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## **Teachers, technology, and digital natives: Building a reading culture in a secondary school**

### **Abstract**

Integration of digital technologies into the English classroom requires that we rethink pedagogical frameworks within which education occurs. The paper discusses findings from a study of conventional and digital literacy practices in a high school that has committed itself to building a strong reading culture among its students. Through a series of interviews and classroom observations, the researcher focused on identifying attributes of a pedagogical paradigm for promoting an interest in reading along with the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy skills among adolescents. Some of the themes that emerged from collected data are: technology as the extension of teacher; technology as the extension of student; library services and on-demand book acquisition; choice-driven English curriculum; and teacher autonomy. Research findings have direct implications for conceptualizing secondary English education in terms of its content, as well as pedagogical approaches to teaching it.

## **Statement of the problem and focus of the study**

Today's young people are positioned by the pervasiveness of digital technologies. This creates a cultural context that is characterized by the dominance of the medium of the screen – smart phones, eReaders of various kinds, laptops, to name a few. New literacies that have emerged from new technologies are frequent topics of discussion in the educational research community. Yet examining the role of new technologies in the development of “traditional” literacy skills, such as maintaining an interest in reading among adolescents, is rarely a focus of research. The study presented in this paper aimed to address this gap by exploring the following research question: What instructional practices can foster secondary-level students' interest in reading in “new times” (Luke & Elkins, 1998)? Other questions that guided the study were as follows:

- Are there advantages to using digital technologies when it comes to English education? What do they make possible in the secondary English classroom that would not be possible otherwise?
- How can/should we change pedagogical paradigms to better reach 21st century learners?

## **Assumptions and theoretical framework**

The study was carried out under the assumption that reading, language, and narrative should remain central to education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Waxler & Hall, 2011). Kress (2003) asserts that although “language-as-writing will increasingly be displayed by image in many domains of public communication, writing will remain the preferred mode of political and cultural elites” (p. 1). The changing cultural environment forces us to reflect with renewed vigor on “the value and relevance of reading in the education of

citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Waxler & Hall, 2011, p. xi) and, at the same time, to critically examine our approaches to teaching literature and writing in light of new technological possibilities and challenges.

Empirical data on benefits of reading make a strong case for literature-rich curriculum across different grade levels. Krashen (2004) emphasizes the connection between reading and the development of more sophisticated language abilities:

Studies showing that reading enhances literacy development lead to what should be an uncontroversial conclusion: Reading is good for you. The research, however, supports a stronger conclusion: Reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammatical competence, and the only way we become good spellers. (Krashen, 2004, p. 37)

Both empirical research and findings reported by different foundations call attention to the connection between reading habits and academic performance. Thus, studies conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) and Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) report that more frequent reading correlates strongly with academic achievement. In addition, the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) report says that

- Voluntary readers are better readers and writers than non-readers.
- Children and teenagers who read for pleasure on a daily basis score better on reading tests<sup>1</sup> than infrequent readers.
- Frequent readers also score better on writing tests than non-readers or infrequent readers.

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<sup>1</sup> This and other examples that use data from standardized reading tests are provided not to promote them as a valid tool to evaluate reading abilities but to illustrate the relation between recreational reading and the development of more advanced language competencies.

These findings are completely consistent with Krashen's (2004) conclusions based on his analysis of century-long reading research. For instance, he highlights the crucial role of reading for the development of writing abilities: "Writing style does not come from actual writing experience, but from reading" (p. 132). This finding, Krashen writes, is consistent with what is known about language acquisition: "Language acquisition comes from input, not output, from comprehension, not production" (p. 136).

The Electronic Age has brought conflicting views on the impact of digital technologies on reading and writing habits and abilities of the rising generation. Some point to the declining reading scores in the period of growing ubiquity of electronic devices. Others claim that digital technologies promote literacy, as people now read and write more than they ever did: email, blogging, texting, social networking, Web browsing, to name a few, are popular literacy practices that have a substantial language component.

