



Creating an Author Visit with Impact



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Context

- I am a newly appointed librarian at Bury Grammar School in Lancashire. There are currently over 1300 pupils and students taught in a diamond structure. Only senior school pupils are taught separately.
- Over the summer holidays, I undertook the Teachers' reading challenge and was eager to apply my new knowledge of children's literature and reading for pleasure practice within my new role.
- I am also currently studying for a Level 3 Apprenticeship in Leadership with the National College of Education and School Library Association.
- Part of the Bury Grammar School's development plan is to "Develop ways in which we put Bury Grammar School on show [by] developing social media strategies". My Reading For Pleasure (RFP) practice may contribute to this in how we put Bury Grammar's RFP practice on show.



OU Research inspiration and rationale

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF ENGAGED READERS

READING FOR PLEASURE



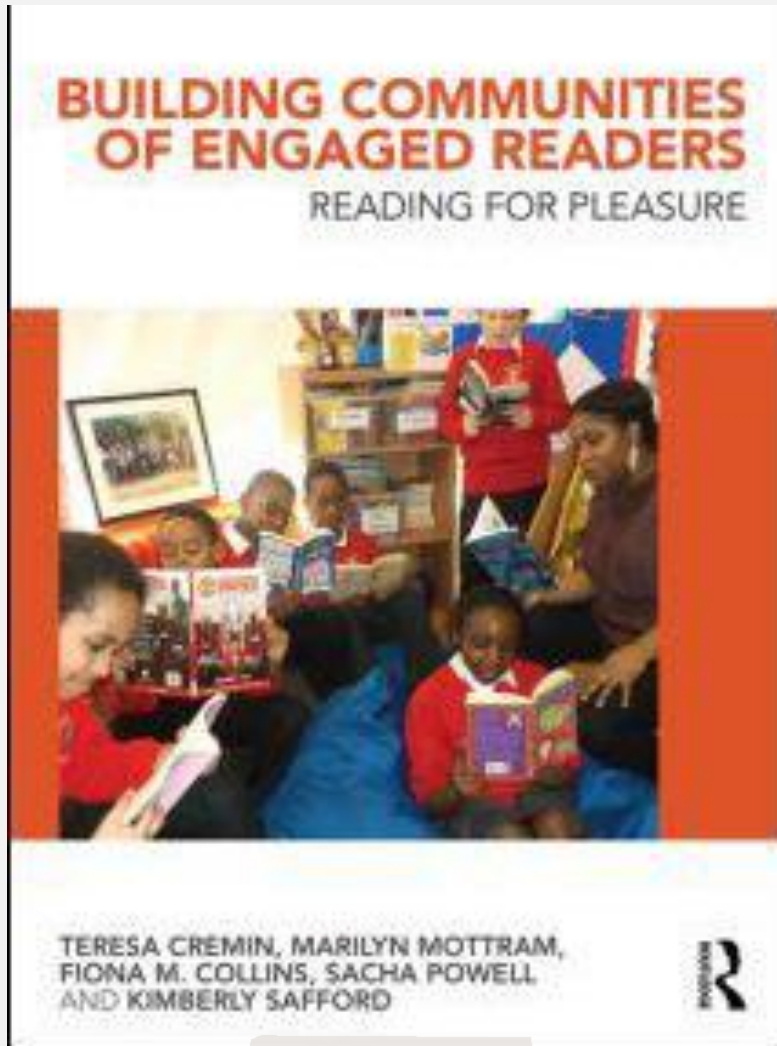
TERESA CRÉMIN, MARILYN MOTTRAM,
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AND KIMBERLY SAFFORD



- I joined Bury Grammar to the news of an upcoming author visit from Aisling Fowler. As the new librarian, I was asked to oversee the event.
- Author events are a popular choice when promoting reading for pleasure in schools. In their 2019 Annual Literacy Survey, the NLT found that the most cited reason that school respondents host author events are to support reading for pleasure (79%).
- Aisling's visit would be a fantastic opportunity for me to audit how Reading for Pleasure is already practiced within my new setting.
- As the school had not had an author visit for a considerable period due to Covid, I also wanted to support the head librarian in ensuring that the visit would be fully utilised to re-enthuse RFP practice.

OU Research inspiration and rationale ctd.

