

# Economies of Learning & Paying Attention: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the role of attention in learning by comparing the effects that different reading modalities and participation practices have in learning, and uses book clubs as venues of learning interactions. Specifically, this paper presents the basic findings of a case study conducted on a gender mixed crime fiction face-to-face book club in Athens. Based on grounded theory methodology, the results indicate that exchanges are framed in terms of an agonistic “gift economy” and circulate among two basic reading modalities grounded in different structures of paying attention and invested with different cognitive value: a) a deep –effortless- immersion of attention in the momentary experience of reading and b) a deep –effortful- re-reading which divides time in order to obtain deeper insight. The study locates a group of marginalized women, who are unable to enter the agonistic exchange cycle as givers and stay in a permanent ‘cognitive debt’. The construction of regimes of worth among members has implications for the study of interactions in many learning environments. In this respect, this paper attempts to bring together insights from social sciences and cognitive theories, in order to open up a fruitful dialogue between the two with pedagogical implications and future cross-disciplinary research directions.

## 1. Introduction

Book clubs are bounded spaces of collective reading, which “pose a serious challenge to the valued notion of the solitary reader” (Burnwell, 2007: 284). They position reading as a social activity, conditioned by its interactional local context.

Historically, practices of collective reading in literary societies of the 18th and 19th century have been attached to educational endeavors, to the extent that they have functioned as sites of semi-formal or informal learning, exposing “their members to learning opportunities that were not available

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within the institutionalized educational system” (Reberg Sedo, 2011: 5).

However, it was not until the end of the 20th century that book clubs became a recognized field of academic study. Since 2001, a growing body of research has developed ranging from ethnographic studies on women’s reading groups (Long, 2003; Howie, 2003; Reberg Sedo, 2004), linguistic surveys analyzing discourse in book clubs (Allington, 2011a, 2011b; Peplow, 2011), and even studies focusing on online or television book clubs (Long, 2003; Reberg Sedo, 2004).

Within the field of educational studies, a large share of work approaches book clubs as sites of “situated cognition” (Marshall, 1995) and focuses on their utility as “learning tools” for the enhancement of the literacy practices of children and adolescents. More particularly, several studies have demonstrated that the collective engagement in literary practices within the context of non-classroom book clubs creates spaces for identity development and is positively associated with the improvement of reading attitudes and school achievement (Daniels, 2002; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009; Polleck, 2011). In a similar vein, other studies have compared discourse structures and patterns within formal educational settings for adults (mostly college literature classes and seminars) and book clubs. All of the studies testify to the educational benefits of book clubs, to the extent that these settings are organized around more collaborative discourse structures and allow participants to experiment with meaning making, using personal experience as a knowledge source (Addington, 2001; Barstow, 2003; Smith, 1996; Marshall, 1995; Swanson, 1993; Beach & Yussen, 2011).

Another strand of educational studies on book clubs focuses on teachers’ book clubs and suggests that they can be used as vehicles for their professional development, promoting the reexamination of pedagogical methods and teaching practices (Kooy, 2006; Burbank, Kauchak & Bates, 2010).

Although contemporary book clubs take many different forms, it seems that research into reading groups adopts a one-sided approach depicting them uniformly in terms of positive participatory outcomes and more specifically as “safe spaces” for the articulation and creation of knowledge (Long, 2003; Howie, 2003; Reberg Sedo, 2004). While the educational benefits of book clubs have been extensively studied, systematic research on the context-specific interrelationships between reading modalities, gender and genre dimensions within these collective contexts is lacking in the field

of social studies. This lack becomes more pronounced if we consider that the aforementioned dimensions exist in a series of learning environments.

This paper presents the basic findings of a case study conducted on a gender mixed face-to-face crime fiction book club in Athens. The paper aims at investigating the role that gender and genre play out in the book club setting in order to situate reading modalities as well as participation practices into wider learning contexts.

In this respect, it attempts to bring together insights from social sciences and cognitive theories, in order to open up a fruitful dialogue with pedagogical implications and future cross-disciplinary research directions.

## 2. Methodology

A qualitative empirical research was carried out from March 2013 to April 2015. The main source of data was the observation of 22 meetings of the club and the conducting of 25 semi-structured interviews with its members. All of the observed meetings and the conducted interviews have been audio-recorded and transcribed.

