

Lucy Calkins Classroom Libraries Video Interview Transcript

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Question: *How were the TCRWP Classroom Libraries developed?*

Lucy: We tapped every friend that we've got. At the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project, there are maybe a hundred staff developers who came together to form the project and each one of us knows of unbelievable teachers in this town or that town, this country, that country; we know of the librarian who's famous throughout that whole state, you know. Or we know of the professor of children's literature who knows so much about books. So we went to all of our friends, from all over the world. We had people writing to us from Singapore and from Finland and from Bogata and from Mexico. And, of course, colleagues -- Katherine Bomer and Lester Laminack and David Booth and Jim Trelease.

And then we also thought to ourselves that we really needed to tap into the knowledge of the children's literature experts in the world. So we went to Anita Silvey, for example, who was the editor of *The Horn Book* for ten years, and *The Horn Book* is the sort of premiere journal about children's literature, and then she went on to be publisher at Houghton Mifflin of children's lit. We brought Anita in and had her working with us for several months, and Anita helped us to find other people -- Betty Carter from Texas, and other people from around the different parts of the country who are the real book people. So we gathered this team and we said to everybody, "Would you send us your recommendations for the very best books, the books that are going to turn our kids into readers?" And we got a list of about 22,000 titles, grades three through eight and more K through two. And then we used all of our connections to publishers and said to the publishers, "Would you send us the books?" because we can't just go on hearsay. We need to actually see the book.

Teachers College was nice enough to give us their sub-basement, this enormous room down below the basement, with little critters living there. And we got the 22,000 books and then we began the process of making selections. So to just try to help you imagine that, you've got to picture, for example, four tables full of mysteries for third, fourth graders. And we came to the decision that we needed a certain number of mysteries for third grades, for fourth grades, let's say 60 mysteries for third graders and 50 mysteries for fourth graders. And then we had to figure out what levels those mysteries needed to be. So we've got data, of course, on what levels the kids are actually reading in third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth, seventh, eighth -- all the levels. I'll come back and talk about K-two in a minute. So we decided we needed this many level M mysteries and this many level N, and this many level O, and P. And then we had to go through these books to figure out the absolute best mysteries, the absolute best biography, the absolute best high-interest non-fiction. And in that way, we developed these libraries.

Now, to make those choices, we had people in the project family who are passionate about particular topics and genres. For example, Brooke and Alyssa just finished writing a unit of study book on mystery and they curated the mystery shelf. And Eric Hand has been obsessed for a decade about graphic novels so he was the chief curator for the graphic novel shelf. Colleen Cruz and Mary Ehrenworth are passionate about fantasy, and have written several unit of study books on fantasy, so they curated the fantasy shelf. Kelly Boland Hohne is the person who, in our organization, is best known for her amazing work with argument, so she was the lead curator for the argument shelf. And for each of these main curators we'd have a team of five or six people to help them because we had, you know, hundreds of books to go through, and we made these choices. So in that kind of way, we kind of began to hone in on the books we'd choose. But before we finished the shelves, we also had to get the kids involved so we bought 30 giant suitcases -- the huge ones -- and you know, for example, we took picture books, third grade picture books for read aloud and we had, really, thousands of applicants for that, of recommended books for that, and we'd take a huge suitcase to a school and get the kids to help us make the choice. We said to the kids, "These are the ones we're thinking, but will you read them and help us to make the final decisions?"

To learn more about the TCRWP Classroom Libraries, browse representative titles, and order shelves, visit calkinslibraries.com