



Reading communities

More research details



The *Teachers as Readers* (TaRs) project was not designed to be an intervention aimed at raising standards, although children's attainment did rise through the year. Instead it was organised to enable teachers to come together as readers and as learners, to become more conscious of their own practices as readers, widen their knowledge of children's literature and explore ways to nurture children's reading for pleasure. Initially however, the sorts of relationships around reading, between children and between children and teachers, were limited and were overwhelmingly founded on more formal exchanges around school-based texts being studied as part of the literacy curriculum. At the start of the project, teachers felt it was difficult to establish engaged reader relationships with the young people in their classrooms, in part due to space and time for informal reading conversations and because what counted as reading in schools was often limited in scope.

As the teachers developed their own reading communities in local groups, they came to value the time as adult readers to read, share and discuss their reading; they also valued the space for reflection on these reading experiences. Through this process, they widened their repertoires of children's literature and other texts and learnt about themselves as readers, about reading in the 21st century and the socially constructed nature of reading. As a consequence, they began to share their increased knowledge and enthusiasm for children's texts with their classes. Conversations about texts developed and reading aloud became for many a kind of bonding time.

New and extended opportunities for interaction around texts developed: independent reading time was established; reciprocal reader-to-reader recommendations ensued; the emergence of spontaneous 'inside-text talk' was documented. Such talk was supported by more relaxed reading environments, and the presence of richly resonant class repertoires of 'texts in common'. Teachers also found out about children's reading lives beyond school and widened their knowledge of children as readers.

Whilst differently shaped in every classroom, the social fabric of new reading communities began to be woven as commitment to reading and talking about texts developed. In such communities, in contrast to the teachers' previous and more traditional instructional practices, diversity and difference were welcomed. Some teachers also began to build relationships with parents, carers, librarians and families and there were signs of boundaries beginning to be blurred between home and school practices.

The project revealed that a reading for pleasure agenda can be developed effectively through the creation of such communities. In school, these were typically characterised by reciprocity and interaction, and in summary were seen to encompass:

- a shared concept of what it means to be a reader in the 21st century
- considerable teacher and child knowledge of children's literature and other texts
- pedagogic practices which acknowledge and develop diverse reader identities
- new social spaces that encourage choice and child ownership of their own reading for pleasure
- spontaneous 'inside-text talk' on the part of all participants
- a shift in the locus of control that fosters reader agency and independence.

The children's pleasure in reading was strongly influenced by the new reading networks and relationships which developed. Children who were initially identified as reluctant, disinterested and disengaged readers became drawn into reading; their perceptions of their abilities as readers and self-confidence improved and their talk about reading and texts became more spontaneous, informed and extended. These changes appeared to be linked to their teachers' enhanced subject knowledge and enriched pedagogic practice; it was also closely connected to their teachers' reading identities and nuanced practices as Reading Teachers. Children's attainment also showed above average increases across the year and children's commitment to, and interest in, reading altered; they showed increased pleasure in reading and began to read both more regularly and more independently, contributing to the construction of lively reading cultures and classroom communities of engaged readers.

The newly constructed reading communities that developed in classrooms fostered a sense of belonging and mutual commitment as well as increased interaction. The project revealed that reading for pleasure is a highly social process and that young readers are nurtured through their involvement in richly reciprocal communities of readers.

Adapted from 109- and 154-5 in Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S. and Safford, K. (2014) *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for pleasure*, London/New York: Routledge.

To read more about the research: see the Executive Summaries, related papers on <http://oro.open.ac.uk/>

or the core book

<https://www.routledge.com/Building-Communities-of-Engaged-Readers-Reading-for-pleasure/Cremin-Mottram-Collins-Powell-Safford/p/book/9781138777484>

