
YAACING

SPRING 2006

The Newsletter of the Young Adult & Children's Services Section of BCLA

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We would love to hear from you!

YAACING is published four times a year and needs your submissions. If you have tried something new at your library, would like to write a column, report on a conference session, or know of an upcoming event for the calendar, please share it with us. Mail, email or fax your material to:

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Spring issue for March/April – Feb 1st

Summer issue for May/June – May 1st

Fall issue for September/October – August 1st

Winter issue for December/January – November 1st

Next Deadline:

Summer Issue:

May 1st

Message from the Chair

I am sorry but I have been unable to obtain the Message from the Chair before going to printing. I know our Chair and Executive have been working hard on pulling together a wonderful lineup for The 2006 BCLA Conference and all of us hope to see you all there.

ED.



“Gripe” from the Editor

YAACING has some great research papers from SLAIS students again this month thanks to Professor Judith Saltman, but I'm afraid that there is no news from anyone in the field. It's getting a bit eerie people! Sorry to be cranky but like the rest of you I am barely keeping my head above water. So if you would like YAACING to continue please help out by sending me your reports on what is happening in the rest of BC. Nag your colleagues to share that great program idea; encourage your boss to send in a report from north of the Lower Mainland; and send me stuff you have written for your local paper. I'll take it all!

Speaking of keeping my head above water, I've been following an online course called "Keeping up to date in the Ever Changing Library World." I say 'following' as it (no kidding) is hard to keep up but so far the course has covered email folders, electronic newsletters, blogs and rss feeds. This week it is web page monitoring services. I'm finding that most of the other participants are in academic or adult services so have little to share with a children's specialist but you guys do! So what is your favourite way (other than reading YAACING) of staying up to date with:

1. Publishing world
 - a. Publisher's Weekly - Children's bookshelf - <http://www.publishersweekly.com/>
 - b. CM Magazine - <http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/>
2. Latest Technology
 - a. <http://www.webology.ir/about.html>
3. Career management
 - a. <http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/>
 - b. www.theshiftedlibrarian.com
4. Programming
 - a. <http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/teenreading/teenreading.htm>
5. Advocacy - www.cla.ca
6. What's happening around BC? - www.bcla.bc.ca
7. Balancing life and work

What other topics are you an expert in? What are you mad about; frustrated by? Toss it out on the listserv as I've just tossed these out to get you going. Maybe a group of you could help me by writing a regular column 1-4 times a year - I'm open to proposals. Remember the best way to learn something is to commit to teaching the topic.

Our next issue will probably have some papers from students studying YA services and will be after the Conference, so here is your opportunity to send me your Teen program outlines and report on a great session at BCLA. Get your name in print and become famous.

Yours truly,

Phillippa L. Brown
Editor, YAACING

Video Games as a Library Service

By Reece Steinberg, MLIS Candidate for LIBR 542a

Introduction

Video games are beginning to show up on public library shelves more than ever before, and are a topic that is engaging North American librarians. Are video games just another new format? By what criteria are they selected? This paper outlines a short history of video games in public libraries, gives reasons why librarians include video games in collections, and discusses how they choose which games to include. It touches on video game tournaments as an added service, including information on one Canadian and two American libraries, which have hosted successful tournaments. Lastly, the paper briefly talks about the ways in which librarians are educating themselves about this unique and special format.

The Emergence of Video Games in Public Libraries

Library journals, listservs and blogs are buzzing about video games. Many are comparing video games to graphic novels- just another format that the library has overlooked and misunderstood, but which can draw young people into the library (Braun 2004, 189; Wilson 2005, 449). In some ways this is a fair comparison. After the widespread popularity and acceptance of graphic novels in the library it encourages librarians to start collecting games. The comparison, however, ignores that librarians did not start video game collections just recently. PlayStation 2 is not the major console for which libraries started buying games, that console was Atari.

In 1982, *School Library Journal* reported that Pacman had spread beyond restaurants and arcades into libraries (Emmens 1982, 45). There is so much similarity between the cutting edge video game article of 1982, and the cutting edge video game articles of today, that, save for the console and game titles, the 1982 article appears to be current. The article promotes video games as a brand new library service that attracts young people into the library. Circulation is extremely high, so much so that one library decided not to allow reserves on the games, because it required too much staff time (before automated hold systems). Initially, all four libraries in the article collected games only for the single most popular console, avoiding the competitors of the time (in 1982, Intellivision, today, Xbox). Finally, the article ends by explaining that libraries exist to provide the public with information and recreational materials, regardless of format (Emmens 1982, 45). To anyone who has read some of the library articles of late 2004 and 2005, these points will sound very familiar. What happened to the video game collections that started 20 years ago? Why did video games not become an established format in the library, like music and movie formats?

Literature about the libraries that ceased collecting video games is more difficult to find than literature about libraries beginning a new collection. I was able to speak with librarians from three of the four library systems which were featured in the 1982 article. Two of the systems ceased collecting video games shortly after beginning the collection, and one has continued to collect and circulate video games since 1982. Mary Butler, a librarian at Arlington Heights Memorial Library in Illinois, stated a few reasons why this library had stopped carrying video games. The multitude of incompatible and quickly changing formats was a large concern for the library. As well, the library

did not have facilities for using the games (consoles), and the games were often damaged in circulation. Eventually, the library ceased purchasing new games or replacing damaged games. Currently, this library does not have plans to start a new collection of video games, though the librarian believes there is a demand for them, and that this type of collection is a possibility in the future (Butler 2005). Librarian Mary Lukkarila of the Minnesotan Cloquet Public Library believed that their video games collection was discontinued 20 years ago due to the expense of keeping up to date with quickly changing technology. She added that Internet gaming is supported by the library, and is popular among young people there (Lukkarila, 2005). The East Brunswick Public Library of New Jersey carries games for Playstation2, Nintendo DS (a portable system) and Xbox (East Brunswick Public Library, 2005). As stated earlier, the library has carried video games since 1982 continuously, changing formats along the way (Hess 2005). East Brunswick Public Library appears to be an exception among libraries; according to the library catalogue, they carry hundreds of new video games, whereas other libraries are just beginning to collect the format (East Brunswick Public Library 2005; Heimrich and Neiburger 2005, 450)

The issues of the early 1980s are similar to issues of today. There are three major consoles, manufactured by Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft, which do not produce compatible games. The manufacturers release new generations of consoles approximately every 4 years. Despite these issues, public libraries are beginning, once again, to collect video games. A major difference between then and now is the security and maturity of the video games industry. In the 1980s, the market was just beginning, whereas today the video game market is more developed (Datamonitor 2004).

Including Video Games in the Collection

Librarians cite a variety of reasons for why they have chosen to include video games in their public library collections. Their reasons range from baiting young people to promoting community (Barack 2005, 22; Heimrich and Neiburger 2005, 450). Other librarians view video games as just another format that helps the library fulfill its role as a source of materials for pleasure and education (Wilson 2005, 449; Heimrich and Neiburger 2005, 450). Many libraries already carried games in CD-ROM form, but preferred the console game for technical reasons- the cartridges do not require problematic authentication codes (Scalzo 2005a).

When librarians use video games as bait, they are aiming to attract the children and young adults who do not currently use the library regularly, or do not use it for recreation. The hope is that once young people enter the library to get video games, they will be attracted to other material in the library. In some ways this ignores any value that video games present in and of themselves. This may also be a hard position to defend as a public librarian, as it is difficult to find studies or data that support this belief.

Many other librarians are espousing the value of video games. They compare video games to audio and video formats which were controversial in the past, but are now accepted as standard in most public libraries (Scalzo 2005c). Like any other format, there are higher quality games and lower quality games. Higher quality games may involve the use of problem-solving skills, literacy, critical thinking and other attributes (Barack 2005, 22; Wilson 2005, 449). They allow people to learn interactively, which can help people to retain what they learn (Whelan 2005, 40). High quality games can include aspects of storytelling (Kelly Czarnecki quoted in Scalzo 2005b). Video games are also attributed with teaching gamers how to be team players, and to take calculated risks, both important skills in the business world, as well as other areas of life (Barack 2005, 22). Playing video games is

an activity that appeals to, and can bridge gaps of age, gender and ethnicity (Kelly Czarnecki quoted in Scalzo 2005b).

