



PHOTO 5.1. Book room.

MAKING THE LIBRARY A PLACE TO FIND READABLE BOOKS

The final story is about Janice, a library-media specialist at Macoby Elementary School. Janice's school is in an urban, inner city area and serves a number of Latino students. The school houses a major English language learning program. Janice enjoys working with children from different backgrounds. She finds that the students in her school really thrill over the bright, colorful books available to them in the library, but she realized that the library could be used better. Janice explains:

"The students in my building love coming to the library. I really work to have an open library and I want the kids to come whenever they are hungry for books. However, I wanted to find out if they were reading the books because I felt like they were just grabbing at titles with colorful covers when checkout time came. About 2 years ago, I began watching one class of third graders. I observed the books that they checked out and I began asking them as they returned the books if they enjoyed them. I might say something like, 'Maria, did you like *Junie B. Jones*? Was it a funny story?' Mostly I got empty looks and shy smiles. I realized that I needed to give them more information about how to find good books to read. So, I did a few class sessions about finding books. I talked to them about how to know if a book was too easy or too hard. I showed them where I

put the *I Can Read* books. I talked to them about the fun of reading a book that they really liked. After my little sessions things went back to the way they were. I decided to talk to the teachers. As it turned out, the teachers had noticed the same thing. They suggest labeling the difficulty of the books for the kids. I really did not like the idea. As a library-media specialist, I believe my role is to provide the entire array of materials to kids, not put up roadblocks to tell them what they can or can't read. I continued to talk to the teachers, though, because I was frustrated that the kids weren't really reading the books. I reluctantly agreed to label my fiction chapter books *on a trial basis* to see if the labels would help with the problem."

Janice used grade levels on the spines of the books based on readability. After placing the difficulty labels on the books, Janice asked the teachers to come to the library during two different class sessions to conference with students about their reading levels. Janice explained to students that each week they should try to find one book that they could read and one book at any level. Janice decided to open the library more so that the students could come back during the week and exchange books. She explained to the teachers that she would suggest the new checkout policy to students but that she would not spend her time enforcing book choices. She did not want to be in the role of telling children that they could not check out books. She also knew that she would not be able to keep the reading levels of several hundred children straight. The teachers agreed that they would help monitor book choices and guide students to finding readable books.

The result of the labeling system was very positive. Both Janice and the teachers found that the students were reading their library books much more. In conjunction with new library labels and checkout policies, teachers started to implement independent reading policies that required students to read. They also conferenced with students individually during independent reading time. (See Karen's plan for independent, self-selected reading in Chapter 7.) Janice found that she had increased the use of the library and responded to teachers' needs without compromising her principles as a library-media specialist. As she explains, she had to trust her teacher colleagues:

"When I told some of my fellow librarians what we had done at a meeting, a few of them grimaced. At first, I got a little concerned and went home in a panic thinking that I would warp these kids. When I really thought about it, I knew that really I had changed their view of the library for the better. For many students the library

became a place for finding books that were readable to them as opposed to books that they couldn't access. I felt that I had maintained control over how the library used difficulty labels and that I did not compromise my beliefs. Even better, I had really worked closely with the teachers and they saw me as a part of their instructional teams, which opened the door for several other projects."

Tools for Matching Readers to Texts

Research-Based Practices

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