



## Building reading communities – attitudes and environments

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### Context

- Queen's Park Primary School, Westminster.
- A 1.5 form entry intake but operates as 2 form entry to create smaller class sizes.
- Amongst the 20% most deprived post codes in England
- High percentage of EAL and SEND learners
- From our School Development Plan for 2020/2021: **Objective Two: Raise profile of reading across the school to continue as a key curriculum focus.**



### OU Research inspiration and rationale

I chose to take part in the project as I could see that children did not consistently engage in reading for pleasure (RfP). Whilst guided reading and phonics are taught well in the school, children struggled to differentiate between reading lessons and reading for pleasure. They saw reading as an academic activity only. We are a school which priorities mental health and wellbeing, however the link between reading and wellbeing is not clear for the students.

The TaRs research project found that RfP is strongly influenced by relationships between children, teachers, families and communities. Where shared understandings were established about the changing nature of reading and the value of everyday reading practices, these supported children's RfP (Cremin et al., 2014).

As English lead, I decided to fill out the audit myself and also asked the teachers and pupils to complete them too. By doing this, I was able to get a whole school overview of reading for pleasure. Whilst all of the TaRs points were highlighted in one way or another, I decided to work on reading communities, as without home/school cooperation, reading for pleasure will never become fully embedded. We also realised that reading communities within the school had been negatively affected by Covid-19. I decided to focus mainly on reading environments as a way to improve reading communities within the school. This to me felt like a first step towards branching out into larger reading communities, including the home/school link.

### Aims

My aim was to build better reading communities within the school, primarily reading within individual classrooms. This process is likely to take multiple steps, so this project is focusing on improving reading environments and how this affects reading behaviours.

- Reading environments which promote reading for pleasure
- Reading environments which facilitate book talk
- Teachers who feel confident discussing and recommending books
- Regular discussion between staff and children about books

- Better reading for pleasure home/school links

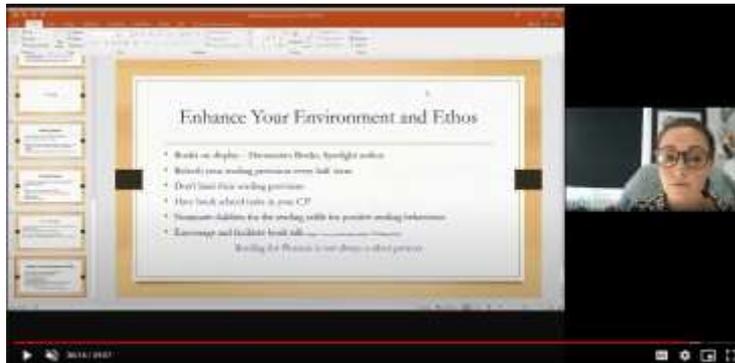
## Outline

To begin with, I did the following:

- Staff Audit – all teachers (using OU questionnaire)
- Pupil Voice interviews with children (Using OU questionnaire)
- Audited reading environments across the school (my own research-informed audit)

I found that the children who valued and enjoyed reading more **perceived their teachers as readers who loved and valued books**. This also correlated with the audit of reading environments. Classrooms with **positive book environments and teacher role models linked directly to children being more engaged with reading**. During all interviews it became clear that ‘reading communities’ needed to be built as children saw reading as a solitary activity.

## Staff Training



I wanted to make sure staff felt confident when promoting reading for pleasure in their classroom so we started having regular staff meetings with this as a focus. During these meetings, I **modelled ‘book talk’ and encouraged staff to share books**. They could then use these techniques in their own classrooms.

We also discussed ways we could encourage reading communities in our classrooms. Most staff had reading for pleasure sessions in their timetable however children often read alone, in silence in these sessions. I encouraged them to allow children to read with friends. **I also encouraged teachers to play an active role in these sessions** by either reading their own book or joining in reading with a group of children.

## Environments

Staff were encouraged to improve their reading areas to make them more communal and a stimulus for book talk. We were able to give each teacher a small budget to buy resources for their classroom reading area. Guidance was given on the type of things they might buy e.g. **display stands to enable more books to be displayed facing forwards or stands for ‘recommendation signs’**.





**Many teachers also involved their classes in designing their reading areas.** In UKS2, children preferred to have their books organised by genre and not ability. Teacher and child recommendation signs were added across the school.



We also worked on **wider school environments outside of the classroom.** Book-related conversation starters are now on our lunch tables and our breakfast club now also has its own collection of books for children to read and discuss together. We also introduced areas around the school filled with books and are also opening a new playground reading area.

### **Whole School Ethos**

Other whole school initiatives included regular discussion and work in phase meetings. We realised through data collection that the issues were slightly different in each phase so each would need its own response.

We also encouraged whole school projects based around a shared text to encourage book talk across the school and at home. This was very successful and the children loved contributing to the display on The Great Paper Caper.

**Ideas such as book clubs and reading clubs have also been introduced.** We are also planning more cross-year group reading activities (e.g. reading buddies) when restrictions are fully lifted.



### **Impact**



There has been a noticeable change to our classroom reading environments. Books are valued and displayed nicely. Consistency across the school was commented on in a recent Local Authority visit. We also have books in various areas across the school and these are accessed by lots of children.

The profile of reading for pleasure has been raised across the school. More conversations happen between staff both informally and during staff meetings. Staff have taken a greater interest in children's literature with many asking the best ways to keep up to date with new titles.

Children are excited about reading and communicate their thoughts well when asked. One child said, "I didn't like reading before. Now I love it!" and her parents have commented on this also. We have started to notice more book talk happening away from the classroom too – a group of Year 6 boys were spotted swapping books before school!

Children are also taking ownership of their book corners and working with teachers to develop them.

Finally, we also saw an increase in reading ages in the majority of children in Years 1 to 6. We were collecting this data for different reasons but we believe the focus on reading has contributed to this. Comprehension has improved and children confidently read aloud to adults.



### **Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice**

The whole process has been interesting and informative. I knew that RfP was a focus in our school however having the 5 TaRs points really helped me to work on specific areas. Engaging with research has shaped our practice in so many positive ways and RfP is now a key focus of the whole school.

Now we have created reading communities within the school, we need to work on reading for pleasure outside of school. Many of our children do not engage with reading at home for a number of reasons and this is something we want to change. Empowering and educating parents is my next area of development. We have been restricted with what we can do with parents this year however I am hoping we can have parents in school more and sharing reading from September 2022.

I will be sharing research from the project with them and simple strategies they can use at home to encourage reading. I also feel like it is important for parents to fully understand what happens in school and the processes we use.