

The Reading Agency

**Literature Review: The impact of reading
for pleasure and empowerment**

June 2015



Contents

Foreword from The Reading Agency

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and context

1.2 Methodology

2. An emergent outcomes model

2.1 Summary of research approaches, 'groups'
and outcomes

3. General adult populations

3.1 Overview of studies

4. Children and young people

4.1 Overview of studies

5. Parents and carers

5.1 Overview of studies

6. Adults with health needs

6.1 Overview of studies

7. Adults with additional needs

7.1 Overview of studies

8. Quality of evidence and methodological trends

9. Evidence gaps and future research priorities

10. Conclusion

11. Bibliography

Appendix 1 - Search terms and result yields

Appendix 2 - List of project steering group members

Appendix 3 - Glossary of outcomes

Foreword from The Reading Agency

The Reading Agency's mission is to inspire more people to read more, to encourage them to share their enjoyment of reading with others and to celebrate the difference that reading makes to all our lives, because everything changes when we read. To maximise the effectiveness of our work we need to be able to evaluate our impact systematically and build a strong national evidence base shared with partners across the reading sector.

In 2014, The Reading Agency was delighted to receive generous funding from the Peter Sowerby Foundation for a collaborative project to develop a robust reading outcomes framework. Our aim is to move beyond a programme-by-programme evaluation approach, to think more strategically about impact and to embed it throughout our work. We want to be sure that our interventions to encourage reading really do make a difference for the people we are trying to reach and we want to constantly improve the work that we do.

We know that by working in collaboration with the organisations that share these goals we will create a better framework. To that end, we have established a strong partnership with Arts Council England, Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians, Book Trust, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Education Endowment Foundation, National Literacy Trust, Publishers Association, Scottish Library and Information Council and the Society of Chief Librarians. Our goal is to use our collective expertise and insight to create something that we can all use to help us improve the impact and reach of our reading programmes.

This literature review is an essential first stage in the project. We have reviewed the evidence about the wider impacts of reading as the first stage in helping us to identify the outcomes we can achieve and how we might more effectively measure these in the future.

We were pleased to commission BOP Consulting to undertake this piece of work for us, drawing on their extensive experience in this field. We feel the review is a vital and illuminating piece of work, which will really help to move thinking in the sector forward. We look forward to sharing the results and building on the findings as we develop the next phase of the project over the coming months.

We are sure that the findings will spark many interesting discussions about the benefits of reading; the evidence really does support The Reading Agency's belief that everything changes when we read.

Sue Wilkinson
Chief Executive Officer at The Reading Agency
June 2015

Executive Summary

This literature review was commissioned by The Reading Agency and conducted by BOP Consulting between March and June 2015. It is the first stage in a wider programme of work to develop an outcomes framework to guide evaluation in the reading sector, funded by the Peter Sowerby Foundation.

The main aim of the review was to collate and summarise research findings relating to non-literacy outcomes of 'reading for pleasure or empowerment' (also referred to as 'recreational reading'). The review seeks to build on other literature reviews that have largely focused on the effects of reading for pleasure on literacy and reading outcomes.

The reviewers searched academic publication databases, as well as integrating key literature from organisations working in the UK reading and literacy sector and general web searching for 'grey literature'. In total, 51 documents met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review.

A key theme that came through the research was the centrality of enjoyment of reading as a prerequisite for the other outcomes of reading to be achieved. Indeed, it was clear that attention must be paid to how individuals are motivated to read so that programmes seeking to bring about additional outcomes are best designed and targeted. It was clear from the review that reading is closely linked to increasing understanding of our own identities and can also play a large part in relating to others, understanding their world-views and so forth. This area of 'identity development' is complex and tends to be explored across different academic disciplines (education, psychology, sociology and the humanities) within the review. Another key theme that emerged was the use of recreational reading for distraction, relaxation, and knowledge development. These are likely starting points for the

development of more 'externally observable' and measurable impacts.

The findings in the review are presented according to the five main populations that the literature tended to focus on:

General adult populations

The main outcomes reported for this group were enjoyment, relaxation and escapism, increasing understanding of self and social identities, empathy, knowledge of other cultures, relatedness, community cohesion and increasing social capital. There was a limited amount of research on this group, and it encompassed a variety of study designs which limits comparability.

Children and young people

The majority of the research reviewed for this study related to this group, indicating a broader and stronger evidence base. The main outcomes reported were enjoyment, knowledge of the self and other people, social interaction, social and cultural capital, imagination, focus and flow, relaxation and mood regulation. Improvements in young children's communication abilities and longer-term education outcomes were also reported for early years children.

Parents and carers

There were fewer studies exploring additional outcomes for parents and carers, although the ones reviewed showed links between reading for pleasure and improvements in parent-child communication and understanding, as well as improving parenting knowledge.

Adults with health needs

There was a relatively substantial amount of research relating to links

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

between recreational reading and health. These mostly related to changes in stress levels and relaxation, health literacy, and improvements in depression and dementia symptoms. One review showed mixed results on the positive effects of reading for pleasure and neurological conditions.

Adults with additional needs

These studies tended to focus on adults with below average levels of literacy but presented findings relating to communication, self-efficacy, learning motivation and relatedness.

Summary

For each group these outcomes were modelled onto an 'impact map' representing how these findings relate to overall personal and social development, and highlighting interactions between outcome areas.

While the types of outcomes of reading for pleasure overlap for these groups, this structure is useful for presenting the weight of findings and an overall model of emergent outcomes is presented in the report.

While the quality of the individual research studies reviewed was generally strong, the diversity of disciplines and methodological designs makes it difficult to aggregate findings and draw conclusions about the overall impact of reading for pleasure. However, this diversity also highlights opportunities to explore the impact and role of reading for pleasure across populations and settings and especially to extend research further into applied policy settings (e.g. health, justice, employment). Indeed a key finding is the need for a more strategic approach to research and evaluation within the reading and literacy sector to improve the quality of evidence across diverse interventions seeking to achieve positive broader impacts. The wider programme of work to develop an outcomes framework for the reading sector that this

review is a part of could address this need.

Overall there is a relatively strong and growing range of research findings which show how and why reading for pleasure can bring a range of benefits to individuals and society.

1. Introduction

This review begins by introducing the context of the study and its core aims and guiding research questions. A brief description of the methodology is then provided along with an outline of the emerging outcomes model based on all the literature reviewed. Each population that most of the literature relates to is then considered in turn, these are; general adults; children and young people; parents and carers; adults with health needs; and, adults with additional needs. For each section, a revised outcomes model relating to the available evidence for that population is illustrated. The final sections reflect on the quality of the evidence overall, and any observable trends in methodology. This includes recommendations for future research and evaluation of reading programmes seeking to achieve broader outcomes.

1.1 Aims and Context

The Reading Agency secured investment from the Peter Sowerby Foundation for a collaborative programme of work to develop an evaluation framework for the reading sector (a full list of project steering group members can be seen in appendix 2). The framework will guide evaluation and map the effects, outcomes and impacts of reading for pleasure and empowerment. For the purposes of this review these two terms are defined as:

'Reading for pleasure' and 'recreational reading' (used interchangeably in the document):

Non goal oriented transactions with texts as a way to spend time and for entertainment

'Reading for empowerment':

Transactions with texts as a means of self-cultivation and self-development beyond literacy

BOP Consulting was commissioned by The Reading Agency in March 2015 to conduct a literature review on the impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment. The reason for including reading for empowerment alongside reading for pleasure is to ensure the review captures evidence about the impact of reading that is self-directed but takes place with a purpose beyond enjoyment; for example reading self-help books.

Initially the study aimed to focus on the impact of reading programmes, but it soon became clear that there were a relatively limited number of evaluations of national or international programmes seeking to encourage reading for pleasure and its broader outcomes. Therefore, the review considers all literature that explores broader outcomes of reading for pleasure and empowerment. Importantly, the review focuses on reviewing literature reporting evidence on outcomes other than literacy and reading.

The research questions guiding the review process were:

- What recent evidence exists relating to broader outcomes (i.e. beyond literacy, reading and academic performance) resulting from reading for pleasure and/or empowerment?
- (How) does this differ according to population, setting, or programme design?

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

- Are there national/regional/local differences in patterns of research or findings?
- What are the roles of social actors (i.e. charities, schools, other organisations, teachers, other employees, families, peers) in achieving these outcomes?
- How have programmes been evaluated, or research conducted, and how might this inform the broader work of organisations seeking to support reading for pleasure?

A number of recent and relatively large scale reviews have taken place to explore the role of reading for pleasure (Department for Education 2012, National Endowment for the Arts 2007, Clark and Rumbold 2006). These each provide a useful summary of existing evidence, much of it published from the 1960s onwards, which demonstrates the value of recreational reading. However, the vast majority of the studies that make up these reviews focus on the impact of reading for children and young people, and are overwhelmingly focused on the effects of recreational reading for literacy development and broader academic attainment. Relevant findings are included in this report, and perhaps inevitably, there remains a focus on children and young people here, however the aim is to explore the evidence of impact beyond reading ability and literacy and towards the impact of reading for pleasure across the life-course and across all aspects of life.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology was informed by EPPI-Centre¹ guidelines on performing systematic evidence reviews and followed a four-step process:

1. Review of key literature provided by The Reading Agency and the project steering group
2. Systematic 'Web of Knowledge' and Google Scholar searching to retrieve peer-reviewed studies meeting the inclusion criteria
3. Web searching for 'grey' literature (i.e. non-peer reviewed publications, largely from the public and third sectors)
4. Checking of included literature with the project steering group and including any omissions

In order to focus the review on the impact of reading for non-literacy outcomes a series of searches were undertaken. Those that yielded the most relevant results were used to focus the web searching for grey literature (a full list of search terms and yields is provided in appendix 1). A set of inclusion criteria was also agreed with The Reading Agency to focus the search and ensure that the process was both methodologically robust and pragmatic in the allocated time and resources. These were:

- The document is a research report or evaluation of a programme, intervention or experiment

¹ The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) is part of the Social Science Research Unit at the UCL Institute of Education.

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

- The document was published in the past 10 years (with exceptions being clearly justified)
- The programme or intervention focuses on self-directed reading (including extra-curricular programmes, and those based in school but focused on reading activity outside of school)
- The programme can include reading for learning, but not learning to read

These criteria set this literature review apart from some of those published in recent years that have focused on reading for pleasure and outcomes relating only to literacy or broader school attainment. The criteria were also designed to broaden the evidence base beyond in-school and student populations, although these groups still make up a large proportion of the samples retrieved.

The number of documents retrieved at stage 1 (stakeholder documents) was 27, of which 14 met the criteria for inclusion, including a document from the Book Trust which summarised a number of their evaluation findings. The number of academic articles first retrieved (based on title only) was 150, of which 24 were eligible. 'Grey literature' web searching contributed another 14 documents, of which 8 were included. The final stage of inviting any omissions led to another 9 documents being considered, with 5 meeting the inclusion criteria. This led to a total number of 51 documents being considered as part of the main review. Sections 7 and 8 below discuss the methodological trends and quality of the studies retrieved, remaining gaps in the evidence, and suggested future research priorities.

