

JAMES CLEMENTS & MATHEW TOBIN

2ND EDITION

**UNDERSTANDING
& TEACHING
PRIMARY
ENGLISH**

S Sage





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To all of the wonderful primary teachers I've been lucky enough to talk to, work with, and learn from over the years. Educational theories are fascinating, but it takes great teachers to bring them to life in the classroom.

JC

Dedicated to Claire (for enduring), Nick Swarbrick (for his friendship and guidance) and Mary Sutcliffe (for always inspiring).

MT

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

James Clements is an experienced teacher, researcher, and education writer. He has worked with groups of schools, education organisations and governments in the UK and across the world. Prior to this, James was a primary teacher and school leader in central London. He is the author of *Teaching English by the Book* and *On the Write Track*, which won the 2023 UKLA Academic Book Award. James' principal areas of interest are children's development of language, the pedagogy surrounding language and reading comprehension, how schools create rich reading cultures, and authentic ways of supporting children's written communication.

Mathew Tobin was a primary teacher and school leader for many years before becoming a senior lecturer in Primary English and Children's Literature. He continues to work closely with school practitioners and pupils with a particular focus on raising standards in English. He is passionate about promoting the importance of Reading Teachers and the Reflecting Realities agenda and teaches these areas at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. Mathew is often invited to chair discussions and deliver keynotes around children's literature, and is involved in various book-judging panels. His own research interests include exploring the relationship between children's literature and landscapes and the pedagogical potential and benefits of a locality-based curriculum.

NEW TO THIS SECOND EDITION

This second edition has been fully updated throughout. Discussion across the book has been updated to reflect recent policy initiatives, including the 2023 update to the Department for Education's Reading Framework which has significance and relevance for many chapter topics. Other key recent influential publications that are cited throughout include the EEF's reading comprehension strategies (2021) and Ofsted's research review study on English (2022) and subject report into English teaching, *Telling the Story* (2024).

Elsewhere, Part 1: English in the Early Years (Chapters 1–4) has been updated to take into account the 2024 update to the EYFS statutory framework (Department for Education, 2024) and non-statutory Birth to 5 Matters guidance (Early Education, 2021). The political currency of oracy is highlighted in Chapter 5.

New guidance on teaching children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) has been added to the book – this is most relevant on the practice-focused chapters on oracy (Chapter 6) and vocabulary (Chapter 14).

Discussion of reading for pleasure in Chapter 10 has been significantly expanded, utilising recent research from the Open University (2025) on this topic, alongside work by the CLPE (2024).

Discussion of the practical aspects of teaching writing (Chapter 11) is enhanced with the introduction of a process-led sequence offering a conceptual overview for teachers as a broad model for skill acquisition.

Chapter 15 examines the policy intentions of the 2024 Labour government and the National Curriculum review underway at the time of writing.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between educational theory and classroom practice is symbiotic: both elements reinforce and enhance the other. As Orchard and Winch (2015) explain:

The best teaching practice combines elements of technical know-how with knowledge of research and theory, including a conceptual map of the educational field. Practical wisdom of this kind enables teachers to act in practically appropriate ways in a variety of complex settings.

While developing this ‘practical wisdom’ is likely to be an important goal for students, trainees, and new teachers taking their first steps into the classroom, making sense of educational theory and its relationship with classroom teaching is a journey that will last for an entire career.

The teaching of English in the primary school is a subject underpinned by a long history of theory and research. This is derived from a range of different academic traditions, from conceptual thinking around the literature used with children, to practical classroom-based research on the efficacy of different teaching techniques. It draws on thinking conducted over centuries, from philosophical ideas dating back hundreds of years to findings from recent cutting edge cognitive science.

As teachers, engaging with this rich body of knowledge allows us to construct our own philosophy of education, helping us to make professional judgements and reflect on our own practice. It allows us to make ‘best bets’ (Major and Higgins, 2019) about what might work in our own classrooms, thinking critically about new initiatives, weighing up likely successes and potential challenges. Very rarely can an idea or technique from research be taken and directly used in the classroom. Often, it will need to be mediated to fit with the demands of a specific school or cohort, a teacher’s beliefs and the educational ecosystem into which it will fit. As Wiliam (2017) explains:

While educational research can never tell teachers, leaders and policymakers what to do – the situations they face are too varied and complex – it can suggest which practices are likely to have the greatest benefits for their students, and which are likely to be less effective. However, even where such guidance is supported by the preponderance of evidence, it is important to note that it may not be applicable to all situations. As a result, teachers, leaders and policymakers need to be critical consumers of educational research.

Another challenge in building practical wisdom is that, in educational research, nothing is ever set in stone. Research findings are often contested and navigating these opposing claims requires a strong degree of research literacy to evaluate different findings critically. In addition, theories evolve and grow as further studies are conducted. As professionals, being able to weigh up the claims of different pieces of research and integrate them into our existing schema is an important skill to develop.

But engaging with theory and research isn't the only way of developing the practical wisdom so important for teaching. There is a rich vein of knowledge that comes with experience in the classroom, both learning from other practitioners and from self-reflection, considering what is happening in our own classroom and the impact it has on the students we teach.

