

Liverpool Readathon

Bringing Schools Together to Read for Pleasure

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Context

About Liverpool Learning Partnership



The Liverpool Learning Partnership (LLP) is a charitable organisation that was set up by school and education leaders in Liverpool to ensure the needs of all learners are prioritised. Known as 'The Liverpool Family of Schools', LLP has 99% of schools (over 160) engaged in the Partnership from all phases of education. Collaboration is at the heart of LLP and we seek to bring an education perspective to major city initiatives. We work closely with School Improvement Liverpool and the Local Authority Children's Services to ensure that the learners in Liverpool are given every opportunity to achieve.

One of our priorities is to support schools with the promotion of reading for pleasure. Our aim is that all children and young people in the city will have opportunities to read for pleasure at home and in school. We do so through a range of programmes including funded extra-curricular reading clubs for vulnerable pupils, support for schools looking to improve their book/library provision and curated offers from local reading organisations and Schools Libraries Service.

The Liverpool Readathon is a joint project by Liverpool Learning Partnership and Read for Good, a charity that has been running sponsored Readathons in individual schools since 1984.

About Read for Good



Read for Good is a children's literacy charity with the main mission of motivating children to read for fun. Schools have been running its Readathon since 1984, raising £28 million and several generations of readers. Children who've taken part in a Readathon are more likely to read more, read more widely and use their school library (source: [National Literacy Trust 2018](#)). Money raised helps fund Read for Good's unique programme bringing the power of stories to all 30 of the UK's major children's hospitals. This year, Read for Good will give away 28,000 new books and arrange more than 200 days' worth of professional storytelling in hospitals. The charity has also donated £1 million to school libraries since 2010. For more information visit www.readforgood.org

OU Research inspiration and rationale

The Open University's Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research project (Cremin et al, 2008) highlighted the importance of reciprocal and interactive reading communities of teachers, parents and children within schools. We wanted to find a way to support schools in developing these communities. However, we also wanted to find ways to build a larger community of reading schools within the city, providing

opportunities for schools to share in reading experiences (having books in common) and to share their reading for pleasure practice with each other.

The initial 2017 Liverpool Readathon showed how a citywide event could provide impetus for a school to launch and develop their own programmes in order to create a whole school community of readers. We were keen to build on this for the next year to further support schools in doing this but also to help them connect with other schools taking part in the project.

Aims

- To support Liverpool schools in developing whole school communities based around Reading for Pleasure
- To connect Liverpool schools to each other (digitally and physically) through a shared sponsored read and author events

Outline

Liverpool Readathon 2017



Read for Good had heard of the Liverpool City of Readers campaign (a project that Liverpool Learning Partnership had worked on in conjunction with The Reader Organisation) and had been piloting extending its Readathon model to clusters of schools - from an academy chain to a London borough - and felt that Liverpool would be a good fit for its first citywide Readathon. We felt that working with them on this project would not only further Read for Good's charitable work but also would provide Liverpool schools with an opportunity to further share their work

on reading for pleasure with each other.

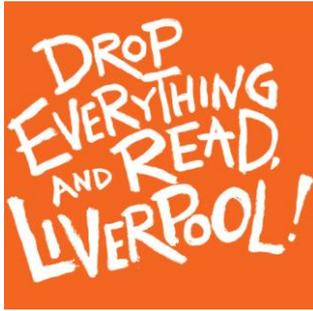
The first Liverpool Readathon took place in October of 2017 involving some 70 schools and 20,000 children. Schools signed up to run a sponsored read for a fortnight, with many holding their own reading celebrations as part of the event. We encouraged schools to use the #LiverpoolReadathon hashtag to share their experiences.

As a way of bringing schools physically together we arranged for an author event with Sarah McIntyre in Central Library. Pupils from 10 different schools came together to meet Sarah, hear about her books and learn how to draw a pug or a shark. Sarah also visited a breakfast club in the morning and a primary school in the afternoon.



Following the success of the 2017 Readathon event we decided to collaborate with Read for Good again on a second event. Based on the Teachers as Readers research, we decided to look at ways to adapt and develop the event in order to further support schools in developing their own reading communities and also to build a larger citywide community of reading schools.

Liverpool Readathon 2018



Based on feedback in 2017 that the sponsorship model was difficult for some schools in more deprived areas, a citywide Drop Everything and Read event was introduced for the 2018 event. Schools could choose to ask for a £1 donation to Read for Good as part of this, but all schools would be able to join in with reading at the same time. In order to create more of a community approach, we also organised Drop Everything and Read events for adults in cultural venues (such as Tate Liverpool and Victoria Gallery and Museum, Liverpool) and in some cafes.

