

Reading aloud to create meaningful bonds

Victoria Percival



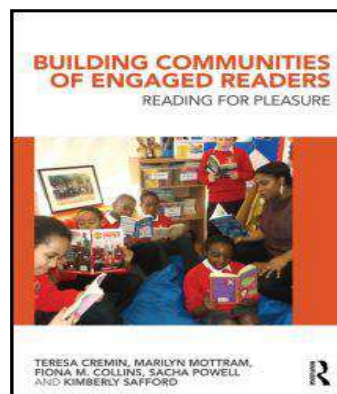
East Tilbury Primary School is a three-form primary school, located in the Thurrock borough of Essex. I am currently teaching in Year 6 and am the newly-appointed Reading Lead.

As a school, we are endeavouring to develop a community of life-long readers and to foster a love of reading for pleasure.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

Research on Teachers as Readers (TaRs) found that in order to foster Reading for Pleasure (RfP) effectively, teachers need to develop:

1. Considerable knowledge of children's literature and other texts
2. Knowledge of children's reading practices
3. A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:
 - Social reading environments
 - Reading aloud
 - Independent reading
 - Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations
4. As Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach
5. Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.



I have always been a reader. I have always loved immersing myself in a book to completely detach myself. This love of reading first started from a very young age: my mother reading *The Hobbit* to me at bedtime. I wasn't old enough to understand the language or even some of the narrative, but I remember my mum explaining what was going on in the story; I remember asking her what some words meant; I remember being completely engrossed that I didn't want to go to sleep nor wait until the next day to find out what would happen next.

Despite loving reading myself because of my earliest reading experiences of bedtime stories and stories being read to me at school, I was not effectively modelling this passion for reading for the

children in my class. The reason for this was because of my lack of **knowledge of children's literature** and not prioritising reading aloud in my timetable.

Since applying for the role of Reading Lead in my school, I began to reflect on what was missing: the opportunities to read aloud and the rich conversations children would have, which develop as a result of these sessions.

The Teachers as Readers (TaRs) reading aloud project - Cremin et al (Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Routledge, 20014) – influenced me to reflect on my own practice and the wider possibilities of reading aloud in school. This research inspired me to develop strategies to create a reading community and have 'books in common' within my classroom. As a result, the project has allowed me to create meaningful bonds with the children in my class through the enjoyment of reading.

Further inspiration came from a recent article by Teresa Cremin (How to become a Reading Role Model, 2018), where she stated the importance of being a 'Reading teacher'. She expressed that reading teachers are highly reflective practitioners, who are able to have a more superior understanding of the reading habits of the children in their classes and how this knowledge will help systematically support these children further. She stated further that by making time for informal book talk, teacher will naturally make deeper connections and build closer reading relationships.

Aims

The intention of my project was to encourage the children in my class, and eventually all classes within the school, to engage and enjoy reading for pleasure through reading aloud and informal book talk.

I knew that in order to develop reading for pleasure pedagogy in my school's setting, I intended to:

1. Develop my knowledge of children's literature, so that I could make thoughtful recommendations to the children in my class.
2. Create opportunities to encourage reading for pleasure: book clubs; class books share; biscuit breaks; fundraising competitions; school environment.
3. Develop a social media presence to encourage children and parents to read at home.

Outline

1. Develop my knowledge of children's literature, so that I could make thoughtful recommendations to the children in my class.

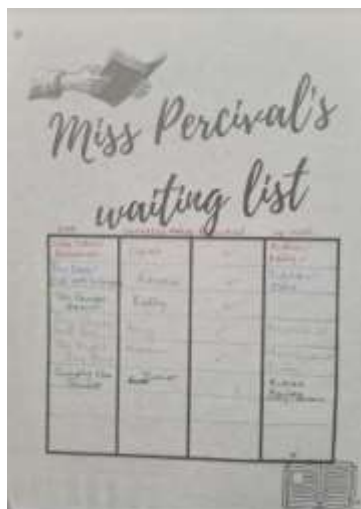
When I started taking part in the Reading Teachers project, I began by having discussions with the children in my class about what books they were reading and their preferred authors. From these conversations, I discovered that a lot of children in my class could name only a few popular, well-known authors (David Walliams, Jeff Kinney, Roald Dahl, Michael Morpurgo). This was also true for me. Therefore, I endeavoured to spend any free time I had reading recommended children's books – from a range of authors - from a variety of book shops.

Once I had read a book, I would then take it in to school and spend a few minutes in the mornings discussing the book with my class. Often, I would have deliberate conversations with my teaching assistant in front of the class to model – informally - how to review a book. These discussions proved to be invaluable as then even the reluctant readers in my classroom would ask to borrow the book for themselves. Additionally, this allowed me to have conversations with the children in my class

that I may have otherwise not have had and be able to make thoughtful book recommendations because of these exchanges.



