

Developing a Whole School Shared Vision

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Context

I work at Trinity Church of England school, a small village school located near to Oundle in Northamptonshire. Historically, our reading results have always been good, therefore 'reading' or 'reading for pleasure' was not a priority or stated in our school development plan. However, more and more conversations were being held in school, and teaching staff and parents had voiced concerns that children weren't reading as much or enjoying their reading in general. The number of children reading at home regularly and the number of library books borrowed had decreased. This refocused my attention on Reading for Pleasure (RfP) and placing this at the core of our reading curriculum.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

Based on the *Teachers as Readers* (TaRs) research findings, led by Professor Teresa Cremin (2009/2014) I choose to develop 'teachers' knowledge of children's reading practices and our knowledge of children's texts as the results of the staff and children's questionnaire survey responses showed that teachers didn't feel that they had the wide breadth of knowledge of children's texts to be able to make personal recommendations to individuals. We understood that without this breadth of knowledge we would be unable to foster reader development.

Children's responses informed us that they hadn't been able to find books that they enjoyed. Upon reflection of the TaRS research, and the comments made by children, it was clear that we were not as effective at providing children with informed role models. Cremin states that providing children with role models who can make tailored recommendations to children '*not only increases the chance of young readers finding books that will satisfy them, but also leads to significant book blether.*' (Cremin 2019:2) I felt that this was what we were missing at Trinity: the spontaneous blethering about books; the shared purpose of reading being a social experience.

I also noticed that a large proportion of our children said that they preferred to read at home because it was '*quieter, more relaxing*' or there were '*less distractions.*' This gave us a good insight for considering ways in which we could begin to develop our pedagogy of reading for pleasure and how developing a reciprocal reading community could enable us to do this. We reviewed the six elements of an effective reciprocal reading community first, as recommended by the TaRs project.

Aims

We set out to engage the children who demonstrated a lack of interest while developing our own understanding of children's reading practices. We knew that to tackle the disinterested children, we had to look more closely at our own reading practices. All members of staff completed the teacher's knowledge of children's texts survey:

<https://researchrichpedagogies.org/research/theme/teachers-knowledge-of-childrens-literature-and-other-texts>

As a result, we made a commitment to read more, not just children's literature, but also the books we enjoy as adults. We didn't set aside time to talk about our reading, but the conversations had begun. I made the effort to talk to every member of staff about what they had read, were reading and what they would recommend to me or to children. These informal discussions allowed us to begin to consider our own reading identities and to review what we knew about the reading identities of children.

I knew that this was the first step to becoming adults who are well equipped to nurture RfP as Cremin suggests, 'unless teachers have a rich and wide knowledge of children's literature and other texts, and a working knowledge of the young as readers, I would argue they are not well positioned to nurture reading for pleasure or to enable the will to influence the skill.' (Cremin 2019:2)

Outline



To create a buzz around school about reading among staff, I created a **book recommendation quiz**. All staff completed a recommendation slip detailing three of their favourite books. I then displayed these in the staff room with a quiz sheet for staff to guess who recommended what. We found that we have lots of staff who were active readers - hooray! We found that we had favourite books/authors in common. Around school, I could hear adults discussing the book quiz and talking about the books they were reading at home.

To keep the conversation going, I then created a **display in the staffroom of staff reads**. I used the website 'What I'm reading' (<http://whatimreading.org/>) to create the display so that adults could scan the QR code on the poster to be taken directly to a link where they could read the blurb or purchase the book.

We then created a staff library in the staff room where adults contributed books that they were willing to share.

Now that we had adults talking about the books that they were reading at home, I moved my attention to sharing the buzz with the children. So I ensured that high quality texts were being offered to children through a daily read aloud as recommended by OU/UKLA Teachers Reading Group and Twitter! TaRs project identified that 'Reading aloud and discussing the text was a crucial strand of the RfP pedagogy.'



I wanted to ensure that children were exposed to daily reading aloud so I compiled a **daily read aloud programme** where teachers planned which books they would be reading aloud to their classes on a daily basis. This communicated the expectations that reading aloud, for pleasure, was an essential part of the day and that this was to happen every day. Previously, I had recognised the need to tackle my own knowledge of children's literature and challenged myself to read 50 books throughout the year which turned into 60 and then 70 and the cycle remains. So I ensured that I had read all of the books I was recommending. **I took to Twitter to engage with the authors** of the books we were reading and created a display in our school library. This got the attention of staff, children and their parents.



The school community were discussing the books on the display and starting to buy the ones they didn't have. The display also provided children with a visual demonstration of their teachers as readers. Children would ask me about the books I read or question me as to why I hadn't read the second or third in the series yet. Children were buying books in common and sharing their reading at home. One parent commented that her daughter picked up her copy of *Moon Locket* by Peter Bunzl and FaceTimed another child in her class so that they could read it together in the evenings. That term, six year six children bought the Peter Bunzl Cogheart series and would come and find me to discuss the story. Parents of my year 2 class asked me, 'Who is Emer Stamp? We've heard all about it at home.'

Through the display and interactions with authors, children and adults were sharing their reading identities, a reciprocal reading community was beginning to emerge.

Impact

Staff now share their personal reading more in school, in the staffroom and in common areas throughout school. Teachers have also started to engage with authors via Twitter and other media. Children are more informed about their teachers as readers and will often make comments like, *'That's Mr Cole's favourite,'* or *'Mr Marshall has read that book.'*

Teachers have started sharing recommendations and borrowing books from our shared library in the staff room. Of the 136 children we surveyed at the beginning of the year, 12 children said they didn't like reading. All 12 children participated in a group discussion at the end of the year, and all of these children responded with positive reflections on themselves as readers. They said that they now enjoy reading; their teacher had made

recommendations that they enjoyed taking home and that they had talked to their parents about authors they had enjoyed reading.

Staff reflections were also very positive. Teachers noted that they had dramatically increased their reading of children's literature and, the time they spent reading aloud to their classes. They explained that they had shared suggestions of children's literature and that they actively talk about those books, in the staffroom during break times, and in shared spaces for children to join in with the book blether.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The Teachers as Readers research has contributed considerably to development of our whole school pedagogy and practice of Reading for Pleasure. We focused our efforts on two of the strands in particular of the TaRs Project, teachers' knowledge of children's literature and teachers' knowledge of children's reading practices.

The subsequent work that has taken place: the staff reads quiz, the 'What I'm Reading' display and the reading display in the library has provided staff and children with a space to share their reading practices and identities. The work we did reinforced relational expectation that reading for pleasure is a two-way street: something to be shared.

The research gave us the insight into the part we all play in fostering a reciprocal reading community where Reading for Pleasure can thrive. The commitment of staff reading more children's literature, and the drive to getting to know (and continue to know) children as readers has ultimately enabled us to begin to build a community of readers where everyone's reading identity is valued.

As a result of this, I am now considering how best to support staff with reading aloud and have made a commitment to finding approaches that ensure children are given independent choice of where they hear stories read aloud and who reads them, to them.

References

Cremin, Teresa (2019). *Teachers' knowledge of children's literature: the cornerstone of reading for pleasure*. Scottish Book Trust.

Cremin, T., Bearne, E., Goodwin, P. and Mottram, M. (2008) *Teachers as readers: Building communities of readers Executive Summary*.