



Highly Commended
Egmont Reading for Pleasure Award
In partnership with the OU and UKLA 2020
Early Career Teacher Category



Nurturing Reading for Pleasure

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Context

I am currently in my second year of teaching in year four, at The Wilmslow Academy, in Cheshire. The Wilmslow Academy is a two-form entry school with a mixed demographic of children aged four to eleven. This academic year, I have been given responsibility for leading reading for pleasure (RfP) within school and the main aim is to engage all children in reading, providing them with the tools to read for pleasure. Prior to teaching, I trained as a dancer and completed my degree in Dance Practices. However, reading has always been a passion of mine throughout my life and I enjoy sharing my enthusiasm of books with others. During my initial teacher training, I attended the UKLA/OU RfP conference at Ash Grove Primary Academy and this inspired me to ensure that children not only develop the taught skill of reading, but the passion and enthusiasm to read simply for pleasure. The conference resonated with me and I could not wait to begin to put RfP into my practice and foster a love of reading in all.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

I have attended three RfP Conferences in the past three years organised by the Open University and UKLA. I was fortunate enough to hear inspirational presentations by leaders in this field including Teresa Cremin, Charlotte Hacking (CLPE), Sadie Philips, Farrah Serroukh (CLPE) and Claire Williams. Throughout each conference, I have always felt a drive and passion from all leaders and leave feeling enthused about enriching children's reading for pleasure. Something that has resonated with me and inspired me, is the statement that *reading for pleasure is a social justice issue and children have the right to access a rich and varied diet of literature*. The fundamental message I continually received is that RfP is an embedded practice and a vital part of children's development. It has been proven that those children that read every day for pleasure or are read to, are more successful in their lives (Pieper, 2016).

In order to enhance my knowledge of RfP and what this means, I read 'Building Communities of Engaged Readers' (Cremin et al, 2014) and focused on the 'reading for pleasure' pedagogy and the 'Reading Teacher' (Capital R, capital T). I found that I began reflecting on what it means to be a reader and the social nature of reading. I wanted to build a reading community with enjoyment being placed at the centre of my classroom practice. The research highlighted how children need to be placed at the centre from the outset- learning about them, what they like reading, how they like reading and what drives them to read.

Aims

To generate specific areas for development, I completed questionnaires with the children and observed them during reading time, in addition to reflecting on my own practice. Based on the research I carried out with the children, I came up with three aims that I wanted to achieve both in the classroom and the community. These included:

1. **To understand the children as readers**, delving deeper into the children's interests and reading behaviours and journeys.
2. **To be a Reading Teacher**, ensuring my class see me as a reader and model positive reading behaviours in the classroom.
3. **To build a reading community**, exploring the impact of reading role models within the wider community.

Outline

I reflected on my own practice using the self-review document on the OU researchrich website. I considered my current reading for pleasure practice and how the children view me as a reader. Prior to this, my head teacher invited the team from Peover Superior Endowed Primary School to hold an INSET day on reading for pleasure, therefore some of the pedagogy below followed this whole school initiative.



Reading Rivers

In order to gain an insight into children's book choices and their reading journey, alongside the staff at school, I completed a 'reading river'. This was then shared with the class so they could understand more about my reading identity and stimulated conversations between both the children in the class and myself. I was able to learn more about what the children read at home but also what they define as reading. From this, I was able to group the children into common themes so they could 'blether' together about the books they enjoyed. Children began to swap and recommend books to each other which encouraged reading to become a collaborative process. These 'reading rivers' are now part of an interactive display in which the children are able to add books which they have loved reading and the children regularly return to them to do so.



