THE ART OF CHILDREN’S BOOK SELECTION: A LABYRINTH UNEXPLORED

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THE ART OF CHILDREN'S BOOK SELECTION: A LABYRINTH UNEXPLORED

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As teachers increase their use of trade books and literature as the core of reading instruction, children will be faced with increasing numbers of decisions about how to select books for their own reading. This study demonstrated that when children select books there is a generalizable routine or pattern that is learned and followed by most children. On the other hand, refinements or elaborations on that basic routine are best demonstrated by "outlier" behaviors atypical to the basic routine of book selection. This study also showed that children typically select books based upon the physical characteristics of the book and a holistic, implicit value attachment to a book representing preferences. Limitations, both external and internal such as time limits, check out limits, personal limitations and self concept, influence children's books selection behaviors. The shelving of books at or below eye-level positively influenced the likelihood that a book would be selected by a student. And finally, children know the geography of their school libraries and tend to apply this knowledge when selecting books.
In recent years, research has led to a dramatic paradigm shift in reading education. In 1985, *The Becoming a Nation of Readers* report (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson) declared that primary-grade children were spending as little as 7-8 minutes per day of allocated reading instructional time engaged in reading connected text. Since that time, increasing both the quantity and quality of student's reading engagement has been a major focus of the paradigm shift in reading education (National Reading Research Center, 1993). Fielding, Wilson, and Anderson (1986) spearheaded this shift of the reading instructional paradigm as their research encouraged a "new focus" on free reading of trade books as integral to quality reading instruction rather than relegating the reading of "real books" (Tunnell and Jacobs, 1989) to recreational reading status. From this call for a new focus on the free reading of trade books, researchers began a series of studies to investigate the nature of the relationship between free reading of trade books and its impact upon reading achievement (Greaney, 1980; Walberg & Tsai, 1984; Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1988; Reutzel and Hollingsworth, 1991). The upshot of these various investigations demonstrated that time spent reading trade books was related to substantial increases in reading achievement. In consequence of both the paradigm shift in reading instruction as well as the reported research support for focusing reading instruction on trade book reading, the increasingly common practice for classroom teachers as well as published reading programs has been a decided movement toward "literature-based" reading programs (Hancock and Hill, 1988; Giddings, 1992; Jipson, 1992; Ohlhausen and Jepsen, 1992).
As national trends move schools, classrooms, teachers, and children ever more toward literature-based reading instruction (California English-Language Arts Framework, 1987; Hiebert, Mervar, and Person, 1990; Alaska Literature Consortium, 1992), children are faced with increasing opportunities to make important decisions about the books they choose to read. No longer relegated to recreational and extracurricular activities, successful book selection will influence many in-class as well as out-of-class reading experiences for school-aged children (Mervar, 1989; Hill, 1986). Facing a room full of books or even a classroom library corner can represent a fairly formidable task for young, inexperienced, or poor readers. How does a child choose "a good" book? Hiebert, Mervar, and Person (1990) indicate that the "handful of studies on children's trade book reading give few hints on how librarians and teachers guide book selections" (pg. 758). Hancock and Hill (1988) indicate that little research has been accomplished in training children to choose the materials they read. They state, "In developing this art of selection I am not referring to the art of promotion or motivation, but of becoming a discriminating reader, of being able to discern what a book has to offer..." (pg. 84). Baker (1986) suggests that past research on adult book selection strategies has been "superficial in nature" failing to determine exactly how patrons select books. A search of the current literature on book selection strategies reveals only one study which was partially aimed at determining how children select books for their own reading in connection with school reading program types - trade book reading instruction and basal reader reading instructional programs (Mervar, 1989). Given the
fact that many children are now expected to select books for their own reading as an integral part of school reading programs without instruction or training on how to select books, students have out of necessity constructed or discovered various strategies for selecting their own books for personal reading. Although important and integral to success of "literature-based" reading programs, the various factors that influence the cognitive and affective processes of book selection among school-aged children have yet to be investigated in depth.

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the book selection process among school-aged children. The study, dealing with children in grades 1, 3, & 5, employed in-process, stream-of-consciousness, and probed verbal reports of children as they visited their school libraries to select books. We selected this approach to the research to preserve the contextual integrity and ecological validity of the book selection process as much as was possible for the children studied. In past studies of children's book selection processes (Mervar, 1989), children were given a set of books by the researchers from which to choose one for reading. In so doing, we maintain that past research removed students from both the context of the classroom or school library as well as severing the typical flow of in-process selection decisions and strategies found in these settings.

Theoretical Framework

Research related to how children and adults select books has been examined in two super categories: 1) characteristics of the book or product of book selection strategies, and 2) aspects of the
process of book selection - domain and procedural knowledge, strategies, and the task demands of selecting a book. Since the preponderance of past research has focused primarily upon the product of the selection process - the book selected- we review this body of research first.

**Book Selection Product Research**

Factors which influence the choice of a book have been researched for many years. However, it is an acknowledged fact that children are motivated to choose certain books rather than others by comparison. In an early review of children's reading interests, preferences, and habits, King (1967) makes a clear distinction between interests and preferences affecting book choices - "...preference is relatively passive, while interest is inevitably dynamic. A preference is a readiness to receive one object as against another; it does not induce us to seek out the object" (pg. 313). Spangler (1983) maintains that "reading interest is based on direct reading behaviors while a preference is simply an expressed attitude:" (p. 876).

