

<p>Institution: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: D29 English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Changing Perceptions and Practice of Literature Professionals through trans-national research on contemporary reading events.</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) The Beyond the Book project has had impact upon the personal and professional development of practitioners, especially public librarians, but also book event organizers, and publishing professionals. The project has achieved this impact by identifying the pleasures that readers derive from shared reading, the limitations of large-scale reading events for producing social change, and by situating the organization of such events within an international context. The project has also had an impact on graduate students in several nation-states through the generation of new methods for studying contemporary readers and reading practices.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) ‘Beyond the Book: Mass Reading Events and Contemporary Cultures of Reading in the UK, USA and Canada’ (BTB) is an example of an original and ambitious interdisciplinary and collaborative research project producing results that have become increasingly relevant to specific user-groups across a decade of investigation, analysis and dissemination (2003-13).</p> <p>BTB was an investigation into the organization, production and reception of large-scale shared reading events termed by the researchers ‘mass reading events’ (MREs) [see R1 below]. Whether events employ mass media such as radio (the CBC’s ‘Canada Reads’) or television (‘Richard and Judy’s Book Club’) or local news media, the internet and a programme of face-to-face activities like the ‘One Book, One Community’ model (e.g. ‘Liverpool Reads’, ‘One Book, One Chicago’), they aim to involve as many people as possible in reading, discussing or participating in events associated with a selected book, rather like a book club but on a much larger scale: city-, region- or even nation-wide. Combining a series of empirical and textual methods, the project made an original methodological contribution to interdisciplinary methods of investigating readers, shared reading and book events that has impacted on students and new practitioners in several disciplines [R2-R3]. Working with readers and organizers, the primary research explored how and why people come together to share reading, and whether new reading practices are fostered. Event organizers and funders frequently claim that these models of shared reading can attract marginalized communities or build social capital among different cultural groups, so the research also investigated whether in fact they could enable social change [R1].</p> <p>Engaging and sharing knowledge with ordinary readers and literature practitioners such as public librarians and book event organizers was fundamental to the research from its conception, but the impacts on professional development and practice which the project has achieved to date were largely unforeseen. Readers were directly engaged through aspects of the empirical research such as focus groups (over 200) and via the online questionnaire (over 3,500), and many more have visited the websites between 2005 and 2013 [see section 4]. The initial analyses of how and why readers participate in events, strategies for recruiting hard-to-reach groups, and ideas for activities were communicated through consultations with practitioners, e.g. Jonathan Davidson, then Artistic Director of the Birmingham Book Festival (February 2006; Aug. 2007); Mary Wallace, Judy Purinton and David Lilly, librarians and organizers of ‘One Book, One Madison County’ (Alabama, USA) (May 2007). Practitioners also represented a third of the 120 participants from 19 countries at an international conference we organized at the University of Birmingham to enable knowledge exchange between academics and user-groups (31 Aug-2 Sept 2007).</p> <p>The first academic study of such events, and a rare example of a trans-national enquiry into contemporary forms of shared reading, the main phase of the project was supported by an AHRC Standard Research Grant (2005-8) [details below]. Dr Danielle Fuller (University of Birmingham, since 1997) was the PI and responsible for the intellectual management of the study. As co-director, Dr DeNel Rehberg Sedo (Dept of Communications, Mount Saint Vincent U, Canada) led</p>

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the field work. The pilot study (Sept-Oct 2004) was supported by a British Academy International Joint Activities Grant [details below].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1) Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. 2013. *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. New York and London: Routledge. **[Listed in REF2]**.
- R2) Fuller, Danielle and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. 2012. 'Mixing It Up: Using Mixed Methods to Investigate Contemporary Cultures of Reading,' In *From Codex to Hypertext: Reading at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Anouk Lang. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 234-251. [This entire collection is part of the Beyond the Book project output]. **[Available from HEI on request]**.
- R3) Fuller, Danielle. 2012. 'Beyond CanLit(e): Reading. Interdisciplinarity. Trans-Atlantically'. In *Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies: Nation-state, Indigeneity, Culture* edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Zacharias. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 65-85. **[Listed in REF2]**.

Research grants:

- 'Beyond the Book: Mass Reading Events and Contemporary Cultures of Reading in the UK, USA and Canada', £239,005, AHRC Standard Research Grant 01-09-2005 to 31-08-2008, ID 112166. Assessment of final project report from AHRC – project rated 'outstanding' in all categories.
- 'Beyond the Book: Mass Reading Events and Contemporary Cultures of Reading in the UK, USA and Canada', £6, 600. British Academy, International Joint Activities Grant, 1-07-2004 to 30-06-2007.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The project changed the perceptions and practice of practitioners who work with readers and/or organize public events by providing new knowledge about the possibilities and limitations of mass reading events for enhancing the cultural life of a city or region, creating social change and producing cultural capital.

Changing the perspectives of practitioners through adoption of the research in training and development

Two key groups of beneficiaries from the research are book event organizers and public librarians. Feedback from the project conference demonstrated that practitioners benefitted from opportunities to see their practical experience in the light of trans-national research contexts.

