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Do boys' attitudes to reading differ to those of girls? A study into the views of reading within a year three class

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Abstract

Differences in reading attainment between the genders have been widely reported, whilst less research has been carried out on gender differences as regards to interest towards reading. Within a sample of two classes of year three children, information was collected to establish any differences in the attitudes towards reading that may exist between boys and girls. This included looking at areas such as reading frequency and preferred literature, which showed that whilst interest in reading was generally good and reading was seen as non-gender specific, varying text preferences and levels of home reading were revealed. Data of this kind allowed for general conclusions to be drawn and therefore recommendations to aid the prevention of negative factors.

Rationale

Reading is at the centre of the curriculum as not only essential to the core subject English, but also the majority of the other subjects, even in mathematics to understand and answer word problems. This is underlined by OECD's claim (2002 cited in Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011 p.7), that reading for pleasure is the single most useful guide for the success of a child in the future and also the suggestion that reading can be of benefit to general knowledge and understanding of other cultures (Meek, 1991 cited in Lockwood 2009, p.10). Similarly, it is maintained that a failure to acquire literacy can lead to issues further on in life (NLT (National Literacy Trust, 2012). The implication is therefore, that it is highly important that teachers ensure that their pupils meet the necessary levels as regards to reading. Despite this, there is sustained evidence to show that on average, the reading abilities of boys throughout both primary and secondary education are consistently inferior to that of their female counterparts, (NLT, 2012; Logan and Johnston, 2010), and represent a gap much larger than in maths or science (NLT, 2012). This pattern also extends worldwide, with Mullis et al. (2007 cited in Logan and Johnston, 2010 p.175) highlighting that reading comprehension levels in 10 year olds in over 35 countries showed advantage to girls. Moreover, evidence suggests that this may be a long term issue, ongoing for over sixty years (NLT, 2012). Consequently, an analysis of this in order to assess its cause and also techniques that may prevent or address the issue is of paramount importance.

The CCL (Canadian Council of Learning) (2009) explained that there are numerous factors that contribute to reading ability and progress of children; one that is particularly noted is the attitude that the child has towards the text that they are reading and to reading in general. Whilst McGeown et al. (2015) explain that there are numerous definitions for attitudes towards reading, these all share the idea of the level of enjoyment shown towards reading. The suggestion is that a good attitude to reading can be more beneficial than both the amount of reading done (Wang and Guthrie, 2004 cited in Logan and Johnston, 2010 p.177) and having parents with a well-paid career (OECD, 2002 cited in Lockwood, 2009 p.9). Evidently then, this issue can potentially have a significant impact on the development of young readers

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and as a result will be the focus of this research project. My own experience in schools has revealed that, generally, reluctant readers have more often been boys than girls, as have those with low reading attainment. The aim of this research is to explore the potential differences in reading attitudes in boys and girls, the reasons for these and also suggestions in order to address the issue. Lockwood (2009) claimed that the teacher is the most important factor in ensuring pupils' positive attitudes towards reading. Therefore, by conducting this research I hope to ensure that my future practice is well informed and that children taught by me are given equal opportunity for enjoyment of reading, irrespective of gender, listed as a priority by Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011).

