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# Understanding boys' (dis)engagement with reading for pleasure

## Project findings



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## Understanding boys' (dis)engagement with reading for pleasure

Why do boys from low-income families appear to read for pleasure far less than other groups of young people? This research project provides new evidence that how reading is taught in schools influences different boys' orientations to and engagement with reading for pleasure. It offers evidence that boys' (dis)engagement is not simply a gender issue and that it also involves teacher perceptions of other aspects of boys' social and learner identities, including 'ability' designation, ethnicity and social class. It also shows how not all boys are positioned as readers in the same way both within the same classrooms and in different schools depending on their ethnicity, social class, socio-economic status and EAL (English as an Additional Language) status. The research shows how these discourses varied significantly in terms of their dominance in each classroom and this varied according to the ethnic composition of the school and ethnic and social class background of the children's teachers. The research was funded by the British Academy and the Leverhulme Foundation.



There is considerable international evidence that illustrates the significant cognitive (including increased attainment in literacy and numeracy tests), affective and social benefits of reading for pleasure (OECD 2010). Yet less than half of boys in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) surveyed in English schools recently (Clarke 2016) report reading for pleasure and are significantly underachieving educationally. The present research case studied eight boys aged 9-10 years and three girls in four schools (labelled Schools A-D) with higher than average proportions (32-59%) of children eligible for FSM in England. The research found that a combination of teachers' perceptions of boys' in-school 'ability' labels, gender, ethnicity and social class, and the teaching practices for reading, caused some boys to become positioned as struggling readers who do not engage with volitional reading for pleasure. This impacted negatively on their orientations to, and level of engagement with, reading for pleasure.



This project identified two key factors in the boys' classrooms, which in combination caused some boys to be positioned as struggling and/or non-readers for pleasure. These factors were:

1. Teachers' perceptions of children's intersecting social and learner identities, particularly related to children's gender and reading 'ability' and in some classrooms, ethnicity and social

class in relation to teachers' understanding of reading and what makes a 'good reader'. This appears to have been a significant influencing factor, in combination with the pressure to raise attainment, on their teaching practices for reading for pleasure and reading in the literacy curriculum.

2. Teachers' understandings of reading (which was primarily in terms of proficiency at the expense of volitional engagement and pleasure) and the teaching practices that were intended support children's reading development were implemented in the schools.

The originality of this study lies in a new approach to boys' disengagement with reading, grounded in intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1991). This intersectionality approach has an explicit focus on how gender, ethnicity and social class intersect in producing different educational disadvantage amongst children. With this approach, the project builds on seminal research into boys' disengagement with reading (Moss 2000) and on reading for pleasure pedagogies (Cremin et al., 2014). It does this by hypothesising that boys' (dis)engagement may not solely be a gender issue and may be related to how they are positioned in teachers' pedagogy as a result of teachers' perceptions of children's intersecting gender, ethnicity and social class identities.



The findings suggest that in three of four participating case study schools, reading was implicitly framed and manifest in the pedagogical practices ostensibly aimed at reading for pleasure and in literacy lessons, as being related only to technical reading proficiency rather than pleasure or enjoyment. This meant that 'struggling' boy readers were viewed almost solely as technically less proficient readers. In two of the Schools this was compounded by the teachers' perceptions of boys as inherently less

competent readers in contrast to girls. Boys were not seen to conform to the kinds of reading behaviour teachers saw as commensurate with being a good reader (for example, taking the apparent initiative to pick up a book during lesson filler time and reading on their own at home, as evidenced in the home school reading record). Furthermore, some of the boys were positioned in deficit terms due to teachers' deficit perceptions of reading practices at home which teachers implicitly linked to the boys' ethnicity and social class. This is likely to have influenced their positioning of the boys as struggling (non)readers. It was therefore very difficult for boys to reposition themselves as good readers, despite their attempts to do so. This suggests that boys (dis)engagement with reading for pleasure is not solely a gender issue where a gap exists between boys and girls as homogenous groups but also involves teacher perceptions of other aspects of children's social identities.

