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DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF READING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: WHAT TEACHER-LIBRARIANS CAN DO

BY

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To my students, who challenge me to find great books for them, and who make me smile when they come to tell me "That was a great book!"

You make it all worthwhile.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LITERACY

Strong literacy skills are vital to students' academic achievement. Students who are strong readers will be able to read and comprehend more quickly, and those who are able to read critically and analyze information effectively will be more successful. Our students are 21st century learners living in a digital age, but they still need the literacy skills to read text effectively, whether on paper or on a screen.

My Interest as a Teacher in Supporting Students' Reading

As a grade four classroom teacher for many years, I wanted my students to become readers by choice. By enthusiastically sharing with them a variety of genres, styles and topics, they soon came to understand that there were books out there they would enjoy. By modeling and sharing my passion for reading, it was hard for them not to want to be readers too, and soon most were hooked. Even though I knew I could motivate children to become excited about reading, I still worried about the students who really struggled with the skills of reading, and how I could help them to develop as readers. I wanted to learn more about the early stages of reading development, and how as a teacher I could better support and teach these students. I had watched the Reading Recovery teacher in my school work with struggling young readers and was intrigued by this research-based program. Clay (2005) developed Reading Recovery, a research-based, intensive one-on-one intervention program used effectively around the world to support and teach struggling six-year-old children, helping them to catch up to their classmates in reading and writing. I observed some lessons and, after ten years as a classroom teacher, I decided to apply for the position of Reading Recovery teacher in my school division. Through the training I received as a beginning Reading Recovery teacher, I learned about

the critical skills and understandings students must have to become competent readers. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience, but after three years of working one-on-one with young children, I found I was missing the interactions with classes and larger groups of students.

While still working half time as a Reading Recovery teacher, I was invited by my school administrator to add the position of a part-time teacher-librarian to my teaching load. She knew I was passionate about reading and successful at building excitement about reading with students, and thought I would be a good fit for our school. I was thrilled with this idea, and started the next fall as an enthusiastic teacher-librarian with very little knowledge of how to run a school library. Our Human Resources department informed me that I was expected to take courses in teacher-librarianship, so I applied and was accepted into the Master of Education program at the University of Alberta, through the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning program. I found my courses to be very pertinent and soon came to more fully understand the role of the teacher-librarian in the school. Through my different studies, I researched topics such as "collection development", "boys and reading", "leveled books in the library" and "children's literature." Many of my courses focused on technology, leading me to develop a school library web site and WebQuests for students, but I always kept returning to the concept of literacy, wanting to learn more about how, as a teacher-librarian, I could help to improve the literacy rates of the students in my school. I also wanted to understand how to make reading more appealing to students, and how to help them choose to be readers on their own time.

Now in my fifth year as a teacher-librarian, I have moved to a Kindergarten to grade 9 school to work full time in the library. I find when working with a greater variety of grade levels, there are many different aspects to the role of a teacher-librarian, including information literacy, collection development, technology leadership and reading promotion, but the most important one for me is that of a literacy specialist, developing a love of reading in my students. I am concerned that the area of literacy is being forgotten in our digital age, and, although the term literacy can include many skills and abilities, I believe the most important is the ability to read text. Without the ability to make meaning of text, students will struggle in all areas of their academic lives on a daily basis.

My Interest as a Teacher-Librarian in Supporting Students' Reading

Harwayne (2000), while principal of the Manhattan New School, promised the parents of her students that their children would not only learn to read, but they would choose to read, now and forever. This was her lifetime guarantee. This goal is what I want for students everywhere, to not only have the ability to read, but to choose to read, now and forever. I know that some children will not grow up to be voracious readers, but I want my students to know the joy of reading, and understand there are books available in their areas of interest, they just have to find them. This is a great challenge for teacher-librarians, especially for those students who state definitively "I hate reading". I am privileged to have the opportunity to spend time with these students hunting for that perfect book. As a classroom teacher, I knew my students well and could easily guide them to the right books. When I became a teacher-librarian, I realized how much more difficult it is to know every student in a large school as an individual and to help them

connect with books they will love. I enjoy the challenge though, and I continue to match books to readers and show students the joy of reading they can experience when they have found great books. I imagine what a difference it would make in schools if all students chose to be readers. Krashen (2004), well known for his stance on voluntary reading, suggests that some students are not readers because they have not found the right book yet, their "home run book", the one that gets students hooked on reading. Atwell (2007a) states that teens need to find their way into the reading zone, where they are taken away and caught up in their book. Her goal is for "every child to become a skilled, passionate, habitual, critical reader" (Atwell, 2007a, p. 12). I want to know what I need to understand and do as a teacher-librarian in order to support this goal in my school.

In this capping paper I will examine the related literature to identify the knowledge and understandings that teacher-librarians need to have about reading and literacy learning, and hope to acquire insights in order to understand how to develop a culture of reading in my school, specifically grades five to nine. I will identify implications for teacher-librarians, and suggest ways they can make a positive impact on literacy in their schools by developing a culture of reading.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive research and professional literature in the area of reading and literacy attest to the importance of reading for students at every grade level. This literature review will focus on teacher-librarians' roles as literacy leaders in improving students' literacy rates and academic achievement by developing a culture of reading in middle school environments. Also addressed will be the factors associated with developing a culture of reading, and how teacher-librarians can begin to develop this culture of reading

in the library, and then, through collaboration, into classrooms and throughout the entire school.

