



Brent Chatterbooks Extreme

Chatterbooks Extreme is a Brent Libraries reading group for young people in school Years 6-9 (ages 10-14), based on the Chatterbooks model. The group was set up in September 2006 to build on success with Chatterbooks and to sustain members' interest in reading through the transition from primary to secondary school.

The effects

Young people who enjoyed Chatterbooks in primary school, with all its benefits for literacy, citizenship and social skills, have kept the reading habit into secondary school through membership of Chatterbooks Extreme, a reading group where they make the decisions. So far members who joined in primary school have sustained their interest in the group and the group accommodates a wide range of reading preferences and abilities. Their activity sessions, chosen by themselves, include ICT and art and design projects and discussion of other art forms (films, plays and computer games). The group has contributed to ordering stock and planning future library services and has the potential to be highly influential.

The experience

Emma Cook, Children's and Young People's Services Librarian, London Borough of Brent

When the new Kingsbury Library in Brent was being planned, our **Chatterbooks Extreme** members had their own consultation event. Their work will be on display at the opening of the new building. Since we set up the group in September 2006, ownership has been very much placed on the young people that attend. They have decided on session times (for an hour once a month in term time), structure and content. They have also bought books for the library: in one session I gave them part of the budget to spend and asked them to choose 30 titles each. Chatterbooks Extreme has grown from six young people to 18, who attend three different schools and are aged between 10 and 13. The original six members have stayed with us into secondary school and we currently have some Year 6s so we hope this pattern will continue. We promote the group in the high school which most of the group attend by taking posters in, and some members have brought their friends.

There is a wide range of reading abilities in the group, from one member with special educational needs and a lower reading ability through those who read mainly popular fiction to those who read quite challenging books. They all bring the books they are reading to the sessions and talk about them and answer questions. They will listen to and question each other and try each other's recommendations although there is always quite a range of books. I don't ask any of the questions, they run the discussion themselves.

Then there is always a reading-related activity on the topic of their choice. We choose the topics at the end of each session for the next one. The group members are very keen to decide upon topic content themselves and to showcase the work that they are doing.

Session topics we have enjoyed so far have included: **Who Wants To Be A Book Billionaire?** (an interactive computer game was developed for the group to play their own version of Millionaire); **Urban Myths** and **True and False Media**. We have discussed books that have become films and play scripts, designed a Chatterbooks Extreme T-shirt and made photo journals (for these, the members took away disposable cameras to photograph things that were important to them). For **Dead Good Writers**, the group researched writers who are no longer alive and discussed whether and why a particular author should be brought back to life: the author who came out top was Beatrix Potter, so we bought her books for the library.

Resources and staffing

- The sessions are run by the CYPS librarian with the help of another member of staff
- Refreshments cost £3 a session and the activities rarely cost anything (except for the photo diaries activity, which cost around £150)
- Books are not acquired for the sessions although members can recommend books to be bought from the library budget

Partners

Chatterbooks Extreme members are pupils at:

- Roe Green junior school
- Oliver Goldsmith primary school
- Kingsbury high school in the London borough of Brent

The group hopes to develop partnerships to organise specific events, for example a Queens Park Rangers Football Club coach is coming to session on football books.

Outcomes of project

Members have sustained interest in books from primary into secondary school and completed art, design and ICT projects that they have devised themselves, as well as taking part in discussion about books. They are keen to express their views and through the library consultation they have learnt that their views are valued. They are vocal about which activities they enjoy and want to repeat.

"Can we meet every week instead of each month?"

Chatterbooks Extreme member

"Can we play Book Billionaire again?"

Chatterbooks Extreme member

"Can we do computers next time?"

Chatterbooks Extreme member

"I like it when we get to talk about the books."

Chatterbooks Extreme member

"Sarah always asks good questions about the books."

Chatterbooks Extreme member

"My daughter really wants to attend the group but we have tuition on a Thursday. I'm trying to stop the tuition because she really wants to come to the Chatterbooks group."

Parent

Challenges/lessons learnt

The combination of Year 6 and key stage 3 members has not encouraged young people from Year 9 to take part. However, the first Year 6 members have stayed in the group into Year 7. Flexibility has been key: the meeting day has been changed to suit the Year 7s' after-school sports commitments. It has been important to establish the young people's ownership and allow them to guide the sessions.

The future

It is hoped that with increased publicity the group will thrive and expand. A homework club is due to begin at the library for key stages 2 and 3 which is expected to attract more members.