Yet in one of the four schools, the teacher's practices to some extent bucked this trend both in terms of her understanding of reading, the pedagogies she used to support reading and her perceptions of children's social identities. This teacher did not draw on deficit perceptions of children's gender, ethnicity and social class and practiced more genuine reading for pleasure pedagogies where reading was seen as a social and pleasurable activity as well as being about proficiency.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- A brief account of teaching practices designed to encourage children's reading for pleasure

- The research methods
- The four key findings:
  1. Boys were trapped in positions as struggling non-readers at school as a result of their 'ability' labels and teachers' perceptions of their gender, ethnicity and social class
  2. Teaching practices for reading – including those aimed at reading for pleasure - were aimed at reading proficiency rather than pleasure or enjoyment
  3. Boys *can* be positioned more positively as 'struggling' readers
  4. Teacher perceptions of boys and resulting practices appear to have a role in boys' (dis)engagement with reading for pleasure
- Conclusions and implications for policy and practice

### *Reading for pleasure pedagogies*

To understand reading for pleasure pedagogies in schools, the project adopted Cremin et al's (2014) work on these practices. This research identified four intersecting strands of reading for pleasure pedagogy (described below) - independent reading, reading environments, reading aloud and informal book talk. These four strands were used to select schools for the study: each school was practicing at least three of these strands and had recently invested in developing reading for pleasure. The four strands were also used to understand how the reading for pleasure pedagogies were conceived of and implemented in each of the schools. All the four strands support a conceptualisation of reading for pleasure in which:

- Children's choice, initiative and volition as readers are central
- Reading is understood as social and involves reading relationships that extend beyond the school and into the community to form communities of readers

The four intersecting strands of reading for pleasure practice are as follows:

- ***Independent reading.*** Time within the curriculum for children's own reading (without an adult), *not reading books prescribed by the teacher* but those chosen by the children, thus fostering their volition and preferences as readers.
- ***Reading environments.*** The physical and social environment for reading, encompassing space, time and resources, often evidenced in areas set aside for relaxed reading which promote reading as a pleasurable activity.
- ***Reading aloud*** without interruption, for the purpose of providing a role model and for pleasure, creating 'texts in common' with which to build communities.
- ***Book talk.*** Conversations between children or between children and teachers about their reading of an informal, non-structured and often spontaneous nature. These reflect their engagement as readers and may involve book recommendations and inside text talk. *They are not literacy focused or instructional in nature.*

## Research methods

The research project involved four English primary schools, each of which was visited for a period of one week in 2016, primarily to observe reading for pleasure pedagogies in practice and literacy and guided reading lessons as well as other opportunities to read throughout the curriculum. The emphasis of this approach was to take a close look at boys' experiences of reading for pleasure and literacy pedagogy and how they were positioned as readers in these contexts.



Two of the four selected schools were located in different major urban areas and the other two in towns. Although the four selected schools had differing ethnic compositions, all had high free school meal status (FSM, ranging from 32-59%) and practiced three to four of the reading for pleasure pedagogies. These precise details of each school and focus pupils are not provided in this report because to do so would risk breaking the anonymity of the schools and children. In each school, two or three focus boys with different ethnicities and one focus girl were identified in the same Year 5 class with the help of the class teacher. The focus pupils were identified by the teacher as 'struggling' (or equivalent term) readers although none of the focus boys and girls had special educational needs (SEND). Only two boys were required for the project but a third was identified in case either of the main focus boys were absent for a major part of the observation week. Although the primary focus of the project was to investigate struggling boy readers, by also selecting one struggling girl reader in each class it was possible to compare the similarities and differences in their experiences. The schools are labelled School A, B, C and D to maintain anonymity and the focus children have been given pseudonyms.

The focus pupils were observed/followed throughout the curriculum for the entire week (five whole school days, Monday to Friday inclusive) in the four schools, apart from the mid-morning breaks and lunchtimes (the researchers checked with teachers whether there were opportunities to read during lunchtimes, this was not the case in any of the schools). The researchers' observations concentrated on the focus children's and teachers' interactions and behaviours during the week and field notes were maintained throughout. These notes related to all lessons and anything of relevance to the project that occurred during the week in school. The notes were written up using an observation guide to focus the observation on factors including lesson objectives, how these were introduced by the teacher, interactions between the focus children, other children and the teacher or teaching assistants and focus children's behaviours including body language. Audio recordings were also made during literacy and reading for pleasure activities. The focus children in each school were interviewed twice as a group during the observation period (after two days in school and then again at the end of the week) using a semi-structured interview guide. The class teachers were interviewed before their week in school so that researchers had some knowledge of the class before the observation period,

and to select the focus children, and then again at the end of the week to discuss the observations of the focus children in particular and the class/teaching more generally.

