

Features of Elementary School Library Poetry Collections: A Collection Analysis Study

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An analysis of the poetry holdings of 72 elementary school libraries in one American public school district addressed the research question: What are some distinguishing features of elementary school library poetry collections? The study data was collected using the reporting feature of the district's online library catalog software. Nearly 90% of the poetry collections in the study sample were less than half the recommended size. Most collections were near the 14-year age limit for a state standards compliant school library collection, and poetry circulation totaled less than one percent of the average library's circulation. It is improbable that these small and aged collections could support modern poetry pedagogy which requires large, current collections of poetry that can be used to read aloud, enhance curriculum, and support literacy instruction. These findings suggest the need for additional research using catalog systems to analyze collection size and circulation as a part of collection development and management.

Celebrating Poetry through the Curriculum

Celebrating the joy and accessibility of poetry by reading it aloud and often during the school day can unlock a lifelong love of the genre in the wariest young student. Ask the fourth grade teacher who ends each spring term at my Texas elementary school with a poetry festival for her students (ages 9-10). It is a day the children anticipate with eagerness, so uninhibited is their enthusiasm for the poems they will read aloud. Plainly, this teacher's love for the goofy rhyme and silly metaphor of the day is contagious and irresistible.

Choosing their poems for the festival is a task the students assume with gravitas, some obsessively pouring over every volume of poetry in the school library. But for the first years of the festival, the library's poetry collection could not stand up to the challenge. Children discovered that most of the poetry books in the library were too old, so they selected poems from teachers' more recent anthologies, collections they had at home, and even from their basal readers.

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The initial condition of the poetry section likely indicated its underuse in the curriculum. Poetry teacher Gregory Denman (1988) called this neglect the “curricular side step” of poetry pedagogy (p. 57). But it prompts the question—are elementary school library poetry collections languishing? Concerned scholars and school librarians have raised red flags about neglect of poetry sections in school libraries since the mid-1980s, warning that indifference toward maintaining a current poetry collection means disregard of an essential and enjoyable part of the curriculum with substantial, proven potential to enhance children’s literacy (Faver, 2008; Harms & Lettow, 1987; Sekeres & Gregg, 2007; Vardell, 2006).

Modern poetry pedagogy makes unnecessary the dry analysis that characterized poetry pedagogy in classrooms of the past. For example, poet and teacher Iris Tiedt (2002) suggests that children be introduced to poetry in ways that foster their natural love of repetition, rhyme, and play and that, in turn, prompt phonemic awareness. Calkins (2003) advocates exploring poetry skills that transfer easily to students’ writing such as condensing ideas into few words and using figurative language. Stanley (2004) points out that teaching children’s poetry covers each of the skills required for literacy acquisition: phonemic awareness; phonics; fluency; vocabulary; and comprehension. Kane and Rule (2004) affirm this notion and add that teaching poetry can help to build students’ academic skills when poetry is connected to lesson content. The work of Kane and Rule frames the general orientation of poetry pedagogy toward reinforcing and enhancing curriculum by reading poetry aloud and including it as a natural, daily part of the classroom routine.

Other scholars have noted that teaching poetry with technology can attract students to poetry, especially when the poet combines video or sound with the words of a poem (see, e.g., Labbo, 2004; Sedgwick, 2000). Also, because typically children in today’s classrooms identify with or represent many cultures, sharing and promoting multicultural children’s poetry can provide an authentic means of access to language, especially a new language. Vardell, Hadaway, and Young (2002) encourage librarians to select multicultural children’s poetry, especially in schools with large immigrant populations, adding that concrete children’s poetry can provide visual clues to meaning and rhyming poetry can aid in prediction for readers of new languages. Tiedt (2002) has noted the particular strength of multicultural children’s poetry in enhancing children’s understandings of the world inside and outside the classroom.

Poetry read aloud in the classroom is a facilitator of literacy. Vardell (2006b) explains modern poetry pedagogy as a function of the way children understand it when they listen to it, noting that the poem read aloud confirms the child’s interest in the sound and the order of the words (as cited in Enochs, 2010, p. 34). Heard and Laminack (2008a; 2008b) contend that poetry can and should be included in the routines of the primary grade classroom, used to make transitions between parts of the school day and to clarify content at the close of the school day.

