Balancing pedagogy for will and skill for boys

More research details

Three of the four teachers in the project understood reading as primarily about proficiency and skill. While some made references to pleasure when talking about reading, this was not reflected in the practice we observed. They also did not recognise reading as a social practice or as a volitional one, related to individual children’s interests.

These teachers saw ‘good’ readers as those which were proficient and children had internalised this understanding. Their perception of a ‘good’ reader was someone who: read fluently, was on a high reading level, understood the meaning of ‘hard’ words, always read at home and could sound out words correctly. This reflects an idea of a good reader as someone who can perform reading in a way that is congruent with a focus on technical proficiency in reading. Pleasure, volition and social interaction were much marginalised.

The four reading for pleasure pedagogies identified through the Teachers as Readers research—reading aloud, informal book talk and recommendations and independent reading time in the context of a social reading environment were evident but very constrained in three of the four schools. There was little social interaction or discussion of texts they read. In independent reading, some children had little choice due to the small range and number of texts available. Books in bigger school collections were either ‘ability’ banded or were not regularly accessible. Reading aloud (which was rare) was not predominantly for pleasure but rather used as an opportunity for teachers to check children’s comprehension of the text or to teach and test vocabulary. Reading areas were mostly used for time out for bad behaviour or as extra workspaces.

These perceptions of reading and ways of practicing reading for pleasure pedagogies may have been due to the exceptionally strong pressure teachers were under to raise attainment in reading. Research indicates that where schools have a large proportion of children from low-income families, as our participating schools did, the prior attainment in literacy and language skills tends to be lower. You can find out more about the attainment statistics here. Often therefore increasing attainment in reading was emphasised in schools.

In one school, the teacher understood reading as more than proficiency and supported children’s emotional and personal engagement with reading. The boys in this class seemed to be more engaged with reading for pleasure in this classroom, this was reflected in their conversations about their reading. In their interviews they focussed on the plot, characters and messages in the texts they were reading. This was in contrast to children at the other three schools who were only, at best, able to name the titles or authors of texts they had read.

For further information on the pedagogic practices which, alongside teachers perceptions, held the boys back project report and the first journal article in Literacy.