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The Role of Text Features in the Self-Selection of Literary Genres by 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Students within  
a Gender-Specific Context

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### *Introduction*

Reading is a very important skill to introduce to our children. Often times, we start reading to them at a young age in order to plant a seed of interest in hopes of its roots taking place and growing as the years pass by. The more a child reads, the greater benefits will come from it.

Reading is also a very important subject in schools. From the beginning, young children's curriculums are designed so that children can read regularly and plenty of different kinds of genres. Some children find reading to be their favorite subject, because it's a time when they are allowed to do something they are familiar with and love to do. On the other hand, some children dread this time in school because reading is not a pleasant activity for them, or they simply have no interest in the subject.

Reading is a very important skill and subject to have our children learn in order for them to be a functioning part of today's society. Just as important is the goal of capturing children's interests in reading, by having various genres of books available to them, and incorporating these genres/books into our schools' curriculums as well.

Tawsha and I set out to find what genre of books 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students were most likely to self-select, if there was a major correlation between genre-selection and gender, and what text feature caused the children to self-select books. Our hypothesis was that the majority of both girls and boys would choose a book based on the cover photo. We also hypothesized that boys were more likely to self-select informational books, while the girls were more likely to self-select fictional narratives.

*Literature Review*

In an article we read, we learned about a school who wanted to create a library that would meet the interests of all children. In this library, they had several books from different authors and genres. The goal was to have plenty of books available that children wanted to read on their own, not because they were required to. Teachers had what was called a “book pass,” where children could sample a variety of books. The purpose of this was that teachers wanted to know why students were interested in reading, and what kinds of books and genres their students were interested in. Teachers placed phrases like “graphics,” “book cover,” and “book summary” on a board for students to mark while they skimmed through books.

In this school, teachers would order books and the children skimmed through the books and labeled the books according to a list of genres she gave them such as; sports, science, historical fiction and informational. One child that attended this school who was involved with the sorting process said, “I liked it ‘cause I’ve seen books I want to read, like all the sports books and Al Capone Does My Shirts.” Other students were asked how they felt about all the new incoming books and different genres. Each child responded with the excitement of seeing a new topic they were interested in and knew some background information about. Many students were more personally invested in this process because they felt like they had a say in what kinds of books the school should order, and many students felt like their request had been heard.

In another article we read, we were quite surprised to find teachers and students who were frustrated with reading. When students were asked why they hated reading so much the most common answer was they felt “forced” to read material that was “boring.” Students were not making any connection to the text and felt there was no use for the material being read in class, because of this students slowly stop reading. This made teachers just as frustrated because

students were not reading and falling behind. This led to teachers to having force or even double the reading assignments in order to have their students “catch up.” When research took the time to look through the teachers’ libraries they noticed that there was a limited amount of books and most of the books had no correlation to interest or lives.

In a middle school library, a librarian talked about the importance of having students self-select their own reading material, then having them read from a specific reading level assigned. “Another important point to emphasize is that interest drives learning. If a student is interested in a subject or author or story, the reader is much more apt to push through challenging text than if no interest is present (Paul 2013.) The librarian showed great interest when it came to her students and their interest in reading, so she took it upon herself to take a short survey to students about what kinds of book interested them. After all the surveys were returned, she made notes about what the students had to say and if there was any topic that most of the students wanted to read about or had interest in. Using these survey, she was better able to accommodate students with reading material.

Throughout these various articles, it is clear to see that taking the time to find out what your students like to read or are interested about is very important. All of these articles investigated different aspects of why students liked to read, and why at times, they refused or shut down when it came to reading. However, none of these articles showed the results we were looking for. What genres were most widely liked by students? What text features were commonly noted as the reason behind self-selecting a book? Did boys and girls choose the same kind of books, or different ones? These are questions still lacking answers.