King's (1967) review found that there were marked differences in readers' interests as these relate to students' general interests, age, intelligence and gender. She determined that: 1) interests tend to change as new interests are developed, 2) interests do not necessarily reflect informational needs, 3) media plays an important role in changing reading interests, 4) younger children prefer fairy tales and realistic stories based on everyday activities and animals, 5) upper grade students prefer mystery adventure, animal stories, family life stories, biographies, sports, science, and
social studies, 6) age nine seems to be a point in time where gender related reading interest differences appear, and 7) reading interests of above average achieving readers mature faster than below average achieving students. Several factors were found to affect reading preferences according to King (1967). First, the kinds of reading materials, e.g., comics, magazines, etc. affected preferences among children. Second, a narrative fiction literary genre was preferred above nonfiction exposition. Third, children prefer a style of writing that includes action, humor, and a good plot. Fourth, children prefer larger type sizes over smaller. And finally, children prefer uncluttered pages, color, and realistic illustrations. More recently, Timion (1992) revalidated the fact that reading interests relate strongly to student book selection. Other studies have found that students' background knowledge and experiences also influence reading interests (Baldwin, 1985; Reutzel & Mitchell, 1986).

Fisher (1988) confirms gender differences among children in their reading preferences for literary genre. He also indicates that teachers have a marked impact on the development of student reading preferences. Wendelin and Zinck (1983) conducted a survey of 5th-8th grade students in Nebraska and California schools. Their results indicate that students rely more upon peer recommendation than teacher suggestions. Children tend to select paperback books instead of hardback books. The visual media influence student reading preferences. Descriptions of the book printed on the back, book jacket, or first page tend to weigh heavily in students' book selection decisions. In addition the thickness, cover illustrations, and print size influence choices to a lesser degree. Children tend to
reread books as well as pursue the books of a single author. By the fifth grade students appear to have wide, extensive, and varied reading interests including fiction and nonfiction materials.

Hiebert, Mervar, and Person (1990) report a study conducted by Mervar in 1989 in which children were asked to select a book they would like to read from a set of five books representing classics, popular supermarket variety books, and reading textbook or basal. Children were asked to verbalize reasons for selecting one of the five books. The data showed "no simple formula for children's choices of books" (pg. 760).

These studies tended, however, to decontextualize the selection process by taking both books and students out of the school or classroom library context. Thus browsing behaviors, geographical knowledge about location of books in the library, and accessibility of books such as shelving and displays are never investigated as part of the selection process in these studies.

**Book Selection Process Research**

In Kay Mervar's study, second grade students for the study were drawn from classrooms where teachers used literature as an integral part of the daily reading program as opposed to students drawn from classrooms where literature was seen as peripheral or serving a "recreational" role in the reading program and the basal textbook was the focus of instruction. After following students into libraries, Mervar (1989) conducted post choice interviews with children. Observations of student behavior during the selection process showed no differences in time or observable manner of book selection between the two populations of students. On the other
hand, students from literature-based classrooms tended to give more elaborated reasons for their book selections vis-a-vis students from non literature-based classrooms. Although a pioneering study, Mervar's (1989) study was not without significant weaknesses. First, Mervar involved students in a forced choice situation where they had to choose one of five books and give their reasons. This task was very much decontextualized from the classroom, school, or public library setting and weakened any generalizable conclusions that could be drawn about book selection in the context of the library. A second weakness of this study centered on asking children to reflect after the fact upon their strategies and processes for selecting a book. Such an approach to data collection may have led to a loss of important potential "in-process" data for how and which factors, etc., influenced the selection of a book. For example, we do not know from Mervar's (1989) research what constitutes the major elements of book selection strategies. Nor do we know if skilled and mature readers have developed more complete or sophisticated book selection strategies than less-skilled or immature readers (Baker, 1986). Further, we have no data on how teachers, parents, or librarians can or do help children develop book selection strategies. Without research in this vital area, both teachers and parents are left without clear direction for helping children effectively select books (Hiebert, Mervar, and Person, 1990).

Purpose of the Study

Because literature-based reading instruction is becoming a national trend which increases the importance of selecting and reading trade books as a fundamental aspect of developmental
reading programs, it becomes critical that researchers address the problem of identifying and describing how children select books. Thus, two questions guided this study. First, what are the macro-process elements, or generalizable routines, or unique processes children use to select books and how might these be described? And second, are their discernible differences among elements of the micro-process elements children attend to as they select a book?

Method

Role of the Researchers

Several levels of participant observation are used by field researchers - nonparticipation, passive, moderate, active and complete participation (Spradley, 1980). Researchers in this study assumed a passive participation stance which involved following the child participants around the library and interacting with them in a limited way - only when prompts were necessary.

Participants

The participants in this study were 18 children, 3 good readers and 3 poor readers at each of three grade levels, first, third, and fifth, in three Rocky Mountain Region elementary schools. Participants were sampled systematically to provide a representative group of children across various grade levels and student reading abilities. Good and poor readers were identified by teacher judgment and scores on the reading subtest of the Benchmark Skills Criterion Referenced Reading Tests published by the Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory (SWRL). The participants' and schools' identities were protected by using pseudonyms during transcription of video and audio recordings and subsequent reporting
of the data. Schools were matched on socio-economic status as indicated by the number of free and reduced school lunches.