Modern poetry pedagogy cannot thrive in a school where access to poetry resources is limited or where poetry resources are outdated and neglected. A basic knowledge of how poetry is used in today’s classroom establishes the foundation for inquiry about the condition, nature, and number of poetry resources available from the school library. The inquiry reported in this article is consistent with the need for school librarians to layer strong familiarity with

current curricula and trends in pedagogy over a keen and specific knowledge of the collection in order to serve the needs of teachers and students.

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this study was to provide statistical information on several quantifiable features of elementary school library poetry collections in one large public school district in the state of Texas and to determine if those collections met the quantitative standards set by the state for school library collections. The significance of the research is three-fold:

(1) Other research has not provided statistical analysis of the poetry collections in the elementary libraries of an entire American public school district. This study provided data for describing and correlating the variables of age, size, and circulation of poetry in a group of 72 elementary school libraries over a single school year, which in turn offered a glimpse into trends in circulation and condition of the collections. Analysis of the data helped to characterize the poetry section in each library.

(2) Descriptive and inferential statistics from this study can allow school districts to compare their own elementary library poetry collections with those in the sample.

(3) This research offers procedures, models, and routes of inquiry for school librarians seeking to develop their schools' poetry collections according to the needs of their individual school communities. The results generated from studies like this one offer an overall picture of use, age, and size of the collection that complements the results from earlier research using interviews and surveys (Pierce, 2003).

For a librarian to evaluate the ability of a poetry collection to fill the requirements of the curriculum and the reading needs of students and teachers, certain facts about the collection can clarify its deficiencies and its strengths. Accordingly, this study attempted to answer the research question: What are some distinguishing features of elementary school library poetry collections in a large school district?

Methodology of the Study

The study was a cross-sectional study, involving the collection of data at one point in time from a particular subgroup of school libraries. The study hypotheses address variables that describe the condition of the poetry collections at the time of data collection, along with associations that were likely between variables:

H₁. These poetry collections are smaller than the size recommended by experts in the field of collection development. Authorities in the field of collection development for school libraries suggest that the collection should comprise five percent poetry (Morris, 2004).

H₂. The average age of poetry collections exceeds state standards for an acceptable elementary school collection. According to the state standards in Texas, the average age of an acceptable school library collection should be less than fifteen years (Texas State Library, 2004).

H₃. Older poetry collections circulate less than newer collections. This hypothesis predicts a relationship between the age of the poetry collection and circulation of the poetry collection.

H₄. Larger poetry collections circulate more than smaller collections. This hypothesis predicts a relationship between the size of the poetry collection and circulation of the poetry collection.

H₅. Age and size of the poetry collection predict circulation of the poetry in an elementary school library. This hypothesis anticipates the potential of the data to assess the impact of age and size of the poetry collection on poetry circulation.

This study did not address causation, time order, or intervening or lurking variables. Since there was no experiment or treatment, the force of the results is in the description of the distribution of statistics about one school district's poetry collections, taken individually and taken together. The chief concern of this study was to characterize poetry collections in a group of elementary school libraries over a given school year, without consideration for the state of the collections in previous or subsequent school years.

Location and Context of the Study

The Fort Worth (Texas) Independent School District (FWISD) Department of Library Media Services gave permission to examine the bibliographic records for the poetry collection in each of its elementary school libraries for the 2007-2008 school year, with the provision that no individual school be identified in the published results. The FWISD uses Follett's Destiny online catalog in the district's 124 libraries. Library statistics collected from the Destiny catalogs of 72 elementary schools in the FWISD provided the data for this study.

This study utilized nonprobability, purposive sampling in order to ensure complete representation of the variables to be studied and the largest sample possible. The FWISD has nearly 80,000 students; during the 2007-2008 school year, the district had 79 elementary schools serving students 4-11 years of age. Libraries that held to different school calendars or that did not serve students in grade levels pre-kindergarten through grade five were eliminated from the sampling frame.

