Article

The seminar goes to work: Towards a theory of collaborative literacy

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Abstract
The research and practice are clear: the humanities develop empathy, sensibility, and other individual skills critical to successful employment. But, they also support the development of collective skills that empower productive teams and workplaces. This article explores the collective impact of narrative literature through the lens of an innovative workplace-based learning program. The program uses facilitated conversations about literature to invite colleagues *at all levels* to practice questioning assumptions, listening to different voices, and connecting to new ideas and to each other. Examining data from over 800 participants, the authors provide scholarly and practice-based evidence that literature discussions support otherwise elusive workplace dynamics. The results establish the link between shared human experience and workplace quality, as colleagues learn to *be* and *work together*. In addition, the concept of collaborative literacy that emerges from this study promises a new approach to learning in multiple non-traditional settings and in the academy itself.

Existing research provides compelling evidence that the humanities (and literature in particular) develop empathy (Hakemulder, 2000), sensibility (Badaracco, 2006), theory of mind (Djikic et al., 2013), critical thinking (Mezirow, 1990), and other individual skills. Recognizing and/or depicting the *whole human being*, narrative literature provides a mirror that reflects the multiple ways in which we experience the human condition.

However, used innovatively, the humanities can also deepen networks and develop *collective* skills that create the conditions for sustainable lifelong learning and the development of collaborative learning organizations (Senge et al., 2004). This article explores the research outcomes of an innovative workplace-based learning program known as Books@Work. This program seeks to build and support productive and collaborative environments by leveraging the humanities to advance interpersonal skills and deepen social relationships. Bringing college professors not to teach, but to *facilitate* discussions of literature, the program invites diverse groups of individuals, from the C-suite to the shop floor, using life experience and personal perspective to explore and wrestle with human questions that do not have answers. Every voice is welcomed, no one is excluded; each individual is an expert in some facet of the human experience.

The prevailing research on the humanities and the workplace still focuses on the individual as the unit of measurement. The outcomes of this workplace program contribute to the theory and understanding of the role that literature plays in workplace-based groups. The program activates and extends multiple learning paths *through* the humanities, taking participants from learning to *do* and *know* to learning to *be* and *work together* (Delors, 1996). These paths set the stage for the emergence of a new form of collaborative literacy.

Context: The humanities and the modern workplace

The future of work is uncertain, unpredictable, and ambiguous. With the influx of new technologies, the advent of artificial intelligence, and the increase in remote or disconnected workplaces, the only thing we can count on is the unrelenting speed of change (DXC Technology, 2017). This change disorients and often adversely affects our sense of connection, belonging, and contribution.

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Table 1. Theoretical foundations.

Theoretical context	Relationship to humanities in the workplace
The value of narrative and reader response theory	A means to explore the human condition (Bruner, 2004). Discussions that "make sense of the world" (Skalin, 2017: 122–123). Narrative creates a space for the "transformation of both our personal and cultural background" (Caracciolo, 2012: 19). Reading is "an important corrective to the increasing emphasis on non-print digital media and the culture of global capitalism" (Pennington and Waxler, 2018: 3). Reading as a two-way *transaction* whose character depends on what is being read (e.g. efferent vs. sensory) (Rosenblatt, 1982). The "reader's stance inevitably affects what emerges from the reading" but "does not deny the importance of the text" (Rosenblatt, 1982: 269).
LLL	Widely accepted answer to contemporary uncertainty, but often places functionally-defined economic, social, and technological demands on individuals (Field, 2006). UNESCO Report (Delors, 1996) asserted that LLL must address changes in the workplace and must also "constitute a continuous process of forming whole human beings [. . .] and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community" (p. 19).
Adult learning theory	Four essential elements: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live [and work] together, and learning to be (Delors, 1996, 2015). More sophisticated views of learning as intersecting, complex processes of cognition, emotion, and social interaction (Illeris, 2014; Jarvis, 2006). Needed investment not only in economic capital but social capital required in complex and changing networks (Alheit, 2009; Illeris, 2003).
Cognitive sciences: enaction and emergence	Participatory sensemaking as an enactive process that can promote social understanding (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2008). When embedded in complex social settings may promote emergence of novel forms of identity leading to impact on individuals as well as larger organizational contexts (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2008).

Note: LLL: lifelong learning.