**Data Collection**

The materials and equipment for the study were video (and back-up audio) recordings of the participants during their regularly scheduled library visits. Data were collected by fitting each participant with a COMTEK PR-72b wireless remote microphone with remote receivers feeding audio signals directly into a Panasonic VHS OmniMovie Camcorder and a Sony TCM-858 cassette recorder.

**Pilot Study of Data Collection Procedures**

Three approaches for collecting the data were piloted and examined for potential differences. In the first approach, a non-prompted condition, participants used the wireless remote microphone directly linked into a video recorder. Participants were instructed to talk about their cognitive processes into the remote microphone as they selected a book. They were to tell what they were thinking and why. This approach was essentially a *stream of consciousness* verbal report of book selection strategies. A second, prompted approach, involved the researchers with the participants by questioning them as they proceeded to select a book. A third approach combined the two previously described two approaches. Students essentially used a "stream-of-consciousness" approach, but were prompted with general prompt statements after five seconds of dead-time or no talking into the microphones as measured by the use of a SPORTLINE® - Allsport electronic stop watch. Prompts included, "Tell me what you are thinking now", or "Why are you doing that." Prompted, non-prompted, and a combined approach for
collecting data for participants' think-aloud protocols were counter-balanced to control for time-sequence effects. The third procedure was selected as the best approach for collecting the data after piloting all three. One concern surrounding the prompting of participants was that the prompts may interfere with or alter the natural procedures in book selection. Ericsson (1984) concluded through a series of several studies similar in design that verbalization and prompting had no significant effect on thought processes themselves or on the verbal reports of thought processes.

Data Collection

Four phases of Spradley's (1980) ethnographic research sequence: ethnography and culture, doing participant observation, making an ethnographic record, and making descriptive observations guided the collection of data. We describe each of these steps and how they applied to the data collection approach used in this study. First, Spradley indicates that ethnographic or naturalistic study situations should include six criteria: simplicity (a single situation), accessibility, unobtrusiveness, permissibleness, frequently recurring activities, and participation of the researcher(s). The single situation identified for this study was the class library time at three different schools. Observations were completed during the regularly scheduled library time for each class. Written parental/guardian permission was obtained for each study participant. Students were observed on three separate visits to the library over a six week period. Verbal prompts used in the study included the phrase "Tell me what you are thinking," and "Why did you do that," but were
expanded on occasion in an attempt to gain greater insight into the students' ideation.

In the second phase of the Spradley (1980) developmental research sequence observations can be completed at one (or more) levels, including: nonparticipation, passive, moderate, active, and complete participation. Spradley (1980) also indicates that record-keeping of activities should include both objective observations and subjective feelings. Researchers assumed a passive participation stance for the most part although some interactions occurred spontaneously during the data collection. One member of the research team followed the subjects as they browsed through the library, and prompted after five seconds of silence. Other members of the research team operated the recording equipment and made scale drawings of the school libraries and took field notes with respect to the environment of the school libraries. The role of follower rotated among the three members of the research team on a random basis and was equally distributed among the three.

Spradley's third phase of the research sequence indicates that ethnographic records of observations should be recorded in an organized hard copy. Recordings should be verbatim (if possible) and observations should be written in concrete terms. Because observations were both video- and audio-taped, verbatim transcripts were obtained for each participant. Further, descriptive details based upon the video record of each child's actions in the library were also recorded.

Finally, Spradley suggests the notation of nine dimensions of observations in the ethnographic record described previously. The
nine dimensions include: space (physical place or places), actor (people involved), activity (related acts people complete), object (physical items present), acts (single actions completed by people), events (series of related activities people carry out), time (sequencing of acts over time), goal (things people are trying to accomplish), and feelings (emotions felt and expressed). Verbatim transcriptions were produced by a research assistant who worked in concert with members of the research team to produce an accurate and complete set of 230 pages of transcriptions for the approximate 52 hours of video tapes. Each transcript was spot edited and checked by other research team members to assure completeness and accuracy. Also, transcripts were checked for inclusion of each of the nine areas of observation suggested by Spradley (1980). All transcriptions were final-checked for accuracy and detail by independent readings of the research team members. Any problems with accuracy or completeness were resolved through conferencing.

Data Analysis

Following the production of accurate and complete transcriptions of the video recorded verbal and contextual data, a meeting was held among the three researchers to determine next steps. At this point, we began data analysis. To code the verbal data, we turned to coding processes described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) - open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61). In this step each researcher read through six randomly selected transcripts independently and sought to categorize information into open categories. One category of
behaviors observed was that of selecting a book based upon one's preference for the topic. For example, "I'd like to read this book because it's about baseball and baseball is my favorite sport" is one way to select a book. Also, running one's finger along the spines of books and cocking one's head to read the titles of books is a way to browse a shelf. After each researcher outlined the categories they felt existed in the six transcripts, they met as a group to clarify open coding category names. Once open coding category names were agreed upon by all three researchers, the data from the other two schools were compared with and coded into the categories established. In cases where the new data did not fit within the previously established open coding categories, the research team met to discuss and determine the new label to be used for an open coding category. In Figure 1, the open coding and axial categories are shown.

