**David Reedy, Reading paper**

## Reading for Pleasure: Evidence and strategies

## Why is reading for pleasure important?

A survey of reading habits in the UK, commissioned by Booktrust (Gleed 2013), suggests

there are substantial personal and practical benefits of regular reading for pleasure:

Overall, the research highlights four justifications for initiatives to

encourage reading for pleasure from an early age, particularly among

disadvantaged groups.

• People who read books are significantly more likely to be happy and content with their life.

• Most people who read books feel this improves their life. It also makes them feel good.

• People who were read to and encouraged to read as children are significantly more likely to read as adults, both to themselves and to their own children.

• Those who never read books live in areas of greater deprivation and with more children in poverty.

(Gleed, 2013: 4)

OECD (2002) found that regularly reading for enjoyment is more important for children’s educational success than their family’s socioeconomic status, that being a frequent reader ‘is more of an advantage than

having well educated parents’ (OECD, 2002: 3)and that ‘finding ways to engage children in

reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change’ (ibid.). The OECD

research found that ‘Cognitive skills and reading motivation are mutually rein forcing …

Rather than being alternatives, schools need to address both simultaneously’ (ibid.: 19).

Echoing the sense that reading for pleasure is an essential part of reading instruction,

Lockwood points out that:

Strategies that promote positive attitudes to reading need to be used alongside the teaching of reading skills in any effort to raise attainment. (Lockwood, 2012: 228)

Clark and de Zoysa (2011) also found a significant positive relationship between enjoyment

and attainment, indicating that pupils who read more are also better readers. However,

they are careful to point out that there is no evidence of a causal link between enjoyment

of reading and higher attainment and that higher attainment may lead to more enjoyment

of reading or greater enjoyment may lead to higher attainment. Similarly Clark and Douglas

(2011), in a large-scale survey of over 18,000 young people, found that those who reported

enjoying reading very much were six times more likely than those who did not enjoy reading

to read above the expected level for their age. Young people who reported not enjoying

reading at all were eleven times more likely than those who enjoyed reading very much to

read below the level expected for their age. In a meta-analysis of international studies

linking young readers’ attitudes to reading and reading attainment, Petscher (2010) reports

findings which support the view that there is a relationship between attitudes and achievement which is stronger in schools with 5 to 11 year olds.

In their review of the research literature, Clark and Rumbold (2006) indicate that

promoting pleasure and independence in reading can have a significant impact not only on

children’s reading attainment but also on their writing ability. Gains are found in the areas

of:

• text comprehension and understanding of grammar

• breadth of vocabulary

• positive reading attitudes

• greater self-confidence as readers

• pleasure in reading in later life

• general knowledge

• understanding of other cultures

• community participation

• insight into human nature and decision-making (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

KEY QUESTION 1:

Are all staff aware of the importance of reading for pleasure (rfp)?

## 2. Children’s attitudes to reading

Generally, different groups have varying attitudes to enjoyment of reading. The Booktrust

survey (Gleed, 2013) indicates that there is a substantial gap in reading habits between the

economically advantaged and disadvantaged groups in the UK. Moss and Washbrook (2016)

report that irrespective of early language skills, girls at age 7 report much more positive

attitudes to school and read more for pleasure than boys (Moss and Washbrook, 2016: 4).

These differences between groups have implications for how teachers might foster engaged

and committed reading regardless of socioeconomic status or gender. It is simply not

enough just to focus on teaching word reading skills and comprehension strategies. Schools

must also develop approaches to motivation and engagement in reading. They must also

consider whether their current approach is encouraging all the differing groups within their

schools to develop engagement in reading. The Simple View of Reading, which is largely promoted in schools in the UK and the USA, is not an adequate approach to fostering a lifelong love of reading.

KEY QUESTION 2:

Do schools and teachers know which pupils, and groups of pupils, report not enjoying reading?