### *Methodology*

In our study, we took the time to look at how students' felt about reading and the reason they felt this way. We looked at different genres and what role they had to play when it came to children's reading interests. In our research, we used the Look-Think-Act approach, the first thing we looked at were two second grade classrooms. Before we started our research project, we wanted to see how the children acted on a regular basis with books. We took the time to go observe the children in the classroom in order to get a feel of what kinds of kids these two classes had, and how much interest they showed in reading. After our observation we sat down and discussed what our goals were for this project and how we should go about making these goals happen. We wanted to know what genre second grade girls and boys seemed to favor and why. We also wanted to know if given the choice what kinds of books they would choose, and what would attract them to the kinds of books they find interesting. Would text features have a role to play in it?

My partner and I met with two second grade classes at a private school in the Suburbs of Chattanooga, Tennessee. We had the privilege of meeting with two teachers; Mr. Rodriguez and Ms. Stiltz. We talked with both teachers and discussed what our research project was about, and the method we would use to collect the information from the students, which we agreed would be done by survey. Both teachers seemed very interested in what our study was about and were both more than willing to help us out, since they too seemed interested in what genres and text features most of their students were interested in.

Our participation group consisted of both second grade classrooms that gave us a total of 43 student to work with. Before we started our survey with the children we made sure to send out consent letters to all the parents giving them a detailed description of what we would be doing, and how we would be collecting our data. We urged the importance of having their permission, because without it their child would not be able to be a part of our study. After sending out the parent consent forms, we wanted to make sure all of the students wanted to participate was well. After we explained our study, and the fact that this was not a mandatory participation, but an optional one, we had them sign a form agreeing they

wanted to be part of this study. Out of 43 second-grade students, consent and assent forms were signed by 29 parents and students. We interviewed all 29 of our willing participants; 16 were boys, while 13 were girls. Of the boy participants, 44% identified as Caucasian; 25% identified as Spanish; 19% identified as African American; 6% identified as Asian American; and 6% identified as “other.” Of the girl participants, 46% identified as Caucasian; 38% identified as Spanish; 8% identified as African American; and 8% identified as Asian.

In order to obtain the information we needed, we decided to interview each student in a separate room away from any other students or distractions. We figured this would allow the students to be completely honest with us. We interviewed each child from 15 to 20 minutes. In a separate room away from the classroom we laid out a total of 34 different books. They had lots of pictures, familiar authors, headings, subheadings, graphics, and books that a child could possibly make a text-to-self connection with or have some background knowledge about. Within these 34 different books we had 11 different genres present which were: non-fiction/informational, biographies, national history, historical, fictional narratives, humor, historical fiction, multicultural, poetry/rhymes, fictional art, and picture riddles.

When the children arrived we explained to them the process we would be using. First, we gave them up to 10 minutes to look through all of the books and select two different books that caught their interest. Secondly, we would sit them down and ask them a few questions about the different books they selected. We explained to the students why we were interested in the reasoning behind the books they choose. Once the student had chosen his or her two books, we sat down to begin our interview. While one of us interviewed the child, the other one took notes on what was said in order to keep the child focused and engaged with one person at all times. We asked the student a series of 6 different questions and they were as follows:

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?
2. Out of the two books you chose, which looks more interesting to you?
3. Why did you choose that book? You can refer to our paper to help you
4. Why did you choose this second book?
5. What type of books do you think boys usually like to read?
6. What type of books do you think girls usually like to read?

### *Analysis*

While my partner interviewed the child, I had a different sheet of paper that contained a place to identify the child's name, gender, race, and the answer to the six questions they answered. After all the interviews were done and all the data was collected, we took the time to put all the information into Excel spreadsheets which included; book name, author, and genre. On another spreadsheet we wrote down which books had been chosen, the text feature used, and which gender chose each book. After typing the information in, we looked at the numbers and calculated out the percentages of girls, boys, and genres that correlated between the two genders.

