

GENREFICATION OF THE FICTION COLLECTION  
IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARY

by

Katie Dunne

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services  
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development University of  
Central Missouri

August, 2015

## ABSTRACT

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This study reviews the literature pertaining to genrefication of the fiction collection of an elementary school library. Literature was reviewed regarding issues related to reading in elementary school; the advantages of genrefication, including its impact on library users; and concerns related to genrefication, including the potential negative impact of genrefication on library users as well as possible alternatives to genrefication. Results indicate that, although genrefication may be utilized to create a student-friendly school library that enables elementary school students to understand and navigate the fiction collection, there are a number of concerns related to genrefication that might influence a librarian's decision regarding whether genrefication is the best choice for his or her student population and school environment.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, there has been resurgence in the debate over how to organize print materials in school libraries in order to best meet the needs of students (Snipes 18). Specifically, the idea of organizing the fiction collection by a book's genre, rather than by the author's last name has gained momentum among school librarians who suggest that this type of organization better matches how students prefer to search for books (Collazo; Dumas 20; Jackman 22-23). Librarians in genrefied libraries have reported an increase in student confidence and independence in book selection (Buchter 52, 54; Kaplan, Dolloff, Giffard, and Stiff-Schiff 26-7) as well as increased circulation rates (Dumas 21; Hembree 65; Jackman 24). Yet, others stress the disadvantages of genrefication, such as a lack of consistency between libraries in which the fiction collections have been genrefied (Acedo; Brisco 36) and the potential for students to limit themselves to only one genre (Simms; Trott and Novak 34). Additionally, genrefication is a large, time-consuming process for librarians and alternatives exist, such as book displays and book talks, that may provide the same benefits with less staff time and effort (Baker 321, 323; Moreillon, Hunt, and Graves 41). In light of these different viewpoints, a review of the literature may provide further insight into the advantages and disadvantages of genrefication and assist elementary school librarians who are considering genrefication of their fiction collection as a way to support their students' information needs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to review the literature pertaining to genrefication of the fiction collection in an elementary school library. Literature was reviewed regarding issues related to reading in elementary school; the advantages of genrefication, including its impact on library users; and concerns related to genrefication, including the potential negative impact of genrefication on library users as well as possible alternatives to genrefication. The results of this study indicate that genrefication of the fiction collection may be utilized to create a student-friendly school library that enables elementary school students to understand and navigate the collection, with the goal of increasing their utilization of the library to find fiction books of interest. At the same time, a number of concerns related to genrefication and the existence of alternatives that may provide the same benefits as genrefication may lead elementary school librarians to carefully consider whether genrefication of the fiction collection is suitable for their student population and school environment.

### **Research Questions**

Three main research questions related to the use of genrefication of the fiction collection as a tool to assist young readers in the school library were explored. The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. What are some of the major issues related to elementary school students' reading habits and their use of the school library?
2. What are the advantages of genrefying the fiction collection of an elementary school library?

3. What are the concerns related to genrefying the fiction collection of an elementary school library?

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study include the lack of experimental research conducted on the effects of genrefication and the newness of the genrefication effort. Much of the information regarding the advantages and disadvantages of genrefication comes from anecdotal evidence or a review of circulation statistics, which could be impacted by a number of variables. It is difficult to establish experimental conditions that incorporate pre- and post-test measurement to study the impact of genrefication on student selection of books and utilization of the school library, and few studies have done so. Likewise, it is difficult to create an experimental condition that compares genrefication to other efforts to increase student selection of books, such as book talks or book displays, in order to study the impact of genrefication compared with these other efforts. Finally, the genrefication effort is too new to adequately determine the long-term impact on students who experience genrefication in elementary school libraries. The literature does not yet contain information about how a genrefied elementary school library might impact students' abilities to meet their information needs later in their academic careers, especially in high school and college settings.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used in this paper. Definitions are provided to clarify the terms' meanings.

Fiction collection: The collection of books that tell an imaginary story and that are typically arranged alphabetically by the author's last name in the Dewey Decimal System.

Genre: A specific type or category of media, which can include books, films, and music. Books are categorized into genres according to their content, thematic elements, or tone. Genres typically found in an elementary school fiction collection may include action and adventure, realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, sports, humor, and scary stories (Hembree 62, Miller 25).

Genrefication: The process of arranging books on the shelf by their genre.

Locus of control: One's belief about whether internal or external forces are in control of one's choices.

Readers' advisory: The process by which a librarian seeks to understand a patron's interests in order to make appropriate recommendations for books that he or she might like (Trott and Novak 35).

### **Research Design**

This study was descriptive in nature. Guiding questions were answered based upon a review of existing literature, research, and online resources that addressed issues related to reading in elementary school and the use of genrefication of the fiction collection in elementary school libraries. At no time was there an effort to create new research or to examine existing data, privately or publicly that would necessitate any type of permission.

Articles were retrieved from the following databases: *Academic Search Complete*; *Education Research Complete*; *ERIC*; *Library, Information Science &*

*Technology Abstracts with Full Text*, *Library Literature & Information Science Full Text*, and *PsycArticles*. Search terms included: “genre,” “genrefy,” “genrefication,” “book choice,” “book selection,” “cataloging,” “elementary school,” “library,” and “reading motivation.”