Promoting Reading

Traditionally, teacher-librarians were considered the authority in schools for literature and reading needs (Braxton, 2008). Teacher-librarians provided support for school literacy programs, encouraged the love of reading and nurtured lifelong reading habits by providing access to print collections and promoting independent reading (Rosenfeld, 2007). Over time this focus on literacy changed, due in part to the increased use of computers and the Internet. Library foundational documents in English speaking countries reflect this shift in emphasis, with reading promotion being replaced by information literacy and inquiry-based learning as the focal point of library programs (American Library Association, 1990; Braxton, 2008; Canadian Library Association, 2000). Although information literacy and inquiry-based learning are vital roles for teacher-librarians, Braxton (2008) indicates that it is essential that their roles also include the fostering of reading in students.

Library policy guidelines

The Canadian Library Association's (CLA) (2000) *Position Statement on Effective School Library Programs in Canada* focuses primarily on information literacy when it states:

> A major goal of education in Canada is to develop students who are informed, self-directed and discriminating learners. To be effective citizens in a society rich in information, students need to learn skills which will allow them to locate and select appropriate information, to analyze that information critically, and to use it wisely. (para. 1)

This statement does not directly address reading as one of the skills required, although it is implied that students must be able to read text if they are going us select, analyze and use information effectively. The American Library Association's (ALA) (2009) *Position Statement on the School Library Media Specialist's Role in Reading* is more specific to reading and explains:

> Reading is a foundational skill for 21st-century learners. Guiding learners to become engaged and effective users of ideas and information and to appreciate literature requires that they develop as strategic readers who can comprehend, analyze, and evaluate text in both print and digital formats. Learners must also have opportunities to read for enjoyment as well as for information. School library media specialists are in a critical and unique position to partner with other educators to elevate the reading development of our nation's youth. (para. 1)

As well, ALA's (2006) *Position Statement on the Value of Independent Reading in the School Library Media Program* addresses the issue that students have not caught the love of reading, and indicates:

> In an information age, literacy demands not only the ability to read and write, but also the ability to process information and communicate effectively. Research suggests that reading proficiency increases with the amount of time spent reading voluntarily. Unfortunately, independent reading is often a casualty in our fast paced, media-oriented society. Today's students know how to read but have little or no interest in doing so. They have failed to catch the love of reading; therefore, they choose not to read. (para. 1)

This statement addresses the importance of reading, including voluntary reading and its impact on student achievement, specifically reading proficiency. Given the knowledge that students who read more by choice will be better readers, developing a culture of reading in the library that encourages students to choose to read is of great significance to teacher-librarians.

The impact of teacher-librarians

Research clearly shows that teacher-librarians have a positive impact on the reading achievement of students in their schools. *Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Library Programs in Canada* (2003) indicates "students in schools with well-equipped school libraries and qualified teacher-librarians perform better on achievement tests for reading comprehension and basic research skills" (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 19). Qualified teacher-librarians provide teaching and resources to support the literacy needs of the students, and work together with trained technical staff to provide a strong library program (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003). The reference to "qualified" teacher-librarians indicates that it is not just the presence of adults in the library that improves student achievement, but rather teacher-librarians with specific knowledge and skills. When teacher-librarians motivate students to read, these students read even more, causing reading achievement to increase (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Haycock's (2003) review of the current literature on achievement and school library programs has similar findings, indicating that "in schools with well-stocked, well-equipped school libraries, managed by qualified and motivated professional teacher-librarians working with support staff, one can expect capable and avid readers" (Haycock, 2003, p. 10). This does not mean that teacher-librarians are expected to be primary reading instructors, but there are ways to support reading development through the library (Braxton, 2008), especially if teacher-librarians are knowledgeable about how children learn to read (Walker, 2005). Coatney (2009) observes that teacher-librarians are in the position to promote the love of reading and subsequently improve student achievement due to their instructional training as *teachers* and information specialist and collection development training as *librarians*, as well as their knowledge of current

literature for children and young adults. Haycock's (2003) review of studies across North America notes that larger, diverse library collections that include periodical and electronic subscriptions mean higher student achievement. Teacher-librarians can have a positive impact on teen reading by ensuring that students are provided with large, carefully selected collections of interesting, compelling, and comprehensible books (Asselin, 1999; Krashen, 2009).

Voluntary Reading

Voluntary reading positively impacts academic achievement (Krashen, 2004). *Free voluntary reading* is defined by Krashen (2004) as "reading because you want to: no book reports, no questions at the end of the chapter. …you don't have to finish the book if you don't like it" (p. 1). The International Reading Association's (2000) position paper, *Making a Difference Means Making It Different: Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction* agrees with Krashen's findings and indicates:

> Children who read more read better. Children who have access to varied sources of print materials in their classrooms, school libraries, town libraries and at home, and who are allowed to choose what they read, read more for pleasure and for information. Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading are positive about reading and are good readers. (p. 6)

Voluntary reading is different than teacher-mandated reading of class novels, short stories with comprehension questions or assigned reading. Instead, it is making the choice to read what they want when they want. Krashen (2004) advocates free voluntary reading, as studies have shown that students who read extensively are better readers, especially if they choose to read for pleasure (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Krashen, 2009). Encouraging students to select and read personally relevant books is something teacher-librarians can do to create a culture of reading.

