

‘What are teacher and pupil experiences of reading aloud for pleasure in the year 6 classroom?’

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Abstract

Much of the research about the benefits of reading aloud to children focusses on the cognitive or academic benefits of the younger child. The emotional or affective dimension is far less researched, particularly from the perspective of the older primary child. This case study investigated the extent to which reading aloud in year 6 classrooms was happening within a trust of nine primary schools in South East London and Kent and explored the benefits for this, both from the teachers’ and children’s perspectives. A mixed methods approach was used. The findings indicate that despite being aware of the benefits of reading for pleasure, many teachers were not finding time to regularly read to their classes; when it was happening, it was often directed and supported by leadership. Teachers and children alike spoke extensively of the enjoyment gained through reading aloud and the children in particular, valued the community element and sense of connectedness. A high value was also placed on the content of the texts shared and the children’s emotional responses to them.

Keywords: Reading aloud, reading for pleasure, social benefits of reading, shared reading

Introduction

Reading aloud to older primary children in the classroom is often perceived as an indulgence. Whilst there may be many occasions when a teacher will read aloud, for example a short passage of literature, the act of reading aloud purely for the pleasure of the reading itself is uncommon.

This is in contrast to Early Years Foundation Stage, (EYFS) and Key Stage One, (KS1) settings where story-time is more highly valued. This is reflected in recent changes to the EYFS framework where several pages of the reading framework section are dedicated to the benefits of reading aloud in the classroom and how this should be done for best effect. (D of E 2021b). In contrast, reading aloud in the Upper Key Stage 2 (UKS2) national curriculum, warrants just a small mention in the reading comprehension section. (D of E 2013)

The academic benefits of reading aloud and reading for pleasure have been widely documented. Elley (1989), Panno et al. (2002), Holmes and Thompson (2014) and Suggate et al. (2013), all found significant vocabulary gains could be made through listening to stories being read. In most cases, additional instruction or emphasis was highlighted as a benefit of teacher-reading over children reading to themselves, however Suggate et al. (2013) found that vocabulary acquisition also happened when teachers read without any additional instruction.

Another area of literacy development associated with reading aloud is comprehension development. Westbrook et al (2018), Feitelson et al. (1986) and Ricketts (1982) all found strong links between listening to stories read out loud by teachers and development of comprehension skills. The children in the research group in Ricketts’ (1982) study were encouraged to enjoy the reading session, no additional instruction or specific teaching

took place at the time. The control group received traditional ‘teaching’ of literacy in lieu of the story time. Results showed that the children in the story time group improved at more than twice the rate of the control groups.

Similarly, Feitelson et al. (1986) found that children who were read to for 20 minutes at the end of each day, outperformed the control group in comprehension tests. This was despite the fact pre-tests showed the control group to have done better on a standardised intelligence test, considered a predictor of later reading achievement. ‘This result bears out the belief that reading aloud by mediating adults helps children develop skills and strategies of use in understanding written texts.’ (Feitelson et al., 1986, pp 354).

Kalb and Van Ours (2014) found similar literacy benefits in parental reading to children. However, they also found, that the numeracy skills of children who are read to also improved. Furthermore, Sullivan and Brown (2015) in a longitudinal study, also found that reading for pleasure (although not necessarily being read to), showed a ‘substantial link to progress in mathematics.’ (Sullivan and Brown 2015, pp 971).

The academic benefits of reading for pleasure, or listening to stories, are seemingly well researched and acknowledged in academia. There appears to be less research, about the more social and emotional benefits of the practise. However, one area which does seem to feature in research is how reading aloud can foster a love of reading in children. Not only is it widely recognised as educationally beneficial, but it is also found to be in significant decline. (OECD, 2010).

Merga, (2016) believes that positive modelling of recreational reading, plays an important role in developing a love of reading in children, especially reading with expression and emotional connection. Most adult self-identified avid readers (64.3 %) said that they had been positively influenced on their attitude towards reading by another person often by read aloud sessions. Merga (2017)

Children who identify as ‘readers’, recounted many story-time experiences as youngsters and they had parents who spent time ‘firmly planting the notion that reading is an enjoyable, worthwhile activity.’ (Beers, 1998, pp. 16) Beers suggests that the read-aloud investment made in these children, develops ‘an aesthetic stance towards reading.’ (Beers, 1998, pp. 17) This is something, she believes unmotivated and unskilled readers do not develop. It is this aesthetic response to reading, she believes holds the key to becoming an avid reader.

