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Promoting Reading Using This 2.0 Stuff

by Stephen Abram

Reading is a social activity. There I said it. I know a lot of people see it as solitary, introverted, internalized, quiet, and even as anti-social! And frankly it isn't.

And this attitude about reading is limiting. It creates a mindset that drives to a place where reading is isolated from mainstream social activities – find a quiet place; the only reading that counts is books; you don't need to share your reading with others if you don't want to; and so on. The experience of reading is just so much more than that, and that social dimension should be encouraged.

In the past few years we've seen an explosion reading. I despise the ivory tower focus on long form reading (novels and scholarly articles) as somehow superior to all of the others. All forms of reading are valid – especially among developing readers. Whole new genres have developed, especially episodic reading in the gaming world and hybrid styles like graphic novels. Others have expanded in 'market share' like web reading, blog reading, news sites, and more. And still others have built interesting adjacencies where reading and real-time reviews and criticism as well as community responses have emerged. It's an exciting and challenging world of reading that is no longer the sole purview of gatekeepers like publishers, bookstore buyers, librarians and magazine editors.

Can we prepare our learners to be full participants in this emerging world order?

Most research is showing that Millennials are reading more and more widely than their parents, reaching higher levels of education, and communicating and critiquing the written word and opinion at much higher rates. Some special interest groups play with the stats but the overall picture is one of a generation of readers. Indeed we are fast approaching the time when the majority of learners under 30 will have also shared their written creations with others in publicly accessible web environments.

Now librarians and teachers have done a lot to support reading. From novel studies, to creative writing classes, poetry slams, and genre training initiatives from haiku to short stories and more, we've been there. We've collected and catalogued excellent books so that they can be found. We've made bibliographies so people can find other books they may like or need for research. We've recommended books to learners, parents and friends. Many of us have

written book reviews. Maybe you've done an index to a book, or edited one, or written one. You've done book talks. Great! Library folks have been doing this sort of stuff for centuries and doing it well. We do books so well. I believe that we can get better, hotter, and more admired and loved! Really?

I visit and see so many school libraries and other types of libraries aimed at young learners— both physical and virtual – and see so many innovations that excite me and promote books, reading and what we do so well. I also see a lot of folks who claim that new technologies are unnecessary in libraries and especially anything TwoPointOh! I fail to see the distinction and I don't think it's just me. Good education and library practice demands that we look for anything that improves our mandates to promote learning, community, research skills, writing and reading.

Of course we can improve and do better. That's why we call it information practice and teaching practice. You just keep practicing as professionals – just like medical practice, nursing practice, legal practice and accounting practice. Professionals get better, though never perfect, with practice. There's no denying that our traditional practice is a great thing. We protect, preserve and serve the human cultural and research record, encourage learning and connect users with the right books, at the right time, in the right place. That's awesome. Then again, good information practice thinking demands that we ask what are the negative issues with the traditional way we practice and how can we get better or complement it? Are there big opportunities with these 2.0 technologies?

Our traditional practice with books is not as scalable as we might want and our users might want. How do we get book recommendations to scale as well in libraries as Amazon does on the web but aimed at our age cohorts? Traditional practice offers a personal touch with a human being. That needs to continue but can we extend that personal touch beyond the walls? Many of our print-based advisory and recommendation activities are largely anonymous or at least lack the personal branding that excites connections between readers and advisors. Since we really care about books (and reading), can we use the new tools on the web to put our services on steroids? Why 2.0? Well, because it offers the first real opportunity to use technology to go beyond search, storage and retrieval and actually engage with readers in a scalable way beyond our walls and beyond physical book formats.

Can 2.0 be about books and reading?

15 Things 2.0 Can Do For Books and Reading

1. How are you doing Book Clubs now? Do you have support for traditional print book clubs? Are there recommended books that you keep in a book club bag? Do you include a copy of the publisher's book club or reading guide from their website in the bag? Do you link to good guides for book clubs (especially, for example, for teens) on the web for all types of book

- clubs? What does the virtual book club support look like? Can they share reviews, comments, etc. online? Are you there on Meebo for questions and advice?
2. Have you tried an audiobook club? Just license a single audiobook for the whole school and let many students listen to it all at once on their iPods and MP3 players. Discuss it on an open blog. If you can't afford the license find one of the many book podcasts or audiobooks that are free on the web and add them to your collection. Then promote it as a whole school activity – include family reading too.
 3. Have you tried a book club using e-books? Do you have a webpage with your top 12, 20, 30 eBooks and reading guides for each? This seems like a good way to get beyond the not-enough-copies problems in whole-school reading events. There's a load of classics on Project Gutenberg and the Open Content Alliance. And, again, you can include parents and family with the kids and support the whole activity with a common blog. You can build community and make an event for the whole school while positioning the library's role in supporting reading and learning. Focus on the social aspects of reading. Bring folks together.
 4. What are your web tie-ins to promote classroom reading and book clubs? Think of a book club as a small group just like the classroom model. How big is your collection of reading guides, book club support, webliographies, blog posts, one-city-one-book ideas from other libraries? Can you mine these for ideas to promote parts of your collection for specific curriculum enhancements? Say start with biographies (one of the most popular book report projects), Shakespeare, 1984, *Lord of the Flies* or whatever. Every time you make one page of links you build a corpus of support tools. You can even start with one grade and add another every year. In short order you'll have something for every grade to position the library as a resource for reading. Start with grade 9 or 7 and follow them through graduation.
 5. Who takes celebrity reader turns at your library? Have you promoted readers with names and pictures of specific library staff, teachers or even the principal? Who is your Oprah? Are all of your colleagues out there as online role models? What do they read and recommend? Are their reviews and selections promoted inside the library and virtually? Can they be on a READ poster throughout the halls? Do they have personal web pages and social sites on MySpace or Facebook?
 6. Are you promoting eBooks for non-fiction? If you have a Books24x7 collection of technology eBooks, have you created a GeekZone club to promote the collection? Alternatively, can it be a Tech for Dummies/Idiots club or service for those who want help? How about car manuals online? What's the target market there? Can you engage more boy readers with

