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Marginalising children's reading experiences: From series books to paratextual reading

Abstract
Using Genette's notions of text and paratext and Raymond Williams' notion of ordinary culture, this paper explores the ways in which institutions reward reading efforts that value only the reading of books, and thus marginalise readers and writers of other forms of text and of paratext. Though book reading continues to be valuable, the tools with which reading is measured needs to be inclusive of all reading platforms reflective of 21st century culture. This paper will use the examples of class reading logs and their template designs, the New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge, public library selection, readers' advisory practices and summer reading clubs to explore how institutions that promote reading can devalue the pleasure reading choices of some children. These institutional practices can act as a deterrent to reading and may prevent children from identifying as 'readers' and perceiving these institutions as relevant to their reading experiences. Cultural and educational institutions need to be current and inclusive in their approaches to literacy, readers and writers.
Keywords: marginalisation, children's reading, rewarding reading, paratext, series books, transmedia fiction, fanfiction

Introduction: Reading text and paratext

Reading is no longer a simple linear narrative accessed through book forms – whether they are print or digital. It has become more complex in an age where our reading is experienced through a variety of media, from standalone books to transmedia fiction. This complexity underpins the essential connection between reading and writing creatively. David Trend in *The End of Reading* says:

> Today reading exists as a vital – yet partial – component of the communications toolbox people need in a digital world of movies, television, the World Wide Web, and interactive media. Print and visual communication are converging in the new digital era to demand new definitions of what it means to be a literate person. (Trend 2010: 27)

This experience is one that younger generations do not even question. Moving between print and digital is a young person's norm. The idea that a text is to be experienced in complete isolation and outside of a social context is foreign to a connected generation of readers where children are described as 'digital natives' (Bittman et al 2011: 161). Reading in the 21st century goes beyond the traditional monograph where the reader consumes literary award winners and bestsellers that have been curated by literary gatekeepers – publishers, editors, authors, media owners, educators and librarians. The reader is their own literary

gatekeeper, choosing materials from traditional texts to popular culture sources demonstrating that there are multiple strands of literacy (Korobkova 2014: 161). Reading includes peer contributions and community creators posting their content online with the reader responding and interacting through written forms with social media so as to communicate and participate along with other readers. Reading of traditional formats such as literary novels remains important in the development of reading literacies. Longform books are necessary for readers to develop complex comprehension of narratives. It is also necessary for readers to have a continued understanding of literary works through pedagogical approaches of both critical and cultural literacies (Turner 2007: 107) This paper is not arguing to replace this reading but rather is proposing that it is imperative to reward other modes of reading alongside these traditional forms. From hereon, an assumption should be made that rewarding these traditional forms remains important and has merit but the focus in this paper is on alternative reading choices from book series reading, fanfiction and transmedia fiction and the ways they are or are not rewarded.

A book has several elements to its form. The central narrative is constituted by its text. That is, the story is the main element of a book. However, books also surround text with additional and necessary information that is referred to as paratext (Genette & Maclean 1991). Paratext is all the information that is attached to the text such as the author name, the book title, cover art, acknowledgements, prefaces, advertising, distribution, and interviews. Paratext is created by the publisher, the designer and advertiser and sometimes by the author. According to Genette, without the paratext the reader cannot access the text (Genette 1997: 2). Genette examines the notion of the paratext in the context of literary works. He considers it a 'zone of … transaction', without which it would not be possible to engage with the text itself.

Even though Genette's context only considers books as the central text, his categorisation can be applied to other writings, so that discussions of paratextualities now extend to movies, television shows and YouTube offerings, websites, computer and video games. Paratextual elements are not only 'thresholds of interpretation' (Genette 1997) but also provide 'thresholds of access' as they have informational purposes (Paling 2002). Paratextual elements such as author names, titles and publisher information are instrumental in creating connections between books and potential readers. Pecoskie and Desrochers show that paratext not only conveys the informational purposes of a text but that 'paratextual utterances' can reveal the 'underlying societal and cultural values placed on various types of information shared (Pecoskie & Desrochers 2013: 238). Hill and Pecoskie point to fanfiction as an engaged and active reading space whereby the community discussions, and the values they carry, impact upon the paratext which can evolve to become a central reading text (Hill & Pecoskie 2014: 145).

