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Attitudes to Reading in English Primary Schools

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Abstract

This article reports on a two-year research project investigating attitudes to reading held by teachers and pupils in a sample of English primary schools. The project draws on international and national surveys of reading engagement and the findings of previous research, but seeks to provide more detailed data relating to the attitudes of individual children and the strategies used by individual schools and teachers whose pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to reading. Results are related to previous research literature on reading motivation and attainment, and to motivational theory. In conclusion, it is argued that strategies which promote positive attitudes to reading need to be used alongside the teaching of reading skills in any effort to raise attainment.

Keywords

Reading attitudes, reading motivation, reading for pleasure, reading engagement, reading teaching

Background

The importance of positive attitudes to reading has been highlighted by a series of international surveys. Analysing the findings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study of 15-year-olds' reading, the ensuing report, *Reading for Change: Results from PISA 2000*, reached two significant conclusions:

- Being more enthusiastic about reading and a frequent reader was more of an advantage on its own than having well educated parents in good jobs.
 - Finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change.
- (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2002: 3)

Reading for Change also concluded that: 'cognitive skills and reading motivation are mutually reinforcing....rather than being alternatives, schools need to address both simultaneously' (OECD 2002: 19).

Given these conclusions, it was disappointing to discover from this survey that UK 15-year-olds had performed below the OECD average when it came to 'engagement in reading', ranking 20th out of 27 countries. 'Engagement' here included reading for pleasure, reading widely and attitude to reading. This was the more surprising when another table of the same countries showed UK pupils actually came first in terms of 'engagement at school' considered more generally.

The following year, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 150,000 9-10 year-olds in 35 countries was carried out, this time confined to pupils in England. PIRLS 2001 reported that English pupils came joint first in terms of attainment in reading for literary purposes. However, the validity of this finding has been challenged by Hilton (2006), who argued that the PIRLS data for the reading achievement of English pupils had 'very dubious validity' because of the exclusion of categories of potentially low-achieving children from the sample and the biased cultural and linguistic design of the tests themselves, which favoured English pupils (pp.830-833). These same English 9-10 year-olds were placed 27th in terms of attitudes toward reading, well below the international average (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement 2001).

The five-yearly PIRLS survey was repeated in May-June 2006, when the results were even more disappointing. In terms of attitudes to reading, English 9-10 year-olds were still well below the international average in PIRLS 2006 and were ranked 37th out of the 45 countries or provinces taking part. This was in fact a significant worsening of the situation reported in 2001, with 15% of English pupils now described as having an unfavourable attitude to reading, almost double the international average. The lack of enjoyment in reading by this sizable minority was not confined to schools: a table concerned with 'Reading for Fun Outside of School' placed England 38th out of the 45 participants. There was also a downward trend in achievement in reading, both for literary and informational purposes (http://pirls.bc.edu/pirls2006/intl_rpt.html) that seemed to confirm Hilton's challenge to the validity of the PIRLS 2001 achievement data, which appeared to show a high ranking for attainment co-existing with a low ranking for attitude to reading.

Results from the PISA international survey of 2009 suggested again the importance of engagement in reading, observing that: 'In almost all countries, students who enjoy reading are significantly more likely to be good readers' (OECD 2010: 7). In this survey, the percentages of both UK boys and girls who read for pleasure were slightly below the OECD average and the overall

figure of 40% of UK students who reported not reading for enjoyment at all was above average (ibid).

Although Hilton's analysis (2006) has shown that international comparisons of attainment can be problematic, independent national surveys of UK children's reading habits have found evidence to back up the findings of PISA and PIRLS about attitudes to reading. The NFER Reading Attitudes Survey, carried out in 1998 and again in 2003 with Year 4 (8-9 years) and Year 6 (10-11 years) samples, confirmed the PIRLS findings. It concluded that English pupils' enjoyment of reading was poor compared to other countries and had declined over recent years. The report suggested a possible connection with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), the central plank of the UK government's project for raising standards, introduced in 1998 (Sainsbury and Schagen 2004: 385).