Referring to the success of the *Harry Potter* books, Gomez (2008) expressed a supposition that if these novels were made available as eBooks, "it could begin to get them [the young] into the habit of merging the reading of text with the use of computers, and it would be a chance to reverse some very serious trends in terms of youth illiteracy" (Gomez, 2008, p. 28). He also suggested that capitalizing on the affordances of the screen medium might be an effective approach to turning digital natives into readers. Adapting literary content and text to our increasingly electronic future and lifestyles is one of the manifestations of this approach:

And, if it [literary content] doesn't, then people won't only turn away from books but they'll also turn away from the stories and ideas found inside books. According to Reading at Risk, 'as more Americans lose this

capability [to read],<sup>2</sup> our nation becomes less informed, active, and independent-minded. These are not qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose.’ It is these qualities we should be afraid of losing, not books themselves. (Gomez, 2008, p. 47)

### **Research setting**

For my research site, I chose a high school that was not “afraid” to lose books as physical objects and, at the same time, declared reading as one of the most essential skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bolster Academy<sup>3</sup> is an independent high school in New England that has become known in the region due to its decision to replace its traditional library with a digital one. The school library has been transformed from one that relied on print resources to one that relies primarily on digital resources to support both the school-wide reading program and its research and information literacy services.

A person with extensive experience in library information technology has been hired to aide the process of transformation. Some of the main goals of the transition have been making resources available more easily to students and faculty digitally and integrating digital eReaders like the Amazon Kindle into the school’s workflow. The school’s twenty-thousand book collection was donated to other institutions of academic learning, while the library space has been transformed into a community lounge – an informal learning environment, which students and teachers can use as a study area and a place for interacting and sharing ideas. All students and teachers have laptops and can access millions of electronic books and journals through Wi-Fi anywhere on campus.

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<sup>2</sup> For comprehensive data on national reading trends, see reports issued by the National Endowment for the Arts: *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (2004, June) and *To read or not to read: A question of national consequence* (2007, November).

<sup>3</sup> The name of the school has been changed to preserve confidentiality.

The school also provides students who want to read in a more eye-friendly format with eReaders, such as the Kindle. But the expectation is that students will do most of their research on their laptops.

### **Methodology**

The data were collected through the in-depth phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006) and through classroom observations. In-depth phenomenological interviewing is a methodology that is drawn from several basic phenomenological assumptions, especially those of Schutz (1967), about how individuals make meaning of their experience and about the importance of an insider's perspective of experience. According to Schutz (1967), it is "by an Act of reflective attention" that "experiences are apprehended, distinguished, brought into relief, marked out from one another" (p. 51). I used the phenomenological in-depth interviewing methodology to turn my participants' attention to their new literacy experiences with the purpose of exploring and assigning meaning to them.

For my research, I interviewed five English teachers, executive library director, and chief librarian.<sup>4</sup> During the interviews, I asked the participants (1) to reconstruct their experiences that steered them toward becoming interested in teaching English or in pursuing a degree in Library and Information Science; (2) to convey the details of their experiences since the implementation of the campus-wide transition from paper-based to electronic reading; and (3) to reflect on the meaning of the recollected past and present experiences. Each interview session was tape-recorded and then transcribed and analyzed.

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<sup>4</sup> The names of the study participants have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

The phenomenological interviewing methodology did not only allow a more in-depth exploration of issues in a given context; it also enabled me and research participants to transcend its boundaries by providing the opportunity (1) to explore the experiences they were recalling in a historical perspective (i.e., over a more extended period of time) and (2) to integrate any other relevant factors and contexts (e.g., home environment, broader social forces) into research.

To supplement the data that were collected through the in-depth phenomenological interviewing, I conducted one observation of each participant's classroom. While the interviewing methodology allowed my participants to articulate their own constructed meaning, the observational component of my research enabled me to gain additional, "independent," highly contextualized insights. To accomplish this, I was taking detailed classroom observation notes "to linguistically imprison a series of motions and actions" (Goodall, 2000, p. 87) that were unfolding in front of me.

I used a thematic approach to analyzing the data obtained through the interviews and classroom observations. At first, I reviewed the interview transcripts and field observation notes and labeled (i.e., assigned topics) most salient material within each individual interview and observation session. Secondly, I searched for connections among the interviews, classroom observations and participants in terms of the topics they revealed to form categories. Finally, I interpreted the established connections in light of my research questions and in light of current literacy and media theories. In addition, this interpretative stage was guided by the following open-ended question: What have we learned from the participants' experiences?

## **Major findings**

Major findings fall under the following categories:

- The amount of reading and writing students are doing has dramatically increased.
- There is a strong correlation between teachers' instructional framework and tools used in their classroom.
- Technology serves as the extensions of teacher and student.

### **Increase in reading among students**

Both technology-driven and non-technological factors have been found to contribute to the increase in reading and writing among the students at Bolster Academy.