The National Bureau of Economic Research (Deming, 2017) notes that, since 1980, social-skill intensive work has grown by over 12% as a share of all US jobs. Wages have also grown rapidly for those who have the required skills. As information and communication technology have transformed the workplace, the need has increased for workers who are flexible and adaptive problem solvers and who engage in teamwork that requires "the capacity to understand the motivations of others. Working effectively with others means not only observing their behavior but also understanding why they act the way they do" (Deming, 2017: unpaginated). The contemporary workplace demands that teams understand the complexity of a wide variety of context-specific problems, as they respond in real time to each other in ever-changing circumstances.

These challenges, among others, invite a new approach to bringing the richness and possibilities of the humanities to strengthen and deepen workplace learning. Bruner (1986) asserted an essential component of the humanities when he wrote, "The humanities seek to understand the world as it reflects the requirements of living in it" (p. 50). Building on Bruner's theoretical assertion, the subject program evolved in alignment with a definition of the humanities as the study of "human experience: what can happen to people and what people can do; possible ways of thinking, ways of feeling, and ways of speaking;

possible motives and possible values [. . .] humanity as a whole and [also] individual (though culturally embedded) human beings in all their immense diversity" (Wierzbicka, 2011: 36). This long-term study of the effects of literature in the workplace provides insights into the sustained collective impact born in a shared exploration of the humanities.

This work relies on multiple theoretical contexts for its design and implementation (Table 1). The humanities, and literary narrative in particular, constitute the philosophical ground for its design. Reading matters in an increasingly digital world (Pennington and Waxler, 2018), but reading alone is insufficient. Adult learning theory links directly to the humanities and also to well-developed theories supporting the need for lifelong learning in the 21st century. Recent advances in cognitive science have identified processes of enaction that stress the value of participatory sensemaking and emergence (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2008) as factors in addressing the complex conditions of contemporary workplaces.

Caracciolo (2012) summarized the potential of linking these broad theoretical contexts:

> [. . .] there are large dividends to be reaped for opening up the discussion of narrative and interpretation to the complexity of human cognition and meaning-making in all its forms. [. . .]

producing and receiving stories is one of the activities whereby human beings interpret—and therefore enact—the worlds they live in. (p. 21)

The Books@Work model

Books@Work recruits and coaches college and university professors to facilitate discussions of high-quality content with learners in non-traditional spaces: the workplace and the community. Using fiction and narrative non-fiction, participants investigate essential questions, explore diverse perspectives and life experiences, and bring their distinctive voices to the proverbial table. Programs vary by company, with groups discussing books weekly or bi-weekly or short stories monthly or periodically.

With a commitment to social change, Books@Work partners with companies to offer their least-educated employees an opportunity to read and discuss literature alongside the most-educated employees, using narrative texts to break down hierarchical barriers and boost individual and collective skills. Exploring human relationships through literature need not, and should not, be limited to managers; high-quality narrative literature invites *all* readers—from the management suite to the shop floor—to reflect on their own life experiences.

The central concept of this work lies in narrative itself—beginning with the text, extending to the shared stories of the gathered individuals, and ending with the collective language emerging from the group's ongoing and iterative interpretation and discussion. Unlike a college literature course, the narrative text in a Books@Work seminar is not "on the table" for examination and interpretation, but "at the table," offering both a perspective on the human condition *and* the conversational space to explore issues rarely addressed in workplace settings.

Since its inception, Books@Work has served over 7400 participants in 389 programs in 62 organizations in 24 US states and 11 foreign countries, led by 304 professors from 188 colleges and universities—demonstrating sufficient scale to support the findings of this study. Despite internal variation, the program represents only one approach to introducing the humanities to the workplace. Other approaches might provide additional insights or outcomes.

Methodology

The subject of this article is simultaneously an evidence-based practice and a practice-embedded study, with research as well as assessment implications (Smith and Nestor, 2017). We approach the practice through the lens of scientific inquiry, marrying theory, and participant experience to shape the curriculum, refine the practice, and capture learnings and insights. Surveys are conducted to compare outcomes prior to and after a program, and we conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews (in person, by video, or by phone) with as many participants as are available.

We approach the resulting data using grounded theory to discover insights from the data rather than prove a set of predetermined hypotheses (Charmaz, 2014). We systematically analyze, categorize, and condense the data to socially construct participant meaning and lived experience, allowing us to develop theories informed by participants' observations, as well as what *is happening* as a result of the individual and collective experience (Charmaz, 2014). In this article, we report on selected themes (particularly as they relate to the humanities) emerging from over 800 interviews with participants, professors, and supervisors conducted over the 6-year period since 2013. The participants interviewed range in age, culture, gender, and educational level and occupy roles from the shop floor or frontline to the executive suite in a broad array of industries, including manufacturing, distribution, health care, high-tech, professional services, nonprofit and government, among others.