The National Literacy Trust's first annual survey into young people's reading, *Setting the Baseline* (2011) was more determinedly upbeat in the interpretation of its findings, concluding that 'young people generally hold positive attitudes towards reading' (p.9). However, this still meant that only 'just under half' of the sample of over 18,000 young people aged 8-17 said they enjoyed reading either 'very much' or 'quite a lot' and only 42% of the boys taking part in this survey (p. 6).

This picture of young people's attitudes towards reading can be contrasted with the findings of a national survey carried out in 1994, before the introduction of the NLS. Hall and Coles (1999) looked at *Children's Reading Choices* and concluded not only that voluntary reading 'remains a very significant leisure time activity for children.' (p. 1), and compared to a similar 1977 survey had increased significantly for both 10-year-old boys and girls, but also that no less than 77% of 10 year olds had positive attitudes to reading.

Literature Review

Issues relating to the attitudes to reading of UK children need to be set in the context of an international body of research evidence which suggests the importance of motivational factors in the development of children's reading.

The association between reading motivation and reading attainment, as well as progress, is a particularly compelling argument for the importance of positive attitudes to reading, and has been made by a number of researchers (Baker and Wigfield 1999; Twist et al. 2004). More recently, Petscher (2010), in a meta-analysis of international studies of the relationship between student attitudes to reading and reading achievement, reported findings which supported the view that a 'moderate' relationship exists between reading attitudes and reading achievement (p. 349). For Petscher this 'encouraging' finding suggested that it is not now a question of whether a relationship exists between reading attitudes and achievement, but of how, practically, positive attitudes can be sustained or improved through interventions (pp. 350-351). Petscher also commented: 'Because the current findings indicated that the attitude-

achievement relationship is stronger in elementary school [5–11 years], it becomes more important to model appropriate behaviours ... for children in their pre-education and early formal education years' (2010: 350).

Ross, McKechnie and Rothbauer (2006) presented research evidence that pleasure in the reading experience itself was a vital motivational factor for readers and that: 'Readers who become proficient are those who enjoy reading and who do it by choice as a voluntary activity in their leisure time' (p. 45). Reading done in children's own free time emerged as an important factor: 'Research also shows that the amount of reading done out of school is consistently related to gains in reading achievement.' (p. 46)

This research can be related to a larger body of theoretical literature on motivation considered more generally. Extrinsic motivation, where 'the only reason for doing a thing is to get something outside the activity itself', is usually differentiated from intrinsic motivation, where 'rewards consist of a direct experience, a state of consciousness that is so enjoyable as to be *autotelic* ("having its goal within itself"). Pleasure and enjoyment are the names we give to these autotelic experiences that are their own rewards (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 1989: 51–52). This autotelic state of consciousness is also known as the 'flow experience' in motivational theory (ibid: 54). 'Flow' is defined as a state of complete absorption in an activity, so that time and surrounding circumstances are forgotten: 'The defining feature of flow is intense experiential involvement in moment-to-moment activity' (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh and Nakamura 2005: 600).

Although 'flow' can be experienced in activities as disparate as rock-climbing, chess-playing, athletics or art, the example of reading is often used to illustrate this state: 'it is what we feel when we read a well-crafted novel' (*ibid.*: 600, 603). It is recognised that this order of motivated experience is not readily available within the situation of formal schooling: 'the excessive concern of schools with testing and with disembodied knowledge' both work against it (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh and Nakamura 2005: 606). As well as 'making formal learning experiences a source of enjoyment for students', the challenge for the teacher is also to develop in students the metaskills which will mean they are 'less at the mercy of the environment for opportunities to experience flow' and more likely to be able to 'derive experiential rewards from pursuits outside of the classroom' (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 1989: 67–68).

