**Winner of the Egmont Reading for Pleasure Award**  
In Partnership with the OU and UKLA, 2018  

**Experienced Teacher category**

### Developing Whole School Reading Relationships by Jon Biddle

**Context**

I’m currently English Coordinator and Reading Champion at Moorlands Primary Academy in Norfolk. The school has been through a turbulent few years (high turnover of staff, disengaged parents and children, lack of books and other resources, etc.) but has recently started to rebuild around creating a genuine, schoolwide Reading for Pleasure culture. Many children, staff and parents are already enthused and engaged by the progress that has been made.

![Moorlands School Logo](image)

**Research inspiration and rationale**

Much of the recently published research about Reading for Pleasure has emphasised the need for schools to build reciprocal reading communities. Indeed, one of the key recommendations from the UKLA Teachers as Readers report (Cremin et al, 2008) was for schools to develop more equivalent reading relationships between staff, pupils and family members. As a school, we felt we needed to focus our efforts on some of our more vulnerable pupils and those who needed extra personal attention, and then gradually begin to bring their families on board.

![Reading Scene](image)

**Aims**

- To provide our more vulnerable children with a ‘reading buddy’ – somebody who would show interest in them as a reader and who would share their own reading life.  
- To introduce and develop a genuinely whole school reading initiative, one that would involve class teachers, support staff, office staff and non-class based SLT.
We looked at our staffing structure and worked out that we had about 35 people available to become buddies, meaning that we could support three or four children per class (from Y1-Y6). Each teacher then put forward their four most 'vulnerable' readers. The children selected weren't necessarily the weakest readers, but those who weren't regularly read to at home, who had nobody outside school to talk with about books and stories or who needed an adult to show some interest in them as readers; basically, the children who might otherwise easily slip through the net. The teachers also included some information about why they considered them to be vulnerable, for example:

- **Freddy has a general dislike of books.** Doesn't engage at home and will do anything other than read during class reading times.
- **Isla had previously been very interested in reading and used to want to share books that she'd read.** However, she now refuses to read during school time and rarely reads at home. It would be good for her to be able to suggest books to someone as well as have books suggested to her.
- **Joey isn't supported with reading at home, but is really interested in books and stories.** Would be great paired with someone who is enthusiastic about books and would be happy to read him the occasional story.
- **Liam finds it difficult to make it through a full book.** He has suggested that he enjoys spooky stories, so perhaps he could be buddied with someone who enjoys this genre?

Once we had our list of children, we then looked carefully at which combinations we thought would work. For example, our Y4 teacher has a real love of graphic novels, so he was paired with a child who also enjoys them but doesn't have access to any at home. We also ensured that the adults were from different year groups to the children and weren't people with who the child already works on a regular basis, as we felt it important for it to be a 'new' reading relationship for both parties. We then introduced the idea to the children, telling them who their reading buddy was and causing a great deal of excitement.

Before the first buddy sessions took place, we had a short meeting with staff. It was made clear that we knew it would be asking for (yet) another time commitment from staff but also talked how much impact it would potentially have and how much it would be appreciated by the children. We then examined how it might work in practice and shared ideas about how to try and keep momentum going across the year. The ideas were then all recorded and shared with other staff (see document below).
Impact

Although the initiative has only been running for a few weeks, there's already been a significant cultural shift across the school. The targeted children are, on the whole, showing far more positive attitudes to reading. There have been a couple of partnerships that haven't yet taken off (time pressure being the major factor) but these are very much in the minority. Children look forward to the sessions and make the effort to turn up. Some have brought in a favourite book from home to read and some have arrived with books that they've enjoyed and then recommended to their adult buddy. This is helping the school to develop a genuinely reciprocal reading community, which will ultimately increase the children's pleasure in reading (as highlighted in the Teachers as Readers report).

The fact that virtually all the staff are involved means that there’s significantly more book talk around the school, with staff talking to each other about their buddies and asking for recommendations of books. Several members of staff who hadn't previously shown much interest in reading are really enjoying the challenge and responsibility of the role. It's been wonderful to see staff visiting the library and searching out books and stories that they think their buddies would enjoy. We asked staff and children to share their early thoughts on sticky notes and created a feedback sheet. We're going to review the idea in more detail next term, looking at how we sustain its impact over the school year, but the feedback so far has been very positive.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Many schools already have a small nucleus of reading teachers, those who understand the importance of being able to share books with children and of being able to participate in the daily ‘book blether’ that takes place in the classroom. However, there are still many staff working in schools who are unaware of the value of being a reading role model. Hopefully, a simple idea like this will help them recognise its importance and begin to support them, as well as provide motivation, on their journey towards becoming a Reading Teacher.
Reading Buddies at Moorlands

Thank you all for supporting this. If we can get it up and running across the school, it will provide an extra layer of support to our more vulnerable readers, the ones who need someone to read them stories, to talk about books with, etc., and will also really help embed our reading culture across the whole school.

