



Reading and Reader Development: The Pleasure of Reading

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New to Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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The introductory line about predictions of reading dying will inspire those who have paid the hefty cost of this book (and who, presumably know all about that subtitle) to shout back in good pantomime fashion, 'Oh no it isn't!' And of course the authors are celebrating what they term a 'reading renaissance'. In nine sections they use extensive quotations from leading practitioners in the book world to provide a very up-to-date view of stirring developments, which include much public sponsoring of reading and the public libraries' responses. There are many success stories here, especially when you view them against the book's opening line, and in particular in the redefining of reader development which provides some of the more substantial sections. The first part of the title seems just right but the second is too flatteringly easy, especially for its presumed audience and not actually what the book demonstrates (although eloquent voices such as Spufford, Manguel and Meek are enlisted to help). What the book shows is the seemingly widespread belief in reading as 'a good thing' and how its proponents (and government) are working hard to make it embracingly inclusive. Much very good news, including The National Year of Reading (and its progeny), Branching Out (and the inspirational Opening the Book) and the work of the National Literacy Trust (and all the groups it oversees). And Book Groups - praise be to Oprah, at least for making this apparently secret activity so exciting - which could number '50,000 for the UK and 500,000 for the US'. It is helpful to have all these practitioners' views collected and to see the span of the recent and lively work. The authors have created a detailed description of the many good intentions and an enormous willingness to get reading right for all. I feel mean-spirited to be wanting more. The book reads like a file-card exercise, with many all too brief accounts of activities and projects, often in the proponents' words and sometimes as the bullet point list of intentions. Even in description it is stronger on some aspects (reader development, the libraries' role and public initiatives) than others - I would notice the education ones - which suffer from the thin coverage (learning to read) and rely on highly partial and confusing individual views (the National Literacy and Key Stage 3 Strategies). There are major issues here, which the methodology of brief sections and the enlisting of a 'key person' leaves more opaque than before. I also wanted to see how much difference has been made, how much more inclusive we might be and what the barriers are to getting even better? The politics and financing of reading would, as ever, have provided a fascinating addition. What comes through is the strong public promotion of the enjoyment of reading for all which seems so powerful and so unifying. There is an ideal here of all having access to the 'reading club' where there are

many roles to play and which includes all writers, too. Looking up from reading the book in a train, I saw, on the window catch, the sign 'Pinch to open'. The pleasure of reading, yes.

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