

7 | HOW DOES READING FOR PLEASURE IMPACT ATTITUDES TO READING?



Kimberley Platts
Scotts Park Primary School

1 | INTRODUCTION

*"You can find magic wherever you look.
Sit back and relax, all you need is a book"*

Dr Suess

I am an Australian trained teacher who has been teaching for 5 years. My teaching career began in a rural school with less than 30 pupils from Kindergarten to Year 6. I moved to the UK in 2014, and taught in Key Stage 2 for one year before finding my current job in Year 2 in a Bromley school, where I have now been teaching for two years. This Bromley school is a mixed 2 and 3 form entry school. In comparison to other schools, it has a low percentage of Special Education Needs and Pupil Premium students, however, more children with English as an Additional Language, often only able to speak their home language, are coming to the school. My project aimed to improve attitudes to reading by allowing more time to engage in reading for pleasure.

It was not until I looked in my 6 and 7-year-old student's home reading diaries that I realised I was not providing them with enough opportunities to engage in reading. I was so focussed on ensuring that we were doing all we could to reach their extremely high targets in Maths and English, that I had assumed that the parents would be picking up on reading at home. Of course, there were the children who regularly changed their reading books, or the ones who would excitedly come and tell me about their latest reading adventure and the children who asked to read if they had finished their work or during golden time. But what about the children who did not do any of these things? The ones that groaned when it was time to do Guided Reading and quickly held an upside-down book in front of their face when they realised I was scanning the room. I wanted to reach these children and show them that they too, could be impacted and engaged by this task that seemed so daunting and tedious to them.

2 | METHODOLOGY

Action research is the appropriate method for my project because it allowed me to implement a dynamic process of inquiry in the context of my classroom, in order to improve teaching and learning. It is often used to investigate specific issues or problems associated with classroom or school life. (Stringer, Ernest, Christenson, McFadyen & Baldwin, 2010) I have employed the action research approach, because I investigated an implication of my teaching and wanted to improve teaching and learning in my classroom. I believe that action research is a valid way of finding new knowledge because in my opinion, every teacher should critically reflect on their practice and adapt

their teaching to suit the learning needs in their class, this idea is supported by Koshy who writes that action research is based on enquiry and is undertaken with rigour and understanding to constantly refine practice (Koshy, 2008).

Action research combines the ideas of taking purposeful action with educational intent (McNiff, 2010). I used the action research model explained by Stringer to guide my project. (2010) Stringer writes that action research is a simple, ongoing process involving three components. The first component, 'Look', involves acquiring information and data. 'Think', comprises of reflecting on information. The last component, 'Act' uses outcomes of reflection and analysis to plan, implement and evaluate. The process provides a scaffold on which to build effective lessons that engage students (Stringer, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Before I commenced my project, I needed to ensure that no ethical breaches or harm would come to my participants. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) states that educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect. Individuals should be treated fairly and with a freedom from prejudice. (BERA, 2011) Smith (1990) believes that before we conduct our research we should consider the likely consequences of the research and whether we are pushing a personal agenda. As well as this, we should be empathic to the research participants, more specifically, would we want this research to be carried out if we were participants?

Some of the ethical considerations I made during this action research process included gaining consent from my participants. Consent is the procedure by which an individual may choose whether or not to participate in a study (Drew, 2008). I ensured that my pupils, although young, understood what the project was going to entail, and what they would need to do as participants, an idea supported by Best & Kahn (2006) and Jones & Kottler (2006). When they had a clear understanding of the project and what we were going to do, the children signed their name on a list. All children were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the project at any time (BERA, 2011), and this idea was reinforced regularly throughout the project. Because this research would be shared with other colleagues, I wanted to ensure that my research would not violate any privacy rights. After careful consideration of the actions that the children would be involved in, I decided to obtain verbal consent from parents and all parents willingly gave consent for their children to participate in the project.

3 | AREA OF CONCERN

As stated earlier in my report, my concern stemmed from my shock at how little some children in my class were reading both inside and outside of the classroom. I had made a terrible assumption that our home reading expectations were being implemented at home. But after looking through each child's home reading record, I discovered that some children had not had a new book from the school since the Autumn term. Evans and Shaw highlight that home reading is valuable in growing the prerequisite skills (word recognition, phonological ability, alphabetic knowledge, concepts of print and vocabulary) for reading development. They also state that the time invested in reading as a family directly relates to how children perceive reading. (Evans & Shaw, 2008).

