



Young Readers Programme Evaluation 2015 / 2016

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Words for life

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Key findings

The 2015/16 evaluation of the Young Readers Programme relied on a pre and post-survey of participating children and a reflective post-survey of participating teachers, as well as interviews and group discussions with teachers, children and volunteers. The main findings from this year's evaluation are highlighted below.

We gathered data from 1,292 children who completed the survey at both time-points. We found that:

- Children who took part in the Young Readers Programme **read an increased range of reading materials** at the end of the project, such as cookbooks (54.9%, up from 50.5%), science fiction (56.6%, up from 50.5%), comics (68.1%, up from 61.1%) and magazines (70.3%, up from 62.7%).
- Children who took part in the Young Readers Programme **showed improved attitudes towards reading**. In particular, they believed that their own reading ability and book choice skills improved. For example, at the post-survey more children said that they can find things that are not too hard or too easy for them (59.4%, up from 54.6%) and fewer agree that reading is difficult (9.3%, down from 12.3%). Similarly, over time more children were likely to read on their own initiative, evidenced by fewer children agreeing at the end of the project that they only read when they have to (30.4%, down from 34.6%).
- Children who started the project not seeing themselves as good readers and not enjoying reading show particularly positive reading outcomes. For example, over the course of the project, **children who didn't see themselves as good readers** were more likely to say that they enjoy reading (58.3%, up from 41.7%) and a greater percentage at the end of the programme agree that they get excited when reading and cannot wait to read more (from 30.6% to 44.4%).
- There is also some tentative evidence that children who were took part in **peer reading** (either as mentors or mentees) have more positive outcomes than those children who weren't involved. For example, peer reader read more widely at the end of the programme than children who were not involved in peer reading.

These findings from the children's voices are largely corroborated by their teachers. The following main findings came through our teacher survey, in which 74 teaching staff participated:

- 100% of teachers observed that their pupils were pleased to have books of their own and that book ownership is a positive aspect of the programme
- 98.4% said the fact that children can choose from a wide range of books is a positive aspect of the programme
- 93.1% said their pupils' enjoyment of reading increased as a result of the programme
- 92.1% noticed a positive change in their pupils' reading attainment after the programme
- 89.7% believed their pupils were more enthusiastic about reading after the programme than before

Overall, key findings from the evaluation show that Young Readers Programme participants have better attitudes towards reading at the end of the programme than at the beginning, and demonstrate better book choosing skills, a key feature of the programme. Another key aspect of the programme is make children aware of the various reading opportunities that are available to them, and it is therefore encouraging that our evaluation showed that children who took part in the Young Readers Programme also read a wider range of materials. This suggests that the programme has the potential to ignite a love of reading in those who have not yet fully explored their reading preferences. Another particularly positive finding from this evaluation suggests that the Young Readers Programme is successful in reaching out to disengaged readers.

Introduction

The Young Readers Programme (YRP) motivates children to read for enjoyment by running a series of three literacy-focused events, teaching children strategies to choose books that are right for them and showing them that reading can be enjoyable. The events are typically spread over the school year and at each event every child has the opportunity to choose a book of their own to keep. The YRP is supported by evidence from the OECD *Reading for Change* study¹, which found that one of the most effective ways of developing children’s literacy skills is to engage them in reading for enjoyment and that this helps children and young people to enjoy more opportunities throughout their lives as a result.

The programme is designed to give teachers the flexibility to organise events as they see fit, based on their pupils’ needs and interests and the school capacity. The events are therefore varied, as described by teachers and other practitioners via an online survey, which asked them to outline one event and share their feedback about it.

The answers below demonstrate the variety of methodologies employed and themes selected by teachers to create a fun book event for their pupils. Themes ranged from Vikings and space to Harry Potter and slumber parties. Some events featured peer reading, others were centred around a treasure hunt; most seemed to give the children the freedom to enjoy their new books at their own pace.

“Our ‘Chill and Read’ event was fun for staff and pupils. We went outside and sat in the sun and shade to read our books with ice pops! We took out beach towels and sun glasses and the children enjoyed relaxing on the grass in the sun to read and share their books with each other :)” (survey respondent)

“Our first event was a spooky sleepover – the children wore pyjamas and brought sleeping bags into school. Teachers read spooky stories to the children, we had a sing-song round the campfire and then, after choosing their books, the children went back to their classrooms where they made dens and read their books by torchlight whilst drinking hot chocolate. This really captured the children’s imaginations and they thoroughly enjoyed it.” (survey respondent)

“The children took part in an evacuee day. We set up the day as though they were being evacuated. At the end of the event, the children chose a book based on WW2. This first-hand experience helped to make the books come to life and feel more relevant to the children.” (survey respondent)

“The children were allowed to bring teddies to school. We talked about how to look after books and the teddies got to read and share the first book choice. The children were encouraged to show the teddies how to care for books.” (survey respondent)

Some schools were able to organise author or storyteller visits:

“The first event, which took place on World Book Day – we had a visit from Miles Jupp, the actor and comedian. There was a great sense of occasion and the children loved choosing their books. It laid the foundations for them feeling very excited about the subsequent events.” (survey respondent)

“A visit from a local author was enjoyed by all children. This was followed by a book signing opportunity at the school book fair. It was attended by parents and children.” (survey respondent)

Several events had a key component involving parents or families:

¹ OECD (2009) *PISA 2009 results: executive summary*; www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/46619703.pdf