After the researchers had concluded their observations in school, all the audio recordings were independently transcribed and each researcher uploaded their field notes onto a pro-forma so that these data were in a standardised format. Subsequently all the data were uploaded into NVivo and nodes were decided based on the emergent themes from the literatures reviewed and by reading a sample of transcripts across the four schools, covering each of the data types (lesson observation notes, lesson audio transcripts and interview transcripts). To ensure inter-coder reliability, each researcher coded their own data which was then second coded by another member of the team. This process was repeated until there was agreement about the definitions and application of the nodes between the four researchers. It was then possible to explore the references gathered under each node to draw out key themes in response to the four research questions. These were drawn out by each of the four researchers in response to one of the research questions and were then discussed in team meetings where interpretations of the data were challenged and refined.



Throughout the research (and the subsequent analyses) the project team followed British Educational Research Association and The Open University (OU) ethics principles. Prior to data collection, informed consent was sought and obtained from the parents of the focus children, the class teachers and the head teacher of each school. All the data was subsequently anonymised before being stored on a secure server at the OU.

## Key findings

### 1. Boys were trapped in positions as struggling non-readers at school as a result of their 'ability' labels and teachers' perceptions of their gender, ethnicity and social class

- **Teachers in all four schools labelled children according to their 'ability' by using assessment data.** This was made visible to children in a variety of ways (e.g. through seating in 'ability' groups, reading ladders and/or through interactions between teachers and pupils and among pupils themselves). This applied particularly to children in Schools A and C.
- In two of the schools (A and C), teachers' perceptions of children's 'ability' had a strong influence on how they were positioned as readers and writers, which in effect positioned children as relatively proficient readers and writers.
- **The intersection between discourses about children's 'ability' and gender was particularly strong in Schools A and C where girls were seen as superior readers both in terms of technical skill and reading behaviour** (for example, picking up a book and reading without being told to), **which met teacher expectations of being a 'good reader'**. Boys, in contrast were seen as much less capable of taking individual responsibility for their own reading in contrast to girls. In School A, these were boys of colour and with parents in working class occupations.

- **Teachers in the same two schools held deficit views of some children's parents, including the struggling boy readers', in that they weren't seen as supportive of education.** This reflects an implicit perception that parenting practices are related to **social class**, where some lower social (under)classes tend to be associated with anti-educational attitudes and practices (Roberts 2011). They saw part of their teacher role as compensating for deficient parenting in being a positive role model (School A) or providing books where there were ostensibly none at home (School C). This was despite teachers having some little knowledge about children's home and reading lives outside of school.
- **In one of these two schools (School A), discourse about 'ability' also intersected with ethnicity in how children were 'ability' grouped for literacy and guided reading.** Boys of colour were more likely to be placed in the lowest group, whereas White British girls were more likely to be placed in the top group. Three of the four 'struggling readers' selected as focus children were children of colour (and were placed in the lowest literacy group) and the four literacy 'high fliers' (in the top group) were White British girls. This was significant because the children were seated in these groups during literacy lessons and in slightly different groups for guided reading and the class teacher spent most lesson time, excluding whole class teaching sessions, working with this group to support their learning. This marked the group out as the lower group within the class, containing the most struggling readers.

In this school, the children of colour were 'othered' in the classroom. For example in a literacy lesson activity focussing on nationality only minoritised children were identified as having (by implication an 'other') nationality whereas British nationality was not mentioned in relation to White children in the class (which by implication was considered by the teacher to be normal and therefore unremarkable). There were also examples of overt racism, for example where the teacher made a racist joke about a British Bangladeshi boy in the lowest literacy group. The teacher in School A also reduced the ethnicities of children of colour to something to be referred to occasionally as a novelty e.g. during 'show and tell' or on special cultural days.

