



Reading in Our Way

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Highly Commended
The Harper Collins Reading for Pleasure Award
 In partnership with the OU and UKLA 2025
Early Career Teacher Category

Context

This project was developed during my final teaching placement in a Reception class at a two-form entry primary school in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The class included 30 children aged 4–5, representing a diverse range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including pupils with SEND and EAL. The school is committed to nurturing a strong reading culture, as outlined in its development plan, which emphasises early reading and developing a love for books as a core priority.

Research inspiration and rationale

This work was particularly inspired by two of the Teachers as Readers (TaRs) findings:

- *Finding 3:* A Reading for Pleasure (RfP) pedagogy, including social reading environments, reading aloud, and informal book talk.
- *Finding 5:* Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.

Research by Cremin et al. (2014; 2024) emphasises that effective RfP pedagogy requires nurturing a love of reading through meaningful, child-centred experiences. My action research explored how to encourage children in the early years to engage with books, identify as readers, and develop intrinsic motivation to read.

Aims

- To create an environment where children feel ownership over reading.
- To develop children's identities as readers by enabling them to share preferences, favourites, and recommendations.
- To increase informal book talk and shared reading experiences.
- To support children's volitional reading, particularly among those less confident or rarely seen choosing books.

Outline

The project was designed around creating multiple entry points for children to engage with reading in ways that felt meaningful and social. Central to this was the introduction of a **reading bear**, which became a friendly and familiar symbol to encourage children's ownership of the reading process. The bear helped make reading feel like a shared journey, inviting children to take the lead in choosing books, sharing thoughts, and reflecting on their reading experiences.

Each week, a child would bring home a **special reading bag** containing a small selection of carefully chosen picture books along with a class journal. This journal allowed children and their families to document shared

reading moments through drawings, photos, or short notes. The bag became a coveted item, as children eagerly anticipated the opportunity to share reading at home and bring stories back to class.

Within the classroom, we created an **inviting reading corner** designed to feel cozy and appealing. It featured beanbags, fairy lights, and a basket of books recommended and chosen by the children themselves, fostering a sense of belonging and ownership over the reading space. To add another interactive layer, a **book swap box** was introduced, where children could exchange books with classmates. This encouraged social interaction, negotiation, and a genuine choice in what to read next, as children discussed and exchanged their favourites.

Daily read-aloud sessions were a key element of the routine. Children were often involved in selecting which story would be read, giving them a voice in the classroom culture. These sessions not only modelled expressive reading but also sparked curiosity and excitement around books. The characters and stories shared during read-alouds inspired many children to bring in related books and even toys from home. These items were integrated into the book corner, where children used them to reenact stories or invent new narratives, strengthening their emotional connection to reading.

We intentionally used **diverse picture books** that reflected the children's varied backgrounds and experiences. This was particularly important as many children were pre-readers or emerging readers. High-quality illustrations, meaningful representation, and culturally relevant themes supported comprehension and engagement, helping all children feel seen and included.

To further strengthen children's engagement, we provided opportunities for them to **draw and make their favourite characters in class**. This creative activity enabled children to explore their responses to stories through art, deepening their personal connection to books and giving them another way to express and share their reading preferences.

Book talk evolved naturally in this environment. Informal conversations about stories, characters, and personal preferences became part of daily life. Children freely recommended books to peers, discussed characters' actions and feelings, and shared their own ideas about stories. This reciprocal sharing helped build a strong reading community grounded in respect for each child's voice.





Impact

The project had a **noticeable and positive impact on both the classroom reading culture and children's individual engagement with books.**

Children showed **increased enthusiasm for visiting the reading corner independently or with friends**. The introduction of the reading bear and the weekly reading bags generated a sense of excitement and responsibility. Even children who had previously shown limited interest in books became eager to take part in reading activities, demonstrating greater confidence in handling books and engaging in book talk.

The book swap box became a particularly popular feature. Children were observed negotiating swaps, recommending books, and sharing stories about why they enjoyed certain titles. This reciprocal exchange not only increased the range of books children accessed but also fostered social skills and the pleasure of shared reading choices.

Parents reported positive changes at home, noting that their children were eager to read and talk about books. Many families had started visiting local libraries more regularly and creating new reading routines, highlighting the project's influence beyond the classroom.

The use of toys related to read-aloud stories in the book corner supported imaginative play and reinforced children's comprehension and empathy for characters. This playful interaction helped deepen their engagement with texts in a way that was authentic and child-led.

Importantly, **the culture of informal book talk flourished**. Children began using reading language confidently, such as expressing preferences ("*This is my favourite book because...*") and making recommendations ("*You should read this one!*"). This empowered children to see themselves as active participants in a vibrant reading community, strengthening their identities as readers.

Reflections on the impact that research had on your practice

I observed my own confidence grow in facilitating informal book talk and recognising diverse reading identities. I developed new strategies to support volitional reading, particularly among less confident readers, and saw the value of creating a reading environment that prioritises choice, interaction, and joy.

Next Steps

Inspired by the success of this approach, I plan to:

- Continue using playful, informal strategies to facilitate reading engagement in future classrooms.
- Develop a "Reader of the Week" system to further celebrate children's reading identities.
- Encourage children to create their own mini-books to add to the class library.
- Share this practice with colleagues and explore how RfP strategies can be embedded school-wide.

This project reaffirmed my belief in the power of informal, relational, and playful approaches to reading. Fostering a community of readers begins with small, thoughtful steps—and with recognising that young children are already readers in their own right, with voices worth hearing and stories worth sharing.

References

Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F.M., Powell, S. and Safford, K., 2014. *Building communities of engaged readers: Reading for pleasure*. London: Routledge.

Cremin, T. and McGeown, S. (eds.), 2024. *Reading for pleasure: International perspectives*. London: Routledge.