Literature review

The importance of positive reading attitudes

Krashen (2004 cited in Lockwood, 2009 p.10) explained that most things that are beneficial tend not to be pleasant but that seeing reading as pleasant is the best way for it to be beneficial. This is supported by McGeown et al. (2015) who stated that numerous longitudinal and cross sectional studies have found a positive correlation between positive reading attitudes and reading skills, whilst Ross et al. (2006 cited in Lockwood, 2009 p.10), declared that those that become competent readers are those that enjoy reading and choose themselves to engage with it. This is typified by the evidence found by Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011), which showed that 97% of those that said they enjoyed reading were either at or above the expected reading level for their age and that those who did not were eleven times more likely to be below their expected reading level. It is understood that the benefits of engagement in reading and the increased reading competency it offers include a number of positive effects regarding academic achievement. Logan and Johnston (2010) highlighted that motivation has been shown to predict reading comprehension performance whilst it has also been shown that reading outside of school shows strong correlation to progress in reading attainment (Ofsted 2012). Moreover, Pabion (2014) showed evidence of a project that by increasing enjoyment in reading, reading attainment was improved as a result, with those involved improving by an average of 1.3 sub levels over a ten-week period, compared to 0.85 in those that did not participate. Whilst the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2002 cited in Lockwood, 2009 p.9) support the idea that reading attainment is ameliorated by positive reading attitudes, they also suggest that it improves other areas of school work, particularly writing ability. One prominent idea is that through interaction with literature, children are likely to assume similar good practice in their writing (NLT, 2012; Kent County Council, 2004; Barrs, 2000). Furthermore, the suggestion is that implementation of schemes to improve reading attitudes may not solely improve the engagement of children, as they can also positively impact on the teacher involved too (Lockwood 2009).

Research on reading attitudes

Ortileb (2015) stressed that negative comments from children regarding their reading ability are frequent in schools across the world, implying that reading attitudes represent a global issue. As regards the United Kingdom specifically, Lockwood (2009) concludes that British primary school children display a deficit regarding their attitudes towards reading when compared in global studies. Despite this, Lockwood (2009) found that teachers generally concluded that their children had positive attitudes towards reading, which was proved initially correct as 87% of children said it is important or very important to read well, however the results for spending their own time reading were indifferent as 53% stated libraries as an okay or boring way to spend time and 50% said reading was an ok or boring use of time. This is reflected by the findings of OECD (2011 cited in Lockwood, 2012 p. 229), that 40% of children tested were not reading for pleasure at all. Lockwood (2009) explained that the importance the children involved in his study had for reading related to achievement in SATs assessments, progressing into different schools and getting a decent profession as an adult, which could link to the increasing

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number of children without books at home with Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) illustrating that this figure had risen from 1/10 in 2005 and 1/3 in 2010, insinuating that children will enjoy reading in school but not choose to do so at home.

As regards to differing attitudes between boys and girls, McGeown et al. (2015 p.390), Clark (2012), and Guthrie (2009) have all presented data to show that boys generally have worse attitudes to reading, whilst it is also claimed that this is evident in the children themselves, with boys' willingness to learn to read being self-confessedly lower than girls' (Clark, 2011). Moreover, it appears that much like attainment differences between boys and girls, international evidence (PIRLS, 2001 cited in McGeown et al, 2015 p.390; PISA, 2009 cited in NLT, 2012 p.11) showed that a gender gap as regards to reading attitudes is present globally, irrespective of the culture or language or education system within which they were formed. Furthermore, Lundberg et al. (2012 cited in Wolter, Braun and Hannover, 2015 p.2) explained that these gender differences can exist even before starting school whilst Casey (2008; 2009 cited in Sarroub and Pernicek, 2014) claims that a cycle of negative experience can ensue for struggling readers, resulting in frustration towards teachers, structures in school and relations at home, leading to further difficulties in reading. This epitomises the need to address any problems and ensure that children can engage with reading.

Suggested reasons for poor attitudes and the gender gap

McGeown et al., (2015), suggested that boys' motivation may even play a bigger role in their development of reading skills than in girls. This idea that the difference between boys' and girls' reading may stem from biological differences is one proposed by NLT (2012) and supported by Logan and Johnston (2010), who outlined evidence showing different brain patterns of activation between the genders when reading and completing language related tasks. Furthermore, Johnston and Watson (2005 cited in Logan and Johnston, 2010 p.176) claim that systematic phonics is favourable to boys as it does not rely on the ability to concentrate for long periods of time, which NLT (2012) declare is often lacking in boys. However, it is argued that such a view can be dangerous, (NLT, 2012) spawning the idea of a futile battle against nature and perhaps causing boys to become the self-fulfilling prophecies that Wolter, Braun and Hannover (2015) say that they can become if stereotyped as non-readers. This is especially dangerous considering the evidence that boys are not always typical and do not all struggle with reading (NLT, 2012).