- **Negative perceptions of gender, ethnicity and social class were far less prevalent in the other two schools (Schools B and D).** The teachers did not cite deficit discourses about children in relation to any of these identity categories – yet discourse about 'ability' was still prevalent. The teachers in these two schools drew on different discourses to Schools A and C, such as educational discourse about EAL and SEN. This deflected blame from being placed on parenting practices. Teachers in all four schools expressed a view that when EAL status was the main reason for children's struggles with reading, their reading proficiency would improve with the right support. In these two schools, teachers connected focus children's reading struggles with their EAL status and discourses about potential SEN issues.
- **One reason for this marked difference between the two pairs of schools, could be related to the ethnic compositions of their pupil in-take and the intersectional identities of the teachers.** The teacher in School A was a White British man and most children in the class were of colour; the teacher in School B was of colour as were the vast majority of children and the teacher in School D was White as were most of the children (at least 85%) and the teacher was also from a working class background. This could mean that these teachers were less likely to hold deficit discourses as they were able to identify more positively with the children's home cultures and in the case of

the School B teacher, she may have been more sensitive to issues around racism and deficit discourse in relation to ethnicity.



## **2. Teaching practices for reading – including those aimed at reading for pleasure - were aimed at reading proficiency rather than pleasure or enjoyment**

Impoverished reading practices were evidenced in three of the four schools. These practices focussed on developing technical language skills and reading proficiency and were not based on understanding of reading as a social practice nor on a coherent understanding of reading for pleasure in which children's choice and initiative are central. The teaching of reading in the literacy curriculum and in reading for pleasure activities were strongly framed by the assessment agenda which drives current educational policy in England. It was arguably also a result of some of the teachers' deficit perceptions of the focus children (boys in particular)

combined with the pressure to raise the attainment of struggling readers in tests.

Summary of reading for pleasure pedagogies as instantiated in the four schools:

### *Independent reading (IR) time*

- IR was regular practice- all classes provided time within the curriculum for children's 'own reading'.
- This varied in length from 25 mins in total across the week to 3.6 hrs in total.
- Children were allowed choice of texts for IR in every class although the number of texts available in the classrooms varied significantly between 147-802 texts (including books and magazines).
- Interaction between children was minimal in three of the four schools. It was either not allowed at all (in two schools) or not encouraged (in one school). In School D, on the other hand, interaction was allowed and encouraged by the teacher.
- The class reading areas were not used during this time except in School D, where children had free choice of where to sit
- Many, though not all of the focus children were less than attentive or engaged in their books during this time and engaged in reading avoidance practices. Again, this did not apply to the same extent in School D.

### *Reading environment*

- Reading was profiled physically in the classroom environment, it was performed and displayed.
- Reading, and particularly volitional reading, was predominantly positioned as an individual and solitary activity, with the exception of School D
- Reading environments were not observed to be used for reading with the exception of School D
- The amount of texts in each classroom varied significantly, ranging from 140 texts in School A to 802 in School D. Researchers counted all texts including books (fiction and non-fiction), magazines and poetry.

- The number of texts with children of colour on the covers of texts was extremely low in all four schools at around 5% of the class book collections in each classroom.
- In the wider school environment, reading was profiled but limited use was made of school libraries and additional spaces. Once again reading tended to be performed and not participated in as an interactive social practice.

### *Reading aloud (RA)*

- RA was not regular practice in the schools, with the exception of School D.
- It was minimally used as a tool to support reading for pleasure in at least three of the schools.
- What teachers referred to as 'reading aloud' for pleasure was misappropriated and reframed by the accountability discourse in schools A and C
- There was a gap between teachers' rhetoric about RA and the reality – the purposes expressed appeared in practice to be unrelated to reading for pleasure. This was with the exception of School D, where the teacher more regularly engaged children and valued their responses.
- The range of texts used in RA and teachers' knowledge of children's literature was limited.
- Children were mostly positioned as passive listeners or responders to questions in RA time in Schools A and C. This was in contrast to School D where children participated actively on their own initiative.
- Moments of connection and meaning making suggest even despite the above, that the experience was positive for some.



### *Informal book talk*

- There was scant evidence of book talk (observed or reported) of an informal, not literacy focused/instructional nature, with the exception of School D where the teacher actively encouraged this kind of interaction during independent reading.
- Teachers referred to talking about texts but the evidence suggests either there was a gap between their views and their practice, or that their conception of book talk was related to instructional whole class contexts, in contrast to the spontaneous informal book talk, book recommendations and inside-text talk documented in Cremin et al (2014) and elsewhere.
- The absence of informal text talk may relate to the teachers' apparent lack of knowledge of children's literature- without such knowledge it is difficult for them to talk about the texts that

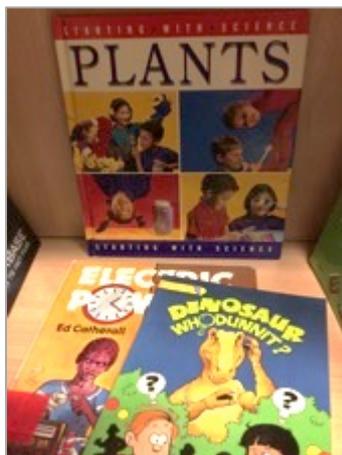
the children are reading. It may also have been influenced by a lack of knowledge about what the children were reading.

