

Boys' positioning as readers

More research details

The research focussed specifically on boy readers who were categorised as 'struggling' readers – boys who were not considered to be doing well at reading. Across the Year 5 classes in the four schools, a number of factors impacted on how boys were positioned, or labelled, as readers. Teachers' perceptions of boys' gender, ethnic and social class identities and their understandings of reading (as proficiency and/or engagement with meaning) combined to influence how 'struggling' boys were positioned as readers in the classroom.

In two of the four schools, the teachers had positive views of 'struggling' boy readers' home backgrounds. For example, both teachers commented on a language barrier being the main reason why some parents were unable to support their children's reading at home and that these parents were actually often keen to support their children's education. This meant that the teachers did not 'blame' the boys themselves or their families for their 'struggling' status as readers. These teachers therefore had a more positive orientation to the 'struggling' boy readers, believing that, with the right support at school, they could improve both their reading skill and engagement with reading.

In one of these two schools, the 'struggling' boy readers seemed to be more engaged with reading for pleasure than in the other schools. This was perhaps a reflection of the teachers' understanding of reading as more than about skill, also encompassing pleasure and engagement in addition to her positive positioning of the boys in terms of their gender, ethnic and social class identities. This did not apply in the other of the two schools referred to above, perhaps because there was more of a focus on reading skill at the expense of the will to read.

Teachers in two schools had strongly deficit views of the 'struggling' boy readers' gender, social class and/or ethnic identities. The teachers had a strong belief that girls were inherently better readers than boys. They also had more negative perceptions of the 'struggling' boy readers' home lives despite having minimal contact with and not having visited their homes. They assumed that their parents were disinterested in reading, and education more widely, and therefore did not support the school's wishes for them to read with their children.

The combination of these two teachers' perceptions of the 'struggling' boy readers' social identities and their understandings of reading as primarily about proficiency, meant the boys in these classes became effectively trapped as 'struggling' boy readers with little prospect of improving in the view of teachers. Their 'struggling' reader status was linked to their social identities of being boys in one of the schools, and being boys from non-White British backgrounds from working class families in the other.

You can read more about how readers may be 'positioned' within schools [here](#).