

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C25 Education

Title of case study: Reading for pleasure in the 21st century: impact on education policy, practice and perceptions

1. Summary of the impact

Our research has transformed teachers' understanding of reading, leading to more effective practices. Teachers reconceptualised reading from a solitary to a social and multimedia practice, resulting in improved attitudes to reading amongst pupils. Championed by five English Local Authorities (LAs), one project was implemented in 800 schools (36,000 pupils per year group) with 61% of reading scores rising at twice the average rate. It was later developed in several other LAs. Embedded in the training of national literacy consultants (550) and initial teacher education lecturers (290), this research shaped policy and practice in England. Using new media, the *Our Story* app has influenced teachers' perceptions and children's reading enjoyment in diverse international settings.

2. Underpinning research

Research on reading within the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET) builds on theoretical insights of literacy as social practice (Maybin, 2004; Swann, 2007), and has been undertaken in the context of a national decline in reading for pleasure. The research revealed that teachers' knowledge of children's literature is too limited to enable reader development, that the diversity of children's informal multimedia reading practices at home is underestimated by teachers, and that reading and talk are mutually supportive learning experiences for children and adults. The work exposed an urgent need for primary practitioners to reconceptualise reading in the 21st century. It developed strategies to enable them to challenge their assumptions about the solitary nature of reading, align their understandings with the lived experiences of learners, and broaden what is recognised and validated as reading in the early years and primary schooling.

From 2006 we carried out seven research projects, total funding £493k. These involved developing close partnerships with teachers, as co-researchers and change agents, and with national organisations including the UK Government's Primary National Strategy (PNS), the UK Literacy Association (UKLA), the National College for School Leadership and Management, Ofsted, The Reader Organisation, and the Chartered Institute for Librarians and Information Professionals.

These projects produced 7 reports, 30 academic papers, 3 books, 17 professional articles, a smartphone/tablet app *Our Story* and considerable website material, including a podcast.

Examples of our research studies include:

- *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers project* led by Cremin with Safford and Drury and researchers from Roehampton, Canterbury Christ Church University and Birmingham LA. Phase I (2006–07) surveyed 1200 teachers' personal and professional reading practices (Cremin et al, 2008). Phase II (2007–08), shortlisted for the IRA European Reading Award, involved teacher–researchers from five LAs (Barking and Dagenham, Birmingham, Kent, Medway and Suffolk) documenting and developing their own and children's reading practices and identities (Cremin et al, 2009). Phase III (2009–11) involved 18 teachers from five LAs adopting an ethnographic stance and visiting homes, researching children's literacy lives and building on their new understandings in school.
- *Multimodal Literacies project* (2007–10), led by Flewitt, enabled practitioners in a Sure Start Centre to reconsider the everyday experiences of 3 and 4 year-olds reading texts in print or electronic media.
- *iPads project* (2011), led by Messer with Flewitt and Kucirkova, enabled teachers in two East Midland cities to explore the potential of touch-screen technology to support literacy

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development in early years, special and primary.

- *Our Story project* (2010–ongoing), led by Messer with Kucirkova, developed a tablet/smartphone app to promote children’s engagement with narrative- and story-sharing (Kucirkova et al, 2012). Available in iTunes for iOS and Google for Android as a free public download.
- *Discourse of Reading Groups* (2007–08), led by Swann with O’Halloran and Allington, worked with reading groups across England in institutional/informal settings, documenting the power of literary argumentation to build reader identities and understandings.
- *Understanding Literary Reading* (2011–12) led by Cremin and Swann, identified the key features of extra-curricular reading groups within the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway shadowing scheme.

Key Researchers

T. Cremin, Professor of Education (Literacy); D. Messer, Professor of Education; J. Swann, Professor of English Language; Dr D. Allington, Lecturer; Dr D. Attar, Senior Lecturer; Dr R. Drury, Senior Lecturer; Dr R. Flewitt, Research Fellow (to Feb. 2013); Dr J. Soler, Senior Lecturer; Dr K. O’Halloran (to Nov. 2011) Researcher; N. Kucirkova, Research Student; K. Safford, Senior Lecturer, and D. Whitelock, Professor of Technology Enhanced Assessment & Learning.

