

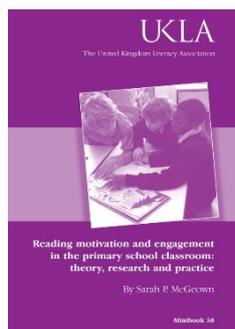
Understanding reading experiences to support motivation and engagement

Last week I found myself re-reading transcripts from interviews we carried out with children and adolescents as part of a recent research project – Growing Up A Reader (you can read more about this project here: www.growingupareader.education.ed.ac.uk). This project examined children's and adolescents' perceptions of 'a reader', while also exploring what they read and why. We were interested in the breadth of their literacy experiences and what they felt different text types offered them.

I returned to these transcripts last week, not because I had to, but because I wanted to. Something funny a child had said during an interview popped into my head and made me smile – I wanted to go back to the interview transcript and read it again, in their words.

What the Growing Up A Reader project taught me is how diverse, and how rich, children's and adolescents' literacy experiences are - from the child who reads books to make them laugh, to the teenager who reads manuals to create fictional worlds for others. We read with purpose: to relax, to be happy, to be thrilled, to pursue an interest, to immerse ourselves in an imaginary world, to spend time with fictional friends. Whether we realise it or not, our reading motivation (why we read) often influences what we read.

As a literacy researcher I've been studying different aspects of children's and adolescents' reading development for 15 years now. As a psychologist with an interest in educational issues, I started off conducting quantitative research. Most of my research involved relatively large-scale studies, administering questionnaires to capture children's level (and type) of reading motivation and examining it in relation to other factors (e.g., their age, sex, level of reading skill, reported personality traits, etc). There's a lot to learn from this type of research (some of it is summarised here: [McGeown, 2013](#)). In fact, one study ([McGeown et al., 2015](#)) which showed that children's reading motivation drives their reading choices, laid the foundation for our Growing Up A Reader project.



Growing Up A Reader was a qualitative investigation into what children and adolescents are reading and why. To promote conversations between friends, rather than a typical interview, we provided research training to a group of [primary and secondary school students](#) and they joined our research team, to talk to their peers about reading. Unexpectedly, there was no difference in the themes arising from interviews led by students

compared to those led by our research team. There was however, more laughter and playfulness when interviews were led by students!



Implications for the classroom

So, what can we learn from quantitative and qualitative reading motivation research that is useful for the classroom? Quantitative research highlights the importance of fostering intrinsic reading motivation in students (an internal desire to read, e.g., reading for entertainment, relaxation, out of curiosity) rather than extrinsic reading motivation (using external drivers – e.g., reading to achieve good grades, to receive a reward, for recognition). Intrinsically motivated readers, on average, read more, engage more deeply with the texts that they read and develop better reading skills. Therefore, helping students have the types of experiences with books that are necessary to promote intrinsic reading motivation is so important.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, provides us with insights into children's and adolescents' reading experiences, from their perspective. Through qualitative research we start to appreciate that while many young people share similar reading experiences, many also read for different reasons. As teachers, it's important to know what motivates your students so you can help them to find texts to suit them.



Sarah McGeown is a Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology in Moray House School of Education and Sport at the University of Edinburgh, UK. Her research focuses on early reading acquisition and promoting motivation and engagement in reading. You can learn more about her research here: www.readresearch.ed.ac.uk. In 2019 she co-

founded the LALco network, to promote communication, collaboration and co-production of research on language and literacy issues. To learn more (and join) visit: www.lalco.org.uk