Following the process of open coding, the researchers met again to analyze the data using axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define axial coding as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (p. 96). Based upon the preliminary open coding categories, researchers worked together to develop axial coding categories which grouped open coding categories into logically related super categories. For example, researchers found that there were several open coding categories that explained the reason for selecting a particular book. These open coding categories included: knowledge about or preference for a
Figure 1. Open and Axial Coding Categories Developed from Constant Comparative Data Analysis

**Book Location Behaviors**

- Touch
- Tilt
- Look at spine
- Pull
- Half Pull
- Look at title
- Look at frontis matter
- Cock head
- Pull next to first pull
- Scan shelf
- Mumble
- Card Catalogue
- Dewey Decimal
- Quick Pull

**Book Sampling Behavior**

- Front cover
- Back cover
- Reads title and/or author name
- Flips
- Page by page
- Turns t page in middle
- Looks at illustrations
- Reads searching
- Scan
- Table of contents
- Tables
- Chapr headings
- Thumbs
- Turns bok sideways
- Turns to first page
- Looks at one side of page
- Notes number of pages

**Library Geographical Knowledge**

- Section
- Shelf
- Eye level
- Above eye level
- Below eye level
- Display book

**Limitations**

- Externally imposed
- Internally imposed
Figure 1. Continued

Motivation to choose

Topical knowledge/preference
Value statement
Recommendations - Direct
Recommendations - Indirect
Personal Connections
Need to know
Conditional (if, then)
Ownership
Sense of audience
Author knowledge/preference
Genre knowledge/preference
Physical characteristics
Character knowledge/preference
Books laying around

Motivation to Reject

Topical knowledge/preference
Value statement
Personal Connections
No Need to know
Conditional (if, then)
Ownership
Sense of audience
Author knowledge/preference
Genre knowledge/preference
Physical characteristics
Character knowledge/preference

Twilight Zone

Unrelated Commentary

Researchers felt that all of these open coding category behaviors could be grouped meaningfully under the axial coding category entitled, Motivation to Choose. Once the axial coding categories were established, the outcome was the creation of the transcript analysis or coding sheet shown in Appendix A.
The final step used in connection with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding procedures was that of constructing a *mini framework*. Mini frameworks often are represented in shorthand form through the use of comparative tables, flowcharts of events, or sequence maps that identify and describe a "strategy, condition, or consequence" (p. 112-113). In this study, mini frameworks took the form of event listing sequence maps to identify and describe individual children's book selection behaviors.

**Results**

Observations of the participants produced rich qualitative information resulting in identifiable themes, patterns, strategies, and routines. As the researchers recorded the behaviors of each participant during the act of book selection, it was noted that children tended toward predictability and consistency in their book selection behaviors once the novelty of observation dissipated. This led researchers to believe that the participants were acting naturally and were unaffected by the research situation after the first pilot observation. Also, researchers noted that specific patterns, strategies and routines in book selection were established relatively quickly and remained stable within individuals. Thus, these observations regarding the consistency of children's book selection behaviors led to a data saturation point after three separate observations for each participant. Consequently, data collection ceased at that point.

**Macroanalysis of observations**

Researchers began by describing individual and group book selection routines, strategies, or patterns using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) concept of *mini frameworks*. For specific procedures on
how to construct a mini framework, we turned to the qualitative data analysis work of Miles & Huberman (1984). They explain in detail an approach called event listing which details processes for creating and representing mini frameworks. Miles and Huberman (1984) explain,

"Life, as we've noted, is chronology. We live in a flow of events. Some of these events occur before other events, some after. We usually feel that there are some connections between events...Qualitative researchers are always interested in events: what they are, when they happened, and what their connections to other events are, so as to preserve chronology and illuminate the processes occurring (a process, after all is essentially a string of coherently related events). Typically these interests lead to the production of a narrative, a story arranged in proper time sequence... But narrative text, as we have noted, has severe disadvantages.... So the problems we face in understanding event flow are those of sorting out the different domains of events, preserving the sequence, showing the salience, or significance of preceding events for following events - and doing all this in an easily visible display that enables us to construct a valid chronology. An event listing arranges a series of concrete events by chronological time periods, sorting them into several categories" (p. 121-122). Event listings are often limited to major
events with shorthand explanations of the connections or causal pushes that move the process from one event to another such as would be found in a flowchart, network, or event map (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

To describe each student’s individual approach to selecting a book, their open and axial codes were event listed across the three separate observations. Since there was little within-participant variance during the three observations of students selecting books, an individual student “Book Selection Event” map was created for each participant.

Once individual “Book Selection Event” maps were created for all participants, the researchers met to compare the similarities and differences among the participants' book selection processes. This comparison is summarized in Figure 2 below:

The similarities and differences provided interesting insights into those book selection behaviors common to most of the participants' and behaviors unique to a few or individuals. The differences shown in Figure 2 among the 18 participants represent “outlier” behaviors indigenous to individual students. The differences determined among “outliers” in book selection processes represent some of the most interesting data. Three examples of "outlier" maps are found in Appendix B. These three examples represented the most "unique" examples of book selection event listings, mini framework, or strategies among the 18 participants.
Howie, a fifth-grader, evidenced the most sophisticated book selection process of the 18 participants. He always began his process with a purpose related to an author, subject, recommended book, a book he wanted to reread, or a topic. He would touch the spines of the books as he scanned the titles. Once he located a book that fit his purpose, he would look at the front cover, the back cover, and flip through the inside pages. At this point, Howie would reject the book by putting it back on the shelf or by "tentatively" selecting the book by placing it into a pile on a table near by. He would continue through this process until he had collected 5 or more books in his "tentative" select pile. At this point, he would seat himself at the table, turn the books as if they were on a shelf, and review the titles again. Then from this more limited pile of books, Howie would make his selection. Howie had somehow learned to deal with browser overload, a commonly observed phenomenon among library goers (Baker, 1986), by limiting his serious attention to those books placed into a "tentatively" select pile.
Jared, another fifth-grader, was driven by specific subjects to select books. He would read the titles of the books with his head cocked to the side looking for the topic he had in mind. Once he located a likely example, he would pull the book, and look at the front cover. Next he would open the book, examine the illustrations, and then he would read a sample from the book for a while. Based upon his reading of a portion of the book along with the attractiveness of the illustrations, Jared would select the book or put it back on the shelf continuing his search. Jared had learned that reading the text was one way to determine the "best fit" of his needs and the book under consideration.

