



Developing Book Talk

Kerry Pearson
St. Wilfrid's Primary
School

Context

I am the Y6 teacher and English Lead at St. Wilfrid's Primary School in Sheffield. During the academic year 2020-21, the school decided to work with the OU to develop Reading for Pleasure. On entry to the school in Foundation Stage, the majority of children are assessed as being at national expectation in all areas. Children are very well supported by parents and most children have access to books at home. However, as the majority of parents are professionals, many children attend both breakfast and after school clubs, and have very busy home lives, which potentially impacts on the amount of time they have to read.



OU Research inspiration and rationale

From the initial children's surveys conducted in the Autumn term, we found that:

only 50% of children in both KS1 and KS2 said that they 'loved' reading. The remaining children said it was 'ok' and 15% said that they did not enjoy it.

The staff surveys showed that, although children did have regular story time during the school day,

only 28% of teachers said that they regularly talked informally about books with the class.

As a result of the surveys, we decided to develop our Reading for Pleasure pedagogy:

- **informal book talk and recommendations.**

This also supported:

- **knowledge of children's reading practices.**

Cremin et al., 2014



Aims

To increase informal book chat throughout the school day in all classes.

'Talking about books and reading and making text recommendations has been found to be influential on developing children's will to read,' Cremin et al, 2014

Outline

- The first action we took was to ensure that the children saw the **staff as readers**. All staff ensured that the book they were reading was prominently displayed in the classroom. Staff also displayed a picture of their book on the wall outside the class for children in other classes to see. Everyone agreed to read while the children were reading independently.
- We made time to encourage **informal book chat at different times** during the day such as lining up, during handwashing, walking through school etc.
- Across the school, we began a **voting system** for story time. In KS2, teachers photocopied blurbs for the children to read and vote on. In KS1, teachers introduced a simple visual such as baskets and cubes.



- Children were encouraged to **recommend books** to each other. In KS2, children started to complete a 3 word review on a sticky note after they had finished a book. These recommendations were then placed on the front cover and displayed front-facing so that the other children could see. In KS1, children recommended books using a star rating system on a book mark or sticky note.



- **‘Snack and chat’** was developed in KS1- an informal time when children chose a book from the book shelf to read either on their own or with someone, while enjoying a snack.
- **Book blankets** were introduced. This involved arranging a wide range of books on the table so that children could easily see what was available. Then a focus was provided, find a book with an appealing cover or find a book with an interesting title. After 2-3 minutes of browsing, we would stop and share, before browsing again. Finally, after three browses, children chose their favourite book and sat down to read it.



Impact

- As a result of staff displaying books and reading whilst the children read, **staff and children began to notice the books they were reading and make comments about them.**
- At first, book chat was something that was led by the staff, but we found that **children were increasingly talking about books spontaneously between themselves.**
- By recommending books to each other, **those who already read for pleasure were really encouraging the more reluctant readers to pick up the book and give it a go,** particularly amongst boys. One reluctant reader in Y6 said in the focus group,

“because I’m in a class who love books, it’s easier to find books that I will like because people recommend them.”

- Book blankets enabled children to choose more easily, without pressure. It provided them with the opportunity to talk to each other about what they had read before and what looked appealing. Book blankets also encouraged children to explore other genres they may not have considered before. For example, **KS2 children choose to read graphic novels and picture books.**

By the end of the project year:

48% of children in KS1 said that they loved reading. 50% said it was ok. 2% said they don’t like reading.

In KS2, **80% said that they loved reading**, 18% said it was ok and 2% said they weren’t bothered. **No one said that they didn’t like reading.**

All teachers (100%) surveyed at the end of the project year, said that they regularly informally talk about books. Teachers really enjoyed getting to know the children as readers.

- Feedback from parents was positive. One parent noted that on a recent trip to a book shop, her Y3 child pointed to a book and said, 'My teacher is reading a book by the same author,' and her Y5 child picked up a book and read the blurb saying, 'my partner is reading this and he says it's really good.'

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Developing book talk across the school has led to a real enthusiasm for reading in all classes. Teachers and staff have enjoyed seeing the children's enthusiasm for reading grow and feel privileged to take part in conversations with children about their newly discovered love of particular books and authors. There is such a buzz about reading around the school.

In future, we intend to continue to develop our reading areas, continue to talk to the children about their preferences before buying new and exciting texts for the them, and to build stronger reading relationships with parents by inviting them in to school to join our reading activities.