Exploring the Impact of Using Storysacks to Engage Year 2 Boys in Reading

Louise Sanderson
Cardiff School of Education
Cardiff Metropolitan University

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of candidature for the degree of M.A. (Education).

October 2015
DECLARATION

This work is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. (Education) and has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ............................................................... (candidate)

Date ............................................................... 

STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is the result of my own work and investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly indicated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A Reference Page is appended.

Signed ............................................................... (candidate)

Date ............................................................... 

STATEMENT 2(i)

I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and inter-library loan, for deposit in Cardiff Metropolitan University’s e-Repository, and that the title and summary may be available to outside organisations.

Signed ............................................................... (candidate)

Date ............................................................... 

Approved by Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Signed ............................................................... (candidate)

Date ...............................................................
Abstract

This research was carried out in order to try to ascertain an effective way of closing the gender gap in reading achievement identified by Primary School A (2014a, p.4). The research explored the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading. Its foci were the practitioners’ perceptions of engaging Year 2 boys in reading activities, and the impact of participating in the Storysack activities on both the boys’ attitudes towards reading and their reading achievement. The research took a mixed methods approach. Perceptions and attitudes were investigated using an action research methodology. Research methods employed here included semi-structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. Impact on achievement was measured utilising an experimental methodology. This entailed identifying an intervention group and a control group, and comparing the progress in reading development of the two groups over the duration of the intervention. Findings suggest that several positive impacts resulted from using the Storysack approach. An increase in the boys’ enjoyment of reading was noted, along with a significant growth in their motivation to engage in reading activities. A positive change in the boys’ view of reading as an accessible activity was also indicated. One notable finding was that although the Storysack intervention appeared to result in the higher and lower ability boys in the intervention group making more progress in reading achievement than their control group counterparts, this impact was not in evidence for the middle ability boys. It is recommended from the research that the setting expands the availability of boy-friendly reading material, and that practitioners take into account boys’ preferred learning styles and incorporate more boy-orientated activities when planning opportunities for reading. It is proposed that this may extend the positive impacts found here to the whole Year 2 male cohort, with a view to accelerating their progress in reading.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their role in the writing of this dissertation. To Jo Bowers, my tutor, who has provided me with guidance and provoked my thinking throughout. To my husband Andrew, who has been encouraging, patient and supportive, and to my children Josh, Matt and Lydia who have been excellent proof-readers and providers of humour during the difficult times! Thank you all.
### Table of Contents

Declaration and Statements......................................................................................(i)

Abstract.....................................................................................................................(ii)

Acknowledgements....................................................................................................(iii)

Table of Contents......................................................................................................(iv)

List of figures.............................................................................................................(vii)

List of Appendices.....................................................................................................(viii)

Chapter 1 – Introduction.........................................................................................1

  Research Statement..................................................................................................1

  Rationale..................................................................................................................3

  Ethical Considerations..............................................................................................7

Chapter 2 – Literature Review.................................................................................9

Chapter 3 – Methodology.........................................................................................18

  Research Paradigm..................................................................................................18

  Validity, Reliability and Triangulation...................................................................20

  Sampling..................................................................................................................21

  Methods of Data Collection....................................................................................22

    Questionnaire.........................................................................................................22

    Focus Groups..........................................................................................................24

    Book Banding and Tracking Data..........................................................................26
Chapter 4 – Results and Analysis

Action Research

Evaluation of the Methodology

Attitudes and Perceptions

Enjoyment

Findings

Discussion

Motivation

Findings

Discussion

Accessibility

Findings

Discussion

Experimental Research

Evaluation of the Methodology

Achievement

Findings

Discussion

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Evaluation of the Research

Main Findings
List of Figures

Figure 1 – Graph showing the average increase in Foundation Phase Outcomes for Reading of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention .................................................. 38

Figure 2 – Graph showing the average increase in Foundation Phase Outcomes for Reading of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention, by ability level ................................................................. 39

Figure 3 – Graph showing the average increase in book banding age of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention ................................................. 40

Figure 4 – Graph showing the average increase in book banding age of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention, by ability level ........... 41
List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Foundation Phase Outcomes for Language, Literacy and Communication

Appendix 2 – Timetable of Activities

Appendix 3 – Storysack Items and Activities

Appendix 4 – Reading Activities Questionnaire

Appendix 5 – Focus Group Questions

Appendix 6 – Book Banding Information
Chapter 1

Introduction

Research Statement

This study aimed to explore the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading. Evidence shows that girls consistently outperform boys in reading tests (Clarke and Burke, 2012, p.10) and this was certainly true in Wales in 2014, where girls performed better than boys in all year groups tested in the National Reading Tests (Wales. Statistics for Wales, 2014, p.3). Primary School A has also identified a gender gap in reading achievement and has highlighted the need to address this issue in its School Improvement Plan (Primary School A, 2014a, p.4).

Research has found that girls are more engaged in reading than boys (Clarke and Burke, 2012) and this has been closely linked to the gender achievement gap because engagement with reading activities has been identified as having a notable impact on progress in reading (Cremin et al., 2009). Dombey (2010, p.5) describes children who are engaged with reading as being those who ‘actually like reading and do plenty of it’. This study set out therefore, to explore the impact of using Storysacks to engage boys in reading in order to develop their reading skills and raise their reading levels, and also to promote positive attitudes towards reading.

The research took a mixed methods approach. The experimental aspect evaluated the impact of an intervention (the utilisation of Storysacks) on a group of Year 2 boys, by comparing them to a control group, who were not exposed to the intervention (Gorard, 2013). The action research aspect aimed to understand practice and base change on the results of the enquiry (O’Connell Rust, 2007). Despite a positivistic element whereby the research in part aimed to measure and
assess cause and effect (Brown, 2010), the research was mainly interpretivist, as it sought to ‘understand socially constructed, negotiated and shared meanings’ (Hughes, 2010, p.36). This meant that the findings of the research could only be interpreted within the context of the learners, the practitioners and the school, and should not, henceforth, be generalised. Conclusions of the research were drawn from the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Firstly, staff perceptions of engaging Year 2 boys in reading were collected. Secondly, the intervention group was asked to share their thoughts and feelings about reading both before and after the intervention. Finally, data from school levelling was analysed, and progress in reading of the intervention group was compared with progress of the control group.

The research took place in Primary School A. The school is a two-form entry school, situated in a large town in South Wales. There are currently 457 pupils on roll. The number of pupils in Year 2 has been fairly consistent over the last three years. Furthermore, the proportion of boys in Year 2 has also remained fairly consistent during the last three years. The school’s Free School Meals (FSM) entitlement figures have fallen consistently into the lower end of the benchmarking group 8.1% to 16% in each of the previous three years. The proportions of pupils on School Action have been much higher than that of the Local Authority during the last three years; however conversely the proportions of pupils on School Action+ have been lower than that of the Local Authority. Notably, the proportion of children from ethnic backgrounds was much higher than that of the Local Authority in 2013-2014. Despite this, the proportion of pupils on early language acquisition stages below competent was lower than that of the Local Authority during this time period (Primary School A, 2014b, p.1).

The sample group for the research comprised the cohort of Year 2 boys. The intervention group (n=6) was supported in experiencing Storysack activities, with a
focus on reading skills (see Appendix 1), over the course of two half terms. It was proposed that if the boys engaged in the Storysack activities, their attitudes towards reading would change, their reading skills would develop and their achievement levels would increase more than those of the control group \((n=14)\). This hypothesis formed the basis for the research. It was hoped that the research findings would lead to a deeper understanding of how to ensure appropriate and relevant provision in the teaching and learning of reading to boys in the Foundation Phase, in order to close the gender gap and raise standards.

The research therefore sought to answer the following question:

*What is the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading?*

This was achieved by seeking evidence through asking three subsidiary questions:

**Research Question 1.**
What were the practitioners’ perceptions of engaging Year 2 boys in reading activities?

**Research Question 2.**
What were the Year 2 boys’ attitudes towards reading activities?

**Research Question 3.**
How did the reading activities impact on achievement?

*Rationale*
The phenomenon of boys achieving less well than girls in reading is a global one; international comparisons found that girls consistently do better than boys at reading assessments at ages 10 and 15 across all of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries surveyed (Twist, Schagen and
Boys’ worldwide under-achievement in reading is reflected in the United Kingdom (UK), where in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 girls outperformed boys in reading by an average of 25 points, although interestingly it should be noted that this figure was ‘significantly less than the OECD average gender gap of 38 points’ (OECD, 2012, p.3). It would seem therefore, that while the issue definitely exists, policies and practices in the UK home nations have gone some way to addressing the gender gap in reading, although of course it must be recognised that cultural and sociological factors could also play a part. An additional finding of PISA 2012 was that overall, reading performance in Wales was lower than that of the rest of the UK, although it had improved slightly since 2009 (OECD, 2012). Whilst it is important to remember that PISA data are collected by testing 15 year-olds rather than across a wider age range, it is apparent from consistently low results over the last three rounds of testing (BBC, 2013) that there is much work to be done in Wales to improve all learners’ reading skills, and this must include implementation of strategies to close the gender gap across the age ranges.