2. An emergent outcomes model

2.1 Summary of research approaches, populations and outcomes

The predominant types of study retrieved were research studies, largely from the academic journal searching, and programme evaluations from the grey literature. There were also a number of previous literature reviews published where relevant findings have been included if they relate to reading for pleasure and non-literacy outcomes.

The research approaches fell into three main types:

Evaluation of the efficacy of an intervention - mostly projects and programmes designed to increase levels of reading for pleasure and noting any additional effects or outcomes beyond literacy

Quasi-experimental designs - these tended to include pre-test and post-test measures or scores amongst non-randomised groups, often using statistical analysis to explore relationships between variables (including levels of pleasure reading in many cases as an additional variable)

Exploratory research designs - these tended to employ qualitative methods to explore perceptions, understanding, and preferences linked to reading behaviour and other outcomes (although there were fewer of this type of study in the retrieved literature than for the other approaches).

The included literature has been organised into five population 'groups' which broadly allude to the characteristics of the samples under study or the topics of the research. These are:

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

1. General adult populations
2. Children and young people
3. Parents and carers
4. Adults with health needs
5. Adults with additional needs

Figure 1 shows an overarching outcomes model based on the findings of the review. Due to the nature of the evidence it was not possible to present this as a clear 'logic model' of how particular inputs are related to outputs and outcomes. Instead, the most frequent and strongly evidenced outcomes are mapped onto broader 'impact areas'.

Throughout each of the findings sections an alternative outcomes model has been provided summarising the outcomes for the population groups that the reported evidence relates to. The broad impact levels are 'Personal outcomes' (i.e. changes that take place within individuals), 'Social outcomes' (i.e. changes that take place that affect how individuals relate to other people, or changes that take place within groups of individuals) and 'External outcomes' (i.e. changes that are more easily observable from an external perspective), with each specific outcome mapped onto these impact areas where they may demonstrate these broader impacts. A glossary of definitions for each outcome in the model is provided in Appendix 3.

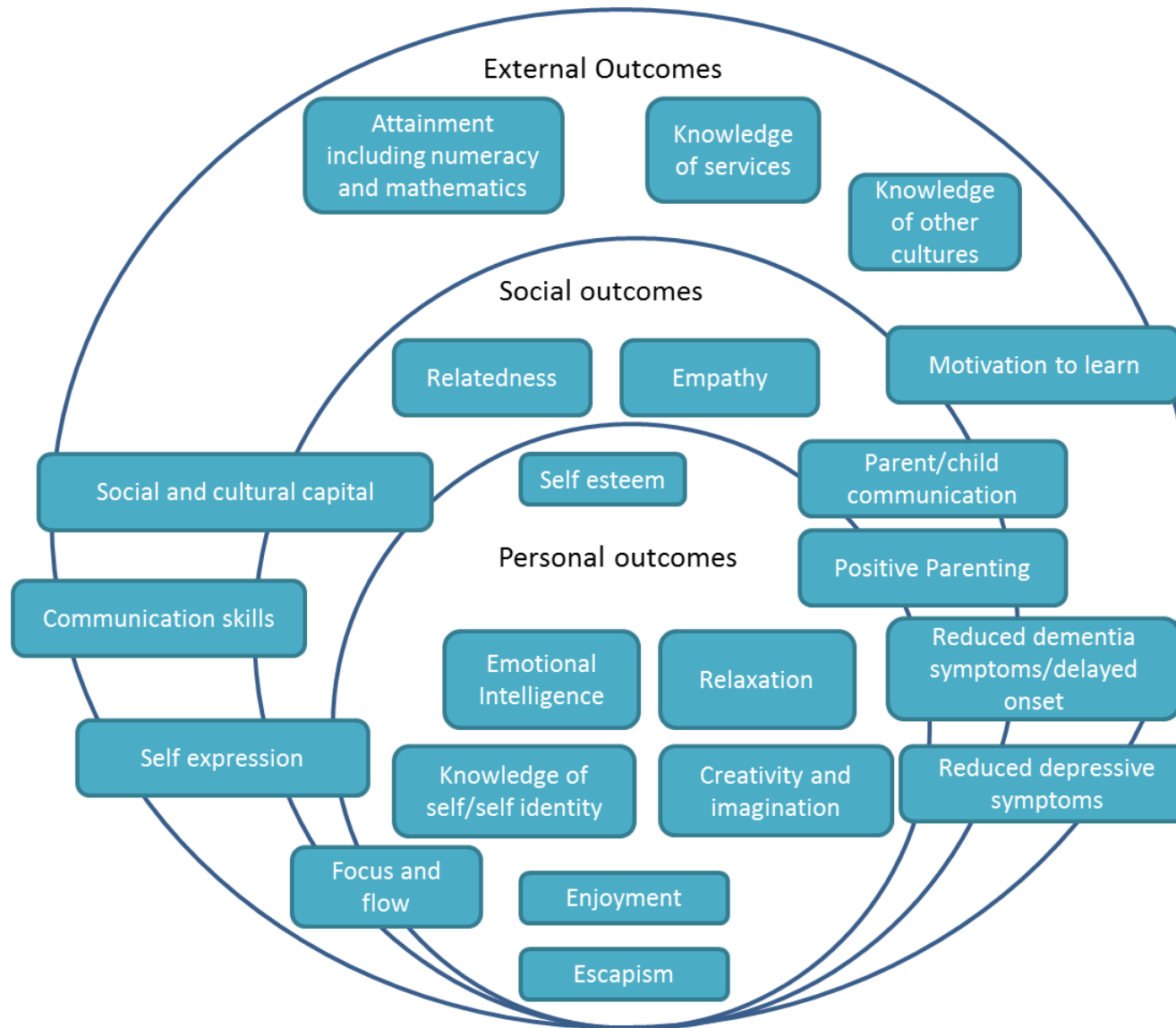


Figure 1: Overall Outcomes Map

3. General adult populations

3.1 Overview of studies

This section considers studies that have explored the relationship between recreational reading and broader outcomes within general adult populations. There was, perhaps understandably, still a broad range of reading habits and motivations observed across these study populations. However, studies tended to use representative samples, which may tell us about links between reading and other outcomes in general populations.

3.1.1 *Frequency, motivations and enjoyment*

DJS Research and Book Trust (2013) published a survey of reading habits and attitudes amongst 1,400 adults in England and found that 28% stated that they read hard copy books every day, with a further 22% reading them once or twice or several times a week. Nearly a fifth (18%) never read hard copy books. Reading frequency was related to socio-economic status, with those in higher socio-economic bands reading more frequently than others. Reading was also more popular amongst females than males. Nearly half of respondents (49%) stated that they enjoy reading 'very much'; with a further 23% stating that they enjoy reading 'quite a lot'. The main motivations for reading were escapism, relaxation, learning, as well as enjoyment of reading for its own sake. These figures echo the latest frequency measures from the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport which found that 69% of

adults read for pleasure regularly².

3.1.2 *Emotional, personal and social development*

A number of studies exploring the outcomes of reading for pleasure on the general population have found a strong association with emotional and personal development. Studies have found that reading for pleasure enhances empathy, understanding of the self and the ability to understand one's own and others' identities.

Billington (2015) undertook a UK-wide study exploring the benefits reported by adults regularly reading for pleasure. The study surveyed 4,000 individuals from diverse demographics through an online poll consisting of fourteen questions designed to elicit participants' perception of their general mood, well-being and levels of social interaction in relation to reading. The findings indicated that reading for pleasure is positively associated with a greater sense of community, a stronger feeling of social inclusion, a stronger ability to enjoy social occasions, and enhanced openness and talkativeness.

Mar *et al.* (2006) carried out a study to explore the link between reading and social abilities on a sample of 94 undergraduate students in Canada. Using a mixed-methods design the authors found that reading fiction is a strong predictor of social ability and in particular, a predictor of empathy. The findings suggested that understanding characters in a narrative fiction is related to understanding of real life peers, however the authors were conscious to note that the relationship between fiction and empathy may not be one way and a stronger ability to empathise with others could be associated with personality traits that make people

² Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport DCMS, 2013/14

more drawn to reading (e.g. openness and a tendency to be drawn in to stories)

Seeking to further explore the nature of the relationship between reading and empathy Mar *et al.* (2009) conducted another study, controlling for personality traits such as openness, tendency to be drawn in to stories and gender. This second study surveyed a larger sample of 252 Canadian undergraduate students and found that print fiction exposure remained a strong predictor of empathy, providing convincing evidence of the positive relationship between reading for pleasure and empathy. The authors suggest that these findings challenge the notion of frequent readers being socially awkward, but also state that further replications would be required to generalise the findings to other populations.

Reading for pleasure has been associated with enhancement of understanding of self and other's identities. Moyer (2007) explored the outcomes reported by recreational readers in the US using a mixed method approach consisting of a survey (completed by 62 people) and 8 semi-structured interviews. The most consistent outcomes reported were the ability to learn about the self and others, learning about diverse human populations and other cultures, and learning about other periods of history. Respondents who read more frequently were also reported to have an enhanced ability to understand people's class, ethnicity, culture and political perspectives.

Vasquez (2005) conducted research exploring college students' ethnic identity taking part in a weekly literature class. Through focus groups and observation of 18 students she concluded that reading enhances students ability to understand one's and others ethnic backgrounds and the role they play in forming their identities. Facilitated discussion of literature was also found to be positively associated with increased understanding of own and others' cultural and world-views.

3.1.3 Summary

While there were few retrieved studies that related to a general adult population, those that were found indicated that reading remains a popular leisure activity. Indeed, enjoyment, relaxation and escapism were often cited as key rewards and outcomes of reading. The term 'reading for pleasure' should not obscure 'pleasure' itself as a key outcome of reading. Beyond enjoyment, there appears to be an emerging evidence base relating recreational reading to increasing understanding of self and social identities, empathy, and knowledge of other cultures. Survey findings indicate a positive association between recreational reading and relatedness, community cohesion and increasing social capital, although further research is required to extend our understanding of how reading functions to bring people closer together.

