Beyond Booked Up Evaluation 2015-16

Executive Summary

Written by BookTrust

Beyond Booked Up (BBU) is a targeted programme for secondary schools[1] in England, which was launched in September 2011. The programme is aimed at students in both Year 7 and 8 and provides schools with a range of accessible resources for each year group (two sets for each term) designed to support reading for pleasure through reading, writing and spoken language activities. The resources include Bookbuzz, which offers all Year 7 students the opportunity to choose a book to keep from a selection of titles, as well as five other resources which aim to engage students with a range of different genres and formats including graphic novels, play scripts, flash fiction and performance poetry.

BookTrust commissioned Coventry University's Centre for Research in Psychology, Achievement and Behaviour to conduct an evaluation of BBU in December 2015. The research aimed to gain an in depth understanding of the factors that influence secondary school students' reading for pleasure, in relation to Beyond Booked Up. A mixed methods approach was used to gather delivery data on how the programme is used in schools, as well as investigate the following key research questions:

- How do each of the key elements of Beyond Booked Up[2], impact on student's reading for pleasure?
- How, if at all, does this differ for students with different attitudes, abilities and behaviours relating to reading for pleasure?

The evaluation involved:

- A literature review of existing empirical and theoretical evidence on factors influencing reading for pleasure for secondary school students
- An online survey sent to all 374 schools who received the BBU programme in 2015-16, with a response rate of 31% (n=115). This relatively low response rate should be taken into consideration when interpreting the survey results. The total number of responses for each question are included in footnotes throughout this summary
- Focus groups and interviews with staff who deliver Beyond Booked Up, and focus groups with participating students from Years 7, 8 and 9, in 5 schools across England (sample 10 staff and 76 students).

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[1] Targeting was based on the percentage of FSM students, and the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM students, in English secondary schools in 2010.

[2] The key elements include providing access to high quality books, developing young people's ability to choose what they read, introducing students to a range of literacy practices, developing staff knowledge about books and encouraging social interaction around books. Limitations in the research design mean the final element of 'encouraging social interaction around books' was not focussed on.

Key findings

Research question 1: How do each of the key elements of Beyond Booked Up impact on student's reading for pleasure?

The survey found evidence of positive changes in attitudes and behaviours as a result of the programme as a whole[3]:

- 77% of staff agreed that the resources had **positively changed pupils' attitudes to reading**, with 25% agreeing this had happened 'a lot'
- 74% of staff agreed that the resources **had increased the amount of reading for pleasure undertaken by pupils**, with 30% agreeing this had happened 'a lot'
- 71% of staff agreed that the resources had **improved pupil's engagement with reading outside of school time**, with 23% agreeing this had happened 'a lot'.

Across all outcomes, the majority of respondents agreed that the changes they observed had happened 'a little', indicating that the BBU programme makes a small but important contribution to reading for pleasure in schools that use the resources. The factors identified below have been isolated for the purposes of this summary; however they interrelate and combine in different ways to impact on the likelihood that students will read for pleasure.

Providing access to high quality books

Literature review findings

Access to books in the home has been shown to be a key aspect of reading for pleasure; children with less access to books at home are more likely to report that they never read (Clark & Douglas, 2011)[4]. One way that issues around book access can be overcome, is through engagement with libraries; Douglas and Wilkinson (2011) suggest that a school library can foster reading for pleasure by embedding it into the curriculum and ensuring that it is personalised to the student's needs.

Primary research findings

The primary research found that it is Bookbuzz which predominantly provides this function – providing a book of choice to keep, and introducing Year 7s to the school library. Almost all (92%) of the survey respondents felt the programme had a positive impact on the school reading culture. The majority of responses to an open question on this issue suggested that out of all the resources, Bookbuzz made the biggest contribution to developing a positive school reading culture.

The term 'school reading culture' was referred to differently by different respondents in the open responses, but there was evidence that for some, the impact observed related to positive changes for all, with Bookbuzz generating excitement in the schools, as highlighted

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[3] Based on between 82-84 responses

[4] For a full list of references, refer to the full report available here
http://fileserver.booktrust.org.uk/usr/resources/1499/beyond-booked-up-evaluation-2015-16.pdf

in the following quote '*The receiving of a free book from a choice of relevant authors is a great way to support student interest and enthusiasm toward reading stories. I have observed the past six years how much excitement the Bookbuzz scheme creates'.*

Developing young people's ability to choose what they read

Literature review findings

Choice in reading material is clearly linked with enjoyment of and engagement with reading. Clark and Phythian-Sence's (2008) review highlights that choice is important for empowering and engaging students, however, this can have negative effect if choices are not presented systematically or in a way in which the students are able to make an informed decision. Teaching students how to select a book is important for encouraging reading engagement; as this can help to create a reading culture within the classroom (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006). Giving children choice in their reading materials can also help them to become more aware of their own reader identities, for example an awareness of their preferences (Bang-Jenson, 2010), thus it is imperative that young people are given choice and control over the materials they are reading. Research has also shown that children can read and comprehend more complex texts when the material is on a topic they enjoy; students who read a text above their reading age were more likely to persevere with the task if they perceived the topic to be enjoyable (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011; Wigfield et al, 2008).

