Making Learner Visits to children's homes







Context

- In the follow up project to Teachers as Readers, entitled *Building Communities: Researching Literacy Lives* (funded by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation) the research team worked with 18 teachers from 10 schools.
- Two schools were involved from each of Birmingham, Barking and Dagenham, Kent, Lambeth and Medway Local Authorities.
- In this project, teachers, working as researchers visited children's homes to find out more about their everyday literacy lives.



(Cremin et al., 2016)



OUResearch inspiration and rationale

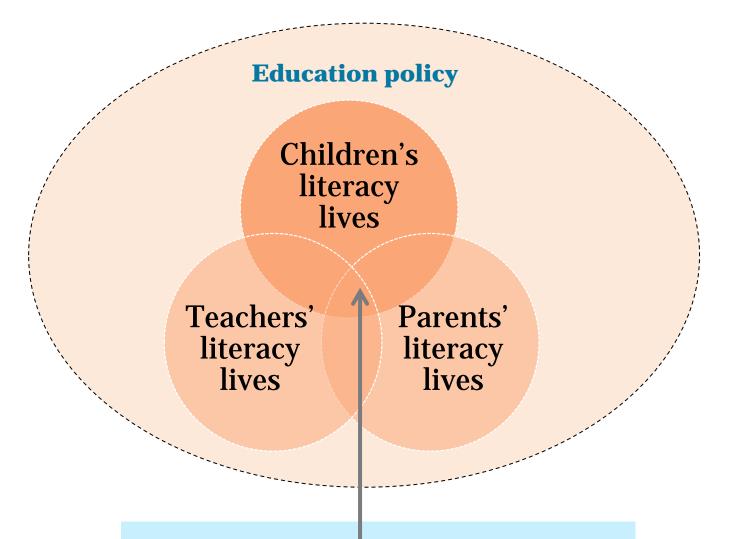
- At the close of the TaRs project, a few teachers had begun to blur the boundaries between home and school reading practices.
- In these schools teachers were beginning to explore with parents what it means to be a young reader in the 21ST century.

 This had potential to forge new understandings/ relationships and promised possible new ways of working.

• To build on these research insights, the next project *Building Communities: Researching Literacy Lives* sought to support teachers in widening their knowledge of their own, the parents and the children's literacy lives.



Building Communities: Researching literacy lives



The project sought to expand this shared social space

Cremin et al., 2016

Aims



- Support teachers as researchers documenting and understanding children's literacy lives;
- Extend understandings about 21st century literacy identities, habits and cultures;
- Create innovative classroom approaches that built on children's literacy lives and fostered positive literacy identities.

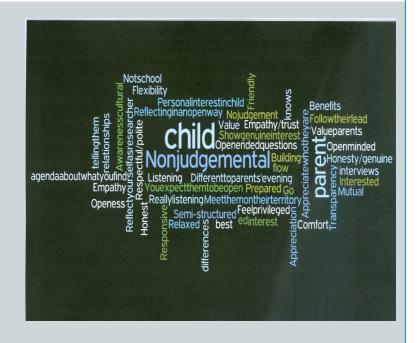


This PPT focuses on one strategy employed: the pivotal **Learner Visits** to children's homes and communities

Outline

•The teachers were supported to undertake Learner Visits to three case study children's homes. Some visited the homes several times.

Through prior arrangement, the teachers walked home with children and stayed to listen and learn. They sought to visit as learners, not as teachers, seeking to find out, not to tell and to describe not judge what they saw. They also wrote reflective journals and were supported in interpreting what they observed.



They were supported to document the everyday reading and writing practices of the children in their families at home- the young people's lived experience of literacy beyond the school gate.

Outline: Making Learner Visits

- After seeking permission, they taped the conversational interviews with parents.
 Later back at school, supported by a linked researcher, they sought to establish
 what new knowledge about the child, their interests, literacy practices and
 learning in the home they had established.
- In the process the teachers moved out of their comfort zones, recognised and challenged their implicit assumptions and began to develop more nuanced understandings about children.



"When I was more open, they were more open, it was like a key to unlocking the conversation"

"It's challenged the assumption that because our children are in low-income families they are somehow neglected and not cared about ... or can't succeed. We talk about them as 'children of promise' not 'deficit' now".

Outline: the challenges

The teachers understandably encountered many challenges and needed support as they were:

- Entering unfamiliar territory
- Coping with openness
- Positioned as researchers, not as teachers
- Prompted to recognise their own perceptions and assumptions.

They were all welcomed by parents, found out a great deal about children's literacy lives and practices and began to question their own assumptions about the children and their families.

