

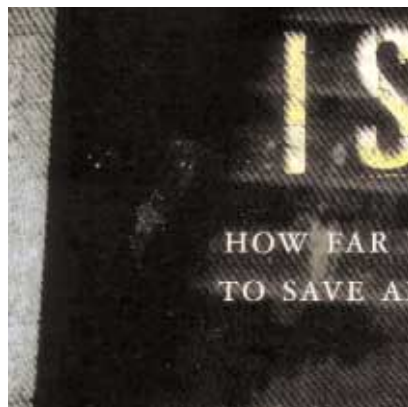
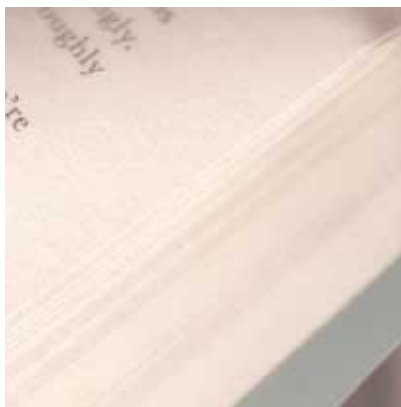
Encouraging reading for pleasure amongst Year 7 pupils

An evaluation of the impact of reading clubs in five selected schools

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New Policy Institute
November 2004



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Building learning
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Contents

Summary	1
1. Introduction	5
2. Profile of participating schools and clubs	9
3. Children's views	16
4. Impact on reading scores	22
5. Staff perspectives	24
6. Information on parents	29
7. Conclusions	32
Appendix 1: Training day information sheet	34
Appendix 2: Questionnaires for children	36
Appendix 3: Questionnaires for club organisers	43
Appendix 4: Checklist for club organisers	54
Appendix 5: Resources for reading clubs	56



The New Policy Institute evaluation of reading clubs in selected schools

Summary

This evaluation has been undertaken by the New Policy Institute for ContinYou, formerly Education Extra. It has focused on a small selection of schools located in areas of the country known to have high levels of need – that is, schools likely to be facing significant challenges in supporting the pupils attending them. Education Extra/ContinYou have developed and run a Reading Club programme since the late 1990s. Around 170 reading clubs have been set up through this programme, with a previous evaluation suggesting that these clubs have brought a number of benefits to the children who use them.

In 2002, with the support of Camelot Group plc, it was decided that a further six clubs would be set up. Aimed at year 7 pupils, these would be offered financial support and advice (including the provision of reading resources such as the Education Extra Reading Journey) and would be independently evaluated from the outset.

Six schools from across the UK were identified and invited to participate. However, early on in the evaluation, staff in one school felt unable to continue. This report therefore describes the activities and information gathered about the reading clubs set up and run in the remaining five schools over the school year September 2003-July 2004.

The five reading clubs

The reading clubs involved in this evaluation were all set up and run in slightly different ways. This obviously needs to be borne in mind since it places some constraints on the comparisons that can be made across the schools.

The clubs included both lunch time and after school clubs and a variety of different school staff ran them. Staff included school librarians, teachers, student teachers and learning support assistants, a Special Educational Needs Coordinator, a head of school's Social Inclusion Department and a head of the Careers Department.

Attendance was voluntary in all of the clubs. In four of the schools, the clubs were open to all Year 7 pupils and thus, all ability levels. In one of these schools, all of the pupils were reading well below their expected reading age and the reading club organiser adapted the reading material accordingly. In the fifth school, there was some degree of

selection in that the school was running a number of different reading initiatives based on different reading ability levels – the Reading for Pleasure initiative forming the basis of the reading club included in this evaluation, with this group of children on average, reading at about one year below their expected reading age.

The clubs were generally more popular with girls than boys and attendance across the five clubs quickly settled down to a pattern of a core group of children who attended most if not all weeks. A small number of children attended occasionally, especially if there was a special club activity on offer.

Attendance was reasonably stable throughout the winter and spring terms, although Ramadan did impact on the London school (there was a noticeable dip in figures during this period) and two of the schools experienced quite a drop in numbers after the Christmas holiday.

Attendance was generally lower for all of the clubs in the summer term. Likely reasons given for this included: exams, more drama and sport activities and better weather making outside play more popular.

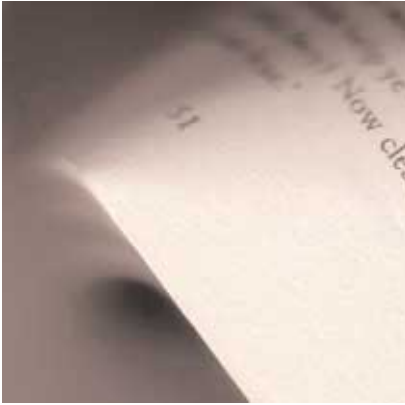
Key findings

Information gathered from the children was generally very positive about the reading clubs. The most commonly given reason for joining the reading club was enjoying reading and wanting to try new books. Information from both parents and staff also suggested that the clubs had attracted children who were already keen readers.

For most, the data gathered at the end of the year would suggest that the clubs had met the children's interest in trying new books, with many comments being recorded about the children trying different authors or forms of written word including poetry and plays.

There were also various comments about reading more regularly at home and of using the local library. As such, in terms of promoting reading for pleasure, the evaluation data suggests that the clubs were largely a successful vehicle for supporting this.

A number of points were also noted about the reading club helping to renew an interest in reading amongst some children who had started to find reading boring –



clearly an important finding in terms of considering ways of trying to sustain interest in the transition phase between primary and secondary school.

With regard to help with improving their reading skills, the children talked of greater confidence of reading aloud, of reading works with 'harder' words and of understanding words better. For some, there were suggestions from the information they gave, that these positive effects had been evident in other lessons. This applies particularly to English, with the children talking of taking part in activities such as class play readings to a greater extent than previously, finding comprehension activities easier and using more descriptive language in essays and reports. To some extent, information gathered from parents and school staff, whilst quite limited, did lend substance to these views – although an important factor to bear in mind is that, as just mentioned, some of these children may have been the keener and more able readers in their year group, who took up the offer to attend the reading club because they already enjoyed and were interested in reading.

Analysis of the reading scores of children attending the reading club indicates that over the year, many of the children improved. However, this finding needs to be treated with caution since analysis of the reading age scores for all Year 7 pupils (where available) revealed a similar pattern of general improvement for many of the children over the year, with some staying the same and a few gaining scores suggesting some deterioration in their reading age.

Because of the limited number of pupils involved in the five clubs, it is not possible to draw out any differences regarding the impact of reading club attendance on the basis of gender, ethnicity or academic ability: overall, there were too many girls in a relatively small total sample and factors such as parental encouragement to read could not be controlled for.

Demands posed by reading clubs

The information gathered from the five club organisers and other staff regularly involved in running the reading clubs over 2003/04, suggested that they were enthusiastic

about having a reading club in their respective schools and saw the clubs as bringing a range of benefits to both individual children and the wider school. However, what was also apparent were the demands on staff time and the pressures caused by other teaching and school responsibilities - issues that apply to all staff organising or providing out-of-school hours activities in general, not just reading clubs.

The key point emerging from the discussions with club organisers is that a successful club, where attendance is sustained, needs active planning. Offering a variety of activities is crucial in terms of attracting and sustaining the interest of the children – and that this will not happen unless at least one member of staff is given the time and support to do this.

Data gathered over 2003/04 highlighted that in those situations where there is insufficient time available to the club organiser, it is all too easy for the club to become quite limited in what it offers, thus leading to a drop off in attendance. At worst, this can also lead to difficulties actually operating the club on a regular basis.

Other issues raised by the reading club organisers included the importance of having adequate space and resources for operating the clubs. Involving parents was recognised as important in terms of the influence parents can exert on reading in general, reading at home and during holiday periods – however, this was an area posed difficulties for all of the reading club organisers to some extent.

Views of parents

Whilst acknowledging that this aspect of the evaluation resulted in the lowest response rate, the information gathered was strongly positive. There were suggestions that attendance at the reading club had resulted in some distinct changes in children's reading at home including the children reading more often and with greater understanding. A number of parents also thought that the reading club had helped with school work.

The importance of external advice and support

Information from both club organisers/staff and the children attending, highlighted the importance of reading clubs offering more than just opportunities for selecting and reading books – that activities such as quizzes, competitions, visiting authors or storytellers and trips out – are key ingredients to a well attended club. These things, however, cost money and from the information gathered, it is quite clear that many schools would struggle to find sufficient funds within their existing school budgets. This highlights the importance of external sources of funding and the need for schools to be pro-active in exploring these.

Accompanying this has been the obvious value attached by club organisers to external sources of advice, support and new ideas for running reading clubs and attracting children who may be 'switched off' reading on the basis that it is viewed as just more school work.

Conclusions

The data gathered through the evaluation strongly suggests that children are positive about the provision of school reading clubs and that in a number of different areas they bring individual and group benefits. These include increased confidence in reading aloud to others and in classroom activities, children feeling that reading clubs help them to improve their reading skills, and raising awareness amongst children of a wider range of written materials. For children who already enjoy reading, quite clearly reading clubs are a welcome addition to the range of extra activities schools may offer and can help to extend their reading interests still further.

Reading club organisers were equally positive and suggested that the clubs produced a wide range of benefits for the

children attending. Some of their ideas for involving other school year groups and school staff also have the potential to extend the positive effects of reading clubs across the school. The 'hard' data to back these improvements is however, limited and as such, only limited conclusions can be drawn from it with regard to the impact on reading age scores.