All media, from web series to movies, TV series and gaming, have paratexts. Depending on which medium is the central text, the accompanying material takes on the paratextual role. Often, reading paratext is essential to the main experience. Subtitles, *Pokemon* dictionaries or *Dungeons and Dragons* guides are all paratexts. These paratexts are not the central object of the experience but without them the participation is less meaningful and potentially the engagement with the cultural activity is less satisfying. The reader gains access to these paratexts through use of forums, online chats, fanfiction and user reviews as well as peer recommendations. These paratexts become important sources of reading material and are sometimes the main reading activities in which children engage. The printed word is now often an accompaniment to the visual form and this reading is evidence of literacies that are across many platforms. It cannot be considered secondary to traditional forms of linear

narratives as is experienced in novel reading. People have become 'accustomed to reading messages in movement' and acculturation is no longer acquired solely through books (Petrucci 1999: 361). Reading outside of the book form broadens readership so that cultural products are made available to a literate audience exploring alternative differing forms of writing. Writers themselves work across a number of media to connect, collaborate and create alongside their readers (Johnson 2010: 172) in a participatory online culture. Yet, this modern manifestation of ordinary reading that has become an organic part of our society can be treated in those processes that reward reading as though it is peripheral, rather than core, to everyday experience.

Children, as part of their ordinary culture (Williams 1961: 10), embrace complex paratextual reading platforms, but the shift of educational and cultural institutions in recognising, documenting and rewarding this reading is still in transition. Raymond Williams, in discussing what is considered culture, encourages authors and readers to acknowledge that

> [a] lived hegemony is always a process … it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continuously to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continuously resisted limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. (Williams 1977: 112)

It is these paratextual 'elements that are part of the physical reality of books and part of how they connect to readers' (Mackey 2001: 169). However, recording and rewarding reading of paratextual material is neither recognised nor encouraged by cultural institutions. This may be due to their reluctance to include marketing materials as part of a reading experience since they believe that texts and metatexts such as series books and fanfiction are not considered to be written to the literary standards upheld by libraries and educational bodies; or simply because the institutions running the reading programs have not realised that the templates and conditions of their rewards system make assumptions as to the materials children are reading so that they, in effect are excluding some types of reading and its readers.

Several institutions and their instruments that reward reading effort will be explored in this paper and will include school reading logs and educational and library reading challenges.

Reading logs, reading challenges and series reading

Two children cry inconsolably over their inability to read – both for the exact same reason. They are aged four and are the youngest children in the group. All the other kids can read to some degree and are taking part in a reading competition of sorts. They try but cannot manage to take part and by the end of the competition are curled up in their parents' laps sobbing over the injustice of not being able to read. The competition is SingStar. These children are sobbing because they have no idea how to decipher the code at the bottom of the screen thus cannot take part. A few weeks after this event they start school and are excited at the prospect of learning to read 'because then I can play SingStar'. Yet, when it comes time to write in their reading log for school there is no place for this type of reading. The only reading that is recorded and measured, and therefore rewarded, is traditional, print-based reading.

Reading logs and diaries are tools commonly used in primary-school grades as aids to literacy. A typical reading log requires the child to list the title and the author of the book that they have read. Most primary-school children in New

South Wales and their parents will be familiar with the requirements to list an author and title, to indicate when they started reading the book and when they finished it. Some reading logs require the child to list the number of pages they read each day.

In reading instruction, the New South Wales curriculum and teachers are flexible and receptive to different reading experiences and they allow for children to list magazines, websites and other reading. However, children making those reading choices are marginalised by the design of the template. Children need to ask permission to list their reading experience outside of the core guidelines and they may need help in providing an author or title to record their reading on the form. Their reading is not part of the template norm despite being part of a student's everyday norm. The use of the word 'Book' impresses upon the child and the adult guiding their reading that this is the expected reading. The children who found pleasure in *SingStar* would be unable to record (or be rewarded) for the 5-10 songs they learnt, even though the lyrics may have been higher in complexity than some of their graded/lexile readers that they might have had to read as homework. Children are aware that there are books that must be read to achieve classroom rewards such as gold stars and certificates; however these books do not put the reading fire in the belly of some young children.

