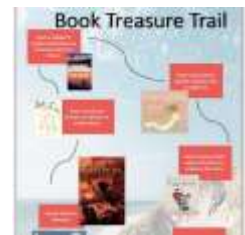


Trainee Teachers' Reading Treasure Trails

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Context



I work at St Mary's University in Twickenham as part of the Primary English team where I teach undergraduate and post-graduate trainee teachers. As part of our undergraduate year two elective programme, English elective students focus on developing their knowledge of a broad range of children's books covering many themes and further developing their knowledge of a Reading for Pleasure (RfP) pedagogy. The work in

this project is from students who participated in this elective module during the academic year 20-21.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

Our rationale for developing our trainee teachers' *knowledge of children's literature* is linked to research conducted in 2008 by Cremin et al., **which found that teachers have a limited repertoire of children's books and therefore may find it challenging to promote a reading for pleasure classroom environment and promote children's engagement in reading.**

After completing an initial pre-module quiz, our students came to realise that they too mainly relied on authors from when they were younger and a few well know celebrity authors.

We focused on **the themes of developing teacher knowledge of children's literature and other texts**, and (within the undergraduate student teacher community) **building reading communities** through **informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations.**

Our aim was to introduce our trainees to a wide range of children's books, establish reciprocal relationships with their peers where they were able to share and discuss books together, and underpin this with a *pedagogy of reading for pleasure.*

Our intention was that this would enable our students to reflect and build on their own practice in school, eventually taking responsibility for and planning to develop children's RfP alongside reading instruction (Cremin et al, 2014).



Aims

- To develop knowledge of a wide range of children's literature
- To support students' understanding of what makes effective social reading environments and facilitate student 'book talk'
- To consider the rationale for choosing certain books for their classroom and how this relates to RfP pedagogy

Outline

- Each lecture centred around developing knowledge and understanding of children's literature and the associated pedagogy. One lecture, for example, centred around developing **knowledge of contemporary picture books** and, alongside this, **an understanding of visual literacy**. Our students learnt about the value of children learning from a 21st century literacy curriculum that recognises the prominence and importance of the visual image, especially in literature (Stafford, 2011).



- A later lecture focussed on **knowledge and understanding of the importance of diversity in children's literature** and students discussed and enjoyed sharing books that recognised the diversity of our community and of the importance of children seeing themselves reflected in the literature they are introduced to (Dolan, 2014). A further lecture provided students with a **deeper understanding of the techniques that graphic novelists use**. They enjoyed sharing these texts whilst engaging in activities they could use to foster children's imaginations in school.



- **To build reciprocal relationships with their peers, our students created and enjoyed participating in a Book Club.** Each week, during the first five lectures, students would take it in turns to share a contemporary picture book and write a review which they would share on a university forum.

During the final five lectures, our students chose a contemporary children's chapter book to read, and they then presented a review of this within their final

lecture. We were incredibly lucky that our local children's bookshop are experts in children's literature and so a group visit provided our students with many high-quality literature recommendations.

Impact

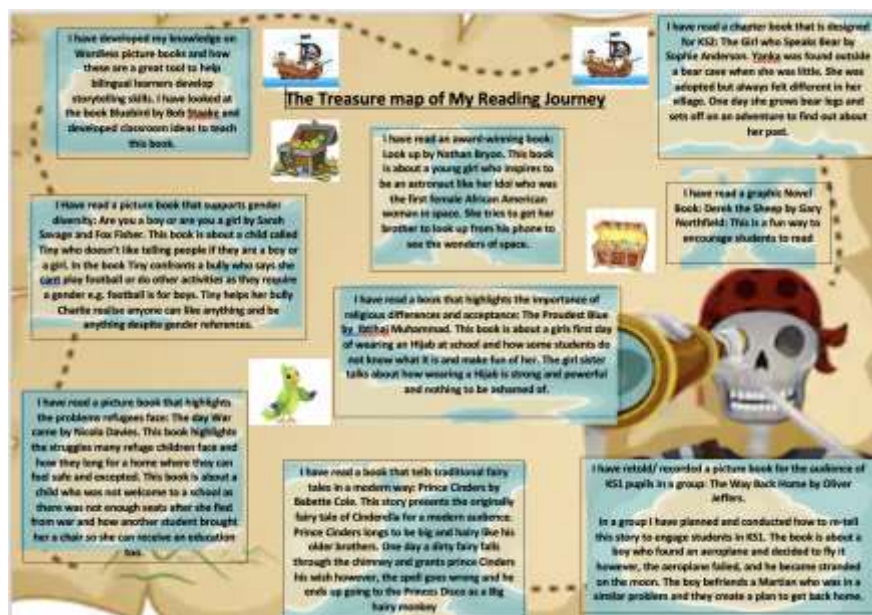
The final 'Reading Treasure Trails' completed by our students, alongside their feedback, showed several ways in which their learning had been impacted:

Our students had enjoyed developing their knowledge of literature and in most cases the learning had reignited a joy in reading children's books. They also **further understood the importance of being 'reading teachers' (Cremin, 2019)**. One student commented: *"The teacher reader aspects of the learning have had an impact on my teaching. It has shown how important it is to read children's books and have a secure subject knowledge"*.

It was also wonderful to hear that being exposed to a wide variety of literature had enabled my students to appreciate the complexity of picture books, such as when one student commented *"I have a newfound respect for the effort authors and illustrators put into books. Children can interact with books in different ways and illustrations can have a profound effect on the reader in many ways"*.

Students were also more aware of the **range of children's literature** available to them and **the importance of choosing books to suit the needs and the interests of the children in their class** (McGowen, 2016).

One student commented that *"Exploring the various genres available will allow me to be able to give personalised recommendations to the children in my future classroom"*. Another commented that she had learnt *"the importance of reading within the classroom and the books included within the classroom should be inclusive to the class"*.



Trainee Teachers' Reading Treasure Trails evidenced that they had **considered this inclusivity in a number of ways**, such as the importance of **children seeing themselves reflected in the books** they engage with (Dolan, 2014) and introducing children to **books that celebrate the diversity of gender and family structure** (Capuzza, 2020).

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Reflecting on TaRs research, our undergraduate teachers had significantly developed **their knowledge of children's literature**, as well as **their knowledge of a reading for pleasure pedagogy**, specifically **the benefits of social reading environments** and **the benefits of creating a classroom environment that encourages regular informal book talk**. As we move forward into our next semester, we would like to build on this in several ways:

1. The Book Club that was created and the **'book talk'** activities our students engaged in were successful in our university sessions and we would now like our students to take these **activities into school when they are on their practice**, and then reflect on how beneficial they were on their return.
2. The students on this module chose English as an elective subject, whereas as other students chose a range of other subjects available. We would like to build on the successful **reading community** we have created **and find ways of engaging all students in all subjects in this reading community**. It could be that the students create a forum (Padlet) where other students can add literature that relates to their chosen subject, for example.
3. Developing our students' **knowledge of children's literature** is dependent on the lecturing staff having exemplary knowledge of children's books. We would like to **find a way of including all of the staff that teach in different subjects, such as primary maths or MFL, to also develop their knowledge of literature in their subject area**.