Specifically, we have chosen to use examples from a subset of our data, interviews with 12 individuals, 7 chosen with intention and 5 at random. This data subset includes eight women and four men, with two managers, six professionals, and four frontline workers. Table 2 provides more detail about these individuals, including their gender, role, industry, and hierarchical level.

But Books@Work is not a randomly designed practice, being researched and assessed from a distance. Along with the research methodology, the program also grounds its practice methods in engaged scholarship and theory (Van de Ven, 2007). Because participants share their experiences with us, they become co-investigators as much as they are participants and informants. Importantly, this multi-layered approach reveals results that go beyond continuous improvement cycles within the practice to inform new theoretical and practical understandings of adult learning in the workplace.

Findings

Systematic analysis of data revealed two powerful findings about the impact of the humanities in the workplace:

1. Valuable human interactions emerge when participants engage in *questioning, listening, and connecting* during the literature discussions.
2. The processes of questioning, listening, and connecting influence the ways in which participants see themselves and each other at work, producing collective learning that promotes effective working relationships and *a novel form of collaborative literacy*.

Table 2. Informant demographics.

Disguised name	Male/female	Title/role	Industry	Hierarchical level
Shelly	Female	Systems analyst	Law firm	Professional
Tom	Male	Director of HR operations	Manufacturing	Manager/executive
Mary	Female	Contract worker-quality	Manufacturing	Frontline
John	Male	Analyst	Law firm	Professional
Julie	Female	Facility administrator	Health care	Professional/manager
William	Male	Shop floor	Distribution	Frontline
Katy	Female	Analyst	Health care	Professional
James	Male	Frontline	Manufacturing	Frontline
Susan	Female	Advance practice nurse	Urban hospital	Professional
Nancy	Female	Secretary	Law firm	Frontline
Lisa	Female	Technical writer	Manufacturing	Professional
Elizabeth	Female	Study nurse	University	Professional

Questioning, listening, and connecting

Participants consistently report that the literature discussion process reflects a unique combination of questioning, listening, and connecting. Although we can examine each of these three processes separately, they are woven throughout the experience and proceed in an iterative rather than a linear fashion.

The process of questioning seems commonplace enough. As Shelly described it, "We were able to have our say about how we felt about something or how we saw something and somebody else would give [another] perspective." Yet when questioning took place in a group setting, Shelly noted that it produced an openness to each other's ideas and differences that created a deeper learning experience for her:

> It was very interesting to see things through the group [...] I just think it made it a rounder, richer learning experience than what I'm used to. It's like practice makes perfect. It's hard to speak up in a meeting talking about business if you have a different idea or you disagree with an idea that's put forward. It's hard to stand up and say something different than [what] the group might think. I think with Books@Work [we were] able to just naturally do that.

Using literature as a focus, facilitated questioning allows individuals to explore complex ideas by sharing knowledge and perspectives while creating different types of learning. Tom noted that in the workplace there is

> this tendency to be so structured or always correct. It's just not life. [Now] there's more debate, more discussion [...] the dialogue with the team, it's more fresh, more of an openness. I think the more struggle we have, the better.

Mary described this as a new kind of learning: "[It] expands your knowledge in so many different ways than just reading that one story and understanding that one story. I just love how that created in us a new learning experience."

Many participants report that narrative discussion creates a safe way to consider difficult questions that are rarely addressed in the workplace. John said,

> [Discussing a book] gives an opening to talk about things that you wouldn't really be able to talk about otherwise. By introducing the topic via talking about the book, you're able to explore gender relations and things like that [...] where it may be more loaded, and more difficult and painful to talk about. I feel like [...] that's really helpful.

Julie stressed, "You can get two very different interpretations. It's like a conflict but not really a conflict, more like two different thought processes [...] And if there's two, there's more. So you've got to be way more open."

William likened the varied perspectives that emerge to tasting new kinds of food:

> Books@Work broadened me up a little bit. I thought I knew certain things, but it is like food. If you have never tasted it, you don't know. We are interacting with one another, we are learning something that we didn't know about a particular race or religion and just doing something different period.

In a similar way, Katy noted that the questions "get us thinking in different ways about solving problems."