Aesthetic reading is concerned with the transaction that takes place between the reader and the text. It is about the feelings and emotions the reader experiences through the text, what is being lived through in that moment by the reader, their emotional response, the feelings and memories and associations that the text evokes for them. (Rosenblatt, 1986). Beers (1998) believes that this emotional connection with a text is developed through shared reading. She says ‘I believe these early repeated ongoing storytime experiences.... places them in.... unconscious delight’ (Beers, 1998, pp. 17) and says that this early literacy appreciation is crucial to help ‘develop an aesthetic stance toward reading.’ (Beers, 1998, pp. 17)

It is my belief that a teacher can help children to develop this aesthetic experience for themselves. By bringing deeper understanding of a text through careful, meaningful delivery; pausing at appropriate points to enhance tension, varying tone of voice, teachers can enhance the meaning of the text which in turn, helps children to connect with it and respond personally to it.

It is widely acknowledged that shared reading is pleasurable, both by parents reflecting on their experiences with their own children and their personal childhood memories. (Merga and Ledger 2018). Teachers also report to enjoy the time spent reading with their classes, (Merga and Ledger 2019), especially seeing the pleasure the children are getting from it. For some, the enjoyment of reading aloud in school comes from the feeling of indulgence in something that is not ‘work’. Teachers reflected how much they were enjoying books together, for enjoyment sake, rather than ‘using it as a tool for literacy’ (Cremin et al., 2009, pp. 15).

It seems that there is far less research supporting the non-academic benefits. Where value is found, for example in cultivating a love of reading, this still relates back to the ‘academic’ benefits that taking enjoyment in reading for pleasure brings. However, it is my belief, that there is significant value in reading aloud for pleasure by a teacher to their class, beyond this.

One study, although conducted with adults rather than children, highlighted the sense of connectedness that can be experienced through shared reading. This study by Duncan and Freeman (2020) was a national survey into the reading habits of 529 British adults. The adults were asked to record their daily read-aloud habits over a period of time. Many of the respondents were surprised to discover just how often reading aloud featured in their lives. In this study, as well as indicating the type of text they read, the respondents were asked to indicate the reason they read aloud. Overall, 88.5% of the respondents included the reason ‘To share what I have read with someone’. Some specific comments included “‘with my child, there’s a connection when we read together’ and ‘it feels fabulous, enhances the meaning, brings the text to life and is an intimate activity.’” (Duncan and Freeman, 2020, pp.108). Furthermore, many respondents spoke of how reading aloud strengthened family relationships. These bonds were not just highlighted between parents and children, but also between adults themselves. It seems that the sharing element of reading out loud is creating opportunities to connect.

This sense of connectedness through shared reading is truly valuable, and in this current digital age, arguably more so than ever. Perhaps the strengthened relationships reported between parents and children and adults in a home setting, can also be realised in the classroom. In her book, *The Enchanted Hour*, (Cox Gurdon, M, 2019), Cox says ‘Where screen tends to separate.....reading together draws people closer and unites them.....It brings.....profound emotional connection.’ (pp. xv).

It is this sense of connectedness, that I was seeking to identify in an older classroom setting through exploring the value in reading aloud for pleasure as perceived by children and teachers. To identify if value is found beyond the academic and if bonds identified in Duncan and Freeman’s (2020) research between parents and children are also experienced between teacher and children. Furthermore, it was seeking to understand more about the nature and frequency of reading aloud for pleasure in the year 6 classroom.

The key questions addressed were as follows:

1. How do children experience being read aloud to in Yr 6 classrooms?
2. What do children believe they get from being read to in the Yr6 classroom?
3. How often do teachers in Yr 6 within my trust read to their pupils for pleasure?
4. Why do teachers decide to read aloud for pleasure in Yr 6 classrooms?

Methodology

Several questions were put to the teachers via an online questionnaire. Some questions were designed to provide quantitative data, for example:

- How frequently do you read aloud to your class for pleasure? (N.B. this does not include reading texts as part of a lesson)
- What types of things do you read to your class for pleasure?

