

2015

Building, Sustaining, and Transitioning the College Reader

Brenda Boshela

Cuyahoga Community College, brenda.boshela@tri-c.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Boshela, Brenda (2015) "Building, Sustaining, and Transitioning the College Reader," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 27: Iss. 3, Article 9.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7080>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

our goals. Ranganathan's dictum "Every reader his book" has never been more true. As we acquire larger and more diverse eBook collections, the need for effective discovery mechanisms becomes more acute. Stephen Bell puts it very well: "The planet's future isn't always in the balance when collection collisions happen. More likely it's just the birth of a lifelong reader or the launch of some new passion. These 'good accidents' are too much a part of the quintessential library experience to allow them to fade away. It is up to our profession to design our libraries and the paths to our collections, physical or virtual, to keep the collisions coming."¹⁰ The collisions can be individual or social; short-term or long-term; imaginative or pragmatic — the main thing is that we in libraries enable them to happen. Without these special accidents of the imagination, many of our best mental sparks would never be born, and the magic of reading would be diminished. The value of libraries would equally be diminished. Social or not, reading is a core service that we nurture and feed, amid the buzz of new technologies and possibilities that greet us daily. 🐼

Endnotes

1. OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community*, <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2010perceptions.en.html>. Accessed 5 April 2015.
2. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Battles, "The Library Beyond the Book." (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass: 2014), p. 18.
3. Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 122.
4. Steve Johnson, "Yes, people still read, but now it's social" *New York Times*, June 19, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/business/20unbox.html?_r=0. Accessed 25 April 2015.
5. Allison Mennella, "What is Social Reading and Why Should Libraries Care?" <http://tametheweb.com/2011/06/14/what-is-%E2%80%9Csocial-reading%E2%80%9D-and-why-should-libraries-care-a-ttw-guest-post-by-allison-mennella>. Accessed 6 April 2015.
6. Andrew Piper, "Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times." (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2012), p. 100.
7. Alan Jacobs, "The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction." (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2011), p. 141.
8. Jacobs, p. 141.
9. Naomi Baron, "Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World" (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015), p. 129.
10. Stephen Bell, "Collections are for Collisions", *American Libraries* 45(9/10), September/October 2014. <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2014/10/13/collections-are-for-collisions/>. Accessed 4 April 2015.

Building, Sustaining, and Transitioning the College Reader: Going from a Shared Experience to Sharing the Experience

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

and Brian P. Hall (Assistant Professor, English, Cuyahoga Community College) <brian.hall@tri-c.edu>

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 Cuyahoga Community College Experience

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

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 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

continued on page 18

students become more successful because they have some responsibility for their learning:

The successful students seemed to believe that they were totally or partially responsible for their learning and knowledge acquisition and employed more task-appropriate and elaborative strategies. In contrast, the less-successful students viewed the professor as the person who not only controlled what they would learn but also whether they would learn; they also selected strategies that emphasized rote memorization. (18)

In order to begin to understand how the students feel about reading, we followed an example shared by Paulson and Armstrong where they asked students to complete the following simile in class: "Reading is like..." We received dozens of powerful snapshots of how our students view reading and the reading process. One of the most poignant similes that was given was "College reading is like an un-colored coloring book. It is up to the teacher to bring the color to it." The student's simile illustrates the importance of the faculty's role in building the necessary foundation within the classroom, a foundation that cannot be reasonably laid until the instructor has a firm understanding of the students' insecurities about reading and learning.

Building Literacy

There are many ways to begin building literacy within the classroom. One of the more important methods is modeling how to annotate. Annotation modeling is important because the instructor shows the students how to tackle a text. With the textbook pages projected on a screen or board, the instructor slowly reads and annotates, modeling how readers question, re-read, connect reading to personal experiences, and grapple with difficult vocabulary and concepts. The instructor explains why she or he chooses to underline certain passages, circle words, and make marginal notes. This window into the instructor's literacy practices allows the students to see how an expert reads in her or his field, and may give the student the confidence and guidance to closely read and annotate the text outside of class.

Another strategy that could be used to scaffold annotation skills is the "Say, Means, Matter" technique. This simple technique requires close reading of specific passages and first explores what the passage actually *says*, allowing for the instructor to formatively assess students' basic comprehension of the text. Then, the class discusses what the passage *means*. This step requires students to use textual evidence to interpret meaning within the context of the overall text. Finally, the class explores why the information *matters*. Students begin to use higher order thinking skills to analyze and evaluate text to determine its significance. This step allows students to consider content significance and its application and connection to their lives outside of the classroom.

