

More than “just a little library program”:
Discourses of power in One Book, One Community programming committees
(Report of AHRC research grant)
Submitted: 13 May 2010

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More than “just a little library program”:

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Abstract:

This article looks at issues of power in the relationships between the organizers of three city-wide book reading projects on the one hand, and their communities, funders, and partners on the other. We contend that a discourse of “organizational legitimacy” emerges from an analysis of discussions with the organizers of the reading programs. Organizational legitimacy here demonstrates that the power effects are self-regulated, as well as externally introduced, and that it has both strategic and ideological implications.

Our identification and subsequent analysis of this specific discourse was achieved through the application of a critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993) designed to locate power and privilege in the production and reproduction of discursive language. We expand this analysis to employ a Foucauldian understanding of power in our analysis of the management strategies of libraries and partner organizations in book reading projects. Emerging from the discursive language highlighted in our analysis is a discourse of legitimacy reflective of a broader social discourse of capitalism. This discourse highlighted participation, democratic process, and funding concerns for individual participants as they tried to explain, describe, rationalize or question the “legitimacy” of their organization or initiative. This approach problematizes legitimacy as a discourse and allows for connections between the broader social discourse and the enactment of discourse at the local level.

Keywords: organizational legitimacy, One Book, One Community reading programs, discourse analysis

I hate to tell people [this] because it sounds so undemocratic but basically we just said, “Oh, Chris, what do you think of this?” “Oh! That’s a great one! Let’s do that.” I mean, no one *cared*; you know – it was just this little library program.

–Co-founder Nancy Pearl on explaining how books were chosen for the *What if all of Seattle were to read the same book?* program

Introduction

In 1996, Chris Higashi, along with her colleague Nancy Pearl, the voice of Seattle’s literary scene, initiated the *One Book, One Community* (OBOC) reading program movement. The model that began as “What if all of Seattle were to read the same book?” has been adapted or adopted by more than 400 cities and regions in the US and Canada, and extends across the Pacific to Brisbane and the Atlantic to the UK, Germany and Denmark.¹ The number of programs is itself indicative of the importance to any contemplation of contemporary print culture. For the readers of *Logos*, in particular, the OBOC phenomenon demands attention because the books that are selected as “the book everyone should read” result in large sales. In this article, we analyze the “discourse” about how those books are selected. Using the research method of discourse analysis, we illustrate how books are selected based on issues of power. “Discourse” is more than a set of vocabulary that characterizes a particular perspective; rather, discourses function to impose social order (Foucault, 1966), or in this case, order upon organizations that produce reading programs and individuals within those organizations that create the programs. We argue that this method of thinking about the book selection process allows professionals and scholars, alike, an

¹ See, for example, the cities, regions or states involved in the USA (<http://www.read.gov/resources/>); One Book, One Vancouver (Canada) (<http://www.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/MDC/onebookonevancouver.html>); Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge (Canada) (<http://oboc.ca/>); Brisbane, Australia (http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:BASE::pc=PC_2354).

opportunity to interrogate and critique norms and assumptions that have an impact on how we all think about books and reading programs.

While the local settings and the organizational committees of OBOCs vary, the programs generally follow the same foundational format created by Higashi and Pearl. Citizens of a city, region or sometimes, nation, are encouraged to read and discuss the same book. The selected book is usually, but not always, a work of literary fiction. Related events can include anything from pub-crawls to bus tours around a book's locations, to on-line discussions and television shows and theatre performances. Some programs even include overnight campouts (One Book, One Vancouver) or canoe treks (One Book, One Community—Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge, Ontario).

In this article, we aim to demonstrate how discourse analysis of city-wide reading programming committee interviews and discussions illustrate that these popular and important reading initiatives are much more than Pearl's modestly self-labelled "little library program" (personal communication, 6 June, 2006). While the programs are influenced by the globalized publishing structure that have re-shaped the literary-cultural field during the last twenty years (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Murray, 2004; Scott, 2009; Striphas, 2009; Wright, 2007), we use discourse analysis to expose the power over the book selection and the events that take place. The results can have large economic repercussions for the book's author and publisher, and for the meanings appointed to reading in each location.