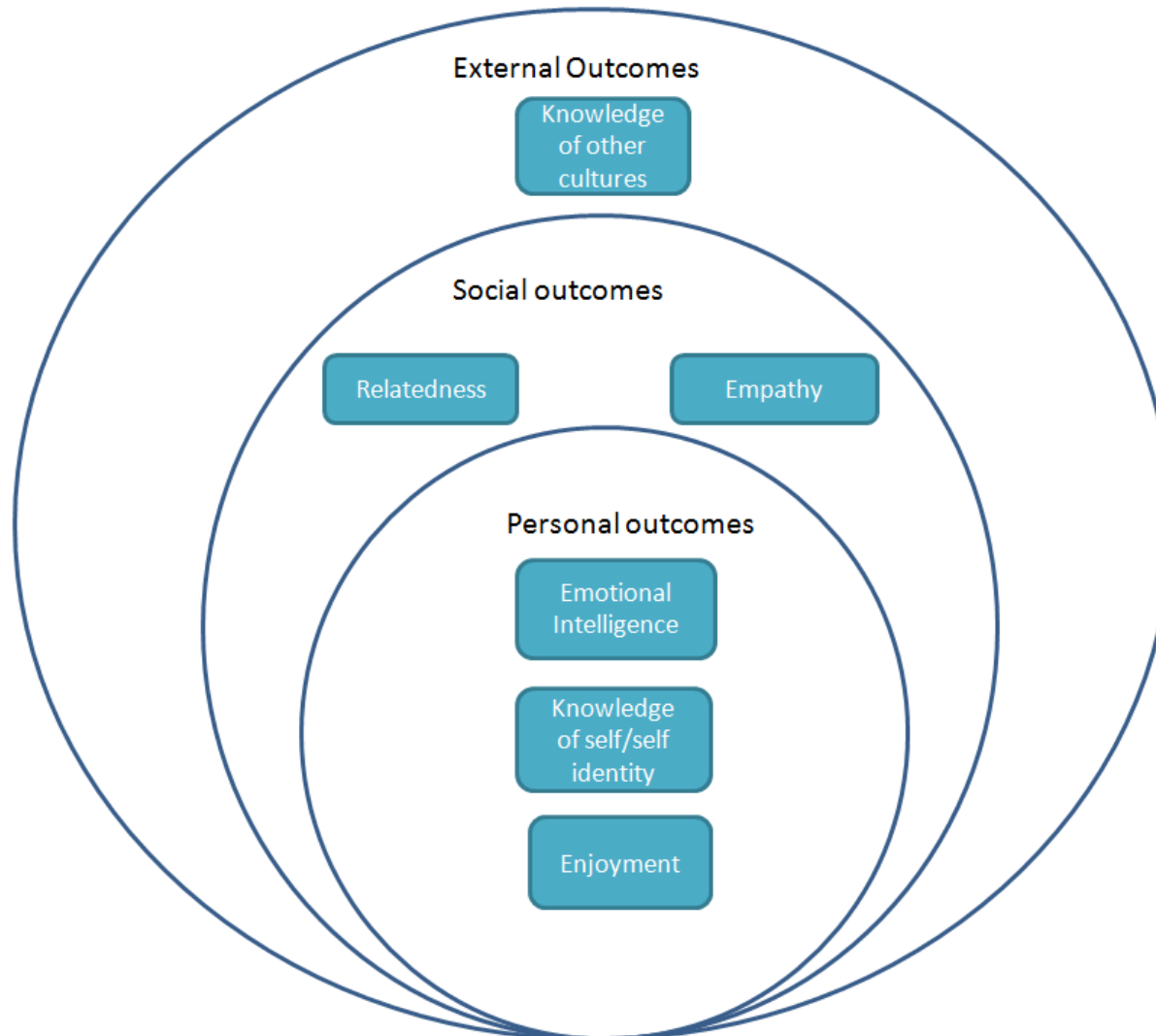


Figure 2: Outcomes and Impact model for general adult population

4. Children and Young People

4.1 Overview of studies

The majority of studies relating to reading for pleasure amongst children and young people focus on reading behaviors and motivations, many also measure reading ability and literacy. Those studies that have provided detail of the broader impacts of reading for pleasure (crucially, including 'pleasure' itself as an outcome of and motivation for reading) have been included in the review. We have also briefly included some studies that indicate reading for pleasure patterns and trends during the review period (i.e. 2005-present) in a bid to inform future strategies in policy and programme design.

4.1.1 Motivation and enjoyment

An American study often cited in the literature by Kush and Watkins (1996) provided longitudinal measures of attitudes towards reading. The authors found reading attitudes were relatively positive for both recreational and academic reading. After three years, however, attitudes dropped significantly for both pleasure and academic reading. Girls consistently expressed more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than boys. Similarly, girls also demonstrated greater stability in reading attitudes than boys, contributing findings to the growing body of evidence regarding young boys' negative reading attitudes.

Twist *et al.* (2007) reported findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), an internationally comparative study of the reading attainment of ten-year-olds. The authors found that attitudes to reading of ten-year-old children in England were poorer compared to children in other countries, and had declined slightly since 2001. Girls reported attitudes to reading generally more positively than

boys and the authors reported a positive association between attitudes toward reading and reading attainment and reading frequency.

These findings were further developed in a more recent study by Smith *et al.* (2012) who explored the relationship between self-efficacy and levels of enjoyment of reading across two samples; one aged eight to nine and one aged 12 to 13 using a large scale cross-sectional survey across schools in New Zealand. They found reading enjoyment was higher among the younger age group (despite higher levels of reading achievement amongst the older children), and amongst females over males at both age groups. Importantly, reading enjoyment was not associated with socio-economic status in either age group. Reading enjoyment was not associated with reading self-efficacy, but reading achievement was. The conclusion drawn by the authors is that children enjoy reading and achieve gratification from the process of reading, even when they do not think it is something they are particularly good at.

De Naeghel *et al.* (2012) explored this in greater detail in a questionnaire study measuring recreational and academic reading motivation amongst 1,260 10-11 year old American school students. She identified two main factors to reading motivation, autonomous (self-directed) and controlled (externally-directed), which combine to explain reading behavior and performance above and beyond students' reading self-concept (i.e. whether they consider themselves 'readers' or not - a variable linked to reading frequency in the studies above). The type of motivation (i.e., autonomous vs. controlled motivation) is important because recreational autonomous reading motivation, as compared to recreational controlled reading motivation, was associated with higher leisure-time reading frequency, more reading engagement, and better reading comprehension. The author concludes that interventions seeking to encourage reading and stem the decline of reading motivation as children grow older should focus on enhancing

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

autonomous motivation for reading, since it leads to more recreational reading and better reading performance.

This contributes more evidence that children and young people must achieve enjoyment and gratification as outcomes from their reading experiences in order to pursue autonomous reading. They must also feel motivated to read based on their own intrinsic motivation or the many initiatives designed to increase reading behaviour will not be successful.

This distinction in motivation has been discussed in a previous review of studies of reading for pleasure and the impact on children and young people by Clark and Rumbold (2006). The authors explored the prevalence of and motivations for reading for pleasure and suggested ways to increase reading for pleasure amongst children and youth populations. Their findings suggested that reading for pleasure occurs more in response to intrinsic motivation (i.e. self-directed) than extrinsic motivation (i.e. instructed to read for other goals and rewards). The authors provide a brief report on how reading for pleasure is linked to increases in general knowledge, understanding of other cultures, community participation, and insight into human nature and decision making. The authors also describe how recreational reading events (e.g. book groups, school and library events) are linked to enhanced social skills, decreased loneliness, and engagement in an aesthetic process. The majority of the literature cited in the review falls before 2005, and there is limited information on the methodologies of some studies, however it remains a useful point of reference for the current report.

The Department for Education used much of this material in its own (2012) review of reading for pleasure among primary and secondary aged children. They conclude that there are seven main benefits of reading for pleasure; reading attainment and writing ability; text

comprehension and grammar; breadth of vocabulary; positive reading attitudes; greater self-confidence as a reader; pleasure in reading in later life; general knowledge; a better understanding of other cultures; increased community participation and a greater insight into human nature and decision-making. The study emphasises the positive links between reading for pleasure and educational attainment (reiterating the OECD findings of 2002 that reading habits have more influence on educational attainment than socio-economic status).

The study highlights three factors that are crucial for the promotion of reading for pleasure amongst children and young people: ensuring that there is adequate access to books; parents taking a proactive role in encouraging reading for pleasure and teachers providing guidance and encouragement. However these latter recommendations do not fully account for the role of intrinsic motivation in increasing reading for pleasure amongst children and young people discussed above.

The Reading Agency's (2003) evaluation of its Chatterbooks programme, running children's book groups in schools and libraries since 2001, indicates a number of benefits to children and young people from taking part, albeit through externally directed motivation to read. The evaluation found self and parent reported improvements in confidence and self-esteem, listening skills, self-expression and relating to other people. While this is a useful account of the types of outcomes reported for a specific programme, there are methodological limitations in applying the findings to a more general child population or to the function of reading more generally.

An evaluation of The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge (Kennedy and Bearn 2009) used a control group to measure reading preference before and after taking part in the programme. It found that 43% of Summer Reading Challenge participants enjoyed reading more after taking part, compared to 19% enjoying reading more over the

same period, without taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge. However, the sample size is quite small and the design of the programme limits its transferability to outcomes of reading in general, although does suggest that short-term reading challenges can increase reading enjoyment.

Overall there is a significant amount of existing and ongoing research into the patterns of and motivations to read for pleasure amongst children and young people. The findings reported here reiterate the need for enjoyment and pleasure itself to be considered as a key outcome of reading behaviour in order to further encourage and understand reading frequency. The strong findings linking self-directed and autonomous motivation with increased prevalence and quality of reading is an important contribution, indicating the psychological driver of reading for pleasure that must exist as a prerequisite of any broader outcomes. In short, other outcomes will occur more often and strongly if reading is self-directed and enjoyable in the first instance.

4.1.2 Attainment

The suggestion that reading for pleasure is linked to broader attainment is made clearly and with a great deal of evidence in the previous reviews discussed above. However there are a number of more recent studies that have further contributed to the evidence base and are worthy of inclusion as they explore outcomes beyond literacy.

Based on analysis of the 1986 wave of the longitudinal British Cohort Study, using a sample of around 6,000 16-year olds, Sullivan and Brown (2013) investigated links between own reading and reading in the home and cognitive scores of vocabulary, maths and spelling. The findings indicated that reading for pleasure at the ages of 10 and 16 had a substantial influence on cognitive progress across the three scores, but was largest in the case of vocabulary. Summing the effects

for reading books often at age 10, reading books more than once a week at age 16, and reading newspapers more than once a week at 16, the total scores were equivalent to a 14.4 percentage point advantage in vocabulary, 9.9 percentage points in maths, and 8.6 percentage points in spelling at age 16. The analysis controlled for parental social background and parents' own reading behaviour. The influence of reading for pleasure was greater than that for having a parent with a degree, equating to an advantage of 4.2 percentage points for vocabulary, 3 percentage points for mathematics and 1.8 percentage points for spelling. This study is particularly notable since it presents an analysis of longitudinal data and controls for many of the independent effects that can affect equivalent scores in cross-sectional samples.

