

Read to share, love to read

Harper Collins Reading for Pleasure Awards 2025 Submission for Early Career Teacher Category

Alice Wilkinson
Manor Leas Infant School

Context

I am a year two teacher in the second year of my Early Career Teaching (ECT) years. Since the beginning of my teaching career,

I have been in year two and have taught alongside our reading co-ordinator. Manor Leas Infant School is a two-form entry infant school in Lincoln. We currently have 152 children on roll. Our percentage of children on the SEND register is 28% and 23% of our children are pupil premium children. One of our whole-school focusses has been to ensure that at least 70% of our year two cohort reach the expected standard in reading and that at least 80% of our year one pupils meet the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check. Our children are exposed to a range of high-quality texts within reading lessons however we wish to broaden our knowledge of reading for pleasure (RfP) practices and encourage a broader love for reading across the school.



Research inspiration and rationale

I have always been- and still am- a lover of books. Growing up, I could always be found exploring my school library for a new and interesting text to read. Since starting my teaching career, I have been struck by how much children enjoy reading when we read together as a class and who actively ask for me to read to them but then do not read consistently at home. When I conducted the OU's RfP survey with my class at the start of the year, I found that almost all respondents reported not reading daily outside the classroom. This pushed me towards my aim of ensuring that they were being given the opportunity to partake in daily reading for pleasure time, whether that is listening to a story or reading the books themselves/ with their peers. I wanted

this time to be protected, not only to support the RfP pedagogy within my classroom but also to contribute positively to the children's overall wellbeing.

As an ECT I am aware that teachers at the beginning of their professional career frequently have poorer subject knowledge in relation to children's literature (Cremin et al., 2024). However, I recognise that there is scope to further develop my knowledge of children's literature and that expanding this will enable me to more confidently recommend texts that align with my pupils' interests and support their engagement with reading. I therefore decided to develop my own knowledge of children's literature and other texts.

However, whilst working on my knowledge of children's literature I have also developed the overall RfP pedagogy within my classroom through my understanding of reading aloud, the children's knowledge of texts and their ability to participate in informal book talk.

Aims

- To provide the children in my classroom with a learner led, daily story time session which is informal, social and with texts that tempt their interests.
- To give the children autonomy over the books we are reading and develop their own understanding of their reading preferences.
- To develop the diversity of our class library to allow all children's preferences to be included as well as allowing my children to engage with books as both 'mirrors'—reflecting characters and situations they can relate to from their own lives—and 'windows'—offering glimpses into unfamiliar characters, places, cultures, and experiences (McNair & Edwards, 2021).

Outline

Battle of the Books!

We have established a protected daily story time to support children's enjoyment of reading and to provide smooth transitions during the school day. As part of this, children are given a choice between two texts, embedding the British Value of

democracy within our reading sessions. Following the completion of the Reading for Pleasure survey, I researched the types of books the children expressed an interest in and incorporated these into our daily story selections. This initiative sparked further enthusiasm, with children expressing a desire to bring in their own books from home to include in the daily vote and share with their peers.

Book Blanket

The children were invited to bring in their favourite books from home which we then displayed as a book blanket. Each child was encouraged to choose a book they would recommend to other children.

High-quality questioning was then used to encourage the children to reason about why they chose that particular book. This allowed us to explore a wide range of texts, genres, and authors together as a class and in turn supported the children to become more aware of their preferences as readers. Through being encouraged to share their ideas, they became much more willing to recommend books to their peers.



Impact

After completing the OU's Reading for Pleasure survey for a second time, children were able to provide more detailed responses about their favourite books. Whereas many had previously been able to name only one or two titles that they enjoyed, but they could now list several.



This development is as a direct result of me having a greater understanding of the types of books my children enjoy and providing similar titles during whole class reading sessions and in our class library.

As a school we have taken part in virtual author visits, such as sessions with authors such as Eileen Browne. Taking part in these visits has introduced the children to new authors and has given them an additional opportunity to listen to high-quality read aloud stories. For those already familiar with Browne's most well-known work, these sessions provided exposure to a wider range of her writing, further enriching their knowledge of quality children's literature.

Children are now being given significantly more time to explore the library and share texts with their peers. This has resulted in a noticeable increase in book talk within my classroom as well as in increase in mine and the children's knowledge of children's literature. As an early career teacher, I am finding myself recommending books to my class much more and have a much broader knowledge of my children as readers. Through taking part in the Teachers as Readers group I have had the opportunity to share high-quality texts with others and introduce these to my class. Participating in the Teachers as Readers group has enhanced my confidence and ability to engage in meaningful discussions about books with others. This experience has also enabled me to model and share these skills with my children, fostering a love of reading for pleasure within our classroom.

As a class we are now reading a wider selection of texts and the children are much more adventurous in their reading choosing to read poems, non-fiction texts and graphic novels during our protected class reading time. As a result of this, the children in my class have been exposed to, and are now aware of an increased variety of texts and are becoming braver in their choices of books during free reading time. I found that at the beginning of the year the children would gravitate towards the same one or two books whenever they were given the opportunity to read for pleasure. Now, they take their time to browse the shelves, select books they genuinely believe they will enjoy, and seek recommendations from their peers. This shift not only reflects their growing confidence and curiosity as readers but also highlights their development in engaging in informal book talk and expanding their knowledge of children's literature.

Reflections on the impact that research had on your practice

Undertaking this research and taking part in the Teachers as Readers groups has greatly impacted my practice and will continue to impact my practice as I continue my teaching career. Taking the time to discuss reading preferences with my children has positively influenced my understanding of children's literature and developed positive relationships in my classroom. I am now providing all of the children in my class with a protected story time each day in which we can share high-quality texts together and begin to take part in informal book talk, thus further developing the RfP pedagogy in my classroom. Additionally, taking the time to share books with my class daily has increased my knowledge of children's literature and has increased my confidence in recommending texts to my children. I will be continuing all of these practices throughout the rest of my career to allow the children I teach to develop the same love of reading that I have.

References

Cremin, T., Mukherjee, S., Bearne, E. (2025) Pre-service teachers as readers: moving beyond reading frequency as a marker of engagement. *Australian journal of Literacy* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44020-025-00085-x>

McNair, J. C., & Edwards, P. A. (2021). The lasting legacy of Rudine Sims Bishop: Mirrors, windows, sliding glass doors, and more. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 70(1), 202-212.