

Laying the foundations of Reading for Pleasure for student teachers.

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Context

I work as a part of the Primary PGCE team at the Institute of Education in London and lead the Primary English module on the PGCE course. I also work on the Teach First programme plan and teach on this 2-year PGDE (post graduate diploma of education). I took over the role of English lead in 2017 on the PGCE and inherited a well-established course whose central vision is for trainees to leave the IOE as newly qualified teachers with an understanding of themselves as teachers of reading and how to foster reading motivation as well as instruction, within their classrooms. My role therefore has been to enhance and continue this solid foundation. This example of practice is focused on the work which has been done on the Primary PGCE course during 2019/2020.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

A core aim of the PGCE course is to foster a love and knowledge of children's literature which draws on research which identifies that teachers' knowledge of children's literature is often limited, and limited to books which were read as a child, or to a small unit of well-known authors (Cremin et al, 2008). This focus is used as a starting point to ensure that students are given a rounded concept of what it means to teach reading and to be a reading teacher. We want the students to develop their knowledge of children's literature across the training year to ensure that they have a repertoire of books which will enable them to recommend books to children and foster reading for pleasure in their classrooms. The aspiration is that these trainees will begin their careers with a broader knowledge of children's books and have fostered an interest, which will act as a foundation to develop through their careers. This, we hope, will further enable them as future teachers to understand children's reading preferences. The course seeks to position both components of reading: 'the will' and 'the skill' (Cremin, 2019) within the concept of reading pedagogy of which reading for pleasure is a part, so student teachers understand these concepts theoretically and are able then to critically examine and reflect on the practice they see as they develop their own balanced reading repertoire.

Aims

- To develop students understanding and knowledge of children's literature and other texts
- To support students to begin to understand the concept of reading for pleasure and its position within the reading curriculum
- To encourage them to undertake an initiative which allows them to apply their understanding to support reading for pleasure within a classroom.

Outline

The following items demonstrate how we foster developing student teacher's knowledge of children's literature and reading for pleasure across the academic year.

1. Precourse preparation

Pre course preparation focuses on developing student's knowledge of children's literature. It begins with a short survey of their knowledge focussing on fiction, non-fiction, poetry and picture book authors. It is followed up with a recommended reading list and the challenge of reading at least 4 picture books and 3 novels before the course starts and encourages them to read new authors.

Students are also asked to consider their own reading development in the form of a reading river. We ask them to consider it over their formative years from 4 – 16 and reflect on themselves as readers. We use these pre course tasks to begin discussing reader identity and notion of reading teachers within the first English session. One student commented on the process: 'I've just returned to my family home and have so enjoyed revisiting all the books on my shelf that I read when I was younger! It's been so enlightening returning to them now ...'

1. Essential: Read, read, read ... books for children

Introducing good quality children's literature into our classrooms and English planning is exciting. The range of books available is vast, so choosing can be difficult, we have provided a recommended reading list to help you expand your knowledge.

What you need to do:

- Complete the children's literature questionnaire (page 2 of recommended reading list see below) to audit what you know now about children's books.
- Referring to the recommended list of children's literature, aim to read at least 4 picture books and 3 novels before the course begins. Choose books which are not already familiar to you.
- Think about the different kinds of literature you may have read as a child and through your adolescence to your reading habits now. This may include books, magazines, webpages, films, comics.



2. Sharing our enthusiasm for children's literature

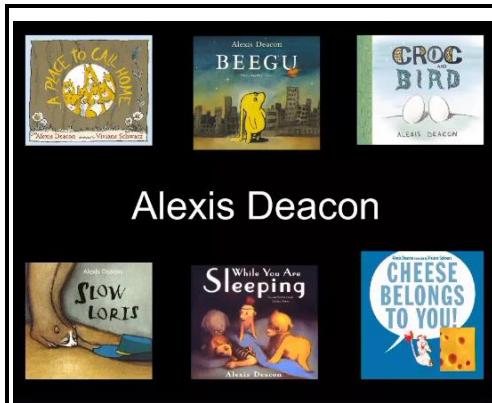


English Session 5 'Talk for Learning'

Drawing on research findings that the teacher role in engendering enthusiasm for reading is critical, as a teaching team, we committed to sharing personal favourites at the beginning of teaching sessions to support

the continued momentum and focus on introducing the students to a range of authors. This enabled tutors to share personal recommendations with groups and begin to understand student's interests and enthusiasms. Additionally, the title pages of each sessions' presentations include a range of children's literature.

3. Reading for Pleasure afternoon



Alexis Deacon

In February 2020, we gathered the cohort together for a reading for pleasure afternoon where we looked in more detail at the underpinning research for reading for pleasure and considered how it can be put into practice in school. This year we gave a short lecture which covered the research, then invited the Deputy Head and Reading for pleasure lead from Princess Frederica Primary school, one of the schools within our partnership, to share their reading for pleasure practice. This supported students to see how the theory underpinned practice and the afternoon finished off with an engaging and inspiring talk from children's author Alexis Deacon.

