Book Recommendations on-line

By Ann Baker

Context

- **I work as a TA in the Reading Intervention Team** in Blackhorse Primary, a large school in Emersons Green on the outskirts of Bristol in the county of South Gloucestershire.

- My role is to work mostly 1:1 with children in the lower 20% and those in receipt of Pupil Premium in years 1 and 2.

- **Baseline data revealed that it's easy to get stuck in a reading rut** and not refresh and update book knowledge, relying on trusted authors or static collections. This applies to teachers and children alike.

- In my survey of children in KS1, about 75% of children in year 1 are read aloud to at home, reducing further in year 2.

- **The majority couldn't name two favourite books.**

OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

- Inspired by the Open University's Teachers as Readers (TaRs) findings, I chose to focus on two areas:

- A reading for pleasure pedagogy which includes informal book talk and recommendations.

- Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive.

- For most of the children I work with, reading is something I tell them to do; reading a text they have little or no choice selecting. Due to Covid restrictions free choice has been suspended in the library so there has been less opportunity to " **Develop reading networks and positive reader identities**" **(Moss & McDonald 2005**) I try to incorporate some informal book talk but I'm very much aware that it's mostly adult led.

- During lockdown closure I read stories and uploaded them to the school website where we have a '**Blackhorse Story Box**'. Currently there are **over 130 stories that have been recorded by staff** throughout the school.

- When school reopened fully there was a lot of positive feedback from children, '"*I saw you on the TV!*", or *"I've got that story too", " I watched at bedtime*."

OU Research Inspiration and Rationale

- Building on the success of this I wanted to explore how this could be developed with the aim of nurturing reciprocal and interactive reading communities as described in the Teachers as Readers research by Cremin et al 2014.

- My aim is to create a new way of sharing children's book recommendations, the TaRs research found that it was important to create " New social spaces that encourage choice and child ownership of their own reading for pleasure." Also "**Peer recommendations help pupils make meaningful choices.**"

- I was also mindful that during lockdown stronger connections were made with families, with direct contact with parents and carers via Zoom reading sessions and email. It would be lovely to maintain and extend this as "**Reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships**" (Cremin et al) Children, teachers and families sharing texts and their enjoyment of them.

Aims: A reader recommended story channel

- I hope to encourage children to recommend their favourite books or books they have enjoyed for me and other staff to read an upload onto the school website.

- The nominating child will get a 'shout out' for the recommendation along with any additional comments the child may wish to add. The school newsletter, twitter feed and display will promote it.
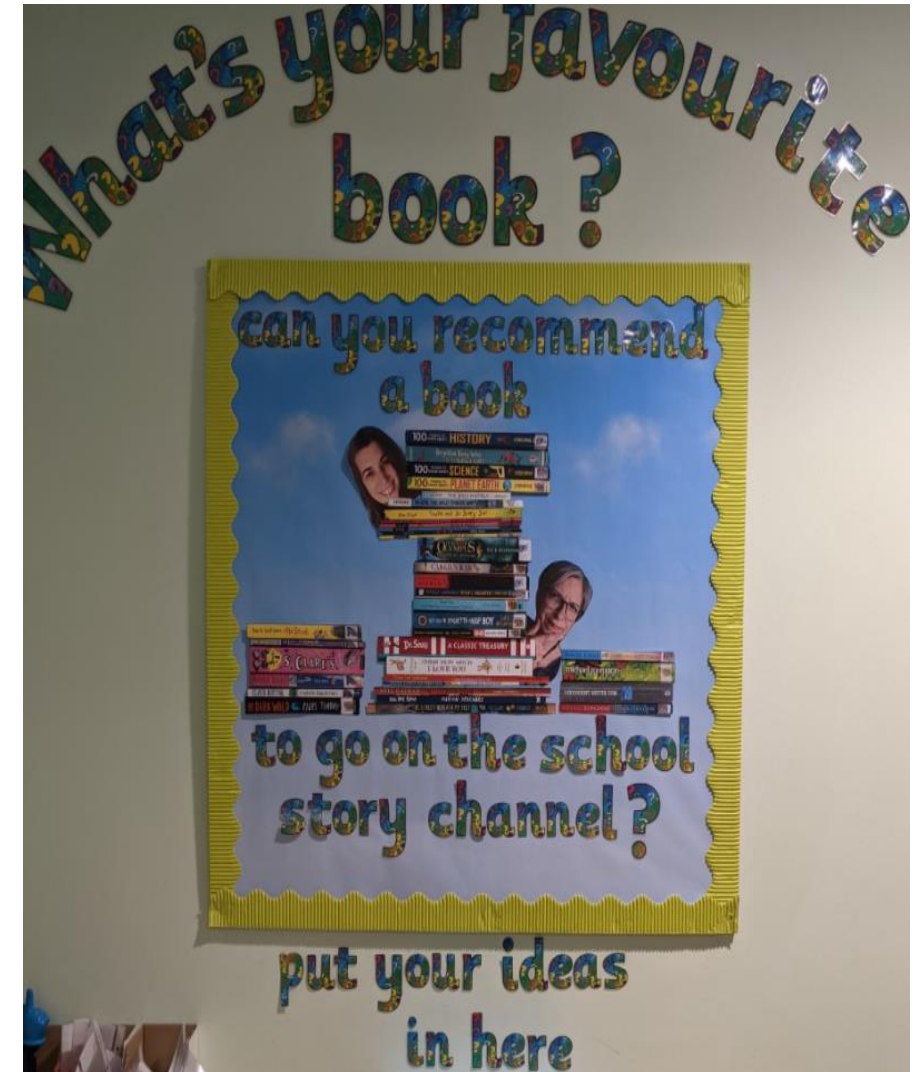
Outline I: Developing RfP

- **Book talk tends to be quite formal, embedded in the curriculum and driven by lesson or assessment objectives**.

