



# **Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers**

## **External Evaluation Report**

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November 2008

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## 1. Summary of project aims

In 2006–7 the United Kingdom Literacy Association undertook a study entitled '*Teachers as Readers*'. Its survey of 1200 primary teachers nationally disclosed that while most are committed readers, their knowledge of children's literature was relatively narrow. This raised concerns as to whether teachers were knowledgeable enough to guide and recommend reading, to plan literacy work for diverse student needs and to extend beyond a limited canon of the most popular authors whose work children are already selecting for themselves. It was recognised that children's literature is not formally recognised as part of a primary teacher's professional repertoire.

The second phase of the project, '*Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers*' 2007–8 (TaRs), sponsored by the United Kingdom Literacy Association and the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation, is the subject of this evaluation. It was designed as a response to these findings, to provide a model for teachers' professional development in order to:

- broaden their knowledge through their own reading
- understand the value and role of literature in the growth of readers
- connect this with the development of pedagogic skills and repertoires
- motivate children towards becoming enthusiastic, independent readers.

(Participants are known as 'teachers' for the purposes of this report but there was also at least one teaching assistant in the cohort.)

The premise was that increasing children's independent reading for pleasure would not only encourage lifelong positive reading habits but also increase reading attainment. The project aimed to:

1. widen teachers' knowledge of children's literature in order to support independent reading for pleasure.
2. develop teachers' confidence and skilful use of such literature in the classroom in order to foster reading for pleasure.
3. develop teachers' relationships with parents, carers, librarians and families in order to support independent reading for pleasure.

4. develop Reading Teachers, teachers who read and readers who teach, in order to support independent reading for pleasure.

The project was led by a core team of researchers supporting action research by 50 teachers in 5 Local Authorities (LAs) led by Local Authority Co-ordinators (LACs).

## 2. Aims of the external evaluation

This external evaluation was commissioned in order to examine the impact of the project in relation to its aims, as follows:

1. effects on teachers' development as readers and their knowledge of children's literature
2. effects on teachers' skilful and reflective use of children's literature in the classroom
3. effects on relationships with librarians, parents, carers and families
4. impact on children's reading and literacy
5. impact on Local Authority planning and professional development provision in relation to literacy.

The evaluation also considered the effectiveness of the models for change developed in the 5 Local Authorities, involving professional development, action research, teacher leadership and development of communities of readers within schools, in families and in local communities.

The evaluation sought to identify the key factors or catalysts in determining success, the barriers to success in meeting the project's aims and emerging challenges for the future.

It was intended that the external evaluation would rely predominantly on critical analysis of rich evidence gathered by the core team, corroborated by immersion in the project's activity through attendance at events and engagement with the dialogue amongst participants and stakeholders. It was therefore important to include in the evaluation an examination of the methodology through which evidence was generated, as well as an analysis of outcomes and impact.

### 3. Methodology of the project and the external evaluation

A strong research foundation for the project was clearly established from the outset. The core team structured research into the project not only by gathering baseline data against which to compare further evidence at strategic points during the year, but also by building capacity for teachers within Local Authority teams to undertake action research. A researcher was allocated to each Local Authority. The core team gathered a vast amount of quantitative and qualitative data, including rich interview and questionnaire evidence and case studies of school development. Teachers selected case study children in their schools as part of their action research.

The core team ensured that research and evaluation processes were rigorous and comprehensive. Indeed they showed an insatiable appetite for collecting, interpreting and sharing data and information formatively and established this as an explicit and accepted dimension of the project. There was methodological integrity throughout the structure; the core team referred to data continually at the national project conferences and in documentation, making it visible and accessible to teacher participants and LA Co-ordinators. Thus participants were encouraged to become comfortable with thinking about and working with data. Articles including some authored by the core team were circulated along with references, resources and websites. The value of research and scholarship was championed while connecting with the practical realities of classrooms and teachers' professional and personal starting points, which for some included lack of confidence and skill as researchers, lapsed academic backgrounds and chronic pressures of time.