A number of questions also emerged from the information gathered, some linked to the demands posed by reading clubs just outlined, namely:

- how to equip reading clubs with adequate space, staff time and financial support if they are develop, attract and sustain pupil attendance, and become a sustained part of the provision offered by schools.

Also:

- How to encourage less confident readers to voluntarily attend reading clubs? This question is posed on the basis of suggestions emerging in the evaluation that there is a danger in reading clubs such as these tending to attract those children already interested and more confident in reading.
- How to attract and engage boys in regular reading club attendance. This is raised on the basis of the much greater numbers of girls who chose to attend the reading clubs over 2003/04 in comparison to their male peers.
- How to involve parents? This is raised on the basis of the limited success in this area reported by the five reading clubs.

These questions suggest that there may be a need for some subtle or soft targeting of the children who could benefit from the support reading clubs may be able to offer. They also highlight the importance of effectively disseminating information about what the reading club offers, when and where it operates and who runs it.

1 Introduction

Background and scope of the evaluation

Gathering robust data about the effects of school reading clubs is clearly relevant in terms of current literacy objectives for all secondary schools (Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy) and the overarching interest in raising standards within education.

Past research has revealed a worrying drop in children's literacy standards in the year following the transition from primary to secondary school (Reading Clubs Report, page thirteen). For this reason, the focus of the evaluation has been on Year 7 pupils, with a view to providing some assessment of whether reading clubs can make a contribution to preventing this dip in children's reading abilities. Originally, it was proposed that the evaluation should commence in the second half of the winter term 2002 and should end July 2004 (i.e. nearly two school years). In the second year, the evaluation would include some tracking of the Year 7 pupils as they moved into Year 8 to see whether any effects of the reading club were sustained over this longer time period. It would also include evaluation of a second group of Year 7 pupils.

Due to difficulties and delays recruiting schools to the programme, this timetable was subsequently amended with the evaluation starting in the winter term of 2003. Six schools were recruited to the programme, all located in areas of the country with high levels of socio-economic deprivation. Staff from three of these schools then attended a training day in London organised by Education Extra on 3rd June 2003. Prior to this day, an Information Sheet about the evaluation had been circulated to the schools which explained the data to be collected and what the schools needed to do to assist with this (see Appendix 1). One of the sessions during the training day was about the evaluation and provided an opportunity for questions and queries to be raised by the school staff before the evaluation commenced.

Given this significantly delayed start, it was subsequently agreed that sustaining the involvement of the participating schools and the pupils attending the reading clubs in an evaluation for a further two years was likely to be onerous on the schools and that a programme of information gathering over a one year period was the best way forward. This was not thought to likely to compromise the quality of the evaluation data in that a more intensive schedule, including a greater number of visits to the schools, would be put in place during this one year period. These changes were then communicated to the schools by telephone and/or letter.

Early into the start of the autumn term, one of the schools withdrew from the programme before being able to set up a reading club. Problems with a lack of staff available to assist the librarian who had agreed to run the club, was the main reason for this decision.

Evaluation aims

In line with the wish of Education Extra/Camelot to gather data about the effectiveness of reading clubs in supporting children's literacy/ability to read, the evaluation aimed to:

- Examine whether reading club membership had an effect on pupils' reading age scores.
 - Examine the effects on members' academic attainment.
 - Consider these with respect to different groups of pupils – for example, to look for variations on the basis of gender or levels of academic activity.
- A central theme of the programme was about promoting reading for pleasure and, as such, the evaluation also explored:
- The 'wider' effects on pupils' attitudes towards books and reading (in its widest sense).
 - The 'softer' benefits to participating pupils such as increased self-esteem and confidence.
 - The views of parents towards the reading club (to also pick up on any changes in reading habits of their children when at home).

Finally, the evaluation also sought information from the reading club organisers about any other factors that might impact upon the operation of the reading club – for example, other strategies or initiatives within the school to promote reading and, also, the availability locally, of library and other leisure facilities.

Methodology

The basic methodology, amended for data collection over one year, was as follows:

- End of term questionnaires for the children attending the club.
- End of term questionnaires for the reading club organisers.
- Reading age scores for all children in Year 7 attending the reading club at the beginning and the end of the school year – and, where possible, reading age scores for the whole of Year 7 collected at both the start and end of the year, to allow comparison with those attending the reading club.
- The reading test already in general use within the respective schools was used for this aspect of the data collection.
- Questionnaires to parents of children attending the reading club.
- Where possible, end of term visits to each school, for face to face time/observation of the children taking part in a reading club session.

At the beginning of the school year (September 2003), the schools were asked to circulate a letter to all parents of children in Year 7 advising them of the evaluation and

offering them the opportunity to contact the New Policy Institute with any queries.

For each participating school, school brochures, information packs for parents and any other information materials for pupils or parents were requested in order to build up a profile of the school.

Design of questionnaires

For the children, questionnaires were designed for each term as follows:

- In the winter term, children in all the clubs completed Tell us about your reading club.
- In the spring term, children in two of the schools completed the Reading club term 2 questionnaires. The children in the other three schools shared their views about the reading club via small group discussion meetings with Cathy Street, using the term 2 questionnaire as a discussion guide.
- In the summer term, children in all five clubs received the Reading club end of year questionnaire.

Copies of all children's questionnaires are in Appendix 2. In all cases, the format of information gathering was kept as simple as possible. Many questions simply required the child to tick or circle their answer or to write a short sentence. However, all the forms also provided plenty of opportunities for the children to make suggestions or to describe in more detail any issues they thought were important.

For reading club organisers, questionnaires were again designed for each term. These covered attendance, activities undertaken, materials read, what had or had not worked, plans for future and support needed (from Education Extra/ContinuYou).

Club organisers were also asked to collect views/data from their teaching colleagues where possible, with the questionnaire in the second (spring) term including specific questions for other school staff.

Questions in the third term were divided into four main sections: operation of the club for that term; operation of the club over the school year; impact of the club and support needed to run a reading club.

Please see Appendix 3 for copies of these questionnaires. Parents were asked for their views in the spring term. Children in one of the schools designed their own questionnaire for this purpose. In three other schools, a questionnaire designed by the New Policy Institute was distributed.

In the fifth school, on the advice of the reading club organiser, no attempt was made to gather information from parents (on basis of longstanding problems trying to engage parents/poor attendance at school evenings for parents).

Response rate

The response rate was generally high from the children, with nearly all regular club attendees completing the end of term questionnaires – possibly because of the questionnaires being distributed and completed during a reading

club session or during an end of term session with Cathy Street.

It was decided to distribute the questionnaires in this way because of the likely need for the club organiser/other club staff to help some of the children to read the questions and to write down their views. Even with this support, roughly half of the children confined their answers to the tick box sections of the questionnaires, or used very limited English and wrote very little in the boxes asking for their views and ideas.

14 of the 15 questionnaires distributed to reading club organisers were returned. However, the amount of information gathered from other school staff was very limited and several of the reading club organisers reported having difficulties getting feedback from their colleagues. Around 20% of the parents from the 4 schools returned the questionnaires.

Overview of data gathered

Winter/term 1 data gathered was comprised of the following:

- 5 reading club organiser questionnaires.
- 106 questionnaires from children.
- Reading age scores for Yr 7 pupils.

Spring/term two data was as follows:

- 5 reading club organiser questionnaires plus some comments from other teachers including 3 English teachers at Mount Gilbert.
- 71 questionnaires from children plus verbal information from 28 children via face to face sessions in 3 schools.
- 32 questionnaires from parents.

Summer/term three data was as follows:

- 4 reading club organiser questionnaires.
- 59 questionnaires from children.
- 8 questionnaires from parents.
- Reading age scores collected.



2. Profile of participating schools

Summary

- 3 of the reading clubs took place during the school lunch break.
- In 2 of these schools, the club was offered on two separate days to accommodate the numbers involved or different class timetables.
- 1 school offered a lunch time reading club and an after-school club.
- 1 school ran the club as a once weekly after-school club.
- A variety of school staff were involved in setting up and running the clubs – school librarians (3 schools); a Special Educational Needs Coordinator; a head of Social Inclusion; a head of the Schools Careers Department; a number of English teachers, teaching assistants; student teachers and learning support assistants.
- Whilst attendance was voluntary, in one of the schools, there was a degree of selection in that the school was running a number of different reading initiatives based on different reading ability levels.
- 4 schools were co-educational, 1 was for girls only. In the co-educational schools, the clubs were generally more popular with girls than boys, noticeably so in 2 of the schools.
- Attendance in all of the clubs settled down to a pattern of a core group of children who attended most if not all weeks, with a small number of children attending occasionally if the club had organised a special activity.
- Attendance figures were generally lower for all of the clubs in the summer term.

Cardinal Newman High School, Bells Hill

Overview

Cardinal Newman High School is a large Roman Catholic comprehensive school serving the Bellshill, Mossend, Viewpark and Tannochside areas of central Lanarkshire in Scotland. In these areas, there are high levels of unemployment.

The school is popular with the local Catholic community and is also often selected by local non-Catholic parents. The school takes both boys and girls and covers the school years S1-S6. Information from the school handbook 2004/05 indicates that the total number of pupils on role is around 1035, with 78 members of teaching staff. Cardinal Newman appears somewhat isolated from its immediate community, with access to the campus being down a long slip road off a main road. Also of note is the unusual design of the building which was opened in 1977 – the main teaching block is curved, with the Science/Social Studies, Technical and PE/Community blocks linked to it around its circumference.

Activities within school

The school day at Cardinal Newman runs from 8.55am to 3.30pm. Each day is broken up into 6 teaching periods with a break for lunch and in the morning.

