educational standards and rigor. Students must learn to take full responsibility for locating, selecting, and pursuing books, rather than always expecting teachers or other adults to choose for them. Since choice is an integral component of literate behaviors, if we don't require students to be constantly assigning reading to themselves, we have set our educational standards far too low and are nurturing dependency and helplessness. By providing structures and schedules to promote student-chosen reading experience at all levels, activities like Literature Circles, Reading Workshop and Sustained Silent Reading offer a way to redress our schools dangerous imbalance between assigned and independent reading. (Daniels, 2002 p. 20)

Students can be guided through a simple discussion about "what makes a good story" and given formal guidelines on looking for a good book/story. Peer recommendations work really well. Students could be given an opportunity to say why they liked a particular book or author, a list of favourites could be posted in the classroom or in the library, student could be encouraged to write book reviews for the school news with the view to encouraging others to read what they have enjoyed. Special interest groups can help in a particular genre or field such as the "Sci-Fi club".

About boys. Boys have different tastes to girls, although the research is conflicting as incomparable methods have been used. (Kohn, 2002). James Maloney

(2000), says "A good book for a boy is one he wants to read." Boys are generally not necessarily reluctant readers it is often the type and presentation that stymies them. Boys enjoy action ahead of emotion where doing is more important than feeling. Boys enjoy the action novel and will often follow a whole series. Recently Matthew Reilly's books are taking off with boys. "Boys love the ghoulish, the gross and the disgusting", (Maloney) they like to read about boys that match the image of themselves. Boys take longer to learn to read than girls; they read less than girls and are more apt to describe themselves as non-readers; and they are more inclined than girls to read informational and nonfiction texts (Jones 2005). Reading for pleasure or voluntary reading with the progression through school diminishes, with boys far less positive about reading than girls. (Kohn, 2000)

A word about graphic novels and boys. Wil Eisner (in Lee 2004), describes a graphic novel as sequential art, the arrangement of pictures or words or images to narrate a story or dramatise an idea. Brennar (in Lee) says "processing the images and the text of a graphic novel together create a unique kind of literacy, and should not be considered any less than traditional reading." Boys generally love graphic novels. Even the most resistant reader will actually 'have a go' at a graphic. Emanuel School library has a graphic novel display in proximity to the entrance of the library. It is surprising the number of boys who voluntarily take one home to read. Public libraries are now collection graphic novels in a bid to get their young adult readers back.

*About girls.*The research on girls' preferences is inconclusive. Girls generally like books which investigate relationships, as they get older they are very interested in the boy-girl relationship. They enjoy diaries. They will read most genre provided there is a strong female character, (Roemy in Halstead 2000). Hawkins (1983 in Halstead, 2002) found that senior primary (elementary) school girl student's preferred biography, fairy tales and animal stories while boys preferred science and science fiction. Roemy (2000 in Halstead) found that high school girls enjoy historical, romance, mystery/horror and science fiction; the most important element was a strong female character. Girls like to live vicariously through other lives in literature and will seek out life experiences through stories. 'In the work of Rosenblatt (1983 in Carico, 2001).) on reader response theory is the notion that literature study includes a process of integrating the voices. She spoke of literature as a "potent force" (p. 276) in students' lives, suggesting that it is possible to learn about oneself, about others, and about life through literature."

About the gifted. Gifted children sometimes read, earlier, better and more than most children. They enjoy the same types of books as their peers, they read a great variety of books and may be more adventurous in exploring different types of books. Gifted children can read 3 to 4 times more books than most children and can continue to read avidly well after that time when reading interests taper off. Classic literature, particularly fantasy can offer the bright child "many layers of meaning within an exciting and often chilling stories" such as Harry Potter. (Rogers, K 2002 p.373), they can be taken on to read the works of Mark Twain, Charles Dickens and Homer.

"As they grow older, their interests will become so individual that general statements no longer apply. Anyone hoping to guide and influence their reading will have to know them as individuals, and know their background reading well." (Halstead p. 85)

About reluctant readers. Students can be given the very best guidance for choosing good literature, with assistance from competent library staff, teachers and enthusiastic peer recommendations. Some, however, can be resistant to every overture and encouragement possible. These students are best left to find their own place and to be encouraged when they make "good' choices. There is a lot of information available about the reluctant reader.