## 3. Reading for pleasure in the reading curriculum

Cremin et al. (2014) argue that although reading instruction is critically important in

developing successful readers, it is also crucial for schools to focus on both ‘the skill and

the will’ to read. Currently, in both England and internationally, policy seems to have

emphasised the skills of reading rather than engagement, motivation and the commitment

to reading. Although national policies do acknowledge reading for pleasure (see, e.g.,

England’s National Curriculum, DfE, 2015), the emphasis through high-stakes national

tests and school inspections concentrates almost exclusively upon skills.**kes testing:** when tests have significant consequences for the pupil, fortution.

In this table, Cremin et al. (2014) represent the distinctions between ‘the skill and the will’

– between reading instruction and reading for pleasure.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reading instruction is oriented towards:** | **Reading for pleasure is oriented towards:** |
| Learning to read | Choosing to read |
| The skill | The will |
| Decoding and comprehension | Engagement and response |
| Reading for the system | Reading for oneself |
| Teacher direction | Child direction |
| Teacher ownership | Child ownership |
| Attainment | Achievement |
| Solitary reading | Social and collaborative reading |
| The minimum entitlement  (A set reading level) | The maximum entitlement  (A reader for life) |

What is clear from this table is that if schools want to develop children as lifelong readers,

they have to incorporate strategies for both ‘the skill and the will’ into their ongoing

teaching. Equally, if reading for pleasure strategies are to be successful, children’s agency,

and desire to read, must be central.

KEY QUESTION 3: What is the balance between the skill and the will in your own practice/school?

Cremin et al. (2014) argue that their research, which investigated reading instruction in a number of English schools, identified:

a multi-layered Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy, and subtle, but significant distinctions between reading instruction and reading for pleasure. These distinctions and the interplay between children’s desire to read and their capacity as readers – the skill and the will – were central to the project.

(Cremin et al., 2014: 3)

The research summarised the following important findings:

• that reading and talk are mutually supportive

• that reading urgently needs reconceptualising in the twenty-first century to take into

account new forms of text

• that reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships between teachers,

teachers and children, children and families, and schools, families and communities.

The research also found that a reading for pleasure agenda can be developed effectively

through the creation of supportive classroom reading communities. Such communities are

most effectively led by ‘Reading Teachers – teachers who read and readers who teach’

(Commeyras et al., 2003: 4). Teachers who are increasingly aware of their own

reading lives, their preferences, habits behaviours and strategies and reflect upon the

implications for teaching are able not only to set up sound reading communities in schools

but also to recognise that children have rights as readers and develop their own identities

as readers.

## 4. Strategies for promoting engagement and enjoyment

Researchers and teaching organisations (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Lockwood, 2008;

Cremin et al., 2009; CLPE, 2014; Traves, 2015; NUT, 2016) have identified a range of factors

as crucial for promoting reading for pleasure in schools:

**• Incorporating children’s own reading interests into curriculum planning.**

**• Creating diverse, supportive and social reading environments that promote children’s**

**agency as readers and are based on a view of the classroom as a community of**

**readers.**

**• Teachers who are knowledgeable about texts and share their own reading lives with**

**children, talk about books and make recommendations to individuals and the whole**

**class.**

**• Reading aloud to the class for pleasure rather than for instrumental literacy teaching**

**purposes.**

**• Creating frequent opportunities for children to read independently for pleasure, and**

**giving them choices about what to read.**

**• Providing creative opportunities, such as drama and role play, to help children explore**

**and understand texts, including those with challenging content and theme.**

**4.1 Case study, early primary: Incorporating children’s own reading**

**interests into curriculum planning**

Teachers of 5 and 6 year olds in Greenfields Infant School in East London decided that

to develop their reading curriculum they needed to know much more about the child -

ren’s literacy experiences outside school: what they were interested in reading about,

and thus what could be built in school in a variety of ways. Greenfields serves a diverse

and economically challenged community where thirty-six languages are spoken.

The teachers asked the children to:

• research their own literacy lives by taking photographs of when they engaged in

literacy experiences with members of their families and to bring in texts that

they read together at home into school to share

• bring into school, or talk to the teachers about, texts they liked to read because

the contents were interesting to them and that they would like to see more of in

school.