Teachers were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements, giving their responses on a scale of 1-7. For example, statements included:

- Reading to children in the classroom, for pleasure, is important.
- I would read more if we had more time.

Other questions asked were to elicit deeper, more qualitative responses, for example:

Do you have memories of being read to as a child? If yes, please summarise those memories using one or two sentences.

In these semi-structured interviews, teachers were asked more open questions. They started quite general, for example ‘Tell me about your experiences of reading aloud to children in your classroom’ As the interviews progressed, they became more specific, for example ‘what influences your [book] choices?’ In addition to the set pre-scripted questions, additional questions were asked to clarify or deepen responses given.

In the focus group pupil interviews, the children were asked a number of pre-scripted questions. They started very broad: ‘Do you enjoy reading?’ and became more specific, for example, ‘How do you feel during story-time?’ Replies were probed and further questions asked to deepen responses, such as- ‘Can you remember when you felt like that?’ Children were also asked about the books we shared, whether any stood out to them and why, what they liked or disliked about story-time.

The teacher participants in this study all work within the same multi-academy trust. There are nine primary schools within the trust, all located within South-East London and Kent. The schools range in size and serve different socio-economic communities. The initial respondents consisted of 9 current, or recent, year 6 teachers. A selection of these respondents were invited to participate in the interviews, which a further three did.

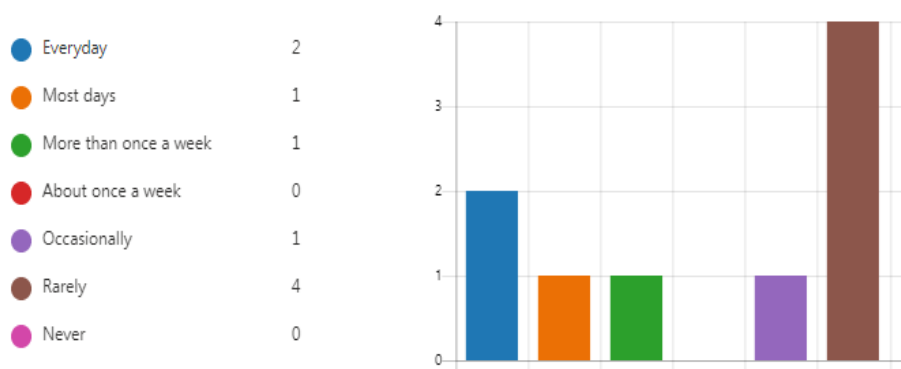
The nineteen pupil participants in this study are all pupils in the researcher’s year 6 class with parental consent granted.

Findings and Discussion of Findings

Responses to Teacher Questionnaires.

The questionnaire was sent to nine primary school to forward to the current and recent year 6 teachers in their schools. There was a total of 9 responses.

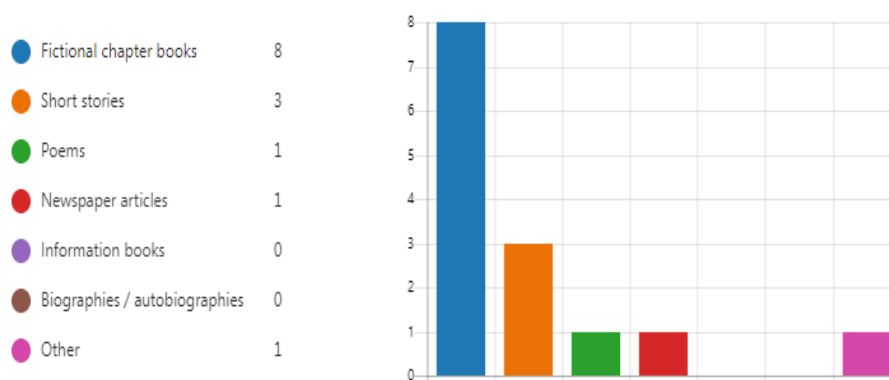
The figure below shows the responses to the first question, ‘How frequently do you (did you) read aloud to your class for pleasure? (This does not include reading texts as part of a lesson).



The bar chart shows how spread and varied the responses were. However, it also shows somewhat of a split between the (just over) half of the respondents who said rarely or occasionally and the remaining who said more than once a week up to everyday. No respondents selected once a week and no one selected never.

