



Teachers' knowledge of children's literature and other texts

More research details



Teachers' knowledge of children's literature and other texts is not commonly regarded as part of the subject knowledge required of teachers, yet the *Teachers as Readers* (TaRs) research has shown it is highly significant in developing children as readers who can and DO choose to read.

The Phase I survey (Cremin et al., 2008) revealed that, whilst teachers do read for pleasure themselves, (73.2% of the 1200 respondents had read for pleasure in the last month), they have limited and limiting repertoires of children's authors, poets and picture fiction creators and rely upon childhood favourites and 'celebrity' authors.

- Only 46% of the teachers named 6 children's authors. Roald Dahl dominated the list (744), with Michael Morpurgo (343) Jaqueline Wilson (323) and JK Rowling (300) receiving 300 or more mentions.
- Only 10% of the teachers named 6 poets (22% named none at all). Michael Rosen (452) led the list, with Alan Ahlberg, (207) Roger McGough (197), Roald Dahl (165) and Spike Milligan (159) receiving over 150 mentions.
- Only 10% of the teachers named 6 picture fiction creators (24% named none at all, regardless of Key Stage). Quentin Blake (who illustrated for Roald Dahl, himself and others) led the list (423), with Anthony Browne (175), Alan Ahlberg (146), Shirley Hughes (123), and Mick Inkpen (121) receiving over 100 mentions.

This scant knowledge represents cause for concern. Road Dahl, who was cited by many teachers as their favourite childhood author, was also the most cited 'good' author and was the most popular author to read aloud in class (Cremin et al, 2008a,b). His dominance further reduces the range and breadth of writers being introduced to children and suggests that the profession is over-dependent upon a narrow range of authors and texts. The project's Phase I data suggest that teachers may not possess sufficient **knowledge** to foster reading for pleasure and reader development and indicate they may find it difficult to **prioritise** children's engagement and response as readers in school.

In the Phase II project the teachers, whose own questionnaires indicated not dissimilar results and reliance on 'celebrity' authors, sought to develop their repertoire of children's literature and other texts. They set themselves targets, individually and in groups and read and discussed their reading. Book swapping between them became common practice as they recommended books they had read and enjoyed to each other. Through these and other practices, communities of readers developed and teachers learnt from each other.

Teachers gradually started to respond to texts in a more aesthetic manner and came to consider how reader responses relate to their life experiences, knowledge, culture and context (Rosenblatt, 1978). Significantly they began to read children's literature as engaged readers, not just as teachers, and their discussions with one another as teachers shifted from being about how a book could be used to teach specific literacy objectives to focusing upon how it affected them as readers. Their widened repertoires increased their assurance as teachers.

“Knowing more authors has made the world of difference to my confidence as a teacher, my ability to talk children about what they are reading (even if I don’t know the actual book, I often know other books by that author, and it’s given me a platform to talk about what I’ve read, to recommend and encouraged me to read more.”

(TaRs teacher, Suffolk)

The Phase II project demonstrated that, when teachers recognise their professional responsibility to expand their repertoires of children’s literature and other texts, they are enabled to talk about such texts, make tailored reader to reader recommendations and foster reading for pleasure. Without secure subject knowledge and thoughtful appreciation of reading and being a reader, teachers are not effectively able to employ a reading for pleasure pedagogy.

This summary draws upon the following papers which are available at <http://oro.open.ac.uk/>

Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Bearne, E. and Goodwin, P. (2008) Exploring teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature *Cambridge Journal of Education* 38 (4): 449-464.

Cremin, T. (2010) Motivating children to read through literature in G. Gillon, J. Fletcher, and F. Parkhill, (Eds) *Motivating literacy learners in today’s world* Auckland: New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER)

To read more about the research: see the Executive Summaries, related papers on <http://oro.open.ac.uk/>

or the core book

<https://www.routledge.com/Building-Communities-of-Engaged-Readers-Reading-for-pleasure/Cremin-Mottram-Collins-Powell-Safford/p/book/9781138777484>

