

Pageturners

opening books opening minds

Case Study: Malmesbury Secondary School, Wiltshire

Who was the project for?

The Pageturners Project at Malmesbury School was run for a group of year 7, 8 and 9 girls with a parent or carer attending and taking part with them. Six girls took part with a parent or carer – making a group of twelve.

What did we do?

A series of six one hour sessions were run for the group as an after school project. The aims of the project were to:

- To promote and encourage a shared interest in reading
- To provide a chance for young people and their parents to take part in a wider family learning project
- To provide an opportunity for young people and their parents to share a book together and take part in a range of activities and discussion around the book and its themes/issues
- To promote emotional literacy and emotional well-being
- To provide parents with a chance to interact with their children in an informal education setting
- To help develop critical thinking

The group chose a book from a selection of four by voting on different aspects of each book (cover, blurb and extract) and the 6 sessions were then based around discussing the book and undertaking activities and linked to the themes and characters. The book they chose was *Beswitched* by Kate Saunders. Some of the activities included:

- Creating a large 'character board' for the main character, Flora. This developed and changed over the weeks as we got to know the character better.
- Recreating scenes from the book and changing aspects of them.
- A *Beswitched* team challenge board game; we did this at the end of the project as a fun way of reflecting on what we had done and on the story too.
- Lots of art and games drawing out themes and storylines from the book.
- A puppet show about bullying; making characters and script writing.
- Reading the book, people read this at home in their family pairs.

This project was also independently evaluated by Chrysalis Research to get a really good picture of the projects impact.

What were the challenges?

The biggest challenge was bringing together a mixed group of young people and adults where people mostly didn't know each other beforehand. However, the group worked very well together and we had full attendance each week!

What were the outcomes/feedback?

The outcomes are well documented in the evaluation report by Jon Batterham of Chrysalis Research. The following extract is taken from his report (see the Pageturners website for more information on the evaluation):

***Project outcomes:**

This section discusses the impact of the project on the participants. Analysis of the feedback found evidence of outcomes in three areas: personal development, reading views and behaviour and the relationship between the mothers and their daughters.

As discussed earlier on, the teachers reported that academic progress of the participating students would only be assessed at the end of the year and, as result, it would be difficult to judge the impact of the Pageturners project on attainment levels.

"It will be difficult as there are so many things that come into play. It's important to look at softer outcomes."

Assistant head

Personal development

The students felt their confidence grow through the project as these SMS responses show:

'I have become more confident at speaking in front of adults and people i don't know. I have really enjoyed the variety of activities too.'

Student by SMS

'I have got more confidence and met some new people and got to know my sister more.'

Student by SMS

The teachers mentioned that the girls were not friends before the start of the project. The observation and feedback provided by SMS and during the interviews provided evidence that the students had formed strong bonds during the course of the project. This had boosted the confidence of some of the students who had previously found it difficult to open up in front of others. This was also confirmed by the mothers who saw their daughters become more confident during the project.

'Confidence at taking on new challenges and working as a team with people she doesn't know.'

Mother by SMS

This change was put down to enjoying the sessions, making new friends and successfully working with adults, the other mothers, that they did not know before the start of the project.

Reading: attitudes and behaviour

The SMS messages sent over the course of the project suggested that the project helped build reading skills, confidence and enjoyment. Here is a selection of the messages that were sent over the course of the project:

'..also about thinking more about a story and reading between the lines.'

Mother by SMS

'I think it helps me too understand reading better :).'

Student by SMS

'i really enjoy reading but it has encourage me to read more.'

Student by SMS

'I am a bit more confident with my reading.'

Student by SMS

'It has changed my view of reading books.'

Student by SMS

The mothers reinforced this in the feedback they gave in the group discussion. They felt that the emphasis on the book over the last six weeks and the engaging activities had encouraged their daughters to view reading differently. Giving the students the chance to choose the book at the start of the project was felt to have helped them see the book in a positive light. This was important as the mothers felt that their daughters could quickly lose interest in a book.

'I've always felt that my daughter's problem was finding a book that would interest her.'

Mother

The students confirmed that this was normally an issue. However, the book chosen for the project held their attention throughout. The students liked the way the suspense built up and those that had finished it enjoyed the twist at the end.

'I usually find books boring and give up. I thought I didn't like books.'

Student

The mothers also felt the activities enabled their daughters to get more out of the book than they would have done normally. Many reported that their daughters struggled to interpret books and the activities helped them to reflect on the themes and the characters. As a result, mothers felt that their daughters got more out of reading the book than they normally did. This was also implied by the students.

'I found it easier to understand than other books.'

Student

'I never imagined acting things out and talking about a book so much.'

Student

'You get to talk about more things when you read books with people.'

Student

Mothers were unsure whether the project would have a longer term effect on their child's reading but most agreed that, at least in the short term, the project had helped increase their daughters' enthusiasm for books.

'It made her realise what you can get out of a book.'

Mother

'She's now reading 50 pages a week. She'd normally only read that on holiday.'

Mother

'She's normally given up reading the book by now.'

Mother

The students were more confident that this would have an effect with some resolving to make more time for reading now they realised how much they enjoyed it. Feedback from the students suggests that the project was most effective among those who had previously had a love of reading, but had fallen out of the habit.

'When I was younger I used to be the reader (in the family) but I didn't like it when got older. But coming back here made me realise again how good books were. So I think I will be reading lots of books again.'

Student

The students' future choice of books will be crucial in maintaining this enthusiasm. Lesley, the project leader, pre-empted this by giving them a list of recommended books based on their preferences. This was likely to be useful as the project helped the students identify what they liked and why.

'I like books where you have to piece things to together and work them out.'

Student

A few of the students were unsure whether they would finish the book and had instead relied on the sessions. For these students, the sessions had demonstrated the benefits and enjoyment of reading, but this had not been followed up over time. They would be likely to need sustained support and encouragement to get them to read more.

Parent and child relationship

Teachers reported that having a timetabled family learning activity had helped the girls' relationship with their family member/carer. All had been reading book together at home and had been discussing the plot and characters together. Mothers felt it helped to have a shared activity to do together and that the project had helped bring them closer together.

'I've got to know more daughter more – we're usually busy with our own lives.'

Parent

'We've sat at home reading together, taking it in turns sitting together. This doesn't happen usually when you're used to juggling lots of things.'

Parent

This was confirmed by the students who liked spending time with their mum's. Crucially, their mum's involvement had given many of them the confidence to take part with the students reporting that the first session had been less daunting than it could have been if their mum had not been there.

**Taken from evaluation report by Chrysalis Research*