Mol and Jolles (2014) explored the difference in reading patterns between two groups of Dutch high school students aged 12-13, one group taking part in the 'higher-track' (i.e. more advanced) curriculum and the other in the 'lower-track' (i.e. less advanced) curriculum. They found that 32.5% of those in the higher educational track engaged in leisure reading, compared with 19.5% of those in the lower education track. These findings were also replicated in measures of mental imagery (i.e. a measure of imagination) where 12% of those on the lower track said they had no mental imagery capabilities compared to 6.6% on the higher track. Those who read for pleasure were also significantly more likely to report positive mental imagery. While the results are correlational rather than casual (i.e. the study cannot suggest that it is reading for pleasure that causes students to be on the higher educational track), they remain useful for indicating strong and ongoing relationships between reading for pleasure and improved academic performance. The authors also highlight that the majority of pupils across both groups reported that they enjoy reading and that this should be considered in the design of future policy and interventions over and above the continuing distinctions in reading behaviour based on academic performance.

This point was also made by Lockwood (2012) based on a questionnaire study with around 1,400 nine to ten year olds. Her findings indicated that 92% of pupils reported that they felt happy/very happy when a book was given to them as present and 84% replied they like reading. Based on follow-up interviews with a smaller sample of children and teachers, responses showed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations resulted in positive attitudes to reading. Importantly for the discussion on attainment and the development of broader skills, many children described their pleasure in the activity in a way that was analogous to the 'flow' experience detailed in motivational theory. Flow theory suggests that, under the correct conditions, individuals can be wholly focused and committed to the task at hand and it is the experience of flow that results in gratification and motivation to complete or repeat the task. When reading is pitched correctly and there is some degree of choice and control over material, there may be a resultant increase in motivation and gratification, if this results in higher commitment to reading it is therefore also arguable that broader academic benefits and outcomes will be maximised.

4.1.3 Emotional and personal development

The suggestion that we need to better understand the psychological processes at play during reading activity in order to fully understand broader outcomes was explored by Kumschick *et al.* (2014). Their study aimed to test the hypothesis that reading and discussing children's books with emotional content increases children's emotional competence. The study was carried out in Germany and involved developing a literature-based intervention, named READING and FEELING. The intervention was tested on seven to nine year olds (n=104) in their after-school care center. A major aim of the study was to find out whether replacing the regular daycare programme with a literature-based intervention would increase emotional competences amongst the children. The findings were positive and showed that the

READING and FEELING programme had a particularly beneficial effect on the enhancement of emotional vocabulary and knowledge and understanding of emotions. The effects of the programme partly varied by gender of child, where boys were more positively influenced in their capability to recognize masked feelings than girls. Overall, the study confirms that children's literature can be used as a model for analyzing everyday emotional processes and can consequently support emotional development in this age group. As with other evaluations of this type, further work is required to investigate whether these results would be repeated using different intervention designs or across other age groups and geographies.

A recent study by Greenwood and Hicks (2015) explored the reading habits and rewards of blind and partially sighted children and young people using an online survey, individual and group interviews. The findings indicated that participants considered reading as a way to enhance mood, to relax, to cope with stress and anxiety, and to escape and to engage their imaginations. There was broad agreement that reading also builds empathy and understanding, is an important source of information and knowledge (including about health and personal development), and is a source of learning (including enhancing vocabulary and communication skills). It is also an important way of engaging in meaningful activity and can play a part in filling the gaps left by loneliness and isolation. Another important finding for this group was the role that reading played in interacting with other people, reading together as well as discussing books, highlighting the need to expand the range of books available for this population as a key policy imperative.

Howard (2011) conducted a series of focus groups exploring the reading motivations and gratifications of 12-15 year olds (n=68) in a Canadian high school. While there was a higher than average number of participants who read at least weekly and considered reading a

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

favoured leisure time activity (85%), participants reported that the main reasons they read were; to improve overall literacy and thinking skills; to better understand the world; to increase social conscience and empathy; for empowerment (i.e. increasing strong beliefs and agency to act on them); to be entertained; to escape their daily lives and problems; to relax, and; seeking reassurance (i.e. feeling better about their identities and lives).

4.1.4 Social and cultural capital

This latter point highlighting the role that reading can have in people's social lives and interactions has also been taken up by a number of authors.

In a mixed-methods study from the United States which included a large-scale longitudinal survey, interviews and ethnography, Moje *et al.* (2008) found that many adolescents were taking part in formal and informal peer, family and online literature networks where material would be exchanged and discussed. Indeed, the authors conclude that these networks, along with the recreational reading activity itself, act as principle ways for adolescents to develop self and social identities, including crucial gender and ethnic identities. Challenging the prevailing discourse that seeks to link out-of-school reading with in-school performance, the authors conclude that youth recreational reading cultures should be considered apart from formal literacy learning in order to best understand their role and function in the lives of young people.

While not explicitly focusing on the role of reading in developing social capital, Merga (2014) investigated the social status of book reading amongst an adolescent population in Australia (n=520). She found that book reading was found to be generally socially acceptable; only 9% of the students agreed with the statement "It is not cool to read books",

less than a third remained neutral, and 60% of students disagreed with the statement. However, the author concludes that all readers experienced low levels of encouragement from friends to read, which underpins the importance of exploring ways of connecting students to reading peers. This recommendation would have the double-fold effect of increasing students' own social capital through reading, as well as improving the social value of books and reading as an activity.

Product Perceptions and The Reading Agency reported outcomes relating to social and cultural capital in their (2003) evaluation of the Summer Reading Challenge. Based on interviews with 380 participating children, they found that 77% talked about a book with an adult and 40% with a friend; 65% would tell their friends to read a book they have enjoyed; 65% had the confidence to recommend a book they like to their friends; 59% found out something from a book they did not know; 12% joined the library to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge; 63% read a book about people with different lives from them; and 59% found out something from a book they didn't know before. While this type of evaluation design may be subject to a 'Hawthorne' effect (where participants provide positive answers because they may feel it is expected from them), the overall range of outcomes reported in the evaluation show how reading can be considered a social exercise, and has clear links to increasing cultural knowledge and understanding, which is also associated with greater cultural capital.

4.1.5 Early Years

Book Trust, amongst others, has done a great deal of work to promote and encourage recreational reading for early years children (under-5) and their parents through programmes and interventions. While much of the evaluation findings relate to literacy and reading ability, there have also been a number of other outcomes reported. A longitudinal study of the impact of the Bookstart programme (Wade and Moore

2000) indicated gains in mathematics as well as literacy in a 4-year follow-up from participants being aged 9 months.

A recent evaluation of a National Literacy Trust early years programme by Wood *et al.* (2015) also found significant improvements in children's enjoyment of sharing books, children's enjoyment of joining in with songs and rhymes, parents' confidence in sharing books with their children, in singing with their children and in understanding the importance of talking to children. Findings also indicated that the programme impacted on the quality of children's home learning environment. These findings were particularly marked amongst participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.1.6 Summary

There is a far greater proportion of research on the impact of reading for pleasure amongst children and young people than on other populations. This may be expected considering the huge implications that positive learning and development at this stage has for later life. Within these studies a number of outcome areas emerged strongly from the literature.

Once again, reading as a pleasurable activity in its own right has been reported, not just as a consequence of recreational reading but as a motivating factor. Research findings indicate that children and young people will read more if they have some control over their opportunities to read, and those broader outcomes beyond enjoyment (including attainment) are more likely to be achieved if children are motivated to read through intrinsic over extrinsic motivations.

As with adult populations reading for younger people has been shown to increase knowledge of the self and other people, which can also lead to greater levels of social interaction and increases in social and

cultural capital. Other research has shown improvements in imagination, focus and flow, relaxation and mood regulation for those children and young people engaging in more recreational reading.

As with the findings relating to the general adult population, there is a need for further research to explore how these different outcome areas are related to each other and to understand how they may be experienced at both a universal, population-level, and at an individual level. There is clearly a growing evidence base relating to outcomes beyond literacy for children and young people, but there remains a need to engage in research to explore these overlapping outcome areas in a systematic way. The reading outcomes framework project that this research is part of may provide a structure within which this research could take place.

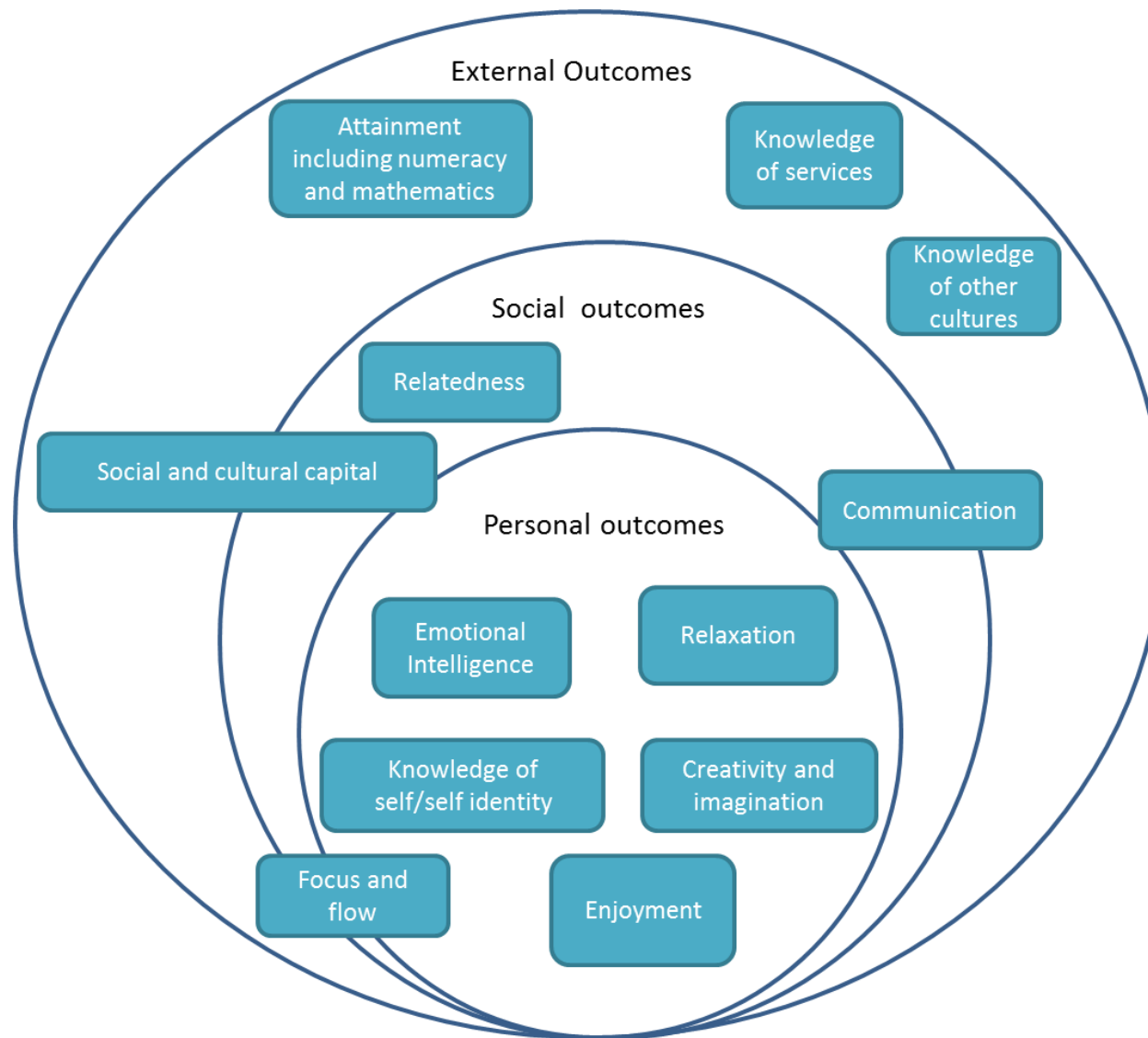


Figure 3 - Impact and outcomes for children and young people

5. Parents and Carers

5.1 Overview of studies

A number of studies were retrieved which explored the role of reading for pleasure in parenting and how reading can support parents as educators.

