

Starting the RfP Secondary school Journey

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Context

I work at Windsor High School and Sixth Form, a secondary school in the West Midlands. I teach students from Year 5 through our Mastery programme up to those studying A Level English Literature. For the past two years I have been Curriculum Leader for KS3 English. As part of my role at school I work alongside our inspiring School Librarian, supporting our reading programmes and finding new ways to entice our children and teenagers to read.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

I have always been an avid reader and grew up in a household where reading was valued and shared and my passion for books led me to study English Literature at University. I was also inspired by my own teachers who introduced me to some of the books I still hold close to my heart to this day. Yet, I look back on my teacher training and my subsequent time working in Secondary schools and have noticed a problem: the only time I talked to my students about books was when we studied a class novel or they completed a reading analysis task. Our fortnightly reading lessons were generally conducted in silence. I sat and read with them but this was either a behaviour management tool or an attempt to 'close the gap' for the weaker readers with more questions and checking of understanding. If the children didn't know what to read, I couldn't offer them any meaningful help aside from recommending the books I had enjoyed as a child over ten years before. I could tell them I loved reading and it was really important, but I couldn't help them find this out for themselves. This led me to begin to explore what I could meaningfully change in my classroom practice.

Two years ago, I listened to a fantastic Research Ed talk by Sonia Thompson in which she shared with us her school's journey and engagement with the OU/UKLA RfP Research. This was my introduction to the 'Teachers as Readers' (TaRs) research. I explored the website and the book (Cremin et al., 2014) and had one of those lightbulb moments when I realised I had found what I needed to shift my focus from an exclusively purpose driven approach to reading, as is so often the dominant mode in secondary education, towards one that fostered the joy that I remembered from my childhood.

TaRs found that in order to foster RfP effectively, teachers need to develop:

1. Considerable knowledge of children's literature and other texts
2. Knowledge of children's reading practices
3. A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:
 - Social reading environments

- *Reading aloud*
 - *Independent reading*
 - *Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations*
4. *As Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach*
 5. *Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.*

(Cremin et al., 2014)

The research clearly outlines that without a rich and evolving knowledge of Children's Literature, teachers cannot begin to develop reciprocal reading relationships with their children, so this is where I decided to begin. Alongside my own observations of my practice, I completed the Reading Survey on the website which helped me see that the biggest barrier to my development and my ability to support my students was my knowledge of Children's Literature.

I could only name a handful of children's authors and most of those were from my childhood experiences or the authors routinely taught through the KS 3 curriculum. This was a simultaneously troubling and empowering moment for me; I had a starting point and set out to begin to broaden my very lacking knowledge!

Aims

- Improve my knowledge of Children's Literature
- Share my passion for books with my students through visible displays
- Investigate meaningful opportunities to ignite reading conversations in my classroom
- Begin to consider how our departmental approach to 'reading lessons' could change and develop for the better through practice in my own lessons.

Outline

Improving my knowledge

I set out to read as much as possible, beginning with the wonderful '**Book Award**' lists available on the **OU RfP** website. <https://researchrichpedagogies.org/news-awards/details/book-award-winners-2018-19>

I also **used Twitter** as a way of engaging with other more well-read teachers who offered suggestions and ideas of 'what to read next'. I joined the UKLA and explored the reviews in 'English 9-11' and attended two OU/UKLA conferences to expand my awareness of the wonderful range of children's books out there and open my mind to the exciting possibilities.

To increase the visibility of this in my own mind, **I changed my email signature to 'What I am reading'** both so colleagues could also see my current book of choice and to ensure I could 'track' my own choices and build in variety. I also used the brilliant <http://whatimreading.org/> to create a poster to display on my classroom door so the children could also see what I was reading.

Miss H. Grace
Curriculum Leader KS3 English

Currently reading...



What are you reading?

Miss H. Grace
Curriculum Leader KS3 English

Currently reading...



What are you reading?

