

What is the impact of the Reading Road Map on attainment and child engagement in different genres?

Southwold Primary School, Upper Phase

Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the impact of an initiative designed to boost engagement in primary reading, the Hackney Reading Road Map. The initiative created by the Islington School Library Service is provided at a cost to state schools, and it is therefore important to consider the return on investment. It is not a scheme of work nor a structure to adhere to, but a supplementary reading provision designed to provide a balanced structure of cross genre reading. Class teachers in Year Five, were asked to conduct a questionnaire to assess pupil attitudes to reading and their willingness to read outside of chosen comfort genres. A control group in Year 4 were also used to support comparative perspective. Children were given access to 40 books of varying genres and an engaging way of recording what they had read, split into genres. This system was supported with a reward system of certificates to acknowledge different milestones throughout the course of the research. The research is based around one school term of contact with the reading initiative.

Introduction

Reading is the spine of learning and a fundamental aspect of one's ability to learn and interpret new information. Prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the publication of books was in fact solely dedicated to human discoveries and research into the world around us and written fiction did not exist, (Lockwood, 2008). The fiction genre and poetic licence sparks creativity and all things unusual, which is why it is integral in a child's development. A child's *engagement* with reading lays the path for their application of knowledge gained from reading. Without this active participation, learning will not be committed to the long-term memory, (Harris, 2006). Throughout child development and education industries reading for pleasure has come to the forefront of practitioners priorities even for new-born babies, (Paul and Russo, 2019).

The Reading Road Map is a reading initiative designed to foster this passion for reading and over several years has developed personalised maps for multiple boroughs in London. This makes the process familiar and meaningful to a child's local context. The programme uses recently published books to engage the reluctant and challenge the more able; it claims to effectively assist teachers in their awareness of a variety of new authors. Ten different genres are depicted on each child's map by roads in their borough, including adventure, classics, crime, fantasy, graphic novels, horror, humour, poetry, science fiction and sport. Ultimately, children aim to read the 40 books provided, ticking off each one as they finish and therefore reading the breadth of the 10 genres.

Southwold, a recently 'Outstanding' school, already has a successful system in place to engage children in text, books and stories, therefore a key question is, why does it need an additional initiative? Southwold educates a large portion of socially disadvantaged children who are eligible for pupil premium, which affects their ability to access and engage with fiction for a multitude of reasons, (OECD, 2000). It is important that as educators opportunities are consistently sought to engage all children in a wide range of texts to facilitate breadth of reading and discovery, particularly those who do not have access to it outside of formal education.

Two Year 5 classes were tracked across a term and data collection points identified to review the effectiveness of the initiative. It was expected that the outcome of the project would result in children showing a greater enthusiasm for a larger range of books and authors, as well as being able to talk confidently about their own reading habits and preferences.

Research process

Southwold Primary School uses Destination Reader as a structure to teaching reading. An approach rather than a scheme, it involves daily sessions incorporating whole class modelling, partner work and independent reading to deliver structured daily reading sessions for KS2. The programme encompasses the key principles of effective reading provision and fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. As part of this approach children are asked to complete an 'End of Term Review' (Fig. 1), at the end of each term. This is familiar to them as these are completed termly thus reducing the response bias in this study. These questionnaires form the basis for the understanding of each child's attitude to reading prior to the implementation of the Hackney Reading Road Map. A Year Four class was used as a control group and these questionnaires were also used to compare the progress of data. This was particularly important as the unquantifiable nature of tracking a change in 'attitude' is difficult to isolate.

Autumn end of term review

Are you enjoying reading?		Favourite genre			
Favourite author		How many times a week are you reading at home	Rarely	2-3	5-7
Have I tried a new author/genre this term? Give an example					
I have been pleased with myself as a reader because...					
A book I would recommend					
I would like to read more non-fiction about...					
My target is... (could be about amount of reading, variety of genre or authors, skills.)					

Fig. 1 Autumn end of term review questionnaire

The next step was implementation. This started as an in-depth discussion with the class teachers to pinpoint their role in this study. As per the guidance from The Reading Road Map employee, the teachers were instructed to champion this initiative as best they could. Although this might seem as participant bias, it was important to apply the initiative as it was meant to be delivered. Children's independence was not being measured. To boost anticipation, the Literacy subject leader introduced the maps in an assembly and then the class teachers briefed the classes in more detail.

In the children's usual reading lesson, each child was given a Hackney Reading Road map and had an opportunity to ask questions and clarify the way it would work day-to-day in the classroom and at home. The following session, the children entered the room and the 40 books were covering the table tops, organised by genre. The children were free to peruse what was on offer and told to make a note of the genre they were particularly interested in reading and were encouraged to share the reason with their peers. A teacher-led class discussion invited the children to consider how they choose books. It is important to comment at this point, that both teachers offered that 96% and 98% of the children in their classes' were not notably competent in effectively choosing a book to either suit their taste or challenge themselves. This had been identified in a previous class context meeting and key reason for this cohort taking part in the study.

Teachers were given stickers to award the children with, when they completed a book, for their map. The teachers encouraged the children to tell them about the book they had read, likes and dislikes and whether or not they would read another from that genre. Once the child had completed five books they received a 'bronze'

certificate, awarded to them by the Literacy coordinator in the Key Stage Two phase assembly. Reading 10 books was rewarded with a 'silver' certificate, a 'gold' certificate for 15 and a 'platinum' certificate for 20 books. The certificates helped the adults keep track of progress and maintained a certain level of enthusiasm and engagement with the program, over the term.