Methodologically, this research builds upon grounded theory, which refers to conducting qualitative research on the basis of a set of systematic inductive methods. As such, grounded theory does not start from a pre-existing theoretical framework in order to verify or falsify its premises. On the contrary, it seeks to generate new theory by grounding its analysis in the perspectives, practices and interactions of social agents. Thus, its major difference from other qualitative research approaches is its particular emphasis upon “theory development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The methodological strategy of grounded theory is organized around the principles of coding raw data, theoretical sampling and constant comparison.

Coding is a procedure of highly importance, to the extent that it functions as an organizing mechanism and a linkage between raw data and the developing theory. Theoretical sampling is a methodological tool for identifying variations in the data, by expounding the different properties and dimensions of the evolving categories (Charmaz, 2006). Literature in grounded theory functions as a supplementary source of data, which is to be continuously compared with incoming empirical data. As the research proceeds the literature search expands outside the substantive area of study, something that commits the researcher in a multidisciplinary review process.

### 3. Book club profile

The investigated crime fiction book club is well organized and has been running for eight years. Meetings are held once a month in the bookstore of a well-known Greek publishing house and run for approximately two hours. There exists a stable core of regular members (around 20-22) and a peripheral group of more or less infrequent participants. The book club is gender-mixed (6-7 regular male members), but as is the case internationally, there is a preponderance of women (16-18 regular female members). The group has a male coordinator who is responsible for organizing the conversations.

Furthermore, the book club has adopted a practice of amateur book reviewing. On each occasion, one member is assigned to write a review of the selective book and distribute it electronically few days before the regular meeting takes place.

Most members of the club belong to the middle class, in terms of educational level and occupation. At the time of the study, more than half of the members interviewed were retired<sup>1</sup>.

### 4. ‘Reading with the flow’: a female reading modality of ‘deep attentional immersion’

The research has indicated that most female members of the book club approach reading of fiction as an integral part of their identities. Women see the act of reading as a source of pleasure, which is contrasted to any sense of obligation. As Vicky puts it: “I am a hedonist. I never read out of compulsion”. In the same vein Barbara reports: “We read in order to enjoy ourselves [...]” and suggests that the kind of reading she does for the book club is nothing like what she did while in school.

Reading fiction is organized around a deep involvement in the lived experience of reading a text. It becomes synonymous with traveling, image generation and absorption into alternative “narrative worlds”.

Ruth makes it clear: “Reading books is like traveling for me. From the very

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed social profile of the members interviewed see Tselenti, D. (2017). “Making texts mean: reading practices and gender in the context of a crime fiction book club in Athens”, in M. Buscatto & M. Leontsini (eds.), *Du genre dans la critique d’art / Gender in Art Criticism*, éditions des archives contemporaines.

first line, my mind starts picturing the setting. When the writer describes a crime that happened in Oslo for instance, I start imagining the houses, the fiords, the cold and heavy atmosphere, the people”.

As Susan suggests: “Reading is something that immerses you. You enter into a world, you get identified with a character, you experience his adventures”.

In this respect, reading can be depicted as a form of transportation, which constitutes “a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery and feelings” (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004: 312).

It is a process that resembles the optimal experience of flow. According to Nakamura’s & Csikszentmihalyi’s conceptualization, flow is based on: “Intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment; merging of action and awareness; loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor); a sense that one can control one’s actions; that is a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next; distortion of temporal experience (typically, a sense that time has passed faster than normal); experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding” (2009: 90).

In this regard, the kind of reading most women engage in does not centre attention on what is to be carried away or retained after the reading event”, that is to say it is not predominantly “efferent (after the Latin *effere*, to carry away)” (Rosenblatt, 1988: 5). Drawing on Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading, one can suggest that the majority of female members adopt an “aesthetic reading stance”, whereby “their selective attention is focused primarily on what is being personally lived through, cognitively and affectively, during the reading event” (1985: 101-102). The experience of reading *per se* becomes rewarding on its own sake.

As Susan emphasizes: “When I read I am not interested in stopping at an unknown word or analysing”. In the same vein, Sonia stresses out: “What I mostly want out of a book is to enjoy it while reading, rather than remembering every single detail. I don’t mind forgetting [...]. I remember the stuff that I liked [...] and captured my interest”.

In line with Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory, the way these women read in private is *autotelic* based on an endogenous use value of the very act of reading and grounded in an “effortless attention”, which is achieved “when attention is not only highly focused but also entirely voluntary-in pursuits that a person finds intrinsically worthwhile” (Bruya, 2010: 13).

