

## Context

A core requirement in our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) English department is that, over their three years, students keep a reading file which catalogues the children's books they read. In it, they reflect on the teaching and learning opportunities these texts could provide in the primary classroom. This has been mandatory since I was a student, twenty years ago, and the reason behind its implementation has always been sound: without a core knowledge and understanding of children's books, you are unable to support pupils' diverse reading needs and tastes. Yet this has always been seen as an onerous task for many students who, during the opening seminar, confessed to only populating it days before the file inspection!

Having become lead for the final year module (U71170: Literature in the Primary School), I proposed to my English team that using [Goodreads](#) (an online, socially collaborative learning approach to the reading journal) could prove more motivating than the traditional, individual one. With the aim of inspiring students to expand their limited knowledge of children's books, populating the online journals would become a continual and engaging experience rather than an assessed piece at the end of the module.



Goodreads is a website which sits on front of Amazon. It contains the entire catalogue of all books that they have access to, and for those that they do not, the site offers the ability to add your own entries. It allows members to search the database, reader friends' reviews whilst writing their own and log books that they want to read in the future. It enables users to see what members are currently reading and tag, thematically, books that they've read. You can also create reading lists, groups, offer book suggestions to others and have online discussions about reading.

## Research inspiration and rationale

The UKLA study involving 1200 primary teachers revealed that the majority relied on a limited range of children's authors to support reading development and planning (Cremin et al., 2009, 2014). This lack of knowledge has been shown to have a direct correlation with a decline in children reading for pleasure and national attainment results in reading and writing (Hurd et al., 2006; Twist et al., 2007). To counter this, Cremin and her team, worked with 43 teachers in the TaRS project which led to improved subject knowledge, motivation and enthusiasm towards reading which, in turn, was reciprocated in the pupils that they taught (Cremin, 2014, p. 25). They also saw an increase in attainment and achievement in reading.

Planning opportunities for collaborative learning where ITE students work together to enrich their subject knowledge is a pedagogical approach that I value. An investigation into improving students' knowledge and understanding of children's books could, potentially, see them better equipped to improve reading and writing standards, attend to pupils' reading needs and interests and foster a sense of enjoyment in their future classroom. With the current knowledge of my students mirroring Cremin's initial study, I wanted to see whether creating an online community of reading teachers could have similar results. If so, this could inform their practice and grant them greater opportunities for exploring effective and inclusive pedagogical approaches to reading.

## Aims

- To support ITE students in widening their knowledge of high-quality children's literature.
- To encourage ITE students to read for pleasure in the hope that this is carried in on their future practice.
- To choose an approach to the reading journals that is collaborative and is sustained beyond ITE.

## Outline

The investigation was run throughout all four module groups which included 101 students. Assessing the success of the approach came through online observations, a survey and a questionnaire set at the module's close. Before beginning, I decided to remove all module requirements related to reading journal

expectations and shared this with the students. A non-assessed engagement with Goodreads would, I argued, give an honest and reliable overview of whether this approach was implicitly motivational and useful.

Every student's Goodreads account was regularly monitored during and after the module. Like Facebook, Goodreads has an update feed which publishes everyone's account activity and allows access to individual profiles. This permitted me to see what students had read, were reading, who they were following and any reviews they had written. This guided my questions when sending messages to students in Goodreads, allowed me to recommend books to individuals based on their reading and monitor its use by the cohort.

During the final seminar, a paper-based questionnaire asked students to evaluate their Goodreads' experience in order to inform my future practice and encourage them reflect on their own. The six brief, open-ended questions aimed to encourage students to share experiences of Goodreads, evaluate their use of it and reflect on how they could improve related practice.

## **Impact**

The feedback from the students regarding whether an online, collaborative approach to reading journals over the traditional solitary files suggests that it has, at the very least encouraged students to be more proactive in improving their learning and attitudes with regards to their knowledge of children's books. The fact that one group said that it had inspired them to read more and another noted how they had begun to enjoy reading again, highlighted for me the intrinsic motivational potential that comes with learning alongside others in an online community.