### *Literacy lessons and guided reading*

Reading (and writing) in literacy lessons was strongly framed by assessment and concerns about proficiency. Yet significantly, in School D, the teacher understood reading as also related to understanding and engaging with the underlying messages of a text/story and children creating their own interpretations of this.

- Reading in literacy lessons in Schools A, B and C was mostly confined to reading isolated sections of texts (as opposed to whole stories or books, which were used once in School C) as part of activities focussed on reading or writing proficiency. In School D there was more focus on whole novels and interpretations and meaning in stories during the observation week.
- Assessment had a particularly strong profile and role in shaping literacy lessons in Schools A and C. This was less so in Schools B and D.
- Teachers viewed assessment of reading as a way of identifying gaps or lack of understanding against the NC standards (all schools).
- Pupils knew their own and sometimes each other's reading levels (except School B).
- Children were grouped by 'ability' for literacy lessons in Schools A and C, but not in B and D. In Schools A and C, children were seated in their 'ability' groups, which marked children out according to their 'ability' as readers and writers.
- Children were also grouped by 'ability' for guided reading lessons in all four schools.
- The pupils' reading had been 'benchmarked' in all four schools i.e. given a child's age; his/her reading age and the child's reading level.
- Pupils' reading and literacy levels were displayed on 'ladders' for all to see in School C.
- The purpose of reading in literacy lessons was to answer questions relating to comprehension, asked by the teacher in Schools A and C.

As a result of these pedagogical practices, particularly in Schools A, B and C, teachers' and children's judgements of them as readers was in relation to their reading proficiency. Both teachers' and children's constructions of 'struggling' readers were related to a view of reading as a matter of proficiency that was judged when the child read aloud and in assessments. Descriptions of a 'struggling reader' included lack of fluency, low phonics knowledge, coding difficulties and low attainment in tests, though also being a reluctant or disengaged reader.



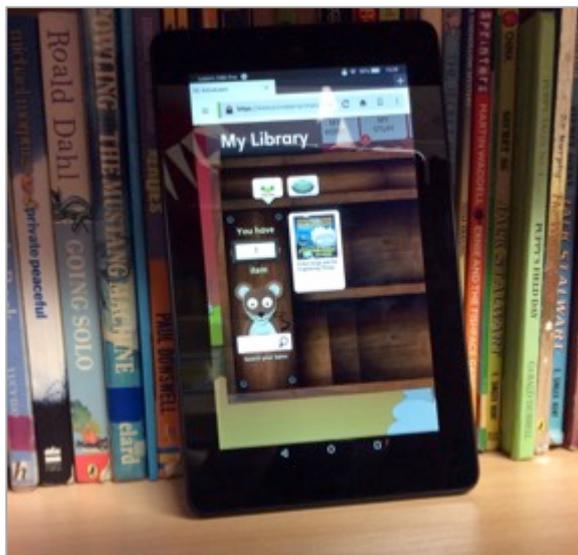
### **3. When 'struggling' boy readers were positioned more positively as readers**

School D differed in some important ways from Schools A and C in terms of the teacher's perceptions of the 'struggling' boy readers and their teaching practices for reading for pleasure and literacy. There was little evidence of the deficit perceptions of gender (for boys), ethnicity and social class in this classroom and the teacher spoke more about children's EAL status and saw children with EAL as being capable of progressing with their reading proficiency with the right support. This may (at least in part) be due to the teachers' own social identity, especially as she came from a working class

background that she described as similar to some of the children in the class.

Reading was also positioned more as a social activity and in independent reading, for example, children were not only allowed but also encouraged to interact around what they were reading. This meant that children had the opportunity to engage in some informal book talk. For example, children were asked to share their reading choices with other children and were allowed to choose who they sat next to, and where in the classroom they sat, during this activity. This was also the only class where children used the reading corner/environment for independent reading. During reading aloud, the teacher encouraged children to actively engage, which they did by asking questions and making observations about the story.