The core team provided materials and tools to support the gathering of evidence and its discussion and analysis, including a high quality support pack for LA Coordinators setting out the principles and structure of the project, detailing the data collection processes to be followed and giving clear guidance, including substantial ethical advice and consent forms. LA Co-ordinators were asked to organise discussion and completion of surveys on impact and on teachers' development as readers. User-friendly materials were organised chronologically to show what was expected through the year to support the action research cycle. These materials ensured that baseline and other data was comparable across the 5 LAs. Teachers were also required to develop portfolios demonstrating evidence of progress and instructed about the generic items they should include. It was beneficial when teachers were allocated time during group meetings for compiling these records.

In addition to this generic data gathering, bespoke tools and approaches were developed to fit the specific purposes of LAs and schools. This enabled teachers to be proactive, integrating research with development and using it to evaluate and

support change rather than regarding it as a bureaucratic, summative and retrospective process in which they were passive respondents. A particular strength was the collection and presentation of artefacts such as displays, books of children's writing, labelled photographs and quotations to capture the essence of the developments. Teachers demonstrated increasing confidence in offering evidence as well as description in their case study presentations as the year progressed.

The regular meetings and conferences both centrally and in LAs provided essential reflective space. Throughout the project there was a sense that evidence was continually fed back into the development process and, importantly, offered for public scrutiny amongst participants and stakeholders to fuel participants' individual and collaborative learning. The project built not only communities of readers but also, at its heart, a community of researchers and learners.

The following documentation was gathered by the external evaluator as the project progressed:

- Local Authority action plans
- Local Authority Co-ordinators' interim reports (February 2008)
- Local Authority Co-ordinators' final reports (July 2008)
- Questionnaire data
- Steering committee agendas and minutes
- Core team proceedings
- Conference documentation
- Plans and information about dissemination events

The evaluator was also copied into and forwarded correspondence between members of the core team and participants, which enabled valuable insights into the project in progress and gave a running commentary about processes, issues and outcomes.

In addition, the evaluator attended the following events:

- Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers *National Project Meeting* at Scholastic Children's Books, London, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008
- Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers: *Kent Cluster INSET day*, The Hop Farm, Paddock Wood, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2008 (attended part of the day)
- Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers *National Project Meeting* at the Methodist International Centre, London, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2008

- Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers *Project Dissemination*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008

During these events, rich evidence of the process and impact of the project was gathered from:

- informal conversations with a range of participants
- observations of group discussions, presentations and networking activity
- formal presentations by teachers, the core team and others
- displays and artefacts brought by teachers to share with colleagues within and between LA groups.

It was unnecessary for the external evaluation to duplicate the rigorous and comprehensive research processes already structured into the project. The external evaluation focussed on drawing the evidence and analysis together to look for patterns, identify issues and triangulate with observations and evidence gathered as the project progressed.

## 4. Impact of the project

An experienced member of the core team commented informally that ‘Teachers as Readers’ has had more impact than any other project in which she has been involved. Unguarded and unsolicited qualitative remarks such as these should not be taken lightly. Similar comments have been made in countless conversations, presentations and emails by participants experiencing the wide-reaching effects of this project first hand. More formally, the project has achieved profound impact upon individual professional practice for those directly involved, in their schools and most importantly on children’s literacy and learning. It promises continued impact in the 5 LAs and has already made a significant impression nationally, including nationwide dissemination through the Primary National Strategy.

Impact is discussed under the five headings outlined in Section 2.

### a) Effects on teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature

Teachers’ individual starting points were very varied, since participants were selected solely on the basis of their willingness to develop. Inputs from the core team and other experts at conferences introduced new texts and enticed participants to explore more widely but the reinforcement of this through the project’s structure and processes was crucial. Opportunities were given for teachers to discuss both children’s literature and other reading, then to model this in the classroom. They became more confident not only as readers but also in discussing reading, developing a ‘sense of self’ as a reader.

Teachers were given catalogues, flyers and promotional materials linked to the National Year of Reading. Talks by the project’s literature consultant included reading and enjoying children’s books. Teachers were exploring children’s books as literature in their own right, rather than as resources for teaching, learning from them and delighting in them. Observation of a ‘Book Talk’ session at the national project conference in February demonstrated how this worked in practice. Teachers were already keen to share and listen and were connecting with the books at a personal and emotional level, rather than viewing this as a ‘knowledge gathering’ exercise that might be useful in their lessons. Although this made people vulnerable and required considerable trust, the core team noticed initial reticence giving way to ‘liberation and empowerment’. The project immersed the teachers in children’s literature, including the use of Scholastic Children’s Books as a high class venue with quotations and illustrations around the walls.

