



The not so reluctant readers

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Context

Hedworthfield Primary School is situated in Jarrow, Tyne and Wear. We are a one form entry primary school with a 78 place nursery school and a 24 place specialist Speech and Language Resource Base. We have 215 pupils on roll with 54% of children eligible for pupil premium funding. We are part of the Mosaic Federation which enables us to work closely with Valley View Primary School. The project was carried out within one year 6 class (28 pupils).

When returning to school from lockdown, children were disengaged with reading despite several online tools and reading books being sent home. Parental engagement in supporting reading at home is generally low.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

Engagement in reading is so important. As a year 6 teacher, **I noticed the children in my class had become disengaged with independent reading.** They asked to go to the toilet or would pretend to read. In conversation, I found **they were bored with their choices in our class library as books did not always reflect their interests.** I decided that it was important to raise the 'Reading for Pleasure' profile within school. Due to a range of diverse personalities, I knew I would have to try a variety of things to get the greatest impact.

Much of the published research on Reading for Pleasure (RfP) has emphasised the need for schools to **build reading communities** which focus on the importance of giving children ownership over their reading choices (Cremin et al., 2014). Ross (2001) highlighted several ways to help pupils make informed meaningful choices, which includes peer recommendations. Moss and McDonald (2005) found that in classroom libraries, when teachers gave children space to choose their own books, reading networks emerged and reader identities were positively affected. I felt that a 'pupil recommendations shelf' would be one way of helping achieve this. I felt that children needed to agency to fully buy-in to the 'Reader for Life' concept.

Therefore, **I chose to focus on strand 3: a reading for pleasure pedagogy.** RfP pedagogy includes: social reading environments, reading aloud, independent reading and informal book talk (Cremin et al., 2014). Although the project touched on all of these, **I focused primarily on using Informal Book Talk and Recommendations.**

Aims

- To use Book Talk to increase children's knowledge of books available in our library, as a way to promote reading for pleasure across school.
- To ensure that all readers have the opportunity to explore and talk about engaging texts suited to their ability.
- To make children aware of the texts that are available to them - through bookshelves that are inviting and accessible.
- To increase knowledge of and access to, a wider variety of authors.
- To use Informal Book Talk and Recommendations to develop reader to reader relationships, ensuring there are many opportunities (daily) to discuss books.

Outline

SURVEY: What do the children think of reading?

To begin with, **we gave the children a reading survey** which asked about their knowledge of different books, authors they had read and their general attitude to reading. This gave us a platform to explore the level children were at and how they felt about RfP. **Only 2 out of 28 children said they loved reading.** Children did not find the book selections engaging and were just reading as they had been directed to.

Within a day, Y6 **children visited our school library and they looked at different authors/books.** They visited in small groups and our class TA spoke to them about carefully selecting a book, using the cover and the blurb as well as recommendations.

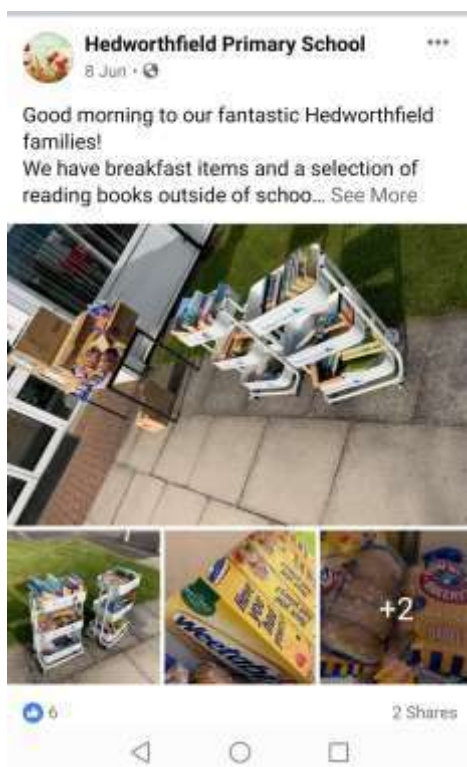


Book Talk & Recommendations

The children took a selection of books back to their classroom and **we used the English lesson to read and share their books with their peers.** During informal book talk, they said they enjoy hearing about what others recommend. **We then suggested the idea of a recommendation slip, which would fit inside the book when they returned it to our class shelf.**

'Bookadvisor'

From this, **'Bookadvisor' was born** and the children completed a review slip whenever **they finished reading a book.** Through book talk they completed their review before returning books to the bookshelf. Other children browsing the shelves, were able to read an earlier review and use it to help them decide if they wanted to read the book. Having completed a book, children then added to the reviews for it. **We found that this offers a visual way to see which books are popular** from the number of reviews and the 'Bookadvisor' rating.



Book Buzz

Every week we **make time in class to discuss books we have enjoyed** that week. Children are encouraged to be positive as well as realistic - if they have not enjoyed the book, we ask them to articulate why they did not like it, then other children recommend different books they might like. **Sharing recommendations in this way creates a 'buzz'** and the children actively discuss and share books as a result. **Sometimes there has even been a waiting list** for some of the books we have in circulation.

We also promote reading on social media so **parents can see our achievements** and children's reading is recognised through certificates. **Parents are invited to pick up a book when they drop off children too!** The aim to create a community 'book buzz'.



Hot Books - grab a favourite from Miss Sparks

During our book chat one day, I **brought out some of my own books** in a box. I shared my books with the class and discussed why I liked them, or themes I had discovered. I thought it **was important to model language when discussing why I liked particular books**; children often went on to use phrases that I had 'dropped' into the book talk discussions. These 'hot' books then went into a display box for children to 'steal'.



