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UK Preparatory School Librarians' and Teachers' Design and Use of Reading Lists: A Qualitative Study of Approaches, Perceptions, and Content

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a small-scale qualitative study that explored the perceptions of and approaches used by UK school librarians and teachers in the design and use of reading lists. The research question was: "What is the best way to construct reading lists to maximize -driven and pupil-centered. The purpose was situated within a wider reader-development curriculum. However, the participants perceived that the reading list was a less-effective method of reader development than face-to-face interaction with pupils. Four recommendations to improve practice in similar contexts are suggested. The conclusion reached was that UK preparatory school librarians' and teachers' construction of reading lists is a complex practice that attempts to balance pupils' reading for pleasure with their needs for literacy attainment.

Introduction

Both practitioners (Gorman 2010) and academic researchers (Lo et al. 2014) identify that the construction of lists of recommended reading is part of a school librarian's role. In the UK context, Sue Shaper (2014) has advocated the creation of reading lists as a method of supporting reading across the curriculum. Yet, to date, there has been limited research into the construction of reading lists and their use in school libraries as a method of reader development. Two earlier studies offered insight into how summer reading lists have been used by U.S. school librarians. Firstly, in Ya-Ling Lu and Carol Gordon's (2008) study of a free-choice summer reading program, students in grades 9–12 were given access to twelve online annotated reading lists to select titles to read over summer vacation. Secondly, Libby Gorman's (2010) study of the views of twelve school librarians in North Carolina investigated the purposes behind summer reading lists. However, these studies did not examine the school librarians' perceptions of the reading list as a method of reader development nor the librarians' approaches in the construction of the lists. Thus, the significance of the research described in this paper is to provide a unique study into the perceptions of and approaches used by UK preparatory school librarians in the design and use of reading lists. This study will be of interest to in-service school librarians and teachers worldwide who wish to implement Ross J. Todd's "Evidence in Practice" approach: "integrating available research evidence with deep knowledge and understanding derived from professional experience" (2009, 89).

The issue of recommended reading for children and young adults is of central importance. The

The research aimed to explore the role of the school librarian in the delivery of teaching and learning and the role of the reading list as a pedagogical tool. This research followed a qualitative approach to identify the motivation, processes, and perceptions of school librarians and teachers in regard to the reading list. In this paper, the literature surrounding the librarian's role in teaching and learning, reading for pleasure, and literacy attainment is discussed and leads to an identification of the strategies employed by school librarians to promote reading. To understand the complex landscape in which school librarianship and teaching coexist, teachers' subject knowledge and their use of library services were examined and are reported here. Finally, research into the purposes of reading lists and their content are then reviewed in this paper.

Literature Review

UK Context

In England school library provision is not a statutory requirement, and, as a result, the appointment of a qualified school librarian is not mandated. In the UK 47.7 percent of the school library workforce have no professional qualification in Library and Information Studies (LIS)

(Archives and Records Association 2014)

Australia (Hughes 2013) and Taiwan (Lo et al. 20

The emphasis upon the role of the school librarian in relation to the development of pupils' literacy is not limited to the UK. In a study of school libraries in New York State, fostering development of students' literacy was found to be the "most important aspect" of the librarian's role in the opinion of multiple stakeholders, including head teachers, classroom teachers, and parents (Small, Shanahan, and Stasak 2010, 10). Mos

prepare them for a professional partnership (2015). Patricia Montiel-Overall and Patricia Jones's survey of 194 elementary teachers found that they perceive collaborative practices "as important to student learning," yet many did not recognize that "they shared responsibilities with school librarians" (2011, 68). When collaboration occurred, school librarians performed traditional tasks (Montiel-Overall and Jones 2011). Further, teachers lack an understanding of school librarians' instructional roles (Montiel-Overall and Grimes 2013). However, this lack of collaboration could also be related to a gap in librarians' knowledge of instructional techniques as the UK LIS curriculum focuses on academic theory rather than teaching skills (Inskip 2015).