In addition to annotation, picture books can be an effective addition to the curriculum for reading instruction because they can be used as a simple way to introduce the class to more complicated topics or may even generate class interest. **William Bintz** calls picture books "way-in books" because they "can interest students in topics for which little or no interest currently exists. Way-in books are high-quality, often award-winning texts that provide students a 'way-in'—an unexpected entry into a world of topics they might find interesting to explore" (34-35). Picture books that have been beneficial in some developmental courses include the following:

- *I Want My Hat Back* by **Jon Klassen**, which has been used to teach inferences;
- *The Arrival* by **Shaun Tan**, which also has been used to explore inferences;
- *The Dot* by **Peter Reynolds**, which is used to discuss empowerment;
- *Black Dog* by **Levi Pinfold**, which is about facing fears.

Picture books can foster a discussion, but they can also be used to build basic foundational background knowledge on an idea or theory. For example, **Peter M. Meyerson** writes in "Using Children's Picture Books as Tools to Facilitate Undergraduates' Learning" how picture books can show the idea beyond the abstract, and he uses **Leo Lionni's** *Fish is Fish* as an example of Constructivist Learning Theory in practice (259).

There are a plethora of other reading strategies to incorporate into the classroom and library sponsored workshops, but before instructors attempt any of the strategies, they should have an honest discussion with their students about how the students see reading and learning. Then, strategies can be shaped to best support the students as they become more successful at reading and responding to the texts in their courses.

Institutional Support — The Reading Center

Beyond the classroom, the institution should have a number of support systems that assist students in sustaining and expanding their literacy skills. These are programs that can be operated either through the library or, as we have on our campus, a Reading Center. Created by English faculty and staff and supported by our college's administration, the Reading Center assists students and community members at any literacy level. The Reading Center's staff, whom we call consultants, have the credentials and ability to help students with fundamental literacy skills, such as fluency and character recognition, and the staff can work with students on more advanced literary skills, such as finding main ideas and exploring inferences. The main goal of the center is to help students become more accomplished college-level readers, and this happens mainly by one-on-one consultation. However, the center also helps to sustain student literacy skills by a variety of specific literacy programs.

During the Fall 2014 semester, the Reading Center began offering bi-weekly reading programs with each program focusing on specific reading strategies. The strategies ranged from more fundamental, such as finding the topic and main idea, to the more advanced, such as reading for the Health Careers. Meant to support, sustain, and expand the reading instruction in the classroom, the programs also allow the students to "become active, strategic learners" (Simpson, Stahl, and Francis 13).

Within each program, the students were urged to reflect on how the strategies can positively affect the reading that they are doing in class. The programs accomplished this by asking: What did you do? What worked? What should change? Consultants prepared for each workshop by choosing at least two readings that supported the use of the strategy to be taught. Each workshop began with a consultant modeling the use of a specific strategy using high-interest reading material. Sessions were informal, and attendees were encouraged to discuss the strategy as it was modeled. Students were asked guiding questions like, "What do you notice?" "Does this remind you of other strategies you have used?" "Are any steps in the process unclear?" Following the modeling, students were asked to group into pairs or triads. They continued reading and applying the new strategy during a time of guided practice. The consultant remained actively involved, moving from group to group, continuing to prompt students with guiding questions and checking for understanding among the participants. Finally, students were provided with a second reading. They were given time to *individually* practice the application of the reading strategy that had been taught. Following this time of individual practice, students reformed their groups of two and three and discussed not just the text they had grappled with, but more specifically, the application of the strategy to the text and how the strategy helped organize their thoughts and make meaning from the text. Attendees were also encouraged to recognize that strategies are meant to be useful, so if students had ideas about how to tweak a strategy or adapt it to support a specific text, they were asked to share.

Possible Roles for the Library

For institutions that do not have a Reading Center, creating programs to help sustain and expand literacy in the institution can effectively be organized through the college's library. College librarians are more than qualified to implement such programs because of their content expertise and their familiarity with the students.

There are many ways that the college library can either extend their current programs or, if the college library has limited programs, implement the building, sustaining, and transitioning model. Though we focused on building academic literacy in the classroom, many of our suggestions can be presented as programs in the college library. For example, to assist students to become more accomplished college-level readers, the college library could create programs on basic literary skills, anno-

continued on page 19

Building, Sustaining, and ...
from page 18

tation workshops, or by having specific workshops on how to read in different disciplines, such as health careers, psychology, or even math. Offering these types of programs on a continuous basis would also allow the students to practice and sustain those skills.