- The two Teachers as Readers (TaRs) findings I would investigate when running the author event are as follows:
- **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, above)



Aims

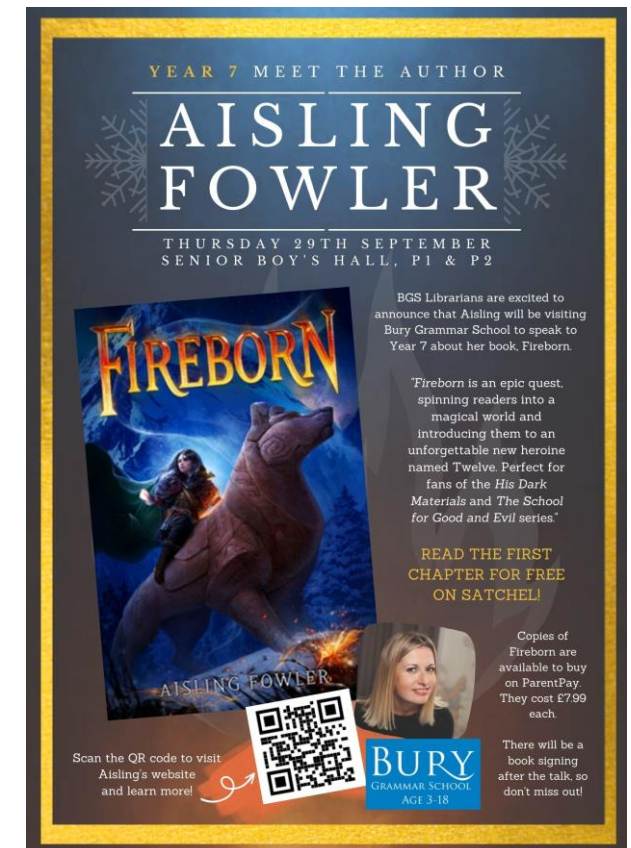
I aim to gauge how **RFP is practised school-wide** and implement the TaR's research findings of reading pedagogy and reading communities in school **in my planning for an author event** (Cremin et al., 2014).

Reading pedagogy

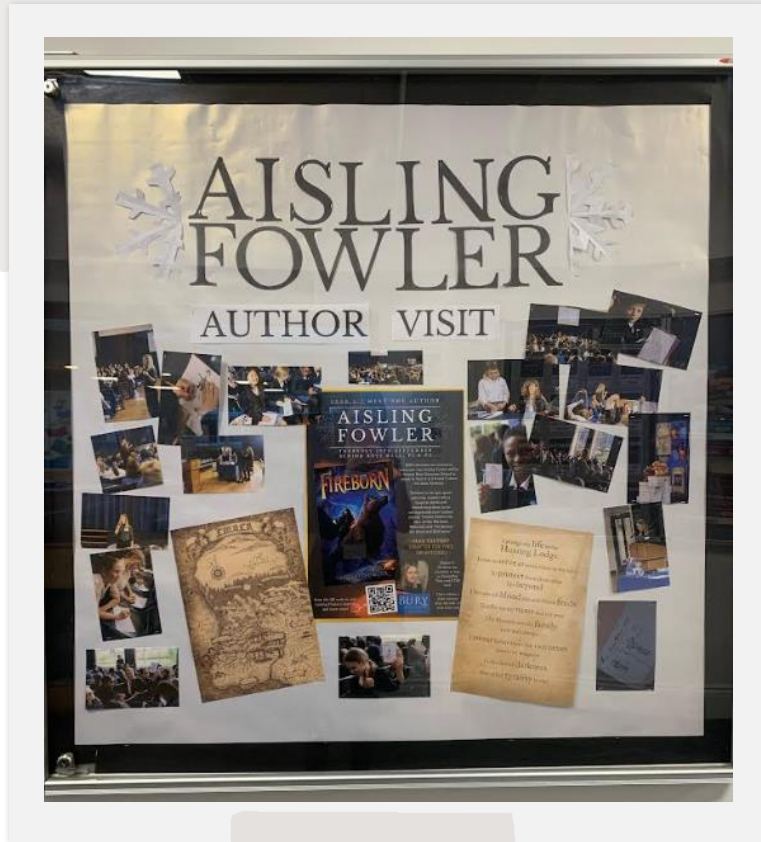
- **Social Reading Environments:** Create a school-wide 'buzz' around Aisling Fowler's book *Fireborn* ahead of her visit.
- **Informal Book Talk:** broaden staff and pupil knowledge through one example of contemporary fiction and current authors.
- Make opportunities for **reading aloud** and **independent reading** of Aisling Fowler's book in and outside of lessons.