The New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge, running since 2001, was established to encourage young people's interest in reading. This program takes kids beyond the curriculum. It is not an explicit learning tool. Unlike the English school syllabus which in Australia rarely discusses pleasure as an integral element for students learning outcomes (Turner 2007), the Reading Challenge supposedly has pleasure reading at its core. To take part in this program, children need to read a specified number of books from a substantial list. The number of books and the range from which to select vary according to age. However, at the top of the form used for recording reading is the statement that children should be familiar with the rules that govern what can be read and recorded. The challenge restricts the selection of reading. Most significantly, only two books from each series can be counted towards the final required books; up to five other series books can be included in the list of personal reading. Therefore, only the broad reader is rewarded. The reader of series books does not merit an Honour award. That is, if a child has focus and reads all sixty of Terry Deary's *Horrible Histories* books or Daisy Meadow's *Rainbow Magic books*, they can only count two titles with a maximum of five more as their 'Personal choice' books. If a child reads all of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, Megan McDonald's *Judy Moody* books and Anne Fienberg's *Tashi* books, the total of which far surpasses the required twenty titles, the challenge rules mean that this child would not receive recognition of this achievement within the program. The New South Wales Premier's Sporting Challenge, in comparison to the Premier's Reading Challenge, requires children in a class group (not individually) to reach daily activity goals in the sport of their choice. This can be any sport. A child can jump on a trampoline or play soccer for one hundred hours, or can choose to list twenty hours of cycling, twenty of running, swimming and so on. For this, the child receives recognition. There are other structural differences between these two programs but the overall premise of the sporting challenge is one of inclusion not exclusion and the child interested only in one activity is awarded, not marginalised.

Children's Book Week, sponsored by the Children's Book Council of Australia, is the longest running children's literary festival in Australia. Its purpose is to celebrate books and Australian authors and illustrators and to highlight the importance of reading. Many primary schools hold a Book Week parade, which encourages children to dress up in the theme of their favourite reading.

Participation in the Book Week parades seems to give children a greater sense of engagement in reading. At a primary school in Sydney's Inner West in 2010, all 130 sixth graders were in costume for the Book Week parade. There were two predominant teams: Team Potter – full of wizards, and Team Cherub – full of secret agents, suggesting that they all had some engagement with one or other of these themes. Both teams were resplendent in costumes reflecting both JK Rowling's and Robert Muchamore's respective book series and reflecting the students' engagement with their storytelling either through the original written texts or their paratexts. Yet, three months later, only two children from this same group received certificates for the New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge. Engagement with a program devised to promote pleasure reading was not evident. Setting limitations on what students can choose to read results in readers becoming disinterested in being rewarded as their actual reading achievements are being invalidated as well as not being recognised.

Series books are included in library collections to cater for a wide range of ages and abilities and their purpose is often acknowledged to be to guide the child to 'better' reading. Catherine Sheldrick Ross observes that librarians worry about stocking series books. She says, 'The conflict arises because deep-down many librarians think of reading as a ladder with popular fiction at the bottom and literary fiction and canonical texts at the top' (Ross 2009: 635). Texts have certain values ascribed to them, which creates hierarchies of reading. These hierarchies of reading are captured in the metaphor of the reading ladder (Ross 1987: 151). This is not only about the skill level of the reader (whose upward trajectory is imperative to the learning process) but it is also about the aesthetic and literary value that positions texts from lower to higher rungs on the ladder thus ascribing cultural capital to the chosen texts.

