

## Student Teachers as Readers: The ITE responsibility



This blog is the third in a series arising from Student Teachers as Readers (STaRs) pilot research into student teachers' experiences as readers and their views about supporting children as readers. In the [first blog](#), Helen Hendry focused upon reading identity and asked us to consider what type of reader we are on a continuum from enthusiastic readers to detached readers.

In the [second blog](#), Anna Harrison explored the significance of childhood memories of reading and how those memories may influence how reading is taught in the classroom.

In this, the final blog in the series from the pilot study, I am exploring the notion of student teachers' expectations of reading for pleasure as they start their teacher education course.



Do you need to read for pleasure yourself to encourage children's own reading for pleasure?

This question has always interested me as a class teacher and now as a researcher. Reading for pleasure (RfP) has been defined by the National Literacy Trust as 'reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that, having begun at someone else's request, we continue because we are interested in it' (Clark and Rumbold, 2006: 5). In addition, Cremin et al., (2014) note that reading for pleasure could be solitary, social and/or interactive but at its core the reader's own volition, agency and desire to read is paramount. From research, we know that teachers who have a comprehensive knowledge of children's literature through their own reading become authentic models for reading for pleasure in the classroom where they can motivate, tempt, suggest and recommend texts as part of a community of readers within the class (Cremin et al., 2014).

However, to what extent do student teachers, in their first few weeks of their teacher education course consider the relevance of the link between their own reading habits and themselves as teachers of reading and what is their current level of knowledge of children's literature? We know that there are links between our own reading practices as teachers and that these can impact on children's reading for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2014), but to what extent does this resonate with student teachers? Our own survey reported that overwhelmingly student teachers agreed that a teacher would be better placed to encourage children's reading for pleasure if they enjoyed reading themselves. One participant wrote that:



***“I think children will be astute to whether my actions in the classroom are genuine or not, for example passion and enjoyment of reading and this will 'rub off' on them.”***

Another participant noted that:

***“Children are very perceptive; they notice if a teacher is teaching with enthusiasm or as a robot because it's in the curriculum!”***



It was clear from the initial responses that student teachers recognised and knew the importance of being a teacher who was authentic in their own reading for pleasure and understood how that would reflect through their own classroom practice. However, we wanted to explore whether this notion was dependent on the degree to which the student teachers already read for pleasure.

Through the survey we analysed the responses and categorised the students, in order for us to understand their behaviour (Applegate et al. 2014; Rimensberger 2014), under the following headings, identifying them as:

- Frequent Readers - reported reading for pleasure several times a week or daily
- Readers - reported reading for pleasure several times a month or weekly
- Rarely Readers - reported reading for pleasure rarely or monthly
- Non Readers - reported never reading for pleasure

The majority of responses from the students gave a strong indication that they felt that their own reading for pleasure was crucial to foster RfP in the classroom. In addition, our analysis of the survey data showed that there is little disparity between the knowledge of children's literature held by the frequent readers when compared to the rarely readers, with both groups naming a similar number of responses to the question, *'please list up to 6 children's authors/illustrators/ poets whose work children are likely to enjoy'*.



Category of reader	Numbers of authors, picturebook makers/illustrators, poets named					
	6	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Frequent readers</b>	23% (45)	21.5% (42)	20% (39)	18% (35)	16.5% (32)	13% (25)
<b>Readers</b>	20.5% (40)	20.5% (40)	20% (39)	17% (33)	12% (23)	10% (19)
<b>Rarely Readers</b>	23.5% (46)	23% (45)	21.5% (42)	18% (35)	12% (23)	8% (16)

Exploring the data in more detail enabled us to highlight the top 5 authors in each reading category. This shows that the rarely readers rely more on what Cremin et al. (2008) coined as the canon of celebrity authors and furthers the claim that [our profession may be Dahl dependent](#).

	<b>Roald Dahl</b>	<b>David Walliams</b>	<b>Jacqueline Wilson</b>	<b>Michael Morpurgo</b>	<b>JR Rowling</b>
<b>Frequent Readers</b>	26	18	10	15	9
<b>Readers</b>	23	13	17	7	10
<b>Rarely Readers</b>	30	20	18	14	15
<b>Totals</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>34</b>

The pilot study data indicates that although pre-service student teachers recognise the importance that their own reading for pleasure plays in their teaching of reading, they draw on a narrow range of authors, picturebook makers and poets which is similar to the findings for the Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research by Cremin et al (2008; 2014). The implication for teacher educators is that

unless student teachers' knowledge is enriched, it is likely that there will be little expansion of the range of texts student teachers share with the children they teach. The desire of the student teachers is clear, the understanding of the relevance, importance and impact of their own RfP is evident, but they need the knowledge, guidance and modelling from their teacher educators and from classroom teachers with whom they work in order to be able to know, appreciate and be confident with a diverse range of contemporary children's literature.

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## References

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