



## Learning to Love Reading

Megan Gill



### Context

Currently studying Primary Education with QTS at Liverpool Hope University as a second year student specialising in English. Liverpool, Merseyside.

### OU Research inspiration and rationale

After researching and reading a number of studies conducted throughout the past decade it is clear that children's reading and attitudes towards reading are something of a concern. By taking steps to ensure children are engaged and most importantly, enjoying reading is something every teacher must do in their classroom.

According to the UKLA (United Kingdom Literacy Association) once children have learnt to read, it is important for adults to continue reading to children to experience texts they may not choose personally, or higher-level texts. Reading aloud to children is something I maintain when in the classroom. UKLA also suggests that talking about reading is crucial, particularly for younger children to develop their comprehension skill and understanding of text. This can be achieved through scaffolded questioning, scaffolding is particularly important to consider when reading with children with low reading ages as the more knowledgeable other. For higher ability children, or older children they can think of their own questions and ask others.

According to Teresa Cremin (2011) as teachers, it is important that we must read ourselves – and enjoy reading. The *Teachers as Readers* survey completed by 1200 primary teachers across in England, (and some student teachers) who worked with children aged between 5-11 showed that 75% had read for pleasure during the last month. If teachers are reading for pleasure, why shouldn't they be promoting this to young children? (Cremin et al., 2008)

This research suggests it is crucial for teachers to have knowledge of a wide range of children's literature so that they are in a good position to recommend books to their pupils. Therefore, asking children questions such as: "Have you heard of this book before?" "Have you heard of this author before?" "Have you ever read anything by this author before?" is particularly important as it gives them the choice of reading books they have not heard of before. This will expand their knowledge of authors and will help expand their preferences for reading.

**Aims**

I have recently completed a Hope Challenge over a period of four weeks, working with Knowsley council, and schools in Knowsley where perhaps reading does not take priority in some families. Many of the children are not interested in reading, or have very low reading abilities. I set out to begin to improve children's attitudes to reading, showing them that reading can be enjoyable and reading the right book can have a great impact on the child.

**Outline**

Once a week, I would visit this school and read with each child in the class during the afternoon session – whilst the class teacher was teaching a foundation subject. As instructed by the class teacher, I would read with one lower ability child individually, and a small group of middle and high-ability children.

On arrival, it was clear that the reading ages and abilities within the class were extremely different, it was also clear that some of the children, particularly some of the boys, did not enjoy reading and did not want to read at all. During my first session, I noticed that the books some of the children were reading – they did not enjoy and were simply reading because they had to read once a day. Although this was not the class teacher's fault, it was something that I discussed with her – and she agreed. I then decided to find out more information about what the children liked to do in their spare time. What films did they like to watch, what sports did they like? And after talking with one boy it was clear that he adored two things: football and *Horrid Henry*. This particular child was not keen on reading and would be very vocal about how much he disliked reading. So, after speaking with the class teacher and looking through a collection of books I received from Knowsley Council I went into the school the following week and asked if I could read these books with the children instead.

I asked the teacher if the children could bring cushions outside with them that so they were more comfortable and were able to relax, reading books I thought the children would enjoy. I also ensured that the children had a choice, if the children were given a book they did not enjoy we would change the book and find a book the child might enjoy. Most of the children preferred books that were related to adventures and action and therefore, there was always a large selection of such texts to choose from. Although some of the children I read with were not able to read more complex books, and usually read more structured reading scheme texts for example 'Oxford Reading Tree' I still gave specific children a choice in what they read.

After each session I asked the lower reading groups what had happened in the book, and had a series of differentiated questions depending on their ability, such as: "Who was the narrator?" "What do you think will happen next?" "What was your favourite part of what we have just read." I asked the middle and higher-ability children questions such as: "If you could re-write the ending, how would it end?" "Why does the author use this feature for?" "Why do you think the author/illustrator has used this layout?". I asked all children if they enjoyed the book and why? and "Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why?"

I also talked to the children about books I have read, and was currently reading. This often prompted them to ask questions about how I feel about my book, "Do you like it?" "What is it about?" "Can we read the book?" These questions reflected an emerging interest in reading and what others are reading.

**Impact**

At the start of the four weeks the children were quite openly uninterested in reading and did not want to leave the classroom to read books they did not enjoy. However, after the second session once the cushions were introduced and more targeted enjoyable books, the children began to

show more interest and would often ask if it was there time to go outside to read. At the end of the four weeks, most of the children thoroughly enjoyed reading and would often talk about their excitement about what will happen next in the book they were reading at the time. One child had bought his own books to read at home and was beginning to show a positive attitude towards reading, and although he was still slightly uninterested at times, there was a subtle change in his attitude and I trust this will grow and develop as he reads more. The teacher also noticed a change in attitudes and was keen to hear feedback on how the sessions were going and how the children were progressing.

### **Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice**

Before going into school there were a number of techniques and strategies I intended on using to improve the children's attitudes towards reading for pleasure after researching and learning about the issues around reading for pleasure. One of the strategies I was keen on developing was my knowledge of children's authors and poets as the results of the *TaRs* surveys. Reading a range of books with the children allowed me to familiarise myself with different genres, authors and texts. Not only did it improve my knowledge, but it improved the children's knowledge of authors they liked as well. The research also suggests that questioning improves comprehension and I used this strategy to prompt discussion, it was easy to implement and extremely beneficial.

I was also keen to share what I was reading at home, this is an extremely easy strategy that can be implemented into any classroom setting. As class teacher, or support staff throughout school, it is important that children see you as a role model, promoting reading and showing your love of reading as this can have a very positive impact on the children.

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