5.1.1 Positive parenting

Hong and Lin (2012) conducted a study investigating the effects of participating in a book reading club on improving parents' positive interactions with children and positive thinking in a suburb of Southern Taiwan. The intervention lasted two hours and included: (1) cooperative learning in which parents read books together; (2) watching parent-child interaction/positive thinking related movies; (3) small group discussion (4) reflective interaction by peers that challenged parents' interaction with children and their perceptions; (5) oral sharing in whole-group discussions based on findings from small group discussions. The study found that a structured book reading club significantly improved parents' positive thinking and positive parent-child interaction. This suggests that the elements of the intervention; heterogeneous grouping, reflective peer-assessment, wide topics of book selection (not specifically on the topic of parenting), watching films related to positive thinking, and reflective peer-assessment are all potentially important components in enhancing parents' positive thinking.

A study from Hong Kong (Parthasarathy *et al.* (2014) explored caregivers' oral health literacy, whether it was related to their children's oral health status, and how this may be related to their recreational reading habits. While there is quite a substantial body of research relating to health literacy and health outcomes in general (DeWalt &

Hink 2009) it was rare in this review to find research including reading for pleasure as an interacting variable. The study found that those who read more in their spare time (in both English and Chinese) had significantly higher oral health literacy levels (word recognition and comprehension) than those who read less, controlling for socio-economic status. However, levels of reading did not predict overall oral health status of the children themselves.

In a similar study Taylor *et al.* (2012) examined the relationship between maternal full time employment and variables associated with children aged 5–15 years (n=641), and the factors associated with child weight/obesity. Levels of recreational reading amongst the children were included in the statistical analysis as an independent variable. The study found no relationship between maternal full-time work and child BMI, but did find that those children with full-time working mothers spent significantly less time reading and more time engaging in non-reading screen based activity.

In a recent evaluation of the Bookstart programme (providing free books for 0-4 year olds), Venn (2014) found that 45% of parents and carers reported spending more quality time with their children and that 82% of those receiving books identified reading as good way of spending time with their child, compared to 58% of those not taking part in the programme. An evaluation of a more intense intervention aimed at particularly disadvantaged communities (Bookstart Corner) was conducted by Demack and Stevens (2013). Using baseline and follow-up measures they found that those remaining in the programme throughout reported improved parental confidence and enjoyment, increased parent-child engagement, increased parent-child interaction and improved interest in their children. A significant increase in playing and engaging in family life by those completing the intervention, as reported by early years practitioners, was also highlighted by the authors.

5.1.2 Summary

Whilst not extensive in scale, these studies indicate that reading for pleasure can be linked to parenting and educating roles. Extending some of the findings from the early years studies discussed in the previous section, it is clear that recreational reading has a role in encouraging and supporting positive behaviours in parenting at later stages of the life course and in considering the role of parents as educators.

Research on parent-child reading in the early years has shown improvements in later education outcomes, as well as improvements in parent-child communication.

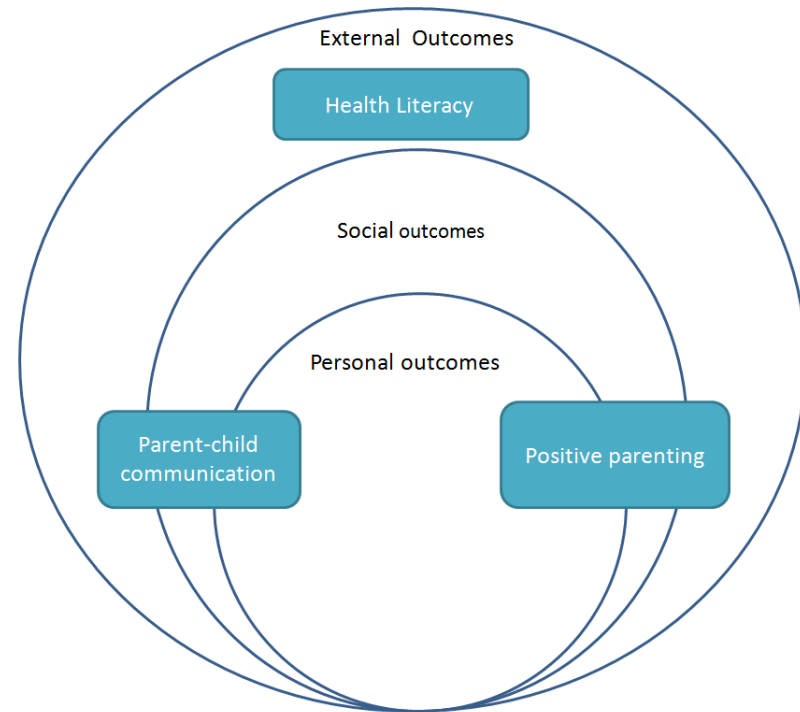


Figure 4: Impact and outcomes map for parents and carers

6. Adults with health needs

6.1 Overview of studies

A diverse range of studies provide strong evidence about how reading for pleasure can promote mental and physical well-being. The literature suggests reading for pleasure is effective in both tackling common mental issues such as anxiety and stress, and in raising awareness about health issues and habits.

6.1.1 General mental and physical health

An online poll of over four thousand people from a representative sample in the UK revealed that regular readers for pleasure reported fewer feelings of stress and depression than non-readers, and stronger feelings of relaxation from reading than from watching television or engaging with technology intensive activities (Billington, 2015). The study also showed that those who read for pleasure have higher levels of self-esteem and a greater ability to cope with difficult situations. Reading for pleasure was also associated with better sleeping patterns.

Pankratow (*et al.*, 2013) sought to examine the effects of reading exercise-related magazine articles, reasons for exercise, and perceptions of attractiveness, among women in first year at university. 173 participants read a health article, an article about body shape, or a control article. Participants then completed questionnaires measuring reasons for exercising, physical self-perception, and exercise self-identity. The study reported that participants that had read the health article rated health as an important reason to exercise more highly than participants who read a control article. It thus appears that the health article was successful in getting the participants to think about exercising for their health. Those reading the 'body shape' article

tended to read it more critically rather than reflecting negatively on their own body image. (Pankratow *et. al*, 2013). These findings remind us that we must ourselves be aware of critical, as well as intended reading responses to a range of literature types.

Spacey *et al.* (2012) undertook research with blind and partially sighted adults to explore the impact of reading for pleasure. Structured interviews on a sample of 108 people across the UK as well as an online survey revealed that the motivations and the effects of reading for pleasure in blind people are not dissimilar to the ones of sighted readers. The most frequently cited reasons for reading for pleasure was relaxation, escapism, and learning about new things classifying as primary motivations/effects of reading for pleasure.

6.1.2 Symptom change and management

There is also an increasing body of literature showcasing the evidence of reading interventions in reducing symptoms of diagnosed illnesses such as depression and dementia. The literature highlights some under-researched areas such as the impact of reading for pleasure on neurological conditions.

Dowrick (2015) carried out a study which sought to explore the outcomes of Get into Reading (GiR) a two weekly reading group programme run for 12 months by GPs for people who have been diagnosed with depression. Analysis of both quantitative data, gathered in the form of questionnaires administered before and after the intervention, and qualitative data, gathered through digital recordings of all sessions, suggested a reduction in depressive symptoms for participants. Positive outcomes were particularly associated with reading as a group exercise activity in a non-pressured, non-judgemental atmosphere. The presence of a facilitator with expertise in literature, providing guidance around the subject was also deemed

pivotal in fostering relaxation and calm while at the same time helping participants focus.

Billington (2013) examined the impact of a literature-based intervention on older people living with dementia using mixed-methods including questionnaires and semi structured interviews with patients and members of staff in care homes and hospitals. Findings revealed that symptom scores were lower during the reading period than at baseline. In particular, patients reported enjoyment, feelings of authenticity, having a meaningful experience, and a renewed sense of personal identity. Patients also reported enhancement of listening, memory and attention. Other studies highlight how reading for pleasure can be effective in diminishing the risk of dementia. For example, two population level studies (i.e. large-scale studies that are representative of a whole population) carried out in the US (Hughes *et al.*, 2010; Verghese *et al.* 2003) showed that being engaged in more reading, along with other hobbies, is associated with a lower subsequent risk of incidents of dementia. This was especially the case for reading fiction, over and above newspapers and magazines.

An emerging body of literature is also seeking to explore the effects of reading for pleasure on people with neurological conditions, although this appears to be an under researched area. Latchem and Greenhalgh (2014) conducted a review of the literature on the evidence of the effect of reading for pleasure (including lone reading, group reading and shared reading) on people with neurological conditions in clinical and long-term settings. Although some of the studies showed a positive association, the authors concluded that more research was required to substantiate the positive effects of reading for pleasure for those with neurological conditions.

6.1.3 Summary

A clear subsection of literature emerged exploring links between recreational reading and health. This ranged from studies associating reading with lower levels of stress and increased relaxation, to those linking reading with improved understanding of health information. For those with chronic health conditions such as depression, partial sightedness and dementia there is an emerging body of evidence showing how reading for pleasure can alleviate symptoms, and in the case of dementia, reading for pleasure may be linked to a lower risk of dementia in later life.

The lack of clear evidence showing the positive role of recreational reading on people with neurological conditions indicates that there remains scope for these studies to be scaled up and applied across more diverse settings.

Overall the emergent evidence suggests that there is a role for recreational reading in the treatment of certain health conditions, as well as in maintaining good health and wellbeing across the life course.

