

Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers

2007-08 Executive Summary

This UKLA project was planned in response to recurring evidence that suggests children in England continue to read less independently and find less pleasure in reading than many of their peers in other countries (Twist et al., 2003; 2007). In the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (n: 41 countries), only 28% of the English children reported reading weekly compared to an international average of 40%.

In addition, previous UKLA research, drawing on questionnaires from 1200 primary teachers nationally, showed that whilst the majority read independently for pleasure, professionally they rely on a very limited canon of children's authors and can name only a narrow range of picture fiction creators and poets (Cremin et al., 2008a, b). This raises the question of whether teachers are familiar with a sufficiently diverse range of writers to enable them to foster reader development and make recommendations to young readers with different needs and interests.

This lack of subject knowledge, placed alongside the documented decline in reading for pleasure and the reduction in primary phase book spending (Hurd et al., 2006), suggested a need for increased professional support to enhance children's reading for pleasure.

Project aims

The core goal of *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers* funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and UKLA, was to improve teachers' knowledge and use of literature in order to help them increase children's motivation and enthusiasm for reading, especially those less successful in literacy. In order to develop children's independent reading for pleasure the project aimed to:

1. Widen teachers' knowledge of children's literature.
2. Develop teachers' confidence and skilful use of such literature in the classroom.
3. Develop teachers' relationships with parents, carers, librarians and families.
4. Develop 'Reading Teachers', teachers who read and readers who teach.

Project organisation

This UKLA research and development project was undertaken in five Local Authorities in England: Barking and Dagenham, Birmingham, Kent, Medway, and Suffolk. All worked within a given framework and held local CPD sessions with teachers. The 40 teachers involved also attended national project meetings in London, and, as action researchers, reflected on their own learning journeys as teachers and as readers. They case studied three children (n:120) who, whilst able to read, rarely chose to do so. The data included:

- baseline and end of project children's & teachers' questionnaires
- teachers' reading histories & written reflections
- book talk data
- teachers' data tracking of focus children
- interviews with children, teachers & headteachers
- classroom observations.



Descriptive summary of project findings

Children identified as reluctant and disaffected readers became drawn into reading; their perceptions of their abilities as readers and self-confidence improved. They showed increased pleasure in reading and began to read both more regularly and more independently. The majority of the children's attainment showed above average increases across the year. Children's talk about reading and texts also became significantly more spontaneous, informed and extended.

As teachers in the project enriched their subject knowledge of children's literature and other texts, they took risks in their choices and responded more aesthetically. Many transformed their conceptions of reading and readers and recognised their professional responsibility to sustain their enhanced subject knowledge. Personally and professionally, the teachers took considerably more pleasure in reading.

The teachers' increased subject knowledge, combined with personal reflection and support enabled them to create a more inclusive reading for pleasure pedagogy. This encompassed marked improvements in reading environments, read aloud programmes, book talk and book recommendations and the provision of quality time for independent reading. As teachers became more confident, autonomous and flexible in using their enriched subject knowledge, they began to articulate an informed and strategic rationale for selecting and using texts to support children's reading for pleasure.

Teachers came to appreciate the significance of the wider range of reading which children experience in their homes and communities. They recognised the importance of extending definitions of reading and providing a more satisfying and challenging reading curriculum.

Some teachers developed as 'Reading Teachers' and became increasingly aware of their reading preferences, habits, behaviours and strategies and explored connections between their own reading practices and those of the children. As a result, these professionals sought to build reciprocal reading communities, which focused on readers' rights and identities and fostered learner autonomy. As potent role models, they markedly influenced the children's commitment to reading.

Shared understandings were established between teachers, children and families about the changing nature of reading and everyday reading practices. These supported children reading for pleasure and generated new kinds of talk about reading, both with and amongst children. Where relationships with local libraries were fostered, there was evidence of significant impact on individual children's lives.

