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The Pop-up Reading Picnics

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Part of the Reading-for-Pleasure project at Grove Primary School

By Alice Lee-Fox



Background context and school statistics



The Grove
PRIMARY SCHOOL

I am a Year 3 teacher at The Grove, a mixed-gender, two-form entry primary school in North Cambridge.

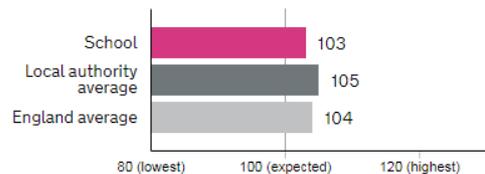
From Reception to Year 6, we have 273 pupils on roll, 52.9% being boys. 31.75% have English as an additional language, 35.77% are pupil premium, 50.73% are White British children.

In 2017, 45% of pupils reached expected standard in combined Reading, Writing and Maths.

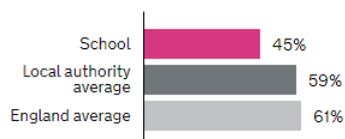
In January 2017, the Ofsted report stated: *Staff identified that in reading pupils did not have the stamina to read at pace. In addition, the quality of vocabulary used by pupils needed to improve.*

In 2017, the Reading progress score was 'Average':

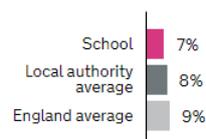
Average score in reading ?



Pupils meeting expected standard in reading, writing and maths ?



Pupils achieving at a higher standard in reading, writing and maths ?



To address the needs of the school, one of the 2017-18 school development areas was to *Develop children's*

independence and self-help skills in reading and spelling, focussing on two strands:

- 1) Promoting Reading for Pleasure (RfP)
- 2) Develop the teaching of reading (Guided Reading)

Research inspiration and rationale

“Creating a whole-school reciprocal and interactive reading community”

I am part of a dedicated team of teachers at Grove school, putting emphasis on raising attainment across the curriculum, focusing on progress across the core areas and supported by foundation subjects. The profile of RfP is growing ever more prominent and *reading enjoyment has been reported as being more important for children’s educational success than their family’s socio-economic status (OECD, 2002)*. Because of this, I was keen to focus on this aspect of the reading curriculum and intended to raise the profile of reading, encouraging parents and children to read more frequently, basing my plans on the relationship between reading-frequency and reading-enjoyment as discussed in recent research (Clark 2011; Clark and Douglas 2011).

My initial inspiration was the input received in school CPD on the ‘characteristics of effective learners’ based on the work of Guy Claxton. The rationale for this being introduced by the SLT was to encourage children and staff, to think reflectively, critically and creatively. My understanding is that academic and social developments complement each other and underpin CEL and RFP. This central message made a strong starting point for my research project. (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Following on from this, I became interested in The ‘Teachers as Readers’ (TaR) research, which demonstrates that building a dialogue between children, families and teachers, all as readers, is a vital way to involve parents in the reading development of their child (Cremin et al., 2014). I felt that using ‘new’ open-social spaces, encouraging parental involvement and developing positive learning environments for children and parents to learn and enjoy reading a good book together, was a way in which we could strengthen parent/school partnerships irrespective of socio-economic backgrounds. This complemented the inclusive ethos of Grove, supported the CEL and RfP agenda, the school’s emphasis on raising attainment of all children, and closing the gap in progress in reading of those children in vulnerable groups, for example, pupil premium and EAL.

From the data which shows low attainment in Reading, Ofsted reports and responses received from questionnaires in January, (“parent voice”), it became clear that children were not making sufficient progress in reading and that there are many Grove families who try hard to help improve their children’s reading, both decoding and inference, but lack the confidence and skills to do this. In order to meet the needs of parents and children, we have held a four different R4P activities (Reading Picnics, Secret Book Club, Buddy Reading, timetabled Drop-Everything-and-Read events) along with various national and county-based competitions (e.g. 100 million minutes reading challenge, #ExtremeReading challenge and Arbury Court Library reading challenge). We have also invited authors and visitors to the school, (author Luke Temple and singer-songwriters, The Young’Uns). All these events contributed towards creating **reciprocal and interactive reading communities**.

All of this provides background information on what we as a school have done this year, in this Exampel of Practice I will be focusing only the Reading Picnics.