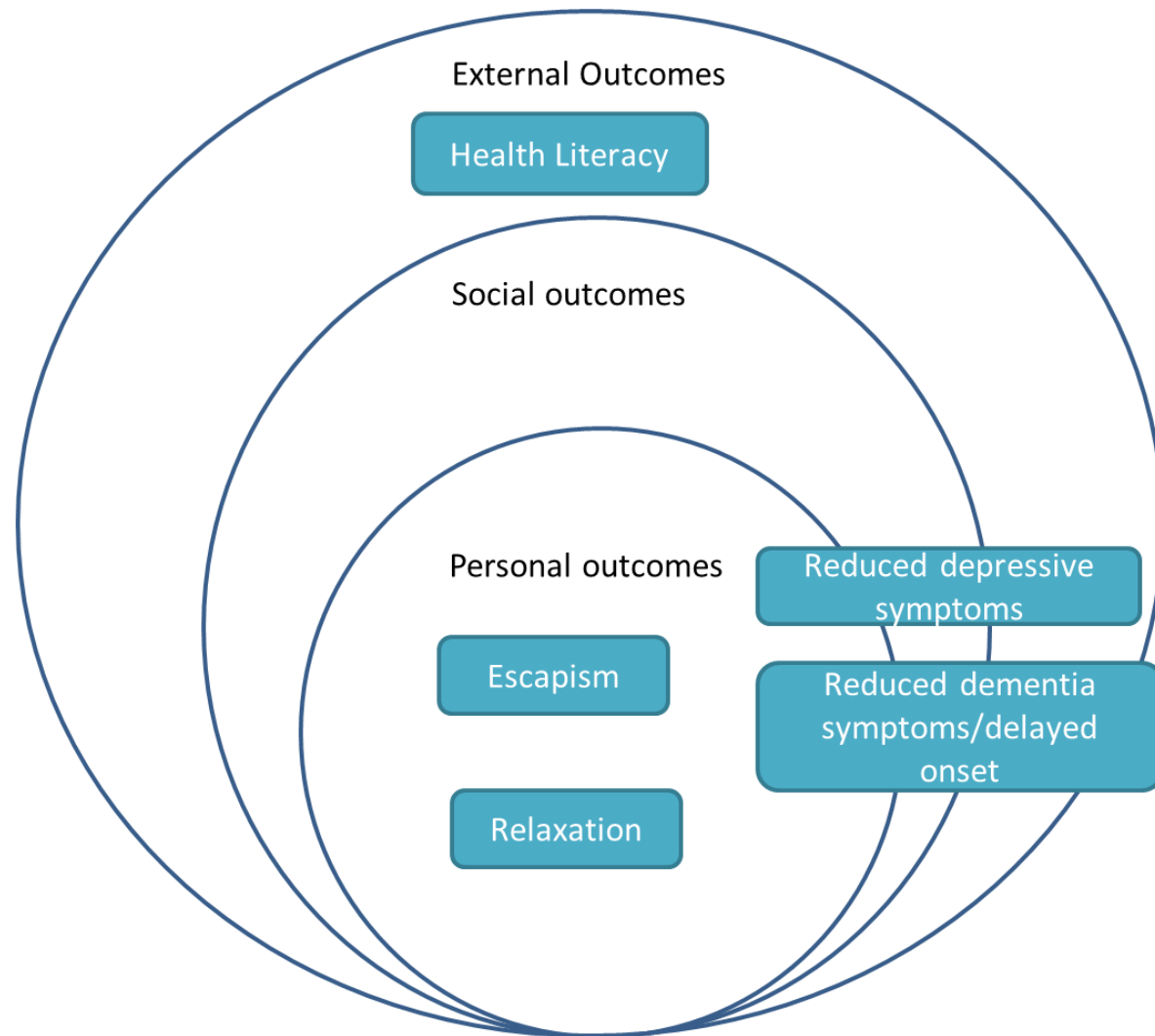


Figure 5: Outcomes and impact map for adults with health needs

7. Adults with additional needs

7.1 Overview of Studies

A number of studies have examined the effects of reading for pleasure on adults with additional needs, adults with low literacy levels, adults coming from disadvantaged social backgrounds and facing a range of other additional challenges. Several studies show a positive association between reading for pleasure and the acquisition of transferrable skills, (skills which might boost potential for employability and active participation in society).

7.1.1 *Transferable skills*

Oakey (2007) evaluated the outcomes of an Essex based reading intervention targeting 57 adults with limited ability to read. The intervention included the offer of reading short and low-difficulty books for pleasure facilitated through partnerships with libraries. Participants were encouraged to read for pleasure both within the session and in their spare time. Analysis of the pre-intervention and post intervention survey, complemented by focus groups held with the learners and 8 in depth interviews with key stakeholders, highlighted that, in addition to enhanced reading abilities, learners reported increased cognitive and communication skills. More specifically, 77% of learners felt more confident about their skills and abilities, 79% felt they were better able to express themselves in writing, and 87% were more motivated to learn.

Duncan (2010) examined the benefits of reading for pleasure for adult emergent readers, defined as adults who consider themselves non-readers because they cannot or do not read. Empirical investigation through focus groups and questionnaires on two reading groups in the

Greater London area (including observation, focus groups and interviews) showed participants reported improved confidence as well as improved personal skills and particular cognitive and communication skills. Participants took pride in their ability to complete something of clear social and cultural value and felt increasing confidence about their ability to learn and to express their self.

These findings echo an earlier study by Morris Hargreaves Macintyre (2005) who sought to explore the impact of reading for pleasure on emerging adult readers. The study highlighted that participants reported increased self-esteem, confidence in their abilities and communication skills, and concluded that an improvement in these skills was likely to increase participants' employability.

The positive association between reading for pleasure and transferable skills has also been highlighted by the Prison Reading Group, an organisation which promotes the set-up of reading groups in prisons, providing advice and support to those who run them. When running a small scale and qualitative evaluation of their work they found a positive association between reading for pleasure and the development of transferable skills including cognitive abilities, communication and self-esteem (Prison Reading Group, 2010).

7.1.2 *Relatedness*

Studies exploring the effect of reading for pleasure on adults with additional needs also show a positive association with key social capabilities such as empathy and relatedness.

In the 2010 study mentioned above, Duncan (2010) found that emergent readers reported enhanced abilities to interact and engage in their communities. Several of those taking part in the reading group spoke about how they shared their books with family members, friends

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

and neighbours, encouraging them to read and talk about the books they had read as part of the programme. Libraries and reading circles emerged as locations for community cohesion, gathering people from diverse backgrounds in the local area and providing them with opportunities to exchange their ideas and worldviews.

The Prison Reading Group evaluation (2010) also demonstrated how prisoners who took part in reading groups reported an enhanced connectedness with a wider culture beyond prison.

7.1.3 Summary

A relatively strong evidence base is emerging for outcomes relating to adults with additional needs. While the studies summarised here tend to focus on adults with below average literacy levels there are a number of repeated outcomes across different populations and study designs. For these groups, along with positive development in reading ability there was a tendency for improvements in communication, self-expression, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and relatedness to be reported. These findings are a point of reminder that when measuring educational development and progression for adult learners, it is important to explore and consider broader outcomes and how these may interact with learning outcomes.

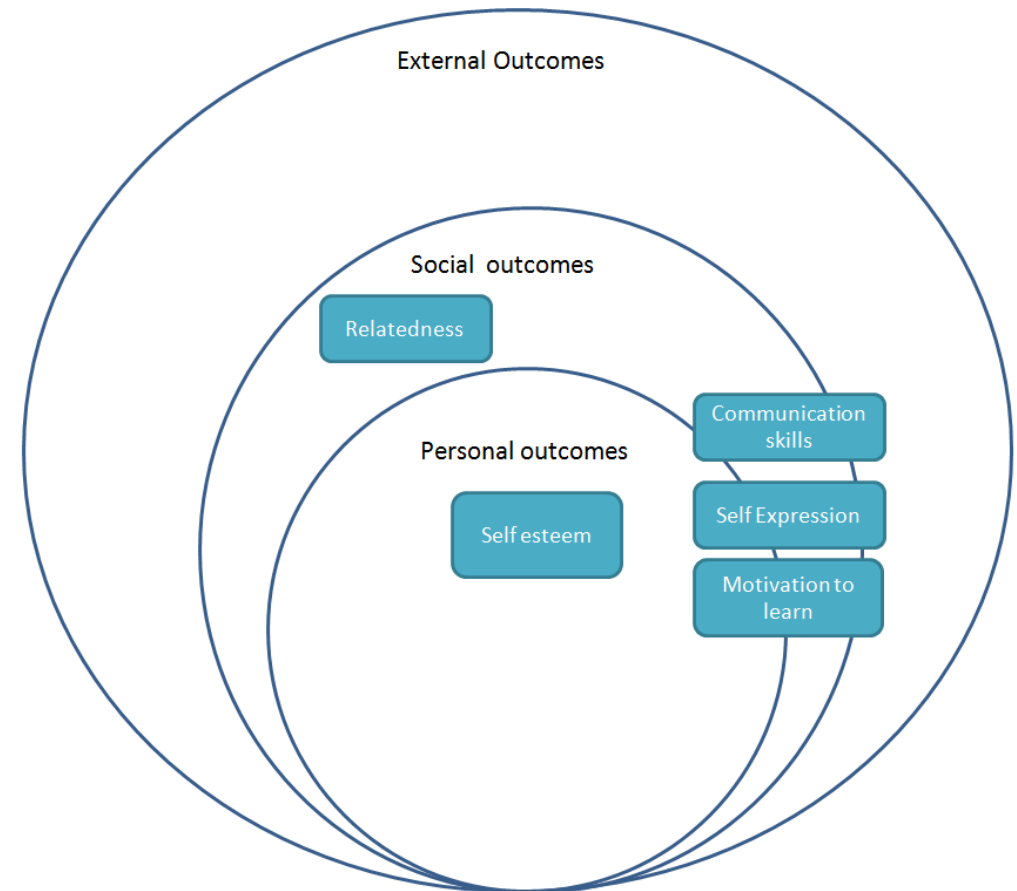


Figure 6: Outcomes and impact map for adults with additional needs

8. Quality of evidence and methodological trends

Overall the papers reviewed from both the academic journal search and the grey literature were of a high standard and reliable. Studies came from a range of disciplines with a predominance of studies from education, psychology and health, and a large proportion of the grey literature relating to UK-based cultural interventions and programmes. Studies were fairly geographically diverse with a slight bias towards the United Kingdom, the United States, Western Europe and Australia. Searches in Spanish and Italian did not retrieve any studies eligible for inclusion. There was an identifiable trend for studies to have been published since 2012 more so than in the seven previous years of the eligible timeframe. This may indicate that 'reading for pleasure' or 'recreational reading' is becoming a more popular area of study across disciplines in recent years.

The predominance of medical and education research designs means that the retrieved and included literature was mostly quantitative and from a positivist research paradigm (i.e. testing hypotheses and replicating research models from the natural sciences). While this is the common approach in population-level studies and those seeking to explore differences before and after an intervention, as well as relationships and associations between variables, it limits the extent to which we can understand people's perceptions and the role and function of reading in the lives of different populations and samples.

