

Building a community library from scratch Started from the bottom (shelf) now we're here!

Tobias Hayden @TobiasHayden

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Context

I am a Year 4 Class Teacher at Richard Alibon Primary School in Dagenham, East London. Last year I took part in a writing research project *What is it that writing for pleasure teachers do that makes the difference?* Young (2019). One of the principles of this pedagogy is connecting Reading and Writing for Pleasure and it was the weakest part of my practice. This encouraged me to explore the Open University's Research Rich Pedagogies website where I investigated the examples of practice further.



OU Research inspiration and rationale

Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.

One of the key findings from the UKLA's Teachers as Readers report Cremin et al., (2008) was:

'A reading for pleasure agenda can positively impact upon children's attainment, achievement, disposition and desire to read (The will influences the skill).'

Reading Instruction is oriented towards:	Reading for Pleasure is oriented towards:
Learning to read	Choosing to read
The skill	The will
Decoding and comprehension	Engagement and response
System readers	Lifelong readers
Teacher direction	Child direction
Teacher ownership	Child ownership
Attainment	Achievement
The minimum entitlement (A Level 4)	The maximum entitlement (A reader for life)
The Standards Agenda	The ECM and Personalisation Agendas

Figure 1. Distinctions between reading instruction and reading for pleasure

Despite this finding, it seems that the overbearing nature of high-stakes assessments dominates much of the thinking around the teaching of reading and leaves little room for the 'will' to be prioritised. With this in mind, I set out to complement the existing direct instruction reading approaches with a full scale Reading for Pleasure assault on my class.

More recently, as [Cremin et al., \(2014\)](#) have shown, readers benefit from being invited to participate in

richly reciprocal and interactive reading communities. I was wary of avoiding just ‘institutional demonstration’ of community and wanted to make the project as participatory as possible. I also wanted it to last the whole year and have the capacity for growth giving us the chance to create a sustainable two-way relationship; an exchange of information between home and school; a collective knowledge of each other’s reading tastes, identities and habits.

For example, we will add to our collection as we expand our collective knowledge of authors we rate. Additionally, as I discuss in my reflections, this project will be the mothership, since it will provide many opportunities to explore other aspects of a Reading for Pleasure pedagogy through other satellite projects.

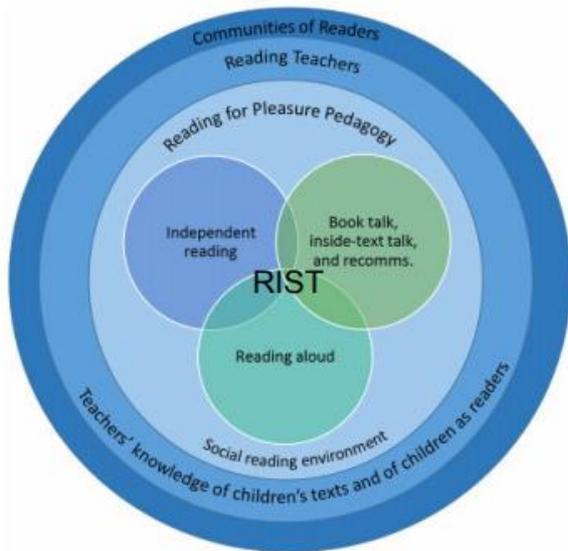


Figure 1: Research insights regarding the effective development of reading for pleasure (based on Cremin et al. 2014)

Aims

- To enthuse learners and their wider families to read for pleasure and generate talk around books and reading;
- To create a library of books where children and adults have a sense of agency over book selection;
- To create a feeling of investment in the books so that children and adults experience an increase in their intrinsic motivation to read;
- To demonstrate that communities can come together to create democratic and meaningful change.

Outline

We are a community which, like many others, has suffered the pain of austerity not least in the form of cuts to school budgets, which make the regular purchasing of a fresh stock of brand new and current books a challenge. I set out to reimagine just what a class book corner could be and tap into parents' and carers' desire to see their children not missing out on the best available children's literature.

In this way, I hoped to demonstrate the power of a community coming together and to highlight the impact that public spending cuts have on the children in our communities. I also felt quite strongly that Reading for Pleasure was not just playing second fiddle to direct instruction, but often struggled to make it into the orchestra at all.

In order to raise funds, I undertook a **Run for Reading (a 10k run around Stratford Olympic Park)**. I sent out a letter asking for sponsorship offering to match any amount raised and so did the school.

Reactions from children, parents and carers were overwhelmingly positive and we received a generous amount of donations and messages of support.

One of the school support staff supported our cause with a £5 contribution and several children donated their pocket money.

Our final total was £162, which was trebled when topped up with mine and the school's contributions.

GRAND TOTAL: £486!



