



Boys, reading, and the school library

An action-research project: How to better promote reading in boys by examining the role of the elementary school library

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*“Oh Lord! Not I;
I never read much;
I have something
else to do.”*

(John Thorpe
Jane Austen)



My seven-year-old son has brought the same book home from the library since the beginning of the school year. It is a large and exceedingly heavy volume about hockey, filled with glossy pictures and difficult text. He has yet to read it himself, but he pores over the pictures and insists that I recite to him intricate details and facts about teams and players and leagues. He memorizes every detail. My son is passionate about sports, passionate about hockey, and passionate about this hockey book! But any other accompanying book brought home on library day is rarely opened, let alone read. This ice-skating, puck-dribbling, fact-reciting son of mine is showing little interest in reading and literacy in general. He is lagging behind his peers in his Grade 2 language arts program.

Our home is filled with books. Our three daughters have been avid readers of a variety of genres from an early age. I am a school librarian myself. The girls' interests and passions in other things have always paralleled their interest in reading. But my boy doesn't focus on anything else but his passion. His love affair with the single hockey book is repeated many times over in my observations of boys' borrowing habits in the elementary school library where I work. Boys typically race through book-selection time, borrow from the same categories of books over and over again, select what are the easiest and most readily available materials, and return more materials unopened and unread than their female peers.

As a mother and as a school librarian, what can I do to encourage my son to read? How can the culture of reading be enhanced in boys? How can I do this, in particular, in the school library where I work?

This action research project takes shape around those questions. In it, I will endeavor to:

1. Collect data and information on the borrowing habits of boys versus girls in the library to determine whether

my observations and assumptions about boys, and reading, and library usage are valid;

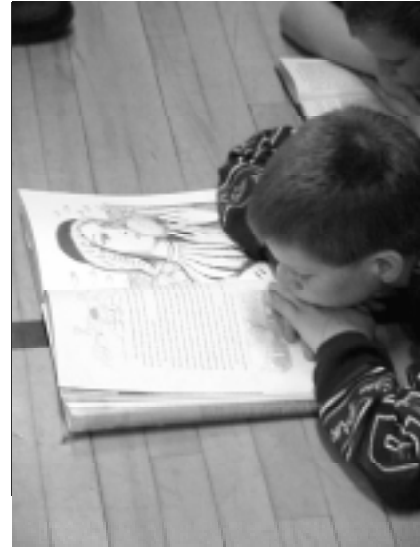
2. Survey boys and girls to acquire information on their reading interests and habits so as to:
 - Design effective systems/activities in the library that encourage boys to read more and to select from a broader range of subjects, and;
 - Implement and assess these systems to determine whether any changes and/or improvements in reading behaviour in boys have occurred.

Along the way, I hope to illustrate how the process of action research in my workplace has affected me, helped me, at times frustrated me, and ultimately changed me into, I hope, a more thoughtful and effective librarian.

I want the school library to be as interesting, as colourful, as enticing, as action packed, as exciting, and as meaningful to my son and to boys like him as is the hockey arena, the soccer field, and the baseball diamond. I want him to devour books with the same passion that he devours hockey statistics. I want him to feel as confident about reading as he does about his soccer skills. I want him to value literacy with the same zeal with which he values physical activity. Most of all, I want my son to read and to love to read and to be a confident reader. The school library has a valuable role to play here, and this action research project has assisted me in uncovering some of the ways in which I can help him and boys like him.

Part I— Assumptions about boys and reading

It is a hot topic at the moment: boys and schools, boys and literacy, boys and maturational lags, boys and academic performance, boys and disruptive behaviour, boys and failure. A veritable plethora of articles, research projects, books, documentaries, and studies raise the alarm on boys. Many caution us that our zeal to address real and perceived problems of girls and discrimination has come at the expense of boys. Amelia Newcomb¹ notes that in North America today, boys are “the most likely to drop



*“People say that
life is the thing,
but I prefer
reading.”*

(Myself—Logan Smith,
1865–1946)

*“I only know two
sorts of boys.
Mealy boys, and
beef-faced boys.”*

(Mr. Grimwig
Charles Dickens)

out...they're targeted as troublemakers...recommended more frequently for special education or treatment to address disruptive behavior...are less likely to go on to college.” Indeed, research indicates that boys are more frequently labelled learning-disabled or diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) than girls, and that they dominate the ranks of those students suspended or chronically in trouble at school². In my own small elementary school, for example, overwhelmingly staffed by females, at any given time of any given day, a quick survey of those students being disciplined in the hallways or awaiting “a good talking to” from the principal (also female) will reveal them to be almost entirely boys.