If you’re able to meet with your buddy for about five minutes twice a week, that would be great, but don’t worry if you can only manage it once a week. There will be times when it won’t happen for different reasons, again don’t worry. I’m aware that it’s asking for another time commitment from staff. This is genuinely appreciated, and will be appreciated even more by your buddies.

When you meet with your buddy will obviously depend on when you can find the time. It could be during break, lunch, at the end of assembly, just before school, etc. It’s important that the children take the lead in coming to find you. The children we’re focussing on are going to be the less enthusiastic and less engaged readers, so this might not be as easy as it sounds but please persevere. It doesn’t matter if you reward them the first few times for turning up, it needs to be something that they feel positive about, look forward to and want to be involved in.

Suggestions (feel free to come up with your own)
Talk about their reading book- probably the most obvious! Are they enjoying it, what has been their favourite part so far, which other books it reminds them of, have they read anything else by the same author, are there any parts they don’t like, etc.

Talk about what you’re reading- bring it in to share (if appropriate!). Could be a book, magazine, football programme, etc. The message that we need to try and get over is that all reading is good reading.

Ask them to share their class book- when they read it, why they look forward to it, who’s their favourite character, etc.

Reading histories- share the books you enjoyed as a child, why they were special, what you remember about them. Ask them about the books they can remember from when they were younger.

Poetry- share a poem, ask them about poems they enjoy, point them in the direction of a poet or poetry book.

Read them a page or two from a book, or find a short story that they would enjoy- lots of children on the list don’t get stories read to them at home and would absolutely thrive on the extra attention.
As well as Reading Buddies, I’ve been able to introduce many new R4P initiatives across the school over the past year:

1) **Poetry Post**: Each term we like to share our love of poetry with the local community by writing out our favourite poems (either our own or by a favourite poet) and then delivering them around the village. We’ve had lovely tweets, emails and letters from residents who have enjoyed our work. We’ve also visited our local care home to read poetry and stories to the residents. Hearing some of the residents share with the students their memories of reading Enid Blyton books to their children over sixty years ago was an unforgettable moment!

2) **Peer Recommendations**: Knowing that books which have been recommended by peers are more likely to be read than books which have been recommended by teachers we’ve introduced class ‘What we’re reading’ videos, an ‘If you liked…then try…’ book in the library, daily child-led book talk in the classroom and regular recommendations from our school book council in assembly. Our Y6 school librarians also visit other classes at least once a fortnight to recommend books and talk about new arrivals of books.

3) **Reading Surveys**: The importance of getting to know individual children as readers can’t be emphasised strongly enough. At the start of the year, each class teacher gives out a simple R4P survey and then acts on the results. This year, the two common themes were that the children wanted more time to ‘just read’ in class and wanted story time to happen.

Tell me two interesting facts about you as a reader (eg Mr Biddle loves reading books about the history of cricket; Mr Biddle enjoys Fighting Fantasy adventure books where you get to choose what happens next)

1) I love reading graphic novels and books about Vampires
2) I am most of who I am because of reading
‘every day, not just some days’. We’ve also looked at increasing the range of poets and poems that the children are aware of, as this was a weakness across the school. We’ve appointed poet Joseph Coelho as our Patron of Reading, purchased more poetry books for the classrooms and created a dedicated poetry shelf in the school library.

4) Social Media: We regularly use social media to engage parents and the local community with our reading in school. We’ve run #mymumreads and #mydadreads initiatives over the past year, as well as a #sendusyourshelfie campaign. Each campaign is better supported than the previous one as more children and their families come on board.

5) Reading Identities: Children become genuine readers when they have their own ‘reading identity’. We’ve done a huge amount of work based around individual and family reading histories, as well as class reading timelines. Inviting parents in to share the books that they enjoyed as children is hugely rewarding and always leads to interesting conversations between staff, parents and children.