This type of open-ended questioning requires active listening. Elizabeth defines active listening as trying to really understand someone: "I think listening to others' opinions, it's almost like [being] mindful. I'm really trying to understand why people are thinking the way they are." Active listening is not simply hearing what other people are saying; it is also listening to how they feel. As one CEO confirmed in a description of the program, "Before Books@Work, I would cognitively listen to what a colleague said, but I didn't appropriately listen to how he felt."

This seems to be particularly important when participants share unexpected points of view that cause others to re-examine their own thinking. James noted that listening more carefully to multiple perspectives gave him a

better understanding of others, but he also began to listen more humbly to his own views:

> We're finding a few things out about people we didn't know before, and some people's opinions, how they differ from others. Once you start seeing those different opinions, it makes you think, 'I kind of see it that way, too.' There's still learning in the session for us.

Careful listening seems to be at the heart of the narrative experience, as participants describe that their openness to each other is the foundation for changes in interpersonal dynamics. Susan said,

> I like hearing other staff perspectives on reading the same book and how different everybody's thoughts are. And now, I know more about them because you get a piece of everybody's personality and a little bit of their life during the program. And so, it's like they're more individuals than they were. Before you just would see them passing in the hall and now it's a little different relationship, which is kind of nice.

Through the knowledge, understanding, and perspectives being shared, participants find deeper connection to one another as well as a connection between the text, the discussion, and the workplace. Katy described how this happened for her:

> After Books@Work, I do see the assumptions we make about people—they might be intimidating or they're mean—and now they are not as scary as I thought. So it's not difficult to say I need to go talk to [that person]. It's helped build relationships in that regard. Actually one of my teammates that I'd felt that way about years ago [. . .] shared a lot of personal stuff and I was like Wow! Now I see her in a whole new light and there's a whole new respect for her and so I could actually see myself working with her now. I understand why she might react the way she reacts in certain situations.

In a similar way, Nancy stressed how discussions set the table for valuing co-workers differently:

> You see a different side of a co-worker than you might have seen before. That helps because we're all diverse and have different backgrounds. We all bring something different to the table [. . .] and I think that helps a lot.

Tom summarized the result of combined questioning, listening, and connecting when he said,

> I love that I am learning more about people. And they're infusing things about [the company] into the stories in a way that really is meaningful to the collective team, where at first it was completely about the story. So I think that's becoming more natural.

A new form of collaborative literacy

As we examined the results of questioning, listening, and connecting, the data pointed toward the positive impact of working together in the day-to-day life of the organization. The participants' shared narrative experiences not only brought them new ways of thinking as individuals; they also described collective changes that created different interactions that we began to see as a new form of collaborative literacy, a competency that enhanced their collective work. Participants asserted that their narrative discussions were leading them to enact new ways of working together as well. Lisa noted,

> You see a more human side. [. . .] it's really interesting to get to know even little things about somebody else through discussing a book and not a board meeting. An engineer that I'm working closely with on a project, he even said, 'Man, I just don't think we'd be as good friends without Books@Work'. And then after that we were working on a project together. It was really interesting. It was kind of like a nice segue way into working together.

Participants revealed the positive impact on the workplace when their connections to each other deepened, as when James said,

> It's [about] getting people thinking outside the box a little bit more. Also being able to understand you can get somebody else's perspective on this. 'Hey, what do you think about this or that?' And you get a pretty good understanding of working with those people. It makes it easier to deal with them every day, too.

Mary described a specific example of a change in work-related conversation as the result of narrative discussions:

> Having a relationship with [my co-workers] and feeling very comfortable with them, it's like now we can talk and we can begin the communication on equal pay within our ranks and equal opportunity for the guys and the girls here. I think that's an important conversation. If we want to create that culture of equality, we're gonna have to speak of equality. And wherever we can start that, that's where it needs to happen. And it's among [our group], who then in turn get empowered to talk among other people, about equality. I think that's an important thing. When you look at only one female machinist here at [the company], that's pretty significant.

More importantly, Mary brought her perspective from the shop floor to highlight the broader implications of new forms of learning and interacting (collaborative literacy) when she said,

> If we could take Books@Work plant-wide, we could really stop some of that stagnant learning and behavior and [learn] how to communicate better and share ideas more. Because

there's a lot of tribal knowledge here and we need to learn how to relate to some of the new people who are coming in and teach them this tribal knowledge. Unless you can converse with somebody and understand where somebody's coming from, they're not gonna share with you that tribal knowledge. That path isn't gonna open. You need something to open up the path. Some common denominator, some common ground to open up the path of communication. [. . .] And I think that that spurs you to want to learn, too, which is a good thing for [our company] because if you want to learn, you're going to be paying more attention to not just your job, but the jobs around yours.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that facilitated literature discussions (especially in non-traditional environments like the workplace) unlock the conversations people rarely find occasion to explore and help colleagues to make sense of the world they share. The findings not only illustrate this observation but also illuminate the mechanisms that contribute to the phenomenon. These discussions, grounded in narrative, build on a powerful interplay of questioning, listening, and connecting that encourages emotional awareness and social interaction (Illeris, 2014) and new forms of learning.