Growing awareness of gender issues has allowed girls to make great strides academically. It could be argued though that girls tend to do well in school largely because they behave in a most teacher-pleasing way. They sit still, do neater work, finish homework on time, are more inclined to put extra care and effort into assignments, and in general are less threatening. As boys race through work to get out onto the playing fields, girls have quietly moved ahead. Christina Hoff Sommers, in her provocative new book, *The War Against Boys*, argues that we have spent the last two decades helping girls academically and programming schools to be more girl oriented, and that “we need to do for boys what we have done for girls”³. As girls make gains in math and science, the same is not true for boys in the key skills of reading and writing, where girls have led for a number of years⁴. In the interests of gender equity more attention needs to be paid to how boys are doing and how they learn.

Research tells us that boys are typically a year and a half behind their female peers in maturity². They have higher energy levels; are more restless and rambunctious and competitive. Also, they are chronic underachievers; have limited attention spans (very debatable if you've ever watched a Stanley Cup hockey series with your son!); need practical activities and continual motivation and engagement in their learning. Studies of boys in all male junior schools in New Zealand⁵ reveal that boys do well when clear boundaries are set, active “hands on” learning is encouraged, sound male role models are provided, and high expectations of achievement and success are established.

So how does this all relate to boys and their reading and attitudes in the library? There is a great deal of research on boys and reading. Gender appears to play an important part in boys' reading choices; as boys get older, they read less fiction but often increase their levels of non-fiction reading by replacing books with magazines and journals. Boys who develop difficulties reading will typically cover up with behaviours they know will distract teachers from their literacy problems. Fathers' reading habits and their role in their son's reading can have a substantial impact on a boy's ability to read, on his level of interest and reading choices⁶.

My observations of boys in the elementary school library concur with those research findings. Boys race through library circulation time. Boys are the first to line up at the checkout. They spend minimal time browsing, they generally ignore displays and bulletin board presentations, they select the most readily available materials, they are often disruptive and loud in the library and must be spoken to, and they frequently return books that appear to have been unopened or unread (see experiment later). Boys will, at times, seek out specific books from a narrower range of subjects than girls. Indeed, sometimes boys appear to enter the library with very definite ideas about what books to select. They borrow fewer materials. They are more inclined to lose or damage materials. They borrow less fiction than girls, select more below-grade-level materials, and prefer magazines, comics, and journals to novels. At my library, I host a lunchtime library club and a student newspaper club, both of which are attended almost entirely by girls. Soccer wins out every time over decorating bulletin boards, creating book displays, cutting out, laminating, or writing and laying out articles for a newspaper!

How can the school library become more relevant to boys? Is it guilty of Hoff



*“I am fond of
children
(except boys).”*

(The Life and Letters
of Lewis Carroll
Lewis Carroll)

Sommers' criticism of school in general, namely too girl oriented? The library is mainly the domain of female staff. It is arguable that too much female influence has prevailed over the selection of materials for the collection, promotion, display, and presentation of these materials, and the expectations of decorum in the library. School libraries need to become boy friendly, and fast!

The role of the school library

The school library has a unique responsibility within a school. It is not a classroom, and yet it is a place where all students are required to spend time. Library club activities may be voluntary, but all elementary school children, at least in my district (Coast Mountains 82), must visit the library on a regular basis—twice a week at our school, once for circulation, and once for instruction with the librarian. Therefore, the library has a captive audience. All children must borrow books. It is like owning a restaurant where everyone in the building is obliged to come and choose something to eat! Careful consideration and thought, then, should go into:

1. the design of the physical space so as to maximize appeal,
2. the promotion of materials (story reading, display, advocacy, visiting authors),
3. the accessibility of materials (cataloguing, shelf presentation, sound circulation procedures),
4. the content of the collection (through purchasing, discarding, and updating),
5. the quality of the collection—fiction versus non-fiction, magazines/comics versus novels, and subject selection,
6. the relevance of library activities, and
7. the attitude toward library patrons.

