



## OU RfP Research and Practice Podcast



The second podcast in our series tackles independent reading, and practitioners share their experiences of developing this pedagogy, alongside the research findings.

### Independent Reading podcast

#### **Amy**

As I was reading it, instantly a child popped into my head and I thought, I have to pass this on to this child.

#### **Lucas**

I want them to become independent users. But I also I know that they do need a guide.

#### **Lou**

It's knowing when to step in and when to step back. And yeah, I think it's always a challenge, but you've just got to really know the children, haven't you? I suppose.

#### **Kelly**

Welcome to this Open University Research and Practice podcast. I'm Kelly Ashley, a lecturer in Reading for Pleasure at the OU. The Reading for Pleasure team at the Open University are keen to support teachers and other practitioners as they develop their knowledge and understanding of the power of reading for pleasure as this is a matter of social justice. When we use the phrase 'reading for pleasure', we're talking about children who not only can read, but those who choose to do so.

Volition and agency are at the heart of RfP practice, and this was central to the findings of the Teachers as Readers research from 2014, led by Professor Teresa Cremin of the OU. We know from the Teachers

as Readers research that the starting point for building RfP practice is to develop our own knowledge of children's literature and other texts.

At the same time, we can build our knowledge of children's reading practices. Who are they as readers, and what do we need to find out? Once we strengthen this knowledge, we're in a better position to select the most appropriate pedagogies to foster reading for pleasure, reading aloud informal book, talk inside text talk and recommendations, social reading environments, and of course, the focus of today's podcast... independent reading.

Really, reading, is it ever truly independent? When we read, we draw on our prior knowledge, experiences and also our reading lives. We bring these into each reading experience. When I take my sons to the local library, for instance, they look for authors they've read before, they're influenced by recommendations from me and their peers and also the books that they've read already.

This raft of experiences comes with each of us as we choose to read. We don't read in a void that lacks influence. So today we're going to explore some of the challenges that schools face with regard to independent reading, thinking about how we support choice and engagement, and how we truly invite readers into our network, which is our reading community.

So I would like to welcome our three panelists today who've joined us from across the UK, from Yorkshire to Nottingham and London. We have Amy Greatrex. She's an early years and Key Stage One teacher and phase leader who's been leading reading for pleasure in her Nottingham Primary School for the last three years. We also have Lou Rayner now Lou in a Key Stage Two teacher and English lead of a small primary school in North Yorkshire. You may have seen her reading newsletter resources for parents on social media. And finally, I'd like to welcome Lucas Maxwell, a secondary librarian from Glenthorne High School in South London. He set up his own book award with students in his local school, entitled The Bookling Award.

Our first question is about book choice. So, Lucas, I'm going to come to you. Now, Lucas, as our resident librarian today, I'm sure that you'll see many trends, specifically in your secondary school library in terms of what the students are choosing to read, what's most popular at the moment for our older readers?

### **Lucas**

In my opinion, our older readers are looking at murder mysteries. They're really enjoying the Karen McManus series I think because it's on TV now as well - One of us is Lying. They cannot get enough of it for sure. And even with older students, our Manga is still very popular as well, all the way up through to sixth form.

So Manga comic books, but not, I wouldn't say traditional comic books like Marvel or DC. Comic books that deal with real life issues are extremely popular, along with the murder mysteries, one hundred percent. I can spend a huge amount of time with the students helping them to steer them in the direction of the books that they want to read or that they didn't realize that even existed. Which is a lot of fun for me to put books in their hands.

### **Lou**

It's knowing when to step in and when to step back. And it's always a challenge. But you've just got to really know the children, haven't you I suppose?

### **Kelly**

We know from research that there is a fiction effect. So it's not just children who can read or choose to read, but in particular children who read fiction can have a really positive impact on children and academically and socially and otherwise. So it's great to hear how you're extending those choices, but also in that comfortable space by knowing our readers and knowing who they are.

We're driven by their interests, but also trying to extend and get them to think about other ideas within that genre. Because at the end of the day, by tapping into those interests, we're really going to extend their readership as well.

### **Amy**

It really made me think, Lucas, that for me as a reader, a massive part of my reading identity is actually researching books, finding them, going into the bookshops and exploring them, looking at, you know, books that are trending, like you said.

