



# Creating A Desire To Read

Michelle McMurdo

Blacklaw Primary School

## Context

I am a P7 teacher in Blacklaw Primary in East Kilbride, Scotland.

Since returning to school following school closures due to the Covid pandemic in 2020 I noticed that children appear to be reading less for pleasure and have very limited knowledge of what books they might like to read.

Improving attainment in literacy is a priority on our school improvement plan and I strongly believe Reading for Pleasure goes a long way to improving attainment in this area. Our school is currently in the process of achieving accreditation to become a Reading School. I have a pivotal role in this project and I felt that what we are doing within the school ties in well with the TaR's.

## OU Research inspiration and rationale

I am an avid reader myself and always have been. I was always brought up to enjoy reading and can barely recall a period of my life when I haven't read. Having children of my own exposed me to picture books and early novels that I had not read in years, I discovered that as much as I enjoy adult fiction there is also something magical about reading young fiction. I realised that when I stopped reading aloud to my own children, reading children's fiction was something I continued to do. Being passionate about reading is something I want to pass on to my pupils.

The strand of the Teachers as Readers (TaRs) findings that inspired me to develop this activity was to develop a reading for pleasure pedagogy focusing on creating social reading environments and developing and improving skills in informal book talk.

As part of our first TaR's session we were asked to complete an audit by OU/UKLA. We also wanted to measure the impact of establishing the school as a Reading School so we adapted the OU survey to suit our needs and asked all children from P1-7 to complete it in order to gain an insight into their reading habits. For the purposes of the TaR's I have focused my research on my own P7 class.

CONTEXT	INSPIRATION & RATIONALE	AIMS	OUTLINE	IMPACT	REFLECTIONS
---------	----------------------------	------	---------	--------	-------------

I read Open University Reading for Pleasure Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach. This suggests that teachers who read and share their own experiences of reading, make a positive impact on children's desire to read and frequency of reading at home and at school. This highlighted the importance of ensuring that my pupils see me as a reader.

My class seemed to have little knowledge of authors which might appeal to them (sticking to celebrity or well known authors, or familiar texts). They also found it difficult to talk about books and recommend books to each other.

# Aims

- To change perceptions of reading so that reading is a desired activity.
- To establish a culture in class of 'book talk'.
- To widen my pupils knowledge of authors.

# Outline

The results of the P7 audit highlighted the following:

- Only 33% of children said they enjoyed reading 'very much' or 'quite a lot'. 46% said they enjoyed reading 'a bit' and 21% 'not at all'.
- Only 25% of children read every day and 21% said they 'hardly ever' or 'never' read. The rest read either a few times a week (33%), once a week (17%) or a few times a month (4%).
- When asked who their favourite author was, 40% stated David Walliams. Other favourite authors consisted **only** of JK Rowling, Roald Dahl, Liz Pichon and Michael Morpurgo.

When children were asked if they shared books, or made book recommendations to each other, not one child in my class who that said they enjoyed reading said that they did this. They did not see book talk as being part of reading and suggested that readers only read.

To change perceptions of reading so that reading is a desired activity.

When asked what children felt about reading there was a large amount of positive comments, however, some of the negative comments children said were:

I only read when I am told to.

It makes me scared and worried because I can't read very well.

Reading is difficult.

I cannot find anything that interests me.

Reading is boring

CONTEXT	INSPIRATION & RATIONALE	AIMS	OUTLINE	IMPACT	REFLECTIONS
---------	-------------------------	------	---------	--------	-------------

If I wanted my class to see reading as a desired activity then I had to demonstrate this. I regularly read children’s fiction and always display the book I am currently reading in class. Showing my own enthusiasm for reading became a regular occurrence, frequently referring to books I have read, making connections to texts and doing so with excitement and joy.

*Providing time and space to read in class is a core element of an effective RfP pedagogy (Cremin et al, 2014).* To ensure that children were reading every day a number of approaches were taken.

- We have a weekly dedicated slot in our weekly timetable for RforP; ERIC (Everybody Reading in Class). This consists of 20–30 minutes of independent reading and then 10–15 minutes of book talk.
- At least three times a week our morning task is dedicated ERIC time.
- When children are finished tasks in class, they are encouraged to RforP.

Reading aloud and discussing the text was identified in the TaRs RfP pedagogy research as being vital to its success. It enables children to access rich and challenging texts, offers a model for silent independent reading, prompts the children’s engagement creating ‘texts in common’ to discuss. I make sure the children hear someone read aloud everyday purely for pleasure. We use a mix of me reading aloud or listening to an audio book. *There are many benefits of hearing stories and other texts read aloud regularly. Listening to rich engaging texts offers a foundation for later understanding and helps sustain a love of reading (Sullivan and Brown, 2015).*



To widen my pupils knowledge of authors.

If I was to encourage children to have reading as a desired activity then they had to have access to 'texts that tempt.' It was vital to the potential success of this study that the children were exposed to a variety of authors and genres and access to award winning/nominated books.