Data Collection and Results

To facilitate data collection, the FWISD Department of Library Media Services provided administrator access to the online catalog. Four reports from the catalogs of 72 libraries disclosed six variables for analysis in this research: age of the collection, age of the poetry collection, size of the collection, size of the poetry collection, circulation of the collection, and circulation of the poetry collection. For the seventh variable, percentage of the collection comprising poetry, the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used to calculate the number of items in the poetry collection as a percentage of each library's total collection.

The first report, *Collection Statistics Summary*, provided the age and size of the collection for each library. Figure 1 shows an example of this report for the collection of one elementary library. Follett's Destiny catalog software calculates age of the collection from the publication date taken from the MARC record for each title. If the publication year is cataloged as a range of years, the Destiny program uses the first year shown.

The same report generated through additional filters allows the administrator to drill down within a given Dewey Decimal System classification in order to find the age and size of a

given segment of the collection. For this study, the detailed report included the age and size of the poetry collection in each library.

School A					
Collection Age Report					
Call numbers grouped by Dewey.					
Range	Age		Circulations		Collection Copy Count
	Copies w/ Dates	Average Age	This Year	Total	
000 - 099	191 [100.00%]	1998 [10 yrs.]	1 [00.02%]	17 [00.02%]	191 [01.62%]
100 - 199	43 [97.73%]	1994 [14 yrs.]	3 [00.06%]	48 [00.06%]	44 [00.37%]
200 - 299	28 [100.00%]	1993 [15 yrs.]	6 [00.11%]	52 [00.07%]	28 [00.24%]
300 - 399	883 [99.21%]	1993 [15 yrs.]	241 [04.58%]	2,700 [03.65%]	890 [07.56%]
400 - 499	90 [100.00%]	1992 [16 yrs.]	11 [00.21%]	204 [00.28%]	90 [00.76%]
500 - 599	1,938 [99.90%]	1997 [11 yrs.]	760 [14.46%]	13,479 [18.22%]	1,940 [16.47%]
600 - 699	581 [100.00%]	1995 [13 yrs.]	122 [02.32%]	2,764 [03.74%]	581 [04.93%]
700 - 799	323 [99.38%]	1994 [14 yrs.]	175 [03.33%]	1,861 [02.52%]	325 [02.76%]
800 - 899	247 [99.60%]	1993 [15 yrs.]	42 [00.80%]	589 [00.80%]	248 [02.11%]
900 - 999	842 [99.53%]	1994 [14 yrs.]	79 [01.50%]	1,076 [01.45%]	846 [07.18%]
AUD	4 [66.67%]	1988 [20 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	6 [00.05%]
AV	8 [50.00%]	2006 [2 yrs.]	9 [00.17%]	48 [00.06%]	16 [00.14%]
B	527 [100.00%]	1994 [14 yrs.]	62 [01.18%]	1,052 [01.42%]	527 [04.48%]
CL	31 [96.88%]	1982 [26 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	84 [00.11%]	32 [00.27%]
CONY	1 [100.00%]	2004 [4 yrs.]	1 [00.02%]	2 [00.00%]	1 [00.01%]
E	3,090 [99.97%]	1991 [17 yrs.]	2,085 [39.66%]	28,691 [38.78%]	3,091 [26.25%]
F	1,933 [100.00%]	1994 [14 yrs.]	1,022 [19.44%]	15,035 [20.32%]	1,933 [16.41%]
FIC	1 [100.00%]	1987 [21 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	4 [00.01%]	1 [00.01%]
KIT	2 [66.67%]	1988 [20 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	1 [00.00%]	3 [00.03%]
NP	1 [100.00%]	2003 [5 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	1 [00.01%]
PROF	5 [83.33%]	1995 [13 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	6 [00.05%]
REF	4 [100.00%]	1994 [14 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	5 [00.01%]	4 [00.03%]
SAG	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	1 [00.01%]
SP	849 [99.53%]	1996 [12 yrs.]	632 [12.02%]	6,125 [08.28%]	853 [07.24%]
TAK	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	1 [00.01%]
VT	116 [99.15%]	1990 [18 yrs.]	6 [00.11%]	98 [00.13%]	117 [00.99%]
No Call #	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]
Temporary	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	52 [00.07%]	0 [00.00%]
	11,738	1994 [14 yrs.]	5,257	73,987	11,776

Figure 1.
Follett Destiny Collection Statistics Summary for one elementary library,
showing age and size of the collection.