Questioning, listening, and connecting are such well-used terms that it might seem as if they hardly need theorizing. And yet, the power of these activities expressed in the findings reminds us that the simplest concepts are the hardest to explain, let alone to teach. Schein's conception of humble inquiry (2013) as an open, curious, and selfless act of trying to understand another's perspective can be a challenging starting point for someone schooled in asking pointed or purposeful questions. But a narrative text provides a critical platform to erase personal agendas and, as John explains, to enable an exploration of "more loaded, more difficult and painful" topics. By leveling the playing field—after all, the rare workplace counts "literature expert" among its hierarchy of titles—the humanities take participants back to the essentials, to seeing each other and themselves, as Katy describes, in a "whole new light."

Participant insights provide shape and context to the simple act of listening—from simply hearing to listening with the head and the heart (Garrison, 1996). Shared perspectives challenge our assumptions (Mezirow, 1990) and, as James points out, new perspectives cause us to revisit our own views, with sensitivity to what we offer and what we may have missed.

Although the findings demonstrate that questioning, listening, and connecting are iterative rather than linear processes, these are nonetheless distinct mechanisms that operate together to create the kind of high-quality connections that Dutton and Heaphy (2003) envision to scaffold more productive and positive workplaces. Our findings build on this vision, by illustrating that high-quality connections must first be constructed and that they cannot be formulaic. Rather, the connections our participants develop, fueled by their practice in "connecting" at a more personal level, are transferred and sustained beyond the literature discussions and into the stuff of everyday work. As Mary eloquently put it, the "tribal knowledge" of the workplace, the very heart of a company's organizational knowledge and processes, requires a "path" for sharing. "You need something to open the path."

Mary is not alone. Many participants reported their surprise and pleasure in finding that these discussions had an impact that reached well beyond the sessions themselves and strengthened the quality of interaction in their day-to-day work. This surprise highlights a powerful discovery and theoretical contribution: the collaborative approach to the text and the collective impact of the discussions interact to become a precursor to something even more powerful and more sustaining—a new kind of collaborative literacy built on the enactive nature of the Books@Work learning experience (Carraciolo, 2012).

Katy explains it well. Books@Work conversations helped her see people differently, challenging her assumptions about others. Replacing these assumptions with a deeper understanding of the motives and beliefs of other people helps her to "see" herself working with someone with whom she had not previously felt comfortable. Many participants reinforced this perception, as they thought about how their evolving assumptions carried over into solving work problems more effectively. And as James reminds us, "Once we have these different conversations, it may spark a different conversation later on."

This learning about ourselves and each other, unlike traditional modes of workplace learning, move well beyond training or knowledge development, what Delors (1996) calls "learning to do" and "learning to know"). As the outcomes and behaviors of a Books@Work session transcend the exercise to move into the workplace, they trigger more existential and interactive forms of learning, or what Delors (1996) calls "learning to be" and "learning to live together," a concept we interpret for workplace purposes as learning to "work" together. This being and working together provides the key drivers for effective collaboration. Recall Tom's insights: "I am learning more about people" and developing insights that are "meaningful to the collective team." Finally, he adds an uncanny illustration of this concept of an emerging literacy: "I think that's becoming more natural."

As we theorize about the collaborative literacy emerging from the sessions themselves, the continuing presence of the text deserves note. It is tempting to assume that the text has done its work, that it served as the diving board, and the group is now swimming together in life's complex waters. But it is not that simple. Even in her late-career perspectives in reader response theory, Rosenblatt (1982) theorized

the process of reading as the transaction between the text and the reader, still describing a bilateral, albeit interactive, relationship. Books@Work participants offer a third approach—a *collaborative* approach—that moves beyond the single reader experiencing a text to include a group of readers, each of whom experiences the same text but brings divergent contexts to understanding and absorbing it. And the collective in turn enriches the text. Julie's comments illustrate a recurring theme: another reader's different interpretation opens participants not only to new views of that reader but also to new views of the text itself. The ensuing return to the text becomes an exercise enabled by the humanities: deeper thinking, parsing meaning and active, real-time participatory sensemaking (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2008).