The next figure shows the responses to the second question, ‘what types of things do you (did you) read to your class for pleasure?’ Respondents were invited to select all that applied from a list, or add their own.

‘WHAT ARE TEACHER AND PUPIL EXPERIENCES OF READING ALOUD FOR PLEASURE?’



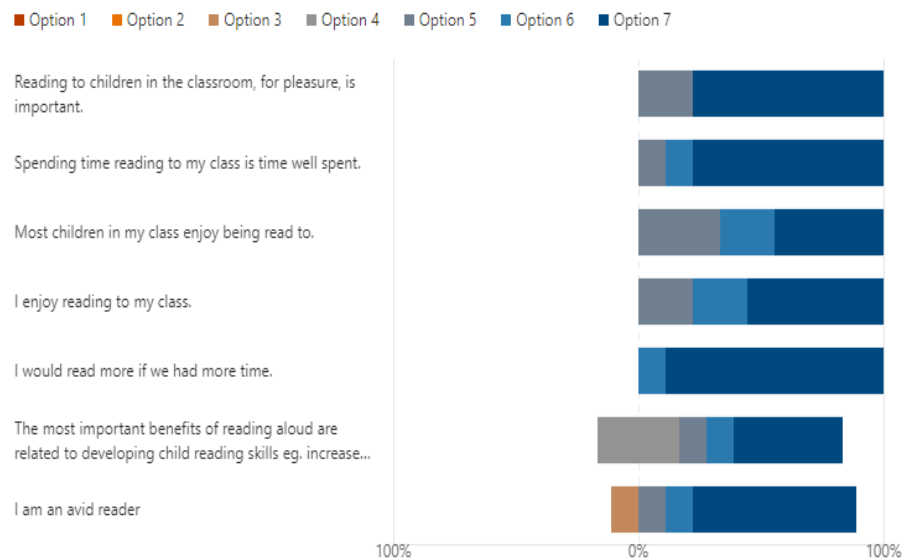
For this question, 5 respondents selected a single option with four choosing ‘fictional chapter books’ and one choosing ‘poems’. Three respondents selected two options – both ‘fictional chapter books’ and ‘short stories’. One respondent selected three options - ‘fictional chapter books’, ‘newspaper articles’ and their own option, ‘bible stories’. In all, only one respondent did not select fictional chapter books, and no respondents selected information books or auto/biographies.

The majority of the respondents, 8 out of 9, responded ‘yes’ to the question ‘Do you have memories of being read to, as a child at school? If yes, how would you describe this experience?’

The short descriptions given with the responses were all positive or neutral, with the following word, or root words appearing in more than one response:

Root word	Number of respondents including word in description
Enjoy	3
Relax	2
Love	2
Good	2

Respondents were next asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a statement, 7 being strongly agreed, 1 being strongly disagreed and 4 neutral. Most of the questions, with the exception of one, were phrased such that a high numbered response reflected a positive attitude to reading aloud in class and reading in general. The results are shown in the figures below. The first figure shows the result per statement:



The second figure includes the responder's answer to the frequency they read to their class, for reference:

I would read more if we had more time.	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Spending time reading to my class is time well spent.	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	6
Reading to children in the classroom, for pleasure, is important.	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	5
I enjoy reading to my class.	7	7	7	7	6	6	5	7	5
I am an avid reader	7	3	7	7	5	7	7	7	6
Most children in my class enjoy being read to.	7	7	7	7	5	6	5	5	6
The most important benefits of reading aloud are related to developing child reading skills eg. increased vocabulary and comprehension.	6	5	7	4	4	7	7	7	4
	Everyday	Everyday	Most days	More than once a week	Occasionally	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely	Rarely

Finally, the respondents were invited to leave any further comments they might have about reading aloud for pleasure in the year 6 classroom. This was an open and undirected option. Overwhelmingly, this space was used to express the restraints teachers found on their ability to read aloud in class, whether this be time restraints or other priorities. Six of the eight comments reflected this. Reasons cited include 'outside pressures', 'so much to fit in[to]', 'prioritising work', 'more time', 'timetable restraints', 'limited time', 'timetable constraints', 'never seems to be the time' and 'not enough time or priority'.

One respondent described their school's approach to encouraging reading of pleasure and others simply reflected on the importance of encouraging reading for pleasure.