Information was also obtained from free online resources such as organizational websites and Web posts from librarians, including the Association of Independent School Librarians, the National Library of New Zealand, *School Library Journal*, The Bespectacled Librarian, E-literate Librarian, Eternal Learning of the Open Mind, Learning in Progress, Mighty Little Librarian, Mrs. ReaderPants, and YA Books.

### **Conclusion**

This study includes three chapters related to genrefication of the fiction collection in an elementary school library. The next chapter is a review of the literature that addresses issues related to reading in elementary school and the use of genrefication of the fiction collection in elementary school libraries. The final chapter consists of answers to the research questions that guided this study as well as implications for elementary school librarians who are considering genrefication of their fiction collection.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

A visit to the school library provides students with the opportunity to discover new books that pique their interest and engage them as readers. For elementary school students, however, the book selection process may be a source of confusion or even anxiety. In particular, the organization of the library's fiction collection, arranged by the author's last name rather than by content area, can be confusing for young students. Brief checkout periods and a generous collection of materials may overwhelm students and cause them to feel rushed to select a book. During these quick checkout periods, the school librarian may struggle to meet the information needs of all students who need assistance. Thus, the confusing organization, the rushed time span, and the inaccessibility of the school librarian create an unsuccessful or even stressful school library experience for some elementary school students.

The issues of locus of control, choice, and reading motivation may also impact students' school library experience. A student's sense of control and personal choice affects reading engagement and motivation to read. However, motivation to read tends to decline as students age, with older students checking out fewer books from the school library than their younger counterparts. When students lack the time or necessary skills to self-select that "just right" book from the school library, they may be less likely to view the school library as a resource for reading for pleasure. Given that the school library plays a part in the academic success of students, including reading success, helping students feel empowered to navigate their way easily may promote continued school library usage.

This paper explores the use of genrefication of the fiction collection as a way to create a student-friendly school library that enables elementary school students to understand and navigate the collection, with the goal of increasing their utilization of the library to find fiction books of interest. Specific topics to be addressed are (1) issues related to reading in elementary school, including the role of locus of control and personal choice in students' motivation to read as well as age and gender differences in book preference, reading habits, and school library usage; (2) advantages of genrefication of the fiction collection in an elementary school library, including its impact on various library users; and (3) concerns related to genrefication of the fiction collection in an elementary school library, including the potential negative impact of genrefication on various library users as well as possible alternatives that may involve less labor-intensive efforts with the same benefits of genrefication.

### **Reading and the Elementary School Student**

Much research has focused on factors that impact students' motivation to read as well as differences among students in their book preference, reading habits, and usage of the school library. This section offers an overview of these topics in order to set the framework to discover how genrefication of the fiction section in an elementary school library may address these issues. To begin, the role of locus of control and student choice on a student's motivation to read are discussed. Next, age and gender related differences in book preference, reading habits, and school library usage are explored.

#### **Student Choice and Motivation to Read**

A student-friendly school library provides students with the opportunity to select books of interest that engage them as readers. In this section, the themes of student

choice and motivation to read are explored. First, the relationship between locus of control and reading engagement is discussed. Second, the impact of student choice of specific reading material on reading engagement and motivation to read is explored. Finally, the role of librarians and teachers on promotion of students' self-selection of books is addressed.

Student perception of control matters when it comes to reading engagement and motivation to read. In their study of 170 students in third to fifth grade, Vieira and Grantham found that students with an internal locus of control, the belief that one is in control of one's own choices, expressed more interest in the reading material that they were given than did students with an external locus of control, the belief that outside forces, such as parents, teachers, and peers, are in control of one's choices (335). In other words, students who felt that they had control over their choices may have been more intrinsically motivated and thus more likely to be engaged with their reading material. In contrast, students who did not feel in control of their choices could answer basic questions about what they read but did not become deeply involved with the material (Vieira and Grantham 336). This suggests that students with an external locus of control are more extrinsically motivated readers; that is, they read primarily to answer teacher questions or to perform well on a test (Vieira and Grantham 340). Thus, students' locus of control may be a factor to consider as teachers and librarians look for ways to promote reading engagement in their students.

In addition to having a sense of control over his or her choices, a student's ability to choose specific reading material also impacts his or her reading engagement and motivation to read (Edmunds and Bauserman 420; Palmer, Codling, and Gambrell 177).



In their interviews with fourth graders, Edmunds and Bauserman found that choice was one of the main factors that excited students about reading both fiction and nonfiction texts (417-418). Choice was also identified as a main component of students' motivation to read in Palmer, Codling, and Gambrell's interviews with third to fifth graders (177). They found that "self-selection of reading material is clearly linked to enjoyment and sustained reading experiences" (178). This finding was true for all students, regardless of their reading abilities and overall motivation to read. Finally, Mohr states that "interest, access, and control are key aspects of intrinsically motivated readers; high interest can offset text difficulty in that motivated readers may persist in reading a text that is beyond their reading level" (85). Because allowing students to choose their own reading material helps them become more motivated to read, librarians and teachers are advised to give students the freedom to choose their own books and to provide time during school for students to read those books (Edmunds and Bauserman 420).

### **Differences in Book Preference, Reading Habits, and School Library Usage**

A student-friendly school library that makes it easy for students to find fiction books of interest may be able to counteract some of the gender and age differences seen in children's reading habits. In this section, the themes of elementary school students' book preferences, reading habits, and school library usage are explored by gender and age. First, gender differences in students' book preferences and reading habits are discussed. Second, age-related declines in students' motivation to learn and to read and in their use of the school library are addressed. Finally, students' challenges with the organization of the school library and how this impacts library usage are explored.