*Library services and on-demand book acquisitions.* The library's shift toward digital resources has enabled a fundamentally new approach to book acquisitions – a “just in time” method. It involves getting something digitally when someone needs it and constitutes a sharp contrast to the approach that was used before – a “just in case” method, which involved building and maintaining a collection and hoping that if someone asks about a certain item, the library would have it.

Students are encouraged to look at what is available on Amazon and if they see a title that interests them, library staff will get it for them right away. Students come to the library to get a title they like. And while they are standing there, library staff would buy it for them. Students can also request a book via email, and library staff would deliver it to them. The whole process takes less than five minutes. As chief librarian put it, “It’s immediate. Everyone wants immediate gratification, and we are getting more and more to be that kind of a society. We expect that. So, I think that in that sense it’s been good.”

The school acquired a large number of Kindles to meet the demand, and they are available at the library. If students continue to read on the Kindle they borrowed and if they continue requesting books on it, they can keep it for the whole semester; they do not have to bring it back. According to executive library director, “Almost to a person, there have been few exceptions, students really have found that they read more on the Kindle because it’s a very pleasurable reading experience, and they are able to get new titles very quickly.”

The number of students on campus exceeds the number of Kindles the library purchased, however. More and more students are getting devices on their own that they can use for reading. If the device students acquire has a Kindle application, they still can read the library’s Kindle collection and, therefore, have free access to eBooks.

Now the library’s digital collection has almost 1,000 books that were purchased almost completely from demand, based on requests – a combination of student requests and faculty/staff requests: 60% student-driven and 40% faculty/staff-driven book acquisitions. A lot of student requests are teen romances – vampires, *The Clique* series – whatever adolescents are interested in. Thus, the Kindle replaced what used to be the role of popular fiction and non-fiction print collection – to encourage students to engage in long-form reading for pleasure. Hence, the school provides students with resources they need to continue reading, even though it does not purchase paper-based, print books for its library.

*“It’s literally the device.”* When students borrow the Kindle from the library, they are able to explore what is already on it. They can look and see what other people have been reading because on that particular Kindle, there might be listings of books that have

been purchased before, requested by other readers. Therefore, even though students started out asking for a particular book, they might read some other books too. This way, adolescents constantly discover new titles on the Kindle, which has been good for promoting reading.

Also, having an eReader in one's backpack is like having a portable library at hand, whose collection can satisfy a range of reading moods. One of the English teachers observes,

Students have said to me, "I'll keep my Kindle in my backpack." And, you know, what is it – 2400 books or something? - They keep on a Kindle now. So, they have this huge library of books with them. And they'll say, "If I go on a weekend, or if I go on away game on a bus, I'll pull out my Kindle and I'll read because I know there is going to be something there for me to read." As opposed to literally thinking like a teenager packing books in a backpack: What book are you going to want for that moment? Are you going to want a quick read, or are you going to want a longer read? The homework? Whatever? It's not intuitive for them to do that. But to have this one device, it's amazing what it has done.

*Inviting atmosphere in the library.* As mentioned above, the library has been transformed into learning and social commons, into a collaborative space with a café, comfortable chairs and tables, and welcoming atmosphere. The chief librarian remarks, "Certainly we have a lot more kids in the library now, in the physical space. It's a popular place to be. I am sure, that comes into it, too – 'I'll come down here, and maybe I'll get a Kindle out and read a book.' I am sure that has some effect, too."

Although there are no rules about silence, library staff is trying to make it clear that this is an information space, and it is different than just a social club. A few flat-screen TVs display book covers of the latest Kindle purchases that the library has or run book trailers, created by the library personnel as animoto videos. The goal is to create a

space where students have a place where reading can happen in a more social way, engage in research, and do face-to-face project work.

*Choice-driven English curriculum.* The English Department has recently become largely choice-driven, which manifests itself in the following ways: 1) students choose their own courses rather than teachers choose for them; 2) teachers design courses and select readings based on what is likely to be of interest to their students; 3) teachers design courses and select readings based on their intrinsic interests in either particular authors or themes; 3) for *some* courses, students select their own readings. At the junior level, for instance, students traditionally take the American literature class. Each teacher who offers that class is doing it from a different point of view, which is based either on the books they are really interested in, or the point of view they are really interested in. Since different teachers offer different approaches to the American literature, every student has a choice as to how they want to study American literature, through what lens.

There is an ongoing trend among the faculty to blend classics with more contemporary works. Each course reading is a result of a very careful selection process. As one of the teachers put it, “I’d rather spend my time trying to come up with the right book for the right class for the right reasons and trust that if I do that part, then they [students] will read it.”

