



# Reading Rivers

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SOUTH WILFORD  
Endowed C of E Primary School



## Context

- I work at South Wilford Endowed Primary School in Wilford village, a two-form entry primary, close to the River Trent. The school hosts two libraries, a farm and a forest school area. The school has a large community of staff, parents and carers. The school has a rich history involving the Carter family legacy.
- I am the school's Reading for Pleasure (RfP) Lead and Reading Champion, taking on this role a term before the pandemic in September 2019.
- Our aim is to develop a lifelong love of reading in our children and community, inspired by the five outcomes from the Teachers as Readers (TaRs) Research. We start, explore and deepen our learning with a story. We believe reading for pleasure is knowing our children as readers and providing for their needs.
- In light of the Covid-19 pandemic the school has a **DARE** acronym in place to highlight our school development plan of: **D**igital Learning, **A**ll Equal, **R**ecovery and **E**xceeding Expectations. Reading weaves through all aspects but is focused on **R**ecovery; we are supporting the recovery of our children in their learning, well-being and mental health.
- The Reading Action plan for the academic year 2020 – 2021 has three aims.
  1. Develop relationships with Trust schools and reading leaders to gain knowledge of best practice.
  2. Develop a digital forum on the school website which promotes and celebrates reading for pleasure and literature and produce a newsletter which highlights reading at South Wilford.
  3. To use reading for pleasure to support mental health and reading identity development across the school community.



## OU Research inspiration and rationale



I found links with all of the Open University's TaRs findings (1-5). However, the initial focus was on:

### 2. Knowledge of children as readers (Cremin et al., 2014)

The baseline data for this project was taken from the 'Reading for Pleasure: Review Your Practice Early Years' Survey, completed by myself and my job share. We teach a class of 27 Reception children in a two form entry school. It highlighted:

- ✓ Firstly, that our knowledge of children's reading practices at home was not as strong as other areas.
- ✓ Secondly, that we only witness children discussing texts with peers *sometimes*.
- ✓ Thirdly, we only discuss the books children like to read at home with the parents *sometimes*.
- ✓ We both wanted to develop our knowledge of the children's reading identities and preferences, and felt that we often choose the stories read at story time, and these often came from the current book corner selection.

Reading for Pleasure  
Review your practice: EYFS



This self-review document is designed to help you consider your practice with regards to reading for pleasure. It is organised around key themes which, research evidence indicates, influence teachers' capacity to effectively develop children's engagement as readers: readers who like reading, who chose to read and who want to talk about what they are reading with interested others.

As the project developed, I included a staff meeting, whole school event and summer reading challenge. In this way my project also incorporated links with other aspects of the TARs research, including developing **teachers who read and readers who teach; reciprocal and interactive reading communities** and aspects of pedagogy from **social reading environments to informal book talk, inside-text talk and informal recommendations**. (Cremin et al., 2014)

I have been inspired by the following Examples of Practice on the Open University Reading for Pleasure website:

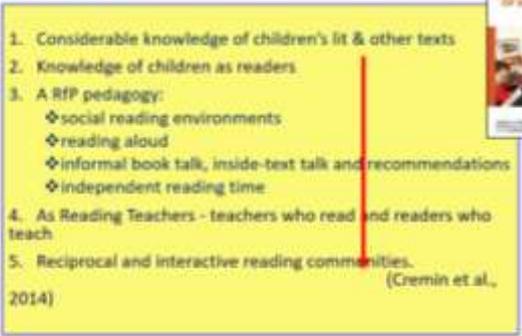
- ✓ [Reading Rivers by Jon Biddle](#)
- ✓ [Our Desert Island Reads by Charlotte Underhill](#)

## Aims

The main aims of the project were

- ✓ **To improve teacher's knowledge of children's reading practices in school and at home**
  - 2. *Knowledge of children as readers*
- ✓ **To give children ownership of the texts read to them at story times**
  - 2. *Knowledge of children as readers*  
(from Cremin et al., 2014)

To develop children's RfP effectively, the TaRs research showed that teachers need to develop:



1. Considerable knowledge of children's lit & other texts
2. Knowledge of children as readers
3. A RfP pedagogy:
  - ◊ social reading environments
  - ◊ reading aloud
  - ◊ informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations
  - ◊ independent reading time
4. As Reading Teachers - teachers who read and readers who teach
5. Reciprocal and interactive reading communities.

(Cremin et al., 2014)

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## Outline

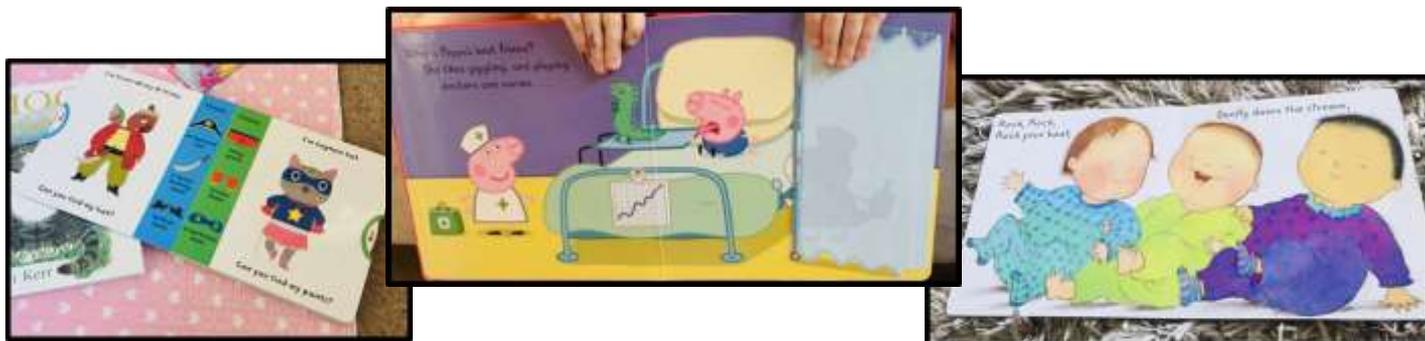
### Early Years Focus Group – Reading Rivers at Home

