

Reading for Pleasure or Progress?

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Context

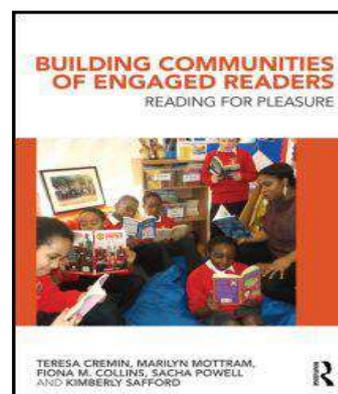
I am Assistant Headteacher and joint English Lead at Sturton by Stow Primary School, a small, rural school just outside Lincoln. As a school, we have been working on promoting Reading for Pleasure (RfP) over the last couple of years. We have spent lots of time developing our knowledge of reading and the teaching of reading as a staff. Teachers have spent time with an English consultant and feel confident about the texts we select when we are teaching reading – we consider what the children will benefit from, we read widely and share book recommendations. However, this still means that the texts used are largely determined by the class teachers – we needed to think about how we could give some ownership to the children and how we can make their voice and reading preferences heard. Do the children read for pleasure?



OU Research inspiration and rationale

The Reading for Change Report (OECD) claims *'Reading for pleasure is a prerequisite for successful performance in any school subject', as well as a fundamental part of future life success.'* We have had already done a great deal to embed a love for reading in our school with teaching staff but felt that passing this ownership to the children was a natural next step.

Therefore, as a school, we decided to focus on **Knowledge of children's reading practices** to give the children more ownership of our reading journey as a school.



Teresa Cremlin's article, **Reading Communities – Why, What and How?** reports that: *'Teachers' knowledge of texts and of readers was key to (the) journey and the cornerstone on which interactive communities of readers were built. When practitioners enriched their repertoires of children's literature and began to get to know the interests and practices of the young readers, they were more able to skilfully book-match and tailor their recommendations to particular individuals.'*

Aims

- To support all staff in knowing what kinds of books their children enjoy in order to provide them with books matched to their interests
- To consider ways to improve children's ownership over the books and stories that are shared in school and at home
- To promote RfP further as a school from the children's perspective and to consider what RfP means to them
- To give children further opportunities to read for pleasure
- To make clear that we are a 'Reading School' and that we value reading in all its forms

Outline

We decided that we wanted to get to know what the children thought about themselves as readers, what they enjoyed about reading and what they felt could be improved. We wanted to have a clear baseline to work from so decided to create a reading survey on Microsoft Teams so we could analyse the reading practices and attitudes of each child in school.

The survey provided us with some interesting findings. We asked Key Stage 1 children questions such as who they read to, what would make them read more and to tell us anything else they wanted us to know about their thoughts on reading. Children generally reported reading to mum or dad. A large number of children talked about how they would read more if books were shorter, if they had more pictures, if they were 'easier' or if they could choose their own books, which suggested a few important areas for development. We thought about the way reading is perceived by the children. The fact that children were describing reading as a mechanical process, that they felt their ability hindered what they read and that the books were 'given' to them rather than chosen by them was interesting. It made us think that perhaps children tend to see reading as part of a phonics or an English lesson and that RfP really hadn't filtered down to them yet. We considered the books children take home to read. Do we give children a choice on what they take home? Or is it just based on their phonics ability or reading level?

In Key Stage 2 we asked the children what their favourite genre of books was, what would help them read more often, if they saw Sturton as a 'reading school' and whether they perceived reading as 'cool'. Again, lots of children felt they didn't enjoy reading because they couldn't always read the books they wanted to themselves, lots of children said they would read more if they had a comfy area to do so, some suggested that they would enjoy reading more if there were quiet time dedicated to reading. A high percentage of students said they would like to see more comic and graphic novels in school as well as more mystery and joke books. Lots of children said they would use the library more if it was updated, a cosier space or if it had more books linked to their interests (again, a better

16. True or false? Sturton is a reading school.

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selection of non-fiction, story books and comics). Lots of children didn't see reading as high profile in our school and many disagreed that reading was 'cool'. Children also reported not visiting or being a member of a library.

