



By Clare Bell

In order to continue to improve our provision for reading we chose to take part the 'Reading for Pleasure' project in partnership with other ASPIRE schools and the Open University. It was an amazing project where the lead for reading was able to work in collaboration with an expert in reading and the Director of Literacy for ASPIRE in order to further inspire our pupils to become outstanding readers. This is the report of the outcomes of the project that we feel has had significant positive impact on the enjoyment of reading that our children show.

## Context

I am the Reading and SPAG Subject Lead at Victoria Road Primary School in Northwich, an urban school on the built-up edge of the town centre. We are a single form entry school of 182 pupils, serving a close knit well-established community for over 100 years, with generations of the same family attending our school. 22.5% of our school population are EAL children, 28.6% are pupil premium and 17% are SEN. In 2018, 57% of KS2 pupils met the expected standard in reading.

## Intent

From our data, it was clear that children were not reaching the expected level of attainment in reading. An analysis of reading within school had already thrown up several key issues: our children did not have sufficient stamina to read at pace or gain a strong idea of the sequence of a text. The children's vocabulary was not developed enough to allow them to understand age-appropriate texts.

When we first began to think about developing our RfP ethos, we conducted a pupil questionnaire and a staff survey. We also looked carefully at our whole school data, analysing children's reading practices, reading response books and test papers. We wanted to unpick why our children were making enormous strides with their writing (2016-2017 – pupil progress in the top 2% of the country) and not with their reading.

**From our baseline data we made several key findings:**

### **TEACHER KNOWLEDGE**

Teachers' knowledge of children's texts was predominately limited to authors they had read as children themselves, for example, Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton. Very few modern authors were named and, when they were, they tended to be 'celebrity' authors e.g. David Walliams and J K Rowling. Teachers were aware of very few poets and illustrators.

Teachers were not being 'reading teachers' in school. They were not sharing their own reading practices with the children in their class. Many teachers stated in their surveys

that they had never thought about revealing themselves as readers or discussing their own reading with the children in their class. Furthermore, the pressure of the curriculum meant that teachers were not setting aside time for children to choose the books they wished to read or for high quality book talk to take place. In the children's eyes, Reading For Pleasure did not have a high value in our classrooms, and teachers, however inadvertently, were not being effective reading role models. In many cases, reading had been reduced to being something to do if there were a few moments of spare time.

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Parents' involvement in their children's reading was limited. Questionnaires showed that many children believed reading was something you had to do alone. A study of reading diaries showed that many parents did not regularly read with their children. This was despite children reporting that their favourite person to read with was mum or dad.

## **KS1**

Most concerning were our KS1 Pupil Questionnaire results. We were surprised to find that, when we analyzed our data, KS1 children reported significantly less enjoyment in and engagement with reading than their KS2 counterparts. Many KS1 children did not have a positive reading identity. This was the exact opposite of what we expected, and we knew we had to find out why this was happening and address it quickly.

## **School Development Plan**

A major element of our School Development Plan was to promote reading for pleasure. From our baseline data, we focused on three main strands:

- Children to choose to read for pleasure, enjoying a range of different authors and text types
- To engage parents in supporting their children's reading
- To raise attainment in reading esp. at KS2

Following our pupil questionnaires, we also knew we had to focus on KS1.

## **Research and Inspiration**

*Reading for pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child's future success –  
OECD 2002*

*In 2012, young people who enjoyed reading very much were four times more likely to read  
above the expected level for their age compared with their peers who did not enjoy  
reading at all – Clark 2013*

There is considerable evidence that RfP and reading engagement are strong predictors of reading attainment *and* attainment in maths, spelling and vocabulary. We needed to raise our reading attainment and therefore we were keen to understand the research around RfP and apply it in our school.

Our school also prides itself as having nurture at its heart; a robust RfP pedagogy would allow us to spend more time talking to our children about their likes and dislikes, their feelings towards and engagement with different types of texts, their reading choices and motivations. It would allow us to get to know our children even better and foster even better relationships between all members of our school community.

The key principles of RfP are all social in nature:

- Reading aloud
- Informal book talk and recommendations
- Independent reading time
- Creation of a highly social reading environment
- Teacher understanding of children's literature and children's reading lives.

We quickly understood the value of everybody in our school community being on board with these principles and immersing themselves in a Reading for Pleasure culture.

