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Developing readers who choose to read



Internationally, far too many young people can read, but do not choose to do so - they have the skill but not the will - the desire to read. The persistent decline in the number of children who enjoy reading is alarming (e.g. Mullis et al., 2023). In Australia, 26% of the 10–11-year-olds who participated in the last Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) reported that they didn't like reading (Hillman et al., 2023). In England too, more children reported disliking reading (24%) than their peers across the world- the international median across 57 countries was 18% (Mullis et al. 2023). These young people are not only disengaged readers- they are also disadvantaged learners.

The advantages of reading for pleasure

Reading for pleasure- that is choosing to read - is driven by readers' own goals and interests (which may well include social and relational ones), in anticipation of some form of satisfaction. Such volitional reading is positively associated with higher reading comprehension and academic outcomes (Torppa et al, 2020). Engaged readers read frequently and give themselves extra lessons each and every time they read. Regardless of whether they are seeking to satisfy their curiosity or are emotionally invested in a narrative for instance, those who read regularly and of choice, benefit and benefit significantly. Recreational reading expands children's knowledge about the world, their understanding and use of vocabulary, enriches their spelling and is linked to enhanced narrative and descriptive writing (see Cremin and Scholes, 2024 for a review of the benefits involved). Those children and young people who regularly read of choice, fly further and faster through the curriculum than their peers who do not.

Time spent reading also has a positive impact on children's social and emotional development (Sun et al, 2023) and fiction reading is linked to the development of the imagination, empathy and mindful awareness of others' values and cultural practices (Simpson and Cremin, 2022). Furthermore, reading can be an intrinsically satisfying experience and can help young people create new social bonds and networks.



Reading roadblocks

So why do so few choose to read in their own time? Technology and social media are often blamed in such discussions, alongside assertions that parents don't do enough at home. In England, teachers also understandably argue that the cost-of-living crisis and loss of public libraries has reduced children's access to texts. But as educators, surely, we too need to accept some responsibility for children's disengagement in reading?

Perhaps inadvertently we create school-based reading roadblocks- by prioritising the teaching of phonics and comprehension, by seeing reading for pleasure as a solitary activity assigned to home, or an extra- 'a nice to have' if there is time in the busy school day. Perhaps too we simply offer an eclectic range of 'feelgood' events and activities under the banner of 'engaging readers' or making it 'fun' and don't actually evaluate the impact of our work. As a profession, we need a strategic research-informed way forward that motivates and supports *all* children, particularly those who are disengaged and rarely choose to read in their own time.

Motivating readers

We cannot require children read for pleasure, nor demand they enjoy it. However, we can entice and invite, model and engage the young in the riches and delights that reading offers, and create environments in which being a reader is the norm, an exciting and engaging norm that triggers us to talk about texts. Engaged readers not only read regularly, they are socially interactive and want to talk about new facts, characters, and interesting issues they encounter. We know this from our own lived experience as readers. As adults we often discuss news items, local and national concerns, and many of us also attend book clubs to share our views and hear those of others.

We need to motivate readers. Research suggests that motivation is multidimensional. External reasons for reading are often linked to a reader's desire for rewards and recognition, internal reasons to a reader's desire for involvement in a narrative, a personal passion or interest, and social reasons to a reader's desire for interaction and relationships with others. Understanding that reading motivation is multi-dimensional – influenced by extrinsic, intrinsic and social factors - can help us as practitioners nurture volitional reading more effectively.

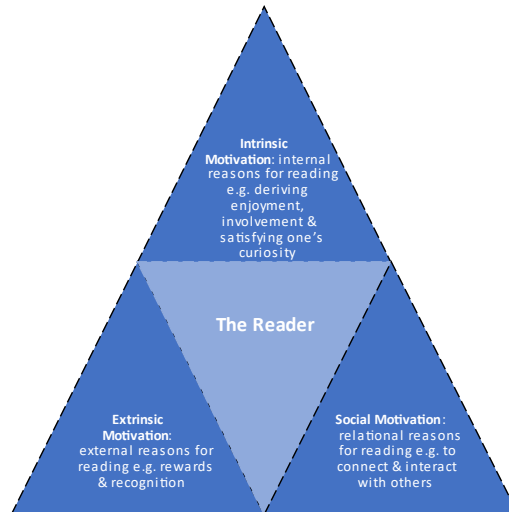


Figure 1: The multi-dimensional nature of reading motivation, Cremin 2023.