Finally, it is important to note that this collaborative literacy is *not* an individual ability but a collective competence. In fact, the collaborative or participatory sensemaking in a Books@Work session often augments or completely replaces the sensemaking that individuals bring into the session. Lisa's joy in discovering that the sharing of literature means the sharing of different interpretations led her to see that the views of others helped her to affirm and extend her own conclusions. Another participant, she explains, "might have gathered something really small that you didn't think about that changes your perspective. I loved that." And Julie, a health-care facility administrator, confirms Allison's observation: "When two people read the same thing, you can get two very different interpretations." Once she saw two, she became alert to the presence of still more perspectives that, at work, might first be viewed as conflict but that later become additional valuable insights in improving patient care outcomes. Her simple assertion, "You know [...] you've got to be way more open," reflects the important transfer of abilities from Books@-Work to a collaborating team or group.

Implications for future practice and research

This systematic qualitative study demonstrates the powerful results that can be achieved by bringing the humanities into the workplace. The program has had a broad geographical reach and has crossed many industries and contexts, as well as all levels of hierarchies in organizations. The consistent findings suggest important implications for theory, practice, and research in the humanities, adult learning, and workplace interventions to strengthen organizations and communities.

Efforts to address the "soft" skills needed in the workplace have rarely looked directly to the humanities as a source for developing the qualities of mind and interaction that are required in complex organizations. This study confirms that engagement with literature promotes the very sensibilities that companies seek: critical thinking and problem-solving through *questioning*; empathy and inclusion through active *listening*; and stronger and more effective social interactions through *connecting* with each other in meaningful conversation. Rather than being a learning activity separate from the life of work, these discussions have established a clear link between the shared exploration of human experience and the quality of the workplace as people learn to *be* and to live and *work together*.

It is important to note that, from the program's inception, Books@Work discussions have diverged from the way the humanities have generally been delivered in the academy to include a robust exploration of the life experiences of participants. It is that combination of text and experience that participants inevitably stress as the value of the program and that challenges educators to consider more creative ways to bring such an approach into non-traditional settings. As described earlier, narrative establishes a learning ground (Alheit, 2009) that has produced unexpected outcomes in the workplace.

Laura Baudot (2019), a Books@Work professor, describes her own insights that contributed to changed practice in her liberal arts college seminars. She writes:

> The activity of close reading no longer functioned simply as a way to teach the methods and rigors of a discipline. Rather, it was a critical skill and a life skill—a way to enrich experiences both of literature and of the world. What I sought to learn and to teach was integration. (pp. 26–27)

She suggests that a re-examination of theory in the humanities, in conjunction with new understandings of effective lifelong learning practice, may yield increased opportunities to bring the humanities into programming in varied communities of practice, including the academy itself.

The notion of collaborative literacy that emerges from this study holds promise as a novel approach to learning in multiple settings. It is, in fact, a literacy of collaboration involving complex elements of learning that includes cognitive awareness, emotional acuity, and specific types of social interaction. Further research is needed to define more fully what factors create and/or promote shared language and skills that participants have described as drivers of positive change in their day-to-day interactions and their effectiveness in the workplace. In addition, the findings of this article compel additional research into the generalizability of collaborative literacy in other programs as well in the academy, as Baudot (2019) suggests.

Conclusion

Books@Work represents a workplace learning initiative that engages the heart as well as the head, using stories to connect to emotions, insights, and other people. Toward the end of her career, Louise Rosenblatt (1982) reflected,

For years, I have extolled the potentialities of literature for aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating our world. (p. 276)

Both the *practice* and the *research* of workplace-based literature discussions support and deepen her theoretical insights and underscore the importance of a text in helping to catalyze a unique form of collaborative literacy.

Originally conceived as a program to advance the growth of individual participants, this approach to humanities in the workplace reveals that, when colleagues discuss stories and share their own life experiences, important collective changes also emerge. As part of a social learning process, the humanities drive deep collegiality, effective interpersonal interactions, and collaborative literacy. Collaborative literacy is, in fact, more than the collaborative approach to reading we found in the data. It is more than the synchronized practice of questioning, listening, and connecting, and it is more than the existential growth that comes from learning to be and learning to work together. Collaborative literacy is the collective ability or the competency to co-exist and co-create, to accept and manage difference, and to enact a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. This ongoing study demonstrates that the humanities help us be better together.

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