Another key idea for us was the concept of a reading identity – how children perceive themselves and how they feel they are perceived by others. Our pupil questionnaires indicated that some of our children had damaged or vulnerable reading identities. We became acutely aware of the social risk involved in reading when others can see what you are choosing to read and make judgements on you accordingly. As Reading Teachers we needed to 'consider the identity positions made available to children in the classroom by our own routines, expectations, text organisations and wider pedagogic practice.' (Cremin 2014) By creating a culture of 'readerly empathy' we hoped to strengthen the reading identities of our children.

**Our Logic Model**

What needed to change:

- Teacher knowledge
- Parent engagement
- KS1 attitudes and engagement

We were inspired by the TaRs' research findings which found teacher knowledge of children's texts was limited, and that it side-lined or ignored much of the vibrant children's literature available today. This was endorsed by the results of our staff surveys.

TaR research also found that RfP allowed teachers to connect to children's reading lives beyond school and provided new ways to make and strengthen relationships with parents and families.

Research also made us aware that children's positive attitudes towards reading often decline as they progress through primary school as does their enjoyment of reading. We therefore needed to make sure our KS1 children developed positive attitudes towards reading and that our reading culture enabled these attitudes to grow and develop.

## **Our Plan**

Our children will choose to read for pleasure, impacting on attainment in reading and writing. To achieve this, we aimed to:

- Shift the reading culture of our school so that it embraced the key concepts of RfP
- Identify and implement ways to encourage children to read independently outside of school and to monitor this
- Empower children to make their own reading choices and be secure in their reading identities
- Empower adults in our school community to engage in high-quality book talk with children
- Empower parents to engage meaningfully in RfP with their children
- Provide our children with an enriched reading diet
- Provide our children with time to read material of their choice and time to share and discuss their reading
- Strengthen poor reading stamina
- Develop an understanding for all stakeholders of how reading skills influence our lives and can enable us to progress more quickly and achieve our goals in life

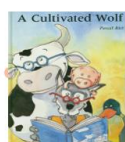
- Develop an understanding for all stakeholders of how reading can strengthen us emotionally, connecting us to others and linking to our lives

## Implementation

### Launch meeting for staff

We held a staff meeting early in the school year to launch the project. It was important everybody understood the research around the project and engaged with the cultural shift around reading. Staff were asked to write an informal action plan describing the elements of RfP they would be using in their classroom over the first year. All staff could see the immense benefits for all stakeholders of engaging fully in a RfP culture.

#### RfP: significant benefits



International evidence demonstrates:

- increased **attainment in literacy and numeracy** (e.g. Anderson et al., 1988; OECD, 2010; PIRLS, 2006; Sullivan & Brown, 2013)
- improved general knowledge; richer **vocabulary**
- increased **self-confidence as a reader**
- supports **identity explorations** (Rothbauer, 2004; Appleyard, 1990)
- encourages **imagination, empathy** and mindfulness of others (Kidd & Costano, 2013)
- The **will influences the skill** and vice versa (e.g. OECD, 2010)

## Impact

Staff were immediately engaged with book areas being revamped and exciting texts appearing in classrooms.



### RfP conference

All staff attended the RfP Launch Conference which included attending different RfP workshops and engaging in book pitches by the lead teachers. I was asked to lead a book pitch which enabled me to introduce new authors and texts to staff from all participating schools. The response was overwhelmingly warm, involved and positive. All staff were able to engage with many different types of text, 'old and gold, new and bold' but each text, I hoped, had


Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Following the conference, more book related activities appeared in classrooms. Book recommendations and personal reading practices began to be shared on twitter. Teachers understood the need to develop their book knowledge and share themselves as readers with the children in school.

Children were talking about books in corridors. On a visit to a local nature park, during lunch, one boy pulled out a Beast Quest book and used his free time to get



something to say to everybody. The research message was strongly reiterated at the conference with Professor Teresa Cremin delivering an hour long keynote speech which brought the RfP research to life and set it firmly in the context of our school and our children's lives.

Staff found Professor Cremin's speech inspiring and thought-provoking. A key message which particularly resonated with us was the difference between Reading Instruction and Reading for Pleasure.

Reading Instruction	The Open University	Reading for Pleasure
<b>is oriented towards:</b>		<b>is oriented towards:</b>
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:		The maximum entitlement:
The "expected standard"		A reader for life
The standards agenda		The reader's own agenda

Distinctions between reading instruction and RfP. (Cremin et al., 2014: 157)

Children's enjoyment of reading was something we had all been thinking about since the unexpected KS1 results of our pupil questionnaires. Therefore, the following piece of research was also of particular interest to us:

*In English speaking countries, England had the lowest ranking for enjoyment and the lowest for pupil engagement in reading in PIRLS except Australia (McGrane et al, 2017)*

All members of staff attended three workshops throughout the day, each linking to a key element of the TARs research from the OU website and

stuck in! Pupils began to talk about writers – Emma Carroll, Katherine Rundell, Robert Swindells – when they bumped into me in school. A book buzz was developing in school.



