University of Southampton

Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology

Title: Encouraging Reading for Pleasure: Widening the support could narrow the gap

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Abstract

While phonics instruction is proven to improve certain elements of reading, it is not clear how this contributes to reading comprehension; a key skill found in children who read for pleasure. Reading for pleasure is in decline despite its benefits to sociability, academic knowledge and reading achievement. Children need to be motivated to read for pleasure, and parents play a vital role in this. Interventions which involve parents such as Paired Reading can cause gains in reading achievement and strengthen the relationship between carer and child, but need to be properly implemented so that interactions use a dialogic style and create a positive climate around reading. Some families already practice more promote positive reading behaviours than others, so recommending a parent-child reading intervention may continue to exclude those families who tend not to access such practices for reasons such as language and culture barriers, reading difficulties and negative attitude toward reading. Parents could therefore benefit from literacy support too, developing their own skills alongside their children whilst learning how best to support their child, in the form of a family literacy programme. The potential contribution of an Educational Psychologist (EP) is considered throughout.

Encouraging Reading for Pleasure: Widening the Support Could Narrow the Gap

It has been said that "unless children have learned to read, the rest of the curriculum is a secret garden to which they will never enjoy access" (Department for Education [DfE], 2010, p. 43). Children's exposure to print has been shown account for a high proportion of variance in general academic and practical knowledge measures, even when variance associated with general cognitive ability was accounted for (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1993). It has been suggested that young adults with higher levels of literacy not only have higher occupational status, but are also more likely to participate in community activities, pursue a hobby, engage in physical fitness activities and be more politically active (Guthrie, Schafer, & Hutchinson, 1991).

The Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) looked at the reading habits of Year five pupils from 2001-2006 and has illustrated that children's reading performance in England has fallen significantly since 2001. Moreover, girls' reading performance is better than boys'; a trend which is seen across the world, but for England is slightly above the international average (Twist, Schagen, & Hodgson, 2007). In a recent research report for the National Literacy Trust, Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) found that one in three children do not have books of their own, compared to one in ten in 2005. Having their own books is linked to children's reading attainment; over 90% of children who had their own books read at or above the level expected for their age (Clark et al., 2011).

The PIRLS study has also revealed that children in England engage in reading for pleasure less frequently than children in other countries. What is more, the same study has reported a strong positive correlation between reading for pleasure and achievement in reading (Twist et al., 2007). In addition, enjoying reading and thinking that reading is cool

has been strongly linked with reading at or above age expected levels (Clark et al., 2011). In order to progress children's reading then, it seems that it would be beneficial encourage children to read for pleasure. Indeed, Kellett (2009) suggests that schools should create cultures which encourage reading for enjoyment as this could have a powerful impact on literacy.

Phonics instruction programmes have become more and more prevalent in schools and focus on establishing links between letters and sounds, teaching children to recognise individual high-frequency whole words by sight and also how to relate individual graphemes, or letters, to the phonemes, or sounds, that they represent (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). When children subsequently come across words in continuous passages of text, they will be able to decode the word using their phonics skills. As children progress, they will learn additional high-frequency words and grapheme–phoneme correspondences out of context in order that they can read more difficult words and access more challenging texts (Solity & Vousden, 2009).

Phonics has been given privileged status in the UK's National Literacy Strategy and, before this, the Primary National Strategy (Eyres, 2007), based on a body of evidence which suggests that phonics instruction is the most effective method in teaching children how to read. A meta-analysis by the National Reading Panel in America (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl & Willows, 2001) has found that systematic phonics reading instruction helps children to read more effectively, particularly in first grade and under, than non-systematic or non-phonics reading instruction. Phonics was found to improve word decoding, text comprehension, word reading and, for children in or below Grade 1, spelling in children from low and middle socio-economic backgrounds, children with reading difficulties and even younger children deemed at risk of developing reading difficulties (Ehri et al., 2001). This research is supported by a recent UK government funded review of language and literacy attainment

from early years to Key Stage 2, which has found that teacher ratings of progress in phonics were strongly related to reading and writing attainments, particularly in Year 1 assessments (Snowling, Hulme, Bailey, Stothard, & Lindsay, 2011). The government currently offers up to £3,000 of match funding for schools to purchase phonics resources in accordance with this body of evidence (DfE, 2011a).