There are a number of differences between boys and girls when it comes to reading. Some findings suggest that boys navigate toward information texts, such as books about sports or cars, whereas girls prefer fiction texts (Asselin 53; Moss 101). Yet other findings suggest that both boys and girls prefer fiction (Doiron) or that both prefer nonfiction (Mohr 90). Even within these later studies, however, nonfiction books were chosen at a higher rate by boys than by girls. Boys also tend to read fewer books in general than do girls (Asselin 53; Doiron; Moss 101). This holds true even among boys and girls who read at the same ability level (Moss 102). Finally, compared with girls, boys are more frequently described as struggling readers (101). This may help explain why some boys prefer nonfiction to fiction texts. With nonfiction, struggling male readers may be able to disguise their reading ability level (103). The non-linear layout of many nonfiction texts for young readers allows struggling readers to browse information, thereby enabling them to become “experts” on a topic without the need to deeply comprehend the text. This can help raise the self-esteem of struggling male readers and may be a reason that they prefer reading nonfiction texts, which is viewed as play, whereas fiction is viewed as work (103).

Yet, the benefits of reading fiction suggest that teachers and librarians find ways to promote fiction among young readers, including reluctant readers and those who are reading below grade level. Vieira and Grantham state that promoting interest in fiction stories is important because “fictional reading can serve as a gateway to the development of general reading interest” (323). In addition, research suggests that those who read fiction display higher levels of empathy and a more well-developed theory of mind (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, and Peterson qtd. in Oatley 42). By being

able to identify with and understand the motivations and actions of characters in fiction stories, students learn to navigate their social world more effectively and to “understand the complexities of social life” (Oatley 43). These lifelong skills do not negate the importance placed on nonfiction by the Common Core State Standards; however, the research conducted by Oatley and his colleagues indicates that reading fiction has multiple benefits for students that go beyond their academic work.

In addition to potential gender differences in students’ book preferences, there appear to be age and gender differences related to students’ motivation to read and to their use of the school library. Young students tend to be motivated to learn when they first enter school. As years pass though, their motivation wanes for all types of learning, including reading (Guthrie and Wigfield, qtd. in Edmunds and Bauserman 415; Wigfield et al. 458). Gander states that “by eighth grade there is a 50 percent drop in reading for pleasure” (20). This coincides with students’ use of the school library. Elementary school librarians have noticed a drop-off in circulation by the time students reach 5th grade (Neltner). A report by the National Literacy Trust in England indicates that students ages 7 - 11 are more likely to use the school library than are older students and that use of the school library declines rapidly with age. Girls are also more likely to use the school library than are boys (Clark 4), which correlates with findings that girls read more books than do boys. Among the reasons given for not using the school library is the perception that the library did not contain books of interest (Clark 4). The National Literacy Trust report also indicates a strong correlation between school library usage and reading attainment. Students who are proficient or advanced readers are more likely to report frequent school library usage than are students who are struggling

readers (Clark 4). This correlation does not prove causation, but provides evidence that, at the least, school libraries play a part in the lives of successful readers (Clark 5).

Although school libraries play a role in students' reading success, young students may find it difficult to effectively utilize the school library. There are several reasons for this. First, the layout of the library and the sheer volume of books may overwhelm some young students (Coleman 42; Jones 576). Baker suggests that library patrons may suffer from "information overload" when they attempt to browse the shelves for a book of interest (317). This problem becomes more prevalent as the size of the library collection increases (Baker 372). Second, many elementary school students are not cognitively ready to search for information in the way in which most libraries are arranged. Elementary school students function primarily in Piaget's concrete operational stage of development, although some may still be in the preoperational stage (Hale 3; Webb 5). This stage is characterized by concrete thought processes; students categorize information and rely heavily on visual input, rather than textual input, during the information-seeking process (Cooper 920). For example, in her case study involving 21 students in second grade, Cooper found that students used concrete operations such as touching books and looking at the covers and inside pictures to select a book for a project (915; 918). They rarely used a book's text features, such as the table of contents or index to help them select a book. Third, school library checkout periods are often very brief during elementary school (Jones 576). By middle school, formal library checkout periods may no longer exist; instead, students may only be allowed to visit the school library during their lunch period or between classes, which limits their ability to fully explore their reading choices (Dumas 20). Finally, students may be hesitant to ask

for help during their book search (Montgomery E7). Some students are comfortable using the school library's online catalog; however, many younger students struggle to find the keywords that match the terms in the library cataloging system. Solomon indicates that the adults responsible for creating subject headings for works of fiction may not utilize the same terms that children are likely to use when searching for those works, creating a mismatch when students then try to search for books using the online catalog. Even in libraries that use a graphics-based catalog interface, students may find it difficult to use the system to find the books they want (Solomon). If students have trouble finding information on their own, and are hesitant to ask for help, their library experience will be unsuccessful and perhaps even frustrating (Hembree 62). Thus, school libraries that lack student-friendly organization may not be utilized as frequently by students.

### **Advantages of Genrefication of the Fiction Collection**

Genrefication of the fiction collection is one way to create a student-friendly elementary school library that engages student readers. In this section, the concept of genrefication is explored. First, the term genrefication is defined and genres common to the fiction collections of school libraries are provided. Second, the advantages of genrefying the fiction collection, including its impact on the various users of the elementary school library, are described. Finally, the effect of genrefication on the circulation of materials is discussed.

