LEVERHULME TRUST





Reading and Wellbeing: Developmental and Diverse Perspectives

Nicola Currie ncurrie2@ed.ac.uk UKLA International Conference, University of Exeter 23rd June 2023



Project Team

Postdoctoral Research Fellow: Dr Nicola Currie, University of Edinburgh Principal Investigator: Dr Sarah McGeown, University of Edinburgh Co-Investigator: Professor Gemma Moss, Institute of Education, UCL

Project partners: Katherine Wilkinson, Scottish Book Trust

Dr Christina Clark, National Literacy Trust











Overview

What do we know already about the relationship between reading and wellbeing?

- The Reading and Wellbeing Project
 - Positive Affect
 - Connection
 - Personal Growth

Conclusions

The relationship between reading and wellbeing



Children and young people who enjoy reading report higher levels of mental wellbeing than those who do not enjoy reading (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018)

> Bibliotherapy can help to reduce feelings of depression in adults (Gualano et al., 2017)

Shared reading groups in the community can have a positive impact on wellbeing (Billington et al., 2010; The Reader, 2019)

Adults report that reading is beneficial for their wellbeing at times of stress (Scottish Book Trust, 2021)

How can reading fiction support our wellbeing?



Offers the opportunity for escapism and the chance to immerse into a different world (Green & Brock, 2000; McGeown et al.,2020)

> Can be a positive, rewarding experience, even when the content is sad or tense (Mar et al., 2011)

May help to reduce feelings of loneliness via connection with characters (Oatley, 2021) and others in our daily lives (Scottish Book Trust, 2021)

> Offers opportunities for personal introspection (Mar et al., 2011)

> Unique interaction between a book, an individual and their life experience (Eekhof et al., 2022)



The Reading and Wellbeing Project



Aims

> What are readers' perceptions of the relationship between reading fiction and wellbeing?

• Focus on the qualitative experiences of the individual reader

> Are there similarities and differences in readers' perspectives at different ages?



Method

Participants: 20-25 children (9-11), young people (15-17), adults (30-50) and older adults (65+)

- > Children and young people recruitment via schools
- Study advertisement for adults via project partners, Twitter, leaflets/bookmarks in community spaces (e.g., libraries, book shops, wellbeing group)

>Semi-structured interviews - designed and piloted to be suitable across the age range.

>Questionnaires: Reading habits and demographics.

OSF pre-registration: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/N6RFV





> Wellbeing is a complex term, ranging from feelings of subjective happiness to relationships with others and opportunities for growth as an individual (Deci and Ryan, 2006; Deiner et al., 2018).

> We chose to focus our interviews on three key aspects of wellbeing:

Positive Affect Connection Personal Growth **Positive Affect:** How does reading fiction make readers feel? How does mood influence fiction reading?

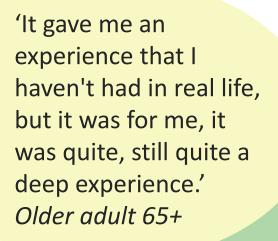
> 'I just love the thrill of it, I just love the magic...It just feels like I'm in another world.' *Child 9-11*

'Things in my day-to-day life rarely make me cry. But fiction does a lot, and I think it gives me a safe space to kind of play with those emotions.' *Adult 30-50* '...if I'm happy then I
will pick something
that looks comedic and
funny but if I'm feeling
a bit down I will, I will
pick, I'll pick something
that looks a bit more
like a drama.'
Child 9-11

'....I'm really, really frazzled, what is going on? And I realised I haven't actually read for pleasure in about two weeks and that's my cue to go and do it. I know it is part of my good mental wellbeing.' *Adult 30-50*



Connection: How does reading fiction promote feelings of connection with books, their characters and others?



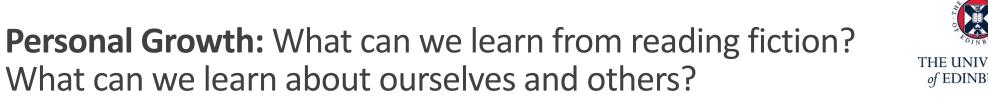
'...How, I know it's just
a book, but it's it feels
like sometimes just
yourself.'
Child 9-11

'A lot of the books that I remember the most or I identify as like my favourites are so connected to what I was going through at the time or how I was feeling.' *Adult 30-50*

'Some books they just, they make you feel happy and they make you want to go and see your friends and make you want to go and see your mum and dad.' *Child 9-11*

'And it's just a good feeling to know that you've made someone want to read a book.' *Child 9-11* THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Note. Preliminary data





'It's a bit like sort of climbing a mountain and get a bigger perspective on where you are in something.' Adult 30-50

> 'And it just makes me know that it's not my fault that I'm feeling these things.' *Child 9-11*

'It gives you an understanding and an insight and maybe hopefully an empathy into those experiences that you, you were not gonna have yourself.' Older adult 65+

'...interpersonal stuff being able to hear people's stories and, and and active listening and things like that and responding better.' Adult 30-50

> '...using your creativity to actually understand real life better not just to escape from it.' Adult 30-50

> > Note. Preliminary data



Conclusions and Future Implications

> In-depth insight into the influence of fiction reading on wellbeing from the perspective of the reader.

Highlight the role that reading plays in supporting wellbeing at different stages in our lives.

> In addition to helping us better understand the role of reading at the individual level, the findings could be relevant to community services:

- School and community libraries
- Community reading activities used to promote wellbeing



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Thank you for listening

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For further information:

Nicola Currie: ncurrie2@ed.ac.uk Twitter: @NicolaCurrie_ University of Edinburgh Literacy Lab: @UoELiteracyLab Presentation slides: https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/talks/ Project Webpage : https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/readwell/







