

Document name: Blurring the Home/School Boundaries – Building Reading Communities  
Document date: Unknown  
Source: The Open University's Reading for Pleasure website / Melissa Hudson  
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OpenLearn course: Developing Reading for Pleasure: engaging young readers  
OpenLearn url: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/developing-reading-pleasure-engaging-young-readers/content-section-overview>

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## Blurring the Home/School Boundaries – Building Reading Communities

# Blurring the Home/School Boundaries – Building Reading Communities

Melissa Hudson

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FOR CONSIDERATION WITHIN EGMONT RFP AWARD –  
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# CONTEXT



I'm currently a Reading Teacher at St. William's Primary School in Norwich, and have been for seven years. When I first started there, there had been attempts at making the school one that 'reads'. By changing the way we teach English (it is all now book-based) and incorporating various elements such as author visits, Reading Buddies and making World Book Day about books and not costumes, we are now a Reading School and I couldn't be more proud to work in a school where reading is given the time and attention it deserves.

# OU RESEARCH INSPIRATION AND RATIONALE

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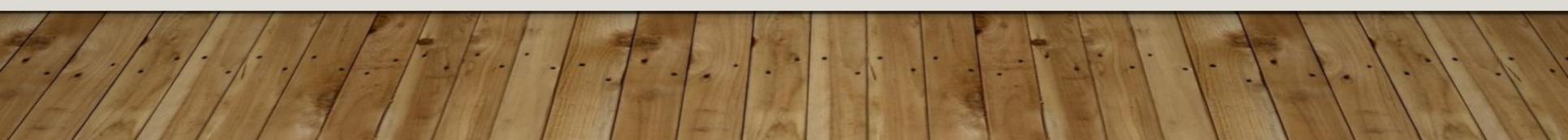
The focus for my case study was based on building **‘Reading communities that are reciprocal and interactive’**, with a focus on reading at home and parent/carer engagement. The reason I chose this was because I felt that it was the area in which I was weakest as a Reading Teacher. I had promoted a strong reading community in school and knew the children in my class, and many outside it, as readers. I was also able to use my knowledge of children’s literature to suggest books that may encourage and support reluctant readers.

However, I felt I needed to make a stronger link between children’s home and reading worlds. As discussed in *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for Pleasure* by Cremin et al. (2014), I wanted to blur the boundaries between them as readers at home and readers at school. I was also influenced in the work of Dr Rachel Levy and her research on how shared reading at home was so much more than being ‘about the book’, and I therefore wanted to provide the opportunity for a shared reading experience at home.



