

Parent Reading Recommendations

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Context

I work in an independent girls' school in west London. Reading is given a reasonably high priority within the school, but many of the parents work very long hours and have little input into their children's reading and into the reading life of the school. Although the parents try to read with their children, they are not always a terribly visible part of our reading community at school.

OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

This research is connected to the Teachers as Readers research (Cremin et al. 2014) on Reading for Pleasure (RfP). I wanted to try to create a more reciprocal and interactive reading community within the school, in which parents played a greater part. I wanted the children to see their parents as reading role models, in the same way that they viewed their peers and their teachers.

Aims

I have previously worked with the teachers and the children at school on recommending books to each other and seeing each other as readers; I wanted to extend this community to include parents too, as they have such a huge influence over their children's perceptions of themselves as readers. I wanted both the children and their parents to feel part of our shared reading community at school.

Outline

I asked any parents who wanted to, to submit a recommendation for a children's book that they had either loved when they were younger or that they enjoyed reading to their children at home. I asked the parents to send me a photograph of themselves with their book and a short review, mentioning why they enjoyed it. I then created a display using the photographs and the reviews, in a visible part of the school.



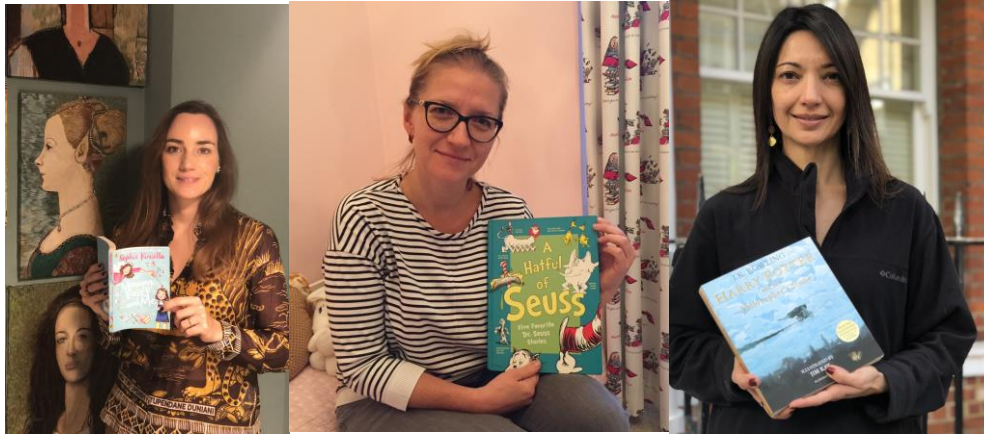
Impact

Some children were thrilled to see their parents' pictures and book recommendations on the wall in school, many found it inspiring and some were just embarrassed! The display generated much discussion amongst the children about the books parents were recommending. I overheard children discussing whether they had heard of the book a particular parent was recommending and whether they had read that book at home with their parents. Other children were asking the child whose parent was featured for more information on the recommended books. These discussions around the display inspired children to take that conversation home and continue it with their parents, thus drawing those parents into the reading culture of the school too.

One girl whose mother had submitted a book recommendation and whose photograph was up on the wall stated that, "I feel very proud of my mum". Her mother is not often able to come into school, so this enabled her to be part of our reading community.



We as teachers also gained clearer insights into the children's reading practices at home through discussion of the display. Whilst discussing her mother's book recommendation, one girl revealed, "I feel good and relaxed when we read together".



Many of the children enjoyed reading the recommendations of their friends' parents and many discovered new books that they subsequently enjoyed reading. One girl noted that, "I think putting other people's favourite books is a good idea because children can know other books".



Others enjoyed finding out more about their friends parents. One girl observed that, "You can find out more about who people are. You know people better and their personality".

This display of parents' book recommendations really helped to draw the featured parents into the reading community of the school.

Reflections on Impact the TaRs Research Had on Practice

Through this project, I have become more aware of how parents are a key part of the reading community of a school. I have realised how inspired the children can be by their recommendations and the weight that their opinions carry. Drawing them in has inspired the children and has helped to bind the whole school community together, with reading as the common thread. It has created conversations about reading that go to and from home and school. I would love to continue to do this in the future, featuring different parents and continuing to keep reading at the forefront of our discussions within our school community.