“Year 3 held an afternoon tea reading event. The children dressed up and invited their families into school for this event. Children then enjoyed sharing their new books. This event was successful because children got to share their excitement about their new books with their family.” (survey respondent)

“We invited the parents into school and had a ‘reading picnic’. We all shared picnic rugs and our school cook baked biscuits for us to eat as we read our new books. We also enjoyed a story together.” (survey respondent)

Some schools linked up the YRP events with other initiatives outside school:

“We joined up the day with WWF Wear it Wild day. The children completed a range of endangered animal activities. This included sharing stories / non-fiction books with their peers through paired reading. They gathered information from books and presented to the class. We talked about the importance of books to keep us informed on these issues, as well as reading papers / magazines.” (survey respondent)

“As well as the London trip, where the children chose from a range of city guides, maps and non-fiction, [they] also had a video game day . . . and we invited a circus in to train the children in circus skills.” (survey respondent)

Evaluation methodology

The programme was evaluated using a mixed methods approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative elements. The evaluation was harmonised across the different strands of the programme and was conducted consistently with the evaluation of other programmes within the National Literacy Trust that share similar aims, particularly regarding the expected outcomes for children. This report presents findings from the children’s survey, teacher survey, teacher interviews and pupil group discussions.

Children’s pre and post-surveys

Children who took part in the YRP completed an online quantitative survey before YRP activities began. This pre-survey explored their attitudes to reading, notably trying to establish whether reading was intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, as well as their reading enjoyment levels and their usual reading habits.

Depending on the delivery model and funder, the pre-surveys were completed between the autumn term 2015 and the early part of the summer term 2016. All children then completed a very similar post-survey at the end of the summer term 2016, which enabled us to compare their attitudes to reading, behaviours, confidence and enjoyment over time. The survey was created to be consistent across all strands of the YRP in order to enable programme-wide analysis.

The analyses were conducted using matched data, that is to say that only children who completed both the pre and post-surveys were included in the final sample. Only results that are statistically significant are presented in this report. If a difference or relationship is statistically significant, then the likelihood is not more than 1 in 20 (5%, using the 0.05 p-value) or 1 in 100 (1%, using the more stringent 0.01 p-value) that it would happen by chance. We can therefore be relatively confident that it is meaningful. In this report, we use the threshold of $p = 0.05$.

Reflective adult surveys

A reflective survey for teachers and teaching staff was administered online after programme activities finished to obtain their feedback on the project, its delivery and how it impacted on their pupils. This post-survey allowed us to compare the findings obtained from children with observations from teachers.

Focus group discussions and interviews

Children's focus group discussions (FGD), interviews, teacher and volunteer interviews were conducted in May, June and July 2016. The qualitative data are presented in this report via the use of direct quotes. Interviewees were asked for their feedback about the project and its perceived outcomes on children, teaching staff and others.

Sample description

Pupils

5,008 children responded to the YRP pre-survey and 2,537 responded to the post-survey. Only responses from children who completed both surveys were used, leading to a final sample of 1,292 children.

The YRP is aimed at children in primary school, across Key Stages 1 and 2 (from Year 1 to Year 6), with a focus on Years 3 and 4. **Table 1** shows that the sample in the evaluation reflects this: children from Years 1 to 6 are represented, with children in Years 3 and 4 making up nearly three-quarters of the overall sample.

Table 1: Year groups in matched sample

What year are you in at school?					
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2.5%	10.7%	43.5%	29.2%	13.9%	0.2%

The sample contained slightly more girls than boys (52.6% vs. 47.4%), while the percentage of children on free school meals (FSMs) in this sample is much higher than the national average: 34.7% of respondents said they received FSMs compared with a national average of 16% for KS2².

Two focus group discussions (FGD) and seven interviews were conducted with children in England, Wales and Scotland, gathering responses from a total of 18 pupils. The FGD and interview prompts are available in the appendix. In addition, the research team observed two YRP events in England.

Teachers and teaching staff

74 people responded to the teacher or teaching staff survey. Most of the respondents were literacy coordinators (37.5%) and teachers (30.6%). A clear majority have been teaching for more than three years (66%).

Volunteers

Corporate volunteers who work for two different YRP funders, and who supported YRP projects in two schools, were interviewed for this evaluation. Two corporate volunteers were interviewed over the phone following a YRP event in London, and five other corporate volunteers were interviewed in a group discussion about their involvement with the YRP since 2013.

In addition, a local library community engagement staff member was interviewed over the phone. She is not a volunteer but a paid member of library staff and experienced child literacy practitioner, however her involvement in the programme is on a voluntary basis and not remunerated, hence her inclusion within this group.

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/483897/SFR47_2015_text.pdf

Findings

Children's outcomes – survey findings

Based on data from 1,292 children whose pre and post-survey responses could be matched, our evaluation shows that participating **children read a greater range of materials** at the end of the project. More specifically, at the end of the programme a greater percentage of children say that they read **cookbooks** (54.9% vs. 50.5%), **science fiction** (56.6% vs. 50.5%), **comics** (68.1% vs. 61.1%) and **magazines** (70.3% vs. 62.7%). The prevalence of reading poems, non-fiction and fiction has remained the same.

Children think more positively about reading at the end of the project than they did before taking part³. More specifically, they are **more likely to believe in their own reading and book choice skill**⁴. For example, during the post-survey a greater percentage of children say that they can find things that are not too hard or too easy for them (59.4% vs. 54.6%), while fewer agree that they cannot find things to read that interest them (15.7% vs. 20.4%) and that reading is difficult (9.3% vs. 12.3%).

