

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT -
CREATING A READING CULTURE**

Bishop Burton College

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Final Report - Creating a reading culture

Bishop Burton College



The purpose of this project was to increase learners' time spent reading and to demonstrate to them the impact that reading can have on their ability to communicate with the world around them.

Summary

A Reading Culture Group was established by three English teachers, two of whom are Teaching and Learning Coaches (TLCs), across two college sites. The group consisted of the three teachers and one group of learners per teacher.

These learners were 16-18 year olds on vocational study programmes, who were working towards Entry/Level 1 Functional Skills and GCSE English.

The project would focus on three activities which would develop a reading culture in the groups, as well as develop learners' skills related to reading and writing. These included a 'Read Anything Initiative', a book swap and finally, the opportunity to enter a writing competition where the winner was published in the local paper.

Rationale

Evidence suggests that a limited exposure to literature will have a negative impact on a learner's drive (and ability) to learn how to express their thoughts, opinions and aspirations through their writing.

Our project aimed to overcome this resistance to reading by demonstrating that literature can be accessible and interesting, as well as a tool to aid expression. We hoped that the project would demonstrate to learners that reading in order to develop writing provides them with the skills they need to pass exams and also enriches their lives, gives them a voice and aids in their progression in to employment and beyond.

Approach

Stage 1: Read Anything Initiative – Learners were given a clock or questionnaire to complete (Appendix 1), stating what they believed they read on a daily basis. They initially needed assistance with this as they believed that when we spoke about reading, we were focusing purely on novels. Once we discussed all reading, such as shampoo bottles, timetables, and so on, the learners became more engaged. This backed up the idea that students only associated novels and fiction with reading.

Once learners had completed the questionnaire or clock a group discussion arose around how learners chose what they were going to read and what they liked/disliked.

From this, we found:

- the majority of learners read what is needed for studies, not for fun;
- learners are more likely to read something that had been recommended by a peer;
- learners wanted to read something that will immediately engage them and that has a clear purpose.

The learners were then put in to Thinking Pairs (Kline, 1999) at the beginning of each session where they were asked to summarise what they have enjoyed reading in one uninterrupted minute. After the learners had shared their experiences this was then brought into a whole class discussion. Some of the questions raised from these discussions were:

- What was the last thing that the learners had enjoyed reading?
- How long ago was this?
- Why do they no longer read for 'pleasure'?

It became clear, from this, that most learners stopped reading for pleasure aged 11, when it was no longer compulsory to read at school.

Following this, learners were tasked to read anything of their choice (e.g. social media or a bus timetable, and progressing on to areas currently less familiar e.g. newspapers, book from the resource centre etc, differentiated by individual learners).

Stage 2: Literature Swap: Learners (who have progressed from Stage 1 and have been encouraged to identify a genre they like to read from the variation of activity from the Read Anything Initiative) brought their texts in to share with others. This was also shared on a Padlet. Again, they were put into thinking pairs where they summarised, in one minute, why their partner should read it, using persuasive techniques they had been working on within their GCSE and Functional Skills lessons. This could be a literary work, an article or even a useful document linked to their vocational subject - whatever they wanted to share.

The learners were also given time to read for ten minutes at the start of the session. Some read in the library and others in the classroom environment, depending on what was more suitable for that group of learners: for example, Foundation stage completed reading or were read to in the classroom, Level 2 / Level 3 BTEC learners were more engaged when reading in the Learning Resource Centre independently.

During this stage there was a learner who was reluctant to carry on reading. After discussions it became clear that he did not enjoy the book he was reading yet he thought he had to continue. This was rectified by us going to the LRC and choosing a different book. Once this was completed the learner was re-engaged and enjoyed the book that he was reading. The learner thought they were expected to complete all books and were not familiar with the practice when reading for pleasure of leaving a book and choosing another.

Another teacher went down a different path and took the learners to a local primary school. Here learners were actively involved with reading with younger pupils. The feedback here was that the learners were amazed at how passionate the younger learners were about reading and this reignited their own passion.

Stage 3: Writing Competitions: Learners contributed to writing competitions using a sample text for inspiration. They were taught how to complete 'shadow writing'. Students were to create some writing using what they have read to help them with ideas, structure, vocabulary and punctuation (Appendix 2). The connection between the development of their reading skills and increased exposure to literature was highlighted by their tutors as they created the competition entries (150 words creative writing).

