

## The Rooted in Reading and student attainment

The Rooted in Reading Award passport was originally designed to be reading's equivalent to the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The tasks are demanding and completion of 8 qualifies you for the bronze award, 12 for silver and 16 for gold.

Because of the amount of work involved in the tasks, which include things like reading a prize winning novel, attending a literary event or getting involved in a book group, a lot of students and possibly teachers too may well have been put off. Surely all this Additional work will have a negative impact on my/their GCSEs or A levels, won't it?

It was to try to answer this question that I recently visited Aldridge School: an Academy in Walsall. I knew that some students there had been work on the Award passports because I had heard about it from their librarian, Harbans Kaur, who had followed the instructions on the inside cover of the passports, to let me know about students who had completed an Award passport so that their achievement could be independently verified. The plan is that Lincolnshire Teaching School Alliance will keep a list of the names of all students who reach the required standard. Students can then inform external organisations who in turn can check on the students' achievements with us if they wish. Harbans had already sent me photocopies of a random sample of the completed passports chosen by me and I had been very impressed by the detailed, reflective and thoughtful entries which the students in her Academy had written and by the clear evidence they showed of learning and progress.

What I now wanted to know was how the students themselves felt about the Award passports and what the experience of working through the tasks had actually been like. To help me find out, Harbans arranged for me to interview five current Y12 students who had completed Award passports at different levels during Y11.

Hazel was quick to point out a positive impact of the Award, saying "it made me realise how much I missed reading." Charlie agreed, as she said she had "forgotten" about reading for pleasure sometime during KS3. Michaela felt that the tasks in the Award passport "got you to read outside genres you normally read in" and Hazel felt the challenges were "unique and really interesting, not repetitive" and a "nice transition back into reading before A level". Others liked the way you can work through the tasks in the order and at a pace that you choose.

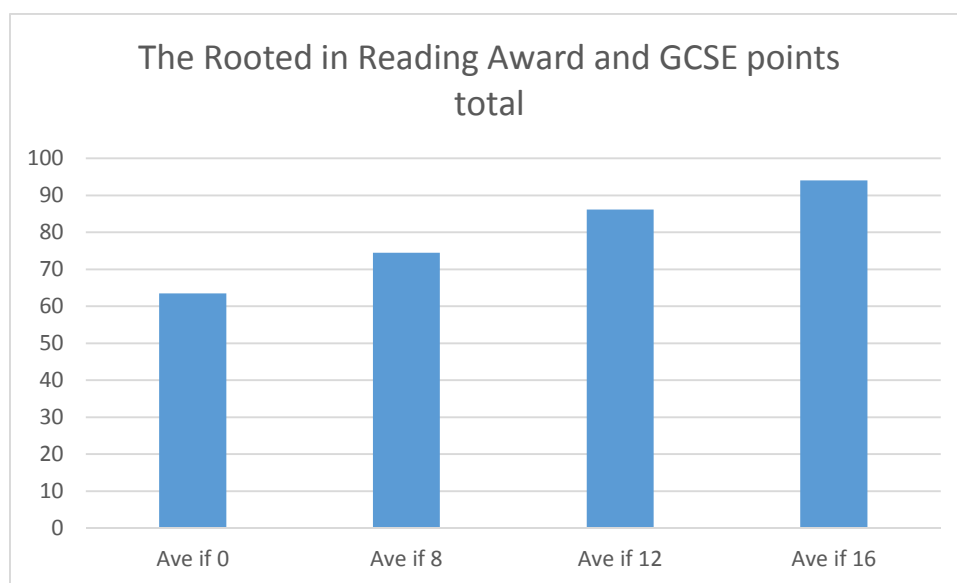
So what did the students get from completing these tasks? Charlie was clear that it was a positive experience – "it felt like it was adding a bit of knowledge". Hazel was more explicit, saying "It made me write more reflectively and more evaluatively. It helped with English GCSE." Micheala gave a personal example, "When you were doing classic books (she'd read *Hamlet* independently) it helped you cope with *The Merchant of Venice* when we did it in class." Charlie agreed, "*Pride and Prejudice* got easier as you went along. It made tackling *Dr Jeckyl and Mr Hyde* easier." Amber said "I read the Persian Wars section of Heroditus" and that this had helped her with Ancient History GCSE.

