Bridging the gap between research and practice to support reading for pleasure

Professor Sarah McGeown
University of Edinburgh

LJMU, June 2025

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Overview

- Why reading for pleasure?

- Love to Read

- Collaborative research:

    - Research-practice partnerships

    - Participatory approaches

Why reading for pleasure?

Why reading for pleasure?

- Children's reading enjoyment and engagement is at an all time low (Clark et al., 2025).

- Education policy and practice commitment towards 'reading for pleasure' (DfE, 2023)

Report finds 'shocking and dispiriting' fall in children reading for pleasure

National Literacy Trust finds only 35% of eight to 18-year-olds enjoy reading in their spare time, a sharp drop on last year to the lowest figure yet recorded
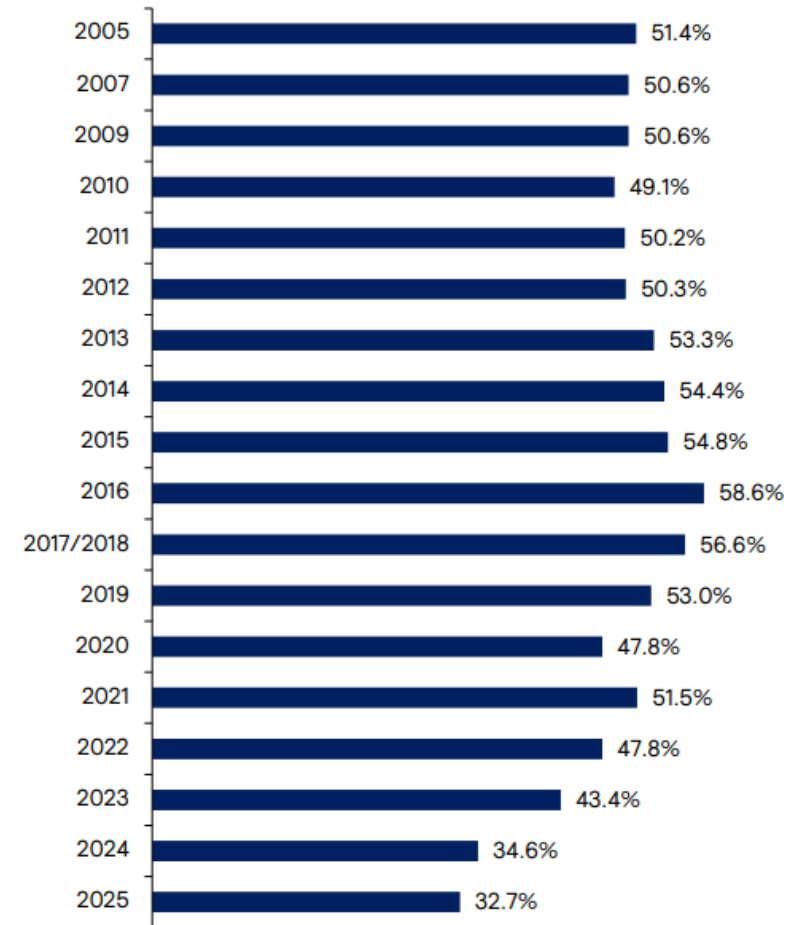
Source: The Guardian, 5th November 2024

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Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who told us that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot between 2005 and 2025

Year	Percentage
2005	51.4%
2007	50.6%
2009	50.6%
2010	49.1%
2011	50.2%
2012	50.3%
2013	53.3%
2014	54.4%
2015	54.8%
2016	58.6%
2017/2018	56.6%
2019	53.0%
2020	47.8%
2021	51.5%
2022	47.8%
2023	43.4%
2024	34.6%
2025	32.7%

Clark et al., 2025: 2025 n 114,970 (515 schools)

Why reading for pleasure?

- Internationally, declines have been reported in reading attitudes (PIRLS).

- Reading attitudes reflects reading enjoyment and out of school reading.

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2020

Love to Read

Love to Read

- **Aim:** To co-develop and evaluate a programme to support primary (aged 8-11) children's reading motivation and engagement.

- **Original grant application:** Application between researchers, and individuals working within literacy and education organisations (Scottish Book Trust, National Literacy Trust, Education Scotland), in addition to two teachers (one Scotland, one England).

- **Once funded**: Recruited 6 teachers to co-design the Love to Read programme, and sought children's (n = 59) input.