### **Genrefication Definition and Categories**

Simply put, genrefication is the shelf arrangement of the fiction collection by the genre of book rather than alphabetically by the author's last name (Acedo). The goal is

to increase students' ability to access books of interest (Moreillon, Hunt, and Graves 39). Some elementary school libraries divide their fiction collection into (1) a picture book section that is tailored toward younger students who need an adult to read to them and (2) a chapter book section that is tailored toward older students who are emerging or proficient readers. Both fiction collections can be genrefied independently of one another. The picture book section of the library can be arranged by subject or "pre-genre," such as dinosaurs or puppies (Buchter 51). The chapter book section may contain the following genres common to an elementary school library: action and adventure, realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, sports, humor, and scary stories (Hembree 62; Miller 25). Depending on the size of the collection, some elementary schools may also create a section for graphic novels (Hembree 64; Makatche; Miller 25; Scaglione). Libraries in middle and high schools, which contain a larger, more diverse fiction collection, may include additional categories such as relationships and romance, guys' read, and dystopian fiction (Bates; Collazo; Sweeney 42; Whitehead).

### **Benefits of Genrefication for Students**

Creating a genrefied fiction collection has many advantages for students. First, the organization of a genrefied fiction collection more closely matches the way in which young students cognitively search for information. Cooper found that elementary school students rely on shelf browsing and concrete or visual information such as touching books and looking at the covers to gain information about books (918, 920). In addition, many librarians have reported that their elementary and middle school students prefer to search for particular types of books or for books with particular content, rather than by

author's last name (Collazo; Dumas 20; Jackman 22-23). These reports are supported by research studies with elementary school students. For example, Edmunds and Bauserman found that fourth graders were especially drawn to funny or scary books (418). Similarly, Mohr's work with first graders found that students were most interested in books about animals or in books that were funny (92). Given the way in which young children cognitively search for information and their preference to search for particular types of books, a school library organized by genre, rather than by the author's last name, will help young students sort through a large fiction collection more easily.

Even when taught how to search for books by author, students still have difficulty navigating this organizational layout. For instance, Jana Hunt, a middle school librarian in Texas, found that "75 percent of students struggled to conduct author searches, even after instruction" (Moreillon, Hunt, and Graves 40). After Ms. Hunt genrefied the fiction collection of the library, her students reported that the new organization helped them find books of interest more quickly. Having the fiction collection organized in this manner empowers students to find books of their own choosing without assistance and when students can find and read books of their own choosing, they are more excited and motivated to read (Edmunds and Bauserman 420; Palmer, Codling, and Gambrell 177).

Genrefication of the library may also change students' reading habits, leading them to explore more fully a genre of interest or even to try a new genre. Because similar books are shelved together, students can more easily find "look-alike" books; that is, books that may be similar in tone or content to a favorite book. This allows students to read more deeply within a particular, favored genre (Buchter 52; Simms). It

can even lead them to try new authors within that genre (Baker 374). Alternatively, genrefication may prompt students to explore genres that they had not previously considered. For example, Laura Stiles, a middle school librarian in Texas, tells the story of a student who was excited to explore the romance section of the library when she realized that her favorite series, *The Princess Diaries* by Meg Cabot, had been shelved in that section (Stiles 32). This student may have initially needed the librarian's help to find her favorite series, but was now exposed to a whole new genre of books in which she was interested.

Another reason that an elementary school librarian might genrefy the fiction collection is to make it more accessible and appealing to reluctant readers or to those who prefer nonfiction books. Gangwish and Pietsch reported that their reluctant readers seemed more at ease navigating through the smaller genre-specific sections of the library than they had through the larger fiction collection arranged by author's last name (25). In addition, Stiles reported that genrefication of her fiction section resulted in "a large contingent of 'nonreaders' who stop by the library to find 'their' kind of books" (32). Genrefication may also entice readers who prefer nonfiction books to give fiction a try. Elizabeth Dumas, a middle school librarian in Louisiana, found that genrefication of her fiction collection led her male students who were avid readers of nonfiction sports books to become interested in reading the sports books located in the fiction section (21). By genrefying the fiction collection, Dumas was able to draw these students' attention to particular types of novels in which they might be interested.

Genrefication may also increase students' social interactions in the library. School librarians have noticed that students engage in more impromptu discussions



with peers about genres and favorite books within those genres after genrefying their fiction collection (Hembree 65; Sweeney 45). For example, Sweeney reported that students often exchanged ideas and offered recommendations to peers who were undecided about which book to read within a particular genre (45). Although some students prefer to read books by a particular author or within a particular series, it is worth noting that, in genrefied libraries, students are engaging in content-rich discussions with each other to offer suggestions for new books to read.

Most notable, perhaps, is that students gain confidence and are more independent in their search for books in genrefied libraries (Buchter 52, 54; Kaplan et al. 26-7). Information overload can be a problem in non-genrefied libraries, especially in libraries with large collections (Baker 372). Some students have difficulty finding a book on their own and may be hesitant to use the online catalog or to ask for help. Julie Hembree, an elementary school librarian in Washington, noted that her reluctant readers were hesitant to use the online catalog because it required too many steps, which caused them frustration (62). Prior to genrefication of the fiction collection, these students would often leave the library empty-handed, reporting that it was easier to find a book in their classroom library, which was organized by genre. With its simplified organization, a genrefied fiction collection empowers students to find books of interest on their own, without needing to request help from the school librarian or utilize the library's online catalog. In one genrefied library, Buchter found that "students as young as kindergartners are self-directed and empowered to find resources without the need of an adult" (52). This sense of independence in the library may relieve any anxiety that

students feel when entering the school library to search for books and may entice them to return to the library more often.

