

Evaluation of Chatterbooks in Primary School Settings

This report has been authored by
Dr Emma Vardy & Ms. Sam Waldron

Centre for Research in Psychology, Behaviour and
Achievement
Coventry University

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Executive Summary

Chatterbooks is the largest network of books clubs in the UK, and are typically run in libraries for children aged 6-12. This pilot evaluation explored whether it is feasible to run a Chatterbooks group in a primary school setting and what the potential impact of taking part are for the participating children and school staff. Between May 2014 and May 2015, a team from Coventry University's Centre for *Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement* evaluated Chatterbooks in 15 primary schools in the West Midlands, in a project funded by The Mercers Charitable Foundation.

A mixed-method evaluation was conducted to explore the impact of Chatterbooks. The evaluation involved all children completing a survey pre- and post- Chatterbooks to measure reading motivation, attitudes to reading and reading behaviours. The pre and post survey results were compared to identify any changes that might have been due to participating in Chatterbooks. A sample of these children participated in focus groups at the end of the project to explore their experiences. Teachers were asked also to complete a survey for each child taking part, and ten teachers were interviewed about their experiences of running a Chatterbooks group in a school context. In total 11 schools of the 15 completed the evaluation, a limitation acknowledged when exploring the results.

Key findings

The evaluation reported that Chatterbooks in a primary school setting has a positive impact on those children participating. The results showed that after taking part in Chatterbooks children reported higher levels of enjoyment for reading and their motivation to read and attitudes towards reading had improved significantly. There was an increase in the average reading enjoyment of children from 18% to 65%, which equates to over three times as many children enjoying reading. There was an increase by 19% in the number of children who reported reading books, from 67% to 80%. This was also evident in the comments that children made:

'You know before I started Chatterbooks I hated books, I didn't even want to read but now I read loads.' (Walsall student)

'Ever since coming to Chatterbooks I have started reading bigger books, more chapters and stuff, because I started to like reading more.' (Telford student)

The students enjoyed having access to new books, choice over the books they could read and the chance to talk with peers and teachers about what they had read.

'I thought Chatterbooks was really good because there were books that you haven't even read, you get chance to read new books that you didn't even know of.' (Sandwell Student).

'I like the chatter part because you are not just reading books by yourself, you are talking about the books and telling people what you thought about the books and people are telling you what they thought.' (Telford student)

Recommendations for the future

Overall, this pilot indicates that Chatterbooks can have a positive impact for children when run through schools where there is support from senior management, a dedicated and enthusiastic member of staff and access to an array of resources. However, The Reading Agency will need to consider how to support schools before a national roll-out. School staff required more support and materials from The Reading Agency to run the groups and help with planning, for example access to frequent training and information about online resources available.

As the pilot was a small-scale exploratory evaluation to inform future work, there are a number of limitations that restrict the conclusions that can be drawn from this piece of research, including the high level of attrition at post testing and lack of a control group. Further research should be conducted to address these issues. Despite some of the challenges faced, the schools were overwhelmingly keen and positive about the project. The report provides evidence that Chatterbooks can be an effective model for running a book club in primary schools. Using this report schools can learn about how to run reading groups effectively and it will provide support for those running establishing groups, but more importantly it will help guide the provision provided by the Reading Agency for Chatterbooks in schools.

Section 1: Introduction

Chatterbooks is the UK's largest network of children's reading groups with approximately 10,000 children belonging to a Chatterbooks group. The groups are targeted at children aged 6 to 12 with no restrictions on reading ability. Chatterbooks groups are typically held in libraries and have been taking place across the UK since 2001. In Chatterbooks groups children talk about what they have been reading, participate in fun interactive activities and choose new books to take home. The model to deliver Chatterbooks is flexible to allow deliverers to use their own ideas and choose activities that suit all those participating in the group.

The aim of Chatterbooks is to build lifelong readers by encouraging children to read for enjoyment. Reading for pleasure is a government focus at the moment due to the decline in the number of children reading for pleasure (Clark, 2006). To combat this the '*Reading: the next steps*' report published by the Department for Education in March 2015 announced support for schools to set up book clubs for key stage 2 pupils and asked all schools to arrange library membership for all their Year 3 pupils. Running a book club can be time consuming and is potentially a bewildering task for school staff. The aim of this project was to explore if it is possible to run a Chatterbooks group in a primary schools in three local authority areas, thus the research is very timely.

Section 2: Evaluation Methodology

A mixed-method approach was used in this pilot evaluation of Chatterbooks. In each area (Telford & Wrekin, Sandwell and Walsall), five schools were selected by the local School Library Service to participate. Teachers selected the students to participate; the students selected were those who were considered to be reluctant readers (pupils who appear to be disengaged with reading, demonstrate a negative attitude to reading or do not voluntarily read for enjoyment), below average reading ability (pupils who are not achieving the national benchmarks for their age) and/or pupil premium students (pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds). Schools were provided with little guidance on how to select the students to participate in the project, using their professional judgement they selected students who they felt would most benefit. Many schools used the criteria listed above (but a small number of schools also selected students who enjoyed reading to act as positive role models in the group. Thus the students who participated in this pilot evaluation represented a mix of abilities.

The measure used in the survey was devised by the Centre for Research in Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement at Coventry University as part of a separate research project. Students completed a survey which included items on attitudes towards reading and engagement with reading. The survey was completed at time point one when the children first started taking part in Chatterbooks and time point two after the children's last Chatterbooks session. These time points varied depending on the delivery of the Chatterbooks sessions, but were broadly at the start of the Chatterbooks programme and after the sessions had been delivered. The number of respondents at each time point can be seen below.

Table 1: Number of participants at each time point

	Pre Chatterbooks	Post Chatterbooks
Schools taking part	13	11
Number of completed child surveys	168	102
Number of completed teacher surveys	202	102

In May 2015 at eleven of the school sites at least one focus group was conducted with a sample of the students who had participated in Chatterbooks. Teachers were also invited to participate in an interview and 10 teachers consented. The interviews and focus groups provided the opportunity to explore the impact of the Chatterbooks group and how running such a group worked in a school setting. Focus groups and interviews typically lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The focus group sizes varied depending on each school and the availability of the students, but the groups did not exceed eight participants at a time.

