

'Me' time or 'We' time?

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Context

The University of Cambridge Primary School is the first primary training school in the country, committed to exemplary teaching and learning that is rooted in research. The school opened in 2015 and is a three-form entry primary school. I am currently a Year 3 teacher at the school and teach a class of thirty children.



OU Research inspiration and rationale

In my research, I focused on a reading for pleasure (RfP) pedagogy with a particular focus on social and independent reading.

Being in a school with such a strongly embedded RfP culture, my class have always loved RfP sessions. However, prior to this research, RfP opportunities in my class have usually been unstructured, often spontaneous and have always happened inside the classroom. During these sessions, I **have also always given children a choice as to whether they wanted to read independently or socially**. I have noticed that most children often gravitate towards social reading during these times.

This has led me to wonder **whether I am inadvertently limiting the children's opportunities to enjoy independent reading by always giving them the choice**. Are some children missing the opportunity to develop a love for independent reading because they always choose to read socially? Alternatively, are other children missing the chance to share and enjoy books with others because they always choose to read independently?

These questions have led me to become curious about the **children's perceptions of social reading and independent reading**. I wanted to conduct an experiment to see what would happen if I added more structured opportunities for both. I also wanted to experiment with reading environments to see how this contributed to the children's perception of both social and independent reading.

Aims

- To deepen my understanding of the children's preferences for and perceptions of social reading and independent reading.
- To explore whether children favour particular settings for each type of reading.

Outline

I decided to introduce daily RfP for 15 minutes. Each day, I alternated between social reading and independent reading. During social reading sessions, children were encouraged to share books and talk about their books with peers. During independent reading sessions, children were encouraged to read quietly and independently. I also experimented with the settings in which these sessions took place to see how these contributed to their perceptions. On some days, children could read outside; at other times, they sat at tables and on other occasions, children could choose a space

inside the classroom. After completing these series of sessions, I asked the children to complete a questionnaire. After each question, I asked the children to explain their reasoning.

Impact

Independent v. social reading

I asked the children to rate independent reading and social reading from a scale of 1-5. Twenty nine children took part in the questionnaire. Below is a table showing the children's responses:

How much do you enjoy these types of reading?

	1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Love it!)
Independent	7%	14%	14%	24%	41%
Social	7%	0%	24%	21%	48%

The data confirm that there is a strong RfP culture already embedded in my class. This extends to the 4 children who ticked 'not at all' for one of the categories as they ticked 'love it!' for the alternative category of reading.

The data also show a fairly even split between preferences for independent v. social reading, with a slight leaning towards social reading. Out of the 29 children who completed the questionnaire, 14 had a stronger preference for social reading and 12 for independent. The other 3 children loved both equally.

Contrary to my previous RfP sessions where I had observed that most children gravitated towards social reading, I was surprised to see how many children actually preferred independent reading. Many of the comments about independent reading related to the relaxing emotions they experienced:

- *"Independent reading is peaceful."*
- *"It makes me feel relaxed and calm."*
- *"I get some peace and quiet."*



On the other hand, children commented that they sometimes found social reading noisy:

- *"It's very loud."*
- *"I quite like it because it can be with whoever you want but it can be noisy."*

- *"I like the fact that when I read with my friends I'm not lonely but the noise level is sometimes too much."*

Comprehensive reading of the children's comments gave me further insight into the perceptions of both types of reading.

A couple of children commented that independent reading allowed them to read at their own pace or read books in their first language. Others enjoyed being able to immerse themselves in their own story:

- *"I can get my mind in the world of the book like I'm there as it's happening..."*

Lots of children also commented that independent reading allows them a time to have some space for themselves:

- *"Sometimes we need a bit of me time and that is a perfect opportunity."*
- *"No one can interrupt you..."*
- *"Sometimes I just want to be alone and not sit and read with other people..."*
- *"I love just reading with no interruptions and just sinking into a good book."*
- *"Because it's quiet, people don't annoy you as much and you get more personal [time]..."*
- *"...you get time for yourself."*
- *"...I don't have to talk."*