They are also more **likely to read of their own accord**. For example, after the project fewer children agree that they only read when they have to (30.4% vs. 34.6%) and that they only read when with an adult (16.4% vs. 19.0%) than before taking part.

Outcomes for children who do not enjoy reading or who do not see themselves as a good reader

There are two groups of children that seem to have benefited from taking part in the YRP: children who started the programme not seeing themselves as a good reader (N = 72)⁵ and children who started the programme not enjoying reading (N = 300)⁶.

40.6% of children who started the programme not seeing themselves as a good reader see themselves as one at the end of the project. In addition, over the course of the project:

- **More children enjoy reading**⁷, with the percentage rising from 41.7% to 58.3%.
- **More children read daily outside school**⁸, with the percentage increasing from 19.4% to 25%.
- Children are more likely to **say that they have a favourite book** (an increase from 69.6% to 75%) and to **read a greater range of books**⁹. In particular, a greater percentage of children at the end of the programme say that they have read non-fiction (from 44.4% to 62.5%), science fiction (from 31.9% to 43.1%), comics (from 45.8% to 55.6%) and magazines (from 34.7% to 58.3%).
- More children **think positively about reading**¹⁰. In particular, **more are intrinsically motivated to read**¹¹. For example, at the end of the programme a greater percentage

³ Pre: M = 1.67, SD = .444; post: M = 1.61, SD = .444, with lower means indicating more positive attitudes; $t(1286) = 4.917$, $p < .001$

⁴ Pre: M = 1.52, SD = .456; post: M = 1.45, SD = .424, with lower means indicating greater agreement with skill items. $t(1286) = 4.811$, $p < .001$

⁵ This subsample contained slightly more girls than boys (52.9% vs. 47.1%) and a high percentage of FSM pupils: 67.2%.

⁶ This subsample contained slightly more boys than girls (60.9% vs. 39.1%); nearly half (45.2%) of the children in this subsample receive FSMs.

⁷ $z = -3.196$, $p = .001$

⁸ $z = -2.454$, $p = .014$

⁹ Pre: M = 3.53, SD = 1.86; post: M = 4.22, SD = 1.97; $t(59) = -2.170$, $p = .031$

¹⁰ Pre: M = 2.13, SD = .441; post: M = 1.95, SD = .500; $t(71) = 2.406$, $p = .019$

¹¹ Pre: M = 2.15, SD = .623; post: M = 1.91, SD = .603; $t(66) = 2.431$, $p = .018$

agree that they get excited when reading and cannot wait to read more (from 30.6% to 44.4%) and that there are lots of things they want to read (from 38.9% to 50.8%).

- **More children also feel more confident in their own reading skill**¹². For example, more agree that they can find things to read that are not too hard or too easy for them (from 33.3% to 48.6%), while fewer agree that reading is difficult (from 44.4% to 27.9%) or that they cannot find things to read that interest them (from 33.8% to 26.6%).

Over half (54.7%) of those children who did not enjoy reading at the beginning of the project say that they **enjoy reading at the end**. Also, over the course of the project:

- **More children read daily outside class**¹³ (from 12.7% to 19%). It should be noted that reading daily is associated with higher reading attainment¹⁴. This finding therefore suggests the possibility of longer-term impact.
- **More children think positively about reading**¹⁵. Specifically, **more are intrinsically motivated to read**¹⁶. For example, at the end of the project more children agree that they get excited when they read and cannot wait to read more (from 38.4% to 42.7%) and that there are lots of things they want to read (from 38.5% to 48.2%).
- **More children believe in their skill as a reader**¹⁷. For example, at the end of the project more children agree that it is easier to find things to read that are not too hard or too easy (from 39.7% to 51.7%), while fewer agree that they cannot find things to read that interest them (from 28.2% to 20.6%) or that they find reading difficult (from 23.1% to 7.3%).
- Finally, children are **more likely to read on their own initiative**, i.e. fewer were extrinsically motivated to read¹⁸. For example, at the end of the project more children agree that they choose to read outside school (from 29.7% to 38.1%), while fewer agree that they only read when they have to (from 49.8% to 37.5%) or that they only read when an adult reads with them (from 27.2% to 21.8%).

Peer reading

There is some indication that the different ways in which pupils are involved in the YRP could have an influence, with pupils who took part in peer reading (N = 898, 70%; regardless of whether they were mentors or mentees) showing signs of slightly higher reading enjoyment and wider reading than those who did not take part as peer readers (N = 384, 30%).

More specifically, over the course of the project, more peer readers than non-peer readers:

- enjoy reading (from 78.0% to 80.3%, while the level for non-peer readers remains static at 74.0%)
- read more widely, with more peer readers at the end of the project reading poems (from 64.5% to 69.4%), cookbooks (from 52.6% to 58.1%), non-fiction (from 68.6% to 75.1%), science fiction (from 52.2% to 58.5%), comics (from 61.8% to 69.4%) and magazines (from 63.1% to 71.4%), while the equivalent levels for non-peer readers have remained largely unchanged.

