

Can Teacher-Led Book Discussions Promote a Culture of Child-Led Reading Talk?

Karen Duncan, P3/2/1 Class Teacher and Literacy Lead, Whitecross Primary School

What did you plan to do and why?

To determine the focus of my project, I conducted a school-wide survey to identify any barriers that might be impacting pupils' enjoyment of reading. Although all children participated in at least two reading-for-pleasure sessions per week, only 27% reported discussing what they had read. Given that informal book talk is a key component of effective reading-for-pleasure pedagogy, I selected this as the central focus of my enquiry. To further investigate, I asked teaching staff to complete the Open University audit to assess the current opportunities available for children to engage in conversations about their reading.

What has happened in your enquiry?

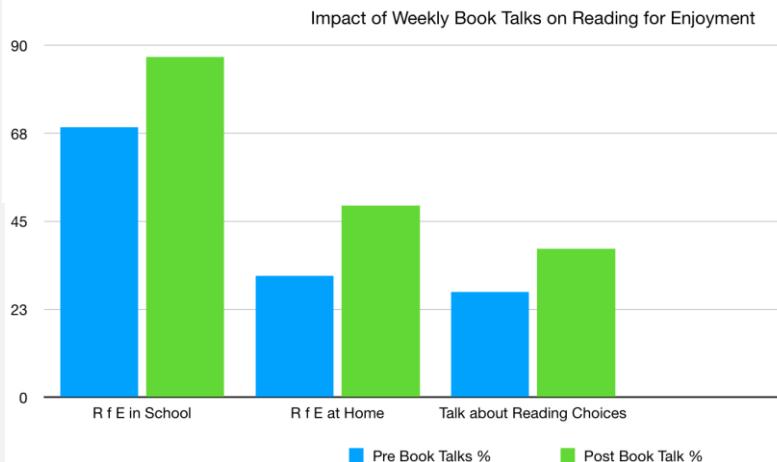
Using videos by Mary Woollard and Jon Biddle—contributors to the *Teachers as Readers* research—as a starting point, I recognised that the initial book talk sessions would need to be formal and led by the teacher. While I recognise that informal book talk is more valuable in fostering a reading-for-pleasure culture, formal book talk was initially necessary to model effective discussion and introduce children to the concept of sharing and reflecting on their reading. As a member of a small rural school, I wanted all pupils to benefit from engaging in book talk. To support this, I shared the Open University's *Reading for Pleasure* research summary with my colleagues, and all teaching staff agreed to take part in the project. Drawing on examples of effective practice from the Open University website, I created a "Book Blether" PowerPoint featuring ten different book talk activities. Teachers were asked to carry out at least one book talk session per week. After six weeks, pupils completed the same survey again, and staff conducted a follow-up audit to evaluate the impact of the book talk activities.

What impact has this enquiry had?

Audit of Book Talk Within Classrooms

| Aspect of Book Talk | Pre Book Talk | Post Book Talk |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| Informal book talk (teacher → child) | Rarely | Regularly |
| Informal book talk (child → child) | Rarely | Regularly |
| Specific recommendations (teacher → child) | Rarely | Regularly |
| Teacher's rating of prevalence (1–10) | ★ 2 | ★ 8 |

Initially, I was disappointed with the results, as there was only an 11% increase in the number of children discussing their reading choices. However, on a more positive note, the percentage of children reading for enjoyment both at school and at home rose by 18%. The book talks appeared to have a greater impact on teachers; all staff agreed that book talk was now taking place in classrooms, and we collectively rated our practice in this area as a much-improved 8. When asked about discussing reading choices, pupils in the Primary 1–3 class did not recognise the Book Blether sessions as book talk. Instead, they perceived them as formal learning tasks.



What are the implications and next steps?

On reflection the Book Blethers was too formal a tool to promote book talk, especially for our youngest learners. It has however been a useful starting point to develop staff's knowledge of the importance of informal book talk and has led to more children reading for enjoyment in school and at home. Moving forwards as a school we plan to make book talk more informal by facilitating spontaneous discussion led by the children in our Reading Group as opposed to teachers. We hope this will allow the children to view book talk as an enjoyable, social activity as opposed to a formal learning task.

References

<https://ourfp.org/finding/rfpp/booktalk-and-recommendations/> [accessed April and May 2025].
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Contact Details

karen.duncan@education.falkirk.sch.uk
 @whitecrossps.bsky.social