

What Children Want Their Teachers to Know About Reading for Pleasure

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Context



- I work at Kaizen Primary School in the borough of Newham, East London, which is part of the East London Research School. I am a class teacher based in KS2, additionally I hold the roles of English Lead and Research Lead.
- In 2018, I undertook an MA in Education and wanted to use the opportunity to develop my knowledge and pedagogy around reading for pleasure, in particular how the children in my school felt they could be encouraged to engage more in this activity.
- I therefore used my MA research, based on the voices of the children, as the spark to light the fire of change in my school's approach to reading for pleasure.

Research Inspiration and Rationale

The research into 'Teachers' knowledge of children's reading practices' by the Open University found that teachers who dedicated time and effort into developing their knowledge of children's reading tastes and choices fostered reader to reader relationships and children's reading engagement in school. These findings advocate the importance of teachers' listening to children's ideas and perspectives on their reading habits in order to best support the children to develop a positive relationship with reading.

The OECD report Reading for Change (2002, p15) asserts that 'Reading for pleasure is a prerequisite for successful performance in any school subject', as well as a fundamental part of future life success.'

A large proportion of Kaizen's primary school's student cohort are from a low socioeconomic or 'disadvantaged' backgrounds. Prior to my appointment as English Lead, the school did not have any active programmes on developing 'Reading for Pleasure' (RfP) and this led to my decision to undertake a case study in order to try to both understand the current reading habits of the students in Year 5 and also ways in which student-voice could inform future RfP strategies within the school setting.

Research Inspiration and Rationale

There seems to be a consensus amongst many researchers and policy makers that RfP plays an additional important part in a child's academic development. For example, the National Curriculum for primary schools in England is clear on the fact that encouraging reading for pleasure is part of the role of the school (DfE, 2013) and recurring evidence from pupil questionnaires and test data suggests consistent links between children who engage regularly in reading for pleasure and high-level reading attainment (Petscher, 2010; Gilbert and Fister, 2011; Clark and Teravainen, 2017 and the DfE, 2017).

Other studies have linked reading for pleasure to academic benefits in additional areas such as maths and vocabulary (Sullivan and Brown, 2015) and to positive social and emotional development through the exposure to new cultures, experiences, emotions and situations (Sainsbury and Schagen, 2004; Howard, 2011; the DfE, 2012 and Whitten et al, 2016).

In addition, the OU research (Cremin et al. 20-14) highlights the need for teachers to develop their knowledge of children as readers in order to develop an effective pedagogy.

All this research confirmed my own initial thoughts that RfP was an area of pedagogy that was vital to develop in order to ensure the progress of our children across the curriculum, and holistically and that I needed to start by getting to know our readers' perspectives.

