

Teachers who read: Readers who teach



Helen Grove

St Peter's C of E Primary School Buckinghamshire

Context

St Peter's is a Church of England voluntary aided school located within Burnham Village. The school serves a socially and economically diverse local community. 28% of pupils are entitled to pupil premium funding and the proportion of children entitled to free school meals is 22.3%, which is above the national average of 13.6%. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is 18%, above national average of 14.6%.

Shown below are a few specific lines from our English Intent overview and Reading Intent statement, which guided and led this Reading for Pleasure project...

English Overview Intent

'... as well as inspiring a passion for reading which immerses them in the wonders of quality literature. Our pupils will become lifelong readers who are passionate for discovery and able to explore their imaginations'.

Reading Intent

'Reading is at the heart of St Peter's curriculum and we strive to develop a child's love of reading both at school and home... Inspiring children to become absorbed by a wide range of rich quality reading material is perhaps the greatest gift any adult can pass on and is essential in developing children who become lifelong readers. Our aim is for all children to read for pleasure and be competent at decoding using strong phoneme and grapheme awareness and have reflective and secure comprehension skills.

The pleasure of being read to, being able to read and enjoy reading will allow our pupils to thrive. We intend that all our children leave us holding an intrinsic love of reading which will equip them academically and socially, with a greater understanding of people and the world around them, and importantly with self-confidence, self-esteem and the emotional vocabulary to express themselves throughout their educational and working lives.'

OU Research inspiration and rationale

I have been English Lead at St Peter's C of E Primary School since 2015. During 2019, I began an evaluation journey reflecting upon English at our school, our strengths and the areas we wished to develop. This reflection time focused on both the children and my colleagues as English practitioners and included valuable research time behind my subject area. The whole staff began a curriculum review which led to the completion of writing curriculum intent statements. Key elements strongly permeated through, particularly how we wished our broad and balanced curriculum to be informed by quality literature.

Reading, writing and Speaking & Listening should be motivated by quality literature, to both inspire reading for pleasure and as a pathway for children to develop writing skills so that they could become authors themselves.

Following the review lockdown descended. However, fortunately for me as an English Lead, so did the Open University, Reading for Pleasure, Buckinghamshire Group led by Stephanie Hilder. And as part of this experience this Reading for Pleasure project developed. I have been further inspired by the OU research project, Teachers as Readers (Cremin et al., 2014) and drew on it as CPD for my colleagues.

Teresa Cremin (NATE Primary Matters Summer 2019) considers the long term aim of developing readers:

Reading for pleasure has myriad other benefits such as a wider vocabulary and general knowledge, an enriched imagination and more developed narrative writing (Senechal et al., 2018)

Reading for pleasure had a powerful influence on children's learning, especially for the development of their vocabularies, but also for their spelling and mathematics skills. We discovered that those who read books often at age 10 and more than once a week at age 16 gained higher test results at age 16 than those who read less regularly. In other words, reading for pleasure was linked to greater intellectual progress, both for vocabulary, spelling and mathematics. (Reading for Pleasure (Research Briefing N°106) Sullivan and Brown)

Reading for pleasure is the single biggest factor in success later in life, outside of an education. Study after study has shown that those children who read for pleasure are the ones who are most likely to fulfil their ambitions. If your child reads, they will succeed - it's that simple (Bali Rai)

The development of our knowledge of children's literature, will enable us to become teachers who read so we can become readers who teach in motivational and engaging ways. We wish the children at St Peter's to see our love of reading, develop their own intrinsic love of reading and be lifelong readers. As practitioners we will explore and share texts that tempt.

Aims

It is our professional responsibility to develop our knowledge of children's literature by reading a wide range of children's literature. It is important for our children to see us as readers and to think of St Peter's as a school driven by the love of reading.

This project focused on the following strands of the TaRs Research findings;

1. Teachers' knowledge of children's literature and other texts
4. As Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach

Our aims were;

To improve teachers' knowledge of children's literature

Teachers to be able to recommend books and authors to children

Teachers to be able to recommend books and authors to other teachers

Children to be able to recommend books and authors for teachers through Book Talk

Children to view their teachers as 'a teacher who reads'

Teachers to use quality literature to inspire reading for pleasure

Outline

Where we began:

First, we looked at the current range of books we used within our classrooms. We explored ways of using quality literature to drive both reading for pleasure and the writing journeys for our children. This practice, through professional dialogue, also included looking at The Literary Tree and Just Imagine and drawing good practice and insight into a wider range of literature from the websites.



My Reading for Pleasure meetings guided me towards the 'Review your practice' self-review document by the Open University. Each teacher completed the review and it opened important and valuable reflection time, indicating where we were on our Reading for Pleasure journey at St Peters. It clearly showed our capacity for effectively developing children's engagement as readers - readers who like reading and wish to engage in Book Talk.

My colleagues were very open to what the survey revealed to them: the dependency of a restricted range of authors, a lack of diversity within our book choices and an overall score rate of the repertoire of children's books and other texts to be an average of 5 out of 10. Yet everyone recognised that we needed a drive to develop a greater depth of knowledge of children's literature. We were at the centre of creating a Reading for Pleasure pedagogy within St Peter's School and that we were the greatest role models for the children in our care.

