

Developing whole school reading environments

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Context

I am currently working in Marnar Primary School as a year 2 teacher and as a part of the English team. Reading for enjoyment is developing, and pupils are encouraged to read for a range of purposes. Pupils are given time during guided reading to read for pleasure, however, there aren't sufficient books within the classrooms and book corners do not yet provide an equitable range of fiction and non-fiction books for children to choose from. In addition, due to Covid restrictions our children have not been able to access the library, therefore the books within our classroom have become even more important.



Research inspiration and rationale

There has been plenty of research around Reading for Pleasure (RfP), the Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers research project (Cremin et al, 2014) and The Reading Environment (Chambers, 1991) highlights that spontaneous and informal book talk ('inside-text talk') is one of the key factors needed to create a classroom RfP culture. Indeed, one of the key recommendations from the UKLA Teachers as Readers report (Cremin et al, 2008) was for schools to develop more equivalent reading relationships between staff and pupils. We sought to build on this idea of sharing books we love between staff and children.



Aims



- To improve children's and teachers' knowledge of books and authors.
- To provide children opportunities to share the books they love and be given time to enjoy these books that they have chosen for themselves.
- To introduce and develop a whole school reading initiative, one that would involve class teachers, support staff, office staff and non-class based SLT.
- To increase children's oracy when explaining why they enjoyed the book they have been reading.

Outline

We initially had a whole school staff meeting where our book corners were discussed between staff and the ways in which we feel our reading environments are working or not working. We also had a quick walk around the school taking a look at reading areas and what teachers felt were needed to boost interest within the classroom. Many of the classrooms had a very small area for reading and did not have enough books to keep interest going. However, the books teachers had were enough to spark interest, the children just needed to be shown these books. We decided having recommended books added to a very scruffy reading area would just be ignored after a while.



As a result of the book environment, we introduced an idea of having special shelves with the teachers/adults book recommendations. These would be displayed in the classroom all day and the children could access them easily. But these would be kept separate from the classroom book corner. We wanted to make these books special as these are the teacher's favourite books with some children's recommendation. Teachers introduced a new book each week and they modelled why it was their favourite book and why it deserves to be on the shelf.



I trialled the shelf concept using a windowsill as my special books area. The impact this had on the children was phenomenal. Children were desperate to read a book that was handpicked by the teacher and from the recommendation they knew what to expect. Children were slowly explaining to each other how they agreed with the teacher's recommendations and encouraged their friend to read it next. Children

were soon bringing in books from home that they love and were sharing the book out. There even became a rota for certain books. Children were reading during home time whilst they were lining up and during golden time!

Soon after these findings we decided to order some shelves for each class and have teachers recommend their books to the children and have them displayed in the classroom. We also created a buddy system for them to read and share their books whether it is with each other or the adults within the classroom.



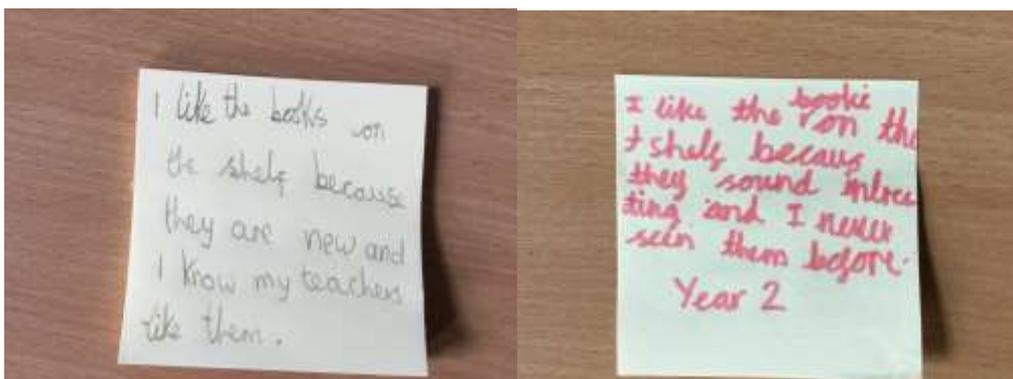
Impact

Although the shelves have only been up a few weeks there's already been a significant cultural shift across the school. The children have shown positive attitudes to reading, they are now reading around the school and are talking about books wherever they go. Some have brought in a favourite book from home to read and some have arrived with books that they've enjoyed and then recommended to the other children. This is helping the school to develop a genuinely reciprocal reading community, which will ultimately increase the children's pleasure in reading (as highlighted in the Teachers as Readers report).