Figure 2 shows the report for the Dewey 800s, broken down by 1s in order to find the age and size of the school’s poetry collection (Dewey 811). In the last column, the catalog also presents the size of this library’s poetry collection as a percentage of the total collection.

School A Collection Age Report Call numbers grouped by Dewey.					
Range	Age		Circulations		Collection
	Copies w/ Dates	Average Age	This Year	Total	Copy Count
810	2 [100.00%]	1999 [10 yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	5 [00.01%]	2 [00.02%]
811	201 [100.00%]	1995 [14 yrs.]	127 [00.68%]	427 [00.49%]	201 [01.68%]
812	1 [100.00%]	2007 [2 yrs.]	3 [00.02%]	6 [00.01%]	1 [00.01%]
813	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]
814	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]
815	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]
816	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]
817	0 [00.00%]	- [- yrs.]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]	0 [00.00%]
818	28 [100.00%]	1993 [16 yrs.]	91 [00.48%]	272 [00.31%]	28 [00.23%]
819	1 [100.00%]	1999 [10 yrs.]	2 [00.01%]	17 [00.02%]	1 [00.01%]
	233	1995 [14 yrs.]	223	727	233

Figure 2. *Follett Destiny Collection Statistics Summary for one elementary school library’s Dewey 800s, showing age and size of the poetry collection.*

The catalog’s circulation snapshot entitled *Library Info* provides circulation statistics of the collection for a given time period. For this study, dates that the district’s libraries were open for circulation during the 2007-2008 school year defined the beginning and end of the study.

Library Statistics for the date range 9/4/2007 to 5/22/2008

	Total Circulations	Total Holds Placed
Total	29,117	11

Report generated on 11/3/2008 at 1:18 AM

Figure 3. *Follett Destiny Library Info report for one elementary library.*

The *Collection Statistics–Historical* report provided circulation statistics for a particular call number over a given time period. Figure 4 illustrates pages one and two of a sample *Collection Statistics–Historical* report for the poetry collection in one elementary library. This Follett Destiny report includes circulations for currently held copies and for copies that

circulated during the time frame but have since been deleted from the collection. The program includes all checkouts, renewals, in-library use, and interlibrary circulation in calculating circulation totals.