Our Year 5 teacher started reading *The Explorer* by Katherine Rundell to her class on a Friday. Over the weekend, a boy in her class went out and bought the book and had finished it by Monday. These were the kind of stories which teachers were now telling me about the children in their class.

Our Year 5 teacher, after scouring charity shops for engaging texts, gave every one of her pupils a hand-picked book for Christmas.

Our teachers had managed to create a real book buzz in a very short amount of time.

Learning Walks also enabled us to see how elements of Reading for Pleasure were becoming embedded into our practice. One

<p>further deepening their understanding of RfP.</p>	<p>teacher began her session with a book wrapped up as a present with only a few tempting pages accessible to the children. Another teacher, in a Reading for Pleasure session, covered up some of the book covers to get the children hooked and thinking about the contents.</p>
<p><b>Parents' Reading Sessions</b>  On the OU Research Rich Pedagogies website I came across a piece of work by Claire Williams entitled Learning Together: Involving Parents. I used this as inspiration to launch the RfP project to our parents and invite them into school to read in an informal and relaxing context with their children.</p>	<p>Attendance was disappointing. However, the parents who did attend said they enjoyed the sessions. Other adults attached to school also attended; our sports coaches responded really well and provided brilliant role models for our children. We began to think carefully about how we could draw in a greater attendance and achieve greater parental engagement with reading. We looked again at the OU website, at the work of Claire Williams and at the work done at Joy Lane Primary School in Whitstable and realised we needed a much clearer structure to our sessions, something further to draw our community in.</p>
<p><b>Lovin' Books</b>  After looking more closely at Claire William's work, I discussed our barriers with members of my RfP group. The concept of Lovin' Books – a day to celebrate all things reading – was born.  <b>This is what we did:</b></p>	<p>Children made invitations to invite family members to our Lovin' Books event and this certainly contributed to the fantastic turn out. The hall and each classroom were full of adults and children engaging in book talk – sharing thoughts and feelings, choosing books together and making connections.  Northwich Library mentioned that many parents had told them how much their children were enjoying reading since the project started and how many parents had decided to join the library after attending the event.  Feedback from children and parents was overwhelmingly positive.  <b>Our Chair of Governors wrote:</b></p>

*What a fabulous event this morning was. You must have put so much thought and effort into organising it. It was amazing to see how much support there was from, what I could tell, all year groups. For someone like yourself, who has a passion for books and reading, it must be very heart-warming to see that there IS a healthy culture of reading within school and a great many parents DO support their children with this.*

*As you know I also love books and it was fantastic to walk round the hall and hear the children talking about, drawing and remembering the books they have read. The passion they have is nurtured by yourself and all the staff at school and we, as parents and governors, are very lucky to have you teaching our children.*

*Congratulations again and please pass that on to all involved.*

*May I suggest the 'I Love To Read' hearts become part of our uniform.*

We also gained valuable insights into our children's reading preferences from their responses to our activities. We had a giant list of the books they wanted to read and a huge map they had constructed together, making links between different literary and imaginary worlds. It helped us to get right to the reading hearts of our children.

In the afternoon Roving Books travelling bookshop set up in the hall and as children were browsing we listened carefully to what they were saying and choosing.

Likewise, at the end of the day, when parents came to visit the bookshop, it was lovely to hear the conversations as they shared their thoughts and stories of their own childhood reading with their children.

We were heartened by how many books were purchased for our children.

**LOVIN' BOOKS**



# A Valentine's Day Book Festival

## Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February



**In classrooms:** each class will be holding a Reading for Pleasure session designed for children and adults to share reading together. Activities will include: Make Your Own Book, Make A Reading River, Make A Gift Badge (I like reading with my... because...)

Or you could just snuggle up and read!

**Each class will also be premiering a short film they have created about reading.**

**In the hall:**

**Roving Books** will be here to provide children with a genuine bookshop experience, stimulating their interest in quality books.

