

Love to Read Libraries

2023-2024

Final Project Report



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Executive summary

Love to Read Libraries (2023-2024) was an extension of the Nuffield Foundation funded Love to Read project (2021-2023). It aimed to translate six research-informed principles to support children's reading motivation and engagement into library contexts, to support library staff as they work towards increasing children's enjoyment and engagement with books.

The motivation for Love to Read Libraries is growing recognition of consistent declines in children's attitudes towards reading, and volitional reading outside of school (Clark et al., 2023). Libraries provide ideal contexts to support our collective efforts to reverse this trajectory. However, library staff rarely have focused professional development or accessible research-informed resources to do this. Libraries are also ideal places to reach families and other adults in children's lives, thus extending knowledge of practices to support children's reading motivation and engagement.

Through a collaborative process between researchers and library experts/professionals, the Love to Read Libraries guide and resources were created to be relevant to, and easily adopted into, public library contexts. The guide includes research-informed summaries about each principle, its relevance within library contexts, and activities and resources to embed these principles into libraries. This guide and resources are freely available here:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/>

Context

In the UK, public libraries are increasingly under threat due to the current economic climate. Library closures, reduced library hours/services, and an increasing reliance on volunteer library staff, often with no professional qualifications, has created challenges within the sector. This context is intensifying the challenges faced by those working to increase children's reading motivation and engagement.

Love to Read Libraries was therefore an opportunity for a research team with expertise in children's reading motivation and engagement to support library staff by providing a research-informed guide and resources reflecting contemporary research around how to support children's reading motivation and engagement. The research team recognised that libraries are increasingly under-resourced, and that library staff often have little or no experience of working with children, or insight into relevant research to support children's enjoyment and engagement with books.

Aims

- 1) To support library staffs' professional learning:

To ensure librarians and other library staff have access to contemporary research reflecting approaches to support children's reading motivation and engagement.

- 2) To support children's reading motivation and engagement:

To support children's reading motivation and engagement, through the implementation of research-informed practices and resources within libraries.

To achieve these aims, a guide was co-created between researchers and library experts/professionals.

Key terms

Throughout this report, guide and resources, the terms reading motivation and engagement are used widely and so are defined below.

Motivation

Reading motivation reflects the extent to which a child is motivated/driven to read (i.e., wants to read) and includes children's beliefs about reading (whether they believe they are good at reading or not), attitudes towards reading (whether they think reading is an enjoyable, useful and

important activity) and goals for reading (reasons to read) (Conradi et al., 2014). Reading motivation is important as it is a precursor to reading engagement.

Engagement

Reading engagement reflects the quality and depth of engagement children experience when they read. A systematic review of reading engagement research (Lee et al., 2021) identified four distinct dimensions: behavioural, cognitive, affective and social (see McGeown and Conradi-Smith for a recent practitioner summary). **Behavioural engagement** reflects the amount of reading that children do, that is, how often children read and for how long), **cognitive engagement** reflects the level of cognitive effort children put into reading, and the extent to which they put into place strategies (e.g., decoding, re-reading) to support their comprehension, **affective engagement** reflects the depth of emotions children experience while reading, the extent to which they are interested in what they read, and explore personally meaningful content, while **social engagement** reflects children's participation in diverse reading activities with others (e.g., peers, teacher, family, etc) as they share, swap and discuss books. This allows children to learn and benefit from other readers in their class. Reading engagement is important because it is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, which are described below.

The benefits of reading books

Book reading is associated with a wide range of rich and diverse positive outcomes. For example, children who read more often have better general knowledge, language, reading and spelling skills, and school achievement (Mol & Bus, 2011; Torppa et al., 2019). In addition to 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 (McGeown et al., 2020; McGeown & Wilkinson, 2021). For this reason, research has suggested that book reading is associated with children's wellbeing (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018), empathy and social skills (Eekhof et al., 2022) and can help children to develop an enriched understanding, and reduced prejudice, towards others (Vezzali et al., 2015). However, for these benefits to be realised, children need to be motivated to read, and engage with the books that they read. Therefore, focusing on enhancing children's reading motivation and engagement is essential to ensure these benefits of books are realised.

Principles to support reading enjoyment and engagement

A recent review of research (McGeown, Oxley et al., 2023) identified six principles which encapsulate the breadth of theory and research to support children's reading motivation and engagement. These principles are: access, choice, time, connection, social and success, and are defined below. A full description of their relevance within library contexts, and practices to embed these principles into libraries can be found in the Love to Read Libraries guide:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/>

Access: Children need to have regular and easy access to books which reflect their interests, preferences, lives, experiences and abilities.

Choice: Children need to have choice over their reading activities. Libraries need to have the structure, and children need to have the skills, to ensure good (i.e., skill and interest aligned) reading choices.

Time: Children need to have regular quality time to read books and take part in book reading activities.

Connection: Children need to be able to access and choose books, and book reading activities, which are personally relevant, and connect with their own reading goals.

Social: Children need to have the time, skills and confidence to be able to share and discuss books with others

Success: Children need to have a range of rich and diverse positive reading experiences, be able to set meaningful goals for themselves, and recognise their growing success as readers.