The notion that reading extends far beyond 'books' was highly significant for the project. Teachers realised that reading is all around and began to look for a much broader spectrum (signs, packets, computers, comics, signs and symbols and so on). Teachers shared their ideas in their schools and across the project, including discovery for many of the unexpected power of picture books. While broadening the scope of what 'counts' as reading, there were also opportunities for intensive collaborative work on one particular text giving depth as well as breadth of knowledge development by individuals and groups.

Teachers' response to this was revealed in the language they used, which reflected that of the project leaders (typified by words like 'enticing', 'invitational', 'seize', 'satisfaction', 'explore', 'tempting', 'pondering' – all from one talk by the project director, who also noted the importance of time for 'silence and stillness'). Teachers described the 'freedom' that they experienced in exploring unfamiliar genres and authors, encountering new literature and being 'allowed' to read for pleasure. They expressed 'passion' and 'joy'. Although the Phase 1 survey revealed that many teachers do read for pleasure themselves, the Phase 2 project lent legitimacy and gave time and space to this, developing enthusiasm for knowledge, interest, learning and personal growth through reading of both adult and children's literature, which they then shared with one another and with their pupils and colleagues.

Overall the improvement has been immense. Teachers no longer rely on a canon of familiar texts and expressed clear intentions to take responsibility for increasing their knowledge and keeping up to date so that this learning will be sustainable. They have the confidence and commitment to continue to explore, take risks, enhance their knowledge and deepen their learning in relation to children's literature.

#### **b) Effects on teachers' confidence and skilled and reflective use of literature in the classroom**

The project has had a profound influence on the practice of most teacher participants and in many cases this has spread to colleagues, teams and schools. Although inevitably some teachers viewed their work as part of a finite 'project', there were many examples of significant changes of attitude, approach and pedagogy and it is difficult to see how any participant's pedagogy could remain completely unaffected in the long term. Informal comments suggested that the project was viewed as hard work that was worthwhile and sometimes became central to their practice; one said "this project is what keeps me going", while another said that it provided much needed impetus where her teaching had "gone stale". One LA report stated that the practice of the teachers involved would never be the same.

Teachers shared a wealth of ideas that had been put into practice which were evaluated through their action research including case studies of individual children, some of them initially reluctant readers. Many teachers had taken risks in carving out time for reading for pleasure in class, immersing children in books, talking about reading, doing their own surveys about reading preferences and recommendations and generating 'book talk' in innumerable ways. Teachers reported learning to listen to what children were actually saying, rather than for what they wanted or expected to hear. An important aspect was commitment to reading aloud with children, in Key Stage 2 as well as with the youngest children.

Certain techniques and ideas generated by teachers were greatly influential, capturing imaginations in schools and at the group meetings and conferences. The sharing of artefacts was highly prized and teachers were given space and time to browse and gather ideas, prompted by the interest of the project leaders. On 'Rivers of Reading', children displayed their own and families' range of reading. 'Book Showers' allowed children to browse, explore, choose and discuss different genres and authors from a blanket covered with books. 'Curiosity Kits' could include all kinds of reading to take home. One teacher made a 'Reading Chair' which prompted children to compete for the opportunity to sit and read, an idea quickly copied by colleagues. There were many imaginative examples of comfortable, colourful and attractive spaces for reading and interactive displays. In one school with limited space, an unpromising cupboard became a space ship with ugly heating pipes incorporated into the decoration.

Teachers were encouraged by LACs to become leaders in their schools. Many were able to collaborate and share ideas to the extent that the impact was school-wide, as noted in LA reports. In addition to changes in classroom pedagogy, there was much sharing of resources and improvements were made to school environments in book corners, libraries and corridors, with displays promoting reading for pleasure and 'book talk'.

Many teachers, schools and LAs became adept at funding and resourcing the increased activity. Publishers ran book clubs and stalls with sales converted into a percentage of free books for the school. Teachers raided second hand shops to fill their book corners. One teacher's school was reportedly 'groaning with books'. Schools became generous too: after a visit to school in a developing country, one teacher had involved her own school in supplying books, speaking with pride of the international impact of TaRs.

