

Giving Children A Voice

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- *Ysgol Cefn Mawr is a Primary School with around 200 children set in a small community in North Wales. I teach a class of 26 Reception children and I am the school Literacy Coordinator.*
- *This year the school identified developing children's voice and reading for pleasure as key areas to focus on in the school development plan.*

OU Research inspiration and rationale

The Open University's Teachers as Readers (TaRs) finding (3) A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes social reading environments and informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations (Cremin et al., 2014) inspired the project.



The research found that talking about texts and talking about reading was at the heart of Reading for Pleasure (RfP). It needed to be informed and highly reciprocal, was often spontaneous and involved two-way teacher-child/ child-teacher and child-child book recommendations. This talk was dependent on the teacher's knowledge of children as readers and their knowledge of children's literature and other texts. It is also influenced by the complementary strand of reading aloud and independent reading time and a physically and socially engaging reading environment.

A physically engaging reading environment with open access at all times was well established in the class and I felt I had a good knowledge of children's literature. However completing the 'Review Your Practice' document revealed that I would like to improve my knowledge of the children's reading preferences and provide more opportunities for them to talk about their reading and preferences as reader.

Aims



To develop pupil voice, encouraging them to engage in informal book talk by:

- *Supporting children's own reading choices*
- *Sharing passion and enthusiasm for reading*
- *Developing reciprocity and personal connections*
- *Building a community of readers.*

These aims also connect clearly to the key TaRs research findings on informal book talk, inside text talk and recommendations.

Outline



Although I was very committed to this aim as with many things in school it was trying to create the space in a very busy daily schedule! Rather than adding time into the day it was decided to use 'dead' spaces in the day more effectively. As a school we are very lucky to have a Local Library across the road and as a class we had weekly timetabled sessions to visit. This time was reorganised to allow an extended session where the children could discuss their choices. In addition the morning register slot became a reading zone where children had free choice to read, discuss and recommend reading material.

Initially as they were very young children this proved tricky as many children as yet lacked the understanding of the range of different text types available to them or the vocabulary to discuss them. During the next library session the range of different text types were shown to the children and led to discussions about what



they liked eg flap books, feely books, animal stories etc. The children took these back to school to add to our Book Nook and Story Time Box so that the texts used in class were based on the children's voice.

During the following session the teacher, teaching assistants, students and Librarian showed the children what they liked to read which led to the children expanding their understanding of different text types such as information books, magazines, manga comics etc. The adults modelled reading these texts during the week and the children then began to widen their choices and discovered their love of comics!

Next session the adults modelled making recommendations to each other and this led to a super discussion about what their family members liked to read and what they



read at home. The children were raring to go during the next library session and over the following weeks were able to both voice their preferences, make wider choices for themselves giving reasons for their choices and best of all began recommending texts to each other. This was brought back to school during registration time but soon spontaneous discussions began happening throughout the day both indoors and outside. The children loved den building so the idea to make reading dens was developed both inside and out and the children created a surprise reading den for the Nursery children. They added snuggly blankets and biscuits and excitedly shared their favourite stories with the younger children.

Impact

Using the Review Your Practice documents at the beginning and end of the project it was clear that there had been clear improvement towards the project aims. At the beginning of the project I rated my knowledge of the children's reading practices in school as a 3 and now rate it as a 6. My knowledge of their reading habits and preferences at home had moved from a score of 2 to 5. Looking at the question of



how often the children in my class chose what they read the score rose from 3 to 5. In particular the score for how often the children are encouraged to talk about texts during independent reading rose from 2 to 6. Although the children sometimes freely interacted with the classroom reading environment this was now regular. Opportunities provided for children to talk informally about their reading and preferences as readers moved from rarely to regularly. Specific tailored book recommendations rose from sometimes to regularly. How often I discuss what I am reading and my reading history moved from rarely to regularly. The initial library



sessions and adult modelling of language, attitudes and choices was central to getting the ball rolling. The registration time slot was pivotal in the early stages in developing reciprocity and personal connections and building a community of readers.

Much more importantly the children are motivated and love to read. They showed their passion and enthusiasm for reading by developing their reading den idea for the nursery children. They think positively about themselves as readers and are much more confident in their reading skills and at expressing their choices. They now read for pleasure regularly and make wider choices. In particular it has been great to see

how many of the boys in the class now identify themselves as readers and how the children seize opportunities for informal reading chats throughout the day. Going with their idea of developing reading dens was particularly useful during the later stages of the project in extending their talk and independent reading choices to outdoor play. They also take the lead in choosing our stories to follow during literacy sessions, story times and research projects which has had a huge motivational impact across the curriculum.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Using the 'Review Your Practice' documents really helped me to focus on which aspects of RfP pedagogy I needed to work on as a next step and was a very useful tool both for measuring progress and bringing all school staff into the project. A clear understanding of the importance of knowing which types of reading material individual children were motivated by and the crucial role of adult modelling of the process and language of making recommendations was especially impactful on my practice.



We now have regular discussions about book recommendations both adult-child, adult-adult and child-child which has been key in their motivation to read, allowing children to see themselves as readers and to look for authors or different text types themselves. It has also been great for the children to use the wider expertise of other children, family members, the librarian and local book shop owner and develop real communities of readers. The Year 6 teacher has also joined the project and used many of the techniques suggested to make ERIC time more impactful and has great results.

Some of the quotes from Y6 include 'I used to hate reading, if my mum bought me a book, I'd shove it the back of the bookcase. I couldn't find authors I liked. Now I'm discovering new ones for myself and I'm bothering my mum to buy them!' Even book sales at our Book Fair greatly increased! A community grant has been used to develop child designed reading sheds on rainbow and woodland themes to create an environment where the older children develop their own reading communities, making recommendations to each other. This is generating a buzz about reading across the school and as a next step we will develop the approach in all classes.