And actually, that's almost as big a part of reading for me as actually reading the book itself. It's a big part of it, but maybe that's just my identity and other people find books very quickly and you can just pick maybe one up in a supermarket because it's so readily available now. But for me, it's almost, it's part of the pleasure of it.

I love researching them, love having my 'to be read' pile, which just expands. So that's a great thing to talk to the children about as well. Isn't it? Like how you're choosing the books?

### **Kelly**

Absolutely. Now, we had a little bit of insight into your reader identity there, Amy. And for this second question, I'm going to stay with you now. As an early years and Key Stage One teacher, you'll always be thinking about who the readers are in your classroom, what they like, what they don't like.

But another thing to consider is the places and spaces where they choose to read independently. So how do you organize this time and space into your day in early years in Key Stage One - space for independent reading?

### **Amy**

I suppose the main thing that we do for Reading for Pleasure to be independent is our continuous provision. We call it challenge time, but it's got various names across the country like learning through play and free flow.

So that's a dedicated time when the children get to choose their learning and how they want to play essentially. So we have lots of physical areas set up with books and various other things. So we like to flood the environment with texts that are going to tempt the children. We do have inside a dedicated book corner with lots of topic books, but within that it might have puppets as well.

We've got a construction area where we might have, you know, some books about architecture out. We change the provision all of the time, but also inside we're also developing having a separate kind of reading pleasure box of those favourites that the children love, that they always want to go to throughout the year, whatever our curriculum or topic might be. Outside, it's just as important in early years and the environment really is that third teacher and what we like to do is, we do have a literacy shed which has lots of books.

They like to open that up, put the books out on blankets and cushions, and then the children in that provision time they have access to that. They might choose to go to the books, they might choose not to go to the books. And I suppose, you know, as an advocate of Reading for Pleasure, I would argue

that both is fine, but we do obviously want to encourage them as much as possible to read for pleasure and to get joy in that. So, often, as the adult in that situation, you might go into the book corner to read to them.

Sometimes you can be really purposeful with the books and kind of highlight, oh this is new book out today, isn't that exciting? And they'll flood to it. Sometimes you can be like a little elf and leave the books somewhere for them to find next to the Play-Doh. So it can be quite a magical thing. Outside the children are really transporting the books, so they're using them, they're accessing, they want them, but they're very fluid with them.

They're very active. And that is a massive shift for me as a teacher of what I'm seeing with that. They then have access to a book blanket club, essentially where they can sit with lots of blankets and cushions and their friends and they can choose some reading for pleasure books from a selection. And then we also have dedicated storytimes every day.

And obviously because I'm very passionate about reading for pleasure and stories, I generally have lots of books on my chair that when we have moments throughout the day, I will share it with them. So it's very much kind of drip-fed through the day and there's lots of opportunities.

### **Kelly**

There's so much there to pick up on. Things I've heard are, the importance of the teacher's role. So thinking about noticing, as you've mentioned, also using reading aloud and recommendations to invite them in to these spaces, but also that's learner led. So checking the list, is it learner led, is it informal, is it social, and are there texts that tempt?

Lou, in key stage two, what's different? What's the same in terms of the places and spaces for reading for pleasure?

### **Lou**

In my school, we're quite a small school, so physical space is a problem. We don't really have a library. We have a corridor with some books on for the children to access. But other than that, we are in the classrooms and at desks. So that is quite different I suppose, and it is quite tricky in your busy timetable.

I'm teaching year five and six this year for the first time in a long time, and it's just trying to make it routine. I think that is the biggest key is when we come in in the morning, that is our time and the kids always have their books out. We've got reading diaries. I made the reading diaries myself because I was just not happy with the ones that were available.

So I was thinking, you know I really want to encourage the children to show they're reading for pleasure. And the reading diary formats that were out there just weren't what we wanted our school. So having those out all of the time and encouraging the children to note down what it was that they really enjoyed, not necessarily a text, but what it was about a particular book that they enjoyed.

So it's just giving them that time and that space really. We're trying to get some reading suitcases set up. So I've got, I think it's, three massive suitcases just from Facebook Marketplace and we're getting some high quality books together. My reading ambassadors are helping me with that at the moment.

