

# Reciprocal Reading: A Case Study

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There has, in recent years, been a growing concern in Wales regarding the raising of reading standards. Research has shown that enthusiasm tends to decrease as children grow older, particularly in the case of boys, who tend to lack older male role models. Fewer children read spontaneously for pleasure in their leisure time and as a result they lack reading stamina and fluency when faced with challenging texts. Further concern was prompted by Welsh pupils' disappointing performance in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) PISA tests in reading in 2009 where:

**Reading is defined in PISA as understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.**

With the introduction of the Welsh National Reading Tests for Years 2 to 9 in May 2013, expectations are undoubtedly higher. These tests are to be used for benchmarking as well as diagnostic purposes. They require pupils to have reading stamina and to be able to apply higher order reading skills in order to access a range of texts: non-fiction, narrative and poetry.

It was felt that using Scholastic's Reciprocal Reading resources, focused on non-fiction text purposes in the primary phase, would be the ideal way to foster greater independence in reading, through developing deeper understanding by practising the application of higher order reading skills within a self-supporting group situation. Collaborative learning, peer tutoring, meta-cognition, self-regulation and feedback have been shown by Sutton Trust research findings to have high impact in raising attainment and Reciprocal Reading incorporates all of these. This approach would also fit comfortably alongside the organisation of established guided reading sessions.

4 schools were involved in our case study: all were targeted as a result of Local Authority literacy audits, taking into account end of Key Stage 2 results.

- School 1: a group of Year 5/6 pupils from the above average ability range
- School 2: a group of Year 5/6 pupils from the average ability range
- Schools 3 and 4: a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 from the average ability range

## **Training:**

- An introduction to Reciprocal Reading and explicit teaching and modelling of reading skills was delivered to the 12 teachers and LSAs working with the pupils, using the information and suggestions from the Scholastic Connectors Teachers' Notes.
- The importance of the monitoring process was emphasised.
- All targeted pupils completed a brief reading questionnaire on their present understanding of reading skills and strategies, their attitude towards reading and their perception of themselves as a reader.
- A session was modelled by the Local Authority Advisor with each group of pupils.

## Implementation

- Trained groups worked independently alongside the guided reading groups: time allocation varied from four sessions per week in schools 2 and 3 to twice weekly in schools 1 and 4.
- Groups were monitored periodically using the observation sheets from the Teachers' Notes and feedback given to the pupils.
- Groups trained other groups in the class, with adult support, on the process of Reciprocal Reading, and these were also monitored periodically.

## Follow-up

- Groups were observed by the Local Authority adviser and feedback given to pupils and adults overseeing the programme.
- Standardised reading scores were compared with the previous end of year scores.
- A second questionnaire was completed by pupils.

## Findings

- 85% pupils substantially improved their standardised scores, with the greatest gain being 35.
- The average standardised score gain was 9.8.
- 15% failed to improve on their previous year's standardised score and one pupil's score showed significant regression, but there were particular home circumstances in this case which had affected his overall lack of academic development owing to a decrease in his well-being.
- The second questionnaire findings:
  - 90% pupils were able to list a greater number of reading strategies that they now used
  - 93% pupils had a positive attitude to reading, showing an increase of 21%
  - 100% pupils felt that their reading had improved: 57% felt that they had improved a lot and 43% felt that they had improved a little.

## Teacher/LSA feedback

- The materials were very easy to use and pupils were able to work independently after only one session of training and modelling.
- The icons and speaking prompts structured the group work and established the discussion register very effectively.
- The reading material was extremely popular, with pupils vying to read the next book.
- Everybody learned something new; children were often keen to carry on reading beyond the allocated length of the session.
- Use of reference books became an established element of reading sessions and promoted further interest and discussion.
- The quality of dictionaries generally available for use was reviewed in all schools as the level of vocabulary was challenging and definitions often unavailable in 'Junior' dictionaries, which it was felt did not sufficiently stretch pupils.
- Feedback, incorporating peer assessment, using the observation sheet, was an invaluable part of the process in improving performance.
- The application of reading skills was seen in evidence in the nearly all pupils when undertaking other cross-curricular reading tasks.

- Pupils became more active and curious participants in the reading process and were no longer satisfied with ‘surface reading.’
- The ability to work constructively in a team certainly improved, with some pupils showing unexpected levels of maturity.
- Oral construction is improving as a result of having the opportunity to talk at greater length when forming and supporting opinions.
- A focus on different levels of questioning, the use of prompt cards and question dice, has improved the quality of pupil questions and answers.
- Making links between reading and their own non-fiction writing has been evident in improved organisation of written texts.
- Study skills are developed by the final sections in the books: *Something to think about*, where pupils have to synthesise the information; *Visual summary* which relates well to visual prompts we use when mind mapping and story planning; and *Review* gives important time for reflection.

## Pupil feedback

- ‘Reciprocal Reading stops me from skimming through texts: I do deeper reading of non –fiction now.’
- ‘Inferring in reading is like estimating in maths.’
- ‘It’s useful having mini whiteboards for jotting down questions and vocabulary as we go along.’
- ‘I like it when we sometimes read aloud, as well as in our heads.’
- ‘I don’t skip over words I don’t understand anymore.’
- ‘We help each other to understand by talking.’
- ‘I really like the books – they cover lots of interesting topics and we find out some really strange facts and think of lots of questions.’
- ‘We like challenging each other.’
- ‘I like working without an adult.’
- ‘I think summarising is the most difficult thing to do well – working out what is most important - but I am improving.’
- ‘I like the part when we discuss what pictures we see in our heads – we often have very different ideas which can be surprising.’

## The way forward

- Roll the approach out across all junior classes with all ability groups.
- Hold an information session for parents, modelling the process with a film or group of pupils, showing how parents can support their children’s reading.
- Liaise with the secondary schools to ensure consistency in approach when reading subject specific texts and cross-curricular application.
- Ongoing regular whole-school monitoring and evaluation of Reciprocal Reading by the literacy co-ordinator.
- Increase the library of texts available.
- Ensure all classes have good quality dictionaries detailing word derivations.