Summer Reading Programs

Research into the effectiveness of summer reading clubs and programs to prevent the documented decline in reading achievement over the summer vacation has shown mixed results (Dydia et al. 2015). Susan Roman and Carole D. Fiore's Dominican Study investigated the impact of a summer reading program on students in the third grade (ages 8–9 at the beginning of the study) across eleven sites in the United States. Roman and Fiore found that "students who participated in a public library summer reading program scored higher on reading achievement tests at the beginning of the fourth grade and did not experience summer loss in reading" (2010, 30). Richard L. Allington et al.'s (2010) study examined the effect of a book gifting scheme over three consecutive years; the study subjects were students in seventeen elementary schools in two Florida districts. These researchers found that "easy access to self-selected books for summer reading over successive years does, in fact, limit summer reading setback" (Allington et al. 2010, 422). Further, the type of material self-

due to its multiple methods and approaches (Ormston et al. 2014), G. E. Gorman and Peter Clayton offer the following definition:

a process of enquiry that draws data from the context in which events occur, in an attempt to describe these occurrences, as a means of determining the process in which events are embedded and the perspectives of those participating in the events. (2005, 3)

A qualitative approach was selected for this study as it focused on understanding both the perspectives of and the processes used by school librarians and teachers in their design of reading lists. The research strategy adopted for this study is a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). Gorman and Clayton (2005) stated that qualitative research involves a process of pattern seeking. Therefore, thematic analysis is an appropriate research strategy for this study. Braun and Clarke argued that thematic analysis is an accessible strategy for inexperienced researchers and it is a flexible method that is not rooted in a “pre-existing theoretical framework” (Braun and Clark 2006, 81). Yet they also stated that the researchers must clarify their “theoretical position” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 81) as this has implications for the manner in which the data is analyzed.

The researcher for this study, Rebecca Scott, holds an interpretivist belief that reality is socially

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90 percent of the UK school library workforce are female (Archives and Records Association and CILIP 2016), the researcher believes the gender of the sample reflects the current situation in the sector. Four of the participants' schools were coeducational, and one was a single-sex boys' school. The views of school librarians and teachers working in single-sex female schools were, therefore, not investigated. The ages of the pupils ranged from two to thirteen. Table 1 shows an overview of the characteristics of the final participants.

Table 1. Participant overview.

Participant	Qualified Librarian	Qualified Teacher	No. of Years in Post	School Location	Year ISI Report Published	Type of Independent School
Librarian A	3		16	Hertfordshire	2011	ages 4–13 coeducational
Librarian B	3	3	1	London	2011	ages 3–11 coeducational
Librarian C			15	London	2015	ages 5–13

“provide[s] an opportunity for detailed investigation of each person’s individual perspective, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomenon is located” (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 56). To ensure the research was conducted ethically, each participant signed a consent form prior to the interview, and each participant’s identity was protected by use of pseudonyms when the results of the research were reported. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using Thomas Eri and Joron Pihl’s (2016) adaptation of Per Linell’s (2009) transcription conventions.

A triangulation of methods was used to improve the credibility of the findings. (More details are in the next subsection.) The second method of data collection involved the gathering of preparatory school reading lists. In addition to those given to the researcher by interview participants, forty-two examples from eighteen different schools were identified through an online search and ~~ad~~ e

length of participants' pauses was presented in parentheses, e.g., a two-second pause is presented as (.2). These transcription conventions were used by the researcher to document participants' verbal utterances, which indicate their reflective interaction with the questions posed.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis—Frequency of Coding.