Teachers' Interviews

Three teachers were interviewed about their experiences of reading aloud in the year six classroom. Two of the teachers, Alice and Ben [pseudonyms] were consciously and regularly reading for pleasure in their classes and one teacher, Caroline [pseudonym], had not read for pleasure to her class so far this year (six months in). Both of the teachers who were reading aloud, were doing so as part of a whole school initiative. Caroline was in a school that did not have directed routines on reading for pleasure. Despite this clear distinction, there were a number of themes that were common to all three interviews.

The most prominent theme was an acknowledgement of the value of reading aloud to children. It was clear that every teacher was aware of the value of reading for pleasure and in promoting this to the children- even Caroline, the teacher who was not reading to her class. The teachers who were following a whole school approach to reading aloud, talked about how their schools had recognised a need to promote reading for pleasure.

'it is on our...school improvement plan...developing this culture of reading', Ben. 'We changed our guided reading this year to try and get them to enjoy books and get more stamina with books', Alice.

Whilst it wasn't explicitly said, it was clear that the academic benefit of reading for pleasure was the driver for this. Improving children's comprehension skills and reading fluency were intended outcomes for the initiatives. However, on initial analysis of the transcripts, it appeared that the most commonly mentioned outcome of reading aloud to children wasn't the improvement in comprehension but the 'enjoyment' it bought the children. For example, some teacher comments included:

'allows, the children to just, absorb and enjoy', 'I see them gain enjoyment from reading', 'all of our children enjoy being read to by their teachers', 'I think...that kind of experience they enjoy', 'just enjoying the story'.

As well as enjoyment, another consistently used adjective was 'love' or 'loved'; 'they absolutely loved those books', 'he absolutely loved it', 'my class absolutely loved', 'they absolutely loved both of them'.

Other outcomes and benefits were mentioned, including improved stamina for reading and an introduction to a wider range of genres and authors. Ben reflected on seeing an impact this year, saying 'we're getting to the point where you can see the results and, you can see the children talking about a wider range of authors'

Alice also mentioned how children had become more adventurous with their book choices, even reluctant readers were shying away from the 'easiest books' in favour of something more challenging. One child was encouraged: 'why don't you pick a bit more of a challenging book, something you wouldn't normally pick, and he picked Jane Eyre!' Discussions about books between the children was also mentioned by two of the teachers; 'they absolutely loved those books and would talk about them', 'and also it encourages some discussions between them, and I hear them talking to each other, recommending books'

Another key theme that was common to all three interviews, and the earlier questionnaires, was in relation to the time restraints that teachers face and the fact that reading for pleasure had to compete with other curriculum priorities. Ben said:

'the reason we put it on the timetable is because we found it was one of those things...it's very easy to skip the session... something comes up and you don't do it. So we decided that actually, everybody at this time is going to do it. And... nothing can get in the way of that. And that is the sacred time, the dedicated time for this'.

This clear acknowledgement that without specified direction, reading aloud was an 'easy' session to 'skip' seems to be at odds with the value teachers attribute to it and speaks to the conflicting priorities teachers face. The teacher who was not currently reading aloud for pleasure with her class, said 'in terms of reading for pleasure... we would like to do more but is the time'. The time issue continued to be raised throughout all three interviews; other comments included:

'it's really difficult because of constraints of time, I think that is probably one of the biggest challenges, time that we have to dedicate', 'maybe we're not, finding the time to strictly read for pleasure', 'well we haven't got time this week'.

These findings are in line with Merga and Ledger's (2019) findings – 'time and the curricular demands were the most significant barriers to greater frequency of reading aloud' (pp. 136).

Further to this, Caroline, who was not currently reading for pleasure, reflected on the reasons, suggesting that perhaps she, justified it by reassuring herself that reading was happening elsewhere, like in the literacy lessons. She developed this point further reflecting on how, literacy lessons used to be short-text based, whereas now more schools were using whole-text based schemes. She pondered whether this had given them an excuse to let the reading for pleasure slip.

A third theme that emerged was modelling of reading, with a number of references made to this. Some of the references related to the technicalities of reading; 'I think they find it...useful for me to model...the intonation, how a character might be speaking'. Another teacher spoke of mispronouncing words or coming across an unfamiliar word. These occasions were grasped as learning opportunities; the class would assist in looking up the word in a dictionary. He suggested this had the benefit of showing the children that their reading didn't have to be perfect. Which leads to the other element of modelling – that of being 'a reader'.