The school caters for children of all abilities and also has facilities for children with disabilities. There is an active Learning Support Department and as would be expected in a Roman Catholic school, Religious Education and Religious Observance play a central role in the school's weekly programme of teaching and activities.

The school has developed active links with the local community, including pupil involvement in fund raising for local charities. In the evenings, some of Cardinal Newman's drama and sports facilities are used for evening classes and recreational pursuits by the local community. Cardinal Newman also runs the Partnership Project. This aims to "encourage parents to be more involved in their child's learning, to develop positive links between home and school, support young people who are experiencing difficulties at home, school or in the community, to provide opportunities for young people to take part in educational and social activities both in and out of school, and to establish good links with other agencies in the community in an effort to support young people and their families" (School handbook 2004/05).

Activities undertaken through this project include: Parent Groups, helping to organise the 'Buddy' scheme, the Homework Club, the Boys' Club and the Girls' Group.

Operation of the reading club

The reading club began in September 2003 and operates each Tuesday lunchtime in a classroom for 45 minutes. An average of 25 pupils have attended over the year, noticeably more girls than boys (75% - 25%) with a wide range of abilities. (Boys attended initially but appeared to lose interest quite quickly; the opportunities for sport also proved more of an attraction to them).

Over 2003/04, the club was run by one of the English teachers with support from the art teacher and the Head of the English Department. Support and interest from other staff in the school, including the Head, has been good.

Activities undertaken by the club included: group discussions about books; creative responses to books such as designing book covers and postcards; use of the internet to access various literary sites aimed at children/young people; visits from local booksellers and authors (one via the International Book Festival); visits to author signings and to the theatre; themed sessions; end of term parties. The club used the Reading Journey provided by Education Extra and operated a 'passport' system for recording what each young person read, which in turn presented the opportunity to win prizes as book miles were collected. Open discussions about favourite books have been report-

ed to be one of the most successful club activities, with more structured games and quizzes being less popular – views from the pupils indicated that, as one pupil explained, these made the club “too much like another lesson.”

Over the last year, the club has clearly become very popular with a welcoming, informal atmosphere. A genuine interest in reading and discussing books, including making recommendations to one another, was apparent amongst the young people attending the club.

No other specific reading initiatives were in operation within the school during this period of evaluation – however, in the English department overall, there is a policy of promoting reading for enjoyment and in 2004/05, the reading club will be included in the development plan for the English Department.

Mount Gilbert Community College, Belfast

Overview

Set at the end of the Shankhill Road and drawing from a very small community, Mount Gilbert School is considerably under subscribed – in 2003/04, it had around 220 students in a building designed to serve around 900.

As such, year groups are small and promoting new activities out of school is a serious challenge:

- Many pupils come from families with low expectations of education.
- There is limited interest in reading and certainly little appreciation of the idea of reading for pleasure. Reading ages for the children are below average, generally falling within age 7-9 levels.
- School attendance patterns are poor.

Activities within the school

Given the low numbers on role at Mount Gilbert, and a widespread culture of pupils leaving promptly at the end of the school day (often due to transport difficulties), not surprisingly, the amount of activities such out of school clubs, not surprisingly, has been limited in recent years. Over 2003/04, a reading scheme operated in the school and pupils showed significant improvements. (This did not include the school year involved in this evaluation).

Operation of the reading club

The club at Mount Gilbert was set up and run by the Head of English and began early in the Autumn term 2003.

Initially, the club attracted a considerable amount of interest with roughly half of the school year attending (14 out of 26 pupils) – although the club organiser felt that this was more to do with the possibility of winning prizes, sweets or other treats rather than any real interest in taking part in reading activities – and as the year progressed, numbers dwindled to a core group of around 4 pupils, occasionally more if something ‘special’ had been organised.

A competition was held for the children to name the club

with The Little Bookworms Reading Club then being chosen. At the start of the year, the club operated once a week for 30 minutes during the school lunch break, using a room that at other times is used for detentions. In the spring term, a further session of the club started after school, based in the club organiser’s own room, a much more welcoming and informal setting (attracting the same core pupil group).

As the year progressed, the club organiser attempted to introduce a range of different activities – however, the low reading abilities of many of the children attending the club, and very limited parental support and involvement, placed limitations on what could be attempted.

Magazines were reported to be popular, also play reading as long as the vocabulary used was fairly small and simple. Despite these limitations, very positive feedback from some of the Mount Gilbert English teachers about the impact of the reading club on other lessons was received and there is enthusiasm to continue the reading club in the future.

Notre Dame Catholic College, Liverpool

Overview

Notre Dame Catholic College is a Voluntary Aided Catholic comprehensive school for girls aged 11-19, with provision for mixed education in the sixth form.

The college has been in existence for over 130 years and aims to serve the local population of inner city Liverpool, giving priority to baptised Catholic girls living in a number of local Catholic Church parishes. It is well thought of in the local community and places are in demand.

In 2002, Notre Dame underwent a significant change and opened as a Specialist School for Performing Arts – “a response by the government to the fact that the college enjoys an excellent reputation for its work in dance, drama and music” (College Handbook 2003-2004).

Activities within the school

The school day at Notre Dame runs from 8.45am to 3.30pm. An extended day operates for Performing Arts: 8am – 8.45am and 3.30pm-4.30pm.

Each day is made up of five one-hour teaching sessions. Religious Education has a central role within the curriculum. There is also a long established Special Educational Needs Department.

Given its status as a Specialist School for the Performing Arts, not surprisingly, the school offers many art and drama activities and extra-curricular clubs. These include: dance, gym, choir, and drama and music clubs. Work experience, residential study weekends and educational visits are also features of the school programme.

Operation of the reading club

Over 2003/04, the club ran on a twice weekly basis, having started at the beginning of the autumn term 2003. The two sessions take place in the school library during the breaks after lunch on Mondays and Wednesdays (between 30-45 minutes).

The school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), the school librarian and a number of teaching

assistants/learning support assistants, have been involved in running the club that from the start has proved to be popular and well attended.

Having started with over 50 girls attending the club, average attendance for the club over the year has been 30 pupils. There was some drop off in numbers in the summer term, a time of many other drama activities in the school, school plays and the like. Improved weather also made playing outside a more attractive option.

A wide range of activities were undertaken by the Notre Dame reading club throughout the year, including the compilation of reading diaries for each child attending the club. Reading aloud to one of the adults helping to run the club proved popular, as well as practical activities such as model making (of a scene from a book).

Pennywell School, Sunderland

Overview

Pennywell is a Community Comprehensive School for pupils aged 11-16 years. It is co-educational throughout and is not affiliated to any particular religious denomination. In 2002, 1185 pupils were on roll; this number was slightly lower in 2003.

The school is located in an area of Sunderland marked by high socio-economic deprivation, which in turn, has resulted in low educational aspirations of many of the young people in the area. In 2002, whilst just over half of the Year 11 leavers went on to 6th form or college, nearly a quarter were recorded to be unemployed (School Information for Parents booklet).

Activities within the school

Apart from offering a wide range of sport and other extra-curricular activities, Pennywell School has developed a number of reading activities over recent years. With only 40% of Year 7 pupils reading at the right age, the following four groups have been in operation, with children being assigned to one of these groups on the basis of reading ability:

- The Reading Initiative aimed at children with the lowest reading age, three to four years below where they should be. The initiative consists of an individual reading programme - daily reading with regular monitoring and testing of progress.
- The Key Skills Group
- The Ruth Miskin Literacy Programme
- The Reading for Pleasure Group – for those who are reading roughly one year below their expected reading age; it was this group who were included in the evaluation.

Operation of the reading club

In 2003/04, the reading club at Pennywell School operated during two school lesson periods with two groups of children. One group was held on Tuesdays, the other on Fridays, with an average of 8 children in each group. This number reduced slightly as the year progressed.

The club was run by the school librarian with help from

the ICT Centre Technician. The school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) was also involved in the initial planning of the club.

The club has proved to be popular with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls and favourite activities included reading aloud, play reading and poetry. The club also used the Reading Journey supplied by Education Extra at the start of the school year.

The activities undertaken by the Pennywell reading club were quite varied but were to some extent limited by the constraints of the room where the club sessions took place – a corner of the library and social inclusion room. Often other groups of children would need to use these facilities at the same time, meaning the reading club space was limited and activities had to be reasonably quiet.

Quintin Kynaston School, North London

Overview

Quintin Kynaston School is a state-maintained co-educational secondary school in North West London borough of Westminster catering for around 1,110 pupils.

As might be expected from a school in Central London, the school population is strongly multicultural, with the children speaking over 60 different languages. This population is also quite mobile.

The teaching staff at the school is made up of a Headteacher, seven Associate Heads and 82 teachers. Popularly known as "QK", the reputation of the school has improved considerably over the last three years. Examination results at Key Stage 3 have improved year on year in the period 2002/03 and are now above average in comparison to all borough of Westminster schools and almost matching the national average for these exams.

Activities within the school

Since September 2001, Quintin Kynaston has enjoyed Specialist Technology College status. This allows the school a substantial budget for improving the level of technology across the school, including more funding for ICT and computer equipment. As part of a six year plan, the school premises have recently been subject to a major refurbishment and QK has been selected to become one of the first extended schools in the UK (School prospectus 2003). A specialist Inclusion Faculty operates within the school to work with students who need additional help, including those whose first language is not English or "who for other reasons are on the fringes of mainstream schooling, whether they are refugees, looked-after children or those with emotional or behavioural difficulties" (School Prospectus 2003). Some of the support offered through this Faculty includes Learning Mentors, Counsellors and a School/Home Liaison Worker.

