Enticing reading corners

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Context

We are primary PGCE trainees at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.
As part of the initial, four week placement, we complete a project based on reading for pleasure. For this placement we were based in a Year I class in an urban school.

Research inspiration and rationale

- The TaRs report highlighted the importance of social reading environments in creating rich reading communities. These were characterised by being physically engaging and relaxing, inviting children into texts and spaces where they could read for pleasure.

- Fundamentally, the research shows that engaging social reading environments are interactive, encouraging informal book talk which is a key component of RfP pedagogy.

Rationale based on our context

Reflecting on the TaRs report encouraged us to think about the social reading environment in our classroom and how this might restrict the social interactions necessary for RfP. Due to the shape of our classroom, the 'reading corner' was composed of two book cases located on two adjacent walls. These did not seem an integral part of the classroom, and we noticed that the children did not actively choose to use them. Reading conversations with the teacher were limited to their daily guided reading slots, where the children read a banded book separately within their group. There was a noticeable lack of talk between the children about their reading, and the books in the reading corner were only read by the children not in that day's guided reading group. During this time, children would frequently sit at their normal tables, although sometimes they would sit/lie on the floor in a more informal manner. Whilst they were sitting with their peers there was no interaction as each were read independently.

Our aims:

- To create an enticing reading corner that tempts children to read for pleasure

- To build reciprocal reader to reader relationships between staff and children by reading to them and sharing questions

- To build reciprocal reader to reader relationships between children by facilitating discussions about texts and reading

- To expand the children's knowledge of texts and to inspire their engagement with a greater variety of books

- To encourage children to reflect about what they like and don't like within a text, leading to interactive discussions and recommendations

- To create a display that encourages discussion within children based on their reading experiences, and offers recommendations to the class

Outline of the Project

Our research involved reading one fiction, one non-fiction and one poetry book with a group of 4 children. We read out loud to the children, normalising the practise of reading aloud, which the TaRs research identified as being one of the key specific practices. After each reading, we engaged in informal booktalk with the children, summarising the readings and talking about interesting features and information that engaged or disengaged the children. Children were encouraged to identify what they did and did not like within the books.
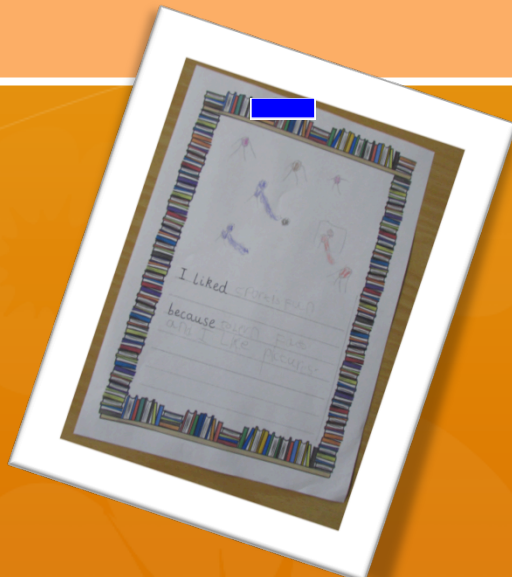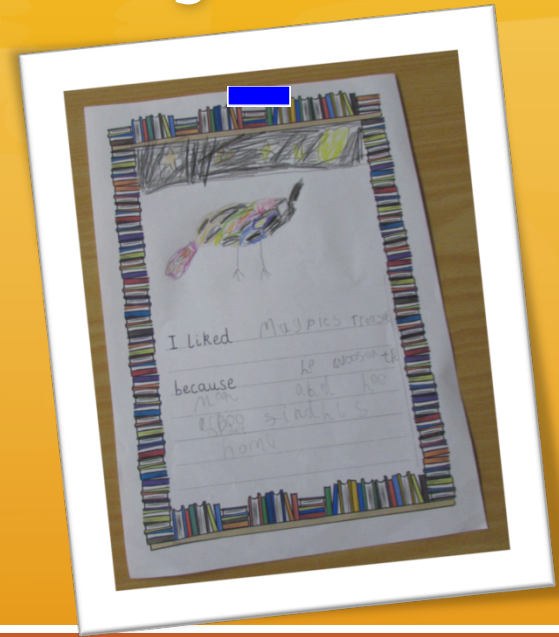
The children were then asked to choose their favourite of the three books and to complete a poster identifying the book, explaining why they liked it and then drawing a picture. The children's work was then displayed on a new, eye-catching display. During guided reading over the rest of the week, the rest of the class were asked to complete their own posters each time they read a new book.

Impact and Reflections

The children enjoyed us reading to them and were very engaged in the discussions that followed. They were confident in discussing which parts of the texts they did and did not like, and in choosing their favourite text.

The eye-catching display drew the children to the books and saw them learning about what others in their class had enjoyed about their reading experiences. This made them more aware of the range of books available to them and inspired them to read a greater variety of books. We hope that we have now created an environment that inspires the children to read for pleasure.

In reading and discussing communally, we formed reciprocal and interactive reader to reader relationships with children, familiarising the children to social reading environments. In having these discussions, it is hoped that we have created an environment which facilitates the sharing of recommendations within the class.

Independent reading time does now have the potential to take place within a more social reading environment- children remain in control of their personal reading however are also more confident at interacting within their reading communities in greater depth. However, we must acknowledge that the extent to which this can happen is dependent on their teacher's rules within guided reading time, when the children have their reading opportunities. Nevertheless, the permanent display does facilitate book talk outside of key reading times which may still inspire future reads.