USING THIS BOOK

As teachers first, and now as researchers, we have written the second edition of *Understanding and Teaching Primary English* to bring together these two aspects; demonstrating links between theory and practice across the breadth of primary English. While English is a holistic subject, with different areas supporting and complementing one another, for ease of navigation, we have divided the book into broad, interrelated sections:

- English in the Early Years
- Oracy and Spoken Language
- Reading
- Writing
- Vocabulary and Word Knowledge
- Curriculum, Planning and Assessment

Each section is structured into two parallel parts. The first part introduces the key theoretical ideas, sharing important research and signposting further reading. The second part looks at the implications for this theory in practice, offering illustrations and case studies of how different theoretical ideas might be enacted in the classroom. This approach is designed to help you move confidently between theory and practice, thinking critically about the validity and application of educational research, as well as considering the foundations on which classroom practice is built. Both parts include Stop and Reflect boxes, to support you to consider your own opinions and practice.

We hope *Understanding and Teaching Primary English, 2nd edition* will help you navigate your path through the myriad possibilities that exist in primary English teaching. Upon this journey towards practical wisdom, it is important to foster your own philosophy and understanding of education: we hope our own experiences and readings inform and guide you on your way.

James Clements and Mathew Tobin

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TEACHERS AS READERS – UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

CHAPTER AIMS

This chapter will:

- Explore the importance of teachers’ breadth and depth of knowledge of children’s literature
- Reflect upon the importance of choice and diversity of literature we encounter and share
- Consider a range of approaches in supporting teachers to become avid readers of children’s literature and bring the joy of reading into the classroom

INTRODUCTION

It can be easy to forget how influential we are as role models for the children under our care; if we are to support them in becoming lifelong readers then we must consider investing in improving both their skill in reading and their desire to read (Applegate and Applegate, 2004). The following chapter builds on what has been said in Chapter 9 but focuses further on the Reading Teacher as expert, facilitator and guide. Your knowledge, engagement and enthusiasm along with knowing each child as a reader are deeply influential with regards to a child’s own reading habits and engagements (Gambrell, 1996; Applegate and Applegate, 2004; Collins, 2014) and play a powerful part in shaping a classroom’s ethos.

If we acknowledge the correlation between a teacher's knowledge of children's literature and their confidence 'in the teaching of reading and writing' (Cox and Schaetzel, 2007; Cremin et al., 2008a) then it becomes concerning when evidence suggests that many training teachers and established practitioners are not avid readers of children's literature. This remains a concern, as many pre-service teachers continue to report limited exposure to contemporary texts and lack confidence in curating reading for pleasure experiences in diverse classrooms (Farrar and Simpson, 2024).

Furthermore, children's literature constantly finds itself 'embroiled' in pedagogical debates around its function as a tool for the teaching of reading and other curricular areas (Cremin et al., 2008a; Arizpe et al., 2013b).

Finally, 'overburdened' curricula, and a preoccupation with the teaching of the skill of reading rather than actively promoting 'a love of reading' (Merga, 2016) can dominate teachers' thinking and attitudes to the detriment of a delight in a knowledge of children's books. This is compounded by what we now know about the national picture, where children's enjoyment of reading continues to decline despite widespread curriculum efforts to prioritise reading (National Literacy Trust, 2025).

Studies have shown that motivated and inspired readers read more and, therefore, perform better in comprehension, knowledge, fluency, vocabulary and writing (Krashen, 2004) as well as 'stimulating... their social, emotional, and aesthetic development' (Chou et al., 2016). It seems sensible then to consider our own position in supporting them to become readers who have both the will and the skill to read.

The 2014 National Curriculum for English in England has a welcome emphasis on promoting reading for pleasure (explored in depth in Chapter 9); in consequence, teachers are more responsible than ever for fostering lifelong readers (Merga, 2017). Since then, guidance documents such as *The Reading Framework* (DfE, 2023) have continued to place a clear emphasis on the teacher's role in modelling reading behaviours, broadening knowledge of children's literature, and creating a reading-rich classroom culture.

Therefore, it seems to go against the grain that there should be such a focus on learning to read and less upon *why* we read. The business of guiding children to become lifelong readers means teachers making the distinction between the teaching of reading and both enabling and inspiring children to read for their own pleasure (Atkinson, 2017). Central to that enablement is a teacher's breadth and depth of knowledge with regards to children's literature in all its forms (Collins, 2014). This chapter will explore how we can support ourselves as training and practising teachers to fall in love with reading.

TEACHERS AS READERS – THEORY

Central to reading success is motivation, defined as 'the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading' (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000; Clark and De Zoysa, 2011). Motivation theory makes a clear distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and a brief understanding of both will not

only help us reflect on our approaches but also on our attitudes towards fostering a positive reading culture (Applegate and Applegate, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2007). The 2023 *Reading Framework* reaffirms this by placing strong emphasis on the teacher's role in nurturing motivation, positioning intrinsic engagement with books as central to building successful readers (DfE, 2023).

Intrinsic motivation is 'an internal desire to complete a task' (Breadmore et al., 2019) because the reader, in this case, associates reading with a positive experience and sense of enjoyment and confidence on a personal level. Books are associated with a sense of curiosity, enjoyment and are valued; 'intrinsic readers' (Becker and McElvany, 2010) take pleasure in the 'emotional and cognitive' engagement (Wang and Guthrie, 2004) and challenge that reading can bring, and 'seek out' reading-related activities such as book sharing (Sainsbury and Schagen, 2004). Intrinsic readers have a 'positive self-concept' of themselves as readers (Clarkson and Sainsbury, 2008).

