

Case Study: Sue Shaper, Librarian, Little Ilford School, London

Targeted Reading Groups for Year 9: a collaboration with the Pastoral Team

Sue Shaper is the librarian at Little Ilford School, a secondary school located in the borough of Newham, London with approximately 1400 students aged 11 – 16 years. Having, earlier in the term, done a presentation to the pastoral teams about services that she could offer, she was approached by the Year 9 Deputy Pastoral Leader who had chosen to do a reading project for his CPD that year. He would be working with six hand-picked, able but under-achieving Year 9 boys with the aim of giving them a positive experience of reading, and to sow seeds that might lead to an increase in their library use and reading for pleasure. The Head of Year 9 then decided to undertake a parallel project with a group of shy, quiet girls who did not join in with the school's extra-curricular programme. With this group, the aim was to get them involved and comfortable in a small group situation, to enjoy a book together and contribute to discussions about it. The idea was that Sue would run the group sessions but the pastoral colleagues would do the background support work such as getting parents on board, insisting that pupils attend sessions and motivating them. The meetings took place after school and ran for 3-4 months.

Sue did not plan the whole programme in advance because she was feeling her way with the groups and wanted to react to their responses as they went along. Therefore, she worked out what they would do in a session one week at a time. Her choices were influenced by two factors: firstly, over many years, she had become convinced that reading needs to be made a more social activity if it is to engage reluctant readers more enjoyably (Cremin, 2018; Smith, 2019 and Wilkinson, 2018). Secondly, she wanted to model the reading habit and allow the students to experience hearing a book read aloud

fluently and with expression (Barton, 2012). As Chambers (2011) emphasized, *“the reading process comprises a number of activities of which taking the words off the page is only one”* and Sue found his work on reading circles very helpful.

The Boys Group

This group started with a trip to the Browns Books for Students Book Bus which was visiting the school for the day. The timing was a happy coincidence and use was made of something that had been organised for the school anyway. The boys were taken out of their lesson for a short time to give them this privilege and it made the group special.

The group met after school each week for 30-40 minutes. The first session Sue read aloud from *Lottery Boy* (Byrne, 2015) and gave them a photocopy of the following chapter to read at home. The next session she had some quiz questions for them and then read some more. This time they each borrowed a copy of the book and jointly agreed upon how many pages they would read at home. At the third meeting they were introduced to the idea of them taking turns to read aloud. Each time they agreed to read some more of the story at home and at every meeting, as well as the tasks or discussions, they had to bring their Deputy Pastoral Leader up-to-date on what had happened in the story.

Sue was always conscious of trying to ensure that the sessions were a different experience to English lessons. From the beginning she included an element of competition, awarding points for the different tasks along the way and contributions to discussions. The final task on the last day was to plot on a map Bully's journey across London, indicating what happened at each place. Participants were then awarded prizes; books for the winners and sweets for everyone. Throughout the project Sue could sense that the boys were getting sucked into the story, they began to relax and enjoy the sessions. However, at no point did they seem anything other than lukewarm about the competition aspect so their feedback, noted below, took her by surprise.

The Girls Group

This group met once a fortnight for an hour-long session but this was harder to get started, perhaps because the Head of Year did not attend the meetings, although she was very active behind the scenes.

However, the third meeting was attended by all eight girls and they were able to get under way with the story Sue had chosen for them, *I Am Thunder* (Khan, 2018). She followed the same pattern as with the boys with reading aloud and discussion question, although the girls did not particularly engage with the competition aspect so she let that drop. All of the girls did the agreed reading at home and by week four they were getting interested in the story - even the girl who was very clear about her dislike of reading said that she didn't hate it and thought it had potential. The story threw up lots of issues for the girls to talk about and they gradually contributed more and more to discussions about topics arising including gender, parenting and terrorism. Attendance continued to be erratic with fluctuations dependent upon the Head of Year's input.

As with the boys' group Sue made use of a special event that she had previously organised for the school. Author, Sufiya Ahmed, visited for a day to do talks and workshops and she arranged for the girls' group to meet Sufiya for a chat over drinks and biscuits. The pastoral team ensured that they all attended and they were polite and attentive although still very quiet.