We also sent home a parent survey which asked how often children asked to read and which authors they enjoy at home. The responses were mainly that parents have to initiate reading and that the authors children know or choose at home are the usual choices such as David Walliams, Roald Dahl and Julia Donaldson. This made us question how children are enabled to make 'good' book choices if they are not exposed to high quality texts first and not just during English lessons with teachers.

From our survey findings we put in place the following:

- **Reading River** – we decided to create a whole school reading river to show how we develop and grow as readers. We wanted children to see what the other classes were reading and begin to promote that all-important book-blether amongst the children.
- **Patron of Reading** – from discussions in the RfP group and hearing how beneficial this had been in other schools, we decided that having a Patron of Reading (PoR) would be perfect for creating that 'buzz around books' with our children. We choose a patron we thought would really excite the children. We also asked him to recommend some books for the children to read. We felt that this was an important first step – introducing the children to a variety of different books from lots of different authors so they can begin to form their own opinions on texts.
- **Book Choice** – children are given a choice of books to vote from for a class story. They are encouraged to bring in books from home and to talk about their favourite stories so that we can share these books together in class. In EYFS, children are responsible for changing the books weekly in the reading area to keep them fresh and interesting. We realised that our reading space was very fiction heavy so we now have a non-fiction Friday where we spend time looking at non-fiction books which has really appealed to those children who have expressed an interest in this genre of text.
- **Library Time** – we have 'made over' our school library, cleared out old books, purchased new books the children have requested and ones our PoR has recommended. It has been made into a more comfortable, bright and inviting space. Children are now able to use the library to relax and read and can take home books of their own choosing.
- **Reading Ambassadors** – we have selected two children from Year 5 to be our Reading Ambassadors for the school. They were selected because they are good reading role models – they read widely and enjoy books. We envisage their role to be instrumental in helping other children in school select books and identify genre preferences. This will be done through books reviews shared with



the school and through their role in the upkeep and running of the school library. This a responsibility that we hope will evolve as children are able to have more contact across bubbles and when we are able to have whole school assemblies again.

Impact

The work we have done so far appears to have had a very positive impact both in my EYFS class and across school. Children have really liked being given more ownership over the books they choose to read. They enjoy selecting what we read for fun as a class and have really enjoyed having the opportunity to read a variety of different genres of text during Non-Fiction Fridays. The reading area is used much more often than it was because children are contributing to the books that are included in it.

Children across school have LOVED getting to use the new library. Through informal conversations, it is very apparent that they feel that their voice has been heard and that we are providing the kinds of books they would like to read.

Children have really enjoyed playing an active role with our new Reading Patron. My class in particular have been so motivated by the book recommendations he has provided us with and have been very excited to engage in book chat with him – asking him for his favourite stories and discussing their own.

There appears to be a shift in attitude to reading. Pupils can be seen discussing the Reading River in the corridor, talking about their favourite whole school text or comparing the books read by different classes. During Parents Evening, many parents reported how excited their children were about the upcoming POR author visit and how they had asked their family to buy them new books the author had written or recommended.

The children have said:

‘Reading is fun, especially when you find a book you don’t want to put down!’

‘The library and Gareth Baker make reading more exciting.’

‘I like the book recommendations Gareth makes, they are fun and help me choose new books.’

‘I like reading because some books give me joy, some make me frightened. Books make me feel lots of emotions.’

‘I like reading stories, Gareth Baker is really funny!’

‘Books make me happy.’

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The work we have carried out surrounding RfP in school has had a very positive impact in a short space of time. I think that we have an increased understanding of what RfP is and an awareness that we really need to give children ownership over what they choose to read to facilitate their interest in reading.

To provide us with more evidence and to help us improve RfP further in school, we would like to conduct a second survey to see how the children’s attitudes to reading have changed. It would be

useful to get the children's views after the Patron of Reading has visited, when our Reading Ambassadors have settled into their role and when all other developments have been embedded.

We would like to include parents further in our work on RfP. From our first survey, we found that parents don't always know which books they might provide their children with to support their reading – we need to look at ways we can help with this in future – perhaps through the development of a reading area on our website. We also think our Patron of Reading will be invaluable in this.

We would also be interested to know what the staff think, what changes they have seen in regard to their own class' reading practices and whether they think there has been a positive shift in reading for pleasure.