I found that my classroom did not have a distinct or positive 'reading culture'. This realisation encouraged me to clearly focus on improving reading for pleasure in my class, in the hope that I would begin to turn reading in to a positive experience for the children who clearly did not enjoy delving in to a book. Research conducted by the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA, 2008)

has found that reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships. I recognised that to promote attitudes to reading in my classroom, then I needed to model to the children that I also engaged in and enjoyed reading. This idea is supported by Cremin, who argues that 'reading teachers' can intrinsically motivate and positively motivate children's desire to read (Cremin et al, 2014).

The Current Climate of Reading in my Classroom - Reading for pleasure has been defined by Clark and Rumbold as 'reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that has not begun at someone else's request, we continue because we are interested in it' (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

In my classroom, there are a few opportunities for reading throughout the day offered, but these are usually related to evidence that I needed to collect for the SATs, or to provide contextual links to writing. The class participate in a 25-minute Guided Reading Carousel daily. We also explore quality texts in English and occasionally read a story before home time.

Hanke reports that the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) introduced the idea of the guided reading carousel in 1999 to promote a 'carefully balanced reading programme.' (Hanke, 2013) (DfEE, 1998) Beard goes on to explain that theoretically, small group reading time, made more efficient use of a teacher's time and enabled teachers to embed reading strategies, like phonics and comprehension, more explicitly. (Beard, 1999) However, further research conducted by Fisher and Skidmore et al, 2003, found flaws in this model. They discovered that small group guided reading sessions, were teacher dominated and there was little opportunity for children to engage in collaborative discussion and evaluate their reading. (Skidmore 2003) (Fisher, 2008) This sounded like a familiar story for the reading that was happening in my class and I knew that for this project to be successful; I would need to reflect and improve on my current practice and create a plan of action to implement in the class.

4 | DATA TO INFORM THE ACTION

I conducted a survey with my class to set a baseline percentage, against which I would measure my results at the end of the project. Descombe (2007) suggests that the successful use of surveys depends on devoting the right balance of effort to the planning stage. (Descombe, 2007) As a result, I needed to make sure that my questions were clear and specific and that they helped inform my project. I had to ensure that the survey was accessible to all the reading abilities of children in my class so that I would be collecting honest and accurate data. I made the choice to use a closed-question, multiple choice style survey. Wilkinson writes that the main advantage of this style of data collection is that the answers from participants is effective in length and that it also lends itself nicely to being quantified and compared (Wilkinson, 2003).

Sample of Results from 'Reading in Year 2 Survey'

Question	% ☺	% ☹ or ☹
I like reading.	64%	36%
I think that I am a good reader.	60%	40%
I like to read at school.	53%	47%
I like to talk about books I have read.	43%	57%
I like reading with a partner or a friend.	57%	43%
I read every night.	28%	72%
I get enough time to read at school.	39%	61%

To me, the results of my survey were staggering. I was surprised at some of the high achieving children that did not like reading and at the children who did like to read at school. But I was mostly surprised by the percentage of pupils in the class that did not read at home and the children who would like to read more at school.

As a result, I considered what I knew about the children and from this data collection decided to pursue a purposive sampling route. Denscombe describes purposive sampling as 'hand picking' because the researcher already knows about the specific people or group and knows that they may be able to provide the best information (Denscombe, 1998). I decided to purposively sample my focus group as I wanted the group to consist of a mix of boys and girls from a range of abilities, educational needs and backgrounds. Now that I had collected my baseline data and found my core focus group, I would use interviews and observations to inform my project further. Cohen and Manion describe interviews as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. (Cohen & Manion, 2011) Upon further research, I decided to adopt an open, flexible approach known as the unstructured interview strategy as described by Kerlinger (1970). This informal style, allowed me to change my questions as the discussion with the focus group progressed throughout the interview. I chose to interview my focus group after the initial data collection to explore their answers further and gain more context.

As my project continued, I met with the focus group weekly to discuss their reading progress. Often during a reading activity, I would also ask children from the focus group how they were going and what their thoughts were on the task. Cohen and Manion write that group interviews are most effective when the children challenge and extend each other's ideas and that ranking responses is a valuable way of collecting data. (Cohen and Manion, 1980) I agree with these notions, because as my project continued, I noticed that the focus group children enjoyed talking about the reading activities that they had participated in and towards the end of the project, I became an observer in their "group chat" while they independently facilitated their discussion, compared activities and challenged or supported each other's ideas.