Method

Drawing upon the six principles from the original school-based Love to Read programme, a short guide with activities and resources were created to easily embed these principles into library contexts. An online meeting and offline correspondence between researchers (n = 3) and library experts/professionals (n = 4) were used to ensure the knowledge, experience and expertise of all were drawn upon, and to ensure the guide and resources could be easily adopted into libraries.

Before the first meeting, the library experts/professionals were sent a first draft of the guide to prompt discussion (this included definitions of the principles, research related to each, and some suggested practices for libraries). During the first online meeting, considerable feedback was given, including orientating the research summaries more towards libraries and their essential role in

supporting children’s reading motivation and engagement, and different/additional practices to embed the principles into libraries. On the basis of this, considerable revisions were made to the first draft. The second draft was shared with the library experts/professionals, with guide and resource content divided in two, to ensure two library experts/professional could look in depth at the revised content (although everyone had the opportunity to look at all). Further feedback was provided, revisions were made and the third draft of the guide and resources were sent to all for final feedback. Some further revisions were made before the guide and resources were finalised and agreed among the team.

The principles underpinning the guide are based on reading motivation theory and research, and these principles, and related activities, have been evaluated in primary schools. Love to Read Libraries however, has not been evaluated. That said, it has been made available on our website, and is free to use for library staff. In addition to the guide, editable resources were created which can be printed and used independently by library visitors (i.e., children and their families) as it was recognised that library staff are typically unable to provide personalised support when children visit the library. In addition, two activities were created for school/class visits to the library (based on the choice and success principles) as these principles were considered optimal for this type of activity. These activities were written in detail, to ensure those with little/no experience of hosting school visits would be able to deliver them.

The guide, resources and activities can be found here: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/>

Summary

Love to Read Libraries was an extension to the Love to Read project and aimed to support our collective efforts to increase children’s reading motivation and engagement. Libraries and library staff are essential to support a love of reading among children – libraries provide children with access to a range of rich and diverse reading material, and library staff are ideally positioned to support children to develop a lifelong love of reading.

Acknowledgements

Love to Read Libraries (2023-2024) is an extension of the Love to Read project (2021-2023). The team involved in Love to Read Libraries included Professor Sarah McGeown (Principal Investigator, University of Edinburgh), Dr Charlotte Webber (Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Edinburgh) and Dr Nicola Currie (Lecturer, Edge Hill University) working alongside the following library experts and professionals: Robin Crawshaw (Reading Development, Lancashire Library Service), Catherine Lindow (Library Professional, Edinburgh City Council), Éadaoin Lynch (Research and Evaluation Manager, Scottish Book Trust), Sean McNamara (Director, Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals Scotland)

Funder

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. Visit www.nuffieldfoundation.org



Outputs

Webpage: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/lovetoread/libraries/>. This webpage includes the guide, all editable resources and activities for librarians and library staff.

Invited talks:

Libraries Connected (June, 2024). Libraries Connected represent all libraries across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The talk was recorded and can be accessed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqVDCIE0Zzk>

References

Clark, C. Picton, I., & Galway, M. (2023). Children and Young People's Reading in 2023. National Literacy Trust. Available here: https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Reading_trends_2023.pdf

Clark, C., & Teravainen-Goff, A. (2018). *Mental wellbeing, reading and writing*. National Literacy Trust. Available here: https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Mental_wellbeing_reading_and_writing_2017-18_-_final.pdf

Conradi, K., Jang, B. G., & McKenna, M. C. (2014). Motivation Terminology in Reading Research: A Conceptual Review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 26(1), 127–164. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-013-9245-z>

Eekhof, L. S., van Krieken, K., & Willems, R. M. (2022). Reading about minds: The social-cognitive potential of narratives. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 29(5), 1703–1718. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-022-02079-z>

- Lee, Y., Jang, B. G., & Conradi Smith, K. (2021). A Systematic Review of Reading Engagement Research: What Do We Mean, What Do We Know, and Where Do We Need to Go? *Reading Psychology, 42*(5), 540–576. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888359>
- McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., & Wilkinson, K. (2020). Understanding reading motivation across different text types: Qualitative insights from children. *Journal of Research in Reading, 43*(4), 597–608. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12320>
- McGeown, S. & Conradi-Smith, K. (2024). Reading engagement matters! A new scale to measure and support children’s engagement with books. *The Reading Teacher, 77*, 462-272. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2267>
- McGeown, S., & Wilkinson, K. (2021). *Inspiring and sustaining reading for pleasure in children and young people: A guide for teachers and school leaders*. UKLA Minibook.
- Mol, S. E., & Bus, A. G. (2011). To read or not to read: A meta-analysis of print exposure from infancy to early adulthood. *Psychological Bulletin, 137*(2), 267–296. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021890>
- Vezzali, L., Stathi, S., Giovannini, D., Capozza, D., & Trifiletti, E. (2015). The greatest magic of Harry Potter: Reducing prejudice: Harry Potter and attitudes toward stigmatized groups. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 45*(2), 105–121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12279>