Motivational theory has been applied to how reading is experienced in schools and how this can be developed to foster greater intrinsic motivation (Paris and McNaughton 2010). Research into the key features of classroom practice associated with increased motivation to read presents some recurring factors. For example, Gambrell (1996) suggested the following, based on her four-year involvement in the Literacy Motivation Project at the U.S. National Reading Research Center:

- A teacher who is a reading model
- Access to a book-rich classroom environment
- Being able to choose books oneself
- Being familiar with books
- Social interactions with others about books
- Incentives that reflect the value of reading (p. 20)

Guthrie, Van Meter and McCann (1996) in their summary of classroom contexts that enhance literacy engagement, derived from a year-long action research project termed Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction, also suggested the importance of activities that are:

- self-directing, featuring student autonomy in choice of topic, books, peers
- metacognitive, containing explicit teaching of reading strategies, problem solving, composing
- collaborative: involving social construction of meaning (p. 323)

Reading for Change, the report on PISA 2000 mentioned above, recommended these same approaches for promoting positive attitudes to reading, but added one further factor. As well as 'interesting texts, autonomy and collaboration (with peers)', the report also added 'real world interaction' (OECD 2002), the importance of making links between reading inside and outside the classroom, showing how readers in the world beyond the school also read for pleasure as well as for a variety of other purposes in their daily lives.

The project described below drew on the research findings mentioned above, but sought to provide more detailed data, both quantitative and qualitative, about the attitudes of individual children and the strategies used by individual schools and teachers who seek to promote positive attitudes to reading.

Research questions

The research reported here ran for two years. It was prompted by the background context described above, and informed by the literature review. The intention was to look at ways in which schools were able to make the experience of reading more enjoyable for pupils and to encourage positive attitudes in them, thus increasing motivation to read. Through identifying examples of effective practice which promoted positive attitudes to reading, the project sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What attitudes towards reading do the teachers hold in the primary schools surveyed?
2. What attitudes towards reading are displayed by the children in these schools?
3. What teaching strategies are employed in the schools surveyed where children have positive attitudes towards reading?

Research methods

Research design

Answers to the above research questions were sought in written questionnaires to teachers and pupils. After an initial analysis of the teacher and pupil questionnaires, follow-up interviews were conducted with the teachers of pupils who seemed from their questionnaire responses to show particularly positive attitudes towards reading.

Sample

Teacher questionnaires were initially sent to English leaders in a sample of 100 primary schools within a region in the south of England to find out about school policy and practice with regard to promoting positive attitudes to reading. The sample was constructed to include a cross-section of schools, having regard to socio-economic factors such as the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM). However, it was not intended to be a nationally representative sample. Responses were received from English leaders in 40 of the schools, drawn from nine different local authorities (LAs). This was therefore a self-selected smaller sample of respondents who were sufficiently interested in the research topic to complete and return the questionnaire. Although this sample was relatively small, it did represent teachers and pupils in a range of different LAs in the south of England. Thirty-five of these respondents then carried out 'reading surveys', in the form of a written questionnaire, with a total of over 1400 of their Year 5 (9–10 year old) pupils. There was no evidence that schools from socially disadvantaged areas excluded themselves from these self-selecting samples: for example, the representation of schools with proportions of pupils eligible for FSM above the then national average rose from 14% in the original sample of 100, to over 17% in the subsequent samples of 40 and 35.

Teachers with responsibility for English from 17 schools were interviewed. These were selected on the basis of having particular success in promoting positive attitudes to reading on the evidence of their pupils' responses in the reading survey. The teachers interviewed represented a wide spectrum of experience in teaching, ranging from 2 to 34 years, with an average of 12.6 years experience. Their schools were from a variety of socio-economic settings, including again over 17% from areas of social disadvantage, as defined above.