### **Instructional framework and tools used in the classroom**

The study revealed two distinct instructional frameworks used by the English teachers-research participants: teaching supplemented by technology and teaching transformed by technology.

The former one is grounded in the belief that the role of technology is to *supplement* teaching and learning. Within this framework, the use of technology is guided by the question, “Will this tool make teaching and learning more effective?” The Internet and the SMART board are two principal tools used within this pedagogical paradigm. Viewing and comparing different interpretations of *Shakespearean* plays, including modern ones, is representative of this framework. In addition, technological tools enable teachers to capitalize on spontaneous associations and thoughts that arise during in-class discussions:

Oftentimes my classes are very organic. I have ideas that I want to talk about, but frequently it’s difficult, if not impossible, to pick the trajectory that the discussion is going to go. And in any given class, there is going to be a couple of key moments where the students are right on the cusp of understanding an idea. There are times when that means that just pushing them a little bit further with discussion what that means. So, if there is some sort of magic wand to say, “That’s what we need, at this particular moment.” If that means teleporting to an island somewhere or just instantly going somewhere or being able to pull up a resource.

Teachers acknowledge that the Internet and the SMART board often play the role of that “magic wand” and, therefore, are “incredible resources and an invaluable luxury.”

In a classroom, where technology plays a supplemental role, students read and discuss the same text, in a format of their choice: it could be a paper-based book, the Kindle, a smart phone, an iPad, or a laptop. Students are very pragmatic about their choice of the reading format for their English classes and choose “whatever it is going to be easier for them in class.” Most of them choose paper format because it aligns well with the flow of the instruction:

From a teaching standpoint, it is much easier for me to say, “Turn to page 98, and we are going to look at the third paragraph on this page.” With a Kindle device, they are in trouble. They are looking at their friends and try to find a phrase that they can type in. They get there, but it’s not the same.

When we are talking about passages and really doing some close reading, students will be taking notes in their book knowing that these passages are important for one reason or another, or that could be important for them when they write eventually. And, again, it's just more cumbersome with the electronic devices.

The classroom *transformed* by technology is anything but conventional. Now we are in a former gym and dance studio. It is a huge space with mirrors on two walls, sofas, armchairs, and a few standing lamps. Regular ceiling lamps and standing lamps allow different light arrangement during the lesson. Upon entering the classroom, students sit themselves on the armchairs and sofas, looking relaxed and engaging in small talk with one another. Each student has a laptop open in front of them and is busy checking email, Facebook, looking up websites. Although the lesson has officially begun, the teacher ignores these off-task behaviors – one of the students is setting up equipment for a presentation (laptop and LCD projector), and the rest of the class continues to behave quite informally while waiting for the first presenter. The homework was to choose a poem to one's liking, to find music and visuals that convey the poem's mood and message, as interpreted by each student. There is no right or wrong – just individual creativity materialized for others through a computer-assisted presentation. After each presentation the teacher tells students to take a few moments to write up their comments and to send them to her via email. Next on the agenda is choosing next reading and forming reading groups. As part of their homework, students have prepared to talk about a book they would like to read next and to give a rationale for that particular choice. As each student talks about their selection, the teacher finds that book on the Amazon and opens up an excerpt from it “to give a sense of the prose” to the listeners/viewers. The text is projected on the board, but some students prefer to read this information on their

laptops, which they access immediately. The teacher always has something to say about each book the students present. Later she told me that she reads every book the students select in order to be able to talk about it, which amounts to quite a bit of reading. The selected books range from contemporary young adult fiction to classic novels: Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, James Carroll's *An American Requiem*, Stephen King's *The Shining* (as the student who picked that book remarked, "It is a classic, but I have not read it."), and many others. Although it is an advanced English class for seniors, the teacher does not object to any of the students' choices – her overarching goal is to develop love of reading in her students: "All I am trying to do is create love of reading in the kids. And everything else comes from that. And it has been wildly successful." The students are listening to each other quite attentively – at the end of the lesson, they will need to form reading groups based on their interests and on what they have heard about each book. Some may change their mind regarding their initial book choice if they find somebody else's book selection more appealing. After reading groups are formed, the students within each group collaboratively make a reading schedule.