Developing Video Games Collections

Development of video games collections is unique; it differs in important ways from any other format. Video games are reviewed less broadly and widely in library literature. Traditional library review sources often do not include this format at all. This can cause difficulties for librarians in a number of ways. Without reviews, librarians do not have access to reputable sources which can inform them about the video games market and help them in selecting high quality games. As well, librarians often use positive reviews from reputable sources to justify their selections to the public and other library workers. Video games are reviewed in popular magazines, such as *Nintendo Power* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* but the reviews are aimed at home gamers and may exclude information that is pertinent to libraries. As well, the ethics of video game journalism are questionable, as magazines sometimes have direct industry ties, such as with *Nintendo Power*. In other cases, reviewers are offered select advance use of games, often coupled with extravagant accommodations and other perks which may influence their feelings towards the game. Overwhelmingly, reviews in video game magazines are positive and upbeat (Hall 2003). Some librarians are beginning to publish online critical reviews of video games which are pertinent to libraries. These are often in the form of blogs¹. These sources are not peer-reviewed, but librarians can use them to get a feel for what other libraries are doing, coupled with listservs such as LibGaming, a Google Group. Alternatively, one librarian has decided to write a regular column for an online video game review publication. Primarily he uses his column to inform potential users of the video game services that his library provides, but his writing can also be useful for librarians who are looking for recommendations for games to add to library collections². Criteria for selecting video games may also be different than criteria for books and audio/visual material, and librarians need to determine this before beginning to collect games. Collection management policies should reflect these criteria. Different libraries have different needs, and this affects the selection criteria for video games. Some libraries primarily use games onsite, sometimes in video game tournaments. In this case, libraries tend to choose games that are popular and can allow multiple players, such as Mario Kart on Nintendo's Gamecube. Mario Kart has a LAN (Local Area Network) mode that allows eight Gamecubes to be linked up so that up to sixteen people can compete simultaneously in the same game (Helmrich and Neiburger 2005). Libraries which do not have onsite gaming, and instead lend the games out for home use, may strive to get as many high quality games as they can. As well as popular games, they may collect "hidden gems"- games which are attractive and high quality, but not as well-known. Some libraries purchase only games which are rated E (for Everyone) or T (for Teen), avoiding the mature content of M-rated games (Scalzo 2005a; Kelly Czarnecki quoted in Scalzo 2005b; Waters 2005). Libraries also look for games which will appeal across broad age ranges, and which appeal to girls as well as boys (Kelly Czarnecki quoted in Scalzo 2005b).

¹ For example, *Game On: Games in Libraries*, a blog run by three librarians and one library student, available at <http://libgaming.blogspot.com/>

² Librarian John Scalzo's column in *Gaming Target* is called "The Video Game Librarian", and an index of the columns to date is available at <http://www.gamingtarget.com/articles.php?kywr=The+Video+Game+Librarian>

In addition to deciding the criteria for selecting individual games, librarians must determine which console(s) the library will collect games for. Some libraries choose to keep a smaller collection of games for multiple consoles, so that most users have at least some games available for their console. Other libraries have decided to collect for only one console to minimize the confusion of library workers, as well as users (Scalzo 2005a). In the latter case, Playstation2 is popular, as it has the largest market share and installed base, as well as the largest number of games (Datamonitor 2004, 3; Scalzo 2005a). Also, the forthcoming PlayStation 3 is reported to be backwards-compatible, so PS2 games will be playable on that system (Scalzo 2005a).

Tournaments in the Library

Video game tournaments are a new trend in library services, and have met with great enthusiasm. Ann Arbor District Library in Michigan has organized large and successful monthly tournaments which are documented widely in library publications, and have influenced other libraries to organize similar events (Barack 2005, 22; Heimrich and Neiburger 2005, 450; Matt Gullet quoted in Scalzo 2005b). Bloomington Public Library in Illinois is another library early to organize video game tournaments for young people. Both libraries chose Mario Kart Double Dash for the game's ability to allow up to 16 simultaneous players. BPL's GameFest happens four times per year and in addition to the gaming, the library provides a pizza supper for the participants. GameFest also features Dance Dance Revolution Extreme, a physically active game in which players follow dance steps. BPL's program has been extremely successful; each successive program has drawn a larger number of participants. Due to demand, the library has plans to organize additional video game tournaments for adults and children, since GameFest is restricted to young people ages 12-17 (Kelly Czarnecki quoted in Scalzo 2005b).

In Canada, Red Deer Public Library in Alberta hosted its first tournament in the summer of 2005, featuring Tony Hawk Underground 2. This was a very successful event drawing about 15 participants, ranging in age from 12-18 (Waters 2005).

Tournaments are beneficial to libraries in a number of ways. Tournaments showcase the video games collection, help to build community, promote the library as a relevant community resource, and bring new users into the library. Tournaments enhance the collection by providing a service that participants could not obtain from playing the games at home (Helmrich and Neiburger 2005, 451).

Librarian Education

Recently, librarians have been striving to educate themselves in order to better serve youth. In addition to the blogs, journal articles, listserv and columns mentioned previously in this article, an upcoming conference focuses on this topic. Gaming, Learning and Libraries, a two-day symposium hosted by Chicago's Metropolitan Library System, is taking place on December 5th and 6th, 2005. This event is the first of its kind, and focuses on the educational potential of video games and the logistics and reasoning behind offering video games as a collection and service of the library (Metropolitan Library System 2005).

Conclusion

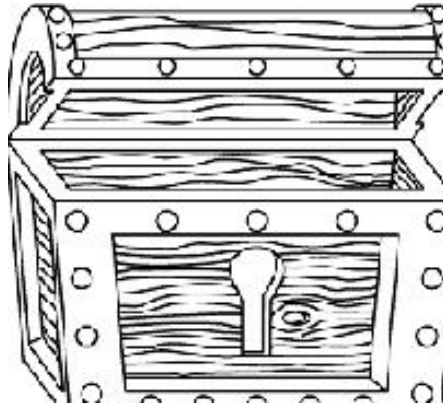
Though video games have existed in some public libraries for over 20 years, the library community as a whole is beginning to talk about games now more than ever before, and in many different mediums. Video games as a format offer challenges- there is a lack of reputable library review sources for video games and a lack of knowledge among librarians about the video games market. Decisions about

video game collections require an assessment of the type of services a library is able and willing to offer, including whether or not the library will host video game tournaments and other programming. Libraries that have introduced video games into their collections have overwhelmingly met with support from the community and a high turnout for video game-related programming. As well, many librarians have worked to educate others in the field on the value of having video games, and about the logistics of bringing them in to the library.

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TREASURE HUNT PROGRAM—GRADE ONE



1. Help us find the Treasure Chest
2. Book: Edward and the Pirates by David McPhail
3. Song: “You Can’t be a Pirate” by Don Freed
4. Book: Bartholomew and the Bug by Neal Layton
5. Song/Activity: “We’re going on a Treasure Hunt”
(Based on We’re going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen)
6. Book-based Storytelling: Strega Nona by Tomie de Paola

Wendy Huot and Michael Groberman

You Can't be a Pirate

(Don Freed)

Being a pirate is all fun and games,
'Til somebody loses an eye.
It stings like the blazes, it makes you pull faces,
You can't let you mates see you cry.
A dashing black patch will cover the hatch
And make sure the socket stays dry.
Being a pirate is all fun and games
'Til somebody loses an eye.

Being a pirate is all fun and games,
'Til somebody loses an eye.
It stings like the blazes, it makes you pull faces,
You can't let you mates see you cry.
A dashing black patch will cover the hatch
And make sure the socket stays dry.
Being a pirate is all fun and games
'Til somebody loses an eye.

CHORUS

It's all part of being a pirate. (Aarg!)
You can't be a pirate with all your parts. (Aarg!)
Oh, it's all part of being a pirate. (Aarg!)
You can't be a pirate with all your parts. (Aarg!)

Being a pirate is all fun and games,
'Til somebody loses a hand.
It spurts and it squirts and it jolly-well hurts,
Pain only a pirate could stand.
The fash'nable look is a nice metal hook,
But now you can't play in the band.
Being a pirate is all fun and games,
'Til somebody loses a hand.

CHORUS

Being a pirate is all fun and games,
'Til somebody loses a leg.
It hurts like the dickens, your pace never quickens,
Hopping around on a peg.
So all of you prancers, and flamenco dancers
Can jolly-well go suck an egg.
Being a pirate is all fun and games
'Til somebody loses a leg.

CHORUS X 2



Storytelling: the key to getting reluctant readers reading

Submitted by Melanie Au

Once upon a time, in a place not too far away, 30 children and volunteers were settling down for a reading session at the local public library. Well, at least they were supposed to be settling down. Three grade 2 girls were busy chattering away, two boys were leaping from chair to chair in the library's group study area, one boy was tugging on my arm begging to go on the computer and another child was wreaking havoc in the library stacks with his remote control dune buggy. It was yet another lively session of our summer reading program for children who needed extra help with reading. My mission? To somehow get the children to practice reading for 35 minutes, then participate in art and science activities when most of them would rather do anything else other than read. What to do? Eventually, we rounded everyone up and gathered at the story pit where I told the tale of the Seven Chinese Brothers, a tale that had intrigued me when I was a young child. And suddenly the children were sitting still, their eyes fixed on me, the expressions on their faces showing that they were riveted by the story. When I was finished, I introduced other books with similar legends – and to my surprise, at our next reading session the children began to ask for the books, sit down and *read* them.

Throughout the ages, stories have been used to entertain, preserve history and teach. Some claim that storytelling is perhaps the most powerful and effective teacher of all time, particularly in the area of reading and language. There are studies that link storytelling to improved recall, vocabulary, language fluency, writing, visualization and logical thinking skills (Doll et al. 2001). In some cases, storytelling appears to lead to improved scores in English language tests (Mitchoff 2005). The following discussion explores the connection between storytelling and the development of reading skills and examines how storytelling might just be the key to getting reluctant readers interested in reading.