Literacy activities were defined widely, including print and screen texts – on small

or larger screens. When the children brought in texts and talked about their literacy

experiences, the teachers were surprised by the richness of the children’s home

literacy lives and how they shared these with their families, both in print and on

screen, sometimes going on simultaneously.

To illustrate the variety of home reading experiences, one 6-year-old boy, who had

four older sisters, reported that he:

• enjoyed stories about football, rabbits and pirates

• was very interested in wildlife and nature

• enjoyed family outdoor activities – for example, hunting, ferreting and fishing

with his father

• regularly read information texts, mainly magazines, about hunting and wild life

with his father

• liked to watch television programmes about Ben 10, Power Rangers and

Wrestling, and looking at their respective websites

• played the Wii with the family in their living room most days.

This was typical of the range of literacy activities children engaged with in their

homes. Religion also played a central role in many families, with daily reading of the

holy book as well as regular trips to the local place of worship. The teachers also

found that children engaged intensely with a constellation of texts around current

popular cultural interests. Children watched television programmes about the

characters, visited dedicated websites, collected magazines, played associated

computer games, read books and magazines, role played the characters in play -

ground games, and watched their popular cultural favourites at the cinema.

It was also particularly noticeable that many boys and their fathers shared the same

keen interests and liked to read texts together, which extended their information and

understanding. For example, two of the boys had lorry-driving fathers and so shared

an interest in texts about trucks. Aaron brought one of his books about trucks into the

classroom and talked knowledgeably to a rapt class about the different trucks and

their characteristics. Immediately he finished there was intense interest amongst other

members of the class to look at the book and to share the information it contained.

**4.2 The classroom as a community of readers**

As a result of what they found out, the teachers made some far-reaching changes to

their practice including:

• Regular focused ‘show and tell’ sessions where children brought in texts and

objects of interest. Teacher’s noted what was brought in and considered how

they could incorporate into their planning for future teaching and learning.

• Introducing an ‘interest tree’ in the classes. Children wrote down what they

were particularly interested in reading about on a ‘leaf’ and put it on the tree.

Teachers again used these as a prompt for including in planning.

• Making time for ‘text talk’. Children were encouraged to bring in texts they

engaged with at home and talked about them to other children. The books and

other texts were put on display in the book area.

• Reviewing the reading resources in the classroom/school and incorporating

texts about areas that children reported interest in. This led to significantly

more interest and engagement from the children.

• Teachers now feeling they could talk knowledgeably with parents about their

children’s interests outside school so that relationships became stronger.

• Teachers shared their literacy lives with the children and together developed a

community of readers in the classroom, undermining preconceptions (and

deficit views – see Chapter 1) of children’s and families’ literacy lives.

• Teachers became more knowledgeable about popular cultural and media

influences on the children, could refer to them and make lessons more relevant

to the experiences of the children.

The teachers reported that engagement in reading at school had significantly

improved as a result of the changes that they had made. Their initiative had ensured

that many of the recommended strategies for developing reading for pleasure had

become part of the warp and weft of everyday classroom life. Children’s agency was

supported. Talk about texts became central and children’s’ literacy practices, interests and knowledge of the world were celebrated and built on within the curriculum.

**4.3 Teachers who are knowledgeable about texts**

The case study illustrates how teachers can became knowledgeable about the texts children

like to engage with out of school, particularly ones associated with current popular culture.

There were some gender differences in the content of the texts that boys and girls liked to

read but it was clear that there was little that reflected both boys’ and girls’ out-of-school

interests in the reading materials in school. Magazines which found their way into the

classrooms and were avidly read and shared, were mainly donated by the children

themselves. This study and others in the research (Cremin et al., 2014) strongly indicated

that teachers need to develop knowledge of children’s out-of-school reading preferences

and a wide knowledge of literature for children. Teachers who have a good knowledge of

children’s literature are much more able to make well-judged recommendations to children

about what they may like to read next and are also more able to develop a community of

readers in their classrooms (Younger et al., 2005; Kwek et al., 2007).

KEY QUESTION 4: Do teachers know what pupils like to read, and read about, outside school?