The UKLA project has identified:

- a coherent strategy to develop children's reading for pleasure by enhancing teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogic practice
- the value of developing 'Reading Teachers' as actively engaged role models
- the significance of creating reciprocal reading communities that nurture children's pleasure in reading
- a need to build different professional relationships based on new conceptions of reading and increased reciprocity between children, families and teachers.



Key findings

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 1. Distinctions between reading instruction and reading for pleasure

1. A reading for pleasure agenda can positively impact upon children's attainment, achievement, disposition and desire to read (The will influences the skill).¹
2. A reading for pleasure agenda is distinct from, although closely related to, a reading instruction agenda, as summarised in Figure 1.
3. A reading for pleasure agenda can be developed through the creation of classroom reading communities of reciprocity and interaction.
4. 'Reading Teachers' are well positioned to develop genuinely reciprocal reading communities. Such professionals recognise the significance of reader identity in reader development and frame their pedagogic practice in responsive ways.
5. Reciprocal reading communities in school encompass:
 - a shared concept of what it means to be a reader in the 21st century
 - considerable teacher and child knowledge of children's literature and other texts
 - pedagogic practices which acknowledge and develop diverse reader identities
 - new social spaces that encourage choice and child ownership of their own reading for pleasure
 - spontaneous 'inside-text talk' on the part of all participants
 - a shift in the locus of control that fosters reader agency and independence.
6. Reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships: between teachers; between teachers and children; between children and families; between children, teachers, families and communities.



Recommendations and Implications

Reading for pleasure urgently requires a higher profile in primary education to raise both attainment and achievement and increase children's engagement as self-motivated and socially engaged readers.

The UKLA project *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers* indicates that teachers need considerable support to help them find the time and space to widen their reading repertoires, create a pedagogy which fosters reading for pleasure and develop as 'Reading Teachers'.



There is still much work to be done to address the widening gap in reading experiences in and out of school and to

extend conceptions of reading in this new media age. Strategic support is needed to enable the profession to find more equivalent and reciprocal ways of working with families and communities that connect with their everyday reading practices and experiences.

It is therefore recommended that schools, teachers and student teachers are supported to:

1. Take responsibility for developing reading for pleasure, alongside and as complementary to, reading instruction, and plan systematically to achieve this.
2. Widen their conceptions of reading and being a reader in the 21st century.
3. Develop as 'Reading Teachers': teachers who read and readers who teach.

4. Make space and time to build reciprocal reading communities in their classrooms that blur the boundaries between children's home and school reading worlds.
5. Expand their knowledge of:
 - literature and other texts
 - everyday reading practices and experiences
 - individual children as readers.
6. Develop pedagogy that encourages reading for pleasure, fosters 'inside text talk' and builds positive reading identities for all children.
7. Foster children's autonomy as readers who can exercise discrimination and choice within and beyond school.
8. Construct new, more equivalent reading relationships with families and community members, exploring the potential synergy between teachers,' children's and parents' reading lives and practices, as in Figure 2.

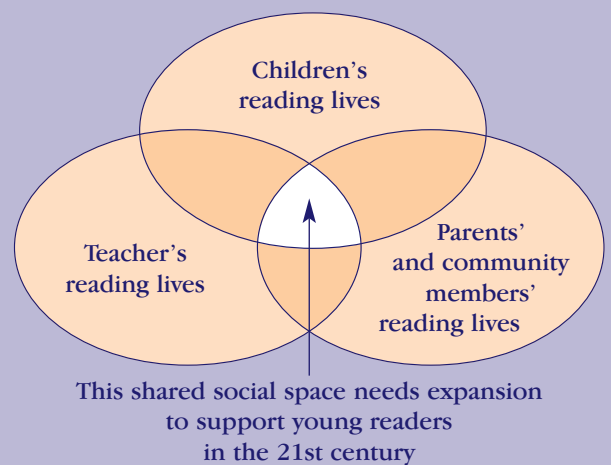


Figure 2. A model for the development of shared reading lives: diversity and collaboration.

References

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¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2002) *Reading for Change: Results from PISA 2000* www.pisa.oecd.org

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