Before we interviewed the students, we spent some time with them in the classroom in order to get a better feel of who we should use in our study. We kept in contact with Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. Stiltz to make sure we were all on the same page, and to ensure that we were meeting their school standards as well. While interviewing the students, the information was written down and kept in a folder so that we could refer back to it if needed, and to have it organized and available to the teachers and principal if needed. While analyzing and calculating how many students chose certain genres or text-features, we created a spreadsheet to organize the information in one place. Once we collected our data and analyzed it, we were eager to share



our findings with both second grade teachers, and share with them what our study pulled from their two classes. They were interested in seeing which genre of books their students would prefer to read if they had the choice. Each child's name was recorded on the survey we used, but when we created our spreadsheet, we labeled the children "Boy 1, Boy 2, Boy 3," and "Girl 1, Girl 2, Girl 3," We did this to ensure the privacy of the children. The only ones with access to the information with names on it are my partner and I. Once the study was finished, all of the information received from the children was properly disposed of, no personal information about any of the children is or was accessible by anyone other than the two of us conducting this study.

### *Results*

In the beginning of our study we made a hypothesis. We felt that most of the children would chose a book based off of the graphics of the book. This included the front cover of the book, and the pictures within the book. We also felt that when it came to genres that most of the boys would chose a non-fiction/informational kind of book, while most of the girls would chose a fictional narrative. After our study was over we came to a conclusion that part of our hypothesis was actually correct.

Since part of our study investigated the different genders' interests we separated the data according to gender. To our surprise, we came to find out that there was no genre specific favorite among the genders. Both genders came very close to choosing the same genre and text features that applied to them. Out of the 29 students we interviewed, there were 13 girls and each girl chose two books each. Of the 29 books 10 of them were non-fictional/informational (38%), 9 were humor (35%), 3 fictional narratives (12%), 2 historical fiction (8%), and there was a tie with non-fictional/historical books and poetry/rhyme books that each had 1 book chosen from (4%). From our calculation most girls preferred to read non-fictional/informational books. For

the boys we had a total of 16 participants, which gave us a total of 32 books that they chose. In first place, with 13 books we had non-fictional (41%), 12 books for humor (38%), and the rest of the categories were too small of numbers see as significant which gave us a total of 9%.

Looking at our results, we were quickly noticed that there was not a difference within the genres that separated the boys and girls. Non-fictional/informational books were preferred among both genres and in second place was humor.

After we looked at genres, we wanted to see the reasons why the student chose the books they did. Our hypothesis was that both genders would be attracted to a book by the pictures on the book. Out of the 26 books chosen from girls, 17 (65%) of those books were chosen because of the pictures the book contained, 5 (19%) were chosen because of the title, 3 (12%) because of the students' knowledge about the author, and 1 (4%) was chosen for the subheadings.

When it came to the boys of 23 (72%) books chosen because of the pictures, 6 (19%) books were chosen because of the title, 1 (3%) because students were familiar with the author and 1 (3%) because of the title and the author. So, as you can see, our hypothesis that the majority of boys and girls would choose a book based on the cover photo was correct. The second-highest text feature that was used to self-select a book was the title for both the girls and the boys.

### *Conclusion*

There are some limitations to our study; due to the fact we only interviewed two second grade classes, and out of those two class only 29 students were able to participate in our study we were limited to 29 students for our results. I would not recommend this study be used as primary source of reference since our numbers were limited. Because of this, our study has room to

expand for further knowledge to be gather about the correlation between children's reading interest, text-features, and if that has any connection to their gender.

Overall, we were very pleased with the way our study went. We received great feedback from Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. Stiltz about how they could incorporate the information they received and be more aware of student's interest. In the future we like to carry this experiment out again with a great number of students in hopes of collecting more information, until then we are satisfied with the outcome of our study about how the role of text features in the self-selection of literary genres by 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students within a gender-specific context turned out.