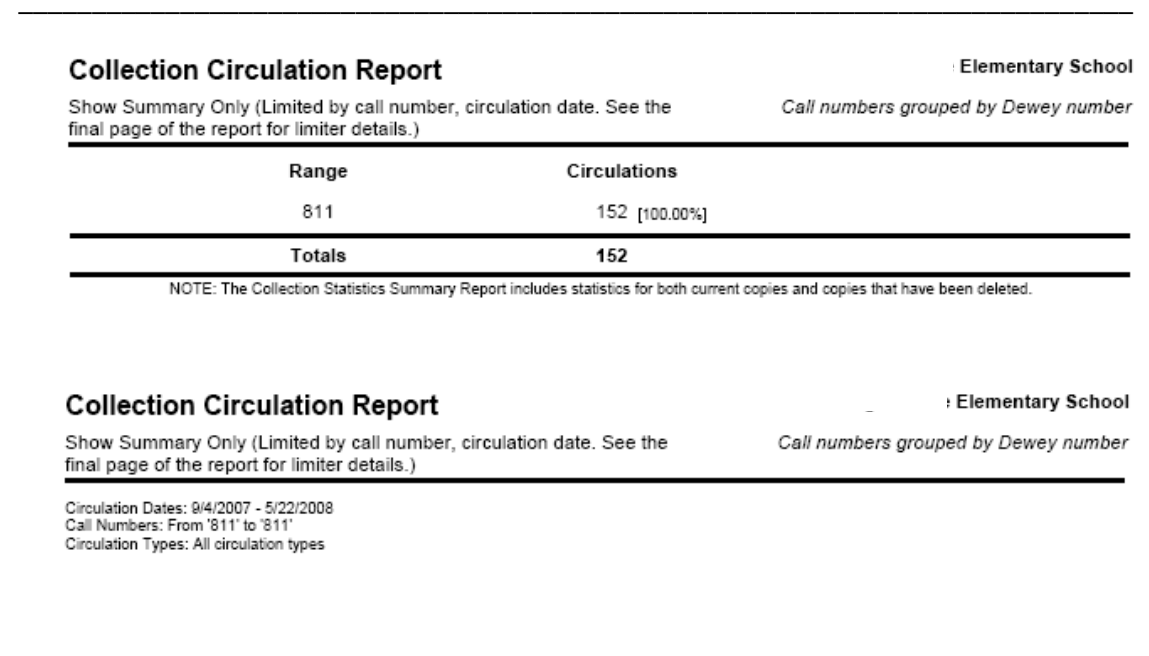


Figure 4.
 Follett Destiny Collection Circulation Report, pages 1 and 2.

Collecting existing data for each variable from all of the qualifying libraries provided the largest sample possible. In addition, generating reports solely from the administrator client for the catalog eliminated the chance of non-response or librarian error had data been requested in survey form from individual school librarians. However, an online catalog can account for in-library use only to the extent that a librarian or patron is vigilant in reporting it. For example, if a class visits the library and seven students use a poetry book and shelve it, its use is not recorded; even if the book is collected and scanned into the system, the catalog records only one use. Another limitation of the study involves how poetry is classified in the elementary school library. Some librarians place verse novels in the fiction section, book-length poems with large illustrations in a picture book section, and works containing poetry by older poets in an anthology section—problems not accounted for in this research design. Detailed analysis of the bibliographic records of the libraries in the sample would likely reveal that the poetry collections are larger than holdings in the Dewey 811 section of the library would indicate.

Another potential limitation of the study was incorrect calculations of collection age because of errors in publication dates which commonly occur in a library’s transition to an automated catalog. Spot checks of the publication dates of a group of poetry books classified in the Dewey 811 section were conducted to test the accuracy of publication dates. A visit to each school library was not feasible because the campuses were far apart and, more importantly,

recalling the books from students and teachers in order to check publication dates could have interfered with instruction.

Most school library poetry collections have many titles by 2006 Children's Poet Laureate Jack Prelutsky (Vardell, 2006a), so for three randomly selected libraries, the WorldCat publication date for each Prelutsky title in the school's collection was compared to the date entered in the school library bibliographic record. For library 1, with 24 Prelutsky titles in its collection, all publication dates were correct. Library 2 held 12 Prelutsky titles, and all were correct. Library 3 had 11 titles by Prelutsky, and one had a mistake in the publication date (a date of 1996 that should have been 1993). With 98% of the books in the spot check showing correct publication dates, data collection proceeded as planned.

As shown in Table 1, the library collections in the sample contained an average of 11,713 items, and the poetry collections averaged 197 items. The average age of the collection was 14 years, while the average age of the poetry collection was slightly less than 14 years--the maximum age for a Texas state standards compliant school library collection. For the 2007-08 school year, the average circulation of the total collection was 26,931 items, and circulation of the poetry collection averaged 170 items.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations of continuous variables

	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Age of collection	72	14.17	1.58	10.00	19.00
Age of poetry collection	72	13.72	1.68	10.00	17.00
Size of collection	72	11715.74	2890.14	6635.00	19199.00
Size of poetry collection	72	197.40	51.06	92.00	347.00
Circulation of collection	72	26931.49	15797.17	5569.00	75298.00
Circulation of poetry collection	72	170.85	102.46	15.00	480.00
Percentage of collection comprising poetry	72	1.71	0.30	1.13	2.60

Table 2 shows that poetry collections in all libraries accounted for less than 3% of the total collections, despite recommendations that poetry comprise 5% of the school library holdings (Kerby, 2006; Morris, 2004). Table 3 shows that about 85% of the library collections were between 13 and 15 years old; about 60% of the total library collections and the poetry

collections were less than 15 years old, compliant with the Texas standard for adequate collection age.

