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## **Doorstep Library deserves our respect**

Reading for pleasure - choosing to read- matters. Research reveals that numerous benefits are associated with being a reader in childhood. These include:

- enriched vocabulary (you encounter a rich treasure trove of words in books you can use in conversation)
- wider general knowledge (you can read and learn about what you're interested in e.g. crocodiles, climate, chocolate in and through fiction and nonfiction)
- richer comprehension (you can deepen your understanding through reading)
- Enriched writing (you can lean on the styles, structures and language used in texts to shape your writing)
- enhanced wellbeing (you can find a space to step away from everyday pressures when reading).

So, if children choose to read regularly, they benefit- academically, socially and emotionally. In the long-term research indicates reading contributes to job prospects, earning power and health in life. That's the good news!

The challenging news is that children's attitudes to reading are in serious decline. They are at their lowest for 18 years (Cole et al., 2022) and in England far fewer ten-year-olds report loving reading than their international counterparts (Lindorff et al., 2023).

Action is urgently needed - from parents, teachers, schools, libraries and literacy organisations. All our children deserve to fall in love with reading, and come to care about characters, delight in details about dinosaurs, find out more about their football team, satisfy their curiosity about cats or koalas and laugh with friends when sharing a funny poem, a comic or a graphic novel.

Across the last three years I've been leading a team of OU researchers examining what international evidence can tell us about how best to motivate and support young readers and how six London based literacy programmes achieve this. Doorstep Library (DSL) was one of these. What a privilege it was to get to know about the work of this extraordinary organisation. We found that *all* the staff and volunteers that we met over the three years (2020-2023) were committed to making a difference to children's lives through reading. We met some children and their families too.

So, in this blog I want to reflect on some of the key things we came to know about this remarkable and somewhat unsung organisation and to highlight the very personal and responsive way that DSL works. The organisation's approach is well aligned to the international research evidence which reveals the most effective ways to motivate and engage young readers. Three points stand out:

- Texts, time and individual attention
- Conversations and connections
- Responsive adults

### **Texts, time and individual attention**

If we are going to inspire young people to read, then as the research shows, giving them the choice over what they read is critical. DSL volunteers always offer the children choice - they get to know each child's interests and inclinations and go back to the base to fill their rucksacks with tempting texts for them. Then they spend time helping the children browse and make wise choices - a skill that is not always taught in school. Children are more motivated when the texts offered are culturally relevant and connected to their lives and the DSL youngsters were excited by the choices offered and valued the individual attention they received. As one typically commented:

*I would describe it like they're really, I'm being honest right now, they're really intelligent, they're really fast, but they take their time sometimes and they just bring amazing books like every day. (DSL, Focus group 2).*

### **Conversations and connections**

While the children and the volunteers' conversational exchanges often centred around the books, they also linked to the children's lives, such that the young people could connect to their feelings, their families and their interests. This, alongside substantial praise, and encouragement, contributed to the children feeling recognised and accepted- as individuals and as readers. The research evidence is clear on this too, children's self-assurance and increasing confidence in reading positively contributes to their development as readers. We saw that this mainly developed through the relaxed conversations that emerged as the volunteers, the children, their siblings and sometimes their parents too, shared books together. Volunteers were aware of this, as one noted:

*There's nothing better than delivering a book to a child that they've asked for the week before, we can chat about it and it connects us (DSL Interview 2).*

### **Responsive adults**

International studies indicate that adults who successfully motivate children as readers become invested and involved in the child's journey, and we certainly observed this in action with DSL volunteers. The way the programme is designed means that the volunteers visit the same children regularly and over a sustained period of time, and this enables close relationships to develop and they surely do. One volunteer had even received a birthday card from a child she had stopped visiting the year before! As a member of staff noted:

*We really strive hard for consistency in the relationship so that a bond and trust can really build up between the volunteers and the families.... With that relationship, the children might be more willing to take mistakes while they're reading and more comfortable reading with you. (DSL Interview 3).*

So, let's celebrate the work of Doorstep Library – it is an organisation committed to social justice and is making difference to children's reading for pleasure and their sense of self as readers. It is an organisation that deserves our respect.

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To read more about the project see:

Cremin et al., (2024): [Reading and Writing for Pleasure: A Framework for Practice](#)

### References

Cole, A., Brown, A., Clark, C. and Picton, I. (2022a) [Children and young people's reading engagement in 2022: Continuing insight into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on reading](#), London: National Literacy Trust

Lindorff, A. Stiff, J. and Kayton, H. (2023) [PIRLS 2021: National Report for England Research Report](#), London: Department for Education.