**Northwich Library** will be here to showcase the many and varied reading experiences they offer.

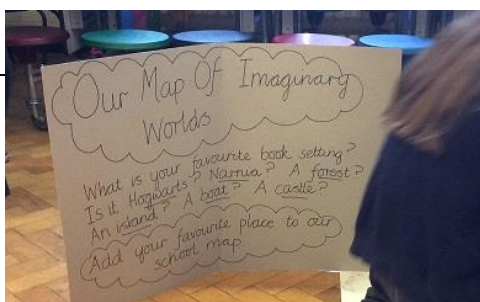
**Imaginary Worlds** – there will be a huge map for every child and adult to add their favourite book setting.

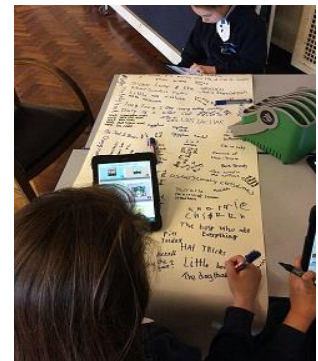
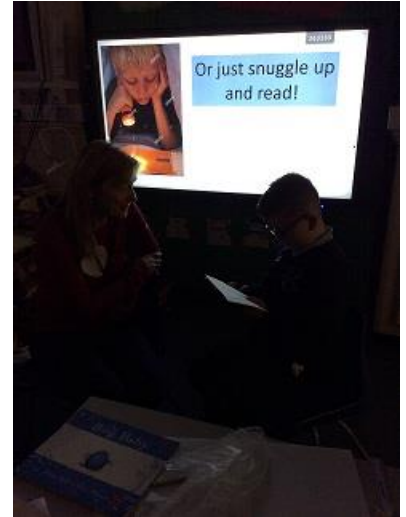
**Memory Tree** – there will be a memory tree so each child and adult can add a treasured memory of a time they shared a book with someone special.

**Commemorative Book** – there will be a chance to make a page to add to our commemorative book. The pages will come together to make a celebration of our book festival.

**i pads** – the i pads will be available so children and adults can research books and add the titles to our school's giant wish list.

**Refreshments** – enjoy a cuppa and a book!





## Birthday Books

Instead of buying cakes and biscuits when a member of staff celebrated a

Books started to come and in and were shared in assembly so children knew who they were from and why they were chosen. This allowed our children to learn about the

birthday, we asked if they could buy a book for the school library instead.

reading life of a member of staff they might not otherwise connect with. Our reading community was growing.



### Bedtime Stories

During our Lovin' Books event it became apparent that not all adults know how to read a story to their children; we realised that this skill would be completely dependent on the childhood experiences of the adult. We decided to film ourselves reading bedtime stories and post them online, modelling book talk, asking questions and revealing our emotional responses to what we were reading.

This is a new initiative but early response has been positive. I found it was important at first to share the stories with the children in class. This created excitement and a desire to go home and find the story on the school website for themselves. One child said, 'I can't wait to show my mum. This is my favourite story.' Another aspect of this which the children found engaging was including them in the storytelling.

### Newsletter Book Reviews

Every month a different class reviewed a book and wrote a book review based on their thoughts which we published in our school newsletter. The intention behind this was to maintain the high profile of reading for our parents.

We received some feedback from parents which is helping us to hone our approach. For example, one parent suggested that we include magazine reviews instead. *'I am particularly thinking of boys. For example if someone reviewed Top Gear magazine it might encourage someone to get it in the future.'*

#### Book Recommendation by Year 4

**Title:** The Dork Diaries Popstar

**Author:** Rachel Rerke Russel

**What was the story about?** A girl who lost a scholarship and there is a talent show and she has a band and want's to sign up with her band. The band can't enter and they are all sad.

**Who were the characters?** Nikki, Pad, Theodore, Brandon, Brianna, Students, Mackenzie, Matt, Mom, Vide.

**What did you like about the book?** I like the pictures because they are really detailed; I also liked how they put humour in it.

#### Year 5 Book review

King Kong by Anthony Browne

King Kong is an exciting tale about the love a beast has for the face of beauty. Ann Darrow is chosen to become a famous actress in Carl Denham's new up and coming movie. They sail to Skull Island where the beast awaits. In the dark of night, Ann is captured by Kong and taken to his cave. On their journey, they face many menacing and fearsome creatures as well as Carl Denham, Jack Driscoll and the crew chasing after them. Eventually, the men are able to capture Kong and take him back to New York. Will he escape and find his one true love again or will the city kill the beast?

#### Quotes

"I liked the action scene when Kong is on top of the Empire State Building." Thomas, Year 5.

