

## Second Library Observation

On Friday, April 01, 2011, I made a visit to Kari Baumann and the Greensboro Academy Library. Greensboro Academy is a charter school ran by the National Heritage Academy in Ann Harbor, Michigan. Greensboro Academy is a Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade school which has approximately 720 students, 28 grade level teachers, 5 specialist teachers, and a handful of paraprofessionals and other support staff. Mrs. Baumann is in her first year as Greensboro Academy's librarian. Previously she was at Jamestown Middle School. Mrs. Baumann has a part time assistant, Mrs. Royster. Although Mrs. Royster has been on staff for several years at Greensboro Academy, this is also her first year as the library assistant.

Mrs. Baumann has a fixed schedule for her elementary grade classes. The middle school students have a fixed schedule as well, but only for checkout time. I arrived prior to the school day start and chatted with Mrs. Baumann and her assistant. Mrs. Baumann sat at her desk which also doubles as the circulation desk entering new books into the computer catalog system. Mrs. Royster was shelving books.

The library is very small, about the size of a classroom. It is part of a large room, divided in half by a partial wall, separating the library from the computer lab. There are tall shelves around two-thirds of the perimeter walls. There are two sets of lower shelving in the room perpendicular to each other. There is no real order or organization of the books on the shelves. Non-fiction is divided and is on tall and lower shelves. Elementary level fiction is also on tall shelves on two different walls as well as on lower shelves. A work table is in one front corner of the room parallel to Mrs. Baumann's desk. Fund-raiser baskets for a raffle are dispersed throughout the room, covering the top of all the lower shelves, with a few on top the taller shelves. The room is yellow, with a large tree painted on the front wall, and quite a few posters above the tall shelving around the room. There are only two computers available in

the library itself. Because of the parent company standards, the computer catalog is not readily available for quick, easy access. Students have to log in, and then they must go to the program menu to access the computer catalog.

I arrived prior to the start of the school day. Mrs. Baumann was sitting at her desk entering new books into the computer catalog system. Mrs. Royster was shelving books. I chatted with them about the library. The current collection is around 10,000 titles with approximately 11,000 total books. According to Mrs. Baumann, there is little duplication of titles. Mrs. Baumann says she uses this time to get organized and set up for the day and attend to whatever miscellaneous things that come up. Once her classes begin coming at 9:15, there is little if any breaks between them.

Her first class this day was a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class. Mrs. Baumann greeted them at the door, gave instructions for returns and seating, and walked with the class to the carpet area between her desk and the small work table. She discussed the agenda for their class time in the library then began with her presentation. Mrs. Baumann had been out for 10 weeks (from the first of January until Mid-March) on maternity leave. While she was absent, she created a unit lesson plan that covered the North Carolina Children's Book Award Nominees. Today's lesson included discussing the books left unread, review all the books on the list, and have the class vote. She began with announcing the title and having the class analyze the cover for clues of the type of book it would be. She stood in front of the class. There was really no room to move around them and class management was a little difficult. She had to pause several times to regain attention. Students were engaged through questions and involved with passing out pencils, clipboards, and ballots. After the lesson, she dismissed the students to check out books by the color of their shirts. Students were also given book sticks or marker-colored paint sticks for their book hunting. The assistant did all the checking in and out. Mrs. Baumann walked around with the

students as they looked for books. The class was lining up to leave as the next class was ready to come in.

The second class was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class. Again, Mrs. Baumann followed the same procedure of greeting the class at the door, giving instructions, and following the students to the carpeted area. The 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class had two short picture books left on their list of books for the book award program. Mrs. Baumann followed the same procedure of announcing the title and analyzing the cover for clues. She read both short picture books then had the students vote. When the students got loud during the voting, she called the class by the teacher's name and began counting backward, "Mrs. Carlson's class: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1." The class returned attention to Mrs. Baumann so that she was able to give directions for dismissal to checkout. Mrs. Royster had checked in all the returns, but left for a field trip. Mrs. Baumann asked me to fill in for her at the circulation desk. I happily checked out books to students.

The circulation software is Destiny, just like I am using at Southeast Middle School. The difference was that the students at Greensboro Academy have barcodes in a notebook that are scanned whereas at Southeast Middle the students tell me their student number. I was still checking students out when the class lined up and was leaving because the next class was coming in! I finished checking out the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class and began returning the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class' books as Mrs. Baumann followed the same procedure as she had previously with the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class that had just left. This time, though, Mrs. Baumann did not use the clipboards. I again filled in at the desk checking books in and out to students.

After the class left, Mrs. Baumann thanked me for my help and we talked for a few minutes about her role in this school library. She said she didn't get to do all she had hoped this year, given it being her first year and having a baby in the middle of it. She has plans for next year to further work with the elementary teachers for lesson planning and to work on the organization of her library. It is still

in the state in which she arrived, and she is aware of its shortcomings, such as the unstructured system of the books on the shelves. She said the most important thing she could tell me was to stay flexible.

From this observation, I felt I received a realistic snapshot of elementary school librarianship. The most useful insights were how elementary classes utilize the library, how the librarian of an elementary school varies significantly from middle and high school librarians, and how the librarian of an elementary school is challenged. Comparing the elementary school library to the middle and high school libraries, I learned that there is more hands-on needed with the younger students. Subsequently, I noticed there is less traffic during elementary school class times in the library. Between classes, students were allowed to come in and check out materials. However, once classes were in the library, students were not allowed to come in. This could be due to the amount of attention the elementary librarian needs to give to the class. I discovered that the elementary librarian became “the teacher” because the regular class teacher did not accompany the class to the library. This means that the elementary librarian is responsible for the class during the library visit. This insight made me realize the importance of having a lesson or activity will be essential for class management as well as transferring information skills to students.

With the knowledge of how hands-on elementary librarians are in comparison to upper –grade level librarians, came a discovery of challenges elementary librarians face. The biggest thing I realized is the class management. While watching Mrs. Baumann read her picture books from a position at the front of the class, I witnessed her have attention issues with some of the students. From this I gained the realization that she was unable to position herself anywhere else and perform the task of reading and displaying a picture book. Understanding this challenge is important for me as a future librarian because I will need tools for maintaining discipline and behavior management.

Because I was there and Mrs. Baumann knew I was familiar with the circulation software, I was able to assist her with check-outs. This experience made me question what I will need to do in a future situation if I do not have an assistant or volunteers. Additionally, I will need to identify and implement steps that afford me the most time in my routine and lesson plans for the tasks that need to be performed if I do not have any assistance.

Mrs. Baumann's parting words were for me to have flexibility. From this observation, I have learned that flexibility is not just being willing to alter the lesson plan or improvise when necessary. Flexibility, I feel means having an attitude of being able to make things work as best as you can with what you have for the betterment of the learner.

Overall, I enjoyed my visit at Greensboro Academy with Mrs. Baumann. I have improved my understanding of school libraries by now observing an elementary library. This knowledge will be useful in deciding the best fit for me in a school setting in the future as I compare the differences and expectations of each grade level.