

How does using a “Reading River” to identify and highlight a broad range of reading behaviours affect children’s self-perception as a Reader?

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What did you plan to do and why?

The plan was to work with learners from two different stages (CfE first and second level) and introduce them to the idea of a “Reading River” and to support them to create their own. The project focused on the learners’ views of themselves as readers, with their self-defined identity acting as a proxy for their engagement with Reading for Pleasure. Supporting activities were to encourage the learners to consider their understanding of what makes a “Reader” and how this could apply to a range of different styles of reading and to encourage them to broaden their own interpretation of the word. The aim was to demonstrate to the children that they should recognise all types of reading and texts with which they engage and to encourage them to value them all.

This project was designed in response to the National Literacy Trust’s survey of Children and Young People’s Reading in 2024 which reported a self-reported continued decline in reading enjoyment and frequency. Although the report stated that the participants were reminded that reading took very many forms, the published details did not show self reporting of different types of text. Work done by Jon Biddle on Reading Rivers, based on Gabrielle Cliff-Hodges research work, seemed an appropriate method of both collecting information on learners’ reading habits and giving them an opportunity to reflect upon the potential variety in their own reading experiences.

What has happened in your enquiry?

Initially I approached two colleagues with a three session plan to carry out this project over eight weeks with their classes. Both teachers agreed for their classes to take part. In the class of younger learners an extra session was delivered due to timetabling opportunities and with the older group due to timetabling issues, only two sessions have been delivered so far. These sessions covered exploring children’s understanding of “a reader” and how closely they identify with this term, and a further session explaining and creating “Reading Rivers” and discussing the variety of texts the children engage with on a regular basis. The younger learners also designed badges to wear that celebrated their self defined reading identity, and an evaluation session of how closely they identified with “a reader” following their Reading River activity.

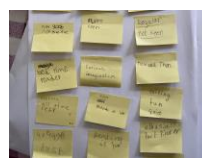
What impact has this enquiry had?

The impacts of the enquiry have taken different forms – more children in the younger age group felt positively towards the statement “I am a reader” after the delivered sessions and children in both groups in creating their Reading Rivers acknowledged a greater range of texts they recognised as “reading” in their daily lives.

The delivery of the sessions created opportunities for both groups to define to what degree they perceived themselves a reader.



7 yr olds rating their agreement with the statement “I am a reader”
52% gave 7 stars or more



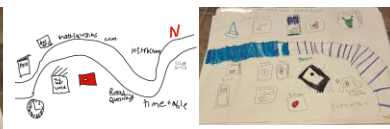
10 year olds providing qualitative self-descriptions of themselves as readers

Through artwork the groups shared their understanding of what “a Reader” is and discussed commonalities in their representations ie; happy, female, wearing glasses, surrounded by paper books (novels) etc. The children were able to articulate their choices.

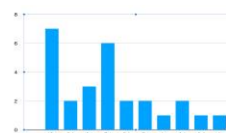


“She reads a lot of books,” (age 7) “She is clever, that’s why she is wearing glasses,” (aged 7, “She likes to read in her bedroom, she reads books about children her age,” (age 10), “I’ve drawn me!” (age 10).

A blog post from the National Literacy Trust (Library Lifeline 02.05.23) states that children may not see themselves as readers as they hold “perceived notions of reading against which they think they do not measure up”. A 2011 study from the National Literacy Trust demonstrated that both enjoyment of and attitudes to reading feed in to positive reading behaviours. By aligning themselves more closely with a description of “reader” the learners are developing more positive reading behaviours. Both groups created Reading Rivers which led to in-depth conversations about what constitutes reading and many children were initially reluctant to include non-book/school reading but ultimately embraced a wide range of reading materials along their river.



The younger group of learners also had an opportunity to describe themselves as a reader, creating badges to wear. These included messages such as “I am a good reader”, “I am a silent reader” and “I am an enthusiastic reader.” All participants created a positive description of themselves. The reading attitudes of the younger group were surveyed again.



After the input, 66% of learners recorded 7 stars or more in responding to the statement “I am a reader.”

What are the implications and next steps?

The learners who took part in this project overall were enthused by the activities and the opportunity to have all sorts of reading recognised as Reading For Pleasure. I would like to ask this question with more learners to raise the profile of different forms of reading, to give value to children’s own reading whilst also giving learners the opportunity to reflect on how reading makes their worlds more accessible and enjoyable.

My questions would be

- 1) When could time be given to give staff a chance to participate in this activity to allow them to appreciate the aims and values?
- 2) Is there some correlation between self-identity as a “reader” and an increase in reading behaviours? How could we track this?
- 3) What would the benefit of revisiting a reading river activity (or similar) be for children? How frequently should it be?
- 4) What can we do in school to promote and recognize different types of reading and help children to make explicit links between texts they read and their own chosen activities?

References

[Library Lifeline: How can I help pupils see themselves as readers? | National Literacy Trust](#) (accessed 04/05/25)

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