3. References to the research

1. Cremin, T., Mottram, M. Bearne, E. and Goodwin, P. (2008) ‘Exploring teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature’, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 449–64. ISSN 0305-764X.
2. Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S. and Safford, K. (2009) ‘Teachers as readers: building communities of readers’, *Literacy*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 11–19. ISSN 1741-4350.
3. Kucirkova, N., Messer, D. and Whitelock, D. (2012) ‘Parents reading with their toddlers: the role of personalisation in book engagement’, *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, March, doi: 10.1177/1468798412438068.
4. Maybin, J. (2004) ‘Researching children’s language and literacy practices in school’ in A. Goodwyn and A. Staples (eds) *Learning to read critically in language and literacy education*, London, Sage, pp. 86–106, ISBN 0-7619-4473-7.
5. Swann, J. (2007) ‘Designing “educationally effective” discussion’, *Language and Education*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 342–59. ISSN 0950-0782.

All journals named above employ an anonymised peer review process.

Research funding:

2006–07: £10,000 awarded by The UK Literacy Association (UKLA) to Prof. T. Cremin, for a project entitled ‘Teachers as Readers: *Phase 1*, Teachers’ Reading Lives and Practices’.

2007–08: £107,903 awarded by AHRC to Prof. J. Swann for a project entitled ‘The Discourse of Reading Groups’.

2007–08: £159,000 awarded by The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and UKLA to Prof. T. Cremin for a project entitled ‘Teachers as Readers: *Phase II*, Building Communities of Readers’.

2007–10: £69,894 awarded by ESRC to Dr R. Flewitt for a project entitled ‘Multimodal Literacies in the Early Years’.

2008: £10,000 awarded by The National Strategies (DCSF) and UKLA to Prof. T. Cremin for the production of ‘Building Communities of Readers: Professional Development Guide’.

2009–10: £115,000 awarded by The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and UKLA to Prof. T. Cremin for a project entitled ‘*Phase III*, Building Communities: Researching Literacy Lives’.

2010: £2,000 awarded by The Reader Organisation to Prof. J. Swann for a project entitled ‘Evaluation of Find Your Talent/Liverpool Reads School Reading Groups’.

2011–12: £17,213 awarded by Carnegie UK Trust and CILIP to Prof. T. Cremin and Prof. J. Swann for a project entitled 'Understanding Literary Reading in the Carnegie Greenaway Shadowing Scheme'.

4. Details of the impact

Our research has had a positive impact on children's motivation to read, reading frequency, reading repertoires, and confident participation in the shared social experience of reading. In *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers* (Phase II), 43 teachers from five LAs identified disaffected readers and, through exploring their informal reading practices, transformed their own and pupils' understanding of reading. Their changed practice included talk-based activities, validation of textual diversity and recognition of the importance of readers' identities. One teacher noted, 'I see reading differently now – I'm not sure why I didn't recognise how social it is' (Cremin et al., 2009).

The External Evaluation Report (2008) identified significant impact on:

- pupils' attitudes and attainment, e.g. '61% of reading scores rose by twice the usual rate over the year'
- teachers' knowledge and use of children's literature, e.g. 'teachers' views of pedagogy in the teaching of reading have undergone a seismic shift'
- local and national policies.

The core group of LAs systematically built on our 'powerful model for professional learning' (External Evaluation, 2008) developed by the project and rolled it out locally (800 schools with approximately 36,000 pupils in each year group). Sustained impact was noted, e.g. by Kent's LA Manager, 'the project's roll-out has made a sustained difference to fostering reading for pleasure right across the authority' (2012).

The External Evaluation recognised that by maximising extensive face-to-face and virtual networks, the project's recommendations shaped policy and practice, locally and nationally. For example, Phases II and III of the Building Communities work were embedded in the PNS training for the national team of Literacy Consultants (approximately 550, in both 2009 and 2010). Supported by the project's Professional Development Guide (funded by the PNS), several LAs mirrored the approach (e.g. Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Lancashire). Significantly, the findings were presented and integrated into the PNS ITE training for higher education lecturers nationally (2009 and 2011). As a result, eight university ITE courses ran modules developed from the model, promoting wider knowledge of children's literature and reading for pleasure pedagogy.

