



The Red Thread of Reading for Pleasure: Reading Teachers

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[246](#) [2]

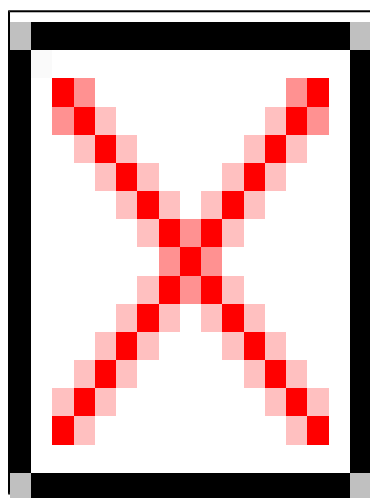
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The Red Thread of Reading for Pleasure untangled by **Teresa Cremin**

*In the second of a trio of articles, **Professor Teresa Cremin** untangles the red thread of Reading for Pleasure.*



What is it to be a Reading Teacher? (capital R, capital T) Is it a teacher who reads? Who reads what you might ask? And do they share their pleasure with the children? Is that it?

Personally, I think it's far more complex and exciting than that, although sharing one's pleasure in the latest Anthony McGowan is important, being a fully-fledged Reading Teacher involves much more. For me it critically encompasses four strands: Read, Reflect, Act and Notice (RRAN). It means becoming a highly reflective reader who not only reads, but regularly considers the nature of this social practice and the possible ramifications for classroom practice, then takes actions to offer newly aligned opportunities. Finally, a RT notices the impact of these opportunities on the children as readers and adjusts accordingly - it's not a case of 'do as I do'!

In this my second article on the red thread of reading for pleasure, I want to explore the potential of teaching from the dual perspectives of teacher *and* reader; of being a Reading Teacher and Reading, Reflecting, Acting and Noticing. But first let me offer you some context and recognise the challenges involved.

Reading Teachers Research

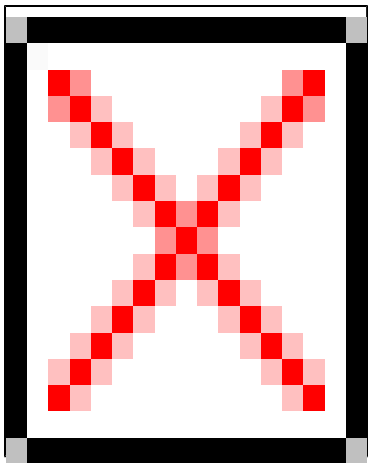
The term 'Reading Teachers: teachers who read and readers who teach' was initially coined in 2003 by Michelle Commeyras and her American colleagues. They interviewed practitioners about their understanding of reading and what it might mean for classroom practice. In the **Teachers as Readers** project, we built on this work by case studying teachers, interviewing and observing them in action over a year. At the end of the project a continuum of practice existed: some teachers simply shared their pleasure in reading, whilst at the other end, teachers held up a mirror to their own reading practices and re-shaped their pedagogy in response (Cremin et al., 2014).

Several practitioners expressed reservations about taking time from teaching to share their reading lives, and remained unconvinced that adopting a personal stance as a reader would influence children's attitudes or attainment, noting for example, *My work is to develop children as readers, not share my reading life*. Many found the open-endedness of engaging as a Reading Teacher challenging, for example, *I'm not used to working without specific objectives*. They felt the stance was at odds with the prescribed culture of teaching and wanted re-assurance that this would result in raised standards.

Significantly however, the teachers who developed most fully as Reading Teachers positively influenced children's attitudes towards reading and the frequency of their reading at home and school. In addition, these teachers developed stronger teacher-child reader relationships which impacted upon the children's knowledge and perception of their teachers as readers (Cremin et al., 2014). Reading became a more shared, sociable, relaxed experience in their classrooms as the teacher-readers participated in informal book talk and reader to reader recommendations with children.

Teachers who regularly reflect on their reading stretch their own understanding of reading through the process of reading, reflecting, and acting and they notice the consequences of their adapted pedagogy on children as readers (Cremin, Williams and Denby, 2019). These RTs are not only motivated and enthusiastic fellow readers, but are thoughtful, interactive, reading role models. Some of my recent reflections on reading may illuminate this personal stance.