Reading for pleasure is far more closely associated with intrinsic than extrinsic motivation (e.g. Orkin et al 2017). Reading that satisfies one's own curiosity and deepens personal engagement matters. The social motivation to read deserves our attention too, reading is frequently viewed as a solitary experience, but it is also a social and relational one, and many children find this aspect motivating and supportive. Ways forward that build children's desire to read, include both individually and socially oriented approaches which offer choice and agency, informal interactions and attuned and well-read teachers who get to know their children and work responsively to build engaged communities of readers.

Individually oriented approaches: teacher knowledge and child agency

Teachers' knowledge of children's texts and of readers is key to this development and the cornerstone on which interactive communities of readers are built. When practitioners enrich their repertoires of children's literature *and* begin to get to know the interests and practices of the young readers they are more able to skilfully book match and tailor their recommendations to particular individuals. In turn when students find personal resonance in texts and make connections with what they are reading, their engagement increases, supporting comprehension, and motivating further reading. Requiring young people to read particular texts for pleasure is counterintuitive – choice and agency are critical to nurturing the desire to read.



Teachers' who have rich repertoires of diverse contemporary texts can engage alongside child readers, be part of discussions and share personal connections, creating new reader- to reader relationships that are often less hierarchical than traditional teacher-pupil ones. Over time two-way reciprocal recommendations and 'books in common' between teachers and children will develop, and children too will exchange texts with one another. If you want to develop your repertoire of children's texts, then why not try one of the following challenges and do so publicly, sharing your journey with the children as you broaden your subject knowledge. You might choose to:

- Read outside your comfort zone, maybe graphic novels, manga, verse novels or poetry?
- Read Award Winners- CBCA, ABIA, DANZ, Children's Book Award
- Read and display forthcoming diverse titles, also increasing children's awareness.
- Invite the children to set you a reading challenge.
- Create your own mini library shelf: Bring books from home and add ones you've read from the class collection.
- Read a book a week and share your growing monthly bedside book pile or shelfie.



If you want to get to know the children's preferences and practices as readers, then creating 24-Hour Reads, Reading Rivers, Reading Histories, or Graffiti Walls can be useful, alongside surveys, reader identity explorations and pupil voice groups. Be sure to join in too, sharing your own reading life beyond school. Inviting the young people to make their own Reading Rivers for example can serve as a basis of reading conferences, and may prompt you to consider diversifying the material available in your classroom, in response to the popularity of particular genres and comics and magazines for instance.



Giving agency to the young readers means honouring their choice of texts and allowing them to exercise their rights as readers. So the spaces and places that seek to foster engagement need to be child-owned and shaped, informal, sociable, without any sense of an attendant assessment. Inviting their views and acting upon them is absolutely central to developing autonomous readers. However, many children will need support to browse and select texts that suit their abilities and interests, so you will want to help them make wise decisions that create legacies of past satisfaction and power them forwards.

Socially oriented approaches: interaction and belonging

Socially oriented approaches foreground the social and relational nature of reading and being a reader, and again involve us as teachers as well as the children. In a UK based project called *Teachers as Readers*, learning from the practice of teachers in 25 schools, we identified the core elements of a reading for pleasure pedagogy (Cremin et al., 2014). These not only included highly social reading environments, in classrooms, corridors, playground book nooks, reading dens and libraries, but also space and time for hearing texts read aloud, for talking informally about self- chosen texts and time to read, alone and with others. All these planned opportunities invited engagement and triggered interaction which our research showed made a difference to their desire to read. (see Figure 3)

