

Moss, G., & McDonald, J. (2004). The borrowers: Library records as unobtrusive measures of children's reading preferences. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 27, 401-412.

Key Words: culturally responsive instruction, diverse texts, motivation

Summary:

In order to explore what the library borrowing practices of children can reveal about their reading habits, researchers collected the computerized library records of 90 10- and 11-year old students over the course of a year. Two-thirds of the student records belonged to boys. Researchers also interviewed students and classroom teachers in order to establish friendship groups and reading networks that might influence students' reading choices.

Assumptions:

- Children's reading habits and text preferences are important to the understanding of literacy and reading achievement.
- Most children's books can be categorized in one of four categories based on the reading path that children follow in the reading of the text:
 - Non-linear (such as magazines and informational) texts that can be read in any order.
 - Linear texts such as storybooks that must be read from front to back.
 - Linear-dip texts are organized in chunks. Each particular chunk must be read from beginning to end; however the reader can begin with any chunk. A book of poetry is an example of this kind of text.
 - Picture-led texts must be read from beginning to end; however, the story is driven by the illustrations more so than the text, and a sense of story can be gained by just looking at the pictures in sequential order.
- Some readers are more committed to the act of reading than others.

Findings:

- The majority of students borrowed books during weekly class visiting times.
- Some repeated checkouts of the same book seemed unconnected (i.e., not checked out by members of the same class or grade, and the time between checkouts was great). However, some texts were checked out and then passed on to friends on a regular basis.
- Teachers' perception of a student's reading ability did not always match the difficulty of texts students borrowed.
- The variety of texts borrowed was more diverse in classes where all texts were considered legitimate.

Conclusion:

This study gave evidence that students read and share books within their social networks. Additionally, students felt freer to read a variety of texts particularly when they could do so to fulfill school reading requirements (such as sustained silent reading). However, although students were allowed to make trips to the library on their own and check out books, most students only did so during class visits.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Ask students to make lists of their library check-out books. Examine the lists to learn about students' reading choices and habits.
- Find ways to foster choice and social networking around reading.
- Talk with students about different text types (see above), and help them see which are “legitimate” for classroom reading.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Ensure that school libraries are useful for teachers and students.