The above are all crucial in capturing and retaining the interest of users and, in particular, that of the difficult male market. If the library is to be a place of sanctuary, where

children want and love to be, and where reading and a love of reading might be instilled, then the environment of that library is very important. It needs to be a treasure trove of wonderful things, of colourful quality books, of relevant and exciting materials, where interesting things happen, where the routines of a classroom can be left behind. It needs to be a visual, stimulating, creative, and exciting environment, where children can gather and share and explore. And boys, with their sticky fingers, dinosaur/sports obsessions, and loud voices must be made to feel welcome and, more importantly, wanted.

Cormorant Elementary School's library

Cormorant Elementary School's library is unique. The school is dual track, with English classes to Grade 5 and French Immersion classes to Grade 7. The 161 students are divided into nine divisions. The library is therefore bilingual, a relatively small space in which collections of French and English materials must be contained. It has been a real challenge to organize the limited space available so as to make sufficient room for both collections, while avoiding a crowded and cluttered look. I have attempted to divide the library into six sections: French primary fiction, English primary fiction, French intermediate fiction, English intermediate fiction, French non-fiction, and English non-fiction materials. These "sections" overlap, and are in some instances, (French intermediate fiction for example) no more than a carousel stand of books. Further complicating matters is the need to separate hardcover books from soft-cover books, which is important in terms of accessibility of materials. In a display case or on a shelf of books, soft-cover books are easily overlooked. Their spines are thin and difficult to read. Therefore I try to store and display them separately, often with the full-title page visible. The library is not well positioned either, situated at the end of the hallway rather than in a central spot. I find myself decorating the hallway as much as I decorate the library itself so as to entice children and adults alike down the passageway and into the facility! The librarian position is part time (0.5) and is supplemented by a library clerk who works 12 hours a week. The circulation is computerized (Follett software) and that, together with the small number of patrons in the school, facilitated data collection. I was able to gather statistics generated by the

“Madam, a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year! And depend on it Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last.”

*(The Rivals
Richard Sheridan
1751–1816)*

“My library was dukedom large enough.”

*(The Tempest
William Shakespeare)*

*“You are a human
boy, my young
friend. A human
boy.*

*O glorious to be a
human boy!*

*O running stream
of sparkling joy,
To be a soaring
human boy!”*

(Mr. Chadband
Bleakhouse
Charles Dickens)

computer, and analyze student transactions without being overwhelmed by the numbers.

The demographics of Cormorant’s student population are unique to Kitimat. Of the 161 students, boys and girls are evenly divided. Immersion students dominate, with six out of the nine divisions being French Immersion classes. As the only French Immersion school in town, Cormorant has been hand picked by parents who travel from throughout the area to send their children here. The school has sometimes had a waiting list for entrance. It offers a specialty program within the public system and therefore attracts children of parents who tend to be highly motivated and interested in their child’s learning. The school enjoys a high degree of parental involvement, from volunteering to fundraising to intense advocacy at the board level on behalf of the program. Many parents are signed up as patrons of the library, and it is not uncommon for parents to borrow additional materials, usually French, for their children. The library hosts two book fairs a year, one in English and one in French in order to accommodate the two programs. They are always successful and well supported.

Cormorant students cannot really be deemed representative of students from a typical neighbourhood school, given the immersion program. Circulation in the library is not completely open either, and most students from immersion classes are required to borrow materials in both languages. Those factors must be taken into consideration when analyzing borrowing transactions. Nevertheless, although we may manipulate the collection considerably, emphasizing and showcasing certain materials and authors, displaying and promoting others, working with and reading from still others, students are generally free to select whatever materials they like. The teacher/librarian must avoid passing judgment on a child’s choice of book. As long as Cormorant school’s requirements are met (a certain number of books in English and in French), freedom of choice should reign. Any influence that one may or may not have over book selection comes before or after, but not at the time of check out. I may recommend and inform, but not disagree, criticize or belittle a child’s selection. “Oh, not that hockey book again” or similar patronizing comment can render a positive and enjoyable experience negative and anxious. Respecting children’s choices, particularly those of boys, is important. They

should not need to seek the librarian's approval. And it is these very choices, freely made every week, that this action research project examines in some detail to determine borrowing habits and trends, boys versus girls.