Additionally, the majority of studies are cross-sectional in nature, reporting observations from a single population at a single point in time. This does not allow for causality to be fully determined or account for change in the significance or influence of reading for pleasure over time. A final observation is that many of the studies reported findings from student, school pupil or clinical populations. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations and to more

naturalistic settings. Overall, while the variety of disciplines and methodologies adds a great deal of value to the evidence, this does make the aggregation of results more difficult as comparing the findings of studies from different sources can be complex.

9. Evidence gaps and future research priorities

In addition to the trends identified above there was also an obvious bias towards studies of children and young people. This may be expected based on the significance of reading behaviours on individuals' future lives and later outcomes, but it also limits our understanding of the significance and effect of reading amongst the general adult population.

'Reading for pleasure' was often included as a variable alongside many others in studies (e.g. academic reading, other leisure activities), which limits empirical attention on the unique features and function of recreational reading as an activity in its own right. The outcomes framework that will be developed building on this literature review should guide research and evaluation to focus on which aspects of reading for pleasure are the most important and how outcomes overlap and are linked.

There were significantly fewer studies retrieved on 'reading for empowerment'. The blurred areas between reading for learning and learning to read may have obscured the retrieval of appropriate studies through the search strategy adopted, but it seems there is also relatively lower levels of empirical attention paid to individuals choosing to read in their spare time in order to explicitly learn and master new skills and knowledge, or for self-help. While some studies refer to increases in emotional literacy, agency and externally observable skills, this is not always associated to book content or type and further research is needed that explores intentionality as a function of reading for pleasure. In short, if people are reading to improve their selves

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

(whether through a lack of personal, social or applied skills, to deal with an illness or condition, or to increase their knowledge of a topic) and they are doing this in a self-directed way in their leisure time, there does not appear to be much of an evidence base as to whether and how this is achieved or if it leads to any associated outcomes.

Based on the findings of the current review, there is a lack of research in the following areas:

Interpretative and phenomenological studies - The way that individuals comprehend and make sense of the role of reading in their lives and how their reading behaviour relates to other aspects of their identities, relationships, and abilities would be well suited to qualitative and interpretative research but there were very few studies that used this approach to explore the broader outcomes of reading for pleasure and empowerment.

Longitudinal research - Within the quantitative studies reviewed there was a lack of longitudinal studies, either as empirical designs or in the form of secondary analysis of existing data sets. There is an opportunity to explore reading habits as an independent variable across many existing longitudinal studies. This would also increase the opportunity to explore causality and change within populations over time. This could also shed light on the changing role and function of recreational reading if explored in existing life-course studies.

Applied settings - As research and evidence relating to the function of reading for pleasure in peoples' lives continues to emerge it will be important to direct research activity towards exploring how recreational reading can affect current policy issues (e.g. health and wellbeing, justice, employment and training). There were few reliable studies reporting the efficacy of recreational reading programmes in applied settings despite their effectiveness often being taken for granted.

Future programmes should have research and evaluation embedded, ideally through formal partnerships with third-party research organisations. The lack of research in applied settings is likely also a feature of academic convention and must also be challenged from within the academy.

Future approaches to research and evaluation across programmes and initiatives seeking to increase reading for pleasure and empowerment and improve broader positive outcomes should carefully consider how research approaches seeking to explore and measure impact are embedded from the beginning. Particular methods that could be relatively straightforward to implement and would improve the quality of evidence include:

Baseline and follow-up measures - much of the existing evaluation measures are post-hoc and reflect back on individual experience taking part in a programme. More robust findings could come from taking a repeated measures design.

Control groups - while full randomised control trials can be challenging, expensive and sometimes inappropriate, there may be opportunities to take comparative measures from control groups receiving alternative or no interventions and comparing the results. This would increase the reliability of findings and confidence in the results.

Interpretative and explorative research - the identified links between pleasure as an outcome, the development of self and social identities, and the directional links between outcomes (i.e. how one change leads to another) all lend themselves to qualitative inquiry. However, there was a dearth of in-depth qualitative studies that focused on these processes. This would also generate data that could better explain some of the statistical associations highlighted in this review (e.g. why does reading make people feel more confident and to what extent is

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

this process the same for different types of readers or types of literature).

10. Conclusion

A key theme that came through the research was the centrality of enjoyment of reading as a prerequisite for the other outcomes of reading to be achieved. Indeed, it was clear that attention must be paid to how individuals are motivated to read so that programmes seeking to bring about additional outcomes are best designed and targeted. It was clear from the review that reading is closely linked to increasing understanding of our own identities and can also play a large part in relating to others, understanding their world-views and so forth. This area of 'identity development' is complex and tends to be explored across different academic disciplines (education, psychology, sociology and the humanities) within the review. Another key theme that emerged was the use of recreational reading for distraction, relaxation, and knowledge development. These are likely starting points for the development of more 'externally observable' and measurable impacts.

The findings in the review are presented according to the five main populations that the literature tended to focus on:

General adult populations

The main outcomes reported for this group were enjoyment, relaxation and escapism, increasing understanding of self and social identities, empathy, knowledge of other cultures, relatedness, community cohesion and increasing social capital. There was a limited amount of research on this group, and it encompassed a variety of study designs which limits comparability.

Children and young people

The majority of the research reviewed for this study related to this group, indicating a broader and stronger evidence base. The main

outcomes reported were enjoyment, knowledge of the self and other people, social interaction, social and cultural capital, imagination, focus and flow, relaxation and mood regulation. Improvements in young children's communication abilities and longer-term education outcomes were also reported for early years children.

Parents and carers

There were fewer studies exploring additional outcomes for parents and carers, although the ones reviewed showed links between reading for pleasure and improvements in parent-child communication and understanding, as well as improving parenting knowledge.

Adults with health needs

There was a relatively substantial amount of research relating to links between recreational reading and health. These mostly related to changes in stress levels and relaxation, health literacy, and improvements in depression and dementia symptoms. One review showed mixed results on the positive effects of reading for pleasure and neurological conditions.

Adults with additional needs

These studies tended to focus on adults with below average levels of literacy but presented findings relating to communication, self-efficacy, learning motivation and relatedness.

The literature reviewed in this study comes from a range of diverse sources and disciplines, not least highlighting a distinction between research seeking to test hypotheses or explore population level trends, and that seeking to establish the efficacy of a programme or intervention. One overarching conclusion is that there is scope to bring these poles together so that the outcomes of reading for pleasure being discussed in international peer

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

reviewed journals are reflected in the programme design and evaluations of those working in the applied sector, and vice-versa. Developing an outcomes framework to guide evaluation across the sector could facilitate this.

Since most of the findings relate to non-educational outcomes there is also potential for this evidence to inform the discourse of education research and encourage a wider lens of enquiry (i.e. to include reading for pleasure and non-literacy measures in studies otherwise focusing on academic or literacy outcomes). This may serve to bring disparate research inquiries together and further strengthen the evidence base for the broader role that reading plays in people's lives and society.

Separating the evidence according to 'groups' or populations has been used to structure this research, but is also an unsatisfactory way to think about how these outcomes overlap in lived experience. While it is useful to explore the scale of research relating to different populations, it is also important to explore where these reported findings and outcomes are applicable across populations and can be considered as stable and secure impacts of reading in general. Outcomes relating to greater understanding of the self and others, knowledge of other cultures, relaxation, imagination and escapism, all transcend the defining characteristics of the 'groups' above. This may be a useful starting point for further enquiry.

Considering the relatively broad range of countries that are represented in the above research there is also potential to further explore cross and trans-national research that seeks to compare findings across cultures. There also appears to be a need to generate or locate research findings from 'developing' countries as this did not emerge in the current study.

There are clearly roles for individuals, parents, educators, third sector organisations, policy-makers, and more to be considered in promoting reading for pleasure among the general population and specific sub-sectors. The evidence presented here can increase understanding about when, how and why action can be taken to increase frequency and scale of reading for

pleasure and empowerment, as well as how supporting arguments can be best presented. In short, it is hoped that this review moves things forward in making the case for reading over and above the widely evidenced benefits of literacy in the traditional sense and highlights how reading is a popular activity to experience pleasure and empowerment, but has a function far beyond.

11. Bibliography

Bhatt, R. (2010). The impact of public library use on reading, television, and academic outcomes. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 68(2), 148-166.

Billington, J. (2015). *Reading between the Lines: the Benefits of Reading for Pleasure*, Quick Reads, University of Liverpool

Billington, J., Carroll, J., Davis, P., Healey, C., & Kinderman, P. (2013). A literature-based intervention for older people living with dementia. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 133(3), 165-173.

Book Trust (2008). *Reading for Pleasure: Reading for Life*, London: Book Trust

Book Trust: Evidence summary - The importance of reading with children frequently, ideally every day

Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for Pleasure: A Research Overview. National Literacy Trust.*

Demack, S. and Stevens, A. (2013). *Evaluation of Bookstart England: Bookstart Corner*. Sheffield Hallam University/ Book Trust

De Naeghel, J., Van Keer, H., Vansteenkiste, M., & Rosseel, Y. (2012). The Relation Between Elementary Students' Recreational and Academic Reading Motivation, Reading Frequency, Engagement, and Comprehension: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1006-1021.

DeWalt DA, Hink A. Health literacy and child health outcomes: a systematic review of the literature. *Pediatrics*. 2009 Nov;124

Department for Education (2012). *Research evidence on reading for pleasure*, Education standards research team, UK Government

DJS Research (2013). 'Book Trust Reading Habits Survey 2013': A national survey of reading habits and attitudes to books amongst adults in England', Book Trust

Dowrick, C., Billington, J., Robinson, J., Hamer, A., & Williams, C. (2012). Get into Reading as an intervention for common mental health problems: exploring catalysts for change. *Medical Humanities*, 38(1), 15-20.

Duncan, S. (2010). 'Understanding reading for Pleasure for emerging adult readers', National research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), Institute of Education, London

Goldfeld, S., Quach, J., Nicholls, R., Reilly, S., Ukoumunne, O. C., & Wake, M. (2012). Four-Year-Old Outcomes of a Universal Infant-Toddler Shared Reading Intervention The Let's Read Trial. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 166(11), 1045-1052.

Greenwood, H. & Hicks, D. (2015) *Assessing the Impact of Reading for Blind and Partially Sighted Young People*, RNIB, The Reading Agency, Loughborough University

Hong, Z.-R., & Lin, H.-s. (2012). Impacts of a Book Reading Club Intervention on Enhancing Parents' Positive Thinking. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 17(2), 273-284.

Howard, V. (2011). The importance of pleasure reading in the lives of young teens: Self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 43(1), 46-55.

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

Hughes, T. F., Chang, C.-C. H., Vanderbilt, J., & Ganguli, M. (2010). Engagement in Reading and Hobbies and Incident Dementia in the Community: The MoVIES Project. *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 18(3), S100-S100.