# AIMS

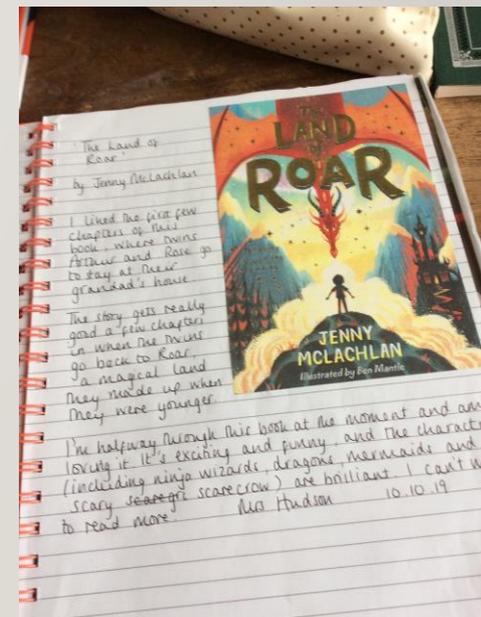
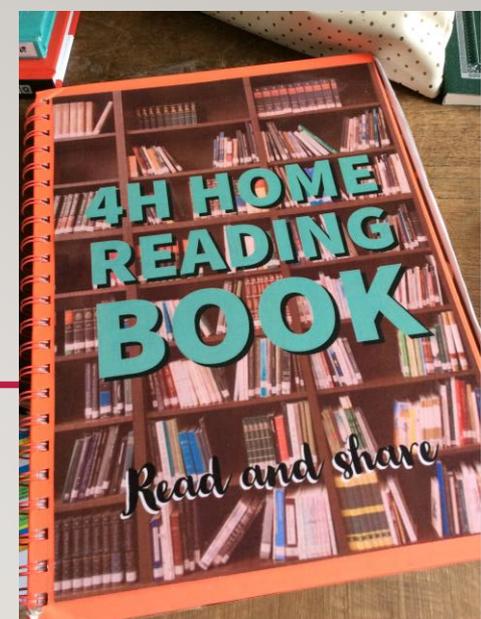
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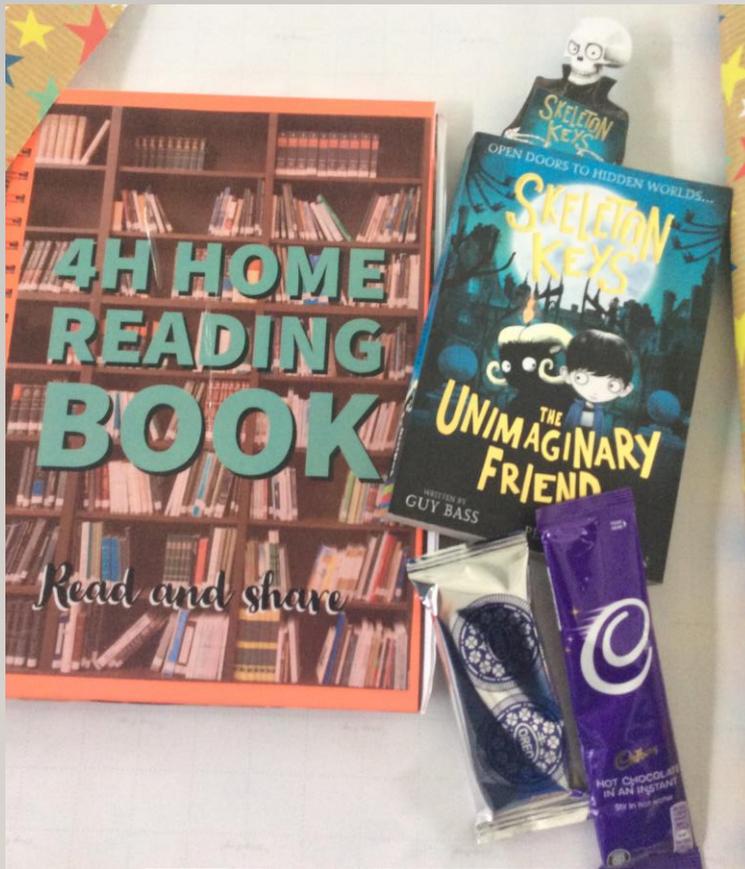
- The aim was to **extend the children's school and classroom reading community to the home**, developing their identities as readers by blurring the home reading self and school reading self, and also to include parents in this process.
  - **I also wanted to use my knowledge of children's literature to encourage reading at home.** As I learnt about my children's reading habits through frequent and informal book chat, I learnt that very few chose to read at home and were usually 'made to read' by parents. I was able to choose texts based on their confidence, decoding ability, stamina and interests in order to make the experience a pleasurable and positive one.
  - **Children having choice over their texts** was also vital too, so a selection of books (based on the above information) was always offered.
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# OUTLINE

Children were chosen randomly, one at a time, to be the recipient of the class **Home Reading book**. The expectation was that they chose which book they would like to take home from a selection carefully chosen by myself. I would chose a selection of books to suit the individual child, such as including the brand new sequel to our class book for the children who liked to be first or the less-wordy but exciting and funny book, or a graphic novel for the ones who lacked stamina.

They would then choose one to take home at the end of the day with the expectation being that they would read the first few chapters and record what their first thoughts were in the Home Reading book to share with everyone. By not making the children read the entire book before writing a review, my intention was to not make it a chore or a lengthy task to be completed. I also wanted to avoid making them feel like they 'had' to read the entire book, as it would go against one of our reading rules – we stop a book when we want to, regardless of where we are in it. I completed the first page as an example of one way it could be completed.