Teachers spoke of occasions when they had started a book with the class but soon realised that 'no-one's enjoying this' and so stopped and selected a different one. It suggests to the children that being a reader can mean assessing your own enjoyment of a text and making choices about what you read. Furthermore, it speaks to the teacher's commitment to the community element of the read aloud session and the idea that it is for collective and joint enjoyment.

There is much research that considers the role of a teacher as a reading model, (Merga, 2016; Cremin et al. 2009). Merga, (2016) believes that teachers who model a love of reading can foster such a love in children. This belief was reflected in the teacher comments too: 'If the teacher shows enthusiasm for the book, then they'll get enthusiastic for the book.' This same teacher also spoke of her book subscription and how she would bring in new books to share with the children. 'Before I even get the end [of the blurb] ...I ask if anyone would like to read it, they're all like yeah!' Even without the teachers consciously modelling reading, it was clear that many valued reading for pleasure and this is likely to have been apparent to the children. By giving time to the activity in their classrooms, they would have been promoting it. 'As teachers, we influence our students' perspectives on the value of an activity through the manner in which we position it within the classroom.' (Merga and Ledger, 2019 pp139)

Both Alice and Ben reported enjoying the sessions, in particular seeing the impact on the children. 'I get pleasure out of that... seeing them connecting to reading.' One teacher spoke of a reluctant reader becoming inspired by her book recommendations, and how the child's mother had emailed a photograph of him reading – saying this had 'never been seen before.' Other comments included: 'I find it an enjoyable experience to read to them, to have that time together because I had that as a child.' 'I find it quite rewarding'

The final, although less prominent theme that emerged from my analysis was teacher's reflections. All the teachers reflected during the interviews, either on the impact their read aloud sessions were having on the children or the limitations they were facing in finding time to read and why. The teachers who were currently reading with their classes reflected more on the impact they were seeing. The teacher who was not currently reading with her class was particularly reflective. The questions about her own experiences of being read to as a child, which she responded to warmly and enthusiastically, led her to pose the following:

'I suppose it doesn't really matter who's like reading to you does it?', 'You enjoy it because, they're kind, I suppose an adult reading to you is like an expert?' 'So they're, you don't have to put the effort in, do you?' 'It's not an effort to listen to some-

one is it?’ When asked whether the children in her class were likely to be reading with an adult at home, she further pondered;

‘I think it's less, which sounds a bit of shame... now we've sat talking about it... I think it's probably something. Yeah. Don't know, maybe, you might inspire me now... to start reading, because I do think it's important.’

Overall, the prominent themes coming out of the interviews reflected those identified from the questionnaires. It was clear that all teachers are aware of the benefits of reading aloud in class and the importance of promoting reading for pleasure, however, without a clear directive from their school, it was not something that was always happening. This is something that was highlighted by Merga and Ledger, ‘Teacher valuing of the practice alone may not be sufficient without these additional top-down supports.’ (Merga and Ledger 2019, pp.140)

Pupil Focus Groups

The transcripts from all three groups were analysed as a single data set as they had all been exposed to the same read aloud experiences. Each group comprised of eight or nine children and, there was an almost 50:50 gender split. The analysis identified a number of main themes, with two particularly dominant themes.

The first, and most widely occurring theme, was ‘connected-ness’ or ‘community’. Many of the children referred to enjoying coming together as a whole class; it was often one of the first things mentioned. Comments included: ‘It's nice to have a class thing to do’, ‘it brings the whole class together’, ‘I like the whole class gets together’. One child even made the point that ‘table’ or ‘group’ work was the norm in class and that it was nice change to do something with everyone.

Many children used the word ‘connect’ when describing this whole class element, for example one child, when asked why she thought we had storytime said - ‘a nice experience ... a lovely way to connect’. Many other comments relating to connected-ness, focused on the benefits whole-class reading brought and in particular, the ability to discuss the books and share idea together. For example, children reflected that they: ‘get to share our feelings’, ‘you can share your predictions ... compare’, ‘some people, notice things that you don't’. However, the two comments that really seemed to sum up this idea were:

‘I really like reading aloud because you all get to hear the same thing... and you'll get to kind of discuss that incident from the same perspective’, ‘you can express different emotions with different people ... you're on the same boat... you can you can say to each other. Oh, I didn't expect that or I think, and it just it's nice to talk to someone about it because you want to share your opinions with them.’