Although the government's white paper The Importance of Teaching (2010) cites the sources of their assertion that systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective way of teaching children to read as both the National Reading Panel review (Ehri et al., 2001) and a research review of the use of phonics in teaching writing, spelling and reading (Torgerson, Brooks & Hall, 2006), the two are not entirely concurrent with each other. The Torgerson et al. (2006) review finds no evidence to suggest that phonics instruction boosts comprehension or should be used to teach spelling as well as reading (Torgerson et al., 2006). Furthermore, a recent press release from the DfE has revealed that of the 8,963 Year 1 children who took the pilot phonics screening check in June 2011, only 32% reached their age expected levels (DfE, 2011b).

In 2006, the government's Primary Literacy Strategy (Department for Education & Skills [DfES], 2006) was updated to include teaching phonics systematically, discretely and faithfully to the programmes, but to embed this within a broad language curriculum. Careful assessment of children's progress is recommended as they "move from learning to read towards reading to learn, engaging with diverse texts for purpose and pleasure." (DfES, 2006, p. 7). The Primary Literacy Strategy does not make clear exactly what happens along the "journey from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'" (DfES, 2006 p.8) apart from that somehow children should become fluent readers "with the skills to access, engage with and enjoy a wide range of texts" (DfES, 2006, p. 8) which, later, are suggested as being able to "secure the alphabetic code, become confident in decoding and recognising words, and begin

to read for purpose and pleasure." (DfES, 2006, p. 49). There have been claims in the media that phonics instruction alone does not build a relationship with reading, including the headline "Gove's obsession with phonics will turn children off reading" (Garner, 2011). The Primary Literacy Strategy does, however, recognise another element to reading; reading comprehension, which it describes as a lifelong activity (DfES, 2006). Sénéchal (2006) has found that children who read for pleasure tend to have good reading comprehension skills. Perhaps, then, it is unclear how learning phonics can help children to read for pleasure because of the key role that reading comprehension has to play in this process. An EP would be able to provide insight into this issue by investigating the impact of phonics on reading comprehension and, in turn, reading for pleasure. It would also be useful to know how phonological training influences children's attitudes towards reading books for pleasure.

It has been suggested that while phonological training is good and reliably improves phonological awareness and reading skills, it is not sufficient alone to teach reading (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1999), nor will it make competent or enthusiastic readers (Eyres, 2007). Teaching correspondences could mainly be used to establish the principle of phonemes in children's minds so that children have the skills to eventually start working things out for themselves (Eyres, 2007).

Cox & Guthrie (2001) posit that reading for pleasure is an autonomous, self-directed behaviour which, self-determination theory suggests (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991, as cited in Cox & Guthrie, 2001), will be positively influenced by motivational variables. Their study found that Grade 3 readers for pleasure were influenced by previous achievement and motivation for reading and by Grade 5, readers for pleasure became further still dependent on motivation. In summary, they found that strategy use predicted school reading, whereas motivation predicted reading for enjoyment (Cox & Guthrie, 2001).

An important factor influencing children's motivation for reading is their parents. Parental involvement in the form of interest in the child at home is a major contributor to educational outcomes for children (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). A comprehensive literature review has revealed that the underlying factors affecting levels of parental involvement include parents' values and educational aspirations, which in turn influence enthusiasm for their child's learning and parenting style. These impact on the student's motivation for learning, self-perception as a learner and educational aspirations (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

When teachers interact with children in a group context, they are less able to personalise questions and feedback to individual children, whereas parents may be in a much better position to be able to do this when they are interacting one-to-one with their child (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Parental involvement has been shown to be as effective as, if not more so than, teacher input for children of preschool age, and involvement in the form of shared-reading may compensate for times when children have not attended preschool due to their low socio-economic status (Whitehurt & Lonigan, 1998). In fact, Blanden (2006) has found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to improve their own economic position in the future if their parents took an interest in their schooling and, in particular, if they read with them.