The winner from the competitions was chosen by vocational tutors and then published in the local newspaper (Figure 7a-1). This demonstrated to the learners how, through reading more, they were able to have a voice in their local paper. All other learners' writing will be published in a high-quality booklet at the end of the year.



Figure 7a-1: Newspaper article about the winner of the competition

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

As the project progressed the three teachers involved developed their skills as reflective and evaluative teachers. They all felt that engaging in the action research project gave them the encouragement to try new things in the classroom, especially those they anticipated would meet resistance. They became more aware of the need to compile evidence of whether a teaching and learning approach was working for their groups and provided areas to think about with regards to responsive teaching that they may not have considered previously.

For example, by collecting evidence from learners about how much they read at the outset of the project compared with the amount they found themselves reading at the end of the project we were able to see how effective the teaching approach had been. We took account of changes in behaviours, thoughts and opinions as well as what they read as evidence that our teaching approach was effective. Developing their reading and writing skills was value-added for the learners.

Staff feedback showed that the action research training empowered them to experiment in the classroom, to try something that doesn't end up working for some learners, to reflect upon this realisation and to modify approaches and try again. For example, the staff intended that all learners would be part of the Reading Culture group, but found for some that the expectation of each stage was too high. However, they succeeded by modifying the approach from the learners reading themselves to the teacher reading to some groups and the use of audio books for those who found reading for themselves too demanding.

The project also encouraged the English teachers involved to look further than their own teams and colleagues for collaboration; for example, collaborating with the Literacy Lead in the infant school was a valuable link as we were able to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phonics-based teaching methodology employed in Early Years education. As more of our learners progress through the phases having been taught phonics at school, I anticipate that I will be able to incorporate this into our teaching, in particular for the newly introduced spelling requirement of FS English.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

By engaging in this project, three English teachers working across two different sites had the opportunity to develop their professional relationships and communities of practice by sharing best practice in a way that they had not been able to do before. The teachers who engaged in the project have commented that the dissemination and training events gave them the opportunity to discuss and consider their practice with colleagues from other providers. They felt that it was refreshing and gave them a new perspective to assess how best to help our learners develop their English skills in meaningful ways.

Further collaboration includes the relationship developed between the English teachers and the Learning Resource Centre staff, as well as the students talking to

the librarians about the kinds of books and authors they would like to see on the shelves in the College library. This conversation was unlikely to take place in the everyday business of the library. The librarians also got involved in showing the students how the journals could now be obtained digitally. Library staff are now considering the viability of introducing a more in-depth induction to the library, with the view that learners from all areas, even those not participating in English can be involved, creating a reading culture that will be college wide.

In terms of further cross-college collaboration, inviting the vocational TLCs in to judge the creative writing competition initiated discussions about how we could encourage the students to read more widely, such as through building library sessions into the timetable. This will be implemented next academic year.

TLCs from all departments were also given a visualiser to use in the classroom in order to encourage the use of the printed word for vocational study, rather than only online resources. This encouraged the TLCs to engage in the project and role model how a 'Reading Culture' can link directly into learners' chosen vocations. These initiatives have sown the seeds of a culture of a more holistic approach across the organisation to developing a Reading Culture.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Questionnaires regarding their reading habits at the beginning of the project included learners commenting that: *"I don't read books...takes too long...old people like [books], younger people like their phones"* and *"At senior school you would be called a swot or geek if you read"*. This indicated some of the reasons for a lack of engagement in reading literature for pleasure.

The same learners questioned at the end of the project reported that they had enjoyed the experience of reading again and were engaged and on task during the reading sessions without the involvement of the tutor. Tutors reported that attendance was good throughout the project with attendance at 95% for the learners involved, compared to 89% attendance in English classes across the college. Learners actively looked forward to the sessions and would ask in advance if the reading session was going to take place that week.

Student	Quotes before study	Quotes after study
A	I do not enjoy reading; I only read what I have to for studying. I never read anything else.	I am surprised at how many different things I do read. It is nice to know that by reading it does not always mean a full novel.
B	I would like to read more; however, I do not have time. I am busy with work, college and having a social life.	When I completed the literacy clock, I was surprised at how much time I spent reading social media. I decided to make small changes and read something more meaningful. I am now reading a book every 2 weeks. I cannot believe I used time as an excuse.