I decided to privilege time within my teaching day to immerse myself in my newly discovered books. Whereas previously I would work through lunch marking or responding to emails, **I set aside 15-20 minute to just read and relax, sometimes in my classroom and sometimes in the school library.** I also decided to 'win back' some of the time within my day when I was away from my desk such as the 5-10 minutes before staff briefing. These two changes were the most powerful; not only did I feel better for it, but colleagues noticed too. **Colleagues frequently asked what I was reading** and I have since shared books and

recommendations with them.

On break duty, I would take a book with me and make sure it was visible. I noticed that children began to come up and ask 'Miss, what are you reading?' and even if they could 'have my book next'. Sometimes, particularly with the older students, the question was 'Why have you got a book at break time?', which itself opened up more interesting conversations about the value of reading and their own feelings about reading.

Making it visible

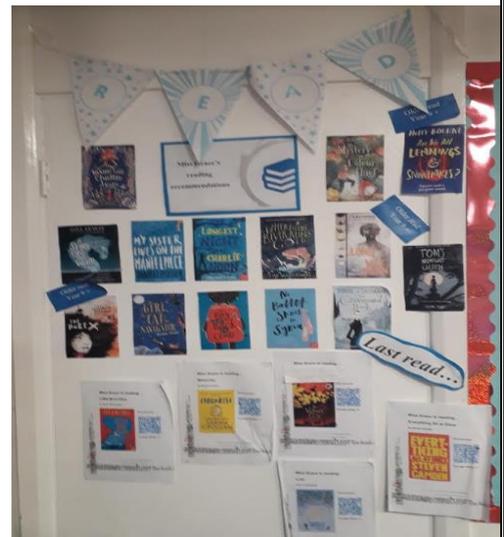
I was lucky this year to move to a classroom which offered me space to display books I had read and enjoyed. Over the summer I **created a display at the back of the room to show my top reads from the summer** which ignited interest when the students returned.



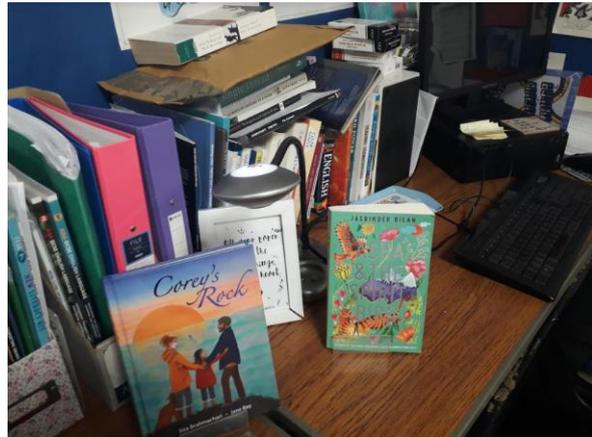
I also wanted to make sure I had these books available so they could borrow them, using a bookcase to create a small reading corner in the limited space available in the room. I made sure some were front-facing and regularly rotated them.

Children began to and explore, at first it was a novelty but it did begin to become a regular place the children wanted to visit. Most notably, as the photograph shows I

noticed some my most disengaged students in Year 10 began taking the front-facing books during our Friday reading time, reading them in class and labelling them as 'R's book' or 'Don't take my book' to make sure it didn't disappear for next time. They weren't at the stage where they wanted to take books home but they were reading!



Then, at the front of the room, I displayed books I had bought and read following an OU Conference or been lucky enough to win through the fantastic and generous competitions I had begun to enter on Twitter. I made it clear that students could come and take these to explore! I tried to include some picture fiction and poetry to 'hook them' in with different genres and challenge their expectations of what 'reading books' were. The impact of this became apparent, when students began to query if reading 'the book with pictures' or poems 'counted'! I started to read illustrated books – including the wonderful 'A Story Like the Wind' - under my visualiser and these choices quickly became popular.