While the scale and explicit aims of the programs otherwise differ, as do the agencies involved, all projects work to enable reader participation.² Funding structures and

² The findings presented in this article are part of *Beyond the Book*, an interdisciplinary, trans-national analysis of mass reading events and the contemporary meanings of reading in the UK, USA and Canada, which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council 2005-8. The study's focal point is the city- and nation-wide reading groups inspired by Oprah's Book Club and the proliferation of shared reading programs. The reading events we are interested in include those that fit into the 'One Book, One Community' model, such as

government policy influence the agendas and shape of different events; however, in Canada, the UK, and the US, cultural policy is currently being driven by the notion that expanding participation in cultural events increases the cultural and social capital of citizens, thereby producing socially responsible and politically engaged citizens (Florida, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Hermes & Dahlgren; 2006). The governments' agenda for cultural policy and planning is motivated by the search for an effective means of state intervention in an era of globalization. There is also the belief, informed by recent research on cultural citizenship, that if you get more people reading and sharing their reading experiences, then you'll have citizens who are not only more literate or better educated but who are also more likely to invest time in local social and political issues (Jeannotte, 2005; Murray, 2003). In the UK cultural activities are also viewed as an important means of re-generating and re-branding cities – Bristol's Great Reading Adventure, for example, is one project among several that are managed by the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership, an alliance of public and private sector agencies that were charged with the task of delivering a roster of cultural events under the umbrella title "Creative Bristol 2008."³ What concerns us is how far these top-down agencies, ideological imperatives and economically-driven factors influence what actually happens "on the ground". The relationships among some of the committee members provide useful examples of the intricate power struggles among volunteers, employees, government, and other supporters. Using Van Dijk's (1993) principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, we

'One Book, One Chicago,' 'One Book, One Vancouver,' or 'Liverpool Reads.' In the larger project, a multi-disciplinary team employed mixed methods including on-line surveys, focus groups with readers, interviews with event organisers, and participation-observation of events in order to investigate shared reading as a social practice and to examine the power relations among the various agents involved in selected reading events. See <http://www.beyondthebookproject.org>.

³ See <http://www.bristolreads.com/>, <http://www.lostworldread.com/>, and http://www.bac2010.co.uk/great_reading_adventure.htm. The Creative Bristol 2008 webpage is no longer active. See instead: <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/leisure-and-culture/local-history-and-heritage/>

argue that the power in the relationships among the various paid and volunteer workers who organize the events largely reflects the economic pressures present in contemporary cultural industry structures and policy. Within this context, we identify that these relationships reflect the application of specific discourses of power that serve to position organizations and relationships within a broader context of capitalism and socio-cultural development.

Defining “discourse” and “Discourse”

As Alvesson and Karreman (2000) illustrate, “discourse is a popular term used in a variety of ways, easily leading to confusion” (p. 1125). The confusion arises, to some degree, because the term discourse has been used, almost interchangeably, with a number of other terms related to the communication of meanings within organizations including organizational rhetoric, language, narratives, vocabularies, scripts, or conversations. There are also a variety of methods used in relation to this analytic approach (Benwell, 2009; Philips & Hardy, 2002). These methods may include textual analysis, interpretation of symbols and deconstruction of narratives, among others. As well, there exist two dominant, but quite distinct, approaches to understanding organizational discourse. These are:

the study of the social text (talk and written text in its social action contexts) and the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained (the shaping of social reality through language). The former approach highlights the ‘talked’ and ‘textual’ nature of everyday interaction in organization. The latter focuses on the determination of social reality through historically situated discursive moves. (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1126).

It is the second of these approaches, the study of social reality as discursively constructed and maintained, that is the focus of this paper. This connection between language, meaning and individual action provides a useful framework for examining the power effects of the language of legitimacy in relation to individuals and organizations. In this case, the term discourse draws upon the Foucauldian tradition, which defines discourse as “a set of ideas

and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomena” (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 253). Foucault’s analysis aims to discover how discourses come into being, and how they are translated into effects, such as control (McHoul & Grace, 1997). From this perspective, a discourse is historically situated, and specific rules govern and structure it (Prasad, 2005). The Foucauldian perspective advocated in this paper builds on earlier work (i.e., Holtzhausen, 2000; Motion, 2005) that suggests the need for a Foucauldian lens to challenge traditional views of public relations practice and traditional understandings of relationships and stakeholder management. Motion (2005) uses Foucault in her study of participative public relations to problematize idealized notions of stakeholder engagement and participation. In a similar vein, we see the value of extending this analysis to address the importance of managing stakeholder relationships, not only in terms of funding, but in relation to the organizational legitimacy that this discourse provides.