Theme	No. of instances
CONTENT	51
Patron-driven	13
Literary merit	12
Exclusion	9
Textual variety	9
Curriculum	8
USER	48
Parent-driven	15
Supportive scaffold	13
Pupil-centered	8
Readers' advisory	5
Discoverability	4
Personalization	3
PURPOSE	43
Reader-development curriculum	22

Theme 2: User

Parent-Driven

Two main groups were coded under the user theme: parents and pupils. Lists were most commonly perceived as parent-driven and, therefore, parents' expectations were a motivation for construction of the lists:

The parents, uh, really value reading lists... here, um, it's intended to be a list of recommended books. Um, that's going to give guidance as to the kind of choices that children might make... They're all very ambitious for the children. (D1).

Librarian C commented that parents "worry a lot about progression" (C1). Thus, the reading list was considered a supportive scaffold for parents by providing "a sort of gateway into something that can be quite frightening" (B1). A reading list was perceived to be a tool for use "outside school" (D4) and "something concrete for them to work on" (C1). Yet Librarian C expressed concerns that parents' aspirations can lead to an over-reliance on the reading list because they "are just desperate" (C2). This concern suggests that parents need further support to develop effective reading practices.

it is likely that the time available to develop pedagogical practices in addition to managing the collection is limited.

More importantly, participants' comments indicate the absence of a learning outcome-driven approach to the design of reading lists and an uncertainty about the impact of the reading list as a pedagogical tool. As Todd noted in his study of the instructional role of school librarians, the issue surrounding the measurement of learning outcomes is one of "precision and specificity" (2012, 22). To evaluate the impact of reading lists on pupils' reading, precise learning objectives and a clear assessment strategy are required. The school librarian's role in teaching and learning is to be a "leader" in reading for pleasure (SLA 2016), and a vital part of this leadership is

individualized approach is advisable. Librarians can then effectively communicate the effectiveness to parents and other stakeholders. The academic literature identified the need for effective communication between the school library and parents (Sakr, Nabhani, and Osta 2009; Fletcher, Greenwood, and Parkhill 2010; Domínguez et al. 2016). As Teacher E explained, parents “haven’t got the knowledge or the expertise that we have” (E3). Consequently, increasing both parents’ knowledge and their confidence through a range of strategies may reduce their reliance on reading lists. Librarian A recognized the need for improved communication because there are “so many good books out there now. They [parents] just need to know about them” (A12). Thus, the role of the school librarian involves bridging the gap between reading practices at home and at school so that the needs of stakeholders are met.

User Needs

The user theme highlighted a duality in reading list design as the participants managed a complex interplay between parents’ expectations and the needs of pupils. The reading list was perceived as parent-driven, and this finding is unsurprising because, in the context of independent preparatory education, parents are fee-paying customers; the school is both an educational establishment and a business. The value parents attached to the list, perhaps because it is “concrete” (C1) and something that is easy to “request” (E7), was a catalyst for its construction. As parental involvement in pupils’ learning is linked to attainment (Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack 2007), the importance of including parents in the reading process cannot be underestimated. Participants recognized that the reading list was “one way of encouraging a child to read more widely” but not necessarily the “preferred way... It depends on the list” (D5). Thus, the participants used their expertise to develop reading lists that would reconcile the needs of these two—at times oppositional—user groups.

On the one hand, the use of patron-driven selection ensures that the choices and the changing interests of children are taken into account. Librarian A’s involvement of pupils in selection illustrates a method of actively engaging pupils in the learning process. This active participation is considered empowering for students as it makes them agents “in the process of reading” (Domínguez et al. 2016, 238). This approach may increase pupils’ motivation to use the 4(d e)4(m)-2(pow)-8(e).

differentiated design increased the possibility that the reading list would meet the needs of the pupils because the content was organized for different levels of ability. This differentiation is interesting in light of Small, Shanahan, and Stasak's finding that "librarians seek ways to provide appropriate resources but do not typically design programs and services to meet the needs of

going to meet parents' needs, then digital texts should undoubtedly be included. It is unclear if digital texts are addressed in the wider reading-promotion strategies of the participants as exploration of wider reading-promotion strategies was beyond the scope of this study. However, as none of the participants raised the issue of digital content and none of the reading lists analyzed included digital text types, currently the issue appears not be of central importance to the participants. School libraries should be providing quality digital content for learning (Newsom 2016). If pupils are to be effective 21st-century learners who can adapt their reading

subject-specific reading lists. Consequently, the benefit to pupils of a subject-based reading list is not maximized.