2. *Selection Tools.*

There are many tools available to the school librarians. In most countries there is a children's book group or association which support quality children's literature in various ways, including book awards, journals and professional development.

Professional Associations.

Australia. In Australia we have the Children's Book Council of Australia **(CBC)** http://www.cbc.org.au

The CBC aims to foster children's enjoyment of books through:
- Managing the Children's Book of the Year Awards.
- Providing information on and encouragement to authors and illustrators. Organizing exhibitions and activities during Children's Book Week.
- Supporting children's library services. Promoting high standards in book reviewing.

The CBC produces *Reading Time* which reviews all books for children and young people published in Australia, as well as overseas books of quality, particularly New Zealand titles. It publishes information relating to the CBCA Awards and other children's and young people's literature awards, interviews with authors and illustrators, and critical articles on children's literature. The CBC produces a yearly publication of *Notable Books* for the year.

USA. The Association for Library Service to Children ALSC develops and supports the profession of children's librarianship by enabling and encouraging its practitioners to provide the best library service to the nation's children.

UK. Founded in 1926, Booktrust (formerly the National Book League) is an independent educational charity working to bring books and people together, Booktrust provides information via two websites, www.booktrust.org.uk and http://www.booktrusted.co.uk/booktrust/ . The organisation administers book prizes including the Nestle Children's Book Prize and the Early Years Awards, as well as a number of projects including the national 'books for babies' scheme Bookstart and the Children's Laureate award.

The National Book Committee exists to bring together, and collectively to represent, all those concerned with the place of books in society; readers, authors,

publishers (books and journals), booksellers (new and antiquarian), literary agents and libraries.

Ireland. Children's Books Ireland is the national children's book organization of Ireland. The aim of CBI is to promote quality children's books and reading throughout the country http://www.childrensbooksireland.com/

Wales. Welsh Books Council's Children's Books Department. http://www.cllc.org.uk/home.html The Welsh Books Council is a national body, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, which provides a focus for the publishing industry in Wales. It provides a number of specialist services (in the fields of editing, design, marketing and distribution) with a view to improving standards of book production and publication in both Welsh and English.

Children's Book Awards. Children's Book Awards are also another way of identifying literature which should be engaging ands satisfying. The Database of award winning children's literatures compiled and indexed by Lisa R. Bartle, reference librarian at California State University, San Bernardino is an excellent resource, http://www.dawcl.com.Unfortunately it appears to feature mainly English language texts.

Miscellaneous. **Journals of professional associations**. Most countries have professional T/L associations; they may produce journals which include annotated bibliographies of books for children.

TL toolkit: great reading. It is part of T/L: The journal of School Library Professionals based in Blue Ridge Summit, PA. The information in the bestseller section is supplied by www.amazon.com . Every issue of T/L includes subject based book lists. http://www.teacherlibrarian.com/tltoolkit/reading.html

Magpies: "The Source" by Kerrie White and Rayma Turton. A guide by subject to children's fiction, poetry and short stories from around the world, with an emphasis on Australian books. This data base is by subscription and is a very useful tool for selecting good quality books. In addition to bibliographical information *The Source* provides brief biographical details on authors including links to their websites, as well as lists of awards and themes in the book. http://www.magpies.net.au/

Specialist Awards. There are specialist awards, which are included in Lisa Bartle's database *some* are:

- **Sydney Taylor Award.** The authors of the most distinguished contributions to Jewish children's literature published in the preceding year.
- **Coretta Scott King Award.** Recipients are authors and illustrators of African descent whose distinguished books promote an understanding and appreciation of the "American Dream" for books published in the preceding year.
- **AIP American Institute of Physics Science Writing Award – Children.** Awarded to: Articles, booklets, or books on physics and astronomy intended for children preschool to fifteen years of age published in the preceding year

3. Working with classroom teachers

Collaborative consultation is an interactive process that enables people of diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems (Idol, Paoliucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, in Hurren, 1993). Building a collaborative partnership involved a "climate of trust and mutual respect" (Hudson & Glomb, in Muronaga & Harada, 1999). When teachers request assistance with reading programs this is the T/L's opportunity to assist in a very real way. "planning and teaching with the T/L… is an extension of the planning and teaching with fellow teachers… the majority of teachers welcome the close involvement of teacher librarians in their class activities as long as the involvement is clearly understood and can be depended upon" (Cooper, 1992). The classroom teacher brings a personal knowledge of his/her students as well as knowledge of the curriculum; the T/L brings a vast knowledge of literature, its age and content appropriateness. A sprit of teamwork is critical to the success o the program (Schnorr & Davern 2005). There is a plethora of literature on the external structures of organizing planning sessions.