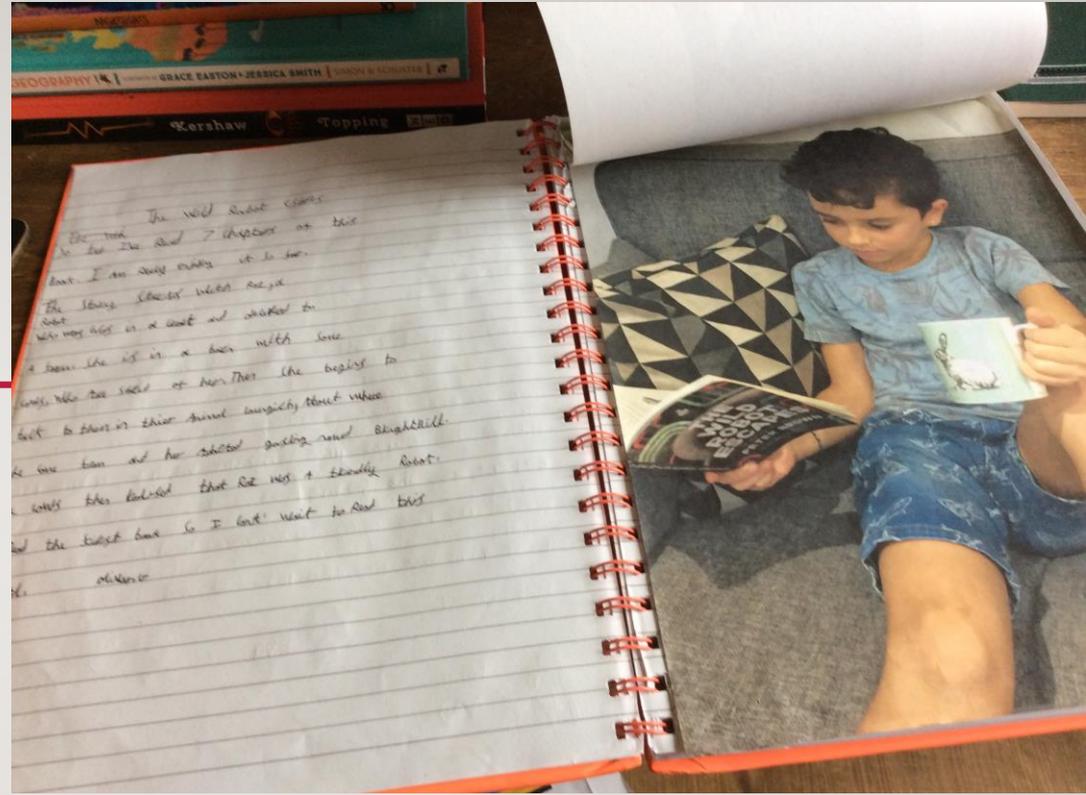
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In order to encourage reading becoming either a shared and/or positive experience – as experience is something I really want the children to do with books – the Home Reading book, and the text they had selected, came with a few extras (cookies, hot chocolate, bookmark, etc.) and was presented to them as a gift.

This wasn't as a bribe. I feel that rewarding children with 'stuff' for reading gives them the wrong message about what reading is. It was to make it special and provide them with what they needed to make the reading more of an experience.