So choosing which books are going to go in there and then each class is going to have their own suitcase outside so that they can really freely choose at playtime as well, especially if for Key Stage Two when there isn't the same sort of level of opportunity like Amy was talking about, actually incredible, you know, chances, and I love that phrase of flooding, you know, your provision with it. It's just trying to find those little moments. But definitely at least every morning, you know, trying to make that timetable work, really, I suppose.

### **Kelly**

And I think, as you've said, using things like suitcases, I think when we spoke previously, you were talking about having a poetry suitcase and other themes and it's great to hear that your reading ambassadors are getting involved in that. So it's thinking about what space do we have, what's going to work for us and how can we adapt?

Can we bring those spaces out in playtime, inside and outside, bringing the reading to them? And I think that challenge of that busy timetable is also really reflected in the new Reading Teacher's book, which just came out in 2022. There's a chapter by Jo Tregenza, Phoebe Lawton and Sadie Phillips, titled Time to Read, and they reflect a lot of these sentiments about finding and planning places and spaces for independent reading.

So it could be reading on the playground or setting up book clubs or they call them 'early morning wake up and read' clubs. These are some suggestions that they offer. They also reinforce the importance of making regular time for reading in our timetables, as you've just reflected there, Lou. If you'd like to find out more ways to actually build-in these places in spaces, I'd encourage you to have a look at our independent reading classroom strategies documents which are available in the independent reading section in the ourfp.org website.

So, Lucas, I'm going to come back to you now for our third and final question today. In what you've seen, is their reading mostly social, is it solitary or is there a bit of mixture of both? So we would call it 'me time' or 'we time.' What do you find?

### **Lucas**

I would say it's definitely a mixture of both. So the library's open pretty early in the morning. And what I'm seeing is that they are coming in with their friends in the morning. And one thing that has happened is that someone very kindly donated a beanbag chair that creates this really nice atmosphere of friends kind of sitting around reading the comics.

So I put it by the comics section. It is a big mixture of reading together socially during before school break, lunch and after school, but also more solitary during library lessons.

### **Kelly**

Amy, what do you find? Do you see that they tend to be more social, solitary, or both?

### **Amy**

That's a really hard one to answer because it depends on the individual child, doesn't it? But I think generally, I think it's really rare in early years that it's just 'me time,' that it is just solitary, because I think even when it starts like that, you will often notice they're desperate to talk and to share something that they might have seen in the book.

It might be something funny or a picture or a question that they have or that they want you to read it. But I think even when I notice children that are enjoying books by themselves, it very quickly turns into them going to show a friend or coming to show me. They're learning how to be readers and they're kind of vocalizing that and working out their reading identity.

So it is a pleasure to see and to, to teach that.

### **Kelly**

I think that combination of making sure we're giving them different reading material as well, and it depends on what the reading material is that makes it social or solitary. So a lot of our new nonfiction books, so for example, the Big Book of the Blue or The Big Book of Birds by Yuval Zommer, these books really crave social environments.

We want to sit around, we want to talk, we want to invite discussion in comics and magazines and Manga and graphic novels will be the same. But there will also be some children who like that solitary time. So we want to make sure that our reading spaces and places cater for the needs of all of our learners.

I'm afraid we've actually run out of time for today, so I'd like to thank our panelists who've shared so many wonderful ideas to consider from their own experiences.

I think the key thing that shone through today for me is knowing our readers and finding ways to develop autonomy and agency. And these are things that we want them to carry with them, to put in their reading rucksack as they move through life. As we mentioned at the start, this is actually a matter of social justice. If we can start these practices at school, we can work to ensure that this will carry on in the home and how they read in their daily lives.

Our role is to gently nudge them into these spaces, and perhaps the way that we support this reading at home would be a good idea for another podcast.

So to finish, I want to leave you with another quote from the Reading Teachers Book 2022 regarding independent reading. 'The challenge is to avoid independent reading time becoming a chore focused on everyone or routine that is void of authentic reader engagement.'

So we want to think carefully about how we help our readers to choose their reading material, whether that be a magazine, a graphic novel, a nonfiction book, or a fiction or picture fiction. We also want to think carefully about the spaces and places where they choose to read and then how we can nurture them and invite them into these spaces.

We hope you've enjoyed this Open University Research and Practice podcast with me, Kelly Ashley and our fantastic panelists, Amy Greatrex, Lou Rayner and Lucas Maxwell.

Do keep an ear out for new research and practice podcasts which will be released soon by the OU team.

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Thanks so much everyone.