A discourse analysis of organizational legitimacy

In this analysis we contend that a discourse of organizational legitimacy emerges from the discussions we had with program organizers. Organizational legitimacy here demonstrates the power effects of order and control with both strategic and ideological implications. Our identification and subsequent analysis of this specific discourse was achieved through the application of a critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993) designed to locate power and privilege in the production and reproduction of discursive language. By focussing on language and power as central to the analysis, this method creates a bridge between the broader socio-cultural discourse and the local sites of our study.

Critical discourse analysis as a method has emerged as a response to the inability of traditional discourse analysis to deal with the issue of organizational power. This method builds on the social constructionist perspective of discourse analysis to specifically address the issues of inequality, dominance and legitimation reproduced through language (Van Dijk,

1993, p. 249). To that end, techniques of critical discourse analysis are most useful in their ability to analyse the role of “language, language use, discourse or communicative events in the (re)production of dominance and inequality” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 279).

Our analysis of the relationships between the different community, corporate and government players involved in the book reading programs focuses on interviews from three OBOC programs. Purposive sampling methods were used to recruit the committee members. Anyone involved in the production and implementation of the book program was approached for an intensive interview. While there were nine research sites in our study, we have chosen one from Canada, one from the USA, and one from the UK to illustrate our arguments: Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge, Canada; Huntsville (AL), USA; and Bristol, UK. The authors have selected these particular locations for analysis because of the differences in committee goals and composition. Including sites in different countries illustrates that the economic imperatives are consistent in Western capitalistic societies where funding for cultural programming is in competition with other social programs. The text of these interviews was analyzed from a post-structuralist perspective, employing a method of critical discourse analysis. As context is an important aspect of discourse analysis, it is important for us to acknowledge the background stories of these three programs.

Bristol’s region-wide program represents well the UK’s move from public funding to private agencies and public-private partnerships. As an initiative of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP), *The Great Reading Adventure* “aims to bring communities together, highlight the value of literacy and raise awareness of local history” (briefing document). While the program is implemented primarily by libraries in the region, it is organized by the husband and wife team of Andrew and Melanie Kelly. Financial support comes from BCDP (Arts Council England, South West, Bristol City Council, and Business West). The *Great Reading Adventure* 2006 included 15 centres across England’s South West

region as part of the year-long Brunel 200 celebrations with Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* as the featured text.⁴ In 2007, the regional program became *Small Island Reads* to reflect the expansion of the project to include cities and villages spanning from Bristol to Liverpool, Hull and Glasgow. Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* were selected as the featured books.

Negotiating a special cost with publishers, readers who participated in *The Great Reading Adventure* (or its different iterations) received free copies of the selected books from advertised distribution points, including libraries, book stores and work places. In 2006, almost 18,000 free copies of the Penguin Classic edition were provided to libraries for loan, and another 22,000 books were purchased for schools and colleges, and the general public. Bristol and Bath's *Venue* magazine also acts as a promotional vehicle for the program by distributing free copies of the book. The *Bristol Evening Post* supports the annual project in-kind by serialising specially-commissioned abridged versions of some of the chosen books during the first week of the project.

Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge One Book One Community (K/W/C OBOC) encompasses three small cities in southern Ontario that have a combined population of 440,000. Unlike many other OBOC programs in North America, the instigator of the program comes from the private sector. Tricia Siemens, the owner of Waterloo's independent bookstore Words Worth Books, appears to have the perfect combination of social and cultural capital, local knowledge and creative energy required by agencies that wish to promote reading as a community-building activity.

Unlike many OBOC programs in North America that are championed by public libraries, K/W/C OBOC is unusual in that it is organised by a more informal coalition of local

⁴ Brunel 200 was funded by The National Lottery through Arts Council England and the Millennium Commission Heritage Lottery Fund.

agencies that includes public librarians, independent booksellers, representatives from the municipal government and the editors of the literary journal *The New Quarterly*. These agencies, working through an organizing committee, combine their expertise in book programming with local knowledge of community cultures and social networks. Thus, the program depends for its success on both public money and private capital, paid and unpaid labour, to stage activities. The librarians and ex-teachers on the organizing committee of K/W/C OBOC cherish the ideal of increasing print literacy. However, the collectively negotiated vision for their program as articulated by its instigator, Tricia Siemens, is to “build community through reading.”