It has been suggested that an influential impact on reading attitudes may be the attitude that the child has towards the way in which it is taught (NLT, 2012). As alluded to earlier, boys often prefer different ways of learning, such as challenges, direct instrumentation and interactive teaching (PLRS, 2015; Heron, 2003 cited in Sarroub and Pernicek, 2014 p.30; NLT 2012), mainly because they tend to be less organised and less able to concentrate for as long as girls (NLT, 2012). Therefore, failure to meet these needs may result in loss of interest from the boy, disengaging him from reading. NLT (2012) concluded this to be the case, explaining that there is too much focus on the techniques of reading being taught and on the type of reading done which Sarroub and Pernicek (2014) say is over emphasised by some teachers. Furthermore, Mckool and Gespass (2009) explained that reluctant and struggling readers, who Logan and Johnston (2010) say are more likely to be male, tend to receive more intervention regarding skill whilst their competent reading counterparts are given more time to read for pleasure, cited by Ofsted (2012) as vital in building a love of reading. The implications of this are that the child only reads for academic purposes, rarely for pleasure, potentially leading to what Gallagher (2009, p2), termed 'readicide': the focus on progress and standards in reading causing the destruction or stunting of reading enjoyment.

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Oakhill and Petrides (2007) said that students who see a topic as interesting are more likely to view the book in which it is contained in a similar way, and continue reading it. For that reason, if, as professed, reading motivation plays a bigger role in boys (McGeown et al. 2015) the choice of text could be vastly influential. Ainley, Hidi and Bernhoff (2002 cited in Oakhill and Petrides, 2007 p.224), looked at interest in text and persistence to read, finding that girls showed bigger interest in all texts and were also more likely to continue even with those that they were not overly interested in. As a result, as is suggested by Ainley and Hidi (2002 cited in Gillespie and Deacon, 2010 p.31), the level of interest in the text could be highly impactful for boys during comprehension assessments. Oakhill and Petrides (2007) report that boys reading comprehension SATs scores were 14% better in 1999 with a factual text about spiders than in 1998, a fictional text about evacuees. Whilst those that completed the two exams were entirely different children, Oakhill and Petrides (2007) conducted their own study, with 32 children from a private school and found that boys did better with the 1999 paper than 1998, whilst their questionnaires found that 13 out of 16 boys preferred the text on spiders, therefore evidencing the impact on boys' success text type can have.

Pabion (2014) reported that boys generally prefer different genres of books to girls, deemed to consist of factual texts, magazines and comics (Clark 2012; 2011; 2010; Merisuo-Storm 2006). Whilst it was argued by Merisuo-Storm (2006) that poems appeal to no pupils, this was a study conducted in Finland and is contradicted by Clark (2012; 2011; 2010) who lists poetry, along with fiction, romance, adventure and plays, as genres preferred by girls. It is revealed that those favoured by boys are often not classed as traditional school reading (Clark, 2012; Merisuo-Storm, 2006) and in fact those who, at home, read literature commonly associated with girls such as that above, often perform better as regards to reading attainment, compared to those that read stereotypically male genres (Clark, Woodley and Lewis 2011). This may explain a study in the USA (Worthy, Moorman and Turner, 1999 cited in CCL, 2009 p.4), which found that books appealing to boys were only in one third of classrooms with teachers viewing them as inappropriate reading. Furthermore, teachers' selection of books could be subconsciously effected and consequently detrimental because of their own views as NLT (2012) explained that a large scale survey of teachers asking them to suggest six authors, found only one author who wrote primarily for boys mentioned. A further proposal is that primary school teachers, who tend to be female, choose books that they prefer, books that interest girls (NLT 2012; Worthy, Moorman and Turner, 1999 cited in CCL, 2009 p.4), in the process potentially neglecting books that would appeal to boys. Furthermore, it is suggested that boys frequently opt for texts linking to their own masculine identity (Love and Hamston, 2003 cited in Sarroub and Pernicek, 2014 p.29), a notion supported by Sarroub and Pernicek's (2014) case study of a boy who sees reading and himself as a reader positively, through seeing his father who reads similar texts to him as a male reading role model.