Hopefully these selected examples of our work help show that developing Reading for Pleasure is absolutely central to everything that we’re doing at the school. Developing a child’s love for reading is our professional responsibility, but I believe it’s also our moral responsibility. To find out more about what we’re trying to achieve at Moorlands, please visit: http://childrenreadingforpleasure.blogspot.co.uk/.
A letter to Deer Class from Mr Biddle

Dear Deer,

Today I realised something very exciting! Did you know that you’re all readers now, every single one of you? I don’t mean that you all can read, because you’ve been able to do that since you were in Reception and Year One. That’s a different kind of reading, working out what all the sounds are and how to put them together. I mean that you’re readers; real, genuine, passionate readers. I spent a lot of time thinking about it on my way to school this morning (there was bad fog so I had to drive very slowly), and I’m going to try and show you that I’m right.

You’re readers because you remind me every single time when I forget about you sharing our Poem of the Day. You’re readers because you work brilliantly together to tidy up before story time, which means that you can squeeze every last minute out of it. You’re readers because you all get excited whenever a new book arrives in the classroom. You’re readers because you work so hard to keep the school library up and running. You’re readers because you love talking about your favourite books at every possible opportunity. You’re readers because you want to share the books you enjoy with children lower down the school.

In fact, now that I’ve started, let me be even more specific…

Lauren, you’re a reader because as soon as you found out that there was another book written by Katherine Rundell, you marched straight down to the school library to find it.

Troy, you’re a reader because you think very carefully about which picture book you’re going to share with the children in Reception at story time.

Liam, you’re a reader because you love looking at books with beautiful illustrations and trying to recreate them.

Charley, you’re a reader because you got so emotionally involved when we read One Dog and His Boy together and sat there with tears streaming down your face.

Isobel, you’re a reader because you squealed with joy when you found out that there might be a third Varjak Paw book one day.

Nico, you’re a reader because you insisted that your mum read Wonder straight after you did, so that she could see what you were so excited about.

Gracie, you’re a reader because you spend every spare minute talking about how amazing you think Lyra Belacqua and Katniss Everdeen are.

Rubie, you’re a reader because you read the books that you enjoy and you don’t care what anyone else thinks about them.

Hollie, you’re a reader because you spend your playtimes reading the Eddie poems by Michael Rosen to anyone who’ll listen.

Jack, you’re a reader because you love sending the class photos on Twitter of the purchases you make at the different bookshops you visit.

Andrew, you’re a reader because you can recall almost every record from Guinness World Records 2017 and you know straight away where to find any that you’re not sure of.
Alfie, you’re a reader because you can remember exactly what happened on page 264 of Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (and on any page of any other Harry Potter book).

Marley, you’re a reader because you’ve read so many books and you’re always happy to share recommendations with your friends.

Layla, you’re a reader because you can give a detailed plot summary of every Jacqueline Wilson book ever published.

Oliver, you’re a reader because you’ve quietly been working your way through the Young Samurai series since September.

James, you’re a reader because you love finding out extra facts about whatever topic we’re studying, and you start virtually every sentence with ‘Did you know...?’

Romy, you’re a reader because you always want to try books that you shouldn’t really be reading quite yet. Don’t worry, their time will come…and when it does, you’ll love them even more.

Leo, you’re a reader because you carefully take your signed Tom Palmer book out of your drawer and sit reading it with a contented smile on your face.

Jack, you’re a reader because you’re not afraid to change a book that you’re not enjoying.

Gabriella, you’re a reader because you read Bridge to Terabithia time and time again. It’s wonderful that you enjoy it so much!

Christian, you’re a reader because you come in every morning (without fail!) and tell me about the latest developments in the Once series.

Sonny, you’re a reader because you turn up at school book council meetings absolutely full of fantastic suggestions about which books we can buy for the school.

James, you’re a reader because, after a whole year of reading nothing but Beast Quest, you were brave and tried the Ranger’s Apprentice books and The Hobbit. And Christian was right, you loved them!

Taylor, you’re a reader because you discovered the Barnaby Grimes books by Chris Riddell and are happy to tell everyone you meet about how exciting you think they are.

Maddison, you’re a reader because you got so angry and frustrated during ‘that’ scene in Wonder.

Have I proved my point Deer Class? I really hope so. Thinking about all of this today meant that it was the most heart-warming and enjoyable drive to school that I’ve had for a very long time, so thank you all!

Mr Biddle