Peer reading testimonies from the teacher survey:

34 teachers said their version of YRP had a peer reading element. Among them, 31 thought that the peer

¹² Pre: = 2.29, SD = .384; post: M = 1.83, SD = .503; t(71) = 6.092, p < .001

¹³ z = -3.409, p = .001

¹⁴ Clark C., *Children and Young People's Reading in 2014*, National Literacy Trust 2015: "In 2014 children and young people who read daily outside class are five times as likely to read above the expected level for their age compared with young people who never read outside class (23.0% vs. 4.9%)."

¹⁵ Pre: = 1.98, SD = .415; post: M = 1.81, SD = .453; t(299) = 6.062, p < .001

¹⁶ Pre: = 2.03, SD = .562; post: M = 1.94, SD = .590; t(278) = 2.169, p = .031

¹⁷ Pre: = 1.77, SD = .470; post: M = 1.63, SD = .464; t(288) = -4.317, p < .001

¹⁸ Pre: = 1.97, SD = .585; post: M = 2.15, SD = .607; t(299) = 4.539, p < .001

reading element had a positive impact on reading enjoyment for participating children (two saw no impact on reading enjoyment), and 29 noticed a positive impact on reading frequency as well (five said it had no impact on reading frequency). Furthermore, 13 said that peer reading had “definitely” contributed to creating a whole-school reading culture, and another 18 said it had “somewhat” contributed to a whole-school reading culture.

Below are some of the comments about peer reading shared by respondents:

“We paired siblings to try to ensure peer to peer could continue at home too where appropriate.”

“Children really enjoyed sharing the books with each other, exploring the different choices that were made. Children wanted to take part in a book swap which we hope to facilitate in the future.”

“Encouraged more discussion and children 'sharing' and recommending books to each other.”

“I think we need to do more as it is beneficial, especially older children reading to younger children and not worrying about what the listener is thinking; it boosts their confidence.”

“Peer reading was undertaken prior to our involvement but now there is a new lease of life to this aspect of learning.”

“The children love to do peer reading. The older children loved the responsibility, and the training they were given before they started. The younger children enjoy a different audience for their reading. The bonds they have made as peer readers is a pleasure to witness.”

“This is now embedded in school and will be continuing.”

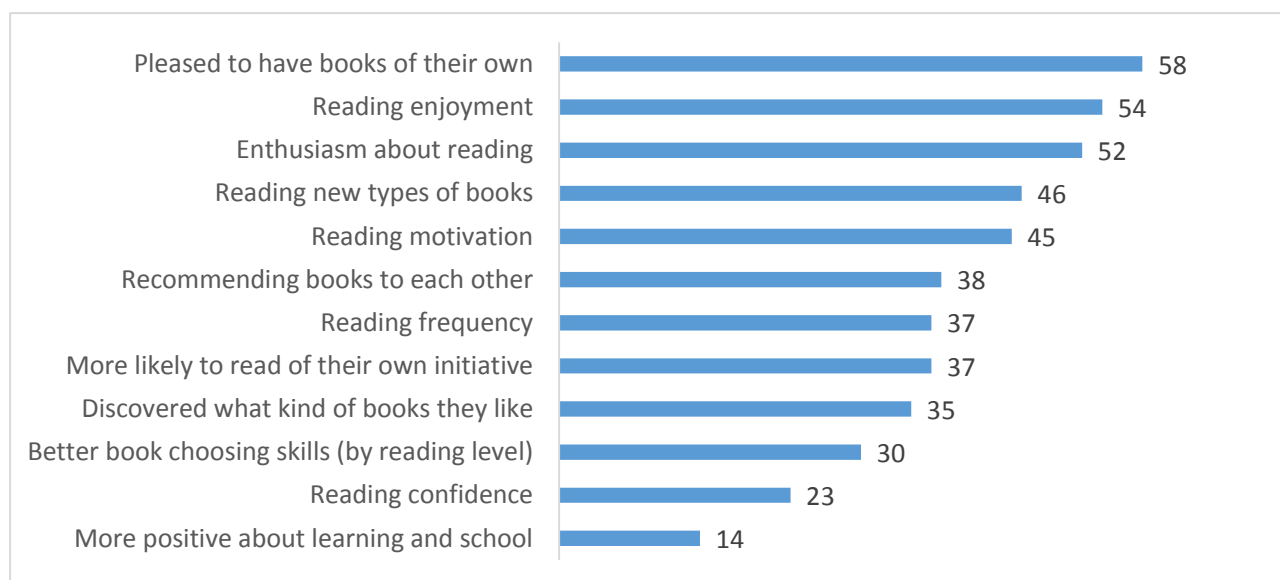
“We are looking to extend peer reading in our school next year by recruiting and training reading volunteers to coordinate peer reading.”

“We are rolling it out whole-school next year.”

Children’s outcomes - Teachers’ perceptions

58 teachers who responded to the survey (92.1%) have noticed a positive change in their pupils' reading attainment. Five (7.9%) say they have noticed no change. **Figure 1** below outlines which changes among children have been noticed by teachers in key outcome areas.

Figure 1: Number of teachers who have noticed changes in the key outcome areas



Respondents were asked which of their pupils (from reluctant to very engaged) they think benefited the most from the project. Seven think it was the well-engaged pupils, 20 think it was the most reluctant readers and 22 think the project was particularly beneficial to pupils with “average reading skills and a medium level of interest in reading”. Interestingly, the children's data show that the project was beneficial to children who said in the pre-survey that they do not

enjoy reading or that they do not consider themselves good readers.