5 | ACTION

Action 1 – Hooked in to Reading

After exploring the results from my baseline survey, I decided that I needed to revamp the entire perception about reading in my class and classroom. Our first task was to create a 'River of Reading'. I first heard about the River of Reading at a cross-borough reading seminar delivered by Val Cork. It is, as described and developed by Burnard, a collage of a river, reflecting a person's reading over time – 24hours, a weekend etc... (Burnard, 2002) We created our rivers about books that we had read so far in our lifetime. I modelled how to create the River, showing the class how to make a little book. I included books that were important to me, but that I knew some of them had read, J.K. Rowling, Enid Blyton etc., and talked to them about why these books were important to me. I saw their excitement starting to grow, as they could make a connection about these books too. When it became their turn to complete the task, the whole class were off in an instant, but more interestingly, even though 57% of the class had indicated that they did not enjoy talking about books, they were engaged with their peers in 'book talk.' Pie Corbett describes book talk as the ability to talk about books and developing the confidence to offer ideas. (Corbett, 2008) He believes that it helps children to trust their own ideas and interpretations, deepens understanding and can shift ideas and thinking together as a group. (Corbett, 2008)

I asked the adults in my classroom to create their own river of reading with the children and engage in book talk with them, making observations about how they were communicating with each other, questions they were asking, links and connections they were making and how they were participating in the task. We discovered that the class were talking about books they had read and parts of the books that they had enjoyed, they were discussing, and sometimes critically arguing, why they preferred one book to another and in some cases even started recommended other titles with similar story lines to books that they enjoyed.

After we had completed our River of Reading task, I interviewed the focus group. The focus group was made up of 8 children, 4 boys and 4 girls. The group compassed a range of abilities, backgrounds and educational needs, their results to the baseline survey were also mixed. For this first interview, I took all eight children together, I did notice however, that some children were more dominant in the group than others, so would need to take this in to consideration for future interviews. All children could explain the activity and agreed that we had done the activity to help my research project, find out what other people in the class were reading and to talk and share ideas. They all agreed that the activity was enjoyable, but some children in the group expressed anxiety about not being sure what books to choose, realising that they do not read enough or that the books that they have at home seem to be more for their sisters than for them. At the end of the activity, we shared our Rivers with everyone in our class; the focus group all agreed that they enjoyed sharing their Rivers with their peers. "It was interesting to see what books other people in the class like," (Pupil 4) "It was funny when I had the same book as someone else," (Pupils 1 and 7) and "I got some ideas of other books that I might like to read." (Pupils 2 and 3)

Action 2 – Building a Reading Community

After our River of Reading activity, I decided that I needed to create a positive reading space in my classroom, to reiterate the point that we were building a positive reading culture in our class. I bought pillows, soft lounges, carpets, a reading tent and blankets to make a comfortable area where the children could sit and read. I also bought some cuddly toys so that the children who didn't like reading to a friend, (43% of the class, as uncovered by the baseline survey) could sit with a toy and read with a toy instead, an idea promoted by Zimmerman. Zimmerman found that children are not self-conscious about stumbling over words when reading to a stuffed friend, and 'speed-demon page-flippers', would slow down to a comprehension-friendly pace. (Zimmerman, 2016)

The baseline survey also uncovered that 39% of children in the class were unsure or did not like the books in our class reading area. As a result, I decided to do a 'Book Blanket' activity with the class. Book Blankets can highlight the range of books in the class, enable the children to learn about different genres, encourage children to look in to books that they many not normally choose and can also assist in the reorganisation of a book area with the help of the children. (Lambirth, 2014) I covered the tables with all the books currently in our classroom and the class were encouraged to walk around the tables, looking at the books we had. After they had had the chance to look, I began giving instructions about different books to pick up. My first instruction was to pick up a book that they loved and explain to the person next to them why they loved this book. These books were then moved to another table so that we could see the books that people had picked, we engaged in 'Book Talk' about why we agreed that these books belonged on the "loved table." Other instructions that were given were; a book that you think one of your friends in the class would enjoy, a book that attracts you, a picture book that you enjoy or attracts you, a non-fiction text that looks interesting, a book that looks challenging and two other books that you know you enjoy.