In 2008 Estyn found that there was already a gap in language skills between boys and girls on school entry (Estyn, 2008). Furthermore, the need to improve boys’ literacy achievement in the Foundation Phase was highlighted by Estyn in 2009 (Estyn, 2009) and remains increasingly compelling. In 2013, girls outperformed boys across the Foundation Phase in Wales, with the biggest differences in performance being evident in Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) (Estyn, 2013). This trend has continued into 2014, where across Wales, girls outperformed boys in LLC by a difference of 8.3% (JLX Education Ltd, 2014, p.7). Data specific to the reading element of the LLC Area of Learning are not available, moreover Estyn is clear that the learning
and teaching of all elements of literacy, that is oracy, reading and writing, should be closely interlinked during the early years of development (Estyn, 2011). Nonetheless, results from the National Reading Tests 2014 show that for Year 2 across Wales, 5.5% more boys than girls achieved below average scores and 5% more girls than boys achieved above average scores (Wales. Statistics for Wales, 2014, p.3). The data, therefore, would appear to reveal a definite gender gap in achievement in the reading element of LLC.

In common with Welsh national data, a gender difference is also in evidence in performance in LLC at Primary School A. Most learners are expected to achieve Outcome 5 (see Appendix 2) by the end of the Foundation Phase (end of Year 2). In 2014, 11.1% more girls than boys achieved Outcome 5 and above and 30% more girls than boys achieved Outcome 6 (JLX Education, 2014, p.7). Furthermore, girls have outperformed boys in LLC at Primary School A for the previous three years (JLX Education, 2014, p.5). National Reading Test data are available for the last two years. This shows that in 2013 and 2014, more boys than girls scored below average, while in 2013 more girls than boys scored above average. Notably, in 2014, more boys than girls scored above average; however this was an anomaly in the whole school dataset (The Data Exchange Wales Initiative (DEWi), 2013; DEWi, 2014). The school has identified the disparity between boys’ and girls’ achievement in LLC and National Reading Test performance data as a crucial issue in its School Improvement Plan (SIP) and has consequently targeted an improvement in boys’ reading achievement in order to raise standards (Primary School A, 2014a).

According to research by Siraj-Blatchford et al., (2006) practitioners in Wales have historically found planning and implementing effective strategies to teach LLC in the Foundation Phase difficult. They found in their evaluation of schools piloting the
Foundation Phase that although whole-class teaching of literacy had been reduced in favour of more group based activities, the quality of literacy in these schools had declined. The situation had seemingly not improved in 2013 when Estyn found that the teaching of literacy remained a cause for concern in Wales and pointed out that learners’ who were unable to ‘read with understanding at an age-appropriate level’ would find it difficult to understand the content of many lessons, resulting in an adverse impact in achievement across the curriculum (Estyn, 2013, p.26). Thus learners who have lower reading skills will ultimately under-achieve even in Area of Learning where they have good subject-specific skills. It is vital, therefore, that effective strategies are identified to improve reading achievement.

In deciding upon a strategy to improve boys’ reading achievement effectively at Primary School A, many factors were taken into account. Estyn recommends the use of ‘a careful blend’ of structured literacy work along with play-based activities, and the ‘greater promotion of play and active-learning approaches’ (Estyn, 2009, p.9). Moreover Estyn also states that ‘developing good oracy skills is … vital to success in learning to read’ (Estyn, 2009, p.2). Foundation Phase practitioners (2014) at Primary School A reported that many of the boys in their classes were reluctant readers, often found the sedentary nature of Guided Reading sessions difficult to cope with and became easily distracted, although this did lessen somewhat as they moved through the year groups. Significantly, when Primary School A surveyed parents and carers in an attempt to gain more insight into the learning and teaching of reading, in common with practitioners’ perceptions one of the most common issues reported in the survey was a difficulty in engaging boys in reading (Primary School A, 2014c).

Subsequent to consideration of these points, and in light of Cremin et al.’s. (2009) finding that engagement in reading has a substantial impact on progress, it was
decided to implement the use of Storysacks to develop Year 2 boys’ reading skills. It was felt that this could be an effective strategy because following the successful introduction of a Storysack initiative in Reception, Storysacks had been found by the school to be effective in engaging learners and developing oracy skills (Foundation Phase practitioners, 2014). In addition, Storysacks encourage active participation in the reading process through the use of props, and also contain non-fiction books, games and reading activities linked to the text (Griffiths, 2001). These could be designed to appeal to boys, thereby diminishing the likelihood of them becoming disengaged.

**Ethical Considerations**

The research took ethical considerations into account. Firstly, there was the issue of informed consent (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2011). As the intervention group were involved in the Storysack activities as part of their everyday learning at school, they were not expected to consent to participating in these. However, it was still necessary to obtain the informed consent of the intervention group before asking them to share their response to reading activities for data collection. In view of the age of the boys concerned, it was important to ensure that the purpose of the research was explained to them in language that they could understand. Additionally, in view of my role as a teacher in a position of authority at the school it was vital to ensure that the boys understood that they could withdraw from the research at any point. Secondly, my dual role as a teacher and researcher meant that I needed to be mindful of confidentiality issues, because I was seeking the views of colleagues in the course of my research (BERA, 2011). In order to avoid tensions at work, I needed to be clear about when practitioners were speaking to me candidly as a colleague, and to differentiate between this and when they were expressing
measured views for data collection as part of the research. Ensuring that these factors were taken into account enabled the research to be carried out ethically.

For a detailed timetable of the research process see Appendix 2.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This research set out to explore the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading. The research was based on the hypothesis that if the boys engaged in reading activities, their attitudes towards reading would change, their reading skills would develop and their reading achievement would increase.

In order to set the current context for the research and to provide a framework for it, a review of literature was undertaken. It was found that copious amounts of literature exists about the teaching of reading, and a large body is concerned with the gender differences that are perceived to impact on this. I chose, therefore, to ensure that the majority of the research I referred to was very recent in order to attempt to reflect the current situation as accurately as possible. It was also found that a large portion of the recent research regarding the way gender differences impact on reading was carried out by the same researcher, Dr Christina Clark, on behalf of the National Literacy Trust. I felt that it was viable to refer to her many different research findings throughout because of the large scale of the research projects, which increased the likelihood of reliable findings. Furthermore, the fact that the research was undertaken on behalf of a charity that aims to promote literacy meant that it was unlikely to have been carried out from a biased viewpoint and was more likely to have been concerned with discovering a true picture. Much of the research data available concerning reading attitudes and preferences related to children from Year 3 upwards. However, I felt these data would still be valuable to inform this research as the sample children here were approaching this age and were likely to hold, or be developing, similar views.

Underachievement in reading is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to boys, and not all boys underachieve (Douglas et al., 2012). Nevertheless, data consistently reveal a
gender gap in reading achievement for school-aged children, be it on a global, national or local scale (e.g. Bradshaw et al., 2010, Wales. Statistics for Wales, 2014, JLX Education, 2014). Interestingly, brain research finds that ‘the various regions of the brain develop in a different sequence and tempo in girls compared with boys’, for example the language centres in the brain of many five-year-old boys are comparable in maturity and function to those of the average three-and-a-half-year-old girl (Sax, 2007). It is possible therefore, that testing young children against notionally agreed age-related reading norms is simply irrelevant because the gender-based developmental sequence of the brain renders the results meaningless as a basis for comparison. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government remains committed to closing the gender gap in reading in all age phases (Estyn, 2008), thus Primary School A has set a target of increasing boys’ reading achievement at the end of the Foundation Phase (Year 2) (Primary School A, 2014a).

When seeking to identify a strategy to improve boys’ reading achievement in Year 2, it was helpful to consider the different approaches that have been developed to teaching reading. The psycholinguistic, or whole language, approach was identified by Goodman in 1967, and propounds that reading is more than a technical skill of decoding words, and demands ‘real’ books and contextual print rather than reading schemes to promote it (Lambirth, 2011). In this approach, phonics is seen as a vital skill in reading, but not necessarily the ‘prime skill or the one that must be acquired ‘first and fast” (Wyse and Styles, 2007, p.36). The cognitive psychological approach, on the other hand, is based on the premise that learning to read is a linear process (Kelly, 2008). It takes the view that word identification is the most crucial factor, thus phonics should be drilled daily and phonics-based reading schemes utilised to ensure staged progress (Lambirth, 2011). More recently, a socio-cultural approach has been
identified which focuses on reading being ‘purposeful, meaningful and relevant in a familiar context’. This approach essentially places an emphasis on participation in reading in a social context, utilising reading materials that are relevant and interesting to the readers. (Lambirth, 2011, pp.34-35).

In Wales, Foundation Phase policy dictates that ‘early literacy is best promoted through meaningful and real contexts of learning and a print rich environment’ and acknowledges that ‘children do not learn to read in isolation of the other skills of speaking, listening and writing’ (Wales. Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2008, p.14). The likely effectiveness of the mix of psycholinguistic and socio-cultural approaches taken in the Foundation Phase framework is supported by Dombey’s review of evidence which found that where children are taught to read ‘most effectively’ a more balanced approach is taken (Dombey, 2010, p.5). Notably, because the research took place in a school in Wales, it was necessary to ensure that its component activities were delivered within the parameters of this curriculum framework.

Despite the holistic and evidence-based Welsh education policy, the gender gap in reading achievement still exists in Wales just as it does elsewhere. Thus it may be that it is more apposite to consider not which approach is taken in the teaching of reading, but rather whether how it is delivered meets the learning needs of boys.

It is claimed that ‘when boys enter the classroom, they are expected to behave in ways that are not natural for them’ (Johnson and Gooliaff, 2013, p.28). The more active learning style of boys is identified as a significant feature of their learning needs (Clark and Burke, 2012) and brain science confirms that teaching boys needs to involve a focus on physical action to be effective (King and Guriam, 2006). However, Douglas et al. (2012) point out that boys will sit for lengthy periods when playing computer
games. Interestingly, more recent brain research suggests that boys can ‘jump-start their brains with an increased dose of sensory or physical stimulation’ (Senn, 2012, p.217). This had implications when planning reading activities for use in the research, because it is apparent from the evidence that learning which allows boys to be physically active or even simply has physical activity as a theme may be more effective in terms of learning.

