

Context

I teach in a Key Stage One class at Derwent Lower School in Bedfordshire. In discussions with my class of 5 and 6 year olds about what they would like the reading area to look like, the children expressed a desire to have cuddly toys to have with them when they were reading. I wanted to see how this choice would impact upon the children's attitudes to and interest in reading as my children did not all voluntarily choose to read.



Research inspiration and rationale

The TaRs research highlighted four specific practices: social reading environments, informal book talk and recommendations, reading aloud, and independent reading, as part of its 'Reading for Pleasure pedagogy'. I realised using the strategy of book buddies might prompt a focus on two of these practices by encouraging children to read aloud to their buddies, and that this might help create a more social and interactive reading environment that could tempt the children to read.

Aims

I wanted to create an area for the cuddly toys so that they had a 'home' and to encourage the children to take on the responsibility of tidying the area. I hoped that having this area would allow the children to choose their teddy if they wanted one, but also allow the children who didn't choose a toy to read freely in a space. I wanted to see whether the children would use these teddies to read to or with and to explore the consequences of introducing new book friends to children aged 5-6 years old.

Outline

In the past the children in my Year 1 class have expressed how much they enjoy having something to cuddle whilst reading a book. I gave the children the opportunity to have a 'Book Buddy' as a reading friend whom they could hold and read with or read to. These book buddies are cuddly toys who live in the book corner. The children choose a teddy that they would like to hold whilst reading and place them back when they were finished.



Impact

It has been a very popular strategy and, because it was derived from the children's own ideas, gives them more ownership over their reading environment. As a result, the children have really enjoyed having the book buddy bucket in the reading area. They have shown great maturity with the teddies and adhered to the rules around tidying up our reading friends. The children have often taken a teddy or other character and sat quietly in the book corner whilst reading to themselves. On other occasions children have read their story to their teddy/toy and if they're unable to read the text they have improvised the story by using the pictures in their chosen book. One child explained, "It reminds me of bedtime when Mummy and Daddy read to me". I have also observed other children reading to a small group of book buddies as if they were the teacher!

This is encouraging and suggests that, whilst such a small strategy, this bucket of book buddies has afforded new opportunities for children to read and share their reading.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Having the 'Book Buddy Bucket' has brought another element to our reading area and has allowed the children to take ownership over their learning. It has been received very well and the children have taken great responsibility with this. The children have enjoyed speaking to their book buddies and also pairing up with others who have book buddies, and have spoken about the books. In some instances, the children have read their book to their book buddy or they have impersonated the teacher, using their book buddies as pupils.

I will keep this going, as it has offered a more social element to our reading environment. I might also seek out buddies who are, or could be, characters in some of our well-known stories, so that children can use their buddy to re-enact the tale.