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Writing in the Library? Why Not! ————— Using Google Slides to Reinvent the Library Checkout Period

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The class visit to check out books has long been a staple of school library programs nationwide. This flexible or scheduled time allows students to take advantage of the library collection and enjoy reading based on their own interests. The library provides the perfect environment for students to self-select books based on their interests, an activity that has been shown to increase student motivation to read (Edmunds and Bauserman 2006). Still, the school library is a dynamic technology-rich space that is much more than just a warehouse for a collection of books. While some days it is easy to get caught up in a circulation-based workflow, as school librarians we all need to make time to step back from the clamor of daily tasks and think about our long-term goals for our students and our library programs.

Many educators recognize that, while it is important to collaborate with colleagues, finding the time to plan and collaborate on lessons can be a challenge in the high-stakes assessment-driven environment we currently occupy (National Center for Literacy Education 2013). As a result of this focus on testing many school librarians have felt pressure to reduce their role in the school to simply circulating books and helping make sure teachers receive their prep periods. Although getting books in the hands of students is a key aspect of any library program, it is not the sole purpose of the school librarian in the K–12 school. This article is for those who find themselves struggling to connect checkout time with reading comprehension, student learning, and critical information-literacy skills. It outlines a more-efficient checkout period that uses reading journals to get students writing about their reading in a reflective, informal, and ungraded environment. This approach opens

doors to collaboration and can start conversations with teachers about how the library can contribute to student achievement.

As reading and writing are interconnected, complementary processes (Britton 1972), reading journals have successfully been used as tools for students to enhance learning and improve reading ability (Kim 2011; Graham and Hebert 2010). The school library always plays a major role in the reading element of student achievement, but not always the writing aspect. Supporting reading

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journals offers school librarians an opportunity to participate in developing these interconnected skills. Participating in journal writing helps students clarify ideas, both for themselves and others, as they develop understanding (Langer and Applebee 1985; Pfeiffer and Sivasubramaniam 2016). Journaling increases student engagement with readings, reading comprehension, and motivation to read (Hurst, Fisk, and Wilson 2006; Hancock 1992; Martinez and Roser 2008; Wong et al. 2002). Reading-response journals can act as a safe space for students to take chances with their writing without fear of grading, and increase students' confidence

and motivation to read (Wollman-Bonilla 1989). As students become comfortable with the journaling process, responses to readings become more thoughtful (Gammill 2006). The checkout visit to the school library is a perfect time to give students a chance to reflect on library readings and learning, and to build a portfolio tracking their reading progress.

One tool that can serve as an excellent platform for reading journals is Google Slides. With Google apps now in over half of the nation's school districts, there is a good chance students already have an account (Singer 2017). If not, accounts for lifelong use can easily be created during a single forty-minute class period. With a Google account, students can create Google Slides presentations that are the perfect medium to document their library readings and progress over time. With reading journals students are able to make effective use of all of their time in the library either selecting books or working on a journal entry. This structure can help school librarians better manage the library space while checking materials out, helping students with readers' advisory, and keeping students engaged. Unlike one-off assignments, the slides presentation is a cumulative portfolio of a student's own reading, and there is no limit to the length of any given entry or the entire journal. Images, videos, and links to outside sources can all be added to slides to help students document ideas and create meaning from their readings. Another benefit is that the journal format is adaptable to any grade, from kindergarten through high school. As students develop technology-based skills over the course of their educations, the journal becomes an effective way to incorporate technology skills and concepts with learning.

In action, journaling creates a new routine for the school librarian and students in the library. Students enter the school library and pick up a Chromebook, laptop, tablet, or other device while returning their books; they can even have a seat at a desktop computer. Students log in and open their Google Slides presentations. After selecting an aesthetic theme and creating a cover page for a presentation, each new slide is dedicated to the library book read most recently. Student entries can follow a prompt provided by the librarian or a classroom teacher, or students can head off in

their own directions when writing about the experiences they had with their books. The librarian can have students, individually or in small groups, rotate selecting new books while the rest of the class works on their entries. As with all Google Docs, presentations made with Google Slides can be collaborative, and students can share their presentations with the librarian, classroom teacher, peers, siblings, and even parents so that they can comment and view each student's progress over the course of the year. While it is important that students not be graded on these

entries, responses from both the teacher and school librarian can help motivate readers and develop a better understanding of learners.