Put forward is the idea that boys may have built a perception that reading is for girls and therefore choose not to spend time on it over other activities (NLT, 2012). This stereotype is one explored by Wolter, Braun and Hannover (2015) who suggested that boys are less motivated in pre-school and behind in reading competence in year one if their pre-school teacher held gender stereotypes, whilst girls were found to be unaffected by teacher role. Alarmingly therefore, It has been found that holding views of this kind can result in children rejecting reading because of its feminine reputation and interacting through this rejection, a notion supported by NLT(2012) and Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011), who highlighted the negative impact that this has on attainment. The implication is that teachers' own views can heavily influence the development of the boys in their class as NLT (2012) found strong evidence that those who viewed reading as for girls performed worse than those who did not.

Potential solutions

Lockwood (2009) said that teachers play the biggest role in improving children's attitudes towards reading, whilst McKool and Gespass (2009) listed them as second only to parents. Regardless, it is clear that teachers have a large impact, meaning that, as highlighted by Sarroub and Pernicek (2014), they must find ways to make children want to read. Gallagher (2009) explains that awareness is paramount when constructing tasks as boys are shown to prefer different ways of learning, (Pabion, 2014; Heron 2003 cited in Sarroub and Pernicek 2014 p.30; NLT 2012). This could also mean introducing more topics led by the interests of the children, something that NLT (2012) claim has the widespread support of teachers, such as the use of popular culture like that of football used successfully by Pabion (2014). This evidences the fact that making reading more fun remains at the centre of the issue. A study in America highlighted a successful scheme called 'FVR' which helped to motivate children by removing book reports, vocab checks, frequent questioning and the necessity to stick with a book that they are not interested in (Krashen, 2004 cited in Lockwood, 2009 pg.10). Lockwood (2009) suggests that reader of the week is a useful tool, representing the use of goals and rewards which is widely supported (Ortileb 2015; NLS 2014; Kent County Council 2004).

The NLT (2012) presented the idea that the gender gap is not only a result of the way that children are taught to read, whilst Wolter, I & Braun, E & Hannover, B. (2015) emphasised the need for teachers to be sensitive about their own views. This relates to the idea of ensuring that reading is not viewed as feminine. Although it was suggested that more male teachers would help, there is no real evidence to say that this would work (NLT, 2012; CCL, 2009), male reading role models like parents and those utilised in Pabion (2014) are advocated instead (NLT, 2012).

Consideration also needs to be taken regarding the choice of reading material, as Cole (2002, cited in Merisuo-Storm, 2006 p.112) explained that these need to fit the children's interests as well as their ability and genre preference. Whilst it has been argued that more modern and interactive ways of engaging children should be used (Kent county council, 2004), which could involve the use of E-readers, which were found to be supported by teachers, with a suggestion that they could improve children's engagement, with reluctant male readers highlighted as one of the groups to benefit most (Goodwyn, 2014).

Methodology

The sample and focus

This research was carried out in the two year three classes of one school in the North of England at which the 'proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is almost twice the national average' (Ofsted 2014, p.3), in order to minimise the impacts of age and socio-economic background which can have an effect (Clark, Woodley and Lewis 2011; Clark 2011). Following findings from the literature review, questions were focused on collecting data about their feelings towards reading and also potential reasons, specifically those relating to gender stereotype, type of books, and the idea of academic reading as opposed to reading for fun.

