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Some Reflections on Social Reading

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I’s reading social? We traditionally asso-
ciated books and reading with solitude.
Mention the word “library” to the average
person, and a timeless image of someone with
head down, immersed in a book, springs to
mind. The 2005 OCLC study on Perceptions
of Libraries and Information Resources made
it clear that the book is still our brand. The
2010 study reinforced this message: “69% said
“books” was the library brand in 2005, while
75% said the same in 2010. Importantly, the
corollary message was that the definition of
book included eBooks as well as print books
—and this gives us opportunities for opening
doors to new channels for reading, and to suit
the needs and interests of our wide range of
patrons. This shouldn’t be seen as an either/or
choice, but rather an opportunity to engage
with the multiplicity of reading technologies,
circumstances, and learning possibilities in
the digital era.

This implies for me a fundamental re-evalu-
ation of what we mean by public versus private
reading experience. It used to be that this was
a relatively straightforward issue. Books and
other intellectual works in a library were read
by solitary individuals, usually in contempla-
tive silence. Subsequent engagement with
the broader community occurred through any
number of activities, through quotation,
discussion, word-of-mouth, and book clubs.

Battles and Schnapp remind us that
“...books have never been “just books.” They
were always coaxed to life by conversation
and oration; the oral and written sharing of
excerpts; practices of addition, deletion, and
extension; swarms of mental and scribbled
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Building, Sustaining, and Transitioning the College Reader: Going from a Shared Experience to Sharing the Experience

by Brenda Bosheila (Reading Specialist, Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, OH) <brenda.bosheila@tri-c.edu>

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One of the many challenges that faculty and staff struggle with at our urban community college is the low literacy level of many of our students. These students are not just the ones enrolled in our developmental English classes, but they are also taking our college level courses and visiting our campus libraries. Many times their success depends on their ability to read and comprehend their textbooks, which may be written two to five grade levels above their actual reading ability. We know that our college is not alone in this challenge, and many literacy organizations are raising awareness of these issues. Each year the International Reading Association (IRA) releases its list of “hot topics in literacy education.” In the category, “Hot and Should Be Hot” for 2015 is “College and Career Readiness.” This is followed by the category, “Should Be Very Hot” in which “Adolescent Literacy” is identified (Wohlwend). National attention is focused on education, and it is important that we identify systems and supports to build our students’ literacy skills.

Since many of our students are nontraditional, adult learners with families, and come from neighborhoods that statistically have low literacy levels, we recommend creating a multi-dimensional program that first builds the reading skills of the student in the classroom and then sustains and expands those skills outside of the class either through a Reading Center and/or with high-interest reading programs sponsored as a collaboration between faculty and campus librarians. As students become more accomplished readers at college, the students will be able to transition these literacy skills into their homes by sharing literacy with their family in any number of ways, such as reading to their children or helping others in their family or community become stronger readers. This building, sustaining, and transitioning approach is one that our campus’ Reading Center uses to help students succeed at the college level, and it is also one we hope allows students to bridge their academic and literate life on campus into their homes and communities.

The Student Perspective

Before engaging in the building process with the students, it is important within the classroom to learn the students’ perspectives on reading, and this is particularly important for instructors in the developmental courses who need “to be aware of the students’ beliefs or personal theories about reading and learning” (Simpson, Stahl, and Francis 19). By understanding the student perspective, instructors will be able to scaffold course assignments so students will become more self-directed and actively engage in the learning process. As Simpson, Stahl, and Francis note, this helps neighborhoods that have had historically low literacy rates. To determine the literacy rates, we reviewed the Literacy Needs Assessment Technical Report for Cuyahoga County, which used a statistical model to review the literacy levels in different neighborhoods of Cleveland. The literacy levels range from 1 to 5. Level 1 literacy includes “locating a piece of information in a sports article” and locating “the expiration date on a driver’s license.” Level 2 includes the reading skill to “locate an intersection on a street map.” People with Level 3 literacy can “use a bus schedule to choose the correct bus to take to get to work on time.” Levels 4 and 5 include being able to “explain the difference between two types of benefits at work” and being able to “compare and summarize different approaches lawyers use during a trial” (“Literacy Levels”). Those who test within the 1 to 3 range are believed to have difficulties reading, especially to “meet the demands of the 21st-Century life” (Mikelbank et al. ES1).

Many students who attend Metro campus live in neighborhoods where the population at a literacy level of 1 or 2 can range anywhere between an estimated 68% to as high as 97% (Mikelbank et al. 26). Furthermore, in the spring of 2014, 55% of incoming students tested into either a developmental English course or a bridge course, which is meant to prepare the students for college composition. Because of these numbers and because of the goal to have students become more accomplished college-level readers, faculty and staff created a Reading Center to assist students and to have a program of building, sustaining, and transitioning the literacy skills of students.

The Cuyahoga Community College Experience

Located in Cleveland, OH, the Metropolitan (Metro) campus of Cuyahoga Community College draws many students from area

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Endnotes


