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Revisiting reading for pleasure: Delight, desire and diversity

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How to cite:

Cremin, Teresa (2007). Revisiting reading for pleasure: Delight, desire and diversity. In: Gouch, Kathy and Lambirth, Andrew eds. *Understanding Phonics and the Teaching of Reading: A Critical Perspective*. Berkshire, UK: McGraw Hill, pp. 166–190.

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Version: [\[not recorded\]](#)

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/html/0335222277.html>

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.Cremin, T. (2007) Revisiting reading for pleasure : diversity, delight and desire in K. Gooch, and A. Lambirth, (eds.) *Understanding Phonics and the Teaching of Reading*, Berkshire: McGraw Hill.166-190.

Revisiting reading for pleasure: diversity, delight and desire

Reading can change your life, it can inform ,motivate, inspire and elevate; but it must be reading you do for yourself, at your own pace, in your own way, and that has a bearing on your own background, interests, values, beliefs and aspirations. Reading that is forced on you in a mechanistic way and formally assessed may have the reverse effect, the major purpose becoming pleasing the teacher and passing tests, and a preoccupation with form rather than substance.

(Woods, 2001, p.74-5)

To what extent do children in the early 21st century choose to read for pleasure, for leisure and for enjoyment? Are they reading for themselves, or for their teachers and the assessment system? Does the desire to read independently, to engage with others' worlds, to wonder and ponder and find out more about issues of interest run deep enough to sustain the young as readers of today and tomorrow?

In the light of findings which suggest there is a decline in reading for enjoyment, particularly among boys and children from the lowest socio-economic groups, this chapter revisits the significance of reading for pleasure. It re-considers the value of the 'free will' reading of a range of texts, examines evidence of a decline, and underlines the importance of parents, carers and educators developing children's motivation, their delight in reading and desire to read. It also reflects upon why children choose to read, and provides vignettes of reading encounters which, in different contexts, reveal some learners personal and social reasons for reading and sources of pleasure. Diversity in terms of texts as well as contexts is acknowledged and the principles of creative classroom practice are considered. It is argued that the profession needs to pay more attention to children's attitudes, their preferences, pleasures and perceptions of themselves as readers in order to help ensure that they develop as readers who not only can, but do chose to read, for pleasure and for life.

Potential benefits

The influence of reading achievement on academic attainment is widely recognised, for example the PISA study shows that reading has an influence on academic attainment across the curriculum and can mitigate the effects of socio- economic status (Topping et al., 2003). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) also shows that being a frequent reader is more of an advantage than having well educated parents (Mullis et al., 2003; Twist et al., 2003). Although, relatively fewer studies focus on reading for pleasure, research in this area points to personal and academic benefits, including: improved general knowledge, (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998), and increased reading and writing ability(Krashen, 1993. Reading amount and achievement have also been shown to be reciprocally related to one another (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998). Some studies highlight specific benefits including increased self confidence as a reader (Guthrie and Alvermann, 1999), a richer vocabulary, an improved capacity for comprehension (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998;Cox and Guthrie, 2001) and greater pleasure in reading in later life (Aarnoutse and Van Leeuwe, 1998). Reading for pleasure is also seen to be positively correlated with positive attitudes to reading (Guthrie and Alvermann, 1999). As Sanacore, quoted in a review of reading for pleasure (Clark and Rumbold, 2006) observes, when individuals read for pleasure frequently, they:

'experience the value of reading for efferent and aesthetic processes. Thus, they are more likely to read with a sense of purpose, which further supports their developing reading habit'.

(2002, p.68)

A decline in pleasure?

However, international research evidence from PIRLS shows that whilst children in England are among the most able in the world in terms of reading achievement, they have a much poorer attitude to reading and read less often for pleasure than pupils in other countries (Mullis et al., 2003; Twist et al., 2003). Specifically, this study, which involved comparing ten year olds in 35 countries, ranked English children's attainment 3rd (after Sweden and the Netherlands), but revealed that 13% disliked reading compared to 6% on average. When asked how confident they were about reading, only 30% of the English children rated themselves as highly confident compared to an international average of 40%.