Ginger-reading man

In order to model reading practices, and to gain a further insight into each individual child and their reading habits, I completed my own ginger-reading man and highlighted to the children how I like to read. Inside the gingerbread man, I wrote how I like to read and around the gingerbread man, I wrote how reading makes me feel. This then stimulated an interesting discussion about the rights of a reader (Pennac, 2006) and the children's perception on this. The children then completed their own ginger-reading men which provided me with the opportunity to get to know every child as I engaged in conversation with them whilst they completed it. Following this, I was able to group the children, and provide the different reading environments they preferred in addition to making personalised book recommendations based on their interests. This enabled the children to see me as a Reading Teacher and a shift in their attitudes towards reading was clear from their constant requests for further recommendations. Parents have commented on the children's enthusiasm for reading and the impact that this has had at home.

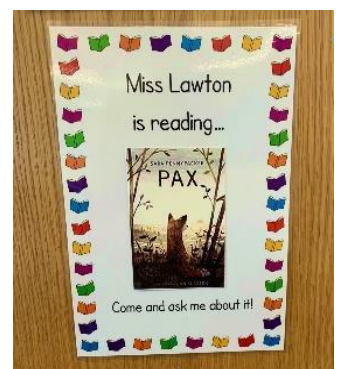
Social reading classroom

After attending the RfP, I immediately changed the layout of my book corner to ensure it promoted LIST (Cremin, 2019). Following the 'ginger-reading man,' I completed further observations of the children's book habits which enabled me to have a greater understanding of how children read, and therefore I incorporated this into my reading area. From my observations, I found that reluctant readers in the class would always pick the same books and weren't challenging themselves with other styles or genres. Therefore, I ensured I regularly changed the display of books and created a 'buzz' by ensuring there were texts that tempt in a range of genres. This also gave me a further opportunity to make personalised book recommendations to enhance their knowledge of children's literature and encourage a rich diet of texts. To give the children ownership of their reading, they voted on which books they would like on the 'Bookflix' display based on their recommendations. As a school, we also have a pet rabbit (Bertie) who will join us on occasions, and the children enjoy reading and entertaining him. I found that this had a huge positive impact on the children's attitudes towards reading and especially on the more reluctant readers who were eager to share their books with Bertie. Additionally, it was pleasing to see that children were challenging themselves with new text genres. Children became excited to read and some children set up their own little book piles around the classroom which contained the books they wanted to read and share with their friends.



What I'm reading

After the INSET day, the importance of children seeing 'Teachers as Readers' was highlighted. In order to promote this within school, I therefore displayed my current reading material on my classroom door alongside other members of staff. This invited 'book blether' amongst both children and teachers and created a real buzz around the school. This stimulated the creation of a community of readers who were excited to discuss their current reads and make recommendations to each other based on shared interests. Moreover, I have found that this is beginning to have a positive impact on the wider school community as children recommend books to parents and the afterschool club staff.



OU RfP Reading Teachers

In order to develop as a Reading Teacher (Cremin et al, 2014), I attended an inspirational CPD day with the Open University and set up an Open University and UKLA Teachers' Reading Group in Cheshire East. This provided me with the opportunity to connect with other Reading Teachers and enhanced my current reading and exploration of new literature. Additionally, I have developed my RfP pedagogy and practice and embedded this within my classroom.



Timetabled RfP

Following the INSET day, we timetabled RfP as a whole school, once a week. A focus of enjoyment was a core value and therefore the children read anything they wanted to, including picture books, non-fiction texts, newspapers, magazines, etc. Having a positive social environment is key to the RfP pedagogy, therefore I have adopted an approach where children can sit or lie where they wish, get comfortable and relaxed by sitting on the sofa, building dens, or reading in the dark with torches. This echoes the idea that there should be a strong focus on being comfortable and relaxed in order to encourage enjoyment of the activity (Cremin et al, 2014). As the year progressed, there became less need for this to be timetabled as it became embedded and integral to the school week. During reading for pleasure, I model positive reading behaviours by reading my own book or sharing a book with other children and encourage an environment that is reciprocal and interactive. This has aided excitement and engagement in RfP both in the classroom and across the school. I often hear children talking to each other during their lunchtime and recommending a book to a child in another year group.