## **Parental Permission for Child Participation in Research**

**Research Study Title:** The Role of Text Features in the Self-selection of Literary Genres by Second Grade Students within a Gender-specific Context

### **Introduction**

This form will give you information about a research study that will be conducted. The information within may affect your decision about letting your child participate in this study. Information on the study is listed below; feel free to ask any questions you may have before you decide to grant or decline permission for your child's participation. If you allow your child to participate in the study, this form will be a record of that decision.

### **Purpose of the Study**

If you agree to let your child participate, he or she will be involved in a study about self-selection of books. The purpose of this study is to find out which books 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students are most interested in and to find out if different genders prefer specific genres a majority of the time. Another purpose of the study is to find out why children are interested in certain books; we want to know if their interest stems from pictures, words, real-world connections, etc.

### **What is my child going to be asked to do?**

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to:

- Complete a short interview that may entail the following:
  - Identifying favorite books
  - Expressing why specific books are of greater interest
  - Answering questions about reading interests
- Possibly be audio recorded

### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

We may learn the specifics of what your child is truly interested in reading and why. If we know why children are interested in specific things, we may provide better learning material in the future. When children are interested in what they are reading, they have a more enjoyable learning experience.

### **Does my child have to participate?**

No. Your child’s participation in the study is based on your consent, as well as his or hers. You may both refuse. Even if you agree to allow your child to participate now, you may change your mind at a later date with no penalty. Your child must also agree to be in the study to qualify as a participant. He or she may choose to not be in the study, with no penalty.

**How will my child’s privacy and confidentiality be protected if he or she participates in this research study?**

Your child’s name will be changed within our research. Any papers or written data that have been collected will be shredded once the study is completed. If your child was audio recorded at any time during the study, it will also be deleted upon completion of the study.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

If at any point you have any questions, concerns, or comments about the research study that is taking place, feel free to contact one of the researchers:

- Tawsha Stiltz at [tawshas@southern.edu](mailto:tawshas@southern.edu).
- Isabel Rodriguez at [isyr@southern.edu](mailto:isyr@southern.edu)

**Signature**

Your signature below indicates you have read the previous information and you are willing to allow your child to participate. If, at a later date, you decide to withdraw your child from the study, that may be done. You will receive a copy of this document for your own records.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child may be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child may not be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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 Signature of Researcher

---

 Date

***Appendix B***  
**Child Assent Form**

We are college students at Southern Adventist University. We are curious about the books you like to read. We are doing a study on second grade students to see what your favorite books are, and we want to find out *why* those books are your favorites!

We may ask you to choose the book that you find the most interesting from a stack. We may ask you why you find it interesting, or we may ask you some other questions about reading and books. When we ask you these things, we may write down your answers so we can remember them later. We may also record what you are saying. Once we are done with our study, we will destroy all the things we have written down or recorded; nobody else will see or hear what you said to us.

Here are some things we'd like you to know:

- You do not have to be in the study. You will not be in trouble for refusing to be in the study.
- Even if you start the study, you may quit at any time if you truly want.
- We asked your parents if you could be in our study. Even if they said that you could be in our study, you can still choose not to be in it.
- If you want to talk to one of us about the study while we are not here at A.W. Spalding, or if you have any other questions, you can email us at one of the following email addresses: [tawshas@southern.edu](mailto:tawshas@southern.edu) or [isyr@southern.edu](mailto:isyr@southern.edu). We will reply and answer your questions as soon as possible!

If you understand what you would be doing in our study, and if you want to participate, sign your name on the line below.

---

 Your Signature

---

 Date

---

 Researcher Signature

---

 Date

***Appendix C***

**Interview Question**

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?
  
2. Which of these books looks more interesting to you?
  
3. Why did you choose this book? (picture, words, text-to-self connection etc)
  
4. Have you read any books like this before?
  
5. Why did you choose this next book?
  
6. What kinds of books do you think boys/girls like to read?

**NOTES:**

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