Julianna, a third-grader, searched for books with predetermined physical characteristics. She was interested in the pictures and the size of the print. This meant that she pulled books fairly randomly from the shelf. She would read the title and look at the pages inside the book slowly. Her decision to select or reject a book was based on the difficulty of the words as gauged by print size, how long she thought it would take to read the book, the pictures, and peer recommendations. She would occasionally look at the front cover before selecting a book.

Using the similarities shown among the 18 participants in Figure 2, a "Generalized Process Book Select Event" map was generated to capture those events in book selection that occurred frequently across the majority of observations and participants (See Figure 3).
All participants pulled books from the shelves, although the purposes and reasons motivating the pulling of books from shelves varied. Most students looked at the front covers of the book before opening the book. Once inside the book, participants looked at the illustrations, examined the pages, flipped through the book, or read
from a few selected pages prior to making a judgment about the book. Half the students expressed a judgment prior to rejecting or selecting a book.

**Microanalysis of observations**

Researchers turned to data analysis procedures described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as *constructive-enumeration* to quantify micro-level observations of children’s book selection strategies. *Construction* is a process of abstraction whereby units of analysis are derived from the "stream of behavior" (p. 334). Thus, researchers constructed categories from the students' verbal responses and tape recorded behaviors using open and axial coding processes as previously described (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

*Enumeration* is a process where previously defined behaviors found within open and axial coding categories are "subjected to systematic counting" (p. 334). Once categories were established by the research team, each verbal and behavioral event within categories was counted. Researchers used the transcript analysis or coding sheet shown in Appendix A to count events within the open and axial coding categories. An inter-rater reliability among the research team members was established prior to scoring all 18 transcript sets. The three member research team independently counted events from six randomly selected participant transcripts in the study. After several discussions and clarifications, a step-wise regression coefficient on the three researchers transcript scores predicted the degree of agreement among the three raters to be $R^2 = .95$. This was judged to be sufficient. At this point, one member of the research team completed the counting of the remaining 12 study
participant transcripts. Quantifiable data (frequency counts of participant behaviors and verbal utterances within open and axial coding categories) were recorded as shown in Table 1.

Frequency counts were analyzed using separate single-case chi square (c^2) statistics (Welkowitz, Ewen, and Cohen. 1976). Statistical analyses using chi square were used to examine the frequency counts within the axial coding categories of book selection behaviors interpreted or constructed from the data patterns observed. These included:

1) Library Geographical Knowledge, 2) Shelf Level, 3) Motivation to choose, and 4) Motivation to reject, and 5) Limitations. The Twilight Zone was used as a place for comments in the transcripts that did not relate to the study.

Across all axial coding categories analyzed, book selection behaviors varied significantly at the p < .05 level. An examination of the frequency counts and percentages in the Motivation to Choose axial coding category evidenced the fact that three open coding categories, topic, value, and physical characteristics, accounted for 72% of all factors that motivated children to choose a book with value statements about a book accounting for 50% of these three factors influencing book selection.

Jason, a fifth grader, provides an example of the topic category as a motivation to choose a book:

Researcher: Tell me what you're doing and why you're doing what you're doing.
Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages of Book Selection Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxonomic/Domain Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Motivation to Choose</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Recommendations</td>
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<td>03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Connections</td>
<td>047</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ownership</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
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<td>Sense of audience</td>
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<td>03</td>
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<td>06</td>
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<td>Conditional (if, then)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Author knowledge</td>
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<td><strong>Shelf Level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Below eye level</td>
<td>072</td>
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<tr>
<td>Above eye level</td>
<td>006</td>
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<td>Display</td>
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<td>Exact book location</td>
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<td>01</td>
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Table 2. Single Variable Chi Square Statistics of Book Selection Behaviors within Selected Axial Coding Categories

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<th>$\chi^2$</th>
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<td>.05</td>
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<td>Shelf Level</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>95.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library Geographical Knowledge</td>
<td>1,3</td>
<td>363.05</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jason: (flipping through the book while talking) Well, I like science and I'm gonna report on insects, I like science and I'm doing a report on insects and usually, and um, I like to draw and stuff, after I'm done with the report I like to draw a picture of the insect, after I get done with the report on the insect.

Nathan, a first grader, provides an example of the value statement category as a motivation to choose a book:

(Almost immediately chooses a book very near the last book on the shelf. This one is probably about 11" square and was the first book sticking out past the last book he browsed. He looks at the front cover and then quickly thumbs through two pages. The book closed so he thumbed through three more pages starting from the back of the book.)
**Researcher:** What are you thinking now?

