

There's no beating hot seating!

Context

I am a trainee teacher on the SCITTELS School Direct PGCE programme. I conducted my research in a Year 5 class of a 4-form entry primary school in Newham, which was the location of my first teaching placement.

SCITTELS

School Centred Initial Teacher Training
in East London Schools

Research inspiration and rationale

I found the TaRs research particularly thought provoking and relevant to my own developing practice due to the nature of its planned and explicit reading for pleasure pedagogy. More specifically, it provided a rationale for providing children with an opportunity to develop a love for reading on their own terms, informally, in a social reading environment.

However, I felt that while such environments may already exist in schools, children may be unable to access them effectively if they do not have the requisite tools with which to do so. Consequently, the TaRs research provided the rationale through which I could endeavour to provide children with a specific skill set which they would be able to utilise informally, on their own terms, within a social reading environment.

Aims

The principal aim of my research was to provide children with the skills with which they can develop an in-depth understanding of a book, perhaps as a way of escapism, by fully understanding and empathising with the situation and characters about which they are reading. I had come across some fantastic book corners, however I wanted them to be more than just a place where children went to pick up a book, but instead where children could access another world, the reality in which books are set.

To do this, I set out to enable children to actively get to know the characters about whom they were reading, through discussions with their peers, not formally, but informally, just like an adult might discuss the content of a book with a friend.

Outline

To provide children with the tools to comprehend literary characters, I decided to focus on an activity which would develop their ability to empathise. The chosen activity was hot seating, an activity where one child takes the role of an interviewer and the other the role of the character. The former questions the latter, who does their best to answer the questions from the character's perspective.



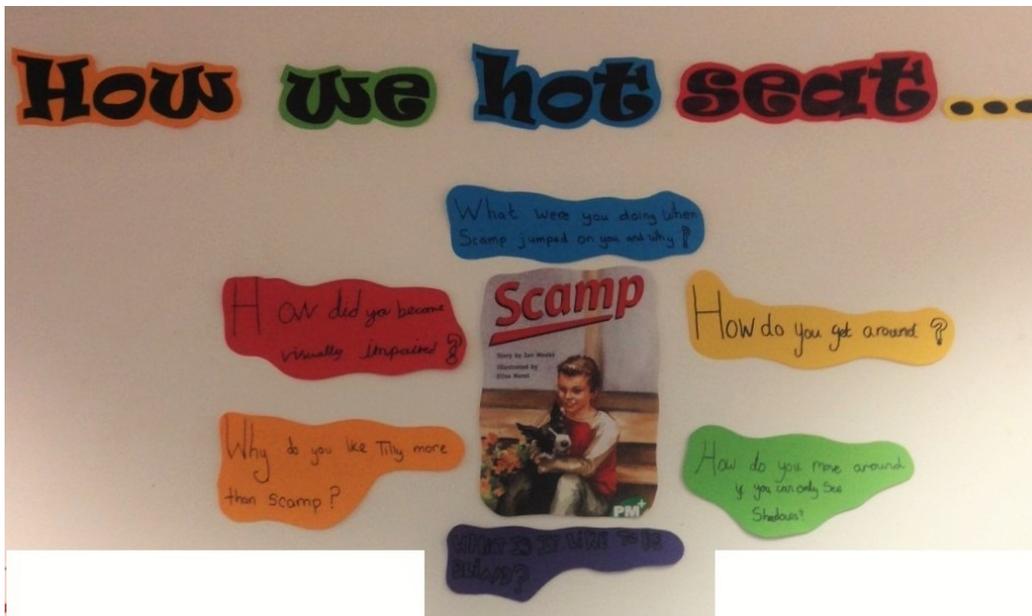
In accordance with one of the considerations of the TaRs research, I reviewed a range of contemporary children's books to develop my subject knowledge of children's literature and selected one which introduced the theme of homelessness ('Way Home' by Libby Hathorn). I then worked with the children to develop a set

of questions which they could ask the principal character, before undertaking a 20-minute hot seating session. The activity was then repeated the following week with another book ('Scamp' by Jan Weeks) to provide the children with an opportunity to compare and contrast two characters, which had at least one major theme in common, which in this instance was loneliness.

Impact

The children were enthused by hot-seating and, between sessions often expressed their enthusiasm for the next session, which demonstrates the impact of the activity. Equally important was the effect on the children's ability to impersonate and empathise a character. By the end of the second hot seating session, the children were using their voice, body language and facial expressions to put themselves in character and this helped to significantly deepen the children's understanding of both the character and the book as a whole.

To capture the children's enthusiasm for the activity, I asked them to select their favourite questions and used them to create a hot seating display in the reading corner. This now serves as a visual reminder of how children can use hot-seating with their peers to develop their understanding of a literary character through a fun, interactive, yet informal activity. Furthermore, even if reading alone, it is these types of thoughtful questions which children need to be able to naturally pose and mull over in their own minds when reading.



Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The TaRs research has had a significant impact on my practice, firstly by encouraging me to acquire a greater understanding of contemporary children's literature, in addition to widening my focus from the authors of my childhood with which I am most familiar. More specifically, in the context of this project, the TaRs research has provided me with a rationale to promote informal book talk and social reading environments within my classroom and the wider school. Further to this, it has been an opportunity to reflect upon how children can be equipped with the tools they need to maximise the effectiveness of social reading environments and then to implement strategies through which these needs are met.