

Exploring children's perceptions of me as a reader

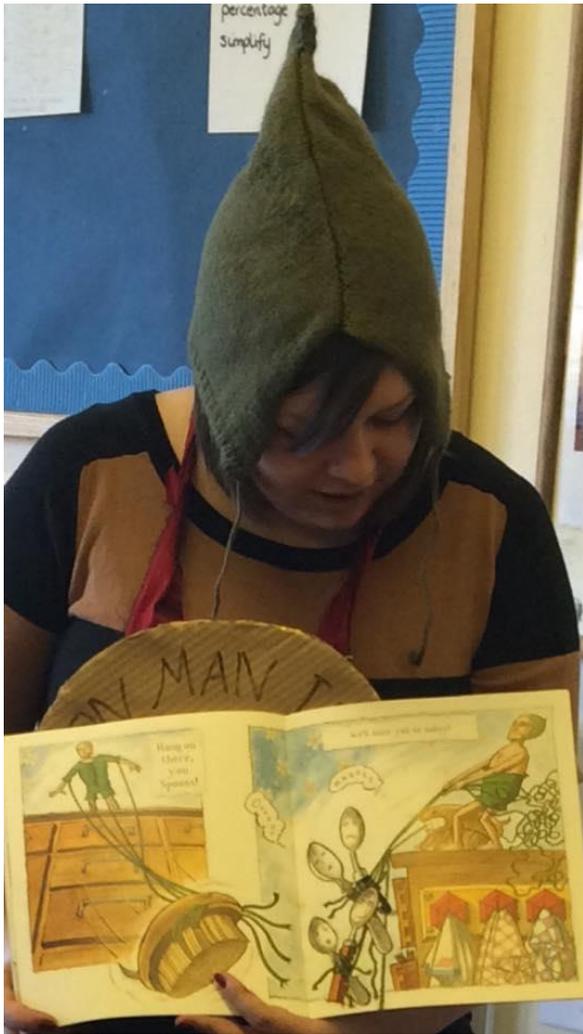
Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach



Claire Williams

St. Andrew's C of E Primary School





Sharing an all-time favourite picturebook, *Traction Man Is Here*, with some children at school in a knitted green bonnet ... but not matching all-in-one romper suit!

Context:

- ▶ I am the Year 4 teacher and Reading Coordinator at St. Andrew's C of E Primary School, a one-form entry primary school in North Essex.
- ▶ As a school, we are committed to developing our school community as a community of engaged readers and we are continuously striving to develop our reading for pleasure pedagogy.
- ▶ According to the 'Facts about Miss Williams' that some of the children in my class wrote one break time:

"She's crazy about books and reading!"

I am passionate about fostering a love of reading and giving children 'irresistible' experiences of reading that support their development as lifelong readers. I am also committed to my development as a reading teacher.

Research Inspiration and Rationale:

- ▶ The TaRs research reveals that teachers who are both readers and teachers, and who share their own experiences of reading and reading lives in school, have a positive impact on children's pleasure in reading.
- ▶ Teachers who open themselves up as readers and share aspects of their reading lives with the children they teach are better positioned to develop genuinely reciprocal and interactive reading communities.
- ▶ **How did these findings of the TaRs research inspire me?**
I am an avid reader and the findings of the TaRs research made me reflect on whether the children in my class see me as such and whether my enthusiasm for reading has any influence on theirs. Do they know what and where I read for pleasure and, if so, how? Do they know my likes and dislikes? Do they care? I wanted to develop an activity that would enable me to explore these questions.

Aims:

- ▶ To explore children's perceptions of me as a reader and their knowledge of different aspects of my reading life.
- ▶ To reflect on how the children's perceptions of me as a reader influence their own reading identities and desire to read.
- ▶ To develop the extent to which I share my reading life with the children, shaped by what I learn about their perceptions.

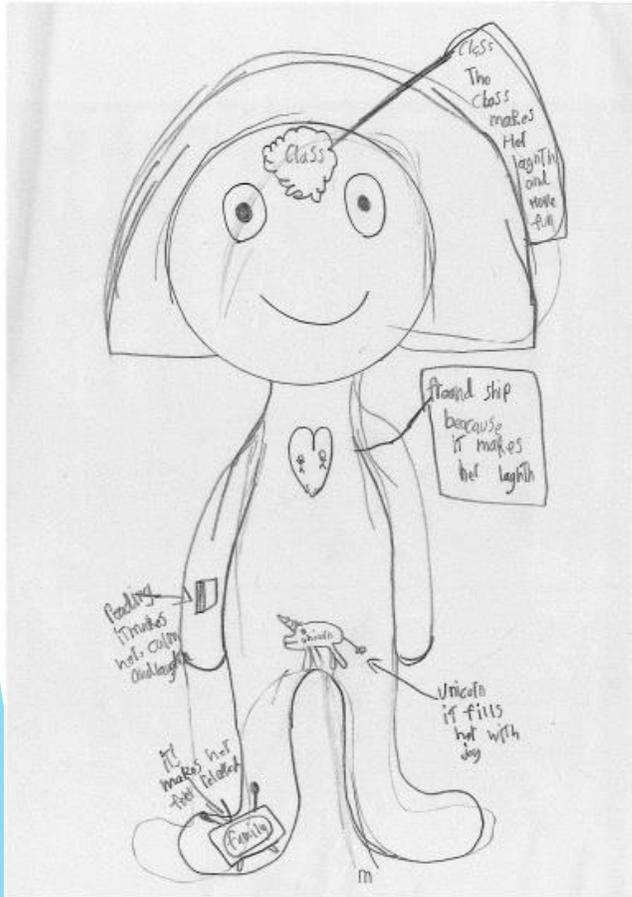
Outline:

- ▶ In order to explore the children's perceptions of me as a reader, I developed a two-stage activity. Initially, I invited the children to draw me, annotating it with the things that they considered were important to me. In the hope of avoiding bias, I deliberately left the room and none of the adults in the room knew the purpose of the activity. I assumed that if they thought books and/or reading had some significance for me, they would surface.
- ▶ The second stage then involved finding out (as books and reading were things that the children were identified as being important to me!) what evidence base they had that I'm a teacher who reads. This was scaffolded by questions such as:
 - What is Miss Williams' favourite book?
 - Are there any authors for whom Miss Williams has a particular passion?
 - What does Miss Williams read at home? Where? With whom?

I wanted to find out whether the children just felt passion or whether they knew detail and whether they thought this was a teacher role or really me as a human.

Impact:

- ▶ Without any mention of reading before or during the initial activity, two thirds of the children identified books and/or reading as something that is important to me and included these in their pictures. A few children offered details such as 'it makes her calm and laugh', 'books help her imagination' and 'reading because that's how she shines'.



Impact:

- ▶ The second stage revealed a far deeper understanding of my reading life than I had anticipated. For example, the children's whose drawings are shown on the next slide have included details about my favourite books and authors, authors that I've met and my reading habits outside school. They have even drawn my calendar – they knew that I use it to record publication dates that I'm excited about!
- ▶ Interestingly, the children only mentioned novels and picturebooks that I particularly like. This surprised me because I share a wide range of different text types that I have read with them. This made me consider how and why I share the material that I enjoy. Maybe I inadvertently profile literature? Maybe I even imply that what counts as reading in my class is fiction?

'She even has a book dress!'



Impact:

Book queen

She gets lots of her books signed.

1000,000,000 of Books

She reads at home and we know that because she tells us.

I think she likes to buy books so she can share them with us so we can see if we like them too.

She always orders new books to read and share to us.

She invented mini hay festival so we can relax with a book outside.

She recommends books to us.

She screams whenever she reads a new book!

She has a dress that has a lot of books on.

She is a book worm

She loves HARRY POTTER because she got a huge version of it for her birthday. We know miss williams loves Mini Grey because

Mini Grey

MISS WILLIAMS

Gill Lewis gave us another poem.

She organized the mini hay festival so we could relax and enjoy books.

I think her favourite author is Mini Grey because she told us, she goes crazy about her books, she always speaks to Mini Grey and she always recommends them.

She likes lots of authors but I know she talks to Mini Grey Gill Lewis Ross Montgomery (he wrote perisae and me.) because she tells us she also likes Michael Rosen and Chris Riddell and Roald Dahl and JK Rowling because she has their books and always speaks about them.

I think she buys most of her books from Waterstones because she always tells me and everyone else.

She loves books because she buys all the new ones, she has a massive book shelf and a book burrow. She even wears a book dress!

She always loves to take the new books in her calendar.

She likes reading on the sofa because she left my library book on the coffee table next to it and was reading my story.

Impact:

- ▶ This new insight has made me reflect on *how* I share the range of texts that I read for pleasure with the children. At the beginning of this year with my new class, I displayed an illustration of an empty bookshelf in my classroom, on which I am recording each book that I read outside school. I am aiming to show a wider breadth of reading and highlight the variety of texts that I tackle as a Reading Teacher, making clear to my class that while personal preferences and passions are important, diversity matters too.

A blank template of this 'My Bookshelf' can be downloaded from Jon Biddle's blog: <http://childrenreadingforpleasure.blogspot.co.uk/2017/06/my-bookshelf.html>



Reflections:

- ▶ The TaRs research highlights how teachers who are both readers and teachers, and who share their own experiences of reading and reading lives in school, have a positive impact on children's pleasure in reading. This is fundamental to developing genuinely reciprocal and interactive reading communities.
- ▶ Exploring the children's perceptions of me as a reader showed me that many of the children in my class position me as a fellow reader. As well as knowing that I enjoy and am passionate about reading, they were able to talk about my reading habits, interests and preferences in much more detail than I anticipated. On reflection, I think a lot of this knowledge has come from the way that I informally share aspects of my reading life in school alongside the children, often spontaneously and without necessarily realising that I'm doing so!
- ▶ It also made me question and reflect on why the children only mentioned fiction texts and authors of fiction texts when they were discussing my favourite books and authors. In order to counteract this, I am aiming to further develop this personal dimension of my practice to ensure that I am highlighting the wide variety of texts that I read. I hope that the children will view other text types, including non-fiction and poetry, as a really important part of my reading life as a result – and, in turn, support the development of positive reading identities for all children.