

We Are Readers

Putting Reading for Pleasure at the heart of practice in rural County Antrim



By Laura Brown @learningtrail12

Context

- We are a small, rural school in Country Antrim, Northern Ireland.
- This year, a key part of our school development plan sought to focus on Reading for Pleasure (RfP) pedagogy and practice.



OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

The Teachers as Readers research (Cremin et al. 2014) found that in order to foster RfP effectively, teachers need to develop:

- a) *A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes:*
 - *Social reading environments*
 - *Reading aloud*
 - *Independent reading*
 - *Informal book talk, inside-text talk and recommendations*
- b) *Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.*

Initially, an audit was conducted to draw out the main aims of the development plan. Surveys were carried out with staff, children and parents alongside professional discussion. We found that:

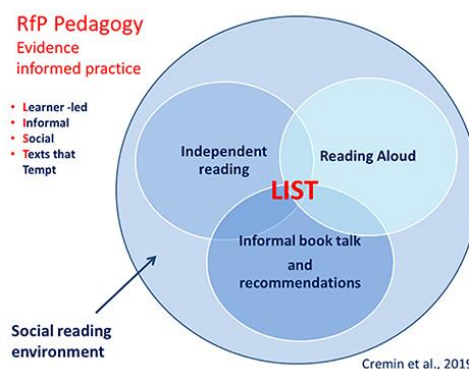
- While many of our children claim to enjoy reading, for some this did not transfer to a lot of time spent reading overall.
- There was evidence of a need to broaden exposure to a greater range of reading material, authors and genres.
- Staff surveys and discussion pointed to a need to focus on RFP pedagogy and strategies to expand knowledge on children's literature.
- Parent surveys showed an interest in helping to support children's interest in reading.

"[I want to know] how to get a book in her hands." – Parent survey comment

As noted in the TARS research, reading is not simply a solitary pastime - it is a social practice, that is nurtured and enhanced by reciprocity and interaction. Books can be enjoyed, shared and celebrated with others- chatting, reflecting on and sharing in the reading experience. Thus, this project sought to use the power of the reading community to further develop engagement with reading.

We also wanted to showcase the adults in the school community as recreational readers and make this visible to the children (Merga, 2016).

To support all of this, a focus on pedagogy was necessary to make sure that we, as a school, were considering aspects of our role in facilitating and scaffolding Reading for Pleasure. We agreed that RfP would be characterised by pupil volition, choice and free will (Powell, 2014).



Aims

- Bring awareness and understanding of RfP to the whole school community, including pupils, staff and parents.
- Increase book chat, book sharing and making recommendations across all key stages.
- Develop exposure to a wide range of quality reading material.

Outline

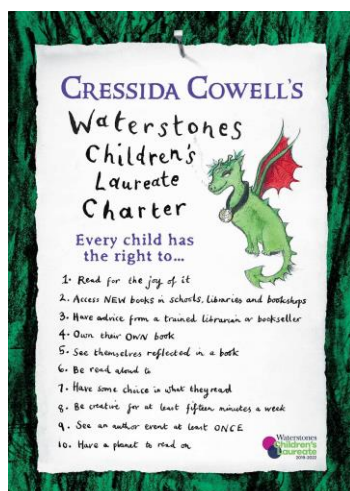
Building a model for RFP in our school...

At the beginning of the year, staff meetings were held to discuss the different strands of RFP pedagogy, to highlight the importance of reading aloud and independent reading time.

Reading aloud in many instances is used to explore a novel with associated literacy/curricular tasks. While beneficial and important, this practice is focused on literacy skills and objectives. Using rich and engaging literature in lessons can certainly involve taking pleasure *in* reading, but it was agreed that reading aloud should also exist outside formal lesson time, *for* pleasure. We developed a model that maximised exposure to quality texts throughout the school day, both formal and informal, recognising the importance of RfP as a distinct focus in its own right.

The plan...

