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NOTEBOOK



Notebook

Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux and David Loertscher

This has been a fascinating issue to assemble concerning reading and writing in the contemporary library media center/learning commons.

At press time two fascinating ideas created quite a stir on the Internet. The first was an article in *The New York Times* about student choice vs. adult imposition of the classics as the basis of language arts that drew upon the ideas shared by Nancie Atwell (read the article at <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/24/science/about-education-teaching-the-excitement-of-reading.html?ftpagewanted=all>). Feeling a bit misrepresented by the article, Atwell responded in a video talk about myths regarding student choice (see this excellent video at her Heineman publisher's website <http://www.heinemann.com/>). Enjoy her explanations of seven major myths about what happens when children choose their own books:

1. Book choice means that anything goes.
2. A goal of creating a habitual life-long readers is somehow insufficient, or soft, or lacking rigor.
3. The classroom is a place for the classics only. Students can read popular literature on their own.
4. Students actually read the classics their teachers assign.
5. Adults who are literary habitual readers got that way by reading the classics as kids.
6. Students who choose their own books are deprived of opportunities to discuss literature with others.
7. Reading Workshop only works with certain kinds of students.

At the same time, James Tracy, principal of Cushing Academy in Massachusetts was announcing that the books in the library were cleared out to make space for digital information resources (See the article at http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/09/04/a_library_without_the_books/). To the aghast of many across the nation, David Loertscher published the following response to California teacher-librarians:

TEN THINGS WORSE THAN A LIBRARY WITHOUT BOOKS:

1. A library without a credentialed teacher-librarian.
 2. A library without information in the formats users prefer.
 3. A library that restricts access to information in any format.
 4. A library that most teachers ignore.
 5. A library that most students Google around.
 6. A teacher-librarian who is afraid of, or ignores the impact of technology.
 7. A library that only deals in print materials.
 8. A library of antiquated computers and computer networks.
 9. A library where tech directors have a big sign behind their desks reading: Just Say NO!
 10. An empty library.
- So, what is the role of the library/learning commons as we progress further into the 21st century? As editors, we constructed a checklist of that role and asked our distinguished Board members and others to

respond, edit, change, and react to the list. We offer this as further clarification of current standards and statements from across many professional organizations for your consideration and use in your professional learning communities, district meetings, and most important, in the building of your own role as central to reading and writing.

We were equally impressed with an important professional book by Jean Knodt entitled *Nine Thousand Straus* (Libraries Unlimited, 2008), that stressed open inquiry as a foundational idea of what a learning commons can and should be. Invention, creativity, fun inquiry, and investigation pair wonderfully well with a school-wide reading community. It is a reflection of a long-standing idea that children WANT to come to the library because it is alive, active, fascinating, and fun.

Of course, if students are actively reading, they are automatically better writers. Writing comes as a natural and positive consequence to reading. In the school library we want to embrace both. Two articles explore ideas to extending invitations to write in a nurturing environment.

Lucy Spence describes a writing workshop with 2nd graders. Mark Crilly discusses his technique of using the writing of comics to spur interest and creativity in writing. And, our tips and tactics authors draw upon both pop culture and simple write your own book strategies that contribute to a literate school environment.

This issue also brings you our first comic strip (pgs. 83-84). We hope you will find it relevant to the issues of reading in a school library. Take time to discuss it with your students and send us your results.

And do not miss our new column, From the Brain Trust, which introduces a professional from our field. Our first interviewee is former AASL President Sara Kelly Johns who wants us to know, "We have the BEST job today!"

Reading and writing are foundational for much that we do. We now have so many more tools to pursue interest, ability, and most important, the excellence of literacy that every single child deserves to experience. What a great time to be a teacher-librarian!

TELL US WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ

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and tell us what topics you would like to read about, and we will seek to publish articles on those topics. Other comments and suggestions are welcomed, too.

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