I also found that modelling and supporting the use of Goodreads needs be constant in order to maintain students' motivation and engagement, whilst encouraging them to share their own successes and failures. Students also valued seeing my own passion for reading as I modelled using Goodreads and they engaged more with their reading when I commented on their progress. Students commented on how this social aspect was both motivational and inspirational. See the exemplar below.

## **Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice**

As I mentioned at the start, TaRs highlighted the importance of teachers needing to have a rich reading repertoire in order to cater for children's different reading needs and interest.

The results from the first run were very encouraging and what struck me most was how the process became more autonomous the more students joined and took part. I also noticed, through students using Goodreads to recommend books to each other, that the quality of texts chosen for the accompanying module assignment was far better than the previous year.

The idea of a community of readers had a real impact on me and made me think about how this relationship between ITE and teachers in the field continues after the students' graduate.

# Student Exemplar 1:

This student has capitalised on the use of tagging books through the use of bookshelves. Should she require a book on 'bears' when recommending or reading to class, she can easily access the ones that she has catalogued. I can also see how many reviews the student has done.

Full reviews are indicated in a student's library through the comment (with text). This makes it easier for the lecturer and peers to access.

The student's review of The Tunnel is on the following page. Below is an example of the student creating a bookgroup to broaden her reading range and encourage discussion.

cover	title	author	avg rating	rating	my rating	comments	date read	date added
	The Tunnel	Brownie, Anthony	3.95	★★★★★	★★★★★	1	Jan 05, 2016	Jan 05, 2016 <a href="#">view (with text)</a>
	The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters	Ahlberg, Janet	4.48	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	Nov 17, 2015	Nov 17, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	Goldilocks and Just One Bear	Hodgkinson, Leigh	4.05	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	Nov 11, 2015	Nov 11, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	A Bear Called Paddington (Paddington, #1)	Bond, Michael	4.20	★★★★★	★★★★★	1	Nov 11, 2015	Oct 20, 2015 <a href="#">view (with text)</a>
	Magic Box	Cleminson, Katie	3.75	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	Nov 12, 2015	Oct 02, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	We're Going on a Bear Hunt	Rosen, Michael	4.25	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	not set	Sep 29, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	Where's My Teddy?	Alborough, Jez	4.18	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	not set	Sep 29, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?	Waddell, Martin	4.13	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	not set	Sep 29, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	Peace At Last	Murphy, Jill	4.21	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	not set	Sep 29, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>
	Orange Pear Apple Bear	Gravett, Emily	3.99	★★★★★	★★★★★	0	not set	Sep 29, 2015 <a href="#">view</a>

## review of The Shadow Keeper > Liked By

(showing 1-2 of 2)

419 books  
30 friends

**Abi**  
79 books  
408 friends

In relation to the review of 'The Shadow Keeper' on the following page, note that Friends have 'liked' the student's review. One of these is the author herself showing the potential for motivation and inspiration in extending reading. Many students followed Abi after seeing her 'like' R's review.

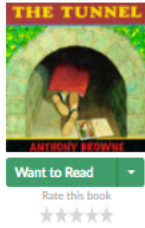
**R GROUPS** recent posts

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**Group C and beyond!** – 7 members – last activity Jan 14, 2016 07:09AM

This group was created so that we can recommend any good books amongst our group. Also, similar books could be read so that we can discuss them in det ...more

R



## Reviews > The Tunnel

### The Tunnel

by Anthony Browne



R

Jan 05, 2016

★★★★★

bookshelves: bravery, anthony-browne, bears, emotions, environment, eys, fairy-tale, family, journey, imagination, ks1, ks2, perspective, picture-books, wolves

Read on January 05, 2016

I finally read this book today, whilst sat in a classroom during which the children were packing up from their lesson. While I was reading the book, I found myself getting the most strangest looks, but that was because of the facial expressions I was pulling due to my utter enjoyment in the book. I found that whilst reading the book, I was taken into the tunnel with the children, and shared the same experience with them.

Anthony Browne has yet again produced an amazing children's book for children of all ages. With links being made relating to fairy tales, such as Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, and Goldilocks and the Three Bears, through illustrations, children of all ages could easily relate to this book and develop a love of reading. Those of all abilities could interact with this book, whether this be by focusing on the pictures and the words or by just focusing on one aspect (either purely the words or the illustrations), the teacher could develop a community where children are confident when sharing ideas.