Involving taking pleasure in reading	Promoting <u>reading for pleasure</u>
<p><i>Engaging, rich book-based literacy curriculum</i></p> <p>Each literacy unit taught uses quality texts to teach reading and writing objectives.</p> <p><i>KS2 whole class guided reading</i></p> <p>Using high quality whole texts to support pupil reading development</p>	<p><i>Standalone class RfP read aloud</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher selects options, taking account of class interests and experiences. -Pupils are involved in voting for selection. -Focus is on listening, enjoying and discussing the book. <p><i>Daily independent reading time of self-selected books/texts</i></p> <p><i>Creating social opportunities for informal book chat, book sharing and making recommendations</i></p> <p><i>Fortnightly mobile library van visits</i></p> <p><i>Promotion of the 'Rights of the Reader', using these principles to inform ethos around reading</i></p>
<p><u>Impact</u></p> <p>As a result of professional dialogue on RfP, staff have become more attuned to what it means to support it and have more understanding of what RfP is <i>not</i>. It will be important to continue to discuss and explore these ideas over time.</p>	



Independent Reading Time

In terms of independent reading time, it was acknowledged that some children who experience challenge and effort in reading, find it more difficult to engage in 'silent reading'. Moreover, pupils who can read but otherwise are disengaged from reading often seem to lack focus during sessions that demand they sit quietly at their table with a book. To address this:

- Children have access to large floor cushions and can choose where to sit in the room.
- Children are allowed (and encouraged) to read to/with a friend.
- Children are able to chat quietly about books.
- Children are allowed to read any kind of text that they choose, including digital texts/audio.



Impact- This model of 'comfy reading time' has been more inclusive to all reading abilities and has helped to **facilitate conversation around books**. During this time, it is possible for the adult to **model book chat/recommendations and to scaffold conversations** popping up around the room. Some children who previously appeared to lack focus during the silent reading model, appeared more relaxed, often chatting over non-fiction with a friend.

"I like it because it gives us time to read. It is good to have a choice to read with someone else." – P5 child

"It is good to get comfy." – P5 child

"[Because I'm more comfortable] I'm more relaxed and I feel like I'm in the stories. I can take a break from work and I'm in my happy place." – P5 child

Outdoor Social Reading Area

It was noticed that during independent reading time in class, many pupils enjoyed reading to/with each other, looking at books together and chatting about books. We wanted to extend opportunities for this kind of social book chat beyond the classroom, for the benefit of all pupils. We felt that an outdoor reading area in the playground would be a way to encourage this, offering a safe, comfortable and sheltered area to share books and read during break and lunch times.

I met with the children to gather their ideas (cushions, beanbags, new books, carpet etc.) and small groups took turns to paint sections of the walls.



The PTA were involved in funding the new resources and we were able to share the finished area with families during a PTA coffee morning. Some very little brothers and sisters enjoyed browsing our selection of books!



Impact-

- There was great excitement about the new area and having the children directly involved in setting it up was intended to give them a sense of ownership over the space and project.
- Children who need a break from the busy playground environment have a more relaxed, comfortable place to go.

"I really like it because it's comfortable and I get to read in peace." – P6 child



The library van

Each fortnight we are visited by the Libraries NI mobile library service. This is an invaluable resource as our school has only a small classroom library stock and no central library. The library visits mean our children have access to a wide variety of texts, including recent releases. When browsing, some children were observed to lack direction in their choices and to pick out books on a whim, often returning to the same types of text, genre and author. To maximise their experience, we gave time for KS2 children to use the internet



to research books they might like to try and to build 'wish lists'. They were then able to make requests with the librarian. This increased the buzz around library time, the anticipation and excitement around visiting the library and meant the children were more often walking away with something they could engage with. It also was a great opportunity to scaffold book choice and to talk with children about how to find appealing texts, for example:

- Discussing preferred genres
- Looking for other books by authors they have previously enjoyed
- Looking at book award lists
- Checking out new releases online
- Talking with friends about recommendations.



Impact

- It is not unusual to see a pupil at the library desk requesting the book that another pupil has just returned, as they have recommended it.
- Pupils are selecting a greater range of books.

"A child in my class who was a bit switched off from reading, seemed to be bogged down by novels. We discovered that she prefers graphic novel style books that are less text heavy. She seemed to have a sense of pride in finishing these books." – Class teacher

"There's loads of books that I haven't read yet and we can order books." – P6 child

"Library van is good because you get to see different books and sometimes the ones in school you have already read or don't like. You always have different choices on the van." – P7 child

Developing exposure to a range of reading material

To build on this work, in an attempt to further diversify children's exposure to a range of reading material, a book tasting was organised for World Book Day 2022. Book choices for each key stage were considered in order to offer a range of genres.

P5 also responded very positively to an attempt at reading a poem a day. Although we must admit that on occasion we didn't get to it, we made up for that with several multi-poem sharing sessions. We, as a class, certainly believe that there's (nearly) always time for a quick poem!