**Nathan:** *I think...eh... it looks like a good book.* (Putting it back.)

**Researcher:** Why do you say that?

**Nathan:** *Because...um...cough...it looks like it...was um...fun.*

Janell, a third grader, provides an example of the *physical characteristics* category as a motivation to choose a book:

(She pulls a book out almost next to the last one she looked at. This one is the size of a piece of paper sideways and is darkly colored. The cover is a black border and a bright orange picture in the middle of it. She opens it up to a page about halfway through and she is flipping to another page.)

**Researcher:** What are you thinking?

**Janell:** *This one has nice pictures and I like it because of the pictures.*

An examination of the frequency counts and percentages in the *Motivation to Reject* axial coding category evidenced a similar pattern of motivation to de-select or reject a book as a choice. Two open coding categories, *value* and *physical characteristics*, accounted for 61% of all factors that motivated children not to choose a book with *value* statements about a book accounting for 59% of these two factors influencing book rejection.

Julianna, a third grader, provides an example of the *value statement* category as a reason to reject a book:
(As she is bending down her eyes scan the books in the beginning of the second shelf but physically she ends up closest to the end of the third shelf so she begins looking there.)

**Researcher:** What are you doing?

**Julianna:** I'll probably find one down here. I really don't like Indian books or things that look, what would have to do with Indians because I'm not, I'm not interested in them that much.

Corey, a fifth grader, provides an example of the physical characteristic category as a reason to reject a book:

(Pulls a book off the shelf at eye level. Looks at the front cover briefly and then flips thought the book. Looking at the illustrations on the pages as he looks at them.)

**Researcher:** What are doing --what are you thinking?

**Corey:** Um, here's another book, um, it's called "Elmer and the Dragon" by Ruth Sills Gammette. This book sort of looks like an old tale or something. Its sorta of a cartoon book, it's got cartoon pictures in it and um, this is, this is really a book for little kids. This book isn't really very long, it's only 78 pages long.

Next, an examination of the frequency counts and percentages in the Limitations axial coding category evidenced a decided difference between external and internally imposed limitations upon the book selection process. Results showed that nearly three-fourths or 72% of limitations on the selection of books comes from external sources. These external limitations on book selection included time limits and number of books to be checked out as prescribed by librarians and teachers.
Diana, a first grader, provides an example of the external limitation category related to time limits:

(Diana continues looking at the front cover. In the background the librarian announces.)

**Librarian:** *Mrs. Jay's class it's time to close your books.*

Russell, a third grader, provides an example of the external limitation category related to the number of books allowed to checked out:

**Researcher:** *Tell me what you're thinking.*

**Russell:** *Um, I'm thinking about space science.*

**Researcher:** *What made you choose that book?*

**Russell:** *Because I like science and space. This is the one and you get to choose two in this school.*

The next axial coding category was somewhat different from the previous three. The shelf level category frequency count was established through video observation rather than from the verbal data children provided. As children pulled books from the shelves of the library, the researchers noted the shelf level from which the books were pulled. An examination of the frequency counts and percentages in the Shelf Level axial coding category evidenced decided differences among the three open categories of shelf levels - at eye level, below eye level, and above eye level. Results showed that 96% of books pulled from the shelves for consideration as a choice came from the eye level or below eye level of the participant. Only 4% of the time did a participant browse, pull, or select a book from a shelf above eye level.
Finally, we examined the *library geographical knowledge* axial coding category that provided information from children about their knowledge of where books could be found in the library. An examination of the frequency counts and percentages in this axial coding category evidenced fairly specific knowledge about books and their location in the school library. Two open coding categories, *section* and *shelf* geographical knowledge, accounted for 95% of children's knowledge of book locations within their school libraries.

**Discussion**

The results of this study provide several important insights into the processes, routines, patterns, and context variables that influence children's book selections in school libraries. The findings of this research are summarized in two categories: macro and micro behaviors.

**Macro-Behaviors**

In the category of macro-behaviors, a process known as event mapping was the means by which individual book selection routines were analyzed for similarities and differences. The similarities found were listed and then re-represented in a "generalized" book selection event map by showing the typical elements and typical sequence of events common to at least 50% of all students' book selection processes. Shared or common book selection elements in children's book selection processes included: a) pulling books from the shelf, b) looking at the cover, c) reading the title, d) opening the book, e) flipping through the pages, f) read inside the book, g) look at pages inside the book, h) look at illustrations in the book, i) make a judgment, and j) select or reject the book. These behaviors
represent a basic, routinized, set of behaviors common to most children's book selection processes. Mervar's 1989 study found that there were no observable differences in the way children selected books as this related to school reading program types. Thus the only other study of children's book selection processes indicated that observable book selection behaviors weren't discernibly different. It may be that the basic task of selecting a book relies on a set of similar rudimentary routines such as those described above.

Unlike Mervar's (1989) findings of similarity, our analysis of book selection macro-behaviors yielded some interesting findings with respect to "outlier" selection strategies. Outlier strategies were book selection behaviors exhibited by a clear minority, typically 2 or fewer of the 18 participants. Findings included: a) choosing books on display (shown with cover out), b) looking for specific characteristics in a book, e.g., print size, no. of pages, etc., c) sampling specific pages in a book, d) discussing with others a personal reaction to a book, e) re-reading portions of the book, f) touching the book spines while scanning the shelf, g) changing or adjusting the topic for selection, and h) reducing all books in the library to a smaller tentatively selected group of books. It is interesting that the most elaborate and interesting "outlier" behaviors in book selection processes were among older children. This may signal the fact that book selection processes are subject to developmental influences. We assert that these outlier book selection behaviors represent refinements on the basic processes described above and which are common to most students' book selection behaviors. It remains unclear where or how children learn about
these elaborated strategies for selecting books. Even when questioned, children were unable to clarify when or how they had seen, developed, or learned about these outlier book selection behaviors. It is clear these "outlier" strategies may represent children's efforts to develop more strategic and flexible approaches for selecting books. For example, reducing all books in the library to a smaller set of tentatively selected books before making a final selection is an obvious strategy to deal with the problem of browser overload as described by Baker (1986). Similarly looking for books with specific characteristics represents a strategic, meta-cognitive decision that guides and directs the selection process toward a more limited set of considerations.