The intended data

Groves et al. (2009) claimed that the selection of the data collection method to be used is paramount and impactful. This project saw the use of questionnaires, shown, completed in the appendix and distributed to the children involved, asking for their feelings towards reading and allowing them to withdraw if they wished to do so. This mirrored a method used successfully in similar studies such as (Pabion, 2014) and (Lockwood, 2009) which gathered information from children about their reading frequency and the extent to which they liked or disliked reading, issues also pursued through this

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research. Moreover, it is argued that this method has the potential to produce useful data that is both quantitative and qualitative (Walliman, 2011) with Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2012) describing it as suitable for obtaining statistical data as well as opinions. As the aim was to gather information on whether children liked or disliked reading as well as potential reasons why, it was paramount that both types of data could be provided for. As a result, the questionnaires followed a similar structure to those used by Lockwood (2012) and (Gambrel et al. 1996 cited in Lockwood, 2012 p.234), using multiple choice questions as well as those offering an opportunity for children to express their reasons.

Suitability to scale of group

It is explained that questionnaires are useful when looking at particular groups and comparing them in order to make conclusions that make generalisations (Wilkinson, 2002), such as comparing boys and girls on the basis of their reading attitudes. Although questionnaires are typically inflexible (Walliman, 2011) and this is often seen as detrimental, this inflexibility proved useful as it meant that results could be directly easily compared, as was the aim of this research. Furthermore, as the study sought to make generalisations about boys and girls, a relatively large sample was required in order to improve the extent to which it was representative (Salkind, 2011). The use of questionnaires subsequently aided this because as is explained by Bucknall, (2012), they are likely to receive a much bigger response than other techniques such as interviews. In addition, it is maintained that this response rate is often further extended by a promise of anonymity such as was given on this questionnaire (Walker, 2010), which saw no space provided for the children to enter their name as well as a request given asking them not to provide it. Furthermore, as there were time constraints on the completion of this research it was vital that not only a large amount of participants were involved but that the questionnaires were collected within a short space of time. As, unlike interviews, questionnaires do not require you to speak to everybody individually, the use of questionnaires proved to be highly time effective (Walliman, 2011). This allowed for the distribution of the questionnaire between two different classes, with the potential for sixty responses.

Suitability to children

It is claimed that questionnaires, because of their reliance on the participants' ability to read, can prove to be unsuitable for those with poor literacy skills (Wilkinson, 2002). This issue was exacerbated when the topic of this study was considered, as those that struggle with reading are often those that display a bad attitude towards it and also tend to become frustrated with it (Casey, 2008; 2009 cited in Sarroub and Pernicek, 2014 p.28), meaning that they may not have completed the questionnaire properly and therefore impacted on the validity of the data obtained. In order to address this, and ensure the understanding of the study, the children who chose to complete the questionnaire were read the questions and available answers by a teacher independent from the study, in a similar approach to that used by Lockwood (2012) and McGeown, Norgate and Warhurst (2012). As a result, although (Oliver, 2010) pointed out that, unlike interviews, the questions in questionnaires cannot be clarified potentially leading to useless data through misunderstanding, this was not an issue during this project as the teacher offered an option of clarification.

Potential issues

It has been expressed that the accuracy of the data obtained from interviews can be influenced by the relationship the interviewer and interviewee share (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) as participants may provide answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear or fail to give a true account of their feelings because it may impact on their relationship. Although this research saw the use of questionnaires only, this issue of an impact stemming from the relationship shared with the children involved remained. It was a possibility that the children may have felt under pressure to respond positively about reading, in order to avoid getting into trouble or upsetting the researcher. It is stated by

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Ortlieb (2015) that reluctant readers are not one dimensional but can be categorised using their behaviours, one of these categories shows children who pretend to be confident and enjoy reading. This shows therefore that children may simulate an interest in reading and therefore potentially feel embarrassed about revealing their indifference towards it. This may result from the fact that as Shaffer (2008) explains children often do not like to admit something that is likely to be viewed negatively and perhaps punished, meaning children may not give truthful accounts even when it the face to face element is removed.

