

Case Study: Lucy Chambers, School Librarian, Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service, London

Evaluating the impact of librarian-run reading and writing clubs for disadvantaged readers: a study based on data from Hague Primary School, London

The aims of this project were to:

- Improve children's reading and appraising skills
- Develop enjoyment of reading, curiosity and creativity through reading
- Develop literacy skills
- Empower children to share knowledge and reading interests with their peers
- To promote Equal Opportunities by identifying the level of improvement in reading ability made, if any, by disadvantaged children

'School libraries are important to the learning outcomes of the whole school and the impact goes beyond its walls to the family and wider community...(The library) inspires a child's imagination, provides...information needs and creates life-long learners.' (The Primary School Library Guidelines, 2014, CILIP, SLA and ASCEL.)

An introduction to Hague Primary School from the school website:

- The significant majority of children enter the school with starting points well below expected levels and few achieving age-related expectations at the start of Reception.
- A large percentage of children enter the school with low levels of spoken English and language skills well below those expected for their age. Most of the children have English as an additional language with at least 1 parent benefitting from translation during meetings.
- Parental support for their children's learning is difficult. Parents are often unsure how to support their children's learning at home for a range of reasons, including high levels of EAL in the family, lack of knowledge of the expectations of the curriculum, lack of strategies and ideas to support at home.

- Home visits have shown that there is little evidence of books or English reading material in children's homes.

Lucy Chambers is part of a Schools Library Services team of peripatetic librarians in Tower Hamlets, London, currently running 4 primary school libraries. The existence of a library run by a professional librarian is of great importance to children who often don't own books and whose families are EAL. She has run reading and research clubs in primary schools for many years, using a structured approach that includes reading aloud, silent reading, scanning techniques, visual literacy, comparing texts, discussion, writing reviews, writing stories inspired by books and creativity related to books. These clubs have always proved popular, with children saying that they enjoy the mixture of activities and, as a result, enjoying reading more than when they started. The Head asked Lucy to demonstrate the impact of her work with disadvantaged children to contribute to the school's annual Pupil Premium/disadvantaged report. She had developed the school library as a resource offering equal opportunities to children of all abilities and backgrounds and also offered clubs so she decided to demonstrate impact by comparing school reading records and estimates of disadvantaged children over time, adding another layer by analysing their book choices using Junior Librarian 3 data and her knowledge of the book stock. She focused on Year 5 disadvantaged children as the teacher had concerns about their reading levels.

Lucy ran two clubs for Hague Primary School's Year 5 children, once a week for 45 minutes over 2 terms:

1.September – December sessions featured a reading club with thirteen Year 5 children selected by the class teacher. The children were identified as reluctant readers, not making expected reading progress, not reading at home and/or had learning difficulties. In addition, six of them were disadvantaged children. As part of the club, they wrote reviews of newly published books from Macmillan Publishers; titles ranged in ability level and topic from First World War poetry to humorous novels, fantasy stories and light-hearted takes on science facts.

The children read all the books in their own time. During club they discussed what they had read and their views, what they had enjoyed and what they didn't, the quality of the text and pictures. They wrote reviews and enjoyed related artwork inspired by the books. They also used library books to research some of the topics they had read about.

2. January – March sessions involved a picture book writing club with six children chosen as above; five were disadvantaged. They examined and analysed a range of published picture books, identifying what worked and what didn't, developing visual literacy skills. One session was with a professional cartoonist, where they watched him work and learnt drawing skills and storyboarding. They invented stories and illustrations to create their own picture books; these were submitted to the Reading Zone Picture Book Creation competition.

Reading club was perceived by the children as fun and not as pressurised as reading in class; they therefore no longer saw reading as a chore. Talking about their interests gave the children confidence and curiosity to try and find out more independently. The picture book club children enjoyed being creative and developing visual literacy skills. The professional cartoonist's visit inspired them to work at their picture book creation and was an excellent role model, developing their aspirations.

Children who had been reluctant to talk about their interests and reading gradually gained the confidence to do so. They enjoyed all aspects of the club, particularly being read to, the drawing/writing activities and talking about books. The children in the picture book club were inspired by the cartoonist to create well-drawn characters and interesting plots. Some decided to create their book in pairs, with one undertaking the text and the other the pictures. Their stories were featured on Reading Zone.com blog and the school was rewarded by several cartoon books to add to the library.