### **Benefits of Genrefication for Teachers and Librarians**

In addition to creating a more student-centered school library environment, a genrefied fiction collection also has advantages for teachers. Teachers report that they can more easily find materials that connect to content that they are teaching in class (Dumas 22; Kaplan et al. 25). For example, Dumas mentions a social studies teacher who was able to find several novels in the historical fiction section that pertain to planned units of study. In addition, Dumas reported that a recently adopted English Language Arts curriculum was organized by genre, which matched several of the genre sections housed in the library (22). Finally, teachers find it easier to match students with “good books” (Dumas 22) and are better able to have discussions with students about genres (Simms).

There are several ways in which genrefication of the fiction collection might benefit the school librarian. First, the process of genrefication itself helps librarians get to know their collection (Collazo; Dumas 21; Parrott and Peterson). Collection analysis and weeding are often the first steps in the genrefication process (Jackman 23; Sweeney 42). These steps help librarians identify and eliminate old or damaged copies of books, and also highlight areas of the collection that may have holes and that need rebuilding (Collazo; Gangwish and Pietsch 25; Sweeney 42). Once students begin utilizing the genrefied collection, librarians can get a better impression of which genres are most popular and, alternatively, which might need promotion among students (Simms). An improved knowledge of the collection also helps librarians engage in more

informed readers' advisory services (Sweeney 41). During readers' advisory, the librarian seeks to understand the students' interests in order to make appropriate recommendations for books that they might like (Trott and Novak 35). In a genrefied collection, the librarian is better able to make suggestions that meet a student's preferred genre, even when the librarian is less familiar with that particular genre, because similar books are shelved together (Sweeney 41).

Another way in which a genrefied fiction collection may benefit the librarian is by changing how he or she spends time during library checkouts. Because students are better able to find books on their own in a genrefied library, the librarian can spend more time during checkouts engaging in deeper, more meaningful conversations with students about the books they are reading or would like to read next (Buchter 54; Kaplan et al. 26, 28).

Finally, genrefication of the fiction collection enables school librarians to modify the arrangement of the library's materials to meet the needs of students. Altering the library collection for the benefit of patrons is not a new concept. Although fiction books are listed as part of the 800s literature section in the traditional Dewey Decimal system, many libraries have pulled out fiction into a separate section, or have otherwise "de-Deweyed" their collections with success (Cox; Dumas 20; Grigsby 27). The organization of the library should meet students' needs (Cooper 332-3). Because the arrangement of the fiction collection in a genrefied library is changeable, the librarian can make modifications as needed to match what is best for the school's student population (LaGarde 5; Parrott and Peterson). If, for example, the librarian first combines science

fiction with fantasy and then finds that students have strong preferences for one genre over the other, the collection can be easily modified to separate these two genres.

### **Impact of Genrefication on Circulation Rates**

In addition to the accounts of how genrefication benefits students, teachers, and librarians, creating a genrefied library seems to have a positive impact on circulation rates within the school library. School librarians who have genrefied their collections overwhelmingly report higher circulation statistics after the change was made (Collazo; Dumas 21; Hembree 65; Jackman 24; Miller 25). For example, Hunt reported an increase in the annual circulation of materials from 7,569 items pre-genrefication to 16,024 items post-genrefication (Moreillon, Hunt, and Graves 41). In addition, Hembree noted that circulation of materials increased 92% from pre- to post-genrefication (65). Four years after genrefication, circulation had increased a cumulative 336%. These increased circulation rates suggest that genrefication may continue to positively impact students' reading habits years after initiation.

### **Concerns Related to Genrefication of the Fiction Collection**

While genrefication of the fiction collection of an elementary school library appears to have many advantages, there are also a number of concerns related to this practice. In this section, the disadvantages of genrefication as they pertain to the various users of the school library are discussed. In addition, possible alternatives to genrefication that may offer the same benefits but require less time and effort on the part of library staff are explored.

## **Disadvantages of Genrefication for Students**

Genrefication may negatively impact students. One potential drawback is that genrefication of the fiction collection may limit cross-genre reading by students. While students may enjoy finding books within their favorite genre shelved together, they may use genrefication as a way to disregard their less-favored genres (Simms; Trott and Novak 34). In other words, students may choose to read only within their preferred genre and eschew any books that fall outside of that genre. Given that reading fiction is shown to promote empathy within readers (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, and Peterson as cited in Oatley), it may behoove students to read across multiple genres in order to better enhance their understanding of people of various cultures, backgrounds, and experiences.

Second, genrefication may make it more difficult for some students to find specific books. For example, students who prefer to read books by a particular author may find it difficult to navigate a genrefied library versus a library that shelves books by the author's last name. Because some authors write across multiple genres, their books may be shelved in different places throughout the library (Trott and Novak 34). Students who enjoy reading a particular series might face the same difficulty if the librarian decides to separate books in a series by genre rather than keeping them together. Finally, because the librarian decides how to classify the novels, he or she may place a book in a genre different from what the student would have thought, making it difficult for the student to find that book without assistance or using the online catalog.