**Activity 6.3**ping up with books for children – pairs/group/reflective journal/blog

**4.4 Reading aloud**

Reading aloud conditions a child’s brain to associate reading with pleasure, creates background knowledge and provides a reading role model; when children are read aloud to, they are ‘enveloped’ in a risk free learning

environment that ‘removes the pressure of achievement and the fear of failure, allowing the freedom to wonder, question and enjoy material beyond their reading abilities’.

(Wadsworth, 2008, cited in Safford 2014: 94)

Reading aloud by an adult is a very important strategy for supporting children in their

development as readers all through their primary years. Research (Taylor et al., 2003;

Parkhill et al., 2005) clearly suggests that this should be a daily activity. This is also a good

opportunity to introduce young readers to less familiar authors as they are likely to access

well-known authors such as Roald Dahl, Jacqueline Wilson and Jeff Kinney by themselves

**4.5 Creating opportunities for children to read independently for pleasure, and giving them choices about what to read**

Children get better at reading by reading, so it is important to provide frequent opportunities

for them to read during and beyond the school day. Just 15 minutes a day of independent

recreational reading significantly improves children’s reading abilities (Block and Mangieri,

2002). Children’s choices are critical here (Gambrell, 2011). Children should choose what

they want to read in these planned times and browsing time also needs to be planned for.

Short but regular independent reading sessions are better than one long one each week

and it is important that there are no interruptions. The key issue here is how to make a

regular time in busy school days for independent reading.

**Case study, early, middle and upper primary: Planning opportunities for children to read independently**

Longroad Primary School decided to develop a systematic approach to planning regular opportunities for children to read, to browse the school library or class reading area, to choose at leisure and to read independently. Immediately after lunchtime, for 15 minutes, ERIC (Everybody Reading In Class) took place. This meant that everyone read at the same time, including the adults who acted as positive role

models. Occasionally the adults talked about what they were reading and why they had chosen that particular text. The school also suggested to some children who found reading individually every day problematic that they could choose to read quietly to each other if they wanted to. In addition, the school created other opportunities such as reading assemblies where every so often, different classes or different adults in the school, shared their reading enthusiasms. This ranged from fairy tales to manuals about motorbikes. There are also reading clubs held at lunchtime where reading monitors/mentors (often older pupils in the school) supervised while children read independently in the school library. Sometimes the mentors read with younger children and share recommendations for books they might like to read. Book swap clubs – ‘bring one, take one’ – were organised after school once a week and the school set up a book - shop where books that were being read aloud in class could be bought. The school also organised occasional ‘reading sleepovers’ where older children could come in the evening and read before going to bed. Adults other than teachers – for example, the site supervisor and lunchtime staff – visited classrooms from time to time and talked to the children about what they liked to read. One of the key initiatives was the Reading Gladiators scheme run by Just Imagine (http://justimagine.co.uk/project/reading-gladiators/)), designed to provide a challenging reading experience that motivates children to read for pleasure. Children are encouraged to read widely and to make adventurous reading choices. They collaborate with others in the class and carry out individual challenges. Parents and families are also invited to be part of the reading community of the school with book evenings and quizzes where family members and children enjoy activities about reading together. One of the parents has set up a dedicated part of the website for sharing book recommendations and this became a popular social site for adults and for children and special places for reading were set up in the school garden. As a result of these initiatives, the school became a very obvious ‘reading school’ with a community of engaged and enthusiastic readers.

Paired reading, where older children and younger children read collaboratively chosen texts to each other, is also an effective strategy to promote reading engagement and confidence. The younger children benefit from hearing a role model, and older readers benefit by building their confidence even if they are not themselves

particularly fluent.

KEY QUESTION 5: Is reading aloud a regular activity in every classroom, including tutor time in KS3?

## 5. Creating diverse, comfortable, supportive and social reading environments

Not many adults read in uncomfortable places. They choose to find a comfortable chair and many enjoy reading in the comfort of bed. It is clear that being comfortable makes a great difference to the pleasure

gained from reading, so schools should ensure that children are physically comfortable

when they read independently. Class rooms and the school library should have inviting and

stimulating book corners which all children are encouraged to spend time in every day and

borrow texts from the library on a regular basis (Figures 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4).