this strategy? Can you partner with your local public library for some of these materials? All it takes is a link and a library card!

7. Have you tried to promote books and reading with podcasts and videos on YouTube? Podcasts are a fun way to connect with your communities about books. It's the poor man's community cable show! I've seen many libraries doing 5 minute book promotion podcasts and building listener bases apace with teachers and students. You might even consider interviewing local authors and poets to promote their works in your collections. Can your great storytelling folks take out-of-copyright classics and create wonderful podcasts for learners? Even Shakespeare is more easily understood aurally! Can you promote your first library podcast stars? It would seem a natural for Reading Buddies programs! Let the students record their own podcasts. It's as simple as recording a few sessions in the library and posting them online to our blogs. And YouTube a few too – maybe partner with the Drama Club.
8. Are we ready for using streaming media in a strategic way? Can you load or point your websites and promote local or bestselling authors? Many author interviews are available online and this can have a salutatory effect on reading their books. It's an easy link that thinks beyond text. Partner with the classroom teacher to focus on certain novel studies or authors.
9. How about movie tie-ins with books. Many of our books have come from or inspired movies. Some, like plays, were meant to be experienced visually rather than as text. Can you add the movie trailer from YouTube or the studio website to your promotion piece? If we did this and enticed someone to a series of books we hold (think LOTR, Harry Potter and Trekkers and Trekkies alone!), then we've encouraged reading.
10. Blogging is a no-brainer for promoting books and reading. Besides linking to the many great book blogs (sometimes called biblioblogs) you can do your own. There are a number of great examples of book blogs in libraries. Teacher-Librarians are recommending books all the time. How cool is it to not only make that personal recommendation in-person but to take the time to jot down a few sentences and post it with a book cover and link to the OPAC? If everyone in a school board did that – and signed their work – we'd have thousands of targeted recommendations in short order. And we'd have trusted local education-based recommenders developing personal engagement strategies with our learners. Imagine this as a project starting with just biographies for those difficult projects every year. Cool. It's all about promoting reading.
11. One of the classic 2.0 technologies is RSS, really simple syndication. Instead of having to handcraft new book lists and subject and topical lists, why not use RSS tied to the OPAC by call number, or through a Boolean

- search? Connecting individual RSS feeds to users is great. Even better is using RSS to redefine outreach at your library. Just imagine adding RSS feeds of new fiction books to the school website. Add specific RSS feeds for those annual topical field trips to the museum or whatever.
12. Wikis are a wonderful new tool that is very 2.0 and free. Build a wiki to organize community book recommendations and promote it to all teachers and students. Have a contest to have everyone post every book they read this year before May 15th. Give prizes for the best, largest or most interesting book pile. Eventually this sort of tool can inform collection development too. For now, just get community recommendations about non-fiction, hobbies, science fiction, mysteries, romance, and the rest! People love to share and the library is a trusted place to share with. You could use free wiki software like MediaWiki or PBWiki or design a group in LibraryThing.
 13. You can even consider using Amazon (or B&N or Borders) to access more user reviews and encourage your students to post their reviews there. Respecting their voices and opinions encourages reading. Have you checked out MySpace Books? What are young MySpace users recommending to each other? Can you add this sort of functionality to your library's MySpace page? It's where big groups of users are and they're readers.
 14. Have you seen the new Facebook Fan pages? Are you set to experiment with a fan page for an author or book? Just start with an event like a book / author reading or a school-wide reading initiative and move on from there. Set up your own or use one that's already in Facebook. What are the popular authors in your community or school?
 15. Can you leverage 2.0 and the power of the long tail and promote more books in your collections for recreational reading in addition to curriculum based functions? Of course you can! Author interviews, Flickr pictures, YouTube videos, online book talks, podcasts, webliographies and more all sit at your fingertips. Library 2.0 challenges us to build on our traditional skills and goals. Web 2.0 can help books circulate.

So, there you have it, if we're really about connecting kids and books and reading then we have many simple, new and exciting opportunities.

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