Beginning the process of sharing with students

As my knowledge developed, I also began to plan and trial different approaches to begin to generate reading discussions with the students including:

- Sending out a weekly

KS3 Reading Noticeboard to my department and displaying this on the corridor to share student book reviews, reading links and reading stars.

- **Creating challenges such as the 'Summer Reading Bingo' and 'Get Caught Reading for World Book Day'.** Although I was wary that this

Wincor High School Summer Reading BINGO!
 See how much exciting reading you can enjoy over the summer holidays. Record the title, author and ONE word to describe the book or article - be ambitious!
 Hand in your completed bingo sheets to Miss Drake or your English Teacher by the end of the day on **Wednesday 4th September** to be entered into an exciting prize draw.

NAME: _____
 TUTOR GROUP: _____

A book of less than a 100 pages	A book from your local library - check out libraireadings.better.org.uk/ library catalogue for your nearest one!	A book set in a faraway location
TITLE/ author _____	TITLE/ author _____	TITLE/ author _____
My one word review _____	My one word review _____	My one word review _____
A book that makes you smile!	A newspaper or magazine article about an issue that is important to you.	A book that you have read with a parent/ sibling/ friend
TITLE/ author _____	TITLE/ author _____	TITLE/ author _____
My one word review _____	My one word review _____	My one word review _____

Earn a bonus entry into the prize draw by taking a photograph of yourself reading over the summer and attach it to your bingo card.

Happy reading!
 The English Department

HOUSE OF COMPETITION
Get caught reading!

WORLD BOOK DAY

Take a **photo** of yourself **reading** in an unusual place. Make sure that the book you are reading is visible.

Challenge yourself to...

- Include a World Book Day Book;
- Read an inspiring text;
- Create a photograph as a tutor group

All entries to be printed and handed or emailed to Miss Grace OR Mrs Wood in the Library by the end of the day **Thursday 5th March**.

The categories are:

1. Individual student photograph
2. Tutor group 'caught reading' photograph
3. Staff member photograph (points for your House!)

The top photograph in each category will receive a prize and ALL entrants will receive **house points** and be part of an exciting display on World Book Day!

Get Caught Reading

could appear tokenistic, I wanted to provide the children with opportunities to see reading differently, and critically, entice them into the library or my classroom to discuss these activities which would then open up further potential for developing reading relationships.

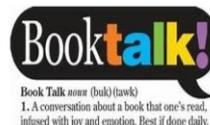
- Shifting the focus in my own weekly reading lessons away from 'silent reading' to **a culture of book chat and shared recommendations**. With my Year 7 and 8 groups I introduced a 'Big up your Book' slot in which students had one minute to 'sell their book' to the rest of the class. We sometimes also did the spontaneously. With Year 8, who often struggled to concentrate and openly told me reading lessons were 'boring', I bought them a selection of comics and picture fiction and gave them the opportunity to wander, read in pairs and read aloud.
- **Providing opportunities for children to share reading choices across year groups and with staff**, such as Year 10 students presenting their top reads to Year 8 in a '**Book Factor**' events and a '**Books and Bakes**' afternoon involving a wide variety of school staff and our School Librarians.

Impact

The impact of my growing knowledge has been profound on me personally; I now myself enjoy reading more as I can have positive and exciting conversations with children in our reading lessons. My engagement with my own reading experience has also opened up many more questions than answers for me, as I now begin to consider how I can develop our reading time to fully engage the children who 'can, but don't'.

'**Big up your book**' has been a great success with my KS3 classes; whilst initially already 'hooked readers' in Year 7 regularly signed up, I have noticed other students now putting themselves forwards or, at least, taking part in 'bigging up' in pairs. When asked in a recent lesson in which we studied Blake's 'The Schoolboy', what they thought about school, it was heartening to find they recorded 'reading lessons' as one of their favourite things about school!

Thursday



READ THIS NOW

BIG UP YOUR BOOK!