Simply modelling reading for pleasure can communicate a preference for reading which, over time, can pass from parents to their children (Mullen, 2010). In addition, parental reading example and instruction can have positive effects on children's language development, particularly later on in primary school (Kloosterman, Notten, Tolsma, & Kraaykamp, 2011). Despite evidence showing what a key role parents play in reading development, research by the Book Trust found that only 8% of parents and carers saw themselves as the single biggest influence on their child's reading (Book Trust, 2009).

Paired Reading is a short, regular and structured intervention which can be carried out between parents and children. First, the adult and child read together at the same pace and the adult corrects any errors the child makes by repeating the word correctly so that the child can copy. The extension phase occurs when the child feels ready to read a passage alone, and makes a non-verbal signal which the adult recognises as an instruction to be silent, for which the child is praised. Parents are also encouraged to talk with their children about the story, the pictures and what the child thinks might happen next, taking care to listen rather than doing all of the talking (Topping, 1995).

A key feature of Paired Reading is that the child chooses the reading material, based on the premise that children learn better from reading things they like (Topping, 1995). It is also specified that children should not be made to participate if they would rather be doing something else. According to self-determination theory, the autonomous, self-directed element of this intervention may influence children's motivation to participate in reading. In addition, the parent or carer in this intervention may be able to provide the relatedness necessary for greater internalisation of this school-related behaviour (Ryan, Stiller & Lynch, 1994, as cited in Ryan & Deci, 2000).

As well as promoting reading as an enjoyable activity, children experience gains in building vocabulary, comprehension and word recognition via the talk which accompanies shared reading experiences (Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein & Serpell, 2001). Sénéchal implies that there is a causal relationship saying that "shared reading can enhance children's vocabulary, which in turn, will be a strong predictor of children's comprehension in later grades" (Sénéchal, 2006, p. 80).

A review of parental involvement in literacy has found that Paired Reading seems to be more effective than passively listening to a child read. Furthermore, it is described as

simple, inexpensive in time and resources and not age restricted (Close, 2001). Topping (1995) has reported that children made gains in reading accuracy and reading comprehension with boys making higher gains than girls. Over 70% of parents reported that their children showed greater confidence when reading, read more widely, enjoyed reading more and made fewer mistakes. In addition children have been found to read more fluently, self-correct more often and improve their phonics skills (Topping, 1995), despite this intervention not involving the teaching of phonological techniques for word decoding per se. In fact, during shared reading experiences, parents tend not to use the opportunity to teach decoding skills (Baker et al., 2001).

Talking about the content of a story can help children to improve their level of vocabulary (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), but also builds a positive emotional climate (Baker et al., 2001). Martin and Jackson (2002) have found that looked after children, a group at particularly high risk of academic failure, can progress with their reading using a Paired Reading intervention, but also form stronger child-carer relationships as a result of the scheme. It is imperative that the guidance given for carers' interactions during an intervention such as Paired Reading is followed, however. It is not enough to simply ask parents to engage in shared reading with their children to experience gains such as these, since certain interaction styles have positive and negative effects on children's reading behaviour and subsequent achievement.

A study looked at the behaviour of caregivers of high-risk toddlers who had scored either high or low on a measure of expressive language during a shared reading activity. Caregivers of the low-scoring toddlers were found to exert controlling behaviour, failing to interpret the wishes and ability levels of their children. Examples of this included caregivers meeting children's attempts to physically interact with the book with discipline and repeatedly asking questions that were impossible for the child to answer. These behaviours

are not likely to lead to intrinsic motivation for reading with caregivers; this was demonstrated when caregivers took control during reading and the children quickly lost interest (Cross, Fletcher & Spiers Neumeister, 2011). When parents teach their children word decoding strategies during shared reading experiences, this may undermine the positive emotional outcomes of the interaction, even beyond the benefits arising from talking about the meaning of text (Baker et al., 2001).