Additionally, it is highlighted that many young boys do not like the ‘solitary nature’ of reading and prefer to talk about texts (Serafini, 2013, pp.41-42). Henry et al. (2012) concur with this view, emphasising the importance of giving boys the opportunity to share what they are reading with others. Furthermore, the value of shared reading as a context for ‘explicit teaching but in a collaborative and democratic atmosphere’ is expounded (Goouch and Lambirth, 2011, p.84) and Dabble (2011, p.122) points out that peer group discussions have the added benefit of ‘transferring some of the responsibility for learning from the teacher to students’. The inclination boys reportedly have to discuss and debate their reading material is closely bound up with the socio-cultural approach to learning to read; however it is noted that in a busy classroom teachers are increasingly concerned with the mechanics and accuracy of reading (Douglas et al., 2012), and it is likely that this takes precedence over enabling child-led conversations about the reading matter to take place. Nonetheless, when planning the research activities it was felt to be a priority that they should allow for the social exploration of texts, because the evidence suggests that this likely to increase the achievement of boys.

Another aspect of gender differences in learning needs is documented in the literature. Boys have significantly more extrinsic motivation to read than girls (McGeown et al., 2012); this means that they are motivated by the desire to gain reward, recognition or
to achieve better grades and out-perform others (McGeown, 2013). Conversely, girls are more likely to be intrinsically motivated than boys (McGeown et al., 2012), meaning that they read because they relish the challenge of mastering more complex reading materials or because they find it interesting and enjoyable; in other words they engage more with reading (McGeown, 2013). For example, Clark (2013, p.13) reports that ‘nearly twice as many girls as boys say they enjoy reading very much...conversely nearly twice as many boys as girls say that they don’t enjoy reading at all.’ Moreover, girls have been found to have a more positive attitude to reading than boys (Clark and Burke, 2012). This poses a difficulty for practitioners trying to close the gender gap because it has been pointed out that it is boys’ lack of motivation and engagement in literacy activities that has led to their consistent underachievement (McGeown et al., 2012). Indeed engagement is found to have the second biggest effect on progress in reading after parental income (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998, cited in Dombey, 2010) and a high correlation between reading enjoyment and reading attainment is identified (Clark, 2011).

So it is apparent that finding ways to foster intrinsic motivation to read, especially by engaging boys in reading, may be a key factor in increasing their achievement. This was the view that was taken when planning the research reading activities and this is also the view that is taken by many primary practitioners, the majority of whom when asked what they thought would make the biggest difference to boys’ reading achievement mention the importance of engaging them (Clark and Burke, 2012). However, Lever-Chain (2008, p.84) believes that ‘attitude centred models [for teaching reading] appear to have had little influence in the UK’ and that despite its significance, promoting the enjoyment of reading is ‘rarely addressed as an independent constituent of reading acquisition’. It may be, therefore, that neglecting to promote reading for
enjoyment in schools in recent years has discouraged boys from engaging with it. Catering more to boys’ learning styles is evidently closely interlinked with engaging them and it is likely that providing opportunities for movement, physical stimulation and reading-related talk may help to increase boys’ intrinsic motivation to participate in reading activities by making it a more natural and enjoyable experience for them.

The literature indicates that differences in learning styles are not the only barriers to effectively engaging boys in reading. Research finds that whilst girls enjoy reading fiction and electronic texts, particularly those linked to social networking, boys prefer to read newspapers, manuals, and other non-fiction as well as comics and joke books (Clark and Burke, 2012). Interestingly, in his blog, children’s author Emmett (2014, no page numbers given) wonders if the reason that boys prefer non-fiction to fiction is that ‘the detailed imagery and technical language that fascinates them is more likely to be found in a non-fiction book than in a picture story book’. He goes on to point out that the same preference does not seem to apply to other media, for example most boys would prefer watching a television adventure featuring spacecraft than a documentary about spacecraft. This viewpoint suggests that it is the content of the fiction that does not appeal to boys, rather than the format itself.

Indeed, Clark (2013) finds that different genres of fiction appeal more to boys than girls; boys are more likely to read crime, war/spy stories, science fiction and sport whereas girls choose romance and animal stories. As schools have a tendency to use narrative, realist fiction with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Lockwood, 2008), it is possible that one reason that boys do not engage in reading at school is that they are simply not interested in the reading material. This presents a real obstacle to improving boys’ reading achievement, because in comparison with children with similar reading skills, children with lower interest in the texts they are reading have
lower comprehension of them (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008). Merisuo-Storm (2006) concludes from her research that interest to the reader should be the primary factor when selecting reading material and Henry, Lagos and Berndt (2012, p.40) candidly advise that ‘teachers … have to let go of some of their biases about books that contain underwear, farting and slapstick misbehaviour and allow boys to read books that they find engaging.’

An added advantage to choosing texts that will interest boys is that it helps to combat the view that boys have of reading as an activity that is not ‘cool’ (Clark, 2012, p.17). Smith’s (2004, pp.12-14) research finds that boys made ‘more positive connections between masculinity and reading’ when they are able to read to find out about traditionally male topics of interest, and use their knowledge to boost their status among their peers. Bearing all the evidence in mind, a key factor in choosing the texts to be used in the research was ensuring that they included themes that boys would enjoy, as well as non-fiction and texts in other formats, in order to promote their engagement.

Reading role models are important to over three-quarters of children (Clark, Osborne and Dugdale, 2009). Significantly, more boys than girls say that their reading role model needs to be of the same gender as themselves (Clark, Osborne and Dugdale, 2009), so it may be presumed that this would present a difficulty in primary schools, where only 16% of the workforce in the UK are male (UK. National Statistics, 2014, p.4). However, only 1.9% of children name a teacher as a reading role model, whilst 42.6% mention a family member, 14.2% a sportsperson and 8% a friend (Clark, Osborne and Dugdale, 2009, p.17). Schools could accommodate this by bringing suitable role models into the setting. Additionally, on a daily basis, it may be that utilising a range of staff and more skilled readers to support reading activities where
possible might be advantageous in that it would increase the likelihood of boys finding someone with whom they can establish a reading ‘connection’, thereby increasing their motivation to read. This was taken into consideration when planning reading activities for the research.

Finally, it is mooted that it is not always reading texts *per se* that engage readers, rather the types of activities that are linked to them (Mallett, 2010). Hawley and Reichart (2011) find that boys respond well to activities that produce products, are structured as games and involve creativity, problem-solving, teamwork and challenge. This highlighted the need to think creatively about the activities that were designed for children to respond to texts in the research, ensuring that motivation, enjoyment and engagement were at the forefront of the planning.

In seeking to find a way to address the gender gap in Year 2 boys’ reading achievement, this study drew on the evidence in the literature, and a strategy of using Storysacks was settled upon. Storysacks are cloth bags containing a picture story book and other items based around the theme of this book, for example non-fiction texts, props, games and prompt cards for other activities (Griffiths, 2001). It was felt that they were an appropriate resource to use for several reasons.

Firstly, Storysacks are designed to be used by small groups of children, supported by an adult. This enables the adult to scaffold the children’s learning, that is to ‘give them the appropriate level and type of support to enable them to work independently with a task’ (ffield [sic], 2014, pp.27-28) and also to help the children to engage in sustained shared thinking. This means that the all of the reading activities take place within the socio-cultural paradigm and allow for lots of discussion. Secondly, each Storysack is based around a picture book with a theme; in this research these were themes that are likely to appeal to boys. Booker (2012) points out that the illustrations in picture
books can often complement and enhance the story, and sometimes even tell a contradictory story to the text. It was felt that the pictures could be useful in engaging the children and provoking and challenging their thinking about the stories, as well as providing extra cues for decoding the text, in line with the psycholinguistic model of learning to read (Lambirth, 2011). Props to accompany the picture books in Storysacks add ‘interest and sometimes a frisson’ (Mallett, 2010, p.37, italics in original), as well as adding a physical dimension to the reading (Senn, 2012) and it was felt that this could also increase engagement.

Storysacks include a variety of text types such as non-fiction books, comics and instruction leaflets alongside the picture books. This was felt to be advantageous in that it demonstrated explicitly that many varied text types were valued as valid forms of reading material. It also meant that there was an increased likelihood of the boys finding a text type that they preferred during the reading activities, which in turn was likely to increase their engagement (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008). Finally, the additional activities that are based on the theme of the Storysack may be specifically designed to include aspects that meet the needs of the learners. It was hoped that incorporating activities that were likely to appeal to the boys in the Storysacks would further improve the likelihood of increased engagement.

Introducing and developing ‘boy-friendly teaching strategies’ is found to have a significant impact on closing the gender gap in reading (King and Gurian, 2006, p.56). It was felt that creating Storysacks that were specifically designed to suit the learning styles and to meet the learning needs of Year 2 boys would probably augment their engagement in reading, thereby increasing the likelihood of them developing their reading skills and improving their achievement.

For an inventory of Storysack contents and activities, see Appendix 3.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Research Paradigm

This research sought to investigate the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading. It took place within a mixed methods paradigm. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.25) state that ‘mixed methods research addresses the ‘what’ (numerical and quantitative data) and ‘how or why’ (qualitative) types of research questions.’ Certainly, for this research I wished to collect numerical data about boys’ progress in school reading levels, as well as gathering data about the additional impacts of the Storysack intervention such as changes in attitudes, which are often more difficult to quantify but easier to describe in a narrative form. The decision to use a mixed methods paradigm therefore reflected Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s view (2011, p.23) that ‘methodological pluralism’ results in the research being ‘driven by the research questions… rather than the methodological preferences of the researcher.’

