

DEWEY



VS

GENRE

THROWDOWN

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Introduction

This title sounds a bit melodramatic, but a throwdown adequately describes what took place in the school libraries in the St. Vrain Valley (CO) School District when the newest elementary school, Red Hawk, opened its doors. At Red Hawk we asked and answered the question “Is the Dewey Decimal Classification system still the best way for students to locate the information they seek?”

According to Law Four of Ranganathan’s Five Laws of Library Science, libraries are to “save the time of the reader” (2006). Libraries that use a word-based system do just that. According to Dr. R. K. Bhatt, “Libraries must have the objective of saving the time of the reader. The entire journey of librarianship is about devising, designing, and developing methods, systems of organization and dissemination of information to provide the best service to their readers in the most efficient, accurate, and effective manner and thus saving the reader’s time” (2011). In addition to saving the time of the reader, a word-based system also saves the time of the school librarian.

Background

The Dewey Decimal Classification system has been in use since 1876. The majority of school libraries use it, and, until recently, school librarians have not questioned its validity and purposeful use in a public school library setting. The St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD) *did* question its use and took a chance to make a difference in the lives of students; the results were astounding.

In 2009 Rangeview Library District in Colorado was rebranded as Anythink Public Libraries. Part

of this rebranding included moving from the Dewey Decimal Classification system to a subject- and genre-based classification scheme. Anythink’s system is based on BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications) Subject Headings as published by the Book Industry Study Group.

A visit to one of the branches coincided with the initial planning for the library in our newest elementary school, Red Hawk Elementary. This school’s collection had to be based on the traditional SVVSD curriculum and the Core Knowledge curriculum (see <www.coreknowledge.org>). A dual-curriculum school created a level of complexity not experienced previously. I was a firmly entrenched member of the Dewey camp. Before this visit to Anythink, any other option was considered treading on that most sacred of library grounds, the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Leaving it behind had never been considered an option.

What changed? A tour of the picture book section at Anythink’s Wright Farms branch revealed books grouped by subject (genre). Some examples were animals, transportation, and dinosaurs. In a traditional elementary school library in SVVSD, books are organized by the author’s surname. How many five-year-olds know the name of an author other than Dr. Seuss? They know they want a book about dinosaurs or puppies. These youngest of library users are wholly dependent on an adult such as a parent or school librarian to guide them to the books that will answer their informational needs. Using a subject-based classification system starting with Pre-K and kindergarten students promotes connections between keyword identification in searching in print and digital resources. In this age

of digital natives, making this connection between the library and the Web is crucial for success in school.

Other Considerations for Leaving DDC

A few other considerations for abandoning the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system include the students’ inability to navigate it. According to Colorado Academic Standards, decimals are not taught until the second half of fourth grade. The Dewey Decimal Classification system requires background knowledge in number sense and decimals. Students without a mastery of these mathematical concepts become easily frustrated, which leads to a degree of library anxiety and a sense of failure. The elementary school library experience should leave the student with a love of books and reading, not feelings of frustration and anxiety.

One of the biggest complaints by students and teachers alike is the difficulty in locating all the information required for personal or teacher-led research needs. This difficulty leads to incomplete assignments and gathering inaccurate information. Current students have always had the Web as an integral part of their lives; their brains are wired for keyword searching. It is not surprising that students prefer to use Google over their traditional school library. Google is fast and easy. Searching by keyword or words used in common everyday language is easily accomplished by the youngest information seekers. Using a subject-based classification system in place of DDC allows for seamless transitions between Web searching and searching in the school library for nondigital resources. A subject-based system lessens anxiety and increases independence. Such

a system also leads to students' increased level of knowledge gained unintentionally or accidentally. This type of system encourages browsing among the stacks. In fact, the online catalog is seldom used in the schools that have converted to this system.

Uniqueness of the St. Vrain Valley School District System

A new trend for school libraries to adopt a hybrid model for library organization is emerging across the country. News of schools converting to the "Bookstore Model" seems to be splashed all over social-media sites. The use of the label "bookstore model" is inaccurate and confusing. Bookstores arrange books to generate and maximize sales; libraries do not generate sales. Most school libraries that use the bookstore model have arranged their fiction according to genre, but continue to use DDC for nonfiction materials. Some schools have changed or adjusted the MARC records in the catalog while others have not.