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation relates to completing a task for some future reward. This could be working towards improving grades; gaining attention and credit from peers/parents/teachers; reading as a source of recognition; compliance as a way of avoiding punishment or as a source of competition (Wang and Guthrie, 2004). 'Extrinsic readers' (Becker and McElvany, 2010) tend to have a 'negative self-concept' of themselves as readers and will 'avoid' reading (Clarkson and Sainsbury, 2008), especially after the reward has been gained. They may also 'see reading as a school job' and something not worth investing in outside of the classroom walls (Miller, 2012). When the teaching of reading is overly focused on technical skill and fluency, without equal attention paid to the emotional and motivational dimensions of reading, these attitudes can be reinforced – something that current classroom guidance urges us to be mindful of (EEF, 2021). This is precisely why the Open University's Reading for Pleasure (2025) research foregrounds the importance of developing reading communities that honour children's agency, curiosity and pleasure – placing equal weight on the social and affective aspects of reading as on the instructional.

STOP AND REFLECT 10.1

Think of the children in your current class or a class you have worked with in the past.

- How many children would fall into the category of intrinsically motivated readers?
- How many would be extrinsically motivated readers?
- Are there occasions where you think that giving children an extrinsic motivation to read might not support them to see the intrinsic pleasure in reading?
- What might be the signs that a child is either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated within a particular context?
- Can you think of any actions you could take to support children's intrinsic motivation?

Although the main body of research above is focused on understanding children as readers, there is much here that we can learn about teachers as readers too. It stands to reason that our own motivation and attitudes also need acknowledging and reflecting upon: how do we see ourselves as readers and are these perceptions going to encourage children to be intrinsic readers too? If we, as teachers, are not intrinsically motivated to read and do not enjoy reading, or see ourselves as readers, then such beliefs may be mirrored in our classrooms (Strommen and Mates, 2004). Although the main body of research above is focused on understanding children as readers, there is much here that we can learn about teachers as readers too. It stands to reason that our own motivation and attitudes also need acknowledging and reflecting upon: how do we see ourselves as readers and are these perceptions going to encourage children to be intrinsic readers too? If we, as teachers, are not intrinsically motivated to read and do not enjoy reading, or see ourselves as readers, then such beliefs may be mirrored in our classrooms (Strommen and Mates, 2004). As the Reading for Pleasure research has shown, a teacher's self-concept as a reader – and the breadth of their personal reading repertoire – can profoundly shape the kinds of reading opportunities they create for their pupils (Cremin et al., 2024). When this identity is underdeveloped or shaped by limited or canonical texts, classroom reading may become limited in scope, driven by outcomes, or overly focused on discrete skills.

Reading Teachers

If, as evidence suggests, children are motivated to read through the desire to 'explore', 'observe' and 'learn', then teachers should embrace these factors too when considering their role as Reading Teachers of children's literature (Gambrell, 1996; Wray et al., 1999; Applegate and Applegate, 2004; Cox and Schaetzel, 2007; Patrick et al., 2007; Cremin et al., 2009). 'Vigorous theoretical support and research' (Brooks, 2007) shows a correlation between teachers who valued and practised reading for pleasure and an increase in 'best practice' with regards to the effective teaching of reading and writing (Dreher, 2003; McKool and Gespass, 2009).

What value is there then in children's literature and why should training teachers and those in the field devote a large portion of their time to it? The answer to this links closely to the earlier comment on the need for educators to see children's literature as something more than a pedagogical tool, in which a text is mined for meaning or lexical form or used as a time filler (Cremin, 2007 in Goouch and Lambirth, 2011; Cox and Schaetzel, 2007; Arizpe et al., 2013b). Stories for children are much more than this. For example, they:

- invite readers to grow and develop emotionally and socially by presenting them with the opportunity to self-reflect and self-construct (Benton and Fox, 1985; Garces-Bascal et al., 2018)
- allow readers to step into the shoes of others and experience the world through different eyes, developing a strong sense of empathy and understanding of different cultures

- can offer a form of escape, a way of relieving stress, of improving our general knowledge and knowledge of ourselves (Dugdale and Clark, 2008)
- invite a 'greater insight into human nature and decision-making' and meaning-making (Dugdale and Clark, 2008 citing Bruner, 1996)
- invite readers to become part of a community in which they share their thoughts, opinions and feelings about the stories together (Dreher, 2003; Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), 2015)

In the comprehensive 'Teachers as Readers: Building communities of readers' project run by the UKLA and involving 1,200 primary teachers, it was found that teachers relied on a limited range of children's literature. Choices were dependent on what they had encountered as children themselves or on best-selling children's authors, often reinforcing a narrow repertoire shaped by a dominant popular canon (Cremin et al., 2008a; Cremin et al., 2009; Cremin et al., 2024). Few could cite more than a handful of picture-book authors/illustrators, poets (Cremin et al., 2008a; Cremin et al., 2009) or diverse writers and illustrators.

This becomes problematic when we consider the need for teachers to support readers in finding texts that children might like and how reading for pleasure flourishes in environments in which teachers' own intrinsically motivated reading identity is central to bringing young readers and stories together (McCarthy and Moje, 2002; Dreher, 2003; Goodwin, 2017; Merga, 2017). An 'extensive knowledge of children's literature' is imperative if we are to motivate every child in becoming and continuing to be a reader who reads for their own enjoyment throughout their primary years and beyond (Cremin et al., 2008a).

