

## Pupil Preferences and Pedagogy

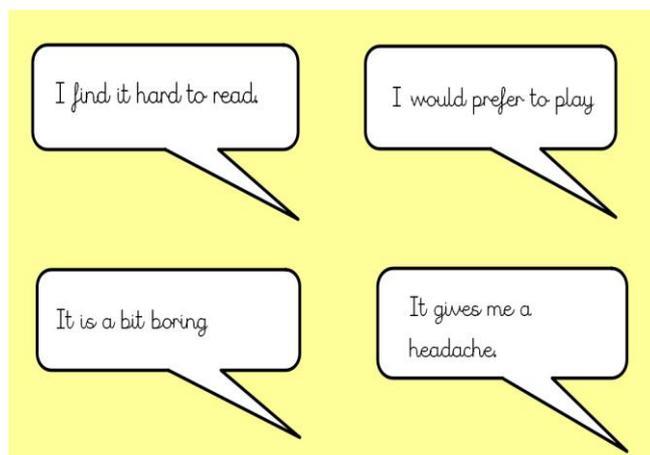
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I am a second year ECT at Ashlands Primary School in Ilkley and currently teaching Year 4. Though a love for reading has always been valued by our staff the school is early on its official Reading for Pleasure (RfP) journey. An increased focus on strategies for developing RfP across school aligns with my own Early Career journey as I develop my pedagogy in this area.

Early in my first term, I conducted a pupil survey. When looking at survey results and my own observations (during quiet reading and when listening to a book as a class), it became apparent that less than a quarter of the class outwardly enjoyed reading and only 3 children would choose to read in their own time and really loved it.



## OU Research inspiration and rationale

It quickly became apparent to me that in order to foster a love of reading I would need to focus on **understanding the children as readers**, their experiences in and beyond school and their individual preferences and interests.

Intertwined with this, I felt it was essential to develop my own knowledge of children's literature and other texts in order to tailor the recommendations I made to the needs of the individuals as I grew to understand them. (Cremin et al., 2014)

## Aims

- To understand the barriers for those children who did not enjoy reading by using surveys and observation;
- To foster a love of reading using approaches such as: book blankets, 'Top Shelf Takeover,' voting for class readers and reading in different spaces;
- To develop a wider knowledge of the types of texts that appeal to children (including and beyond fiction books).

## Outline

- To begin, children completed a **reading survey focused on their habits as readers** (or non-readers). I **followed this up with observation of children's reading behaviours** - during reading of our class book and quiet reading time. It was also my aim to hear each child read their school reading book during the first fortnight and look closely at our guided reading in order to give me an understanding of the level of skill of individual readers.
- Through these observations, it became apparent that less skilled readers struggled to focus during quiet reading. Many children spent time at the bookcase 'changing their books'. Quiet reading time seemed like a punishment to these children and generally was not very quiet at all. When I was reading aloud, the children were fidgety and distracting others.
- I decided to **take a different approach** – their reading experiences were not pleasurable for them, their classmates or me! As a keen reader, I struggled to understand why this group of children would not seize the opportunity to settle down with a good book. On reflection I wrote an article relating to how our skill level in any given activity influences our enjoyment of it, 'Reading for Pleasure – A Golfing Analogy.'



- To move forward using my knowledge of children, I **built an RfP afternoon into the timetable** to trial some of the approaches used by others on the OU RfP website:
  - **Curating book blankets of different genres** each week and giving children the opportunity to **choose a partner to share** a self-selected book with;
  - Introducing the '**Top Shelf Takeover**' that allowed pairs of children to work with a partner to curate their favourite reading materials and recommend books to their peers;
  - Involving the whole class in **spending our book budget** for the year;
  - Children **voting for our class reader** from a range of quality texts; and
  - **Reading in different places** (e.g., outdoor classroom, the library).
- We were also able to return to '**Reading Buddies**' post-Covid. We were invited to read to (and with) Reception children on a Friday afternoon.

## Impact

- The **'Top Shelf Takeover'** has resulted in children making recommendations to each other which seems to have had much more influence than the recommendations of their teacher! This is the beginning of a whole new journey into becoming 'book blatherers' and I can't wait to see where it takes us. It has also helped to expand my knowledge of children's texts as children have brought books from home that I have not seen before.



- **Book blankets were a great way to make recommendations... without making recommendations!** The children who were reluctant readers began to pick from genres that they would not normally access. Having a week where we looked at picture books made it far more socially acceptable for all children to access books for 'younger' readers.
- Giving children the opportunity to **share their choices with a partner or friend** meant our RfP time was a treat. I was delighted to see the children enjoying books together and often the less-skilled readers were best supported by their closest friends. **Reading began to be seen as the treat.** If our RfP time looked like it might be under threat, the children would soon hold me to account!
- In choosing how to **spend our book budget** these children looked at blurbs, covers and some content. They **wanted to have their say and take some ownership** of what would end up on our shelves. They began to develop as readers with preferences, rather than seeing themselves as non-readers.
- **'Reading Buddies'** had a huge impact in terms of confidence. The children who had seen themselves as non-readers or 'not good at reading' became the experts. I bought a wider selection of picture books from my own collection at home and they enjoyed, through the week and during quiet reading times, working out which book they would be taking to Reception to share with their buddy. For one child in particular who reads at Reception/Year 1 level, the TA or myself would practise through the week so he could go in and read fluently. He now enjoys reading to an SEN child in the class on a regular basis and has picked up recommendations from his peers.

- **Personally, I developed a much greater level of empathy and understanding for the barriers that reduce the likelihood of children wanting to read for pleasure.** Why do they not see themselves as readers? Why they did not want to engage with reading activities or even actively avoid them? The benefit of this was that I felt less frustrated with their level of engagement and began to think more creatively about reading activities that would give them a more positive association with reading.

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

Understanding and **developing empathy for the readers in my class** has been key in developing my pedagogy around reading for pleasure.

In my mind, RfP meant choosing a quality class book that I thought the children would enjoy and providing a range of what I perceived as quality texts, for them to enjoy at quiet reading time, in an attractive book corner. This, in itself, kept RfP time formal and controlled.

When I joined the OU/ UKLA Teacher's Reading Group, the discussions with the leader and other professionals and the encouragement to access research on the OU RfP site has been key in developing my pedagogy in promoting RfP.

Though there is, of course, a place for a class book and quiet reading, these elements now only form part of my approach, they have evolved and **the decisions I make are much more driven by the needs, choices and requests of my class**. Accessing the TaRs research (Cremin et al., 2014) encouraged me to adopt a range of approaches that better suited the individual readers in the class. For the children who saw themselves as non-readers, a more sociable, child-led and relaxed approach was key in fostering an enjoyment of reading and allowing them to take more ownership of what and how they read. This led them to see themselves as readers. It has given me, as a teacher, the confidence to hand more control to the readers themselves enabling them to develop their own identities and confidence as children who do read and choose to read for pleasure. I have benefitted from this as children have made recommendations of books that are new to me, thus expanding my knowledge of children's texts.

To take it to the next level, **I am now beginning to focus on reader's voice** - encouraging children to talk more about books, voice an opinion about what they would like to see on the shelves, their likes and dislikes and to make recommendations to others. I would also like to involve parents and carers more so that reading for pleasure is not just something that is associated with school.