QK offers a full programme of enrichment activities that run before school at lunchtime and after school, including a wide range of clubs covering most subject areas. There are many school sports teams, also regular art, music and drama activities and performances.

Operation of the reading club

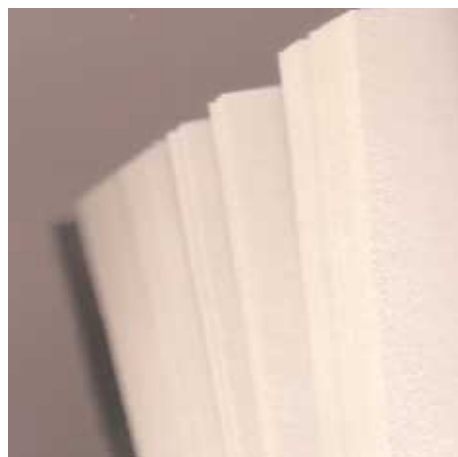
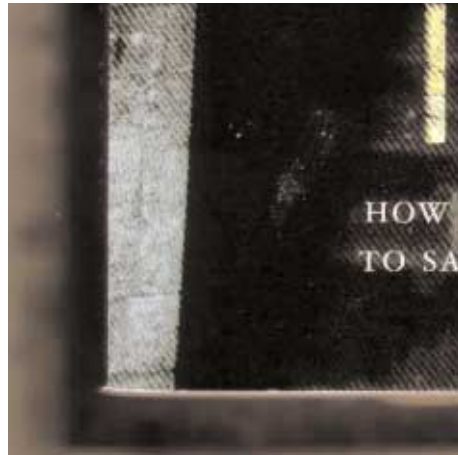
The reading club at Quintin Kynaston was set up as an after school club, running from 3.30pm - 4.30pm each Monday in a room that is part of the school library. A reading club had actually run at the school during the previous year, following a request by the borough of Westminster and Education Extra. The reading club run in the school year on which this evaluation is based followed a similar format – namely, a one hourly session one afternoon per week at the end of the school day.

The club has been run by the Head of the Careers department with input from the school Library Manager and the Library Assistant. Later in the year, two student English teachers on placement in Quintin Kynaston became regularly involved, largely taking over from the Head of the Careers Department who had been promoted to a more senior management position within the school.

Due to the lack of one member of staff able to take full responsibility for the club and to plan activities, in this second year, the club had not been as successful as the previous year. Pressures on school staff meant that its start had been delayed in the winter term of 2003, pupil attendance rates were generally lower for each term and it had not always been possible for the club to run each week.

In the year 2003/04, an average of 10 pupils attended the club, with the club proving more popular with girls than boys. Activities undertaken through the club early in the year included: story writing; quizzes; use of the internet to visit author sites; a trip to hear an author speak about their work and designing book covers. The club did not use of the Reading Journey provided initially by Education Extra.

As the year progressed, the time available to plan activities became more limited and the club became more like a drop-in session for the children to select from the club selection of books and to read these either in the session or to take them home.



3. Children's views

Overview

"the best thing about the reading club is that you read different kinds of books, the books are interesting and the club helps you with your reading.... the worst thing is that it only lasts during lunchtime and it is only once a week..."

Information gathered from the children over the three terms of the evaluation was generally very positive in all the schools – they had enjoyed the opportunities to read new materials, the art and practical activities and in particular, the trips out (for example to attend book signings, to buy books or to go to the theatre).

The most commonly given reason for joining the reading club was enjoying reading and wanting to try new books; this echoes the findings noted in Education Extra's Reading Clubs Report. Within each club, a number of children also identified wanting help with their reading as the reason why they had chosen to attend the club.

Many of the children (over three quarters) expressed the view that attending the reading club had helped them with their reading – especially confidence in reading aloud. Less positive comments noted about the clubs included that sometimes activities were too structured, were 'like another lesson' and did not reflect the interests of pupils. Club sessions where the only thing for the children to do was to pick a book and read, or where they were not allowed to talk and were expected to be quiet, were often described as boring. In several of the clubs, comments were made about a lack of space and comfortable furniture, making it hard for club sessions to be relaxing. The majority of the children who took part in the evaluation indicated that, if it was possible, they would like to continue their attendance at the reading club when they were in Year 8 –

"I think it should go on for a good few more years... I would really enjoy being able to keep on going..."

Reasons for attending the reading club – Term 1 questionnaire

A wide variety of reasons for attending the reading club were given in the first questionnaire given to the children. These included:

- Wanting to read books/enjoying reading.
- Wanting to improve their reading.
- To learn about different kinds of books.
- Wanting to read MORE or NEW books.
- The club having books the school library did not have.
- Wanting to go somewhere quiet.
- Because of friends.
- To get out of the cold.
- To see what it was like.
- Being told to attend.
- Being told it would be 'fun'.
- Seeing a poster (in school) and thinking it sounded interesting.
- Boredom in school breaks.

Over three-quarters of the children mentioned liking reading/wanting to read as the reason they had chosen to attend the club:

"it is all good fun but I like the different types of books"

General views about the clubs

Table 1: Club ratings by the children, term one (106 questionnaires)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Like coming to the reading club	51	49	5	
Club activities are good	48	46	10	
Club books are interesting	43	52	9	1
Good place to meet friends	42	47	14	
Club a place to make new friends	29	24	34	14
Reading different things	40	45	14	2
Club has helped with reading	49	35	11	5
Club has been a help with school work	35	41	20	7

In the first term, the children were asked to rate a range of questions about the club according to whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed. Not all children completed all of the questions in this part of the questionnaire. However, some clear patterns were apparent in the responses that were given:

- For the questions I like coming to the reading club and the activities at the club are good, the majority of the children reported that they strongly agreed.
- There were more mixed views about whether the books were interesting, with a spread of pupil responses across strongly agree, agree and a small number noting they disagreed. (A number of the boys responded that they disagreed, with other

comments on their forms indicating that they found the books boring, with few on topics of interest to them such as sport).

- Most pupils strongly agreed or agreed that the reading club was a good place to meet friends although most also disagreed with the statement I have made new friends through the club. (A number explained that they already know everyone attending the club).
- With regard to the statement I am now reading different things through the club, in two schools nearly all of the club attenders indicated that they strongly agreed. In the other three schools, responses were fairly evenly divided between strongly agree and agree, with a small number disagreeing, some strongly disagreeing and some not answering this question.
- A similar pattern was evident in the responses given for the statement the club has helped my reading.
- The statement the club has been a help with my school work gave rise to more varied responses – the biggest category of responses was agreed, a slightly smaller number said they strongly agreed and quite a few indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

What they liked

From the comments noted in the questionnaires for all three terms and the face-to-face sessions with the evaluator, the enjoyment gained from practical activities such as designing book covers, writing book reviews, using the internet to explore relevant sites, was clear to see. Likewise the appreciation of pupils for opportunities to read aloud to adult helpers or in small groups (especially play reading and book reviews) was quite evident:

“other club members and/or the teacher recommending books helps me to read things I would never have read normally...”

“it is best when we all read together in a circle. We play games as well which I like but I would rather read...”

Times for quiet reading were also valued, although on a number of occasions, it was noted that most pupils did not want the whole club session to be used in this way. Other popular activities included themed club sessions, watching videos of books read in the club, quizzes, trips out to buy books, attend the theatre or to go to author signings – or on the other hand, for authors to visit the club for a session. Arrangements to help to choose new books and also to borrow books for reading at home appeared to be generally popular:

“its been good to have lots of new books. I have been working my way through authors I have heard of and wanted to read”

A number of the children also mentioned the importance of the reading club being relaxed and friendly, with comfortable furniture and enough space to be able to move around, undertake practical activities and ideally, to have some refreshments.

Reading choices

All of the clubs offered a wide range of different reading materials to try and stimulate the interest of the children attending the clubs. The materials on offer also catered for the wide range of abilities presented by these children. In the first term questionnaire, the children were asked what they liked to read and some of their responses were as follows:

- Horror stories (also “stories that scare you”).
- Adventure stories.
- Poetry.
- Mysteries.
- Joke books.
- Funny books.
- Comedy
- Picture books.
- Books about real people and history.
- Magazines and comics.
- Books about children.
- Books about animals.
- Fishing magazines.

Very few authors or specific books were mentioned by the children. The few that were included: JK Rowling; Jacqueline Wilson; Michael Morpurgo and Roald Dahl; the Harry Potter Books and Tom’s Midnight Garden. (NB: the evaluation took place during the run up to the release of the third Harry Potter film and it did not appear that many of the children had read these books but, rather, were interested in the forthcoming film. Tom’s Midnight Garden was read as a club group activity in one school).

What did not work so well

A variety of comments were noted throughout the three terms. These included:

- The club having ‘boring’ books.
- The club sessions feeling too much like another lesson.
- More competitions (and prizes) and more activities such as reviewing books and time using computers were needed.
- Not having enough ‘good books to choose from’ and having to wait for them.

In three of the clubs, some of the children commented on limited space, insufficient opportunities for one to one reading or discussions with an adult and of the club being too quiet.

Views on how the reading club helped

As noted at the start of this chapter, over three quarters of the children who took part in the evaluation indicated that they felt that attendance at the reading club had helped them with their reading. (84 of the 106 questionnaires completed in term one gave a positive response here). A slightly lower number also thought the reading club had helped them with their school work more generally (but with more clear disagreement noted).