Reading Teachers, 'readers who teach and teachers who read' (Commeyras et al., 2003), are ideally placed to create a reading culture in their classroom that will foster intrinsic motivation for reading. The research by Clark and Foster (2005), Lockwood (2008), Cremin et al. (2008b) and Collins (2014) proposes that a broad knowledge of reading materials with regards to range, genre, voices, accessibility, content and form (e.g. websites, comics and e-readers) is key – with the proviso that the Reading Teacher also pays attention to the financial remit that they are bound by. The OU Reading for Pleasure framework continues to advocate for this wider repertoire, highlighting the importance of socially engaged, reciprocal reading practices that go beyond instructional talk and create space for genuine book-based conversations (see <https://ourfp.org>).

The impetus behind the 'literate lives' of teachers means that they are constantly engaging with and learning from what stories have to offer. They ask questions of the text and encourage children to do the same (Kaufman, 2002). By sharing and reflecting openly on their own reading experiences, tastes and interests, Reading Teachers are seen and valued as readers by the children in their care. This is characterised by teachers and children engaging in 'meaningful language experiences', both formal and informal, around texts and showing an interest in one another's reading life (Clark and Foster, 2005; Arizpe et al., 2013b). These teachers also use their knowledge to guide children with their reading choices, and prioritise time for independent reading and booktalk (Brooks, 2007; Miller, 2012; Collins, 2014).

Effective Reading Teachers know their children's reading interests, preferences and habits, alongside their ability, in order to support and motivate them to continue finding pleasure in reading (Clark and Foster, 2005; Brooks, 2007; Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008; Lockwood, 2008; Cremin et al., 2008b). By being informed of the different reading backgrounds and reading cultures in a child's home, they accommodate and support where appropriate and possible: this allows the individual and the class to celebrate these differences by ensuring they have enough multicultural books available that authentically present 'mirrors and windows' (Bishop, 1990) into children's lives. Classroom-based studies further reveal how this kind of knowledge-building – particularly through informal booktalk and dialogic reading conversations – can strengthen inclusion, deepen trust, and support teachers in selecting texts that meaningfully reflect children's lived experiences (Robb, 2025).

STOP AND REFLECT 10.2

Consider how you would answer the questions below. How well do you match the characteristics of a 'Reading Teacher' according to the research? Where do your strengths lie? Where might you have room to improve?

- How deep is your knowledge of children's literature, including:
 - Contemporary children's literature?
 - Poetry for children?
 - Picture books?
 - Literature reflecting a diverse range of characters and experiences?
 - Literature by authors from a diverse range of backgrounds?
- To what extent do you seek to find out about the reading lives of the children you teach?
- How do you share your own reading experiences and reading life with the children in your class?
- What strategies do you use to guide children's reading choices, introducing them to texts that they might not otherwise encounter?

The Aesthetic Reading Teacher

Applegate and Applegate (2004) explain how it is those teachers who value and promote reading from an aesthetic perspective (who become 'absorbed in the text and live through the experience of others' (Rosenblatt, 1978)) who are most influential in the classroom since they create 'a sense of excitement' around the text and are passionate about how reading 'enhances and enriches their lives' (Gambrell, 1996 cited in Applegate and Applegate, 2004). The reading attitudes and behaviours that teachers embrace, therefore, affect their classroom practice (Chou et al., 2016).

Applegate and Applegate (2004) conjecture that if teachers are not ‘engaged readers’ then they cannot hope to motivate the children in their class to read. This has been validated by both Morrison et al. (1999) in a study involving 1,900 elementary teachers and with Cremin et al. (2008a) in a study involving 1,200 primary teachers. Both pieces of research reinforce the concept that the more engaged teachers were in the aesthetic reading of children’s literature, the greater the chances of using and promoting reading circles and pupil engagement and in going on to become ‘effective literacy teachers’ (Collins, 2014).

Developing Our Knowledge of Children’s Literature

The research conducted by Cremin et al (2008b) shows that teachers rely on a limited canon of authors, poets and illustrators, and this means that their ability to make ‘informed recommendations’ for all readerly identities is equally limited. If our reading world is narrow, then it is likely that the stories we put into the hands of children under our care are limited too. Enduring familiarity with a small number of ‘childhood favourites’ or popular authors can unintentionally restrict the range of voices and perspectives offered to pupils (Cremin et al., 2024). This is especially important to acknowledge and reflect on if we consider that children’s literature does much to shape children’s views of the world around them (Arizpe et al., 2013b).

If we are to encourage teachers to read more children’s literature, then we can learn much from the research around what motivates young readers too. Clark and Phythian-Sence (2008) highlight the importance of ‘choice, interest and self-awareness’ in examining reading behaviours and the centrality of engagement as a form of motivation; this is important to remember when we consider the potentiality of social networks for Reading Teachers later in the chapter. The OU Reading for Pleasure framework similarly foregrounds these conditions – choice, agency, and social interaction – as being just as relevant for adults as for children, particularly in shaping sustainable reading habits (see <https://ourfp.org>).

Making an ‘informed and meaningful’ choice as to which children’s book you want to read next brings its own pleasure (Schraw et al., 1998; Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008). You might pick up a book based on a number of factors: its cover, the familiarity of the author or the fact that it was recommended by someone. The fact that the choice is yours is what is empowering and is what might motivate you to pick up another book. ‘Ownership and self-determination’ are key.

Choice then remains central to the success of reading for pleasure both in the child reader and the Reading Teacher; choice with regards to finding the right text for the right child but also choice with regards to your choosing to read rather than occupying yourself with something else. Given the competing demands of digital life, teaching workloads, and professional expectations, such reading is rarely incidental – it requires conscious investment (Robb, 2025). In a time in which social media is prevalent across a range of platforms, choosing to make time to read children’s literature is perhaps a greater challenge for training and working teachers than ever before, and yet such motivation for both teacher and child is central to future reading success (Ross, 2000).