Benefits to students when creation of reading journals is part of a library visit are substantial. Reflective reading journals allow students to learn from their own experience, the most fundamental and universal of all learning (Britton 1972). Students can reflect on their experiences with texts, relating them to other stories, their own lives, historical events, and the like. The journaling



process encourages activation of prior knowledge and creates a record of learners' thoughts that they can later refer back to. The Google Slides medium allows students to access their journals from anywhere, asking questions as they read through their library books both in and out of school. Students will feel emboldened to take chances with their writing as this type of library reading journal represents one of the few spaces in which modern students can write without consequence or punitive scores. Teachers' and librarians' comments on journal entries can encourage students to look deeper into readings and increase their willingness to write even more (Hurst, Fisk, and Wilson 2006; McIntosh and Draper 2001).

Teachers also stand to benefit from library reading journals. The journal becomes a window into student learning and thought processes (Werderich 2010; McIntosh and Draper 2001). Responding to student entries allows teachers to ask questions that may prompt learners' deeper understanding of text and development of comprehension skills. While not all teachers may be willing to contribute, there are ways in which the librarian can increase the likelihood of teacher buy-in. Teachers may want more

than just a reading journal; they may want specific information included in each slide. Students can be prompted to investigate guided reading levels, Lexile level, or other metrics that would help track progress and add those to each slide in addition to students' reflections in response to prompts of their own, teachers, or librarians. Teacher-generated prompts can also serve as a way to get students to relate reading to content-area learning. Use of reading journals is also a springboard for teachers to dive into technology-infused lessons that leverage the librarian's expertise and the library collection.

Some students will want to add images or outside information to illustrate key points from their entries. This desire provides librarians with an opportunity to integrate information-literacy skills into these reflective journals; entries are a great way to promote inquiry in the library. Librarians can encourage students to include questions that arise as the result of reading a particular story. These questions can guide inquiry during library visits and take the place of prompts. This authentic exploration will not only help students connect the material they read to their learning, it also encourages student agency. By allowing students to connect the school library with their

own unique interests and learning, librarians can create a dynamic library experience for every student. Of course, none of this happens overnight; it takes time and patience to develop effective use of reading journals in the school library. In a few years' time students can develop robust journals filled with quality reflections on reading, genuine inquiry-driven research, and evidence of student agency.

As James Britton said, "What is important is that children in school should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them" (1972, 68). Adding writing to a library visit is an effective way to transform a latent use of students' time. Everyone in the school benefits from this far more productive use of the book checkout period. Students will be able to critically reflect and inquire about the material they read. They will also get a chance to research and explore topics related to materials they read: genuine student-centered inquiry and student agency. At the end of the year students will have a sense of accomplishment looking back at all of the books they have read over the course of the year. Because these journals are stored in the cloud, students can take these documents with them after the end of each grade. Starting new journals or continuing where they left off last

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year will allow them to see progress over the years as they advance and become stronger readers. Students can make comparisons between texts and relate newly read books to ones they have read in the past.

Teachers will be able to see what their students are reading and make evidence-based decisions as

a result. The librarian will get an insider's view of the material each student is reading and see how students are progressing. Both teacher and librarian can comment on the entries, ask thought-inspiring questions, and make informed choices on future reading suggestions based on the entries students create. Parents can also

benefit by seeing what their children are reading in school and how they are integrating the new knowledge they gain as they advance through the grades. Ultimately, the library reading journal allows students to write about what matters to them, to somebody who should matter to them: their school librarian.



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