Actions taken

These issues were approached in two main ways, firstly the children were promised anonymity which, as claimed by Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink (2004), increased the likelihood of receiving truthful responses and also allowed for the children to express feelings that they may have been too embarrassed to otherwise reveal (Oppenheim, 2000). Moreover, the use of the independent teacher allowed for an explanation to be given to the children, assuring them that the truth was required and more useful, regardless of whether it was positive about reading or not. Furthermore, it has been found that by providing children with relevance to their work, such as an explanation of why it was being done, they are likely to work more creatively, expressing themselves (Craft et al., 2014), something that was paramount for useful results in this study.

Questionnaire design

There is widespread support for the idea that the way in which a questionnaire is devised can be instrumental in the success or failure of a project (Walliman 2010; Wilkinson 2002). In addition, Farrell (2011) explained that the approach taken when dealing with children is required to be highly sensitive because of their role as vulnerable participants. It was therefore of heightened importance that due care was taken in order to ensure that the questionnaire was appropriate for the children. (Hopkins, 1993 cited in Conner and Southworth, 2012 p.71), said that questionnaires with children need to be simplified with straightforward questions, containing symbols, such as smiley faces. This approach was evident throughout, as six out of eight questions asked required no writing at all whilst the questionnaire itself was colourful and contained smiley faces which provided opportunities to colour in. Two of the questions used saw the use of Likert scales in order to assess the children's attitudes towards reading generally and reading in school. It was decided that these were to contain only four options rather than five, as Kulas, Stachowski and Haynes (2008) stated that in Likert scales with an odd number of options, people tend to pick the middle or indifferent option. This meant that the children that were non-committal had the choice between either liking or disliking reading a bit and as is argued by Lavrakas (2008) were almost forced to commit to a decision. However, it is explained by Albaum et al. (2007 cited in Brace, 2008 p.75) that the use of the four option system produces results more representative than those with five.

Findings

Response

Hargreaves (2003) explained that time is precious in schools and Ward (2011) stressed that when time constraints are imposed, English and Maths are often the preferred use of time because of the assessment in these areas. This meant that only one of the two classes to whom it was issued, completed the questionnaire. Furthermore, for various reasons such as absence and also acting on the right to withdraw, five of the class who responded to the questionnaire, did not take up the offer of completing it, guided by the independent teacher. This meant that twenty-five questionnaires were completed, whilst on some questions, 'item non response' (Biemer and Lyberg, 2003, p.43) was present, with children choosing not to answer certain questions.

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Attitudes to reading in general

Global studies have often claimed that British students' attitudes to reading are comparatively lower than other countries (Lockwood, 2012, 2009; OECD 2002), predicting a low response from this English based study. Results from the questionnaires, however, contradict this assertion. 88% of those questioned expressed positivity towards reading, with 64% saying that they really liked reading, the most positive option available. In comparison, only 4% said that they strongly disliked reading, the most negative option provided. Although this may refute the claims of global studies, it does however mirror the findings of Lockwood (2009), which saw that a vast majority of children say that they enjoyed reading.

Although the question on the attitude to general reading presented a result of overall positivity, examining the responses on the basis of gender alters the outcome. Of those that answered expressing dislike for reading, none were girls. This supports the assertions made by Clark (2010), that girls, generally, view reading a lot more positively than boys. Furthermore, not only were all those who said that they disliked reading male, this accounted for thirty percent of boys questioned. The implication of this is that as was suggested by NLT (2012) that this remains a pressing issue amongst a large proportion of boys.

Attitudes towards the importance of reading

Considering thirty percent of boys said that they dislike reading, it is interesting that all of the boys that answered the question regarding the importance of reading said that it was important. This underlines the notion suggested by (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002 cited in Sarroub and Pernicek, 2014 p.29) that boys do view reading in school as important, but do not enjoy and engage with it, as they see home and in school reading as unrelated. Furthermore, only one of the cohort said that they did not see it as important, equating to just over 4.5%. These results link to and support the results found in Lockwood (2009), who discovered that despite a large majority of children seeing reading as important, half said that they saw it as only an okay or boring way to spend time.