The New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge and the practices of some public libraries continue to maintain a focus on books that are recognised by literary arbiters as being of high quality, reinforcing the view that reading unlinked, stand alone books is a more important skill that needs to be nurtured in our community, and embraced and encouraged through our literary and cultural institutions. Series books were discouraged in libraries from the early 20th century and so it was with inclusiveness in mind that Leroy Merritt in considering selection policies for children's books, wrote that, 'retarded as well as advanced readers are considered in selection' (Merritt 1970: 52). His intention was to signal that books at all levels of literacy were to be included in the collections of public libraries. The wording of selection policies may have changed since he wrote his influential book. The term used now tends to be 'reluctant readers' which is thought to be more neutral. This labelling of readers also labels the books they read and has the potential to set up a cycle whereby children who have difficulty reading are associated with books that are treated as subliterature (Cawelti 1969: 382) by educators and library staff, so that by association the reader is labelled as subliterate.

The case against series books is well documented. Series books and books that adhere to a writing formula are seen as something that only lower reading performers engage with and are tools to lead their reader to the more worthwhile titles. Rather than being valued for their story, these books are merely an instrument to facilitate progressing to a higher level of reading. Series books have long been criticised as being 'pernicious', 'mind-weakening', 'addictive', 'sensational and 'formulaic' (Ross 1995: 203). Stephanie Loer, children's book editor of *The Boston Globe*, said of RL Stine's *Goosebumps* series 'the consensus is that these books are not good literature, but they are not harmful. Enticing, recreational reading, they can be a hook to get reluctant readers into libraries where they will find books of more substance' (Loer 2006: C5). Catherine Sheldrick Ross, in a study of readers, conducted 142 open-ended

interviews with adults and found that 60% of avid readers read series books as children. She concluded that series books are an essential stage in the development of powerful, literate people and are far from harmful (Ross 1995: 202).

The reading of series books can be compared with the playing of sporting games. Where a romance, western, fantasy or series book is criticised for having strictly defined plots, tropes and settings, and innovation comes mostly through character behaviour, a sportsperson is lauded for their creative playing within the strictures of a game. In sport, being an expert at a formula is celebrated. For example, in a basketball game the boundaries are strictly defined; players adhere to the rules of the game, which are set to international standards. The two same teams can be playing a week apart with the exact same players. Yet the games can range in outcome and excitement levels because there are so many variables. Children's series reading acts in much the same way. Like sporting games, they allow for a 'patterned experience of excitement, suspense, and release which we associate with the functions of entertainment and recreation' (Cawelti 2001: 3). The series reader is engaged and invested in the characters in their books. These characters are interesting, they have growth and development, they are cyclical in their nature (Schmidt 1987: 43) and they have not bored the reader who seeks further engagement with them.

Public libraries and the programs they offer have also been influential in establishing value in reading and reading material. Librarians at the beginning of the 20th century positioned themselves as having the professional expertise to 'recognise, select, and celebrate "the best" and to keep out the mediocre, the cheap and the meretricious' (Ross 2009: 634). This saw the establishment of awards for children's literature – the Carnegie and Greenaway Medals in the United Kingdom, the Newbery and Caldecott awards in America and the Children's Book Council Awards in Australia during the early and mid-20th century. By the late 1980s there had been something of a shift in perspective in the role of the children's librarian and all reading, not only literary reading, was established as being important. Public libraries 'actively court[ed] pleasure readers', setting up book clubs and instituting readers' advisory services (Ross 2009: 634). They actively helped readers connect with books, not in a prescriptive 'reading as a ladder' (633) approach aimed to lead children to improve their skills in reading and thus move up the ladder to books of 'better quality' but through attempting to match the right reader to the right book for them in promoting pleasure reading.

Public library reading programs, which do not require explicit learning outcomes, also exclude complex non-traditional reading options in their template designs. Summer Reading Programs are an annual literacy effort run by public libraries (Setterington 2009: 157) not only in North America but in Australia as well, such as the national Summer Reading Club coordinated through the State Library of Queensland. These programs comprise activities run during the summer holidays, where the aim is not directly to teach reading but to engage in recreational reading so as to maintain reading levels attained during the school year. These programs often have digital components as can be seen in the following blurb: 'the Australian Summer Reading Club is an annual program delivered in libraries and online that aims to encourage a continued love of reading and ongoing multi-literacy skills development amongst children and young people during the summer holidays' (State Library of Queensland 2016).