St. Vrain's version is not a hybrid. The Dewey Decimal Classification system is not in use in any portion of the collection in the Red Hawk Elementary School library. Picture books are organized by "pre-genre"; fiction books are organized by genre. Nonfiction books are organized by subject. The catalog reflects this word-based system. Once the decision was made to pilot a word-based system in place of DDC, we evaluated the BISAC and Anythink's Wordthink system. Neither system would work for this school district since they did not address curriculum needs and categories. Working together, my cataloger and I created our version that would address these curriculum needs, in addition to categories that



FIGURE 1

Contrast between picture books arranged by authors' surnames (left) and picture books arranged by kid-friendly "pre-genres" (right) identified by labels with words and pictures.



would guide students and staff to be independent searchers and users of information. Cataloging is done via a ten-page spreadsheet instead of the four volumes of DDC 23.

The uniqueness of this innovative approach to library organization was noticed by district administrators who applied for and received a copyright protecting the intellectual property and documentation. This action marked only the second time in the history of the school district that this level of protection was obtained. This copyright was pursued when it became obvious other entities were interested in this work and tried to obtain access to it without the district's knowledge or permission. Having the copyright gives SVVSD the potential to market the system to book vendors and other school districts. Currently, Mackin Educational Resources has access to the system for cataloging purposes as Mackin is the only vendor who was willing to take on an innovative project of this nature.

Red Hawk Elementary Library Pilot

The pilot at Red Hawk was the first of its kind in a public elementary school library to convert an entire library and have the catalog reflect the conversion. The system was immediately embraced by students, staff, parents, and district administrators. Some of the features include:

- Separate sections for graphic novels and ready-to-read (beginning chapter books)
- Clear delineation between fiction and nonfiction titles
- Picture books organized by pre-genres; see figure 1 (A pre-genre is a designation for picture books

that allows young readers to easily find books that meet their informational needs. The pre-genres help students transition to the traditional genres in the fiction section.)

- Fiction books organized by genre
- Nonfiction books organized by subject
- All "call numbers" on the spine are word based—no numbers; see figure 2
- Original signage
- OPAC computers needed only to seek a specific title; this system promotes browsing among the stacks and leads students and staff to increase their exposure to unintentional knowledge as well as more complete knowledge on a particular subject area
- A unique ten-page cataloging grid instead of DDC's four volumes needed to catalog

Red Hawk Elementary Library Statistics

Another unique feature of this pilot is the statistical data gathered. In anticipation of the potential impact of this project on the school library community, I collected baseline checkout statistical data on my test group, the students enrolled in the Erie feeder system in fourth grade in the 2010–2011 school year. At the time, this feeder system consisted of two schools: Erie Elementary and Black Rock Elementary. The test group included approximately 270 students. I followed these same students as fifth-graders when Red Hawk Elementary opened its library with the BCS (Buchter Classification System) in the

2011–2012 school year, as well as the following year when they were sixth-graders at Erie Middle School. The purpose of this data was to determine the success of the project. If this pilot did not make an impact on students' searching and book choices, the Red Hawk library would have been converted to DDC.

Within the first six weeks, it became evident that the new system was making an impact on the Red Hawk community. I was contacted weekly by community members, neighboring school board presidents, public librarians, library school instructors, and real estate agents who wanted tours. (The real estate agents used this particular library as a selling point for houses in the area.)

This school library was making a positive impact on the students as well. After the first six weeks,

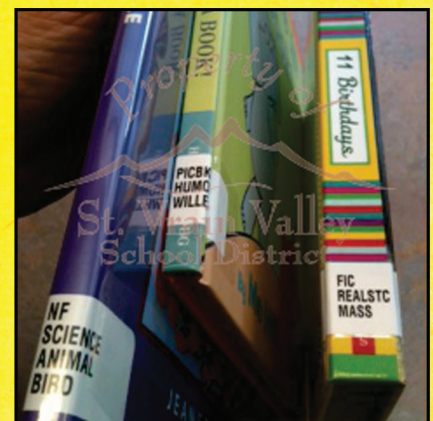


FIGURE 2 Book labels for nonfiction and fiction.

analysis of the data showed that 100 percent of the students checked out a book in a category different than they had as fourth-graders. Those students who previously checked out a book fewer than five times during the previous year were checking out a different book every week. Students who previously would read only J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books were now checking out titles written by other fantasy authors. Students were making connections between fantasy and mythology, science fiction and science events, historical fiction and history. All of these connections were occurring without prompting from adults. Students as young as kindergarteners were able to navigate the library independently. Observations showed that students helped each other. No adult was needed. This independence helped alleviate library anxiety and created a love of the library and a love of books that did not exist previously.