Reasons given for attitudes towards general reading

The results showing large support for reading as important can be linked to the reasons given by the children when asked to explain either their like or dislike of reading. Although, generally, the quantitative results were positive, the qualitative data displayed several reoccurring themes. These themes related to viewing reading as a vehicle to help improve reading and writing, meaning therefore that despite the responses being generally positive and the question not asking them to do so, the majority of children linked their view of reading to school. In total, fourteen of the twenty-one responses related to school and learning. Although it is commonly agreed upon that reading is important for improving academically (McGeown et al., 2015; NLT, 2012), it is suggested that the over emphasis on skills in reading can be detrimental to enjoyment of reading (Gallagher, 2009).

Attitudes towards reading in school

Examining children's attitudes to reading in school, the data bears many resemblances to that of their general reading attitudes. The data exhibit that only 8.6% of those questioned show dislike for reading in school, with 0% expressing strong dislike. Whilst again it was only boys who expressed dislike, further strengthening the assertion that boys have a worse perception of reading than girls (Clark, 2011), the results were generally more positive. This was as only just over 22% of boys expressed a negative view of school reading, compared to the 33.3% that resulted from the general question on reading,

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supporting Smith and Wilhelm's (2002, cited in Sarroub and Pernicek, 2014 p.29) suggestion that boys value reading at school, perhaps more than reading for pleasure.

Reasons given for attitudes towards reading in school

Looking at the responses explaining the children's attitudes to reading in school, common themes are present again, both from those who saw school reading positively and those with a negative view. Those who answered positively again referred to improving their writing, such is the research of NLT (2012), Ofsted (2003) and Barrs (2000), however, those answering negatively mentioned not about the tasks given to them and their suitability as suggested by Gallagher (2009) and NLT (2012), but in fact the texts available. The importance of interaction with quality literature has been championed by CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) (2015) but there may be dispute over what constitutes as such, as Mather and Jaffe (2016) recommended using magazines and newspapers, suggesting that it familiarises children with daily reading. The two negative responses refer directly to this, as one explained that they could not always find the books that they wished, or as it is expressed on the questionnaire "I cot fatne a book wot i lace", which epitomises the idea that engagement with reading is linked to improvement in writing (NLT, 2012, Ofsted, 2003). Moreover the other boy alluded to a lack of magazines, something also noted by a participant who actually professed a liking of reading. These were all responses from boys, therefore, emphasising the claim from (Worthy, Moorman and Turner, 1999 cited in CCL, 2009 p.4) that the books that boys prefer are often absent from primary classrooms and as the teacher was a female, also supports the NLT'S (2012) idea that this could be a possible reason.

Feelings of reading as gender specific

Although it is noted that reading can often be viewed as an activity more suited for girls (NLT, 2012), the question asking the children whether reading was gender specific returned an almost unanimous decision of disagreement. This saw only one participant claim that reading was for girls and this was in fact a girl. Moreover, as Wolter, Braun and Hannover (2015) claimed that a view of this kind from girls does not affect their positivity or motivation towards reading, implying therefore that it is unrelated to her reading achievement or that of the class.

Text preferences

It is widely accepted that the books that boys read tend to be of a different genre to those that girls prefer (Pabion, 2015; Clark 2011). This was echoed by the findings of this study, which show clear preferences of genre, differing between the two genders. The boys preferred more factually based reading material, in particular magazines and fact books, whilst poetry and narratives were chosen by girls, as was found by Clark (2012). As magazines were so heavily preferred by boys, it is of concern that it was noted that they were lacking in this classroom and those in general (Worthy, Moorman and Turner, 1999 cited in CCL, 2009 p.4). Furthermore, although one boy highlighted story books as his preferred texts and explains that he likes reading in school because of his reading of Horrid Henry books, a story book, this reinforces research on boys reading preferences. Clark (2011) says that story books are often preferred by girls and therefore for a boy to profess affection for reading and explain that a story book is the reason, suggests that the cause of this may be that he had reading habits that were traditionally more feminine, which allowed him to engage more with reading.