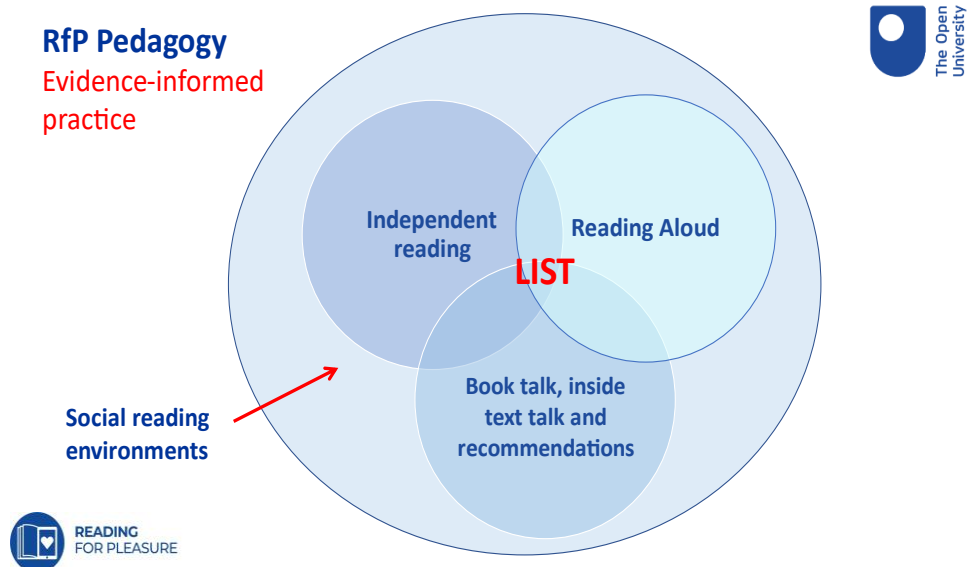


Figure 2. Reading for pleasure pedagogy

However, it's not what we do that matters most, it's the way we do it, and such reading practices may become routinized, timetabled opportunities devoid of reader engagement unless they are underpinned by the following principles- they need to be LIST:

- Learner-Led
- Informal
- Social
- and with Texts that tempt.

If you want to foster relaxed interactions around reading, and build the desire to read, your practice needs to be really learner-led. During time set aside to support reading for pleasure, you could give children options of who to sit with, where to sit, which texts to read or share with others, whether to talk to friends about what they are reading and more besides. This is their reading time after all! They might suggest and enjoy stories and hot chocolate time, making reading dens with torches and blankets, or creating reading opportunities outdoors such as booknics- reading picnics. For some youngsters this may be the first time they have engaged volitionally with books and food in a comfortable setting.



Talking about texts takes many forms, but relaxed non-assessed activities such as Big Up your Book, Book Buzz, Book Oscars and reading aloud for pleasure (not for comprehension or related writing), can trigger connections, camaraderie and reader relationships that socially motivate young people. Keen readers often refer to texts between themselves and quote from their favourites in a form of 'inside text talk' which further underscores and develops their interpersonal connections. In schools with rich reading cultures, myriad incidental conversations about texts of all kinds are common in corridors, classrooms, the playground and the library – between children and children, as well as adults and children and adults and adults.

Reading role models and communities

Reading role models come in many forms, including peers, reading ambassadors, librarians, learning support assistants, parents and teachers. All of whom can inspire, encourage and share their pleasure in being readers. In England, where RfP is mandated, teachers are increasingly recognised as 'influencers', community members who share their own reading lives, likes and dislikes with children. Those who develop as Reading Teachers- (capital R and T) – are seen as both teachers who read in their home lives, and readers who teach in their professional lives.



Such Reading Teachers recognise the importance of being learner-led, of informality, sociality and texts that tempt, and through constantly reflecting upon their own practices and rights as readers, may come to re-view reading and the significance of readers' identities (Cremin et al., 2023). These teachers shape their practice in responsive ways. They work to make the experience of reading for pleasure less 'schooled' and system oriented, and more authentic, real and individually and socially relevant to each young reader. Reading Teachers help build communities of engaged readers.

To create these communities, teachers need rich repertoires of children's texts and knowledge of their readers, a responsive pedagogy and an understanding of reading developed through adopting the personal stance of a Reading Teacher. Rich reading communities are typified by the recognition and valuing of diverse reading preferences and habits, and a shift in the locus of control around reading for pleasure which is child-led and owned. Over time, parents and the wider community will also be involved, but this is not one-way traffic; reading communities are reciprocal and interactive.

So, as you move forward in developing recreational reading and fostering more positive dispositions, you may wish to ponder on the following points:

- What counts as reading in your classroom- the skill and the will? What's the balance?
- What time and space are you committing to fostering the beneficial habit of RfP in the school day?
- What is your school's planned RfP pedagogy?
- Do you monitor and evaluate the impact of your work to develop RfP?
- To what extent as a Reading Teacher do you share your reading life and practices with the children to support authenticity and engagement?
- Does your school have a rich reading culture and ethos that nurtures young readers who can and do choose to read?

Reading for pleasure community website

In order to support educators nurture the habit of reading in childhood, The Open University in the UK has created a practitioner research-informed website devoted to RfP. Framed around the key findings of the *Teachers as Readers* research, it has a range of resources, including over 800 examples of teachers' practice, classroom film clips, PowerPoints for CPD, podcasts, handouts of practical ideas, audits, videoed interviews, research bites, Top Texts and Authors in the Spotlight. Do share your practice on the site if you wish and sign up to our free monthly newsletter to keep up to date with new ideas and resources (over 45,000 educators have already!). See: <https://ourfp.org/>

Together, we can enable more children to develop the habit of reading in childhood, and find pleasure and satisfaction in the process.

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