

Reading for Pleasure in 2020

Learning about literacy teaching during the pandemic.

At CLPE we do the work we do because we believe, and the research shows us, that being literate changes your life. The research also shows us that if you are a literate child who reads for pleasure then this has more impact on your future life chances than any other factor. In all our work we see encouraging reading for pleasure as a social justice issue.

Like many other literacy and education organisations, we have been working with thousands of primary school teachers throughout this strange and unpredictable year. In fact, we've worked with more than treble the number we would in a 'normal' year. This means that we have had a fascinating insight into how teachers have adapted their planning, their pedagogy and their approaches in order to ensure that children receive high quality literacy learning, wherever that is taking place and under whatever circumstances.

It feels to us that whatever teachers have had thrown at them this year – and there's been A LOT – they have continued to prioritise reading, and more than that, they have prioritised reading for pleasure. In January, as the country was gripped by another lockdown, we decided to find out how they had done that.

We sent out a survey to teachers who were working with us asking them about their experience. We received 1162 replies from throughout England, and beyond and representing teachers who taught the entire primary school age range. The questions in the survey were guided by our own research into Reading for Pleasure which identifies factors which will be present in a school with a successful 'Reading for Pleasure' culture.

These include:

- Developing an ethos and an environment that excites, enthuses, inspires and values
- High quality texts with depth and interest in story, character, illustration, vocabulary, structure and subject matter
- A read aloud programme
- Teachers who are knowledgeable about children's literature
- Creating a community of readers with opportunities to share responses and opinions
- Planning for talking about books and stories, providing structures within which to do this
- Working with authors and author/illustrators to understand the process of creating books

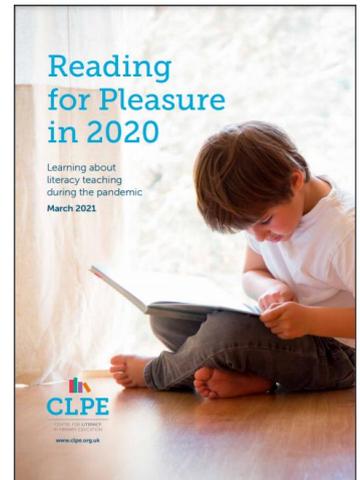
The responses were fascinating and the full report can be seen here:

<https://clpe.org.uk/publications-and-bookpacks/research/clpe-reading-pleasure-2021>

The main findings from the research include:

A quarter of teachers are worried about children's access to books being a barrier to their reading.

Teachers identified this as a major barrier not just to developing reading for pleasure but to children's literacy achievement overall. This was even higher in responders from the North West and South West where a third of teachers were worried about children's access to books. Many teachers had tried to give children access to electronic books but as one teacher told us: *"It is challenging! We have two online reading platforms – so kept promoting those, plus giving access to online libraries and whatever came along free. Access to devices is a challenge in our community. There are also some households with very few paper copies of books to access."*



Nearly 60% of children have been able to take books home from school during the pandemic. This is very positive and the myriad of ways in which schools had worked to get books to children was remarkable and awe-inspiring. Of course, this means that **40% of children have not been able to take books home** and have either had to rely on having their own books at home or solely on electronic versions of texts. This picture was similar across the country although in London fewer than half the children in schools have been able to take books home during the pandemic. Our data also suggested that the younger the child, the less likely they were to be able to take books from school home.

Many schools have done a combination of things and are obviously working incredibly hard to find as many ways as possible to get books to children. This has included buying books to give children as gifts or delivering books to children’s homes. **Most teachers (82%) are finding ways to read aloud to their classes at least weekly. The majority are reading daily (58%).** The pattern was similar across the year groups although teachers were more likely to read aloud to the youngest children more frequently. **69% of teachers had recommended a video of an author reading aloud and 38% of teachers had recommended a video of an author led activity.**

We asked teachers to tell us what they have learnt about **promoting reading for pleasure** during the pandemic, we asked them to identify the things that have worked and the barriers that have made it difficult to do.

The free text responses were wide ranging but could be grouped into some broad categories.

| what works | |
|---|-----|
| facilitating support at home - including books at home, support and encouragement for parents, creating a community of readers that goes beyond the school and into homes | 38 |
| planning for talking about books and stories, providing structures within which to do this | 240 |
| using high quality texts and teachers who are knowledgeable about children's literature | 60 |
| online environments and tools that create enthusiasm, interest and excitement in books and reading | 89 |
| A read aloud programme | 175 |
| | 602 |

| barriers | |
|--|-----|
| access to reading material in general and books in particular, many teachers were really worried about this and identified it as a major barrier not just to developing reading for pleasure but to children's literacy achievement overall. | 274 |
| lack of opportunity to talk about books or time to spend on reading because of all the other pressures. | 84 |
| too much screen time which was actually switching children off or difficulties with screens/IT/remote support - or just access to IT at home | 84 |
| | 442 |

Authors, illustrators and texts

It is clear that teachers have engaged with a wide range of online content produced by professional authors and illustrators. Many said that they used this content to engage children and as a part of their reading for pleasure programmes. It was also seen as accessible to parents and useful ‘enrichment’ content.

Teachers were asked to name authors, illustrators or poets that they had recommended or asked children to watch read aloud or doing an activity. **69% of teachers had recommended a video of an author reading aloud and 38% of teachers had recommended a video of an author led activity.** Teachers of children in the EYFS were much less likely to use these kind of resources. Interestingly, **teachers in schools where the children were able to take books from school home were more likely to ask children to watch videos of authors reading aloud and to recommend that children took part in author led activities.**

The vast majority (86%) of teachers who responded to this survey based their literacy planning around a text. The majority of teachers were still able to do this during the pandemic. However, they were more likely to still be doing this in the EY and Y1/2 than in KS2

We were fascinated by the outcomes of this survey because it demonstrated to us – and to those we shared it with – just how many schools are finding ways to make the purpose and pleasure of reading sit at the centre of all they do. Teachers are endlessly inventive in ensuring children have the resources, knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow them to be successful, regardless of the circumstances in which they are learning and in finding ways to ensure parents and families feel part of the reading process. More than anything, this survey showed us that, despite the pressures, uncertainty and upheaval, many schools are focussing their learning programmes on what is and always has been, good practice and provision in reading.

“Books and stories provided a sense of togetherness when it can feel awfully isolating. (Storytime) provided content for conversations and a shared dialogue.” – and teachers know that this is the power of a rich reading programme, whatever is happening in the wider world.

Louise Johns-Shepherd is the Chief Executive at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) is an independent UK charity dedicated to raising the literacy achievement of children by putting quality children's literature at the heart of all learning. It is a charity with a national and international reputation for excellent literacy training, teaching resources and research. The charity was the 2019 winner of the Eleanor Farjeon Award and the Southwark Charity of the Year in 2020. Visit www.clpe.org.uk for further information