At the end of Spring Term, the 40 books were placed back on the tables and children looked back at the genre they had identified at the beginning of the study. They discussed whether or not this was still their favourite genre, on reflection. Children were then asked to complete the Spring end of term review questionnaire (Fig. 2). During this class discussion, teachers were careful not to encourage children to reflect positively on their current attitudes, to ensure fair results.

SPRING TERM REVIEW

Are you enjoying reading?		Favourite genre			
Favourite author		How many times a week are you reading at home	Rarely	2-3	5-7
Have I tried a new author/genre this term? Give an example					
I have been pleased with myself as a reader because...					
A book I would recommend					
I would like to read more non-fiction about...					
My target is... (could be about amount of reading, variety of genre or authors, skills.)					

Fig. 2 Spring end of term review questionnaire

Findings

Teachers and adults who worked in the focus classrooms noted a significant improvement in children's engagement with and talking about text. They expressed that children who had often struggled to find a text they were interested in, particularly thrived when given access to this set of books and the map to complete. It should also be noted that parents acknowledged a change in attitude towards reading at home and an eagerness to converse about what they were reading. The children's enthusiasm and commitment to completing their Reading Road Maps was also evident in assemblies the Literacy coordinator delivered. Children enjoying talking about books, although somewhat unquantifiable, must be considered in the success of the initiative.

The data taken from the questionnaires filled out by the children before and after taking part in the initiative shows impact. To add context to the data, Mallard and Osprey Classes as seen on Figure 3, are the focus classes in Year 5 and Eagle Class the Year 4 class, who did not take part in Hackney Reading Road Map, are the control group. The data extracted from the questionnaires shows us that the number of children reading at home '2-3 times a week' decreases. In Mallard Class, this drops by 10.1% and 42.2% in Osprey. The number of children reading at home '5-7 times a week' increased by 30.4% (Mallard) and 26.3% (Osprey). This shows a significant shift in how many times children are reading at home. Although this is not the precise focus of the study, it definitely indicates that children became more motivated to read. Furthermore, in the control group, the reverse was seen, fewer children chose the 5-7 times a week column.

COUNTA of How many times a week are you reading at home?		How many times a week are you reading at home?				
Class	Term	2-3	5-7	n/a	Rarely	Grand Total
Eagle	Autumn	30.43%	69.57%			100%
	Spring	34.62%	53.85%	3.85%	7.69%	100%
Eagle Total		32.65%	61.22%	2.04%	4.08%	100%
Mallard	Autumn	29.17%	45.83%	4.17%	20.83%	100%
	Spring	19.05%	76.19%	4.76%		100%
Mallard Total		24.44%	60.00%	4.44%	11.11%	100%
Osprey	Autumn	54.17%	41.67%		4.17%	100%
	Spring	12.00%	68.00%	4.00%	16.00%	100%
Osprey Total		32.65%	55.10%	2.04%	10.20%	100%
Grand Total		30.07%	58.74%	2.80%	8.39%	100%

Fig. 3 A table to show the frequency children read at home.

Figure 4 shows the children's own understanding of how much they enjoy reading. This shows that the Hackney Reading Road Map has impact on reading for pleasure. This data shows us that Mallard and Osprey Classes had the highest increase of children who stated that 'yes' they do enjoy reading from the end of Autumn term, before the initiative was introduced and the end of Spring term after the initiative was in place. Impressively, 100% of children in the class stated they enjoyed reading at the end of the study. That is an increase of 29.2%. This is quite a significant increase, particularly in comparison to that of Osprey Class at 9.2%. This could be for a variety of reasons, the most obvious being that the delivery and maintenance from the adults supporting the pupils was more consistent and effective.

COUNTA of Are you enjoying reading?		Are you enjoying reading?				
Class	Term	n/a	No	Sometimes	Yes	Grand Total
Eagle	Autumn	8.33%	4.17%		87.50%	100%
	Spring			4.00%	96.00%	100%
Eagle Total		4.08%	2.04%	2.04%	91.84%	100%
Mallard	Autumn	4.17%	12.50%	12.50%	70.83%	100%
	Spring				100%	100%
Mallard Total		2.22%	6.67%	6.67%	84.44%	100%
Osprey	Autumn			13.04%	86.96%	100%
	Spring		3.85%		96.15%	100%
Osprey Total			2.04%	6.12%	91.84%	100%
Grand Total		30.07%	58.74%	2.80%	8.39%	100%

Fig. 4 A table to show the percentage of children who enjoyed reading.

Finally, the data shows that the number of children who engaged with a variety of genres and therefore authors. At the beginning of the study, children largely noted well-established authors such as Roald Dahl, Jeff Kinney and David Walliams but in Spring more children were entering lesser-known authors, who neither the children nor the teachers had heard of before, such as Nick East and Candice Lemon-Scott. Equally, 72% of children changed their favourite genre from Autumn to Spring.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data supports the effectiveness of the Hackney Reading Road Map initiative in increasing the frequency of children reading at home and their enjoyment of reading. As previously discussed, these factors are fundamentals of reading for pleasure. In addition, the initiative has a changing effect on how children approach choosing a book and broadens their exposure to a variety of authors.

A key, yet unanticipated, question that rose from the study was that of children choosing books. It became obvious early on in the study to all adults involved that the children did not possess the ability to choose a book for themselves. Furthermore, it is a skill that is not discretely taught or modelled to children. Going forward this will be a development point for the phase and an area of interest to the Literacy coordinator.

Like all research projects, particularly in education, the data has disadvantages. If it was to be remodeled, attainment would have been the preferred data. However, as it sought to gauge the enjoyment and engagement of primary-aged readers, a child-led questionnaire seemed most fitting with the purpose of the study.

References

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