Research Instruments and procedures for use

The teacher questionnaire

The evidence from national and international surveys and from the existing research literature on reading motivation, as discussed above, informed the construction of a written questionnaire for teachers. This was used to survey the views and attitudes of teachers towards reading and to discover what strategies they used to try to promote positive attitudes towards reading in their

pupils. The questionnaires were emailed to teachers and could be returned electronically or in printed form. They featured a mixture of questions: some with multiple choice responses, some with opportunities for respondents to add more detail, and others which were more open-ended and invited teachers to express personal experiences and views (see Appendix 1).

The pupil questionnaire

This was adopted with minor changes from the Reading Survey part of the Motivation to Read Profile originally developed by Gambrell et al. (1996). This was designed to assess both 'Self-Concept as a Reader' and 'Value of Reading' and combined 20 multiple choice questions, using a four-point scale. A box with space for pupils to add their own comments or drawings was included for the purposes of this research in order to generate some qualitative data alongside the quantitative (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire was piloted with pupils in schools which were not part of the sample and the language and design were slightly adjusted following this trialling. The use of this instrument in previous research in the US had led to its reliability and validity being already established, so that it was placed in the public domain for teachers to use freely. For example, Gambrell et al. reported for the Reading Survey that 'pre- and post-test reliability coefficients were calculated for the sub-scales (self-concept = .68; value = .70), which confirmed the moderately high reliability of the instrument' (1996: 526). After appropriate consent had been received and procedures to ensure confidentiality for all respondents explained, the reading survey questionnaire was administered by the class teacher, following detailed written guidance from the researcher.

The teacher interview

The researcher personally visited the 17 schools whose pupils scored highest in the reading surveys to interview the English leaders at length about the strategies they had used to promote reading with their pupils. The interview followed up the responses given to each question in the initial teacher questionnaire, to allow the answers to be elaborated. Additional questions were also asked, in relation to promoting reading, about the involvement of parents in reading activities, any links with local public libraries, and the implications of the introduction of a revised version of the NLS at this time. Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed.

Analysis

The 40 teacher questionnaires and 17 transcribed follow-up interviews were analysed by the researcher. Frequencies were computed for the multiple choice responses and percentages calculated. The qualitative aspects of the questionnaires, the further detail added to certain responses and the answers given to open-ended questions, along with the additional comments in the interviews, were scrutinised for recurring elements.

The pupil questionnaires were processed using SPSS software to calculate frequencies and percentages. The written comments at the end of the pupil questionnaires were fully transcribed and then scrutinised for patterns of responses by the researcher, along with the drawings added by some respondents. Analysis of the drawings was found to be more subjective and open to varying interpretation, so these data are not referred to here.

Research Findings

What attitudes towards reading do the teachers hold in the primary schools surveyed?

The responses of the 40 English leaders to the questionnaire made clear that these volunteers were indeed a self-selecting group of enthusiasts. The completed questionnaires revealed, for example, that:

- 98% said their pupils' attitudes to reading were very positive or quite positive
- 98% thought promoting reading was important or very important in their literacy teaching
- 98% read for pleasure themselves

The replies also revealed that the majority of respondents were knowledgeable about children's literature and most approached national frameworks for literacy teaching in a flexible way. For example:

- Only 8% strictly followed the Literacy Hour lesson structure then prescribed by the NLS in their teaching
- 62% considered that they had an excellent or good knowledge of children's books

What attitudes towards reading are displayed by the children in these schools?

The findings from their questionnaires showed that the pupils were, as their teachers had suggested, very positive about their own reading and valued reading as an activity. The percentages of pupils expressing positive attitudes in response to some questions were considerably higher than in the national and international surveys discussed above. For example:

- *When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel:* very/sort of happy: 92%;
- *Knowing how to read well is:* very important/ important: 87%;
- *Reading a book is something I like to do:* often/sometimes: 84%;

When the questions related to reading in later life and adult reading, the percentages were slightly lower, though still very positive:

- *When I grow up I will spend:* a lot/some of my time reading: 78%;
- *People who read a lot are:* very interesting/interesting: 67%;

It was only when questions referred to reading in leisure time and to libraries that there was no longer a majority who were positive:

- *I think reading is:* a great / interesting way to spend time: 50%; an OK / boring way: 50%
- *I think libraries are:* a great/interesting place to spend time: 47%; an OK/ boring place: 53%

This suggests that libraries in particular, as sites of public reading, whether in or out of school, were still unattractive, even to children who were positive about reading personally.