Advantages to leisure reading

Reports on adolescent literacy show that a positive attitude toward reading, fostered through independent reading, results in higher literacy levels and higher achievement (Rosenfeld, 2007). Bauerlein (2008), while investigating the impact of the digital age on young Americans, found that "leisure reading of any kind correlates more closely with a student's grades than any other media". The amount of television watched had no impact on student achievement, while the amount of leisure reading did (Bauerlein, 2008, p. 89). This is not only true when compared to time spent on computer or watching television, as it has been found that reading is also more important to student achievement than social factors. The 2003 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study concluded that:

> The most important predictor of academic success was the amount of time students spent reading and that this indicator was more accurate than economic or social status; that the time spent reading was highly correlated to success in math and science; and that the keys to success lay in teaching students how to read and then having them read as much as they can. (Braxton, 2008, p. 23)

It is clear that students who read more and enjoy reading will be more successful. Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between students' achievement and their attitude toward reading, frequency of leisure reading, and diversity of materials read (Brozo et al., 2007). As well, PISA findings have shown that students who read a greater variety of reading materials are more proficient readers (Brozo et al., 2007). It has also been shown that students who do not enjoy reading read less, and their skills do not improve like stronger readers who are motivated to read, therefore reading more and becoming increasingly better readers (Brozo et al., 2007).

Not only does regular leisure reading improve student achievement, but Krashen (2004) believes students who read for pleasure will be better equipped for the future as well. He also suggests that people who do not develop the reading habit as adolescents will have a very difficult time keeping up as adults with the reading and writing demands of society (Krashen, 2004).

In addition to the lack of reading conducted by teens is the concern that teens are not reading quality material. Sullivan (2003) is clear in his message when he states, "get over the idea that what they are reading does not measure up to what they should be reading; the fact that they are reading at all is a plus" (p. 29). Although it is preferable for students to read a variety of materials, studies have shown that light reading provides motivation for more reading, and does improve fluency and comprehension (Hughes-Hassell, 2003; Krashen, 2004). Reading what they enjoy may help students to develop a reading habit, leading them towards the goal of becoming lifetime readers (Hughes-Hassell, 2003; Krashen, 2004).

The reading habits of teens

Students read less as they move from elementary to middle school, a trend that is seen in countries around the world (Brozo et al., 2007, Shannon, 2003). Many older elementary students and teens, although readers, spend very little time reading for pleasure (Strommen & Mates, 2004), emphasizing the importance of creating a culture of reading at school.

Studies have shown that there are many different reasons that teens do not choose to read voluntarily, not all of which have to do with reading difficulties. Beers (1996) identifies three types of non-readers during adolescence: *dormant*, *uncommitted* and

unmotivated. Dormant readers consider themselves readers, and like to read, but are too busy with other activities like sports, drama, friends, and/or a heavy academic schedule to find time to read. Uncommitted readers see reading as a skill and do not like to read, but are open to the possibility of being a reader in the future. Unmotivated readers do not like to read and do not expect to change. They see reading as boring and difficult and do not plan on doing any more reading in the future (Beers, 1996). Tovani (2000), a classroom teacher and literacy staff developer, views non-reading teens differently, describing the types of struggling readers encountered most in secondary schools as *resistive readers* and *word callers*. "Resistive readers can read but choose not to. Word callers can decode the words, but don't understand or remember what they've read" (p. 14). Alternatively, Kim and Krashen (2000) found in their research that “very few of our nonreaders claimed that difficulty in reading was responsible for their lack of interest. From their responses, it appears that they simply didn't have interesting things to read” (Kim & Krashen, 2000, para. 10). Despite the different findings and labels, essentially teens are not reading either because they find reading too difficult, or because they are not interested at this point in their lives.

It is understandable that students who find reading difficult and do not understand what they read are less likely to read voluntarily. Mazey (1989) reflects on studies in Canada that demonstrate how the home environment can impact children's interest in reading, and explains "reluctant readers tended to come from homes where books were not in evidence, where they were not read to and where television was prominent in the home" (p. D.1.FAM). These studies show that if reading is not modeled and shared, it is less likely to become a habit for young students.

Although adolescents do not read as frequently as younger children, research has shown that some teens are still interested in reading, and choose to read voluntarily (Hughes-Hassell, 2003). Middle school students who do read voluntarily have responded to surveys indicating that, along with books, they read magazines, newspapers, and comic books in their free time (Hughes-Hassell, 2003). To create a culture of reading, these different formats will need to be available, in areas of interest, along with a variety of books that meet the needs of teens. Given the many reasons teens choose not to read, teacher-librarians need to look for different ways to connect with these students, encouraging them to read for pleasure while respecting and tapping into their areas of interest.