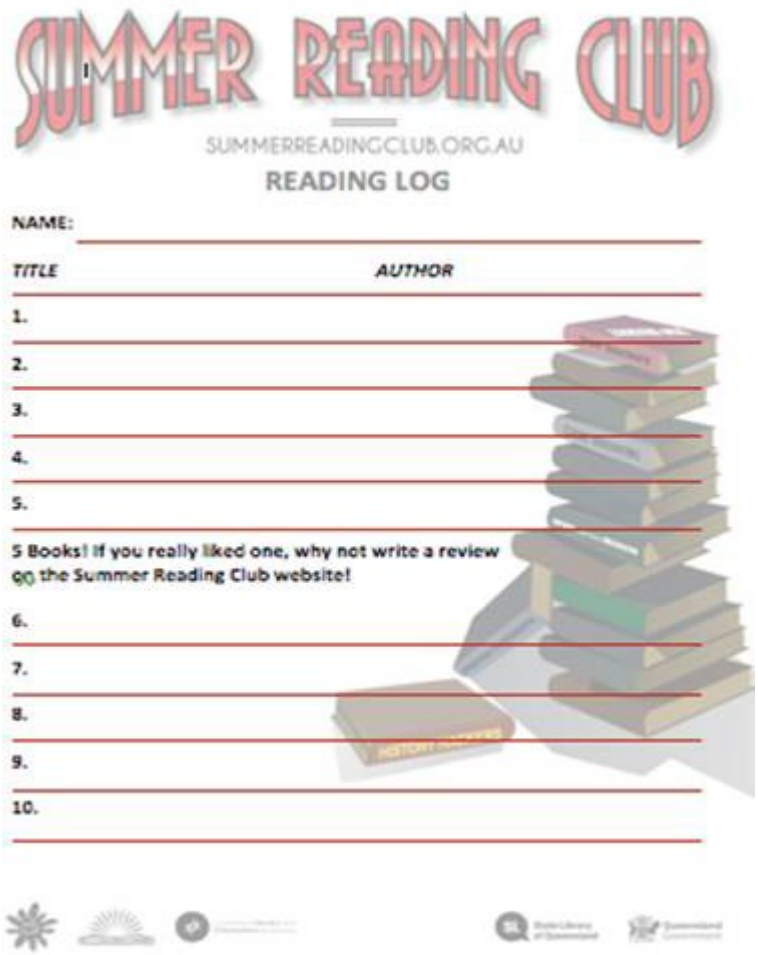

Figure 1: Reading Log template (http://www.summerreadingclub.org.au/program-portal/in-your-library/resources/) [1]

Though one could imagine that a title/author entry could allow for a fanfiction entry, the promotional sentence on the template 'Books! If you really liked one, why not write a review on the Summer Reading Club website!' excludes the readers of other text forms from reviewing on the website. The activity booklets have find-a-words and quizzes but the reading-log template is restricted to books. Their own template excludes the reader who used the activity log url *http://www.squiglysplayhouse.com/BrainTeasers/Detective.html* that is provided to encourage further reading of riddles.

Unlike the New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge, the Summer Reading Club makes no statement against series reading however non-book texts are implicitly excluded and so the scheme does not recognise that children's holiday reading is diversified beyond the book form. To list a few examples, a child who reads and participates in author blogs will not assume that they can list this reading in the program; neither will a child who reads their Football Manager 2015 emails covering daily meetings, transfers, scout reports and news releases and nor will the fanfiction reader assume they can include their texts.