Table 2
Frequencies and percentages for percentage of collection comprising poetry

	Frequency	Percentage
Poetry items in collection		
Less than 1.25%	5	6.9
1.25% to 1.49%	14	19.4
1.50% to 1.74%	20	27.8
1.75% to 1.99%	22	30.6
2.00% to 2.24%	9	12.5
2.25% to 2.49%	1	1.4
2.50% to 2.74%	1	1.4

Table 3
Frequencies and percentages for age of the collection and age of the poetry collection

	Frequency	Percentage
Age of total collection		
10 years	1	1.4
11 years	4	5.6
12 years	2	2.8
13 years	16	22.2
14 years	21	29.2
15 years	13	18.1
16 years	12	16.7
17 years	2	2.8
19 years	1	1.4
Age of poetry collection		
10 years	4	5.6
11 years	4	5.6
12 years	6	8.3
13 years	15	20.8
14 years	21	29.2
15 years	12	16.7
16 years	7	9.7
17 years	3	4.2

About three-fourths of the library collections had overall total circulation ranging from 10,000 to 39,999 items, while about three-fourths of libraries circulated 50 to 249 items from their poetry collections. Table 4 shows that the largest proportion of libraries had poetry circulation of 100-149 items:

Table 4
Frequencies and percentages for circulation of the collection and circulation of the poetry collection

	Frequency	Percentage
Circulation of total collection		
fewer than 10,000	6	8.3
10,000 to 19,999	20	27.8
20,000 to 29,999	22	30.6
30,000 to 39,999	12	16.7
40,000 to 49,999	4	5.6
50,000 to 59,999	4	5.6
60,000 to 69,999	2	2.8
70,000 to 79,999	2	2.8
Circulation of poetry collection		
fewer than 50	5	6.9
50 to 99	12	16.7
100 to 149	19	26.4
150 to 199	14	19.4
200 to 249	9	12.5
250 to 299	6	8.3
300 to 349	2	2.8
350 to 399	1	1.4
400 to 449	2	2.8
450 to 499	2	2.8

Pearson's product moment correlations are used to examine relationships between continuous variables. Correlation coefficients can range between -1.00 and +1.00. A positive correlation indicates that increases in one variable are associated with increases in the other variable, while a negative correlation indicates that decreases in one variable are associated with increases in the other variable. Correlation coefficients close to 0 indicate a weak relationship or a lack of a relationship between variables.

Table 5 displays Pearson's correlation coefficients for the relationships among the variables for the larger collections and poetry collections in the sample. Predictably, as the age of the larger collection increased, so did the age of the poetry collection, and increases in the age of the larger collection and of the poetry collection were associated with decreases in poetry circulation. Increases in the size and circulation of the collection were associated with increases in the size and circulation of the poetry collection. Interestingly, and unfortunately, an increase in the size of the collection was also associated with a decrease in the percentage of the collection comprising poetry.

Table 5
Pearson's product moment correlations of continuous variables

	Age of Collection	Age of poetry collection	Size of collection	Size of poetry collection	Circulation of collection	Circulation of poetry collection
Age of collection	--					
Age of poetry collection	.785**	--				
Size of collection	-.007	.023	--			
Size of poetry collection	.083	.064	.762**	--		
Circulation of collection	-.333**	-.237**	.485**	.276*	--	
Circulation of poetry collection	-.340**	-.418**	.041	.162	.379**	--
Percentage of collection comprising poetry	.142	.095	-.294*	.373**	-.243*	.178

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

This study used a multiple regression analysis to predict the circulation of the poetry collection based on the age and size of the poetry collection. A positive beta coefficient for any variable means it is associated with an increase in the dependent variable; a negative beta coefficient for that predictor indicates it is associated with a decrease (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The results indicated that the age of the poetry collection was a significant predictor of poetry circulation but the size of the poetry collection was not. The age of the poetry collection was also associated with a decrease in the circulation of poetry (see Table 6).