C	Reading is boring. I really don't enjoy it and there is nothing that anyone can do/say to change my mind.	I did enjoy reading Gangsta Granny, recommended by X (another student). I won't say that doing this has been life changing, I'm not going to rush out and start reading loads of books but I am more open-minded about reading.
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Examples of changes in learners' attitudes towards reading

Teachers who engaged in the project were able to show changes in learners' reading behaviours. Some learners who were disengaged with reading at the outset were encouraged to explore different genres, increased their reading time from zero hours to 45 minutes per day. After engaging in the project, a teacher was reported as saying, *"Student A has regained her love for reading. She is now reading for an average of 45 minutes a day on the bus home from college...she has now read a variety of different genres and will often be seen around college with her nose in a book or in the LRC looking for new reads"*.

Further evidence that the learners changed their feelings towards reading include how the group self-managed their reading behaviours: for example, one group set up a book club type activity where they were all reading and discussing the same novel. A second group chose to read a single book out loud to each other, even including two students who were not members of the class. Others chose to read independently.

Reading a variety of texts enabled learners to produce some fantastic competition entries and it is hoped that it will contribute to the development of the skills required to write more creatively for Functional Skills and GCSE exams. Not only has reading introduced them to new terminology, interesting spellings, developing vocabulary, demonstrated use of punctuation but has also built their knowledge of the world and provided them with information they can draw on to respond to transactional and creative writing tasks.

As a result of the Reading Culture group activities, all students felt confident to engage in the story writing task and reported that the reading had generated ideas. They were also sufficiently confident in both the quality of the story telling and their ability to read aloud that they read their stories to their peers. This is something they were reluctant to do before the start of the project.

33 learners, across both colleges took part in the project, with 21 completing the writing competition. Whilst learners were encouraged to participate it was not a compulsory activity so we were amazed at how many learners chose to take part. Learners were encouraged to use 'new and exciting' vocabulary from texts they had read during this project.

Learning from this project

We learned that sometimes the expectation that learners are able to pick up a text and start reading, even if it is for their reading ability, is not always possible. However, by using alternative approaches such as audio books and reading to the

learners, all learners were able to enjoy the process of reading especially when they were told it was fine to stop reading something you were not enjoying and read something else.

The research confirmed that learners viewed reading as an academic activity solely linked to English lessons and this had become an attitude embedded throughout their school life from when they stopped reading for pleasure at about age 11.

We learned however that by empowering the learners to choose their own texts, recognising and building their existing reading skills the time became pleasurable.

Our views about the extent of reading digitally were confirmed by the project questionnaires and that the nature of most on-line reading led to learners reading only brief texts. This meant that they found it difficult to read longer texts.

We also discovered that reading paper-based texts was viewed as an old person's activity, which possibly explained much of their reluctance to read magazines, books or other texts.

The latter stages focused on how to develop their skills as a writer. The publication of the stories gave the learners tangible evidence that being able to write gives them a voice and is not a skill restricted to use in an English lesson or examination.

The tutors have learned from this project the value of including the views and opinions of the learners through the use of questionnaires, empowering them to choose their own reading material and helping learners to recognise that not only do they have reading skills but that they also use them all the time. These findings were significant in the overall success of the project and can be replicated in other curriculum areas.

Finally, the tutors learned the value of trialling different approaches and of holding professional conversations with colleagues across the country to develop themselves professionally. They now feel empowered to do the same for other topics.

Appendix 1 – Reading questionnaire

Reading Questionnaire

1. On average, how long do you spend reading per week? (take into account all forms of reading including social media). _____
2. Do you read books for pleasure? Yes/No No
3. How long do you read a book for in an average week? don't read books
4. Do you read hard copies or digital copies? Hard / digital / both/neither neither
5. What is your preferred genre? I watch funny videos
6. Do you consult reference books as part of your vocational course? Yes/No No
7. Have you reading habits changed? If so describe how.
I would read more in primary school

8. What prevents you from reading books?
takes to long

9. What would encourage you to read books more frequently?
don't now

10. Do you think that hard copy books have a future? Please explain your answer.
old people like them but young people use there phones.