Literature was also, to an extent, positioned differently in School D as the teacher made more use of whole texts in literacy teaching rather than reading decontextualized excerpts only. While the School C teacher also used a whole text, this was done more frequently in School D with two texts during the data collection week. There was also less focus on assessment in comparison with Schools A and C and children were not 'ability' grouped for literacy (although individual children were still assigned reading levels by the teacher).



#### **4. Teacher perceptions and practices appear to have a role in boys' (dis)engagement with reading for pleasure**

##### *Boys' (and girls') orientations to reading for pleasure*

Children across the four schools spoke of enjoying reading, though with reference to a limited range of texts in three of the schools. Evidence from Schools A and C suggests this may be children seeking to position themselves as volitional readers for pleasure to the researchers during group interviews. Some children in these schools did, however, express

a limited engagement with reading for pleasure. In contrast, there was some suggestion that School D focus children did engage more with reading for pleasure than most children at the other schools due to the nature of their discussions about the literature they read for pleasure. In School D, more than the other schools, the conversation often explored or questioned the narrative and characters of the named texts, beyond the naming of authors and titles. They also made reference to a more diverse range of texts and text types. This suggests that the pedagogical approach to reading for pleasure and reading in the literacy curriculum may have had some positive impact on children's orientation to and engagement with reading for pleasure.

There was a marked difference in children's discourse about reading outside and inside schools, and their observed reading behaviour in school, with outside school being far more positive (although there was no observational data from children's reading lives outside of school to compare with this). Reading at school was perceived by children as a performance and an activity to be overcome by some children across all the schools, despite the differences in teaching practices for reading. Reading outside of school was presented as more enjoyable and volitional.

Children's reading outside of school:

- Many of the focus boys (and girls) reported that they read for pleasure (some frequently) at home and were able to name their favourite authors and books, though these tended to be very limited in range (suggesting that they were not encouraged or enabled to choose a wider range). In School D, more than the other schools, the quality of children’s conversation about reading, as indicated above, suggested a deeper engagement with reading for pleasure. This suggests that at least two children (one focus boy and the focus girl) in School D were more likely to be reading for pleasure than the boys at the other schools.
- Children’s discussions about reading at home by children in Schools A and C in particular, were possibly a performance during interviews, given that many focus children were not observed to be engaged in sustained reading at school. This may reflect the children’s desire to position themselves as readers for pleasure at home to the researchers as they had been unsuccessful in doing so with their teacher. Furthermore, in Schools A and C (where this data was available) this was contradicted by the small number of signed entries from home in their reading logs (e.g. one of the focus children in School A only had two entries from reading at home during a five month period leading up to the data collection week). Also, in School A, children’s accounts of reading at home were inconsistent and unrealistic (the focus boys claimed to be reading many more hours than possible in the time available after school)



- Children across the schools engaged with a range of text types. However, in School D, children made more reference than at other schools (who mainly spoke about a narrow range of books) to reading a more diverse range of texts including digital (e.g. computer games, text messages), magazines and comics, suggesting a broader understanding of reading for pleasure. Across the

schools, non-traditional text types were more likely to be engaged with at home with the exception of School A and B, where mainly books were identified as reading material. Despite several focus children from all schools coming from EAL backgrounds, engagement with dual language texts at school or at home was limited across the board.

- Children's reported experiences of reading outside of school were social, albeit this was not reflected in reading logs in Schools A and C. Children reported that extended family members played a role in children's reading practices (or lack of practices) out of school across all schools. They were described as supporters, as collaborators in shared reading, or as role models (as readers or non-readers).

Children's reading inside school:

- Reading at school was perceived by children as a performance and an activity to be overcome.
- Choice of books was a key issue for children's engagement with in-school reading. Yet the possibilities for choice, for example in classroom collections, varied significantly across the school as noted above. Children therefore had significantly more choice, due to a much larger number of texts in the classroom in School D compared with the other schools.
- Boys (and girls) were aware of a 'classification or hierarchy' of books and reading is sometimes connected with gender, i.e. books for girls/boys. Book banding led to the notion of some books being 'harder' than others. Books were 'measured' according to the number of pages or thickness of the book.
- Children explained school-based reading practices as routines although some in-school reading tasks, in School A and B, were presented by teachers as optional activities.
- Children appeared to be playing the game called 'reading independently' following routines and behaviours, e.g. choosing and changing books, but lacked sustained time with reading.
- Some focus children were taken out of the class for literacy interventions during independent reading time in Schools A and C and therefore missed out on some IR time.
- Sustained reading was challenging for some focus children; they lacked focus, flitting between pages, particularly in Schools A and B.
- Other children used passive task avoidance strategies, e.g. forgetting their reading book, leaving reading logs at home. This was evident in Schools A, B and C.