Children's Literature For All

Choice, then, is an intrinsically motivating factor for us as adults. But, as teachers, we have a duty to consider the choices we offer the children in our classrooms too. Only then, in making reading meaningful and 'relevant', are we able to provide every child with the opportunity to become a lifelong reader (Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Substantial research shows children being motivated to read if they have access to literature which reflects their own realities, be they related to gender, race, need or culture (Bishop, 1990; Colby and Lyon, 2004). Yet we know from research that a significant proportion of teachers continue to rely on a narrow and often monocultural canon – limiting children's opportunities to see themselves authentically represented in literature (Cremin et al., 2023; Clark, Picton and Cole, 2025).

Hope's definition of diversity is a useful one to work from here:

Diversity is an umbrella term that recognises a common need that underpins the exploration and representation of people from a wealth of backgrounds with varied experiences and lifestyles that construct our concept of society at large.

(Hope, 2017b)

Celebrating both similarities and differences is vital; it helps us to relate and empathise with others and affirms our place and our culture in the world while respecting and acknowledging those of others (Rosenblatt, 1978; Colby and Lyon, 2004; Harper and Brand, 2010; CLPE, 2019). Part of our role as Reading Teachers is to support children to become more tolerant and accepting towards differences in the world around them while constantly reflecting upon our own 'beliefs, attitudes and practices relating to diversity' in the reading classroom (Colby and Lyon, 2004). Teachers in contemporary classrooms are often navigating these complexities with care – seeking to pair inclusive intentions with texts that reflect their pupils' lived experiences, without reinforcing tokenism or stereotypes (Robb, 2025); with growing recognition that representation must prioritise 'quality' as well as 'quantity' (CLPE, 2024).

Our reading choices, then, need to consider what realities they reflect. As Hope (2017a) continues:

When we discuss literature for children and adults we have to be aware of a historical precedent that has tended to reflect only a very narrow demographic in terms of class, race, sexuality and physicality.

With this in mind, we are required to be more critical of the literature we choose to read and share with children. In reading, we need to also be critical of our own entrenched cultural and social beliefs and privileges since we can carry and pass these on to the children in our classrooms too (Colby and Lyon, 2004).

In coining the term, 'Mirrors, windows and sliding glass Ddoors', Bishop (1990) suggests that literature has the potential to 'transform human experience': the mirror reflects our lived experiences back at us; the window presents us with views into other lives which might be

'familiar or strange', 'real or imagined' and the sliding glass doors invite us to 'become part of whatever world has been created or recreated' (Bishop, 1990). Bishop goes on to state that since 'mirrors' have a way of affirming our place within the world, then for some children to never see themselves in the literary world would not only be harmful but also present those who are constantly found in literature with 'an exaggerated sense of self worth'.

This should prompt us to diversify our reading and carefully assess the literature that we have in our classroom and whether it challenges or entrenches harmful, stereotypical concepts (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Colby and Lyon, 2004; Larson and Marsh, 2005; Arizpe et al., 2013b). Not only does this help the children we teach 'understand the principles of tolerance, inclusiveness, diversity and respect for all' but also challenges our own concepts in these areas and goes a long way to help us 'unlearn' narrow world-views (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Pirofski, 2001; Campbell et al., 2016).

Reading Teachers, Role Models and Relationships

Unless a school is staffed by people who enjoy books and enjoy talking to children about what they read then it is unlikely that they will be very successful in helping children to become readers.

(Chambers, 1973)

The literature that we place into the hands of children has the potential to invite a sense of joy and pleasure but also has the potential to challenge, affirm, comfort and invite them to see their place in the world: the same goes for Reading Teachers. Our own interactions with children's literature, and with the children who encounter it, should be rooted in curiosity, care and purpose – motivating and engaging all readers from all backgrounds. But these challenges and opportunities can only occur if a teacher is equally passionate about reading and places value in widening their knowledge of children's literature and considers its accessibility in the classroom.

Reading is 'fundamentally a social phenomenon' (CLPE, 2015; see also Chambers, 2011) and so finding others who want to share these reading experiences with you and being part of a community is important. Social media has made it easier than ever to be a part of a Reading Teacher community who can not only recommend great literature but also affirm your own beliefs about the power and importance of children's literature (Kwek et al., 2007; Collins, 2014). The Open University Reading for Pleasure network (see <https://ourfp.org>) exemplifies this, with thousands of teachers engaging in reciprocal booktalk, shared reading practices and reflective dialogue to shape their classroom culture.

What is important is to reflect upon your own reading behaviour, attitudes and beliefs and whether they are best set to give children the opportunity to succeed in reading themselves and go on to be aesthetic, intrinsically motivated readers or not. Taking the time to care about and show an interest in each readerly identity in your classroom is central to building up that reading community. This relational aspect of reading – the acknowledgement of children as individuals with varied textual histories, interests and identities – is deeply entwined with how we see ourselves as readers (Cremin et al., 2024; Robb, 2025).

Who you are as a reader and who you are as a teacher of reading are not mutually exclusive identities; they are one and the same and pupils will be quick to see this (Whatley, 2011). With this in mind, it is important to consider what kind of model you think is the best one to help children succeed and what behaviours you both show and cater for in the classroom.