Refuting or substantiating assumptions/observations re boys

The data collected from four weeks of patron transactions at Cormorant library did not necessarily support the preconceived ideas that I had about boys and borrowing. For example, while it did substantiate the notions that boys use the library less frequently than girls, check out fewer materials and borrow from a narrower range of books, the statistics were very close and many of the differences could be deemed negligible. As for the assumption that boys borrow less fiction than girls, the evidence from this library did not support that. Boys in fact checked out more fiction than their female peers, although cataloguing procedures must be taken into consideration here. Enthusiasm for boys' reading novels must be tempered, then, by the realization that comic journals were catalogued as fiction. However, the data did record that boys are more inclined to borrow below-grade-level materials, and less inclined to borrow above-grade-level materials. As for borrowing being influenced by displays and promotions in the library, there appeared to be no gender difference, with both boys and girls borrowing identical amounts. It was encouraging to note that boys demonstrated greater responsibility in terms of lost or damaged materials relative to girls. In fact, it would be hard for even the naughtiest or most irresponsible of boys to challenge the standard set recently by one small girl in the "vomit book returning episode," who most innocently attempted to check in a very "damaged" book to the library!

It would appear, then, that boys are doing well at Cormorant library. They are somewhat atypical in their borrowing habits relative to the current research and stereotypes. Nevertheless, I am unable to get too excited over the results, given the peculiar demographics and special program offered at this school. I would argue that a high degree of influence from parents and staff alike imparts bias on the results so that boys' own choices and behaviours are not truly represented. While I would like to

*"Quiquid agas,
prudenter agas, et
respice finem."*

*"Whatever you
do, do cautiously,
and look to the
end."*

(Gesta Romanorum
Anonymous)

*“A good book is
the best of friends,
the same today
and for ever.”*

(Proverbial
Philosophy Series 1.
Of Reading
Martin Tupper)

believe that some of the systems in the library meant to enhance boys' reading are now showing results, I remain cautious in my optimism. There is still much work to be done.

Part 2

Activities in the library that encourage boys to read

So, what have I learned from all this?

“Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

(Choruses from The Rock 1 T.S. Eliot)

What am I now doing in the library that effectively meets the distinctive behaviours and learning styles of boys?

What still needs to be done? The data collected now confirms what I had initially suspected, namely that boys:

- are more cautious library users
- borrow fewer materials
- borrow from a narrower range of categories
- are less inclined to browse
- are more inclined to borrow below-grade-level materials
- read less
- are less confident in their reading ability
- prefer comic books and magazines

The data also revealed some encouraging information, namely that boys:

- would like to read more if they had more time
- enjoy having books read aloud to them
- damage or lose fewer materials than girls
- are interested in reading for pleasure
- are influenced by their friends' recommendations
- are influenced by the librarian

Peculiar to boys are:

- an interest in fantasy characters and super heroes
- a strong interest in science fiction
- a preference for sports figures and anything sports related
- a distinct preference for video magazines and comics
- an inclination toward visual materials over those that contain strictly text

Boy-friendly libraries

I find myself acutely aware now of the presence of boys in my library. Not that I hadn't noticed them before, but I had failed to differentiate or take care to really identify the different behaviours between boys and girls. I am more cognizant now of the boy-appeal factor, of the way I talk to boys, the types of books that I select to read and promote; the displays that I design; the assignments that I set and the comportment that I allow in the library.

