



How can a model library space increase trainee teachers’ knowledge of children’s texts and understanding of how to develop reading for pleasure?

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Research Context

In the Nottingham Institute of Education (NioE), I am a member of the English team within the primary education initial teacher training courses. The Core Content Framework (CCF) provides the criteria for the minimum entitlement for trainees in initial teacher training which includes:

- ✓ Every teacher can improve pupils’ literacy, including by explicitly teaching reading, writing and oral language skills specific to individual disciplines.
- ✓ Strengthening pedagogical and subject knowledge by participating in wider networks.
- ✓ Contributing positively to the wider school culture.

(DfE, 2019)

The value of these skills is echoed in research. Gannon-Leary (2007) found participating in wider networks can have many benefits including knowledge sharing, strengthening of expertise and developing links. The government’s reading framework also delves further into the specifics of improving pupils’ literacy, providing guidance on both how to ‘choose and organisation books’ and how to ‘developing a reading for pleasure culture’ (DfE, 2023).

In the context of NioE, the school currently runs an OU/UKLA Teachers’ Reading Group which invites trainee teachers, teachers, librarians and any other staff in education to attend. However, following the pandemic this has moved to an online format and attendance in both 2021/22 and 2022/23 has been fallen, with approximately 10 - 15 attendees at each event. The university library also offers a dedicated space for children’s literature however, feedback from trainees and data shows this is not widely accessed. The Reading Framework (2023) states ‘To be able to make recommendations, steering individuals out of their comfort zone and encouraging them to try new books, teachers need a good knowledge of literature and of their pupils as readers. This should form part of keeping subject knowledge up to date’ however NTU library data shows the majority of children’s texts have been loaned less than 10 times, with those loaned more often not being by current, up to date authors. This mirrors UKLA (2008) research which found most teachers asked cited Roald Dahl or ‘celebrity’ authors as being ‘good’. The research recognised that one author’s ‘dominance further reduces the range and breadth of writers being introduced to children and suggests that the profession is over-dependent upon a narrow range of authors and texts’ (UKLA, 2008).

In response to this, NioE are implementing a model library in the ITT building. This will be used to model good practice (linked to creating an inspiring, inclusive environment), share a range of new and diverse children’s literature and to facilitate the Teachers’ Reading Group. The aim of this study is to explore the impact of the space on trainee teachers knowledge of children’s literature and approaches to develop reading for pleasure (RfP).

Literature Review

There is a breadth of research into RfP (particularly conducted by the UKLA and Teresa Cremin) including the elements this study aims to explore: modelling good practice in developing reading spaces, developing knowledge of children’s literature and facilitating wider networks.

In 2008 research by the UKLA identified that ‘reading for pleasure urgently required a higher profile in primary education to raise both attainment and achievement and increase children’s engagement as self-motivated and socially engaged readers’ (Cremin. T., 2008). Since this, the Reading Framework (2023) makes specific reference to reading for pleasure and its significance in links to children’s academic success. Therefore, it is a valuable focus in ITT.

1. Developing knowledge of children’ literature.

However, barriers still exist to promoting reading for pleasure in schools. A large percentage of primary teachers still have limited knowledge of children’s authors hindering their ability to make tailored book recommendations and promote RfP. Whilst children who enjoy reading are happier with their lives, data also shows only 50% children say they enjoy reading and only 1 in 11 children in the UK own a book (National Literacy Trust, n.d). Therefore, ensuring trainees teachers develop the skills and knowledge to foster a love of reading is vital.

2. Modelling good practice in developing reading spaces.

Later research by Cremin et al. (2014) found teachers had often developed reading spaces but acknowledged these were not always ‘richly engaging’. Furthering considering pedagogic practice in the area, they found knowledge of children’s literature and children’s reading practices to be vital factors in driving their provision which in turn developed children’s knowledge of authors, texts and developed their view of themselves as a reader.

In addition to this, CLPE’s Reflecting Realities report (2022) highlights the remaining lack of diversity and quality representation of BAME minority groups in children’s literature. Being mirrored in literature develops engagement and enjoyment of reading and therefore it is also imperative that teachers develop their knowledge of diverse children’s literature and authors to ensure minority groups are offered equitable chances to develop a love of reading and achieve academic success.