1. I researched the best ways to find out about children's reading preferences and decided to use the reading rivers approach with a small focus group of children in my class, with the view I could roll out this project across the school at a later date, to help inform all teachers of their children's reading preferences.
2. In discussion with my job share we chose three children who we wanted to support with their confidence and reading identities. I discussed with their parents if they were happy for their child to take part in the focus group and explained what would be involved in creating and sharing the reading river.
3. I created and helped our three focus children complete a survey about their reading preferences. We explored books from our inside and outside book areas, and I made notes of their choices and talked to them about their preferences. I observed these children in their play and after morning work when the children access the book corners, making notes and taking pictures of their book choices, this helped to create a thread of their choices for me. I encouraged these children to attend my weekly story club where I share new picture books and the children have time to access books for pleasure.
4. I completed the Reading Rivers challenge as a parent with my five-year-old daughter before sending out the instructions to parents. I was able to see the experience from the point of view of a parent and how best to word the instructions. I also saw and felt the mental health benefits of such a project for myself and my child. I used my daughter's reading river as a visual example to share with parents and it enabled me to word the instructions clearly.
5. The parents received these images and modelled examples via private Tapestry observations. They were invited to create a new Tapestry observation with their children's reading river. I gave the parents a long time frame to achieve this and spoke to them about it in person at pick-up times. **The key was to only add books to your blanket/river that you love!**
6. After receiving these reading rivers I held book conversations with the pupils. We discussed the children's reading choices and I listened to why they had chosen those texts for their special river.



## Impact Class Story Voting

After receiving the reading rivers on Tapestry from the children, it became clear that the children were drawn towards classic children's texts, Disney and superhero books and magazines, and more importantly pre-school and toddler books. I found this really fascinating because I would normally shy away from providing these types of books to the children, considering them 'too young', 'too basic' and poorer for language development. I spoke to the focus children about these texts and they were a clear area of safety and comfort for them – true reading for pleasure in early years. To address this and bring these texts into our class I decided to hold a class story voting system twice a week. This would involve presenting two pre-school books or books that follow their interests (non-curriculum/topic focused) and for the children to vote for them by placing their morning registration pebble on the book of their choice.



This instantly created a book buzz in the class and children would excitedly tell the next child coming in about the books and which one they voted for, 'look its Waffle dog, I love Waffle dog so much!'

This was a huge success for driving **book talk**, **book preferences** and **following interests**. However, I began to notice several children would move other children's pebbles or swap the pebbles over before I had read the winning book because they were so keen to get their choice! This is when I introduced two plain but tall boxes for the pebbles to go into. This way the children were not guided by which book had the most pebbles on but on their own desire of which book they would like. **It also created an air of mystery and excitement about which book would have the most pebbles.** This voting system has been such a success it is now firmly embedded as a twice weekly event that the children look forward to. **It is also influenced by the reading rivers knowledge I gained and I use books that are linked to the texts** seen in the rivers.



## Pyjamarama 2021

During Pyjamarama the children had access to pre-school and toddler books in a special wicker basket that was separate from the school topic books in the book corner. I have continued to offer these types of reads to children through having them on the 'teacher chair' and available to look at during Challenge Time (learning through play).



## Staff Meeting and Staff Display

I held a staff meeting called 'The Love of Reading' where I shared the TaRs research, a staff book club of our favourite reads and explained the reading rivers and how we could use it to know our children as readers. I created a Reading Rivers display for the staffroom showing the research, the outline for my reading rivers project, and a river for staff to add their own reading recommendations – developing **teachers as readers and readers who teach.**



## Reading Rivers Day – Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> July

On Reading Rivers Day teachers modelled making their own reading rivers and our class rivers were exhibited on the field. I gave a talk about reading for pleasure and children explored the books. The photographs of the class rivers will be shared with the new class teacher.



## Summer Reading Challenge – Reading Rivers

All of our parents and carers received a letter outlining the reading rivers activity and have the option of completing it for our school's summer reading challenge. These rivers will be photographed and emailed to the children's new teachers, with the view that it will **give teachers a solid understanding of the children's reading identities** from the beginning of the academic year.

## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The TaRs research has made me realise the importance of developing good reading for pleasure practices within early years.

I now see the **early year's children as having reading identities and preferences which are valuable and rich whether at school or at home**. I have seen how valued children feel when we give them time to discuss their favourite books and stories.

As a parent I have seen the joy my daughter got from creating her river and she regularly asks me to make my own or to make one for her sister. **She has begun to realise her reading identity is fluid and not fixed, it is always changing and books can and should be taken away and added with time, depending on preferences**. Through creating reading rivers children can see themselves as readers who choose what they read and who know which texts they want to read without a grown up guiding them to do so. This is where the power of reading rivers lies, and really instead of the question *being* 'Which books do you love?' Maybe it should be 'Which books would you read without a grown up telling you to?' There is the key to reading for pleasure for reception and key stage one children – choice and adults valuing these preferences.



My plan and next steps to support children's engagement as readers:

- ✓ To develop the use of the reading rivers created over this summer to: **generate book talk between children and teachers, to develop children's confidence in sharing their book preferences and choices** with their parents, teachers and peers.
- ✓ To support the teachers to become Reading Teachers by offering **a monthly book club** where we share our current reading practices at school and from home.
- ✓ To develop our **social reading environments so they are used frequently** by the children.
- ✓ To develop ways **to engage reluctant readers**.