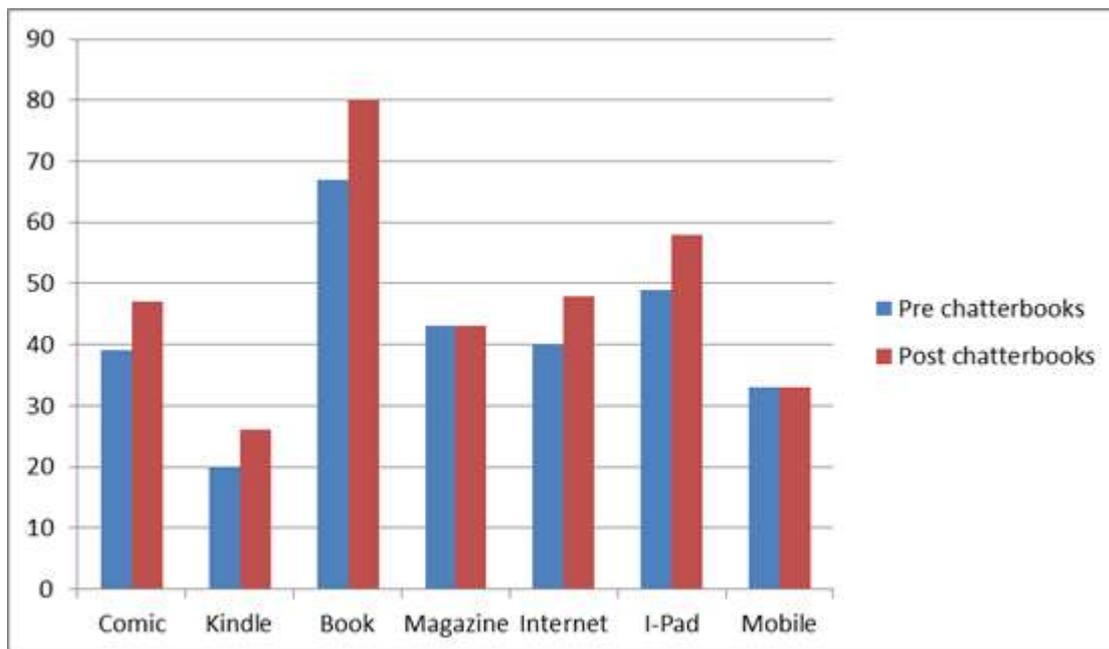
Initially 15 schools were invited to take part in the project, thirteen schools accepted the invitation to implement Chatterbooks so participated in the pre-test phase and of these schools eleven participated in the post-test phase. The schools in each area are as follows: five schools completed the yearlong implementation of Chatterbooks in Telford, three schools in Sandwell and four schools in Walsall. When comparing the sample of the pupils who completed the survey initially to post-test from the eleven schools, there is a 40% reduction in the sample. This is considered a fairly high level of attrition for a small scale study; as typically you would expect a reduction of 25% or below. Attrition was higher than expected for the project because of school and pupil-based reasons. At the school level, some teachers could not find the time or resources to complete the Chatterbooks sessions, creating the resources for the sessions can be time consuming, especially if the teachers were running more than one group simultaneously. At the pupil level, support from parents was needed to attend Chatterbooks as an after school club and as the year progressed Chatterbooks had to compete with other clubs. A more focused and pre-prepared schedule may help schools with the planning of their Chatterbooks groups. For the pupils, they mentioned how they would forget about the Chatterbooks group if they were bi-weekly, and after school holidays such as half term some children simply assumed that the sessions stopped after the holidays and thus did not return. Chatterbooks sessions were in competition at some sites with afterschool clubs or other commitments. Those schools that ran the sessions during the school day had the highest attendance. These limitations impact upon the data collected, and thus also on the conclusions that can be drawn. When discussing the results, these limitations should be kept in mind.

Section 2: Pupil Survey

Reading habits

The graph below shows the percentage of students reading using different media before and after taking part in Chatterbooks. There was an increase in reading across almost all types. The largest increase was seen in the number of students reading traditional books, which reflects the text most used in Chatterbooks groups. Prior to commencing Chatterbooks 67% of children reported that they read books during a typical week, post Chatterbooks this increased to 80%.

Graph 1: Differences, pre- and post- Chatterbooks to show what percentage of children reported reading various media, in a 'typical' week



The students reported in the focus groups that following Chatterbooks they were reading more books, as shown in the graph above, because taking part in Chatterbooks had motivated them to do so.

'I'm reading more books'. (Telford Student)

'[Chatterbooks] inspires people to read.' (Telford student)

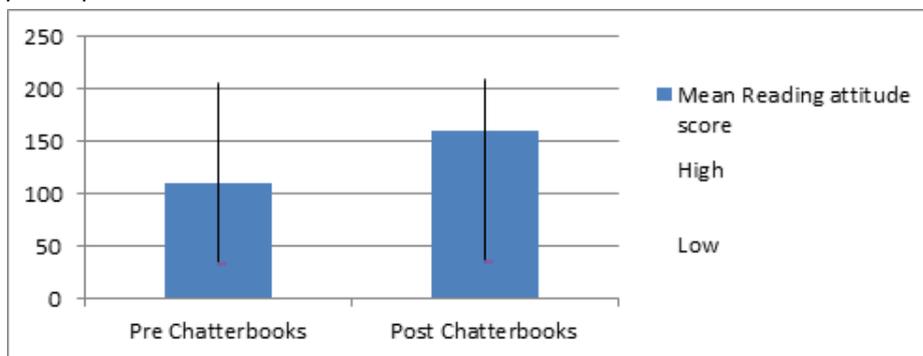
'I read in the library now, I am reading more books because I am coming to the library.' (Walsall student)

'You know before I started Chatterbooks I hated books, I didn't even want to read but now I read loads.' (Walsall student)

Impact on Reading Motivation

Chatterbooks aims to increase the number of books a student reads by focusing on the enjoyment of reading. Reading motivation is extremely important; a student who experiences higher reading motivation has greater confidence in their ability and is more likely to read for pleasure. A paired samples t-test reported significant differences in scores on the reading motivation scale before (M=115.27, SD=29.78) and after-participation (M=163.78, SD=30.55); $t(126)=-11.08$, $p<.001$. Thus, Chatterbooks had a positive impact on the affective factors (motivation, confidence, self-esteem and self-perception) associated with reading. However, the standard deviation reported is high, meaning that there is much variability within the data. We theorise that this is because the groups were run in different ways at different school sites, and with different groups of children at each site, thus the qualitatively data is of importance to understand the result reported.

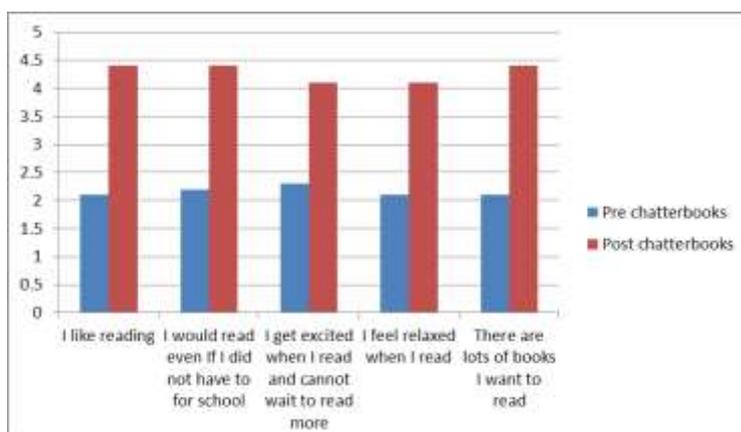
Graph 2: Mean differences between total affective factor scores, pre- and post- Chatterbooks participation



T1: mean total: 111 (Range 60-205); T2 mean total: 160 (Range 76-209)

The survey items below measured intrinsic motivation; this relates to the internally motivated desire to read, rather than reading for external rewards. Students with a higher level of intrinsic motivation are more likely to be lifelong readers (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). From the survey items below the students reported after taking part in Chatterbooks that they would read even if they did not have to for school (an increase from 18% to 65%) and that there are a lot of books they would like to read (an increase of 18% to 71%). This indicates that participating in Chatterbooks appears to support the development of a love of reading for these pupils.