This year, based on this action research, the following has occurred:

1. We began the year showcasing Roald Dahl, C.S. Lewis and J.K. Rowling, all author's of superb children's fantasy fiction. I read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Wonderful World of Henry Sugar* and the first in the *Harry Potter* series to establish a standard of richness and excellence in literature. Research suggests that when higher standards are set, boys will respond accordingly. I wanted to introduce boys, then, to works of the highest quality. I wanted only books containing rich and fluent language and interesting text. I also consciously opted to present these books by reading aloud rather than just by telling the students about them. It worked, and with the first Dahl novel, the first of the Narnia Chronicles and the first Hogwarts adventure read and enjoyed together, the students, especially the boys, were hooked. We were not able to keep a single Dahl novel on the shelves, and there has been a waiting list for the Rowling and Lewis books all year. I went on to present the *Series of Unfortunate Events*, by Lemony Snickett, *The Hobbit*, the classic *Tom Sawyer*, and the enchanting *Borrowers* series to the children, in a continued effort to highlight excellent fantasy and adventure literature.
2. The value of story reading and story telling has impressed me. "Storytelling can be the ideal medium for fostering a love of language and firing the imagination. At a time when young people have less and less opportunity to hear stories told, it can be one of the most effective ways to engender a love of narrative."⁷ Reading aloud is particularly appealing to primary and intermediate students. It allows one to read up a level, and for boys this is so important. Doubting their own reading abilities, they are cautious in the level

"Mad about the boy.

It's pretty funny but I'm mad about the boy."

(Mad about the boy
Noël Coward)

of materials that they borrow. Reading aloud allows them to enjoy books that they might never have selected themselves. Furthermore, I selected only children's classics that would challenge and engage the listener. I also selected books that featured boys as central characters. I did not worry that the girls might feel discriminated against. Girls tend to select from a wide variety of subjects, characters and higher reading levels anyway. I certainly never received any complaints. From Harry Potter to Stanley Yelnats in Louis Sachar's brilliant novel *Holes*, to Bud, not Buddy from the novel of the same title by Christopher Paul Curtis, boy heroes facing and overcoming adversity was a common theme. Pony Boy in *The Outsiders*, James, in *James and the Giant Peach*, Gerald in *My Family and Other Animals*, are all boy heroes that capture the imagination of readers, and of male readers in particular.



3. I paid attention to the research that indicated the importance of male role models for boys. Male teachers, fathers, grandfathers, and coaches, in fact any male influence, can make a significant difference in a boy's literacy development. Growing up in Africa, in a British-based schooling system, I have never understood the North American aversion to single-sex schools. I attended an all-girls' junior and high school, and my brothers attended all boys schools. They were taught predominately by men, coached at sports by men, and counselled by men. This is very different from the experience of my own son here in the public school system in Kitimat, B.C. He has only had female teachers, and given the staff ratio here, probably will until he reaches high school. The principal is female, and so is his soccer coach!

Given the propensity now of single-parent families, usually led by women, it is evident that boys are lacking significant male role models in their lives. I endeavored, then, to seek out men for the library! Every year as part of Education Week, the library hosts a Celebrity Reading Week. This year, in the spirit of encouraging boys to read, I selected only male celebrities. It was a success. The high school principal, the superintendent of the district, the fire chief, a local published author, a United Church minister, a human resources manager from a large local industry, a book-store owner, and a father all shared their love of reading with the children. The

response, especially from the boys, was very positive: men as storytellers, men sharing their favourite books, men who coach sports teams but also write books, men comfortable in the library, men who value words and language and ideas. This is the modelling that little boys need. I intend to invite men into the library on an ongoing basis, and it won't hurt if they happen to be good looking too!

4. Collected data from this action research has influenced the purchasing decisions made this year. School librarians are a predominantly female bunch, and female influence has surely prevailed over the establishment of most school collections. Data gleaned from the reading survey is particularly useful in highlighting those categories of the collection with high "boy" appeal. Adventure and fantasy fiction, animal fiction and non-fiction, non-fiction comics and sports are most popular with boys. Yet, in our library, there is a dearth in quantity and variety of materials that boys enjoy. For example, we have no science fiction, although 70% of boys selected that genre. We also lack magazine resources with boy appeal. Video, Nintendo, music, computers, puzzles, games, and humour, were all listed by boys as being popular; yet our library carries only science, some sports, and girl teen titles. I am on the lookout, now, for visual materials with manageable amounts of text (an excellent way to encourage reading in French) that boys might borrow enthusiastically. *J'aime lire* remains a perennial favorite, but more variety is necessary.