The PISA Study (OECD, 2002) focusing on older readers (15 year olds) also revealed that despite high average scores in term of attainment, nearly 30% of the English students never or hardly ever read for pleasure, 19% felt it was a waste of time and 35% said they would only read if they had to. Regardless of ability, girls were much more likely to read for pleasure than boys. In the National Literacy Trust survey (Clark and Foster, 2005), the views of over 8000 primary and secondary pupils were collected, overall secondary pupils and boys were more inclined to report negative attitudes than primary learners and girls. On balance this survey, which encompassed a very wide range of texts, (both screen based and on paper), suggested rather more positive attitudes to reading than those reported in the PIRLS study, although this may have been a product of the schools' involvement in Reading Connects. A decline in reading for pleasure is also reported in comparative work by Sainsbury and Shagen (2004) who collected children's attitudes to reading in 1998 and in 2003 and noted for example a decrease in desire to read in 10-11 year olds from 77% to 65%. In the Reading Champions survey (Clark, Torsi and Strong, 2005), again reading attitudes are seen to decline with age and in the Nestlé Family Monitor research (2003) whilst most of the 11-18 year olds report reading books in their spare time, girls again report reading more for pleasure than boys and a small but significant proportion believe reading does not play an important role in their lives. A third say they have better things to do than read books and a quarter suggest that they would be disappointed if someone gave them book.

Little media attention has been afforded these multiple data sources which indicate a distinct lack of pleasure in reading on the part of an increasing number of learners, although the English government did commission a survey to investigate reading for purpose and pleasure (Ofsted, 2004). This reveals that many schools had given insufficient thought to promoting children's independent reading or building on children's textual preferences. Few schools successfully engaged the interests of those who, whilst competent readers, did not choose to read for pleasure and furthermore, in the less effective schools, additional support for strugglers focused on raising attainment, and did little to improve attitudes on the part of those who saw little point in reading. Whilst schools must take responsibility for their own actions, it must be acknowledged that from the inception of the literacy hour, it was predicted that reading for pleasure would take a step backwards. Meek (1998), Dombey, (1998), Furlong (1998) and Burgess- Macey (1999) all warned there was limited encouragement of reading for pleasure in the NLS (DfEE,1998) and in the prescribed literacy hour itself there was no mention of it. As Dombey (1998) observed there was also almost no mention of purpose in literacy teaching and learning in the original documentation, although she acknowledged:

Mention is made, at the end of a long list of technical competences, of enjoyment, evaluation, justification of preferences, imagination, inventiveness and critical awareness. But these appear, like a little-used list of desserts, detached from the menu that precedes them- to be enjoyed if at all only after pupils have eaten up all their nutritious technical cabbage. They are unlikely to flourish from strict application of the Framework.'

(Dombey, 1998, p.129-130)

Nine years later, whilst some schools and teachers have no doubt chosen to sustain a commitment to reading aloud and the promotion of literature and other reading materials, many others, in assiduously following the NLS may well have reduced opportunities for voluntary/independent reading for pleasure (Frater, 2001; Martin, 2000; Cremin et al, 2007). In concentrating on developing children's knowledge about particular linguistic, structural or lexical aspects of texts, it appears that the reason for reading the text in the first place may have been seriously neglected. As Philip Pullman observed there were 71 verbs in the original NLS connected to the act of reading; 'enjoy' was not one of them (2003). In addition, concerns have been voiced about the fragmentation of the experience of reading, demonstrated through the use of de-contextualised text extracts, the absence of meaningful interaction in shared reading (Burns and Myhill, 2004) and reduced opportunities to enjoy texts at length (Gamble, 2007; Fisher, 2005). Professional authors too have voiced their consternation at the skills-based orientation of the NLS, and the focus on analysis and scrutiny of texts at the expense of pleasure and engagement (Powling et al., 2003).

The decline in reading for pleasure documented by Sainsbury and Shagen (2004) is seen to be related to the introduction of the NLS, although they acknowledge the complexity of this issue in the context of rapid technological advances and the changing nature of childhood. In addition, in a survey to understand the reduction in primary phase book spending, Hurd et al. (2006) conclude 'there is evidence that reading is being neglected beyond the confines of the Literacy Hour and that 'schools no longer view reading across the school day as a priority' (Hurd et al., 2006, p.85). The accumulating evidence suggests therefore that despite the gains in terms of reading attainment associated with the NLS (in 1998, 65% of 11-year-olds reached the target level in English, by 2005, nearly 80% reached it), there have been losses, most notably in relation to children's attitudes to reading.. As Steve Anwyll the director of the Strategy acknowledged in 2004:

"If we're increasing the attainment of children at the expense of their engagement and enjoyment, then we're failing to do the whole job and we have to take that seriously."