I created my own bookshelf – separate to the class book shelf - in my classroom so that I could recommend books I had read to the children I thought would enjoy them.



Since this time, I have now created 'Miss Percival's Waitlist'. The waitlist is used often as the books (which were casually discussed) have now been so popular that often lots of children would like to borrow the books I have reviewed. This has now developed into a child-led reading culture, where the children encourage each other to read the reviewed books in their spare time so they are able to hand it to the next child on the waitlist as quickly as possible.



The children are also now aware that any books which have been stamped, have been read and reviewed by me.

2. Create opportunities to encourage reading for pleasure: Reading aloud in class time; book clubs; class books share; biscuit breaks; fundraising and competitions; school environment.

Reading aloud in class time

In order to encourage the children in my class to Read for Pleasure, I recognised that I had to create more opportunities to read aloud so that the children could be engrossed in a text as well as the children benefitting from hearing intonation and expression being used. Therefore, I ensured that I spent at least half an hour reading aloud to my class.

In the middle of this project, schools were asked to close due to the Coronavirus pandemic. To ensure that the children in my class (and across the school) were accessing opportunities to hear books being read aloud, I asked teachers across the school to choose a book to read aloud to their classes via the school's social media page and Google Classroom.



Corridor displays to inform others what book each class in the year group is reading.

East Tilbury Primary School
25 January · 🌐

Listen to the wonderful Year 6 staff read chapters 1-10 of Who Let The Gods Out? By Maz Evans. The next part of the story will be posted on Friday. Let us know if you are enjoying the book.



Opportunities for reading aloud to continue despite schools closing to the majority of children.

Book clubs

Since the children returned to school after the school closures due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we have introduced two book clubs, which focus on reading books aloud and spending time discussing the books we have read. One club is after school and another club is during school hours. The club during school hours has specifically targeted the children who were in the school building during the lockdown (key worker and vulnerable children).



Corridor displays celebrating children in book clubs.

Class book share



In my classroom, we now have a class book share, which was suggested by one of the children in my class. Children now have the opportunity to bring in books they have read before and share them with others; often conversations and recommendations are now made between the children. These books are kept separately from books which belong to the school.

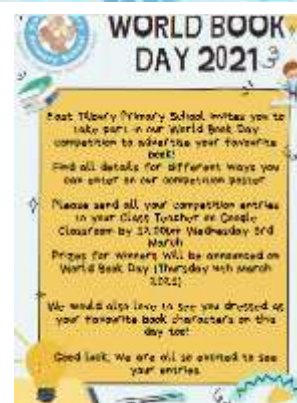
Biscuit breaks

Since the national lockdown, my school has introduced a well-being break in the mornings for children to have a brief pause in their learning. In my classroom, we use our biscuit break time following the reading aloud session, where we sit and discuss the chapter we have just read. Often, children will make predictions about what they think will happen next.

Fundraising and competitions

In order to purchase some new books for the school and encourage RfP at home, I organised a sponsored read event in conjunction with the publisher Osborne over a two-week period. The children were provided with sponsorship forms and reading logs and could collect money based on how much they had read to go towards acquiring new books. To inspire children to take part in the competition, I set a school-wide challenge of reading for 10,000 minutes.

The event was incredibly successful and we managed to raise over £1300. With this money, each class was allocated a set amount of money; teachers and children browsed the Usborne website together and decided on a new set of books for their classroom. Any remaining money was used to buy new banded books to assist in the teaching of decoding.



School environment

This year, my school has had a large focus on promoting RfP in shared areas. I had the opportunity to meet with my Head of School to discuss the installation of new wall art. I was able to contribute my opinions into which books should be featured on the displays. The new fittings were well received by the children, who wanted to explore the school to hunt for books they knew. This new art also provided the opportunity to discuss how books could be adapted into films, theatre shows etc.



3. Develop a social media presence to encourage children and parents to read at home.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and not being able to have as much face-to-face contact with parents, I spoke with the school's senior leads (who coordinate our social media pages) and discussed the importance of posting regular updates to encourage parents to engage and inspire their children to read at home.

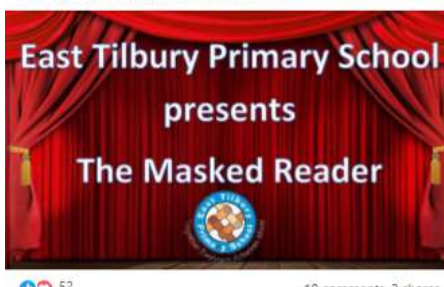
Over the lockdown, I organised a series of competitions, including The Masked Reader, where staff could conceal their identity for children to guess who was reading a short story. In addition, I also used this opportunity to encourage staff to read aloud to their classes via the school Facebook page.



