



Gallions Primary School
Gallions Book Society
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Context

Gallions Primary School is a 3 form entry school in Newham, London. It has a disproportionately high level of EAL pupils which has a significant impact on how much they read and are read to at home. Reading scores have also been consistently below targets.

It also has a broad range of teachers who largely reflect the backgrounds of the pupils. Reading has not been a high priority in the community and is generally only thought of in terms of attainment for most teachers.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

It was recognised following the recognition of TaRs research (Cremin et al, 2016) that the school needed to engage teachers more in order to encourage the staff of Gallions to become more of a reading community on an adult level at first. Primary schools rely on the passion and expertise of their staff and so a book club began as an informal way of engaging staff who were otherwise disengaged from reading or reading conversations. It was also a more natural outgrowth of informal conversations with more engaged members of staff and so began from a strong bedrock of interested parties.

It was hoped that the book club would inspire informal conversations between staff members that would help raise reading to a higher profile.

Aims

The aims of 'Gallions Book Society' are:

- to encourage informal book talk around a range of shared reading experiences.
- to give teachers a broader knowledge of literature.
- to allow teachers to share their enthusiasm for particular books.
- Encourage teachers to share books with their classes.

A large part of the aims here are informal as they rely on naturally occurring conversations but a particular focus would be how much these conversations feed back into classrooms and how much they are able to spread throughout the school.

Another important aim was to promote the idea of Reading Teachers who understand both the social and solitary natures of reading and how they can influence children. The reading lives of teachers could be shared with students.

Outline

Staff book club was informally created out of staff room conversations about adult books and was coupled by the recognition that all staff could benefit from an increased knowledge of children's literature.

It was agreed that we would meet once a month and books would alternate between 'adult books' and 'children's books'. Initially the book club had about 8 members but that has since increased to about 15 depending on the month and selection of books. The school would buy enough children's books for the staff to have copies but adult books would be bought by staff.

Currently the book club has run for 6 months.

Impact

The impact across the school has been far greater than anticipated. Initially it was expected that only teachers with an already existing love of reading would join and even then that it may be hard to maintain. Since the group started we have seen:

- an increase in the amount of teachers participating in the group. This increase has also come from a broad range of teachers in terms of age taught and curriculum speciality.
- a huge increase in informal book chat across the school from teachers to teaching assistants and admin staff.
- more conversation about books used in lessons as well as the reactions of students to the books we choose.
- an increase in the diversity of books the school has available to students and teachers.
- staff requesting specific books in order to do their own research.
- a broadening of staff's knowledge of children's literature. The book club has a long backlist of books 'we would like to read' off the back of suggestions from members and other curious staff.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The initial impact of something as simple as a book club has been a revelation. staff at Gallions have embraced the book club and it has become a part of everyday conversation now. Staff are frequently caught discussing books and there is a huge increase in the amount of stature that reading has across the school.

There are, however, limitations to these otherwise positive developments. The book is, and of course always should be, a voluntary group which means that there are certain staff/ teachers that still do not consider themselves readers and see reading for (their own) pleasure to be outside of something that they are either capable of or interested in. There needs to be greater steps taken in order to engage these staff members in conversations about reading. This could be to lower the bar required

for them to participate. This could be through the school buying a selection of new books each month from a range of genres and then allowing staff access to these before they are shared with students. These could help to remove possible barriers of overwhelming choice and access to books.

Further steps need to be taken as well in terms of creating positive reading communities in classrooms and with the wider school community. As it stands, this has been a good starting point and has helped to increase staff's knowledge of books while remaining fun and engaging. These feelings are important and help promote reading as a social activity and what we need to convey and encourage with students. Teachers who understand this and are excited by it are the catalysts.