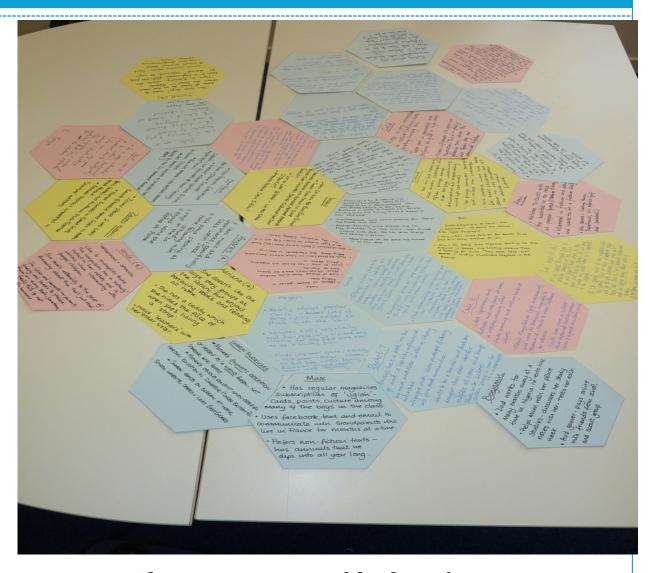


I had to ask myself- where does this come from? Why did I assume they'd [the parents] not be interested?'

Outline: the insights

The teachers shared their new knowledge and understanding of children's reading and writing practices in the home with each other.

They found many involved digital technologies, but also print related texts related to the children's own interests.



The emerging asset blanket of new knowledge (Cremin et al., 2016: p.75)

Teachers found that at home children frequently:

- read, wrote, talked and learnt about issues that interested them e.g. learning to play the guitar, speak a language, play a digital game, look after a ferret
- **learnt in social and collaborative contexts** in the company of others e.g. taught each other how to play computer games, cared for siblings
- **demonstrated considerable independence** as learners e.g. showed a degree of decision making and responsibility not always shown in school
- **exercised choice** over their activities e.g. decided what activities to do Slovakian dancing, reading pop magazines, researching cheats for games
- **employed a wide range of digital texts** for their own purposes and for pleasure e.g. listened to the Disney channel, played myriad games, texted/Skyped relatives
- **took the time/space they needed** and concentrated for long periods e.g. time to draw, read, play on games consoles, Wii, football.

Impact

The teachers began to:

- Recognise the features of children's literacy and their patterns of learning in the home
- Recognise their own perceptions and shifts
- Develop more culturally responsive curricula that built on their new knowledge of children as literacy learners in homes and communities
- Consider school wide strategies for building stronger relationships with parents



"What's really important here is what the teachers *do* with their knew knowledge and understanding - what difference it makes..."

Phil Jarrett Chief Inspector, English, OfSTED

Impact

Teachers considered new more responsive classroom approaches These included:

- Teachers being personal
- Connecting to children's lives and interests
- Offering multiple collaborative opportunities
- Giving children ownership and responsibility
- Building in more choice and independence around activities
- Making full and extensive use of their 21st century literacy practices, particularly the digital



"I don't know why I hadn't realised that their digital expertise has so much potential for learning in school".

"They love reading online- we never made much time for it before"

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The TaRs research spawned new research into children's everyday literacy practices. This in turn enabled teachers to develop their knowledge of children's literacy lives through making carefully supported Learner Visits which not only widened teacher knowledge, but began to impact upon their perspectives and practice.

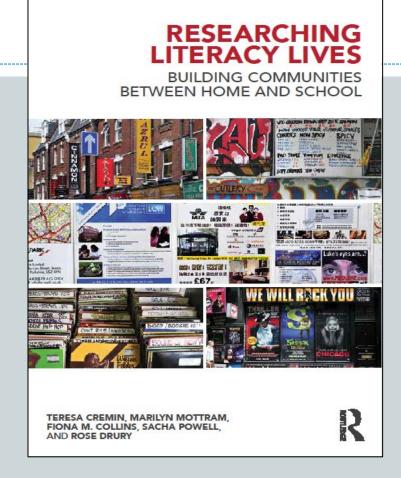
"I think it is very easy as a teacher to lose sight of the child outside of the school environment and only think of the child as a person in your class between 9am and 3.15pm".

And what it [the research] reaffirms to me - I know deep down that it is so easy to lose along the way with the busy-ness of school and the targets and the expectations and everything that drives school and academic prowess - and it is very easy to lose sight of actually there is an awful lot more literacy learning that goes on outside of school and that it is so important to tap into children's' interests and their other skills and abilities not just their academic abilities and to celebrate all that."



To read more about the Learner Visits and the wider project

Winner of the UKLA Academic Book Award 2016



https://ukla.org/awards/ukla-academic-book-award