The Big Read in Huntsville and Madison County, Alabama, is part of the The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Big Read Program.⁵ Former NEA chairman, Dana Gioia, and a staff of less than five created *The Big Read* program in response to a study that claimed that reading for “pleasure and enlightenment” in the US is “in crisis” (NEA, 2005). Less than two months after the 2004 *Reading at Risk* study was released, calls for grant proposals were sent, and by the end of the year, ten cities were chosen to pilot the program. Today, the project helps to fund nearly 300 reading programs across the US.⁶ The Huntsville – Madison County Library was one of the first programs to receive funding through *The Big Read* program.⁷

The library serves Madison County, where the population is a little more than 300,000. While the residents of the area were quick to tell researchers that the area is not the

⁵ See <http://www.neabigread.org/>.

⁶ See <http://www.neabigread.org/communities.php> for more details.

⁷ Important to note in terms of the global reach of these program is the announcement that the Huntsville – Madison County Library was chosen to facilitate the 2009 program with a library in Egypt. “Madison County is one of only four communities nationwide piloting this Global Exchange Initiative, which is sponsored in part by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. As these U.S. communities study *The Thief and the Dogs*, four Egyptian communities are presenting parallel The Big Reads in Egypt in 2008-9” (<http://huntsvillereads.org/>).

typical south, there are stereotypical generalizations that are evident to those who are outsiders to the region. These include the pervasiveness of the Christian religion, evident in the everyday language of the residents, the abundance of outdoor advertising promoting a variety of churches, and the fact that this was the only location in our research where the young people openly denied reading Harry Potter. Also obvious was the kindness the residents show visitors, and the politeness of genteel rituals, such as presenting flowers and punch bowls at an afternoon lecture.

In 2006, three librarians and one public relations professional staged the Huntsville Big Read. This was the first year they were funded by a NEA Big Read Grant. The four previous years, *Get into Reading*, as the program was called, was managed by the same small committee who chose the books, planned the program, wrote and distributed the promotional material and reader's guides, and facilitated the events. This included film screenings, art competitions, book group discussions and historical re-enactments. The NEA funding provided financial fuel that allowed the group to continue with the programming that one librarian involved said, is "a unique way that people from different walks of life, different parts of the community, could connect."

Methodology

The question of power in the language of organizational legitimacy is central to this study, and critical discourse analysis offers insight into the dynamics of power, knowledge and ideology that surround discursive processes (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 20). Further, critical discourse analysis is uniquely suited to this particular study as a method that allows for a "close examination of the relationship between discourse and power" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258) and an investigation of the contextual aspects of the process of organizational legitimacy. At the same time, the analysis of discourse demands a focus on language that highlights the reflexivity of discursive processes (Putnam, 2005). The analytic

categories that emerge through a discourse analysis of language and text reflect the subjective reality of those involved in the study.

Linda Putnam's (2005) guiding principles for conducting discourse analysis provided a starting point for this analysis: 1) Let the text and context talk to you, 2) Work back and forth between the text and the concepts, 3) Look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences and 4) Dispute your own interpretation and explanation (p. 28). Although these elements provide an appropriate introduction to the analysis, they do not, as described above, reflect the central interest in power and privilege required by a critical discourse analysis. Therefore, this research incorporates the work of Van Dijk (1993) and Phillips and Hardy (2002) to build on Putnam's model, explicitly to add a critical focus. The revised principles reflect this as:

- 1) Let the text and context talk to you; identify language and power and how these elements are privileged in the context of their production.
- 2) Work back and forth between the text and the concepts, reflecting the use of power, privilege and access to discourse which inform broader knowledge/power relationships.
- 3) Look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences, including language that silences other perspectives and marginalizes groups or individuals.
- 4) Dispute your own interpretation and explanation with attention to reflexivity that acknowledges the researcher's own sense making and participation in the production of discourse.

Text and context

The first step in analysing the text from interviews was to become immersed in the content of the text and identify elements of the discourse that might represent patterns.

Emergent patterns reflected elements such as examples of decision-making processes related

to the choosing of books and the staging of events, lived experiences in terms of developing and evaluation of the project, and the rationalizations of decisions made by individuals, partners and funding organizations. We have also attempted to highlight the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) provided by participants in the study that contributed to the establishment of context for this analysis.

Work back and forth between the text and the concepts

As Putnam (2005) argues, “Working back and forth between the text and the concepts keeps inferences about discourse patterns close to the observations of the data” (p. 29).