“By reading more books, I think my vocabulary has improved a great deal and I am now able to punctuate my sentences better”

Increased confidence in reading aloud was mentioned frequently, with a number of the children noting that they now felt able to take part in activities in English lessons such as play reading (activities they would not have volunteered themselves for before) and essay writing. Improved spelling, understanding more difficult words and use of punctuation were also mentioned.

At the end of the third term of the evaluation, the children were asked to think about the whole school year and whether they thought that attending the reading club had helped them with their reading and their school work. Not everyone completed these sections of the questionnaire – however of those that did, overwhelmingly, the responses given were positive for helping with reading. For school work, the pattern of responses was again mixed, although in comparison to the views recorded at the end of term one, more children now indicated that they felt the reading club had helped with school work. The reasons given by the children for feeling that over the year, the reading club had helped their reading included:

- Now reading more at home.
- Reading is easier/reading is not so hard.
- School worksheets now seem easier to read.
- Being able to read more fluently and without stuttering.
- “I can read more quickly”.
- Using the library – and understanding how to do this.
- Feeling that they understood more words.
- Spelling has improved.
- Now able to read words that were too difficult before (the value attached by the children to the support from reading club organisers and club staff in helping the children to discuss the words they found hard to read or understand was mentioned several times).

A number of comments were also noted about the club helping to renew an interest in reading, with some children starting to enjoy reading again – clearly an important finding for an initiative aimed at promoting reading for pleasure and also trying to sustain interest in the transition phase between primary and secondary school:

“I have always been into reading but because I was so tired out at school I began to lose interest. Since going to the reading club I have started to read again and I really enjoy it...”

With regard to how the reading club had helped with other school work, the children were also asked if this

applied to particular subjects. A number of children commented that the club had helped across all subjects by helping them to read the materials more easily. However, a greater number of children singled out English as the subject that had most benefited, with this again being linked to increased confidence to read out loud and to participate in class activities such as play reading. Improved essay and report writing skills were also noted and increased confidence in using descriptive language. Suggestions for how clubs should be run or improved. The suggestions collected from the children were wide-ranging and, as might be expected, included requests for more outings and opportunities to win prizes (through competitions, quizzes and so forth). Book signings and opportunities to meet authors were clearly highly popular. Other ideas, that emerged from across all five schools included:

- More comfortable chairs (or beanbags) and space for the reading club.
- Club sessions to be longer.
- Club sessions to be available for all years within the school.
- Clubs to run more regularly.
- More use of the computer.
- Headphones for talking books.
- More one to one time with an adult – help with words, developing reading skills.
- Clubs to provide an area for talking alongside quiet areas for private reading.
- Refreshments during club session.
- More videos linked to books available in the club.
- Play reading and production.
- Children to help run the club, decide and plan activities.

A prominent theme running through many of the comments noted was the need for reading clubs to provide a variety of activities and for these to reflect a balance between practical activities such as designing book covers, creating scenes from books or plays or writing reviews and times for reading alone, in a group or to a member of staff.

The importance of the club being run in a reasonably informal way and yet at the same time, providing some structured/pre-planned activities, was also highlighted.

4. Impact on reading scores

Overview

Reading age scores for the pupils were taken at the beginning of the school year and were repeated in the summer term using the reading tests usually employed within the respective schools. In one of the five schools, it was not usual to repeat reading tests in the summer term, thus these were only organised for the children who had regularly attended the reading club over the previous year. Analysis of the children's reading scores indicates that over the year, most of the children improved. However, the reading age scores for a small number of the children regularly attending the reading club stayed the same or in some instances, showed a deterioration.

Data limitations

It should be noted that in many respects, the collection of reading age scores over a school year presents only a limited picture - i.e. they do not allow consideration of other factors that may be influencing a child's performance in the test or on a certain day and as such, only limited conclusions can be drawn. In the case of some of the lower summer test scores for example, factors such as absence from school and illness during the year were thought to have influenced some of these results.

The following are also important considerations, which further support the need for caution in reaching conclusions about the 'hard' or quantitative outcomes of reading club attendance:

- The pattern of the scores of the children attending the reading clubs is in line with the pattern of reading scores for ALL Year 7 pupils (where available) – that is, a picture of general improvement for many of the children over the year, with some staying the same and a few gaining scores suggesting some deterioration in their reading age. Thus the improved reading scores may reflect children's general maturation and development, or be the result of teaching over the year to all pupils.
- Information from the reading club organisers indicated that the reading clubs might have attracted those children already more confident and interested in reading. It is thus to be expected that their reading scores would show progress over the year, regardless of whether they attended a reading club or not.
- In one of the clubs, analysis of the reading age scores broken down by both regular and irregular attendees showed no difference between the two groups – both generally improved.
- Furthermore, the level of parental encouragement and support at home with reading is largely unknown but from the small number of questionnaires returned by parents, is likely to be an influence on reading development over the year.

Irrespective of the limitations of this quantitative data however, the positive views of the reading club organiser, and also parents, with regard to the 'softer' beneficial outcomes of the clubs was clear from the data collected in term of children showing increased confidence, improved self-esteem and more interest in reading. These benefits are discussed in the following two chapters.

The pattern of reading scores over the school year With the exception of Mount Gilbert, who provided data for both regular and irregular attendees at the reading club, the data presented below relates to children who regularly attended the reading club for all three terms of the evaluation.

Table 2: Reading age scores of children attending the reading clubs (89 children)

	Incomplete*	Improved score	Unchanged	Deteriorated
Pennywell (16)	13	1	1	1
Quintin Kynaston (10)	5	2	2	1
Mount Gilbert (15)	13	2		
Notre Dame (30)	20	4	1	5
Cardinal Newman (18)	9	4	5	

Incomplete data is noted where reading scores for the child are not available for both the start and end of the year – for example, due to a child being absent from school.



5. Staff Perspectives

Overview

The five reading club organisers and the staff working regularly with them to run the reading clubs all reported positively in terms of how they thought that attendance at the club had affected the children.

The club organisers were able to identify a range of activities that, in their opinion, had worked well and had been enjoyed by the children.

They also mentioned a number of challenges that they had faced in setting up and running the reading clubs and their ideas for how some of these might be addressed.

Views about the impact on children attending the reading club organisers and other staff

Whilst acknowledging that it would be hard to quantify the changes in reading ability/skills, for most of the clubs, there were many comments made about the children showing increased confidence and a growing interest in different forms of reading.

In one club in particular, confidence in reading aloud on a group basis was noted and in another, greater skills in using the library to explore areas of interest.

The sense of belonging to the club was also thought to be important in fostering cohesiveness amongst the pupils and as one club organiser explained, club membership helped to dispel the image of reading being a boring activity for the more studious pupils in the school. The importance of the club being something different from other lessons, where the children could exercise some choice over the activities, was another attraction.

Activities that worked well

All of the club organisers recognised the importance of providing a balance of quiet reading sessions alongside more active types of activity. These included: designing book covers; model making (of book characters or scenes); use of the internet to visit author sites or to order books; writing book reviews, quizzes and competitions. The importance of having sufficient adults for the children to read to individually and for sessions when one of the club staff would read to the children was also noted. Several of the reading clubs used the Education Extra Reading Journey and found it a useful resource. The clubs also experimented with various forms of reading diary or reading logs for charting individual pupil progress through the year, with rewards being offered for completion of agreed stages/numbers of books. This was thought to be especially useful for less confident readers in visibly demonstrating and reinforcing the progress they had or were making.

Watching videos/DVDs of books being read in the club proved popular as a group activity – with this approach possibly helping to build up and maintain interest in longer, more complex stories.

Trips out to local libraries, books signings, the theatre and the cinema were all extremely popular – but posed cost and time considerations. With pressures on school budgets and generally quite limited resources, this highlights the important role of external or dedicated sources of funding for the success of initiatives such as extra-curricular reading clubs.

Without this support, it is highly likely that the clubs would have had to be much more modest in their planning of activities and the purchasing of new reading materials - as one staff member explained, it would become very difficult to offer the “nice extras” that make the reading club different and which attract the children to keep attending.

Challenges encountered over the year

A number of challenges or concerns about the operation of the reading clubs emerged from meetings with the club organisers and from the information shared in the end of term questionnaires. These broadly related to:

- The demands on staffing and communication/staff support within schools.
- Sustaining attendance.
- Space and resources.
- The wish to involve parents, and limited success in achieving this.

It should be noted that many of these issues are of general concern to school staff involved in organising and running out-of-school hours activities and clubs.

Demands on school reading club staff

The demands on staff time and especially, the need for at least one dedicated person to be in charge of planning and organising reading club activities (otherwise interest from the children wanes) was quite evident in the information shared during the evaluation.

The key point emerging from the discussions with reading club staff is that a successful reading club needs active planning – offering a variety of activities is crucial in terms of attracting and sustaining the interest of the children – and that this will not happen unless at least one member of staff is given the time to do this and can also ensure that the children are informed of what is on offer or is planned.

In addition, the pressures of combining teaching and roles within school alongside developing a reading club meant that several of the club organisers were of the view that ideally, more than one member of staff was needed to run actually run the club sessions – especially if the club is to be able to offer times for the children to read individually to an adult and to be able to offer some of the activities such as making models and scenes from books.

Having more than one member of staff involved would also allow cover for those times when a club organiser might not be available to oversee the club session.

Sustaining attendance

Whilst generally all five clubs were successful in attracting and sustaining reasonable numbers of children to the clubs on a regular basis, in one of the schools, the core number of pupils attending regularly was very small and considerable efforts were required of the club organiser to sustain even this level of interest.