The reading habits of boys

Differences in the voluntary reading practices of boys and girls have been noted, including PISA studies, which have shown that adolescent girls read more for pleasure, and enjoy reading more than boys (Brozo et al., 2007). Boys often do not like reading in the teenage years, explaining that reading is boring, they are too busy and like other activities better, they cannot get into the stories, and they are not good at reading (Jones & Fiorelli, 2007). Sullivan (2003) observes, "boys read less and do less recreational reading than girls do" (p.1), which is a concern, especially when you consider that "success in reading comprehension comes from successful reading engagement" (St. Lifer, 2004, p. 11). Gurian (2001) states, "girls are approximately one and a half years ahead of boys in reading and writing competency….The girls' reading advantage exists at all levels" (p. 56). According to Jones (2005), boys "read less than girls and are more apt to describe themselves as nonreaders" (p. 37). Even though boys have been shown to read

less than girls, Braxton (2003) states "I don't believe there are boys who hate reading - I believe there are just boys who haven't discovered the magic yet" (p. 44).

There are also differences in what materials are chosen by boys and girls for voluntary reading. Boys typically do more nonlinear reading than girls do, including magazines, newspapers, Web pages, comic books and graphic novels (Jones & Fiorelli, 2007; Sullivan, 2003). Males prefer to read nonfiction, action, mystery, humor, adventure, fantasy, sports and outdoors, comic and joke books, magazines, annuals and graphic novels (Booth, 2002; Haupt & Clark, 2003; Jones & Fiorelli, 2007; Sullivan, 2003). Boys also read and understand fiction less than girls, but those that do read fiction tend to enjoy science fiction, fantasy and humour. Sullivan (2003) adds that boys "are much more likely than girls to go for the edgy kinds of comedy" (p. 23) and points out that "boys have an interest in things physical; sometimes that means some level of violence, and it is better to have them explore this through narrative fiction than through movies or video games" (p. 26). Teacher-librarians with an awareness of these differences will be better able to support boys in their voluntary reading, developing a collection to meet their needs.

Creating a Library Environment for Reading

Research has shown that it is important for students to be able to walk into their school library and feel welcome (Shannon, 2003). Teacher-librarians are unable to positively impact students' literacy rates if students avoid the library, so it is critical for the library to be a comfortable, welcoming place where students choose to be (Braxton, 2008; Campbell, 2009; Shannon, 2003). Research has also shown that two of the most important factors in students' attitudes towards the library are attractiveness and amount

of space (Shannon, 2003), suggesting that teacher-librarians have the power to create an environment that is appealing to students. Hughes-Hassell (2003) indicates that the library needs to "look like a place that teens would want to visit" (p. 95), one that reflects teen culture and interests. Reading is also a social activity and teens need opportunities to discuss what they are reading with others (Parsons, 2004). For this to happen, the library cannot be a silent place, but instead needs to be a vibrant space filled with quiet conversations, one that allows teens to gather and discuss their books. Developing an inviting physical space and a friendly atmosphere for students is an important part of creating a culture of reading.

The physical space

There are many aspects of the physical setting of the library that should be considered when creating a welcoming space for students. Studies have shown that a quiet, inviting place is more conducive to reading (Krashen, 2004), and that comfortable seating or cozy reading corners with cushions will help students relax and spend time reading in the library (Carmichael, 2007; Hughes-Hassell, 2003; Johnson, 2007; Krashen, 2004). Displays highlighting events, topics and authors should be prominent and change regularly (Braxton, 2008, Campbell 2009; Fenn, 2005; Friese, 2008), and materials in displays should be available for immediate checkout (Hughes-Hassell, 2003). Books shelved at levels appropriate for the students (Braxton, 2008), with some turned to display the covers instead of the spines, will attract more interest (Fenn, 2005). Posting signs that will allow students to find books independently means they can use the library with more confidence, and won't have to ask the library staff for help all of the time (Braxton, 2008). Developing a library space that is user-friendly for students will also

help to create a positive culture where students aren't intimidated or overwhelmed, especially if the library staff is supportive (Johnson, 2007).

Developing relationships

Teacher-librarians also play an important role in establishing an atmosphere conducive to reading. They can create a literacy-rich environment by modeling reading and sharing their passion for books with students (Brozo et al., 2007; Campbell, 2009; Cart, 2007; Fenn, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007). A library that has a strong culture of reading is one where students know that the library staff is happy to have discussions about books and will recommend titles based on the students' interests and previous reading choices (Fenn, 2005; Friese, 2008). Speaking passionately about books will create excitement about reading among students (Cart, 2007; Fenn, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007), but teacher-librarians also need to listen to what students have to say, to allow them share their own enthusiasm about the books they have read and to become informed about which books and authors are important to the students (Cart, 2007; Fenn, 2005).

Matching the right book with a particular student is a skill (Cart, 2007), and developing relationships with students and understanding reading development will help to facilitate this (Fenn, 2005). To ensure that students are matched with materials at their level, allowing them to feel competent as readers, teacher-librarians will need to know students as people so they can connect them to books that relate to their interests out of school (Brozo, 2002). Smith (2002) states in his study that the students "wanted to be appreciated and known as individuals…when teachers or other adults did express interest in students and their lives, the students responded with tremendously positive emotion" (p.100). Braxton (2008) emphasizes that creating a reading-friendly environment should

be a teacher-librarian's first priority. When a positive culture of reading has been established, students will see that the library belongs to them, that the teacher-librarians are the custodians of the library, not the owners (Braxton, 2008).