Reading Questionnaire

1. On average, how long do you spend reading per week? (take into account all forms of reading including social media). ~~10~~ ~~20~~ 30 hours
2. Do you read books for pleasure? Yes/No No
3. How long do you read a book for in an average week? 0 hours
4. Do you read hard copies or digital copies? Hard / digital / both / neither
5. What is your preferred genre? none
6. Do you consult reference books as part of your vocational course? Yes/No No
7. Have your reading habits changed? If so describe how.
No

8. What prevents you from reading books?
Dyslexia

9. What would encourage you to read books more frequently?
easier to read but just as engaging.

10. Do you think that hard copy books have a future? Please explain your answer.
last longer

Appendix 2 – Learner stories



Two Houses, One Home.

Today, was the day I dreaded...

My heart sank like the Titanic on a Baltic night “Come on, Tilly! Get up please.” my mum yelled from the kitchen. I was quite happy, enjoying my peaceful slumber and I was unwillingly to face the day.

A couple of hours had passed, and I found myself in the removal van on my way up to Mum’s house. I was shaking like a leaf on an Autumn day, as if I was about to collapse. Silent and still shocked about my parents divorcing. But I knew – within time – that soon – everything would be okay.

At first, when we arrived at the house, it was messy, filthy, unloved. It made me feel uneasy. I was reluctant to bring friends over because the area was rundown. It didn’t feel like a home; my Mum felt a stranger to me.

And now, everything’s okay... 😊

(2)

A New Beginning

A heart that was frozen solid by her past. Completely switched off from the world, disconnected from everyone.

Gemma felt alone.

She knew she would never be able to love again. But today all that changed.

She fell instantly, hopelessly and irreversibly in love with Willow. Over time, with unending patience, Willow slowly taught Gemma to open her heart and love again.

Nervous, how was she supposed to care for this tiny, special, precious creature? She had never faced such responsibility before. A flicker of doubt crossed her mind. He couldn’t look after himself, he was totally dependent on her. She knew people thought he may just be a part of her life, but she was his whole life.

He gave her a chance to love again. A chance to open her heart and let people in again.

She couldn’t explain the love she felt for her new kitten.

Hunting the man in the black suit

"You forget the house always wins!"

BANG! He shot me.

Everything went black, but not forever. How long was I out for? I was in a cold, irradiated wasteland. A voice softly called, "Hey, you finally awake, how about that?" It was a bald man with a white brush of a moustache under his nose.

After a long and difficult talk, he agreed to help me and gave me a small amount of medical supplies and a gun with just a few bullets.

The hunt is on!

I have to find the man in the black suit - the suit black like his heart.

After an exhausting walk I made it to Novac, a sprawling slum, the closest to where I was shot. After discussions with the locals I discovered that he was here. Living in luxury.

I carefully counted my bullets and kicked the door open.

Payback was exquisite!

Appendix 3 – Tutor personal feedback

Personal Feedback

Within the department, the external events have provided us with the opportunity to discuss reading and enabled us to consider the foundation stone of our subject area. On a day-to-day basis, we are consumed by logistics, data and results so it was refreshing to take a step back to assess how things could be done differently. As we work on different sites, there is rarely the time or space to take a view on the wider picture.

In terms of cross college collaboration, bringing in the TLCs to judge the creative writing competition initiated discussions about how we could encourage the students to read more widely, e.g. build library sessions into the timetable.

The students talked to the librarians about the genre of books / authors they would like to see on the shelves in the College library. This conversation was unlikely to take place in the everyday business of the library. The librarians also got involved in showing the students how the journals could now be obtained digitally. Library staff are now considering the viability of introducing a more in-depth induction to the library.

Taking students to the local infant school to participate in shared reading, necessitated co-operation from course managers, (LBO, H&Sc & Animal). All were supportive and the H&Sc, students have been able to record this as an entry in their experience log. It provided an opportunity to talk to the other course managers about the research we have been doing.

Collaborating with the Literacy Lead in the infant school was a valuable link as I was able to gain a more in depth understanding of the phonics-based teaching methodology employed in Early Years education. As more of our students come up through the phases having been taught phonics, I anticipate that I will be able to incorporate this into out teaching, in particular for the newly introduced spelling requirement of FS English.