A key element of this research was trying to identify whether the Storysack intervention made a difference to boys’ reading skills in terms of reading levels achieved. For this, an experimental design was chosen. Gorard (2013) argues that in order to make claims about an intervention making a difference, then a comparator group is necessary. This type of research design is problematic in view of BERA’s research guidelines (BERA, 2011), which raise concerns about interventions which are deemed to be desirable being offered to one group of participants but not to another. However, Gorard (2013, p.133) argues that ‘it is … more ethical to find out whether interventions work and have side-effects before rolling them out in an uncontrolled way’. He goes on to qualify this statement by saying that ‘a trial should only take place when the
intervention shows promise but its effect is not certain.’ In this research, a previous Storysack intervention which had taken place in the Reception class of the setting had anecdotally been found to have improved children’s engagement in reading. It was thus felt that whilst it was likely that the introduction of the Storysack intervention for the Year 2 boys was likely to result in positive effects, this was by no means a certainty. It was decided that it would be more ethical to ascertain more accurately the effects of the intervention on the development of reading skills before rolling it out to the whole Year 2 cohort.

The experimental aspect of this research methodology was based on a positivistic paradigm, which advocates that it is possible to measure and assess cause and effect (Brown, 2010). This was true for this research where quantitative data were collected to measure and compare the sample groups’ reading levels. Notably, Hayes (2010) cautions that in social sciences, dealing with people often presents difficulties in achieving the level of control necessary to produce absolute conclusions. The data for the reading levels were thus collected in the knowledge that due to the human nature of the research participants, it was impossible to control all of the factors that may have impacted on their reading development. It was accepted that the conclusions drawn from the research were limited by this, and as such could not be generalised, but were specific to this time and setting.

Assessing and evaluating any impact of the intervention on motivation and attitudes towards reading was harder to quantify accurately. For this element of the research, it was felt that a qualitative approach should be taken, as this would place an emphasis on ‘enlightening … professional practice, by providing information which questions assumptions and offers fresh ways of interpreting familiar events’ (Edwards, 2010, p.159). Here, action research was identified as the most appropriate design. Wilson
(2013, p.234) asserts that educational action research is ‘geared towards changing the curriculum, challenging existing school practices and working towards social change’. The introduction of the Storysack intervention aimed to change to current practice in the teaching of reading, and it was felt that rather than simply focusing on changes to numerically measurable reading skills, it was important to also ascertain whether it had an impact on attitudes towards reading. It was hoped that by collecting narrative data in conjunction with some numerical data where appropriate, it would be possible to gain an insight into the particularly human responses and reactions to the intervention (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2014). It was recognised that the interpretivist nature of analysing these types of data meant that the results could not be generalised, but were again specific to the context of the research (Hughes, 2010).

*Validity, Reliability and Triangulation*

This research did not seek to produce data that could be generalized and so said to have external validity, instead it sought to achieve internal validity, whereby the findings ‘described accurately the phenomena being researched’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.183). This pursuit of internal validity meant that it was of paramount importance to ensure that the presentation and analysis of results ‘captured important features of the field and … analysed them with integrity’ (Edwards, 2010, p.162). Whilst being concerned with the authenticity of the presentation and analysis of the research findings helped to safeguard their validity, it was acknowledged that this validity only existed within the context of the research.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.199) argue that ‘reliability is essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability.’ Interestingly though, they also recognise that the distinctive nature of naturalistic studies in the field means that
they cannot be replicated (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The human uniqueness of each participant in this research was felt to mean that even given the exact same context at a different time, it was unlikely that the exact same results would be obtained. It was felt therefore that it was more important to focus on striving for dependability by ensuring that what was recorded as data provided a true reflection of what actually happened in the setting, rather than on aiming to create replicability.

Biesta (2012) points out that triangulation may be effectively achieved by conducting separate studies of the same phenomenon and then bringing together the findings, so triangulation of these research results was aided by its mixed methods design. Moreover, Evans (2013, pp.152-153) believes that ‘by including different categories of informants…the converging perspectives will arguably make the findings more powerful.’ This research took into account the views of learners (boys), teachers and support staff. It is proposed that this should make the findings of this research more reliable and more authentic.

**Sampling**

The population for this research was the cohort of twenty Year 2 boys at Primary School A. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.144) counsel that ‘the larger the sample the better’, because this leads to more reliable results. However, the desire of the school to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy before deciding whether to roll it out to the whole cohort, coupled with the time constraints in this research, meant that it was necessary to identify a smaller sample from the population at large.

I decided against random sampling because I wanted to ensure that I could collect data from children of a range of reading abilities. Stratified sampling was thus used to identify a treatment group of six Year 2 boys who represented the range and proportions of reading ability in the population as a whole to receive the Storysack
intervention. Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and children with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) were removed from the sampling process, as it was felt that it was beyond the scope of this research to incorporate their particular learning needs.

For the experimental element of the research it was also necessary to identify a control group. Gorard (2013) points out that increasing the size of the control group increases the robustness of the counterfactual evidence without leading to any increase in the risk of side effects of the treatment. It was decided therefore to use the remaining population, minus any children with EAL or SLD, as the control for the intervention, \((n=14)\).

Two teachers and three learning support assistants, all of whom would be working with the sample group to implement the Storysack intervention, as well as carrying out the usual reading activities with the whole population, agreed to answer questionnaires to add their perceptions of engaging boys in reading activities at school to the research findings.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Issues of confidentiality were considered; all data collected was kept securely and anonymity of participants was maintained throughout (Coady, 2010).

**Questionnaire**

This tool aimed to answer Research Question 1- What were the practitioners’ perceptions of engaging Year 2 boys in reading activities?

I had initially hoped to use observation as a tool to determine the reactions of the treatment group to different reading activities. However, due to an already heavy schedule of performance management observations, the adults involved were
reluctant to agree to this. The need to compromise between ‘the ideal and the achievable’ when choosing research methods has been acknowledged (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2014, p.63), so I decided instead to opt for using a questionnaire to gather data about the practitioners’ perceptions. I hoped that this would negate some of the worries that staff may have about scrutiny of their practice. I also explained the purpose of the research fully to the respondents and provided them with a letter assuring them of their rights to confidentiality, anonymity and to withdraw their participation at any time (BERA, 2011).

The questionnaire was piloted on members of Early Years practitioners at Primary School A, who were familiar with implementing Storysack reading activities. This enabled me to check that the questions were easily understood and elicited relevant data (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2014). The questionnaire was kept as brief as possible to ensure that the respondents did not lose interest in answering the questions and that their responses were more likely to be considered rather than rushed, so that the data collected were valid (Tymms, 2012). The order of the questions was also planned carefully, so that non-threatening, easier to answer questions came first, in the hope that this would encourage respondents to continue providing true, reflective responses (Oppenheim, 1992).

The questionnaire included closed questions, where the range of responses was set. This was helpful because I wanted to elicit some quantifiable, unambiguous data to work with (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Likewise, Likert-style questions were employed to ascertain the respondents’ feelings and position on aspects of the research on a continuum (Oppenheim, 1992). I was careful to ensure that I included an odd number of possible answers for these questions, as if the respondents wanted to ‘sit on the fence’ I felt that this was also pertinent to the research findings (Tymms, p.233).
I also included open-ended questions to obtain a richness in the data to help explain and illuminate certain features of the quantitative data. These provided a qualitative check on the interpretation of the quantitative answers (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010), and I hoped that the variety of question styles would have the inclusive effect of allowing for the various preferences of the respondents, so increasing the reliability of the data collected.

In order to ensure that the respondents were able to complete the questionnaire at a time convenient to them, the questionnaires were self-administered without me present (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, an advantage of the research taking place at my place of work meant that I was able to ensure a 100% response rate as I was able to remind the respondents and assist people who desired it with the questionnaire’s completion (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

For the questionnaire, see Appendix 4.

**Focus Groups**

This tool aimed to answer Research Question 2 – What were the Year 2 boys’ attitudes towards reading activities?

I was aware that the boys may have different perspectives to the views expressed by the adults in the questionnaire (Folque, 2010) and I wanted to ensure that these were taken into account. This was especially important to ensure the ethical integrity of the research in light of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989), which establishes the right of children to have a voice in matters that affect them. To this end, I chose focus groups as a research tool.
The benefits of using focus groups to access the views of young children include the fact that ‘children can react to the perspectives of others [and also] can have thinking time when others are speaking’ (Warwick and Chaplain, 2013, p.70). I felt that the nature of the focus group as an interactive process made it a valid research tool which could yield some rich and enlightening data. Nonetheless, Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2014) caution that the data gathered from focus groups can be biased because more confident children may be very vociferous, while less confident children may be influenced by peer pressure to express a particular view or may lack the confidence to speak at all. As a counter to this, I hoped that the skills that I have gathered as a teacher of young children would enable me to support every participant to have their true voice heard.

While my role as a teacher provided me with the skills I needed to conduct focus groups, there was a drawback in that the boys may have viewed me as a teacher rather than a researcher in this context, and there would have been a subsequent imbalance in power distribution between us. There was also a danger that the boys may have assumed that there was a ‘right answer’ to my questions that I was searching for, and that they would try to find this rather than expressing their honest opinions (Folque, 2010, p.241). Before each of the focus group sessions, therefore, I reminded the boys of the purpose of the research and assured them that I was interested in their true responses, that there were no right or wrong answers and that it was alright to feel differently to their peers.

I planned the questions to prompt discussion during the focus group sessions in advance, as this allowed me to explore specific themes with the boys whilst maintaining focus (Warwick and Chaplain, 2013). For focus group questions, see Appendix 5.
**Book Banding and Tracking Data**

These tools aimed to answer Research Question 3 - How did the reading activities impact on achievement?