With regard to attendance, the other four schools also raised a number of important concerns or issues that need to be borne in mind when setting up clubs of this kind:

- How to encourage less confident readers to attend? Information from several of the club organisers suggested that the children attending the clubs on a regular basis were those who were known to already like reading. (This view was backed up by some of the information given by the parents who completed the evaluation questionnaires in term two).
- How to attract boys to attend? In two of the clubs from the four schools that were co-educational, girls outnumbered boys and attempts to get boys involved did not seem to result in any lasting change.

These are clearly pertinent issues to provision set up on the basis of voluntary attendance that is open to all. They suggest that possibly some subtle or soft targeting is required of those who might benefit most from reading club attendance, alongside:

- Ensuring that the reading materials on offer do cater for different ability levels and include topics likely to be of interest to boys.
- Consideration of how to ensure that information about what the reading club offers, when and where it operates and who is involved in running it, is effectively disseminated across the relevant year groups in school.

Positively, information gathered through the evaluation revealed that the reading club organisers had made attempts to address these issues or had plans to do so in the next school year. (See final section of this chapter).

Physical space and resources

In several of the schools, the lack of space and general pressure on school facilities impacted on the operation of the reading club – for example, regarding the opportunities to make the club sessions more relaxed and informal, or more lively with the children more able to move freely around and to take part in artistic activities such as designing book covers or scenes from plays and books.

The club organisers from two schools in particular highlighted this as a difficulty they had faced. They expressed the hope that in future years, if the reading club continued, it would be based elsewhere in the school – ideally in rooms with more comfortable furniture such as sofas and bean bags rather than simply tables and chairs.

The availability of suitable rooms was not only the difficulty encountered. The pressures of the daily school timetable and the high usage of facilities such as the school library were noted to a cause of some difficulty in terms of the time available for club sessions.

In one school, this meant that the club had to be after

school even though possibly a lunchtime session might have attracted more pupils (issues to do with travelling home safely after school, especially during the darker winter months were thought to be an influence on the numbers attending). In another, the club operated during class time and thus, had to be careful not to appear too recreational or informal in its approach.

Involving parents

Reading club organisers recognised the important influence of parents in terms of children being generally interested in reading, reading at home and during holiday periods.

Whilst four of the clubs were successful in getting some feedback from the parents of those children regularly attending the club, overall, the level of parental involvement was very limited and this was an area which had posed difficulties for all of the club organisers involved in the evaluation.

Ensuring that parents were given more extensive information about the reading club and what it might offer, at the start of the school year was thought to be one possible way of improving parental involvement. This was something several of the club organisers mentioned that they were considering for the following year.

'Wider' school effects

All the of the reading club organisers and other staff involved in running the clubs suggested that the positive effects on the children regularly attending the reading clubs would be evident across the school – especially in terms of children being more confident to read aloud, a generally heightened interest in reading, using the library and borrowing books to take home.

Unfortunately, requests made by reading club organisers to their teaching colleagues for information about the possible impact of the reading club on the performance in class of the children regularly attending the reading club brought forth only very limited responses. This includes the section of the term 2 club organiser questionnaire designed for collation of comments from other teachers/school staff.

However, from the small amount of information that was received, comments were made that:

- Some of the children now seemed more willing and confident to read aloud.
- In some pupils, a small improvement in self-esteem was apparent.
- Some children were showing an improved use of vocabulary in their imaginative/free writing.

Resources needed

In addition to some financial resources for purchasing new books, other reading materials and art equipment, all of the club organisers highlighted the cost of trips as something that would be impossible to cover from existing school budgets. Money for purchasing small prizes for activities such as book quizzes was also mentioned.

Adequate space and comfortable furnishings were also noted by all five club organisers.

A general view seemed to be that a minimum of £500 per

year is needed to run a reading club that offers a reasonable range of the 'extra' activities such as some trips out and a programme that includes some quizzes, competitions and artistic activities.

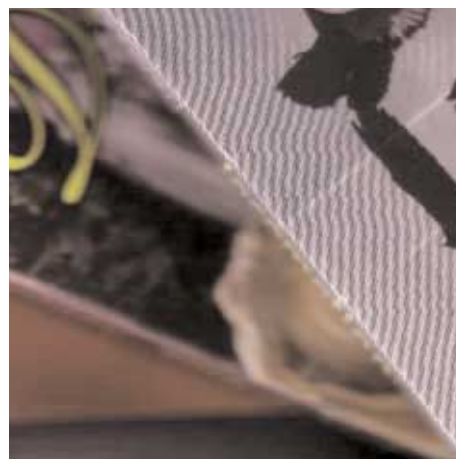
Plans for the future

In four of the schools, the reading club organisers indicated that the reading clubs they had set up would continue to operate in the school year 2004/05 for a second group of Year 7 pupils. In the fifth school, at the time of completing the evaluation information gathering, it was not clear whether the club would continue, largely due to problems of staffing and the difficulties finding a more relaxed and informal venue within which to run the club. In general, most of the club organisers suggested that their reading clubs would follow the same arrangements in terms of the timing of sessions and the activities on offer (although further advice and information on new things to try was noted to be welcome).

In several, the possibility of widening access to the club to include other school years was under consideration although space constraints were a potential barrier to this. (This consideration in particular concerned those who had attended the reading club as Year 7 pupils and who had expressed the wish to continue attending in Year 8. In one school, some ideas of these pupils helping to run the club and to introduce the new Year 7 pupils to it were being considered).

The following changes or plans for the future were identified:

- In one school, due to the retirement of the librarian, a new club organiser would be taking over – an English teacher already working at the school.
- In one school, the two student English teachers who had helped with the reading club during 2003/04 had been recruited to the permanent school staff and would take over the running of the club from autumn 2004. In addition, the school was hoping to recruit a new librarian who might also take on some role in running the reading club.
- In another, the reading club had been included on the English Department development plan, thus allowing the club access to some of the departmental budget. In addition, this club was exploring avenues for promoting reading in the community, including the possibility of some further external sources of funding.
- In the fourth school, following the successful involvement of two new Learning Support Assistants in the club sessions over the summer term 2003, it was noted that the club hoped to develop more group based practical activities and opportunities for individual children reading with adults in its second year.



6. Information for parents

Overview

In the second term of the evaluation, the reading club organisers were asked to circulate a questionnaire to parents of all children attending the reading club. This asked for parents' views on how the reading club might have affected their child's interest in reading or may have helped them with their reading skills. It also asked parents if there were any particular things they would like the club to offer in the future or suggestions for improvements.

On the advice of one reading club organiser, no attempts were made to collect information from parents of children using this particular club. In another, the children decided that they would prefer to design a questionnaire for their parents (this formed the basis of one of the reading club activities that term). In a third, in an attempt to increase the chance of receiving some feedback information from parents, the questionnaire was distributed to parents alongside a consent form for an end of term reading club outing.

Despite these attempts to make the information gathering as flexible as possible, the response rate was fairly low with a total of 40 parents (less than 20%). All parents returned the questionnaires to the reading club organisers (i.e. none were returned directly to NPI).

Changes in children's interest in reading

Most of the parents who responded felt that attendance at the reading club had increased their child's interest in reading, or had renewed an interest that had started to wane.

"the outing to meet the author.... helped with keeping the motivation to learn and to seek more reading material..."

For some parents, some quite distinct changes in their children's reading were evident. These included:

- Reading at bedtime on their own when they had never done so before.
- Reading a wider variety of materials.
- Reading more often.
- Reading books with a wider vocabulary.
- Reading with more understanding.
- Becoming interested in particular authors.

"she has taken books on holiday for the first time... she is now bragging about how many pages she has read each day..."

It is possibly significant that a number of these parents made comments to the effect that their child had always

loved books/reading and had read at home prior to the reading club starting – i.e. these children came from households where there was already an interest in reading, which might be one reason why this particular group of parents responded to the request for feedback about the reading club.

This parental interest and encouragement to read at home is an important factor to be borne in mind in considering the possible impact of attendance at the school reading club on the reading abilities of these children. However, we do not know about the levels of parental interest and encouragement to read at home amongst those parents who did not give feedback. As such, these findings also link into a more fundamental question about whether running school reading clubs on the basis of completely voluntary attendance may result in the clubs being disproportionately made up of pupils who are already interested and able to read, thus missing those who reading ability gives greatest cause for concern.

"she has been reading much more and always seems to have a book with her... she is actively looking to increase her book collection..."

Did attendance at the reading club help with their child's reading or with schoolwork and if so, how?

"she used to read short story books but now she reads chapter books. She has learnt a lot of new words"

"he is confident and keen to read aloud because he is more sure of his skills"

A number of the parents gave responses to the effect that their child had always been a good or competent reader or were unsure of the impact of the club. Others however, indicated that they felt the reading club had helped their child, in the following ways:

- Better understanding and use of language.
- Development of skills for using dictionaries, looking up references, using the library (including for completion of homework).
- Increased vocabulary including wider use of adjectives.
- More confidence.
- Widened knowledge of authors.
- Better understanding of structure of books.
- Improved concentration.

"it has increased interest in school generally because the reading club gives him an opportunity to meet with the pupils he enjoys being with... he now spends time reading about the topic areas being studied at school..."

Several parents commented that the reading club had also proved to be valuable source of help to their child -

for example, through the reading club organiser or staff offering ideas or advice on references for homework or school project work.