The values and practices of cultural institutions may affect the reading choices of boys more than the reading choices of girls. Boys are more likely to choose a variety of non-fiction materials (McKechnie 2006: 62) as well as having an affinity for non-linear reading (64) but since cross-platform non-fiction may not sit on the ladder of reading for some public librarians these choices may help to reinforce the notion that boys read less than girls. In an exploration of reading it

was found that boys diversify their reading more readily than girls. In surveys it was found that 80% of girl's reading choices are fiction titles yet boys choose fiction and non-fiction equally. Their favourite books are often non-fiction and they use guides, dictionaries and manuals for games much more readily than girls. The choices of boys are 'often treated as subliterature, something that a reader should move beyond' (Newkirk 2002: 70). Thus, the notion of the reading ladder is evident here too, but children's series fiction has been elevated a few rungs and transmedia fiction and fanfiction, along with other metatextual and paratextual reading, now sit at the bottom.

Fanfiction and cross-platform reading

Fanfiction is fiction written by fans of a central narrative, whether it is from a book, movie, TV show or game. These fans appropriate the central narrative's characters and create their own stories with them. Fanfiction is contextualised and understood through the central text (Hill & Pecoskie 2014: 145) yet can evolve over time to become a central text. These fan girls and boys, and writers, who come from diverse backgrounds, develop their skills in a collaborative community, many starting out as readers and then progressing to writing and peer-reviewing (Korobkova 2014: 21) Engaging in fanfiction leads to their own 'skill development, literacy learning, and identity development' with reader/writers eventually developing their own fans and following (p 18). Fans who love to read One Direction (1D) lyrics and fanfiction may not consider this reading as relevant in their programmed holiday achievements such as the Summer Reading Club and they certainly cannot include it in the Premier's Reading Challenge, yet when band members Niall and Louis from 1D decided to act out some of the tamer fanfiction on BBC Radio, they sent teens scrambling to read (Zicarelli 2013). Fandom's engaged and enthusiastic readership is not given the value that it deserves. Well-known authors such as Meg Cabot, Neil Gaiman and SE Hinton take part in different fandoms. Naomi Novak and Cassandra Clare both were signed up by mainstream publishing houses due to the popularity of their fanfics. JK Rowling has written her own fanfiction on *Pottermore* in the voice of her character Ginny Weasley (Flood & Irvine 2014) and SE Hinton has written *The Outsider* fanfics about which she says '…a few years ago I wrote three Outsiders stories to see what kind of a response I would get. I use a different name, naturally' (Whitford 2015).

Many authors now use blogs and newsletters as a form of keeping their readers engaged between books. Blogs, as well as micro-blog platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr allow authors to explore and share their ideas and research as well as enter into a dialogue with their readers and their own colleagues. Educators have been using author blogs as teaching tools for collaboration, creativity and connectivity from early in the 21st century (Johnson 2010: 172). Being able to use the blogs of Maureen Johnson, Justine Larbalestier, Lisa Yee and Laurie Halse Anderson and many others for teaching also models reading practices that give students regular connections that allow them to 'find, manage, organize, and engage with online resources in ways that promote critical thinking' (Johnson 2010: 180). Other children's authors who post regular reading instalments include Andy Stanton's Mr Gum character who released a newsletter called *The Lamonical Chronicle* between books as it 'is the only way to keep up with news from the world of Mr Gum while you're waiting for the next book' (Stanton 2015). Historical fiction children's series author Caroline Lawrence has a regular blog *Roman Mysteries & Western Mysteries* discussing historical facts and trivia as well as tips for her readers as she writes and promotes her books. These models for reading encourage reading beyond a central text. John Green, author of the *fishingboatproceeds* tumblr and books

The Fault in Our Stars and *Looking for Alaska*, is also the creator of *vlogbrothers*, *Crash Course History* and *Crash Course Literature,* and *John Green plays FIFA14* YouTube channels. The comments on his vlogs show engaged and intelligent youth exchanging ideas. Green challenges school and children's librarians to look beyond only acquiring books 'published by reputable houses' and notes that, as gatekeepers, librarians should consider various formats to deliver written stories to kids (Green 2010: 27).

Children expect to be able to read an author's works from fictional creations to opinion pieces across a variety of mediums because this is the way that they read. Children don't compartmentalise their own reading, happily alternating between print and screen, text and image when they engage in recreational activities (Bittman et al 2011: 163). Engaging in an author's work across multiple platforms is not an exception but an expectation. This is evident with author Molly Backes tweeting 'I don't think of myself as a writer so much as a cross-platform creator' (Backes 2014). For many authors each platform provides a different aspect of their creative output to be read. Each output can be read as a standalone piece and is not dependent on the other platform to be understood, unlike transmedia stories.