The teaching of reading throughout the Early Years and primary phase will always be a contentious site with regards to that balance between the skill to read and the will. While timetabling and precedence will largely be in the hands of school leaders and governmental initiatives/policies and although teachers' time is as constricted and busy as it has ever been, our own beliefs as Reading Teachers 'truly matter' (Applegate and Applegate, 2004). We have a profound effect on the literate lives of children, and it is through our actions in the classroom that this effect is enabled. The next section of this chapter will consider the ideas explored above in the context of practice.

TEACHERS AS READERS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE – PRACTICE

There are four core aspects to a pedagogy of reading for pleasure for a Reading Teacher, or an 'Enabling Adult' as Chambers (2011) sees them, that are key: talk around books, independent reading time, reading aloud and recommendations (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008; Safford, 2014), all of which become more challenging to promote if the teacher is not a reader of children's literature.

Teachers who are both knowledgeable and critically reflective of the literature they read will be better placed to foster an aesthetic reading environment. How 'visible' this environment is, how it is presented and what it provides readers, is 'key to the engagement' of your class (Safford, 2014; CLPE, 2015) and Chambers (2011) provides an excellent model from which to build a sense of understanding as to what this looks like.

These three elements hold equal importance and rely upon that knowledgeable, active Reading Teacher as the enabler (Safford, 2014). In Chambers' model (see Figure 10.1), we can also see that the dual-headed arrows from the hub show that practice and experience inform the professional and vice versa. Each is part of an ongoing cycle that the Reading Teacher uses to improve and inform future choices that they make for themselves and for the children in their class. This iterative relationship between professional learning and pedagogical decision-making is central to effective reading for pleasure practice. It relies upon us not only increasing our knowledge of children's literature and refreshing the environment but also reconsidering and revisiting the young readers in our class and adapting to their changing interests too (Safford, 2014).

When children see us in this role as informed, aesthetic Reading Teachers who see reading as something sociable, entertaining, pleasurable, rewarding and challenging then we have a greater chance of them emulating the same attitudes and beliefs in the classroom (Strommen and Mates, 2004; O'Sullivan and McGonigle, 2010; Arizpe et al., 2013a).

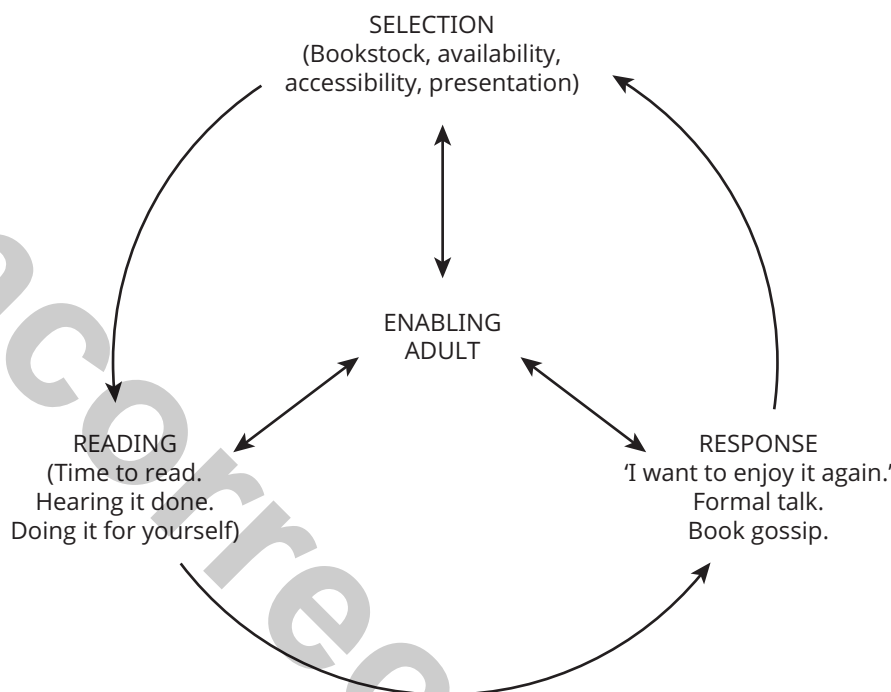


Figure 10.1 Chambers' (2011) Reading Circle

Much of this journey starts with your own reflections as to what makes you the Reading Teacher that you are today. It is important to reflect upon what informs your own reading choices and the routes you took into reading.

Table 10.1 offers some guidance for exploring these aspects of your readerly identity and proposes some next steps.

Finding the time to read independently for pleasure has always been a problem for teachers. Being part of a community helps. Both schools and initial teacher training programmes could build in some time to present teachers with this space. Sometimes, time is all that is needed to kick-start that passion and desire, and remind readers that reading children's literature can be pleasurable for its own sake (Merga and Ledger, 2018). In terms of visualising this as something manageable, Lesesne's (2017) model, adapted from Anderson et al. (1988), does make the goal seem more realistic:

Reading 15 minutes each day = 105 minutes a week

105 minutes a week = 5,460 minutes read a year

This results in 20 books per year read in 15 minutes a day.

'Being a reader' not only means 'reading for yourself' but also making the time to do so (Chambers, 2011). Although Chambers refers here to the context of a teacher providing these moments for their pupils, we must also consider it for ourselves, for our own time and pleasure, as well as for our class.

