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Spreading the Word: Reading, Journaling, and Social Engagement

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Citation Information

Owens, M.; and Chambers, Cynthia R.. 2013. Spreading the Word: Reading, Journaling, and Social Engagement. *Breaking Ground*.

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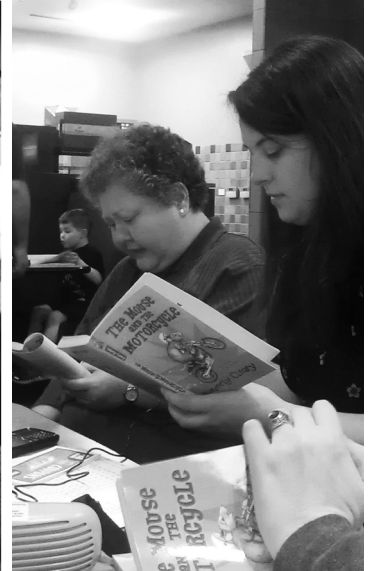
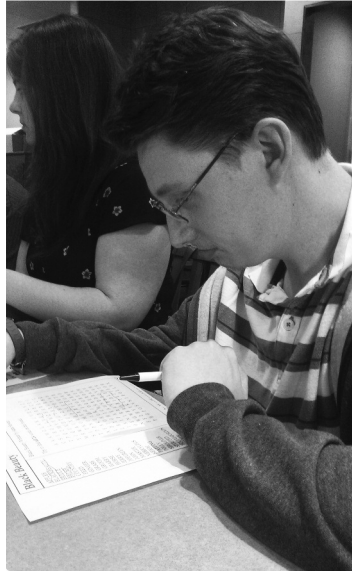
Spreading the Word: Reading, Journaling, and Social Engagement

Spreading the Word: *Reading, Journaling & Social Engagement*

BY MEGAN OWENS AND CYNTHIA CHAMBERS, PHD



THE NEXT CHAPTER BOOK CLUB MODEL SEEKS TO PROMOTE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY INCLUSION AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS IN A BOOK CLUB SETTING.



You enter a coffee shop and join your friends at a table for your book club meeting. This is a familiar place to you. You come here every week at the same time. You feel welcomed by the other group members and feel like you can be yourself in this relaxed atmosphere. While you sign in, you discuss with the others how your week has been: what you did, what was good and what was bad. There is no hesitation here.

Once the discussion dies down and everyone is ready to begin, you open a familiar book, the same one you've been reading for the past several weeks. As a group you discuss what happened during your last reading and then your book club's facilitator asks for a volunteer to read first. Your mind begins to wander. Six months ago, you never would have volunteered to read, much less read first. Since then, you've come to realize that this is a safe place where you're offered a chance to succeed. You volunteer yourself and begin reading as the other group members follow along. You come to a funny line and begin laughing. Someone asks what you're laughing at and the group begins discussing what it would be like to encounter that same situation. You feel free, accomplished, and wanted. Such is the experience of a Next Chapter Book Club participant.

Book clubs consists of five or six members of

varying reading levels who all understand that everyone is welcome and a valued participant. Each club is coordinated by at least one facilitator who assists book club members in designing and running book clubs according to their preferences. Book clubs meet in community settings such as book stores and cafes.

The book club model affords participants a wealth of both internal and external benefits. Book clubs allow individuals to "lead" their own organization by creating a place to call their own, and, within that same setting, by providing opportunities for self-advocacy. Participants choose the books that they read as well as how to structure the group.

Therefore, each book club has its own personality, defined by the interests of the participants, the rules they outline for meetings, and the procedures for how the book club itself will run (e.g., who will read first, next). Here are a few example rules for some of the book clubs located in the Tri-cities of East Tennessee:

- Follow along with others while reading and stay on the same page as the group.
- No talking about spiders... unless you specify that they are in a cage.
- Wait until the person reading pauses to make a comment.
- If you come to a "not nice" word while

reading, say "beep".

Book clubs provide a number of ways for participants to utilize their leadership skills. Participants may provide support for their fellow members by echo reading with them (i.e., providing the words to the reader while he/she reads the text out loud to the group), assisting them in holding their book, or helping them stay on the correct page with the group. Community involvement creates other opportunities for support. Participants often order refreshments from their book club sites before or after their meetings. It is during this time that volunteers and facilitators are able to help participants advocate for themselves in these natural settings.

As is to be expected from a book club program, participants gain skills from the literacy exposure that they receive on a weekly basis. Participants have begun reading more words, and participating with more confidence as a result of this program. The Next Chapter Book Club is not designed to be a highly instructional method, yet the sheer joy of reading has presented an amazing opportunity for individuals of all reading abilities to kindle the motivation to read more and to share their discoveries with others within as well as outside the book club setting. As a result of these experiences,

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participants gain a sense of pride and accomplishment.