Therefore, at this point in the analysis, we were concerned with moving beyond an analysis of the language reflected at the local site of this discourse, the organization, and connecting the themes that had emerged to a broader discourse of legitimacy. This focus is important from a Foucauldian perspective as it serves to locate the language of legitimacy represented at the local level within the broader discourse operating at a socio-cultural level.

Look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences

Putnam describes inconsistencies as “contradictions that appear in the text and call for the researcher to question the data” (p. 25). These presented opportunities for the researchers to address puzzles presented in the data. Inconsistencies in this case referred both to contradictions in text provided by individual participants, as well as contradictions found between different participants, projects, or locations.

Dispute your own interpretation and explanation

In this final guiding principle, Putnam argues that “discourse analysts need to make decisions based on coherence among analytic schemes, evidence drawn from the texts, and interpretations that resonate with the situation” (p. 29). To that end, we adopted an approach of questioning interpretations in an effort to eliminate explanations that did not resonate with insight drawn from other sources, the context of the research sites, or the theoretical

framework of the study. This principle also served to illustrate the reflexive nature of the analysis and challenged the researchers to acknowledge our own role in the production of this study.

Analysis & Discussion

Emerging from the discursive language highlighted in our analysis is a management discourse of legitimacy reflective of a broader social discourse of capitalism. This discourse comprised a number of themes that individual participants in our study invoked to explain, describe, rationalize or question the legitimacy of their organization or initiative. Specifically, these themes were participation, democratic process, and funding.

Participation as legitimacy

The discursive power of a language of legitimacy is not a new phenomenon among public sector and not-for-profit organizations. As pointed out by Gerwin (1993), the local administrative bodies of government and not-for-profit organizations can acquire legitimacy through citizen participation. As a result, the practice of focusing on numbers of participants and / or partners can be an important aspect of relationship building between these organizations.

Organizational legitimacy for these reading programs is dependent on partnerships. Partners offer external endorsement. The relationships expand to create networks that further legitimize the reading programs. In K/W/C, for example, previous attempts to engage the community in the reading program had been unsuccessful. As one organizer explained, “It’s a lot of work to publicise your event, to get readers, to co-ordinate everything and then not to have people come. It’s a situation that we did not want to find ourselves in again, but with the support of the newspaper, with the support of *The Record* [local newspaper], there was a kind of synergy that took place... Our first meetings were much larger than just the other

librarians – there were members of the city who were in it So we had a very successful first year” (personal communication, Angela Caretta, 3 July, 2003).

The community newspaper figured as a key partner in the Bristol project as well. According to one of the organizers, the synergy that results through support from a local media outlet is imperative to the success of the program.

Our profile is much higher in so many ways and the Great Reading Adventure has been a great help to us in that way because you know the Evening Post mentioning libraries so positively all the time, it’s been really good for us... And [the Evening Post] is increasingly pushing their role as sort of campaigning through community newspaper. Not just reporting on the city, they’re actually involved... They’re not just reacting, they’re actually proactive... Obviously, it’s to their advantage to push things that push literacy but they’re sort of genuinely interested in getting involved. (Cynthia Martin, personal communication, 20 April, 2005).

In this excerpt, the role of the *Evening Post* as both a benefactor of the project and a vested beneficiary of the project offers some insight into the importance of the partnership. There is recognition that visibility and media endorsement are key to establishing the legitimacy of the program within the eyes of the broader community. Although the obvious benefits of increased community literacy to the paper are acknowledged, this is put into a context of that organization being “genuinely interested” and involved. A mutually beneficial relationship has therefore emerged between the paper and the reading project.

The reliance on partnerships within the broader community was emphasised at other sites. In the instances of communities that received funding from The Big Read, the (US) nation-wide NEA program, organizers had to prove partnership support in order to garner funding. Indeed, as [former] NEA Director of The Big Read David Kipen and Acting Director, Deputy Director for Museum Services and Director for Strategic Partnerships for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (a partner in The Big Read), Marsha Semmel, described in the excerpt below, the number of partnerships (or organized groups participating in the NEA-sponsored program) took on an important significance as they increased in

Topeka (Kansas). The ways in which the organizations participate vary, but it is the quantitative reporting of their involvement that appears to represent a powerful element of the project's evaluation (and hence, future funding).

Interviewer: Could we talk a little bit about what your expectations were of the different communities that won the pilot round? I mean, you've been talking quite a bit about how you wanted to give them a certain amount of freedom, but did you have – I mean, presumably you had a certain set of goals or things you wanted them to achieve?