We have a reasonably well stocked school library but I wanted to update it with new books and authors. I wrote to publishers of award nominated books and asked for donations of books. The response was overwhelming. The children now had access to some new, high quality books and seeing deliveries of new books caused a buzz and excitement about who was going to get to read them first.



We are lucky enough to have our local library within a 5 minute walk and I wanted to capitalise on this. A monthly trip to our local library began to take place. Children without their own library card (which was most children) were able to take books out on my school card. At these monthly visits, children were initially guided towards books or recommended books initially by myself or the Children's Librarian.

Children were given plenty of time to browse and time to sit in the library and read. They were also encouraged to share books between each other and to take out recently returned books.



CONTEXT	INSPIRATION & RATIONALE	AIMS	OUTLINE	IMPACT	REFLECTIONS
---------	----------------------------	------	---------	--------	-------------

To establish a culture in class of 'book talk'.

On a day to day basis in class I ensured that I demonstrate and showed the children that I am a reader. I achieved this by always talking about the book I was reading before we had ERIC time. I demonstrated how to talk about what we read without giving away too much detail. I was also honest about what I did not enjoy about a book.

During ERIC time the children had time to discuss (dedicated 10-15 minutes allocated for this) what they were reading with each other.

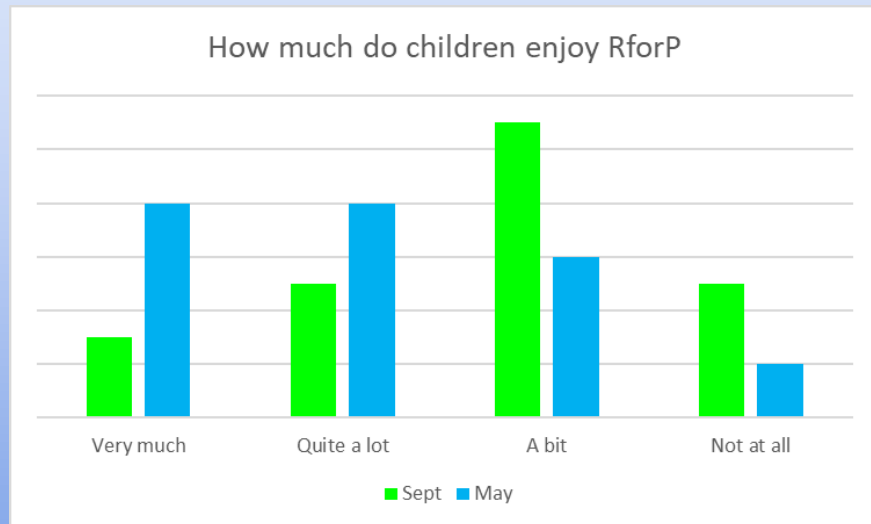
I made both informal observations and had meaningful conversations during ERIC time to understand what types of books my children were interested in. Getting to know my pupils' hobbies and interests also helped me with where to start with recommendations and who is most likely to enjoy specific books.

# Impact

At the end of May I audited my class again, asking them the same questions I had in September. The results were as follows:

- 67% of children said they enjoyed reading 'very much' or 'quite a lot'. This is an increase of 34%
- Only 8% said they did not like reading at all, down from 21%.

Overall, enjoyment of reading has increased substantially. It is now a desired activity and children are choosing to read in their free time.



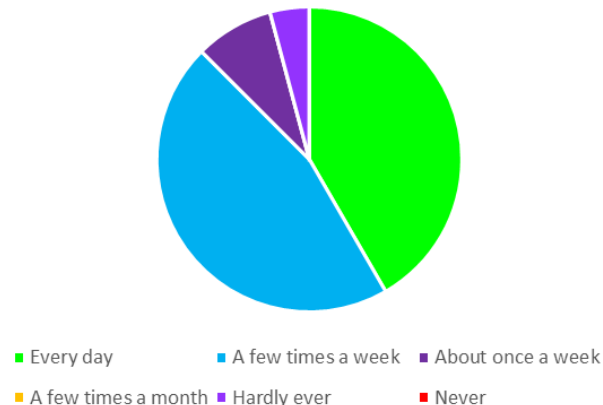
When asked how often children read for pleasure now there was a dramatic change from in September..

- Only 25% of children previously read every day compared with 42% of children who now say they read every day
- 46% read a few times a week.
- Only 4% said they 'hardly ever' or 'never' read, down from 23%..

How regularly children RforP - Sept 2021



How regularly children RforP - May 2022



With exposure to so many books, when asked who their favourite author was the children had a much wider range of authors to draw from. They were no longer saying the well known or celebrity names but instead demonstrated a much wider repertoire of authors. These are some of the authors the children named when asked again in May:



The Children's Librarian at St. Leonards Library commented on how she has noticed the children's choice in authors and genres is improving and maturing. They are less likely to go towards celebrity authors or familiar texts. Children were showing confidence in searching for books and know how to find books they will enjoy themselves.