As a result of the small group routine meetings provided by the book club setting, participants form lasting friendships. Most of these take root in book club meetings but eventually extend far outside. During book club meetings, discussions usually start with a point from the book and branch off from there. This aspect provides a safe place for participants to voice their fears, disappointing moments and successes, and, in turn, have individuals who understand them listen and respond. No matter what the perceived ability level, all book club members provide support to each other through their help with reading, laughter, friendship or sense of caring.

Recently, developers of the Next Chapter Book Club concept have opened the door to an exciting new opportunity. A similarly motivated writing club - Jot It Down - has been created. The new program was formed as a natural crossover from reading stories to

creating stories. With similar goals as Next Chapter Book Clubs, Jot It Down promotes creativity, imagination and expression. Little emphasis is placed upon instruction and craft.

During meetings, members work individually and collaboratively on writing stories, poems, letters and postcards, MadLibs and blog posts. Tools such as pen and paper, tablets and whiteboards are utilized. To kick off the new initiative and encourage expansion within Tennessee, Dr. Tom Fish of the Nisonger Center of Ohio State University presented both program models in Nashville in early October to current NCBC sites and other interested parties.

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the current Next Chapter Book Club sites are excited about the possibilities for reaching out with the Next Chapter Book Club/Jot It Down initiatives. We hope to provide new participants with the benefits of these programs and increase the number of clubs not only within our current areas but across the state as well.

For more information on existing clubs or getting a club started in your area, contact the following sites:

*Memphis Center for Independent Living
Susanna Cullen, scullen@mcil.org*

*The Arc Williamson County
Sharon Botorff, (615)790-5815,
sbbarc@bellsouth.net*

East Tennessee Technology Access Center

*Lorrie Crockett,
lorrie.w.crockett@gmail.com*

*Turning Pages Together: East Tennessee State University
Cynthia Chambers, (423) 439-7586,
tpbookclub@etsu.edu*

Megan Owens is coordinator of Turning Pages Together. Cynthia Chambers is associate professor at East Tennessee State University.

WALGREENS STUDY ▶

study compared Worker's Compensation costs for employees with a disability to costs for employees with no disclosed disability. The data was extracted from 110 claims over a 32-month period. The study found that costs for medical treatment for employees with disabilities was 67% less than for employees with no disclosed disability. Further, the costs for indemnity/time off were 73% lower for employees with disabilities. Finally, the expense costs for employees with disabilities were 77% less than for employees with no disclosed disability. The study also found that the lost-day average for employees with a disability was 40% less than for employees with no disclosed disability. The study concluded that Worker's Compensation costs incurred by employees with disabilities were significantly lower than for employees with no disclosed disability.

The study's findings regarding Worker's Compensation

costs are significant. The costs for employees with disabilities were much lower than for employees with no disclosed disabilities. Many employers harbor the belief that employees with disabilities will be at greater risk of serious injury in the workplace causing concerns about liability. This study's findings contribute to refuting that concern and removing a significant barrier to employment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

Walgreens has implemented a landmark disability employment initiative in its distribution center system. As a result of this initiative, Walgreens now has over 1000 employees with disabilities working in its distribution centers nationwide. The Walgreens study on the performance of employees with disabilities in its distribution centers confirms that this initiative was a good business decision. The study found that employees perform the same jobs just as well as employees with no disclosed disabilities. The study further found that employees with disabilities had

significantly lower turnover rates as well as significantly lower costs per Worker's Compensation case. The findings indicate that Walgreens is getting equal performance from its employees with disabilities and is saving on costs related to employee turnover and Worker's Compensation. These findings by a major national company should be encouraging to other companies to follow Walgreens' lead and recruit employees with disabilities.

The performance of Walgreens employees with disabilities also has significance for disability employment service systems. First, the Walgreens initiative relies on employer-driven partnerships with community service providers to assist in recruitment, training and job retention supports. Additionally it uses an innovative, flexible training curriculum to teach people with disabilities required skills. This study confirms the effectiveness of these partnership and training models.

Second, Walgreens has large numbers of people with disabilities, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, successfully performing full-time, skilled jobs in the company's distribution centers. The Walgreens distribution centers are a "show the way" example for practitioners in the system of new possibilities for the employment of people with disabilities. Employers and service practitioners alike need to take note of the findings of this study and collaborate to replicate Walgreens' success.

A copy of the Walgreens study report is available at: www.asse.org/professional/safety/pastissues/057/06/062_071_F1KA_0612.pdf

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