## Conclusions

This research project has provided new insight into the role of teaching practices in influencing the engagement of some boys with reading for pleasure. It also offers evidence that boys' engagement with reading is not simply a gender issue, but also involves deficit perceptions of boys' 'ability' labels, social class and ethnicity. It shows how teachers' perceptions of 'struggling' boy readers' intersecting ethnic and social class identities inform their pedagogical practices for reading. These perceptions, in combination with the pressure to raise children's attainment in tests, lead to pedagogies for reading

for pleasure and reading in the literacy curriculum to become heavily framed by a drive to focus on children's technical language skills, thereby almost completely marginalising enjoyment and pleasure. 'Struggling' boy readers were positioned within these pedagogies as readers who lacked reading proficiency, were not volitional readers and did not read for pleasure. Teachers did not appear to take responsibility for these boys' disengagement with reading for pleasure and believed that they had provided the opportunities for them to read for pleasure, which the boys failed to take up. This was seen by teachers as a result of the boys' intersecting gender, 'ability' and their parents' deficit parenting practices, which was sometimes compounded with these boys being 'othered' due to their ethnicity.



In Schools A and C, this appears to have had a negative impact on their orientations to reading for pleasure. To an extent, this contrasted with pedagogical practice for reading in School D (and to a lesser extent in School B), where the teacher did not draw upon deficit discourses about struggling boy readers in terms of their gender, ethnicity and social class. Her teaching practices for reading for pleasure allowed children to have more genuine volition as readers and to engage with reading with a focus on meaning and the messages behind the stories.

While children across the four schools spoke of enjoying reading they only made reference to a limited range of texts, at least in three of the schools (A-C), suggesting a limited engagement with reading for pleasure. Furthermore, evidence from Schools A and C suggests this may be children seeking to position themselves as volitional readers for pleasure to researchers. There was some suggestion that School D focus children did engage more with reading for pleasure than most children at the other schools. This suggests that the pedagogical approach to reading for pleasure and reading in the literacy curriculum at school may play a role in children's orientation to and engagement with reading for pleasure at home and in school.

If equality of opportunity to develop as a reader is to be offered to all children, teachers will need support in order to challenge and disrupt some of their 'taken for granted' assumptions and perceptions about boys and their attitudes to or competencies as readers. The predominance of the 'ability' discourse also deserves recognition and response as do the consequences of ability labelling.

## Implications for policy and practice

In addition the project reveals that conceptualisations of reading and reading for pleasure deserve closer attention by the profession. The data indicate it is currently tethered to the ability agenda and pedagogical practices which could offer children both a degree of volition and positive engagement as readers are being reshaped and constrained by the focus on proficiency and ability. To ensure that young readers can and do choose to read for pleasure, teachers need to recognise the subtle distinctions between reading for pleasure and reading instruction, one is oriented towards the skill the other the will.



Furthermore, it is not enough to offer the four intersecting strands of reading for pleasure pedagogy, as the Cremin et al (2014) study also revealed reading practices work in complex combinations, influenced both by teachers knowledge of the children as readers and their repertoires of children's literature as a well as their conceptions of reading. If teachers predominantly perceive reading as a technical skill and a matter of proficiency, and side-line the nature of reading as a meaning making experience, then as this research indicates their practices will be shaped in ways which instantiate this. Children's engagement and responses, and their desire to read, will be effected. The practices observed in School D, on the other hand, provides some guidance for teachers to ensure that reading for pleasure pedagogies genuinely allow children choice and initiative as readers for pleasure.

Aside from practitioners and policymakers, the outcomes of this project will also be of interest to a wide range of literacy organisations by supporting them in terms of where and how they might target book-based initiatives e.g., book-gifting schemes, to those groups of pupils most in need and in indicating the complexity of reading for pleasure pedagogy and teachers perceptions and mediating role will serve to suggest ways forward.

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