(Hall, 2004, p 120)

Motivated to read?

To foster delight and pleasure in reading, surely increased attention needs to be paid to motivating readers and to the construction of creatively engaging environments which nurture children's personal encounters with literature and other texts and offers them choice, giving space and time to read voluntarily and share their preferences. There is also a real need to develop their intrinsic motivation 'in the form of a positive self concept; a desire and tendency to read; and a reported enjoyment of an interest in reading' (Sainsbury and Shagen, 2004, p.374). Low achievers often have limited intrinsic motivation to read and indifferent or negative attitudes towards reading and may see reading as a chore. Additionally perhaps, compounded by an extended period of failure and a reduced sense of self efficacy, many appear to lack faith in their efforts (Pressley, 1998). In the NLT survey, the young people believed they would read more if they enjoyed it more, had more time, if books were cheaper or about subjects they were interested in (Clark and Foster, 2005).

As Woods outlines in the opening quote to this chapter, extrinsic motivation involves readers reading to satisfy the demands of others- to pass tests, to meet school or parents' expectations for example. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) identify three aspects of extrinsic motivation, namely: reading for recognition and reading for grades and for competition, so readers who are extrinsically motivated are not necessarily reading because they desire to do so or are interested in the subject matter. In contrast, readers who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to be reading for their own pleasure and satisfaction; studies suggest these readers may be reading more widely and more frequently and enjoying their reading more (Cox and Guthrie, 2001). The aspects of intrinsic motivation identified by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) which, according to their research, predict both reading breadth and comprehension include: importance, curiosity, involvement and a preference for challenge. It would appear then that keen independent readers believe reading is a worthwhile activity and continue to challenge themselves, reinforcing and developing their competence as readers in the process, (for a more extended examination of reading motivation see Guthrie and Wigfield, 2004).

Reading for pleasure is thus closely related to intrinsic not extrinsic motivation and when other variables have been accounted for, intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with reading comprehension (Cox and Guthrie, 2001; Wang and Guthrie, 2004). However as Clark and Rumbold (2006) highlight, the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not a simple 'good versus evil' scenario, since children may well be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects; they may read for their own pleasure and be obliged to read for others' purposes in school (Lepper and Henderlong, 2000), furthermore the reading repertoire needs to include all types of reading. Although excessive extrinsic motivation and pressure to perform in school may drown a child's intrinsic desire to read, since as Bernard Ashley observes 'because children have to sweat so much over books, reading for recreation for some is like going for a leisure swim in their own dirty bathwater' (2003, p.4).

Reading preferences

Over the last decades the nature and form of what children can choose to read has changed radically, partly as a consequence of rapid technological advances and the increasing dominance of the image. The multi-modal texts now readily available commonly include sound and music, voices, intonation, stance, gesture, and movement, as well as a print and image and exist in different media such as computer screen, film, radio and book.

These multi-modal texts have changed the ways in which young people expect to read, the ways they think and the ways they construct meaning.

(Bearne, 2003 p.98)

Today's children bring to their reading considerable experience of reading and viewing texts of many kinds, and the NLT survey confirms that outside class children chose to read a very diverse range of texts. The most preferred reading materials reported upon by primary children in this study were: jokes (75%), magazines (72%) comics (69%), fiction (62%), TV books and magazines (61%), signs (57%), poetry 54%) and websites (51%). In the Nestlé Family Monitor (2003) survey, seven in ten of the young people said they would rather watch TV/DVD/video than read a book and over half report a preference for using the Internet over book reading. The recent UKLA Reading on Screen research (QCA/UKLA, forthcoming) also shows a rich variety of home-based text experience, both screen-based and on paper and a higher preference for multimodal screen based texts over those composed mainly of words in relation to leisure reading. It is worth noting though that in this research there was no lack of interest in sustained book reading at home, the children surveyed appeared to be aware that they could gain different reading satisfactions from different types of text. Additionally, this data suggests that reading on screen often boosts the reading of paper-based texts, with frequent indications of crossovers or links between screen texts and written texts. Fears and assumptions about the influence of popular cultural texts and TV competing with book

reading still remain, but research evidence has shown that the process involved in reading print and TV have similarities as well as differences (Robinson and Mackey, 2003), that children's reading skills can be developed through reading film (Blakemore, 2006; Reid, 2002; Kremer, et al., 2002) and that moving image texts can enhance learners' motivation to engage in print related texts (Marsh, 2002).