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Love to Read

Development

Love to Read

Development

Research

Children

Teachers/
professionals

Love to Read

Development

Research

Review:
Different disciplinary perspectives / methodological approaches

Love to Read

Development

Research

Review:
Different disciplinary perspectives /
methodological
approaches

SIX PRINCIPLES

Research: six principles

McGeown et al., (preprint). Supporting children's reading motivation and engagement: The development and initial evaluation of a school-based program.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5195889

Love to Read

Development

Research

Review:
Different disciplinary perspectives / methodological approaches

SIX PRINCIPLES

Children

Individual and group interviews to seek children's perspectives and experiences of a) existing RfP practices and b) perceptions of principles.

Children's input

Example: Access

NFER — National Foundation for Educational Research

Routledge — Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS

Check for updates

Reading for pleasure practices in school: children's perspectives and experiences

Emily Oxley and Sarah McGeown

Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131881.2023.2236123#abstract

Input into the illustrations used in the programme and outputs
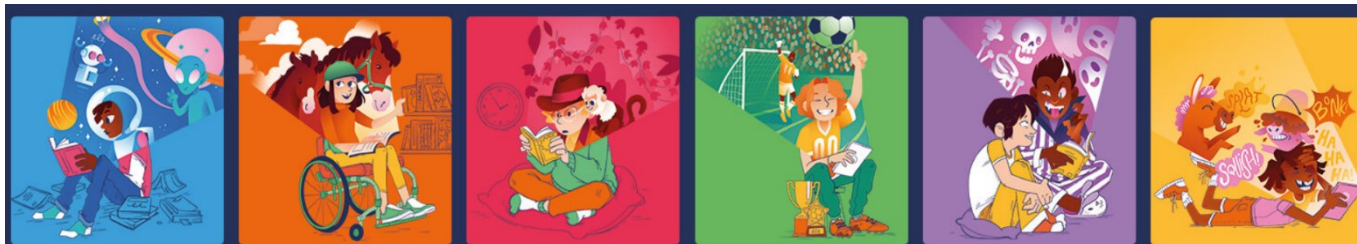
"Once you've read a lot, it's in alphabetical order so if you know an author that you like it's easy to just whizz to that section and find a book, so it's kind of easy to find a book but then sometimes it's hard if you don't know what you're looking for"

"Well sometimes it's difficult because we only have a limited time to choose a book ...We have two minutes I think"

"You can't read some other books that are in the year 6 library, and you have to just try to read the books that are on the shelf, even if you don't really like them"

"I think they should do what we're doing now, they should maybe ask a kid's opinion"

"I think [it's] easy because theres loads of books that you can read, and there are loads of different types and other books as well"

Love to Read

Development

Research

Review:
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SIX PRINCIPLES

Children

Individual and group interviews to seek children's perspectives and experiences of a) existing RfP practices and b) perceptions of principles.

Teachers/ professionals

Programme co-design informed by research, children, and teachers' professional and pedagogical expertise

PROGRAMME DEVELOPED

Teachers/professionals input:

Example Access:

Activity A.3. Library Audit

- Carry out a current library audit to evaluate whether school book provision reflects the interests, preferences, lives, experiences and abilities of students in your school. Involve the children when reviewing your library collection, removing outdated books or those in poor condition - old, tattered books can put children off reading – unless they are favourite reads! The school provision of books should look as exciting and inviting as possible.

Multiple activities associated with each principle. These were discussed and agreed during online co-design sessions, and follow up communication.

Teacher Reflection

General

- What are the key messages from this section for you and your colleagues?
- Reflect on how access is currently supported within your class and school context.

For delivery

- Which access activities would make the biggest gains to children's reading motivation and engagement in your classroom?
- Are there any students in your class who would benefit from more support with access?
- What preparation do you need to undertake to put these activities into practice?
- How could you work with other teachers and teaching assistants to improve access across the school, share learning, and workload?
- Are there any 'access' resource implications that need to be discussed with your school leadership team?

Discuss these points with colleagues, to support each other with the introduction of this principle in the class and school context.

Following programme development, points for reflection were added, based on teacher/educator input.

Love to Read

Development   Evaluation

Research

Review:
Different disciplinary perspectives / methodological approaches

SIX PRINCIPLES

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Individual and group interviews to seek children's perspectives and experiences of a) existing RfP practices and b) perceptions of principles.

Teachers/ professionals

Programme co-design informed by research, children, and teachers' professional and pedagogical expertise

PROGRAMME DEVELOPED

Evaluation

Feasibility study, examining implementation and effectiveness, using mixed methods.

PROGRAMME REFINED

Evaluation

- Theoretical/empirical insights which informed the six principles
- Programme co-design
- Acceptability/feasibility study
- Mixed methods
- Highlights importance of RPPs to develop, deliver, and evaluate school-based programmes

Supporting Children's Reading Motivation and Engagement: The Development and Initial Evaluation of a School-Based Program

37 Pages · Posted: 27 Mar 2025

Sarah McGeown
University of Edinburgh

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5195889

What did we learn from the project?

