

Reading Engagement: A Guide for Teachers



As teachers it is important to understand, and think more deeply, about children’s reading engagement, to ensure children benefit fully from the rich and diverse benefits that books have to offer. Research shows that children who read books more often have better general knowledge, language, reading and spelling skills, and school achievement. In addition to these learning benefits, books provide opportunities for children to relax, laugh, escape to new worlds, pursue their interests, learn new things, experience adventures and/or spend time with fictional friends. Indeed, research suggests that book reading is associated with children’s wellbeing, empathy and social skills, and can help children to better understand themselves, and others, better. However, for these benefits to be realised, children need to be deeply engaged with the books they read. This means supporting ALL children to find books that resonate with their interests, preferences, lives and abilities.

A recent systematic review of reading engagement research (Lee, Gee Jang & Conradi Smith, 2021) highlighted four distinct dimensions of reading engagement: behavioural, cognitive, affective and social. While behavioural, cognitive and affective engagement with a book, social reflects children’s reading engagement with others. In this guide, we summarise each aspect, before providing a series of strategies to measure and support children’s reading engagement.

“In some books, it's fiction but they put facts into it and you can read the story while also being interested by the facts and things”

“You don't want to put it down, because every page you read, there's another cliff-hanger; ‘Oh, what will happen here? What will happen here? Oh, can I just read for two more minutes?’”

What children say about reading, taken from McGeown et al., (2020).



Behavioural engagement reflects children’s reading behaviours. This includes how frequently and for how long children read in their own time, as well as the breadth of their reading activities (e.g., range of text types/genres). Research demonstrates that the amount of time children read outside of school contributes to growth in their reading skills and comprehension, with fiction book reading being particularly important for reading development.

Affective engagement reflects the depth of emotions children experience while reading and the extent to which children are interested in what they read and explore personally meaningful content. It includes immersing oneself in a book, relating personal experiences to text content, using one’s imagination, and empathizing with characters. Indeed, book reading provides an opportunity for children to relax, laugh, explore new worlds, escape reality, support wellbeing, and/or spend time with fictional friends.



Cognitive engagement reflects children’s level of cognitive effort while reading—for example, the extent to which they put into place strategies (e.g., decoding, rereading) to support their comprehension. Cognitively engaged children are much more likely to spend time deciphering unfamiliar words, working out word meanings, monitoring their comprehension and making connections between information in the book and their existing knowledge. Cognitive engagement is important for comprehension skills.

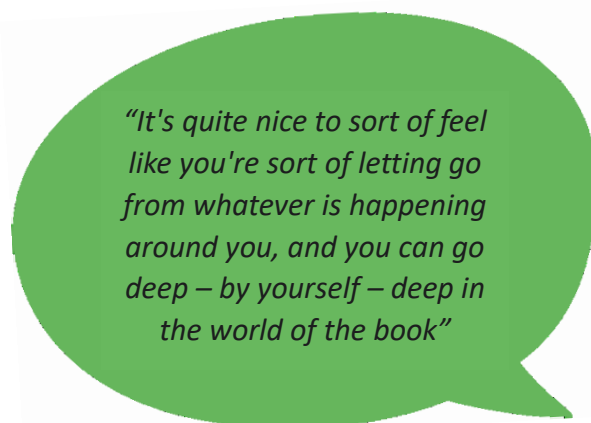
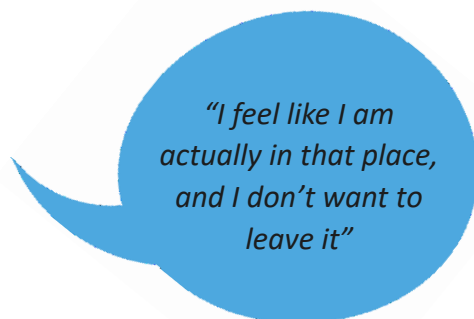
Social engagement reflects children’s participation in different types of reading activities with others. This includes talking about books, reading together and/or recommending, sharing and borrowing books. Providing inclusive opportunities for these social practices is key to creating communities of readers within a school. Social interactions can also result in deeper reading and understanding of a book, and opportunities to learn from each other.



Reading Engagement Scale

The Reading Engagement Scale was developed to measure and understand children's breadth and depth of reading engagement. This scale was intended to be used with whole classes of children, aged 8-11, to capture their reading engagement with books (fiction and non-fiction) that they read in their own time (either in school or out of school). It was created by researchers, with considerable input from teachers, literacy and pedagogy leads, and children, into both its development and use.

The scale takes approximately 10 minutes for children to complete and is easy to score. We encourage adults to read the questions aloud, to ensure reading skill does not influence children's ability to complete the scale. Furthermore, the scale has an optional follow-up discussion section, to encourage teachers and students to discuss and reflect upon ways to improve their reading engagement.



What children say about reading, taken from McGeown et al., (2020).

UK and US versions of this scale have been developed. For updates visit:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/measuring-reading-engagement/>

This scale is freely available for use by teachers, researchers and other professionals interested in children's reading engagement. For anyone interested in translating this scale, please contact Sarah McGeown: s.mcgeown@ed.ac.uk