

Project 4/ Part 2: Participation and Reflection

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LIBS 678

July 28, 2015

## Individual Participation

For this project, I set up a Blackboard group discussion board for my group and got the group started with some posts to organize our plan. My group quickly came to the idea that we set up a fictional summer reading program that focused on middle school age boys. One of the group members, Karen, pointed out that summer reading programs always seem to be tailored toward what girls want to read. It would be fun to focus on the boys for this program. We decided to call our program "Let's Hear it for the Boys!" Each of us chose 4 books (I chose 5) to add to the book list and create activity ideas for those books. We came together on the discussion board to add general ideas to the mix, such as resources, video clips, websites, and other material that we thought would be useful for the group project. I chose the books *Bruiser*, *The Maze Runner*, *Hero*, *Million Dollar Throw*, and *The Crossover*. I found resources for each, such as the Maze Runner book trailer and fan sites and created activities for each, such as writing an article for Sports Illustrated magazine (*Million Dollar Throw*) and creating a concrete (shape) poem about the reader's favorite sport (*The Crossover*). Before this project, I hadn't given much thought about the topics that would interest boys and how to incorporate more of these titles into the library. Through my research, I found several authors who focus on "male"-centered themes of sports and action/adventure, such as Mike Lupica and James Dashner.

Because I have used Blogger for other classes and in my personal life, I suggested that we use it for our summer reading program. I set up the website and selected the template, layout and design features. I chose a dark background for the blog because it felt more masculine. The group decided on six pages for the website: home, book list, book activities, calendar of events, resources for you, and additional info. I created the home page, which

features a “shout out” to middle school aged boys who would like to join the reading program along with an invitation to a pizza party to kick start the event. I added Julie and Karen’s book choices to the book list and typed up their resources and activities as they posted them to me in Blackboard. After discussing ideas with my group, I created the calendar and added some fun book club events and activities to the calendar. In fact, on the calendar we created a fun tie-dye activity for the Fourth of July, so my group wore tie-dye on the last day of the Summer Institute to collaborate with our project! My group was able to use some work time during the Summer Institute to work together to add some finishing touches to our website, including resources of our creation (Karen’s Good Reads reviews; my updated calendar; etc.) One of the best ways to promote literacy among teens is to model lifelong learning and reading for pleasure in every way possible (Fenn, 2005). I feel like we showed this with our enthusiastic reviews, fun activities, and the depth and breadth that we used to create interactive lessons. As a whole, I felt like my group communicated extremely well and I very much enjoyed working on this project with those two ladies.

### Reflection

When working with any group of students, regardless of age, the librarian’s mission should be to “instill a love of learning in all students and ensure equitable access to information” (Empowering Learners, 7). As we move into the digital age, it becomes even more important for the librarian to embrace technological advances and empower students to “be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information” (Empowering Learners, 8). In order for students to reap the benefits of a knowledgeable school librarian, they need to be available for collaboration with other students, teachers, and the library. Teenagers can be a particularly difficult age group to work with, so it takes a

special librarian to think creatively on how he or she can promote and teach reading to young adult students.

In the article “Teens Need Libraries”, The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) states that “libraries have a strong track record of providing a variety of key services that meet the unique needs of teens”. In terms of need, teens are most likely to use a library for three reasons: workforce development, digital literacy, and pleasure reading (YALSA). When teens do not have the same technological advantages at home, they can turn to the library for computers, internet access, and equipment. “The school librarian works to bridge this digital divide and ensure that all learners are skilled users of information in all formats” (Empowering Learners, 11). One way that a librarian can bridge this gap is to provide instruction on different technologies that are available in the school. When students learn about these technologies, programs, and software in the school, they will be better prepared to use them in college and the workforce. For example, the librarian can collaborate with a teacher to create a lesson that incorporates interactive programs, such as using Blabberize, Voki, or Animoto. Instead of relying on the same old format of paper and pencil to write a summary, students can show their mastery of the content by creating a summary through the previously-mentioned programs. The school librarian can show the teachers that there are new and exciting programs on the computer that can take the place of traditional summative assessments.

It is a common belief that reading is a “window to the world”, meaning that “reading is a foundational skill for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment” (Empowering Learners, 12). YALSA points out that “librarians are trained experts who can match the right book to the right teen, whether he or she is a struggling reader, an English language learner, or

developmentally disabled”. School librarians are able to reach their target audience when students are in the library. One way that a librarian can promote reading for pleasure is to create book talks as presentations when students are in the library. A well thought-out and planned book talk can create intrigue and anticipation in a reluctant reader and encourage that student to seek out specific books. A librarian gives students the opportunity to hear the material in a different way than is being presented by their teacher. “The librarian can read aloud to add variety to a unit of study by including enriching folktales, retellings of Chaucer and Shakespeare, stories of key historical events, or poetry (Fenn, 2005). Students who are technology-savvy can use resources such as online reviews, ratings, images, and quotes to gain more knowledge about a certain book or author (Valenza, 2013).

Another way to promote literacy in the library is to offer books that teenagers actually want to read. Even if a librarian personally prefers to read only one or two specific genres, the “schools must also offer literacy experiences in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry that speak directly to students” (Fenn, 2005). For example, when creating my list of Young Adult book choices for class, I was challenged to choose books outside of my comfort zone. I was required to select a variety of fiction and nonfiction, including biographies and graphic novels. Ensuring an adequate budget for purchasing new books every year can help keep the students’ interests in the reading material available at the school library as well.

## References

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Summer Reading program website link:

<http://letshearitfortheboysreadingprogram.blogspot.com/>