The pedagogic approaches used within the project were significantly different from the use of reading schemes, reading instruction and criterion-based work geared to

test preparation and targets that were universally followed at the start of the project. The project has served to convince teachers that ‘fighting’ for time for reading is worthwhile, where previously they would not have believed that there would be space in the curriculum. In these classrooms, reading has become exciting, important and personal. ‘Book talk’ is routine. Instead of using books as the basis for ‘work’, children are reading them – teachers have reconceptualised the reading *as* the work.

The activity and pedagogy might at first sight seem less tightly structured than previous approaches, e.g. in allowing time for browsing and choosing, but it needed to be carefully planned, facilitated and nurtured. Teachers’ views of pedagogy in the teaching of reading have undergone a seismic shift through the project. Their creativity and enthusiasm has built vibrant communities of readers. Their leadership, with LA support, has spread this into schools.

### **c) Effects on relationships with librarians, parents, carers and families**

A range of strategies were used to make links beyond schools, drawing on a wide variety of contacts offering expertise and experience in this field, and there are many examples of innovative and effective developments. However, LA reports suggest that this aspect of the project was the most difficult and that coherent and consistent progress has not yet been achieved.

At the start of the project, many of the expected relationships around reading did not exist at all. From this low base, existing or new links with libraries were reinforced through visits by the children and librarians coming into schools and to conferences. As a result, some children and families have now become established library users. One headteacher reported that ‘patterns for life’ were being established and there were many examples of habits developing, as reflected in borrowing and attendance figures.

In other localities, the developments were largely internal and these wider links are thought to be part of the next step, building on the confidence that teachers have gained in their own classrooms and on the children’s motivation. Librarians cite various formal schemes designed to encourage children to read and have promoted these through schools, while elsewhere bespoke schemes have been introduced, such as putting a different selection of books into classrooms every fortnight.

Parents, carers and families have been involved through developments in classroom practice e.g. when children have been asked to draw their families into investigations or contribute photographs of children reading at home. ‘Rivers of Reading’ has had

the same effect through displays of family reading activity: one teacher commented “they’re readers even if they don’t think they are”.

Schools and LAs have realised the importance of ‘getting books into homes’ where reading is not part of the culture. Teachers’ comments were telling: “Parents don’t read with their children except the ones that are obvious”; “What do you do if children don’t possess a book?”; “...they say, “What d’you want to read for?””. One teacher suspected that some parents were concealing their illiteracy by claiming to be dyslexic. Children were inevitably disappointed when their parents did not attend events to which they had been invited; a ‘Book Talk’ to which only 3 parents came was dispiriting.

Although some parents have noted improvements in their children’s reading and motivation, it is another step to involve themselves as readers for pleasure and recognise its value. Without the benefit of the careful facilitation within LA group sessions and national project meetings, it may be much more difficult for parents than for teachers to make the mental transition from conceptualising learning to read as instruction through a series of stages or levels (e.g. using a reading scheme), to encouraging a range of reading for pleasure that might include comics, picture fiction and poetry as well as books from a wide range of previously unknown authors. Where this has been explicitly tackled, parents have realised that different kinds of reading could be equally valuable, even when anxious to see high levels of attainment (particularly important to them where the LA system involves selection at 11+).

Current activity was generally described as ‘patchy’ and clearly there is still much to do to reach many families that cannot readily engage. It is therefore important to examine models where parents have been involved successfully. A teacher from one Birmingham school described a whole range of strategies involving libraries, the police, trained volunteers, buddies across year groups and ‘Dads and Lads’. Here there has been a noticeable increase in families using the library over weekends and holidays, which is particularly significant where children usually show a marked dip in reading level over the summer. Parents have developed confidence and reading at home has massively increased. This example shows what can be achieved when particular focus is given to building communities of readers beyond the school.

Formal strategies need to be developed more consistently within LAs to support these emerging relationships and links with families, parents, carers, communities and services. Important principles and messages need to be explicitly communicated and reinforced, to build self-esteem and confidence around children as readers at home. Family learning and parent/carer support has much potential for extending

the opportunities provided in schools, including enabling schools and families to work together to use libraries' valuable resources and expertise. The most well developed examples show the importance and dramatic influence of this in building social cohesion and enhancing children's wellbeing through better relationships in families and closer community links.