David: Well, the thing we wanted to see most in looking over the – in having our panel look over the applications – was the partnerships and sure enough, that's been borne out in the results. Because, you know, the fact that I can go to Topeka, and from the Public Library, to the Historic Site where [Brownview] Board of Education was first brought to court, to looking around and seeing all these billboards around town. Our principal expectation was not so much for any specific program, although inevitably book discussion groups were going to outnumber, if not outshine, everything else that we were doing. But no, what we wanted to make sure was that they were doing a diverse bunch of events and they were bringing in as many partners as possible. And the figures for Topeka are just staggering; I mean, it's just like triple figures! 150 partners?! Retirement homes; convalescent homes – I mean, you know, participating to various extents, but the fact that they could tally it up that way and come up with a figure like that was just staggering to us!

Marsha: So, the first year, she has ten community and corporate partners; the second year, she had about fifteen, and the third year, she had – is this what she just said? Over 120.... This jump, yeah, it was this jump because, you know, we required it, and then, when she was able to go to partners and say, "Hey the National Endowment for the Arts is partnering with us in this community." It just made them that much more likely to – I wouldn't say it legitimized it, but it kind of made it more exciting. (Personal Communication, 25 May, 2006).

Interestingly, Marsha said in the last sentence, "I wouldn't say it legitimized it," however, the context of the language and presentation of the quantitative evaluation in the previous two sentences certainly privileges that piece of information with the discussion of the Topeka program.

Democratic process as legitimacy

The theme of democracy in planning and executing the book programs was an important one in the interviews we analysed. Nevertheless, it did present challenges for our

participants as they attempted to reconcile their actual processes with what they understood to be a more legitimate approach. In our introduction, we provide a quotation that hints at the origins of the selection process for the Seattle book process: “I hate to tell people [this] because it sounds so undemocratic but basically we just said, ‘Oh, Chris, what do you think of this?’ ‘Oh! That’s a great one! Let’s do that.’” Pearl’s statement illustrates recognition of the discursive power of democratic process in terms of legitimating a decision-making process. Although the program was (and remains) successful, the founder qualifies her statement against potential, and in her view, justifiable, claims about the legitimacy of her choice.

In Huntsville, Alabama, library staff Mary Wallace and Judy Purinton described the process whereby they moved away from a community-based committee providing input on book selection to a small internal committee that makes the decision in a much less participative way.

Mary: Yeah, the first year we did have people on our planning committee from the community, because we had some teachers and scholars and somebody else – I can’t even remember who all was on the committee. But we held all the events and we did all the publicity and all that kind of stuff. But, um...but we haven’t even had anybody from the outside on the committee since then, have we?...I think because having no budget that a lot of times we – we fly by the seat of our pants. We do it at the last minute, and so we – you know, you just have to do it quickly. And so, um, there isn’t really time to get a lot of input from the community...And honestly, that first year was sort of painful with having all these different people – we spent how many meetings trying to decide what we were gonna read? At least four meetings. I mean, and we were just like, “We’ve gotta decide, y’all! We’ve gotta just pick one at this point!” You know, because everybody was really passionate about a certain book and maybe *that* was why: we didn’t want to go through that again, you know, without having this big epic battle about what we were going to read because that took more time than anything else, just deciding what we were going to read.

... the paper did this front-page article about, you know, “What does the community want to read?” And I don’t think we even took that into consideration, what the community wanted to read. They did this big article, and then I think we decided on our own anyway, didn’t we?

Judy: Yup, I think so. [laughing]

Mary: Because we were still going round and round, you know, with that.

Judy: Yup, and the decision was made like [snapping her fingers]!

Mary: Yeah, and then it was still this big discussion and we were like, “We’re reading *All the King’s Men*. It’s over. The people have spoken!”

In this exchange, the organizers rationalize their decision to abandon the community-based committee in a couple of interesting ways. By invoking a discourse of efficiency, around time-frames and the need for a strategic decision, they provide a critique of the original more democratic process as an ineffective process. Not only was the process time-consuming, in the end it did not lead to the desired group decision. Pressures of time and money lead to a quick decision. It is ironic that in Mary’s final pronouncement, she justifies the final decision with, “the people have spoken!”

In each of these examples, organizers have attempted to reconcile discursively the discrepancy between what is viewed as a generally desired quality of democratic involvement with the inability of this process to support a dominant discourse of efficiency and productivity. In this final excerpt Mary describes how she plans to involve more community partners in the process in the future, because it is a requirement of the funding process.