Summary of student feedback

The responses to the initial questionnaire gave the over-riding impression that the students rarely, if ever read a hard copy of a book. Only one of the participants reported reading books. The consensus, for when they stopped reading for pleasure, was at the end of primary school when it ceased to be something that had to be done for homework. All the participants regarded this enforced reading to be a chore as opposed to a pleasurable activity. One went on to explain that if they did not get their reading record filled in correctly then, “we would be issued with a detention”, further reinforcing the negative connotations of reading.

Therefore, it was unsurprising when they admitted that they were dubious about the value of, “being made to read books at our age”, and that they viewed this project from a negative perspective.

However, after only two sessions they described it as, “a chance to relax a bit, whilst still doing something useful”. The vast majority of participants stated that they enjoyed being part of the project and they looked forward to the reading sessions. One, who had been part of the self-formed book club said, “I’d forgotten how fun it could be to talk to mates about something other than College and what everyone else is getting up to.”

Interestingly, one informed me that, “we felt a bit like those Loose Women”, which I interpreted as them viewing the book club activity as something associated with middle aged women and that they were almost role playing the situation.

One participant, who chose not to interact with the others during the sessions and instead read privately declared that, “It made a change for me not to be the only one in the place reading a book and not on their phone.”

They particularly enjoyed visiting the Infant school and being read to by students in Yr 2. They were surprised at the range of reading skill exhibited by the Yr 2. As one said, “She was reading quite a grown-up book with all the expression in it, I wouldn’t have been able to do that in Yr 2.” Another commented, “One of the children tried really hard, but had to sound out almost every word”.

When they returned to College they spoke positively to their peers about the experience, asking if they could do it again. In addition, some of their peers asked if they could join a visit if it were to take place again. Perhaps it was the fact that they were the ‘experts’ in the situation that made them view it so favourably.

However, despite enjoying and fully engaging in the sessions for the duration of the project, all of the participants fed back stating that they did not feel that this would encourage them to go back to reading on a regular basis. They gave the following reasons:-

- No time to read – they needed to prioritise study and in many cases work.
- Did not have an author or genre they were particularly interested in.
- They would be made fun of if they got a book out on the College bus.
- E-books were too expensive.

The over-riding reason why these students felt that they would not continue reading books was the availability of other media on their phones. Often this media required little effort or time to access as it was in the form of memes, YouTube videos or Facebook videos.

When I questioned them more deeply about the amount of reading they did via their phones it turned out to be far less than I expected. Students tended to ‘like’ videos rather than comment. Only 1 of the students would consider opening a linked article and only then, “if it was something that really mattered to me”.

Another explained, “There is always so much entertainment on your phone, you can watch videos, listen to music, play games, flick through social media; you never get bored.”

When they were asked whether reading had a future they all felt that people would always read, but, “reading is mainly for older people or people that have to do it for their jobs”.

Appendix 4 – Case Study 1

Case Study – Establishing a Reading Culture

Approach and Methodology

The Reading Culture (RC) group was established in September 2019 and involved students in the 16-18 age range who were retaking English GCSE as part of their FE study package. Their primary learning goal was Animal Management. The students in the study had previously obtained Grade 3 in GCSE English and were to re-sit the exam in November 2019. Two students were selected for the case study, one male and one female, both aged 16.

The period of study extended from September 2019 – January 2020 and was based on participation of 1 hour a week as part of their English GCSE.

Participants were initially questioned about their past and current reading habits and were interviewed to ascertain their attitudes to reading and reasons behind their habits.

During the course of the study the participants were given the opportunity to read material of their own choice as part of their English lessons. This time was chosen, both so that the reading choices and behaviours could be monitored through direct observation, but additionally, so that they did not feel that this was an additional home learning burden. The location was the Learning Resource Centre (LRC), selected because it was an area of the College associated with reading, therefore the participants would feel comfortable engaging in reading activities in this environment. Additionally, it was not perceived by the participants to be something that differed from their normal experience in English sessions.

During the first two sessions the participants were encouraged simply to read, the format of that reading was left to the discretion of the student, i.e. hard copies of books or journals or digital media. In order to promote engagement the choice of subject matter was also decided by them.