As the teacher and the T/L work through the strategies and content for developing a successful reading program they get to know each others strengths and weaknesses and can come to respect each other contributions. The T/L at all times must be aware that the work is being planned for this specific teacher in this specific instance; the program is being tailored to suit this class and these children. There appears to be little research available on the response of the teacher to the collaborative project or indeed working cooperatively to create a reading for pleasure type program. In my experience it has been a very positive experience, both teacher, T/L and students gain much from the experience. It is important for the teacher and T/L to evaluate the success of the program and make any adjustments or changes for next time. If the teacher asks you collaborate on the same project or another one, or refers other staff members, you can be sure that the collaborative experience was a success. See also point 5 Evaluation.

4. *Choosing an appropriate program*

a) Open choice programs. There are a variety of open choice programs which gives students scope for personal choice. Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Krashen, (1989, 1993, 1995a 1995b) in Cullinan, conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of forty-one studies on in-school free reading, sustained silent reading, and self-selected reading programs. In thirty-eight of forty-one studies, students who engaged in free reading did as well or better on standardized tests of reading comprehension than students who were given direct instruction in reading. The purpose of this paper is to look at encouraging life long readers, but this is an interesting statistic. This research would be useful in making a case to executives and classroom teachers for having such a program in place.

Both D.E.A.R. and S.S.R. programs work well if the whole school or part of a school participate simultaneously. It works very successfully when the classroom teacher participates.

Suggested reading lists for various grades or groups. These reading lists can be tailored to suit the needs of the class or aligned with particular topics.

For example:

Science: Year 6 may be studying space, if so science fiction is the most obvious type for this topic. You may want to include journal articles on space related topics.

English: The year 8 English teachers wants students to "read widely" you can create a wide reading list incorporating a wide variety of titles aimed at the reading ability and interest of the group.

History: Aligning historical fiction with a topic being studied in class can bring new life in to a subject. It is important with this genre to choose carefully, as some historical fiction particularly for children can be dry and boring. The writer must see the story as paramount, and with primary (elementary) school and middle school students it's best if the protagonist approximates the readers age. "Writers bring stories to life by adding little details, and colourful trivia can often make the difference between a dull record of the eighteenth century, or something vibrant and alive. (Farrer, 2005 p. 5).

b) Programs with some choice. It is often appropriate to design a reading program which has restrictions, such as group discussions like literature circles, or specific reading lists from which the student must choose. It has the advantage of allowing teaching staff some control over the literature students are reading. It still maintains that element of choice and sometimes students are grateful for that restriction when they have difficulty deciding for themselves.

Literature Circles. Literature circles are one very important way to help students select reading materials that conform more to their personal interests, while allowing teachers to be more directive than we can during independent reading, or Silent Sustained Reading. (Frederick)

Harvey Daniels (2002, p.18) gives a very clear 11 point definition of literature circles

Some of these may be omitted when students are just beginning the program.
1. Students choose their own reading material
2. Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice
3. Different groups read different books
4. Groups meet on a regular; predictable schedule to discuss their reading
5. Students use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion
6. Discussion topics come from the students
7. Group meetings aim to open, natural conversations about the books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome
8. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor
9. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation
10. A spirit of playfulness pervades the room
11. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around reading choices.