On the contrary, men do not construe their reading experience in the same way nor do they value it as high. The majority of male participants either ignore or bypass the question “What does reading mean to you?”

##### 5. The ‘added value’ of collective insights: L-earning through expanding the attentional spectrum

The study indicates that one strong motivation for both men and women for participating in the crime fiction book club is the desire to share the personal experience of reading as well as to exchange different perspectives.

Discussing the books within the collective context of the club allows members to gain insights into diverse perspectives, while attending to aspects of the text that they have previously neglected.

Helen emphasizes: “I like the fact that I hear different views, different opinions [...], that I share what I have received from the book with others, because the others have certainly seen something that I have neglected”.

As Reberg Sedo notices book club members don’t consider the self as a sufficient knowledge source (2004: 37).

Members attend the book club in order to *add value* to their individual reading experiences. Gaining access into perspectives of others enables members to broaden their individual ever so limited attention spectrum and in turn their cognitive horizons. This resonates Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura who suggest that “attention is a limited resource”, which “highlights the narrow bandwidth of information we can process at any given time” (2010: 180).

John points out: “I want to hear everybody’s view and this is what I like and makes our meetings interesting, because each of us has his/her own perspective, his/her own point of view that I want to hear. Because it will offer me clues to the points I hadn’t attended”.

As the club is organized around the genre of crime fiction, membership results to an incremental expansion of the literary horizon and the production of new generic knowledge, to the extent that members get acquainted with books they would not have read individually. According to Barbara’s view: “In the book club I read much more. I have always been reading, but now I have entered more into the genre of crime fiction. If we take into account the books that we read in the club plus the books I read on my own. Sometimes it’s a bit of an excess”.

Alex emphasizes: “It is a fact that my view on crime fiction has expanded a

great deal since I started participating in the book club”.

In light of social learning theories, the crime fiction book club is construed as a “community of practice”. According to Wenger, a community of practice consists of three basic elements: “a joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members”, “the relationships of mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity” and “the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time” (1998: 2).

#### 6. Exchanges among different reading modalities (of paying attention)

The study of the book club discussions has indicated that exchanges among members are grounded in the basis of four central reading modes:

1. One central way of engaging with texts is ‘affective’ and focused on the sharing and revival of the feelings experienced during the private act of reading. It is organized around narratives of gratification or discomfort and descriptions of the reading event.
2. A second way of reading is ‘story-driven’ and focuses on parts of the plot and the characters.
3. A third way of engaging with texts is ‘author-based’ and centers upon forming hypotheses or imputing intentions to authors. The ‘ideal’ way to ‘put oneself in the shoes of the author’ and to obtain his/her perspective is by reconstructing the writing strategy of the text.
4. A fourth way is ‘generic’ and it centres around a ‘corrective’ reading grounded in the ‘diagnosis’ of generic ‘symptoms’. It focuses on detecting lacks, flaws and discrepancies from which the texts “suffer”. This reading measures the ‘genre-ness’ of every text under discussion. As Jim reports: “I am still searching for a 100% flawless crime fiction story”.

Michael emphasizes: “There are many ways to read a book. Crime fiction calls for an intensive reading. I see many people who take a book in the train. They browse through a crime fiction story. This is not reading. When you read a book, you read it intensively; otherwise you don’t attend to a lot of things. You stay on the surface”.

This way constructs as its ‘ideal’ reading mode a *deep re-reading* of texts.

As Pyrhönen notices “rereading detective fiction combines our efforts to grasp the structure of a work with a demand for intertextual comparison” (2010: 54). Therefore, this type of reading is organized around what Rita Felski calls a “hyperalertness and sharpened attentiveness that typify suspicion”. It is a challenging “hunt for information”, “grounded in a semiotic sensibility”, which “pivots on the treatment of phenomena as signs” (2015: 37-38). It belongs to the reading methodology that Carlo Ginzburg has subsumed within the “conjectural paradigm of clues”, a paradigm with roots on primal hunters, that is grounded in collecting and relating “tiny details” that “provide the key to a deeper reality, inaccessible by other methods” (1980: 11).

The analysis has shown that members construct crime fiction as a genre on the basis of a threefold set of expectations:

1. The experience of suspense is a basic presupposition for attaining reading pleasure.
2. Verisimilitude is seen as a cornerstone of the genre. In particular, the verisimilitude of characters is seen as a “measure” for the reality represented in crime stories.