In their comments, some teachers stated that they believed all children benefited equally:

“I think all children benefited from this project and there was a noticeable shift in ALL children’s attitude towards reading.” (survey respondent)

“It has reignited the passion for reading for pleasure in ALL children.” (survey respondent)

Seven explained why they felt the project was particularly beneficial to medium-skill readers:

“By being able to choose their own books, middle attainers were much more motivated and therefore more engaged.” (survey respondent)

“I think the element of choice and ownership motivated these readers [those with average reading skills] particularly. They really looked forward to choosing their next book after each event!” (survey respondent)

“Most of the children in my class, especially those who were slightly below national but were targeted to reach expectations by the end of the year, said that the reading events were the thing they enjoyed most during the year.” (survey respondent)

“They were the ones who seemed motivated to read more regularly than they had.” (survey respondent)

Four explained why in their view the reluctant readers were the ones who got the most out of the project:

“Owning books that were good quality and at a level they could read was a huge motivator for our more reluctant readers.” (survey respondent)

“The opportunity to have a book and then be able to keep it has been invaluable to many of the children and our reluctant readers have become more interested in looking at the books their peers received.” (survey respondent)

“This group of children were so enthusiastic about the books they had chosen. Some of them have very few books of their own at home and they loved being able to talk about their favourite books with other peers. Plus some of these peers may be higher achieving readers so it boosted their confidence to see themselves reading the same books as them.” (survey respondent)

And two explained why they felt the higher achieving readers were the ones who benefited the most:

“Although all of the children enjoyed the events and were pleased to have books of their own, those without the support at home didn’t seem to continue with the motivation to keep reading – it’s hard when they want to share their excitement about the programme and their books but that excitement isn’t reciprocated. Those who were already engaged with reading seemed to stay excited for longer.” (survey respondent)

In addition, three respondents pointed out how the project had been beneficial to children with little or no reading support at home and to boys:

“Project helped us to provide books for those children from certain homes where spending time and money on books has not been a priority before.” (survey respondent)

“Reading is not necessarily a priority at home, and there are often not books available to the children. This was an exciting project that provided books and new opportunities for children to read at home.” (survey respondent)

“Boys increased their motivation to read and select books.” (survey respondent)

Interviews and group discussion findings

Local libraries

Interviews and event observations in 2015/16 have brought up how primary schools taking part in the programme can link up and collaborate with their local library. Several teachers bemoaned how little children use the public library with their families.

“I mean there’s a massive fabulous library just down [the road], and we can’t get the children to go!” (teacher, interview)

“That’s why we got our own library going. Because if the parents aren’t going to take the children to the library, at least we can.” (literacy coordinator, interview)

During practitioner interviews with a librarian, several class teachers and literacy coordinators, we asked whether a programme such as the YRP which involves book gifting might potentially discourage children from using the library; the reasoning being that if book ownership is such a strong factor in encouraging reading enjoyment, would children be deterred from borrowing books from the library if they owned more books themselves?

The response from practitioners was that on the contrary, igniting a love of reading among children via book gifting could only lead them to read more and therefore use the library more, and that the book choice element of the YRP could only be supported sustainably by engaging children with their local library.

“I don’t think the book gifting detracts from [going to the library] ... It’s nice for them to have their own book, but it’s nice for them to know that they can go to the library and get another book that’s not going to cost them anything.” (teacher, interview)

“And then the third [event] was obviously the library visit. And it was just making clear the distinction, you know, this is [a] library and how fortunate we are that we can just borrow these books etc. And then here we have our own personal book and it’s that sense of ownership and the newness of the book and the bit of excitement – ‘I can’t wait to get home and read my book’.” (teacher, interview)

“It’s good to give free books, book ownership is important for the love of reading, but we need to think of the areas where we work and how book ownership is low. And you need to think of the library skills as well, choosing, picking and browsing ... I think if you want to create a reader, they should know where the library is, how to access it, and they should have their membership card ... I don’t think book ownership kills libraries. If you are going to give away books as a gift, you need to balance it out by showing them, this is another great way to access a lot of books. None of us could buy all the books that we ever read!” (librarian, interview)

In two case-study schools, the last event of the year was a visit to the library, where children who did not already have a library card signed up to become members (with prior authorisation from their parents). All children were introduced to how books are organised in the library space and the rules of borrowing and returning books were explained. In both cases, the children were also introduced to the Summer Reading Challenge.

A librarian in Bradford, who benefits from a long experience of working with the YRP, described this as her preferred model, making reference to how events have been organised in the past:

“Well, it’s a building up of knowledge for me. I went into the class before their first visit, so they recognise me, they can talk to me about the books they like, so I had the books [for gifting] ready waiting for them in the library. And we do activities, like create a book character, talk about their favourite characters. So they’d discover the library. Then the second term, they’d come back to the library, they’re a bit more familiar, they get their second gifted book (also based on a taste survey done in school beforehand) and we’d do

book design covers for instance. And then on the third visit they would have their library card and they'd join the Summer Reading Challenge. But it'd be building up to these things. And over the year, they can also talk about it at home, so that by the summer holiday, they've been to the library three times so you've built a bit of an interest, they're less intimidated, maybe they can convince their parents.” (librarian, interview)

One teacher and the YRP coordinator explained how she initiated a relationship with the library near the school thanks to the programme, something which was not in place in her school before but which is now a key element of the YRP. Likewise, another class teacher describes how she intends to keep the relationship going beyond the scope of the project.

