



Reading and Wellbeing: Developmental and Diverse Perspectives

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Project Team

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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



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- 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?



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- 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)



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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>



Method

- 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?

'It gave me an experience that I haven't had in real life, but it was for me, it was quite, still quite a deep experience.'

Older adult 65+

'...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



Personal Growth: What can we learn from reading fiction? What can we learn about ourselves and others?

'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



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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Presentation slides: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/talks/>

Project Webpage : <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/readwell/>

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