

## Student Teachers as Readers: 'The Student That Books Built'



Do you know that frisson of excitement when you read someone's memoir and at almost every sentence, you're internally saying 'Yes, YES'? This is how I felt reading Francis Spufford's memoir *The Child That Books Built* – hence the title of this blog. His memoir shows how the books we enjoyed when we were children can shape us quite fundamentally. And so in this blog (the second of three) I'm looking at how student teachers bring to mind childhood memories of reading at home (rather than school). You may be asking why this matters. Well, it's all about students' own identities as readers which then become part of how they go on to teach reading in the classroom. Understanding more about students' identities as readers by finding out about their reading life histories can help teacher educators tailor training to build on that knowledge and enhance their potential as future teachers of reading.

It was through postgraduate study where I began to make connections between my own childhood reading and how those memories may be intertwined with my own reader identity today. From my



reflections, significant aspects appeared: **access** to books at home and through weekly library visits; **a devoted Granny** who gifted books or Peter Rabbit christening bowls; **space** to immerse myself in adult-free Cornish adventures with the *Famous Five*; **time** to imbibe detailed illustrations from series, such as *Topsy and Tim*; and finally, **vivid recollections** of specific moments, such as *Mrs Mopple's pig* (dressed in a

nightie of course!). These graphic memories have undoubtedly shaped me as a reader today and are behind my own teaching drive to inspire future generations of children as life-long readers.



However, whilst my own personal memories tended to fall on the positive spectrum, this may not be the case for everyone. What were the memories that our STaRS (Student Teachers as Readers) research project uncovered when we conducted an initial pilot with 202 student trainee teachers last September 2020? Using Corpus Linguistics, we explored the student

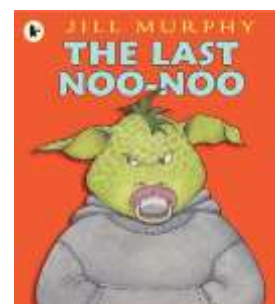
teachers' childhood memories. Corpus linguistics allows the investigation of large sets of language data. The corpus in this study, i.e., the electronic collection of all the qualitative survey responses, was analysed for lexical frequencies, collocations and selected grammatical structures to gain insights into the student teachers' memories using some of the most used words in response to questions related to childhood memories, such as 'reading', or by examining passive structures, for instance. The image on the right shows a collocation network, revealing the words that were employed by the student teachers with 'reading', for example '*pleasure*'.



Student teachers' memories of reading at home can be categorised as '**Affective**' resonances where texts are linked to strong feelings; '**Place and Time**' as key factors within memories; '**Specific**' recollections of key texts; and finally, those that can be associated with '**Cognitive Benefits**', the sense of reading being beneficial for multiple reasons.

Memories linked to feelings were some of the ones you might expect such as reading leading to a feeling of safety and cosiness, being tucked up, feeling snug, or under the bed covers. Other feelings were linked to close moments with key family members: looking forward to the familiarity of bedtime rituals, of always reading a chapter of the latest book before sleep, or being read to, or being listened to, or taking turns to read. Students frequently used words such as '**immersed**' '**engrossed**' '**transported**' '**inspired**' in the survey as well as mention of crying when a story ended or discussing and sharing the '**good bits**'. The pure delight of staying up 'PAST my bedtime' are part of a number of recollections that border on the subversive! Even strained listening out for adult footsteps was mentioned as that meant a sad signal to stop reading.

Specific memories included students commenting on reading all the Harry Potter series, or all the books by a particular author such as Jacqueline Wilson. Other recollections were about being engrossed in or transported to other fictional worlds, such as Narnia as well as tight memories of actual stories, *The Last Noo-Noo* by Jill Murphy or *Horrid Henry* by Francesca Simon. Poems by AA Milne and *The Owl and the Pussycat* by Edward Lear featured, too.



These positive memories based in a home setting (sadly not school) are echoed in the literature where previous studies, for example, Boggs and Golden (2009) and Applegate and Applegate (2004) reinforce this perspective. The students' memories of the importance of family members in their reading lives,

particular books that have remained in their minds and strong memories associated with reading, echo a study by Roe & Vukelich, (1998) who describe three key categories:

**Models:** any people, often parents and carers, who provide praise, encouragement and visual joy in reading themselves

**Materials:** having the right books to hold attention and provoke social discussion, as well as encompassing a range of different genres that take readers beyond themselves

**Epiphanies:** which can include both positive and negative memories of the act of reading

The Student Teachers as Readers (STaRs) initial survey adds to these categories, not only the aspect of the cognitive benefits of reading, but the important element of how memories of childhood reading may influence them as future teachers of reading.

Our team is embarking on widening our STaRs research this autumn, and I know that I will relish deciphering data in relation to students' memories of reading. Based on the pilot findings, I sense that the responses will offer further valuable insights into student teachers' reading lives. This will help us in teacher education to create strong and committed reading teachers of the future, who can offer themselves as models, provide rich materials for reading in their classrooms and create positive epiphanies for children through a range of exciting reading opportunities.

***Look out for the next blog in the series that explores the influences on student teachers' reading identities linked to their developing sense of reading pedagogy.***

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See our first blog: Student Teachers as Readers: Enthusiastic or just Lukewarm? on [STaRs-Blog-1-UPLOAD-1.pdf \(ourfp.org\)](#)

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## References

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