We built up our list of books together using the Love Reading 4 Kids website. I led the way by selecting about two-thirds of the books, leaving room for the children to pick the remaining third.

<https://www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk/bookshelf>

The rationale for this was because of the results of the Reading for Pleasure KS2 Reading Survey which we undertook in September.



https://researchrichpedagogies.org/_downloads/RfP_Childrens_Reading_Survey.pdf

The results suggested a vacuum in variety which could only be improved with some exposure to alternatives. So, I set about opening the children's eyes to the myriad possibilities that exist outside of the usual suspects with which they were familiar.



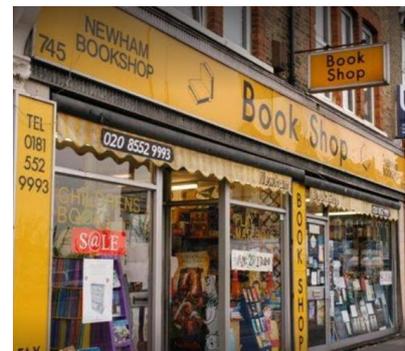
This had the added benefit of rapidly improving my own knowledge of children's literature for this age group, which is of course another important strand of the pedagogy.

I invested a lot of time in researching using a variety of sources. I sought out expertise on Twitter from Ben Harris (@one_to_read); his discussions around Joan Aiken led to us nabbing *Arabel's Raven* and *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*.



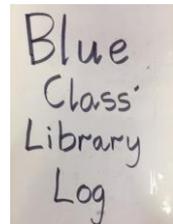
Also, I researched all the children's book awards' longlists and shortlists for the last few years including:

Little Rebels, UKLA, Blue Peter, Branford Boase, Klaus Flugge and The Children's Book Award. Finally, I browsed the shelves of Newham Bookshop.



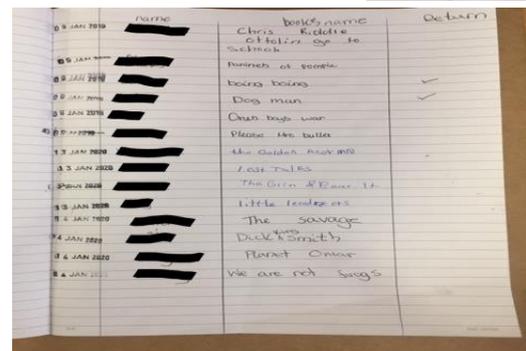
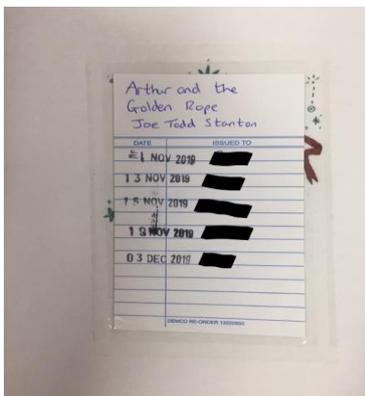
After that, we tried to make the library function like an actual library. We had a library log, tickets in the front of each book and a date stamp.

The children ran the library themselves in rotation during Reading for Pleasure time and during their own time if necessary.



They had full agency over book choice and were excited by the prospect of being responsible for the running of the library.

We organised the books according to genre and got reading!



Impact

I conducted the survey again after the first term to see what impact the project was having and whether or not we needed to adapt it, or launch any new initiatives. The results were very positive. With a love for reading going up significantly and far more children saying they enjoyed reading at school now.

Furthermore, many children are reading far more frequently outside school and the volume of books read at this stage of the year has shot up. We keep a record of all the books children have read or abandoned with their own personal rating.

This gives ample opportunity for me to discuss their reading with them, and vice versa, in an informal way and helps me develop an understanding of their developing reading tastes and interests. This makes the purchasing of future books far more relevant.

Books We've Read & Books We Are Reading

Number Of Books Read			Number Of Books Read			Number Of Books Read			Number Of Books Read		
6			17			8			12		
CHILD 1	Rating	Read?	CHILD 2	Rating	Read?	CHILD 3	Rating	Read?	CHILD 4	Rating	
Born to Run	8	1	Football School: Season 1	9	1	Marcy and the Riddle of the Sphinx	10	1	Tim All Alone	10	
Until I Met Dudley	10	1	Barry Loser	8	1	The Secret of Black Rock	10	1	Tim and Charlotte	10	
The Butterfly Lion	10	1	Football School: All Stars	4	A	The Sandwich Thief	8.5	1	Cloud Tea Monkeys	10	
Hansel and Gretel	6	1	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Meltdown	10	1	Beast Quest Ghoul of Shadows	9.5	1	The Sandwich Thief	10	
The Lizsts	9	1	Gangsta Granny	7.5	A	Lupo	7	1	The Little Girl and the Tiny Doll	5	

