

On Reading/Writing for Pleasure 2: Pivoting on a sixpence

Pivoting on a sixpence: Six literacy organisations and their rapid responses to COVID-19

As highlighted in the first of this blog series [On Reading/Writing for pleasure](#), The Open University's research team is working in collaboration with seven London-based literacy-based organisations (2020-2023) across six different projects, exploring the approaches and methodologies that seem to be effective in inspiring and encouraging children and young people to read and/or write for pleasure. This second blog reports on the many ways each of the projects pivoted their original plans and adapted to the challenges faced by all practitioners over the last 18 months.

The aim of the first year of the three-year Mercer's Company research project (2020-2023) was for the research team to get to know the projects, to better understand the nature of the communities they work with and to appreciate how they establish and enact their ethos. For instance, we wanted to understand the relationships established with schools, parents and children and how these impact on young people's desire to read or write, particularly those who are less enthusiastic or reluctant.

However, as with everything in 2020, plans swiftly changed as projects found themselves adapting and innovating on their original ideas and approaches. Face-to-face projects quickly converted into online offers and standard ways of working were framed through the computer screen. From our early conversations with projects, a common response was the opportunity they had taken to accelerate some planned innovations into their core offer.

At the end of year cross-project meeting, all projects showcased their current programme developments and how they had made adjustments as a result of pandemic-related restrictions and lockdowns. The use of Google Jamboard (Figure 1) and a colour-coded system enabled project leads and the research team to learn more about their modifications. Yellow sticky notes indicated questions (from other projects), blue sticky notes highlighted similar issues, and green ones focused on the differences (between projects). After the workshop, project leads returned to Jamboard answering the questions using orange sticky notes.

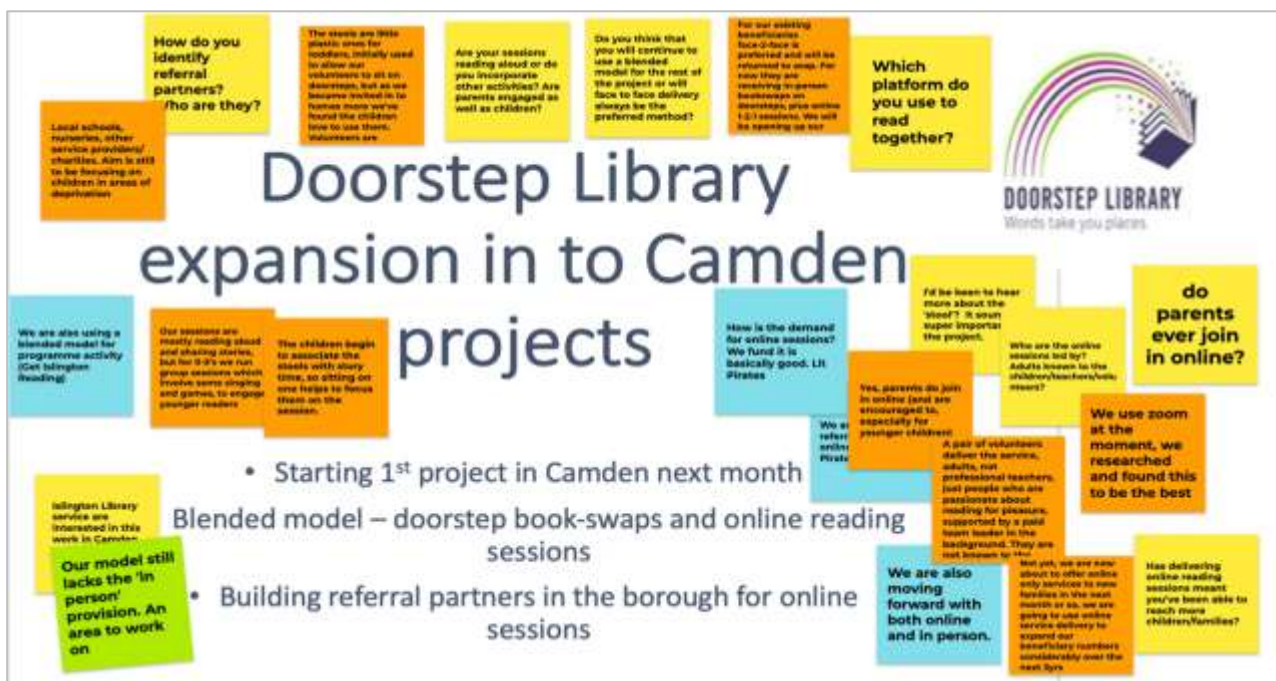


Figure 1: Project feedback via Jamboard

Unsurprisingly, there were a range of similar issues faced by the projects, but what struck us all was the speed with which projects have responded and the types of innovations the pandemic had prompted. The agile adaptations implemented by the projects ensured the core aims were retained, but also led to innovations that offered potential new ways of working in the future. Projects were quick to pivot and provide new online offers leading to new virtual platforms and many took the opportunity to harness **new technology** and the benefits it affords. For example, virtual author visits reached more children and families, and the technology itself meant it was possible to communicate with parents with less effort. All **training** went on-line, and where once face-to-face was the norm, films were written and produced specifically to kickstart projects in an **online environment**.

Many of the projects work with children identified as coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in receipt of free school meals or Pupil Premium, and there was a shared concern about equity of access to online resources. However, projects found ways of **partnering** with or signposting to, other organisations who could help. Projects were aware of the amazing things teachers had achieved during lockdown and wanted to continue these efforts through their work. As literacy-based ventures using resources to enthuse young readers and writers, finding ways of ensuring that books were getting out to families or prioritising access to a range of online quality books was vital. It was possible to build a remote reading community, and for some projects, **parents** became partners rather than observing from the sidelines. Other projects sent book boxes into homes, turned physical book offers into audio subscriptions, and encouraged engagement with online reading campaigns.

Whilst most projects are resuming in-person delivery from September 2021, many will continue with their newly blended models. Although leaders reported that face-to-face is the preferred mode, the pivoting over the last year has proved that **on-line+** works well. Projects made the space for parents/carers to be part of young people's positive literacy experiences, which in turn led to a deeper consideration around parents as consumers of resources and provided a rethink on tone and presentation of resources. Over the past 18 months all projects have held steady to the aims and principles, the relationships, and the personal feedback received to continuously reflect on and adapt their programmes. Being forced to adapt and to push back on traditional project approaches has meant being brave, but in so doing the focus has been on creating the best experience for young readers and writers.

Further details of the six projects can be found on their website: [Doorstep Library](#), [Get Islington Reading](#), [Literacy Pirates](#), [Ministry of Stories](#), [Primary Shakespeare Company](#) and [World Book Day](#).

The *On Reading/Writing for Pleasure* blog series and other useful about reading for pleasure can be found on The Open University *Reading for Pleasure* [website](#).



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