

Speaking Notes: Issues in Library Ethics Assignment

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Issue: At our most recent faculty meeting, the school principal announced that he has decided that the school library should not allow students to check out non-fiction until second grade.

Audience: School principal, leadership team

Speaking Notes:

- Introduction of speaker & issue
 - Good evening. My name is _____ and I am the librarian at _____ Elementary School. Recently, a new policy was suggested that would not allow our younger students to check out non-fiction books until they are in second grade. It is important that students have access to diverse book genres, no matter the age. I am here today to appeal to you to ensure that our students have the opportunity to choose books that interest them, despite the genre.
- Library Bill of Rights
 - An interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights states that “major barriers between students and resources include but are not limited: to imposing age, grade-level, or reading-level restrictions on the use of resources” (American Library Association, 2021a). Limiting students in 1st grade or younger to only one genre of book infringes on the child’s right to access materials and materials.
- The American Association of School Librarians Practices
 - The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) recently released a statement regarding labeling practices. It is a library’s job to meet the needs and

interests of their users. Labeling books based on reading levels “imposes a psychological barrier for patrons” (American Library Association, 2021b) when browsing for books. Instead, “school librarians should... advocate for the development of policies that do not require library staff to restrict access to books based on reading or age levels” (American Library Association, 2021c).

- Research Defense
 - Many young children prefer to read nonfiction books, specifically books about animals. In a study conducted by Kathleen Mohr, 190 first graders were asked to choose their favorite book from a variety of fiction and nonfiction books. An overwhelming 84% of the students chose nonfiction books (Mohr, 2006).
- Suggested Action
 - My suggestion for this issue is that there should be no restrictions on book checkout. Students of all ages should be able to make the decision for themselves, based on their own individual interests, of which books to check out at the library. Furthermore, when advertising and encouraging students to check out books, equal emphasis should be placed on nonfiction and fiction books alike. As stated by the National Council of Teachers of English, “student choice in text is essential because it motivates, engages, and reaches a wide variety of readers” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2019). When students are engaged in reading, they are more likely to become independent readers, and “independent reading has the most significant impact on student success in reading” (NCTE, 2019).

References

American Library Association. (2021a). *Library bill of rights*. ALA.org.

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/accessresources>

American Library Association. (2021b). *Labeling and rating systems Q&A*. ALA.org.

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/labelingratingqa>

American Library Association. (2021c). *AASL releases position statement on labeling practices*.

ALA.org.

<https://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2021/03/aasl-releases-position-statement-labeling-practices>

Mohr, K. (2006). Children's choices for recreational reading: A three-part investigation of selection preferences, rationales, and processes. *Journal Of Literacy Research*, 38(1), 81–104.

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National Council of Teachers of English. (2019). *Statement on independent reading*. NCTE.org.

<https://ncte.org/statement/independent-reading/>

Annotated Bibliography

1. American Library Association. (2021). *Restricted access to library materials: An interpretation of the library bill of rights*. ALA.org
<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/restrictedaccess>

This article from the American Library Association explains an interpretation of a policy from the Library Bill of Rights. Some libraries limit access to resources based on its content, reading level, or perceived age range. In school libraries, some librarians organize the collection based on a “reading management program that assigns reading levels to books” (American Library Association, 2021), which may limit users to certain areas of the library or to a certain section of books. In doing so, the ALA explains that this is an example of restricted access. Age and reading level does not always correlate, and when organizing a collection based on reading levels, “users may feel inhibited from selecting resources located in areas that do not correspond to their assigned characteristics” (American Library Association, 2021), such as age or reading level. This resource can be applied in the defense of allowing children of all ages to check out nonfiction books. As noted in the article, limiting access to resources solely based on age is a breach of the “the First Amendment right to receive information” (American Library Association, 2021). The article serves as a foundation that age should not be in consideration when organizing library materials and creating checkout policies.

2. Simpson, H. (2021, April 1). Fact or fiction? Children want their non-fiction books, adults may be their barriers. *Room to Read*.

<https://www.roomtoread.org/the-latest/fact-or-fiction-children-want-their-non-fiction-books-adults-may-be-their-barriers/>

Heather Simpson works with Room to Read, a global nonprofit organization that focuses on improving literacy and gender equality in education around the world. In her article *Fact or Fiction? Children Want Their Non-Fiction Books, Adults May be Their Barriers*, Simpson mentions multiple studies in which nonfiction books are a minimal part of young childrens' worlds, though are their preferred book genre when given a choice. Simpson explains that nonfiction is all around us- from dinner recipes and directions to work, to simply learning information about the world around us (Simpson, 2021).

Though we find it so common in our own lives, a study linked in the article noted that only about 10% of the classroom libraries studies were made up of nonfiction texts.

Many school libraries are taking note of the benefits of nonfiction books, such as piquing interest in unique topics, developing critical thinking skills, and “[developing] knowledge of their environment and society” (Simpson, 2021), and are incorporating more information texts into their libraries and lessons. Knowing the benefits of nonfiction texts on young readers will help defend the dilemma of a principal restricting book access to 2nd graders and older.