RELUCTANT READERS – THE CHALLENGE

The International Adult Literacy Survey, released in June 2000 by Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, compared the literacy³ rates of 20 different countries. The Movement for Canadian Literacy states that the results of the survey indicates that “over 10 million Canadians are working at marginal or modest levels of literacy” (Movement for Canadian Literacy 2005). Research in the United States shows that 35% of children entering school are at risk for having academic difficulties due to low levels of literacy skills and motivation (Public Library Association 2005). This has significant implications for the ability of individuals to communicate with others, build their careers and manage their lives – and a direct impact on the overall socioeconomic state of a country. Unfortunately, many children (and adults) with reading difficulties do not see the need for good reading skills, and are not motivated to take steps to rise above minimal levels of literacy.

³ Literacy was defined as “the ability of adults to use written information to function in society, to achieve their goals and to develop their knowledge and potential” (Movement for Canadian Literacy 2005).

STORYTELLING VS. READING ALOUD

Both reading aloud and storytelling are powerful means of inspiring reluctant readers to read. In some ways, storytelling seems more difficult and risky (for the teller) because it requires memorizing stories (though not always word for word) and means there is no book to hide behind (Woodard 2002).

However, one of the advantages of oral storytelling is that the storyteller speaks directly to the audience, creating a stronger bond between them and leading to more interaction and trust after the storytelling (Farrell 1994). This is important for both teachers and librarians, as gaining the trust of reluctant readers mean they may more readily accept instruction and suggestions. Some suggest that the speaker is perceived as more active and therefore, able to bring listeners “closer” to the events and characters described. In addition, when there are no visual props or pictures, listeners are encouraged to use both the right and left sides of their brains to process what is being heard. They are required to rely on their own memories and imagination to visualize that which is being described (Woodard 2002). Storytelling is an intense language experience where the five senses are engaged to a greater degree and the audience is more actively engaged (Roney 1994).

STORYTELLING ENHANCES READING COMPREHENSION AND BUILDS VOCABULARY

Research shows that listening comprehension is the cognitive foundation for reading comprehension (Farrell 1994). Storytelling, an intense listening activity, can help develop listening skills, and, in effect, develop reading and writing skills. If the language that is heard is rich, full of variety and meaning, there is a greater chance of being able to speak, write, read and understand a wider vocabulary. Oral storytellers often use words and expressions that move beyond the everyday vocabulary used by most children, providing exposure to a variety of words, phrasing and language patterns (Farrell 1994; Mitchoff 2005). Rhythm, tone, and volume are used to convey meaning, so that the learning of new vocabulary actually becomes easier because of such cues (National Storytelling Association 1994). When children read after hearing stories, they will bring their level of listening comprehension to the reading experience.

In addition, stories develop the ability to structure, organize and understand what is seen and experienced (Farrell 1994; Craig et al. 2001). There appears to be a direct correlation between a child’s sense of story, reading comprehension and writing skills (Farrell 1994). The more stories one hears about different times, places and events, the more exposure and understanding one will gain of the world around them – exposure and understanding that will certainly help a reader make sense of concepts presented in print.

Language cannot be learned without understanding that words have meaning and purpose; it must be taught with content that stimulates the mind. Storytelling adds meaning that is not conveyed through skill drills, exercise books and spelling tests. And when language has meaning, children will respond and be interested in it. Storytelling can be the bridge between spoken and written words and encourage children to care about what they hear and read (Moir 1994).

STORYTELLING CAN HELP BUILD READERS’ CONFIDENCE

Initial problems with reading are often compounded by previous failures, past reprimand from teachers, parents or peers and unpleasant experiences where reluctant readers are singled out or forced to read things they do not enjoy (Worthy 1996). Reluctant readers can develop an aversion or fear of reading, because they associate it with distressing experiences. Kylene Beers, a researcher at Yale University, states, “challenging texts do more than challenge readers’ decoding and comprehension

ability; they challenge their self esteem” (Beers 2004, 123). Storytelling that does not use print may be perceived as something easier than reading, something that reluctant readers feel they may be able to do because “it only involves talking”. As reluctant readers are given opportunities to listen to and tell stories, they build up their confidence in their own language skills (Woodard 2002). Teachers have reported that storytelling is able to capture the attention of these readers and that their willingness to participate in language arts activities increased with regular storytelling (Mitchoff 2005). Storytelling can be the tool that breaks the cycle of reading failure and poor self concept of one’s own reading skills and be the stepping stone to successful reading experiences.

STORYTELLING BRINGS LITERATURE TO LIFE

In this electronic era of computers, MP3 players and television, where passive consumption of non-stop visuals and sound is the norm, many reluctant readers find words on a page dull and expressionless. Storytelling captures the humour, excitement, and subtle meanings in a text that may not be evident to reluctant readers when read silently. Hearing stories that they enjoy may encourage listeners to read the print form or read similar stories in the hopes that the enjoyable experience will be repeated. In fact, when reluctant readers hear exciting stories from higher level books beyond their reading level, they may be inspired to learn to read better to be able to read such books.

The magic of telling stories is often created by language and literary patterns that are prevalent in literature, such as the repetition of phrases and words and the use of familiar story motifs and character archetypes. Listening to stories can help reluctant readers become familiar with literary conventions, idioms, expressions and the flow and structure of prose, preparing them for the abstract demands of non-verbal language skills involved in reading and writing (Craig et al. 2001). For “storytelling is the act of crafting a literary document in public and in the process, making language patterns and literary structures visible in ways no other experience can [...] As we listen, we learn the grammar of a story and its structure and components” (Moir 1994, 59). A firm understanding of “how stories work” not only prepares a child to read but also leads to a greater appreciation for what is being read when they come across familiar literary structures and references to elements found in classic tales. Spoken language is used to its full extent, with greater expression used in the words spoken (Farrell 1994). It encourages a fascination with language and narrative and more strongly highlights the beauty of language (regardless of which one).

STORYTELLING PROVIDES TOOLS TO ANALYZE AND EVALUATE LITERATURE

Listening to good stories can help children develop and recognize literary standards that can be used to evaluate other stories. Many reluctant readers are unable to articulate what they would like to read because they are unfamiliar with what they might find in books. In some cases, they are convinced that adult figures cannot find a good book for them, yet are unwilling or nervous about finding one for him/herself (Beers 2004). Becoming familiar with a variety of stories through listening to them can equip a child with the tools to decide what to read when faced with the overwhelming variety of books available.

Listening to and telling stories also encourages individual and group reflection. Stories that engage listeners are sure to elicit a response. Listeners will often consider what they liked or did not like about the story, judge the actions of the characters and discuss the outcome of events. Teachers who have used storytelling regularly have reported that discussion among students in the classroom became more frequent, spontaneous and more sophisticated. Students also became more open to

telling, re-telling and composing their own stories, as well as more interested in examining literary texts in depth (De Vos 1991).

IMPLICATIONS FOR READING PROGRAMS AND LIBRARIES

Some ideas on how libraries can use storytelling to promote literacy include:

- devoting a portion of regular storytimes for preschoolers and toddlers to storytelling – especially since it is so very important to begin building literacy skills at a young age
- including storytelling along with the usual booktalks, computer and research skills sessions and Summer Reading Club promotions
- using a variety of storytelling methods, such as “cut and tell stories”, “draw and tell stories”, and dramatic storytelling using props and puppets. While storytelling that is strictly oral has its strengths, exposing listeners to different kinds of storytelling can encourage creativity and experimentation and show listeners that storytelling does not have to be done in one particular way. Instead children can be encouraged to take ownership and tell stories in their unique way.
- encouraging and providing opportunities for children to create, tell and retell stories and to respond to stories they hear through mediums such as oral discussion and art
- recommending stories to teachers, parents and children to tell orally
- ensuring that the children’s collection offers a good selection of materials that supply tales to tell (including storytelling handbooks and guides)

There are many different strategies and aspects to consider in the quest to help reluctant readers. One can focus on approaches such as book selection, reader’s advisory, collaborating with schools, or educating parents. Such strategies are certainly not exclusive of each other, but rather, can be used to complement one another to address the different needs of readers. However, many who encounter reluctant readers would say that the biggest battle to be won is the challenge of getting readers interested and excited about reading. Once a child is willing to read, the doorway to improvement is open and the child has a much greater chance of overcoming reading difficulties. Storytelling may just be the key to this door. Surely, “sharing a story builds and sustains lifelong readers. The building blocks to literacy begin long before children start school and their literacy skills expand throughout their school years with continued exposure to and experience with story” (Mitchoff 2005, 39).

And so, on that warm summer day in July, with a group of children sitting around me listening to the legend of seven brothers with magical powers who outsmarted a cruel emperor, I began to understand the magical power of storytelling that could overcome the seemingly impossible challenge of inspiring children to read.