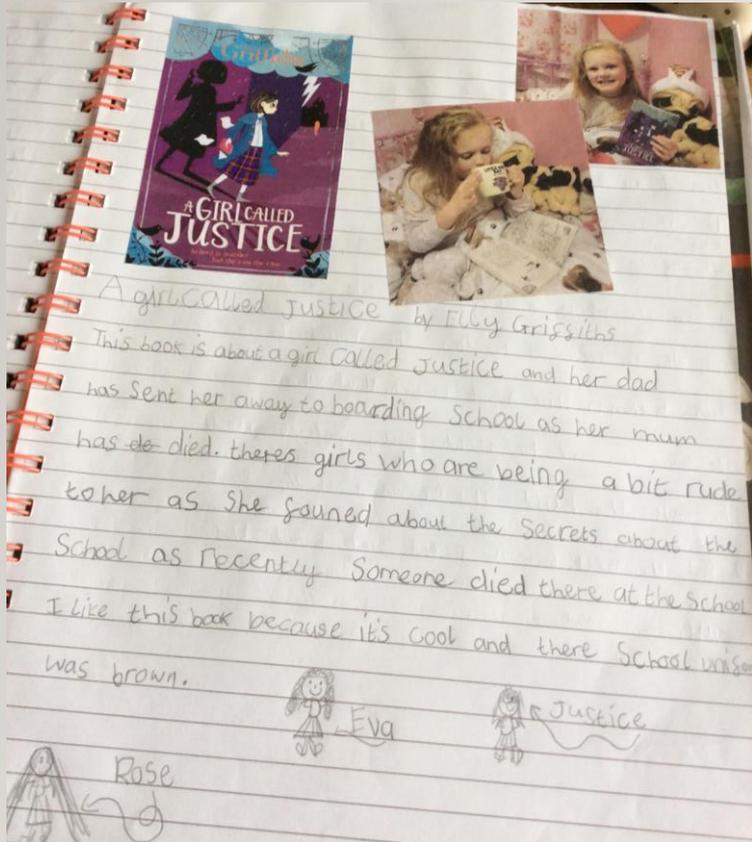
# IMPACT – IN THE CLASSROOM

The impact spread more widely than I anticipated. **Firstly, the engagement of the children increased.** Not only if they were chosen, but those who weren't were interested in who had the book and what they were reading. Those who did take the book home appeared empowered to share their reading experience more than they had done previously, especially as they had chosen that book themselves, and the children became desperate to be chosen next to take the Home Reading book home.



The selected children were also reading more widely, having been introduced to and choosing texts that they would not have necessarily selected themselves. This in turn meant that other children would then read them too, and therefore introduce them to new texts, authors and genres.

# IMPACT - RELATIONSHIPS



It also affected my relationship with the children. As much as our classroom is full of book talk and appreciation, and as much as I know the children as readers and as individuals, the Home Reading book allowed me to share specific reading experiences with the children one-to-one.

We were both able to share not only our thoughts and feelings about the book, but the details of the reading experience: where we read it, who with, how. Was it an audiobook in the car alone or a paperback while snuggled up on a sofa with someone else?

Talking about the same text but having read it in different circumstances not only promoted reading as an experience, but an experience that occurred out of the classroom that had merged into one inside of school.

# IMPACT – PARENTS AND BEYOND

Lastly, there were comments from the parents. While I often have book requests as they ‘just can’t get them to want to read’, the comments from parents and family members began to be more conversation-based.

One grandmother said her grandchild was ‘over the moon’ and couldn’t stop talking about the book she had chosen to read. Another parent talked about how their child hadn’t chosen to sit down and read for such a long time until they took the book home.

Sharing my practice on Twitter also led to other teachers adopting the idea and taking it into their own schools.



# REFLECTIONS – THE TARS RESEARCH

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The *Teachers as Readers* research (Cremin et al., 2014) has not only made me appreciate the importance of building reading relationships with parents/carers, but also led me towards discovering new ways to do this with the skills I already had.

By spreading the book 'blether' into the home, providing rich reading experiences for children to share with their families and then bring them back into school, and consequently opening up the conversation channels surrounding books and how to support and encourage reading in the home, the research conducted by the TaRs project directed me to the area I was lacking and therefore needed to focus on for my own project.

- Make strong connections between children's home and school reading worlds
- Foster children's autonomy as readers who can exercise discrimination within and beyond school
- Build new and more equal reading relationships with families and community members.



# REFLECTIONS - PROJECT

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This project made me realise **how a relatively small change can create a huge impact on the reading community we foster in school by taking it beyond the school walls.** It also enforced the main belief I have on reading for pleasure and that is knowing children's texts is key, but remembering that ultimately this has to be used alongside child agency.

**I feel this is a first step in working alongside parents in knowing how they can support, encourage and nurture an appreciation and love for reading.** As a result of a parent 'apology' for only reading aloud to her child every evening instead of making him read to her, I am in the process of writing a '**Rules and Rights of a Reader**' to be placed in the class Home Reading book. This will explain that being read to is as beneficial (if not more so) as reading aloud to someone, that comics, graphic novels count as reading, as do audiobooks, and that we have the choice over when we stop reading, for example. This will also be shared on the school's social media page to reach a wider audience.

Other teachers in the school will be shown and encouraged to have their own Home Reading book, where staff are also encouraged to contribute their reviews.