4. Reading for Pleasure initiative.

The same afternoon saw the launch of our Reading for Pleasure initiative where we invite students to undertake a reading for pleasure initiative as part of their long school placement in the summer term. We introduce it part way through the spring term so that they can begin to plan and thinking about it. Students are invited to develop a book corner, a reading club, plan a unit or work with a children's book or something else.



Promote Reading for Pleasure!



The Reading for Pleasure prize has been amended to take account of the new Learning Loop 3.

We invite you to share either one or both of the activities we have asked you to undertake in Learning Loop 3. If you had already made plans before this guidance was amended, then please share these too.

Please share your work via this link on moodle:

<https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/mod/forum/view.php?id=142315>

Two prizes will be awarded: a winner's prize and a highly commended prize.

This year, due to COVID 19, we adapted the criteria to include work suggested to students as part of work in the summer term as students could not complete their final practice. This included: reflecting on their developing knowledge of children's literature as well as planning a sequence of lessons based on a children's book of their choice. Each of these activities drew on the components of the course. Some students had already made plans for their initiative and the pandemic did not deter them.



Impact

Students were able to demonstrate through their sharing of ideas and initiatives how the course had influenced their developing knowledge and understanding of children's literature. A total of 39 submissions were made from a cohort of 240. These included reflections on their developing knowledge of children's literature – see figure 1. These demonstrated students' engagement with reading, as well as observing and seeing books in use in school as well as those introduced in taught sessions and old favourites.

Students also demonstrated their capacity and pedagogic understanding to plan sequences of lessons choosing a range of children's books which interested them. Book selections were justified on each plan relating to books relatability, themes, engaging language and images.

Figure 1

The winning entries reflected more individual initiatives. These were judged by our colleagues from Princess Frederica Primary school in conjunction with the English Team. We ended up with 13 finalists from which there were three standout examples of practice.

Winner: Sophie Onn, Little Local readers

An interactive webspace to support local children in the Chilterns to share books read during lockdown. Sophie's winning entry was an imaginative method to engage children with reading and to begin to understand what children were reading and to learn from them.



Runner Up: Ellie Bird

Ellie created an engaging book corner for her year six class so that they could be inspired to read and be able to make better decisions on what to read. This resulted in the Bookflix section where top picks and 'trending now' and further recommendations could be found



Runner Up: Rachel Roper.

Rachel's entry reflected the need for children to find themselves in the books they read. Using interactive QR codes, children equipped with iPads can find online books which reflect a range of issues, cultures and ethnicity. A practical and innovative idea for a book corner, supporting digital literacy.



There were ten other examples which were worthy entrants which demonstrated the engagement the students had undertaken over the course of the. We were able to circulate the submissions via a PADLET so the cohort were able to draw on and magpie others. As one finalist said: 'It was amazing seeing what everyone came up with for this prize and I can't wait to "magpie" people's ideas!'

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Sustaining a profile on Reading for Pleasure throughout the PGCE course with a focus on developing students' knowledge of children's literature has enabled students to gain the following benefits:

- 1 A rounded sense of what what teaching reading may involve and the nature of the balance between the affective and instructional aspects of reading teaching.
- 2 There was a palpable sense that the initiative supported students' own views on the importance and value of reading as an activity of intrinsic value. One student keen on poetry commented: "I can't wait to use it in the classroom and start breaking down both children's and teachers' fear of poetry in the classroom! I wasn't sure how much people considered poetry when thinking about reading for pleasure, so it was affirming to be shortlisted. And my submission being the only one to focus on poetry somewhat shows why this is important!"

As a team we were delighted with the quality of the entrants and the enthusiasm of the students to engage with us. We arranged three online reading groups where we shared books recommendations and cups of tea. These were voluntary but attended by a proportion of students. Each group shared their recommendations with each other, and it was lovely to see the range of books students were engaging with.

Looking ahead

As we move into a new academic year, we have already begun to consider how we can further develop the course and this focus and are asking ourselves the following questions as we ponder our ways forward.

- Can we further support and maintain the engagement in Reading for Pleasure with our PGCE alumni through an Online Teachers as Readers group? It seems sensible to capture their interest within the PGCE Training year and build this further through the Teachers as Readers group.
- How can we build into the course, further scaffolding and planning support so that students can confidently plan their own sequences of work using children's literature as a stimulus?
- When introducing texts to the students how can we ensure that these selections reflect their realities? We are building and creating our own central collection of book recommendations to select from via an Online Padlet. Each of the tutor team will be able to make a contribution, thereby we create our own in house reading community which is reading widely as well . This will mean we can consistently draw on a range of recent, relevant, classic and other texts to introduce students to where all realities might be found.
- As the academic year moves beginning the course online, we need to consider further how we develop our online reading communities with the support of Padlet.