Aims

My aims of the RfP project were:

- To develop the work done already on CEL, and to **support the inclusivity of the school**;
- **To raise standards in reading**, as a core subject, and to support foundation subjects;
- To raise the **profile of reading for children and parents**;
- To promote **reading as a positive, joyful (and free!) activity**, in order to develop a community of life-long lovers of reading;
- To enable **children to have ownership of their choice of text** supported by their teachers and carers, involving reading a variety of meaningful texts with links to the child's life.

The intended impact would be:

- Strengthening poor reading stamina;
- Development of an enthusiasm to read and take pleasure in reading texts;
- Development of an understanding of how reading exists throughout life, and can enable us to achieve goals and develop knowledge across the curriculum;
- Improvement of spelling and therefore improved scores in writing;
- Better understanding of the process and enjoyment of reading by parents/carers.

What is a Reading Picnic?

(Outline)

The Reading picnics were initially trialled as an event during the school's 'Reading & Writing week'. I resourced the picnic by asking staff to bring in blankets, rugs and pillows and place them in an accessible area of the school.

Each year group buddied up with another for example, Yr 1 and Yr 3, and their reading picnic was timetabled (e.g. 9:00 – 9:30am, following the register at 9:00am). The idea around the space is that it would be welcoming and nurturing, comfortable and bright by using rugs, blankets and cushions (which I had resourced by asking staff to loan their unwanted items, but which could have been loaned by asking local shops to donate) and furniture. To give the event a more relaxed and homelier feel, tea, coffee and fruit were available. Every morning, the relevant staff members and I set up this space.

A wide range of texts, e.g. magazines, non-fiction books, atlases, reference books and picture books were placed in the book baskets around the room. Texts were chosen by the teachers of the specific year groups.

I noticed that the children seemed to gravitate towards texts which have been read or are being read in class, as part of Guided Reading sessions, Book Talk or English lessons; it seemed as though these were 'special' books, which the children were proud to know about and proud to discuss and even read aloud to their parent/carer, and in doing so became experts in the content and style.

The picnics were advertised through parent mail, posters and the school's social media. Also, younger siblings were invited to come along too. We aimed for as many parents as possible to come as possible, especially the hard to reach parents.

Following this, I started to organise **Reading Picnics half termly**, ensuring all year groups were buddied up appropriately and parents/carers were informed of dates well in advance, and reminded leading up to the event days. To ensure that all younger children would have an opportunity to read aloud to someone, even if their own parent/carer couldn't attend, we ensured that KS1 classes were always buddied with a KS2 class buddies.

Parent/carer feedback was extremely positive and shaped the next stage of the process, which was to timetable reading picnics for an afternoon slot before home time. This worked better, for several reasons, not least because later slots appealed to parents who were collecting their children at the end of the day. This helped the 'reluctant reader' parents to feel comfortable in coming through our doors and reading with their children!



As the year has progressed, so have the picnics! They have grown bigger and better; evolving into literal picnics, where parents bring along rugs and throws from their own homes and are now bringing and sharing food from a variety of cultures, including the recipes! We have spilled out into surrounding areas such as our local parks and playgrounds, and our picnics are now an established event in our community.



Impact

To gauge the full impact of the Reading for Pleasure project, focusing on the pop-up Reading Picnics, I used a number of measures ,

- Teacher voice
- Pupil voice
- Parent/carer voice
- Attainment data in Reading

1) Teacher voice:

Through the reading picnics, staff reported that they could see a community of readers evolving; not only involving those parents who regularly come into school to read with their child, but also the parents who are reluctant to come into school or do not usually make comments in their child's reading book. Staff reported that the children were talking more about reading and accessing books with enjoyment.

Q: What have been your experiences of the Reading Picnics this year?

Please comment on any observations you have seen including any positive engagement by reluctant readers and/or parent/carers who have shown an increase in engagement along with any positive impacts.

The Reading Picnics have been a wonderful opportunity for parents and carers to come into the school and read alongside their children, in a calm environment, with a range of books and texts which they may not usually be able to access so freely.

I have seen such an improvement in the attitude of a number of children from my class, who may not have been a fan of the idea of 'reading', however, allowing children the ownership of what they read, how they read it and with whom they read it, has really celebrated them as readers and the reading picnics have been one way this has been done.

I would certainly recommend completing reading picnics as a means to promote reading for pleasure.