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From the Skateboard to the Checkout Line: Boys and Literacy

By Caitlin Fralick, for Prof. Judith Saltman, LIBR542a

Childhood literacy is a hot topic, from the academic world to the water cooler. It is a social cornerstone, as well as a subject of much intellectual and personal contention. After all, most people think with pride of the period during which they learned to read, of the books that were meaningful to them, and of the way others may approach this essential skill. The literacy rate of young people concerns us all because of the inherent value their literacy will bring to our collective progress. Since literacy is the subject of both popular and scholarly interest, the tables are forever turning in the study thereof. Numerous agendas come to the fore in literacy research, and all are valid. In recent years, the importance of literacy education for English as a Second Language or low-income children has become a topic of increasing relevance. Evidently, whatever area of reading research is in vogue, there are a myriad of others clamouring for attention. This only speaks to the importance and validity of the study of literacy from any point of view and for the benefit of any group of children. The interest group *du jour* for this paper, however, is boys. The subject of male childhood literacy and reading patterns has recently become a much-debated area of research and discussion. A number of studies arguing for distinctive services for boys and respect for their unique reading preferences have been met with either approval or wariness—after all, how far can we go in catering to boys before we risk ignoring other groups who need specialized services. This is the ever-present conundrum of children’s services in an era wherein abundant research on the many methods of reaching hard-to-reach children is at our fingertips—we must often choose which groups we wish to focus on. As

such, while reading this paper, it is essential to keep in mind that while boys are the focal point, other children are never far from our concern.

This paper will explore the body of research on boys as readers and the ways in which libraries can enhance their literacy development through unique programming and collection building. Through the examples of some innovative library programs and online initiatives, a clearer understanding of the broad idea of “reading” for boys will be reached, from comic book to computer screen. As librarians, we cannot shy away from this breadth; instead, we must embrace and enhance it.

Cognitive and physical variation make for differing approaches to learning in boys and girls. Among some notable differences, boys’ fine motor skills develop more slowly than girls’, and they often speak their first words and develop clear speech much later than girls do (Booth, 2002). Moreover, boys are more likely to make use of “environmental” print, reading the world around them instead of the words on the page (p. 22). More important than cognitive variation, perhaps, are the socially constructed gender differences that begin early in life and are honed, for better or for worse, in classrooms and other social settings. The stereotype of boys as detrimentally witty and aggressive exists for a reason—boys do take more physical risks than girls, do challenge authority, do often care more about social than educational experiences. The problem is the manner in which these truths manifests itself in learning environments. Thompson notes that the knee-jerk reaction to typical boy behaviour is to write them off: “We either treat them like wild animals who need to be controlled or as entitled princes of whom we cannot as very much on a moral basis. We seem to think they are too something—too immature, or morally backward, or fragile, or homophobic, or masculine” (Thompson, 2003, p. 27).

While the feminist movement and equity studies in education have made for increasing benefits for girls and women as learners and readers, this expansion of opportunities does not extend to male students (Barrs and Pidgeon, 1998). The classroom and the library are generally regarded as “feminised” environments, where quiet learning is valued over the often raucous, physical interactivity in which many boys thrive. Whether purposefully or not, classrooms and libraries are more geared toward girls than boys: ninety percent of teachers and eighty-two percent of librarians in the United States are women (Brozo, 2005; Gordon, 2004), leaving very little room for male role models in educational settings. If the educational environment, including schools and libraries, is indeed the breeding ground for social constructions of gender identity, then positive connections between literacy and masculinity are essential to fostering a safe, productive space for boys as readers (Smith, 2004). However, as we shall see, the way we think about bringing books and reading to children devalues the ways in which boys approach reading.

Part of the dismissal of boys’ reading habits by educators and librarians comes from a misunderstanding of the texts they choose as well as the perceived effects thereof. Generally, boys do not gravitate to the classics as readily as girls do. Instead, they are more likely to be “social” readers, influenced by what David Booth terms the “corner store culture” of reading and learning—that is, they learn to enhance their interaction with their peers and to supplement the activities and hobbies they enjoy as a group (Booth, 2002, p. 30). To this end, non-fiction is a popular choice, ranging from books on favourite sports and activities to informational books such as atlases and scientific texts (Smith, 2004; Abilcock, 1997). They are most interested in reading with a purpose, in taking in a text

that will benefit them in other areas of their lives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Assigned reading does not always offer this larger perspective.

Sanford and Blair's longitudinal study of boys and reading found that boys are not necessarily less inclined to read than girls; rather, their reading selections do not always match the expectations of teachers and librarians (Sanford and Blair, 2003). Classrooms and libraries privilege certain kinds of literacy as well as certain kinds of writing. The standard canonical approach to children's literature, for instance, encourages the study of a set number of texts and genres known to be "great books." They are, indeed, wonderful books. But sadly, this approach neglects many of the books of great interest to boys. Moreover, boys' interests in multimedia reading activities, such as text- and plot-heavy video games and internet use, are often ignored or even maligned by educators and parents alike (O'Donnell, 2005). Much of the research on boys and reading demonstrates that they have difficulty making meaning out of the books they are told they ought to read (Sanford and Blair, 2003; Smith, 2004). Engagement is essential to reading achievement; a young person must feel that he is in control of his reading choices and not at the mercy of a well-meaning but misguided reader's advisor, and that he is being allowed to choose books that reflect his interests and needs, intellectual or otherwise. Sadly, though, rather than embracing boys' literary preferences, librarians push them aside.

Thompson contends that the high esteem boys hold for "low-class literature" makes us "nervous" (Thompson, 2003, p. 30), since their choices often threaten our core belief in good literature for a good society. There is certainly some truth to this assertion, but to cling to the overly rational notion that good books alone can create an analytical reader is to risk losing the trust and attention of young boys. In truth, we are already falling off their radar: By emphasizing the canon, or even by emphasizing fiction in general, we ignore boys' preferences. In turn, boys perceive their literary choices as sub-par and even wrong. Reading research has explored two interesting patterns in boys as readers that speak to this gap between what they like and what they are "supposed" to read. Some studies have shown that boys view reading as a girls' activity as a result of their disinterest with the texts with which they are presented in school and at the library (O'Donnell, 2005; Blair and Sanford, 2003). Still others have found that even boys who engage willingly in reading view their reading choices as "boys' books," and other books on topics such as ballet or art as "girls' books" (Smith, 2004). Smith argues that even for eager readers, reading is still gendered insofar as boys are choosing materials that they find suitable to their peer group, a choice that limits what they read to peer-acceptable books. Moreover, there is a further gap between boys who read books deemed unacceptable or invalid by their parents, librarians and teachers—even a peer-acceptable book (or an internet site, for that matter) might not seem appropriate to authority figures, which sends the message to budding male readers that their literary choices are worthless. Consequently, boys will not see the point of becoming more engaged readers, or of thinking critically about the texts they read. They will not find value in their reading because we, as experts, refuse to provide that value.

In spite of the wealth of alarmist research surrounding the frightening plight of boys and reading, there is no need to abandon hope. Instead, parents and professionals alike should examine this body of research in an attempt to better understand the ways we might foster a love of reading, be it a magazine, a website, or a tome by Tolkien. This encouragement must begin at home. Parents must encourage young boys to read, regardless of what form that reading might take. Love and Hamston's study uncovers the pervasive tension between boys and their families when it comes to some of their leisure reading choices, such as electronic text or comic books (Love and Hamston,

2003). These literacy choices often contravene our standards of quality, and it may be difficult for parents, particularly those who are avid readers, to approve of such texts. Nevertheless, parents cannot allow their bias to stand in the way of their budding literary fiends. Literacy is emotional, as well as intellectual. Parental approval and close involvement is essential for continued reading success.

Adult modeling of literacy behaviour is important for turning all children into avid readers, but it is especially important for young boys. Smith's study of adolescent boys found that a father's reading habits was a key determinant of the son's interest in reading (Smith, 2004). Because the male parent is the first and most influential male role model a young boy will have, fathers and male caregivers are in a unique position to instruct his son simply by doing. Boys learn how to be men from their fathers, and if a father can model literacy experiences as uplifting and beneficial, then he succeeds not only in creating a reader, but also in laying the ground for a life of open-minded learning. In a society in which reading is often viewed as a feminine activity, the equation of literacy and masculinity in the home and in the library will help undo gender stereotypes. Initiatives like the Vancouver Public Library's Man in the Moon program help to begin this process during infancy. During a Man in the Moon session, male caregivers bring their babies to the library and participate in a Babytime that encourages caregivers to hold their babies while singing songs and nursery rhymes together. The physical intimacy between parent and child during these sessions is incredibly significant. Man in the Moon tries to break down the emotional and physical barriers that might exist for male parents while also fostering the equation of literacy and love. This unique combination lays the ground for a lifelong father-and-child relationship that encompasses reading and the library.

Libraries should also attempt to provide programming that appeals to boys as readers while keeping in mind their preferred methods of discussion and socialization. The North Vancouver District Library, for instance, implemented an all-male reading club during the spring of 2003, and Ottawa Public Library boasts a similar father/male caregiver and son reading club (O'Reilly, 2004). Harvey Daniels points out that reading circles and book clubs are perfect for boys—they emphasize personal control by allowing members to choose their own reading material, and discussion is open-ended and moves according to what the boys feel like talking about (Daniels, 2002). Parental inclusion is an excellent way to encourage family literacy even after a child is reading on his own. Such initiatives will bring the corner-store culture into the library, giving boys an open forum in which to develop their opinions and analytical skills without threatening their reading choices. All-boys book clubs send the message that reading can indeed be a masculine activity. These programs can also help to break down the assumptions that texts are gendered, that emotional stories are “girly” or boring. Libraries can provide a uniquely safe forum for boys to explore books that classroom politics and stereotyping might keep them from picking up at school.