The genre list. Students can be given "suggested reading lists" organized by genre. These can work really well if they are posted on the internet or the school intranet. It really is up to the individual teacher or librarian how they categorize the lists. I use:

Science fiction
Fantasy
Horror or scary books
Historical
Realistic

Funny
Australiana
Mystery and adventure
Sport
Animal stories
Biographies
Non-fiction
Graphic novels

I generally only use 6 of these at a time, some are chosen for specific purposes. I usually include non-fiction and graphic novels if I have reluctant male readers. I allow students when appropriate to negotiate what they can read, as long as it follows the spirit of the reading program. Many titles may fall into multiple genre headings, for example "The slightly true story of Cedar B. Hartley: who planned to live an unusual life", could be realistic and funny.

Non-fiction is included because some students simply do not like to read books that are not "real". 'Students' reading ability and desire to read are affected by the structure of the texts they read. If texts are well organized, have a logical flow, and include relevant information, they are inviting and reader friendly." (Cullinan)

Electronic Reading Systems. If the criteria for developing wide reading programs is to develop a life long love of reading/literature then the electronic system format is perhaps not the best choice. The human element in the selection is missing as books are categorized according to grammar and sentence structure. There is a difference between reading acuity and the desire to read. The despite to read develops when the student knows there is something rich and meaningful in the texts he/she engages in. 'Children who become lifelong readers not only have access to books but make their own choices about what to read." (Carter, 2005, p.1). Children need to think and read about things they want to think and read about. Independent readers cannot develop if they have a choice restricted by the length and grammatical complexity rather than the value and richness in the telling of the story. Students will read way above their "level" if they are engaged.

Electronic reading systems have their place in the teaching of reading and particularly with the struggling reader. It is not a successful system for encouraging the lifelong reader, it is not created to make reading a joyful, meaningful experience.

Special Interest groups and clubs. There is in every school a small group of genre fans. The science fiction, fantasy, mystery adventure and graphic novel readers. These students may be interested in forming a club to discuss books, up and coming publications and to recommend books for the school library. These students can be a very important part of the collection development policy of the school library. They know what's out there and what other students like. They could also create a magazine or write articles for the school newspaper. Students can feel that they are making a real life contribution to encouraging the love of reading and sharing their particular passion.

Going Solo. There is always out there the solo reader who is reading in a particular genre or following a particular passion. Valuable time can be spent talking to these individuals about what they are reading or how they enjoyed a particular author.

There is opportunity to make suggestions to expand that interest. Never under estimate the power of the one-on- one talk to an individual in helping them along the road to a life long love of reading. Ask most authors how they got started or what was it that kept their interest in reading going, there is usually a librarian involved in their own story.

5. Evaluation

Each program format will have its own form of evaluation which can be assessed during and at the end of the specific program. If the long term outcome is to develop a life long love of reading/literature, then the outcome cannot be evaluated because the student is, hopefully, at the beginning of a long life. The general overall short term goal of the program(s) is to encourage a love of reading for pleasure and to have students self motivated about reading. Possibly the best evaluation of whether goals have been reached is through observation. Is there a buzz happening about reading? Are students more enthusiastic about reading, do they talk to their friends about what they are reading, is the school library being used more?

What about those who the reading program doesn't touch? There will always be those in a group of students who for a variety of reasons both seen and unseen who will not become enthusiastic about reading. Sometimes the best way to overcome the obstacle(s) is to chat with the student one-on-one. In my experience as a T/L and a classroom teacher some of my best break throughs have been through showing a personal interest in the student involved. The solution may be simple, the reading choices being offered do not suit, a simple conversation and negotiation of expectations can help. When planting the seeds for *'the development of a life long love of reading/literature"* the teacher may not see the fruits; germination may occur along the way when the student is outside the contact of the influencing teacher. I often wonder about all those adults reading an enormous variety of literature traveling by train every morning to work. When did they develop their love of reading, what influenced them and how did they get started? Someone, somewhere, sometime must have encouraged or enthused about reading in that person's life.

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Appendix I

"What's the best book you've read this year?" Here are the top fifteen answers:
From Teen Read Week Survey Smart girl. (2001).

1. The Giver
2. The Outsiders
3. Holes
4. Left Behind
5. Chicken Soup for the Soul books
6. Sloppy Firsts
7. The Odyssey
8. A Child Called It
9. The Hobbit
10. Redwall series
11. Where the Red Fern Grows
12. The Tolkien trilogy
13. Watsons go to Birmingham
14. The Bible
15. Enders Game