Mary: But, um – but we *are* going to do that this year; we’re going to include people from the community on this planning committee. Um, we’ve got at least three or four different people we’ve isolated that we want to ask, we just haven’t gotten around to it yet. So, but we’re going to try to do that partly because we did have so many community partners this year that it would be helpful to people from those organizations on our planning committee just to ease up communication, for no other reason. But also just to have those, you know, firm up the support from those different organizations, also.

Interviewer 1: And what kinds of organizations are they?

Mary: Um...the newspaper because they were a big reason why we succeeded this year, I feel like. The, uh, universities, both U.A.H., Alabama A & M; we want some teachers from the local city school system; then also some local writers, as well, um, community people.

Interviewer 2: Um-hum. Was that part of something that you wrote into the grant that you were going to take advantage of, of community partners?

Mary: It was a requirement...There was a whole section that you had to answer, you know, what partners you would have, how were they going to be involved, how were they going to support you. You had to include letters of support from these organizations in your grant proposal. So...yeah, they didn't – they really were stressing, um, partnerships and, uh, not just from organizations but individuals, volunteers, all that kind of stuff – which we used. I mean, we wouldn't have pulled it off if we hadn't have had all of these volunteers.

Mary's discourse illustrates an interesting overlap between the two themes of funding and democratic process in establishing the legitimacy of a book project. In order to be legitimate in the eyes of the funders, partnerships play a determining role in the democratic process.

Funding as legitimacy

Bristol's Great Reading Adventure depends on local, regional and national government and not-for-profit organizations for funding, which fall under the umbrella organization of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership. Nearly all of the promotional material for the program highlights these partnerships. For example, a 2006 Briefing Document legitimizes the program by noting the following:

The Great Reading Adventure is organised by Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (Arts Council England, South West, Bristol City Council, Business West). It forms part of the Creative Bristol initiative, which aims to deliver as much of the programme contained in Bristol's bid to be Capital of Culture as possible. Projects include a focus on Bristol creativity and the arts in 2005, the 200th anniversary of the birth of Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 2006 and a celebration of diversity in 2007.

Melanie Kelly, a principal in the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP), identified some of the conflicts involved in evaluating projects based on quantitative statistics. In a discussion about legitimizing the program, she noted that "There's no way we could do statistical generalizable analysis, but just having some of those numbers is helpful we're particularly interested in how people experience this. Not so much the numbers. The numbers are helpful for policy, of course, and for funding, but when you get down to it it's having the first book being checked out at a new library branch be the book of your choice or the Bristol book" (personal communication, 20 April, 2005). Because the BCDP is the

primary organizer, they have the power to legitimize the program with numbers while also achieving their qualitative goals.

Because they are financially dependent on the The Big Read Grant, Huntsville's reading program is ideal for illustrating the power in partner relationships. The perceived legitimacy is necessary to secure matching funds for the book project.

Mary: [This] is a very common thing in the grant-making community... they want matching funds because apparently that makes you more credible. If you can get funds from more than one funder, then that – your project is more worthwhile, it's more - then you're a more reputable grantee.

Funding is clearly identified as a key indicator in the value and importance of a project. The power within successful relationships with funding agencies is then compounded in that not only does one relationship with one agency result in funds that legitimate the project, it also provides the foothold from where future funding can be accessed, and so on.

Power effects in terms of order and discipline identified through the development of relationships with funders have clear implications for decision-making around cultural issues (such as book content, for example). Again, we turned to Mary and Judy to illustrate our argument. In this exchange, the discussion turns to the prescribed list of books that the NEA's Big Read requires. Organizers choose one text from the list.

Interviewer 1: I was curious about that list, especially in relation to the choices that you'd made before. I mean you'd done – to your credit, you'd tried different kinds of books, which is pretty brave, really, because you'd hadn't gone the path of "Let's just pick classics every year." So did you feel – I just wondered how, when you first saw that list, how people had felt *about* that list because it was – it is a kind of list of modern classics, isn't it?

Mary: Right, right. It is. Um...I like all four books. I had not *read* all four books at the time; I'd only read two of the books although I've since read all of them. But, um, and we came up with pretty good ideas for all of them, actually, but, um – but I guess I was just so focused on getting that money, I didn't care *what* they threw at me. I was just like, "Put four books on a piece of paper; I'll come up with some kind of idea. I want that \$25,000!" But, uh...I mean, [to Judy] did *you* like the choices? Did you think it was good?