Amount of voluntary reading done

It has been suggested that those who enjoy reading, tend to read a lot more frequently outside of school than those who do not (Clark and Poulton, 2011). Despite generally having a positive perception

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of reading, the two options showing the lowest time spent reading outside of school received the biggest responses. This is with 75% of the class reading at most 2 hours a week, contextually low when compared to Clark's (2011), data which revealed that the majority of children read between two and three and a half hours a week. This is intensified considering the study included only upper key stage two and high school children who according to Clark (2011) are less likely to read at home. Comparing the time spent reading between the two genders, only one of seven boys questioned read more than two hours a week, whilst 1-2 hours was by far the most popular for girls, underlining Clark's (2011) suggestion that girls generally read more frequently and for longer when they do.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine whether boys and girls had different views on reading and in those studied the answer appears to be yes. This was highlighted by the fact that all of the girls questioned said that they liked reading, whether it be reading at home or in school, whilst boys were less enthusiastic, 20% saying that they disliked reading in school and 30% expressing dislike for reading in general. Further extending this was the discrepancy between the time spent reading at home, with boys reading less on average and a minority of one boy reading more than the class average.

Many issues have been accredited with the possibility of impacting on the attitude to reading children possess (NLT, 2012; Clark, 2010) and these were therefore examined. The outcome showed some of these as more prominent in the data than others. For example, the types of texts preferred showed clear differences and as some of those preferred by boys were described as unavailable in the classroom, can be accredited to weakening their interest in reading. In contrast however, the idea that children saw reading as a girls' activity was not supported from the data collected. Furthermore the view of reading as school related was recurring, although it did not seem to effect children's attitude, or did so positively if so, with children saying that they enjoyed reading because it was useful for their schoolwork. This implies that many of the children were extrinsically motivated to read (McGeown, Norgate and Warhurst, 2012), doing so to benefit academically, rather than for enjoyment.

It has been suggested teachers play an instrumental role (McKool and Gespass 2009) rendering it paramount that the findings of this study inform future practice. CLPE (2015) explained that teachers have a duty to present children with useful literature whilst NLT (2012) said that the choice of books from personal perspective can be detrimental, showing that as regards to choosing books this role is in fact heightened. Despite this, as illustrated by Merisuo-Storm (2006) who found that none of their pupils enjoyed poetry, despite widespread claims that girls do (Clark, 2011; 2010), children are not always predictable and therefore, it is important to understand the children and their differences, and that it is also important to provide a range of literature choices as suggested by Cole (2002 cited in Merisuo-Storm, 2006 p.112). This includes magazines and newspapers, recommended by Mather and Jaffe (2016) to familiarise children with informal reading, which may in turn affect the view of reading as fun and not just related to school.

As this was a small scale study, in only one area and one year-group, further large scale studies may be more representative and reveal different results. Although not all issues were supported as well as others, these have been suggested in the past and therefore still may be of potential impact on a child's relationship with reading, meaning that they should be afforded consideration. This is part of the necessity that this research has highlighted for teachers to strive to engage children with reading, using many different techniques in order to remove or prevent the multiple potential barriers.

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Appendix 1.Example of completed questionnaire.

Class.....

☒ Boy ☐ Girl

Reading is for.... Boys ☒ Girls ☐ both ☒

What do think about reading? Colour the face that suits you best





 Really dislike  Dislike a little  Like a little  Really like

Why do you feel this? Because I like it & because some are funny.

How important do you think reading is? Tick the box you think

☒ Not important at all ☐ Not that important ☐ Quite important ☒ Very important

What do you think of the books that you read in school?
Colour the face that suits you best

 Really dislike  Dislike a little  Like a little  Really like

Why do you feel this? Because I like horrid Henry and facts.

Which of these do you prefer to read?

☒ Magazines ☐ Fact books ☐ Picture books ☐ Story books ☐ Newspapers ☐ poems

How many hours of reading do you do at home a week? Circle your answer

Less than 1 hour 1-2 hours more than 2 hours-5 hours more than 5 hours