Primary research findings

Related to these points, the survey found that[5]:

- 67% of staff agreed that the BBU resources had **increased pupil's confidence in selecting reading materials**, with 33% agreeing this had happened 'a lot'
- 65% of staff agreed that the BBU resources had **improved how pupils see themselves as readers**, with 25% agreeing this had happened 'a lot'
- 48% of staff agreed that the resources had **increased pupil's confidence towards literacy activities,** with 31% agreeing this had happened 'a lot'.

These findings are particularly important at this age, as reading identities have been found to become more negative when children move from primary to secondary education (Clark et al., 2008; Lenters, 2006).

Introducing students to a range of literacy practices

Literature review findings

When children are personally interested in reading, they are said to read for intrinsic purposes, and are in turn more likely to be engaged with reading (Gurthrie et al, 2006). Struggling readers have been shown to read less for pleasure due to classroom influences such as lack of engaging materials (Garbe, Gross, Holle, & Weinhold, 2006). Students are also more engaged when they see the reading materials as relevant to themselves.

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[5] Based on between 82-84 responses

Primary research findings

The primary research showed that the Introducing Graphic Novel resource in particular was regarded positively by both students and teachers. It had successfully engaged some students with a different format, and some mentioned borrowing graphic novels from the school library afterwards. Fish Head Steve was a popular extract from the resource, however a number of students did comment that it was only an extract and were disappointed when they could not access the whole comic which was not available in the school library; *'I really wanted to read that one to find out more about them [Fish Head Steve and Smile]' (School E, Year 7).* This indicates that the resource was successful in promoting enjoyment of, and engagement with a new format, but the availability of just an extract rather than the whole text could limit continued engagement for students who are not able to access the full text.

There was some evidence that exposure to the other varied formats included in Beyond Booked Up were impactful on students, for example one student focus group discussed how acting out plays felt different and enabled students to enjoy it more. However lower delivery of the Beyond Play scripts unit as well as the other resources (see delivery section for reasons for this), makes it difficult to determine the impact the resources have on students.

Developing school staff knowledge about books

Literature review findings

Teachers have been shown to have a big impact on children's attitudes towards reading (Cremin et al 2009), it is therefore imperative that they model the behaviours they want to encourage, and schools present a broad model of reading. Yet research indicates that some primary teachers tend to rely on books they remember from their childhood rather than current books (Cremin, Bearne et al., 2008; Cremin, Mottram et al., 2008). It is possible that a similar phenomenon is occurring within secondary schools, however more research is needed to confirm this.

Primary research findings

The majority of staff in both the survey and focus groups displayed positive attitudes to the less traditional reading materials that make up the Beyond Booked Up programme. This was particularly evident for the graphic novel resource which was the most used of the resources after Bookbuzz, with 60% of respondents delivering the resource[6]. Of these, 100% found it useful, and 77% felt it supported the curriculum. The majority of staff in the focus groups were also positive about the resource. There was, however, some evidence of less positive attitudes to graphic novels by staff, evidenced by students in one focus group school. These students felt that their teachers didn't consider graphic novels as 'proper reading', conflicting with the students' perception. Therefore, although the programme presents a range of formats as well as genres with the aim of developing staff knowledge about different reading

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[6] Based on 82 responses

materials, there may be a need to focus more attention on communicating to staff the value of different formats as well as genres.

Research question 2: How, if at all, does this differ for students with different attitudes, abilities and behaviours relating to reading for pleasure?

A typology of different readers was used to explore whether the impact of the programme differs for students with different attitudes, abilities and behaviours. Varying degrees of impact were reported for all reader types across all outcomes relating to reading for pleasure, with overall, the highest proportion of respondents reporting impact on the 'can read but doesn't read', and the lowest proportions reporting impact on the 'struggles to read and doesn't read' group. For each outcome, the highest proportion of respondents reported impact from the resources as a whole, on the following groups[7]:

- 63% of respondents reported that BBU had generally changed '**struggles to read but does read' students' confidence towards literacy activities**

- 61% reported that BBU had increased the **amount of time that** '**can read and does read' students spent reading for pleasure**

- 61% reported that BBU had positively changed **'can read but does not read'** students' **attitudes to reading**

- 56% reported that BBU had engaged **'can read and does read' students** with **reading outside of school**

- 57% reported that BBU had changed how '**can read but does not read'** students **see themselves as readers**

- 55% of respondents reported that BBU had increased **'struggles to read but does read'** students **confidence in selecting** books and reading materials.