Table 10.1 Ways of exploring readerly identity

'Know yourself as a reader' by writing your own reading autobiography (Chambers, 2011; Lesesne, 2017)	One of the initial activities that you can do is to create a reading timeline or autobiography that explores your reading journey from your earliest memories to now (Cliff Hodges, 2010). Here, you could reflect upon the books that made you the reader you are today as well as the barriers which impaired your reading journey or halted it completely. What books instilled in you a joy of reading? What experiences or texts halted your reading for pleasure? What stops you reading books for pleasure now? In doing so, we are better equipped to acknowledge biases and pitfalls in our own reading journeys. Sharing these with the class will allow children to see you as not someone who just 'talks about reading' but also as someone who has a 'reading life' (Commeyras et al., 2003; Jennett, 2017)
Become a Reading advocate (Jennett, 2017)	Take responsibility for exploring new children's book releases and share these with your colleagues, class and children's parents (Chambers, 2011, suggests a space for recommending books in staff meetings). Dreher (2003) suggests having a 'box of good books' or a 'book exchange' available for staff with each teacher selecting three to read and sharing reviews throughout the term Many publishers offer free downloadable catalogues, and shortlisting titles can spark staff interest Follow annual book awards and trusted voices in children's literature to broaden your repertoire (Ross, 2000; Cremin et al., 2024). The Reading Agency and the Open University's Teachers' Reading Challenge also offers an accessible way to build community knowledge and enthusiasm
Maintain a Reading journal	Value the text as a reader and not only as a teacher (Collins, 2014). Being able to delve through your own 'reading history' is a pleasure in itself (Chambers, 2011). Use a reading journal – digital or handwritten – to chart your responses to texts as they unfold. You might include short quotes, themes that resonate, character insights or personal reactions. Share these responses with the children in your class but the process should never become burdensome (Commeyras et al., 2003; Chambers, 2011; Merga, 2016). The Open University's Reading for Pleasure resources also suggest tools like 'Reading Rivers' and reflection prompts to help you understand and expand your literary repertoire (Cremin et al., 2024). Journaling helps us surface gaps, challenge habits, and celebrate how we are growing as Reading Teachers
Advocacy and access for reflecting all realities (Arts Council England, 2003)	Check the books available in your classroom and school library. Do they reflect the children in front of you – and offer them insights into lives beyond their own? All teachers share a responsibility to improve their knowledge of diverse children's literature, and the benefits are shared by every reader. This is not simply about inclusion – it is about representation, affirmation, and accuracy (Jennett, 2017; CLPE, 2019; Ramdarshan-Bold, 2019) The CLPE's annual #RelectingRealities report provides clear guidance on good practice, highlights authentic publishers, and explores meaningful representation (CLPE, 2024). For minimal cost, become a member of Letterbox Library whose online catalogue and

	database of recommendations have been promoting 'inclusive and representative quality children's literature', 'specialising in culturally diverse and non-gender-stereotyped books since 1983' (Hope, 2017a; CLPE, 2019)
Reading is a shared, social experience so look out for supportive communities	Social media may have its pitfalls but the reading community in some spaces is a welcome and welcoming one. Look for blossoming reading communities with plenty of teachers, librarians, parents, authors and illustrators. You could use platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Bluesky, Instagram, TikTok and Goodreads to become part of this community More than ever, authors and illustrators are more contactable via social media platforms and gracious with their time. Following them can create important connections for you and the class. Beyond online spaces, joining a local OU/UKLA Teachers' Reading Group can create sustained opportunities for dialogue, shared practice and readerly joy. These groups operate across the UK and centre around the belief that Reading Teachers learn best in community with one another (Cremin et al., 2024)
Reading aloud for pleasure (Safford, 2014)	The latest National Curriculum advocates for the reading aloud of whole texts (DfE, 2013) and this again offers you the chance to introduce children to new and exciting writers, illustrators and poets while helping children associate you with being a reader. Although established authors have their place on the class bookshelf, new voices could encourage children to venture into new reading territories especially when these texts are read 'with expression and emotional connection' (Merga, 2016). This is even more important with older primary children since research has shown that fewer than 50% of parents read aloud to their child when they get to Year 6 (Lockwood, 2008)

The Reading Teacher Environment

In defining his environment and what 'determines' its potency and potentiality, Chambers (2011) separates the physical classroom surroundings (setting) from the personable and private (set) and considers the former more influential than the latter. While the setting might seem obvious (displays, seating, book availability), the set is vaguer but refers to, in part, our 'mental and emotional attitudes', our relationship with other readers in the class and accumulation of past experiences and knowledge – even our current mood (Ross, 2000). Both elements contribute to the classroom reading culture, but it is often the teacher's readerly stance – visible, open, and socially positioned – that anchors the environment in daily practice (Cremin et al., 2024).

Sharing your own latest acquisitions and recommendations will always appeal to the class while showing them that you are a part of their reading world (Jennett, 2017). Teachers may share the front cover, blurb, why they decided to purchase it and read an extract to hook potential readers in (Miller, 2012). As Cremin et al. (2024) reminds us, the reading environment is not just physical – it is affective and social, shaped by how texts are valued, shared, and celebrated throughout the classroom day.

CASE STUDY 10.1

How we present literature to the class is important; any attractive bookshop display is testament to the skill of presenting books in an enticing manner. One school decided to follow the advice of Chambers (2011) in creating an exciting and engaging reading environment, including the following:

- Some teachers presented a review card next to the book on display while others kept their own personal texts in a teacher box next to their table for children to sign in and check out just like a library
- Other teachers rotated their displays to keep the children's interest and engagement with the reading corner space. Some chose to have weekly, fortnightly or termly authors, illustrators, publishers and award winners or thematic shelves and spaces to offer readers new reading experiences or build on their interests. As Lockwood (2008) notes, it is important that you know what is available to the children on your bookshelves so that you can support them in making 'appropriate reading choices'
- As Reading Teachers, staff were sure to find the time to join children in browsing (Allyn, 2012). Exploring the cover, blurb and initial pages modelled to the children how to go about choosing a book. Staff were sure to emphasise how much their reading choice was affected by their mood and personal taste (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008), reminding children it is fine to have different opinions and tastes from friends and classmates (and even teachers!)