Lucy measured outcomes and impact by:

- talking to their teacher before and after the project
- monitoring over time
- a self-evaluation sheet for the children at the start and end of the club term

- monitoring user records on Junior Librarian 3 to measure changes in their book choices over the two terms
- their position as borrowers in the class and whether this changed over the term.

Lucy anticipated that the children would gain in confidence and become more interested in reading, as she had seen these results in previous clubs she has run. Interestingly, teachers commented that there was a marked difference in children's attitude not just to reading but to all aspects of the curriculum. Children in the clubs started taking part more in class and offering answers where previously they would not have had the confidence to do so. Teachers told me that half the children, including the disadvantaged children, had made far more than their expected progress in reading (see table on the next page).

Lucy also expected their borrowing habits would change and they would demonstrate more curiosity. Many children started in the lowest borrowing third of the class, but after 2 terms were in the top third for borrowing and their reader record indicated that they were borrowing more challenging and longer books. It is difficult to entirely credit participation in clubs for this, but teachers said the clubs made a big difference, as shown by their faster than expected progress in reading.

It is impossible to claim that this approach works universally and the data is based on very small numbers but, even so, the school was pleased with the results. The Head circulated Lucy's impact report to the governors and all staff, who were complimentary about its scope.

Impact evidence

For the impact report to the school, Lucy looked at data for all the disadvantaged children in Year 5. More than half of the children were disadvantaged and they all borrowed more books over the two terms than any other class. Three children borrowed 40 books, eight borrowed between 20 and 30 and the rest between 15 and 20. Whilst this is, of course, down to various elements including teaching and the enthusiasm of the teacher for books, the library and Lucy's work in stocking it, running clubs and offering advice has played a major part.

Two of the disadvantaged children who attended both clubs:

Child A (40 books borrowed) borrowed a mixture of Accelerated Readers (AR) and a wide range of free choice books. Her QCA attainment profile jumped more than expected. At the start of the club, she was very shy and reluctant to talk about books she had read. Over 2 terms she became much more confident and articulate at sharing her views. She was inspired to produce a very thoughtful book for the Reading Zone competition, completed in her spare time. Her teacher was impressed by this.

Year 5 Disadvantaged Children in library clubs and their QCA attainment levels for reading (within each level are sub-levels which have not been added but included in the comments):

Child B (20 books borrowed) started as a reluctant reader and disruptive pupil but over the two terms found a positive way of expressing himself, through talking about books and drawing cartoons for his picture book. He was very inspired by the cartoonists' visit who, in turn, was impressed by his drawing skills. Child B's borrowing record shows that over the two terms he progressed from low-level picture books to medium-level chapter books. His QCA attainment profile remained on target. He also worked with the Learning Mentor. The teacher commented on the long term impact of attending the clubs; whereas previously when bored in class he became disruptive, now he chose to read a book.

Year 5 Disadvantaged Children in library clubs and their QCA attainment levels for reading (within each level are sub-levels which have not been added but included in the comments):

Child's name	Sept Attainment Score	Spring Attainment Score	Year 5 Target	Comments on level at end of Spring Term
Child A	2a	2a	3c	Same level
Child B	3a	3a	4b	Same level
Child C	4c	4c	4b	Has jumped 4 steps in this level
Child D	4c	4c	4b	Is now near the top of this level
Child E	4c	4c	4b	Has jumped 4 steps in this level
Child F	3a	4c	4b	Improved score over 1 term
Child G	3a	4c	4b	Improved score over 1 term
Child H	4b	4b	4a	Has jumped 1 step
Child I	4a	4a	5c	Same level
Child J	3a	3a	4c	Has jumped 5 steps in this level

Disadvantaged children's comments:

"(Librarian) orders funny, good and interesting books that I like. She buys everyone's favourite books."

Child H

"Going to Reading Club at lunchtime and after school has helped my reading and having the librarian's help in the library has taught me new things and helped me recap what I already knew."

Child I

"It is good to go to the library because it improves our learning and we know more facts so that we can have more knowledge." **Child C**

Lucy has continued to run similar clubs in all her schools with equal success. She has also designed a course aimed at parents to develop their knowledge of the importance of helping their children with reading, and would like to conduct a bigger study of the impact of reading clubs on disadvantaged children.

Targeted reading clubs can be of great benefit to reluctant readers and children who are getting insufficient reading support at home. As children gain confidence in reading, this will (probably) have a knock on effect on how they access the curriculum. If you run clubs such as this, Lucy suggests you evaluate the children's attitudes to reading both before you start the club and at the end in order to measure progress and also use a variety of impact evaluation tools.