A number of parents highlighted that they now felt that their child read with greater pleasure, that they were reading for pleasure and not because they had to. This was felt to be an important influence on the children reading more regularly and feeling confident to try new materials. In the questionnaire designed by the children in one of the schools, the parents were asked to rate their child's progress in reading following attendance at the club:

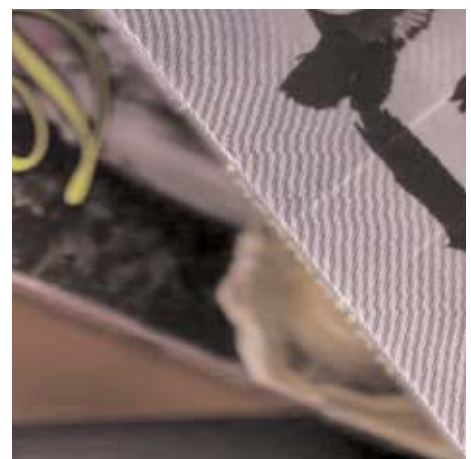
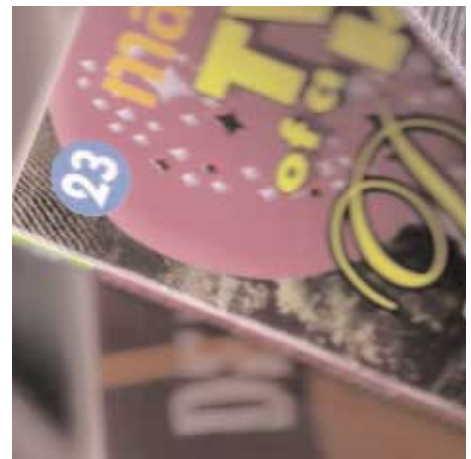
- 9 parents indicated lots of progress.
- 1 parent indicated a little progress.

Suggestions for improvements or activities in the future

There was a limited response to this question (questions 4 and 5 were left blank in about half of the returned questionnaires).

The small number of suggestions that were noted included the following:

- More comfortable chairs/venue.
- More trips out.
- Suggestions for parents re: reading materials, new books that are coming out.
- More author visits.
- Clubs to run twice a week.
- Clubs to offer homework help and support.
- More non-fiction and materials linked to school subject areas.
- More opportunities for the children to read aloud to adults.
- Clubs to be better advertised in the schools so that more children will attend.
- More information parents re: what the children are doing in the club, their progress, activities planned for the future.



7. Conclusions

Benefits to children

From the information gathered from the children attending the five reading clubs included in this evaluation, the staff involved in organising and running them and a small number of parents of the children, a generally positive viewpoint emerges about the clubs:

- That these are something the children have enjoyed and would like to continue to attend.
- That many of the children feel they have helped them to develop their reading skills and to a lesser extent, have been useful to them with regard to other school work.
- That they may encourage children to try different reading materials.
- That they may increase the confidence of some children to read aloud, to participate more actively in activities in other classes such as reading in English classes and to use a wider vocabulary in their essay and report writing.
- That they may encourage more reading at home and during holiday periods.
- That they may play a useful role in renewing interest in reading amongst some children where enjoyment of reading was waning.

Clearly these qualitative findings about the impact of reading clubs are welcome, especially in terms of the overall aim of developing these clubs in the first place – that of promoting reading for pleasure.

However, the ‘hard’ data to back this information, whilst generally positive, is limited – which is possibly not surprising given the nature of the undertaking. That is, club membership and attendance was voluntary and thus open to children of all abilities (with this indeed being part of the attraction to the children of the reading clubs) and as is the case with many such clubs, there was some mobility in the groups of children attending over the year.

The quantitative data that could be collected, namely reading age scores, generally showed an upward trend over the year – that is, a positive outcome. This finding, however, needs to be treated with caution since other factors other than club attendance may be at play.

Additionally, the pattern of reading age scores revealed amongst children attending the reading clubs largely echoed that for all Year 7 pupils – i.e. many improving, some staying the same and some showing lower reading age scores at the end of year point.

What makes a good reading club?

The information gathered from the children in the five schools gave a clear picture of what, in their opinion, makes a reading club work. Their views about what they

did not like, or thought could be improved, are equally useful for those considering setting up a reading club.

To make it attractive to the children, a reading club needs to offer a varied programme of activities relevant to reading alongside periods for choosing books and quiet reading – with a wide range of reading materials available for both club sessions and to borrow for reading at home.

Opportunities for one-to-one reading with an adult are also highly valued and need to be considered when planning the staff input into clubs. Likewise a comfortable, informal club environment appears to be an important dimension to club success or otherwise.

These findings are important in understanding the demands posed by reading clubs and in considering what resources they need if they are to function effectively.

Some of the issues raised clearly apply to all schools.

However, what emerges from this evaluation is some understanding of the particular pressures and demands that need to be addressed in those schools where school resources may be particularly limited or over-stretched and where the levels of need amongst the pupil population may vary considerably.

Challenges for future reading clubs

The information gathered through the evaluation identifies a number of challenges that face school staff interested in setting up a school reading club.

Some of these can be seen to apply to all forms of out-of-school activity and concern:

- Staffing and staff time for planning and organising the club.
- Having adequate space in which to run the club and resources (including financial) in order to provide a varied programme of activities - which is key to attracting and then sustaining the attendance of pupils.
- Finding a suitable time in the school schedule of teaching and other activities.
- Involving parents.

Others appear to be more specific to reading clubs:

- How to encourage less confident readers to attend, given the information emerging from the evaluation that the reading clubs may have attracted those children already interested, more confident and more able in reading.
- How to attract and engage boys in regular club attendance, on the basis that much greater numbers of girls became regular reading club attendees in comparison to their male peers, also that attempts to improve attendance by boys met with only limited success.

These suggest that reading clubs set up on the basis of voluntary attendance that is open to all in agreed school year groups, may need to consider how to target those children who might benefit from the activities reading clubs can offer. They must also look at the sorts of resources and activities they must offer in order to cater for different ability levels and which are likely to be interest to boys.

Appendix 1

Training day information sheet

NEW POLICY INSTITUTE (NPI) EVALUATION OF READING CLUBS – INFORMATION FOR SAMPLE SCHOOLS

Overall objectives

- To examine whether reading clubs membership has an effect on the reading age scores of pupils.
- To examine the effects on academic attainment more broadly of children attending the clubs.
- To consider the 'wider' benefits on attitudes towards books and reading.
- To identify any benefits to participating pupils such as increased self-esteem and confidence, behaviour in school overall.

Who will be involved?

The evaluation will run over two school years from the autumn term 2003.

In the first year of the evaluation, information will be gathered from Year 7 pupils plus a sample of parents, reading club organisers and other school staff as thought appropriate. It is hoped to involve all pupils who attend the reading club plus a sample of those who choose not to, to allow comparison between the two groups.

In the second year of the evaluation, this process will be repeated with the New Year 7 pupils, families and staff. In addition, some follow-up information will be gathered from the original group of pupils who will now be in Year 8 to assess for the continuation of any effects on reading progress/other benefits identified at the end of the first year of the evaluation.

Proposed methods

A key aim of the evaluation is to minimise the burden on participating schools and thus, as far as possible, the evaluation will build upon and collate information that you already collect and will use the reading tests and other progress measures that you routinely use within your school. However it is important that the evaluation gathers new and robust primary data. It is proposed to gather this by the following means:

- The collection of reading age scores at the beginning with reading test results across whole of Year 7 pupils).
- Twice yearly comprehensive semi-structured postal questionnaires to Year 7 pupils attending the club and reading club organisers (beginning and end of school year).
- A once yearly questionnaire for pupils not attending the reading club.
- End of term monitoring questionnaires to club organisers – and/or telephone interviews as preferred.
- Postal questionnaires to sample of parents.

In the second year of the evaluation, adjusted questionnaires will be distributed to year 8 pupils.

Your role in the evaluation

Staff from NPI and Education Extra working on the Reading Club Project will offer support throughout the evaluation and there will be a minimum of one visit per year to each participating club, plus regular telephone contact as and when needed.

The purpose of the visits in the first year will be to plan in detail how information is to be collected and to discuss any issues, concerns or special circumstances that may impact upon the evaluation.

In the second year, the purpose will be to share feedback from the first year of the evaluation and to explore any lessons learnt by club organisers that may result in changes to the way the club is run.

Help from reading club organizers in actually collecting the data is needed as follows:

- Inviting young people attending the club to participate in the evaluation – which will first require the distribution of a letter to parents (prepared by NPI) explaining the evaluation and seeking their consent. (We suggest this letter be sent to parents of all Year 7 pupils given the possibility of some pupil movement in and out of club membership).
- Identifying the group of Year 7 pupils who choose not to attend the reading club.
- Collation of reading test scores (twice a year) and sending these to NPI.
- Distribution and assistance to pupils in the completion of the questionnaires at the beginning and end of each year and returning these to the New Policy Institute.
- Completion of questionnaires and end of term monitoring forms – including liaison with your staff colleagues to gather information as required about the 'wider' benefits of reading club membership across the school – and returning these to NPI.
- Identifying the sample of parents and distributing the questionnaire to them (we propose to send SAEs so that parents can return their comments direct to NPI).

Appendix 2

Questionnaires for children

Tell us about your reading club (term one questionnaire)

We are interested in hearing your views about the reading club you have been going to at school this term.

Below are a few questions about the club. For most of the questions, all you need to do is circle your answer or write a short answer – though if you want to say more, there is space for you to add in your comments and ideas at the end.

You can leave blank any questions you do not want to answer. Also you do not have to put your name unless you want to. Thanks very much for helping!