#### **d) Impact on children's reading and literacy**

This is the most important but also probably the most problematic aspect of impact to evaluate. It is difficult to put a quantitative value on motivation, confidence and enthusiasm, still more difficult to assess the extent to which the project is responsible for improving standards according to National Curriculum levels over such a limited timescale.

Nevertheless it is reported that attainment levels have improved. The sample shows that 61% of reading scores rose by twice the usual rate (at least 3 sub-levels) over the year, which was beyond the improvement normally expected. All LAs reported improvements; one described evidence for improvement in attainment as 'remarkable'; 'very strong indeed'. Another commented that it was 'extremely positive'. Many teachers report that standards have risen significantly and attribute this to the project.

Alongside this are important professional judgements triangulated by qualitative evidence showing children's improved motivation, wider vocabulary, broader reading preferences, greater confidence in discussing reading, more enthusiasm for reading and recognition of a much wider range of genres and styles. There were twice as many positive responses at the end of the year in relation to children's perceptions of ability and enjoyment of reading. Many teachers reported that their students 'look forward' to reading.

Children have also developed much greater discernment: "they can choose comfortable books or challenging books". The links with development of critical skills, independence and confidence are evident. The work with picture books, poetry and a variety of texts was impressive, challenging teachers and pupils together towards new levels of analysis, understanding and emotional response. The link with improvements in writing was noted by teachers, although probably not picked up explicitly in the central data. Importantly, teachers' expectations of their pupils have been raised as a result of the improvements they have seen, so that they now regard the children as *readers* and *writers* rather than people who can't or won't. Children are excited to have had their work published within and beyond their schools.

Although it is very important to recognise, as noted by a member of the Steering Committee, that many children did and do enjoy reading without the benefit of TaRs, teachers universally recounted that enjoyment and fun had been injected back into literacy through the project, indeed it was often not seen as ‘work’. Children were surprised to be allowed to read comics, picture books and joke books. One teacher went as far as to make the bold claim that the project had “reinstated reading” in her school. Reading has also become much more communal and inclusive through discussion, listening and acceptance of diverse preferences and personal responses.

A teacher from a Pupil Referral Unit described a transition from non-readers / haters to readers / not minders; this was reflected in raised reading scores and she believed that through this, pupils had re-engaged with learning. A teacher working in a particularly deprived neighbourhood reported significantly increased standards of reading as a result of initiatives focussed on parental involvement such that the numbers reading at home ‘rocketed’ and book borrowing became the norm. For these children and teachers, the project may have been particularly worthwhile in encouraging lifelong readers.

In summary, there is substantial evidence that the project has had a great impact on children’s reading for pleasure, improving their learning, enjoyment and wellbeing as well as their achievement. It is vital that these findings are taken seriously in developing policies for literacy development.

#### **e) Impact on Local Authority planning and professional development for literacy**

The project has provided a powerful model for professional learning in which the specific choice of focus was made by Local Authorities, with further choice for teachers in how to interpret this in their schools. The project literature is uncompromising in insisting that the focus for action research is negotiated with teacher participants rather than imposed, whilst ascribing to the project principles and overarching LA themes. Thus there was a balance between coherence across the national project and ownership by teachers. While the evidence gathering for the project was both tightly structured and carefully guided, it is clear that LAs developed their own approaches to strengthen and enrich this, some drawing on previous action research experience. The importance of evidence in substantiating claims and supporting change is made explicit in LA support materials. One LA Co-ordinator explained the importance of being able to balance rigorous qualitative data with the normally predominant quantitative data e.g. on performance.

While LAs worked closely with teachers, it was more difficult to influence the ways in which schools worked. Stronger links with head teachers and senior leaders were often sought to ensure support within schools, which was particularly important where teachers without status or authority were leading change. The wider impact of the project depended on teachers' ability to capture colleagues' imaginations and the extent to which the project aims matched schools' development priorities to secure time and resources for collaborative and developmental work in school. There were plenty of examples where this had happened; teachers showed how Local Authority Co-ordinators had insisted on planning for each term and supported them in testing and then sharing ideas and strategies to increase impact. Teachers learnt new skills and developed confidence in running development sessions for colleagues and some contributed to dissemination within the National Primary Strategy that was widely praised. Alongside this there were many examples of organic and impromptu developments as teachers' colleagues simply caught on to ideas and tried them for themselves.