Ensuring access

One of the key roles of the teacher-librarian is to fill school libraries with great books and to put these great books into the hands of students, encouraging reading for pleasure (Fenn, 2005; Krashen, 2009), and in turn promoting student achievement (Brozo et al., 2007; Coatney, 2009; Fenn, 2005; Rosenfeld, 2007). Krashen's (2004) review of the research on students' access to libraries shows that teens obtain a lot of their reading material from libraries, and that students in schools with larger libraries were more successful academically than those with smaller libraries. Studies have shown that more access to books leads to more reading, in turn leading to better readers (Krashen, 2009). Lance (2002) found that the higher the ratio of professional and other library staff to students, the higher the per-student spending on the school library and the larger and varied the collection, the higher the students' scores were on state reading tests. To develop the reading habit, students need access to books that they like, on topics in which they are interested, and books that reflect their lives and themselves (Cart, 2007; Fenn, 2005; Friese, 2008; Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Access to school libraries improves students' reading achievement, but for the greatest improvement, students need access to professionally staffed school libraries with large, diverse collections.

Access to strong library collections is also an equalizer for students in poor schools. Students from low-income neighbourhoods have less access to books at home

than students from high-income neighbourhoods, increasing the need for large school libraries. Studies reviewed by Krashen (2004) have shown that students in poor schools have much more restricted access to school libraries, and are often able to borrow only one or two books per weekly visit. Some schools in low-income areas even prevent students from taking books home, a policy not usually found in wealthier schools. Circulation policies must honour students' choices and allow them to borrow self-selected books at any level (Marcoux & Loertscher, 2009), rather than insisting that students only take books at their personal reading level.

Krashen's (2004) review of research also found that school libraries are open more days per week in affluent schools than in poor ones. They also have more books per student and are more likely to have the books that students want to read, increasing the likelihood that students will choose to read. The importance of large, diverse and current library collections that reflect the school community cannot be underestimated (Cart, 2007). For collections to stay current, teacher-librarians must keep up-to-date on new literature for children and young adults (Coatney, 2009) so they will have the knowledge to select books for the collection that are new and relevant to the lives of their students (Cart, 2007; Fenn, 2005).

Collection development

Collection development decisions can encourage or discourage reading amongst teens. The quality of the library collection and its relevance to the specific school community will impact the amount students read, especially voluntarily, which is a critical factor in developing a habit of reading. Even when teacher-librarians read all the reviews and are informed about what is new in the world of literature, it is critical that

they know their students as individuals, to allow them to effectively select, purchase and recommend titles for the students in their specific schools (Cart, 2007). When students are also able to request titles and find materials on the shelves that are of interest to them (Hughes-Hassell, 2003), they will feel a sense of ownership in the library (Friese, 2008) as the teacher-librarians are acknowledging their collaborative role in the selection of library materials.

Selection policies need to be flexible and include materials such as pop culture since this is what many students are interested in, and it is how they spend their time outside of school (Friese, 2008; Parsons, 2004). Friese (2008) recommends that teacher-librarians be aware of the popular culture in their own schools, realizing that it will vary from school to school. By speaking to students and surveying them to discover their interests, teacher-librarians can be more informed about popular trends and interests, using this knowledge to customize the collection to suit the school community (Friese, 2008). Light reading books should be part of the school library collection, as they are important for students too. Krashen (2004) notes that many adults learned to read with light reading materials like comic books, magazines or teen romance. Ivey (1999) suggests, "if easy materials inspire students to read, then perhaps more materials for light reading should be made available" (p. 188). This type of reading often motivates the reader to read more and students who prefer light reading material as teens will generally move into other, more sophisticated, materials in time (Krashen, 2004; Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999), suggesting that library collections need to be large and varied. Collection development decisions can also support the reading lives of boys, as Sullivan (2003) suggests that boys "are more likely to become pleasure readers if you

let them choose their own reading and give them plenty of the types of books they prefer" (p. 29).

Libraries that encourage a culture of reading will offer a wide selection of books, as stronger readers often choose more complex materials, and light reading materials should only be a part of what is available (Krashen, 2004). To develop a culture of reading and meet the needs of all students in specific schools, school library collections should have wide-ranging selections of books that include many reading levels, genres, topics and formats (Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Campbell, 2009; Parsons 2004; Rosenfeld, 2007). According to the Canadian Association for School Libraries (2004), "as collections of resources increase in quantity, size and scope, students' individual learning styles and needs can be met more effectively" (para. 5). A strong, vibrant library collection will improve the teacher-librarian's ability to develop a culture of reading in the school.

Extending the Culture of Reading Beyond the School Library

Although creating a culture of reading in the library is a worthy accomplishment, the ultimate goal is for students to become lifelong readers, in and out of school. Atwell (2007b) states, "when we teachers embrace our role as literate grown-ups who help children seek and find delight and enlargement of life in books, they have a good chance of growing into adults who enjoy and love reading" (p. 44).