- Benefits
- Methodological considerations

- Teachers' perspectives of the process

International Journal of Educational Research
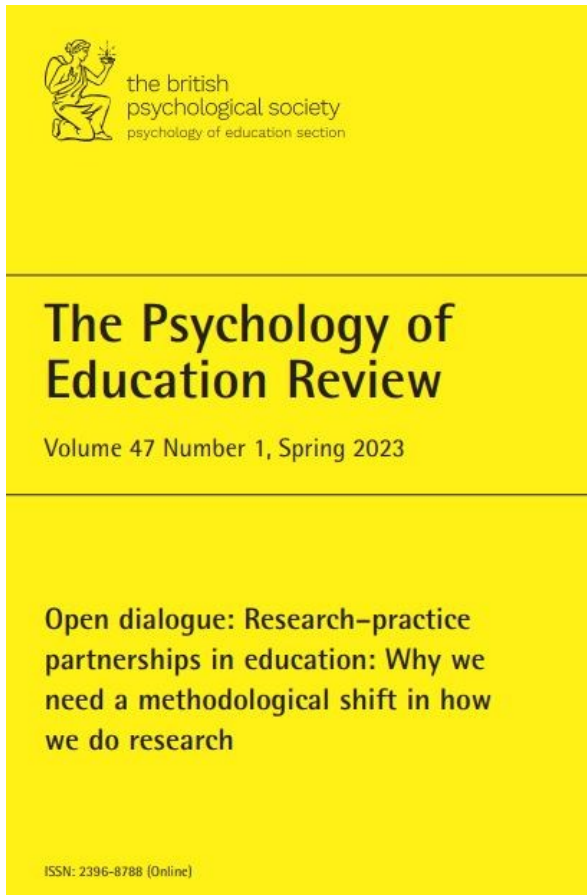
Volume 117, 2023, 102134

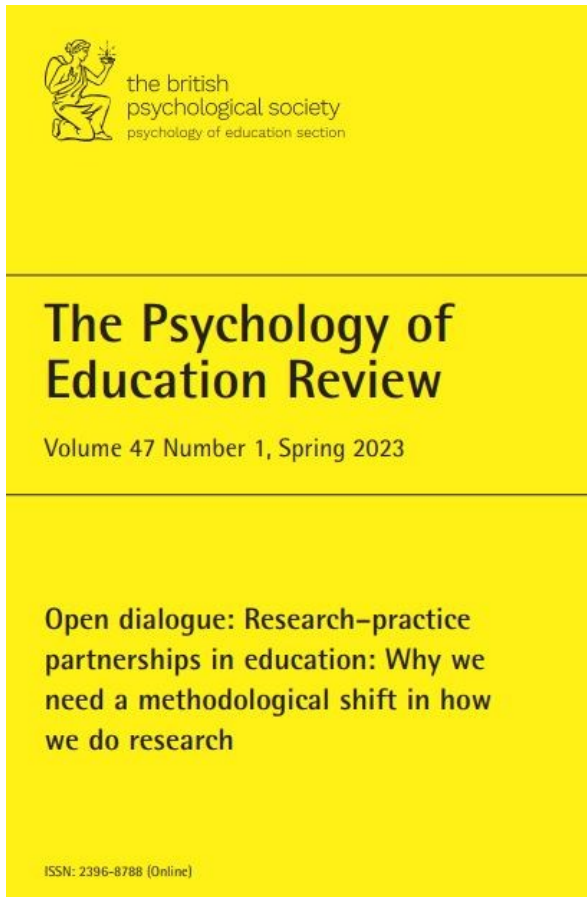## Working at the intersection of research and practice: The love to read project

Sarah McGeown [a], Emily Oxley [a], Love to Read Practice Partners [a], Jessie Ricketts [b], Laura Shapiro [c]

McGeown, S. et al., (2023). Working at the intersection of research and practice: The love to read project. *International Journal of Educational Research, 117, 102134*
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.102134