Sustainability was an important consideration for LAs and depended on priorities and capacity within the Authority. LAs cited this in their concerns in summative reports. Many expressed intentions to try to continue groups on a voluntary basis or link with other initiatives or existing networks. Some organised formal events for dissemination, for example one LA held a cluster conference on a joint development day where every primary school was represented and to which some schools brought all staff, including support staff as well as teachers, with TaRs teachers prominent in sharing their work. This was seen as a central strand of cluster development but also led to a strategic development within the LA in appointing the TaRs teachers as Literacy Leaders. This LAC said that securing senior support within the LA had been essential to enable these developments, along with time consuming building of relationships with schools and headteachers in particular. At the conference, each school was asked to discuss action points they would address. Later it proved difficult to gain a response from headteachers about the impact of this, but anecdotal evidence shows that the effects have been positive not only in influencing pedagogy but in encouraging teachers to re-connect with reading.

There has been widespread and intense interest in the project at regional level. The TaRs research chimed with national concerns about literacy and the teaching of reading, combined with the coincidence with the National Year of Reading, offering LAs a number of contemporary 'hooks' upon which to hang developments. Connecting the work with initiatives, such as 'Every Child a Reader' and 'Assessing Pupils Progress', was actively encouraged. It remains to be seen whether LAs will find specific funding for the key role of Local Authority Coordinators and for continuation of the professional development and resourcing of the project beyond this year but

early indications are positive, with some continuation of the networks face to face and electronically, support for the original TaRs teachers in leading developments, linking of schools to model the approach and the establishment of new TaRs cohorts.

The Steering Committee has planned for systematic and strategic national dissemination, seizing additional opportunities as they arose. Dissemination to all Regional Literacy Co-ordinators nationally through the Primary National Strategy (PNS) is a testament to the value placed on the project by policymakers. The core team and director undertook a massive organisational task to enable teachers to present their case studies at a series of regional events and have also written high quality guidance materials and resources to support Regional Co-ordinators in developing the TaRs approach; many have since been in touch with the team directly. Where LAs are taking on the project, achieving similar levels of impact clearly relies on staying true to the principles of the approach, using the materials and processes creatively to engage teachers as researchers and leaders who will champion the work within and beyond their schools with the same commitment and enthusiasm as the first year's cohort. Effective LA co-ordination is vital to provide the right support and structuring; it is intended that this will be monitored through the Primary National Strategy.

The core team are now engaged in writing and speaking for a large number and wide variety of national and international events to communicate to professional, policymaking and academic audiences, including leading a seminar at DCSF. Publishing has been and will continue to be astonishingly prolific. It is clear that the structures and processes used by the project provide a powerful model for individual, organisational, regional and systemic change. However, it must also be recognised that such a model relies on relationships, human interactions and personalities and on strategic and inspirational leadership; its replication cannot be taken for granted and needs continued development, with research at its core.

## 5. Effectiveness of models for change

### a) Key factors and catalysts for success

It is difficult to see how a one-year project of this kind can have been more effective in driving and supporting change. It is clear from the evidence and current continuing activity that it has not only met but surpassed expectations in professional and school development and in making a national impact. Less consistent progress has been made in building relationships beyond schools, partly because of the tendency to focus internally to begin with and partly because the baseline was lower than initially realised.

The following factors have contributed particularly to the impact of the project:

- Status as a national research project linked to National Year of Reading
- Powerful representation on the Steering Committee with the political understanding and status to advocate national strategic development and align with key policy directives
- Commitment, expertise and enthusiasm of the core team and Local Authority Co-ordinators including highly effective leadership and management by the director working closely with the core team
- Attention to relationships and wellbeing as well as structures and skills
- Unremitting focus upon, and immersion in, reading for pleasure for all participants
- Integrity of research ethos at all levels
- Structured and coordinated national, regional and local support
- Comprehensive structure, guidance and materials supporting research and development
- Coherence in data gathering across 5 LAs for comparison and contrast
- Regional, local and individual flexibility within clear overarching aims

- Opportunities for powerful collaborative learning in local and central communities of practice
- Ambitious and developmental plans for dissemination and sustainability through strategic planning by Steering Committee
- Use of wide range of professional, academic and policy contacts, organisations and networks

In order for the impact to be maximised and sustained, the following factors have emerged as important:

- Continued dissemination and publication linked to Primary National Strategy, other relevant initiatives and existing national and local structures
- Monitoring and support of Local Authority strategies for continued and wider development
- Funding for continued professional and network development in LAs and schools, including co-ordination
- Support from headteachers and schools for teachers leading school development
- Recognition and continuation of the professional development process underpinning development of knowledge, understanding and pedagogy
- Greater emphasis on research and development with families, communities and services working alongside school developments

**b) Barriers to success**

The following factors could, in some circumstances, hinder progress and stifle impact:

- Teachers' lack of time and opportunity for collaborative work in school and/or reluctance to engage in action research
- Teachers' lack of confidence in deviating from prescribed approaches and materials

- Teachers' initial discomfort in engaging and communicating personally and emotionally with children about reading
- Lack of support in school for teachers' dissemination and leadership of change
- Lack of LA intention and/or capacity to support and sustain developments fully and strategically.

**c) Emerging challenges**

The following questions might be considered in taking the project forward in LAs currently involved and in replicating its success elsewhere:

1. Can existing LA communities of practice be maintained and new ones developed beyond the life and funding of the project, to continue developments and spread impact without central support and amidst competing and changing LA, school and professional priorities?
2. Has the importance of supporting the professional and personal journeys of teachers to underpin developments in knowledge, understanding and pedagogy been fully recognised?
3. Are effective conditions, processes and structures for moving from individual commitment to whole school change properly understood by LAs, schools, headteachers and teachers, including the need for full commitment from senior school leaders?
4. To what extent can staff other than teachers become involved in building communities of readers within extended schools?
5. How can teachers and others working with particularly vulnerable children (for example in pupil referral units and special schools) be supported in their engagement in professional development, particularly when it is difficult for them to take time out of the classroom?
6. What are the most effective strategies for building strong and sustainable relationships with parents and carers so as to extend the reading communities into families, recapturing the importance of reading for pleasure and as a skill for life?

7. What are the most effective models for supporting integrated and strategic developments with libraries and other services to build the status of reading in schools and local communities?
8. How does ethnicity affect the kinds of support needed to develop communities of readers?
9. What are the most authentic and rigorous ways of continuing to involve teachers, schools and LAs in research to plan, monitor and evaluate immediate and long-term impact, given that the research itself increases impact?
10. What are the implications for developing pedagogy at Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly where literacy levels are low.

## 6. Conclusion

A complex, multi-dimensional project across 5 LAs that allows scope for flexibility and choice cannot easily be drawn to a neat and definitive conclusion. A rich array of evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, has been rigorously gathered and processed. It should be noted that causal relationships can be impossible to prove in the most powerful and convincing of situations and that the long-term effects of teachers', pupils and others' engagement in the project are not yet known; indeed some may never be captured.

Nevertheless, *Teachers as Readers* has clearly built a community of teachers and LA staff as readers, researchers and learners who have reached out into classrooms, communicated and connected within and beyond schools and influenced attitudes in families, so as to improve children's learning and enrich their experience. There is strong evidence for improved attainment as well as broader impact. Pedagogy has been pushed in new directions and creativity and collaboration have flourished. There is a powerful sense not of completion, but of beginning, as the project legitimates and raises the value and status of reading for pleasure and has already widely disseminated resources, ideas, evidence and enthusiasm to support continuation and extension.

Inevitably the project has had more influence and impact for some LAs, teachers and schools than for others. Richness, diversity, flexibility and choice have been important factors for success; to prescribe, instruct and train would stifle the creativity that has liberated teachers and led to positive impact. A measure of trust is called for, trust that performance outcomes will continue to follow as communities of readers develop, that parental and community involvement will strengthen social cohesion and improve relationships, that children will be freed from constraints and barriers in their reading progress, motivated by the interests, excitements and challenges of reading for pleasure, leading to broader, lifelong outcomes. Teachers and headteachers have expressed the hope and the expectation that their pupils have become readers for life as a result of the development of communities of teachers, not only as readers but also as researchers, learners and leaders. The project has provided a transferable model of professional development that places teachers at the heart of educational change. Policymakers are already taking seriously the messages emerging from *Teachers as Readers*, suggesting that it will have a significant, widespread and long lasting influence on children's lives and learning

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