As the study progressed the participants were asked to read material in hard copy format. They could either bring in material from home or select an item from the College LRC.

The tutor directly observed the reading behaviours of the group. Although the participants were aware of the tutor presence and their behaviour was modified by the fact that the research was taking place during lesson time, the tutor did not intervene in the reading behaviours.

Towards the end of the study period the participants were asked to draw upon their increased exposure to written material to produce their own written piece which was to be a 150 word short story. They understood that the story writing was to take the form of a competition with prizes for the winners and the opportunity to get their work published in the local paper.

The final session was dedicated to a review of the project from the participants' perspectives.

Learning from the project

- Students typically stopped reading for pleasure around the age of 10. This coincided with the period in their educational career when reading was a requirement of the school curriculum.
- The majority of reading that the participants engaged in by choice was digitally based and most typically took the form of social media and was therefore presented to them in short sections which did not require sustained concentration.
- It was reported that they could be engaged in non-directed, reading based activities for around 4 hours a day, the vast majority of this took place using their phones.
- Only one participant reported regularly reading books for pleasure.
- Participants felt that it was “embarrassing” to be seen reading a hard copy of a book and although using a digital version would solve this issue, they were reluctant to use digital books because of the cost.
- One overriding factor preventing students reading in a traditional sense was the plethora of other forms of entertainment available on their electronic devices, most specifically, their phones. It was seen as “easier” and “more exciting” to listen to music or play games on their phones.

Positive outcomes

- Participants reported that they had enjoyed the experience of reading again and were engaged and on task during the reading sessions without the involvement of the tutor.
- They actively looked forward to the sessions and would ask in advance if the reading session was going to take place that week.
- The group self-managed their reading behaviours, for example, one group set up a book club type activity where they were all reading and discussing the same novel. A second group chosen to read a single book out loud to each other, even including two students who were not members of the class. Others chose to read independently.
- All students felt confident to engage in the story writing task and reported that the reading had generated some ideas. They were also sufficiently confident in both the quality of the story telling and their ability to read aloud that they read their stories to their peers. This is something that they were reluctant to do before the start of the project.

Issues

- The change in reading habits was not sustained past the end of the project with all students reporting that they reverted to their original reading habits. Time seemed to be an over-riding issue for them. They enjoyed reading when time was

set aside for them to do it, but they did not value the activity sufficiently to build it into a regular routine.

Appendix 5 – Case Study 2

Learner journey

When KM started with us in September she admits that she avoided reading at all costs. KM said that she did not enjoy the books that she was made to read at school, and while all of her peers were into boybands and read about those, this is again something that didn't interest her. When KM completed her reading clock it was evident that reading did not play hardly any part of her day, unless she was forced to do it for English.

After these discussions it was clear that KM was an ideal candidate to participate in the reading culture programme. The challenge at first would be getting her to agree. I spoke to KM and asked her if she would participate. At first she was reluctant, however I explained to her that the idea would be to improve her English skills and that we would start off easy. After a few discussions I managed to talk her around.

The next challenge would be to find something that KM would enjoy reading. We spent time in the LRC, discussing different genres and looking for something of a suitable level. After discovering that when KM was younger she enjoyed Roald Dahl, we decided on David Walliams 'Gangsta Granny'. Every lesson we had 10 minutes that we would spend reading, KM would get her book out and reluctantly read a few pages. After the fourth week we had a breakthrough. KM asked if she could take the book with her so that she could continue to read this at home. It was a fabulous moment. We had previously discussed that just 10 – 20 minutes of reading per day could help to improve her GCSE grade, now she was doing this. After 2 weeks KM had completed the book.

KM had now discovered that she enjoyed David Walliams as an author, however we decided that the next book would be a different genre, so she agreed to give something else a try. 'Call the Midwife' was the next choice. KM had previously told me that she enjoyed that as a TV show, so it was time to consider the book. As the book is the memoirs, it fit in nicely with the transactional work that KM had been doing for her mock GCSE exam.

By this point KM had regained her love for reading. She is now reading up on average 45 minutes a day with the bus home from college, being her favourite location for reading. KM has now read a variety of different genres and will often be seen around college with her nose in a book or in the LRC looking for new reads.