

# Online booktalk in the Library

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## Context

POWIS Primary is a newly established International school in Malaysia. Although it is coming to the end of its second year, there have been many interruptions due to COVID and at the time of completing this research, the third online learning/lock down was in place. Building a reading culture at the school is very much ongoing and it has been challenging while we have not been in school for face to face teaching for prolonged periods. I undertook the Teachers' Reading Challenge to support me.



## OU Research inspiration and rationale

3. A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:

- Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations

The Teachers as Readers research (Cremin et al 2014) highlighted the importance of talking about texts and books when encouraging and building Reading for Pleasure. In the research, many teachers noted that initially, discussions were teacher-led and occurred during formal lesson times.

- We have a high number of EAL children who can be reluctant to speak and do not participate fully in class discussion and so I chose to work on something informal in the library to build their confidence.



Research insights regarding the effective development of reading for pleasure (based on Cremin et al. 2014)

## Aims

The main aim of this action-research was to build our school reading culture and give the children more relaxed and informal opportunities to chat about books.

- I wanted to give the children some structure and scaffold to focus the conversations and avoid generic 'tell us about your book' openers.
- Many of our EAL children are not confident speakers and would be unsure where to begin or do not have the language structures in place to talk about books and explain their thoughts or feelings about them.

## Outline

- The initial idea was to use time outside of lessons such as lunch time and ECAs but with COVID restrictions this was not possible.
- In my role as librarian, I only see classes once a week but I wanted to give some of our library lesson time to encouraging more informal talk. Classrooms are busy places where, it is perhaps perceived, more formal learning takes place, so I wanted the library to be a more relaxed and casual area.
- I used a number of strategies highlighted in the diary of the Teachers' Reading Challenge.

## Book chat prompts



To support our EAL children and give them a starting point, I used some book review questions stuck onto lolly sticks. These could then be picked from a pot and used in a variety of ways, including:



- Pick one per table for each to discuss their book (giving structure and repetition with the same question, but this can lead to children copying others answers to avoid thinking of new responses)
- Each person picks a stick (so group members hear many different questions)
- Partners pick for the other (this encourages more interaction with asking questions to each other) .



## Book Blankets

During online lessons, I shared my example of a 'book blanket' with the children and talked about the books I had chosen. This activity actually has a number of benefits. It gave me the opportunity to model some informal book chat, I highlighted some new books that had arrived in the library and I was able to give recommendations of books.



### Book Blanket

In your library lesson this week we will be talking about 'book blankets'. Please upload a photo of your 'book blanket' and in our next library lesson we can share and talk about your books.

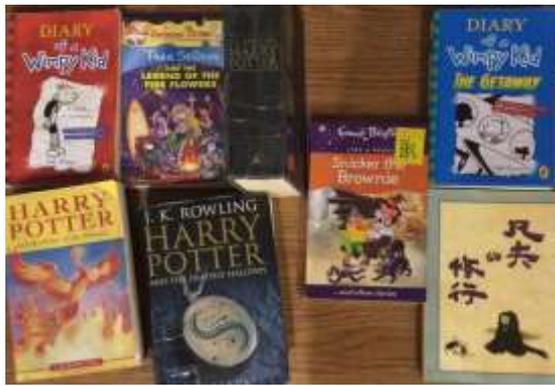
You might want to include your favourite book(s), the book you are currently reading, a book that is special to you or a new book you have not yet started. Please include books in any language that you are reading (they do not have to all be English books).

I look forward to seeing your books!  
Mrs O'Donnell

20 Responses, 0 Waiting for Approval, 0 Drafts, 1 Not Responded

[Add Response](#)

The children then went away to choose their own books to photograph. I was hoping they would search their book shelf, maybe rediscover a book they could read again or find new books they had not read yet. (This was at a time of full lock-down so the children had no access to the library, not even for a drive-by/kerb side pick-up and so I was looking for ways to keep them reading). In the next lesson, children were given time to talk about their books. The children knew this was coming up, so they had time to prepare what they might talk about and did not feel put on the spot so much.



I was able to prompt them a little when they were talking to scaffold where needed. It was really nice to see some similarities and it highlighted children who had read or owned the same books or series. They were able to make connections with each other during this very isolating time.



It was a good opportunity to discuss with the children the importance of reading in their home language as well as English. Questions such as the following worked well:

- Did they feel they had a higher level of reading in English or home language?
- In which language did they read more?
- Did they have any books in home language?
- Can they read in home language independently or did parents read to them?

### Book Waves



These simple 'book waves' allowed the children to hold up and share the book they were currently reading.

Some children wanted to take the opportunity to tell us about the book and make recommendations.



# Impact

## Book chat prompts:

- In comparison to previous lessons where we asked the children to 'talk about your book', using the book chat prompts generated more and longer conversations.
- The children said they were helpful.
- It improved chats by giving the children something to focus on and a starting point.

## Book Blankets:

- The children enjoyed seeing other people's blanket and it generated conversations about the books.
- Most children were confident to share their books with the class and were able to talk about the books they had.
- In some cases, it highlighted to me that not all of our children have access to high quality books at home and therefore the importance our school library to those children.

## Book Waves:

- These encouraged interaction during a long period of online learning.
- Children could refer back to a page if needed when talking about the book.
- They started conversations



## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

I found the TaRs research very beneficial and it has highlighted many things and will influence my course of action for the next academic year.

To improve reading behaviours:

- Encourage a wide range of books and ensure our library collection reflects this. I need to make sure the collection development policy is completed for the library.
- Encourage library staff and class teachers/TAs during the library lesson to engage with children more to talk about the books they are choosing.
- Allocate time in every library lesson for book chat
- If Covid restrictions continue and parents are not allowed on site, we need to work out a method for parental borrowing to support families who do not have access to books at home.

To improve effective processes:

- We will continue working hard to raise the profile of reading within our school.
- Hold termly challenges/competitions for the children to participate in. We have already started working on a Battle of the Books challenge with a quiz at the end and a Read Around the World challenge to encourage children to read more diverse books.