90% of students in this class use the Amazon Kindle to do their course readings. Two factors influence this choice: 1) with the Kindle (or Kindle app on iPad or on iPhone), the access is immediate and 2) students do not have to pay for eBooks – they get them for free through the school library. Teachers emphasize that reading 12 books per term would not be possible financially with paperbacks: "It is literally not feasible for many families to do that." For that same reason, teachers make use of the resources from

*Project Gutenberg* ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)), as well as other sites that provide open access to the content of value. With so many versatile resources instantly available electronically, teachers hope to blur the line between pleasure and school reading: “And it just becomes reading and critical thinking and active engagement with whatever it is: if it’s storyline, if it’s information, whatever it might be. It’s that engagement that is so important for us as adults to keep doing with the kids.”

The strong social element inherent in this framework also contributes to creating a culture of reading among students. Since students do a lot of independent reading, they note what their peers are reading, write it down, and then read it too:

The kids talk about their books on the class Ning, and they respond to each other during the night, during their study hall period: “Wow, it’s a really interesting book. Tell me more about it.” So, they start these conversations about the books. They are very excited about reading because a friend of theirs is reading it and really likes it.

Since research shows that peer recommendations “may be the most important motivator for voluntary reading” (Worthy, 1998 cited in Krashen, 2004, p.90), a pedagogical framework that integrates this understanding seems to be most promising.

### **Technology as the extensions of teacher and student**

McLuhan (2003) famously asserted that technology is the extensions of man. At Bolster, technology serves as the extensions of both teachers and students.

Online environment has created unprecedented opportunities for sharing ideas and arguments with a larger and more authentic audience. An online discussion can either prep the discussion for the next day or be a follow-up for what students didn’t finish in class. Or someone raised an interesting question and teachers would suggest putting that in a blog to further talk about it.

At Bolster, different teachers use various social media to extend class discussions: Google docs; Skype; a class Ning; *co-ment* – a wiki-style online editing environment, which allows users to attach their comments to extracts of text or to work collaboratively on text writing. Teachers emphasize “the whole cross-fertilization thing” of this format: students are not just getting the teacher’s opinion – they are getting each other’s opinions. As a result, it becomes a real forum and not just an isolated conversation between the teacher and the student. Also, teachers point out that any class is too short for a really thoughtful conversation:

And I don’t think their [adolescents’] attention span is always long enough either. So, even if they want to talk about it more.... Teenagers, after 15 minutes – they are done. But let them think about it during the day, give their brain a chance to process, and the stuff they come up with is just fascinating. So, that’s one of the things that I think is the best about having an authentic audience. In a Ning or another secured site, the community is by invitation only. So, they know who the community is. So, if I say it’s just our class, then they know that it’s safe and it’s just them. And if I say that we are opening that up to everybody, then they might change the way they approach it.

In this case, “everybody” could be the world, or could be the whole school. Sometimes teachers invite parents in and have an open URL. This becomes an excellent tool for developing students’ sense of audience, too.

In the past, teachers had to rely on students’ ability to speak their ideas during in-class discussions to evaluate their level of understanding. But, as it has always been the case, not all students are comfortable doing it:

It’s very interesting how when you are able to extend the discussion online, not only to get to those quiet, really smart folks who are just really timid to talk, unlike the loud, chatty folks. [The quiet students are] chiming in, in writing, majorly, long, extensive, insightful pieces at night when they don’t say a word during the day. And then other people are like, “Wow! I didn’t notice this about you! It’s great!”

Electronic environment provides a scaffolded reading experience, which might enable all learners to access more difficult texts. For instance, Kindle's instant dictionary and the text-to-speech feature are very appealing to many students at Bolster Academy. English language learners and students with learning differences are two groups of students who benefit the most from technology-assisted reading and writing. As chief librarian observes, "We have academic support teachers come down. This has been happening quite a bit: 'We only want that book for this student if it's available in text-to-speech enabled on Kindle.' And they would choose a different book if it weren't text-to-speech enabled."

Teachers also observe that the use of technology seems to be linked to learning style. All teachers at Bolster get profiles of the students enrolled in the academic support program. "And sometimes it [profile] will say, 'Please allow the student to use a computer for note-taking.' And that forces us to be more flexible, too. We have students who really have to be taking notes on the computer," says Jane.

Lately, more English language learners (ELLs) at Bolster have joined the library book club, which helps them improve their English. A greater number of book club members among ELLs can be attributed both to the changed demographics – there is currently a higher percentage of international students at Bolster compared to the previous years – and to the fact that all book club readings occur in a scaffolded electronic environment, mostly on the Kindle. Only books that are available on the Kindle are selected and purchased for the book club.

