

Embedding Book Blankets into the Classroom



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Context

- I work as a Year 5 teacher at Strand on the Green Junior School in Hounslow, Greater London.
- Whilst reading is not a specific focus on our School Development Plan, we have discussed it during SSD Sessions/Staff Meets.
- One element of our SDP is 'Sustainable Catch up' where we implement strategies for those most affected by disrupted schooling/home learning during the lockdowns – reading could be a key focus for this.

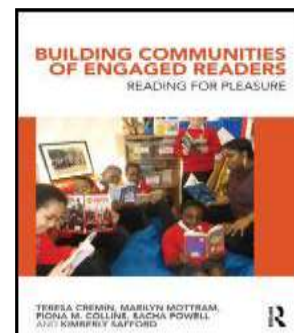


OU Research inspiration and rationale

I have a relatively wide knowledge of children's literature and texts already and I was pleased that during my initial survey with my class, every child reported that they saw me as a reader.

The *Teachers as Readers* finding that inspired me to develop RfP most was RfP pedagogy. I felt in my classroom that we were lacking the social aspect of reading. Most children saw it more as a directed task rather than an enjoyable, social activity where they could share texts and recommendations.

I also wanted to get to know my children as readers.



Aims

- The main focus of my project was in response to the lack of interest in reading throughout my class.

- I decided that I wanted to understand the children in my class better as 'readers'. I was interested to see if they enjoyed sharing their books with others or if they preferred reading independently? Were they drawn to factual or fiction/chapter or picture books? All of these elements would improve my knowledge of children's reading practices and help me to build a stronger picture of each child as a 'reader'.
- I also wanted to find out more about children's individual choices of book – why did that book appeal to them in particular? If I understood what they enjoyed reading better, I would be able to provide more personalised and accurate recommendations.
- These aims link to the second focus area of the TaRs research findings which is 'Knowledge of children's reading practices', however the aims also support elements of 'A reading for pleasure pedagogy' such as independent reading time and inside text talk and recommendations.



Outline

First Steps:

- In order to assess the children's general attitudes towards reading, I conducted a short survey in my class, asking a range of questions about reading at school and home, the types of books children enjoyed reading and whether they would like more opportunities to read and share books with others.
- The results were similar to what I had expected; there were mixed attitudes towards reading and most children wanted more time to read and share books within the school day.
- Interestingly, the most popular types of books amongst the class were those focused on animals or comedy.
- After analysing the results of the survey, I decided to focus on using book blankets as a tool for encouraging children to share and recommend books to others. I hoped these would generate more interest in reading and I also set aside around an hour a week for these sessions giving the class more time to read.

1. Write down three books that you have read in the last year:
Dogman, The Adventurers and Gary of a wimpy

2. What is your favourite genre (type) of book (adventure, mystery, graphic novel, non-fiction, poetry, etc)?
adventure and graphic novel

3. Do you enjoy reading in school? Give a score between 1 (absolutely hate it) and 10 (absolutely love it).
7

4. Do you enjoy reading at home? Give a score between 1 (absolutely hate it) and 10 (absolutely love it).
6

5. Apart from books, do you read anything else at home or in school?
comics

6. How often do you read at home? How long do you read for?
20 minutes every day

7. Do you ever read with an adult at home?
I sometimes do

8. Are you a member of a local library?
no

9. Do you enjoy an adult reading you stories? Why?
yes because I like listening to someone else read

10. How would you make reading more enjoyable in school?
By introducing more books that the children might like

Book Blanket Sessions:

- For each session, I selected around 50-60 books all centred on a particular theme e.g. animals, which the class had identified they enjoyed reading. However, I chose a range of different genres e.g. fiction, factual, picture and chapter books so that all abilities had the same opportunity to engage.
- I moved the tables in the classroom so that we could all sit together and also provided some cushions and blankets for children to use if they wished. Some children chose to lie down whilst others remained sitting.
- I began each session with some focused tasks such as 'Find a book with a fact you didn't know' or 'Find a book with an interesting cover'. Children would bring their chosen book back to the circle and they would share why they had chosen that particular one.
- The class would then have around 30 minutes of time to select any books from the blanket and either read independently or share them with an adult or friend.
- After the session, the children could keep any of the books from the blanket for their reading book.



Impact



- It was clear from the first session that the children really enjoyed having the opportunity to access a wide variety of books, but also having extra time to read and to share books with each other. Many chose to keep books they had found for their reading books.
- I conducted a similar survey to the beginning of the project with the class and all reading attitude scores had improved. Certain children I had identified as struggling with poor reading attitudes are also now more engaged with reading day to day, seeing it as enjoyable, rather than a chore!

Reading...



■ This supports the ROGO model, whereby children who were proficient in reading are now enjoying reading and therefore reading more widely. Furthermore, those children who have now developed a love of reading, are reading more and subsequently becoming more competent.

ROGO model evidence base National Literacy Trust 2017, page 2

Quotes from children during sessions:

- “Can we do this every week?”
- “I enjoyed it because I got to read with a friend”
- “It’s like the library’s come to us!”
- “That was really fun”



Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice



■ By having these sessions, I have been able to observe first-hand which books children are picking and enjoying, improving my knowledge of the children as readers and their reading practices. I am therefore able to make more informed suggestions when helping them to select books.

■ My next steps to support children’s volitional engagement as readers will be to continue the book blanket sessions this year, as well as encouraging ‘Big Up your Book’ where the children can use a microphone to share their current reading book, increasing informal book talk and recommendations (Cremin et al., 2014).

■ With my next class, I will endeavour to learn about their reading practices as early as possible in the year. I may conduct a survey with them or simply have a discussion to try and ascertain their attitudes towards reading (Cremin et al., 2014).