School provision

The culture of low book spending in Britain (Hurd et al., 2006) is in stark contrast to Norway for example, where book spending per pupil is seven times higher (Howson, 1999) and the rich diversity of popular multi-modal texts is not fully reflected in the primary curriculum which, Marsh (2004) argues, relies on a canon of established and privileged texts, and marginalises popular culture and media texts, the very texts that received some of the highest ratings in terms of what children choose to read outside school. Ofsted (2004) too note that schools rarely build on pupils' own reading interests or home materials.

Drawing on detailed ethnographic data collected in multi-ethnic communities in London Gregory and Williams (2000, p.164) also observe that there is a clear distinction between the reading matter that is enjoyed in the home and that which is sanctioned in school. This significant research additionally highlights the wealth of literacy practices in the lives of those often considered by the establishment to be deprived of literacy, revealing the breadth of formal learning and reading experienced outside school by children in multilingual families as well as the range of 'unofficial' reading matter found in monolingual families. Luke (1988) suggests that the reification of the 'residual tradition' of fairytales and approved authors in schools, shown for example in the 'significant children's authors' of the English NC (DfEE, 1999) fails to recognise 'the emergent alternate tradition' and reduces the relevance of much reading material presented to young learners. It is encouraging however that the significantly renewed NLS (DfES, 2006b) does include a much greater awareness of ICT and film texts, and now refers to 'reading on page and on screen' and recognises a need to promote reading for pleasure, but there is still no explicit mention of magazines and comics nor reference to producers or directors as authors. A culturally relevant range of texts and an accompanying culturally responsive pedagogy is arguably a necessity (Ladson-Billings, 1995), not only to increase the possibility of making meanings and connections, but also to ensure that reading is not removed from its socio-cultural context.

"When pupils reject texts it may well not be because they do not understand them.....Having understood, they then reject the text on experiential grounds, on ideological grounds, on grounds of lack of emotional satisfaction: because, in my shorthand, they do not find themselves in it."

(Sarland, 1991, p. 101)

In relation to school provision, choice is critical; many studies show that when children select texts for themselves, this enhances their motivation and self determination and (Krashen, 1993; Sanacore, 1999). The work of Woods and Jeffrey (2003) highlights the role of agency, autonomy and ownership in creative learning and Gambrell (1996) indicates that when children are asked to comment on a book they have enjoyed, over 80% mention one they chose for themselves. Choice is widely perceived to be a motivator, since interested and determined readers will often persist with a demanding text, simply because of their desire to know, to understand and to make sense of it. Yet Ofsted (2004) report struggling readers, are given less autonomy and choice in their reading and, as the UKLA response to the Rose Report notes, such readers are 'exposed to less text and have fewer and more limited opportunities to practice than more skilled peers' (2005, section 5). As a consequence they may be slower to become fluent, are less likely to find reading rewarding and may seek to avoid reading activities, perpetuating their sense of failure. Children with difficulties need support to enhance their motivation, engagement and self esteem and need to be offered choices, albeit supported ones from a range of potentially engaging texts. Tempting them to

read relevant and interesting material may enable them to discover what reading can offer them as individuals.

Reading: meaning and purpose

Successful teachers of reading and literacy are, research suggests, not only knowledgeable about children's literature, they also prioritise the importance of meaning not minutiae, and use whole texts for teaching and for sharing (Medwell et al., 1998). Significantly, they place great emphasis on 'children's recognition of the purposes and functions of reading and writing' (p.7). For as Meek observes:

“Readers are made when they discover the activity is ‘worth it’. Poor, inadequate, inexperienced readers lack literary competence because they have too little idea of what is ‘in’ reading for them.”