Graph 3 Mean differences pre- and post- Chatterbooks, showing how much extrinsic motivation children feel towards reading



Reading for Enjoyment

Improving motivation can lead to students enjoying reading, and reading more because of an understanding of the value of reading. Reading for pleasure is an aim of Chatterbooks; through participating in activities and sharing books with their peers, the children can begin to enjoy reading (see graph 3). Prior to taking part in Chatterbooks 18% reported that they enjoy reading, this rose to 65% post Chatterbooks.

'I've been reading about every single night till half 8. I read a book daily.' (Sandwell student)

'Chatterbooks has made me appreciate books more.' (Telford students)

'If it was Chatterbooks I would [stay after school], otherwise I would go home and play on my x-box'
(Telford Student)

'I would rather do reading than go out and play' (Walsall student)

The students spoke about why they now enjoyed reading and explained that Chatterbooks had changed their outlook on reading for the better; this was for most of the students who participated.

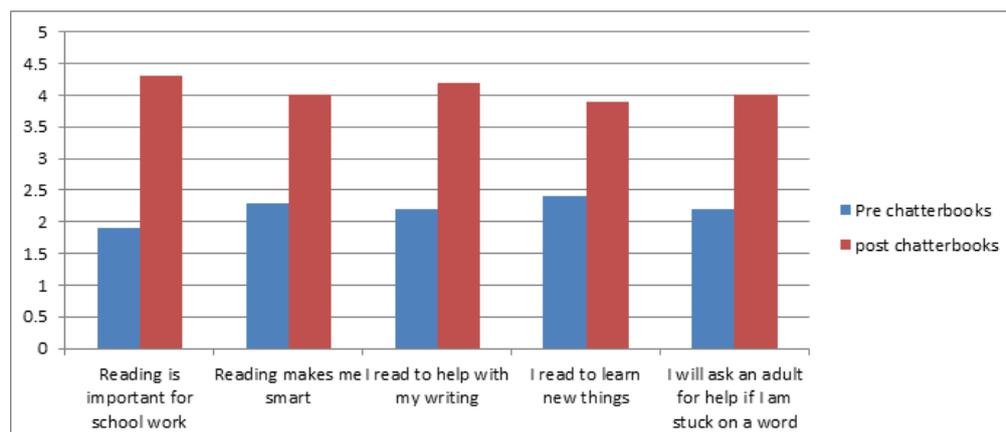
'Because when you are reading books you can get lost sometimes and you can always see the pictures in your heads.' (Telford student)

'I talked to my friend and she said what's the point in reading when you can get it all of the TV and I said well books have all the real stuff and TV have the bad stuff. Watching TV is bad it ruins your brains.' (Telford student)

Confidence in Reading & Increase in Reading Skills

A further outcome of this project was an increase in students' confidence in their reading ability and also improved reading skills. Survey items asked students to rate whether they read to learn new things, whether they thought reading made them smart and whether they thought it was important for school work. These items tap in to the values students place on reading. For each survey item there was an increase suggesting that from participating in Chatterbooks students placed a higher value on reading for school and learning.

Graph 4: Mean scores pre- and post- Chatterbooks showing differences in confidence and reading skills



From the focus groups the students were also able to express why reading is important for school and how Chatterbooks had helped them with literacy activities in school.

'It helped me with my literacy and in other lessons.' (Walsall student)

'Books help with your writing.' (Telford student)

Teachers had also observed a change in their students' ability to comprehend texts in comparison to their peers who had not taken part in Chatterbooks. The students who had participated in Chatterbooks were able to discuss a text in more depth, which may be due to the discussions in the group.

'People have said they have talked knowledgeably about books in the classroom.' (Walsall teacher)

Across all three areas pupils felt they were more confident in their reading. The increase in confidence was evident to the students by being moved up a table in class, this positive reinforcement helped to increase the positive outlook on reading. Teachers were also able to identify students who *'have gained confidence'* from taking part in Chatterbooks.

'I feel more confident about my reading, I was on the lower table and now I am on the middle table.'
(Walsall student)

'I used to be one of the lower levels...but then I moved on...then I had another test and moved on again.' (Sandwell student)

At one school a teacher noted how a student's participation in Chatterbooks had developed their love of reading which had a knock-on effect with their reading at school.

'I do think it has helped, because she's constantly reading at home. Before she started Chatterbooks she was on stages, now she's been took off stages and moved on to library books. She has improved massively and she loves reading.' (Walsall teacher)

In enhancing their confidence, students were challenging themselves with the books they were selecting, including some books they would have not normally engaged with due to size or difficulty of the text. The students felt an increased level of confidence so were willing to select books outside of their comfort zone.

'Ever since coming to Chatterbooks I have started reading bigger books, more chapters and stuff, because I started to like reading more.' (Telford student)

'I started reading a trickier book because we have been reading books that might have some tricky words in and it's helping us develop our reading skills.' (Telford student)

Reading out loud and with expression can help to develop reading fluency; however, for some children they lack confidence in doing this. Students mentioned how Chatterbooks was a safe

environment to read aloud and use expression. In doing so for one student it made them more confident in their reading.

'It has made us confident in reading our loud.' (Sandwell Student)

'I now use different expression and change of voices for different people.' (Sandwell Student)

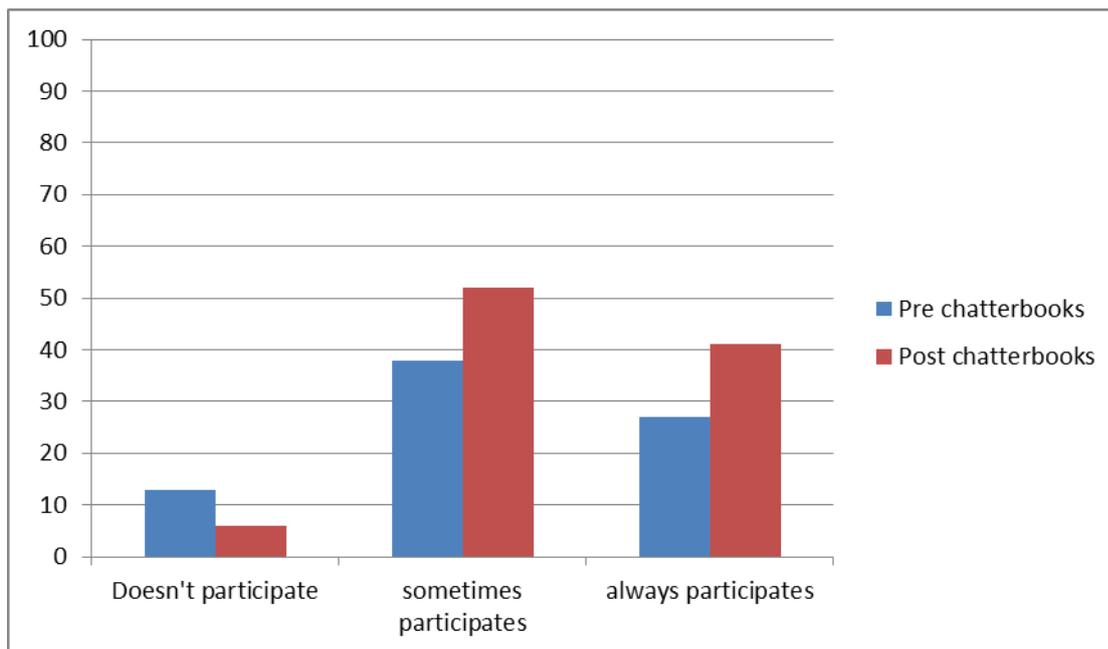
Section 3: School Staff Survey

The school staff facilitating the Chatterbooks sessions were invited to complete a survey before and after the students had participated in Chatterbooks to develop a pupil profile. The response to the survey was unfortunately low with 202 completing the pre-survey and 102 completing the post-survey. Using their professional judgment, teachers reported a positive change in students, however, the low response rate limits the ability to draw firm conclusions from the data regarding teachers' perceptions of the impact Chatterbooks had on pupils.