Collaborative research:
Research-practice partnerships and participatory approaches
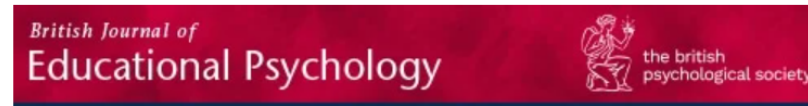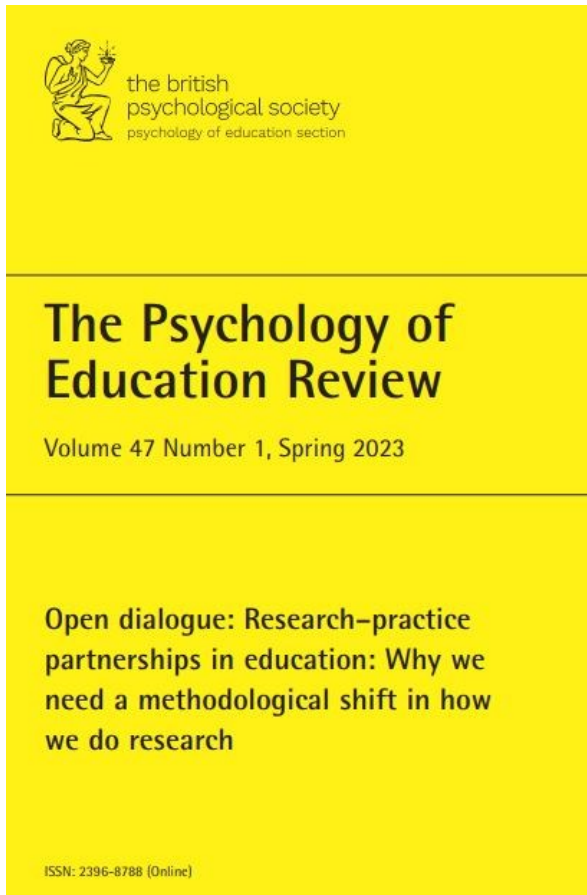
Research-practice partnerships

The Psychology of Education Review

Volume 47 Number 1, Spring 2023

Open dialogue: Research–practice partnerships in education: Why we need a methodological shift in how we do research

ISSN: 2396-8788 (Online)

McGeown, S. (2023). Research-practice partnerships in education: Why we need a methodological shift in how we do research. https://explore.bps.org.uk/content/bpsper/47/1

Research-practice partnerships

McGeown, S., & Sjolund, S. (2025). Research-practice partnerships in education: Benefits, challenges, methodological considerations and key enablers for change. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12785

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British Journal of Educational Psychology

INVITED ARTICLE | 🔒 Open Access | (cc) (i)

Research-practice partnerships in education: Benefits, challenges, methodological considerations and key enablers for change

Sarah McGeown ✉ ∨ , Simon Sjölund ∨

First published: 29 May 2025 | https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12785

BERA

Blog post
Part of series: The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

Research-practice partnerships: Implications for REF 2029

Sarah McGeown, Professor of Literacy at University of Edinburgh   7 Apr 2025

McGeown, S. (2025). Research-practice partnerships: Implications for REF 2029. BERA Blogpost. Available here: https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/research-practice-partnerships-implications-for-ref-2029

Participatory approaches

Using participatory approaches with children and young people to research volitional reading

Charlotte Webber, Elena Santi, Julia Calabrese and Sarah McGeown (iD)

Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Webber, C. et al., (2024). Using participatory approaches with children and young people to research volitional reading. *Language and Education,* https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09500782.2024.2317962

Participatory approaches

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

SPECIAL ISSUE PAPER

OPEN ACCESS   Check for updates

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International Journal of Educational Research
Volume 124, 2024, 102308

Working with a young people's advisory panel to conduct educational research: Young people's perspectives and researcher reflections

Charlotte Webber [a], Katherine Wilkinson [b], Lynne G. Duncan [c], Sarah McGeown [a]

Webber, C. et al (2024). Working with a young people's advisory panel to conduct educational research: Young people's perspectives and researcher reflections. *International Journal of Educational Research,* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102308

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ELSEVIER

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UKLA
UK LITERACY ASSOCIATION

Participatory Approaches in Literacy Research SIG

Bring together practitioners, teacher educators, researchers and allied professionals, from different disciplinary backgrounds, who have a shared interest in understanding and improving children and young people's literacy skills and experiences, through participatory research approaches.

More information here: https://ukla.org/special-interest-groups/

Summary

- Research with those working beyond University boundaries can enrich the quality, relevance, and impact of our research.

- Needs to be sufficiently planned, funded, and effectively implemented.

- Important to share our learning and experience, both positive and negative, to develop expertise.

Thank you for listening

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LITERACY LAB
Collaborative research, to improve literacy experiences and outcomes across the lifespan

Literacy Lab website: https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/

Visit 'publications' and 'talks' pages to access references and slides

LOVE TO READ
Co-designing a programme, with children and teachers, to inspire and sustain a love of reading

Love to Read website: https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/