Helen Harwood, Year 5 class teacher

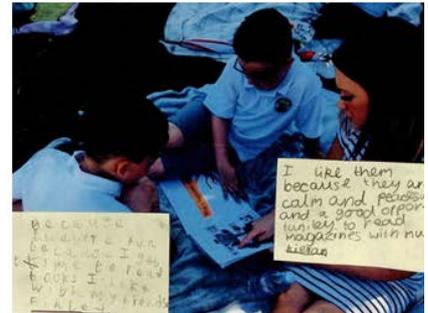
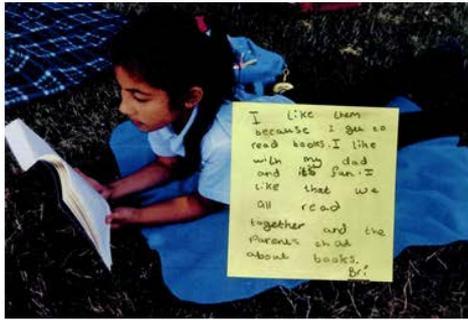
Q: What have been your experiences of the Reading Picnics this year?

Please comment on any observations you have seen including any positive engagement by reluctant readers and/or parent/carers who have shown an increase in engagement.

The reading picnics have been great fun! I have had a chance to listen to children reading in a more relaxed environment and actually take pleasure in reading. The picnics have been a great opportunity to catch up with children on what they enjoy reading, so I am so much more aware of what the fashionable thing to read nowadays is. Many of my boys enjoy reading the children's WWE magazines and of course football magazines. Usually, I wouldn't allow for these sort of things to be read in school time, but actually to see a set of reluctant, highly energetic boys actually sit down and read independently has been magic to see! I've had so many parents coming to me to ask if we can hold reading picnics more regularly, but I think if we held them every week, the novelty could wear off. Something to think about. I'm certainly a fan of them!