A further issue addressed in the academic li.345 hesressesir9-4(1)5.3(/9)-6(h)-3.7(l9)-co(r)-6(i)-6(i)-a4(j)-o(r)-1(

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1) Introductory and Perceptions

How long have you been using reading lists at this school?

What do you understand by the term “reading list”?

What is the role of the reading list at your school?

What are the different reasons that prompt you to create a reading list?

How do you know the reading list is an effective tool?

How does the reading list support you in your role as school librarian? Support teachers? Support pupils?

2) Approaches

Can you show me an example of a reading list you created recently?

What was the motivation for creating this list?

Can you describe the process of construction?

How do you select which texts to include? [Researcher identifies a text on the list] Why did you select this title?

How do you decide how to organize the titles on the list?

How is the reading list used in the library or classroom? How is it accessed?

3) Close

What makes a good reading list?

Appendix B: Thematic Comparison to Reading List Samples

After the thematic map had been produced, four criteria were identified for triangulation with the sample of forty-two reading lists collected as described in the “Data Collection” subsection:

1. Textual variety
2. Purpose
3. Limited not exhaustive
4. Visual appeal

To check the credibility of the themes, a question was set by the researcher to check each theme against the samples. Tables B-1 through B-4 present the data resulting from this procedure. Each question is presented (A–D), and the procedure used to check is described.

Reading List Content—Textual Variety

Question A: 1 taist-st-st]TJ li

Table B-2. Reading list purpose—Year group.

Number of year groups specified as audience	Number of lists	Percentage
1	24	57%
2	12	29%
3	1	2%
4	2	5%
5	0	0%
6	2	5%
Unspecified	1	2%
Total		

Appendix C: Theme Definitions

Themes and Subthemes	Definition
CONTENT	The content theme refers to the texts selected for inclusion on the reading list. It was a multifaceted theme involving five subthemes.
Patron-driven	The selection of texts based on a formal pupil suggestion process or through an ongoing monitoring of their independent choices.
Literary merit	The selection of texts based on their literary merit in order to further pupils' literacy attainment. This selection included a process of canonical pragmatism with texts selected on the basis that students needed to prepare for the 11+ assessment.
Exclusion	The process of selection also involved the exclusion of content from the reading list for a variety of reasons.
Textual variety	The selection of texts to ensure a broad variety of genres and formats was included on the reading list.
Curriculum	The selection of texts to support the wider curriculum and to further students' understanding of a topic.
USER	The user theme refers to the user group and associated needs for which the reading list was originally designed.
Parent-driven	Parents' expectations (of pupils, teachers, and school librarians) and the value parents attached to the reading list was a key purpose driving its design.
Supportive scaffold	The reading list was considered a supportive scaffold for parents providing guidance on appropriate reading materials to further their child's progress.
Pupil-Centered	A reading list constructed with pupils' needs as the central principle and a belief that choice is a key factor in the process of reading for pleasure. A perception was evident that every student is different and thus a reading list cannot replace the day-to-day reader-development practices undertaken to meet their needs.
Readers' advisory	During one-to-one, face-to-face i2.6 ET Q q 213.24 272.4 312.1

FORMAT	The format theme refers to the organization of texts, the visual presentation of the list, the quantity of content, and any additional information recorded on the list.
Systematic arrangement	The process of systematically arranging texts by difficulty level or by grouping them thematically.
Limited not exhaustive	The perception that the number of titles on a reading list should be limited to a manageable number in order to be usable for pupils.
Visual appeal	The belief that the reading list should be visually appealing in order to engage pupils.
Explanatory annotation	The use of annotation to explain how the list was designed, how it is intended to be used, or to offer further information for the user.

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