In Finland, school libraries are a controversial issue, with public libraries often seen as a more important piece of the literacy puzzle than school libraries. There is a feeling that if students become comfortable using public libraries at a young age, they will continue to use the public libraries on a regular basis when they have completed their

schooling. Some schools do have school libraries, but most are staffed for only a few hours each week by teachers without library qualifications (Niinikangas, 1998). Even without strong school libraries in place, PISA studies show that Finnish students score very high on the reading tests. Halinen, Sinko and Laukkanen (2005) explain these impressive results when they state:

> Finns are a reading nation. Eighty-five percent of Finnish families subscribe to a daily newspaper. … A typical Finnish family starts its day at the breakfast table by reading the morning paper and commenting on the day's news. The number of books published annually in Finland is high given the size of the population, and each Finn borrows 21 library books, on average, each year. (pp. 73-74)

As a country, Finland has developed a culture of reading and the results of their international reading tests show that this has been effective. Developing a culture of reading is essential, and once a culture of reading has been established in the school library, what additional strategies can teacher-librarians apply to extend the culture of reading into the classrooms and the school community as a whole?

Promoting reading with classes

When considering different ways to increase teen's motivation to read, Edmunds and Bauserman's (2006) recommendations include allowing students to self-select their books for language arts classes and suggesting books that connect with students' personal interests. Krashen (2004) found that teens that visit the school library regularly with their classes are likely to take out and read more books. Knowing that children need to read material that is relevant to their lives and their interests (Cart, 2007; Fenn, 2005; Friese, 2008; Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004), teacher-librarians can advocate for the reading of authentic texts, including informational texts, rather than just textbooks and published programs in classroom literacy programs (Asselin, 1999). If the goal is for

students to become lifelong readers, they must see that literacy is purposeful and relevant. Graves, in the foreword to Keene and Zimmermann's book *Mosaic of Thought*, states:

> Educators and the public are in a frenzy over how to boost reading comprehension scores. In some school systems children fill out comprehension skill sheets, again and again. In others they struggle diligently through thick workbooks in an effort to improve their SAT scores. Neither approach teaches students to use strategies that will, in fact, help them understand texts better. Worse, neither approach develops the love of reading, the very engine that invites the student into a lifetime of reading. (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, p. ix)

Teacher-librarians can encourage teachers to have students read for meaningful and authentic purposes rather than filling in worksheets or following published programs that seem irrelevant to the students. Ivey (1999) states "it is not surprising that students who do not have genuine purposes for the reading they do in school grow to dislike reading or have trouble finding reasons to read at all" (p. 189). Haycock (2005) found that students were more motivated to read by personal interest and choice of books than by rewards and explains, "collaboration between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers to develop and implement literature-based reading programs with motivational components has the greatest effect on reading motivation and ability" (p. 38). Students do not need rewards; they would rather be allowed to choose their books based on topics, characters and personal interests (Haycock, 2005), which is something teacher-librarians can advocate for in their schools.

It is also suggested that there are opportunities for students to discuss their books with one another, both informally (Strommen & Mates, 2004), and as part of their language arts classes (Pitcher et al., 2007). Teacher-librarians can spread the culture of reading beyond the library walls by promoting the discussion of books with teachers of reading and with students, sharing with them that reading should not always be a silent

activity followed by written assignments (Parsons, 2004). Reading can be a social activity (Strommen & Mates, 2004), even in the classroom, where books are discussed and debated, where students learn about the elements of story by reading interesting books of their own choice, and teacher-librarians can share this knowledge with teachers of reading to develop a culture of reading in their school. Jones (2005) echoes this when she discusses boys and reading, and explains "if reading is to appeal to boys it needs to be presented as a social, rather than as a solitary, activity" (p. 37).

Students who only read because they have to, reading assigned books and using published programs to answer questions and get marks, can become turned off of reading (Parsons, 2004; Pitcher et al., 2007). One of the commercial programs being used in the United States is *Accelerated Reader*, a computerized reading program that has students take quizzes after reading books at their level to earn points. Although the assessment and tracking of books read is made very easy for teachers, studies do not show that this program is successful at getting children to love reading, and there is no clear evidence to show that the program is more advantageous than simply giving students a large selection of books and a large block of reading time each day (Krashen, 2002; Schmidt, 2008; Thompson, Madhuri & Taylor, 2008). One of the concerns with this type of program is that students are not being taught to read for information or for enjoyment, they are being taught to read for points. Schmidt (2008) states that "an analysis of a computerized reading program used in over half the schools in the U.S. teaches adults and children that reading is more about numbers and efficiency than learning from or enjoying books" (p. 202). There is not room or time in the program for conversations about the books, and students are not able to make connections to the text or share their insights and interests

with others (Schmidt, 2008). Some schools have even taken leveled reading so far as to level all the books in the library by reading levels or by lexile, a measurement of the difficulty of the text, and then to reorganize the library by levels. Pappas (2004) reminds teacher-librarians that:

> The purpose of a library is not to teach children to read, but rather to provide them with reason to read - compelling and beautiful books they are motivated to read. No doubt there are books in every library that can help children learn to read, but we must not become educators obsessed with teaching children the mechanics of reading - so obsessed that we drive a love of reading right out of some children. (pp. 69-70)

It is important that students see reading assignments as meaningful (Brozo et al., 2007), and feel that the books they are reading are relevant to their lives (Pitcher et al., 2007), not just at their personal reading level. As it is almost impossible to find one text that would be appropriate and relevant to each and every student in a class (Brozo et al., 2007; Krashen, 2009; Parsons, 2004; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenfeld, 2007), teacher-librarians can encourage classroom teachers to allow student selection of materials. Research has shown that choice and control over what they read is especially important to boys, to the extent that some boys won't read a book if they don't get to select it themselves (Smith, 2002; Brozo, 2002). This is critical, as reading engagement, which also signifies making the personal choice to read, is an indicator of learning success in life beyond school (Brozo et al., 2007).