Does the pupil participate in classroom discussions?

After participating in Chatterbooks the students' participation in the classroom discussions was reported to have increased. This improvement may be associated with the students' reported increase in their confidence levels; Chatterbooks may have given these students the confidence to speak more in class discussions. The survey does not enable us to conclusively say that Chatterbooks impacted on the increase noted in classroom discussion, but over the year this did increase for the pupils participating in this evaluation.

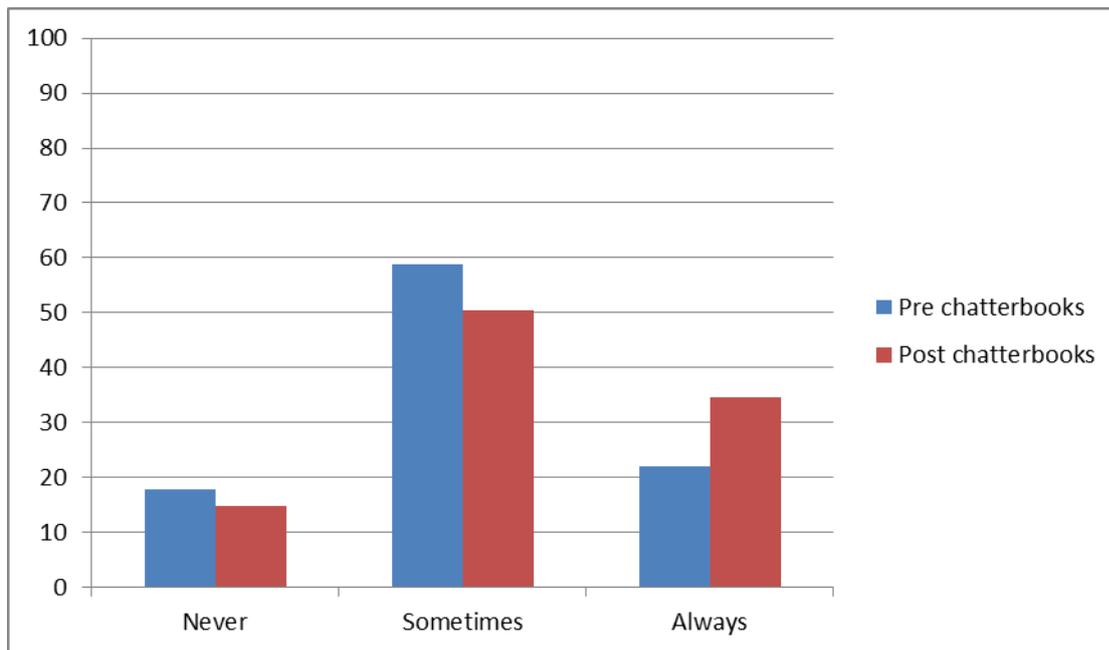
Graph.5 Percentage of children that teachers report participating in class



Does the pupil like to read aloud?

Chatterbooks gives the students an opportunity to discuss their thoughts on books they have read with their peers, and by doing this recommend books to each. This skill may help to develop pupils' confidence in reading aloud; as in the Chatterbooks sessions reading aloud is not a typical feature. The increase reported may relate to the pupils confidence developing over the project, which participating in the group may have influenced.

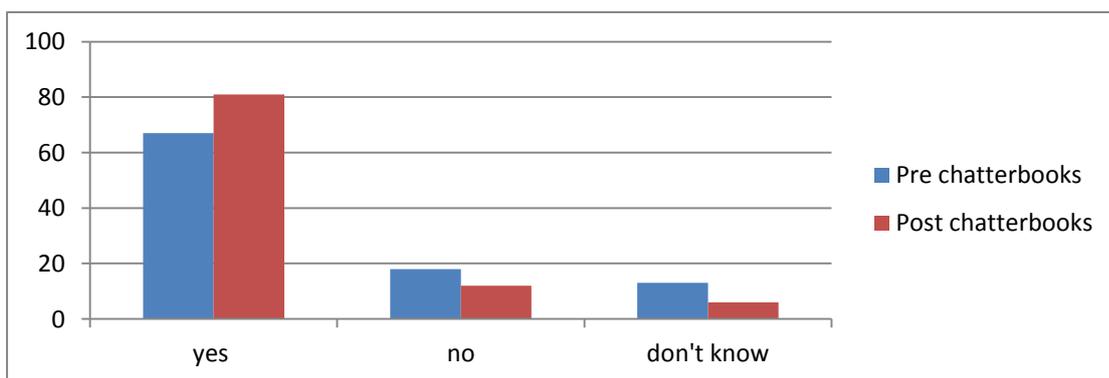
Graph 6: Percentage of children that teachers report *reading aloud in class*



Does the pupil read at home?

To develop an enjoyment of reading access to books is extremely important. In using the Schools' Library Service, the students had access to new books that they were trusted with to take home and read. Signing the students up to their local library and using the school library more would have introduced students to different ways to access books. The opportunity to access books in a variety of ways may explain that after taking part in Chatterbooks the teachers reported the students were reading more at home.

Graph 7: Percentage of children that teachers report reading at home

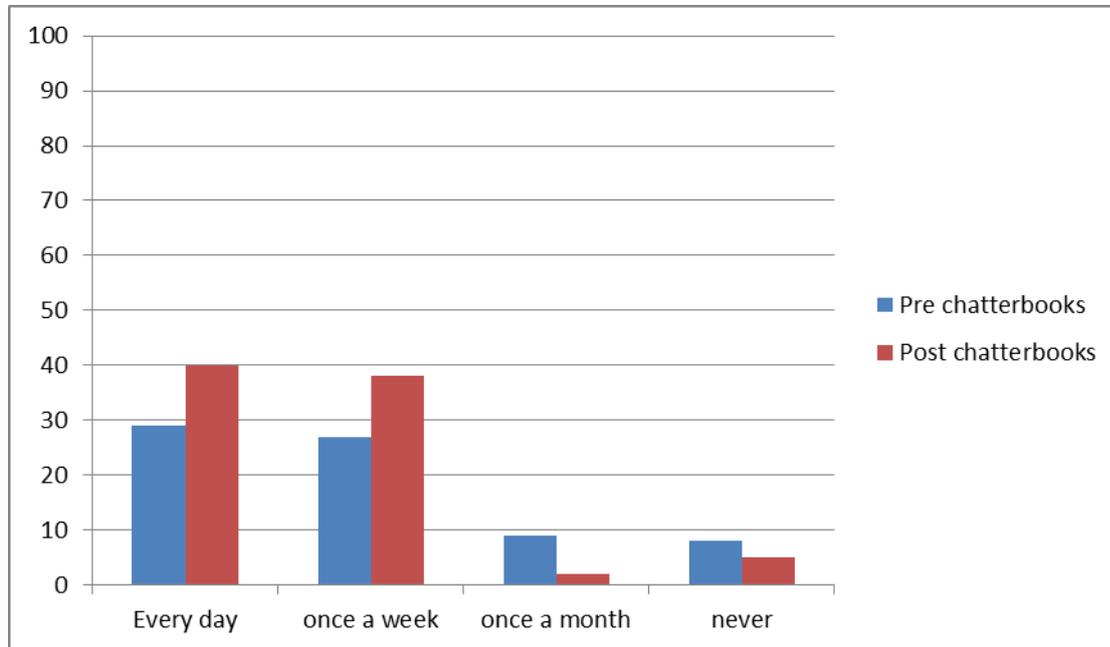


How often do they read at home?

