

Story Time is Cosy Time

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Context

I am a student teacher currently in my last year of teacher training at St Mary's University College. As I was once a child who found reading as a boring and displeasing task, my hope is to provide the children I teach with dissimilar experiences.



Reading should not be thought of as a 'task' by these young, impressionable minds rather it should be sought out as a pleasurable experience. Teachers are in the driving seat for defining what reading is within their classrooms. I therefore aim to become a teacher who inspires and equips children with the skills they require to read for pleasure.

OU Inspiration and Rationale

Reading for pleasure (RfP) refers to reading that a person freely chooses to engage in due to the satisfaction that they will get from being immersed in the act of reading (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). At the beginning of my placement, I was made aware that each day the children take part in ERIC time, (Everyone Reading in Class), during which they would read their guided reading books. When I observed this however, I noticed that some children were reluctant to take out their books. They didn't seem to enjoy this reading experience sitting upright at their tables in a typical learning stance. ERIC time seemed like rather a 'means to an end' with children rushing through the pages to avoid it for homework, rather than actually enjoying the characters and the story. According to the Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA, 2007, p.54) children should, '*read with some independence for enjoyment and information*'. These children were reading for education not for FUN. This reflects how I felt as a child; it is only as I've grown older that I have started enjoying reading. Now when I read at home, I get comfortable, I very rarely sit upright rigidly at a table. Yet, this is what is being asked of children in schools? This is the reason why I choose to adopt 'Story Time is Cosy Time' into my classroom to rekindle a love of reading.

The TaRs research emphasised that creating relaxing social spaces that promote individual choice can encourage children to engage in reading (Cremin et al., 2014). This research motivated me to alter the organisation and structure of reading in the classroom. I allowed children to take ownership of their own reading journeys by providing them with the opportunity to use their favourite reading material from home.

Aims

My ultimate goal for this project is to create an environment in which children pick up books not just for educational purposes but for the sheer joy that they associate with reading. I aim to provide children with sociable and enjoyable reading opportunities to avoid the reading poverty I experienced as a child. This project 'Story Time is Cosy Time' therefore, is very personal to me. I hope to create a community of children readers through:

- Allocating time for reading for pleasure.
- Creating a great atmosphere when children engaging in reading.
- Encouraging independent choice of reading material.
- Developing a social environment in which children share experiences, make book recommendations and express opinions.

- Expanding my own repertoire of children's literature to be able to make recommendations tailored to specific individuals.
- Changing children's perceptions of reading, inspiring them to read for pleasure.

Outline

To plan for this project, I started to reflect on how and where I read for pleasure to integrate it into my classroom practice. When reading I'm normally on my sofa or snuggled up in bed with a fluffy blanket. I thought about how I could make a more inviting atmosphere promote RfP. I introduced the idea of 'Story Time is Cosy Time' to the children instead of calling it 'Independent Reading' which the children were predisposed to. During this time, the children were able to **choose how and where they wanted to sit and read** their books whether it be cosying up in the class library or stretching their legs upon a chair. The children were able to independently choose if they wanted to read silently, read aloud or read with their friend; it **was entirely their own choice**. **A sociable reading environment was created** in which they were allowed to discuss their books with their friends. However, I did make the children aware that they must respect others who wish to read quietly and independently. To make this experience as enjoyable and comfortable as possible the children were able to bring in a **cosy pair of slippers and a small blanket or cushion** from home. I also gathered some of my own cushions and blankets which were stored in the class library. **Sometimes I played relaxing music or placed a video of a blazing fire** on the interactive whiteboard to add to the atmosphere. I was also fully involved in 'Story Time is Cosy Time' bringing in my own favourite book and slippers to enjoy this reading experience with the children.



Impact

From the outset the children were excited about this new vibrant concept of reading time in contrast to the traditional and stagnant methods of independent reading. The project had an instant impact on RfP. I observed children with a completely different attitude to reading than previously, their feedback was extremely positive. Comments from the children include, **"Thank you for letting us cosy read today!"** and **"Are we going to read today?"**. This project altered the environment and the enjoyment levels when independent reading occurred in the classroom, they couldn't wait to delve into their books! I believe that the environment created, provided the children with more freedom to discuss their self-chosen texts with their peers, make recommendations and share books with each other. They were not under any pressure to pick certain books or answer questions based on their book. The children loved 'Story Time is Cosy Time' so much that they decided to raise money for Trocaire by taking part in a **Cosy Read-a-thon**.

Reflections on the impact of the TaRs inspired project

On reflection, I will definitely continue to implement 'Story Time is Cosy Time' in my future practice. It has proved to be an unthreatening platform for children to just get comfortable and have fun reading their books. This project has made me more aware of the importance of advocating RfP within the classroom, inspiring children to develop a love for reading. It has also made me realise that a social environment should be created for reading, encouraging informal conversations about the book's children enjoy, as Cremin et al (2014) also advocate based on their research.

I thoroughly enjoyed this reading experience myself, just taking some time out of a busy day to unwind and get lost in a book. By modelling RfP, I was setting an example for the children portraying how much I enjoy and value reading. Although, I have been faced with some challenges along the way, which I will continue to address in future practice. There were children who tasked with the idea of free choice, decided to stroll around the room. To prevent this, in future, the idea would be to pair the disengaged child with a 'reading buddy'. The child, therefore, would still be able to choose their own book but they would also be encouraged to interact with their buddy about their book. Additionally, I would offer specific book recommendations based on the children's interests. The Northern Ireland Curriculum (CEA, 2007, p.14) states that, 'the learning experiences provided should reflect pupils' interests.'