As librarians, we must also be prepared to move beyond books to encourage boys' literacy development. Instead of ignoring the advent of multimedia formats from the internet to video games to online chat programs, we must embrace their role in young boys' life. As Elizabeth Daley, a Communications professor at the University of Southern California, states in an interview in Lawrence Lessig's book, *Free Culture*,

“What you want is to give [children] ways of constructing meaning. If all you give them is text, they're not going to do it. Because they can't. You know, you've got Johnny who can look at a video, he can play a video game, he can do graffiti all over

your walls, he can take your car apart, [...] [h]e just can't read your text" (Lessig, 2004).

Daley's solution to this problem is essentially to do the best with what boys *can* do—give them a forum in which to express and explore their interests in other forms of communication and reading. Literacy is much more than words in a book; it is also the way we decode our daily lives, the way we “read” our surroundings. A boy enraptured with a role-playing video game or an album by Eminem is not wasting his time, he is merely reading a different kind of text. As proponents of information literacy, then, librarians must give boys the critical language to analyse these texts the way we encourage them to analyze books. Media literacy must become part of our mandate for young readers in general, and boys in particular. Fostering an analytical, aware environment in which to explore multimedia texts will help boys view their literacy pursuits as valid, and it will also help them to see that the library is about more than just books and bun-wearing women (a tired stereotype that has certainly kept many young people from crossing our thresholds).

For the purists among us, we might also approach multimedia resources as extensions of traditional texts. Some notable children's authors whose popularity with young male readers have excellent, comprehensive websites that work to enhance their readers' literacy experience, whether through their own books or through others. Jon Scieszka's *Guys Read* site, for instance, is a “web-based literacy program” designed to empower boys to make their own decisions about literacy and join with other male readers to discuss books they choose for themselves (Scieszka, 2005). Likewise, *Captain Underpants* author Dav Pilkey's site at www.pilkey.com is full of interactive games, interviews with the author, and professional resources. Pilkey's approach is particularly appealing—the author was diagnosed with a learning disability as a child, and is candid about his difficulties in school (Pilkey, 2003). These sites are only two of many that will engage boys, whether they have read the authors' books or are simply interested in engaging, entertaining online content.

In limiting the focus of this paper to the specific needs of boys, the intent is not to misrepresent the reading habits of boys or privilege their literacy development over girls'. After all, the ideas expressed in this paper are not the only truth about boys as readers. Love and Hamston point out that in researching the reading habits of boys, we must continue to ask ourselves “which boys” and “which reading” is at issue (2003, p. 161). All male readers are not created equal, and by focusing only on reluctant male readers, it should not be assumed that all readers are in the same boat. If we go too far in our problematization of boys as readers, we assume the worst case scenario to be the absolute truth. In researching this paper, an interesting trend became apparent. The current popular opinion is that boys' needs are very different from girls', and this difference ought to be an essential component in any reading program, in the library, the classroom, or at home. In contrast, the older research called for increased cross-gender interactions in libraries in order to bridge a perceived divide (Abilcock, 1997). There was much debate as to whether librarians, as collection developers, could ever hope to determine what books were “good” for boys or girls respectively, or how we could figure out what were truly “masculine” or “feminine” behaviours and seek to act against them in our collections and programming (Langerman, 1990). Of course, these assertions were made before the development of the wealth of research on gender and learning we are now fortunate to have. Nevertheless, it still seems important to keep these older views in mind.

As librarians, we cannot tell ourselves that by buying a lot of books on skateboarding and holding internet analysis sessions for young boys, we will solve the boys and literacy problem. There are exceptions to every rule. And there is still a significant place in the library for children's interaction not limited along gender lines. After all, how else can boys and girls learn about one another? The library should be a place in which a child can feel safe, regardless of gender, reading preferences, or social and societal pressures. We must do our best to cater to the needs of every child individually in order to better prepare them for becoming part of their community. A solid knowledge of the ways in which boys come to literacy and reading is only a small part of a great and seemingly endless whole body of understanding of how we can better prepare children for a literate life.

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The Censorship of Children's Books Containing Homosexuality

By Brooke Ballantyne for Libr. 542a,

Introduction

There has been a steady increase in complaints about materials having to do with homosexuality or gay lifestyles. There is no doubt that homosexuality is at the top of the target list for many conservative, religious pressure groups. ("OIF says gay titles top 'most challenged' list")

The censorship of children's books can elicit very strong reactions from any number of perspectives. Some may argue that children's books are the only ones that should be censored or controlled, since the sensitivity of a child's psyche is not a matter to be taken lightly. Others would say that censorship of children's books harms children before they have the knowledge and experience to recognize that their learning is being hampered by lack of resources. Whatever the case, it is certainly true that most parents and caregivers act as personal censors for their children at some time or another. This could be in regard to censorship of certain foods, certain behaviours, and even certain reading materials. Few would argue that there is a universal parenting style that appeals to all parents the world over; there exist an incredible variety of resources and books which are marketed to different types of families. The danger in censoring a certain type of children's book is that a certain type of family is going to have their preferred literature abolished. This is a danger that is continuously faced by families with one or more gay or lesbian caregiver.

Children's literature with a gay/lesbian theme, characters, or discussion has been under fire since its inception. A particular amount of fervour is dedicated to books of this nature that are for younger children, such as Linda DeHaan and Stern Nijland's King & King, Michael Willhoite and Leslea Neuman's Daddy's Roommate, Judith Vigna's My Two Uncles, Johnny Valentine's One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads, and Leslea Newman and Diane Souza's Heather Has Two Mommies, all of which have a small amount of text with large, colourful pictures. Homosexuality is considered an "age inappropriate" theme along with sex and violence for many censorship advocates who often espouse keeping these books away from children altogether. Bills have been passed, and even laws have been attempted, all in the name of keeping books with homosexual content away from children. Some books are feared by publishers because of the presence of a gay character (central or not). Even television shows for children which mention non-heterosexual relationships have been pulled from the air, following complaints. In order to fully comprehend this heated debate, one must examine the arguments and the actions that have been taken by both sides so far.

Protection of Innocence

Does learning about sex or reading about homosexuality cause young people to experiment with sex in ways they otherwise wouldn't? (Mazur, 1999)

Much of the censorship that is recommended or enacted for children's books is done in an effort to "protect" children from possible harm. There is also a theme of fearing and fighting the "hidden gay agenda" which many censorship advocates suspect is behind any children's literature that

makes mention of homosexuality. This view has been espoused and propagated by people in positions of power, such as Republican Alabama State Representative Gerald Allen who has stated that “the homosexual agenda...[is] not healthy for America, it doesn't fit what we stand for, and they will do whatever it takes to reach their goal” (Strassman, 2005). Allen, like many who share his views, does not see himself as a censor, but rather as a protector: “I don't look at it as censorship, I look at it as protecting the hearts and souls and minds of our children” (Strassman, 2005). This role of “protector” goes back to the concept of having a viable, universal parenting style that all feel comfortable abiding by. Allen and others argue that they are not censors since they are only attempting to move certain children’s books out of the children’s section. As Representative A.G. Crowe of Louisiana states: “I am not espousing censorship...There should be a way these types of books should be kept away from children and keep children from picking out these types of books” (Anderson, 2005). Representative Sally Kern of Oklahoma is a little more descriptive in her goals: “This isn't censorship, because I'm not asking that they be thrown away, be burned. I'm asking that they just be put in with adult collections and then if a parent wants their child to see a book like that they can check it out” (“Oklahoma passes gay book ban”). Of course the involvement of State Representatives undoubtedly indicates debate over a certain bill or law. Gerald Allen proposed a bill in which “public school libraries could no longer buy new copies of plays or books by gay authors, or about gay characters” (Strassman, 2005) which died when not enough state legislatures were present to vote. A.G. Crowe filed House Concurrent Resolution 119 which called on all libraries to remove books containing the theme of homosexuality from children’s sections and confine them to areas “exclusively for adult access and distribution” (Anderson, 2005). Sally Kern sponsored a resolution of a very similar nature which calls on Oklahoma libraries to “confine homosexually themed books and other age-inappropriate material to areas exclusively for adult access and distribution” (“Oklahoma passes gay book ban”). All of these proposals took place in 2005, which indicates that the desire to ban, limit or censor children’s books with homosexual themes is still strong.

A Lack of Role Models

In the absence of empirical evidence demonstrating harm, perhaps it is time to reconsider whether it is constitutional - or wise - to deny young people access to information they need to make informed decisions and appropriate choices. (Mazur, 1999)

The other side of this argument stems from an idea that children’s author Judy Blume states quite succinctly: “children are inexperienced, but they are not innocent” (Mazur, 1999). In segregating children’s books with homosexual themes to a section inaccessible to them, one is assuming that the mere sight of such a book would destroy a delicate innocence. Just as the accidental watching of a violent scene can often give a child nightmares, proponents for censorship assume that viewing or understanding homosexuality will be similarly harmful. Yet many see a strong difference between gory violence and homosexuality, especially when the homosexuality is presented in a normalizing, positive manner. An English teacher in Louisville, Kentucky was extremely upset when three novels by an openly gay author (E. Lynn Harris) were pulled from her classroom after complaints by just two parents. She sees the novels as a positive influence for many of her students: “If you ban these books, you subtract role models from these students who have all too few” (Mazur, 1999). The efforts made to remove these books and preserve the “innocence” of

some children often overlooks the support and understanding that these same books offer to other children:

Again and again, we learn that gay and lesbian youth need information and role models to survive physically and emotionally. Denying young people timely access to the information they will need as adults is both cruel and counter-productive. (Mazur, 1999)

Since suicide rates are three times higher for gay youths than they are for non-gay youths, the cruelty of denying support through literature can even prove deadly.