In addition to the quantitative data illustrated above, the pupil questionnaires provided interesting qualitative data in the form of written comments which the children added in response to an invitation to 'write or draw anything else you would like to say about reading'. Children's perceptions of the value of reading varied, but the majority who were positive about the activity felt that it provided an escape into another world [spelling errors have been corrected throughout]:

- *Reading takes you to a different place*
- *I read to help myself sleep and for pure pleasure. I also read to get away from this world and dive into a different world*
- *I think that reading is far better than watching telly because you get into a whole world of your own with stories. I've been to America, China and Japan in my stories!*

These descriptions of reading as an activity characterised by absorption ('pure pleasure'), immersion ('dive into') and escape ('a different place') link to motivational theories of 'flow' discussed earlier. The intrinsic motivation reported by these pupils, where the activity of reading is its own reward, features an intense involvement which is likened to being transported to another world, being under a spell, or losing track of time (Conti 2001). The idea of 'losing yourself in a book' was referred to by some respondents in reporting a sensation of partial loss of self when the reading 'flow' came to an end:

- *The only bad thing about reading is when you finish a really good book you feel like you've lost part of yourself, but the feeling disappears when you find another good book*

Reading was also valued as a form of relaxation and de-stressing, a state distinguished from the experience of 'flow' in motivational theory:

- *It's a good way to relax. And if something's on your mind it can change your feelings and get your mind off it*
- *Great way to calm down if you're unhappy or stressed out*

Reading was seen more functionally by other children as related to extrinsic rewards such as passing tests and succeeding at school:

- *Reading is important to people because when it comes to SATs you will need to understand what it means so you can answer things clearly and as fully as you can*
- *If you start reading all the time, you will be reading adult books at 7-8 years old. It also can get you into grammar school instead of a not very good school*

Many children saw reading similarly as important for getting a job and being able to carry out the functions of that job:

- *Reading is important. If you can't read you won't get a good job. If you want to be a teacher you need to read and know the reading*
- *When you are older, you will need to read for your job like a nurse. You will need to read because it has notes and what is the matter with people*

The comments of the minority of children who had negative attitudes to reading were often characterised by a vehemence which manifested itself for example in the use of capital letters, extreme statements and odd comparisons:

- *READING IS RUBBISH*
- *Reading is the last thing I would do. I would rather die than read.*
- *I'm a good reader, but I think it's boring... It's as interesting as garlic bread.*

The extreme reaction of these respondents suggests they either do not experience or do not value the 'highly pleasant state of intense involvement' where 'time flies' which characterises 'flow' experiences (Conti 2001: 4) and instead are 'bored' or acutely conscious of time passing slowly as they read (*ibid.* p. 2).

What teaching strategies are employed in the schools surveyed where children have positive attitudes towards reading?

In the questionnaires and interviews with English leaders in the 17 schools visited by the researcher, a range of specific activities which were used to develop positive attitudes in individual schools was described. Some provided potential opportunities for pupils to experience the 'flow' of absorption in reading, for example:

- *The Three O'clock Slot*: at this time each day, regardless of what else was happening, everything stopped in this school so that books could be read aloud by the class teachers in every classroom
- *Book Blind Dates*: this scheme involved pupils taking home books covered in plain paper to see whether they could 'get on together': the identity of the book could only be revealed after a certain number of pages had been read

Others offered more extrinsic motivation in the way of rewards, though these did reflect the value of reading as an activity:

- *Reader of the Week*: this incentive scheme rewarded children with book-related prizes for a variety of achievements
- *The Lost Reading Books*: this scheme was inspired by the practice of Book Crossing, where books are left in public places for others to find, read and then pass on in the same way (see www.bookcrossing.com)

Analysis of these and other activities used in individual schools revealed a number of common factors underlying them which emerged as significant in developing positive attitudes to reading in the classroom in the majority of the 17 schools where interviews took place. Some of these were factors mentioned in previous research such as pupils being able to exercise autonomy and choice in reading activities and being able to collaborate in groups or interact with others; often these two factors operated together in practice. Examples of such activities were:

- involving pupils fully in the provision of books in the school through ordering and stock-taking
- developing a culture of 'book talk' within the school, with conversations about reading between pupils and between pupils and teachers becoming the norm
- extra-curricular reading or book clubs being run by pupils themselves at lunchtime or after school.

As in previous research, a classroom environment containing appropriate and interesting texts which were accessible and attractively displayed also emerged as important. 'Real world interaction' was also represented in the findings by activities such as:

- fully involving parents and other adults in the local community in supporting reading within the school and at home for all age-groups
- using library resources in the school and local community fully and developing links between the two

Other common factors identified emphasised the importance of the following qualities in the reading teacher:

- having well-developed knowledge and understanding of the full range of children's literature
- having detailed knowledge and understanding of their pupils' reading choices, tastes and preferences
- providing a positive role model as an enthusiastic reader
- using open-ended, 'authentic' activities rather than closed-off, artificial ones
- using active approaches to exploring and responding to texts, involving the use of drama and other creative arts
- using a range of reading material, both print and electronic, and valuing pupils' own reading choices
- being able to use national literacy frameworks flexibly and creatively
- making use of technology such as interactive whiteboards to encourage pupils to engage with texts
- making use of Internet formats such as blogs to involve pupils in responding to texts

In addition to these features of successful teachers, the research findings also suggested the importance of other factors in promoting positive attitudes more widely within the primary school as a whole. Having a regular timetabled slot where pupils read independently, in addition to one where teachers read aloud to pupils, was a recurring element. This was another possible context for engaging in a 'flow' experience of reading within a school environment mostly not conducive to this kind of absorption.

Discussion

The findings from this research project confirmed the importance of some of the factors previously identified through the literature review as key features of classroom practice linked to increased motivation to read. Pupils with good attitudes to reading were associated with schools where they were given the opportunity to collaborate with others, and exercise choice and preference in the reading-related activities they were involved in. These opportunities, however, needed to be presented in imaginative and engaging ways at classroom level, and needed to have 'authentic' rather than artificial contexts, which often meant reaching beyond school literacy into the 'real' world of reading.

The role of the teacher was found to be more than, as previously suggested, to provide a model of an enthusiastic reader, though this was important. Subject knowledge in the area of children's literature, pedagogical understanding in devising flexible and interactive teaching approaches, skills in utilising new technologies, and the ability to use pupil assessment in planning for reading also emerged as recurring attributes of teaching in schools where pupils reported more positive responses.

Many of the elements of effective practice in promoting positive attitudes to reading mentioned above would be amenable to transfer between schools. Some were in fact aspects of provision previously common in primary schools

and frequently mentioned in existing research literature, such as reading aloud and independent or sustained silent reading. These practices have declined in recent years, partly as an unintended consequence of government curriculum development such as the NLS. Other elements of successful practice were more recent innovations, for example using sports people as positive role models of readers and the use of interactive whiteboards to develop pupils' engagement with texts.

However, other elements of effective practice identified would be less amenable to transfer between schools, such as the personal enthusiasm of individual English leaders for reading for pleasure themselves, the value they placed on promoting reading through all their teaching, their high levels of knowledge of and interest in children's literature, and their capacity for implementing national literacy frameworks and other government initiatives in a flexible way to achieve their own educational goals.