The research has been adopted as part of the professional formation of publishers, librarians, and educators in Europe, North America and Australia. Both the website and select articles are currently prescribed readings on undergraduate courses in both professional and non-vocational programmes at U of Alberta, UBC, U of Toronto, U of Manitoba, Western U, Dalhousie U in Canada; at MIT and U of Wisconsin-Madison in the USA; at Monash U (Australia) and at least 5 European institutions, including universities in Mainz, Paris and Lund.

Since 2008, the researchers have contributed directly to the continuing professional development of public librarians in North America and the UK through a series of invited presentations and continuing professional development events based on our research, e.g.

- Fuller contributed to a training event for 50 Scottish Librarians focused upon organizing and evaluating 'One Book, One Community' events, in Edinburgh, 20 June 2008 (Napier U in partnership with the Scottish Arts Council and Edinburgh City of Literature).
- Rehberg Sedo has given two keynote presentations (May 2008 and May 2011) to members of the Canadian Library Association at their annual conference with audiences of 150+ in attendance on each occasion.
- Fuller has twice been an invited guest (via Skype) in Prof. Vivian Howard's MSc in Library Science and Information Services class to address 100 students following the professional

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programme at Dalhousie U, Canada (Feb, 2011 & 2012).

Responses to Fuller's keynote presentation at a conference on Book Events aimed at arts and literature professionals, publishers, and academics (U of Stirling, 23-4 March 2012) indicate the continuing practical value of the analyses for event organizers and literature producers, e.g. 'Good to access university research on this subject. Examples and insights given will inform and shape my professional practice. Very useful.' (Publishing professional); the trans-national aspects of the research are especially helpful to book industry workers, e.g. 'It was particularly useful to hear about the comparison between the UK and North American contexts' (publishing professional); while the community-enhancing aspects of the models examined inspired others, e.g. 'Interesting to see how the embodied communal experience still enriches how we relate to books – and makes me wonder whether social networking has made people even more receptive to acts that consolidate community.' (book event organizer) [see source 1 below].

Changing the practice of students and new practitioners

A key group of beneficiaries are postgraduate students pursuing degrees in publishing studies, library and information science, literary studies, cultural studies and education who have benefitted from workshops on the research in, e.g.:

- Oxford: Fuller and Rehberg Sedo. Society for Authorship, Reading & Publishing Annual Conference, 24 June 2008, 14 students from 6 nations;
- Australia: Fuller, Master Class in Reading, Monash U, Melbourne, 26 June 2012: 30 participants, mix of early career researchers and graduate students;
- Estonia: Fuller, lecture-workshop for MA students at the University of Tartu, Estonia, 1 November 2012 (20 students).

Participants at the Australian workshop testified to the impact of the BTB research on their professional development by highlighting the ways that it would change their methods/ways of working: 'Inspired me to work collaboratively' (early career); 'The complex methodologies displayed here gave me some modelling for how to develop my own' (postgraduate student); 'demystifying the benefits of using coding programs will inform future projects' (postgraduate student), 'inspiration to pay academic attention to readers' (early career) [source 2].

Online Engagement and International Reach

A variety of forms and media were created in order to engage with a range of user-groups around the world and to disseminate the research as widely as possible. The BTB website (www.beyondthebookproject.org), for example, initially incorporated the online questionnaire aimed at non-academic readers in the UK, USA and Canada (2005-7) and since 2008 online resources continue to be accessed [source 3]:

- Between 13 Oct 05 & 03 Sept 08, there were 144,659 'sessions', 5% of which (7,302) were over 10 mins. in length; an average of 19 visitors per day. The most visitors came from (in descending order) USA, UK, Canada, Brazil, Germany, India and China.
- Between Oct 1, 2008 and June 1, 2011, the website received a total of 1880 visitors from 100 different countries, with particular interest from Australia, Ireland, India and several countries in mainland Europe.
- Between 1 October 2011 and 30 April 2012, there were 645 visitors, and while 46% of these were from the UK, 19% from the USA and 13% from Canada, other visitors hailed from the Ukraine, Brazil and South Africa.
- Between 1 May 2012 and 31 July 2013, there were 1909 visitors to the site, and while 42% of these were from the UK, 24% from the USA and 14% from Canada, other visitors hailed from Australia, Sweden, India and Estonia.

Online resources have been adapted in response to the needs of user-groups so that, since May 2012, the website has hosted two videos aimed at public librarians and book event organizers: 'Why organize a One Book, One Community programme?' and 'One Book, One Community: Tips for Success'. The videos have been viewed 42 times and 22 times respectively (May 2012-31 July

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2013), with most views coming from the UK, USA and Canada. These videos were informed by a series of face-to-face meetings with Reader Advisory librarians and organizers of literary events which were fundamental to the primary research phase (2003-7).

Beyond the Book has achieved unforeseen impacts on the perceptions and practice of public librarians, literature professionals and students through the planned dissemination of research online and through a series of professional development activities and workshops.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Collated testimonies from Book Events conference, Stirling, March 2012 (feedback forms available on request)
- [2] Collated testimonies from Melbourne activities, June 2012 (feedback forms available on request)
- [3] Hits for Beyond the Book website, www.beyondthebookproject.org