So this journey began...

A Reading for Pleasure area developed in our staffroom:

This is a focal point for our Book Talk amongst all staff and share latest favourite reads. There are recommendations for novels, which includes sharing interests and practices voiced by the children. Other types of literature are highlighted. More diverse books are explored - including non-fiction. It has proved to be a positive space to generate ideas and share good practice. It has also been shared with parents through our Head Teacher's newsletter, so that the whole family of St Peter's School is aware of our Reading for Pleasure journey.

A Peek Inside the Staffroom



At St Peter's we have a broad, language rich curriculum and are always keen to find exciting, stimulating texts to inspire our young readers. This week, we have installed a book corner in our staffroom so we can share the latest good quality texts with our colleagues. We even have a scrap book made by Mrs Cornish in which she shares the children's literature which inspires her.

We truly believe that you never stop learning and this is a great way to keep teaching fresh and inspiring. If you have a great children's book which you'd like to share with us, please do!

The Open University RfP course also highlighted the advantages of following different Book Awards lists that we can draw upon to extend our repertoire of highly recommended reads for all areas - Fiction, Non-Fiction and Poetry. We have increased our knowledge of the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway, Costa, UKLA and Smarties prize winners. I have included the latest book award lists in this area for staff to draw upon when looking for a new read.

Most importantly, our children are adding to our growing knowledge of children's literature as they know about the Reading for Pleasure project and are enthusiastically recommending reads for us to enjoy. This often happens whilst they are reading in their new Outdoor Reading spaces which began during this summer term. For a long time now, it had been a great wish to have an outdoor reading area. Unfortunately, budget limits and Covid19 (preventing classes mixing), had put these plans on hold. However, these limitations, have in actual fact, allowed us to review what the purpose of the outside reading space was and highlighted, that it was, one of RfP pedagogies, just a 'space' to relax with a good book, the formation of a reading community, was all that was necessary; hence our class reading rugs. - *We can entice and engage them as readers and create relaxed invitational spaces for reading (Cremin 2019)*



Impact

Teachers' knowledge of children's literature and other texts

As Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach

Our journey at St Peter's to achieve the aims of this Reading for Pleasure project is an ongoing one. It has begun with such positivity and enthusiasm by the whole school and the impact of our initial work is clearly evident.

This can be heard from the most important members of our school. What our children said and wrote when I asked them about the Reading for Pleasure project and how they saw their teachers as readers...

So passionate about books

She always looks happy when reading to us

A whole pile of books for us to enjoy

I can tell they enjoy reading because I think to be a good teacher you have to be an avid reader

They have a scrapbook of their favourite books for us to see

My teacher always recommends books and talks to everyone about books. We really enjoy reading as a class

Every day if there is a spare minute we read

If we are nearly finishing a book and we don't get time to finish it, she goes NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!

My teachers are very passionate about reading

You read happily, like a storyteller to us

You read joyfully and never say I'm tired

A professional reader

Intelligent, comprehending reader

Our teachers get really happy talking about books to each other especially if they have ordered some new ones.

They get really excited and when she reads our class novel does a happy jog

I hear them talk about books all the time

They get excited when we talk about a book we have read at home

We strive to ensure the love of reading is intrinsic and fully felt throughout St Peter's School. I feel this can be heard through children confidently talking about their teachers' love of reading, their own love of reading, and the exciting new reads they have discovered and shared with their teacher and one another.

The outdoor reading spaces have also generated much Book Talk, reading aloud, reading independently and a wonderful insight into both what our children desire to read and think we should read too.

A wonderful dialogue about quality literature is often heard amongst our teaching staff. The Staff Room Reading Corner has been an excellent central point – a space to facilitate so many meaningful discussions with staff about children's literature and the new authors we have discovered. I know that this practice will continue and grow further and allow our reading intent statements to be truly felt and seen throughout our school.

'Inspiring children to become absorbed by a wide range of rich quality reading material is perhaps the greatest gift any adult can pass on and is essential in developing children who become lifelong readers.'

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Being part of Buckinghamshire's Open University, Reading for Pleasure group has been extremely valuable and inspiring, not only for my own practice, but as English Lead and how I can guide, motivate and support my colleagues. Each RfP session, has provided me with important research time so that I can reflect upon the needs of our children at St Peters and enable the

best reading experiences for them across the school. I have benefitted from excellent insight and encouragement from Stephanie Hilder, who encouraged us to think and reflect as English Leads. Many of the discussion points have been shared with my school colleagues providing ongoing CPD.

As the first part of this ongoing project draws to an end with the close of this academic year, I have already thought of further ways for it to grow next year. It will be important for staff to see their individual development of their knowledge of children's literature by once again completing the 'Review your practice' self-review document.

I have put a book request poster in each class and in the school library, so that children will have a say in how my English budget is spent this year.

Which books would you like to see
in your classroom?
Let me know some of your
favourites, so that I can add them
to my order.
Thank you Mrs Grove