Author Visits

Virtual author visits were organised and then we purchased books from the authors to be read at home. Tom Palmer, David O'Doherty and Chris Judge, and Charlie Higson were just a few we tried. Most offered a 'Draw along' session which engaged some of our most reluctant readers.



Impact

- For such a simple project, the impact has been unreal. I did not anticipate the effect of spending some time talking about books would have on the motivation to read within one classroom environment.
- In the beginning only 2 out of 28 children said they loved reading. When we carried out pupil voice surveys again (almost 6 months later), 18 out of 28 said they loved it and a further 6 said they thought 'it's okay'.

If there was one photo to sum up the impact this project has had, this is it:



The Open University

Reading for pleasure

Children's reading survey

1. Do you like reading?
(Tick one box)

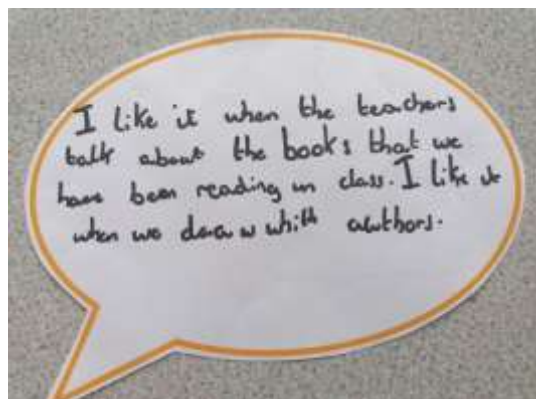
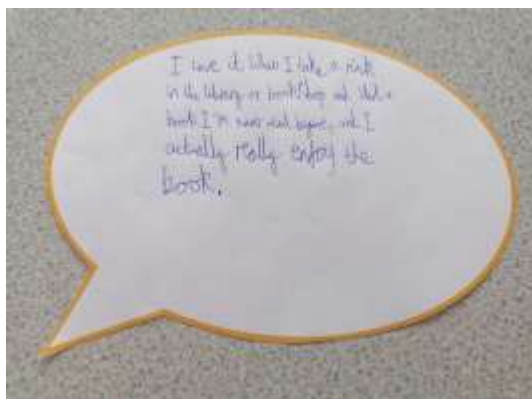
I love reading ☐ It's okay ☐ I'm not bothered ☐ I don't like reading ☒

Why do you think this is?
because I get bored.

I am waiting for Miss Sparks to order the 3rd book in the series. I didn't like reading but I like these and we talk about them in class.

- All 3 of the focus children have significantly shifted their thoughts and practices around reading. All identified that they 'don't like reading' when the project began. Almost 6 months later and they have reported that they 'love reading'.
 - Child A (above) actively chose to read during a recent period of free time, because 'I just wanted to see what happens'. He has finished the two books in the series and is waiting for me to order the next one.
 - Child B and C have also shown shifts in attitude. Although Child B still suggests 'he does not like reading' he has found a love of The Young Samurai books. He has been observed over the last few months, asking if our TA can make time to read with him. He actively discusses his book choices to his peers as well as staff during our 'Book Buzz'.
- I don't like reading but there is a series I like reading. It's called The Young Samurai. The author is called Chris Brookmyre. I loved the drawings with Jamie Liffers. David and Chris.
- All 3 focus children are eligible for pupil premium funding and were initially working towards ARE. In recent assessments, two are secure ARE now and one child has significantly closed the attainment gap and has made greater than expected progress.
 - Generally, across the class, behaviour and focus have improved during reading sessions as children are actively engaged as they want to reach the outcome of finishing the book and making a recommendation.
 - Children are more confident in discussing their reading choices and what books they would recommend – In week 1 hardly anyone wanted to share their choice compared to last week when we had to split the session into 2 to ensure all children had a chance to speak. We certainly have a 'Book buzz' around our classroom.
 - New books have been ordered – children have been involved in their selection and it is hoped they will help organise and promote books across the Key Stage.

- Author visits via Zoom not only boosted the engagement of reluctant readers but also challenged our most able reader (Y6 but with a reading age around Y10) as he was exposed to a range of books he was not aware of.



- Greater awareness of authors by the end of the year. We repeated the A-Z of authors check and most children could list between 15-20 authors compared with an average of 5 when the project began.
- And finally, when checking reading scores using the Salford Reading Age test, we found that all children had made significant progress. One child, who said she just did not enjoy reading, had completely changed her opinion in the pupil voice survey at the end of the year. 'I just find it so much more interesting now, we talk about the books and can read with a partner.' Her reading age was 8.6 years in March 2021 and by June 2021 this had increased to 10.7 years. Although this is still 4 months below her chronological age, she has made almost 2 years progress in less than 4 months.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Reading will always be a focus on our school development plan. I feel like it is important to remember all the things we do to promote reading and adapt these to each situation we face. Independent reading does not have to be silent reading – quite the opposite. Children should be encouraged to talk about their book choices, share books and have the confidence to say why they do not like a book.

Engaging children in reading does not have to be complicated. There are a variety of creative ways to engage children in reading for pleasure. None of the 'fixes' I implemented took very long. By thinking about books and making time to discuss or have 'book talk' ensured that children had a reading purpose.

Next steps:

- Share ideas across the staff team to encourage buy-in across other year groups.
- Hold 'Reading Cafes' to boost partnerships with parents and promote reading at home (previously put on hold due to Covid-19).
- Develop 'Reading Ambassadors' for each class so we can share best practice and a love of books.