Considering this evidence, it seems clear that advising parents to read more with their children may cause more harm than good if not accompanied by sound guidance on how to support children most effectively and create a positive affective atmosphere around reading. Although teaching children word-decoding strategies helps them with word recognition in the short term, a positive emotional climate around reading may benefit children long-term since they tend to pick more challenging texts and gain higher reading achievement in the future, research suggests (Baker et al., 2001).

An EP could help by teaching a more positive dialogic reading style to parents or carers, which involves asking open ended questions, praising children's participation in telling the story and expanding the child's answers by modelling more sophisticated responses (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). This style of interaction may be only the result of brief instruction, for example by videotape (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), but is shown to increase active participation of the child in the reading session and promote early vocabulary skills. Furthermore this reading style was found to persist in parents over time up to two years (Huebener & Payne, 2010).

Even when recommending a structured reading intervention such as Paired Reading to parents, it is necessary to consider the already existing gap in uptake of positive reading behaviours. It has already been shown that interactions between carers and children in shared

reading experiences was more positive when mothers were better educated and from middle-income, rather than low-income homes (Baker et al., 2001), suggesting that mothers of low-income families are already at a disadvantage. It has been estimated that one in five parents in London have literacy difficulties meaning that they may struggle to read confidently with their children (Jama & Dugdale, 2011). Some parents may potentially be excluded from interventions because of their own reading difficulties, negative experiences of school or language and cultural barriers (Close, 2001; Nakagawa, 2000).

By their own admission, Clark et al. (2011) have crudely summarised that "young people who have books of their own are more likely to be girls, in KS2 or KS3, socio-economically better off, from White or Mixed ethnic backgrounds and without a special educational need." (Clark et al., 2011, p. 4). Children who are eligible for free school meals almost never read outside school and may not have access to reading materials at home (Clark & Akerman, 2006). Access to resources and academic achievement have been found to be negatively related (Neuman & Celano, 2001)

It has been found that mothers' reading is positively associated with girls' reading and fathers' reading is associated with boys' reading (Mullan, 2010), but research carried out by the Book Trust charity suggests that far more mothers of 4-5 year olds say that they read the most with their child than fathers; 67% compared to only 17% (Book Trust, 2009). This may contribute to the fact that overall boys do not read as well as girls (Twist et al., 2007), so including fathers in any reading intervention is likely to help to address this gap. An EP would be in a good position to communicate these issues to educational settings, so that they understand the need to persist in offering and adapting their interventions towards the most vulnerable families.

Looking at the research, it seems that in order to begin to overcome the risk of exclusion of those families most in need from parent-child reading interventions, it will be imperative to work very closely with the parents themselves, in order to address any barriers they are experiencing. The evidence suggests that these may include reading difficulties, lack of confidence in interacting positively whilst reading with their chid, difficulty accessing resources, differences in attitude toward reading or learning in general for cultural or other reasons, language barriers or difficulty in having their views recognised within the school. A successful reading intervention should encourage fathers' participation as much as possible and will need to take into account for the differences in reading enjoyment experienced by different groups of children, such as boys and girls, making sure that the scheme is tailored to include reading materials which most appeal to these groups. It could be the case that a family literacy programme may be able to address some of these issues.

Whilst Paired Reading includes family involvement, family literacy programmes have the specific goal of helping parents to also improve their outcomes (Close, 2001) with adults and children learning together (Brooks, Pahl, Pollard & Rees, 2008), thus improving the literacy skills of whole family units (Tett & Crowther, 1998). A review of the literature around parental involvement with literacy illustrates that parents and children can learn together in family literacy programmes, helping all parties develop skills and gain confidence in literacy (Close, 2001). Successful family literacy programmes value the existing home culture, build on the strengths of family members and offer equal access to all members of all families of all kinds (Topping & Wolfendale, 1995). A meta-review of research into the effectiveness of family literacy programmes has found that as well as building stronger home-school links and getting help to support their children, parents may experience wider benefits such as improvements in mothers' child-rearing practices; parents' employment;

parents' self-confidence; and parents being generally more involved with their children's schools (Brooks et al., 2008).