Third, as students become accustomed to navigating their genrefied school library, they may find themselves disadvantaged when attempting to access resources

in non-genrefied libraries or in libraries that have been genrefied in a different way. There is a certain security in knowing that fiction collections are organized consistently, by author's last name, across libraries. This sense of security may be lost when some libraries use genrefication, especially because each genrefied library will look different (Acedo; Brisco 36; Parrott and Peterson). Even among genrefied libraries, there may be inconsistencies in the genres selected or in how particular books are assigned to particular genres, which can be confusing and frustrating to students as they move from one genrefied library to another (Maker 169). Thus, the original intent of the genrefied library, to make it easier for students to find the books they enjoy, may be lost to students when they visit other libraries.

Finally, the aesthetics of genrefication of the fiction collection may negatively impact students. Genrefication efforts often utilize increased signage to help library users navigate the new organization of the library. Rather than helping, however, Maker suggests that additional signs may distract and overwhelm patrons (169). In addition, the spine labels that are often added to books as part of genrefication efforts may obscure useful information, such as the book's title or author (Maker 170). Although Maker's examples were drawn from genrefication practices in public libraries, the same arguments could hold true in school libraries.

### **Disadvantages of Genrefication for Teachers and Librarians**

Genrefication may also have a negative impact on teachers in the school. Although students may prefer to find books for pleasure reading by genre, teachers often have particular books (and authors) in mind when they visit the school library. In a genrefied library, teachers may have more difficulty quickly finding the specific book

they seek, at least until they become acclimated to the new organizational layout (Jackman 24; Kaplan et al. 28).

Genrefication of the fiction collection may also cause difficulties for school librarians. First, genrefication is a large, time-consuming undertaking (Acedo; Parrott and Peterson). During the genrefication process, librarians must think about how the collection should be sorted, then spend weeks, perhaps months, removing books from the shelves, re-cataloging them, relabeling them, reshelving them, and creating new signage (Simms). Unless this work is completed over the summer, when the school is closed, it can take valuable time away from the librarian's other duties, including his or her roles as teacher, instructional partner, and information specialist.

Another issue is that genrefication can create confusion for librarians as they attempt to assign books to genres and shelve them accordingly. For example, some authors write in more than one genre and genrefication may result in books by the same author being split across multiple genres (Saricks 64; Simms; Trott and Novak 34). In addition, librarians need to consider whether to include particular subgenres. For example, some librarians may shelve dystopian novels in the science fiction section whereas others may have a separate section solely for the dystopian novels. If there are zombies in the dystopian novel, where does it go? The decisions librarians make about genrefication of books can create confusion, rather than alleviate it, among library users. Some librarians may choose to resolve this issue by purchasing multiple copies of the same book to be placed in the different genres or subgenres, but this is a cost-prohibitive solution for many school libraries.

Because a genrefied collection often requires specialized spine labels, it may also take longer to process new books. Either the jobber must agree to customize the labeling for the school, or the library staff must correct the labeling of new books when they arrive. In either case, the extra time and effort needed to process new books means that it takes longer to get them on the shelf and in the hands of students (Dumas 21).

Finally, although genrefication of the fiction collection may result in students becoming more independent in searching for books, there is a potential downside of removing librarians from this process. Students may become less likely to view librarians as a source of information when searching for books, which could result in fewer opportunities for the librarian to help students find a new book to pique their interest (Brisco 37; Montgomery E6; Parrott and Peterson). During library checkout times librarians in genrefied libraries should be mindful of redoubling their efforts to have meaningful conversations with students about what they are reading.

### **Possible Alternatives to Genrefication**

Many school librarians who have genrefied their library collections have contributed to the popular literature regarding the benefits of genrefication. However, there are fewer research-based findings in the scholarly literature on this topic, which may give librarians and administrators pause when considering genrefication as a way to engage students. Because genrefication of the fiction collection is a large, time-consuming, and potentially expensive process, it is worthwhile to consider alternatives that may provide the same benefits but with less time and effort on the part of library staff. These alternatives can be implemented instead of genrefication or as an initial



step to determine their impact on student use of the library prior to implementing genrefication.

One alternative to genrefication of the entire fiction collection is the creation of book displays to highlight books that have a common theme. For example, Colleen Graves, a middle school librarian in Texas, found that she was able to entice reluctant readers to try new books by creating a small display of the library's newest books (Moreillon, Hunt, and Graves 41). Without genrefying the entire fiction collection, Graves created small displays of the most popular genres, such as graphic novels. She reports that, at the end of the year, overall circulation had increased 34% (Moreillon, Hunt, and Graves 42). Elizabeth Dumas, a middle school librarian in Louisiana, began her genrefication efforts with smaller displays of popular genres, such as mysteries, horror, and suspense (20). After a positive student response, Dumas surveyed her students and found that the majority of respondents "liked having books separated by genre so that they could easily find the books they liked to read" (20). She then went on to genrefy the entire fiction collection.

In her review of studies on the use of book displays in public libraries, Baker found they increased circulation of the books in the displays, regardless of the type of book (321). She noted that, to be successful, displays must be in locations that are highly visible and readily accessible to many patrons (Baker 325). These locations might include near the library entrance or the circulation desk (Baker 325).