As Paul Copley states, “what is found generally credible at a given moment by an audience lies close to the audience’s expectations about the rules of the genre”. (Copley, 2012: 296) Accordingly, the second strand of verisimilitude is doxalogical, meaning thereby “what is believed to be credible-politically, socially, topically at a given moment by public opinion” (2000: 20). In this way, verisimilitude is dependent on a correlation between generic requirements and “common opinion”. In the case of crime fiction, reality is treated as a synonym for what is credible, probable and statistically or ‘typically mean’.

3. Crime fiction is grounded in an “ideal of realism”. The plot of crime stories is regarded as a “vehicle” or “tool” for the representation of the multivalent aspects of reality (social, political, economical, psychological), for the revelation or exposure of social injustices as well as their causes. In this respect, crime fiction is regarded as a means of obtaining social cognition and a form of social criticism.

Michael reports: “crime fiction is a mode, a tool for seeing many more things. Apart from the mystery theme, of the crime plot as such, you see and learn a lot of things from the world and from different societies. And sometimes these



things can surprise you. I remember what a big surprise it was for all of us in the book club when we read Larsen's *Millennium*, as we have all regarded the Swedish society as perfect in all of its aspects, for its social state, the position of women and so on. It was a shock to read that women in Sweden get so much abuse".

### 7. A Gift Economy of Cognition: Exchanging oral and written resources

The core category of the study identified the crime fiction book club as a public platform of reading and writing exchanges, which can be approached through the "paradigm of the gift", as introduced by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1990).

Mauss conceptualizes gift exchanges as a "total social phenomenon", which organizes the structure of social bonds and is grounded in three mandatory principles: giving, receiving and returning.

It could be argued that a gift economy is generated on the basis of oral and written exchanges of opinions between members. Drawing from the insights of Mauss's theory on archaic gift giving and taking practices, we can approach opinions as intangible gifts, which are given, received and reciprocated.

As Offer remarks, "Exchange is not only an economic transaction, it is also a good in itself, a "process benefit", usually in the form of a personal relationship. Personal interaction ranks very high among the sources of satisfaction. It can take many forms: acknowledgment, attention, acceptance, respect, reputation, status, power, intimacy, love, friendship, kinship, sociability. To wrap it all into one term, interaction is driven by the grant and pursuit of *regard*" (1997: 451). And he continues, "Language is a vehicle of regard, and conversation is a gift economy, loaded with cues of acceptance or disdain" (pp.: 454).

A group of female book club participants seem to express a sense of "insufficiency and lack" as far as their reading and generic competencies as well as their speaking and writing skills are concerned.

Lee states: "I want to learn. Maybe not all of the information is stored [...], especially when you don't have any basis for integrating so many things. It is enough for me to listen. And every time I leave the book club, I feel that I am richer, even though I still stand at the bottom of the pyramid, meaning I have not read so many books as the others. I started reading when I joined the club."

By staying silent or contributing in short turns, these women exhibit an epistemological stance of "received knowledge", whereby they don't perceive

themselves as capable of producing knowledge on their own (Belensky et al., 1986).

With regards to the generic capital of members, some women feel inferior to others. Barbara stresses this point: “If you have observed, I don’t speak a lot in the crime fiction book club, I don’t feel very confident. I haven’t read anything else except for the books we discuss in the group.” And later on, she adds: “John and Alex are very well-informed because they have engaged specifically with the object (of crime fiction). They are not the kind of reader that I am.”

In this regard, some opinions become more prominent and are judged as worthier than others. The educational, reading or generic capital or the speaking and writing competencies of members are the main reported factors for the transition from the primary equal footing of all opinions to the construal of some views as distinguished.

The sense of insufficiency and reluctance to speak is also stressed in the case of Ruth: “I am too shy to speak. I think that the rest of the members have a lot of knowledge [...] they have read ten times more than me.”

According to A. Somaini: “The very identity and social status, honour and prestige of the giver and the recipient depend on their capacity to give: as Mauss writes: ‘Giving is equivalent to demonstrating one’s own superiority, to being worth more, to being raised up (magister); accepting without reciprocation or without excessive reciprocation is equivalent to self-subordination, to becoming client or servant, to making oneself smaller, to lowering (minister).’” (2001: 5.)

These women seem to build their self-image upon shame, which naturally has a detrimental effect on their learning interactions. As Adloff (2016) observes: “shame [...] is linked to the concrete experience of the loss of reputation, respect, [...] and status, and is based on the perception and evaluation of one’s self from the imagined perspective of another” (58).