Promoting reading throughout the school

Teachers and teacher-librarians have common goals in the area of literacy (Asselin, 1999; Parsons, 2004) and can work collaboratively to effectively develop a culture of reading in their school that positively impacts student literacy and achievement. The culture of reading will not move beyond the library if teacher-librarians

are using and promoting best practices in reading instruction in the library only to have the students return to their classrooms to read a class novel, answer questions, and become turned off reading (Parsons, 2004). Professional collaboration is critical for teacher-librarians to extend the culture of reading beyond the library walls and be effective literacy leaders in their schools (Asselin, 2003). It is also beneficial if teacher-librarians are able to understand the language of reading teachers, and use this when planning and collaborating (Glick, 2005; Jones, 2005).

For teacher-librarians to effectively develop a culture of reading in their schools, they should be an integral part of their school literacy program (Rosenfeld, 2007). Although it is beneficial to students when the teacher-librarian is in the library promoting reading and developing a culture of reading, to be a true school literacy leader a teacher-librarian also needs to be involved at the classroom level, collaborating with teachers. Connecting with their colleagues will allow teacher-librarians to have an impact on literacy and create a culture of reading school-wide. Providing book talks and suggesting fiction resources for language arts classes are important roles that teacher-librarians need to embrace (Braxton, 2008; Fenn, 2005; Parsons, 2004), in addition to their strong support in curricular areas (Fenn, 2005). Smith and Johnson (1994) support the use of literature in the content areas when they state:

> If we want students to connect with the story of life, we might begin by integrating children's literature into content studies. Literature can become the lens through which content is viewed. … Teachers who use literature in their content studies … create a strong community of involved and committed learners. (p. 198)

Additionally, Smith and Johnson (1994) found that " … students who were once ambivalent toward learning change their attitudes and behavior after literature is introduced into the content classroom" (p. 198).

Asselin, Branch and Oberg (2003) state that teacher-librarians "see the big picture in curriculum implementation, particularly in developing students' information literacy and lifelong reading and learning habits" (p.57). Teacher-librarians should be key participants in establishing the planning and implementation of the overall school literacy goals, including the development of a culture of reading, allowing the administration to see how the teacher-librarian is involved with teachers and students in the school, and the kind of impact the school library program is having. When administrators can see that the library program directly supports the reading goals in the school, the library program and the teacher-librarian will become indispensable (Walker, 2005).

It is clear from the literature that teacher-librarians can create a culture of reading in schools that will positively impact students' reading achievement and create lifelong readers.

SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

It is empowering to know that the work that is done in the library can benefit students on a long-term basis. Teacher-librarians have the ability to help their students develop the reading habit, and to support teachers so that their students can become better readers. Creating an environment that encourages students to choose to read is an exciting opportunity that teacher-librarians should embrace.

The literature clearly shows that there are concerns with reading in the teen years, especially with boys, and many teens that can read choose not to. This is a

discouraging fact, and although we may not be able to change the situations these teens find themselves in, we can work to promote reading and to provide an environment that encourages reading for pleasure. Although library foundational documents do not always include the promotion of leisure reading as a priority for teacher-librarians, students do need to develop a habit of reading for improved literacy and academic achievement. Creating a culture of reading in middle school libraries is important for our students and an essential component of a successful library program.

Creating a culture of reading

Teacher-librarians wanting to develop a culture of reading in their school can begin with the physical space, collection development, and access policies and procedures. Changes to the physical space and access policies can be made without any additional financial support, and collection development choices can be made based on yearly budget allotments. Teacher-librarians can look at possible changes to be made in these areas, making decisions that will improve the library environment and create a welcoming space. How can furniture be rearranged, signage created, access improved, hours extended and flexible circulation policies generated? Teacher-librarians can ask themselves these questions to look for ways to enhance services and make the library environment more appealing to students. As new books are added to the collection, displays can be created to attract interest, and as the physical appearance improves, students will notice. An exemplary collection, one that is varied in genres, topics, formats and styles, and possibly even languages, will provide more reading choices for students. Offering titles in languages like French, Korean, German, Chinese and Spanish to meet the needs of language programs, including English as an additional language for

immigrant and international students, will be appreciated by students and staff alike. The positive changes can happen fairly quickly and will likely create excitement, causing students to take more of an interest in the library and reading.

Building relationships with students will take longer, as it takes time to develop trust and get to know students well. If teacher-librarians and library technicians are working together to create warm, inviting, and relaxing spaces, conversations around new books will begin, and relationships will start to develop. They will develop slowly at first, but will grow over time, and soon they will become an established part of the culture of reading.

A library with a strong culture of reading will not be a library of silence. A silent library does not offer the opportunity for conversations; the library staff must be open to the gentle hum of patrons' voices, and ensure students and teachers know that discussions about books are encouraged in the library. When the library staff is willing to model and share the passion of reading, through conversations with students and through the development of a vibrant collection, they will find students sharing their excitement and the culture of reading will become stronger.