A second alternative to genrefication is the use of book lists to highlight specific books. In her review of studies on the use of book lists in public libraries, Baker found that, in the majority of studies, book lists increased circulation rates of the books on the

lists (323). She noted that, to be successful, book lists should be distributed widely and should require little effort by the patrons to access (Baker 325). Techniques include displaying the book lists prominently in high-traffic areas, distributing the book lists directly to patrons when they check out books, or posting them on the library website.

A third alternative to genrefication is the use of book talks to highlight books that may be of interest to students. Dumas mentions that she uses book talks in conjunction with her genrefied library to highlight particular genres. In the future, she plans to provide book talks on particular authors whose books span genres in order to encourage cross-genre reading among students (Dumas 22). In addition, Susan Grigsby, a school librarian in Georgia, mentions that she conducts regular book talks with students (27). Students' enjoyment of these book talks has sparked their interest in books and has led them to create their own book trailers.

Book displays, book lists, and book talks serve to narrow down patrons' choices. This helps eliminate information overload, especially in larger collections, and allows patrons to select a book from a smaller selection of materials (Baker 324). Because library patrons often have little time to process the myriad choices available in large collections, techniques such as book displays, book lists, and book talks, which simplify choices and do not require much effort to use, can be successful (Baker 324).

Some librarians have chosen to use book displays or book talks on their own, whereas others use them in conjunction with their genrefied fiction collection (Dumas 22). The process does not need to be all-or-nothing (Hembree 65). The key is to carefully consider the needs of students before implementing any major changes in the library. School librarians reflect on how their students search for materials in the library

and whether there is a better way to meet students' needs (Snipes 18-19). Based on this reflection, school librarians may choose to utilize book displays, book lists, book talks, genrefication, or all four techniques to stimulate student interest in the library's fiction collection.

## CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Introduction**

Elementary school students may encounter difficulties when utilizing their school library; in particular, the fiction collection. First, the size of the collection may be overwhelming for some students. Second, the collection is not organized in a manner in which students typically search for books. Third, young students may not know how to efficiently search the online catalog. Fourth, because checkout periods are often brief, the school librarian may not have sufficient time to help all students who need assistance finding a book. For these reasons, elementary school students' book selection process may be a source of confusion or anxiety, resulting in an unsuccessful or even stressful school library experience.

Genrefication of the fiction collection is one way to create a student-friendly school library that enables elementary school students to understand and navigate the collection, with the goal of increasing their utilization of the library to find fiction books of interest. In this paper, three main research questions related to the use of genrefication of the fiction collection as a tool to assist young readers in the school library were explored. Specifically, this paper aimed to answer the following questions: what are some of the major issues related to elementary school students' reading habits and their use of the school library? What are the advantages of genrefying the fiction collection of an elementary school library? What are the concerns related to genrefying the fiction collection of an elementary school library? In this chapter, the answers to these questions are summarized. In addition, implications and next steps for school librarians interested in genrefying their fiction collections are explored.

## Reading and the Elementary School Student

Research indicates that a student's perception of control and his or her ability to choose specific reading material affects his or her motivation to read. Students with an internal locus of control, the belief that one is in control of one's own choices, express greater interest and are more engaged with reading material than students with an external locus of control (Vieira and Grantham 335). In addition, being able to choose their own reading material is one of the main factors that excites students about reading and impacts their motivation to read (Edmunds and Bauserman 417, 418; Palmer, Codling, and Gambrell 177). The results of the research are similar for students of varying reading abilities.

Students exhibit gender and age related differences when it comes to book preference, reading habits, and school library usage. Regarding gender differences, boys tend to prefer nonfiction books to fiction books and tend to read fewer overall books than do girls (Asselin 53; Doiron; Moss 101). In addition, boys are more likely to be described as struggling readers. This may explain their preference for nonfiction books, which can be read in a nonlinear fashion and allow them to become "experts" on a topic (Moss 101, 103). Boys are also less likely to use the school library than are girls (Clark 4).

Regarding age differences, it appears that motivation to read wanes as students get older (Guthrie and Wigfield, as cited in Edmunds and Bauserman 415; Wigfield et al. 458). In addition, use of the school library declines with age (Clark 4; Nelter). Although research on the causes of this phenomenon are limited, it can be suggested that earlier lack of success finding books of interest might contribute to this.

When young students use the school library, they may have trouble finding books of interest to read. First, the layout and the volume of books may overwhelm them, leading to “information overload” (Baker 317; Coleman 42; Jones 576). Second, because they are in the concrete operations developmental stage, elementary school students may not be cognitively ready to search for information in the way in which most libraries are arranged (Cooper 915, 918). Third, the library search may be unsuccessful because students find checkout periods too short, they are hesitant to ask for help, or they are unfamiliar with how to use the online catalog (Jones 576; Montgomery E7; Solomon).

### **Advantages of Genrefication of the Fiction Collection**

Arrangement of the fiction collection of an elementary school library by genre of book rather than by the author’s last name has a number of advantages for students. First, genrefication simplifies the library search process for students who prefer to look for particular types of books or for books with particular content (Edmunds and Bauserman 418) and is more in line with how young students tend to search for information (Cooper 920). Second, genrefication may change students’ reading habits by enabling them to explore more fully a favorite genre or even to try a new genre they had not previously considered (Baker 374; Buchter 52; Simms). Third, arranging the fiction collection by genre results in smaller groupings of books, which may entice reluctant readers overwhelmed by the traditional arrangement of a large collection by an author’s last name (Gangwish and Pietsch 25). Fourth, genrefication may increase social interactions in the library, as students interested in the same genre exchange ideas and offer recommendations to each other. Finally, genrefication appears to help

students gain confidence and become more independent in their search for books (Buchter 52, 54; Kaplan et al. 26-27).