Moving the focus of attention to the practice of reviewing the books under discussion, some members perceive it as a “generous” offer to the group, which demands a high degree of engagement and is grounded in the expenditure of an extra cognitive effort.

Alex reports: “If one engages deeply with the text and with the content and the messages intended by the author, one can deliver something extra, an incremental value [...] This something extra demands an engagement, a research, a labor, a commitment so to say. If you want [...] to write reviews that will have an additional effect to their receivers you have to work”.

The practice of reviewing bears the cost of allocating resources in order to obtain cognitive control (Westbrook & Braver, 2015). In this regard, it leads to a distinction between more- or less-skilled readers, who display better or worse writing competencies.

Barbara argues: “I have clarified from the start that I can’t write reviews, as I see that they are so well informed. I don’t know if you have seen the written reviews, they are constantly being improved. They are writing dissertations, so to speak.”

As Pam reports: “Jim writes excellent reviews. How can you compete with that?”

The obligation to give back and give back more than one has received results in asymmetrical reciprocity and constructs a group of female participants as marginalized recipients who are permanently in a ‘cognitive debt’.

In this respect, the oral and written exchanges among members construct the gift-giving practices as “presentations of self”, which become the vehicle for the revelation of the identity of donors. As F. Adloff puts it, “gifts stay closely connected to the personality of the giver (and) serve as vehicles for identities as these remain attached to the gift” (2006: 413).

The construction of regimes of worth centered upon personality highlights the agonistic version of gift exchanges and generally works along structural inequality lines. However, it cannot be reduced to socio-economic differences among members only, as there are marginalized women who are not educationally underprivileged.

### 8. A prevailing masculine economy of ‘paying attention’

Analysis has shown that many members put emphasis on a ‘masculine’ mode of opinion expression, which calls for a certain rationalization of the reading experience. Thus, unjustified aesthetic judgments of gratification or discomfort are seen as ‘invalid’. This kind of ‘invalid’ participatory stance is mainly attributed to women. Thereby, both male and female participants discursively construct a ‘typically’ female way of reading and participating. Kate states:

“My feeling is that men are less chatty than women [...] the percentage of male participants who express themselves in a responsible manner is higher than the percentage of women. [O]nly three out of ten women say something responsible, based on proper judgment.”

In this sense, men are seen as participants who base their arguments on

systematic and rational grounds. Lee stresses: “Men see things in a different light to women. I think that sometimes they attend to things more than women do. They focus on what is necessary and everything they say is to the point. Men have more ‘proper’ criteria than us women.” The account of the coordinator highlights the gender hierarchy created within the context of the book club:

“We can identify a degree of impulsiveness in the average female participant of the club; there is a degree of spontaneity, something that you can’t detect in the average sample of male participants. This sample is more rational or at least rational in a verisimilar way. And more difficult to counter-argue.”

Incorporating the exchanged reading modalities within the paradigm of the “gift economy”, it could be argued that the ‘ideal’ reading mode of a deep attentive re-reading can be approached as a way of reciprocating the “inalienable” gift of the author with a “surplus value” counter-gift. The same goes for the author-based reading modality. Offered as a counter-gift to the producer of the text, occupying the author’s position can be seen as the “supreme honour” that can be accomplished within the author-reader transaction.

Although the ‘ideal’ reading modes are not adopted by male members only, the need for a rationalization of the reading practice seems to align with a ‘masculine economy’ which necessitates the “guarantee of repayment” (Pyyhtinen, 2014: 109-128).

Within this masculine economy of attention, the expenditure of cognitive effort is pursued. The obtainment of a panoptical view of the structure of the text or even the occupation of the author’s position results to the attainment of cognitive authority. The practice of written reviews, which demands an additional cognitive expenditure, is extrinsically rewarded by an added status.

The social organization of the masculine economy of attention developed in the club becomes more concrete if we focus on the “order of discourse”. We can approach the meetings of the club as “focused gatherings”. “For the participants, this involves: a single visual and cognitive focus of attention; a mutual and preferential openness to verbal communication; a heightened mutual relevance of acts; an eye-to-eye ecological huddle that maximizes each participants opportunity to perceive the others participant’s monitoring of him” (Goffman, 1961: 17-18).