Table 6
Regression predicting circulation of the poetry collection
from age and size of the poetry collection

	Unstandardized coefficients		<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>			
Age of poetry collection	-26.25	6.54	-0.43	-4.02	.000
Size of poetry collection	0.38	0.22	0.19	1.76	.082

Recommendations for the ideal size of the poetry collection in an elementary school library—the Dewey 811s—are basically inextricable from recommendations for the size of the entire Dewey 800s section. Morris suggests five percent of a school library collection should comprise titles in the 800s (2004, p. 339), a figure adopted by Kerby (2006, p. 50). The number is widely accepted in the profession to be the recommendation for the size of the elementary school poetry collection *de facto* for two reasons. Many of the non-poetry books that in other libraries might be classified as literature in the 800s are classified as fiction in elementary school libraries, and cataloging for school libraries can be subject to pronounced variability in choice of Dewey classification for poetry.

The data support the contention that the poetry collections in this study are smaller than recommended. The average size of the collection in this study was 11,713 items. The average poetry collection contained 197 items; the average percentage of the collection comprising poetry was only one-third the recommended size for the poetry collection. In fact, 90% of the poetry collections accounted for 2.24 % or less of their respective overall collections. This is a most troubling statistic, indicating that almost all of the libraries in the study held poetry collections that were less than one-half the size recommended by Morris (2004) and Kerby (2006). To put the problem in perspective—in a library with a collection of 11,713 items, the poetry collection should number 586 items if the percentage of the collection comprising poetry were the 5% recommended by Morris and Kerby.

The school library standards for Texas specify that the overall average age of the collection should be less than 15 years in order to meet the criteria for a rating of *acceptable* (Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 2004). The Texas standards suggest no specific age for the poetry collection or for any other smaller segment of the library collection.

The results of this study offer a picture of aging general collections, averaging 14 years old at the time of data collection. With the average age of the poetry collections at a little less than 14 years, the data certainly do not support the hypothesis that these poetry collections would be older than fifteen years, which is the standard for an acceptable library collection. But the results indicate that for the school year following the year of data collection (2008-09), an additional 29% of these collections were approaching fifteen years old and soon would be older

than the state standard. Unless librarians give the poetry collection priority, a sustainable age for the collection in these libraries will be difficult not only to establish, but to maintain, since such a large proportion is aging rapidly.

The average collection in this study had circulation totaling 26,931 over the 2007-2008 school year. The poetry collections in this sample had 170 circulations during the same period, which means that poetry circulations accounted for just 0.63 % of total circulation in the average library. The average collection in these libraries comprised 1.71 % poetry.

Discussion of the Results

Bertland (1991) and Greiner and Cooper (2007) suggest that size of a given segment of a library's collection should have a roughly equal association with its circulation. In a public library serving patrons of all ages, a segment of the collection taking up a bigger percentage of the entire collection than its use takes up of total circulation may need to be weeded, or the library may be purchasing items that patrons do not want to check out (Greiner & Cooper, 2007). Clearly, for the school libraries in this study, the average poetry collection was substantially larger than its use, as indicated by circulation records.

However, for school libraries, a discrepancy in size and use may indicate the need for more than a change in purchasing habits, since the size of the collection primarily is dictated by the curriculum and by experts in school library collection development (Kerby, 2006; Morris, 2004). Instead, the sharp discrepancy found in this study between size and use highlights the very low circulation of the poetry collection over the 2007-2008 school year. The low circulation suggests the need to promote the poetry collection to students and teachers, with the goal being congruence between use and size.

Other studies have confirmed the relationship between age of the collection and circulation of the collection (Bertland, 1991; Ettelt, 1986). As expected, in this study, the circulation of the poetry collection decreased with the age of the poetry collections, supporting the hypothesis that older poetry collections circulate less than newer collections.