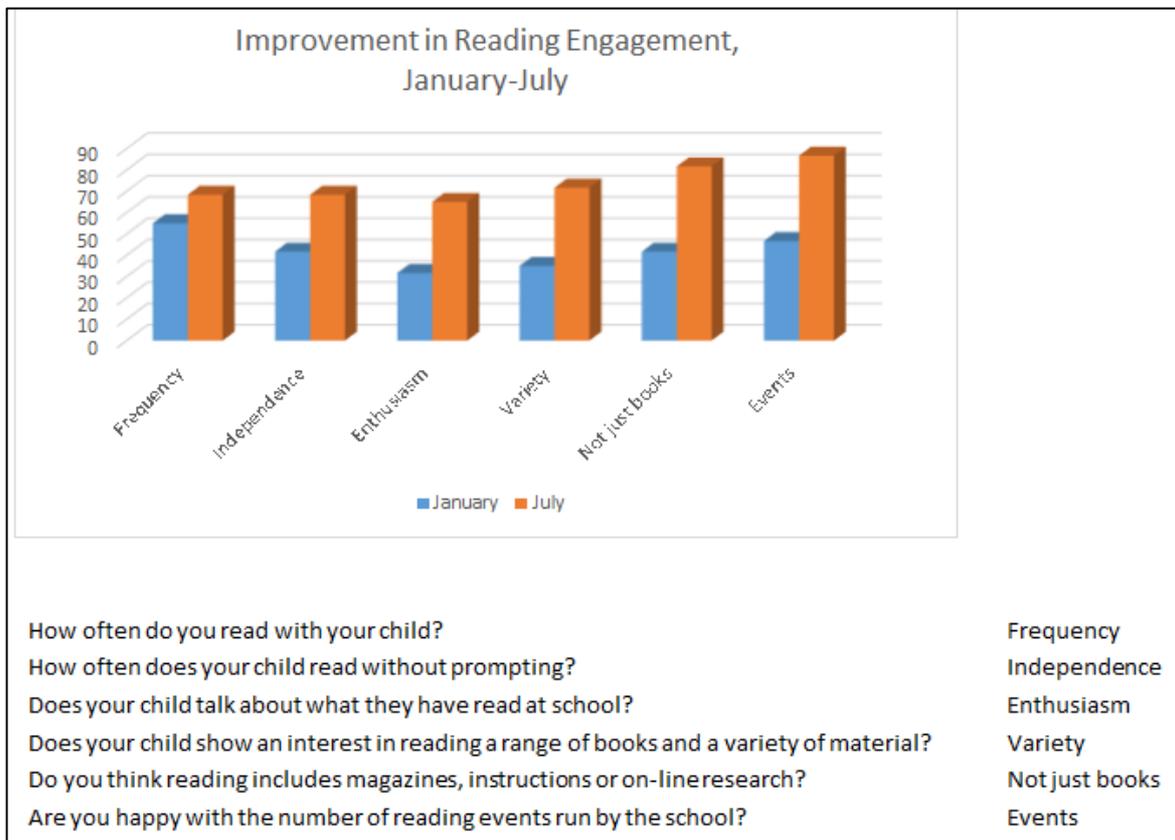
Edward Cowdrith, Year 3 class teacher

2) Pupil voice:



3) Parent voice:

Following the initial set of reading picnics, there were many positive comments made by parent/carers. Across the school's social media the feedback was excellent; parents sharing their reading experiences and recommending texts to each other (apparently 'Oi Frog!' and 'Oi Dog!' were big hits!)



4) Attainment data:

2018

Year 6 – 80% Exp. Standard
 Year 2 - 64%
 Year 3 – 66%
 Year 4 – 64%
 Year 5 - 68%
 Year R – 67%

2017

Year 6 – 60% Exp. Standard
 Year 2 - 67%
 Year 3 – 57%
 Year 4 – 67%
 Year 5 - 66%
 Year R – 74%



(*Year 1 data currently not available)

Reflection on impact

As the evidence indicates, the feedback has been incredibly positive. The staff, children and parent/carers feel that the reading picnics, have been beneficial for a variety of reasons, for example:

- Having time to read 1:1 with a child at leisure, under no pressure (parent);
- Being able to choose the text which they want to read (child);
- Showing an interest in and having the opportunity to read texts they wouldn't usually (child, parent);
- Having a calm and social location to read at leisure (child, parent, staff);
- Showing a greater interest in reading and seeing themselves as a reader (staff).

With the evidenced impact in mind, my aims have been accomplished;

<u>Aim</u>	<u>Completed</u>	<u>Evidence</u>
Strengthening poor reading stamina	✓	assessment data
Development of an enthusiasm to read and take pleasure in reading	✓	pupil, parent & staff voice
Development of an understanding of how reading exists throughout our life, and can enable us to achieve goals and develop knowledge across the curriculum	✓	staff & pupil voice
Improvement of spelling and therefore improved scores in writing	✓	staff voice & assessment data
Better understanding of the process and enjoyment of reading by parents/carers	✓	pupil, parent & staff voice

The TaRs research was at the forefront of my project. Knowledge of the 5 strands drove my own research and shaped the format of this piece of whole school improvement work.

Linking the outcomes to my aims, it can be seen that:

1. **Reading standards have improved this year.** Of course, we must acknowledge that other drives and initiatives to improve reading have been on-going throughout the school, but that this has played a significant part in terms of reading stamina and resilience. Writing scores have also improved but this has been less easy to track in terms of links with the project. However this might be more obviously linked over time.
2. **The profile of reading at Grove has been raised-** reading figures largely on the schools social media and reported comments. Parents and children are engaging with reading more than ever before. Parents have shown through comments on social media and face to face discussion that that they are understanding the process of reading
3. **The community of readers, indeed the school community as a whole, has been strengthened by the pop up picnic approach.** Enjoyment of reading has been visible at every event and the legacy has persisted well into the next school year.
4. **Children have made choices and shown preferences towards texts** and appear to have greater ownership of their reading, choosing texts that are relevant to themselves and their lives. This has impacted on reading across the curriculum, evidenced by comments made by parents, staff and children.

My next steps

My next steps are the following:

- To roll out the project to the Early Years, in order to develop good reading habits from an early age, through early intervention, alongside promoting a reading community and with parents from the start of the children's school life.
- To further analyse the effect this and subsequent RfP projects have on improved scores in writing, spelling and foundation subjects.
- To further develop the community-based ethos of the project, including more EAL parents, by provision of home language texts and interpreters. Potentially inviting members of the groups, like the elderly from the local old people's home.
- To further analyse the effect this and subsequent RfP projects have on specific groups, e.g. Pupil Premium, Low Attaining boys, EAL.