## **Conclusions and educational implications**

Multiple factors have been found to contribute to the development of a school-wide culture of reading at Bolster Academy. First and foremost, this involves engaging students with high-interest reading materials for both recreational and academic purposes.

Transformation of the traditional library into a digital one has proved instrumental to the dramatic increase in recreational reading among students: student-driven on-demand book acquisition, almost instantaneous access to the desired content, and the availability of eReaders allow to capitalize on the momentum opportunity to reinforce a student's intrinsic interest in reading.

The advantage of a digital-based collection over a traditional one is that it is not tied to books as physical objects. Therefore, the school library does not have the limitations of a physical collection, which involves buying books upfront, putting them on a shelf and hoping that they will get used. With a digital collection, librarians and patrons can be much more proactive, and the book acquisition process can be much more student-driven.

It would be erroneous to imply, however, that the mere presence of cutting-edge technology in school is going to turn digital natives into readers (and writers). For instance, acquiring eReaders without the commitment to financially support on-demand, student-driven book acquisitions would not be the most effective use of this technology. Also, as one of the study participants remarked, simply putting a student in a room with the Kindle would be similar to putting him/her in a room with a shelf of books:

If they are not a reader, if they are not interested, then they are not going to go for it. Just because it is bells and whistles does not really do it... But you

have to understand that this is not helpful at all without the adult guidance of what we are doing with that. And *why* we are doing that.

Mere exposure to an inherently interesting text or latest digital gadget is unlikely to make a difference from an educational point of view unless there is a curriculum that engages students in active reading and learning.

One way to capitalize on students' tech savviness and multiliteracies, *as well as* on different media affordances is to use different formats for acquiring, conveying, and evaluating knowledge and understanding. This involves expanding the traditional "read, test/quiz, essay, project" model to include blogging, vlogging, creating videos, Movie Maker projects, Prezi or PowerPoint presentations, and any number of other alternative formats. What teachers bring *to* the technology is their pedagogical vision and a sense of higher purpose – how different modes of engagement with the material will help students learn something of substance and value about it.

Also, more choice-driven English curriculum and teacher autonomy have proved to be important contributing factors. As it has been discussed above, English teachers at Bolster have been empowered to design their own courses, which essentially allows them to share their literary "passions" with students. While the field of education has traditionally focused on the importance of capitalizing on students' strengths, it has underplayed pedagogical benefits of capitalizing on *teachers'* strengths. As Nick observes, "I am teaching Tolkien this spring because it is right up my alley. This is the stuff that I really like. But I know that because I really like it and really understand it then I can do better with it, and they [students] are going to profit from their experience as well." Research (Kositsky, 2010) has shown that having a teacher who is passionate about his/her subject is a formative experience for students: students might not remember

what exactly their teachers told them, but they would remember their passion, their attitude, and some of this will be transferred to the students.

Ultimately, it is variables other than technology that play a crucial role in providing students with optimal reading and learning experiences: engaging instructional framework that integrates different modes of purpose-driven exploration of the material, more choice-driven curriculum, greater teacher autonomy, and financial means to support patron-driven book acquisitions. Thus, only when technology is used as part of an overall successful educational paradigm can it be expected to have a positive effect on student engagement and educational outcomes.

### **Limitations of the study and implications**

Bolster Academy is an independent boarding school, which differentiates it from the public school sector on a number of important points.

Although there are certain standards that Bolster Academy has to adhere to, it is not as rigidly regulated as public schools. Therefore, there is a lot more room for teacher creativity and autonomy. Also, since most students live on campus, there are many more opportunities for the positive peer pressure effect in terms of forming recreational habits, including the habit of reading for pleasure.

However, the model that Bolster Academy is pioneering can be applied to a less privileged school setting as well. The idea is to get students interested in reading through an engaging pedagogical framework and patron-responsive library services and then support student-driven acquisitions of books without them entering a retail transaction on

their own. Also, we should strive to create a motivating environment in any educational setting – public or private. As one of my participants put it,

I saw that book about the Facebook guy, what's his name? Zuckerberg. The workplace was.... You know, they had basketball hoops, they had people going through with roller-skates. The more liberating and more imaginative the workplace, the better off everybody is going to be. I think that the idea of sitting behind a desk, listening to somebody lecture, and taking notes is medieval. I just think that it's part of an educational system that's obsolete, frankly. More and more people are figuring that out.

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