“So for the past three years, the final event has always been a walk to the library... So I just rang the library (...) and I said I'm looking to bring a class down, this is what we're doing, I explained about the programme and how we're looking for activities and they said yeah, we've got the Reading Challenge, we'll set up a treasure hunt around the library for you. It was brilliant! And then I gave her my email and so she would email me different things going on. So... she emailed me to let me know that [a local author] is doing these things and would you like an author workshop with him for your class? So she'll email me about things like that ... And I've never really had that before, I must admit. Not really. And it was probably a resource that we didn't really use enough, I would say.” (teacher, interview)

“Yes definitely, we've said that we would do that [go to the library] and sort of pinch some ideas that we could do for our own library, so things like maybe in September just to get the children used to where the books and things are, have a little treasure hunt type thing. So yeah definitely I think... inviting somebody from the library in... or for children to go down [to the library].” (teacher, interview)

So although it does not appear to take place systematically or as an essential element of the programme which is actively promoted in schools, it does seem that the YRP has the potential to strengthen links between schools and public libraries, and to motivate children to use their local libraries to keep up the enjoyment and excitement which they associate with books following the YRP events.

Volunteer voices

Several schools use corporate volunteers to support the YRP events and other reading initiatives in school. In addition to taking part in YRP events, some are notably involved in regular one-to-one lunchtime reading sessions with struggling readers¹⁹. Two of the schools who use volunteers were case-study schools this year, so we were able to capture feedback from the volunteers and from teachers about their experience of working with volunteers.

What comes out very clearly from interviews is how much the volunteers enjoy the events and their volunteering role overall.

“I've been three or four times I think, now! It's good fun! (...) yeah, I've really enjoyed it, it's good fun.” (volunteer, group discussion)

“I mean, you watch the kids run around the library trying to grab as many books as they possibly can but they can't even carry them back to the school... (laughs) you can see they're excited about it! Yeah! It's very cute.” (volunteer, group discussion)

“Generally I enjoy it very much, and I think the children I read with enjoy it too.” (volunteer, interview)

¹⁹ Note that volunteers may not necessarily differentiate between their one-to-one reading with children and the YRP events where some also read with children, so the quotes below can cover both situations.

The volunteers seem satisfied with the difference they are making with the children they are helping and have a positive view of the impact they are having. They notably highlight that outcomes go beyond reading and literacy.

“I think that it might sound a little bit corny, but you do get a sense of satisfaction just coming and helping out a little bit, and contributing.” (volunteer, group discussion)

“I do believe ... it's not just about books, it's about reading. And how this improves a young person's life chances. Access to information, knowledge ... it will help! And I think the whole concept of this, which is trying to make it fun, is to do it around an activity. I'd like to think it works.” (volunteer, group discussion)

“Food is quite often a theme that they use, isn't it? I've been on two of the events where we've been to the local restaurant, and they talk to them about vitamins and that sort of stuff, so they bring the health element into it.” (volunteer, group discussion)

The reasons that lead corporate employees to volunteer are mainly linked to their desire to “make a difference” and “give back” as well as a strong commitment to promote literacy. They are often given the opportunity to do so because the organisation they work for supports the project through funding.

“I think I started because it sounds like a good idea, children to my mind shouldn't struggle with reading. (...) I always think that it doesn't matter if you're artistically minded or mathematically minded, you always have to read. There's reading in every exam so you always need to read and you have to understand what you're being asked to do. Even reading instructions on washing powder! One of the first things you do is read. So that's why I thought it was important for the kids to get this grounding and to enjoy reading as well. One of the things I still enjoy is books. So to try and instil that love of books for them.” (volunteer, interview)

“I think I'm privileged in terms of what I've achieved in my life and I feel it's incumbent on me to give that back. Some people give money to charity, and although that's not a bad thing a lot of the time that's easy, whereas giving time and making a commitment is a slightly harder thing to do.” (volunteer, interview)

“I think also, reading's so important isn't it? And it's so nice to have an input in someone else... trying to get someone else interested. Doing something that's so useful.” (volunteer, group discussion)

It is interesting to notice that in both cases, the support they receive from their company seems to be the determining factor which enables them to go from wanting to volunteer to actually volunteering.

“But the bank [the employer] helps a lot in terms of facilitating with cars and stuff and giving me a bit of my time back. They're very supportive! When I first started, we used to get a cab to the school and then you made your own way back, which isn't direct. So I ended up walking, not that far, but a half-hour walk. So I could leave the office at 12:15, start the school at 12:30 and then I'd be back at my desk at 1:30. So that was an hour and a half around lunchtime and that was fine. But what they do now is they provide cars both ways because it's a bit quicker. Because that was just transport time so a bit of a waste (...) Interestingly this year, we were coming back from an event, and we ran into a colleague in the lift. She asked us where we'd been and we said we were at the reading event. She said, 'Oh I used to do it but I gave up because it took too long'. I told her about the car and how the bank provides transport now and she didn't know about it. I told her it was a lot quicker now to get there and back. And so now she's doing it again, she's gone back on the volunteering.” (volunteer, interview)

The volunteers in one of the schools all come from a local company which also funds the programme. The decision to support the YRP was made by the CEO and employees volunteer during their work hours. He explained that this commitment to improving literacy and life chances was important to himself, his family and therefore his company.