Reading through transmedia fiction

Transmedia fiction or transmedia storytelling involves 'a multimodal, multimedia story with nonlinear, participatory elements' (Lamb 2011: 14). Transmedia fiction is the telling of one story across a number of media platforms. The story is intradependent on all these platforms to deliver the complete story. No longer a reader but a participant in the storytelling, the individual needs to be aware of the various platforms to understand the complete story.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries provides a useful example. Creators Bernie Su and Hank Green produced a modern-day adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* using several media platforms to deliver their story. The main character, Lizzie Bennet, is a media communications post-graduate student with a vlog (on YouTube) she produces with her best friend, Charlotte Lu, with regular appearances from her sisters Jane and Lydia. On another platform (Twitter) William Darcy and Bing Lee discuss their daily activities. Lizzie and her sisters also have Twitter accounts. The stories converged and fans were able to join in on a number of platforms with updates being delivered via Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube and the show's own dedicated website that chronologically listed all the transmedia in the order that they occurred in real time. This allowed new fans to understand and access the story once it had concluded without feeling lost. The webseries had Question and Answers episodes with the characters answering questions posed by viewers – through YouTube comments or readers – through the Twitter accounts. The series concluded in March of 2013 however the number of fanfiction stories and the comments in the YouTube episodes showing that viewers had either read or planned to read *Pride and Prejudice* to make comparisons between the book and the webseries which indicated that transmedia storytelling acts as a motivator for reading experiences. A year after *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* concluded, a further instalment to the storytelling has been added with a book called *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet* being released in June 2014, with more character introspection and untold stories and her sister's sequel, *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennett,* published in September 2015. These books are evidence of a fanbase that continues to grow and seeks more additions to their story but even more importantly, this all still constitutes reading. A large number of transmedia

fiction has been adapted from classic literature, with examples such as: *Emma Approved* – Jane Austen's *Emma*, *Green Gables Fables* – LM Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and *Nothing Much To Do* – Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* are some examples of subsequent literary vlog adaptations. Some of these are produced by small studios (*Emma Approved*) and others are fan generated and funded (*Green Gables Fables* and *Nothing Much to Do*).

These stories engage and inspire their reader/viewers many of whom follow on from their reading experiences writing and creating their own fan fiction stories. These reading experiences are 'complex, interconnected, and dynamic narratives and vibrant story worlds' that allow for interaction and exploration as well as opportunities to contribute to stories as they are being created. These experience are by no means restricted to the reader participant. Creators too connect with and are inspired by fandoms as evidenced by the writers of *Sleepy Hollow* who post their favourite fan art and fan fictions on their writing meeting room (Romano 2013). Actor Orlando Jones, who plays the character Washington Irving in the show, runs his own Tumblr and calls himself *Sleepy Hollow*'s biggest fan interacting with and trolling fans. Embracing this interactive storytelling culture is integral to relating with fans. Jones states that it was his reading of *Mad Magazine* that led him to working on *MADtv* and then embracing the *Sleepy Hollow* fandom (Votta 2013). In some instances, such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Green Gables Fables*, transmedia storytelling has the characters interacting directly with the readers. In these fictional worlds, the excitement of interacting with the characters of the story makes reading much more desirable.