On the flip side, some children commented that because of their personality, they prefer social reading:

- *"I'm very social."*
- *"You get to share your ideas [in social reading] and I'm an extrovert."*
- *"I don't like being lonely."*
- *"I love social stuff."*
- *"I like being able to share my ideas with other people."*



In fact, a huge factor for the enjoyment of social reading across the class was the opportunity to connect with friends. Friendship was cited in 14 out of 29 responses related to social reading:

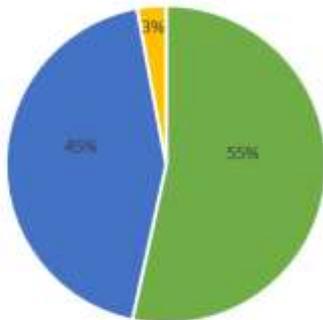
- *"I love reading with friends."*
- *"I like the fact that when I read with my friends I'm not lonely."*
- *"You can share books with your friend."*
- *"I get to read with my friends and chat about the book."*



How important are reading environments?

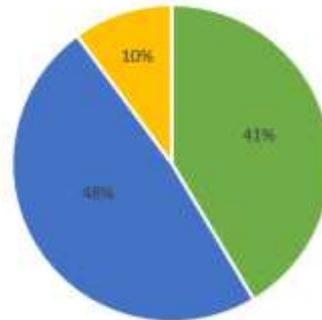
In my questionnaire, I asked children where they most enjoy independent reading and where they most enjoy social reading:

Where do you most enjoy independent reading?



■ Choice inside classroom ■ Choice outside ■ At tables

Where do you most enjoy social reading?



■ Choice inside classroom ■ Choice outside ■ At tables

At the start of my research, I wondered whether there would be a leaning towards a particular setting based on the children's preferences for independent or social reading (e.g. would those who prefer social reading prefer being outside?) However, on analysing the data, there was no clear link between the two.

What is apparent is that **reading at tables is overwhelmingly the least preferred setting for both types of reading**. Overall, there is a slight leaning towards a preference for being outside for social reading and a preference for a choice inside for independent reading.

It also became evident across both types of reading that **children appreciate the choice of place** as to where they spend their reading for pleasure time:

- "I get to read wherever I want."
- "I like a variety of choices."
- "You can pick anywhere in the classroom and be where you want to be."
- "There are many options on where to read."
- "[Outside] there are different spaces."

The overwhelming majority of children who preferred reading outside cited “fresh air” as one of the the biggest factors for their preference. Some children also said they enjoyed listening to the sounds of nature during these times:

- *“You can listen to the sounds of nature.”*
- *“I love nature and it is wonderful having the birds and breeze. It’s better when you are reading!”*



Lots of children also described the importance of feeling cosy and comfortable and they liked being able to choose this inside:



- *“You can go somewhere cosy...”*
- *“I get to lie down on the carpet and it feels nice. Chairs are uncomfortable...”*
- *“I can be on the carpet because it’s cosy.”*
- *“I love reading under my table because it is dark and I can sit...it’s comfy.”*

The sense of agency, freedom of choice and a feeling of comfort is clearly hugely important for children for both types of reading.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

My biggest surprise from this research is how many children actually prefer independent reading to social reading when given the chance. I realised that my previous method of leading RfP sessions in an unstructured way, where children could choose either type of reading, could actually hinder the opportunity for some children to enjoy and fully enter into independent reading time. With both independent and social reading happening in the same space at the same time, noise levels and a 'fear of missing out' on time with friends may have led to some children choosing social reading, despite their preference for independent reading.

Moving forward, I now see how important it is to offer regular opportunities for both independent and social reading. These may need to be scheduled for separate occasions. However, I will need to bear in mind the 7% of children who strongly dislike one of the two types of reading and explore how to engage them fully. Alternatively, if offered at the same time, I will need to consider how I can create different zones (e.g. a quiet zone and a social zone) so that everyone can equally enjoy these sessions. I can also see how important it is to give children the choice of environment and will now endeavour to make this a normal part of my practice.