“Well I suppose the real drive initially is that as a family, we’ve always been really interested in reading and books, and we have over the years read an awful lot. My brother actually had a bookshop for a couple of years. (...) And so it fits in with what we do as a family. As a business, we’ve grown very much focused on self-development and giving people at work the opportunity to improve in their role but also grow as people, and it was quite nice ... last week we got the Investors in People Silver Level Award. (...) And we wanted to do something that was [local] (...) So we went to the National Literacy Trust. (...) And for us, it’s actually being able to ... you know it’s easy to give the money, but to be involved as well, it’s really important. Yeah, absolutely.” (volunteer, group discussion)

Finally, we asked for some feedback about the logistics of the events, how they are run and how volunteers develop (or do not develop) relationships with schools. In both case-study schools the feedback was very positive.

“We’ve been doing it for a while so it’s well run. What I’d say is to make sure you have someone enthusiastic on the organising department at the bank. At the school, [the teacher] has been the one who’s been the driving force. If she was there it happened and if not it got cancelled. You need to have a few people as well, a bit of a team so that if one person isn’t here, then someone else picks it up.” (volunteer, interview)

“And so this is the third year we’ve worked with [the teacher] and she’s been absolutely fantastic. She really does pull us all together and makes us feel welcome, so that really helps.” (volunteer, group discussion)

Two practitioners also fed back that they found it very useful and valuable to work with volunteers as part of the project.

“They’re great, I mean for a lot of them they’re not used to working with children really, so it’s a whole new ball game for them, but I felt that yeah ... they get stuck in, and it’s really good, they’re really helpful! (...) And on the events it’s great that we’ve had enough helpers to walk us down to the library, and when we went to [the restaurant] getting involved ... yeah it was good!” (teacher, interview)

“They’re fantastic. Honestly they’re just brilliant. I can’t praise [the bank] highly enough. They come and do other things with us as well, weekly reading and some maths things as well... But I think that contact with an adult who’s not your parent or your teacher ... because as teachers, we try to do a good job, but we all have a teacher voice, we all have a similar approach. And it’s just lovely for them to come across somebody who’s in neither of those roles and who’s just going to give a bit of time and listen to them. And that’s very positive for our children.” (headteacher, interview)

In conclusion, while using volunteers in YRP events isn’t integral to the programme, it seems to positively support delivery. Some corporate employees seem highly motivated to be involved in reading projects and have a lot of skills they can share. The volunteers we interviewed feel they are making a positive difference to the children, and their presence as adults also seems to be helpful for school teachers who organise and manage the events. While the direct impact of volunteers on children’s reading attitudes or enjoyment has not been measured here, the positive feedback we obtained suggests it might be worth investigating further how children benefit from non-teaching adults being involved in the YRP.

Teacher outcomes and feedback

The YRP is first and foremost aimed at pupils. However, in order to support the positive child outcomes (more enjoyment of reading, better attitudes towards reading, more engagement), the programme seeks to impact on teachers and ideally schools as well, notably by raising awareness of how important it is for children to read for enjoyment, giving teachers some new strategies to engage reluctant readers, and encouraging schools to focus more on literacy and promoting reading for enjoyment throughout all year groups.

Literacy in schools

The 2015/16 evaluation considered whether the programme had had a wider impact on the school as a whole rather than only on participating teachers. Almost all respondents say that senior management was aware of the project (only two respondents are unsure), and two-thirds of teachers say that senior management was actually involved in the programme.

In terms of changes to the school's literacy approach, 32 of 59 respondents say their school has now integrated the YRP into their literacy approach, and another 11 say the school is now considering a whole-school literacy approach. In addition, 34 out of 60 respondents say they are "definitely" more likely to work with other settings outside schools to promote literacy, and another 22 said "maybe".

"I have contacted the local library to make the most of our local resources and continue to widen the books children pick." (survey respondent)

"Strengthened our links with [the] local library" (survey respondent)

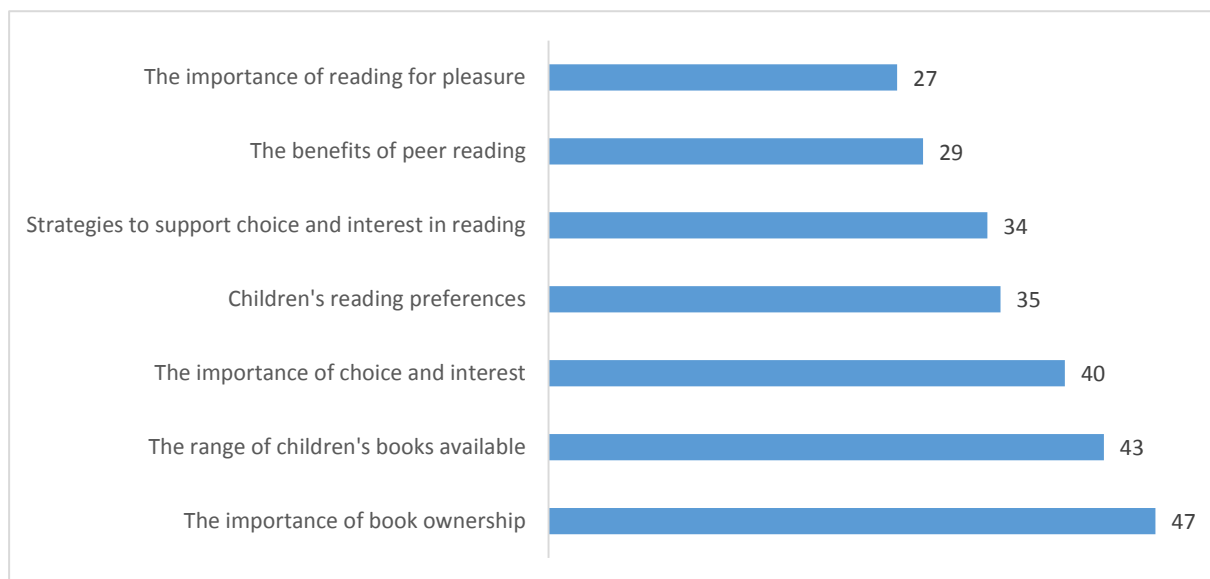
"We are always eager to widen the children's horizons with visits and experiences." (survey respondent)