Genrefication of the fiction collection of an elementary school library benefits the adult users of the library as well. Teachers are better able to help match students with “good books” and engage in discussions with students about genres (Dumas 22; Simms). Through the genrefication process, librarians become better acquainted with their fiction collection, which helps them to identify books that should be weeded and to recognize areas of the collection that need rebuilding (Sweeney 42). Renewed familiarity of the collection and arrangement by genre also increases librarians’ ability to provide quality readers’ advisory services to students, even when they may not be as familiar with a particular genre (Sweeney 41). As students become more independent during the book search process, librarians can spend less time during checkout periods directing students to books and more time engaging in meaningful conversations with students about what they are reading (Buchter 54; Kaplan et al. 26, 28). Genrefication also allows librarians the freedom to adapt their fiction collection to meet the changing needs of their students (LaGarde 5; Parrott and Peterson).

Finally, genrefication has a positive impact on the circulation rates within the school library. Numerous accounts from librarians who have genrefied their collections indicate that circulation increased from pre-genrefication to post-genrefication (Collazo, Dumas 21; Jackman 24; Miller 25). In one instance, this increase was evident up to four years after the change (Hembree 65).

### **Concerns Related to Genrefication of the Fiction Collection**

Despite the advantages of genrefication, there are a number of concerns worthy of consideration, especially related to how genrefication might impact the student population. First, genrefication could limit cross-genre reading by students, meaning that students read only in their preferred genre and ignore all other books (Simms; Trott and Novak 34). Second, arrangement of the fiction collection by genre may make it more difficult for some students to find the books they want. For instance, students who prefer to read books by a particular author will no longer be able to easily find those books, especially if that author's books are spread across more than one genre (Trott and Novak 34). The same might be true for books in a series, if the librarian chooses to split them up. Third, when fiction collections are no longer organized consistently across libraries, students may find it difficult to navigate those collections (Acedo; Brisco 36; Parrott and Peterson). This can be a disadvantage for students when they move from elementary school to middle and high school or even when they move between elementary schools that are organized differently. Finally, the increased usage of spine labels and signage that often characterizes genrefication efforts may be overwhelming and confusing to students (Maker 169; 170).

Genrefication may also have some disadvantages for the adult users of the school library. First, teachers who have particular books (and authors) in mind for classroom use may find it difficult to find those books quickly (Jackman 24; Kaplan et al. 28). For school librarians, the genrefication process is a large, time-consuming undertaking that can interfere with their other duties (Acedo; Parrott and Peterson). Deciding on the genre for each book in the fiction collection is a daunting task and, in



some cases, can create more confusion for patrons (Saricks 64; Simms; Trott and Novak 34). Processing new books can take longer because locations need to be added to the library catalog. Also customized labels are required on all new acquisitions (Dumas). Lastly, as students become more independent in their book search process, they may be less likely to view the school librarian as a source of valuable information, thereby reducing the number of meaningful conversations that might take place between the librarian and the students (Brisco 37; Montgomery E6; Parrott and Peterson).

Finally, there are possible alternatives to genrefication that may offer the same benefits but require less time and effort on the part of library staff. These alternatives include book displays, book lists, and book talks, all of which can help narrow down students' choices to help eliminate information overload (Baker 324). These alternatives can be used on their own or in combination with each other. Some librarians may choose to use these options instead of genrefication of the fiction collection whereas others may use them as a preliminary step before beginning the genrefication process or in conjunction with an already genrefied library.

### **Implications for School Librarians**

The information presented here has several implications for an elementary school librarian who is considering genrefication of his or her fiction collection. First, the librarian may want to observe and query students and teachers on their use of the library. In addition, the librarian should engage in a thorough review of circulation statistics for the past few years, taking into consideration any major occurrences. For example, a large increase or decrease in the student population might have impacted

those statistics. This information can highlight potential patterns in circulation, such as areas of popularity as well as areas that could be better promoted, and may help inform the librarian's decision regarding genrefication.

Second, an elementary school librarian considering genrefication should discuss his or her view of the function of the library, specifically the fiction collection, with the school's administrators and teachers. How the library is utilized to support the school's curriculum plan should inform any decisions about genrefication of the fiction collection.

Third, an elementary school librarian considering genrefication should meet with peers who have already genrefied their fiction collections, both within and outside of the district. Fellow librarians can provide essential information about the benefits and the pitfalls of genrefication. Librarians working in the same district may be especially helpful in terms of sharing any bureaucratic or programmatic roadblocks. In addition, the librarian should engage in conversations with the librarians at the middle and high school for which the elementary school is a feeder school. These librarians may have specific ideas regarding how they want students to be able to search for books, which may impact the elementary school librarian's decision about genrefication.

Finally, an elementary school librarian who decides to genrefy the fiction collection should be prepared to explain and defend this choice to all patrons who utilize the library, including the parents of students. One option is to present the reasons for genrefication at a department meeting, staff meeting, school-wide professional development session, and a library open house offered for students and parents. The librarian can be honest about the potential drawbacks, but explain how genrefication can better support the specific student and teacher populations at the school.

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