The “order of discourse” in the book club is organized around three main participatory modes: (1) silence, (2) taking turns of shorter length and (3) taking turns of longer length. Mainly female participants, largely coming from the marginalized group, adopt the ‘silent auditory stance’ and the participatory

stance based on turns of shorter length. The shorter turn taking consists of instances of cooperative turns, in which “several speakers are working together to make a single point” (Marshall et al., 1995: 106). Longer turns are taken equally by both male and female members, while male members, who are underrepresented, occupy proportionally a larger share of turns.

Lastly, there is a fourth way of participating, one that highlights the central ‘communication problem’ of the book club. It consists of extended parallel turns, where many members talk at the same time, without pausing to let another speaker continue. Members regard parallel turns as instances of “cacophony”. Interestingly, the marginalized female group participates fully in these undisciplined extended parallel turns.

The participation of the marginalized female group in the parallel turns seems to stem naturally from the established club hierarchies. By integrating this aspect into the prevailing masculine economy of attention, parallel turns may be regarded as an attempt of the marginalized women to take the floor but without risking self-exposure as they take cover under the aforementioned cacophony.

In contrast, parallel turns may be seen as a refusal of the gifts of the more ‘privileged’ members, to the extent that gift practices are grounded in the “work of time” that mediates between an offer and its reciprocation (Bourdieu, 1990: 98-111). The marginalization of some women to the sidelines of the group’s exchange circle creates an excess energy of unshared responses. Following Bataille (1988), the unexpressed private reading experience of these women returns as an “accursed share” that increases the entropy of the system.

## 9. Conclusions/ Implications

The results indicate that exchanges within the crime fiction book club circulate among two basic reading modalities grounded in different temporal structures of attention.

The first reading modality is organized around the deep – effortless – immersion of attention in the momentary experience of reading and lies on an unstructured temporality. The second reading modality is organized around a deep – effortful – re-reading, which opens up a temporality in excess of the present in order to obtain deeper insight.

The revival of a flow experience of reading mobilizes mostly affective or story- driven responses, which do not leave any room for defending or refuting

stand–point driven responses (Vipond & Hunt, 1984) by counter-arguments and more particularly for the existence of ‘worthier’ counter-gifts. In this way, the reading pleasure privately experienced by most women of the club cannot find public expression for a marginalized group who are unable to enter the agonistic exchange cycle as givers and cannot measure up to the ‘objective’ standards formed within the community.

The rationalization of reading practices that takes place within the club is part of a privileged masculine economy of attention. In pursuit of extrinsic rewards, this economy is grounded in a structure of expenditure through which one can take the credits of cognitive authority for seeing “through the devices and the goals of textual manipulation” (Pyrhönen, 2010: 54).

We can observe a relationship of analogy between the expectations of the crime fiction genre and the ‘ideal’ reading and participatory modes. More “point-driven” modes are regarded as more ‘worthy’, whereas they connect with the “ideal of realism” and verisimilitude which ground the expectations on the genre of crime fiction.

In conclusion, the findings of the study contrast with the common scholarly depiction of book clubs as collective contexts of equal participants, where all members feel safe to express their opinions.

The presented case study focused exclusively on the micro-level of a crime fiction book club in Athens. Therefore, its findings are not readily generalizable. Nevertheless, the paradigm of the gift that resulted from the research provides a fruitful framework to study interactions and relationships in many learning environments, from educational settings to workplace contexts, where information and knowledge circulate among instructors and learners in the form of exchanges.

As Galea (2006) points out, in the case of institutionalized educational settings, “the teacher gives something which she has and which she is, which the student does not have” and “she expects something back: attention” (86). Moreover, if we extend the notion of genre outside the field of literary texts to the organized domains of learning, we can depict genres as ‘cognitive and rhetorical mind sets’, which construct a horizon of expected modes of paying attention. This in turn brings about a number of interesting issues, which call for further cross-disciplinary research including:

1. The ways, in which knowledge is given, received and reciprocated within set learning environments.

2. The types of attention-allocation within different learning contexts, which is further contrasted to privileged/marginalized modes of attention as well as valuable/non-valuable contributions.
3. The ways in which gift-giving and gift-receiving practices connect to identity constructions within different learning settings.
4. The ways gender and generic dimensions are interwoven with learning relationships.

“Pay attention!” This mundane directive speaks volumes for the importance of attention: “Sometimes it exacts a cost” (Brandon et.al, 2010: 29). What cost does it exact when it comes to learning?

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