Amber wanted to make a more general point about how the reading she did for the Award changed the reading experience for her, "When I read now it is as though you experience the literature rather than just read it. You feel more involved in the plot." Others talked about a sense of accomplishment they gained from completing difficult tasks on demanding texts. Hazel said "For the classic I read *A Tale of Two Cities* and there is a carriage journey at the start and I thought I was going to die. After I re-read it I got it and then I got into it."

When talking generally about the Award several of the group explained that they had enjoyed forming their own book group to read and discuss *The Weight of Water*. Michaela said that what she liked was that “a lot of it was down to interpretation” which again links with the idea that the Award helps to develop personal response.

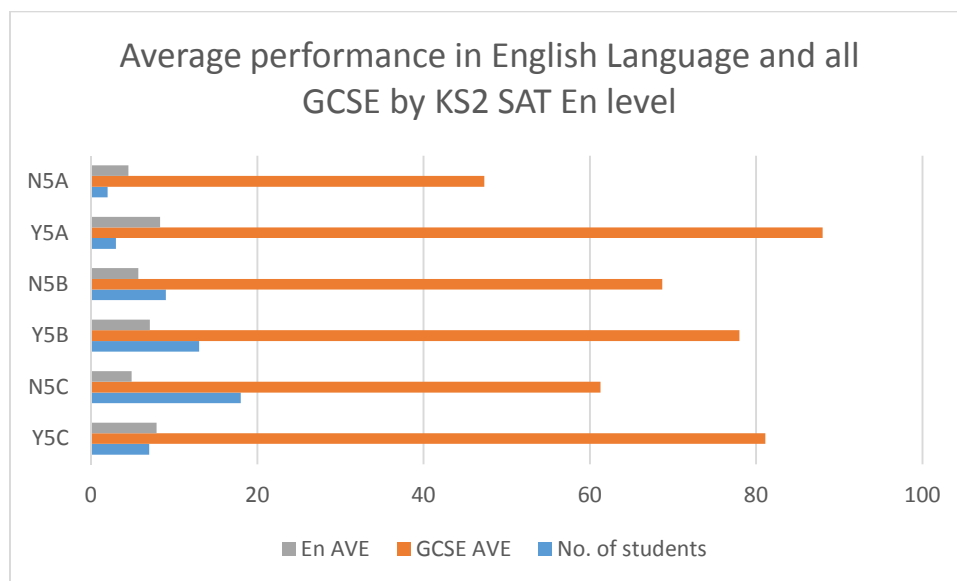
Several of the group particularly welcomed the opportunity to write a creative response to a text and felt that it deepened their relationship with the text. Kate felt that the work they did on the Award “definitely helped our English results” and Charlie agreed that it particularly helped to make the unseen passages in the exams seem less daunting. Hazel rounded off the discussion by saying that, whether or not the Award increased your knowledge “it increased your confidence”.

After this discussion I was keen to find out how the students who had worked through the Award had got on in their GCSEs. With help from the data manager, Harbans and I managed to pull together the KS2 English result, the GCSE English Language result and the overall GCSE points total for the two top sets in English last year; one that had been given the opportunity to work towards the Award and one that had not. Of the two classes, 37 had not completed any of the tasks, 13 had completed 8 and gained the bronze Award, 5 completed 12 tasks and gained silver and 4 completed all 16 tasks, gaining the gold level. So, clearly we are talking about very small group sizes. However, it is clear from the graph below that the higher the Award level the students achieved, the higher their GCSE points total was on average.



Clearly we cannot conclude from this that it is the completion of the tasks that leads to this increase. The type of student who has the inclination and resilience to complete these tasks is also likely to have the qualities required to do well in GCSE. But it seems clear that completing these tasks and doing well in GCSEs are not incompatible.

The next thing I have looked at is how students with the same KS2 starting points did in their English GCSEs and in their GCSEs in general depending on whether they engaged with the Award or not.