The tools used to measure the sample groups’ reading levels took the form of those already in established use at the setting. These were a commercially available book banding tool, alongside participants’ scores from the reading section of the school’s online tracking system. My reasons for using these tools were twofold. Firstly, I had already been trained and was adept at using the tools as a means of tracking children’s development. Secondly, the data produced at the end of the research would be more useful to the setting if it was compatible with data and systems that were already in place there.

Baseline measurements of each individual participant’s reading levels were taken immediately before the Storysack intervention was implemented. The same measurements were taken again at the end of the research. This meant that value-added, (i.e. the value that the reading activities added, taking into account prior attainment (Winterbottom, 2013)), could be calculated for each individual, thereby assigning an accurate and comparable numerical value to each individual’s reading skills development. In line with McLellan’s view (2013), I believed that deciding exactly what I wanted to find out from using these research tools, and thoroughly planning the data analysis before the data collection commenced, would result in data that met my needs and were a reliable source of evidence to answer the research question.
Chapter 4  
Results and Analysis  
Action Research  
This section aims to answer Research Questions 1 and 2.  

Research Question 1.  
What were the practitioners’ perceptions of engaging Year 2 boys in reading activities?  

Research Question 2.  
What were the Year 2 boys’ attitudes towards reading activities?  

Evaluation of the Methodology  
The qualitative data collected from both the questionnaires and the focus group discussions for the Action Research were grouped into themes in order to facilitate effective analysis (Wilson and Fox, 2013). This strategy allowed the key issues in the data to be ‘clustered’ and thereby utilised to answer the research questions (Bell, 2005, p.214).  

Whilst I had initially planned for the questionnaires to be completed by five practitioners in the setting, in the event six practitioners were involved in implementing the Storysack initiative and all agreed to respond to the questionnaire. I believe that collecting data from more respondents has served to increase the dependability and reliability of the results (Evans, 2013, pp.151-152).  

The response from the questionnaires was notably positive in favour of the Storysack intervention. Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2014) argue that when research is carried out in one’s own setting, colleagues may perceive the researcher in a different light and their response to the research may be affected by this. For this reason, I checked with the respondents individually that they had not felt obligated to give a positive
response to the intervention. They assured me that this was not the case and I therefore felt able to confidently utilise the data in my analysis. Despite having piloted the questionnaire to ensure that it produced valid data, upon collecting in the completed questionnaires I found that I wanted to clarify or expand on some of the responses given. Helpfully, proximity to the respondents allowed for me to do this, so that in effect it became a semi-structured questionnaire which allowed me to ‘probe’ and ‘prompt’ and follow up interesting ideas’ (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p.229) (see Appendix 4). I consider that this enabled me to ensure that the data collected had improved pertinence to the research, which increased its reliability as well as its validity (Evans, 2013, pp.149-150).

There were technical difficulties with the recording equipment during the first focus group discussion, so a practitioner at the setting stepped in and noted the boys’ responses on paper. Whilst this did enable me to still give my full attention to the discussion (Gibbs, 2012), it did mean that the evidence was not as comprehensive as I had hoped for, as I was unable to review body language and tone of voice in addition to verbal responses. The second focus group discussion was successfully video recorded using the setting’s online videoing facility. I added questions to the schedule during the second discussion (see Appendix 5) to ensure that I collected data regarding the boys’ attitudes and perceptions of the Storysack sessions specifically (Warwick and Chaplain, 2013), as they had a tendency to view them as separate from other school reading activities. I believe that this added to the validity of the research, as it enabled me to ensure that the data collected was relevant to the purpose of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Time constraints prevented me from transcribing the dialogue (Bell, 2005); however quotations from both this and the notes from the first focus group discussion were used in the findings and discussion sections
of the research. Upon analysis, I found that the videoed evidence provided far more data than the notes. Notwithstanding the issues with the first focus group discussion, these data provided a different perspective and so facilitated triangulation of the practitioners’ perspectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.195) and was therefore still useful to ensure reliability of the research.

**Attitudes and Perceptions**

All of the practitioners found it either moderately or very difficult to engage boys in the current reading activities at the setting, and five of the six practitioners thought that boys did not enjoy the reading activities currently on offer. This perception was echoed by the intervention group, five of whom found current reading activities ‘boring’.

In contrast, every practitioner found it very easy to engage the intervention group in the Storysack activities; one practitioner stated that it was ‘easy to keep them on task’. Likewise the intervention group were all very enthusiastic when asked for their overall response to the Storysack activities, with one boy stating ‘I don’t want to stop [the Storysack sessions]’. It is apparent therefore, that a key impact of the Storysack intervention was a significant increase in engagement in reading. The data suggest a series of other contributing impacts which combine to generate this result; the following themes emerged from the analysis.

**Enjoyment**

**Findings**

Every practitioner believed that the content and / or genre of reading material was an important factor in engaging boys in reading. The intervention group was able to name lots of different authors of fiction whom they enjoyed reading at home. Other things that they liked to read when given a choice included Minecraft material, football books, dinosaur books and things they had written themselves. Despite having clear ideas
about their reading preferences, the data suggested that these choices were not available to them during current reading activities in the setting. Three practitioners reported the paucity of school reading books that were interesting to boys. One boy commented, “We [pupils] are not allowed to read the things we like during Reading Carousel, we have to read reading books.” The intervention group reported that they mainly read story books and dictionaries in school. They mentioned that they do sometimes read about Minecraft, but this is during child-led learning time. Interestingly, while the lower ability and middle ability boys in the intervention group thought that school books are boring, the higher ability boys conceded that some of the school reading material does interest them. One boy commented, “They’re sometimes ok, it depends.”

In contrast, all the practitioners agreed that the intervention group enjoyed reading the materials in the Storysacks. One practitioner stated that she felt it was the ‘interesting topics of the books [and] various resources such as comics, ipad activities, websites’ that engaged the intervention group. She felt that while not every resource appealed to every boy equally, in general the intervention group was very positive in their response to the Storysack reading materials. When asked about the reading materials in the Storysacks, the intervention group became very animated remembering all the different things that they had read, particularly the story book about the rhino, one boy remembering, “It farted a lot!” followed by much demonstration and laughing by the group. They also recalled the non-fiction dinosaur web pages, and reading the comic strips that they had written themselves.

Discussion

It is evident that one impact of the Storysack intervention was to increase the enjoyment of reading experienced by the intervention group. The data show that the
boys in the intervention group had significantly more positive attitudes towards the carefully selected boy-orientated reading materials in the Storysacks than those that are currently in use at the setting for reading activities. This is perhaps not surprising in light of research which finds that in schools there is an 'emphasis on narrative fiction, and usually realist fiction dealing with everyday personal relationships, [which] puts boys at a disadvantage' (Lockwood, 2008, p.101), whilst boys are more likely to read 'science fiction / fantasy, sports-related and war / spy books … comics, joke books and humorous fiction' (Clarke and Burke, 2012, p.12). Here, it is useful to note that in the setting, as learners progress up the reading bands there is a wider availability of non-fiction school reading books containing more difficult technical language. Access to this type of reading material, which may also appeal more to boys (Serafini, 2013), may explain why the higher ability boys were slightly more positive in their response to current school reading material.

Interestingly, the United Kingdom Department for Children, Schools and Families (DSCF) (2009, p2) reports that 'in playing to gender stereotypes, [schools] reinforce the idea that only some activities and behaviours are gender appropriate’, thus it is claimed that altering the curriculum to provide a more ‘boy-friendly’ curriculum is ineffective and limits rather than enhances pupils’ engagement. However in this research the opposite appears to be the case. Furthermore, Moss (2011, p.116) finds that ‘there is no evidence that schools where boys and girls both do well at reading … teach to specifically gendered interests’. This would appear to discourage practitioners from using purposefully selected reading materials to promote reading engagement in boys, which is in direct opposition to one of the key principles of the Storysack intervention, and which this research has found to be so effective.
Conversely, Cremin et al. (2014, p.12) argue that ‘connecting to boys’ individual interests’ is a vital component of promoting engagement in reading, and Robinson (2015) argues that educators should strive to understand and utilise the interests of learners in order to meet their learning needs. Moreover the Welsh Government (2015) trains teachers to use this type of personalised learning as an effective way of ensuring learners’ progress, and Clark (2011, p.16) importantly finds a ‘clear relationship between reading enjoyment and reading attainment’. Taking these points into account, and in light of this research, it would be reasonable to predict that using boy-orientated reading material in the Storysacks to increase Year 2 boys’ enjoyment of reading may also be likely to have the related effect of increasing their reading achievement, thus resulting in a positive impact on both a personal and data-driven school level. It would also comply with the national agenda of a personalised learning framework. Consequently, it would seem that developing the range of reading materials available in the setting to accommodate the different interests and preferences of Year 2 boys, hence bolstering the enjoyment they experience in reading, should be a priority.

Motivation

Findings

The questionnaire responses revealed that the practitioners found that boys did not focus well during current reading activities. Practitioners commented that ‘boys are often distracted by what [else] is going on in the classroom’ and that the boys often ‘want to go to another activity’ or ‘find something else to do’. One reason that a practitioner gave for the lack of motivation to engage was that he felt the activities were ‘very structured’ and ‘boring’ and that consequently he spent a lot of time on behaviour management. One boy reinforced this view with a comment that school
reading activities were ‘boring’, and another said that he would like to ‘make it more exciting’.

On the other hand, the practitioners reported that the boys appeared far more motivated to engage in the Storysack activities. They stated that ‘they’re very excitable about the activities’, ‘they can’t wait to get stuck in’ and ‘they always arrive early to the Storysack sessions.’ Focus group discussion reinforced this perception; comments about the Storysack reading activities included:

“Fantastic!”

