

Beyond the Book Corner

Reading together – creating reciprocal social environments for reading
Sarah Beveridge – headteacher of Leyburn Primary School

Context

- Leyburn Primary School is a single form entry primary school, serving the town of Leyburn and surrounding villages.
- Despite working for many years to improve reading, standards remained average at the end of KS2. In 2019, the head and deputy undertook some training with Teresa Cremin and so started a Teachers' Reading Group that year. This couldn't be completed due to Covid restrictions and so was re-started in 2021.



OU Research inspiration and rationale

We had returned to the full opening of school from a period where children had been learning remotely. When in school, children had been in class bubbles.



Prior to this, we had worked on strengthening and widening our stock of books, primarily fiction. We then necessarily had to shift our focus to phonics, reviewing our phonically decodable books and prioritise the 'catch up' of loss of learning. We were clear in our teaching of the 'skill' of reading but what of the 'will'? How could we actively work on the affective processes and behaviours identified in the ROGO model

evidence base, National Literacy Trust 2017 as, without these, children could read but not necessarily 'be a reader'.

As a result of Covid restrictions, I decided to focus on how we could strengthen these social and shared aspects of reading as they had been significantly affected over the previous 18 months. We knew that children had limited experiences of sharing books, both with adults and each other. The resulting focus in school was creating:

3. A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:

- Social reading environments
- Reading aloud
- Independent reading
- Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations

5. Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive. (from Cremin et al., 2014)
'Social reading environments were seen to be key to creating richly reciprocal reading communities in the TaRs research. Physically engaging, the most successful environments tempted children into texts and offered spaces to relax, browse, and read for pleasure...critically they were also interactive.' (<https://ourfp.org/>)

Aims

The focus on cognitive psychology in our development of the curriculum – how can children know more and remember more – was essential and necessary, but what about 'affective psychology'?

Cognitive psychology is concerned with attention and memory but we know that a 'deep, emotional attachment to a subject area allows a deeper understanding of the material and, therefore, learning occurs and lasts.'

How could we ensure that all children:

- enjoy and are motivated to read;
- identify as readers;
- think positively about reading and relate to texts?

How could we create a 'buzz' about reading, thereby reintroducing all that some of the children had lost through not being at school?

Outline

As I began to reflect, some comments struck a chord with me:

'I don't want a reading corner, I want a reading room.' year 2 teacher.

'Displays of books should be interactive.' teacher.

'I remember those books that some of the children read when we were in year 4 and we didn't get to look at.' (Reading Gladiators for the 'able' readers), year 6 child.

'It would be good to have more than one copy so we can talk about it. We just end up waiting until they've finished reading it.' year 6 child

This project has developed responsively over the course of the year as a result of discussion, observation and reflection.

Here are some examples of the range of whole school activities.

September – Restart the Teachers Reading Group.

Book covers displayed in the entrance and in the main school hall so that children (and staff) could see the books that were being read across the school.



October –

'I don't want a Reading Corner, I want a Reading Room'.

We bought some picture shelves so that books could be front facing in all classrooms.





November – Dazzle Boxes bought from Madeline Lindley for Christmas using donations. Each year group had one and they were opened in each class. This reduced the pressure on staff to select books, especially when we are not near a bookshop.

December – The Advent Bookcase in the main entrance had Christmas books selected by the staff for each class behind a new door every day.



January – Book Clubs in Years 3 and 6. Year 3 meet after school and year 6 share a book with the head teacher and meet over one lunchtime.



As part of our Teachers' Reading Group, Year 5 shadowed the Spellbinding Book Award with another school.

February - Women in Science Day – a set of Little People, Big Ideas shown by some members of the Year 6 Science Club.



March – World Book Day. Children from across the school shared favourite books with each other. This was our first shared event following the lifting of Covid restrictions.

We were doing a lot but it was all planned **by** adults **for** children and the children were essentially passive. I thought about my own experience as a reader and how I had developed agency : how I came to see myself as a reader.

I remembered books which meant something to me and some of these were Ladybird books. Even now, some of the illustrations take me back to a time when I pored over them, read them by myself and learned things about Florence Nightingale, Nelson and the wider world. *How could we create a similar 'deep emotional attachment'?*

I asked Year 6 children about which early books they remembered reading and they all began to talk animatedly about 'the magic key books' (Oxford Reading Tree) as a shared experience. Phonically decodable books for novice readers were, necessarily, focussing on the cognitive processes but how could we support the affective processes in the early stages of reading?

The set of books '*Little People, Big Ideas*', created such an interest for year 2 pupils. It started by luck and through observing the children. We had a biography about Mother Teresa and a child in year 2 said, 'I've got a Vivienne Westwood one of those. Can I borrow the Mother Teresa one?' I then became interested and so bought a couple of sets – Black Leaders and Women in Science, displaying them in the main entrance. Children began to borrow them. We then bought less obvious ones – Elton John, Dolly Parton, John Lennon - and the children took them home to read with their parents and began to share the books – 'My dad loves Elton John', 'I'm named after John Lennon'.

Adults in school then wanted to read them so we bought more! How could we not?

Staff then used books to support their teaching – Frieda Kahlo, Greta Thunberg, Florence Nightingale - and have requested more to support future learning.

One day, there were 3 sets of people in the entrance: year 2s swapping books, year 6 keeping track of them and two members of staff, one looking for Stephen Hawking and one asking the children who L.M. Montgomery was. It was happening – we were a reading community.

As the children read more of these books, they began to make links themselves – Emmeline Pankhurst and Rosa Parks were 'activists', Elton John and Rupaul enjoy dressing up, Audrey Hepburn and Rudolph Nureyev were dancers...

Their background knowledge, vocabulary and cultural capital widened. Through the power of books, Pride Month, Women in Engineering arose naturally. We have extended with other biographies and news articles about Andy Warhol and Coco Chanel, for example and have addressed diversity, protected characteristics and British values.

Impact

There has been a 'buzz' about reading this particular set of books. The children display them, borrow them, keep track of them and share them.



- Children have said that they like the 'texture' of the books and one member of staff said that they are 'beautiful.'
- The palette is muted and the illustrations are two dimensional. Children on the autistic spectrum are particularly drawn to them.
- They are about a wide range of real, and inspiring, people.
- Parents enjoy sharing them with their children and have asked where they could buy their own copies.
- Children who read them are better prepared with background knowledge when a topic is introduced.
- Each morning, children swap and discuss them. Books have become front and centre in school. The displays of book covers are now invisible!
- The responsibility for ordering, displaying and auditing the books is now that of the older children and has had a significant impact upon their engagement and sense of responsibility.
- Less able readers benefit from them as they are age appropriate texts, provide challenging vocabulary, support engagement leading to deeper levels of understanding and deepen background knowledge to support current learning.

What next?

We will keep adding to the collection, create themed displays and use them to highlight current events. We can resource around the texts in all subjects such as art, science, history, RE and PE.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Through a whole school focus on the observation of children's reading, including this specific collection of books, we have seen the above develop naturally over the course of a year. We are well on our way to becoming a sincere and authentic community of readers with books igniting new interests and supporting tolerance and understanding of diversity in all of its forms.