I also need to educate and familiarize myself with the latest in boys' primary and intermediate fiction. The Internet, catalogues, literary publications, peer librarians, teachers, and other libraries (the Kitimat Public Library, fortunately, has a male assistant librarian) are excellent resources. I cannot assume that what interests me, or what I read as a girl in Africa, will have any entertainment or interest value to a young boy today. Cultural, generational, geographic, and gender influences must all be carefully considered. I have picked my Canadian husband's brain for his boyhood literary memories. It was he who suggested I read "*Where the Red Fern Grows*," by Wilson Rawls, a perennial favourite with North American boys and girls alike. The story, written in the 1960s, is listed on the

Amazon.com readers' survey of all-time favourites as the only book selected consistently by all age groups, a classic about a boy and his dogs. In fact, any book about animals, be they subjects or heroes or characters, fiction or non-fiction, from *The Incredible Journey*, *Old Yeller*, *Doctor Doolittle*, and *Stuart Little* to primary books about *Bertrand*, *Benjamin*, and Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit*, will capture children's imaginations and encourage a love of reading.

5. Library Club: I am aware now that library club has been too girl oriented. The involvement of boys in the writing and production of the student newspaper *Wassup?* was far more successful than voluntary activities such as book shelving, poster and bulletin board displays, laminating, and so on. Boys particularly liked working on the layout and display of the newspaper using the computer. They also enjoyed role playing, being reporters with tape recorders. Of less interest was the actual planning and writing of articles. Hands-on stuff, be it software or technical gadgets or the photocopier machine to print out editions, was appealing to boys. I plan to continue with the newspaper, involving boys as much as possible, and I also plan to change the format of the library club. Something offered over a shorter period of time, involving games, model building, train sets, that sort of thing, might be more enticing to boys.
6. Comportment and atmosphere in the library: The classic stereotype of the quiet library with a prissy librarian peering over a book and reprimanding loud patrons, is one that has not served boys well. Sitting still and being quiet is always challenging for little boys. I intend to allow more noise and activity in the library. It will be a challenge, given the constraints of space, but reading is not necessarily a quiet activity, and perhaps if boys can sprawl out, move around, fidget, share stories and opinions with others, laugh and let loose, reading will become more appealing to them. So, I must allow for the wriggle and noise factor! I should also pay more attention to where the library period falls in the timetable, having reading and exchange times backing onto physical education times or vice versa. The facility itself and corridor leading to it should be attractive, warm, colourful, and inviting, with displays of themes, book characters, book reviews, art work, and writing

and photographs done by the children. The library should also be open and accessible to students more often, although this is somewhat difficult given reduced working hours. I want the school library to be a place where kids can just come and hang out, before, during, and after school, not just at supervised times with classroom teachers in tow.

My own comportment in the library similarly needs adjustment. The librarian must pay attention to body language, casual comments, ways of addressing and treating students. The librarian must respect boys' choices and always encourage them. Boys must be allowed to borrow those thick and expensive hard covered books previously placed off limits to "grubby hands." In fact, there should be no books in a school library that are off limits to any student. Yet, remarkably, this is often the case. Videos, cassettes, CD ROMs, and journals should also be circulated freely. If children, particularly boys, are given greater responsibility, they will surely assume greater responsibility. And a well-worn book or magazine or CD is one that was a good purchase and obviously worth replacing if necessary.

7. Computers, Computers, Computers

It is no longer enough that the school library offer books and tapes and videos and CD ROMs. The library must also provide real links to real information. With a computer-literate patron base, and a keen interest in software and technology on the part of boys in particular, Internet and web delivery becomes critical and integral to the attraction of school libraries. The library needs to be interesting if it is to be relevant. It competes with every child's home computer, with sophisticated web connections and expensive hardware, with satellite dishes, Nintendo, and endless movie rentals. Children are continuously bombarded with entertaining and varied distractions. Today's library software circulating and cataloguing programs can provide instant links to other online library collections, web sites and online public-access catalogues. It may be time-consuming, but the librarian must take the time to establish the links,

*“It’s boy, only
boy.”*

(An Unsavory Interlude
Rudyard Kipling)

bookmark the interesting web sites, download the games and activities, design web pages, burn CDs, and do whatever it takes to entice computer-smart students into the facility, and keep them returning. Perhaps they just might pick up a book while they’re there!