Both PNS consultants and ITE lecturers were provided with the project outputs (1, 2), the second of which was awarded the Wiley Blackwell Research Award (2009) and became a *Literacy Journal* Top Ten Download 2009–12. The work was also profiled on government and professional websites (e.g. DCSF, Welsh government and International Reading Association). The PI has advised on establishing similar projects with ITE students and teachers in five countries.

Project recommendations have featured in leading practitioner magazines (e.g. *Scholastic*), media (e.g. *TES*, *Guardian*), and professional conferences (28 keynotes, e.g. National Union of Teachers) reaching 7500 practitioners in the UK and internationally.

The research resulted in the UKLA Children's Book Awards (2008 onwards), uniquely judged by teachers and shadowed by approximately 500 ITE students in 19 universities. Our findings influenced the aims and selection criteria for this award. Oxford University Press has employed Cremin as a consultant over two years to build the project's insights into an extensive online reading resource (available March 2014). Findings have influenced the design of the site, for example, text recommendations and strategies for developing classroom practices.

The research influenced national policy, which now foregrounds reading for pleasure. The team presented at policy seminars at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the DCSF English Board (both 2009). The impoverished professional knowledge of poets for children, identified in Phase I, influenced the creation of the strategic UK Poetry Summit and informed the Ofsted poetry review.

The research formed a focus for three Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency conferences in 2009 and influenced the current government's position on wider reading. Cremin was invited by the Department for Education to lead a National College for School Leadership and Management e-discussion on reading for pleasure (17/06/11–4/07/11), to join the National College working party contributing to the draft reading curriculum, and to be an expert witness at the All-Party Parliamentary Commission on Boys' Reading (2012). The research is extensively quoted in the Commission's report, the Government's Education Standards Research Team's *Research Evidence on Reading for Pleasure* (2012) and reflected in Ofsted's *Excellence in English* (2012).

Exploring multimedia reading, the *Our Story* app was second in the Top Ten Free Apps when launched (2011). It has been used with children aged from 3 to 13 years in diverse settings. Examples include supporting literacy in Gaelic medium nurseries in Scotland, reading engagement in a Nottinghamshire Pupil Referral Unit and storytelling amongst children and parents in a Haringey community project.

Adopted by professionals in UK, Japan, Spain and Slovakia, the app has been employed for history and literacy, with Milton Keynes practitioners appraising it and recommending features for inclusion in the second version. A new version of the app based on their feedback delivers an improved user interface and functionality. Evaluation of this work indicates it is changing teachers' conceptualisations of multimedia reading and influencing children's confidence and enthusiasm as readers.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Building Communities of Readers:

1. *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers*, Phase II, Independent Evaluation Report (2008)
http://www.ukla.org/research/previous_ukla_funded_research/ukla_research_on_teachers_as_readers/ (accessed 15.10.13)
2. *Building Communities: Researching Literacy Lives*, Phase III, Independent Evaluation Report (2010) (impact on children, teachers and the national agenda)
http://www.ukla.org/research/previous_ukla_funded_research/_uklaou_building_communities_researching_literacy_lives_/ (accessed 15.10.13)
3. Director: National Literacy Trust (impact on national policy)
4. President, UK Literacy Association (impact on national policy)
5. Her Majesty's Inspector: HMI, Ofsted and previously Birmingham Local Authority: Senior Curriculum Adviser (practitioner impact across Local Authorities)
6. Barking and Dagenham Local Authority: Senior Primary Adviser (practitioner impact across Local Authorities)

Our Story app:

7. The Haringey Brilliant Stories' project <http://somebrilliantstories.wordpress.com/> (accessed 15.10.13)
8. Family Learning Coordinator, Haringey Adult Learning Service, Haringey Council
9. *Our Story* for iPad, available from Apple iTunes.