Share a Story Fridays



On a Friday afternoon, a pupil from P6/7 goes to read to the Foundation Stage/KS1 pupils. The older children select a picture book they would like to share. In this role, the older children are acting as 'reading ambassadors', promoting RfP to our youngest pupils while mutually benefiting from the joy of sharing a story. This also encouraged the older children to engage again with picture books, that they may have otherwise overlooked, having long 'moved on' to novels.

Impact

"The little ones listen and they enjoy it. It's really fun because I like reading to people. I had never read to anybody else before." – P6 child

"I would have loved to have those [picture] books when I was younger. I would have read them a lot." – P6 child

"I really like it because you get to interact with the younger ones and see them smiling. We were reading books that I would have liked when I was younger." – P7 child

We love this book!

In order to model and promote recommending books, we included a 'book of the week' feature in the school news bulletin. Initially, this was selected and reviewed by me, but after a while, I invited the children to volunteer recommendations each week. This became the 'We love this book!' feature, and children were invited up in Friday assembly to 'big up' their book.



Impact

The children are very keen to share books that they have been enjoying.

"I like recommending books to my friends because then they can experience it too and get the exact same happy feeling as you." – P5 child

Reading Newsletter

To build further on this idea, we launched a reading newsletter for distribution each half term. It was intended that the newsletter would include a variety of reading-related features to bring book chat to the fore amongst staff, pupils and families at home. The newsletter features:

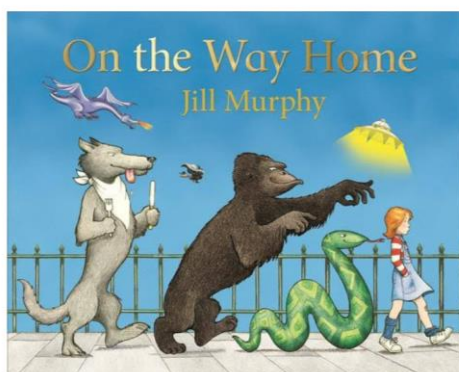
- Book recommendations from pupils
- Staff and parent interviews on reading lives
- Updates on book awards/shortlists/recent releases
- Information on local libraries



-Reading news from the half term

Parent Spotlight

KATIE (TED'S MUM)



My favourite book from childhood:

On the Way Home by Jill Murphy (I bought this for my boys and loved it just as much 30 years later).

I like to read:

I love murder mysteries with a forensic science theme particularly Patricia Cornwell. I also love reading any type of gardening magazine and regularly buy one of each type on the magazine stand- don't tell my husband!

My favourite place to read:

In the swing chair in the garden first thing on a summer's morning before anyone gets out of bed!

The best thing about reading is:

It helps me escape the real world, relax and wind down at the end of each day.

Impact

"It's good because it shows you lots of different books you could read if you haven't read them already." – P6 child

"I really like because it is something different. It is fun to read and see what other people think of books. I can see if there is any other books that I might like to read." – P7 child

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The focus on RfP this year has allowed us, as a school, to reflect on and consider our reading ethos. We strongly value quality reading provision, that helps children to develop as proficient readers. However, we also recognise the value and importance of how children feel about reading and want to make sure we are considering how our practice impacts on their view of reading and of themselves as a reader.

"It has become clear to me that in order to support children to read for pleasure, we need to allow time for this to happen within the school day. We have to invest time, we have to invest money and we have to invest patience. There is no quick fix to developing a love for reading. The plan needs to be responsive to the children - it is imperative to keep up to date with children's literature, children's opinions...a child's love for reading can wane in a matter of weeks if you don't keep them stimulated with the relevant reading materials that match the pace of their ever-evolving interests and maturity."

-Principal

We are, by no means, done on our reading for pleasure journey. I feel that we have only scratched the surface. As noted by Theresa Cremin in her 2016 blog, 'Reading for Pleasure: Just Window Dressing?', it is very easy to simply 'perform' reading for pleasure. But to effectively and consistently support individual children in their reading lives is an ongoing task, and a challenging one at that.

Some ideas currently bubbling for potential next steps include:

- A focus on further developing staff knowledge on literature.
- Expanding our range of texts available in the outdoor reading area to include magazines and comics.
- Better supporting children as readers at home.
- Working in partnerships with other schools.



References

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Powell (2014) 'Influencing children's attitudes, motivation and achievement', in Cremin, T, Mottram, M, Powell, S, Collins, R and Safford, K (eds.) *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for Pleasure*, London and NY: Routledge, pp:128-146