Fiction and Picture Book Checkout Statistics

Eleven different fiction genres exist in the model used at Red Hawk Elementary School. Eighteen different picture book "pre-genres" exist with this model.

- Black Rock and Erie Elementary students checked out approximately the same number of books in both years in the same categories both years. Students in both feeder schools checked out the majority of books in the fantasy genre.

- Red Hawk students experienced an increase of 372 checkouts, with the highest percentage in the realistic fiction genre, but Red Hawk students also borrow books in a variety of genres.

Red Hawk students who did not check out books as fourth-graders in the feeder schools are now able to find the books of interest to them. The new model of classification and organization transformed the school library's value to these students.

Nonfiction Checkout Statistics

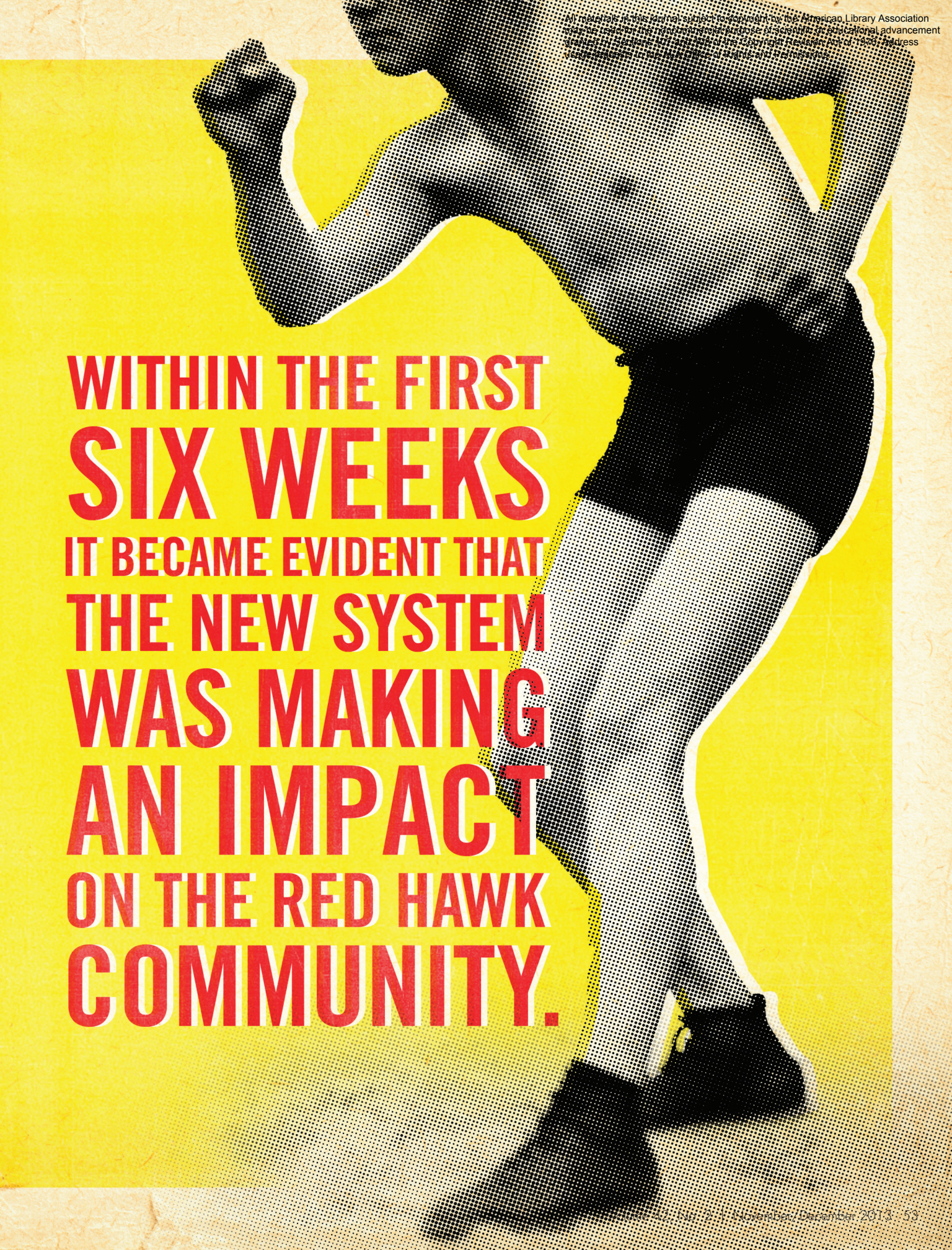
The subject-based classification and word-based labels also had a significant impact on students' reading of nonfiction:

- Erie Elementary students checked out 140 fewer nonfiction books as fifth-graders than they did as fourth-graders.
- Black Rock Elementary School students checked out 328 fewer nonfiction books as fifth-graders than they did as fourth-graders.
- In contrast, Red Hawk Elementary School students checked out 422 more nonfiction books as fifth-graders than they did as fourth-graders at Erie or Black Rock.
- Sixty-one percent of all books checked out by Red Hawk students were nonfiction. Black Rock students checked out 39 percent nonfiction, and Erie Elementary students checked out 46 percent nonfiction. Red Hawk matched the Common Core State Standards best-practice guideline for a collection (60 percent nonfiction materials).

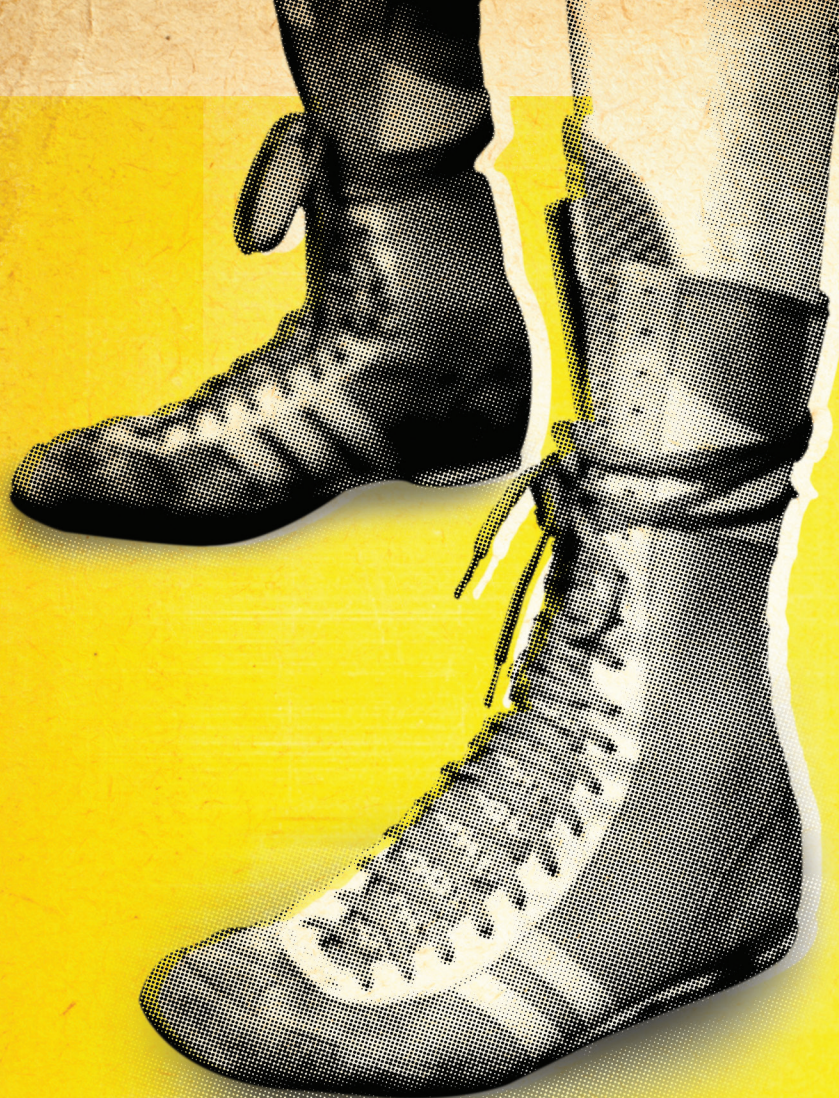
Benefits to Students

Red Hawk students find a word-based nonfiction section easier to navigate than a section arranged by DDC. For example, if a student (or teacher) needs nonfiction resources on an environmental problem like oil spills, the searcher would need to locate materials in a Dewey library in the following categories: 363 (history of oil spills), 639 (effects on animals), 628 (how they occur), and 507 (experiments). In our modified bookstore model, all of these books are located together in the Environmental section. This collocation saves time for students, teachers, and school librarians. Educators at Red Hawk have observed the following:

- Red Hawk students are making smooth transitions between print resources and online resources.
- Red Hawk students are making connections between fiction and nonfiction materials. If they check out science fiction books, they are checking out corresponding nonfiction resources at the same time.
- These students are making smooth transitions between picture books and fiction books.
- Students as young as kindergarteners are self-directed and empowered to find resources without the need of an adult; see figure 3. This empowerment frees up the school librarian for other library-related duties.



**WITHIN THE FIRST
SIX WEEKS
IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT
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- Kindergarten students prefer nonfiction materials to picture story books at a ratio of 9 to 1.
- Based on surveys and observations, 100 percent of the staff prefers this type of library to a Dewey library. Staff support of this library system is crucial for student success and growth of the library program.
- The online catalog is used only to look up specific titles. Students and staff do not need it to browse the collection.
- Shelving returned books takes a third less time than in a traditional Dewey library; the time saved by the school librarian can be devoted to activities that more directly benefit students, activities such as coteaching and collaboration with other school staff.

Benefits to the School Librarian

As stated previously, this system benefits the school librarian significantly. In this school district, all elementary libraries are staffed by only one person. As a result, during any given class period the school librarian must constantly multitask to answer students' reference questions, check out and check in materials, help students locate materials, and assist teachers with their needs. With the St. Vrain system, students in all grades are able to navigate the library unaided, a circumstance that frees up some of the school librarian's time. Since books are grouped by subject, having the books shelved in precise order is not as necessary as it is when using DDC; shelving takes far less time, giving the librarian more time to help students and teachers with



FIGURE 3



Some of Red Hawk's youngest students enjoying books they found themselves.

more advanced informational needs. The school librarian also has time to work with classroom teachers on collaborative planning and coteaching.

New District Model?

Other schools within the district would like to use this model of library organization. Though it has not been adopted as the district model of library best practice, 20 percent of the schools in the district are working on the process of converting their libraries. The conversion process, while time-consuming, does strengthen school librarians' collection-development skills and their knowledge of genre characteristics. As a result, the librarians are better able to do readers' advisory with their school population. The conversion process has proven to be more effective than any other professional development opportunity in the past.

Red Hawk was the prototype for this innovation and was the incentive for other schools in SVVSD to evaluate their reasons for continuing use of DDC. Currently, one high school, four middle, and eight elementary school libraries are in the process of converting to the BCS. To be relevant to students in the twenty-first century, St. Vrain Valley School District libraries will continue to evaluate existing library protocols. Libraries cannot afford to do things the same way they have always been done without a valid reason for doing so.

While no victor of this throwdown has been decided, it is clear that using a genre or word-based approach is a legitimate contender.

Additional Resources:

Longmont Times Call coverage of the Red Hawk Elementary School library's arrangement:

www.timescall.com/news/longmont-local-news/ci_18517432

www.timescall.com/news/longmont-schools/ci_21002903/st-vrain-valley-school-district-secures-copyright-new?IADID=Search-www.timescall.com-www.timescall.com

School Library Media article about subject arrangement schemes, including SVVSD's:

<http://blog.schoollibrarymedia.com/index.php/2011/07/23/would-your-elementary-library-work-better-if-you-scraped-dewey-for-the-bookstore-model>

Holli's blog:

<http://blogs.stvrain.k12.co.us/mediaservices>

Presentation about SVVSD system of arrangement:

www.slideshare.net/svvsdlibraries/using-the-bookstoremodelofclassificationin3withlinks

Copyright record for the St. Vrain system:

http://cocatalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=buchter&Search_Code=TALL&PID=h3_PBMpgoKrLbjVTfGMnh7OpZ2cJ9&SEQ=20130719120751&CNT=25&HIST=1



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Colorado, where she is a backbone to forty-two public school libraries. She is a leader who provides support and management to district personnel to promote success for student achievement. Recent projects include the transformation of using an adaptation of the bookstore model in an elementary school library and participating in the Summer Institute with the Library of Congress. Holli completed her MLS at Emporia State University and holds a BA in English from Shippensburg State University.

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