The findings in relation to children's attitudes demonstrated that many pupils who were most positive in their responses and written comments about reading appeared to describe their pleasure in the activity as being the type of 'flow' experience detailed in motivational theory. Pupils who were most negative about reading did not report this intense state of absorption; instead they described boredom or actual dislike for the experience. It would be interesting in future research to investigate whether these children reported 'flow' experiences in other contexts, for example computer games, war gaming or hobbies of other kinds.

Extrinsic, as well as intrinsic, motivation seemed to result in positive attitudes for some children: they valued what reading could do for them rather than the experience of reading itself. The motivation here was still connected with reading, though, and not focused on rewards unrelated to the activity, such as financial incentives or competitions. A limitation of the reading survey used in the present research was its focus on story and book reading, as opposed to non-fiction and non-book forms. Further research might explore more widely the relationship between reading for a purpose and reading for pleasure.

Conclusion

The project described here has explored what children who have positive attitudes report about the experience of reading, as well as the common features found in those schools, classrooms and teachers associated with such pupils. It has now been firmly established by meta-analysis of relevant research (Petscher 2010) that a moderate relationship does exist between reading attitudes and reading achievement, although the difficulty of separating out attitude from other socio-cultural variables also needs to be acknowledged. In the UK, as in many developed societies, great emphasis has been placed in recent years on raising attainment standards in reading, as measured both in

national assessments and international comparisons. However, continuing governmental efforts to increase attainment levels in reading have frequently failed to address the concomitant need to promote positive attitudes to reading, since in the words of *Reading for Change* quoted at the start of this article: 'cognitive skills and reading motivation are mutually reinforcing...rather than being alternatives, schools need to address both simultaneously' (OECD 2002: 19). The results of international surveys such as PISA and PIRLS suggest that in the case of the UK a vicious circle may be in operation, whereby the measures taken to raise levels of attainment, such as those recommended by the NLS, have had a reverse effect on motivation to read, which may in turn have impacted on continued efforts to increase that very level of attainment. Internationally, PISA 2009 showed that the performance of UK 15-year-olds had not increased since 2000 and that engagement in reading was below the OECD average. Nationally, the results of the National Curriculum reading test at age 11 have been stalled at their current level since 2007, declining slightly in 2010, at the same time that national surveys also report that attitudes to reading have declined. The UK government's immediate response has been to increase the emphasis on the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics in primary schools and in the initial training of teachers in England. However, more recent official publications such as *Moving English Forward* (Ofsted 2012) and *Overcoming the Barriers to Literacy* (All Party Parliamentary Group for Education 2011) have begun to recommend that an emphasis on reading for pleasure as well as systematic synthetic phonics is important. Now seems an opportune time, therefore, to seek to generate a virtuous circle in reading teaching: for increased attention to be paid to what we know about developing the 'will' to read alongside efforts to improve the 'skill', since the evidence increasingly shows that each feeds into the other.

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Appendix 1

TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

School:
Age group taught:

Role in school:
Number of years in teaching:

1. How important is promoting reading in your literacy teaching? underline one
VERY IMPORTANT / IMPORTANT / QUITE IMPORTANT / NOT VERY
IMPORTANT

2. How important is promoting reading in **all** your teaching?
VERY IMPORTANT / IMPORTANT / QUITE IMPORTANT / NOT VERY
IMPORTANT

3. Has your school been involved in any initiatives to promote positive attitudes to
reading?
YES / NO
If YES, please give details.

4. Are there any strategies that you use in your own teaching to promote positive
attitudes to reading? YES / NO
If YES, please give details.