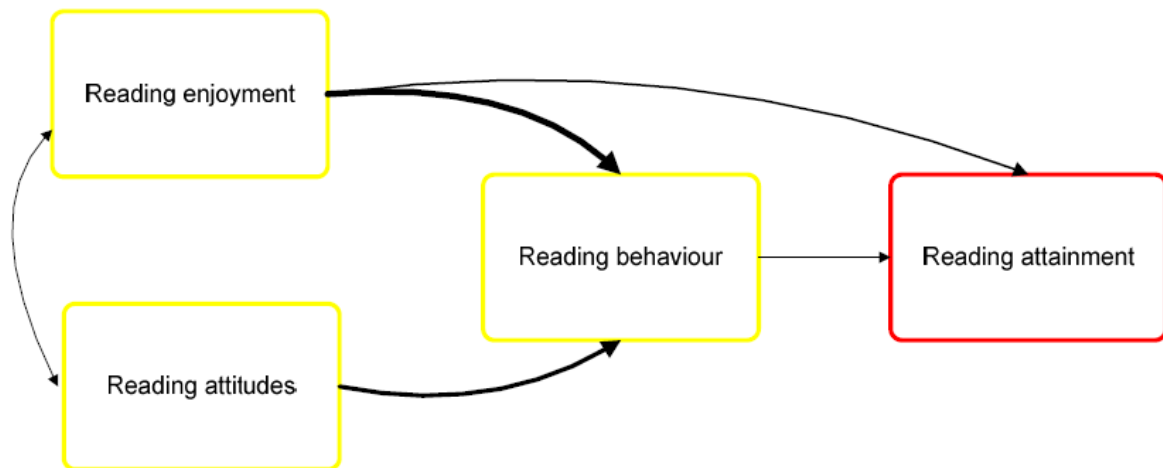
This graph groups students together according to their SAT level and whether they completed the Award, so N5A means students who achieved 5A but did not engage while Y5A did. Again, given the proviso that these are very small groups, you can clearly see that each of the Y groups out-performs the N group for both GCSE points score and English Language. The size of the groups result in some unexpected results. The performance of the N5A group was weakened by one student with a lot of absence. Also the Y5C group outperformed the Y5B group on both indicators.

So what tentative conclusions are possible from this? I would suggest the following:

It seems clear from the testimony of the students that the Award passport, when involvement is encouraged by enthusiastic teachers and librarians, can have a positive impact on students’:

- confidence;
- ability to engage with unfamiliar and demanding texts;
- reading resilience;
- enjoyment of reading.

National Literacy Trust research (see figure below) shows the vital importance of reading attitudes and enjoyment in helping drive up attainment in reading and the results of this very small piece of research would seem to support this view. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this work to isolate all the other factors that come into play in a young person’s life as they progress from 11 to 16 that might have an impact on educational achievement, the numbers presented above suggest that it is certainly possible that the reading that students have to do in order to progress through the Rooted in Reading Award tasks can and does have a positive impact on both their specific outcomes in English Language and their general outcomes in GCSEs generally.



***Mapping the interrelationships of reading enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour and attainment.***

National Literacy Trust 2011

In their book *Reading Reconsidered* (2016), Lemov, Driggs and Woolway argue that there are four ideas which are central to driving up standards in reading. They describe these as “The Core of the Core” and they are:

1. Read harder texts
2. Close read texts rigorously and intentionally
3. Read more nonfiction more effectively
4. Write more effectively in direct response to texts.

The *Rooted in Reading Award* explicitly demands the reading of hard texts, including nonfiction and its format encourages effective direct responses to texts, building students’ confidence to develop and express their own opinions. It would seem, from the students’ comments, that it also encourages close and rigorous reading. It is pleasing to see, in this data and the interview comments, that we might be on to something.

In order to celebrate the students’ success, as well as receiving a certificate, we have created a medal table showing which schools have had most students complete the award. You can see this at <http://www.lincolnshiretsa.co.uk/page/?title=Certificates&pid=175> where you will also find linked resources, including short films explaining Rooted in Reading and surveys that you can use to track the impact in your school. Feel free to contact us for more information through the website. I look forward to adding more schools and Academies to the medal table very soon!

Steve Willshaw