

Context

Reading during the stereotypical energetic lunchtime is not always at the top of every pupil's agenda! At Derwent Lower School in Bedfordshire where I teach, we have acknowledged this and, in order to support young readers and enable reading to become an additional playtime option, we have begun a 'Reading in the Playground Scheme'.



Research inspiration and rationale

The TaRs research reveals the social nature of reading and makes clear that reading is a collaborative as well as an individual act. It also showed to me that in order to develop communities of readers within and beyond the classroom, time, space and opportunities for choice-led reading must be found. Although the study focused mainly on reading in classrooms and libraries, the principle of relaxed reading and space to talk about what you are reading could I felt be extended to the playground. I was taking one strand of the TaRs RfP pedagogy outside - that of creating a social environment for reading.

Aims

Our school aims in establishing reading on the playground were to encourage the children to read and relax during lunchtime or in unstructured opportunities during the day such that they might:

- gain access to a wider range of texts
- broaden their knowledge of different text types
- talk freely about texts.

We also thought that by establishing reading boxes in the playground, there would be more time and space for the children to explore and discuss texts and make relationships with others who also like to read, or might be tempted by the rich fiction available.

Outline

A colourful book box crammed with a wide variety of genres and picture book texts was brought outside for the children to explore and enjoy. It was placed in between the two playgrounds near friendship benches with the librarian. The children were able to look through the book box, sit down in the surrounding area, change their books, discuss the books or read with the librarian. On very cold days the box was taken to the library.



Impact

We found this has become a popular activity during non-structured times, including break and lunchtime amongst the young members of our school community. There has been good uptake too on children spontaneously asking our librarian to read a story to them. In particular it has been seen to:

- encourage discussions between pupils and for pupils to read books to each other
- enhance the children's enthusiasm for reading
- increase the profile of reading and the time available for it in school
- encourage new relationships and greater interactions between pupils of all ages as they read stories together

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Using the playground as a reading environment gave children an opportunity to spend longer periods of time with their texts (other than reading time in the classroom or dedicated library time). It gave them a larger space with a choice of areas for them to settle in and a chance to integrate with other year groups around the subject of reading. It has created a new social environment for reading and raised the profile of reading by the sheer presence of the book box and the librarian on the playground.

In discussions with librarian, I was interested to note that she was able to discuss some of the children's book choices in great depth and felt she had become better acquainted with some of children's reading strategies. The initiative has thus improved the librarian's knowledge of children's reading preferences and practices and has enriched relationships between the children and the librarian

As the scheme developed, children were also seen reading to each other and embarking on discussions about the books they were sharing. This was apparent amongst different year groups and also between integrating year groups. We will be retaining this and documenting its continued use as a strategy for supporting children's reading for pleasure.