Kennedy, R. and Bearne, E. (2009), 'Summer Reading Challenge 2009 Impact Research Report' The United Kingdom Literacy Association/The Reading Agency

Kumschick, I. R., Beck, L., Eid, M., Witte, G., Klann-Delius, G., Heuser, I., et al. (2014). READING and FEELING: the effects of a literature-based intervention designed to increase emotional competence in second and third graders. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5.

Kush, J. C., & Watkins, M. W. (1996). Long-term stability of children's attitudes toward reading. *Journal of Educational Research*, 89(5), 315-319.

Latchem, J. M., & Greenhalgh, J. (2014). The role of reading on the health and well-being of people with neurological conditions: a systematic review. *Aging & Mental Health*, 18(6), 731-744.

Lockwood, M. (2012). Attitudes to Reading in English Primary Schools. *English in Education*, 46(3), 228-246.

Mar, R. A., DeYoung, C. G., Higgins, D. M., & Peterson, J. B. (2006). Self-Liking and Self-Competence Separate Self-Evaluation From Self-Deception: Associations With Personality, Ability, and Achievement. *Journal of Personality*, 74(4), 1047-1078.

Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. *Communications-European Journal of Communication Research*, 34(4), 407-428.

Merga, M. K. (2014). Peer Group and Friend Influences on the Social Acceptability of Adolescent Book Reading. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 57(6), 483-491.

Merga, M. K. (2015). "She knows what I like": Student-generated best-practice statements for encouraging recreational book reading in adolescents. *Australian Journal of Education*, 59(1), 35-50.

Moje, E., Overby, M., Tysvaer, N., & Morris, K. (2008). The complex world of adolescent literacy: Myths, motivations, and mysteries. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(1), 107-154.

Mol, S. E., & Jolles, J. (2014). Reading enjoyment amongst non-leisure readers can affect achievement in secondary school. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5.

Morris Hargreaves Macintyre, (2005) 'Confidence All Round: The Impact on Emergent Adult Readers of Reading for Pleasure, The Vital Link', Museums and Libraries Association

Moyer, J. E. (2007). Learning from leisure reading. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 46(4), 66-79.

National Endowment for the Arts (2007). To Read or Not to Read: A question of national consequence, USA. No. 47

Nippold, M. A., Duthie, I. K., & Larsen, J. (2005). Literacy as a leisure activity: Free-time preferences of older children and young adolescents. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36(2), 93-102.

Oakey, S. (2007) 'Practitioners leading research: Weaving reading for pleasure into the Skills for Life adult literacy curriculum', National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy, Institute of Education

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

Pankratow, M., Berry, T. R., & McHugh, T.-L. F. (2013). Effects of Reading Health and Appearance Exercise Magazine Articles on Perceptions of Attractiveness and Reasons for Exercise. *Plos One*, 8(4).

Parthasarathy, S., Bridges, D., McGrath, S. M., Au, C.P. Wong, T.K., & Yiu, C. K. (2014). The Relation Between Caregivers' Multiliterate Reading Habits and Their Children's Oral Health Status. *Interactive journal of medical research*, 3(3), e13-e13.

Product Perceptions and The Reading Agency (2003) 'Inspiring Children: The Impact of the Summer Reading Challenge', The Reading Maze 2003 National Participant Survey'

Prison Reading Group (2013) 'What Books Can Do Behind Bars: Report on the work of the PRG 1999-2013'

Smith, J. K., Smith, L. F., Gilmore, A., & Jameson, M. (2012). Students' self-perception of reading ability, enjoyment of reading and reading achievement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22(2), 202-206.

Spacey, R., Creaser, C., & Hicks, D. (2014). The impact of reading for pleasure on blind and partially sighted adults and its implications for materials provision. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 46(4), 271-288.

Sullivan, A. and Brown, M. (2013) *Social Inequalities in Cognitive Scores at age 16: The role of reading*, Centre for Longitudinal Studies Working Paper 2013/10, London: Institute of Education

Taylor, A. W., Winefield, H., Kettler, L., Roberts, R., & Gill, T. K. (2012). A Population Study of 5 to 15 Year Olds: Full Time Maternal Employment not associated with High BMI. The Importance of Screen-Based Activity, Reading for Pleasure and Sleep Duration in Children's

BMI. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 16(3), 587-599.

The Reading Agency (2003), *Chatterbooks Evaluation*, unpublished evaluation

Twist, L., Schagen, I. and Hodgson, C. (2007). *Readers and Reading: the National Report for England 2006 (PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)*. Slough: NFER

Vasquez, J. M. (2005). Ethnic identity and Chicano literature: How ethnicity affects reading and reading affects ethnic consciousness. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(5), 903-924.

Venn, L. (Free Thought Research) (2014). *Family reading habits and the impact of Bookstart*, Book Trust

Verghese, J., Lipton, R.B., Katz, M.J., Hall, C., Derby, C.A., Kuslansky, G., Ambrose, A.F., Sliwinski, M., Buschke, H. (2003) *Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, Waltham: Massachusetts medical society, 348:2508-16

Wade, B., & Moore, M. (2000). A sure start with books. *Early Years*, 20 (Spring), 39-46.

Wood, C., Vardy, E. & Tarczynski-Bowles, L. (2015) *Early Words Together: Impact on Families and Children*, National Literacy Trust, Final report, Centre for Research in Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement, Coventry: Coventry University

Appendix 1 - Search terms and result yields

1. Reading

- Reading AND pleasure: research on Web of Science (TOPIC, 2005-2015) yielded 945 results, scanned all 945, selected 21 articles.
- Reading AND intervention: research on Web of Science *(TITLE, 2005-2015) yielded 426 results, scanned all 426, selected 20 articles
- 'recreational reading' research on Web of Science (TOPIC, 2005-2015) yielded 55 results, scanned all 55, selected 15 article. (very useful)
- Reading AND enjoyment: research on Web of Science (TOPIC, 2005-2015) yielded 350 result scanned all 230, selected 17 articles
- Reading AND empowerment research on Web of Science (TOPIC 2005-2015) yielded results scanned all 226, selected 2 articles (many articles already selected).
- Reading AND extra-curricular: research on Web of Science (TOPIC 2005-2015) yielded 15 results, scanned all 15, selected 4 articles
- Reading AND outcomes research on Web of Science (TITLE 2005-2015) yielded 178 results, scanned all 178, selected 13 articles (many of the articles were about reading for the sake of reading)
- Reading AND identities: research on Web of Science (TITLE, 2005-2015) yielded 124 result, scanned all 124, selected 7 articles.
- Reading AND engagement: research on Web of Science *(TITLE, 2005-2015) yielded 75 results, scanned all 75, selected 7 articles (a lot of articles about studying rather than reading)
- Reading AND health: research on Web of Science (TITLE, 2005-2015) yielded 123 result, scanned all 123, selected 13 articles.
- Reading AND economic prosperity research on Web of Science (TOPIC, 2005-2015) yielded 15 result, scanned all 15, selected 1 article.
- 'independent reading' research on Web of Science (TOPIC, 2005-2015) yielded 98 result, scanned all 98, selected 7 articles (not really relevant)

2. Literature

- Literature AND pleasure – 760 (Webscience, TOPIC, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 760, found 26 - 1
- Literature AND enjoyment - 623 (WEbscience, TOPIC, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 623 , found 2 – 2
- Literature AND identities – 396 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 396, found 13 - 3
- Literature AND empowerment – 24 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005-2015), reviewed 24, found 2
- Literature AND extra-curricular - 27 (Webscience, TOPIC.2005-2015), reviewed 27, found 0
- Literature AND outcomes - 897(Webscience, TITLE, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 897, found 5
- Literature AND intervention – 631 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 631, found 5
- Literature AND engagement – 40 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005 – 2015) reviewed 40, found 3
- Literature AND health – 1335 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005 – 2015) reviewed 600, found 1
- Literature AND economic prosperity – 118 (Webscience, TITLE 2005 – 2015) reviewed 118, found 1
- 'independent Literature ' - 9 (Webscience, TOPIC, 2005 – 2015) reviewed 9, found 0
- 'recreational Literature'- 7 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005 – 2015) reviewed 7, found 0

3. Literacy

- Literacy AND pleasure – 59 (Webscience, TOPIC, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 59, found 5
- Literacy AND enjoyment - 86 (WEbscience, TOPIC, 2005 – 2015), reviewed 86, found 2

Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment

- Literacy AND empowerment – 319 (Webscience, TOPIC, 2005 - 2015), reviewed 319, found 3
- Literacy AND extra-curricular – 6 (Webscience, TOPIC, 2005-2015), reviewed 6, found 0
- Literacy AND outcomes – 159 (Webscience, TITLE, 2005-2015), reviewed 159, found 3

Appendix 2 - List of Project Steering Group members

Arts Council England
Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians
Book Trust
Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
Education Endowment Foundation
National Literacy Trust
Publishers Association
Scottish Library and Information Council
Society of Chief Librarians
The Reading Agency

Appendix 3 - Glossary of Outcomes

- **Attainment:** achieving a goal toward which a person has worked, often expressed in the form of certification or accreditation
- **Communication skills:** conveying meaning through different mediums such as talking, listening and exchanging views
- **Creativity and imagination:** forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses
- **Cultural capital:** non-financial assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Examples can include education, intellectual capacity, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance.
- **Dementia symptoms:** symptoms associated with dementia illnesses, often causing deterioration in brain function and loss of memory
- **Depressive symptoms:** symptoms associated with depressive illness, often featuring feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, guilt and a loss of interest in activities
- **Emotional intelligence:** the ability to recognise one's own and other people's emotions, to tell the difference between different feelings and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour
- **Empathy:** the ability to understand another person's perceptions and feelings
- **Enjoyment:** the state or process of taking pleasure in something
- **Escapism:** seeking distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy
- **Focus and flow:** performing an activity fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. Flow is associated with having the correct amount of challenge Vs ability in task completion
- **Knowledge of other cultures:** awareness of different perspectives and ways of life, including differences based on history, geography, religion and custom
- **Knowledge of self/self-identity:** awareness of one's individual properties, characteristics, needs and desires
- **Knowledge of services:** awareness of social support that can help an individual with their needs (e.g. hospital, library, education, financial services)
- **Motivation to learn:** eagerness to acquire new or deeper knowledge and understanding of one or more subject matters
- **Parent/child communication:** the ability to understand perspectives and needs between parents and their children, particularly significant in pre-verbal stages of childhood
- **Positive parenting:** the ability to guide and educate children in a positive way that is not punitive
- **Relatedness:** the feeling of being connected to other individuals and the wider community
- **Relaxation:** reduction of effort and relief from bodily or mental work
- **Self-esteem:** a person's judgment and attitude to themselves, reflecting their emotional evaluation of their own worth
- **Self-expression:** the expression of one's feelings, thoughts, or ideas, especially in writing, art, music, or dance
- **Social capital:** the strength and number of relationships a person has with others and how this makes them feel able to operate in society according to their needs and wishes