“That’s funner! [sic]”

“That was exciting!”

When asked to recall activities that they had particularly liked, the boys remembered making their own comic strips, using ipads to find out dinosaur facts and participating in a team online quiz.

Discussion

The data reveal that another impact of the Storysack intervention was increased motivation to engage in the reading activities. Safford, O’Sullivan and Barrs (2004, cited in Mallet, 2010, p.18) discern that it is not always the reading materials themselves that engage boys, rather it is the type of tasks and activities that are linked to the text. Hawley and Reichart (2011, p.10) find that boys respond well to activities that include producing products, teamwork, competition and challenge to problem-solve, so it is proposed that it was the use of these types of more boy-friendly reading activities, rather than the more traditional kind that are currently implemented in the setting, that produced this result.
McGeown (2013, p.9) notes that ‘reading motivation is associated with … reading skill and reading development’, therefore the impact of the Storysack activities in raising the boys’ motivation to read is likely to lead to progress in their reading. More specifically, it is apparent from the data that the boys experienced high levels of intrinsic motivation to engage in the Storysack activities, i.e. they were motivated because they found reading to be ‘inherently interesting or enjoyable’ rather than for extrinsic reasons such as to ‘get better grades or to gain recognition or praise’ (McGeown, 2013, p.3). This is a crucial distinction because Logan and Medford (2011, p.92) find that ‘boys’ intrinsic motivation … plays a more significant role [than girls] in the effort they put into reading’ and McGeown, Norgate and Warhurst, (2012) report a link between high levels of intrinsic motivation and better reading skills. Additionally, Cremin (2007) finds that intrinsically motivated readers tend to be more likely to read for their own pleasure. Thus using the Storysacks to increase levels of intrinsic motivation will possibly also lead to higher levels of reading achievement, thereby meeting school and national requirements to improve standards, and also have positive implications for the boys’ wellbeing as they experience increased enjoyment and satisfaction in reading. The implication of this finding therefore is that practitioners should aim to plan and deliver reading activities that are more engaging for Year 2 boys, with the intention of increasing their intrinsic motivation to read.

Accessibility

Findings

Data collected showed that boys’ learning styles are not well accommodated by the current reading activities in the setting. Particular concerns were that boys are ‘required to sit for a period of time’, they ‘have to sit quietly’ and that they ‘find it hard to wait for their turn’. These concerns were corroborated by the boys, one of whom
thought that one purpose of reading activities in school was ‘to have some peace and quiet’, while another stated that he did not like waiting quietly for his turn during Reading Carousel because it was boring. It was reported that in the setting, children are usually ability-grouped for the teaching of reading.

In contrast, for the Storysack reading activities the data revealed a different picture. The mixed-ability nature of the intervention group was seen as a benefit by the practitioners because the boys were able to learn through collaboration. Practitioners felt that the lower-ability boys were less reticent about asking for help from their peers than from adults, while the higher-ability boys were empowered by being able to support their peers. Furthermore, one practitioner remarked in the questionnaire that during the Storysack activities the boys ‘were noisy but very engaged’ whilst another reported that ‘the boys focused well as a group’. Other practitioners commented that the boys were easily engaged in the Storysack activities because they allowed for them to be active and move around. A belief was expressed that increased engagement in the activities was a result of the boys being able to ‘laugh / giggle / move around’, and it was also stated that the boys were ‘eager to share their enjoyment [of the reading activities] with each other.’

These views were reiterated during focus group discussion, when five out of the six boys agreed emphatically that they preferred it when they could make a noise during learning experiences, and all the boys spoke positively about the collaborative reading activities they had undertaken, with one boy stating that he likes, “reading with friends, not on my own, it’s boring.”

**Discussion**

The data plainly demonstrate that an additional impact of the Storysack intervention was to allow the boys to engage in learning through their preferred learning styles.
This in turn led to a more positive attitude towards reading as they began to treat reading as something that is compatible with their natural instincts, and therefore more accessible to them as learners.

In light of Johnson and Gooliaff’s argument (2013, p.28) that ‘traditional teaching methods often fail to engage male students in learning’, it is probably not surprising that boys are found to experience low levels of engagement in the current reading activities in the setting. The data highlighted that a different approach to delivering reading activities was more effective. Sax (2007) is emphatic in believing that young boys need to move about and talk whilst learning, and Johnson and Gooliaff (2013, p.28) point out the ‘naturally rambunctious’ nature of boys. This certainly proved to be the case in this research.

Serafini (2013, p.42) discusses how ‘many young boys do not like the solitary nature of reading’, while Mallett (2010) feels that reading as a group is less intimidating, and Henry, Lagos and Berndt (2012) point out the importance of boys being able to share what they are reading with others. In keeping with these points, this research echoes the advantages of collaborative learning, where the boys engaged in reading as a shared activity rather than an individual one. Interestingly, McGeown (2013) propounds the benefits of grouping readers according to skill level to increase motivation and to decrease the chance of disengagement. However, in this research the opposite was found to be true and the data show that working in a mixed-ability group increased motivation and engagement in learning.

Providing for noise, movement and mixed-ability collaboration in the teaching of reading might pose some difficulties in a classroom of 30 children, where practitioners may feel obligated by expectation to maintain an appropriate level of noise and order. This in turn may impose the need to have learners seated and taking turns to share
their ideas, rather than spontaneously and enthusiastically sharing their thoughts and ideas as in this research. Practitioners may also feel bound to stick to the *status quo* of ability grouping for reading activities.

Nonetheless, practicalities aside, the effectiveness of catering for boys’ learning style preferences in terms of increased engagement in the learning are highlighted by the Storysack intervention. This has important implications for meeting school and national agendas for raising standards of achievement because engagement has been shown to have the second biggest effect on progress in reading (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998, cited in Dombey, 2010). It would seem advisable then that practitioners should be encouraged to question current grouping practice, and to seek out and prioritise finding opportunities to allow Year 2 boys to indulge their natural learning styles during reading activities in order to increase their perceptions of reading as an accessible activity.

**Experimental Research**

This section aims to answer Research Question 3.

**Research Question 3**

How did the reading activities impact on achievement?

**Evaluation of the Methodology**

To obtain the quantitative data, assessments were carried out by trained practitioners with no vested interest in the research on the whole cohort of Year 2 boys (*n* = 19) immediately prior to, and subsequent to, the Storysack intervention. The results were moderated to ensure accuracy. One boy from the control group left the school during the intervention period, so his data were disregarded. Numerical scores from two different assessment formats were collected for each of the sample group. I feel that
these factors minimised errors in data collection and thus increased the reliability of the results (Gorard, 2013). The analysis of the experimental data collected was fairly straightforward and took the form of interval analysis, whereby the given values had ‘numerically meaningful levels’ (Harrison, 2010, p.138). This facilitated the use of the data to make comparisons and draw conclusions.

Achievement

Findings

For information about Foundation Phase Outcomes, see Appendix 1.

![Graph showing the average increase in Foundation Phase Outcomes for Reading of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention.](image)

Learners in the Foundation Phase at the setting are expected to progress by an average of 0.33 of a Foundation Phase Outcome per term (Primary School A, 2014d). The evidence shows that on average, both the intervention group and the control group made more than expected progress during the period of the Storysack intervention (two half-terms). However, the intervention group progressed on average 0.12 of an Outcome more than the control group.
When the data are compared by ability level according to this measure, it is apparent that on average, both the lower and higher ability boys in the intervention group made considerably more progress, 0.18 and 0.2 of an Outcome respectively, than the control group. In contrast, there was little significant difference in the progress made by the middle ability boys of either group (0.03 of an Outcome in favour of the control group).

Figure 2 – Graph showing the average increase in Foundation Phase Outcomes for Reading of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention, by ability level.
For information about book banding, see Appendix 6.

![Bar chart](image)

**Figure 3** – Graph showing the average increase in book banding age of Year 2 boys during the time period of the Storysack intervention.

Learners at the setting are expected to progress by an average of six months per term according to the book banding levels (Primary School A, 2014e). The evidence shows that on average, both the intervention group and the control group made above expected progress during the period of the Storysack intervention (two half-terms). The intervention group made on average 1.3 months more progress than the control group.
Comparison of the data by ability level again reveals that according to this measure, the lower ability and higher ability boys in the intervention group made more progress in reading than their counterparts in the control group, 2.6 months and 1.5 months respectively. Once more, the middle ability boys in both groups showed little significant difference in their progress (0.3 of a month in favour of the control group).

Discussion

It is apparent from the data that the Storysack intervention had a significantly positive impact on the achievement of the lower ability boys in the intervention group. The DSCF (2009, p.6) reports that boys designated as ‘poor readers’ tend to avoid spending time on reading tasks and thus fall even further behind their peers. Moreover, Levy (2009) finds that children on the lower stages of a reading scheme appear to be discouraged from reading books outside of the reading scheme because they lack the skills to do so, thereby limiting their experiences with text. Interestingly, children who
are reluctant and disengaged readers are found to engage more in reading as their self-perception as a reader and their enjoyment of reading increases (Cremin et al. 2014). Furthermore, Clark (2013) finds a clear link between reading enjoyment and reading frequency, and a positive correlation between reading frequency, attitude and attainment. Therefore it may be that the positive impacts of the Storysack intervention on the attitudes and perceptions of the intervention group noted above stimulated the boys to develop a sense of self-efficacy as readers and to read more often and more widely. These factors may then have combined to produce the increased achievement found here.