Reading paratextual materials such as wikis, reddits, manuals, character guides and walkthroughs from gaming, as well as transmedia fiction, is generally not classed as a reading experience. Multimedia reading experiences have been shown to engage students who have been labelled as 'reluctant' and 'underachieving' readers who were assessed as having low literacy by their schools, yet when they were interviewed and had monitored their reading by keeping a diary, not only did the students identify themselves as readers but they showed that they were engaging in a wide variety of texts from 'searching the internet, reading directions, song lyrics, and billboard advertisements' (Alvermann et al 2007: 43). This finding was particularly illuminating because these were students who had low scores on literacy tests. They were being labelled as 'reluctant' yet they were engaging in literacy activities outside of school hours because they were motivated (Alverman et al 2007: 44). It is sheer joy and immersion in a text that is the imperative for reading proficiency, not the quality of the text. Thus, as Reilly says, 'Transmedia, done well, can contribute to an immersive, responsive learner-centred learning environment rich with information and linked to children's existing knowledge and experiences' (Reilly 2009: 10). Transmedia, as a form of paratextual reading is a high engagement reading platform just as other paratextual forms can be. These can include karaoke or any other version of singing along with the bouncing ball that involves reading or other forms of paratextual reading such as subtitles and closed captions which are also undervalued as a source of reading (Linebarger, Piotrowski & Greenwood 2010: 149) . Margaret Mackey explores paratextual connections to JK Rowling's *Harry Potter*, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* and Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels. She refers to their paratextual devices as 'satellite texts' and 'variegated links' and says that eventually the reader will be drawn to the central text: 'At some point, the readers steps off the connecting path of the linking texts and disappears into a kind of narrative mist of the story itself, silent and alone, to return later, changed in some way' (Mackey 2001: 187).

Rewarding the ordinary reader; acknowledging the writer

> 'Literacy from the age of the pharaohs forward has never collapsed but only changed.' (Petrucci 1999: 346)

In a cultural and educational environment where digital literacies and being a digital native is a normal part of children's daily cultural activities, the methods and forms with which we reward reading need to be modelled and facilitated on 21st century reading and writing practices. Evidence shows that computer access (with the exemption of electronic games) is associated with increased traditional literacy (Bittman et al 2011: 172). Reading series is immersive; fanfiction contributes to an expansion of readership, as does the reading of blogs, transmedia stories and other paratexts. David Trend says, 'The fact is that media surround us like the air we breathe. It's not so much a matter of whether we engage popular culture, as much as it is what we do with the material' (Trend 2010: 28), and these popular forms of writing continue to be motivators for children becoming readers.

The reader is valuing texts written by both peers and published and unpublished authors across a variety of platforms and their broad reading needs to be recognised and encouraged. Though this aspect of children's reading is indicative of complex digital and traditional literacies, it is still treated as peripheral by cultural institutions. Reading is more than just the reading of books acknowledged by literary authorities and rewarded through institutional practices. The marginalisation of texts that are not core to a reward system or that are considered the by-product of another medium has implications for the readers of those products. Those readers do not consider their reading to be relevant in a formalised, institutionalised reading environment. This marginalisation also has implications for creators as their work is not valued and measured as part of a reader's progress towards literacy. From reading series books which allow for an ongoing connection between character/s and readers to reading online and paratexts with their interconnections of a number of platforms requiring a range of digital literacies, from understanding the onscreen structure of a website or blog to progress through a narrative to gaming and video commentaries, this reading exposes children to a diverse range of established and emerging writers. The work of writers is excluded from these reading programs as they too do not write to the format of reading that is rewarded. Scriptwriters, series writers, web content writers, essayists, fan fiction dabblers and lyricists, to name a few, are all set at the same margin as their readers. The rewarding of broad reading results in the recognition of writers who are creating engaging texts beyond the traditional literary novel. These are all legitimate and valuable manifestations of reading.

A reader will not identify as a reader if their reading choices are not recognised by the documentation processes used by institutions and programs established to foster reading. Though there have already been shifts in the approach to cross-media literacies, the tools of promoting literacy have not changed at the same pace. These tools, which still reflect books as the key information disseminator, give readers the false perception that they are not a reader. Libraries and other institutions that develop programs to reward pleasure reading can create acceptance for these new forms of reading alongside the reading of books. Their inclusion of texts, implicit through template design or prescribed lists of valued reading, needs to be broadened to resemble the vibrant state of children's reading practices and the cross platform presence of writers. Series reading through to the reading of paratextual materials is reflective of our children's everyday reading and we need to recognise and validate their experiences so that they can perceive themselves to be readers.

Notes

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