The government has implemented policy and funding changes in the last decade or so which recognise that family literacy plays a key role in increasing social inclusion and reducing the intergenerational transfer of poverty. Family literacy is also seen to support government initiatives on reducing crime and improving employability and health. In order to engage families at risk in learning and qualification achievement, £30m was allocated over 3 years from 2008 to 2011 (Swain et al., 2009). Although this funding has now ended, a £210million budget for Adult Safeguarded Learning has since been secured which the Skills Funding Agency report that they will use to fund family literacy, building on the legacy that has been created (Skills Funding Agency, 2011).

The legacy is far from perfect, however. Tett and Crowther (1998) suggest that family literacy programmes can privilege "middle-class, school-based literacies" (Tett & Crowther, 1998, p.449) over the literacies of working-class communities and their associated cultures. In addition, a review of family literacy programmes by Swain et al. (2009) has observed that schools have not always provided appropriate accommodation, furniture, ICT access or released pupils from classes during numeracy and literacy hours. Although an EP may not personally gather parents' views regarding these types of problem, as well as parent preference for when and where a programme would ideally take place, they could emphasise the importance of regularly doing so and analyse the results to ensure that parental engagement in the programme is as high as possible.

For a family literacy programme to value the different purposes and meanings attached to reading and in the range of communities and cultures in which it could be helpful, it must make use of a range of resources from the homes themselves (Tett & Crowther,

1998). Finding that most children's reading came from popular cultural and televisual texts, Marsh and Thompson (2001) created media boxes based on children's informal reading habits in their homes which could be borrowed from nursery. By using these in their own homes, parents and children were reportedly enthusiastic and confident to engage in reading, finding that they were motivated to engage with the media and popular cultural texts (Marsh & Thompson, 2001). Materials included in media boxes could take into account what gender differences exist in what types of materials are read outside of class. For example, Clark (2011) has found that amongst 8-17 year olds, more girls read technology-based materials, magazines, fiction, song lyrics and poems than boys, whereas more boys than girls read newspapers, comics and manuals. An EP could encourage educational settings to gain information about children's informal reading practices at home and in their communities, in order that the aims for developing children's literacy skills for their parents and educationalists can be more closely aligned (Marsh & Thompson, 2001).

One of the criticisms of family literacy programmes is that there are currently not the systems in place for measuring the impact on parents' skills, children's skills and parent's ability to support their children (Lamb, 2009). Similarly, Close (2001) recommends that longitudinal evidence be sought to understand the long term impact of family literacy, which in turn is associated with analysis of cost-effectiveness of literacy interventions. It is also necessary to compare family literacy programmes with other strategies which include parental involvement, such as Paired Reading. Further evidence is needed also on how family literacy influences boys versus girls and whether or not these are related to male or female carers being involved in the programme (Close, 2001). An EP is well placed as has the skills appropriate to carry out research that could address all of these issues as they are familiar with working alongside outside agencies and are situated between parents, schools and children.

Teachers want to produce readers, not simply children who can read (Edwards, 2008). Reading for enjoyment is a major contributor to children's reading achievement and world knowledge (Cox & Guthrie, 2001). Reading for pleasure is influenced by motivation and parents have a key role to play here, however in some families it is that case that barriers are preventing parents and children enjoying reading together. These barriers may not be fully addressed by phonics or shared-reading interventions, but good practice such as including autonomy to increase children's motivation and using positive interaction could be taken from an intervention such as Paired Reading. These barriers may be addressed by a family literacy programme which is tailored to individual families and their circumstances. To be successful, such a programme needs to be based around reading materials which are culturally relevant, preferably from the home or community. A family literacy intervention such as this needs to be monitored closely and continue to be altered according to the needs and attitudes of the family so that, rather than the same cycle of poverty being allowed to continue from generation to generation, we persist until it breaks (Kellet, 2009). (3999)

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