Re-reading



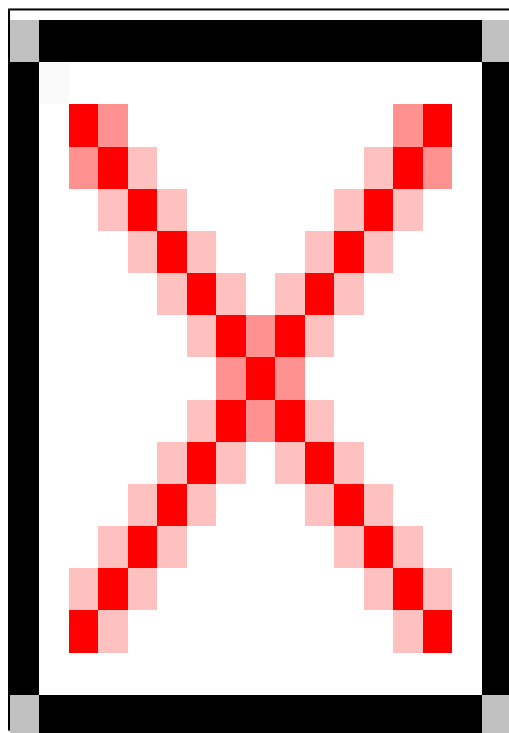
Recently, I went to bed early to finish [Being Miss Nobody \[3\]](#) (Tasmin Winter). As I went to pick it up, my eye happened upon Jackie Morris' **The Unwinding and other Dreamings** and I found myself seeking solace in the trio of short stories 'Dreams of the White Bear', individually entitled 'Shape?', 'Moon?' and 'Peace?'. The prescient affinity between the woman and the bear in these lyrical narratives speak to me, and I feel drawn back to them time and again. I must have re-read them at least ten times over the last month and almost know the last one 'Peace?'- word for word. The visual evocations of the characters' relationship and the woman's search *to better understand the geography of my heart; how it fits with the pattern of yours?* speaks to me of the closest of relationships, of being in tune, of love and loss. As I re-read them I remember my mother - her love of nature, of birds and wildflowers.

Pausing to reflect on this practice, I recognise my need to re-read this now, just as I have re-read **Felix after the Rain** (Dunjar Jogan) and **Some Days** (Maria Wernicke) over and over since September. There are of course myriad reasons for re-reading, currently mine is to better understand and handle my grief. We might also re-read for the sheer delight of

it, or to get our heads around the text, revisit its construction, or experience it again after an interval.

So, I ask myself, have I ever shared with children that I regularly re-read? Have I discussed re-reading with them? Have I facilitated it by borrowing books from yesteryear, so that they can be revisited and experienced anew? Have we made a display of the books we've re-read? Have we discussed re-reading passages just to remind ourselves as we read onwards? In taking action in some way, I'd seek to pay attention to the children's responses, listen hard to their comments and explore the value of re-reading for them. I'd want to help the young understand that re-reading is permissible, purposeful, potentially pleasurable and a choice. A reader's choice - their choice, not an expectation.

Reading anything



On Christmas Eve I started following a stuffing recipe from an old copy of **Good Housekeeping**. The page, well decorated with flecks of ingredients, also has a handwritten note. While the onions sweated, I flicked through other copies (I have a set from 1985 onwards), found another recipe I liked and went online to explore more. Then I remembered the copies of *Woman's Companion* I'd inherited decades ago from an aunt, and after locating them, delighted in reading 1929 adverts for: treating ringworm; Brown and Poulson's cornflour; Snowfire cream; a belted corselette; a fat reducing soap and iron jelloids - to mention but a few! The onions overcooked, causing a break in the proceedings and I saw the other texts strewn across the kitchen - magazines, newspapers, travel books, Christmas cards and letters - all sources of pleasure. Whilst I'm aware that recreational reading involves far more than narrative fiction, this abundance and diversity suddenly struck home.

I stopped to reflect. In what ways can teachers help children recognise text diversity and widen what counts as reading in their eyes? [Thompson \(2019\)](#) [4] highlights the 'living contradictions' between what teachers consider to be reading for pleasure for themselves and the messages they give children, which she found were predominantly related to attainment and reading for progress. Creating Reading Rivers or 24-hour Reads can help to document everyday reading, though I worry that too often this remains an 'activity' not a genuine learning opportunity. More recently, the OU team developed an online [Reading Treasure Hunt](#) [5] to encourage teachers, parents and children to become Reading Detectives, hunting out advertising, messages, comics, reading that makes them laugh, is precious, hidden and much more.

Reading Teachers may want to explore these and other opportunities to share everyday reading, and consider the children's, individually and collectively, helping them recognise their engagement with any text as reading. This might lead to widening the range of texts allowed in reading time and alert teachers to noticing what the young choose to read, their transient or affirmed preferences, their practices and identities as readers.

In sum

Re-reading and reading what you choose are just two aspects of my recent experience of reading, but if you pause to reflect on your reading you'll surely register more. Do you for example: stop and start, pause to problem solve and skip descriptive passages, skim ahead, read across different screens, have several texts on the go, read the end of a novel before you arrive there, fall into reveries, discuss what you read, stick notes/ write in texts, not finish some books? I wonder too, to do your reading habits and behaviours vary according to text and context?

Your reflections may mirror some of Daniel Pennac's [Rights of a Reader](#) [6] and these can be a useful, but your own reflections will be hallmarked by authenticity. They represent your own red thread of reading for pleasure and reveal something personal about you. If you want to develop as a Reading Teacher and support the children as readers, then I'd encourage you to hold a mirror up to your own experience and practices, and to read, reflect, act and notice the consequences of your altered pedagogy and the way your classroom conversations about being a reader expand.

For practical ideas to support you, see: [Reading Teacher](#) [7]

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Page Number:

16

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