(1990, p.76)

Reading for pleasure is oriented towards finding personal meaning and purpose and related to the human need to make sense of the world, the desire to understand, to make things work, to make connections, engage emotionally and feel deeply. In finding resonances in the text, whether inter-personal, extra-personal or inter-textual (Smith, 2005), readers make meaning and turn such meanings over in their hands, their heads and their hearts. Owning a first book as a child, retaining a text which connects to a significant memory and lending/borrowing a book to/from a friend, all reflect a function of the desire to read, indicate a degree of delight in reading itself and the need to share one's affective engagement. Beverley Naidoo (2003) in reflecting on the potency of recognising ourselves in what we read, observed that Anne Frank's diary “was the first book that made me realise that reading is real... I still feel connected to her voice 40 years on- I still have my first copy - I could not part with it”. Young readers find different reasons for reading, but all deserve to encounter texts which have particular salience and interest to them, so that they can come to value the experience and be caught in a web of fiction or non-fiction which inspires and motivates them to return - to renew such an imaginatively energizing engagement. Benton and Fox (1985) highlight the emotional need to read and in responding to questions about why they read, some children too assert that the affective dimension is a key motivator (Dungworth et al., 2004). Other studies indicate that children read because they see it as a life skill or perceive it will help them find out what they want/need to know (Clark and Foster, 2005). A group of avid ten year old readers, discussing this question with their teacher, were asked to offer a statement each about why they read. They observed:

*It makes me feel really alive
You can lose yourself in another world
I want to know all about my team
I like to laugh and tell jokes
I like being in a hot tub in my imagination
I just get thirsty for stories.*

Motivated and successful readers, these young people clearly find the personal and social processes of reading worthwhile. Their individual thirst for narrative or for information about their football team, demonstrates that reading is connected in subtle, but significant ways to these children's affective lives. One boy in the group exasperated that Garth Nix and other fantasy authors insisted on producing series fiction commented, “*It makes it so difficult- I simply can't bear to wait and I wake up dreaming about what will happen and have to wait months to know- all the time I'm desperate- it's not fair*”. Yet he will wait and will persevere with other texts to satisfy his hunger for imaginative world creation.

In the more extended examples which follow, which were either observed by the writer or in Robbie's case, shared with the writer, literacy is put to use in playful and open ended

contexts, by individuals or groups exerting a sense of their own agency and volition. In their different socio-cultural contexts, the salient issues of purpose and pleasure are evidenced by each of the readers, whose desire to read and think about possible meanings is fuelled by previous experiences of delight and a deep sense of satisfaction in reading itself.

Reading as playful engagement

Despite being encased in plaster from her armpits down to her toes, with an iron rod separating her legs to prevent movement, Sarah, nearly 26 months old, drags herself determinedly across the floor to where a pile of well worn books lie. Pushing herself almost upright, she decimates the pile, apparently searching for one particular text. Once *Where's My Teddy* by Jez Alborough comes into view, she smiles broadly, seizes it with delight, almost hugging it to her. Then, squawking loudly she draws her mother's attention, makes her meaning clear and awaits the rhyming tale with anticipation. Helen, has clearly read it so often that she has begun to remember the words and reads with a performed aplomb. Throughout, Sarah nods her head from side to side; her eyes alight, especially when the great big bear arrives. She responds to her mother's informal comments and questions by pointing, gesturing and making noises and when the hero Eddie is finally re-united with his own bear, Sarah claps her hands and sets off again across the floor to collect a tiny teddy lying under a chair. On her return her mother re-reads the page again and Sarah, still flat on her stomach acts out the role of the protagonist, cuddling her teddy and making whispering noises in his ear. As the end paper is reached, she quickly turns the book over and looks up at her mother expectantly. When the second reading of the book comes to a close, Sarah and her mother cuddle the bear together and Helen, extending the narrative, begins a one-sided conversation with the teddy, asking about the big bear and telling him in hushed tones how glad she is to have him home. Later when Sarah goes for a nap she insists on being read the book again and takes the tiny bear with her, as indeed Eddie took his own teddy to bed at the end of the story.

This brief textual encounter demonstrates not only the imaginative potency of this tale to Sarah, but also the pleasure, intimacy and physicality of this reading partnership. Despite her inability to move freely, she still took part in bringing the text to life, taking particular delight in the patterns and rhythms that connect to the nursery rhymes and church choruses which are an established part of her early literacy life. As Meek (1988) has demonstrated, what children read plays a vital role in their anticipation of pleasure and success, even before their ability to read for themselves. Through her mother's interchanges and actions, both during the reading and afterwards, Sarah was learning to engage with and interpret the narrative and was evidently enjoying the experience. Reading, Britton (1982) suggests, is built on a legacy of past satisfactions and whilst as this young child grows such satisfactions cannot be guaranteed, the deep pleasure of such early reading encounters provide her with firm foundations.