Your name:

Your school:

1. How many times have you attended the reading club?

2. Why did you start coming to the reading club?

3. Do you go to any other clubs at school?

4. What sorts of things do you like to read?

5. Here are some sentences about the reading club. Please tick your answer.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I like coming to the reading club	[]	[]	[]	[]
The activities at the club are good	[]	[]	[]	[]
I find the books interesting	[]	[]	[]	[]
The club is a good place to meet my friends	[]	[]	[]	[]
I have made new friends through the club	[]	[]	[]	[]
I am now reading different things through the club	[]	[]	[]	[]
The club has helped my reading	[]	[]	[]	[]
The club has been a help with my school work	[]	[]	[]	[]

6. What is the best thing about the reading club?

7. What is the worst/most boring thing about the club?

8. What was the best activity offered by the club this term?

9. Is there anything you think would make the reading club better?

10. Are there any activities you would like the reading club to offer next term?

Please use the space below to tell us anything else about the club that we have forgotten to ask that you think is important.

Reading club term 2 questionnaire

We hope that you have enjoyed the second term of the reading club.

Below are a few questions about the club. Your views are very important so I hope you will be able to fill these in for me.

Thanks very much for helping!

Your name:

Your school:

1. How many times have you been to the reading club this term?

2. Did you go to the reading club last term?

3. What has been the best activity offered by the club this term?

4. Do you think that coming to the reading club has helped you with your reading or your school work? If yes, please say how

5. Do you enjoy the reading club? (If yes, can you tell me what it is you like about the club?)

6. Is there anything you think would make the reading club better?

7. Are there any activities you would like the reading club to offer next term?

Please use the space below to tell us anything else about the club that we have forgotten to ask that you think is important.

Thanks very much for your help.

Reading club end of year questionnaire

We hope that you have enjoyed the third term of the reading club.

Below are a few questions about the club. Your views are very important so I hope you will be able to fill these in for me.

Thanks very much for helping!

Your name:

Your school:

1. How many times have you been to the reading club this term?

2. Did you go to the reading club before this term?

Winter term YES/NO Spring term YES/NO

3. How many times (roughly) have you attended the reading club this year?

4. Over this last school year, do you think that coming to the reading club has helped you with your reading? If yes, please say how

5. Has attending the club helped you with your other school work? If yes, can you say how (e.g., which subjects)

6. What have you enjoyed at the reading club?

7. What has not been so good or interesting at the club?

8. Is there anything you think would make the reading club better?

9. If you could, would you attend the reading club next year? YES/NO

10. Is there anything else about the club that we have forgotten to ask that you think is important? Please add extra paper if you want.

Thanks very much for your help.

Appendix 3

Questionnaires for club organisers

Reading club evaluation – questionnaire for club organiser

End of term one (Christmas 2003)

Name:

School:

1. When did the reading club start?

2. At what times and where does it operate?

3. Which members of staff run or are involved in the club?

4. How many pupils on average attend the club? Mix of boys and girls?

5. How were they selected?

6. Are all the Year 7 pupils who wish to attend the club able to do so?

7. Are there any specific identified needs that your reading club is trying to address? (For example, any pupils with special needs or difficulties)

8. What activities has the club offered this term?

9. Have any of the reading club activities been linked to other strategies in the school to promote reading/literacy? If yes, please explain.

10. What sorts of materials have the children read in the club this term? Any popular titles?

11. Which activities have worked well?

12. Which activities have been less successful? Your thoughts on why?

13. Has the reading club had any impact on other areas of the school – for example, the children’s reading or behaviour in other classes; peer relationships; pupil/teacher relationships; school attendance?

14. Have you encountered any difficulties in setting up or running the reading club this term? If yes, please explain.

15. Is there any further help or practical support that you need from continuYou (previously Education Extra)?

16. Have you collected the Year 7 reading scores for the start of this school year?

17. Please briefly summarise your plans for next term.

18. If there are any other comments you would like to make about the reading club, or there are issues that you think the evaluation should consider, these would be very welcome.

Thank you for your time in completing this form.

Appendix 4

Checklist for club organisers

The following give an overview of the things it is helpful to check if you are thinking of setting up a reading club. These suggestions are based on the information gathered from the reading club organisers who took part in this evaluation.

(1) Who the club is for

Deciding the age range or school year to be invited to attend the reading club is important in terms of considering:

- The appropriate venue and facilities needed.
- The timing of the club session – after school may be less easy for younger children (need for accompanied travel etc). School timetabling and the timing of other out-of-school activities will obviously influence this.
- The sorts of activities to offer.
- The range of reading materials, including catering for different ability levels, children with special needs and different cultural needs.
- The numbers of staff you may need to help you, which will be influenced by how many young people you are hoping to attract to the club – also if you need specialist input (for example, if you plan to use computer resources).

(2) Planning the reading club sessions

Apart from how long, when and where the club will operate, a key issue to consider is how to make the sessions informal/fun and not like another lesson – something emphasised by the children who took part in the evaluation. This may include deciding:

- To offer or allow the children to bring refreshments.
- The level to which the children are involved in running the club or planning activities.
- If some form of registration for club sessions will be needed, how children's attendance will be recorded – or will the session operate more along the lines of a drop in?
- Furniture and layout of the room you plan to use – several of the clubs in the evaluation were planning to buy bean bags so that the children did not have to sit at tables and chairs if they did not want to.
- Having dedicated space for displaying information about the club or examples of some of the activities undertaken was also thought to help create a 'club atmosphere'.

(3) Marketing the club

You will need to think about what information to share with teaching colleagues and in school to raise awareness of the operation of the club, what it offers and who people can contact if they have questions. Other important people you may need to notify:

- Parents.
- The school librarian.

Some schools found it useful to have posters displayed around school giving details of the reading club times, to sustain general awareness of the club amongst pupils.

(4) Budget

Some form of dedicated budget is important for purchasing new books and materials. Money for providing small prizes and occasional trips is also very useful.

In this evaluation, a general view seemed to be that around £500 per year is needed to run a reading club for around 25-30 pupils that can offer a reasonable range of the 'extra' activities such as competitions, artistic activities and 1-2 trips out to local events (book signings or to buy new books).

It is sometimes possible to ask participating pupils to make some contribution towards trips out but there is the risk that this may put some pupils/their families off and as such, only minimal contributions are advisable.

There are also various schemes for discount buying of books and other reading materials.

(5) External advice and support

Getting in contact with other reading club organisers was something the reading club organisers highlighted as helpful in getting ideas for new activities and in looking at how to sustain and develop attendance. There are other sources of information and advice that club organisers may find useful – these are set out in the next section.

(6) Reviewing the club

Feedback from the children is valuable in terms of understanding what is working well, what is not and what could be planned in the future. The method of information gathering needs to be short and simple, and depending on the particular children you are working with, may need to be verbally based rather than written down.

Appendix 5

Resources for reading clubs

Over the last twelve months ContinYou has been surveying its members and has decided, in conjunction with The Reading Agency, to publish a pack of activities called *The Reading Kit*. Thanks to funds from Camelot, ContinYou was able to satisfy the needs of members for new resources to use in their club time. Here is an outline of the book and example page from it.

The Activity Kit

For young people's reading groups

Need new ideas for your young people's reading groups? Considering starting a reading group but don't know where to begin?

The Activity Kit will give you some of the best tried and tested reading activities for your work with young people.

The Activity Kit is a new handbook for libraries' and schools' work with young people's (11–14 years) reading groups.

The Activity Kit:

- is full of practical ideas and lively activities that are accessible to all levels of reader
- has reading activities that you can use straight away
- supports wider reading and promotes reading enjoyment
- draws on the very best experience of schools' and libraries' work with reading groups.

The Activity Kit will be a 48 page, A4 handbook with photocopiable reading activities and will be published in January 2005.

The Activity Kit has been developed by ContinYou and The Reading Agency (TRA). The Reading Agency's vision is to inspire a reading nation. The TRA works with public libraries and their partners to support and develop reading-based initiatives to deliver this vision. To see its full range of reading resources for young people go to:

www.readingagency.org.uk

Through its Reading Club programme, ContinYou has had first hand experience of the challenges that the clubs face as they enter their second or third year. It is crucial to the future expansion of the book club network that lasting partnerships are formed with other institutions and that the best materials and services available are provided.

ContinYou sees its collaboration with The Reading Agency as a first step and would welcome others in the future. Much of the work that lies ahead has been identified already by the ContinYou development team and will be focused around the development of resources available through the website at:

www.readingclub.org.uk.

Finally, ContinYou would like to thank Camelot for its generosity and support during the project, and personal thanks is especially due to Dot Renshaw and her contribution through the final year of the study.

Neal Hoskins

Book-it! project manager

1 Desert Island Books

What is it?
Based on the popular Radio 4 show Desert Island Discs, members get to choose books to take with them as a castaway on a desert island.

When do I use it?
This is a great activity for rounding up a book club term or year.

What do I need for it?
Paper, pens, reviews of books, tape recorder and microphone.

Photocopiable pages?
Not for this activity.

How long will it take?
Two to three sessions of half an hour to an hour.

Activity Plan

- 1 Get members to draw up a list of the five books that they'd like to take with them to their desert island.
- 2 Choose an interlocutor or interviewer – you might like to record some of the interviews.
- 3 Members talk through each of their top five books, saying why they like it and why it would help them on the island.
- 4 Members are asked to select one of their five books as their favourite.

Follow-on activities
Make displays of everyone's Desert Island Books and visualisations of the islands themselves. Interview key people in the school or an important local person about their top five books. Get a local radio station to interview some your book group.

This is a sample page from The Activity Kit for young people's reading groups, published by ContinYou/The Reading Agency, January 2005. For more information and to download an order form for the Activity Kit, go to www.readingagency.org.uk or <http://www.readingagency.org.uk> and click on the resource catalogue section.