This is the teacher's opinion of whether the students read at home, this may not be accurate, but what can be seen is an increase in the number of pupils reading at home at post-test. This may be due to the children now enjoying reading more or it may be due to other environmental factors. This

is of importance due to the vital role the home literacy environment plays in developing a child's reading ability.

Graph 8: Percentage of children that teachers report reading at home daily, weekly, monthly or never.



Section 4: Qualitative Themes

Book Access

To develop reading for enjoyment access to books is crucial (Clark & Poulton, 2011). For this project each school worked with the local Schools' Library Service, books were sent to the schools on the different themes requested. This meant the students had access to books they had never seen before, which for some was rather exciting.

'I thought Chatterbooks was really good because there were books that you haven't even read, you get chance to read new books that you didn't even know of.' (Sandwell Student).

'I like Chatterbooks because I have heard of books that I didn't know existed.' (Telford student)

'It got me involved in other authors'. (Telford student)

The students were trusted with books that did not belong to the school. For some students this was of great importance to them and meant the books were appreciated more.

'He has really took to being trusted with a book because he doesn't bring them back, so for us to say you can take it home, we trust you, is a big thing for him and he has treasured his books, which was nice to see.' (Walsall school)

The chance to take home new books was one aspect of the project the students really enjoyed. The books were new and considered to be better than the ones in school, which made it more exciting to read these books.

'Class books are a bit tattered, Chatterbooks they are brand spanking new.' (Telford student)

'What's made Chatterbooks more fun is that there are more books to read instead of reading the same books over and over again.' (Sandwell student)

'Before I just had to read the really really boring school books, but now I have Chatterbooks books.' (Telford student)

Not all of the students who took part in Chatterbooks thought the books were better. Depending on what was sent to the school some were too difficult for them to access, making it hard to find a suitable book.

'I didn't like the selection of books because I found it really hard to find a book.' (Sandwell Student)

Overall, there was not a significant difference in the number of students who owned a library card before and after taking part in Chatterbooks (62.5% vs. 65.9%, respectively). However, we believe this is because we tested at a time prior to most schools taking their children to the library, and reflects the different methods of delivery of the sessions, as those who ran the sessions during school hours would have found it difficult to make a library trip fit within the school day.

For two schools, one in Walsall and one in Telford, a trip to the local library was incorporated into their Chatterbooks group. A number of the students at these schools had not been to a library and the teachers reported the positive benefits of including such a trip for the students targeted.

'A few weeks ago we took the whole Chatterbooks session down to the public library and did a session there which was lovely.' (Telford teacher)

'The conversation about the library, oh I have been to the library, some of them had never been when we took them, they have never been to the library, so when we took them it was a big experience and we had siblings join, it has had that effect as well.' (Walsall teacher)

'My mum always says she's too busy [to go to the library].' (Telford student)

'In the library... there is a Chatterbooks group and I want to join it, if my mum lets me.' (Telford student)

Running the Chatterbooks group in the school library had also had a positive impact on the student's engagement with their school library. The teachers noted an increase in the use of the library by the students who had participated in Chatterbooks.

'They come to the library more. They might not take a book out, but they do sit there and read a book. That's what we wanted to do, we wanted to encourage children to pick up a book and read.' (Walsall teacher)

Schools' Library Service

The schools' library service in each area was pivotal in providing access to new books for the students. For the majority of the schools the service was considered to be fantastic. However, with demand high, schools sometimes found the books were not delivered in time to keep momentum going in the group resulting in the teachers finding other ways to source the books.

'The library service can't send books fast enough. The school has supported book buying but only slightly, I have spent a lot of my own money buying books.' (Telford teacher)

'The library service has always been very supportive.' (Walsall teacher)

Choice

In following the traditional Chatterbooks model, ability did not determine the books the students could read. They therefore had greater choice over the books they could read; the students in the focus groups highlighted this as one of the reasons why they enjoyed Chatterbooks so much.

'We can choose our own books.' (Sandwell student)

'We could pick what book we wanted.' (Sandwell student)

The teachers also understood the importance of choice, the students were allowed to select any book they wished, and there were no restrictions. Echoing the students, the teachers also observed that choice was one of the reasons the students loved the group.

'They were making much more informed choices as we went through, over time they had a really good look, had a look inside and things like that as well.' (Walsall teacher)

'They love the fact that they can choose from arrange of books.' (Walsall teacher)

Chatterbooks Structure

The structure of Chatterbooks differed at each school site, but there were key components that all settings followed, including the use of themes, book discussions and ratings of books, freedom of choice and including practical activities. All of these made Chatterbooks *'different from other things'* (Telford Student).

Themes

In each focus group the students discussed the activities and themes they had completed in their Chatterbooks group. Popular themes included funny books, superheroes, favorite authors such as Roald Dahl and pirates.

'This time we are doing pirates, so we are reading pirate books.' (Telford Student)

'I like the pirate books because we made pirate hats.' (Walsall student)

'There was this thing on Mr. Twit and we had to make this beard.' (Walsall student)

Teachers also echoed the same popular themes as the students.

'They loved funny stories.' (Walsall teacher)

Two schools focused on Charlie and Chocolate Factory which was popular with the students, activities included tasting sweets, designing their own chocolate bar and acting out a play.

'Miss brought in a load of sweets and food in that we could taste.' (Walsall student)

'What it was basically Miss put us into two groups, and we were reading bits from the book and pretending to be the characters and the groups watched each other.' (Walsall student)

'We did a play about Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.' (Sandwell Student)

At some schools themes were changed weekly, others it was fortnightly which was difficult for the school staff to plan. To get the most out of the topics, at some schools the themes were extended

over several weeks and the teachers thought this was a better approach rather changing the theme weekly or fortnightly.

'We have tried to extend the themes as long as possible, so they could do a lot of activities based on theme.' (Walsall teacher)

In selecting the themes, this was pupil-led; the school staff listened to what the students were interested in and used this to direct the session. Designing the sessions this way meant the students felt in control but also resulted in a number of unusual activities. Themes in some schools included following a recipe, food tasting, learning about the body and planets. Although these topics are closely related to school subjects, the school staff were creative in their ways to engage the students in the ideas they had put forward.

