



SUPPORTING RESEARCH, CRITICAL THINKING AND THE JOY OF READING

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOLS

Tallahassee, Florida

In the southeast part of Tallahassee, Florida, lies a K-12 charter school sponsored by Florida State University where unique teaching and learning, for students and educators, is based on research and critical thinking. Known as Florida State University Schools (FSUS), this charter school program has approximately 1,700 students. It provides development opportunities for educators as well as a laboratory for teacher education. Its award-winning academic curriculum is one that gives its educators great pride in the success of its students as they move into college and career, empowered with the ability to navigate a complex, technical world.

Jennifer Underhill, who is in her tenth year as a K-12 school librarian at FSUS, strongly believes the skills her students learn in her library helps pave the way for them to have a smooth and successful transition to adult life. Even FSUS kindergarteners are learning valuable research, critical thinking and collaboration skills through the resources Underhill uses in her library. "Our school has kindergarten through grade 12, which is one of the aspects I like the most about my school," Underhill shared. "I love watching these kiddos grow up and go on to college, careers and the military. I hope that in some way I've helped them understand the library isn't scary or intimidating so they feel comfortable using libraries for the rest of their lives."



In addition to managing the library, Underhill teaches collaborative lessons on information literacy skills at all grade levels. One of the tools she relies upon to teach these skills is Biblionasium, an AASL-awarded Best Websites for Teaching and Learning and a COPPA-compliant digital platform. Underhill described Biblionasium as “a social network that allows students to log books, review them and share

or recommend them to fellow kid readers.” Parents or teachers must sign up first and then grant access to kids. Users get to choose an animated avatar and can then start to add books to their My Books section. Biblionasium’s catalog of 1.4 million children’s books, along with the ability to search by reading level, and recommendations from friends and educators, help students find the right books to keep them

reading and encouraged. Reading Challenges, whether they are set up by the student or the teacher, provide students with a healthy rigor and keep them motivated, while giving educators tools to manage and measure their progress.

The very nature of the Biblionasium platform is one that supports the research and critical thinking mission of FSUS.



“I love using Biblionasium to recommend books to the students. They love getting messages and challenges from me.”

JENNIFER UNDERHILL
Librarian, Florida State University Schools

A NEW WAY TO TEST COMPREHENSION

Since Underhill began using Biblionasium as part of her overall approach to helping students master critical thinking and literacy skills, she has seen improved engagement in her kids. The “joy in reading” has improved demonstratively, she reports, as well as students’ depth of knowledge.

“Before we introduced Biblionasium, our K-5 students used to take quizzes after they read books designed to assess comprehension and recall,” Underhill said. “But I really wanted more. I wanted students to use critical thinking skills and work within the higher levels of Webb’s Depth of Knowledge.”

With Biblionasium as part of her teaching and learning arsenal, Underhill has replaced the rote quizzing with book review assignments. “Now our students write book reviews in Biblionasium, which requires so much more critical thinking and writing skill than

taking a quiz. Students recall details, comprehend, analyze, evaluate and recommend to others. They’re operating on all levels of the Depth of Knowledge chart.”

Underhill described how she also requires students to write a three-part book review, which includes a summary, an evaluation and a recommendation. This process presents additional opportunities to practice writing and typing skills, which are both so important today. While Underhill admits it has been a process to switch over from answering multiple-choice questions about a book to writing book reviews, she points out how much students – and educators – are learning in the process. “Change can be difficult at times, but we have been consistent in helping students learn to write reviews, and we’re seeing progress! These book reviews really allow us to gauge student comprehension.”



THE SOCIAL ASPECT

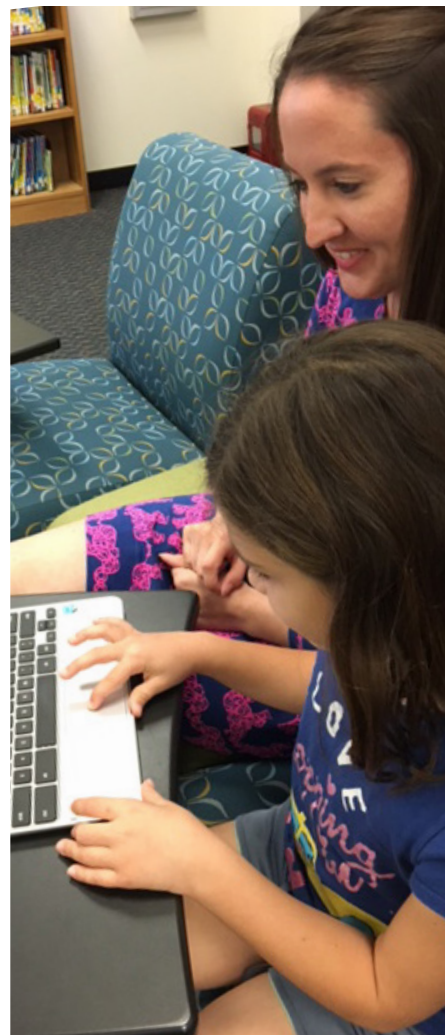
Underhill's students use Biblionasium's reading log to keep track of everything they read. "They love recommending books to each other – it gives them another way to talk to each other about literature," she said. "It feels like a social media site to them, so they find it to be really fun to use. I like that even though it gives them the feeling of a social network, the security measures keep them safe and protected from strangers."

A convenient aspect of using Biblionasium in her library is the single sign-on feature through Destiny. "Kids love that it's integrated with Destiny because they can see what books are available in the library when they search. They've started placing holds on books as well, which they have never done before!" Underhill shared.

READING ENGAGEMENT FOR EACH CHILD

"What I love most is that there is something about Biblionasium that reaches each child," Underhill said. "Some children are very goal oriented and they really love earning the badges and filling up their digital bookshelves. Others really enjoy recommending books to their classmates and teachers. Others love completing challenges. So each child can find something in the program that speaks to them and taps into their interests and motivation."

"I get feedback regularly from students and parents that they love using Biblionasium because it has relieved the pressure of taking tests and making a "goal" in a certain timeframe," Underhill said. "I hear from parents how their children are now enjoying reading and asking to read at night instead of being forced to read at night. That's a huge step forward in helping these students become lifelong readers and high achievers."



"I'd tell any librarian considering Biblionasium that it is a fun, visual way to track what students are reading and what they enjoy reading. The reports feature allows librarians and teachers to easily run reports to track students' progress. It's a great way to improve critical thinking and engagement."

JENNIFER UNDERHILL

Librarian, Florida State University Schools