## 6. Creating a supportive environment for reading for pleasure

• Making spaces relaxing and cosy – think about providing cushions, chairs, sofas, tents etc.

• Make them engaging and attractive – they could be decorated with posters children have made that relate to favourite books or with photos of children, their families and teachers reading at school, at home and elsewhere. This helps to promote reading as a shared, social experience.

• Ensure they are well stocked with books that are well displayed and easy to browse with a selection of new titles, favourite authors, picture books, graphic novels, poetry and non-fiction.

• Displays should be easy to navigate and changed regularly. Help children to browse for books and find what they want.

• Try grouping books by theme (change these regularly) and encourage children to recommend books for display.

• Encourage children to bring in their own books to read (as well as manuals, catalogues, magazines, etc.).

• Think about creating spaces where children can talk about books but also where they can be quiet if they want to.

• Make sure the space is kept tidy (NUT, 2016: 8–9).

Readers will note the references to ‘books’ in the above. As children (and adults) increasingly read on screen, access to screen-based texts via tablets and e-readers will be important to organise, as well as the storage of both the hardware and the software.

KEY QUESTION 6: Is there a supportive environment in place and how is the school library utilised to promote pleasure in reading?

## 7. Engaging children with challenging texts

Developing engagement in reading is not just about reading ‘easy’ texts. Engagement and pleasure can also come from the struggle with challenging texts, ‘strenuous pleasure’ as Raleigh (1996) terms it.

Reedy and Lister (2007) describe a project with 9–11-year-old children who engaged with an oral retelling of Homer’s Iliad. They found that grappling collectively with this extensive, complex and emotionally powerful text, with its unfamiliar language, complex characters and moral issues, promoted high levels of engagement and inclusion. In addition ‘the oral text provided the stimulus and motivation to explore printed texts. Familiarity with the storyline gave children the confidence to tackle the story in print’ (Reedy and Lister,

2007: 5). Books of Greek myths became the most popular books in the class library, and boys in particular went out of the way to find out more about gods and goddesses. Nicholson (2006) reported similar findings from a project on literature and writing, carried out in Inner London, in which 7–11-year-old children encountered challenging literature through strategies such as reading aloud and drama. This approach proved highly

motivational:

[Teachers] spoke of students desperate to write, of loving books and readingagain. In all the teachers’ evaluations of the project it was the attitudes of the students as readers and writers that they were most struck by and most pleased about.

(Nicholson, 2006: 19)

The choice of texts in these projects was just as important as the strategies used to explore

them. Some of the books the teachers chose were: The Winter Sleepwalker by Joan Aiken

(1994), Fire, Bed and Bone by Henrietta Branford (2002), The Green Children by Kevin

Crossley Holland (1997) and Tennyson’s The Lady of Shalott (1986). These were chosen as

texts that have an impact on the emotions:

Books that dealt with important issues and strong themes were more likely to engage and involve students emotionally as readers. These texts enable students to make connections to their own experiences and feelings.

(Nicholson, 2006: 12)

The success of this project indicates that it is important that if teachers wish to promote

engagement and further reading, it is worth avoiding class texts that are simplistic or

underestimate students’s capacities for taking on a challenge.

**Case study, early secondary: Chaucer in the original Middle**

**English –a challenging text**

As part of an extended teaching sequence using classic fiction as a basis for narrative writing, Corinne decided to tackle a really challenging text with her 11 and 12 year olds. This case study describes phase one, particularly ‘reading and investigation’ and ‘capturing ideas’. The writing was to be a story about a dilemma, written from

the point of view of two characters, and the text she chose was Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale – a story about the effects of greed. Before she started the first session, Corinne pinned up part of the Middle English version of the story, but made no comment about it. The section begins:

Thise ryotors three, of whiche I telle,

Long erste er pryme rong of any belle,

Were set hem in a taverne for to drinke;

And as they satte, they herde a belle clinke

Biforn a cors, was carried to his grave;

(Roughly translated: These three ruffians that I’m talking about, early in the day were sitting drinking in a tavern. And as they sat there they heard a bell being rung before a corpse that was being taken to be buried.)

