

Improving reading for pleasure through competitive spirit



Guy Maunder Taylor @St_JamesSchool

Context

I am English Lead for Years 3 and 4 at St James' Church of England Primary School in Bermondsey, London. It is larger than the average sized primary school with approximately 560 children on roll.

- Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic groups with the largest groups being from Black African and White British backgrounds;
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language – 48%;
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is well above average – 52%;
- The proportion of SEND pupils is above average – 11%;
- In September 2012, the school (which was then graded as Outstanding) amalgamated with a local primary school that was judged by Ofsted as requiring special measures;
- The school is located at two sites, with Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 on one site and Key Stage 2 on a different site, about a quarter of a mile away.

School Improvement Plan

A headline target from our School Improvement Plan for the academic year 2018-19 within 'Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment' states:

- *'Improve Reading attainment and progress across the school – particularly looking at progress in Reading and intervention in KS2.'*

Furthermore, within 'Outcomes for pupils' another target states:

- *Close gap in Reading - there is a gap between girls and boys (and identify early in KS2 where gaps are emerging);*

OU Research inspiration and rationale

I chose to look at the following key areas:

3. *A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:*

- *Social reading environments*
- *Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations*

(Cremin et al. 2014)

Aims

As a school, we have been lucky enough to have had many teachers attend training at the CLPE over a number of years. Consequently, many current, recommended strategies are already embedded in our school, yet new ideas are always put into practice. These have included fortnightly reading recommendation emails to all staff,

based on exciting titles; Book Tasting events; story assemblies; contacting authors directly through Twitter and email; author visits and author partnerships and more besides.

Book Tasting Event

Invitations to our book tasting event were delivered to each class in Year 3 and 4 by a member of staff dressed as a delivery cyclist, who behaved very much in role (stressed, rushed, borderline rude). The invites were hidden in otherwise empty burger boxes, attached to luggage tags with instructions to 'consume immediately'. Posters around the school with images taken from Oliver Jeffers' *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* advertised the event in advance. Staff and children were engaged, enthused and a bit bemused before the event had even kicked off.

It served a great launch for new titles that had just arrived at school.



Dear [insert name here],

This is to confirm your reservation on **Friday 19th October** as follows:

3 Norway + 3 Denmark: 1310 – 1345
3 Finland + 4 Tanzania: 1350 – 1425
4 Egypt + 4 Kenya : 1425 – 1500
3 Sweden: Restaurant staff.

Please note the slightly amended reservation times, due to a cancellation (one Miss Mangan). Please be prompt (see our Terms and Conditions below). Please also be aware our No Show policy as outlined below in our Terms and Conditions.

Please could all diners arrange their guests into 3 x groups (three groups) according to their appetite:

Table Number 1
Lower ability (Lime / White and below according to **book** banding),

Table Number 2
Middle ability (self-explanatory)

Table Number 3
Higher ability (see middle ability).

Kind regards,

Mr Guy J. Maunder Taylor

Maitre d'hôtel
St. James' Learning Hub Restaurant

Terms and Conditions

No throwing food.
No speaking with your mouth full.
Women, children and Restaurant Senior Management first in the event of an emergency.

No Show policy

Diners are kindly reminded, if they fail to arrive promptly for a reservation or no show, their credit card will be charged the full fare for an 11 course **Tasting** Menu with flights of wine. And cheese.

However, I am always seeking new approaches to improve reading for pleasure in lower Key Stage 2 and this year had two main aims, both competitive ventures:

AIM #1

- Overhaul reading areas in a Key Stage 2 wide competition for the best reading area (in order to develop more social reading environments and promote informal book talk).

AIM #2

- Boost reading for pleasure by holding a 'Readers' Cup Competition' (in order to develop additional reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.)

Outline

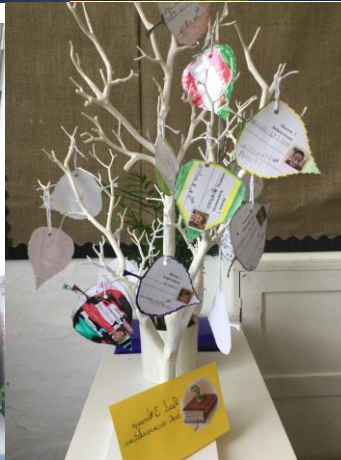
AIM #1: Overhaul reading areas (in order to develop more social reading environments and promote informal book talk).

In 2016/17, we were lucky enough to have significant improvements made to our ground floor hall, transforming it into a learning hub / library space. Hitherto, books had been stored in class libraries across the school and with teachers and years groups moving from room to room every year, assuring suitable titles were available for children was difficult.

With the new ground floor library, books were mostly migrated, with some titles remaining in class libraries. This meant the majority could be properly categorised and there was space for more titles in classrooms.