Your have 2 MINUTES to tell us why we should read your book next!

Think about...

What made you choose it? What clues do the cover and blurb give you?

Who is your favourite character? What is your favourite moment?

Is it...funny? Magical? Confusing?

Intriguing? Emotional?

Who else might like it and WHY?

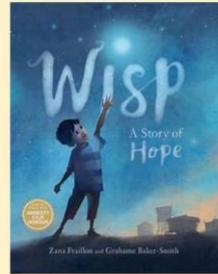
Perhaps share a chapter/ paragraph/ line with your class!

My observations of my Year 8 class have been the most powerful element of this journey. Our lessons are slowly transforming into relaxed and incredibly purposeful opportunities for shared reading. At the beginning of Year 8, I noticed that most of the children in this class weren't actually reading in the lessons and many told me they didn't like reading. Since introducing comics, welcoming and encouraging book chat and giving them more freedom in the library, I have noticed moments such as:

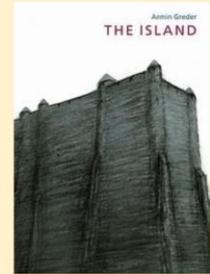
- 'Reluctant' readers engrossed in the 'Roy of the Rover's' Book I bought them after talking to them about how much they liked football;

- Students in the class desperately debating who could read the next 'Looshkin' graphic novel (Jamie Smart) after I hooked them in with the hilarious jokes of 'Fish Head Steve';
- A group of boys enjoying a Non-Fiction book about cars that one of them had brought from home to share;
- Requests for more stories like 'The Dam' and 'Wisp' after I started let them choose a 'shared read' for me to read aloud to them at the start of lessons.

Shared read - you choose!



OR



We still have lots to do, but I have begun to see the foundations of change for these students that will hopefully help them begin to see reading in a different light.

As well as this, I now regularly receive visits from children in school who want some help choosing books in the library and/ or to borrow one of mine or simply want to tell me about a great book they have been reading. **I am finding this is now extending beyond my own classes**, most notably in a conversations with children who come to give me book reviews! Recently, before the school closure, a group of Year 10 girls visited my room to see if I could give them some books as they were worried about not having enough to read and they knew I would have plenty! I was able to give them some books that I thought they might enjoy and escape into during this challenging period. Some of these students have been in touch to let me know how much they are enjoying the books! I have received messages over recent weeks such as:

- *'Thank you for lending me the book 'Moonrise', I sat down yesterday and read the entire thing. I thoroughly enjoyed it.'*
- *'I've just finished the one you let me borrow before, 'The Art of Being Normal' and it was amazing.'*

The most significant impact has been that I have now been lucky enough to lead a an **OU/ UKLA Teachers Reading Group** with a group of colleagues from across our local area which has enabled me to begin to share my passion and engagement with the research on a wider level; the feedback from this has been incredibly positive and all participants have begun to develop their own knowledge of Children's Literature and projects for their schools.



Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Without a doubt, my engagement with the research has transformed my teaching practice and facilitated so many more meaningful discussions with my students.

I am relishing the opportunity to develop my own knowledge as well as encourage my own department and others within our local area – both primary and secondary – to embark on their own RfP journey through running the OU/ UKLA Teachers' Reading Group. My priorities moving forwards are:

- Reflect upon ways to make our KS3 Library lessons and reading time more reciprocal and inclusive of all readers.
- Share my practice with my department and encourage them to engage with the research-informed RfP pedagogy.
- Review and write up my findings from the project with my Year 8 group focused on shared stories, read aloud and reading agency and share the outcomes through my Chartered Teacher Research Project.
- Delve deeper into the transferability of primary-phase research to a secondary context and investigate further as to why RfP seems to be under-documented in secondary schools.
- Continue to grow my TRG and explore opportunities for cross-phase sharing of best practice and form even more connections as Reading Teachers!
- Consider how we can continue our work for remote learning.