Reading as life-coping

The next example, whilst not seeking to endorse what the USA entitle 'bibliotherapy', does reflect the degree of emotional support that reading can offer and highlights the significance of teachers' judgements based on their knowledge of learners and of literature. Eileen, a teaching colleague, heard her tutor struggle to read the demanding picture book *Jenny Angel* by Margaret Wild (her tutor had lost a god-daughter and it evoked painful memories) and immediately afterwards insisted on taking the book home with her – a child in her class had need of it. It tells the tale of Jenny who wants to be an angel for her brother Davy who is dying, she finds she cannot save him and the book, powerfully illustrated by Anne Spudvilas, explores her feelings and ability to cope. It is somehow both uplifting and sustaining, in a manner not dissimilar to the better known *Grandpa* by John Burningham. Eileen read it to Robbie, a six year old whose mother was ill, in the hope that it might offer some shape and substance for his feelings, and later, at his mother's request it was leant to the family. It was read and discussed and Robbie was apparently often seen poring over the pages by himself. Several weeks later, of his own volition he produced his own version (see Figures 1-5).

Jenny Angel 2 (Figure 1)

Jenny was walking to the park by the church and saw Davy in the churchyard. She ran over to him. (Figure 2)

Davy's heart was still beating, getting faster and faster, and broke out. He climbed out of the ground. (Figure 3)

They went to the park. Davy played on the climbing frame shaped like a heart. Jenny felt so very happy. Jenny played on the human body. (Figure 4)

They went very fast to Marie's house and played and played until dinner time. The end. (Figure 5)

Robbie's imaginative transformation of the narrative, underpinned by a deep emotional purpose is poignantly expressed in this creative re-construction, in which he appears to offer himself an imaginative life-line, becoming both the teller and the told. He powerfully conveys the happiness of his characters, as re-united they play on the 'climbing frame shaped like a heart'. This tale too was apparently read and re-read and kept with the original book - as a kind of life-coping companion perhaps. His text and the context which enabled it, demonstrate again that reading is not only a cognitive, but an emotional, aesthetic and ethical act. It also demonstrates the significance of teachers' sensitive judgements, their close attention to individual emergent and diverse identities and to the social context and personal and cultural resources upon which they draw. Teachers cannot mandate children's deep engagement in the world of literature, but they can and should know their learners and the world of children's literature well enough to make connections and recommend texts which variously offer solace, sustenance, support and challenge.

Reading as critical reflection

It is independent reading time in a class of 9-10 year olds and an air of focused activity pervades the scene. Children are scattered in pairs and groups around the room, talking laughing, reading and sharing texts of various kinds. One group, lounging on cushions in the book area, are seemingly intent on their novels, occasionally they shift their physical positions but otherwise remain focused- experiencing life vicariously, as they inhabit the 'secret garden of the novel- that special sanctuary' (Berlie Doherty, 2001). Another group pore over the pages of self chosen non-fiction texts, some, individually selected from the library, are about quad bikes and astronauts, whilst others relate to the class focus on the environment. On one table, comics are spread in colourful splendour and children scrutinise the pages of the *Beano* and the *Dandy* with evident pleasure, occasionally sharing elements of interest and amusement. At the two computers, pairs of learners surf the net, talking rapidly as they search for sites of interest - eventually one pair settle on the Tracey Beaker site, while the others move around sites relating to dangerous creatures. This pair seeks permission to print off some of the images and set up a file to save highlights of the information encountered. Another group is gathered around a box of picture fiction and poetry which has been jointly constructed by members of the staff and this class bringing in childhood favourites to share. The embossed book plates in the end papers are examined constantly to see whose book it is and much discussion is generated about this issue, even before the books are sampled. The teacher is sitting with the last group - a guided reading group- examining a collection of contemporary children's magazines, including for example *Smash Hits*, *Girl Talk*, *Match!* and *Mizz..* Again it transpires that whilst some of these have been purchased, many have been donated by the children- increasing the range available and honouring their home reading.

In this group, the teacher, seeking to help the children enjoy and interrogate what they read, allocates time to browsing and informal interactions around before focusing first on the front

covers and then on a particular article on fashion. During the last activity the children pose various questions including:

Why choose these people?
Why set it out this way?
Did they ask the stars to wear them on purpose?
Did they all get coats or just them?
Do the girls like the style of coats?
Did Jane actually say that?