Although there is extensive research showing the importance of leisure reading in relation to student achievement, further research will inform teacher-librarians of the importance of voluntary reading, and the culture of reading in a school with teacher-librarians and without. In times of budget cuts, it would be interesting to see research data on circulation statistics and reading achievement from schools with and without qualified teacher-librarians. It is not enough for libraries to be large book rooms, we need qualified teacher-librarians to create a culture of reading and support the literacy lives of middle

years students by providing strong collections and vibrant spaces for their love of reading to grow.

IMPLICATIONS

Getting Started

To develop a culture of reading effectively in schools, there are foundational pieces that need to be in place. Schools need to have qualified teacher-librarians working adequate hours to be able to connect and relate with students, select and purchase appropriate resources for the collection, and create and maintain a pleasant library environment that is open before, during and after school hours. There needs to be an adequate budget to allow for the purchasing of new, quality resources throughout the year to keep students interested and excited about reading. Funding is also required for the physical space, the purchase of comfortable reading chairs, shelving and supplies for displays, as well as posters and other materials for reading promotion.

Adequately staffed libraries run by qualified teacher-librarians working with qualified library technicians are better equipped to develop a strong culture of reading than those that are inadequately staffed. It is also more effective if the all the members of the library staff are readers, and have read extensively in the area of adolescent literature, informing their selection choices and allowing them to have honest and authentic conversations with students. Members of the library staff are in a much better position to match books to readers when they have read many of the books in the collection that they are recommending to students. These conversations will be real and students will respect this knowledge and share their own thoughts more willingly.

Providing Opportunities

Students need to be involved in the library, and activities that bring a social component into the library space will help to promote this involvement. Offering book clubs, first for the enthusiastic readers, then expanding to offer a variety of books that will include some of the more reluctant readers is another way to contribute to a positive culture of reading. Creating book clubs for boys, or choosing books selected by boys for book clubs can encourage these students to join in and experience reading as a social activity rather than a solitary one. Using provincial reading awards programs like the Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Awards for students in grades 5-8 to start book clubs and generate interest makes it easier, and will allow for continuity from year to year. Connecting with our 21st century learners by incorporating technology like blogs, for book discussions, and *Shelfari,* to keep track of books read, may entice new members to the book clubs and give them ways to stay involved from remote locations, expanding the culture of reading out of the physical library space.

Giving students a sense of ownership by involving them in the design of the space and the selection of resources, possibly through the creation of a readers' advisory group, will offer opportunities to share decision making with the students. Allowing students to request books and other materials for the collection will inform teacher-librarians as to the current trends and interests of the students in their specific school, providing pertinent information for collection development decisions.

Remembering that the library is for the students, and being open to new opportunities to involve students in activities, groups, and projects in the library will only help to strengthen the culture of reading.

Supporting Teachers

To spread the culture of reading beyond the library walls, teacher-librarians need to regularly network with colleagues, initiating conversations about great books, suggesting literature circle choices for English Language Arts classes and read-alouds for other curricular areas. Teacher-librarians can have professional conversations with colleagues to ensure teachers are aware of specific reading practices that have proven effective over time (Brozo et al., 2007; Parsons, 2004). These methods are what students need to become good readers, and include read-alouds, the modeling of reading by the teacher, and self-selected reading material for the classroom instead of group novel studies (Krashen, 2009; Parsons, 2004; Pitcher et al., 2007). Developing literature circle collections and circulating them as sets out of the library will support the need for students to read books of their choice rather than a class novel and will assist teachers by providing carefully selected sets of books on different themes and topics, as well as at a variety of reading levels. Teacher librarians are also encouraged to regularly read book reviews to be familiar with what is new in adolescent literature and to share this with other teachers, helping them to stay abreast of new literature for teens.

Including time daily for the reading of personal choice material (Brozo et al., 2007; Krashen, 2009) can be a change teacher-librarians advocate for with administrators to improve the culture of reading school-wide. Daily reading can be part of the school timetable, ensuring all students have time in each day to read material of personal interest, encouraging the habit of reading.

To effectively collaborate and show literacy leadership within their schools, teacher-librarians need to be well read professionally in the areas of literacy and reading. To be leaders in their schools, teacher-librarians need to be able to work with classroom

teachers, having informed conversations and modeling best practices in reading. Connecting with other teacher-librarians locally, provincially, and nationally through meetings, library associations, and conferences will offer opportunities to see initiatives that are successful in other schools. Taking and adapting these ideas to fit their own specific school communities will allow teacher-librarians to create excitement in their libraries.

CONCLUSION

Teacher-librarians, as well as administrators, senior management, and public school trustees, must understand the need for a culture of reading in schools to support the recreational reading lives of students and to develop the reading habit in our students, preparing them for future academic success and lifelong literacy and learning. It is a concern that many teens do not choose to read, and teacher-librarians need to work to build and maintain a strong culture of reading in schools so that students do not just learn to read at school, but choose to read in their free time as well. If our students have not caught the love of reading, they will not choose to read or develop the reading habit, which leads to lifelong literacy (ALA, 2006). A love of reading is partly taught and partly caught, and even though students learn to read at school, our libraries have to be warm and vibrant spaces if students are going to catch the love of reading and become lifelong readers. Developing a culture of reading in middle school libraries should be a priority for teacher-librarians.

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