Representatives who voted against some of the pro-censorship legislative proposals share the belief that children need to learn as much as they can about the world around them. G.B. Smithson voted against Sally Kern's proposal, stating "I don't really see that hiding a child from all the evils in the world is protecting a child from all evils in the world. At some point in their lives, they do have to start learning about a few of these things" (McNutt, 2005). This quote proves that one does not have to espouse censorship of a certain perspective simply because one doesn't believe in it. Although Smithson is equating homosexuality with "evil", he still believes that removing literature is not beneficial to anyone. Darrell Gilbert, another representative who voted against Kern, has stated "It's up to the parents to make that decision, not the state" (Oklahoma), when referring to the presumption that homosexuality-themed books would not be appropriate for any child to view without parental supervision or knowledge.

Mentioning Homosexuality

For some readers, the mere use of the word 'gay' is inappropriate, and they can't separate the word from the idea of sex. (Getlin, 2004)

Sometimes this type of censorship moves from targeting the more blatant homosexuality-themed works to the ones that merely mention its existence. Such is the case with Martha Freeman's The Trouble with Babies which contains a passage about two gay fathers and their adopted son. Freeman's publisher informed her that paperback rights would not be sold for the book because of the number of challenges it had received at libraries, and "the possibility of a public backlash" (Getlin, 2004). Freeman was completely astonished at the complaints, as she explained "the story I wrote had nothing to do with gay issues, and the reference to those fathers was strictly in the background, to show you the kind of people who live on a city block" (Getlin, 2004). This means that even a brief passage in a larger book can elicit strong enough reactions to have parents demand that the book be taken off library shelves. Freeman's reaction to this criticism, and its effect on her livelihood has left her divided as to what to do next. Her publisher, Holiday House, has asked her to produce a third installment on the series to which The Trouble with Babies belongs. Freeman is forced to be torn between success and personal integrity: "part of me is tempted to put in even more gay characters, because these are my stories and I really don't like being censored" (Getlin, 2004).

A similar case took place on PBS, when the show "Postcards from Buster" (featuring an animated bunny who visits the homes of various people around the United States) was attacked by

U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings after Buster visited the homes of two lesbian couples in Vermont, where same-sex unions are legal. Spellings was angered because she saw this episode as “exposing children to gay lifestyles” which was reason enough to demand that the show be cancelled (“Right wing ire at bunny’s lesbian friends”). Spellings also reminded PBS that it was partially supported by federal funds, which may have contributed to its decision to not distribute the episode to its 349 affiliate stations.

The Role of the Librarian

*And so the idea that we would have a pristine collection that represents one political view, one religious view, that's not a library.
(Strassman, 2005)*

A common theme in many of these challenges is that of a parent discovering a homosexuality-themed book in the possession of their child after they return from the library. In many of these anecdotes, the parent sits down to read with the child and stops when they realize the presence of an unwanted character or theme. After this, parents vary in their reactions; some burn the book, some refuse to return it unless it is removed from the shelves, and some go to the librarian to debate its presence on the shelves. An unfortunate side effect of homosexuality being such a hot button topic in children’s literature is that librarians are sometimes inundated with challenges and lose the stamina to continue an argument for intellectual freedom. As one librarian in Pittsburgh explains, “the reality is, the parents who objected to this book [Freeman’s The Trouble with Babies] would have taken this to our school board, and I would have been overridden. I only have so much energy for these fights” (Getlin, 2004). Indeed, if a library or school board is dominated by people of a certain perspective, such fights for equal representation in the collection can be increasingly exhausting. But the library remains as one of the few places that, regardless of income, people (including children) can access the information they need. And one of the librarian’s crucial roles is to ensure that as many varieties of information are available as possible, which will inevitably offend someone.

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Child Literacy: the Book, the Internet, the Library

Aaron Francis, LIBR 542a: Services for Children, December 5, 2005

Literacy is a key indicator of success in the global society. The concept of literacy, however, is a fluid one--what constitutes literacy varies from place to place and through time. The emergence of the internet over the past 10-15 years has challenged traditional notions of literacy, causing many to embrace an emergent technological literacy, and others to strive to maintain traditional literacy skills. This paper explores the function of literacy in society, how children acquire literacy skills, and the impact that the internet has had on approaches to teaching literacy skills. The role of the library in promoting this new technological literacy is also discussed.

Defining Literacy

Literacy is most commonly thought of as the ability to read and write. More importantly, however, literacy relates to the ability of an individual to function successfully in an information-based society. Prior to the development of widespread public education, the vast majority of people relied on oral transmission of information. While fluency in oral knowledge stretches the boundaries of what is commonly considered 'literacy', the function is the same: the ability to decode and process information is a basic life skill whether in an oral or written environment. Thus, literacy cannot be narrowly defined as simply reading and writing. Rather, literacy in the broader sense involves transmission of information and the ability of individuals to access and process any form of information in any given society.

The dominance of the written word as the primary form of information transmission is a historically recent phenomenon which parallels the development of the public education system and the general ability of the populace to access education. While great disparities in the ability to read and write exist between developed and non-developed nations, basic reading and writing skills are shared by nearly 100% of the population of developed nations. Because literacy is a fluid concept encompassing more than basic reading and writing skills, however, literacy rates (in the broader sense) among different segments of the population of developed nations vary substantially. For example, 88% of Inuit peoples living in Nunavut "scored below level 3 in prose literacy"--that is, below an adequate "proficiency level" in the context of a modern, knowledge-based economy (Statistics Canada 2005).

The preceding statistic reflects a modern approach to measuring literacy in contemporary knowledge-based societies. The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), defines "literacy proficiency" as the "ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community". The study measured four domains--prose, document, numeracy, and problem solving--at five skill levels (Brink 2005, 3). By this measurement, 42% (representing 9 million individuals) of the total Canadian population were categorized as having "low literacy skills"--a troubling statistic, although significantly better than the rates for First Nations peoples in Canada, or for peoples of less-developed nations. The study also reinforced the positive correlation between literacy proficiency on employment: "62 per cent of employed Canadians have

average document literacy scores at Level 3 or above. In contrast, over half of unemployed Canadians have document literacy scores below Level 3” (ibid., 46-7).

Literacy and Early Childhood Development

While formal instruction in reading and writing normally does not begin until age 4 or later, pre-kindergarten years are critical to the successful development of literacy skills in children. Indeed, while Rousseau described the foetus as a “witless tadpole” (qtd. in Kagan 2005, 57) contemporary researchers agree that learning begins even before birth. Two-thirds of the brain is developed *in utero*, including approximately 100 billion neural cells and an almost infinitesimal number of neural synapses (Cohen 202, 14-15). In addition, learning processes such as “habituation”—decreased response as a result of repeated presentation of a stimulus—have been observed in pre-natal conditions (Kagan 2005, 57). Partly as result of such research, expectant mothers are often encouraged to communicate orally with their child from the first signs of pregnancy.

Learning continues immediately after birth—indeed, newborns exhibit a phenomenal ability to adapt to and learn from their surroundings. Influential researcher Jean Piaget, for example, detailed how sucking represents not simply an automatic reflex, but a learned behaviour: “When his [the newborn’s] search subsequently leads him accidentally to touch the nipple with the mucosa of the upper lip...he at once adjusts his lips and begins to suck” (qtd. in Ginsburg 1988, 31). In other words, the newborn is able from past experience to differentiate successful conditions from unsuccessful conditions.

Educational programs aimed at babies and their parents, such as the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, emphasize not only the importance of the relationship between parent and child, but also the later benefits—including increased literacy skills—that such educational experiences offer. In the early stages of infancy, each new experience “builds new pathways in the brain and repetition strengthens neural pathways and learning” (Berry 2001, 1). In later stages of development (6-18 months), rhymes, songs and other forms of structured communication can enable infants to “isolate individual sounds in the language spoken”, “learn new words and gain a sense of what those words mean”, and “establish early language, cognitive, and motor knowledge” (ibid.).

By 16 months of age, an ‘average child’ is able to produce approximately seventy individual words and comprehend almost three times that number (Newcombe 1996, 219). Within five years, most children will have acquired between 10,000-13,000 new words, an astonishing feat which researchers struggle to explain.

Children acquire language through a variety of processes. First, parent-child “naming rituals”—collaboratively pointing to and naming objects—introduce children to the process of identifying objects by name. Strategic ‘guessing’ is also a major part of language learning, particularly when narrowing down meanings—for example, when a parent points to a picture of a bunny and says “bunny”, the infant must ‘guess’ whether the word refers to the picture, the given name of the bunny, a part of the bunny, and so on. Through repeated experience and by making strategic guesses, children are eventually able to determine a word’s precise reference. Combining words syntactically normally occurs after 18 months of age and is progressive, beginning with two-word combinations (“see doggie”) and moving towards more complex combinations (ibid., 223-4). While the process of learning to

combine words creatively and meaningfully is unending, by the time children reach kindergarten age, they have mostly mastered the most common structures, including questions, negatives, passive sentences, and so on (ibid., 228-9).