In summary, the macro-behavior book selection processes common to the majority of student participants seem to represent a basic, unelaborated schema for book selection. On the other hand, outlier behaviors seemed to represent more sophisticated variations on the basic book selection schema. For example, some children selected books with the assistance of peers, teachers, and librarians through discussion of tentatively selected books. Another approach for tentatively selecting a book was to place the tentative selections into a smaller pile of books from which one or two books would be selected for check out. Some children would only pull a book from the shelf when they had already decided to select that book. These children seemed to enter the library with a preconceived idea of which book or type of book they wanted to select.

In some respects book selection behaviors resembled a shoppers' metaphor. Some children would enter the library like
someone going to the store to purchase a specific item. The children would simply walk to the location, select the book, and go directly to the check out area. Other children would enter the library with a friend or group of friends. Book selection was a social process as described by Wendelin and Zinck (1983) where much discussion and peer input was solicited prior to selecting a book that received the approval or recommendation of peers. Similarly, there were those children who had decided they were going to the library to get a book about a topic or interest. They did not have a specific book in mind; they were simply interested to see what was available for selection on that topic or interest. Still other students would select out four or five books and line them up for closer inspection. From this group of four or five books, a student might select one or two books for checkout. Hence we see that selecting a book shares many common cognitive and behavioral aspects with shopping. Some children appear to wander aimlessly in the library only to make a quick random selection when an external limitation is brought into play such as a time limit. Although there are some common elements for selecting a book, there are many variations on the theme. The tragedy is that teachers, librarians, and parents do not know nor do they share with children the multitude of book selection behaviors that might help students become more flexible and strategic in their selection of books.

Micro-behaviors

The micro-behavior findings revealed several interesting trends about children's books selection processes. First, the primary reason given by children for selecting or rejecting a book was
related to a category we labeled "value" statements. Children tended to carry with them tacit values that influenced their appraisal of the fitness of a book for selection or rejection. These value statements were often stated as emotional responses to the book as a whole and reflected personally held preferences. This finding is consistent with previous related research (King, 1967; Baldwin, Peleg-Bruckner, & McClintock, 1985; Reutzel & Mitchell, 1986; Timion, 1992). Children remarked they "liked it," "thought it looked good." or "was really funny." Thus, a book is selected or rejected for many students when it strikes on one or more of these tacitly held values.

Another prominent reason given by children for selecting or rejecting a book is its physical characteristics. Children remarked that the print size, the lack of, or presence of too many illustrations, the number of pages, the condition of the cover, etc., were reasons for selecting or rejecting a book and fit with previous research on children's preferences for certain characteristics of books (King, 1967; Wendelin and Zinck, 1983). For a young reader, the lack of illustrations may prompt a rejection because the book is perceived to be too hard while the presence of too many illustrations may cause an older reader to reject the same book because "this is a baby book" for younger kids. It is clear, however from these analyses, that the physical characteristics and each participant's intrinsic, tacitly held values prompted or motivated children's choices of books.

Second, there are clearly identifiable externally imposed limits attached to the book selection process in school libraries. Most notably these external limitations are a) time, and b) the number of
books permitted for check out. We observed children responding to both of these external limitations. In the first case, children would browse the entire time without selecting a book only to make a quick, almost random selection of a book when the external limitation of "time to get ready to leave" was announced by the classroom teacher or librarian. It may be that some children would benefit from several "five minute" warnings to help them budget their time better.

Children also remarked that they were only allowed to select a certain number of books for check out and thus needed to limit their selection of books to a number fewer than they wanted. One interesting example of an internally imposed limitation on book selection was the comment that "this book must last me for a whole week" from one young participant. Thus only those books that looked to be long enough were viable candidates for selection given this internally imposed limitation. Checkout limitation may need to be more flexible for those students who demonstrate a long term propensity to read more than the typical limit of one or two books per week.

Third, the arrangement of books on shelves was a startling finding. Sixty percent of books selected were selected from the shelf at the participant's eye-level. The remaining thirty-seven percent of books selected were below eye level. This finding has some clear implications for the manner in which books are presented to students. This finding represents what appears to be a little known contextual element influencing book selection. Those books placed in shelves above students' eye levels are virtually safe from selection.
Thus, libraries may need to be organized horizontally presenting various topics and genre at or below eye level to provide children with the maximum opportunity to select a book.

Finally, children are very much aware of the geographical location of books in a library. In fact, sixty-four percent of the children observed knew the shelf location of books on specific topics or that represented various genre of books. If children did not know the shelf location, in thirty-one percent of the observations, children knew the section of the library where they could locate a book on a topic or of a particular genre. Although children may not be aware of the Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal System for cataloging books into a library, they were very much aware of the location and layout of the library for selecting books. This finding reflects the participant's general knowledge of their school library's organization.

