

“Just one more chapter, please!”

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## Context

I am currently a Senior Lecturer in Initial Primary Education at Bishop Grosseteste University. I work primarily on the Postgraduate programme and specialise in the teaching of English, planning and assessment. I am passionate about the teaching of reading and writing to combat social exclusion and raise educational standards.

Prior to commencing my role at Bishop Grosseteste University, I was English Lead in a large primary academy where my ambition was to develop a reading for pleasure pedagogy with children, teachers and more widely in the school community. This example of practice took place during my time in school and made a huge impact on my professional development as a leader of English.

## OU Research inspiration and rationale

In line with the Open University's Teachers as Readers (TaRs) findings (Cremin et. al., 2014), I chose to focus upon a reading for pleasure (RfP) pedagogy, with a more specific **focus on reading aloud within a Year 6 class**. The rationale for choosing this focus developed through teaching a group of reluctant readers. I found this incredibly sad and disheartening, especially due to my own love for children's literature! Despite many researchers arguing the importance of reading for pleasure (Cremin, 2014; Pieper et al., 2016, Kucirkova et al., 2020), I identified a significant lack of enjoyment of reading amongst the children and limited enthusiasm for my wonderful selection of books in the classroom.

There are many reasons which impact children's desire to read for pleasure. However, **time constraints and the demands of the National Curriculum (2014) has reduced the regularity of teachers reading aloud to pupils despite this being one of the oldest features of the primary school curriculum** (Lockwood, 2008). This was certainly something I had sadly noticed with my class of Year 6 pupils. However, this led me to consider: why should this time be sacrificed when, even for older pupils, it is an incredible opportunity to develop children's love for reading and in turn improve their academic ability? Research directed me to success stories where schools had effectively prioritised opportunities for reading aloud, successfully linking these opportunities to curriculum content (Goodwin et al., 2000; Lockwood, 2008). Following this realisation, the challenge I encountered was how to embed the practices of reading aloud into the curriculum.

These findings led to my decision to **invest in a class set of novels based around the children's current topic of the Victorian Era**. This was a topic that the children were

thoroughly enjoying and therefore, this resulted in the selection of 'Street Child' by Berlie Doherty. I was confident that this would be the perfect opportunity to spark an enthusiasm for reading for pleasure. I also made the decision to buy a whole class set. Access to books is another factor which can impact children's desire to read for pleasure. Therefore, I wanted all the children to have the opportunity to hold their own copy of the book; rather than just listening to the story, this would enable them to feel more involved and experience the delight of turning page after page, in suspense for what may come next!

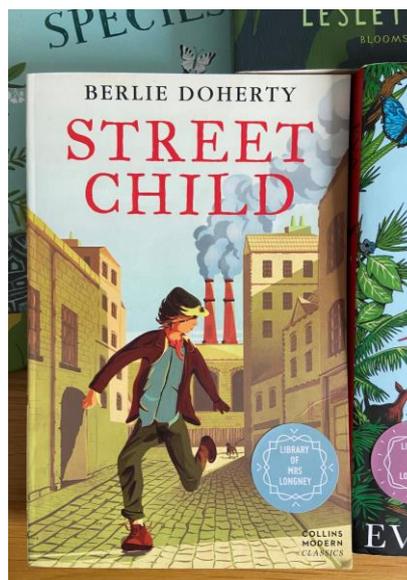
## Aims

The aims in relation to TaRs research findings for promoting a reading for pleasure pedagogy with a **focus on reading aloud**:

- To prioritise valuable time for reading aloud.
- To provide children with the privilege of holding, handling and exploring a physical book.
- To improve children's attitudes towards reading.
- To spark an inherent love for children's literature.
- To create an inclusive classroom culture fuelled with excitement for reading.

## Outline

I planned an immersive unit of work linking reading, writing and the teaching of history together based around 'Street Child' by Berlie Doherty. Within this unit of work, I prioritised time where I would read aloud to the children with no interruptions, no questions at the end of the chapter, but time to simply enjoy the delights of the story (Cremin, 2008; Fox et al., 2008, Gurdon, 2019). Each lesson began with dedicated time for this – arguably the children's favourite part! Lesson activities were then planned linked to the text to further engage them with the characters, plot and effectively build suspense. Throughout the unit of work, I shared regular tweets with parents/carers and the wider school community and examples of these can be seen below.



Year 6 are reading 'Street Child' in their English lessons this term linked to their topic on the Victorians. The children can't wait to find out what happens to Jim tomorrow... 📖📚 #readingforpleasure



At the beginning of the unit, I built children's excitement and interest in the novel, sharing with them the title and reading the blurb. The first lesson began with me handing out their individual copies, watching their faces light up with enthusiasm! Although I thought I may encounter some reluctance to begin with, I was surprised to find all children were keen for me to begin reading the story to them.