Within the model, college libraries become essential to transitioning the skills from college into the home. We suggest, if possible, for the college library to create a partnership with a local library. Through this partnership, additional programming could be offered through the college library, giving students the opportunity to bring their families to the college. This partnership could also allow the college library to allocate a dedicated space for high-interest books from children's literature to genre fiction that can support and encourage family literacy. Finally, the college library can continue to support transitioning literacy by having book fairs, giveaways, book talks, and author visits.

Promoting Literacy and Reading Success

One of the goals we see of the college classroom, library, and the Reading Center is to promote literacy. Ultimately, the purpose of building and sustaining literacy skills is so the skills can be successfully transitioned into the students' academic pursuits and into their homes and community. Though the instructor can easily present picture books in the classroom, having students purchase the books gives them the opportunity to work with the text in the classroom, closely examining use of language, structure, and design. Then they are able to take the books home to share them with their families, or, when the semester is over, to give them to a family or community member. Through our own interactions with students in the community college classroom, students frequently reveal a severe lack of reading material in their homes as they grew up. Many voice a strong desire to alter that as they establish their own homes and families. Providing resources for students to successfully transition their literary pursuits in the classroom into their homes and communities is viewed as one of the vital outcomes of community college coursework.

A picture book that we recommend using in a developmental English course is *The Dot* by **Peter Reynolds**. *The Dot* tells a story about Vashti, and how she feels that she is not very good at art. The teacher tells her to draw something, and Vashti jabs the paper, leaving a small dot. The teacher takes it, looks at it for some time, then slips it back to Vashti and says, "Now sign it." Vashti does and when she returns to the class, she is amazed to see her dot hanging on the wall in a gold frame. This inspires Vashti to continue to make dots (Reynolds). When used early in the semester in the developmental English classroom, this story allows the class to connect to the themes of responsibility, ownership, and empowerment and ways to be successful in college. A number of students who have taken the book home and read it to their children have commented on how much the children not only enjoyed the book, but also the discussion they had with the children about how to try new things.

In addition to the bi-weekly workshops, the Reading Center has offered a program called Taking Reading Home, which focused on presenting strategies to students on how to read more effectively to/with their preschool children. Any college library can implement this program as long as there are library copies of the books to use during the workshops. Attendees of Taking Reading Home had the opportunity to read picture books provided by the Reading Center. Fun ways to look at words and letters and ideas for playing with letter sounds through rhyming and clapping were presented and practiced. Resources for locating short poems and rhymes that connected with the picture books were also shared. Students who attended felt empowered to transition from their role of student and learner in the context of the community college to that of leader and teacher for their preschool-aged children at home.

As educators, librarians, and college staff, a commitment to lifelong learning may seem as second nature as breathing. However, much like we model concepts in the classroom, provide opportunity for guided practice, and gradually release responsibility to our students, scaffolding our students to be lifelong learners is also something to be considered. Referring again to the IRA "hot topics in literacy" release for 2015, in the category "Should be Very Hot," preschool literacy experiences

continued on page 20



**ACS PUBLICATIONS IS NOW AVAILABLE
ON CAMPUS. OR OFF.**

**Get access to cutting-edge
ACS research, anytime and
anywhere, with ACS2Go.**

Access every paper published
in ACS Publications on your
mobile device, whether you are
on campus or off. *Start moving.*



pubs.acs.org



ACS Publications
Most Trusted. Most Cited. Most Read.

topped the list (Wohlwend). Considering the literacy statistics for our city and the communities surrounding our campus, we feel much like Vashti, the little girl from *The Dot*. We are empowered to do our part to make a difference in our classrooms, on our campus, and in our community. With the inclusion of picture books in the classroom and the support services of the Reading Center and library, the long-term goal would be to help move families out of the low literacy statistic. This would enable individuals to not only be more prepared for school but also be more prepared for their professional lives.

We believe that community colleges are in the best position to help students build, sustain, and transition their literacy skills to be successful both at school and at home. When our students state, "I grew up in a home with no books, but my home is going to be different," or "I never used to read at all, but now I read stories to my little brother" or "My goal is to one day have a bookshelf full of books that I can read," we recognize the power of our shared experiences in the classroom. We are not just building a strategy for literacy success for individual students within the confines of the college environment. We are providing the tools and supports to sustain and transi-

tion literacy successes beyond our circle of influence and into the circles of influence that our students have within their homes and communities. Literacy statistics for the urban area surrounding Metro campus may not be heartening, but we are hopeful that one student at a time, one book at a time, one family at a time, one home at a time, we are making our mark.