Recommendations

In order to create an environment where book recommendations were child-led, I made laminate cards which read 'I am reading Ask me about it'. The children were encouraged to write what they were reading on their own card which was then stuck on their desk and they changed them when needed. This allowed for further 'book blether' as the children moved around the classroom during their free time. I often heard children spontaneously discussing and debating what they were reading. I found this caused the reluctant readers to challenge themselves and read books they may not have usually picked up. It has been a pleasure to see children passionate about reading and sharing what they are reading with others.

'Big up a Book'

Following the TaRs research and my aims, I began 'Big up a Book' as I wanted to 'encourage a love of reading and intrinsic motivation to read' (Clark et al, 2006). I started 'Big up a Book' with three children talking about and sharing a book they wanted to 'Big up' and then each member of the class voted on one to be read by myself. This inspired the children to want to read more and soon developed into the children reading the books aloud to each other. The children then developed their own reading chart in the book corner of the classroom and led 'Big up a Book' sessions independently. The children were so inspired by this, that they began bringing in books from home and they couldn't wait to share these with the class.

The enthusiasm and passion for 'Big up a Book' was truly amazing to see. The children were extremely passionate about their books and would often use different voices and act out different scenes from the texts they shared. As this developed more and more, children were keen to have a go at standing and reading in front of the whole class, and it was lovely to see that even the most reluctant readers

wanted to get involved. Most importantly, 'Big up a Book' exposed children to a wide variety of texts and developed each child's personal reading tastes and in turn helped to 'create a sense of community, building the class repertoire of 'books in common' and a shared reading history' (Cremin et al, 2014).

Whole school initiatives

School council and PTA

To raise the profile of RfP in school, we involved the PTA. Following the inset day, the PTA agreed to contribute funding for the summer term of 2019 and each term of the following academic year. Each class were provided with a budget to spend on high-quality texts. A key part of this initiative was to enable the children to have ownership of the book choices within their class libraries. To enable this to happen, each class created a list of recommendations and then voted for their favourite texts which were then purchased. In the following term, Simply Books came to do an assembly to further enthuse the children about reading. After that, each class created a class list of genre preferences and then their school council member went to Simply Books to choose a selection of books based on their knowledge of their class. Once these arrived in school, there was a complete buzz around the new books and the children couldn't wait to get reading.



Reading picnic

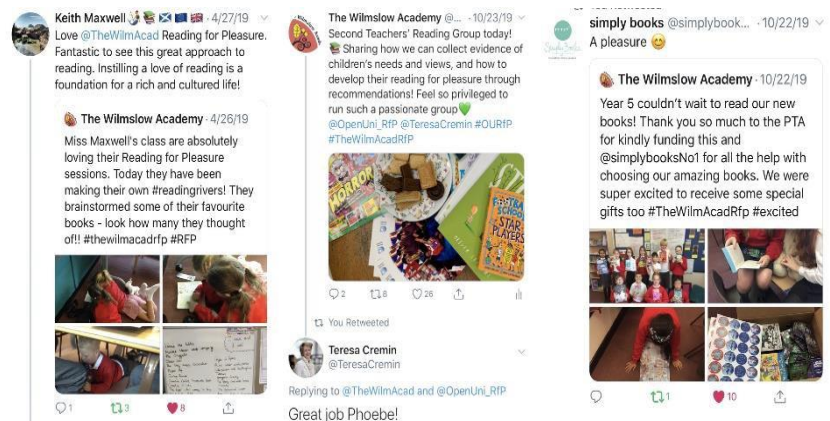
Following the PTAs' support, we held a whole school reading picnic. The children were able to take the new books (or anything they wanted to read), alongside blankets and cushions outside for a reading picnic. This was not only to celebrate the new books but also to provide a space that would be welcoming and nurturing, comfortable and bright. During the picnic, I noticed the sharing of books across the year groups, for example a year 4 student was reading with a year 1 child. The pupils commented on how they felt a sense of belonging within the reading community and as a school. The enjoyment of reading was clearly visible, and the children were engaged and enthusiastic about reading. Following this, we plan on holding more reading picnics, and inviting parents along to share this experience, to further build upon our reading community.