The children were immediately engaged with the explicit link to a current interest and seemed genuinely excited at the prospect of being read to, despite being UKS2. Once I had finished the first chapter, I was delighted that the children were asking to hear more! I couldn't believe the impact this book choice had from the outset.

***"I just can't wait to find out what happens next!"***

I knew straight away it had been a valuable decision to invest in a whole class set. The children were visibly excited to hold their own 'special' copy of the text and I believe it made them feel valued and empowered. In a world where technology sadly holds so much power (Kucirkova et al., 2020), it was a delight to see the pleasure of each child holding their own copy and enjoying this experience.

With each lesson, I witnessed the children become more engaged and more invested in the story. They showed genuine compassion towards the characters and an inherent desire to read. The power of reading aloud allowed all children to embrace and enjoy the same text. It developed an inclusive classroom with a shared passion for reading. I will never forget the incredible image of the children's faces as they absorbed every word.



Year 6 have been developing their speaking and listening skills this week by participating in a debate about whether Jim's life is better working for Grimy Nick or in a Victorian workhouse. Halfway through 'Street Child' now and we can't wait to read the ending! 🇬🇧 📖

***"I really hope Jim escapes. I am on the edge of my seat waiting to find out!"***

The children thoroughly enjoyed exploring the text in more depth. Throughout the unit, they completed a range of activities from role play, to written tasks to participating in debates! All children were involved in these activities and their interest and excitement for the text resulted in some fantastic academic outcomes as well as developing a reading for pleasure pedagogy.

Upon reading the final chapter, the children were amazed to hear the links between the story and Dr Thomas Barnardo. I still remember the gasps from particular children in the class! I believe this was due to how much they had fully immersed themselves in the story, relating themselves to young Jim. I wanted to ignite a desire to read, and it was a privilege to watch this unit unfold and develop.

Year 6 have started their genre unit for this term, writing a biography about Dr Barnardo - an inspirational man who helped the poor children during the Victorian era. Today, the children have enjoyed completing research ready to write their introductions tomorrow 🍷



The title of this project *“Just one more chapter, please!”* summarises the children’s enthusiasm and excitement for reading this class text. It was a privilege to embark on this journey with the children and is an aspect of my professional practice that will never be forgotten.

## Impact

This case study had a significant impact on improving attitudes towards reading within a class of once reluctant readers. It was an absolute pleasure to be a part of igniting this spark! At the beginning of the project, I had been saddened to see a reluctance to read amongst the children in my class. Upon conclusion, I had children requesting to continue reading during their playtime and desperate for me to purchase the next book in the sequel.

**Choosing a book based on a topic that they were truly invested in allowed the children to develop a genuine interest in reading.** Therefore, this inspired me to make further links wherever possible to the children’s interests and **involve them in the process of choosing new books for the classroom.** Interestingly, the children often chose books linked to their current topics. It was a delight to see the children’s faces light up when they saw the new additions to Mrs Longney’s library arrive!



*The above images show some of the children’s selections for our class library! Some of these choices linked to upcoming topics e.g. World War Two and Charles Darwin.*

In addition to making a significant impact on the children, I also received positive feedback from parents and carers too, including comments on how the children had continued to display enthusiasm at home by discussing and sharing the book with their families.

***“Just one more chapter, please!”***



Despite the children being within UKS2, all children enjoyed the pleasure of being read aloud to. It created an inclusive environment with the shared desire to simply enjoy the story. On completion, the children demonstrated many affective processes as outlined in the ROGO model evidence base, such as enjoying reading; being motivated to read, thinking positively about reading and relating to texts (National Literacy Trust, 2017). As a result, reading aloud to the children became a non-negotiable part of my classroom practice. It further fuelled my desire to continue improving my own knowledge of children’s literature in order to be able to select and recommend texts for the children to maintain this level of enthusiasm for reading (Burgess et al., 2011; Collins & Safford, 2008; Cremin et al., 2009).

## **Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice**

This TaRs research improved my practice in many ways:

- I experienced first-hand the valuable benefits of reading aloud to the children, regardless of age, to ignite a desire for reading and children’s literature.
- Reading aloud to children has since been a non-negotiable part of my classroom practice.
- My confidence in using children’s literature to support teaching and learning across a range of curriculum areas developed.



Although I am no longer teaching in the primary classroom, my ambition is to share this knowledge, understanding and experience with primary trainees to ensure that reading for pleasure is prioritised and valued in Early Career Teachers. Through taught sessions, I aim to develop their ability and confidence in reading aloud to children successfully.