Children have been seen reading all over, whether it was during hometime or even Golden time! Without anyone encouraging them children have been seen reading during play times and if you asked them why, it was usually because they wanted to know what happens at the end, or because they wanted to be able to share it with their class.



The fact that many staff members were involved meant that there was significantly more book talk around the school, with staff talking to each other about their favourite books and asking for interesting books that their class enjoyed. Several members of staff have been emailing around their favourite books and have asked for recommendations. As a result we have created a shared folder where adults can share books that they enjoyed reading with their class or buddy. Some staff members were invited as special guests to come and share and read their favourite book. This was often an adult that the children may have never seen read a book! We asked staff and children to share their early thoughts on sticky notes and created a feedback sheet. We're going to review the idea in more detail next year, looking at how we sustain its impact over the school year, but the feedback so far has been very positive.

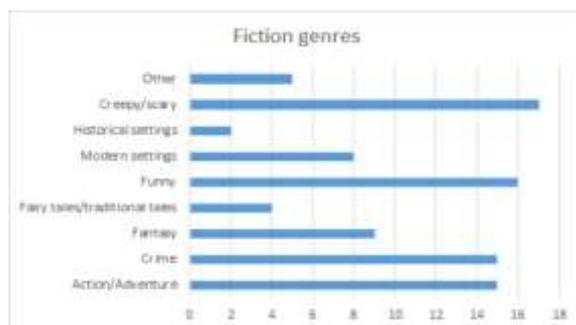


Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

I have in the past made very elaborate book corners to entice the children to go and read and this was amazing for a few weeks. But to really encourage reading for a long period of time, I did not think pulling out 5 or 6 books from the reading corner would encourage such excitement. There are lots of books in the reading corner and children are clearly overwhelmed by them and unsure which book will be interesting to them. With recommendations the children feel like they can trust our judgement and therefore are willing to sit and read for longer periods of time. In the past the children would either look at the pictures or read a few pages and move on but now they want to read the end, simply because they want to be able to talk to each other about it. The children are now leading their own conversations about books they enjoyed and what to read next and it is truly inspiring to see.

As well as above, I've been able to introduce many new RfP initiatives across the school over the past year:

1) **Whole School Peer Recommendations:** we have extended this slightly to incorporate book recommendations across year groups rather than just within the class, because books which have been recommended by peers are more likely to be read than books which have been recommended by teachers. We've introduced a display for children's book recommendations near the playground so that every class going past can see the books being recommended across the school. This has resulted in much chatter across the corridor but when it's about books then I think we can be happy about that.



2) **Reading Surveys:** Most teachers have carried out a reading survey within the classroom to better understand their class as readers and what they enjoy reading for pleasure. Results from many children in Year 5 and 6 have suggested that children prefer Non-fiction books and scary fiction texts. This information has been very informative as that particular class lacked Non fiction texts and books with a scary theme. Once books were

ordered which were more inline with what the children enjoy, reading within the classroom took off, with children writing scary stories in their own time.

3) **Bedtime story with Mum and Dad:** This is a fairly new initiative, one we thought would be quite tricky to roll out with Covid restrictions, so hopefully next year it can be something we push. But from the reading surveys many children highlighted the fact that they enjoy mostly in a cosy environment in bed with their Mum or Dad. Many children also explained how they are often alone but would prefer to read with their Mum or Dad.



We thought about creating a bedtime story initiative where the children could take a book, class bear or toy and some hot chocolate home with them to enjoy at home with their Mum or Dad. They can take a picture of themselves reading cosily and paste them into our class book to share with their class. This initiative definitely boasted excitement amongst the children, however it's one we felt we could possibly try for next year.

Overall, with just a little push towards Reading for Pleasure has already impacted the children and their love for reading immensely and it has impacted them not only their ability to read but their excitement whilst reading has clearly improved. We hope to carry on with these next year when the Library is hopefully up and running again, Reading for Pleasure is at the forefront of school development which is fundamental to children's development.