8. Library hosting unique events: The school library can play an integral role in promoting reading by hosting literacy-oriented events: storytelling, story reading, story-swaps, creative writing workshops, visiting authors, celebrity readers, drop-everything-and-read-days, create-a-book events, poetry/writing contests. All of these can build relationships within the school community and raise the profile of reading and literacy.

Conclusion

I have learned a great deal about myself and about my work environment through action research. I know now that research is time-consuming and complicated, that gathering sufficient quantities of data requires time and careful planning, that predicting, hypothesizing, accumulating and accurately analyzing requires skill and commitment. I have learned, too, that I was not careful enough, did not gather enough data, did not allow for enough time, and did not focus enough to provide the sort of meaningful information that I initially sought. I admit that I had simply had enough and quit long before the research was complete! Ideally, the borrowing statistics should have been collected for a longer period of time and should perhaps have also been collected from other schools, particularly those without specialized immersion programs. Also, the patron reading survey should have been submitted to a far broader number of students to glean further-reaching results. I feel that the accuracy of my results is tainted by the small sample base, peculiar demographics of Cormorant Elementary School, and the procrastination on my part that limited the amount of time that I had to gather data. Well, that’s a novice researcher for you: reading novels and eating bon bons when there were statistics to gather and individuals to survey!

“Lady Peabury was in the morning room reading a novel; early training gave a guilty spice to this recreation, for

she had been brought up to believe that to read a novel before luncheon was one of the gravest sins it was possible for a gentlewoman to commit.”

(*Work Suspended* (1942) *An Englishman's Home*
Evelyn Waugh)

Still, in spite of the rather slim data and at times contrived conclusions, this was a most worthwhile exercise. Action research forced me to carefully consider for a time every child and borrowed book that passed through the library. It made me examine everything that I do and say in the workplace, made me mindful of the responsibility that I have and the consequences of my daily interactions with the children. It made me pay attention to my words, body language, attitude, and actions. It made me think about the library: the collection; literature; students; advocacy; time-management; computer literacy; cataloguing; reading; writing; art displays; book displays; interior design; authors; communication; encouraging students; liaison with peers; further research; book binding; train sets and fish tanks; bean-bag chairs; books to read aloud; men to invite; language; words and, of course, boys and literacy. Action research has opened doors, opened books and opened my eyes to being a more thoughtful school librarian. Now I want to open the way to boys to learn and love reading via the school library.

Foot notes

¹ Newcomb, Amelia. “Back seat boys.” *The Christian Science Monitor* August 1, 2000.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/cgi-bin/avcombosearchsecure.redesign>

² “Schools and boys: It’s time to upgrade both.” Editorial *The Vancouver Sun* March 6, 2001

³ Hoff Sommers, Christina. *The War against Boys. How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men*. Simon & Schuster. New York 2000.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/05/index.htm>

⁴ “The American Teacher 1997: Examining gender issues in Public Schools.” A teacher-student survey. Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates. 1997.

“My early and invincible love of reading, which I would not exchange for the treasures of India.”

(*Autobiography. (World Classics ed.) p.27.*
Edward Gibbon)

⁵ "Promoting Boys' Achievement." Education Review Office. Te Tari Arotake Matauranga, New Zealand. March 2000. <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Publications/pubs2000/sppromoting%20boys%20achmt.htm>

⁶ "Boys 'n' Books: Shortening the road to confidence in reading skills." *Youth Library Review*. Issue 29. Autumn 2000. http://www.la-hq.org.uk/groups/ylg/archive/ylr29_3.htm

⁷ Weir, Liz. Story teller and ex-librarian. "Boys 'n' Books." *Youth Library Review*. Issue 29. Autumn 2000. http://la-hq.org.uk/groups/ylg/archive/ylr29_3.htm

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