

Developing a shared space for reading for pleasure

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Whole School Award



Context

Ash Grove Academy is a single-form entry school that caters for children aged 3-11 years of age. We currently have 240 children on roll. We serve a deprived area of Macclesfield where children live over a mile and a half away from the local library and public transport costs are high.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

‘Social reading environments were seen to be key to creating richly reciprocal reading communities in the Teachers as Readers research. Physically engaging, the most successful environments tempted children into texts and offered spaces to relax, browse, and read for pleasure’. (Cremin et al, 2014)

Staff at Ash Grove have always been passionate about reading and sharing their love of reading for pleasure with the children. All classes have their own reading corners where children can access good quality texts and we had a small library in the corridor, outside the staffroom. Recently, the school has undergone a transformation with a new build which has opened up more space around school. This has enabled us to create a brand new shared space for reading for pleasure. As a result, we now have a much bigger and brighter space for reading, not only that but we have new seating areas for children to read socially and comfortably.

We wanted to offer a wider range of reading choices to children to reflect the variation of their reading choices and to appeal to more readers. As a staff, we sorted through the hundreds of books that were in the ‘old’ library space and shared some of the surplus texts with the wider community which was greatly appreciated. We were fortunate that we had a budget for new books and library resources raised through the PTA which enabled us to make the library a more inviting space.

Last academic year we took part in the Siobhan Dowd competition and received £200 for the work we had done on promoting a love of reading. As a result, we were able to take 2 children from each year group to a local, independent book shop to choose brand new books for their library, thus having an ownership of the books they have access to in the library.

Aims

We wanted to:

- Provide children access to high quality texts.
- Set up a lending library for the children as the closest library to the estate is 2 miles away.
- Provide a communication friendly space where children can socialise and share a love of books.

- Further emphasise the importance of reading for pleasure.
- Widen the children's reading repertoire.
- Create a community of readers through displays of children, teachers, teaching assistants school staff and parents.

Outline

Before the library was set up:



Our new library now:



"A reading area announces to pupils, without the teacher having to say anything about it, that in this classroom, this school, this community, reading is understood to be an essential occupation."

"...because setting can change a set of mind, swaying it for or against an activity, it is important to consider how each feature of the reading environment may affect the set of people it is meant to support."

The Reading Environment by Aidan Chambers (1991)

Over the summer, there was a lot of building work at school which enabled us to open up a space for our new library. We sorted through all of the books in the old library, getting rid of dated books that children were not reading and giving away a huge amount of books to families at school. We did this by displaying the books on the picnic benches at home time over a number of days. We were so pleased when all of the books put out on display were taken by families who may otherwise have a limited number of books/texts at home.

We purchased new furniture for the library, making it an inviting space to socialise in and share a love of reading. We sorted the books into fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Many books have been organised into author collections and children have found this incredibly useful when browsing as they are able to access their favourite authors instantly. We have also dedicated a whole shelving unit to specific year groups with high quality texts pitched to the right age group. Each half term, we have a new author focus and have plans in place for a peer recommendations display.

Impact

Each class has their own library slot where children choose books for pleasure to take home, on loan. There has been a huge increase in the number of children taking books home and wanting to read for pleasure, from children in Reception through to Year 6. Teachers have been saying how much their classes have loved visiting the school library and are always eager to change their books.

We offer a lunch time library club where children from each year group can attend the library and read for pleasure. We are hoping that peer recommendations will follow from this. There is usually a waiting list for lunch time library slots which is just fantastic.

Children are talking about their reading a lot more and are enthusiastic about changing their library books. One child in particular, in Year 6, who never enjoyed reading and would usually stare at a book rather than actually read it is now more engaged with reading, choosing to visit the library and selecting books that she wants to read.

Children are browsing more and engaging in informal book talk. Teachers report that they enjoy spending time in the library with the children, joining in with their book talk and having stories read to them. Just the other day, the Year 4 teacher was a captive audience for a couple of children reading and acting out the story 'They All Saw A Cat' by Brendan Wenzel.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The TaRs research has influenced our practice through demonstrating how much of an impact social reading environments have on promoting a love of reading. Since completing our new library, we have more children engaging in reciprocal reading interactions and children who were otherwise not bothered about reading are now choosing to physically engage with the reading environment, browsing and

recommending books to each other.

Our next steps are to get children to recommend texts to their friends and peers around school. To engage other children in book talk and sustain the 'buzz' that we have created. We want the whole school community, from midday assistants to office staff, to demonstrate that they are readers too, through book talk and displays.

Our long term aim is to engage the wider community, setting up a 'parent shelf' so that parents can come in and borrow books too.