3. Seagraves, E. (2021, March 30). *5 reasons nonfiction books are important for young learners*. Teaching Strategies.

<https://teachingstrategies.com/blog/5-reasons-nonfiction-books-are-important-for-young-l>

[earners/](#)

This website lists five reasons that nonfiction books are important for young readers. The list is a powerful defense for allowing young students to check out nonfiction books from the school library. Seagraves lists the reasons and a description of the reasons in real-world scenarios. The reasons are as follows: “foster critical thinking and information-gathering skills, build vocabulary and language skills, make real-world connections, comprehend increasingly complex text, and support study-related investigations” (Seagraves, 2021). As children are still learning about the world around them, they often have questions that many nonfiction books can answer. Knowing the value that nonfiction books offer to young readers makes it almost nonnegotiable to allow readers to choose the books that they want to read, regardless of age. This resource should be a go-to when considering the reasons for allowing students of all ages to check out nonfiction books, emphasizing the benefits that the books can have on the readers,

4. Gill, S. R. (n.d.). What teachers need to know about the "new" nonfiction. *Reading Rockets*.

[https://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-teachers-need-know-about-new-nonfiction#t](https://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-teachers-need-know-about-new-nonfiction#top)

[op](#)

In Gill’s article, she talks about the uprising in nonfiction books and the change in mindset that fiction books may not be the only book that children should and want to read. Gill conducted a study on what features make nonfiction books appealing to children. Her findings show that the following features of nonfiction books are most appealing to children: “an emphasis on the visual, including illustrations and design

layouts; an emphasis on accuracy; and engaging writing styles, including formats that invite interaction” (Gill, n.d.). Teachers and librarians can use the selection criteria that Gill provides to select meaningful nonfiction texts for their libraries and classrooms. Ensuring that the nonfiction books in the library will be used by the community of that library is important in defending the value of allowing children of all ages to check out nonfiction books. This resource provides insight for my issue. When considering my suggestion- allowing students of all ages to have free access to check out books of interest despite the genre- librarians and teachers should consider the selection criteria provided in the article.

5. Levinson, C., Stewart, M., & Swanson, J. (2021, January 7). "Hey, grownups! Kids really do like nonfiction". *Publishers Weekly*.

https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/85257-soapbox-hey-grownups-kids-really-do-like-nonfiction.html?fbclid=IwAR0Q9ovVfNQDCVz4s9H4V6EUDzOZvnMZfAKeBiTCItu_dPOXUE0-HHA3C8Y

Levinson, Stewart, and Swanson were appalled when they saw an article in the Washington Post titled *Will My Grandkids Still Love Me If I Buy Them Nonfiction?* by Jay Mathews. In response, they published an article that rebutted Mathews’ statements that claimed that children see nonfiction as boring textbooks. Levinson, Stewart, & Swanson include a plethora of studies in their article defending the fact that children not only like nonfiction, but they actually prefer it to fiction. One reason that there may be so much argument over the fact of children not wanting to read nonfiction may be that adults themselves prefer fiction and assume that children have the same preference (Levinson,

Stewart, & Swanson, 2021). Today's nonfiction books are not the traditional "boring textbooks", but are innovative and attractive. One type of nonfiction book mentioned in the article is narrative nonfiction- including books such as *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* by Christina Soontornvat, which is loved because "it has action and it is informational" (Levinson, et al., 2021). Other quotes included in Levinson, Stewart, & Swanson's (2021) article demonstrate childrens admiration for nonfiction as well- "I like nonfiction because you gain knowledge. Then you ask more questions," "Nonfiction is better than fiction because it has real, helpful facts about life," "I like that nonfiction books really make you think about things for a while and then sometimes your thinking changes" (para. 4). This article is a valuable resource to defend allowing children to check out nonfiction books. Why would we want to restrict children from reading what they love?

6. Mohr, K. (2006). Children's choices for recreational reading: A three-part investigation of selection preferences, rationales, and processes. *Journal Of Literacy Research*, 38(1), 81–104. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/s15548430jlr3801_4

Kathleen Mohr's study regarding children's choices for recreational reading provides valuable insight to use as a resource when defending the issue of whether or not to restrict young children from checking out nonfiction books in their school library. In her study, Mohr (2006) asked 190 first grade students to choose "their favorite book from among nine high-quality, well-illustrated picture books representing a variety of topics, media, and genres" (abstract section). Her study found that children, when given the choice,

overwhelmingly choose nonfiction books. Of the 190 children that participated, 84% chose nonfiction books, specifically about animals, over their fictional counterparts. Furthermore, 122 of the children were asked to describe why they chose their books. Of the children interviewed about rationale for choosing the book, 74% noted that the book was a topic of interest to them (Mohr, 2006, p. 92), saying that they preferred “books about animals, family, or books that were funny” (p. 92). Interestingly, and something to note when defending the right to choose nonfiction books in the library, is that “none of the students said that they picked a book because it would be easy to read... text readability did not seem to be an issue among these young readers”, proving that children choose the books based on interest rather than reading level. The school principal bringing up my issue should consider Ranganathan’s five laws of the library, specifically law #2- every reader [their] book. If the reader wants to read nonfiction books, the reader should have access to them.