Additionally, we have used our school's Facebook page as a way to signpost parents to free resources they can use at home to encourage their children to read independently for pleasure.



We also use our social media as a way to model how reading for pleasure can provide life-long enjoyment.



Masked Reader competition

Impact

By providing opportunities to encourage reading for pleasure, I have seen a significant difference in the attitudes towards reading from the children in my class.

Since beginning this project, book talk now happens naturally; the children will discuss books they are reading and enjoying as well as make recommendations to me about books that I should read. In addition to children discussing books, it was suggested by one of the pupils that we set up a class book swap. As a result of this conversation, at present, over half the class have brought copies of their own books into school to swap with other children in the class; this has allowed for even the most reluctant readers to be involved with a discussion with their peers about books which may interest them.



Moreover, we have ensured that a class read aloud is happening daily for a minimum of at least 30 minutes in Year 6. This has created a real buzz amongst the children, who spend their biscuit breaks discussing their predictions and continuing to research into books we might wish to read next.

Staff thoughts

"Before adopting the approach of reading whole books aloud to the class, using different adults to read the voices of the characters, the class showed little engagement with reading. Since introducing this approach, the change in the class attitude to reading has been incredible. Children who would dribble into school and trying to avoid coming into the classroom are eager to come through the door as they don't want to miss the next part of the book. If a child is off school for a day, they are asking what they have missed when they return. Some of the most hard-to-reach children are the ones who are the most captivated by hearing the story read aloud, tracking the speakers. When we reach the end of a chapter, the children try to encourage us to read on as they are keen to know what happens next and, if the books form part of a series, they always want to read the book which comes next. The children are talking about books and reading. There is a buzz of excitement in the air."

- Miss Martin, Recovery Curriculum staff member, Year 6

6VP Pupil blog

In class, we are currently reading a book called Woven. I enjoy it when the teachers read to us, especially when they do the funny voices for the characters when they are speaking. It gets me on the edge of my seat and actually helps me a lot during English as I pull words out of it and model it into my writing.

In English, we are writing our own version of a story called A Vampires Revenge. I love writing stories, especially adventure ones. In fact, I am writing one at home to make use of all the wonderful vocabulary I have learned, which also helps me improve my handwriting.

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Class blog

Pupil voice survey

Along with speaking to the children about their reading habits, I have now begun setting regular surveys using Google Forms to monitor how the children feel about reading aloud and to discover how I can make these experiences more enjoyable for them. From completing my latest survey, I discovered that the children in my class thoroughly enjoy the sessions, with children recommending that we spend longer reading or provide more opportunities throughout the day to read aloud.

If you answered 'The teachers reading to us', why did you prefer this over answering questions in your books?

32 responses

It gives us time to relax, and discover how much we actually enjoy books.

it diffrent

because i enjoy it more

it has been inspiration to me and has increased my vocabulary

because i found it easier for me to understand

Its more interesting

i like people reading to me

yes

its fun to just listen and the teachers use expresions

Do you think your teachers read books at home? If yes, how do you know. Please write 'yes' or 'no' and use the conjunction 'because' to back up your answer.

32 responses

Yes they read at home because my teacher (Miss Percival) would normally read the because reading it to the students to give them a clue of what might happen and how good it will be

yes because they are always lending books they recommend reading to us

yes becuae miss persival always says she does

Yes because she also recommends alot of books to everyone

yes because she tells us that she has been reading books and there good books

yes she tells us

yes because she tells us that she has been enjoying it

Yes beaus she's tells us she's reads the block before us at home

yes she does and i know that because she says she loves reading

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Throughout this project, I have found that my knowledge of children's literature has improved significantly; I am now more aware of the huge amount of resources available to children and aspire to continue to add to my growing recommendations list. As well as this, the project has reiterated the importance of reading aloud and how reading aloud can create a positive influence, not only across the curriculum, but on mental well-being too.

Most importantly to me, this project has provided me with ways to create meaningful bonds with the children in my class through Reading for Pleasure; I now feel more confident in supporting and recommending books as I feel that I have been able to get to know the children better, which I have not experienced with any other class. Additionally, this has allowed me to build important bonds

with other teachers across the school as it has provided me with the tools to appropriately support my colleagues.

As a reading lead, my next steps will be to implement this study across the school to engage the wider school community. I will be putting plans in place to ensure reading aloud for pleasure is timetabled in and happening daily for a minimum of 15 minutes in Key Stage 1 and 30 minutes in Key Stage 2 to allow for informal book talk and to encourage staff to improve their knowledge of children's literature.

Moreover, once all Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, we will be putting plans in place to encourage further parental engagement by holding parent 'read alongs' and parent and children book clubs to model the importance of reading aloud.