A similar positive impact on achievement for the higher ability boys in the intervention group was also revealed by the data. Research finds a high correlation between children with more than 100 books in their home and children who read at above the expected level (Clark, 2011). It may be then, that the higher ability boys have more access to reading material outside of school. Clark (2011) reports a positive relationship between reading frequency and the number of books in the home, whilst a correlation between reading frequency and attainment has also been discovered (Clark, 2013). A link between reading enjoyment and reading frequency has already been noted above (Clark, 2013). It would appear then, that there is a complex relationship between access to reading material, reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment. If the higher ability boys in the intervention group read more frequently because of an increase in enjoyment as a consequence of the Storysack intervention, this may in turn explain their increased achievement.

Whilst the middle ability boys in the intervention group made progress in reading, the data show that this was at a similar level to that of the control group. As the data revealed that these boys experienced the same attitudinal and perceptual impacts as
their lower and higher ability peers, it would be reasonable to expect the same increased achievement levels; however these were not forthcoming. Gorard (2013) describes the process of ‘diffusion’, whereby people experiencing an intervention share their new approach with the control group, thus the effect appears diminished. Whilst this may be a consideration, it must be questioned whether the impact of this effect would feasibly have been confined to middle ability boys here. Gorard (2013) also advises that the nature of social research means that it is impossible to negate the effects of any outside influences which may affect behaviours. Again, it must be deliberated whether only the middle ability boys would have been subject to this factor. It would be helpful, therefore, to carry out further research to investigate effective ways of raising middle ability boys reading achievement.
Chapter 5
Conclusion

Evaluation of the Research

In conclusion, it is felt that this research has contributed substantially to providing the setting with an understanding of the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading. However, it is recognised that the human nature of the sample group, along with the interpretivist approach that was taken, means that it would be inappropriate to generalise the conclusions drawn from the research (Hayes, 2010, Hughes, 2010).

I believe that the mixed-methods research paradigm that was followed was highly effective in producing a holistic view of the impact of the Storysack intervention, because it provided data about both measurable and largely unquantifiable effects (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). For the experimental aspect of the research, using tools for measuring that were current forms of assessment in the setting means that it will be easier for practitioners to put the results into context, and thus hopefully they will be more meaningful. It is acknowledged that the relatively small quantities of numerical data available for analysis limits the reliability of the findings (Gorard, 2013). However, it is contended that the small-scale nature of the research precludes an alternative.

The focus group discussions provided useful first-hand evidence about the thoughts and feelings of the intervention group. The use of interviews rather than questionnaires to collect the perceptions of the practitioners may have further enabled me to develop my understanding of specific points (Mears, 2012). Nonetheless, proximity meant that I was able to ask respondents to expand upon their original answers to obtain the depth of data that I needed. Therefore, overall I feel that the research methods chosen
provided valid data for the research, but for the purposes of obtaining a richer level of data I would consider the use of interviews for future qualitative research.

Main Findings

This research was based on the premise that if the boys engaged in reading activities, their attitudes towards reading would change, their reading skills would develop and their reading achievement would increase. It aimed therefore to answer the question:

‘What is the impact of using Storysacks to engage Year 2 boys in reading?’

The research found that in accordance with Cremin et al.’s (2014) findings, using reading resources that were linked to the interests of the boys in the intervention group resulted in their increased enjoyment of reading. This in turn led to their increased engagement in reading. This impact was in direct contrast to the United Kingdom government’s report that providing a curriculum that caters specifically for boys’ interests limits boys’ engagement (DSCF, 2009).

However, from a national perspective, the Welsh Government advocates the provision of personalised learning to ensure learners’ progress (Welsh Government, 2015). Moreover, a correlation between enjoyment of reading and reading attainment is reported (Clark, 2011). Practitioners stated that at present in the setting there is a scarcity of reading resources that boys find interesting. In similarity to previous research findings (Clark and Burke, 2012, Serafini, 2013), the boys in the intervention group enjoyed reading comics, web sites and non-fiction books, in addition to fiction based around boy-friendly themes. Consequently, it is recommended that the setting develops the range of boy-orientated reading resources available for reading activities to incorporate materials such as these, to ensure that there is plentiful reading material available which is interesting for boys.
This may help to increase the enjoyment, and thus the engagement, of boys in reading.

It was discovered that the provision of boy-friendly reading activities linked to the reading materials had an impact on the boys’ motivation to engage, and more particularly this was seen to be intrinsic motivation. Practitioners stated that it was very easy to engage the boys in the Storysack activities, and that they were very enthusiastic and committed to the activities throughout. Furthermore, the boys themselves were very positive in their discussions about the Storysack activities. Hawley and Reichart (2011) note that the types of activity that boys like to engage in include those of a competitive nature, those that result in an end product and those that involve teamwork and challenge; the findings of this research reflect this. Cremin (2007) notes a relationship between intrinsic motivation and reading for pleasure, which in turn has already been noted to have a positive impact on attainment (Clark, 2011). Additionally, McGeown (2013) finds a link between motivation and reading skill and reading development. As the setting aims to close the gap between boys’ and girls’ reading achievement, it thus is recommended that practitioners should aim to plan and deliver reading activities that are more appealing to boys, in order to increase their motivation to engage.

One barrier to engaging boys in reading was found to be that the reading activities that are currently implemented at the setting are often incompatible with the preferred learning styles of boys. One impact of the Storysack intervention was to increase the accessibility to the boys of the activities, by providing opportunities for them to engage in more boy-friendly ways. It has been argued that boys need to move around and interact noisily as they learn (Johnson and Gooliaff, 2013, Sax,
This research found that these behaviours were successfully and effectively incorporated into the Storysack reading activities, furthermore the boys were reported to be very engaged in the activities throughout.

It was also noted that the boys responded well to the mixed-ability, collaborative nature of the Storysack activities, as they utilised peer support and shared thinking as learning strategies. Although this is in contrast to McGeown’s (2013) finding that grouping learners by ability for reading activities is more effective, it echoes other studies which find that boys like to engage in reading as a shared experience (Henry, Lagos and Berndt, 2012, Serafini, 2013). It is therefore recommended that practitioners consider employing mixed-ability groupings for reading activities at least some of the time, as well as prioritising the provision of opportunities for boys to move around and make noise during these sessions, in order to increase accessibility and thereby increase engagement in reading.

The data showed that the Storysack intervention had an impact on the average increase in achievement for both the lower ability and the higher ability boys in the intervention group during the two half terms over which the research took place. It is likely that attitudinal factors which exist in a complex inter-relationship (Cremin et al. 2014, Clark, 2013), and which were found to be impacted upon by the Storysack intervention, combined to cause this effect. However, no significant impact on achievement was found for the middle ability boys. Whilst there may possibly be some statistically analytical explanation (Gorard, 2013), the reasons for this finding remain unclear. It would be interesting, therefore, to investigate this aspect further.
**Recommendations**

In summary, recommendations from the research are:

- Develop the range of reading resources in the setting to include more boy-orientated material.
- Plan and deliver more boy-orientated reading activities.
- Prioritise the provision of reading activities which allow for the preferred learning styles of boys.

**Future Research**

Whilst in the main this research supported the findings of much other research, perhaps most notably that of Clark (2013) there was a discrepancy in that the Storysack intervention had little significant impact on the reading achievement of middle ability Year 2 boys. It would be interesting then to investigate ways of increasing Year 2 middle ability boys’ reading achievement in this setting.
References


Primary School A. (2014d). Primary School A – Foundation Phase Learning and Teaching Policy. [Obtained Primary School A], 24 October 2014.


Appendix 1

Foundation Phase Outcomes for Language, Literacy and Communication

In the setting, Outcomes are assessed using an online tracking tool. Learners are scored according to their level of mastery of each of the Foundation Phase skills. The scores are then totalled to give an overall Outcome. It is acknowledged that revised Outcomes have been published in August 2015 (Wales. Department for Education and Skills, 2015), however at the time of the research the following Outcomes were in use and current.

Foundation Phase Outcomes for Language, Literacy and Communication (Reading elements highlighted; only the Outcomes relevant to the sample group have been reproduced here.)

Foundation Phase Outcome 4

Children speak audibly, conveying meanings to a range of listeners. They begin to extend their ideas or accounts by including some detail. Children listen to others, usually responding appropriately. They recognise familiar words in simple texts and when reading aloud, use their knowledge of letters and sound–symbol relationships to read words and establish meaning. They respond to poems, stories and non-fiction, sometimes needing support. Children’s writing communicates meaning through simple words and phrases. In their reading or writing, they begin to demonstrate an understanding of how sentences work. Children form letters, which are usually clearly shaped and correctly orientated. They begin to understand the different purposes and function of written language.