The final meeting was attended by 6 of the 8 girls and, of those, 5 had finished the whole book and the other had read over half, which was more than anticipated. All said that they liked the book. Sue offered them the chance to continue meeting as a reading group and showed them the next book she had in mind but only two were keen, the others were reluctant or just refused. However, four of them, including the most resistant reader, borrowed the new book.

Reading for Pleasure is seen as an important whole school issue (Little Ilford School website, 2019) and the report of these projects was disseminated to SLT to inform future activities. This project

supported both the pastoral and the achievement agendas of the school and worked with specific students to address clearly stated needs, encouraging reading for pleasure and wider engagement. It also supported the CPD of the pastoral leaders.

The project was based on several references:

Barton, Geoff (2012) *Don't call it literacy! What every teacher needs to know about speaking, listening, reading and writing*, Routledge.

- Byrne, Michael (2015) *Lottery Boy*, Walker.
- Chambers, A. (2011) *Tell me: children, reading and talk with The reading environment*, Thimble Press.
- CILIP Carnegie Medal Shadowing website (2019) www.ckg.org.uk/shadowing.php.
- Cremin, Teresa, *Reading communities and "books in common"*, www.naae.org.uk/reading-communities-and-books-in-common.
- Khan, Muhammad (2018) *I am Thunder*, Macmillan.
- Little Ilford School, *Statement on reading for pleasure*, www.littleilford.newham.sch.uk/about-us/reading-for-pleasure.
- Smith, Simon (2018) *The Joy of Reading: why reading to your class should happen in every class*, <https://smithsmm.wordpress.com/2018/11/04/the-joy-of-reading-why-reading-to-your-class-should-happen-in-every-class>.
- Wilkinson, Bill (2018) *Why I read aloud to my secondary tutor group*, TES, www.tes.com/news/why-i-read-aloud-my-secondary-tutor-group.

OUTCOMES

The boys' group: Sue ran the meetings but the Deputy Pastoral Leader attended them all. At the first meeting the boys were given a short questionnaire to assess their attitude to reading. Of the six boys only one was a keen reader and library user; the others were ambivalent about reading. Their borrowing records showed that only two boys had borrowed anything from the library during Year 9, and two of them had each only borrowed 1 book since the start of Year 7. None of them used the public library. One boy had been very resistant to joining the group and another boy, Sue had been told, had a reputation of being very lazy. She was, therefore, delighted that the majority of the boys did the home reading that was asked of them. It was also apparent that they were enjoying the story and the meetings, and they visibly relaxed and contributed more to discussions as the weeks went on. At the end of the seventh and final meeting one boy said that this was the first time that he had ever read a whole book.

Written feedback from each boy is shown below:

Student 1, *"I took part in G and T reading club which at first I didn't really enjoy however as I took part and engaged in the reading I actually liked it. I communicated with other G and T students and Miss Shaper did a really good job at delivering the book to us. Also at the end we got a reward which was nice."*

Student 2, *"I think this club was very beneficial for the group because of various reasons such as not judging a book by its cover. And the fact that there was a competition made it more interesting. I think that Miss Shaper done an excellent job in guiding us and teaching about the book."*

Student 3, *"I really enjoyed reading club because I understood how a boring looking book was really interesting." "There was a competition which made all of us engage more." "I understood next time to pick a book which is interesting. I will use the library more"*

Student 4, *"I really enjoyed it and I read a book I wouldn't have read otherwise. Miss Shaper delivered it very well so that we*

enjoyed it. From now on I won't judge a book by its cover". Student 5, "I think this will help motivate me to read more and be more open-minded. The book was really interesting and I would never have taken it. It is easier to understand when somebody else is reading to you".

Student 5, *"I have enjoyed Lottery Boy as it is very engaging. I wouldn't have picked it as I found the front cover boring" "I have learnt to not judge a book by its cover" "I would like to use the library more often and open my mind to more books".*

The chart below shows the boys' borrowing records. Clearly there has been a marked increase in the number of books borrowed since the project started. Whilst borrowing does not, of itself, mean reading, it does indicate at the very least a greater engagement.

