



Reading for pleasure A research overview

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Executive summary

This paper explores reading for pleasure, its importance, and its impact on literacy attainment and other outcomes. Although the Rose Review placed phonics firmly within a language-rich framework that fosters positive attitudes towards reading and a love of books, this context was lost in the subsequent press coverage. It therefore seemed important to us to collect evidence that furthers our understanding of the value of reading for pleasure and to provide information that will enable parents, teachers and policymakers to promote reading motivation and wider reading.

Although reading for pleasure has not been a research priority, studies are accumulating that emphasise the importance of reading for pleasure for both educational as well as personal development. This brief overview shows that promoting reading can have a major impact on children/young people and adults and their future. It also outlines some statistics on reading for pleasure and explores whether children are now reading for pleasure less than they used to. Due to the paucity of the research in this field, and in order to do justice to the complexity of the issue, we found it necessary to examine other underlying issues, such as reading motivation and choice. Two elements of reading motivation – namely extrinsic and intrinsic motivation – are explored in more detail, while the issue of rewards/ incentives is also briefly discussed.

The importance of home and school influences in shaping reading for pleasure is then outlined. Indeed, if reading is to become a lifelong habit then people must see themselves as participants in a community that views reading as a significant and enjoyable activity. Parents and the home environment are essential to the early teaching of reading and the fostering of a love of reading. 84% of over 8000 pupils in a survey for Reading Connects indicated that it had been their mother who had 'taught them to read'. Research has also repeatedly shown that parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.

Similarly, the national curriculum for schools includes a focus on the reading of a range of texts to encourage reading and discussion. This not only leads to engagement in reading but also facilitates drawing on the interests that pupils bring to reading. We

know that certain elements promote a love of reading, which include freedom to choose reading materials; a print-rich environment; access to a variety of texts; time for reading in school; encouragement to readers; and quiet, comfortable places to read. Yet, in order to reap the benefits that reading for pleasure can bring, schools need to implement a reading promotion programme that will make reading an experience that is actively sought out by students.

It is encouraging that the importance of reading for pleasure has been recognised by the government and that a number of policy initiatives have been launched to promote wider reading and reading enjoyment in the UK. There remains a lot more to be done for all children to reap the benefits that reading can bring, but together we can do it.