'I would say the food one, because we got to try and guess the foods.' (Telford student)

'When we blacked out this whole room and we did the spooky stories.' (Telford student)

'I let them choose what authors or what they wanted to do, they wanted to do the body. So what we did was we got some paper and we drew around a couple of the children and they used the books to research where the different parts of the body were.' (Telford teacher)

'We had one session where we looked at Dewey Decimal system, we looked at that and they did their own sorting of books.' (Walsall teacher)

Activities

The activities are as important as the reading in Chatterbooks. There were variations in activities across all eleven sites. Activities mentioned included role play, colouring and designing and making things related to books they had read.

'We did book reviews, we made our own book and sometimes we made posters on the computers'
(Sandwell Student)

'We did a poster of our books, our favorite author and drew pictures.' (Telford Student)

'We did puppet shows.' (Walsall student)

'Making potions-bicarbonate of soda, vinegar and food colouring and we all made a terrible mess, they all made wizard clothes out of newspaper and black plastic bags, they loved anything practical but I also found that they loved sitting down and just doing something like paper and colouring.'
(Telford teacher)

The activities were said to be the reason why the students had enjoyed Chatterbooks. It made the group different from school. One student when discussing the activities in their Chatterbooks thought 'miss kind of tricked us, but in a good way', in regards to the activities had made her read more. This indicates that, following extrinsic rewards the children were beginning to develop

intrinsic motivation towards reading, i.e. reading because they want to do not because they have been told to.

'The thing I liked about it you don't just do reading, you do other fun activities as well'. (Sandwell Student)

'I really liked Chatterbooks because we got to do loads of activities' (Sandwell Student)

'I liked Chatterbooks because we did games and read books.' (Walsall student)

'We get to read books, we get to do fun activities and we get to take books home to read every day.'
(Telford student)

The teachers understood the activities were crucial to the success of the group. The school staff therefore running the sessions focussed on being creative and ensuring the activities were fun to engage all the students who participated.

'We did a variety, a lot of creative stuff, they are writing their own play scripts at the moment they are doing a puppet show.' (Walsall teacher)

'One week we did Mr Twits beard, we all had beards and they could physically put stuff onto his beard. We invented chocolate, not just normal chocolate bars but magic chocolate bars so we mixed Charlie and the Chocolate factory and Harry Potter up a bit.' (Walsall teacher)

'We read aloud to them each week a short story it is usually one that rhymes because they like the rhyme books.' (Walsall teacher)

Incentives

Keeping the students engaged with the programme over the year was a challenge for some schools. Especially for those who ran the group as an after school group. Holidays resulted in difficulties in getting the students to return. Momentum at some school sites was difficult, and it seemed to be those who ran it after school experienced this more. To engage the students and in keeping with school clubs, biscuits and squash were used as an incentive to help attendance over the year. The students enjoyed this and it is perhaps an incentive that can be used by Chatterbooks groups in schools.

'You get to have a biscuit and a drink!' (Sandwell student)

The 'Chatter' in Chatterbooks

Typically in schools the chance to discuss books students have read can be limited. Chatterbooks gave the students the valuable opportunity to discuss the books they had read with their peers and teachers.

'We get to talk about books'. (Telford Student)

Being able to discuss what they had read made it more interesting. In the traditional model of Chatterbooks each session starts with a group discussion of what books the children have read. All the schools followed this, much to the students delight. Being able to share their thoughts on the books in the Chatterbooks sessions was suggested by the students to have helped improve social relationships with other students and develop friendships across the year groups, teachers also noted that Chatterbooks brought pupils together as a group.

'The reason I like Chatterbooks is because we get a book for a week and can share it with our classmates and our teachers.' (Telford student)

'Everyone gets to discuss the book and everyone gets to see what everyone else thinks about the book.' (Sandwell student)

The discussions focused on what the students liked or did not like about the book, talking about words and their meanings, the different characters and how each of them felt. At the end of their oral review students were asked to say whether they would recommend the book and to give it a rating.

'When they come into Chatterbooks I always say what have you read, and they say this and I go well what was this page about.' (Walsall teacher)

'I liked it a lot because we got asked questions about our books and got to tell people what I had been reading.' (Sandwell Student)

'I like the chatter part because you are not just reading books by yourself, you are talking about the books and telling people what you thought about the books and people are telling you what they thought.' (Telford student)

'Most of the clubs I go to aren't really my thing but Chatterbooks is really fun because I get to talk about lots of my favourite books.' (Telford Student)

'I like books more now because we can all discuss them together.' (Sandwell student)

'We got to share our experience with other people, just in case they wanted to read that book.' (Sandwell student)

The teachers were also positive about the inclusion of chatting about books the students had read. The discussions and recommendations amongst peers were viewed highly by the teachers and had an impact outside of the group also.

'They recommend a book to their peers and they talk about what they have read and so on it's been really good.' (Walsall teacher)

'I would stand back and let them get on with it and they would start talking about the books that they had read and talking about things that they enjoyed doing. I think that conversation was as valuable as anything else really.' (Telford teacher)

'The children loved sharing the books and they then wanted to read the book their friend had read. They were picking up books they wouldn't normally which was really positive.' (Walsall teacher)

'The stronger readers were like the ambassadors they wanted to help the children that struggled, they would take a book home and they would come and I would ask them to share what they had read, they would be a bit stuck, they would ask them questions, why did you take that? What did you think? Who were the characters?' (Walsall teacher)

'They actually recommend books to each other as well, so that is a good thing.' (Walsall teacher)

After reviewing the book with peers, the majority of the schools asked the students to rate their books. Over time this developed with the students developing their confidence and their ability to articulate why a book was a 4 or a 10, showing development in the student's reading skills over the time of the project.

'They got better at ranking the books, because at first everyone had to have ten but then we had sevens and they could say why they had put their book there.' (Walsall teacher)

Chatterbooks in School

All the teachers interviewed were positive about Chatterbooks in the school environment. This project was a pilot to explore whether it was feasible to run Chatterbooks in a school setting. The overall response from students and staff who participated in the Chatterbooks groups was positive. The teachers could see the value in the Chatterbooks model for a school context and because of the observed benefits from the pilot were looking to continue the project. Chatterbooks was made to feel different to school and because of this the students had lots of fun.

'We have lots of fun in our group.' (Telford Student)

Not all the students selected to participate enjoyed Chatterbooks, one reason being their strong dislike of reading which was not swayed by taking part in Chatterbooks. Further work is needed to develop ways to engage these students.

'I didn't like it because I think reading is a waste of time.' (Telford student)

'Reading stinks' (Sandwell student)

Some of the students who took part were in year 6 and discussed how Chatterbooks should be made available to secondary school students. These students saw Chatterbooks as a school wide initiative to combat the reduction in reading outside of school.

'I wish it went into secondary school, because people who don't read will then have a chance to read.' (Telford student)

Chatterbooks traditionally allows children to choose whether they read or not. However in schools there is an emphasis that children must read their school book. This difference in ethos meant at some schools students 'went off' reading because they were told off for not reading. One school had two Chatterbooks sessions running simultaneously by different teachers, who both had very different styles of delivery. The group from the more structured sessions did not enjoy Chatterbooks, when they saw and believed that the other Chatterbooks session that was going on at the same time as their own, to be both more fun, and less about school. It is therefore important to make a clear distinction between Chatterbooks rules and school rules. While also ensuring that everyone in the school that is taking part in Chatterbooks has a similar experience, so they do not feel that their own groups are undervalued, as this can lead to negative comments, as can be seen below from the children undertaking the more structured group.