3. Facilitating wider networks.

The CCF (2019) highlights the need for trainee teachers to participate in wider networks however, how these are developed and facilitated can impact their success. Cremin and Swann (2016) found three aspects to be crucial:

- ✓ The role of the environment
- ✓ A relaxed ethos
- ✓ Space and support for choice and conversation about texts

This project aims to explore how a shared, model reading space in a Higher Education environment can be developed to enhance trainee teacher’s knowledge of children’s literature through modelling, sharing and facilitating wider networks.

Research Design and Methods

This research project will use a qualitative approach in order to gather answers to questions directly and in depth (J. Firth., 2019).

During the initial stages of the project, I will distribute a questionnaire to explore current trainee’s attitudes towards developing reading for pleasure, inclusive practice and how the university space currently supports this. The aim of this will be to identify any specific areas for focussed development in the space e.g. non-fiction texts, diverse authors. The questionnaires will be distributed online, via email, to both undergraduate and postgraduate trainees. In line with BERA (2018) voluntary consent will be obtained and participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time. I will also ensure ‘all potential participants understand, as well as they can, what is involved in a study (BERA, 2018). Open ended questions will be used to ensure greater expression of opinion (Kumar. R, 2019) and depth of data.

Following development of the space, I will invite a sample of trainees to a focus group. A focus group will allow for ‘attitudes, opinions and perceptions towards a ... programme.. to be explored through a free and open discussion’ (Kumar, R., 2019) in this case, exploring the impact of the library space. In this sample, I aim to include student’s representative of NioE. In NioE in 22/23, 13% of students were BAME, 14% were mature students (higher than national average) and 23% declared a disability. These groups, alongside trainees from a vocational BTEC background, are part of NTU’s Success for All data where NTU aim to reduce gaps in degree outcomes. It will therefore be essential to ensure their responses are included proportionally in this data. In order to avoid inhibiting the quality of responses the group will be kept to a maximum of ten participants however, to ensure a representative capture of data several focus groups will take place.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	References	Notes
Questionnaire	Online questionnaires can be easily analysed. Better response rate than interviews for participants which may not be in one location. Less expensive.	No-one there to explain the meaning of questions. Self-selecting bias – those who return the questionnaire may have attitudes differing from those who do not. May be influenced by others before responding.	Kumar, R (2019).	As trainees on the ITT courses are on placement a significant part of the year the choice of questionnaire allows all trainees to participate, regardless of year group and location at the time of data collection. As questionnaires will be anonymous, I hope this will negate trainee’s need to refer to others before responding and instead encourage open and honest answers. Self-selecting bias must be acknowledged and therefore focus should be given to the selection of trainees in the focus groups to limit the impact of this. Questionnaires will be accessible to students through clear questioning, rationales provided for more complex questions (Kumar. R, 2019) and language used mirroring that of taught course content. Whilst open ended questions will be given to ensure depth of responses and allow trainees to respond in ‘natural language’ (Firth. J., 2019) some key closed questions will be included to allow for initial overview through data analysis.
Focus Group	Less expensive and time intensive. Gather diverse range of feedback. Opportunity for developed ideas/feedback. ‘One person’s responses could stimulate ideas and reactions in the others’ (Firth. J., 2019).	Data collected may reflect most confident or likely to contribute members of the group. Responses can’t be predicted in advance, therefore, it is challenging to repeat.	Kumar., R (2019). J., Firth (2019).	The focus group will allow gathering of a diverse range of data representative of the cohort in NioE. It will also allow depth of responses to analyse and draw from. Because several focus groups will be run and replicating one discussion may be challenging, key areas of focus will be given to the group and allow for analyse across groups.

Outcomes and Conclusions

It is expected that the implementation of a model library space will impact trainee’s knowledge of children’s literature and understanding to developing RfP during their professional practice and career following university. Focus will be given to application of pedagogical approaches learnt through use of the space and wider networks into professional practice and, in turn, perceived impact by the trainees to children’s progression. Evidence of successful impact will be shown through focus group responses and will include increased knowledge of diverse authors and texts and of pedagogical approaches and environments which can support and develop RfP alongside increased attendance at NTU’s Teachers’ Reading Group. Results of the project will be shared with the NioE team.

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