In 2017 twitter interaction had increased during the event but we wanted to encourage a more sharing and social use of the hashtag for 2018. We incentivised use of the #LiverpoolReadathon hashtag by offering book and comic prizes for schools who shared their experiences. However, we were aware that not all schools are on social media so included a way for schools not on twitter to enter by them emailing us links to their newsletters or websites featuring a piece on how they took part in the Liverpool Readathon.

Feedback from the 2017 showed that schools who attended the shared author events with Sarah McIntyre thought that this was a great way to develop conversations around reading for pleasure in their school. We decided to extend this for the second year by holding not only a primary event (again with Sarah McIntyre) but also holding an event for secondary schools with Phil Earle. All schools attending these events were given copies of one of Sarah or Phil's books.



To date, Liverpool schools have raised more than £33,000 on the two citywide Readathons, with 20% of the money raised used by schools to purchase books for school libraries and 10% supporting Liverpool Learning Partnership's new programme supporting secondary schools to run summer schools for vulnerable pupils leaving primary school - in particular, book swap boxes to encourage children to read for pleasure during the holidays. The rest funds Read for Good's mobile bookcase and storytelling service at Alder Hey - the bookcase bears a dedication to the Liverpool schools who participated.

Impact



Having now ran the event twice, Liverpool Learning Partnership and Read for Good were delighted to see an increase in those taking part from 73 schools in 2017 to 95 schools across Liverpool in 2018 (27,717 children).

In an evaluation of the 2018 event, 71% of respondents thought that being part of a city-wide event motivated pupils to read more than if only their school had been running it: *"Especially with the citywide DEAR and it was good that students could share with friends in other schools."*

7 of the 10 schools who responded said they took part in the Drop Everything And Read events. An average of 260 pupils per school took part in DEAR which extrapolates roughly as 23 400 pupils reading at the same time across Liverpool (based on 70% of the schools taking part in DEAR events): *“It was fun just to stop working and to read.”*



Based on an idea trialled during the Leicester Readathon (which had launched using the model developed with the Liverpool event), a booklet was distributed to all participating schools giving ideas for whole class/school activities that could be carried out during the event to help develop reading conversations- eg reading den building, book assemblies, bedtime stories etc. Through twitter we found that many schools did use the event as an opportunity to hold formal whole school reading events as well as allowing informal reading opportunities within and across classes to develop. Schools carried out their own class Drop Everything and Reads, took part in buddy reads, held book cover design competitions, took part in a school wide book-themed Mannequin Challenge etc. One school found that the whole school focus on reading empowered students to develop their own reading groups on the playground.

Read for Good identified a 300% increase in their twitter interactions during the fortnight. As well as using #LiverpoolReadathon in their own social media posts, several schools encouraged parents to join in too, sharing what they as families had been reading at home.

This collection of tweets gives a flavour of the activities that happened in schools during the fortnight: <http://wke.lt/w/s/bgWlt>

Next Steps

Following feedback from schools (regarding the number of charitable events occurring in the Autumn term), we've moved the next Liverpool Readathon to March 2020 in order to coincide with World Book Day. Our plan is to hold a citywide Drop Everything on Read on both World Book Day and the final Friday of the fortnight, and also to hold further author events as part of these celebrations.

As part of some of our other reading projects, we've been exploring other ways to encourage and develop further sharing between schools as part of the Readathon events. We will continue to encourage social media as a way of doing this but will also look at developing further face to face events which aim to bring schools together to talk about reading and books.



Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Following the wider impact of TaRs research and the OU UKLA RFP website, many schools are now developing group, class and whole school communities based around the ideas of book blether, reading recommendations and books in common.

As part of the Liverpool Readathon, we aimed to develop a citywide approach to reading for pleasure, encouraging schools to run their reading celebrations at the same time and bringing them together digitally through social media (#LiverpoolReadathon) and physically at shared author events.

We've now had two Liverpool Readathons (the 2018 event was also open to schools in Knowsley) and the model developed in Liverpool with LLP has now been adapted by Read for Good for use in other cities, with both Leicester and Manchester now running an annual citywide Readathon. We are planning for our third Liverpool Readathon for March 2020 and will be looking further at how this event can be used to develop a citywide (and potentially even region wide) community of reading schools.

Bringing the city's schools together through the Liverpool Readathon has had the knock-on effect that, throughout the year, LLP member schools are now regularly sharing their ideas, activity and practice with other schools through the @ReadingatLLP twitter account and at face to face networking events. The Readathon events have shown that there is an appetite for joint events based around reading for pleasure. This led to us developing a range of reading based events throughout the academic year that allow pupils and staff to come together (physically and digitally) to share in author events, discuss books and share practice. These events are not just seen as one off activities but have become a jumping off point for further explorations of reading for pleasure.