"Will carry on with [the] library and possibly with WHSmith" (survey respondent)

Young Readers Programme's value for teachers as professionals

29 teachers (out of 60 who responded to this question) found the project very valuable for their professional development, and another 31 found it somewhat valuable. **Figure 2** highlights the areas where teachers have found the programme has given them additional knowledge or understanding.

Figure 2: Areas of improved knowledge and understanding among teachers having taken part in the programme (in numbers)



Several teachers mentioned in the 2015 interviews, unprompted, that they have become more aware of how important book ownership is for their pupils. The YRP also helps teaching staff realise how much the opportunity to choose what they read makes a difference for the children and how it affects their enthusiasm for reading.

What makes the Young Readers Programme work

In the online survey, we asked teachers (and other practitioners) what they thought of how the programme is designed and which aspects of it matter. Notably, we questioned whether book choice and book ownership are considered positives and whether they are regarded as key aspects of the programme.

61 teachers (all respondents by that stage) say the fact that children could choose the books themselves is positive. 55 think it is fundamental to the success of the programme, while six think it does not affect the success of the programme. Likewise, 60 teachers agree that children being able to choose from a wide range of books is a positive aspect of the programme and 53 think it is fundamental. Interestingly, one teacher thinks it is a negative aspect but one which does not adversely affect the success of the programme.

On book ownership, 61 teachers see it as a positive and only two think it is not fundamental to the success of the project.

Finally, 46 respondents say that the multi-event nature of the project is fundamental to its success, while another 15 see it as a positive aspect but not fundamental. All think it is positive. It should be noted here that the enjoyable nature of the events is also regarded as a key feature which helps children become more positive about reading. This was clear in the 2016 interviews.

“Well we’ve been doing it for several years now, so you know, I find it’s great. Especially for our low ability or non-readers. They get into it because they think ‘oh, everyone’s looking at books’ and there’s the events. And they enjoy the event itself.” (teacher, interview)

“I think when I first heard about the programme, I wouldn’t say I was sceptical, but I wasn’t sure how it would all work together and how the events we put on would feed into engagement with reading. And then last year, I was involved in organising a circus event which was for our Year 3 at the time. It was amazing... And these children absolutely

treasured not only that time, but the books they got to take away with them. I left that event in no doubt that they had not only a huge amount of enthusiasm for the different texts they'd been exposed to, but for the whole event.” (headteacher, interview)

“They all loved receiving books, and especially loved the trip ... And I quote ‘This was the best trip ever’, by one child who particularly enjoyed it!” (survey respondent, interview)

“A boy in Year 3 was so excited to go to WHSmith and could not believe that he was able to pick his own book. He kept repeating, ‘Is this mine, can I keep it?’ He has only been in this country for one year and he said his favourite thing in his house is his new books. At the end of this year children were all asked to pick a memorable experience and he picked going to a book store. He also could not wait to buy a book at the school book fair. He has certainly developed a love of books.” (survey respondent)

Conclusion

The 2015/16 evaluation of the YRP demonstrates that the programme is successful in improving children's attitudes to reading, notably the attitudes of the most reluctant readers.

Key findings from the survey data show that the YRP participants have better attitudes to reading at the end of the programme than at the beginning, and demonstrate better book choosing skills, a key feature of the programme. The survey also shows that children who took part in the YRP read a wider range of materials; again, it is a key aspect of the programme to show children the variety of reading opportunities available to them and ignite a love of reading in those who have not yet explored their reading preferences.

The YRP aims to change attitudes among reluctant readers, who are more often boys and more likely to be disadvantaged. Statistical analysis of the survey data reveals that the programme seems to have had particularly positive outcomes on children who did not see themselves as good readers at the start of the programme. That is a particularly positive finding from this evaluation, which suggests the YRP is successful in reaching out to disengaged readers.

Teachers stress the importance of book ownership in terms of encouraging a love of reading among pupils, and how valuable it is, especially for children from deprived backgrounds who may not have books of their own. They also share how much of a difference the programme makes by providing a wide range of books and reading materials for children to choose from, thereby helping the children develop their identities as readers.

In addition, teachers report that the YRP has positively affected their own teaching practices and awareness, notably their knowledge of children's books and their motivation to organise fun events, both in and outside school, to engage the children to read for enjoyment. This suggests the results of the programme might be sustainable in schools in the longer term.

Additionally, this year, a focus on case-study schools showed how the YRP can be well supported by the local library and vice versa, and that taking part in the YRP can strengthen relationships between schools and public libraries. Interviews with volunteers also show how motivated some corporate employees are to make a difference to children's literacy and how rewarding their involvement can be.