If children are comfortable when they are reading I believe they are more inclined to want to read and to read for longer. A social reading environment prompts and encourages children to talk to each other about what they are reading. Establishing regular E.R.I.C. time in class has created a routine that the children enjoy. I had thought that the children would simply enjoy reading for pleasure in class because they had a chance to read but they also enjoyed it because of the feelings it evoked in them and the atmosphere it created in class. Here are just some of the quotes from the children when asked if they enjoy E.R.I.C. time:

- *I enjoy ERIC time a lot, it helps me stay relaxed and happy in school.*
- *Yes because I enjoy reading with other people in my class.*
- *I do like ERIC time in class because it is fun and it is also calming.*
- *I like ERIC time in class because all the class is quite and relaxing and then we get to talk about books.*
- *Yes I do I love ERIC time because you get to read what you like and it's for your enjoyment.*
- *I like ERIC time in class because I get to get lost in all the pages in the text that I'm reading and I enjoy silently reading.*
- *It is calming and de stressing.*
- *I enjoy ERIC time a lot, it helps me stay relaxed and happy in school.*



The children are showing an increased enjoyment of literature. If I forget to change the display of what book I am reading, children ask me and remind me to change it. They are interested in what I am reading. I have been asked to update them on what has happened next in my book.

Having regular book talk has led to the children growing in confidence to talk about books and recommend books to each other. They no longer see talking about books as not something a reader would do. Here are some examples of how book talk has evolved in class:

- *Yes, I do like talking about the books I read because I like to talk about things me and the person both have in common.*
- *I enjoy talking about books because I get lots of recommendations to different books that I would like to read.*
- *I love it because it gives me the chance to find out what other people have read.*
- *yes because we choose a genre that fits us and that's what we want to do.*
- *I like talking so others can hear the stories I have been reading.*
- *Yes I love to explain in long length about what I read.*
- *Yes, I enjoy this because of my love for books.*
- *I do enjoy talking about the books I have been reading because I get to recommend books.*



CONTEXT	INSPIRATION & RATIONALE	AIMS	OUTLINE	IMPACT	REFLECTIONS
---------	-------------------------	------	---------	--------	-------------

Children regularly share and swap books with each other. When we went to the local library many books are re-borrowed by a different child. I have my own books in class which have now been read 3 or 4 times as the children keep recommending it to each other.

By reading books recommended by their peers or myself they show a greater desire to read different genres or authors.

- One child heard me talking about a book I wanted to read, she found it in the local library, read it herself then offered it to me to read. *I recommended Maria's Island to my teacher because I really liked it and she did too.*
- *I recommended "Teachers Dead" to Euan after I finished it. A month later he said he loved it.*
- *Mrs McMurdo has been reading us Wonder, Tilly recommended Auggie and Me to me when we were in St. Leonards library because I said I was enjoying Wonder.*
- *I have been recommended a book called Heartstopper, it's my favourite graphic novel at the moment. There are multiple books and I have only read Volume 1.*
- *A friend recommended a book to me, and I remember recommending The House with Chicken Legs book to Lily.*
- *Mrs Mcmurdo recommended "The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane" because I said I liked books with lots of stories in them. I loved it.*
- *I mentioned to my teacher about a book I'm in the middle of reading called The Faraway Truth and she borrowed it after me.*
- *The teacher recommended Anne Frank graphic novel. She said I might like graphic novels and she was right, I do now.*

CONTEXT

INSPIRATION &  
RATIONALE

AIMS

OUTLINE

IMPACT

REFLECTIONS

In May children were asked their views on how they felt about reading and whether they would continue to read in high school. Only 2 children said they were not sure if they would..

Yes, I will continue to read for pleasure when I go to high school as I enjoy it very much and find it calming..

I definitely will continue reading for pleasure when I go to High School. I love reading so that's why!

I 100% will keep reading in high school because it really helps your knowledge with all sorts of categories.

Of course I would because it makes me feel calm

CONTEXT	INSPIRATION & RATIONALE	AIMS	OUTLINE	IMPACT	REFLECTIONS
---------	-------------------------	------	---------	--------	-------------

## Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Understanding and having knowledge of children's literature influenced me more than anything else during this research. My own knowledge of children's literature has grown substantially over the past year as part of my research and this is an area I would always be seeking to improve and develop. I can see areas where my knowledge is weaker (poetry and non-fiction) but this research has made me see the importance of developing this.

To create a desire to read children need to see this desire in their teacher. My class know how much I value and enjoy reading and I do believe my enthusiasm rubbed off on them.

I appreciate the importance of creating a social reading environment where children can read, discuss what they read and share what they read. Reading is not a solitary task and to be enjoyed needs to be shared.

Whilst undertaking this research for the TaR's sessions I undertook additional study through the Open University; Developing Reading for Pleasure: engaging young readers. I found this a fascinating course and really helped me understand and appreciate the importance of what my aim was.

I will definitely continue to establish a reading for pleasure culture in my class each year.