Aims

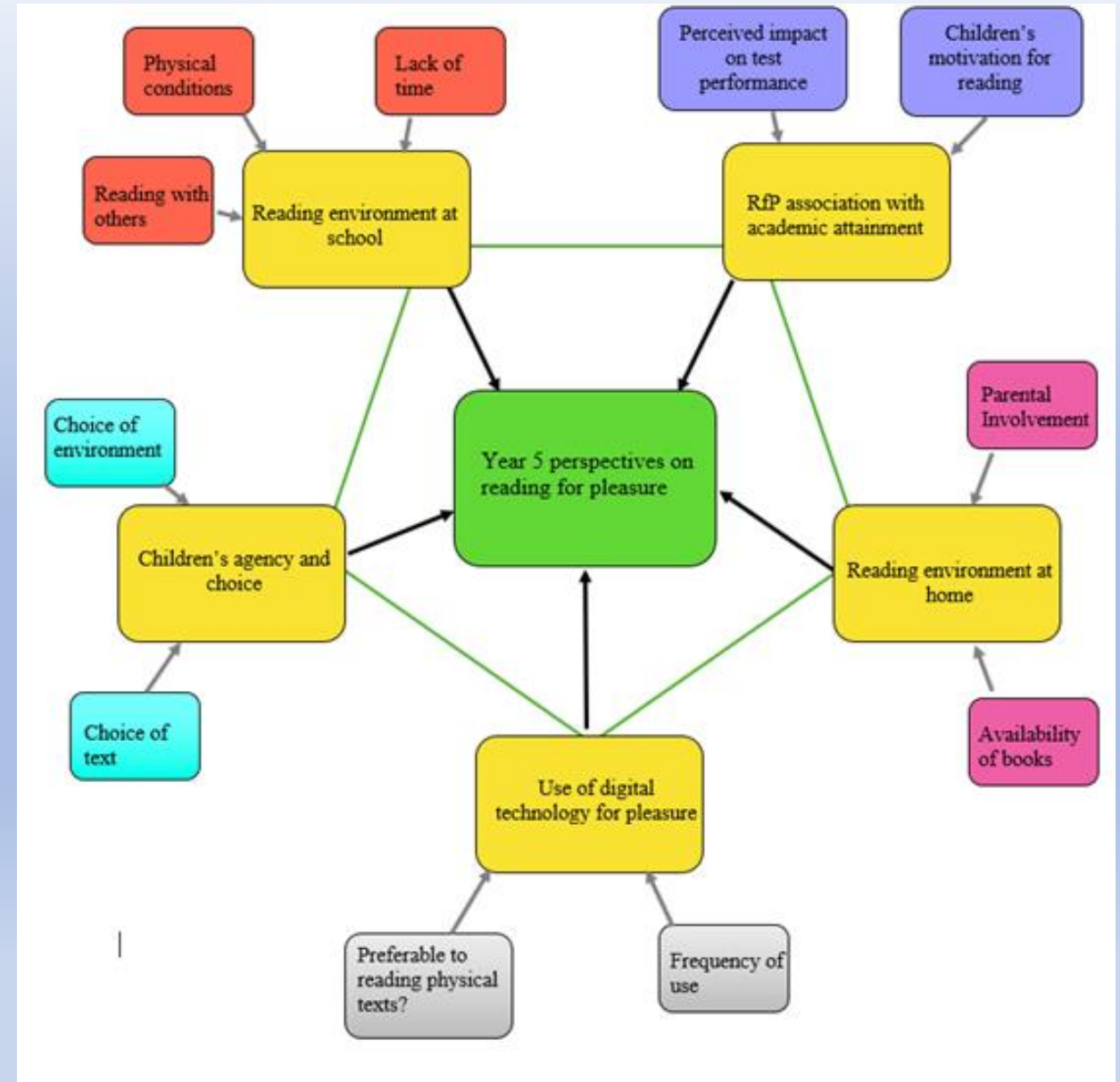
- To gain insight into children's own perspectives on reading for pleasure; in particular the factors that are likely to either engage or disengage them from this activity.
- To use this insight to identify potential strategies to improve school practices on supporting reading for pleasure.

Outline

I carried out a small-scale case-study on Year 5 pupils in the school using a mixed-method approach of questionnaires and focus group interviews with selected students.

I then used a technique called thematic analysis to identify the most prominent themes and ideas from the students' responses.

The themes that were identified as part of this data analysis are shown in the concept map:



The transcripts of the two interviews and the resulting analysis demonstrated that the most prevalent theme was the students' desire to have increased independent choice over their reading material, rather than having this prescribed or dictated to them by adults.

The students indicated their desire to have an input in the range of reading material provided by the school, as well as being given sufficient opportunity and freedom to select from this material.