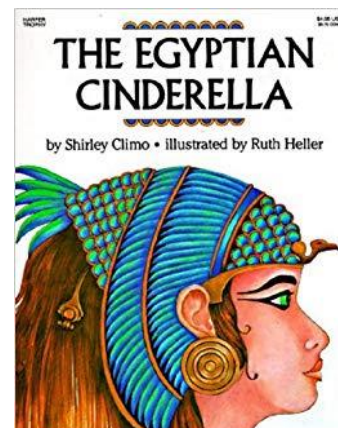
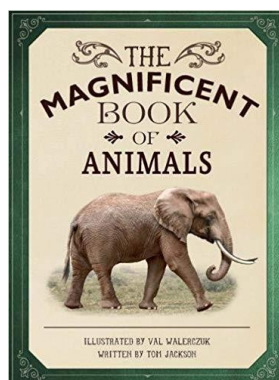
"I found the book to be very emotional but in a good way, I really felt for Kong at the end of the story." Prasalya, Year 5.

## Reading Books

A major realisation for us was that KS1 children were only taking home a banded reading book and not a book of their choice. With a busy curriculum this meant their opportunities to choose and read other types of books could be limited.

We decided to change this so children took home a banded book *and* a book of their choice from the library or classroom.

This impacted well with children showing great excitement about choosing their books and wanting to talk about what they had read when they came into school the next morning. Certain books within the classrooms became firm favourites and I noticed that these were usually books teachers were reading aloud or making a big fuss of.



## Summary

Our end of year staff surveys showed all staff were identifying more as reading teachers than they had been when the project started. The words 'sharing',



‘discussing’ and ‘time’ came up again and again in a positive sense. Staff were able to name a far greater range of authors, illustrators and poets.

*‘I enjoy sharing the books that I’m reading with the children and randomly leaving them on my desk to generate curiosity!’ Year 6 Teacher*

*‘As a headteacher it has made me much more aware of how I should be very obviously sharing myself as a reader. Subtle changes have had surprisingly large impact ie having my books in my office and opening it up to children to come and choose books at lunch, has meant that I have many more discussions with the children about the books that they are reading. As a staff, I have noticed that people are talking about both children's books and what they are reading too. We still have more work to do to embed a passion for reading throughout the whole school community but the strategies from Reading for Pleasure have given us a common language and expectation that we all should be overtly sharing our passion for books- we cannot just assume that they will know.’*

All but one of our KS1 children said that they loved reading in our exit pupil survey.



Our KS1 children went from not being able to name a favourite author to naming dozens of writers – Anthony Browne, Emily Gravett, Tom McLaughlin – and some illustrators.

In answer to the question ‘Do your classmates read aloud in class?’ 71% of children said yes in the exit questionnaire, as opposed to 18% when the questionnaire was first administered at the beginning of the project.

Perhaps most significantly, when the children were asked ‘When do you read?’ instead of naming formal reading lessons as they had done at the beginning of the project, the children named an array of informal situations with one child simply saying, ‘I always read.’

As the evidence suggests, the feedback has been incredibly positive. The staff, children and parents feel that the RfP project has changed the way they think about reading. It has given them:

- Time to read 1:1 with each other at leisure, with no pressure
- Choice of text they want to read
- Knowledge of the different books and reading materials available
- A calm and social space in which to read
- A more secure reader identity

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>To improve teacher knowledge</b>	✓	Conversations with teachers and children, classroom book areas, engagement in RfP activities and events
<b>To increase parent engagement</b>	✓	Attendance at RfP events, feedback at family learning events, feedback to the local library
<b>To raise engagement with and enjoyment of reading in Ks1</b>	✓	KS1 pupil surveys, lesson observations, conversations

**Teacher Assessment shows that reading standards have improved over the year and the profile of reading is very healthy throughout. Our community continues to grow.**

## **Next Steps**

A major part of my work next year will be sustaining and developing RfP within school and ensuring it continues to have a positive impact on attitudes and on attainment.

I will be:

- Further developing our reading community by continuing to hold book events for all stakeholders



- Finding ways to ensure our children have access to high quality books and reading materials
- Keeping the project fresh for teaching staff with regular meetings and initiatives.
- Making sure that our EYFS children are fully involved in the project as soon as they begin to attend school
- Analysing how RfP impacts on reading attainment as well as elements of writing, in particular spelling
- Working collaboratively with staff to create a reading spine to ensure progression through year groups