This idea of there being value in ‘sharing’ the text together is reflected in the research of Duncan and Freeman, (2020). They researched adult reading-aloud practices in Britain. 500 participants recorded their reasons for reading aloud over a given period of time. The most frequently selected response was ‘to share with someone’. This was clearly an important element for the children too. It also suggests that the children are aware of their personal responses to a text and that these might be different to someone else's.

The second most widely occurring theme relates to the content of the books. There were three sub themes within this – ‘thought-provoking’, ‘educational’ and ‘empathising’, although some comments could be categorised in more than one. The children spoke enthusiastically about the different books we shared making several references to content they found thought-provoking. Comments included:

‘didn't really realise before how amazing the earth is, and how its history was. And it makes you think... there's a lot more things that you don't know, that

you want to know', 'Well, it just left me an amazement, really.' 'You're seeing things in a bit of a new light, because 'If' was saying that if everyone shared coins equally then no one would be rich and no one would be poor.'

It wasn't just non-fiction books that prompted this deeper thinking. One child reflected on the predicament of the character in our novel, being punished for a crime he didn't commit, and wondered 'does this even happen [in real life]?' There is also a connection here between the enjoyment in the sharing of the text and the extent to which the text inspires thinking and therefore discussion. Vitz, (1990) proposed that narratives and narrative thinking are especially involved in how processes such as empathy, caring and commitment lead to moral development. (pp.709)

The children also discussed the educational content of what we read, sometimes this was related to specific facts; 'it told you like how big stars and planets are... I never really realised' sometimes it was more general; 'sometimes when you're reading for enjoyment and reading as a class, you find out things that you never would have, even in a fiction book'. Another child talked of enjoying the moral lessons stories can teach.

The final theme relating to the content of the books was one of empathy. One child said it 'just really makes me think, how is the world so unfair?' Other children talked of how they empathised with characters, put themselves in their position and generally related emotionally with them. Some children went a step further, discussing how this helped them in real life:

'it can also help you... to understand other people's emotions because sometimes when you're reading a book... you feel like you're that person, that character, you relate to it. So when you're talking to someone or someone's going through the same thing you can also understand that, you can help them.'

It was clear that the content of the books shared had quite an impact, it wasn't simply the act of switching off and listening to the story, but fully engaging with the content of the books that was key. This leads into the next theme, also under the category of 'learning' which was of teacher expertise; Cremin et al (2008) highlight the importance of teacher knowledge of children's literature in order to make decisions about classroom reading and ensure that it reflects the diverse interests and preferences of the children.

However, the main theme that came out of the focus groups in terms of teacher expertise was the additional clarity that the teacher voice afforded the children. Many commented how listening to the teacher reading the story made it easier to imagine or follow. Some made direct comparisons with reading alone; 'when someone's reading to me, I can really visualise what's happening. Whereas when I'm reading aloud I'm just focusing on getting the words right.' 'sometimes my eyes just look at the words absorbing them but suddenly ... I skip a line because I haven't realised that it's there, but when a teacher reads ..., it's like every word is heard and absorbed'. Many children used the words 'imagine' or 'visualise' when describing the benefits of hearing a book being read. One child commented how 'the teacher makes it really easy to understand' and went on to say that the teacher might ask questions like 'why do you think he is feeling this?' which they may not have considered when reading alone, but brought a deeper understanding.

Teacher expertise in terms of the delivery is something Merga, (2016) found to be important. She states that children perceived their teacher to be keen readers if they 'read aloud to the class with expression and emotional expression' (Merga, 2016, pp.255). This performance element is something that is particularly relevant to reading aloud, adding to the enjoyment and understanding of the text.

Another theme that came out, was the exposure to authors and genres the children may not have selected themselves. Many of the children spoke of how they enjoyed books they might not have selected and how this opened their eyes to new things.

‘If I’d seen the book *The Fib* then I probably wouldn’t have chosen that... it would be a bit of a different choice for me. But to be honest, I actually really enjoyed it. Sometimes you just look and go, oh it’s football, I don’t like football, I won’t like the book, but ... really you will like it. You just don’t really know.’