Judy: I thought it was a good variety; I mean, it was kind of a futuristic kind of thing, with *Fahrenheit 451*, and I just thought, “That’s what we’ll have to do. They won’t want to do anything else.” But, you know, like you said, we had the programs, and we had that hook that Zelda was born in Alabama, so that was kind of a –

Interviewer 2: Yeah, so it was a regional –

Judy: –and we just went out from there.

The balance between the importance of funding and the corresponding lack of control of content are highlighted in this excerpt. The librarians didn’t question the prescribed list of books to choose from because the committee felt they could find regional links that would support programming. More importantly, the program’s funding, and thus its future, was secure.

Legitimacy problematized within the text

Implicit in the themes discussed above is a tension (at each of the research sites) between the need for predominantly quantitative data to legitimize projects and the underlying objectives that lend themselves more to qualitative interpretation. The discourse of organizational legitimacy has produced, and is producing, a framework that requires criteria consistent with a traditional capitalist discourse of efficiency and productivity. Quantitative measurement of funds received, numbers of participants, etc. have eclipsed the associated questions of socio-cultural development, the needs and corresponding impact of the book project within communities, and the importance of reading for the quality of life. For example, a lack of quantifiable participation in adult programming has led to a dramatic reduction of services in Cambridge, one of the small cities in the greater K/W/C region. According to a librarian in the area, Cambridge is economically not as strong as the other two cities. She said, “we have a very high level of adults who have not completed high school, so our job is to get people into the library and to circulate books. We only program for children under 13... any adult programming was stopped— I’d say 15 or 20 years ago— because it

just did not bring in the numbers of people that the work warranted” (personal communication, Angela Caretta, 3 July, 2003). The articulation of her job as “to get people into the library and to circulate books” highlights the struggle to justify work in literacy and cultural programming within a broader context that demands quantifiable outcomes and efficiency in terms of investment. This tension is even more clearly articulated by one of the women who actually started the OBOC phenomenon. According to Nancy Pearl, the quantitative justification to funding agencies is the “worst part” of the project:

To *me*, these projects are *impossible* to evaluate. I mean, you can’t quantify; I mean, you could say, “Oh, we had 2000 people at these programs but that doesn’t speak to – you know, it’s not qualitative. What you would want to get at is: how did reading this book affect your life? Um, and I don’t know that that’s *ever* gonna be – I mean, that’s why in some ways it’s just so interesting that it’s so popular – this project is so popular and yet *nobody* can tell you what it does. ...I think that people want to say, “Oh, this made our community a better place and here’s why.” You know? But I’m actually [unsure] in any way that, you know, that you can put a number to it. And maybe that’s the nature of reading or the nature of the arts. (personal communication, 6 June, 2006)

Even in the case where democratic process emerged as an important element of legitimacy for these organizations, the operationalization of this theme within the projects themselves actually resulted in the need for perceived democracy rather than actual practice. When capitalist elements of efficiency and productivity were in danger of being compromised, savvy project coordinators quickly changed approaches to move more in-line with the more accepted discursive practices.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

The relationships that have developed between the not-for-profit organizations studied here, their funding agencies, and community partners operate within a management discourse of organizational legitimacy with associated power effects. The power implications of this discourse as it is produced by, and also produces, the organizations within it demonstrate far-

reaching effects in terms of not only the financial and logistical aspects of the initiative, but the ideological outcomes as well. The application of critical discourse analysis as a method in this article offers some insight into the ways in which power is distributed through the relationships associated with the book reading projects featured here. By maintaining a focus on language and the power effects of that language within relationships, we have offered a discussion of the discursive effects of broader discourse, like capitalism, on the enactment of discourse at the local level. Limitations of this approach mean that although our analysis of three research sites offers insight into some interesting questions of power and legitimacy, the much focused nature of the study limits the generalizability of our results across the sector more broadly. Nevertheless, several important themes have emerged here and warrant further study in the context of the discursive effects of broader social discourse on community development.

The organizers emphasised the importance of external forces such as funding parameters, access to the grant-making networks, external perception of the legitimacy of the organization, and the integration of participants through democratic processes as key elements in their decision making. These factors influence the nature and number of relationships that are essential in establishing a legitimate book reading project. They also serve to highlight which partners are more powerful within the relationships and how this power influences programming at local sites.

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