

OTTER: Our Time To Enjoy Reading

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Context

It has been questioned; the extent to which children choose to read for their own pleasure, for their teachers or for assessment (Cremin, 2016). The following project is designed to motivate young children to enjoy reading independently, rather than reading only specific materials or resources. This project will first consider the professional context already established in the host school. From this several holistic aims will be devised to improve the approach and environment surrounding reading in the school as cited by Skinner (Evans, 1968), *'We shouldn't teach great books; we should teach a love of reading'*.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum (2007) is skill based designed to prepare children to contribute to society, however reading in the outside world today is no longer confined to books (Self, 2008). Children of today's education should be effective and critical readers of multimodal texts. However, the UKLA study indicates, by forming an enhanced awareness and deep pleasure in reading, teachers can become engaged, self-motivated and socially interactive readers who read widely (Cremin *et al.*, 2009).

The host school was St Columba's, Stranmillis in a class of 26 primary two children. Despite the aim of the project being the same for each child, it was important the approach was appropriately tailored to children's learning needs (Fisher & Williams, 2006). Regarding, reading, all the children had mastered alphabetic skills and letter-sound relationships.

The more advanced readers have become proficient at recognising many



words, both in and out of context (Renlearn, 2018).



The school has a school library with an Accelerated Reader section for children who are involved in the programme. Within my class only seven children were initially involved in the programme, however over the eight-week placement 19 children were introduced to AR daily, taking a quiz about their book and receiving points to progress up their



rockets as a motivator to complete the independent reading. It has been suggested amongst staff, that promoting AR reading in schools introduces a mindset to the children that reading is another task- a chore that must be completed daily; something which this project hoped to avoid.

The children's Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading 'star test' was reviewed throughout each term to determine if they are ready for Accelerated Reading, failure to meet the level for the programme meant these children remained selecting books from their appropriate colour level during 30 mins of AR time.

World Book dress-up Day is something that is always apparent in this school and an opportunity to contribute to the aims of the project.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

The reading for pleasure strand of the TaRs findings inspired me to further develop reading for pleasure to develop a social reading environments. There was evidently a potential opportunity for children to access children's literature in the library however a main concern when entering the school was whether the children knew how to select appropriate literature. Despite the daily time given to reading, this was not always used to its greatest potential as the environment was just like a usual class lesson hence the children had to be spoken to and told to remain 'silent' throughout the session. The NI Curriculum (2007) aim indicates the significance of literacy as a social practice as it cites the need for initial reading experiences to be informal, enjoyable and shared reading experiences as key to scaffolding learning in reading.

Aims

From observing the current promotion of reading traditions in my host school, and upon reflection on the core literature relating reading for pleasure, the following aims were constructed for the project;

- *Promote designated time to reading in class in addition to AR time which will be free from assessment.*
- *Create a welcoming, social reading environment to appeal to the children to engage in reading all the time.*
- *Arrange a 'buddy system' to demonstrate the selecting of appropriate books from the school library for early years children.*

- *Encourage World Book Day as a way of promoting relationships and discussion at home about stories, authors and literature in an affordable way.*

Outline and Impact



OTTER the puppet liked to read stories and visited our class when it was time to enjoy reading. The children developed a rapport and familiarity with him as they listened to Otter discussing his favourite part of a book during shared reading and similarly the children would give feedback of aspects of their story to Otter. When the children listened to the stories read by 'Otter', they developed a sense of empathy towards the characters; this is known to activate the

mirror neurone system within the brain, which relates the story to the listener by intentionally putting themselves in the character's situation, and consequently, the learning and understanding becomes better embedded (Howard, 2013).

Strauss (2005) noted just as stories can help children empathize with characters, they can also help



listeners to become excited as they form a connection to the natural world during an adventure in a story and involve all whom we share our world with. These meaningful links with our society created by story (Council for Subject Associations, 2010) potentially motivate and make pupils feel included in their own learning by encouraging them to

recognise such links (Hewlett, 2008).