5. Are there any strategies that you use in your teaching to promote positive attitudes
to reading specifically for boys? YES / NO
If YES, please give details

6. Are there any resources, including websites, you have used for promoting positive
attitudes to reading? YES / NO
If YES, please give details

7. How positive or negative are the attitudes to reading of the children you teach?

VERY POSITIVE / QUITE POSITIVE / QUITE NEGATIVE / VERY NEGATIVE

8. What are the main difficulties you face in promoting reading in your teaching?

9. How could these difficulties be overcome?

10. How strictly do you follow the literacy hour framework in your teaching?

VERY STRICTLY / STRICTLY / QUITE STRICTLY / NOT VERY STRICTLY

11. Do you use mainly whole texts or extracts from texts in your literacy teaching?

WHOLE TEXTS / EXTRACTS

12. How would you rate your knowledge of children's books?

EXCELLENT / GOOD / ADEQUATE / NEEDS IMPROVING

13. Which of the following would you consider suitable reading material for literacy lessons? [underline any]

COMICS / CHILDREN'S MAGAZINES / NEWSPAPERS / CHILDREN'S WEBSITES

Give individual examples of any of these you would **not** consider suitable.

14. Do you read for pleasure yourself? YES/NO

If YES, please give details, e.g. what do you enjoy; why; did you read for pleasure at school?

Appendix 2

Reading Survey

First Name _____ Date _____

Please tick one box for each statement.

I am in

- ☐ Year 2
- ☐ Year 3
- ☐ Year 4
- ☐ Year 5
- ☐ Year 6

I am a

- ☐ boy
- ☐ girl

1. My friends think I am

- ☐ a very good reader
- ☐ a good reader
- ☐ an OK reader
- ☐ a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Not very often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often

3. I read

- ☐ not as well as my friends
- ☐ about the same as my friends
- ☐ a little better than my friends
- ☐ a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is

- ☐ really fun
- ☐ fun
- ☐ OK to do
- ☐ No fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can

- ☐ almost always work it out
- ☐ sometimes work it out
- ☐ almost never work it out
- ☐ never work it out

6. I tell my friends about the good books I read

- ☐ never
- ☐ almost never
- ☐ some of the time
- ☐ a lot

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand

- ☐ almost everything I read
- ☐ some of what I read
- ☐ almost none of what I read
- ☐ none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are

- ☐ very interesting
- ☐ interesting
- ☐ not very interesting
- ☐ boring

9. I am

- ☐ a poor reader
- ☐ an OK reader
- ☐ a good reader
- ☐ a very good reader

10. I think libraries are

- ☐ a great place to spend time
- ☐ an interesting place to spend time
- ☐ an OK place to spend time
- ☐ a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading

- ☐ every day
- ☐ almost every day
- ☐ once in a while
- ☐ never

12. Knowing how to read well is

- ☐ not very important
- ☐ sort of important
- ☐ important
- ☐ very important

13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read

- ☐ I can never think of an answer
- ☐ I have trouble thinking of an answer
- ☐ I sometimes think of an answer
- ☐ I always think of an answer

14. I think reading is

- ☐ a boring way to spend time
- ☐ an OK way to spend time
- ☐ an interesting way to spend time
- ☐ a great way to spend time

15. Reading is

- ☐ very easy for me
- ☐ sort of easy for me
- ☐ sort of hard for me
- ☐ very hard for me

16. When I grow up I will spend

- ☐ none of my time reading
- ☐ very little of my time reading
- ☐ some of my time reading
- ☐ a lot of my time reading

17. When I am in a group talking about stories

- ☐ I almost never talk about my ideas
- ☐ I sometimes talk about my ideas
- ☐ I almost always talk about my ideas
- ☐ I always talk about my ideas

18. I would like my teacher to read books out loud to the class

- ☐ every day
- ☐ almost every day
- ☐ once in a while
- ☐ never

19. When I read out loud I am a

- ☐ poor reader
- ☐ OK reader
- ☐ Good reader
- ☐ Very good reader

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel

- ☐ very happy
- ☐ sort of happy
- ☐ sort of unhappy
- ☐ unhappy

Please write or draw anything else you would like to say about reading in this box.

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING
OUR SURVEY!**