Limitations

This study is limited in several important ways. First, the duration of the data collection extended over three observations of children in school libraries. Although there are those who may argue this is insufficient time to discover the typicality of book selection patterns, there is evidence that when specific behaviors are observed, a limited observation time often will suffice in uncovering the typical patterns of behavior (Ball, 1990; Cohen, 1990; Peterson, 1990; McCarthay, 1994). Second, children's interpretations of the data were not member checked. In the few circumstances where we asked children's perceptions they typically agreed with whatever we interpreted from the data. In fact, in many cases children's book
selection behaviors represented implicit, tacit knowledge that children evidenced great difficulty explicating to any degree. Finally, the study is limited to those schools and participant's selected for the study and should not be generalized to other populations.

Future research may need to focus on the development of book selection strategies among a few well chosen case studies. These children will need to be followed over a long period of time to document how they learn and if they elaborate their book selection processes beyond some fairly fixed initial strategy. There is reason to believe that a longitudinal case study may reveal increasing sophistication in book selection behaviors inasmuch as data in this study hinted that the sophistication of book selection behaviors may be developmentally influenced. Future research might also look into intervention studies where children are explicitly taught book selection strategies and when and how each strategy might be applied. Such a study might examine student's satisfaction levels about the books they select before and after learning new book selection strategies. Other studies may look at reorganizing the library to reflect shelving practices that facilitate book selection and how this influences children's book selection experiences.

Summary

This study demonstrated that when children select books there is a generalizable routine or pattern that is learned and followed by most children. On the other hand, refinements or elaborations on that basic routine are best demonstrated by "outlier" behaviors atypical to the basic routine of book selection. It may be in discovering these "outlier" behaviors that children can be led to learn
about and apply new book selection strategies. This study also showed that children typically select books based upon the physical characteristics of the book and a holistic, implicit value attachment to a book representing preferences. Limitations, both external and internal, influence children's books selection behaviors. The shelving of books at or below eye-level positively influences the likelihood that a book will be selected by a student. And finally, children know the geography of their school libraries and tend to apply this knowledge to select books.

As teachers use more and more trade books and literature as the core of reading instruction, children will be faced with increasing numbers of decisions about how to select books for their own reading. Timion's (1992) first-graders reported "... that choosing the books was the hardest part of learning to read" (p. 204). Without understanding how children select books and the contextual factors that influence book selection, teachers and librarians will be unable to assist children in what, for many of them is the hardest part of learning to read. As Lynette Tandy of Fort Worth, Texas wrote:

I handled one book
But she said it had
Too lengthy sentences,
Too deep a vocab level,
Too far up
On the fifth grade shelf
For a third grader to understand.
I touched another book
But she said it had
Too short sentences,
Too shallow a content
Too low a vocab level,
Too far down
On the first grade shelf
For a third grader to enjoy.

I chose no more books.
They caused
Too much trouble,
Too often
For this third grader to read.

Research Note: This research was funded by a research grant from the David O. McKay School of Education at Brigham Young University to the principle investigators. We express gratitude for the able assistance of Debra Stahle as a research colleague for the project. Finally, we express gratitude to the principals, facilities, librarians, and staffs of Sage Creek, Grant, and Art City Elementary Schools, for their cooperation and assistance in the conduct of this research.
References

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California English-Language Arts Framework. 1987


**National Reading Research Center, 1993**


## Appendix A

Transcript Analysis Coding Worksheet

### Book Location Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td>Touch</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at spine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Pull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at frontis matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cock head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull next to first pull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scan shelf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumble</td>
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<tr>
<td>Card Catalogue</td>
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<td>Dewey Decimal</td>
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### Book Sampling Behavior

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<td>Front cover</td>
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<tr>
<td>Back cover</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reads title and/or author name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flips</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page by page</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns t page in middle</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks at illustrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads searching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scan</td>
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<td>Table of contents</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaptr headings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thumbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns bok sideways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns to first page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks at one side of page</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes number of pages</td>
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### Library Geographical Knowledge

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<tbody>
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<td>Shelf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye level</td>
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<td>Above eye level</td>
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<td>Below eye level</td>
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### Limitations

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<td>Tally Marks</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topical knowledge/preference</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendations - Direct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendations - Indirect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Need to know</td>
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<td>Conditional (if, then)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of audience</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author knowledge/preference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre knowledge/preference</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical characteristics</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character knowledge/preference</td>
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<td>Books laying around</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Connections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Need to know</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conditional (if, then)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author knowledge/preference</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre knowledge/preference</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical characteristics</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated Commentary</td>
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</table>
Appendix B

Outlier Event Listing Maps
Participant: Howie
Grade: 5th
School: Grant

Look for specific subject

Touch while scanning

Look at Cover

Reject or tentatively select

Line up books in pile and review titles

SELECT/REJECT BOOK

Final Selection:
"Baseball is exciting"
"Fairy tales because they are fun"
Participant Name: Jared
Grade: 5th
School: Art City Elem.
Program Type: Basal

Key:
 Leads to
----- examples of
----- because of

Look for books on specific

find subject

PULL

LOOK AT COVER

Look at pictures inside
Read inside book

SELECTBOOK OR REJECTBOOK

Final Selection: "This book's got what I've been looking for"

Figure 7. Flowchart of Jared's book selection pattern