Communities

- Book Group
- School Magazine



Social Reading Environments



- Librarians decided to communicate the news of Aisling Fowler's visit with members of the school through a display outside the library space. Having a decorated board would not just inform pupils but also work towards reframing the library as a '**social reading environment**'.
- Making this display really helped me to focus on creating a conversation around *Fireborn* within school. I was eager to hear the event being talked about and discussed and found that having a visual stimulus would increase the chances of book talk taking place.
- It was incredibly pleasing to find that the display became such a focal point during the school's open evening. However, I wanted to ensure that pupils, their families and staff were not just passively interacting with the library but also getting actively involved with reading for pleasure practices.
- It is to this aim that I made a 'living' display which changed every day to count down the days until Aisling's visit. This generated a lot of excitement as pupils began to form, for themselves, a meaningful connection between the library and reading for pleasure.

Informal Book Talk

- Aisling Fowler's visit was a great opportunity to launch some informal Book Talk between pupil-pupil, pupil-teacher, pupil-family and even pupil-author.
- The visit provided pupils with the opportunity to talk to each other about what they had read before *Fireborn* and what they would read next. I found that book discussions were best kept casual and so I tried to ensure that staff would keep them unevaluated. As the visit was being thought of as a reading for pleasure initiative, there would be no questioning on how much of *Fireborn* pupils had read by a certain date.
- Despite the unstructured nature of these book talks, Aisling Fowler's visit still provided numerous opportunity for teachers to get to know their pupil's reader identities. The informal book discussions with their pupils led to them learning more about their pupil's individual reading preferences and motivations.



Reading Aloud and Independent Reading

- To encourage reading aloud and independent reading prior to the event, the head librarian and I wanted to ensure that our pupils had access to the first ten chapters of *Fireborn* at home and openly available in the library. This would ensure that we were creating opportunities for pupil participation before Aisling Fowler's visit.
- The head librarian distributed physical resources to primary school teachers to fit in a reading aloud session wherever they could. I uploaded a pdf version of the first ten chapters as an optional task on the pupil's homework platform, Satchel.
- A pre-reading of the text would ensure that Aisling's visit was much more meaningful. Pupils, having interacted with the first few chapters (whether aloud or independently) would have a point of reference when entering the hall to listen to her talk.
- Whilst I found that the Senior pupils had little interest in the pre-reading on Satchel before the event, there was a significant increase in library loans and purchases of *Fireborn* after the event. From this, I could discern that independent reading was happening at home.



Reading Communities: Book Groups

- After Aisling Fowler's visit, the pupils were obviously very keen to start reading *Fireborn* and talk about their thoughts on the novel. Hearing from a Year 7 pupil that *"it would be so fun to read the book together!"*, I decided to facilitate a time and space for pupils to be able to do so.
- I promoted their book group around school through English lessons, posters, emails and Satchel tasks. I ended up with a very positive response from Year 7 with lots of pupils feeling eager to get started.
- Pupils met voluntarily over lunch to discuss their reading. I wanted to ensure that they had total control over the group, so they decided where and when to meet, how often, and how much reading they would do in between each session.
- Giving them complete control over the group ensured that it was entirely pleasurable reading for them. Any elements of the group which they did not enjoy, they could change, and were encouraged to do so. I found that as the group went on, the less involvement from staff was needed.



Reading Communities: School Magazine

- The author event also became impactful for a reading community of older senior pupils for its insight into the writing industry.
- The school magazine team were interested in interviewing Aisling Fowler about all things writing. Aisling Fowler's visit created a great learning experience for these pupils as they knew that to make their interview successful, they would will need to be prepared.
- The School Magazine team pre-emptively met to discuss what questions that pupils would want to hear an author answer. They questioned the authors' craft, including getting started, what being published is like and how the industry treats new authors.
- Having taken notes from their interview with Aisling Fowler, the pupils then got together to research and write an article out of their research. Aisling's answers inspired the pupil's own reading and writing within the ownership their own publication.

An interview with...



Aisling Fowler

Q: To start us off, tell us a little bit about what the story is about!

The story follows Twelve, she is a hunting and she trains at the hunting lodge in order to learn how to fight monsters, the hunting lodge is attacked by monsters and dark creatures manage to break inside and a girl is taken, Twelve is horrified that the adults don't seem to be responding, so she decides to rescue this girl herself, heading out into the wilderness with her pet and a bag of supplies in order to bring this girl home safely. Twelve meets many characters along the way, a mismatched group, the story is about the journey they go on together, with secrets that they are keeping from each other.

Q: What inspired you to write about the themes included in the book?

I always wanted to write a heroine. Twelve was inspired by other three characters, knew she needed to fight monsters, compelling heroine, action packed story, adventure full of excitement, dark past, elements, the world that Twelve lives in was hard to create for me was hard to work out where they came out originally.