Foundation Phase Outcome 5

Children speak clearly, with increasing confidence and use a growing vocabulary. They show an awareness of the needs of the listener by including relevant detail. They understand and convey simple information. They usually listen carefully and respond to a wider range of stimuli. In some situations they adopt a more formal vocabulary and tone of voice. They begin to realise that there is variety in the language they hear around them. Their reading of simple texts is generally accurate. They show understanding and express opinions about major events or ideas in stories, poems and non-fiction. They use a range of strategies when reading unfamiliar words and establishing meaning. Children’s writing communicates meaning. They use appropriate and interesting vocabulary showing some awareness of the reader. Ideas are often developed in a sequence of connected sentences, and capital letters and full stops are used with some degree of consistency. Simple words are usually spelled correctly, and where there are inaccuracies, the alternative is phonically plausible. In handwriting letters are accurately formed and consistent in size.
Foundation Phase Outcome 6

Children begin to modify their talk to the requirements of the audience, varying the use of vocabulary and level of detail. They explore and communicate ideas, showing an awareness of sequence and progression in a range of contexts. Through relevant comments and questions, they show that they have listened carefully. They read a range of texts with growing accuracy, fluency and emphasis. They read independently, using appropriate strategies to establish meaning. They respond to texts and express preferences. They show an understanding of the main points and talk about significant details. They use their knowledge of the alphabet to locate books and find information. Children’s writing is often organised, imaginative and clear. The main features of different forms of writing are used appropriately. Words are chosen for variety, interest and effect. The basic grammatical structure of sentences is usually correct. Punctuation is generally accurate. Spelling is usually accurate. Children produce legible writing.
Appendix 2

Timetable of activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Meet with tutor to discuss focus of study</td>
<td>30th October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Define research questions.</td>
<td>30th October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identify picture books to be used in the Storysacks.</td>
<td>31st October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Complete <strong>Milestone 1</strong> – Research Title, Questions, Statement, Rationale and Timetable.</td>
<td>9th November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Meet with tutor for feedback and to discuss literature review.</td>
<td>13th November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Draw up list of items to be included in Storysacks and source these.</td>
<td>End November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Complete <strong>Milestone 2</strong>– Literature Review. Meet with tutor for feedback and to discuss methodology.</td>
<td>9th January 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Meet with parents / carers to explain Storysacks and to identify volunteers to help make up the contents.</td>
<td>6th January 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Train staff in how to use the Storysacks.</td>
<td>5th February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Collect finished Storysacks from parents / carers.</td>
<td>23rd February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Collect current reading level data for the sample group.</td>
<td>23rd February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Complete <strong>Milestone 3</strong> – Research Design and Methodology. Meet with tutor for feedback.</td>
<td>27th February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Compile and pilot questionnaire.</td>
<td>4th March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Hold focus group with intervention group. Support staff in implementing Storysack strategy in their classrooms.</td>
<td>6th March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Distribute questionnaires to staff. Hold focus group with intervention group.</td>
<td>3rd July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Collect end-of-year reading level data for the sample group.</td>
<td>10th July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Complete <strong>Milestone 4</strong> – Evaluation of methodology;</td>
<td>August 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results and Analysis; Conclusion and Recommendations. Meet with tutor for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>19.</strong></td>
<td>Meet with tutor to discuss <strong>Milestone 5</strong> – Title and Abstract, Preliminaries and Pagination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20.</strong></td>
<td>Final submission date for dissertation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Storysack Items and Activities

The Way Back Home

Puppets - Oliver
  alien
Other items - aeroplane
  spaceship
  parachute
  torch
  spanner
  rope
Non-fiction - See inside Space

The Way Back Home - Suggested Activities

Activity 1

In your group, discuss the book and evaluate the plot – what was an exciting bit? what was a thoughtful bit? when did it begin to build up? etc

Draw the grid below on a large piece of paper. Cold is when the plot / action is quite calm and slow, volcanic is when it is exciting / scary etc.

Make a story temperature chart for the book e.g. was page 7 hot?
Activity 2

Work in pairs.
Use non-fiction books and / or i-pads to research our solar system. Good websites for children to use are:

http://www.esa.int/esaKIDSen/OurUniverse.html
http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/planets.html

Each pair could take a different planet. Share what you have found out with your group.
Super Daisy and the Peril of Planet Pea

Activity 1

Identify the features of Super Daisy. Think about her special super-power (she can fly), her superhero clothes (cloak, leotard, gloves, boots, head band) and how she combats ‘evil’ (fighting powers).

Using the non-fiction book, explore the features of other superheroes. What is their super power? How did they get their powers? What do they wear? Have they got something that helps them to fight evil? e.g. kryptonite, web thrower, watch etc. Do they have an alter-ego?

Invent a superhero. Think about the following:

- What is their super power?
- How did they get it?
- What do they wear?
- Have they got a super ‘weapon’?
- Do they have an alter-ego?

Create a fact sheet about your superhero. Include a labelled diagram to show their superhero costume. Share your fact sheets with your group and discuss your ideas.

Activity 2

Look at the comic strip and identify its features: speech bubbles, onomatopoeic words, pictures show story in sequence. Create a simple comic strip featuring your superhero. Start by deciding how you will break your story down into 4 parts. Share these with your group.
No-Bot The Robot With No Bottom

**Puppets** - Bernard the robot

- monkey
- birds
- bear
- elephant
- dog
- rabbit

**Other items** - mat (map of story settings: park with swing and slide, tree, drum kit, circus tent, house with window box, beach)

**Non-fiction** - Robots for children

**No-Bot the Robot with No Bottom - Suggested Activities**

**Activity 1**

Make a robot using the template in the non-fiction book *Robots for Children*.

**Activity 2**

Have a competition to see who can find the most words in the robot word search.
**Man on the Moon**  
*(a day in the life of Bob)*

**Puppets** - Bob at home  
Bob the astronaut  
aliens

**Other items** - rocket, moon

**Non-fiction** - See inside Planet Earth

---

**Man on the Moon - Suggested Activities**

**Activity 1**

As a group, discuss how the moon environment is similar all over, whereas planet earth differs greatly from place to place. Using the non-fiction book, See inside Planet Earth, and i-pads, explore and research different environments. Useful websites include:

- [http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/habitats](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/habitats)

Use the map of the world to label some of the different environments.

**Activity 2**

Work as a group.  
Create a simple board game based on Bob's day. Write cards with instructions for some squares on the board, e.g. Bob forgets his lunch, go back 3 squares. Bob's rocket uses turbo power, go forward 5 squares. Play the game together.
The Dinosaur that Pooped a Planet

Activity 1

As a group, create dinosaur top trumps by researching the facts you need to complete the cards using the non-fiction book, Dinosaur Encyclopaedia, and / or i-pads.

http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/dinosaurs-other-extinct-creatures/dinosaur-directory/name/a/gallery.html
http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/dinosaurs.html

Activity 2

Use the dinosaur play script sheets to write some speech for the dinosaurs. What do you think they might say to each other? Can you write a short play script with a partner and perform it for the group?

The Dinosaur that Pooped a Planet - Suggested Activities

Puppets - Dinosaur

Danny

Mum

Other items - rocket

Non-fiction - Dinosaur Encyclopaedia
The Really Rude Rhino - Suggested Activities

**Activity 1**

Choose a wild animal, then research it using the non-fiction book, *Nat Geo Wild Animals Atlas* and / or use i-pads. Complete the Explorer's Logbook. Discuss the facts you have found out with your group.

http://ngkids.co.uk/ (then search for animal)
http://www.wwf.org.uk/wildlife/

**Activity 2**

Carry out the online activities:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/scienceclips/ages/6_7/variation_fs.shtml

Don't forget to click on the 'Quiz' section.

http://www.rspca-education.org.uk/youngpeople.htm

(The 'Animals' Needs' section is a good one here)
Appendix 4

Reading Activities Questionnaire

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please be assured that your answers will remain confidential and your anonymity will be maintained at all times.

Where applicable, please tick the box that best describes your answer. All questions refer to the boys in the Storysack intervention group. ‘Reading activities’ refers to any reading-focused activities that the children undertake during the school day apart from the Storysack activities.

1. Do you think that the boys generally enjoy reading activities at school?
   - yes
   - not sure
   - no

2. Where 1 is very easy and 5 is very difficult, how easy is it to engage the boys in reading activities?
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5

3. Where 1 is very easy and 5 is very difficult, how easy is it to engage the boys in Storysack activities?
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5

4. Do you think that the books available for Reading Carousel appeal to the boys?
   - yes
   - no

5. Do you think that the books in the Storysacks appeal to the boys?
   - yes
   - no

6. Do you think that reading activities undertaken in school appeal to the boys?
   - yes
   - no

7. Do you think that the reading activities in the Storysacks appeal to the boys?
   - yes
   - no

Please turn to page 2.
8. Please comment on the usual engagement of the boys during reading activities.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

9. Please comment on the usual engagement of the boys during Storysack activities.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

10. Please comment on what you think effectively engages the boys during reading activities.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

11. Please comment on what you think effectively engages the boys during Storysack sessions.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Please turn to page 3.
12. What, if anything, do you think the boys dislike about reading activities at school?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

13. What, if anything, do you think the boys dislike about the Storysack sessions?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. Have you noticed any changes to the boys' engagement in reading activities since the Storysack intervention?

   yes    no

   Please comment: _______________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

15. Please write any other comments that you have below.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Many thanks for your views and your time.
Questions Asked to Follow up Questionnaire Responses.

1. (re. question 9) In what ways did the boys focus well as a group? What was the impact of this?
2. (re. question 12) In what ways are the reading activities at school ‘very structured’?
3. (re. question 14) In what ways did the boys ‘do things at home’ following Storysack sessions? Which boys did these things?
4. (re. question 15) What do you mean when you say the boys are ‘now succeeding in reading’? Which boys are you referring to here?
Appendix 5

Focus Group Questions

1. What types of reading materials do you know?
2. What type of thing do you read at school?
3. Why do you read at school?
4. Do you like reading at school? Why/why not?
5. Is there anything that you would change about reading at school if you could?
6. What type of thing do you read at home?
7. Why do you read at home?
8. Do you like reading at home? Why/why not?
9. Is there anything you would change about reading at home if you could?

Questions Added for Post-Intervention Focus Group

1. What did you like about the Storysack sessions?
2. Did you like the books we used in the Storysack sessions? Why? / Why not?
3. What can you remember about the Storysack sessions?
Book Banding Information

Book banding is carried out at the setting using a commercial scheme. Children are assessed using levelled books. They are assessed on their technical ability to decode text, their comprehension of the text and their inferential understanding of the text. They are scored and given a colour-coded level. Equivalent reading ages in years and months are calculated using a chart included in the scheme.

(Primary School A, 2014e)