

To what extent do book recommendations and book talk from adult reading role models impact on children's attitudes towards reading for pleasure?

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What did you plan to do and why?

I wanted to create opportunities for adult reading role models, and facilitate book talk in classrooms between staff and learners. This was needed in the setting because the profile of reading for pleasure needs highlighted, and learners need encouraged to take part in structured and inspiring book talk based on a range of meaningful recommendations. After completing a baseline questionnaire with my class of P6 learners, I found that many of them wanted to read more in their own time, but didn't know how to find or choose engaging books, or didn't have adult reading role models at home to support them. There was clearly a gap in their role models in this area. This is echoed in the literature where finding engaging books has been found to be one of the key factors to how engaged learners will be in reading for pleasure, (Merga 2017) and reciprocal book talk and interaction and recommendations by teachers have been shown to increase engagement in reading for pleasure (Cremin 2019). I hoped that the different adult role models in the school would recommend a range of genres, as this is also important in encouraging reading for pleasure (Kuzmičová & Cremin 2021).

What has happened in your enquiry?

As part of World Book day celebrations, the adults within the school made short recommendation videos about their favourite children's books. Every class in the school would watch these each day during the week and take part in class discussions based on the recommendations. This would prompt book talk and inspire different book choices, and encourage learners to see school-based adults as reading role models.

I asked the learners to complete questionnaires which focused on the impact of the book videos, so that I could effectively evaluate the impact. From younger classes, I asked the class teachers for feedback and comments from children regarding the videos and the recommendations.

The method of the enquiry went as expected, and from the literature and my findings I have identified a number of next steps for the school.

What impact has this enquiry had?

To measure the impact of the enquiry, 2 P5 classes and 2 P7 classes completed individual forms about their experience of reading for pleasure, and how they felt about the staff reading videos.

63.25% of the learners said they enjoyed reading at home, while only 9% said they didn't. However, when asked how often they spend reading at home, 47.5% said they read for less than an hour per week and 20.5% of learners said that they read for more than 4 hours per week. I had hoped there would be a higher percentage of children reading for longer each week, based on how many said they enjoyed it.

Only 61% of learners said that the videos encouraged them to try some of the recommended books. Based on the informal feedback given to me by teachers, I was surprised by how low that was, so I broke down the data into P5 and P7 separately. Of the P5 learners, 75% said they were inspired to try one of the recommendations, while in P7 only 47% did.

84.75% of learners said that they enjoyed watching the videos.

I gathered more informal feedback from the younger years to measure the impact of the recommendation videos. Many learners commented on it being funny to see their teachers and PSAs on the videos. Many said that the books were ones they hadn't heard of before. Many children said they liked that the adults read a short bit of the book as it made them want to find out what happened next. For many P4-6 classes, the videos inspired book talk organically; especially when fondly remembering books they had loved when they were younger.

I gave no guidance to the adults about what type of book should be read; just that it should be a favourite children's book. Out of the 28 recommended books: 7% were non-fiction; 40% were picture books aimed at the younger years (nursery – P3); 32% were chapter books written for the middle school age group (P3-5), and 21% were novels written for upper second level (P6-7). This break down of the types of books chosen may have had an impact on the results. Because there were fewer recommendations for books for older children, it is likely that the opinions of the older classes (such as the P7 pupils who were questioned) would have been less positive, and the children less inspired than the younger readers in the school.

What are the implications and next steps?

The enquiry has shown that there is still a lot of work that can be done to improve learners' attitudes towards reading for pleasure. The informal feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and most of the younger pupils (P1-4) enjoyed and were inspired by the videos created by adults in the school. One next step would be to go back and ask the learners now, several weeks on, whether they have actually read any of the recommended books after feeling inspired at the time. Many teachers commented to me that it was lovely and positive but unusual to have this type of book talk in class, about general books and recommendations, rather than specifically books that are being read at any given time. This is a clear next step for us as a school – to have regular, structured book talk times to support the children inspiring each other as readers and also organically getting more recommendations from their peers as well as from adult role models in the class and wider school.

It was apparent that there were more picture books chosen than books aimed at older children. I would really like to build on the enthusiasm and engagement shown by learners by sharing weekly or monthly videos from staff recommending books so that it is consistent throughout the year, but the recommendations would include a picture book, a novel, and a non-fiction book, so that many genres and age groups are covered to engage all ages within the school.

Additionally, 64% of the books recommended are over 20 years old, with only 14% being published in the last 5 years. Time given to teachers to explore recently published books to recommend to their class, which meaningfully represent their cohort of learners, would be extremely beneficial.

References

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