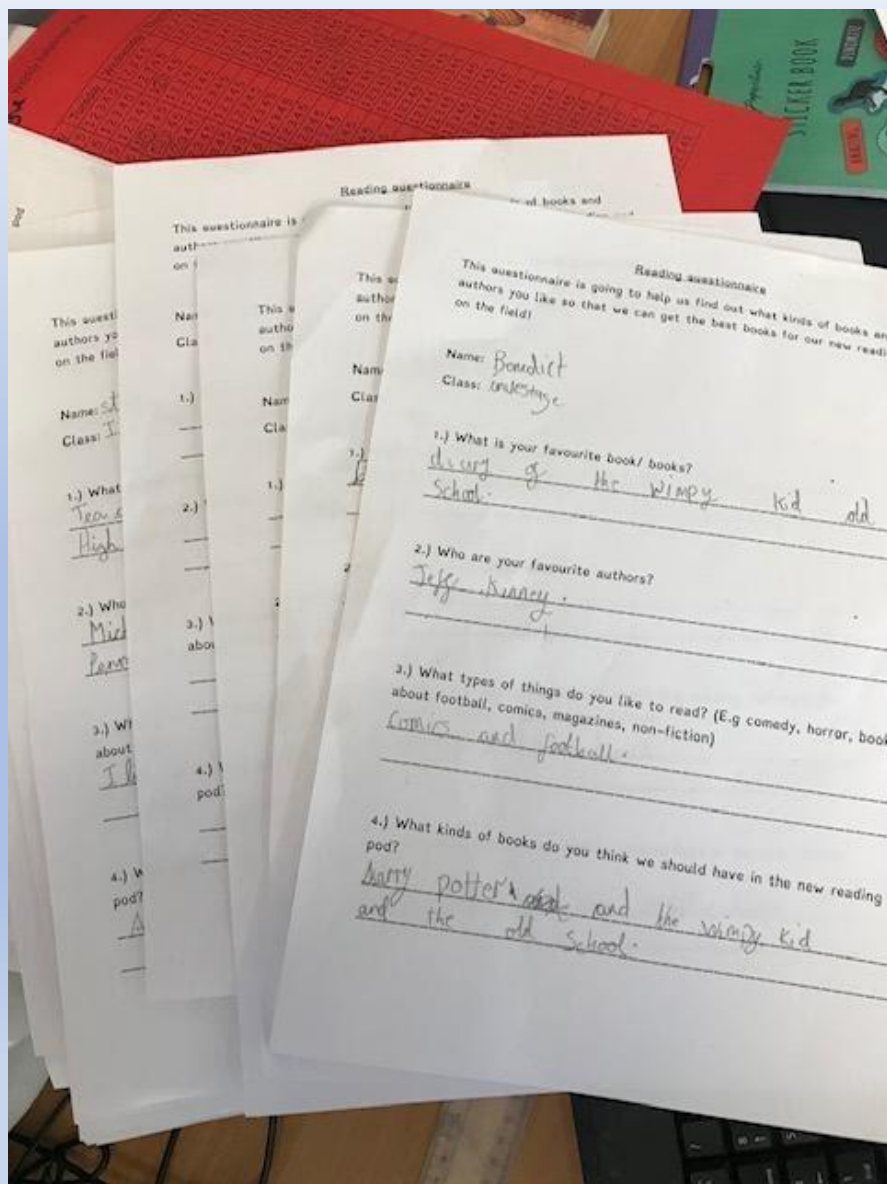
They suggested this was not something they felt was currently happening in the school. This data reflected much of the literature I had previously engaged with, such as Cremin et al. (2014), Drage (2017) and the Centre for Research in Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement (2016).

The implications of this case study were clear, in order to best support students in building their positive relationships with reading for pleasure, they needed to have increased opportunities to choose reading material.

Impact

- As English Lead, I had been tasked with creating a new school library. I therefore used the results of my research to direct my approach to this project.
- A school wide survey was used to inform the stocking of the new school library, ensuring that a large selection of the books had been selected by the students themselves.
- A school wide competition was launched to design the library itself and the winners took part in the decoration of the new building.
- Regular opportunities were introduced for all students and parents to access the new library and have sufficient time for independent browsing and freedom of borrowing.





Impact



All teachers were given full training in motivating their children to read for pleasure; ensuring all students are given sufficient time, space and freedom to choose their own reading material, undirected or restricted by adult recommendations.

When new books are ordered for the library or other areas of the school, children are consulted and asked to choose the majority of these books.

Impact

Students were given the opportunity to decide on new texts for their class reading corners and were also encouraged to design and re-decorate the areas themselves.



Impact

In the months following the implementation of these strategies, library engagement and borrowing rates rose significantly. Most importantly, staff and student feedback revealed that the new focus on students' choice, autonomy and contribution was encouraging most students to develop or begin positive, independent relationships with reading.

This ethos will therefore continue to underpin future strategies and developments in the school's approach to reading for pleasure.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice and next steps

The OU research found that teachers who dedicated time and effort into developing their knowledge of children's reading tastes and choices fostered children's reading engagement in school. This was borne out in my research. So now I will:

- continue to allow children to have input into new book orders for the school.
- deliver refresher training for staff, and training for new staff, on practices in the classroom during independent reading time that support reading for pleasure.
- work with colleagues to consider and develop ways in which children can still have elements of choice in their reading even when there are restrictions in place on physical browsing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.