For the school libraries in this study, the relationship between the size of the poetry collection and the circulation of the poetry collection was not significant; that is, the larger poetry collections did *not* circulate at a higher rate than did the smaller poetry collections. This result signals that simply adding resources to the poetry collection to increase its size will not solve the problem of a collection that has little use. Instead, careful management of the poetry collection should include both lowering the average age of the section by discarding older materials and by acquiring newer materials to reflect current knowledge in the content areas. This would allow more integration of poetry resources with curriculum and would boost the visibility of the poetry collection and most likely increase its circulation.

For the school libraries in this study, the larger the size of the total collection, the smaller was the percentage of the collection devoted to poetry. This finding very likely indicates that when librarians are purchasing new resources, they are not purchasing poetry books in quantities sufficient to maintain the size of the poetry collection, much less build the poetry section to the goal of five percent of the collection.

This study used multiple linear regression to find out how much of the circulation of the poetry collection was due to the age and size of the collection—two quantitative variables over which the librarian has control. The intent also was to discover what proportion of circulation of the poetry collection might be due to factors other than the age and size of the collection. The analysis showed that 21% of the circulation of poetry was accounted for by the age and by the size of the poetry collection, and that age was a significant predictor of circulation while size of the poetry collection was *not* a significant predictor of circulation. About 80% of the circulation of the poetry collection was accounted for by variables *not* taken into account by this research.

Analysis of possible causes for low poetry circulation presents other questions for additional study. In particular, information about the patrons who borrow poetry titles might establish whether low circulation is due to the perception that only teachers, not students, are meant to borrow poetry titles from the school library. However, automated library systems often do not keep such records due to implications for patron privacy. Gathering such statistics would likely rely upon voluntary participation in survey research—the design of which can be problematic for elementary-aged student populations (Borgers, Hox, & Sikkel, 2004).

The findings of this research indicate that the poetry collections in the school libraries in this study are not adequate to support current methods in poetry instruction, both in terms of collection size and of collection age. With the average age of the poetry collection at 14 years, it is fairly certain that there are recent award-winning anthologies, themed collections, and multicultural poetry books missing from these collections.

A small, aged collection can still contain some gems . . . but I believe that the poetry collections and anthologies published after the early 1990s provide a better reflection of the varying interests, backgrounds, and everyday worlds of children today (Janet Wong, pers. comm., 2009).

As children's poet Janet Wong (2009) has noted, most multicultural poetry written especially for children has been a part of the resurgence in children's publishing over the past fifteen years, so collections that suffer from infrequent updating will not contain the titles that speak directly to students from many cultures. Librarians need to replace books of poetry about the content areas frequently, particularly in science and social studies, since poetry like Douglas Florian's *Dinothosaurus* (2009) and Carol Diggory Shields's *Science, Fresh Squeezed* (2003) are relevant to the curriculum only if their content is current. Poetry collections that support curriculum must keep pace with the world that inspires them.

Conclusion

The poetry collections in the school libraries in this study were too small to provide adequate support for current methods in poetry pedagogy. The low circulation of the poetry collections may indicate either a fundamental misunderstanding of the capabilities of poetry to enhance the curriculum or an unwillingness to use the poetry collection for those purposes. School librarians need to promote the poetry collection to teachers and students, bridging the gap between reluctance and enthusiasm for the genre. Modern poetry pedagogy demands that

children, teachers, and librarians have access to poetry that mirrors their social circumstances, that reflects accurate content, and that is a joy to read aloud. The best poetry collections contain plenty of titles by poets who write about the paths that children of all cultures walk daily.

This approach used in this study could be used by school librarians or district library directors in analyzing other classifications in school libraries that might be neglected. Use of this research design to build a model for detailed collection analysis in an individual school library or across a given school district in order to support requests for funding might be the most important other application of the research. Investigations like this study that go a step beyond familiarity with a mandated curriculum enable a school librarian to make more precise decisions in relation to developing and managing the school library collection.

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