'I've gone off reading now.' (Sandwell student)

'Nothing, we don't play games, they do and they get house points for it.' (Sandwell student)

In some of the schools, the groups were mainly boys, due to targeting, and this resulted in disruption at times. It also impacted on the design of the sessions with teachers trying to ensure activities suited all but with a focus on boys to ensure they were engaged. In future looking at the gender split may be needed to support the success of the groups. The mixed ability in the group meant the more able students were able to help the less able but were also positive role models. This helped in the smooth running of the sessions in some sites as these students participated in the delivery of some activities. To engage all students incentives were used such as house points, biscuits and juice, and this is something that could be continued.

'More challenging because of the boys they were targeted you know, that was the point of it.'
(Walsall teacher)

Section 5: Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

The pilot reported a number of logistical issues that could hinder the delivery of Chatterbooks in a school. Schools over the project had learnt that using the same theme over several sessions helped with planning and also meant the students were able to engage in a variety of activities. Therefore, they recommended in future spreading the themes over a long time period.

Classroom Intervention

The timing of the session in the school day impacted on the number of students the group retained. The sessions that took place during the school day were able to retain the majority of the students. Those who ran the group after school experienced a significant drop in numbers due to the number of competing clubs the students already attended or a dislike of the Chatterbooks group.

'There was a natural drop off and we ended up with 12 regulars who are fantastic.' (Telford teacher)

'I was going to say that our biggest problem is that we were competing with so many other clubs, we have a lot going in this school.' (Telford teacher)

'I ain't [going to Chatterbooks] because I started going to football.' (Sandwell Student)

'I would have loved to do it after school but they go to mosque and I think sometimes during lunchtime they would like to go outside and kick a ball around but with the activities they have wanted to come, so it's worked really well.' (Walsall teacher).

'I thought it was fun, the activities we did, I only left because of tuition group but if tuition group isn't on I still go to [Chatterbooks] because my brother goes there.' (Walsall student)

The timing of Chatterbooks in a school needs careful consideration. The schools that ran Chatterbooks during school time were able to retain the majority of the students for the whole year. Whereas, those schools that had chosen to run the group as an after school club struggled with other commitments the students had. It was also difficult to build momentum again after the school holidays. Thus, **when planning a Chatterbooks group in a school setting, schools need to think about what is the target group and when is the best time to run the session, if the group is targeted for those who most need support with their reading, we suggest running sessions during the school and running sessions as a class time intervention would be most effective.**

When asked the preferred time students differed in their responses, demonstrating that no one time suits all. For the majority of students it needed to run at a time that didn't impact on their other commitments or with socialising with their friends, which would mean running it as an afternoon club.

'Yes eat dinner and then rush up here.' (Sandwell Student)

'I don't like it being in lunchtime, do it in the afternoon.' (Walsall student)

In taking into account the students views and the teachers' views, running Chatterbooks as a classroom intervention seemed to be the most effective way. In implementing this model the schools were able to target the students that needed the most support.

'I think it has worked well here because we have done it in class time.' (Walsall teacher)

'It could be but I suppose if it was run outside of school you would only get the kids who like reading, I think, like some of the more challenging would be like I'm not doing it.' (Telford teacher)

'It is going to work more in an afternoon than in their lunch.' (Sandwell teacher)

One school attempted to overcome these barriers, by running half the session at the end of the school day, and half of the session after school. This was a useful way of attempting to engage the reluctant children to want to stay after school.

'I thought it was nice, you can spend half an hour in school and half an hour outside of school.'
(Telford student)

Session Length

The length varied at the schools with one site running the session for half an hour, whereas the majority of the schools had an hour. An hour was considered the right amount of time to deliver all the intended outcomes and to give the students the time to enjoy the activities. **It is therefore recommended to run Chatterbooks in a school setting you need at least forty five minutes to an hour.** The majority of the students wanted to have a Chatterbooks group for a whole afternoon once a week.

'Yes more time, like two hours as we only get half an hour'. (Telford Student)

'I prefer an hour of Chatterbooks.' (Walsall student)

'Just that we want more time.' (Walsall student)

We had an hour, then it went down to 45 minutes, then they programmed it for half an hour. I said it isn't going to work I need the 45 minutes if not the hour.' (Telford teacher)

'We could have had more time....hard to fit everything in within half an hour.' (Walsall teachers)

Planning Time

Time to plan the sessions was difficult. The teachers suggested more materials to support this were needed. Teachers used the packs online but required further support. The time and effort put into planning, as demonstrated by the creative ideas discussed, shows the effort these teachers went to. Without this the students would have not enjoyed Chatterbooks as much.

'Obviously time as a teacher, there have been times when I have gone on its Tuesday and I haven't planned anything for tomorrow. It does take time and to make it work properly you have got to put in the time, from that point of view it has been tricky but it has been well worth it.' (Telford teacher)

'Miss showed us what it is like to read and how fun it can be.' (Walsall student)

Training & Communication

Each school had the opportunity to attend two training days with The Reading Agency. The initial training day covered what Chatterbooks is, the different themes that are popular with students and how it is typically run in a library setting. Chatterbooks is flexible therefore the training was not prescriptive. The other training session allowed school staff to discuss how they had been delivering their sessions and pick up any tips from other schools. **For Chatterbooks to be a success in schools regular contact and appropriate resources are needed. Teachers benefited from being able to meet up with other teachers in the area and hear about how they were running their group.**

Some of the school staff delivering the sessions were not at the initial training, so did not have an understanding of what Chatterbooks was. In attending the further meetings this helped to uncover what Chatterbooks was and what they should be doing. However, in future ensuring the right members of school staff receive the initial training is crucial.

'It would have been nice to have had something right at the beginning; we didn't get to go to that one. The one we did in the middle was really beneficial; I came back with loads of ideas.' (Walsall teacher)

'I never did an introduction to it.' (Telford teacher)

'I think that was really useful. I think it is the fact that we just got thrown into it, we didn't get asked we just got volunteered, so it was trying to do things the way we thought it went.' (Walsall teacher)

Schools would have welcomed more frequent communication with The Reading Agency and in a timely fashion to act on events that would have enhanced the sessions in the schools.

'Chatterbooks doesn't include details of upcoming competitions and events in time to do anything about them, for example Redhouse book awards got told about a week before the award, which wasn't enough time to try and get hold of the books from the library.' (Telford teacher)

Comments from several teachers showed that there is still more that The Reading Agency can do to support teachers in the future. The school staff concerns were the time and effort they had to put into making the resources, and whilst the online Chatterpacks were helpful, they often did not include enough material to fill a whole session, and were often hidden in feeds of text. Furthermore, some schools were not aware of the online resource area. **A website with more obvious links or a dropbox resource folder could be utilised in future to make access easier or an example Chatterbooks session plan as developed by Coventry University from the delivery of Chatterbooks to secondary school pupils;** as these members of staff were running the sessions without been given much extra time to prepare. Moreover, the sessions required structure as they were being

implemented in a school setting which is unlike classic Chatterbooks, thus additional support for schools is required. What is important is making sure the right information reaches the right member of staff for it to be of benefit.