BORROWING STATISTICS	LOAN HISTORY BEFORE THE PROJECT	LOANS NOV-MAR (during and after the project)
Student A	Year 7 – 0 Year 8 – 1 Year 9 – 0	5
Student B	Year 7 – 0 Year 8 – 1 Year 9 – 0	4
Student C	Year 7 – 1 Year 8 – 2 Year 9 – 0	5
Student D	Year 7 – 5 Year 8 – 3 Year 9 – 0	5
Student E	Year 7 – 4 Year 8 – 13 Year 9 – 2	4
Student F	Year 7 – 21 Year 8 – 39 Year 9 – 3	11

The girls' group: Sue ran this group on her own and there were several false starts when only a couple of girls came. The Pastoral Leader personally chased all of them and attendance improved. She asked the same questions regarding attitudes to reading and found that two of the girls were keen readers, four were fairly positive and two did not like reading at all, one being particularly vocal about this and opposed to being part of the group. Two girls had been regular borrowers throughout their school career and all of them had borrowed at least a small number of books, although four had borrowed nothing so far in Year 9. The borrowing history of three girls showed that they had a habit of renewing the same book for months and months.

All of the girls substantially increased their borrowing during the project, as shown in the chart below.

BORROWING STATISTICS	LOAN HISTORY BEFORE THE PROJECT	LOANS NOV-MAR (during and after the project)
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Student B	Year 7 - 0 Year 8 - 1 Year 9 - 0	4
Student C	Year 7 - 1 Year 8 - 2 Year 9 - 0	5
Student D	Year 7 - 5 Year 8 - 3 Year 9 - 0	5
Student E	Year 7 - 4 Year 8 - 13 Year 9 - 2	4
Student F	Year 7 - 21 Year 8 - 39 Year 9 - 3	11

The girls' written feedback reflected their reluctance to show enthusiasm and, for some, their grudging attendance at an after-school activity:

Student 1: *"Being part of the group was okay. I liked how we discussed the book after reading the book. However, it is sometimes tiring because it's straight after PE."*

Student 2: *"I like being part of the book group as it's one thing we all have in common and can have discussions about."*

Student 3: *"Being part of the book group was fun but I would want to read a book and finish it quickly instead of reading a bit every week."*

Student 4: Being part of the group "was okay."

Student 5: *"I don't mind (being part of the book group) because I actually read the book. It can be tiring because it happens straight after PE."*

Student 6: *Being part of the book group "is a good opportunity."*

Sue believes that the students who took part have been left with memories of a positive reading experience, having read a whole book together, a revived reading habit and a strengthened relationship with the library leading to further interactions individually about their reading. She realised she missed an opportunity in giving the boys some ideas of what to read next once the meetings finished. However, the Deputy Pastoral Leader

picked up on this and enrolled all of the boys in the Carnegie Shadowing group (CILIP, 2019) which runs from March until June. This is something that Sue would never have attempted but his authority and motivational skills made even the most reluctant do as he said. So, the legacy and impact on these individuals may be even greater than anticipated.

The reading group activities have also demonstrated to pastoral teams one way in which they can collaborate with the librarian. Sue's hope was that when the whole school pastoral team met to feedback on each of their CPD projects, the work of the library would be highlighted and other Year teams would see the value and be inspired to work with her. But word spread and long before the end of the project she was approached by two Year 7 Deputy Pastoral Leaders to do something similar with them. They had been inspired by the enthusiasm of their Year 9 colleague and the feedback comments of the Year 9 boys. Whilst the role of the professional librarian in this school is in the early stages of development this is a very important step towards acceptance and recognition.

Advice:

1. Shorter and more frequent meetings worked best.
2. I cannot stress enough the importance of the collaboration between colleagues. Our different skills combined to strengthen and enrich the project.
3. The choice of book is crucial. An extensive knowledge of current young people's literature was needed to ensure that the book chosen was one that engaged the group.