Here are some of the children's thoughts:

3. Where do you prefer reading?

At home At school Somewhere else (say where it is)

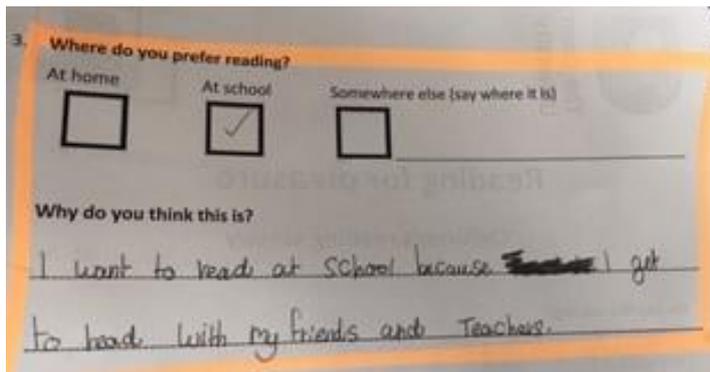
Why do you think this is?

at home i don't have alot of types
but at school we do

In this small sample of views, we can see the enjoyment of the social aspect of reading coming through. I am pleased to see the project having this impact as the Teachers as Readers Study noted similar things occurring:

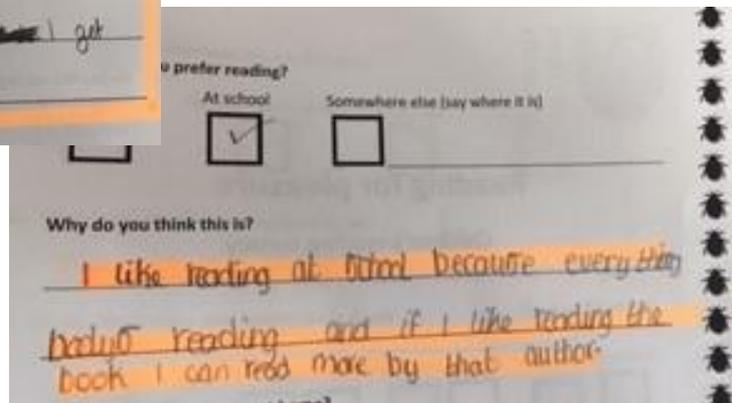
'They were relationship strong and highly interactive, and shifted reading

in these teachers' classes from an individual private pursuit to a more collaborative social activity.' (Cremin et al., 2014)



One observation which surprised me was when children started donating their own books to the class library. Knowing we were trying to build up our stock, led to a

plethora of old titles being brought in on most days. It started with a flood and is now a weekly trickle, but they continue to come in.

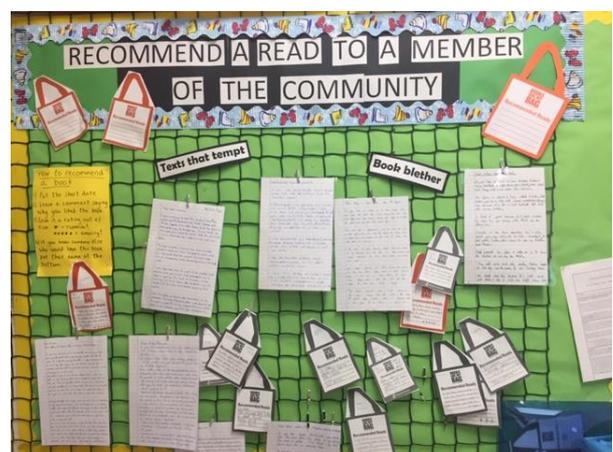


This has helped in a number of ways. In particular, it automatically helped to widen the variety of books, but also helped out the early and developing readers in the class as many of the titles were from when the other children were themselves at this stage of their reading development. In addition, it triggered old reading memories which kick-started all kinds of book blethering merriment.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

This project has acted as a catalyst for a whole host of other Reading for Pleasure ideas which focussed on other strands of the pedagogy. One such example is the creation of an area of the class where children and adults can take ownership of their recommendations.

It acts as a social area where children convene and tend to talk about books they like. They jot down mini-reviews and post them for their friends. It helps us get to know each other's preferences and gives us ideas when we are not sure which book to try out.



Seeing the strength of the impact of this project, I would like to explore further the reciprocal nature of the relationship between school, home and other reading and the role reading habits play in enjoyment. Looking at the most recent survey responses tells me that social reading at home is very common for many children, but not all.

I wonder if there is scope for exploring what happens outside school and whether this can be shared amongst the whole community. I know there are lots of strong examples of practice out there already and suspect it will be more powerful if I engage with families on the next step of our journey.