Despite having access to a school library, as part of the project the second aim was to create a welcoming, social reading environment to appeal to the children to engage in reading all the time. The class library was created as a comfortable, relaxed, colourful and attractively decorated area for reading within the classroom.



Research consistently shows that the creation of a classroom library/space is one of the best ways to foster a love of reading in school, as children have constant access to books and can find something to read at any suitable time in the school day (Cremin et al., 2014; Education.gov.scot, 2018). If children read literature regularly, their higher order thinking skills are said to develop



which will potentially enable them to extend and improve their standard of reading to develop a love for it in the future (Fisher & Williams, 2006).

The following activity was used to encourage the children to become familiar with the new

environment in the classroom while simultaneously developing essential future reading skills; skimming and scanning. The children had a 'scavenger challenge' where in teams they had to look at the picture/ character name from their team list and then record what story book this is from in the class library under the pressure of competition from their peers.



One observation expressed an uncertainty on whether the children could successfully access appropriate literature for their age consequently many did not receive any fulfilment from this reading. Research shows that paired reading can encourage children to read more independently and become more positive about reading in general

(Education.gov.scot, 2018). A 'Buddy

Reading time' was undertaken where primary six children were paired with primary two children as reading should be understood a social practice rather than a solo endeavour (NALA, 2008). On reflection, the collaborative process supplied a scaffold for both learners as the key stage two child showed a development in their interpersonal skills through experiencing a deeper sense of responsibility, dedication and pride in being able to help a peer. There was a development in their speaking and listening skills through the meaningful questions



as

and active listening involved. The younger children also developed confidence as they interacted with a positive peer role models . As Bruner (1999) argued a collaborative learning environment configured as a community of learners can form a 'scaffold' for learning.

There is a strong relationship between parents' knowledge, beliefs and interaction styles with children's engagement in reading (McLachlan *et al* 2013). The following project took place during World Book day and because of this evidence the project aimed to use this day as way of promoting relationships and discussion at home about stories, authors and literature in an affordable way. A range of popular story characters were uploaded on the school website that could be made easily at

-  Aliens.pdf
-  BFG.pdf
-  Cat-in-the-HAT.pdf
-  dress-up-sheets-Burglar-Bill.pdf
-  dress-up-sheets-Harry-Potter.pdf
-  Elmer.pdf
-  MR-Strong-and-Little-Miss-Sunshine.pdf
-  Gruffalo-Mouse.pdf
-  Peppa.pdf
-  Peter-Rabbit.pdf

home with the assistance of parents. This interaction would create the opportunity of a sharing discussion with the child and their parent about stories. Cairney (2003) used the common catchphrase that 'Parents are children's first teachers' as they have a role of: listener, prompter, information giver, asker of questions and fellow meaning maker all of which is necessary when instilling a pleasure for reading from the foundations of home.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Despite the above aims of the project generally being met by most children , in future further differentiation should be incorporated to instil a sense of pleasure for reading among every child. The social, reading environment did initially appeal to the children however if the project was continuing to run for a long period of time it would be vital to change the setting to remain a welcoming and vibrant area. The area had a range of story books however to further enhance the area, a range of texts like non-fiction books and stories with increased words could be included; as



the children progress through primary two. For future recommendations of the project a provision of ideas to support the ever-increasing array of text types and multimodal forms of reading should be included to appeal to different reading styles.

To become a lifelong reader, it is essential you think critically

towards literacy. This is a person who can apply creative thinking to their reading, they can interpret the story, to read the lines but also to read between and beyond the lines (Fisher & Williams, 2006). However, UKLA research, discovered whilst the majority of teachers read independently for pleasure, professionally they rely on a very limited canon of children's authors and can name only a narrow range of picture fiction creators (Cremin et al., 2009).

The project has helped inform my own professional practice as a teacher. In future, I will endeavour to become familiar with a sufficient diverse range of writers to enable myself as an educator to foster reader development and make recommendations to the young readers in my class that have different needs and interests. This research project has shown me as an educator that the lack of professional knowledge and assurance with children's literature has potentially serious consequences for all children.