Reynolds' *The Dot* ends with Vashti meeting a little boy who feels as she did before she was encouraged and empowered to make her mark. He admires Vashti's work but states, "I can't draw a straight line with a ruler." Vashti slides a piece of paper over to the boy and warmly prompts, "Show me." Although his line was wobbly, Vashti looks at his work for some time and then states, "Sign it" (Reynolds). There is power in building, sustaining, and transitioning college readers. Our students and our communities are depending on us. How will you make your mark?

Works Cited

Bintz, William P. " 'Way-In' Books Encourage Exploration in Middle Grades Classrooms." *Middle School Journal* January (2011): 34 – 35. Print.

"Literacy Levels." *The Literacy Cooperative*. The Literacy Cooperative, n.d. Web. 17 Dec. 2014.

Meyerson, Peter M. "Using Children's Picture Books As Tools to Facilitate Under-

graduates' Learning." *College Teaching* 54.3 (2006): 259 – 262. Print.

Mikelbank, Kristen, Lisa Nelson, Sarah Lickfelt, and Claudia Coulton. *Literacy Needs Assessment Technical Report for Cuyahoga County*. Rep. Cleveland: Greater Cleveland Literacy Collaborative, 2004. Print.

Paulson, Eric J., and Sonya L. Armstrong. "Mountains and Pit Bulls: Students' Metaphors for College Transitional Reading and Writing." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54.7 (2011): 494-503. Print.

Paulson, Eric J. "Self-selected Reading for Enjoyment." *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 36.2 (2006): 51-58. Print.

Reynolds, Peter. *The Dot*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick, 2003. n.pag. Print.

Simpson, Michele, Norman A. Stahl, and Michelle Anderson Francis. "Reading and Learning Strategies for the Twenty-first Century." *Teaching Study Strategies in Developmental Education: Readings on Theory, Research, and Best Practice*. Eds. Russ Hodges, Michele L. Simpson, and Norman A. Stahl. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. 12 – 36. Print.

Wohlwend, Karen. "Re: Hot Topics in Literacy Education for 2015." Web log comment. *Teaching New Literacies in PK-2 Classrooms*. N.p., 30 Sept. 2014. Web. 17 Dec. 2014. 🍌

GCCReads: Creating Community through Reading

by Dede Elrobeh (Faculty Librarian, Instructional Coordinator, Glendale Community College, Glendale, AZ) <dorothy.elrobeh@gccaz.edu>

and Cindy Ortega (Reading Faculty, Glendale Community College, Glendale, AZ) <cindy.ortega@gccaz.edu>

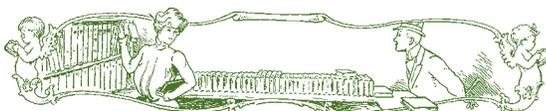
and Renee Smith (Faculty Librarian, Glendale Community College, Glendale, AZ) <renee.smith@gccaz.edu >

"As teachers and librarians, we recognize that there is a correlation between reading for pleasure and academic success, and we believe that GCCReads is the best way to encourage students to read for pleasure."

Academic libraries are focusing on leisure reading. Much of this is due to the fact that recent research has reported the relationship between leisure reading and student learning. As members of the academy, librarians look for methods to support student attainment and align with college wide strategic initiatives. In the fall semester of 2013, **Glendale Community College Library** reconfigured a library space and created a Reading Room. The redesign included the addition of comfortable seating and a leisure collection consisting of bestselling non-fiction and fiction. Librarians noted an increase in use of the space as well as an increase in the circulation of periodicals and leisure books (a year-over-year growth of 51%).

GCC librarians began to focus on finding ways to encourage student leisure reading. Further research showed that other colleges,

such as **Virginia Commonwealth University**, were using reading blogs to encourage leisure reading among students. It became clear to GCC librarians that a blog might be the perfect catalyst for a grant-funded program. In the world of grants, in order for an idea to be seen as meriting support, it must meet a need that the funding organization perceives as a priority, it must have a seasoned team and be based in research. **GCCReads** was born out of these requirements and was funded by a grant from the **Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction**. Annual monies are awarded to projects that promote innovation in teaching and learning and are aligned with college goals. In summary, the **GCCReads** grant proposed



that as a cooperative endeavor between developmental reading and library faculty, a student and faculty book club would be formed, with complimentary monthly club activities and the intention of encouraging voluntary reading and campus engagement, thus leading to greater student success and retention of the participating underprepared reading students.

GCCReads was crafted to address the social and educational needs of developmental reading students as these students are less likely to persist and succeed (Reading Developmental Education Fact Book, 2013). Currently, a critical strategic initiative for many community colleges is meeting the needs of underprepared students. Our proposal focused on providing participating developmental students with the means to make strong academic and personal connections with one another, GCC faculty, and the campus community. We envisioned

continued on page 22