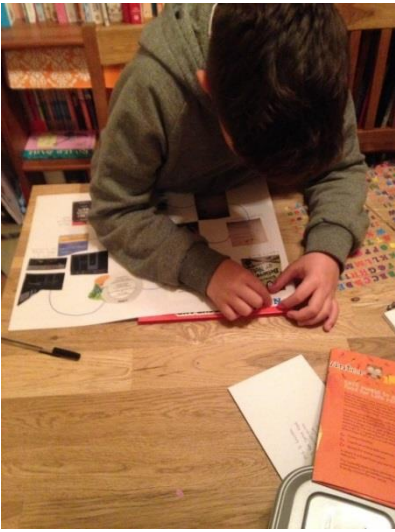


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Reading Rivers by Jon Biddle

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Context

Currently English Coordinator/Reading Champion at Moorlands Primary Academy in Norfolk. School has had a turbulent few years (high turnover of staff, disappointing KS2 SATs results) and is looking to rebuild. Creating a genuine reading culture is at the centre of this.



Research inspiration and rationale

The Reading Rivers idea was originally explored by Pamela Burnard (2002) in relation to tracking musical development and further developed by Gabrielle Cliff-Hodges (2010) with keen secondary aged readers who focused on their journeys as readers of books. In the TaRs work the idea was developed and applied to a much wider range of reading material. This allowed teachers to reflect upon the range of reading materials that they encounter, as well as the range of texts that children and their families regularly engage with outside school. This was one of the key recommendations from the Teachers as Readers report - that teachers need to know more about the diverse and everyday reading practices and preferences of children beyond the classroom.



Aims

- To provide children and teachers with an opportunity to reflect upon the reading they do outside school.
- To enable teachers to further develop their understanding of what the children in their classes read.
- To provide increased opportunities to discuss reading in the classroom.

Outline

- Returning to school after the Christmas holiday, we spent time talking about what the children had read during the break. Several of them talked about books they had received, which led to a discussion about graphic novels and comics not being viewed as 'real reading' by some parents because they're 'too easy' and have pictures. We then talked about what 'real reading' was and about the reading that we do during a day.



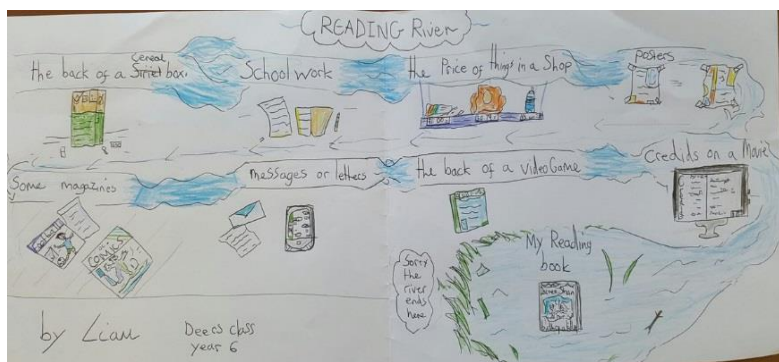
- That evening, I created my own 24-hour Reading River (above) to share with the class the next day. I tried to include a wide variety of media and not limit it to books and magazines. It is a visual activity and, for speed, I used mostly photographs. However, a Reading River could also be easily created using drawing and writing.
- I talked to the children about my reading day and all the text types that I 'flowed' through. I emphasised that some of the reading was done for pleasure, some for work and some for 'real life', reinforcing the message that reading is key to our daily routine.
- Many of the children then created their own Reading Rivers at home (several were helped by their parents) and brought them in to share with the class. Some pupils then talked about their Reading Rivers during assembly.

Impact

- Children were able to reflect upon and share their wider reading diet with their peers, their teacher and their family.
- As a teacher, I was able to learn more about what children read at home and what they define as reading. This made me think carefully about what we had available to read in the classroom and library. As a result, we have subscribed to the Phoenix comic and increased the number of relevant magazines (eg Minecraft, Simpsons) available.
- The activity ensured that reading was discussed every day in class when the children brought in their Reading Rivers.
- The wall display in the library that was created using the children's Reading Rivers created a ripple effect across the school, with other classes and other teachers adapting and developing the idea. One class looked at their weekend Reading River and other children talked about the Reading Rivers for their entire family. Several teachers used the opportunity to 'freshen up' the available reading material in the classroom.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Realising the need to further develop the reading relationship between myself, the children and the parents was a key outcome of this work. Although I was very aware of the books that the children read and was able to engage in conversation about them, I was far less aware of the online reading that they did, as well as the magazines, comics, etc, that they enjoyed.



Next term, I plan to invite the parents into school to take part in a Reading Café style session, where they will be able to create Reading Rivers alongside their children. This will strengthen the reciprocal reading community in the classroom.