As soon as we had collected all these books and restored them back to the reading area, we looked at the books we had left and with a partner, decided whether the books should be kept in our

classroom, or sent back to the library. Observation of the class and listening to paired discussion, particularly between children in the focus group, discovered that the class were inclined to keep books that related to our current and past topics so they could build and reflect on their current knowledge. They also considered keeping books that they had seen people read in the past, or books that they, or friends, might consider reading. I found the most interesting point to be that groups of children would reflect on the abilities of others in the class, for example; they chose to keep simple three-word picture books for the boy in our class who could not yet read, and they also kept more complex texts, like how to train your dragon and thick David Walliams books for children in the class that were 'great readers' and might need a challenge.

For the week following our 'revamped reading area' we would have free reading sessions. During this time, I would put out all of the cushions, sofas and blankets around the classroom, some relaxing music and we would just indulge in the quiet and read our books (or look at the pictures in the beginning stages) I found that when I would also sit with the children and read with them, they were more settled and willing to sit with one book, whereas if I was preparing for the following lesson, they would ask if there was anything that they could do to help or would become focussed on what was happening next.

Action 3 – Reading Partners

Once our reading area was engaging and relevant to the children in the class, I decided to start doing more reading as reading partners. The National Literacy Trust describes paired reading as having a skilled reader and a child who is learning, reading a book together. (National Literacy Trust, n.d.) I implemented these reading sessions twice a week. In the beginning, I let the class choose their partners themselves. I discovered that some of the class were motivated to read together, but there were some partners who would get distracted and then start distracting the pairs around them. Because over half of the class, and the focus group, enjoyed these paired sessions, I decided to continue with them, but realised that I would need to make them more structured. However, I did not want to stop the class from reading with their friends. To compromise, I changed one of the sessions to be a guided paired read session or 'robot reader' and left the other session as a random-partner read.

After researching the best ways to pair the class, I decided to use the criteria compiled by the Literacy Trust. I particularly felt that grouping children of a similar ability was important, so that the paired reading experience would still be positive and collaborative, with both pupils able to contribute, access and discuss the text. Feedback from the focus group confirmed that this was the right decision to make, "I enjoy reading with my friends, but sometimes I like to read with _____ and he is a much better reader than me... That makes me feel sad because I wish that I could read like that." (Pupil 7) "When I read with my robot reader I feel good because if I get stuck on a tricky word we try to sound it out together and help each other". (Pupils 1 & 2)

I also trialled reading with an older class. I found that my class were less likely to engage with the older class and would lose focus quickly. When I asked a member of the focus group about it they said that it was because "I don't have anything to do" (Pupil 3) However, when we read with Reception children the opposite occurred. The whole class were engaged in the task. They would ask questions to involve the Reception children in the text and point out interesting features in the pictures. They would ask the younger children if they enjoyed the book and encouraged them to go and find another text so that they could continue to read together. Feedback from the focus group indicated that reading to Reception pupils made them feel "less pressured." When I explored why, I found out that it was because "I didn't have to worry if I couldn't say a word properly, or if I needed a little while to think and sound out in my head. (Pupils 1 & 5) "It was okay if I couldn't read all of the story and I had to make some of it up, they still said that it was a good story" (Pupil 8)

Action 4 – Whole Class Stories

My next action, was to create a time where we would frequently read together as a class. I asked the pupils to bring in their favourite picture book, and to create five questions that they would ask the class about the book. To my surprise, 27 of my 28 pupils brought in a book to share. I would randomly choose a story (sometimes more than once a day) and we would read the book. Sometimes the children would know words and phrases from the story and would join in when I was reading these sentences. They would suggest voices that we could try for characters, like in *The Day the Crayons Quit*. They were engaged when the owner of the book stood up to be the 'mini-teacher' and asked their comprehension questions. I noticed that as a result of doing this activity, the quality of open-questioning and inferential questioning in the class improved, different children were becoming more confident at answering questions, particularly lower-ability, EAL boys. Also, because we were reading more texts, the class started to independently make connections between characters, settings and themes, they became more likely to start and carry on a discussion themselves, without input from me. It was becoming more beneficial listening to each other's views and debating if we agreed or disagreed than having a teacher-led carousel session. The focus group responded well to this approach.