'There needs to be a bigger range of resources, possibly an online repository?' (Telford teacher)

'I just need to know what I need to do to keep them engaged and want to come.' (Sandwell teacher)

'I thoroughly enjoyed it and then we had one {group meeting} in the school and I think that was beneficial and it was nice to meet other people see what their issues were and see how they were getting on.' (Walsall teacher)

'Having the training gives you an understanding that it doesn't really matter what they have read it is having the theme and the activities round it, has helped it to be that successful.' (Walsall teacher)

Teachers were asked to recommend further training; one teacher thought training on how to ask questions about the books was needed; as they struggled with this at first due to the little guidance provided.

'One of things I picked up [was when the representative] came in from the school library service and when [she] was listening to the children, the questions she was asking, we said tell us about your book and give us a rating out of ten and we were trying to see how we could get them to talk more precisely, what was the funniest part of the book, what was your favourite part of the book, can you tell us about that part. She was asking more specific questions. In future staff having more support on the types of questions and how they could set that up.' (Walsall teacher)

Support in planning the sessions was also suggested; one teacher suggested that a lesson plan booklet that teachers could follow would be really useful.

'That I would find helpful, like a lesson plan, so I don't get stressed out.' (Sandwell teacher)

Engaging parents

If Chatterbooks is to be after school, parents need to be on board, including taking the students to the library to support the development of a love of books. Some of the students mentioned they could not attend the sessions or visit the library due to their parents; it is not clear whether this is true. Yet, engaging parents is important to developing lifelong readers.

'I stopped going because my mum didn't have time to pick me up.' (Sandwell Student)

'Some of the books are good, I begged my mom for a library card but I couldn't, I went to the shops with my nana and brought some books, the same ones we have here.' (Telford student)

In one school after a year of the project, parents have started to actively ask if their child can attend the Chatterbooks group. This school selected Chatterbooks members by choosing those that had no strong feelings towards reading, either positive or negative, but rather, those who did not have

much parental support at home. A number of positive benefits were noted by the school in taking this approach, such as the children being so enthusiastic, that it encouraged parents to become more involved with school life, such as more regular attendance at parent events.

Own space

Giving Chatterbooks its own space works extremely well. Whether that be the library or a vacant classroom, a room where the books can be stored and the students know they can go there to read is really important. The students picked up on this during the focus group discussions, identifying the importance it has to them.

'One small room for Chatterbooks that would have all our books, instead of then being under the computers.' (Telford student)

'Miss decorated the library so it was nice for Chatterbooks and on the front it says where can reading take you and inside it says anywhere.' (Walsall student)

Trips

The students also recommended adding in trips into the sessions such as going to the library for those that did not go and going to the park to read.

'We could go to different libraries.' (Walsall student)

'Like going to the park and taking a book to read.' (Walsall student)

Smaller groups & shorter time

A year for some was too long; smaller groups over a half-term would fit within the school timetable and make it manageable for the teachers. Also the school holidays would not result in students forgetting about the group. **Due to the difficulties in sustaining a core group of students over the year, it was recommended that schools run smaller groups over a shorter period.**

'I think we would go for a smaller group of children, perhaps about 8 and run it for a limited number of weeks so we could perhaps go for 6 or 8 weeks and then we would swap over and perhaps have a new group.' (Telford teacher)

Section 6: Conclusion

This evaluation of a pilot of Chatterbooks in primary schools suggests that Chatterbooks can be run successfully in a school setting. There are however a number of limitations to the research that restrict the ability to generalize these findings.

When considering the results of this research it is important to recognise that this was a pilot; being exploratory in nature we can understand the potential impact that Chatterbooks could have on a larger scale in primary schools, but we cannot be sure whether the findings were replicated in larger scale roll out of the programme. This is of importance due to more schools now running a book club for Key Stage Two pupils. Chatterbooks with minor amendments can be proposed as a potential model that schools could follow. Following this model can, the pilot evaluation suggests, have a positive impact on students' motivation to read for pleasure whilst also impacting more generally on school life by developing student's confidence and social relationships.

These conclusions can be drawn from the mixed method evaluation that was conducted. The focus group responses for the majority of the students were positive; the majority mentioned how they now enjoyed reading. This stemmed from the Chatterbooks ethos, and the students liked belonging to a group. The evidence from the before and after surveys supports this, showing that students attitudes to reading had improved significantly over the course of year. The benefits include reading more and developing an overall positive outlook on reading. Furthermore, the qualitative evidence suggests that before Chatterbooks some of the students disliked reading, but following the project now enjoy reading.

The positive impact evident in the qualitative data suggests that the contributing factors to the change in the quantitative measures were the peer discussions and the fun activities related to books the students were reading. This conclusion can be drawn from the students mentioning in all focus groups their favourite activities and that the fun activities they had taken part helped them to engage with what they perceived to be the less enjoyable but more scholastically useful discussion. The established format of Chatterbooks groups including practical activities and reading worked well.

I think it is nice for the kids to see a different side to reading in the school environment. Reading for enjoyment in school setting helps them to understand what we are trying to achieve in the first place.' (Walsall teacher)

The school staff worked extremely hard to develop creative ideas to bring books to life, and their hard work has paid off. Overall, the teachers who were interviewed were positive about the project. They discussed the positive impact it had had on the students that attended. However, this was only a small number of the school staff running the project, so their outlook may be skewed; as those who were interviewed were keen to continue the groups after observing the positive impact it has had in their school and they could see the value of running such a group in their school.

'I think it is more relevant in a school than it is in a library, as relevant as it is in a library I think it is nice for the kids to see a different side to reading in the school environment. Reading for enjoyment in school setting helps them to understand what we are trying to achieve in the first place.' (Walsall teacher)

The members of staff running the sessions recommended a number of ways of changing the delivering of the sessions in schools which may help schools run Chatterbooks in the future. Some of the teachers who participated did not attend the initial training, which impacted on their knowledge about Chatterbooks. It is important that the right members of staff receive the training and if they cannot as much information as possible is cascaded. The Reading Agency can support this by running more than one training session for schools and setting up local network meetings to discuss ideas with other schools or an online space where this discussion could happen. A plan that could be followed would also help to reduce the time staff dedicated to planning, as well as more guide on what can be and what cannot be in a Chatterbooks session. Some of the staff wanted more guidance to develop their confidence.

'In my opinion it has been a success and I would do it again, but it is just the time factor and finding the bodies to do it.' (Walsall teacher)

Limitations

The exploratory nature of this work meant a control group was not included, thus we cannot conclude that participating in Chatterbooks was the only contributing factor that may have influenced the positive change reported from the pre to the post-test survey. The qualitative data did however help to understand the change reported and how each school ran their group. The sample size limits the ability to generalise the findings to a wider sample, but suggests that for this more challenging group of students Chatterbooks can be effective. Furthermore, of the fifteen schools that started in the evaluation, eleven of the schools completed the evaluation. This may have introduced some bias into the findings therefore caution is required when interpreting the results.

Concluding statement

In summary, the pilot evaluation of Chatterbooks recommends that this model for book clubs can be run in schools and have positive impacts for the students taking part. To be a success the recommendations to provide schools with support and resources to run their groups need to be addressed by the Reading Agency. Additionally further research is required on a larger scale with a control group design to establish the impact Chatterbooks can have.

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