Just as language acquisition may be aided by pre-speech and even pre-natal experiences, learning to read and write is affected by previous experiences. Children who have been read to as infants and young children, for example, are more quickly able to recognise and exploit the relationship between sounds and symbols and, generally, remain better readers throughout their lives.

Reading instruction has historically taken one of two approaches: the phonetics approach and the whole-language approach (or a combination of the two), with the former emphasizing correspondences between phonemes and their alphabetical representations, and the latter emphasizing “authentic” language acquisition by associating whole words with meanings before “artificially” dividing the text into its constituents (TeacherNet n.d.). While individual learners may prefer one approach to the other, there is little consensus about which method is most effective on a larger scale. Computer technology may offer some advantages in teaching at this early stage of literacy through the use of interactive activities and multimedia-based presentations) which are also possible in a non-technological setting) but, in the absence of new theory-based approaches, is necessarily modelled on traditional, book-based approaches to reading and writing instruction.

Books and the Internet

Books as a source of information serve two basic functions. First, books provide society with the myths and stories which shape our understanding of ourselves and place in society. Secondly, books store practical and scientific knowledge—they help people do things. As a form of media, books and the printed word have several advantages, as well as disadvantages, compared with other forms of media. Compared with oral knowledge, the printed word may be disseminated more broadly in its original form, both throughout space (i.e. geographically) and time. In this sense, print—like the internet—represents a globalizing trend. On the other hand, books are less interactive than oral communication—like television, they represent a relatively passive and impersonal method of transmitting and receiving information. In addition, accessing the printed word requires specialized training to interpret the symbols, as well as the capability of acquiring the physical object, thus entrenching a pre-‘digital divide’. The printed word also has a powerful political role in society, enabling segments of the population to use access to information as a mechanism of power and influence.

The emergence of the internet as the dominant form of information transmission has magnified many of the issues which began with the development of print. First, the internet has allowed for the global dissemination of information more quickly and easily than ever before. At the same time, inequality of access to new technology has increased the gap between information ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ beyond the pre-existing literacy/access gap. On the other hand, the internet represents one of the most active forms of information transmission, allowing its users to navigate at their will, as well as contribute to the production of new information. In addition, the internet has to some extent democratised access to information, at least insofar as governments can no longer control what is

available, although governments and corporations still exert great influence on both the content of the internet as well as the ability of individuals to access the technology.

The “New” Literacy

Since the internet, like books, consists primarily of the printed word, many of the skills required to process the information contained on the internet are “identical or very similar to those required to successfully interact with and comprehend information in books” (McPherson 2005, 70). However, as the internet offers additional opportunities to its users, it also requires additional skills for successful interactions. In other words, the requirements for achieving “literacy” have become more onerous and complicated.

The internet presents two major challenges: information overload, and rapid change. Information overload requires advanced navigational and evaluative skills, while rapid change requires adaptability and flexibility. Navigation involves not only technical savvy, but also focussed search skills. For example, research indicates that, while children are easily able to find information generally related to a subject, finding precise information, especially in an electronic context, is problematic (Scott 2005, 21-26). Furthermore, while in the past young readers were able to rely on teachers and/or librarians to assess resources as a function of the selection process, in the internet environment students are on their own. The ability to assess internet resources is, therefore, a critical skill for children to learn. The impact and newness of the internet has also resulted in rapid change. While the pace of change may slow as protocols and practices become established, further change is inevitable. The challenge, then, is not only how to teach internet literacy, but “to help children learn to learn the new literacies that will continuously emerge” (Leu 2003, n.p.). In other words, adaptability and flexibility are crucial.

Public Libraries and the “New” Literacy

Libraries must contend with diverse public views towards the internet. While some suggest that the internet will render libraries obsolete, others are deeply suspicious of the internet and the dangers that lurk. While the internet is problematic in many ways, few would not recognize its central role in contemporary information transmission. Libraries, therefore, must find ways to adapt. An important role is providing access to the technology, a role which has been embraced by most libraries across developed countries. Secondly, libraries must be actively involved in teaching internet literacy skills to young learners by collaborating with local schools and working closely with parents and children. In order to provide these services to their communities, librarians must also train themselves and commit to being familiar with new technologies as they develop.

While the “new” literacy represents significantly different challenges than posed by books (the phrase “new wine in old bottles” does not precisely apply), it is also important to not overlook or underestimate the importance of traditional approaches to literacy. Not only is the internet, like books, text-based, but also books and other paper-based information show little sign of disappearing. Therefore, traditional library activities, such as storytime and book talks, continue to be important and relevant. Research on the effects of infant and early childhood experiences strongly suggests that libraries should pay particular attention to serving the needs of this segment of the population as an investment in the future, so to speak. Finally, while the internet allows opportunities for interaction, the interaction that occurs between humans (children and parents/teachers/librarians) remains the most

important influence on a child's development and success, both in terms of literacy and otherwise.

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Reluctant Readers: Who They are and How Librarians Can Help

By Wendy Huot

LIBR 542A, Submitted to Judith Saltman

Introduction

Librarians usually find themselves working with enthusiastic readers – patrons who enjoy reading and use the library regularly. But what about those children and teens who don't enjoy reading – and may be reluctant to even pick up a book? Libraries and the librarians who run them have a lot to offer these “reluctant readers,” and can even play a role in turning them into enthusiastic readers – or at least, “non reluctant” readers.

Who are “Reluctant Readers”

Reluctant readers are those who, for whatever reason, choose not to read.⁴ It may be because a reader lacks confidence in their reading skills, or because they don't see much value in reading, or because they find the reading process uncomfortable.

The phrase “reluctant reader” generally refers to those who do not read primarily because of an unwillingness or disinclination. Not all struggling or disabled readers qualify as reluctant readers – they may have great desire to read but simply lack the necessary skills. And conversely, not all reluctant readers are poor readers – a reluctant reader may in fact be a perfectly capable reader.⁵ However, reluctance in the early years can lead to poor reading ability due to a lack of experience.

The phrase “reluctant reader” is used by some as a euphemism for “struggling reader,” and is sometimes used in the marketing materials for books for pupils with special educational needs.⁶ Some of these reading aids have primarily educational purposes in mind, and may be of little interest to a non-reader who's main barrier is reluctance and not reading ability.

Types of Reluctant Readers

It is important to consider the different reasons why a reluctant reader avoids reading, as different types of reluctant readers are best helped in different ways. Ron Jobe and Mary Dayton-Sakari have identified four basic types of reluctant readers.⁷ They are described as follows:

- 1) “I can't” readers: these readers believe themselves to be incompetent readers and are afraid of failure. They avoid reading to prevent themselves from making mistakes.
- 2) “I don't know how” readers: these readers assume they cannot read, and may be passive and reliant on others as a result. They do not realize that they must do the mental work involved in learning to make progress.
- 3) “I'd rather” readers: these readers are “thing-oriented” and have strong interests in particular topics. They are preoccupied by their pet interests and do not understand how reading could relate to their passions.

4 Young Adult Library Services Association, “Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers,” *American Library Association Website* (Online, 2005)

5 Prue Goodwin, “Can't read or won't read: perspectives on reluctance to read,” *The New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 5 (1999): 30

6 Goodwin 1999, 37

7 Ron Jobe and Mary Dayton-Sakari, *Reluctant Readers: Connecting Students and Books for Successful Reading Experiences*, (Markham, Ontario: Pembroke Publishers, 1999): 20

- 4) “I don't care” readers: these readers have failed for so long they deny they can or even want to succeed at literacy.⁸

The main barrier for the first two types – the “I can't” and the “I don't know how” readers – is a lack of confidence in their own reading abilities. The primary barrier for the “I'd rather” and the “I don't care” readers is a perception that reading has nothing to offer them.

Jobe and Dayton-Sakari also discuss ESL readers and readers with physical, mental, and language disabilities, but maintain that they are not necessarily “reluctant readers” -- their barriers have more to do with reading ability, not motivation or mentality.

Helping Reluctant Readers

The basic approach to helping reluctant readers is to enable them in having positive reading experiences. A positive reading experience motivates a reluctant reader to read more; it helps build confidence in their reading ability and enforces in their mind that reading can be enjoyable or beneficial – or at the very least “not awful.”

The key to motivating a reluctant reader to read is by creating *interest*. Interest is absolutely essential; a book must look interesting for a reader to pick it up, and it must actually *be* interesting for them to continue reading it. The motivation must come from within: “the emotional 'need to know' engendered by a specific interest hooks them into reading.”⁹

Reluctant readers should be given choice and control in their reading experiences. A reader knows their interests better than anyone, and should play a role in selecting the books they read. A study of sixth grade reluctant readers found that students were “only enthusiastic about reading in situations where they were allowed to investigate topics of choice and select from a wide range of books.”¹⁰

Because the elements of interest and choice are essential in overcoming reluctance, most educators and librarians begin by encouraging reluctant readers to pursue light recreational reading. The first objective for a reluctant reader is to learn to enjoy reading, not to learn any particular information or lesson from a book. Light reading can then serve as a bridge to more difficult material and required school readings.¹¹

The Librarian's Role

Children's librarians are in an excellent position to connect reluctant readers with books that arouse their curiosity. Librarians have the knowledge and resources to select a range of books tailored to a reluctant reader's needs and interests – the typical children's librarian knows more about specific children's reading materials than most educators and parents.