6 | EVALUATION OF THE ACTION

At the end of the project I asked the pupils in my class to complete the 'Reading in Year 2' survey once again.

Post Project Results 'Reading in Year 2 Survey'

Question	% 😊	% 😊 or 😐
I like reading.	89%	11%
I think that I am a good reader.	73%	27%
I like to read at school.	91%	8%
I like to talk about books I have read.	97%	3%
I like reading with a partner or a friend.	96%	4%
I read every night.	46%	54%
I get enough time to read at school.	85%	15%

I was very pleased to see that attitudes to reading in the classroom had changed. I asked the class to rank the activities that we had completed over the course of the project and was not surprised to learn that they enjoyed reading with a friend or to a younger year group. I was surprised to see the change in attitude in talking about books and further analysis has highlighted to me that encouraging my EAL students to talk about books is a priority in my future practice. Another priority for me, is to find a way to engage parents and children in reading at home, as there has been little growth in this area within my classroom.

7 | CONCLUSION

The action research cycle has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the practice in my classroom. I was forced to critically reflect on my reading practice and how my pupils were engaging in reading. I discovered that we were going through the motions of reading, but the pupils were not engaged and in some cases not even benefiting in a carousel style of guided reading. I knew that this had to change, and immediately! I made the decision to learn about how my pupils felt about reading and why. I decided that rather than trying to lead them and tell them what to do, I would try and work with them, giving them power over how we read in the class and encouraging

them to take control and ownership of their reading habits. Through the actions that I implemented, I could see how attitudes to reading were changing, I could see how they were becoming more willing to read independently and with others, as well as the positive engagement in interactive reading projects and activities.

This project has informed my future practice, because I can see how important it is to instil a love of reading as early in the year as possible. I will use my project again to help me understand the reading habits of my new class and strive to ensure that I can improve any negative attitudes to reading. I will continue to reflect on my teaching and use the action research cycle to consistently improve my practice.

8 | REFERENCES

- Beard, R. (1999) *Nation Literacy Strategy: Review of Research and Other Related Evidence*. London: DfE Publications.
- British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Available from: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf> (Accessed July 2017)
- Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. Geelong: Deakin University Press
- Clark, C., and Rumbold, K. (2006) *Reading for Pleasure a research overview*. London: The National Literacy Trust. Available at: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/reading-pleasure-research-overview/>
- Cohen, L., and Manion, L. (1980) *Research Methods in Education*. 4th Edition. London: Routledge Press.
- Corbett, P. (2008). *The National Strategies Primary: Book Talk*. Available at: http://webfronter.com/lewisham/primarycommunity/menu1/Writing/Talk_for_Writing/Booktalk_by_Pie_Corbett (Accessed July 2017)
- Cremin, T. Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S. and Stafford K. (2014) *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for pleasure*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Denscombe, M. (1998) *The Good Research Guide: For small-scale social research projects*. 2nd Edition. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Drew, C. J., Hardman, M. L. and Hosp, J. L. (2008) *Designing and conducting research in education*. Los Angeles, Calif: SAGE Publications.
- Evans, M A. and Shaw, D. (2008) Home Grown for Reading: Parental Contributions to young children's emergent literacy and word recognition. *Canadian Psychology Journal*, 49(2), 89-95.
- Fisher, R. (2008) Teaching Comprehension and Critical Literacy: Investigating guided reading in three primary school classrooms. *Literacy*, 42 (1), 19-26.
- Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1992) *The Action Research Planner*. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin Publishing
- Koshy, V. (2005) *Action Research for Improving Practice: A practical guide*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing
- McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2010). *You and Your Action Research Project*. 3rd Edition. London: Routledge Press
- Skidmore, D., Perez-Parent, M. and Arnfield, S. (2003). The Quality of Teacher Pupil Dialogue in Guided Reading. Paper presented at the *British Research Association Annual Conference*. Edinburgh: Heriot-Watt University.
- Smith, L. (1990) Ethics, field studies and the paradigm crisis, in E. Guba (Ed.) *The Paradigm Dialog*. Newbury Park: Sage
- Zimmerman, A. (2016) *Stuffed Animals as Reading and Writing Buddies*. Available from <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/blog-posts/alycia-zimmerman/stuffed-animals-reading-and-writing-buddies/> (Accessed July 2017)