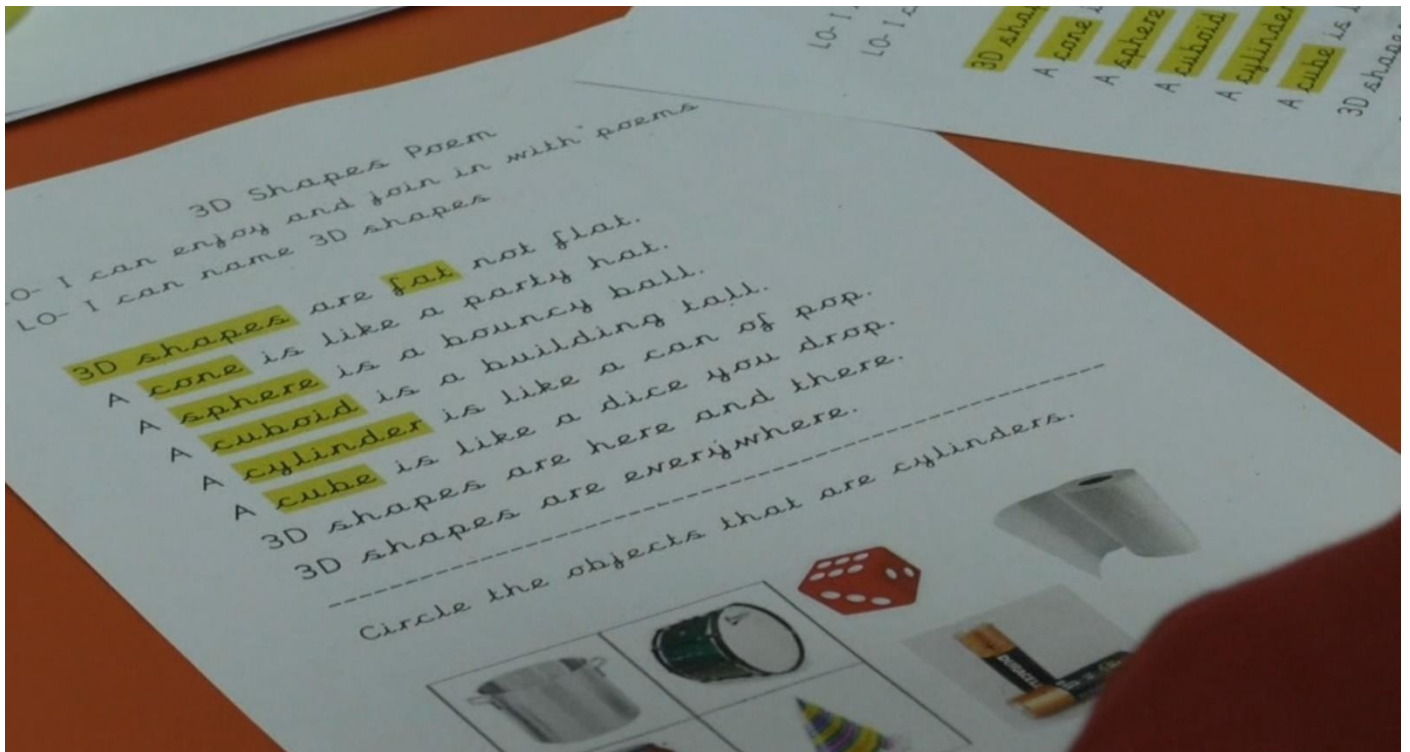


Reading to learn with 'close read'

By Stacey Barnes, Ranvilles Infant School



In this article, Ranvilles Infant School's Deputy Head Teacher Stacey Barnes discusses her school's journey from a general reading scheme with bands and guided reading to non-colour banding books and close reading. This blog follows a workshop she presented at the 2019 Hampshire EMTAS conference where she talked about using close reading of texts to support an integrated and creative curriculum which benefits all pupils, including learners with EAL.

The rationale for using a different approach to reading that is vocabulary specific for EAL learners is supported by research which shows that many children with EAL in England and elsewhere have less vocabulary knowledge than non-EAL peers (Murphy, 2015; Hutchinson et al, 2003). Even EAL children with well-developed oral language skills and above average reading comprehension skills have been shown to have less productive vocabulary knowledge than non-EAL peers (McKendry 2013). We also know that vocabulary is a strong predictor of reading comprehension and with children starting primary **learning to read** but finishing primary **reading to learn** it is crucial to address problems with reading comprehension which may exacerbate the achievement gap between EAL and non-EAL peers in specific sub-groups.

What is close reading? Here is a definition:

Close reading is the careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage of a text. A close reading emphasizes the single and the particular over the general, effected by close attention to individual words, the syntax, the order in which the sentences unfold ideas, as well as formal structures (Wikipedia).

It also uses language in context and is key to exploring language, playing and having fun. We have found it benefits a wide range of children including EAL learners and is useful for all children.

Some examples of close read we have used are instructions for making sushi, instructions for making puppets, passages from a fictional text based on the Titanic and basically anything that supports our integrated curriculum and can provide a cross curricular link to reading. [In this video](#)

[example](#) the children revisited the theme of 3D shapes and reinforced their understanding of different shapes through a short poem.

Close read is distinct from guided reading as one text is used with one mixed ability group. This benefits EAL pupils as children should not be denied access to texts because of their current proficiency in English and this method exposes EAL pupils to a wide variety of reading materials. Close read links to the whole curriculum really well, including subjects like Maths/DT/Art, helping to develop reading in every subject. Close read is not specific to English. Close read also capitalises on practitioner:peer relationships, using peers and adults as a positive model of talk. We have also found the practice to be very inclusive.

Practically we manage close reading by creating mixed ability groups of up to 6 children with an adult, usually within the mainstream classroom. This obviously aligns to best practice for EAL pupils. Close read also allows for pre and post learning for a topic; this can be vital for an EAL pupil. Working with parents may also be something to capitalise on, by sending home close reads or putting them on Tapestry or other learning platforms for parents to access. Explanation in a home language and preparing and talking around the specific text for the child may be extremely beneficial prior to the actual close read.

Above all a close read allows for exploring language and vocabulary and this is essential – the whole reading and writing flow on a sea of talk analogy. It allows for message abundance (Gibbons, 2008) and explicit content learning.

Around a close read many activities could be undertaken such as pre talk in the first language, drama activities exploring the language or Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTs), such as vocabulary matching activities. Many of our close reads lead to an outcome in art, design technology and maths.

The impact of close read has been that our age-related expectation reading results last year increased by 4% to 93%. Results were also favourable for our EAL pupils. Close reads have also helped to increase our results in writing. The overall impact of close reading is that the children are enjoying the close read sessions and making the links in learning to our integrated curriculum and this has been wonderful to see.

References

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Wikipedia - Close reading

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Close_reading