- The idea of developing **more informal ways of talking** about texts really appeals to me. I also think it's important to empower children to have the confidence to talk about books. Whilst putting up the display I had children stop by and suggest books almost immediately.

- "**Talking about reading is intrinsically important in developing motivation to read" (Mary-Ann Wolpert**) and as the TaRs research found "The will influences the skill"

- It may be possible to extend the reading of recommended texts out to children who are happy to be recorded or to parents who may like to video themselves sharing their child's recommended reads at home. **Others from the school community, kitchen, caretakers and office staff could join in too.**

# Outline II: RfP , developing positive reader identities.

- As a baseline I carried out a KS1 children's reading survey. Children often said, "I love reading" and "I'm really good at it", but when questioned further about they often reviewed these responses. In some cases what they were doing was positioning themselves as good readers; trying to fulfil their perception of my expectation of them.

- During further discussion with some children, it was clear that reading was all about technical proficiency and not pleasure. I wondered if this was because as a reading assistant my focus is performative, bound by assessment. As Hempel-Jorgensen et al (2018) note: teacher understanding of reading can be predominantly related to reading as technical proficiency (Pedagogy for Reading for Pleasure in low SES schools) The children were simply reflecting this back to me.

Time to develop more positive reading identities!

Outline III: Positive reader identities

I hoped that my reader recommendations story channel would help foster positive reader identities by;

- Giving children the space to have meaningful reading choices and recommendations publicly celebrated.

- Less confident readers being given equal status and choice too.

- Developing more reciprocal relationships through more informal book talk as Safford (2014) illustrated; this needs to be nurtured.
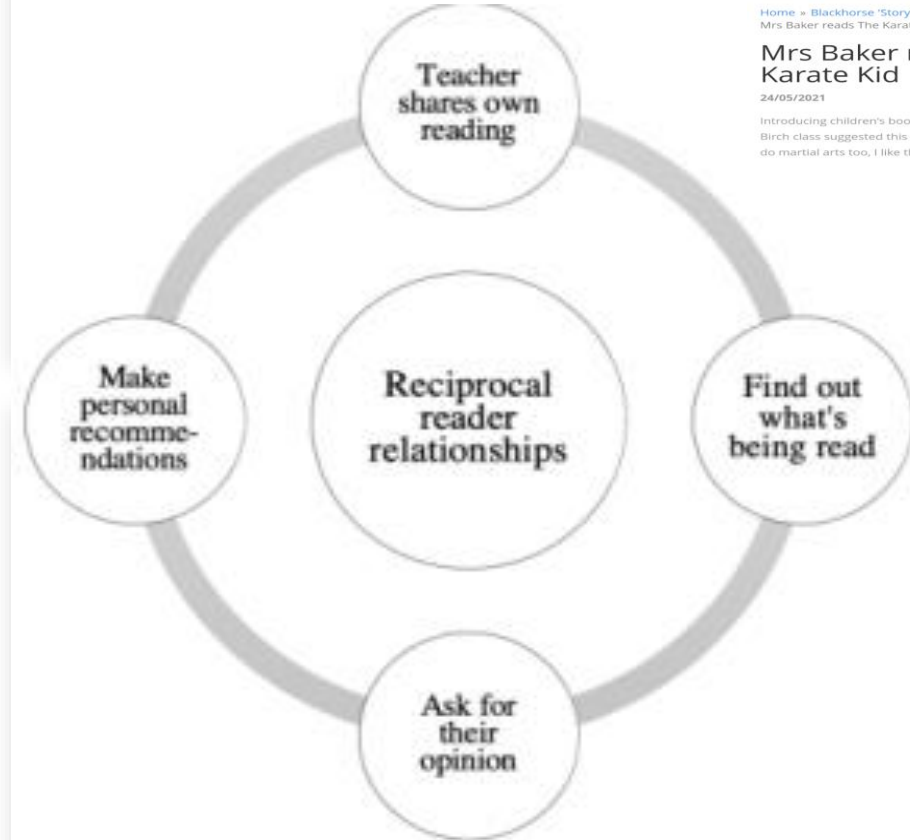
Mrs Baker reads The Karate Kid
24/05/2021
Introducing children's book recommendations, Wilfred in Birch class suggested this story. "I like this book because I do martial arts too, I like the moves!" Thanks Wilfred.

Reciprocal reader relationships
- Teacher shares own reading
- Find out what's being read
- Ask for their opinion
- Make personal recommendations

Impact and Reflection

- At the time of writing, it was a little early to assess impact,(I need to read more stories!) however the feedback from the children whose stories have been featured on the story channel was very positive. They loved the attention, especially those who I don't work directly with. One child told me that their teacher had shown their requested story to the whole class, she was thrilled.

- This very small project has given me cause to reflect on my practice and develop a much more discursive approach to encourage reader agency and independence.

- However, the most important element has been a new appreciation of what RfP means in practice, **that it is strongly influenced by relationships between children, teachers, families and communities.**

Reading Instruction is oriented towards:	Reading for Pleasure is oriented towards:
Learning to read	Choosing to read
The skill	The will
Decoding and comprehension	Engagement and response
System readers	Lifelong readers
Teacher direction	Child direction
Teacher ownership	Child ownership
Attainment	Achievement
The minimum entitlement (A Level 4)	The maximum entitlement (A reader for life)
The Standards Agenda	The ECM and Personalisation Agendas

Figure I. Distinctions between reading instruction and reading for pleasure

The table drawn by Cremin et al in (2008) is particularly useful to summarise the RfP approach.