Corinne began the session by asking the class what they knew about pilgrimages and there was some discussion about Mecca and the Kumbh Mela of 2013. She explained that The Canterbury Tales was a collection of stories told to while away the time while pilgrims were travelling by foot and horseback to Canterbury over 700

years ago. She told the students the story of The Pardoner’s Tale, using artefacts such as drinking vessels, a phial of ‘poison’ and gold coins as hooks for memory. After telling the story, Corinne asked the students if they had any pictures in their minds of any parts of the story. Encouraging them to explain what they visualised as

still images or illustrations in a book, she used these as the basis for groups to freeze frame a chosen episode from the tale and produce a caption to describe the events depicted. The class took photographs of the freeze frames and uploaded them onto the smartboard to use in a later session. The following session began with a recap of the story followed by watching an animated version of the tale available on YouTube . On re-watching, Corinne asked them to notice how the filmmakers emphasised themes in the tale, such as the greed of the different characters and after discussion of camera angle and close-ups, the class watched again with the task of noticing the setting. They did a quick-write describing the village and the tavern and kept these as notes for their later writing. For the third session, Corinne asked the class to watch the video again but to choose to follow one of the ruffians and note anything about his emotions and reactions to events. Volunteers were hot-seated and asked about their feelings and motivations as a basis for the final point of view writing. To end this session, Corinne finally turned to the original Middle English text. She had noticed that several students had been browsing the passage on display but had not commented. She read the first part of the tale and gave the students copies in their groups, inviting them to ask questions about anything that interested or puzzled them. The questions were written on paper strips and put on the wall for others to think about ready to answer in the next session. The invitation to become text interpreters engaged even the least assured readers and in the fourth session Corinne asked volunteers to give answers to the questions.

There were plenty of people wanting to elucidate, so after a few whole class answers, the students moved into groups to make sure that all their queries had been answered. This session ended with Corinne reading the middle section of the tale and asking the students to discuss what had happened in that section. In the final session of the week, Corinne read the end of the tale and giving the groups copies of this section in the original language, asked them to make group summaries. There was plenty of talk and excitement when it came to sharing each group’s version of the ending of the tale. In the following week the class re-read the

Middle English text, relishing reading it aloud and began their own versions in modern English. Corinne had also bought several versions of Marcia Williams’ graphic/comic book version Chaucer’ s Canterbury Tales (2008), which encouraged the class to read more of Chaucer’s tales independently.

KEY QUESTION 7: How are more challenging texts used to promote satisfaction in reading – that reading can sometimes be hard but worthwhile?

**Activity 6.4**

**Summary**

Pleasure in reading is crucial in developing fully rounded readers. Reading for pleasure is a slippery concept, involving engagement, motivation, satisfaction, fulfilment and purpose. Schools and teachers have an

important role in promoting pleasure in reading and the above has described strategies that will support children’s developing sense of what it is to be a successful and satisfied reader. As important as the strategies are the resources schools provide, which should reflect children’s interests and expand their reading horizons

through working together to make sense of challenging texts. In establishing an environment to support reading for pleasure and purpose, teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature and the promotion of children’s agency as readers are central.

KEY QUESTION 1:

Are all staff aware of the importance of reading for pleasure (rfp)?

KEY QUESTION 2:

Do schools and teachers know which pupils, and groups of pupils, report not enjoying reading?

KEY QUESTION 3: What is the balance between the skill and the will in your own practice/school?

KEY QUESTION 4: Do teachers know what pupils like to read, and read about, outside school?

KEY QUESTION 5: Is reading aloud a regular activity in every classroom, including tutor time in KS3?

KEY QUESTION 6: Is there a supportive environment in place and how is the school library utilised to promote pleasure in reading?

KEY QUESTION 7: How are more challenging texts used to promote satisfaction in reading – that reading can sometimes be hard but worthwhile?

OVERALL: Would you judge your school to be a ‘reading school’ where ‘the skill and the will’ are in balance? What points for action are there?

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