In terms of the individual resources, with the exception of the 'can read and does read[8]' group, there were resources in the programme that were particularly impactful on each group of reader. The highest proportion of respondents felt that, of all the reader groups[9],:

- Bookbuzz (47%) and Flash Fiction (43%) have *the most* impact on the 'can read and doesn't read' group
- Exploring stories has *the most* impact on the 'struggles to read but does read' group (46%)
- Introducing graphic novels has *the most* impact on 'struggles to read and doesn't read' group (40%) as well as all groups equally (40%)

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[7] Based on between 49-59 responses
[8] Impact was reported for this group, but compared with the other groups - no resources impacted on them the most
[9] Based on 23 – 64 responses (responses for performance poetry have been excluded as they were too low)

- Beyond Play scripts impacts on all groups equally (42%).

This suggest that the resources as a whole impact on all groups of readers, with two impacting all groups equally, and four having a more pronounced impact on different groups of readers, including students who are struggling, reluctant or disengaged readers.

Key delivery findings and feedback

Bookbuzz and Introducing graphic novels are the most used resources

The Bookbuzz and Introducing Graphic Novel resources are the most used of the resources in schools, with 85% and 62% of respondents reporting delivery of these respectively. This compares to relatively low usage of the other resources with just under half of schools who answered the survey reporting use of Flash fiction (44%) and Beyond Play Scripts (43%), and a third of schools using Exploring Stories (38%) and Performance Poetry (28%)[10]. Therefore, it's important to recognise, that although the impact findings indicate that when the programme resources are used they have a moderate impact, relatively low usage of four of the resources means that some of these numbers are small and should be treated with caution.

Resources are useful and support the curriculum, but lack of time and lack of fit with other priorities prevent all resources being used

Positive feedback was received about the resources that were used, with nearly all respondents reporting each resource was useful, and around three quarters reporting that they supported the curriculum[11]. Key barriers to using the resources were identified by survey respondents who don't use particular resources. Across the resources, these were consistently lack of time, a lack of fit with current priorities/schemes of work, and difficulties engaging/liaising with staff[12]. It may be useful therefore to explore what the current priorities are in schools, and consider sending resources directly to Heads of English who may be able to liaise with teachers more easily.

Resources tend to be used separately rather than as part of one package

Although the programme is designed to offer a set of related resources for each term throughout Year 7 and 8, the majority of schools see a clear distinction between Bookbuzz and the other resources that they receive, and do not tend to use the six resources as a whole package, rather they use each resource as standalone materials (81%).The resources are delivered by different staff in the school, with library staff mainly delivering Bookbuzz and English teachers mainly delivering the other resources.

Resources are flexible and can be used across age ranges

The majority of the resources are used with Year 7 students (including the resources intended for Year 8), however resources intended for Year 7 are also used with Year 8s. For

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[10] Based on 92 responses
[11] Based on between 13-66 responses for each resource
[12] Based on between 11-51 responses for each resource

example, the Year 7 resource 'Introducing Graphic Novels' is used with year 7s (75%) and years 8s (55%), and the year 8 resource 'Exploring Stories' is used with year 7s (90%) and year 8s (43%)[13] Small numbers also reported using the resources with older or younger year groups - indicating overall that the resources are flexible, and can be adapted to be used with a range of secondary school aged children where appropriate.

Suggested improvements

A small minority of responses felt that the programme could be improved through sending out less resources, which may be due to storage space issues as well schools not using all of the resources. A small number of comments also mentioned making the resources more accessible for EAL and SEN students – although they did not specify which resources they were referring to.

Recommendations

Where possible, consider ways that students can access full texts rather than extracts, particularly for the graphic novels resource which really engaged and motivated students. It could also be beneficial to include a graphic novel text in the Bookbuzz selection.

As less impact was reported for the 'struggles to read and doesn't read' group compared with other types of readers, consider ways to further support this group. This could include more intensive intervention elements designed to specifically target this group, who are likely to be facing multiple barriers to reading for pleasure in terms of skills, attitude and motivation.

Consider ways to highlight to staff the full benefits of using non-traditional formats such as graphic novels, as well as how the elements of the programme map onto the key stage 3 curriculum.

Consider a delivery method that gives schools more control over which resources they obtain, and when, and if viable, consider consulting schools to establish which resources they are able to use before sending out print copies. If viable, send inspection copies to teachers, librarians and literacy coordinators and follow up with a telephone call to see if they would like to receive more rather than sending large numbers of resources out to schools.

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[13] Based on 13-66 responses