A librarian can encourage recreational reading and support enjoyable reading with the library collection and a hospitable environment. In fact, the public or school library may be the only

8 Jobe and Dayton-Sakari 1999, 24

9 Mary Dayton-Sakari and Ron Jobe, “The challenge of self-designated non-readers: finding the connections to success,” *The New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 5 (1999): 47

10 Dayton-Sakari and Jobe 1999, 46

11 Ellen V. LiBretto and Catherine Barr, *High/Low Handbook: Best Books and Web Sites for Reluctant Teen Readers*, 4th ed, (Westport, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited Inc, 2002): 5

institution in a young person's life that actively supports and enables recreational reading. A young reader may not have access to any light reading materials in their home, and light voluntary reading may not be encountered in the classroom. For some reluctant readers, their experiences with books are largely remedial in nature and not perceived as fun – they generalize all reading as being functional and boring.¹²

By being an advocate of appealing books and stories, the children's librarian is in a fine position to model and foster a love of reading.¹³ Oral storytelling and booktalking are two of the librarian's crafts that can be used to stimulate interest in reading; these activities can also indirectly model enthusiasm for reading.

But while children's librarians may be experts at picking stimulating reading materials, they may have difficulty figuring out what motivates particular reluctant readers. To understand a reader's needs, the librarian must first establish rapport with the young patron. However, a librarian (particularly a public librarian) may have a limited amount of time to establish rapport, and some reluctant readers may be particularly uncommunicative or socially reluctant as well. A librarian may never even meet some of their reluctant patrons; they may only recommend books indirectly through educators or caregivers. The librarian's role complements that of educators and parents who have more intimate knowledge of a reluctant reader's struggles, reading level and interests.

Materials for Reluctant Readers

When it comes to encouraging reluctant readers, many experts take a “whatever works” attitude. “Anything that gets a kid reading”¹⁴ is beneficial in helping a reader overcome their reluctance. Once confidence and comfort is build up, *then* the reader can be encouraged to try something more 'high quality' or challenging.

When it comes to overcoming reluctance, a child's own interests take precedent over literary merit, educational content, or traditional quality standards for reading materials.¹⁵ Each year, the ALA's Young Adults Library Services Association releases a list of “Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers”; the list is based largely on teen input and observation of what teens will actually “pick up on their own and read for pleasure.”¹⁶ Librarians are encouraged to check their own tastes at the door: “any negative attitudes or personal biases against books selected by children... should be discouraged.”¹⁷

High/Low books

Much of the literature on assisting reluctant readers discusses high interest/low reading level materials – books written using language a few grade levels below the subject matter. This is partially because many reluctant readers may be behind their peers in reading ability (often due to a lack of practice), but also because easy reading is usually more enjoyable and less intimidating for a

12 Marianne Laino Pilla, *Resources for Middle-Grade Reluctant Readers*, (Littleton: Libraries Unlimited Inc., 1987): 8

13 Pilla 1987, 13

14 Richard R Day and Julian Bamford, “Reaching Reluctant Readers,” *Forum* 28 (July-September 2000)

15 Pilla 1987, 11

16 Young Adult Library Services Association 2005

17 Pilla 1987, 14

reluctant reader. Easier text can also boost the confidence of readers who are self-conscious about their reading abilities.

High/Low books were long disliked by librarians for their typically low quality, but high/low books have evolved over the years in terms of both content and quality.¹⁸ Another issue surrounding high/low books is how to incorporate them within a library collection – should they be specially labeled or shelved separately to allow patrons to find them independently, or should they be integrated into the regular collection to avoid social stigma? Libraries differ in their approach to this problem, but an ideal solution would provide easy, respectful, and nonthreatening access to high/low materials for those who need them.¹⁹

Materials involving physical or mental involvement

Many reluctant readers need to be actively involved to focus their attention on text.²⁰ Books that invite and encourage physical action, problem solving and other active processes motivate the reader to pay attention. The successful completion of a puzzle or set of instructions may give “I can’t” and “I don’t know” readers a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Books that require physical involvement include pop-up books, flap books, cookbooks and other instructional books, craft books, and the Klutz line of books. The Klutz books teach fun skills ranging from juggling to jewelry making, and include the necessary supplies (juggling balls, beads) for pursuing these activities.

Computers, audiobooks, and other non-print materials often attract reluctant readers. The Internet features graphics and interactivity along with text, and some sites present information in a variety of ways, which caters to different learning styles and reading abilities. For many young people today, computers are familiar and non-threatening – reluctant readers may accept mental challenges from a computer that they never would from books or teachers.²¹

Nonfiction

Many reluctant readers (particularly those in the “I’d rather” category) are actually information addicts; they may be turned on to reading through engaging informational books.²² They may become interested in reading when they discover that they can use reading to further understand their favorite topics of interest.

The “Eyewitness books” are very popular with young readers, as are amazing fact books like *The Guinness World Records* and *Ripley’s Believe it or Not*. Magazines are quite popular with teenagers, as they are “attractive, reassuring, informative, visually stimulating, colorful, current, and in most instances are easy to read.”²³

The majority of reluctant readers are male, and nonfiction books are particularly popular among male readers. Some male reluctant readers may be particularly averse to fiction, either because of societal

18 LiBretto and Barr 2002, 6

19 Pilla 1987, 39

20 Dayton-Sakari and Jobe 1999, 48

21 Dayton-Sakari and Jobe 1999, 49

22 Dayton-Sakari and Jobe 1999, 49

23 LiBretto 1990, 77

perception (“it's touchy-feely girls stuff”), bad experiences with mandatory readings, or just personal preference.

The “I don't care” type of reluctant reader may respond best to informative non-fiction books on topics that concern them, or at least realistic fiction that resonates with their own experiences. Some older reluctant readers may require materials be focused on 'real life' situations to see them as worthwhile.²⁴

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels have been generating a lot of interest in the library world right now, often in the context of being excellent bait for luring reluctant teenage readers to the library. Graphic novels hold appeal to those who might otherwise not consider themselves readers.²⁵ The visual component is familiar and often interesting for those who have developed stronger visual literacy from watching TV, playing video games, using the Internet, and other visual media.²⁶

As an accessible fiction format, graphic novels may serve as a starting point for reading traditional novels – a difficult category for some. Many graphic novels employ traditional literary devices and contain sophisticated themes, but the pictures provide contextual clues for interpreting meaning. This provides assistance for readers who have difficulty understanding or conceptualizing a story.²⁷

Conclusion

Reluctant readers are reluctant to read for any number of personal or emotional reasons. But a reluctant reader can overcome their hesitation by having positive experiences reading materials that interest and engage them. A librarian can help a reluctant reader by recommending a selection of such materials; these materials should be based on the reluctant readers own personal needs and interests. Popular reading materials for reluctant readers include materials involving physical or mental involvement, nonfiction, and graphic novels.

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24 Dayton-Sakari and Jobe 1999, 45

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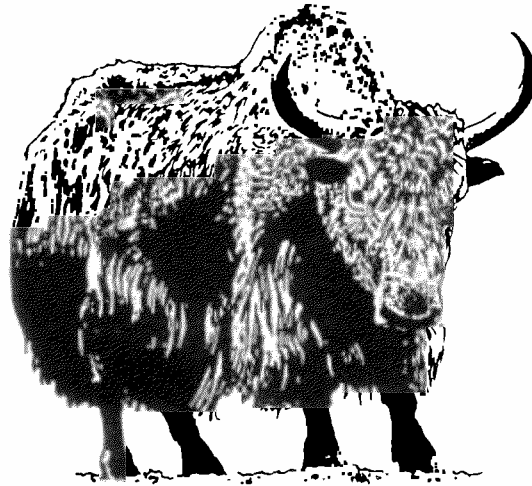
Laura Langston Co-Winner of \$25,000 Kobzar Literary Prize

TORONTO – HarperCollinsCanada is proud to announce that Laura Langston has been named co-recipient of the inaugural \$25, 000 Kobzar Literary Award held last night in Toronto.

Laura Langston will share the prize with Danny Schur, who composed and produced *Strike!-- The Musical*. The Kobzar Literary Award recognizes outstanding contributions to Canadian literary arts through the author or writer's presentation of a Ukrainian Canadian theme with literary merit. Categories include: literary nonfiction, fiction, young people's literature, poetry, plays, screenplays or musicals. The next Kobzar Literary Award will be announced in March 2008.

In her young adult novel, *Lesia's Dream* (published 2003), Langston tells the moving story of a young girl and her family who flee their ancestral European homeland for a promise of 160 acres of free land and a new beginning amid the harsh physical and social realities of life on the Canadian prairies in the early 20th century.

Lesia's Dream was also shortlisted for The Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award, The Snow Willow Award and The Rocky Mountain Book Award. Laura Langston is the author of several books for children and adults. *No Such Thing As*



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