Using shared reading to promote a sense of community - between 30,000 students, 10,000 staff and over 450 miles. A case study across two institutions

Alison Baverstock (Kingston University) & Brian Webster-Henderson (Edinburgh Napier University),
HEA Conference, 5th July 2017
What unites our two institutions – and hopefully us all

‘A paradox. The things you don’t need to live – books, art, cinema, wine – are the things you need to live.’

Haig (2013, p. 273)
Project origins

• Pre-arrival shared reading common in US universities
• But described rather than analysed
• Rare in the UK, but whole city/region reads growing
• Ability to take this forward via SADRAS Research at Kingston University in 2014
• Research among Kingston first years (2014-15) showed much greater interest than anticipated. Went ahead with a customised edition of Nick Hornby’s *About a boy*
Evidence base

• Widespread reporting of the **benefits of reading for pleasure**
• **Engagement strategies for improving student engagement and retention, particularly** among vulnerable communities
• **QAA Enhancement Theme** – transition
• Learning from a body of evidence in other areas of student experience e.g. Smith & Smith (2015) – placements and a new identity; Fotheringham & Alder (2012) mobile technologies
Evidence base

• Widespread reporting of the **benefits of reading for pleasure**
• *Engagement strategies for improving student engagement and retention, particularly* among vulnerable communities
• **QAA Enhancement Theme** – transition
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• The ‘transitional object’ - Lippincott
Feedback from year one

• Very strong student engagement – particularly from those living at home

• How best to reach the staff; let them ask rather than just receive

• Libraries offered a capillary network across the university

• Administrative/professional staff particularly keen – reprinted twice

• A water-cooler project. Widely discussed – even by those not taking part!
The wider societal context - Kingston

• Many Kingston students commute
• 1:8 homes has a university connection
• Many administrative staff live locally
• Building on our active programme of civic engagement with Kingston Council
• Multiple contact points promote action!
Year 2: Edinburgh Napier University join us

• Similar student demograph, different ethnicity
• 28,000 print run for *The Humans*
• Working with LRC staff at Edinburgh Napier
The next year

• Choosing the book, involving both institutions
• Using an algorithm and then letting humans make the choice
• Rolling out the shortlist across the institution – key library role
• How this developed into other workshops
What issues needed to be discussed between Kingston and Napier?

- Open up to audience discussion:
- Any anticipated problems?
- Anything to nip in the bud?
Initial issues

• Personnel
• Choosing a book to suit two institutions
• Distance
• Origin as a senior-management project
• And one invented somewhere else
• Legal formalities
• How many books actually needed?
• Differences in approach
• Learning in both directions
A third partner

• Sale of books to Kingston Council
• Rolled out across 7 public libraries in the borough
• Surbiton Library event
• Public Libraries/KU summit on good practice
Community involvement

• U3A
• The Joel Project, centre for those experiencing homelessness
• Sale of books to Kingston Council
# The profiles of the ENU and KU staff respondents are very similar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>NAPIER</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>147</td>
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<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>31-40</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative staff</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic staff</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRC staff</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contracted staff</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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### Staff at ENU and KU learned about the Big Read in similar ways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>2015 %</th>
<th>2016 %</th>
<th>NAPIER %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General email from one of those involved in organising</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Targeted email sent specifically to you, from one of those organising</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mention in VC’s monthly newsletter</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from senior faculty management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from faculty colleagues involved with teaching and learning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from your head of department</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard of it at a staff meeting</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage on Staff Space</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via a Kingston External Events Calendar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Casual conversation with academic colleagues</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual conversation with administrative staff e.g. LRC, administration team, or KU reception staff</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>211</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>102</td>
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</table>
84% of staff thought the amount of information they had was about right

Q2: Did you get sufficient information on the KUBR?

- 2015:
  - Too Little: 15
  - About Right: 79
  - Too Much: 6

- 2016:
  - Too Little: 9
  - About Right: 84
  - Too Much: 7

- ENU figures 61% not enough, 20% about right, 1% too much
Staff generally found it easy to find a copy

- 84% found it very easy to access a copy. (ENU 69%)

- Many comments about good availability at reception desks/ LRCs

  ‘The reception desks at PR were never without copies, making it very easy to get a copy.’

  ‘I liked the way that LRC and Reception staff were so keen to engage people in the scheme’

  ‘It is a fantastic idea to have books distributed at university reception and libraries. You're really going to reach most people that way.’

  ‘Perfect placement’
### ENU and KU similar in amount read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>ENU 2015</th>
<th>ENU 2016</th>
<th>ENU 2016 %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finished it</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>67%</td>
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<td>More than half</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than half</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>None of it</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>232</td>
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<tr>
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<td>118</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Score (out of 6)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Again a similar profile between ENU and KU

Q Did you discuss the book with anyone? Please tick all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of staff respondents</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>ENU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends (outside the university)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleagues</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not discuss with anyone</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=219 (2015, 228 (2016), ENU (118)
Staff interest in taking part again: ENU and KU results very similar

Staff 2015:
- 24 No interest
- 36 Fairly interested
- 40 Very interested

Staff 2016:
- 16 No interest
- 29 Fairly interested
- 54 Very interested

ENU:
- 20 No interest
- 24 Fairly interested
- 57 Very interested
What we have learned

‘You have really created a buzz. I feel I want to take part.’
Corridor conversation with Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy

• The value of a tangible product
• Boost the vision with a simple statement of what you are trying to do
• Use all means of communicating across the organisation
• Ensure transparency of process
• Find project champions
• Leverage involvement by sharing information
• Encourage others to develop the idea – internally
• Administrative staff valued opportunity for increased visibility
• Find brand partners - externally
Learn from each other

‘Thought it was a well-chosen book due to the themes complementing the transition to a new environment very nicely’
Strategic rationale for library involvement

- Raising library profile across both institutions
- Learning hub of the university and so a central collection point
- Opportunities to network across community through committee structure
- Social media presence gives opportunity to reach out to students
- Encouraged user engagement with LRCs
Strategic development – meeting others’ agendas

• All based on promoting **community and inclusiveness**

• Strategy and evaluation development

• Sharing learning with the Libraries Taskforce
Issues moving forwards – what might we have to anticipate?
Actual issues for the future

• Project funding

• Copyright for project

• Writing papers

• Giving presentations

• Acknowledging credit on both sides

• Involving new partners