Read aloud assembly

I attended an RfP sharing opportunity within the Aspire multi-academy trust and heard Helen Mason present her findings on 'Child-Led Read Aloud Assemblies' (Mason, 2019). As a school we put in place this initiative and timetabled read aloud assemblies. This began with three year 6 children reading aloud to the upper Key Stage 2. This developed into each child 'promoting' their book and then sitting around the edge of the hall. Children were then given free choice on what book they wanted to listen to. I found the children were captivated by seeing the older children read and I was amazed at how the reader's confidence grew as the term progressed. I often overheard children discussing the books they had heard in assembly and asking the year 6 children if they could borrow them.

Twitter engagement

As a whole school we wanted to build engagement in reading for pleasure with our families. We introduced the #TheWilmAcadRfP to showcase reading for pleasure in school and make connections with our wider community. We asked teachers to tweet using this hashtag and encouraged parents to do so as well. Following this we received engagement from parents, teachers, children and authors.



Impact

There is evidence of book buzz across the whole school community. An example of this is when the head teacher visits the class. The children can immediately talk to her about the books they have read. When she brings visitors, the children cannot wait to discuss reading for pleasure at The Wilmslow Academy or as they put it “Read when you want, how you want to, with whoever you want to read with.” The children are very passionate about their reading for pleasure and their enjoyment in it.

There is an increase in spontaneous ‘book talk’ between pupils and teacher and it is evident that the children see the teachers as Reading Teachers. There isn’t a day that goes by without ‘book blether’ or a book being placed on my desk with a post-it saying you must read this! The children discuss writers and their books both inside and outside of the classroom and they talk about a wide variety of texts and genres from graphic novels and magazines to the next Jon Klassen or M.G. Leonard books.

Through delving deeper into the children’s interests, reading behaviours and acknowledging myself as a Reading Teacher, I have become more confident in discussing and recommending books to children. I am confident in knowing what their interests are and have a wide and varied knowledge of children’s literature to support my recommendations. This is supported by Gipps (2016) who suggests that a good teacher knows their children and teaches to this.

Following an Ofsted inspection in September 2019, the report highlighted how ‘*Leaders foster a love of reading in pupils and staff. The teaching of reading has the highest priority in school. Pupils enjoy listening to stories. They talk with enthusiasm about the books that they have read. They are eager to recommend books to each other*’ (Ofsted, 2019). This highlights how, despite the busy curriculum, there is always time for reading for pleasure and that as a school the reading for pleasure initiative has had the intended impact.

From surveys completed in January 2020 children now say;

‘Reading for pleasure has made me fall in love with reading’ (Year 4)

‘Reading for pleasure means you can sit anywhere you want and it is really comfy. You can read any book you want and share recommendations.’ (Year 5)

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The Teachers as Readers research is at the core of our reading for pleasure journey to ensure all pedagogy is research informed and evidence based. The impact has ensured that children are passionate about reading and engaged in reading for pleasure. Both the classroom pedagogy and whole school initiatives have had a positive influence as we are able to provide beneficial time and space for children's reading for pleasure to be nurtured.

The next step on our reading for pleasure journey, as the reading for pleasure lead, is to continue to engage the parents and wider community in reading. Involving parents and the wider community will further embed the reading for pleasure culture we have begun. I aim to achieve this by inviting parents in for our reading for pleasure sessions and our reading picnics during the summer term so that they can share this remarkable experience with their children. In addition to this, I am going to include book recommendations in the school newsletter.

As a school, we still have a journey to undertake as we research into reading further and look into how we can further embed the reading culture within our school community. I look forward to seeing how the higher profile of reading for pleasure develops in our school and how the reading culture continues to thrive when enjoying reading and what it offers is at the core.

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