Other children said that the books read in class had informed their own reading choices too; ‘It also gives me idea of what I want to read’, ‘our class book that we’re reading now ... the author has written another...so I thought I could read that as well.’ Another child mentioned that one book we read she initially dismissed as ‘not for me’, however, ‘when we started to get deeper into it, I thought wow, I’m actually really enjoying this’. This exposure to ‘new’ can also extend to exposure to ‘new’ ideas and perspectives, brought about through the sharing of responses mentioned earlier, linking back to the community element of shared reading.

The final main theme that came out was ‘enjoyment’. This was split into two further sub themes, firstly ‘relaxing’ and secondly ‘not working’. Interestingly, the enjoyment taken from relaxing or not working, did not feature as strongly as the enjoyment taken from ‘connecting’. Nevertheless, it was a significant recurring theme. Some typical comments included: ‘restore that sense of calmness’, ‘it makes you feel calm and relaxed’, ‘it makes me a bit sleepy and a good way, it makes me feel a bit tired’. In relation to the ‘not working’ aspect the children mentioned how listening to the books helped take their minds off learning. This idea of being ‘off learning’ was an interesting contrast to the in-depth discussions they also talked of and suggests that they did not consider those discussions ‘learning’ in the same way.

A couple of children made specific reference to the fact that our story time books were not linked to writing, with one saying; ‘we don’t have to do any work and it we can just keep reading... we finish it a lot quicker.’ In contrast to our literacy lessons, where one text is studied over an entire term. Westbrook et al, (2018) found value in this faster pace of reading narratives, particularly for ‘poorer readers’. This is perhaps a good counter argument to that suggested by Caroline in the teacher interview- that reading was happening in the literacy lessons and so not deemed a necessity for pleasure.

The final theme, which featured in a far less significant way than the previous ones was linked to literacy learning, specifically vocabulary acquisition and writing or comprehension skills. Despite being among the most often cited benefits of reading for pleasure, this theme was the least strong from my analysis. Three out of nineteen children made comments about how the reading aloud sessions could benefit their writing or reading skills and a couple more mentioned learning new vocabulary. This suggests that the efferent response was less memorable for the children than the aesthetic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to understand more about teacher and pupil experiences of reading aloud for pleasure in the year 6 classroom.

Findings show that regular reading for pleasure in the year 6 classroom is not something that is happening in all schools. Time pressures and conflicting priorities are a significant factor contributing to this.

The range of reading material that teachers are selecting is somewhat limited to fictional chapter books, or in some cases, short stories. The sharing of poetry, non-

fiction, newspaper articles or biographies is far less common. The reason for this cannot be determined from the data, but if teachers are to do more towards promoting a love of reading, the reason for this seemingly narrow range of reading material is something that may warrant further investigation.

Whilst teachers did talk of enjoying reading to their classes and acknowledged the enjoyment that their classes took from it, this did not appear to be a driving factor for doing so. Teachers are aware of the academic benefits of reading for pleasure and learning opportunities presented through sharing books together and this seemed to be the key motivating factor for reading in class.

Children's experiences of being read to in the year 6 classroom are overwhelmingly positive. They reported many aspects of the sessions that they found enjoyable. One of the key findings was the significance they placed on the social element of their class reading experiences. Children valued the opportunity to come together as a class and furthermore valued the group discussion class reading afforded. This sense of connectedness was significant, and may warrant further research, particularly in respect of the benefits this connectedness brings to the children; whether this has any positive impact on self-esteem or relationships.

Children also spoke at length about the affect the content of the books had on them, both enlightening – the learning of new information, and, to an even greater extent, thought-provoking or empathy inducing. It seemed that the content of the texts was a key factor in terms of the value they perceived. This finding is particularly significant in light of the previous findings around the limited range of texts being read and highlights the importance of teacher expertise of both current children's literature and the particular interests of the children in the class.

Both the feeling of connectedness and the effect the text content had on the children could be classed as affective dimensions of reading rather than cognitive. The children seemed to be experiencing the texts, indeed, responding to them, and the read aloud sessions, seem to have facilitated this. As previously stated, research into the benefits of reading aloud tend to be more focussed on the cognitive outcomes rather than these aesthetic ones. However, given the value attributed by the children, further investigation would, in my view, be of interest.

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