



Hidden Messages About Reading

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Context

- This was my MA in Education dissertation titled “What *impacts reading for pleasure in a multilingual, multicultural, inner-city primary school?*” I studied at the University of the West of England with Jane Carter as my supervisor.
- My research took place in my previous school in Bristol (2017-18). My context was over 40% Pupil Premium in an economically deprived, inner-city primary school. 88% of children were BME of which 72% were EAL. In our school children with English as their first language had significantly out-performed children with EAL in reading tests and this led to an increased pressure on results. I also noticed that some of the children in my class (despite my best efforts) did not appear to be reading for pleasure. This concerned me given the potential benefits it could have for their futures as well as the enjoyment and pleasure they could be experiencing in the present.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

The Teachers as Readers (TARs) research (Cremin et al., 2014) hugely influenced my MA research. I undertook a case study exploring staff, parent and child perspectives of reading for pleasure and what they believed was either promoting or preventing it. The TARs RfP pedagogy (social reading environments, reading aloud, independent reading and informal book talk) guided the conversations I had with participants about their RfP practice. I also discussed the adult participants knowledge of children’s literature, knowledge of children’s reading practices and perception of themselves of reading teachers as well as to what extent our school was a reading community.

However, through the research, the key strand of the TARs research for my dissertation lay in our knowledge of children’s reading practices and being a Reading Teacher. By considering the hidden messages we communicate to children about reading, we can better understand the influence this may have on children’s reading identities. This, in turn, is hugely influenced by our own practice as Reading Teachers- teachers who read and readers who teach.

Aims My aims were:

- To better understand the school community’s interpretation of ‘reading for pleasure’
- To better understand the current practice of RfP
- To better understand what children, families and staff believed was preventing or promoting RfP.

These aims centred around developing my understanding of children’s reading identities and extending this to the wider reading community of families and staff.

Outline

I completed my year-long MA research dissertation project which consisted of a case study. A brief summary of my methodology is:

- Staff focus group – to explore the shared narrative of the staff
- Individual parent interviews – to explore parent narratives and allow for more detailed questions
- Participatory interviews with children grouped by siblings – card sorts, drawing, discussing, ordering activities and so on.
- Thematic analysis of all the data. I selected interesting points first, grouped them into codes and then grouped this into wider themes.

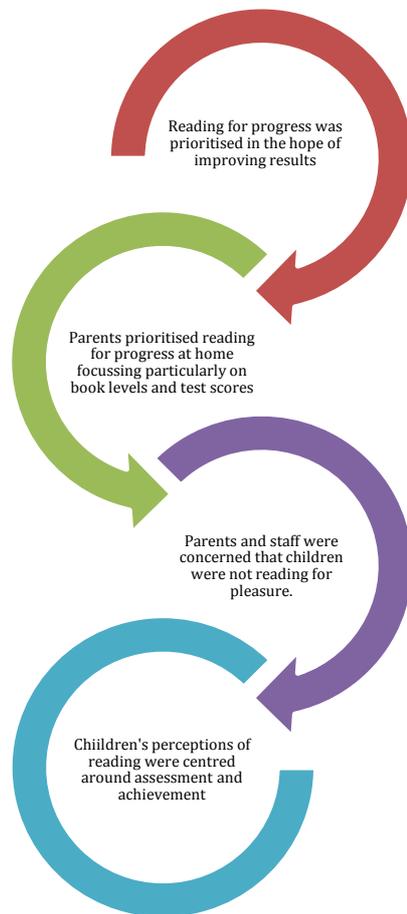
Impact

The key findings from my research revealed to me the importance of the hidden messages conveyed to children about reading.

I found that there were several living contradictions between what adults considered to be reading for pleasure for themselves as readers and the messages they were giving children about reading. Here are just a few of the examples:



It was clear from the data that all participants were eager for children to be competent readers and all viewed RfP as a crucial aspect of this. They valued RfP and communicated their own pleasure in reading to be largely in line with the TARs findings. However, the increased pressure to ensure attainment results and demonstrate children's progress, meant that **reading for progress was prioritised over reading for pleasure and purpose**. Children seemed to perceive the 'important bits' of reading to be centred around progress and assessment and saw reading for pleasure as a fun add on. Whereas, as we know, the will can influence the skill of reading and the two fuel each other.



This made it apparent that the messages that adults communicated to children about reading seemed to be greatly influencing the young people's perception of reading and indeed reading for pleasure. However, adults demonstrated that they do understand reading for pleasure based on their own reading habits. This caused me to question to what extent adults were sharing their own reading identities and thus communicating more positive messages about reading for pleasure. If adults were to fully embrace being Reading Teachers (capital R and capital T) and share their reading identities, communicate their own genuine enjoyment of reading, their reading preferences and behaviours and allowed this to permeate their reading teaching, the messages influencing children's reading identities may have been a great deal more positive.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Understanding children's reading identities has heavily influenced my understanding of the key findings from this research. It framed how I interpreted the data and how the themes came together.

My plan next is to further explore ways to find out about the hidden messages I communicate to children about reading and how to use this to ensure the messages I communicate reflect my RfP pedagogy. I also plan to investigate not just children's reading identities but family reading identities too to better inform my practice in responsive ways.