(Swain, 2005, p.39)

The group were learning to read against the text, and were developing a critical awareness that texts represent particular points of view and often silence other perspectives (Comber and Simpson, 2001). At the close of reading time, the class were invited to offer information, extracts or comments on what they had been reading. Their willingness to share their thoughts and enthusiasm for authors, websites, and comic strip heroes as well as their criticism of particular staff choices and texts was marked. In this class, reading, discussing and questioning texts was seen as the norm, and the children's choices and voices were recognised and honoured as integral to promoting reading for pleasure, engagement and critical reflection.

Creative practice

In the Rose Report, best practice in teaching reading is described as formalised in design, but taught creatively with due regard for individual differences (DfES, 2006b). Yet the two-dimensional conceptual framework advocated in the Rose Report, the 'simple view of reading' that separates decoding and comprehension, has the potential, if not carefully handled, to focus the attention of teachers and young readers on words not meanings, sounds not sense. A potentially piecemeal approach it may short-change children's pleasure in reading still further. Surely an equally simple view is that the early reading curriculum should focus first and foremost on enabling children to develop a range of strategies in order to become competent and enthusiastic readers, who can and do choose to read for pleasure and enjoyment.

As teachers seek to respond to the requirement to privilege synthetic phonics and to separate word recognition and comprehension, creativity will undoubtedly be needed to ensure that enticing invitations to inhabit and explore potent texts from the inside out are still offered and positive attitudes are actively developed. Through constructing creative contexts in which relevant reading is encountered for personal purposes, parents, carers and teachers can invite learners to engage in the active process of meaning making and encourage them to critically reflect on texts and learn from them. Such invitations to engage, personally, emotionally and cognitively, have the potential to increase learners' confidence and desire to read and to heighten their motivation. Additionally, teachers conscious of other core strands of creative pedagogic practice, will plan to nurture the agency of young readers, foster their curiosity and offer them choice from a range of multimodal texts connected to their interests and their lives. Time for discussion and collaboration will also be offered as well as a rich diet of read aloud and a range of book promotion activities that enable children to share their preferences and widen their possibilities in a community of engaged readers. Reflecting upon reading will thread through such creative practice that profiles meaning and purpose, pleasure and play.

Explicit literacy teaching is at times both useful and necessary, but as the degree of explicitness increases, the aesthetic space for learners decreases and so, in routinising textual encounters and focusing on comprehension only after word recognition has been mastered, teachers may reduce the gaps that exist for the learner to become affectively involved and make connections. Creative teachers appear to exploit the potential spaces, problems and possibilities which literature offers, recognizing that the silences or gaps in texts (Iser, 1978)

increase the uncertainty and thus the potential for personal engagement, prompting generative discussion. Good book talk, which is essential for developing readers' understandings of the multi-layered and emergent meanings of texts (Chambers, 1993), can be a powerful motivator since it involves honouring the children's own creative responses, their questions, connections and thoughts. In a pedagogy which focuses on reading not criticism (Benton and Fox, 1985), fluid and open interpretations of texts are fostered, which may later relate to considering how the writer elicited such responses. Creatively teaching reading, practitioners will not focus merely on children learning to read and write, a minimum entitlement, but will focus on 'teaching for the maximum entitlement- to become a reader for life' (Martin, 2003, p.14).

Conclusion

Regardless of any recommended changes in reading instruction, developing children's desire to read for pleasure remains a key priority for the primary profession if a further decline is to be avoided. Teachers need to offer a coherent and creative literacy curriculum that develops children's intrinsic motivation to read, creates an engaging physical and social environment for reading, provides pupil choice and encompasses diversity as well as focused instruction and tailored support. In the process, full attention must be paid to meaning and purpose, the details of text reception, the social context, values, attitudes and culture in the class, the school and the community. In explicitly planning to nurture positive attitudes, teachers will need to respond to children's interests, offer a diverse range of potent texts and engage them in the selection process. Seeking in addition to strengthen home-school-community partnerships and enable creative engagement through enriched pedagogical practice. In creating a reading culture which fuels delight and fosters desire, teachers will be supporting the development of life-long readers, readers who find both purpose and pleasure in reading.

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