A Reading Teacher has the knowledge of texts to foster a rich conversation with others around what informs their reading choices (Ross, 2000). Listen to what children are saying as they make their own choices; guide those who may ask or need it, but also learn to observe and listen while they browse on their own or with a friend, so that you can better support them in their future browsing sessions.

Show the children that you are an equal in this community. Inviting children to recommend books to you as well as their peers is also valuable, as are those shared reading experiences in which children may choose to read together or you might choose to read alongside another child or a small group for pleasure alone. These moments will not just create an inviting, relaxed environment but also encourage children to read for longer through their own choice (Cremin et al., 2009; Safford, 2014; Chou et al., 2016).

STOP AND REFLECT 10.3

Think about your current classroom or a classroom setting you know well. Considering the ideas presented above:

- What works well for modelling, promoting and sharing books and texts?
- Are there any areas where you could develop your practice?
- What potential barriers are there to becoming a Reading Teacher? How might these be overcome?

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how Reading Teachers not only enable children to experience the joys and pleasures of reading but how they can discover and enjoy those pleasures for themselves (Allyn, 2012). Being a Reading Teacher matters and having the qualities, knowledge and skills mentioned in this chapter should not be additional but something that is worth advocating for (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Safford, 2014).

Much success for children as readers comes down to how much they read and what they read: that intrinsic motivation coupled with aesthetic reading experiences. The same can be said for the hallmarks of a Reading Teacher too (Chambers, 2011). Sharing our own 'experience, preferences and enthusiasms' (CLPE, 2015) as both a reading model and reading equal, and being part of the reading community in the classroom will go a long way in convincing children of investing in becoming a lifelong reader.

Reading connects and dissolves boundaries (Commeyras et al., 2003). It invites us to grow by becoming part of a greater whole; it can provide us with mirrors and windows into our lives and those of others, traversing across seas and oceans to other lands and realms yet still connecting us all through the singular commonality of what it is to be human.

Reading can do more than just affirm our place in the world, it can challenge us all to be critical and reflective of the societies in which we live and help us see how we can all make a change for the better together. Literature, as Bruner (1996) reflects, renders the world 'less fixed' and 'more susceptible to recreation' (cited in Chambers, 2011). It shows us that things can change, that knowledge which was once beyond our grasp is there for the taking and it invites us to imagine, to escape, to be free. If you value and understand this then that passion and knowledge will convince the most reluctant reader to join you on their own reading journey without scheme or scaffold.

IN SUMMARY

- Teachers and other adults who work in schools can be influential role models for children, supporting them to see that reading is for them and inducting them into the business of being a reader. Choosing to become a Reading Teacher – a teacher who reads and a reader who teaches – can have a resonance far beyond simply teaching children to read.
- Reading Teachers consciously develop their own knowledge of children's literature, in addition to sharing their own reading lives with children and showing a genuine interest in the reading lives of the children in their class.
- Research suggests that children are motivated to read if they have access to literature which reflects their own realities, including gender, race, need and culture. It is vital that every effort is made to ensure children have the opportunity to see themselves and their own lives, as well as the lives of others different from them, reflected in the books they encounter at school.

FURTHER READING

- Teresa Cremin and colleagues' *Building Communities of Engaged Readers* is the leading UK-based body of Teachers as Readers research. From an overview of the approach to a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of steps that schools and teachers can take to improve and build upon their Reading for Pleasure pedagogy – it is indispensable.
- The CLPE's *Reflecting Realities* Report (2024) offers a powerful and necessary annual audit of ethnic representation in UK children's literature: it is freely available online, just type the title in. Drawing attention to both the progress made and the persistent inequalities still evident in publishing, the report explores how and why authentic, high-quality representation matters in every classroom. More than just statistics, it includes examples of good practice, critical commentary on trends, and reflections on how to move beyond tokenism towards truly inclusive reading environments. Essential reading for teachers committed to ensuring all children see themselves – and others – meaningfully represented in the books they encounter.
- *Teachers as Readers: Perspectives on the importance of reading in teachers' classrooms and lives* edited by Michelle Commeyras, Betty Shockley Bisplinghoff and Jennifer Olsen works as a helpful and more personally reflective series of journals from a range of teachers in the United States. They share their own reading journeys and reflections and the steps they made to improve their attitudes and practice.
- Based upon her extensive knowledge and experiences in the classroom, Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child* (2014) is a welcome insight into how to create a classroom awash with a pleasure for reading. She understands the value of building a community of readers and shares how she sets about ensuring that all children in her classroom are readers for life. Practical with plenty of tried and tested strategies.
- For greater discussion about considering the books children can access in the class library and what realities they are promoting, read 'Whose Worlds are we Sharing with Children?' by Mat Tobin (freely available – search online).
- As a resource bank of best practice, the Open University's Research Rich Pedagogies is an outstanding website full of classroom-based and research-informed ideas that are frequently based upon the theories explored in this chapter. You can access it at: <https://ourfp.org/>

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