

Informal reading environments

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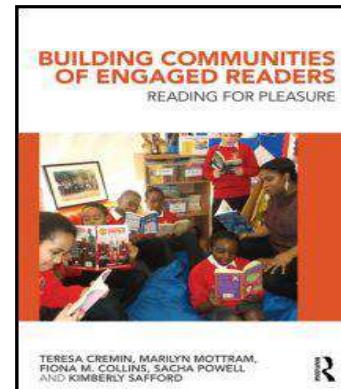
Context

I lead Reading and teach a mixed Year 2 and 3 Class at South Kilvington Primary School, a small village school of four, mixed age classes, on the outskirts of Thirsk, North Yorkshire. Since the arrival of a new headteacher, we have overhauled the teaching of reading in our school so that every class teaches whole class reading every day. The Reading for Pleasure (RfP) aim is part of a wider agenda in the huge promotion of reading that we are currently undertaking across school.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

We embarked upon this project by developing our **knowledge of children's reading practices** (Cremin et al, 2014). We gave the children questionnaires about their reading and had informal discussions with them. From our research it was obvious that we needed to develop much more of a 'buzz' around books and the 'RfP pedagogy' felt like the most logical place to start in promoting reading for pleasure.

In response to the research on developing a strong RfP pedagogy (Cremin et al, 2014), we decided to revamp our **book corners to make them more social reading environments** in each classroom and we **set aside a time each week for both independent reading** where the children chose their reading material and we introduced **informal book talk** in each class.



Aims To create excitement and buzz about reading in school which encourages children to both broaden their reading diet and the amount that they read.

Outline

- **Social reading area:** Every classroom in school introduced a stimulating, social reading environment which mirrored the setting in a core text being read in class. This environment included:
 - A range of reading material from recipe cards, magazines, newspapers, and comics to non-fiction and fiction books arranged by author or topic.
 - Seating which encouraged both curling up with a book e.g bean bags and discussion about books.
 - A display or some method e.g a class book, of recommending books to one another
- **Book Club:** Every class has dedicated time each week to a 'book club' where the whole class have the opportunity to read for pleasure. This means the children choose something they wish to read then find somewhere comfortable in the classroom (some children take cushions under desks etc!) The main aim has been to establish a relaxed reading environment. Towards the end of our 'book club', we (both the adults in class and the children) have time to share what we have been reading and our likes/dislikes.

Impact

Whilst it has only been a term since we introduced the measures outlined above, we are already beginning to see a really **positive change in children's reading attitudes** and the **broadening of their reading diet**.

By merely introducing social reading areas and making our book corners more organised in the **arrangement of reading material**, **broadening the reading material available** and **recreating the setting from a core text** we're reading, we have naturally promoted reading within school.

However, **the real impact has been seen in establishing a weekly book club**.

In my class, 'book club' is **eagerly anticipated**. At first, there was a lot of **excitement about reading in unusual places** in the classroom and the freedom of being able to read under a table! However, as the weeks have progressed, the children have settled much more quickly. They now have their preferred places where they wish to read and they become **engrossed much more quickly in whatever they are reading**.

At the end of the session **children are really willing to discuss the book** they're reading and they're very honest about their reading preferences. As time has gone on, **dialogue has developed between them** and I have been able to stand back more and act as a **facilitator of this dialogue** rather than leading it. There's been lots of excited, "Yeah, I've read that book too, it's really funny. The bit wherehappened was hilarious", then more children join in. Children are choosing to read a far broader range of material than they would normally have done.

This **informal 'book talk' is seeping into day-to-day dialogue** within the classroom. Upon finishing a piece of work children are allowed some independent reading time. Pockets of children can be found in the classroom pouring over a particular book and we frequently hear "Have you got to the bit where.....?" Children also **want to take their reading outside onto the playground**.



One year 3 boy who confesses that he's only ever read one book at home has discovered a love of amusing stories and is eagerly devouring the Dirty Bertie series which he wouldn't have considered reading had it not been for his classmate's recommendations and discussion about the books.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The Teachers as Readers (TaR) research provides a wealth of practical, research based strategies to use in the classroom. There is still lots of work in progress at our school, but the early signs are that Reading for Pleasure research will have a **significant impact on children's enjoyment of books**, both in the **amount children read**, children's **perception of reading** and the **breadth of material** that children read.

We mainly focussed on the first three initiatives in the document, 'Informal book talk, inside text talk and recommendations':

- Making time for informal reading chats
- Building time to talk about texts into other activities

- Creating time to recommend texts

The key word in all of these initiatives is ‘time’ and it has taken a **commitment from all teachers to set aside time to dedicate to discussing the books we’re choosing to read** as well as having time to read them. This isn’t always easy in our ever busy school day but **making the time for reading for pleasure and book talk is of paramount importance because of the lasting legacy that these initiatives will have on children’s attitude and enjoyment of reading.**

Next steps:

We recognise that we are only at the very start of our journey in promoting reading for pleasure. We plan to send out a reading newsletter before the summer holidays, we’d like to hold a book swap after school in September, foster closer links with our local book shop and library as well as develop teacher’s knowledge of children’s literature.

We would also like to delve deeper into the initiatives that we have already started. There are still some initiatives in, ‘Informal book talk, inside text talk and recommendations’ that we have not tried such as reading buddies.

As part of a wider agenda we have also started to develop ‘reciprocal reading communities’. So far, we have introduced the following:

- **Reading ambassadors:** We decided to choose a boy and a girl from each class to be reading ambassadors. They share their class’ favourite books with the rest of the school, they are in charge of the whole school reading display and the, soon to be produced, reading newsletter which will go out to parents.



- **Whole school reading display:** We have a dedicated whole school reading display which is updated termly and reflects the children’s current reading interests. Currently, each class has an area to share a recommended book and we have celebrated children’s reading during lockdown with lots of reading in unusual places.