Drama opportunities - Children could explore this book using drama. For example, hot-seating could be used to explore emotions, freeze frames could be used where similar images are created but alternative fairy tales are used, conscience alley could be used to persuade the girl to either follow the boy through the tunnel or to leave him.

Links to other stories - Alice in Wonderland, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

Receptive context - The teacher that I have been working with in the last few weeks has decided to use this book with her class, because of how much I have been inspired to investigate myself. Together, we have decided to use a tunnel where the children can go through it, sharing the experience that was experienced by the two characters. Also, to explore the story further, we are going to get the children to draw what they think is at the end of the tunnel before actually exploring the story. The overall aim of the unit is to develop children's curiosity but to also get them excited about reading.

1 like - Unlike - flag

date ▼ newest ▸

message 1: by Mathew

Jan 05, 2016 11:09AM



Absolutely fab review R

- a great understanding of its potential.

reply | edit | delete | flag \*

Note that the review was written whilst the student was on placement showing its accessibility over the traditional file approach. The student's review which shows that the she has not only understood the themes within the text well and considered reader suitability (see bookshelves) but also suggests pedagogical approaches to its use in the classroom. This review is accessible to anyone who has a Goodreads account and comes up on the timeline of anyone who is Friends with the student. Below is my reply which sits beneath the review. Anyone who follows either myself or the student see when I responded (same day) and my comment.

The review on the right shows the student reading a quality text after I had read, rated and reviewed it (seen under 'My Rating'. Note the reading progress comments the student is making. This offers a different overview to the student reading experience than the traditional method.

R



## Reviews > The Shadow Keeper

### The Shadow Keeper

by Abi Elphinstone (Goodreads Author)



R

Mar 18, 2016

★★★★★

bookshelves: angels, abi-elphinstone, animals, admiration, belonging, bereavement, bravery, conflict, confrontation, courage, emotions, family, fears, friendship, heroes, hopes-and-dreams, imagination, journey, ks2, loss, magic, memories, mysterious-creatures, novels, mystery, relationships, rescuing, reunion, sacrifice, seperation, sequel, thriller, secrets, tribes, tricks

Read from March 15 to 18, 2016

Well where do I start? Abi is a pure and utter genius! From start to finish, I was so engaged with the text and I am beyond excited for the final instalment.

It was great to be reunited with Moll and Gruff, but it was also lovely to be introduced to Puddle, Scrap and Willow. I found myself intrigued as to what Moll and Sidy were going to get up to and what dark forces they were going to face - at times I wanted to be there with them!

Now since last summer, there have not been many books that have really grabbed my attention, none that I have read so quickly, however this one I couldn't put down! I think this was because I empathised with the characters so much. After being on adventures with them before, I knew what they were like and what they could face, and this time I just felt like I was with them. I got pretty emotional throughout the book, especially when Willow was being so encouraging and thoughtful and when Olive was talking to her daughter, Moll, through a letter - such beautiful words. Also, (how can I forget) I got so anxious when Gryff was hurt, but I am so glad he is okay! Abi's characterisation is just mind blowing and I hope to discover more authors who are like this!

Throughout the book I could imagine every page so clearly in my mind. From the Owls with wings like knives, to the beautiful golden eagle at the end, I could clearly picture everything which made it so much more exciting. I would love for children in my class to read this book and interpret what they read through drawing/art; it would be great to see if our ideas were similar! Furthermore, I would definitely love to see this book on the big screen!!

This is such an excellent book and I feel so lucky to have read it! I am most definitely giving this book, and Abi's current series a place in my classroom. Every child should have the privilege of reading this magnificent story and experience the same as what I have with Moll and Gryff. A huge thumbs up and five stars from me!

2 likes - Like - flag

### READING PROGRESS

Graph

11/10 marked as: to-read

03/15 marked as: currently-reading

03/17 page 116 36.0% "Definitely agree with Piers Torday who suggests that the book reminds him of Harry Potter. All I seem to be doing is making links!"

03/18 page 211 65.0% "Willow definitely reminds me of a fairy god mother!"

03/18 page 252 78.0% "I can't stop myself from reading this! It is so good! Abi is a genius."

03/18 marked as: read

show 8 hidden updates...