Q: Considering it was your very first book you have ever published, what was the writing process like? Was it harder than you expected?

Ifirst book that I finished to the end and published, the process took longer than I thought, reading over the first draft, I knew I could improve, knowing the characters really well, editorial process was the learning curve, I enjoyed it, didn't bother that it took longer, loves the process, found book two difficult, used to the circumstances by book 3.



Q: What was the hardest part of the book to write?

First few chapters, particularly for fantasy, introducing characters and how the world works with the monsters, the early chapters took a lot of effort, rewrite the early section 10+ times, lots of darkness in the story, finding ways to balance that with humour and the pet squirrel.

Q: Is there anything you would like to say to all the young readers and writers out there?

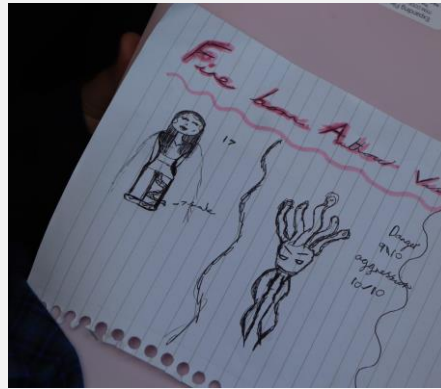
It's not a magical skill, you have to learn and give it time, commit and keep practicing because the more you do it the better you get, endless possibilities, be brave and seek criticism, find similar stories and give them your work and ask them for feedback, really hard to find the changes yourself, learn to take criticism, keep going at it, read lots, I've never done a writing course, I just read. Keep reading.



Impact

- A whole-school buzz around *Fireborn* developed from the very first announcement of Aisling Fowler's visit. It would be the first in-person author event in years (due to Covid).
- Creating a **social reading environment** in anticipation of the event cultivated a strong reading for pleasure culture. The pupils explored both the social and independent aspects of their reader identities. Likewise, a large book sale of *Fireborn* was indicated how the visit boosted the enjoyment of **independent reading**. Pupils had the chance to own their own book and a fantastic memory of the event (Aisling signed some books)!
- I feel that because I had adopted the TaRs research in my planning, Pupils and Staff had more opportunities to **read aloud** and engage in **book talk** around school. Developing reading for pleasure across the school has led to a real enthusiasm for stories in both junior and senior year groups.
- **Reading communities** of teachers and staff have appreciated hearing the pupil's book talk increase and enjoy engaging with them in discussions about their shared experience of a specific author and book.

Bridging the Gap



- Being aimed at Years 3 – 7, Aisling Fowler's visit was a great opportunity for Junior pupils to meet and interact with some Senior pupils over a shared love of reading.
- Here are some of the examples of the creative work that pupils of different year groups completed together during Aisling's visit.

Strengthening Reading Relationships

- The librarians needed to introduce Aisling Fowler and her book *Fireborn* to Junior and Senior school staff so that we could ensure that the event was being promoted school-wide. This was testament to our belief that Reading for Pleasure is a focus of the whole school and not just based within the library and English departments.
- Focusing on one author and one novel really enabled staff to promote this book to multiple year groups. In lessons, staff were able to briefly explain what each the book was about and why the pupils might want to read it. As a school, we pre-emptively strengthened the relationship between the pupils and the author before she arrived for the talk.
- This experience worked towards strengthening our pupil and staff's value of stories and reading. Seeing a real-life author can open a world of reading for pupils and inspire children and young people to have a go at writing and enjoying stories for themselves. We were lucky enough to pull pupils out of their normal curriculum time for the event. This sends a message to the pupils that reading for pleasure is as important as their academic studies and needs to be priority.
- Another way in which this visit strengthened relationships was through raising the profile of the school and its commitment to their RFP agenda. The author visit was a fantastic way for the pupils and the school to interact with the writing community and it worked extremely well. Aisling Fowler's tweets (right) promoted the RFP that was taking place in school at the time of the event.



Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The Teachers as Readers research demonstrated how instructive author visits can be in building reading pedagogy and reading communities.

If I had not organised the author visit with the Teacher as Readers research in mind, it would not have been nearly as meaningful as it was. Initially, Aisling Fowler's visit was arranged for pupils in Year 3 – Year 7 to hear an author speak about their book to encourage our pupil's love of reading.

I would not have thought about reading pedagogies or reading communities and therefore enabled the enrichment experiences - such as the School Magazine or the Book Group - without the Teachers as Readers findings.