We were enormously fortunate to each be given a small amount of money to revitalise book stock in classrooms and remodel reading areas. In addition to new books (selected by class 'Reading Champions' in discussion with their peers), teachers invested in more comfortable furnishings (rugs, sofas and chairs, bean bags, small tables) and plants. In order to incentivise the process, it became a competition between classes to create the most appealing reading area.

As part of a weekly 'reading carousel', a group of children are allowed exclusive use of the reading area, with an emphasis on social reading, sharing titles and quietly swapping informal book talk.



AIM #2: Boost reading for pleasure by holding a 'Readers' Cup Competition' (in order to develop additional reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.)

In an effort to offer something different to the children and to boost reading for pleasure across Years 3 and 4, this year we have held two Readers' Cup Competitions. In advance of the competition, children were invited to qualify by reading a certain amount.

Posters, tweets and notifications in assemblies and newsletters ensured that during the qualification period, children were encouraged to participate. Qualifiers were announced and celebrated as and when they qualified.

The qualification for the first competition was held from October until December 2018 and the competition itself took place over a number of weeks between January and March 2019. The chosen text was 'A Wizard of

Earthsea' by Ursula Le Guin. The qualification for the second competition was held from March until late April 2019 and the competition took place between May and late June. The chosen text for the second competition was 'I was a Rat' by Phillip Pullman.

Participants were each given a copy of the book and deadlines by which to read a certain amount of the chosen text. There then followed a short quiz (using Kahoot!). A leader board was displayed following each round and the top 10 participants at the end of three rounds were invited to take part in a final, in front of Year 3 and Year 4.

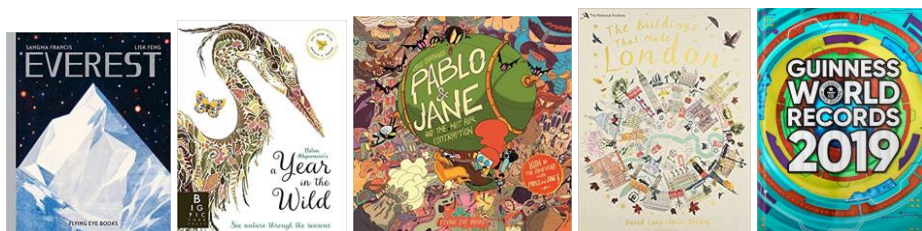
Following the final of the first competition, interest grew hugely and the number of participants for the second competition more than doubled from 30 to 68.

Impact

AIM #1: Overhaul reading areas (in order to develop more social reading environments and promote informal book talk).

Children are hugely enthusiastic about their reading areas. In my own class, there is a cheer whenever reading carousel is announced as the next activity and children very happily share titles in the reading corner in exactly the manner the space was designed.

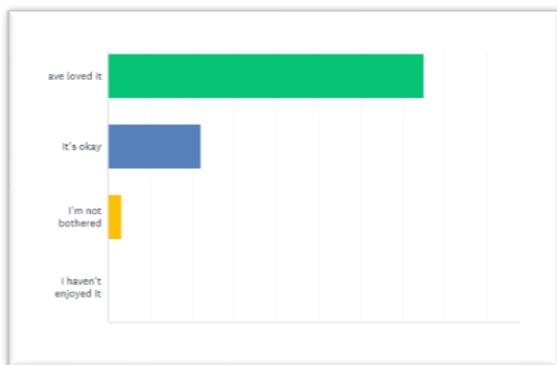
Having saved some of the initial budget to remodel the reading area, I canvassed opinion in January and invested in 9 or 10 new, non-fiction titles, intending them to be titles that could easily be shared: the Guinness Book of World Records, *Pablo and Jane and the hot Air Contraption* (a reimagining of the class Where's Wally? format), *The Buildings that made London* and *Everest* amongst others.



After a period of time, these books were then loaned out to children to take home and enjoy. There is a waiting list for each title and interest had been sufficiently generated from sharing them in class that all of the books were enormously popular.

AIM #2: Boost reading for pleasure by holding a 'Readers' Cup Competition' (in order to develop additional reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.)

Simple and short surveys were conducted with parents, teachers and of course the children after each competition to gauge impact qualitatively.



In short, the primary findings from the first competition were that parents found the text choice too difficult but that the children were enormously enthusiastic.

Below is a summary of findings from the second competition:

- 75% of children reported they 'loved it' (up from 34% from the first competition)
- 81% reported they had either done quite well or really well in the competition (close behind 82% in the first competition)
- 60% reported reading more than usual (55% in the first competition)
- 60% reported enjoying reading 'lots more' than usual with a further 13% reporting they enjoyed it 'a little more' than usual (18% and a further 23% in the first competition)
- 88% reported they thought the competition had helped them 'become a better reader' (85% in the first competition)
- 97% said they would recommend participating in the competition (81% in the first competition).

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Next year the Readers' Cup Competition will be back! Reading has become a much more visible and tangible presence in the school and children are enthused by their reading, as the survey findings indicate.