ENCOURAGING YOUR STUDENTS TO WANT TO READ FOR PLEASURE

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1:30-2:30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 things you discovered</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 interesting things</td>
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<td>1 question you still have</td>
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WHO AM I & WHY AM I DOING THIS?

• Senior Lecturer at Murdoch University in Australia
• Research active educator passionate about research translation
• Used to be 100% education, now papers in or in press in Public Library Quarterly, Journal of Library Administration, School Library Research etc. New editor for The Library Workforce column, International Information & Library Review.
• OR CBC Judge this year
• My background: ESL teacher, English & History teacher, teacher of teachers
• But it all began with a discovery when I began tutoring while I was still in high school...
• Who can make a difference, and how?
SOME OF MY RECENT STUDIES

- 2012 West Australian Study in Adolescent Book Reading (WASABR) (N=520, aged 13-16)
- 2016 Western Australian Study in Children’s Book Reading (WASCBR) (N=997, aged 8-12).
- 2015 International Study of Avid Book Readers (ISABR) (N=1,143, mostly adult)
- 2016 Western Australian Study in Reading Aloud (21 schools, parents, teachers, children K-6)
- 2016 Teen Reading in the Digital Era: Platforms, Access and Diversity (13 high schools, two states, N=555)
EVIDENCE IN THIS PAPER

- Peer-reviewed literature review (mine and others)
- Child-centered research—assumes young people are experts on themselves
- Research needs to be conducted with advocacy shelved, and avoiding pre-conception—**you MUST be willing and able to find the opposite of what you expect/hope for**
- The power of **mixed-methods**—what and why, broad (generalisable) and deep (explanatory)—issues with qualitative (e.g. interviews with small sample) and quantitative (e.g. surveys which assume they are asking the right questions)
WHY THIS APPROACH?

• Bridging the gap between research and practice, refreshing the knowledge base
• Why reading for pleasure is important, drawing on the growing body of research around literacy benefits, cognitive benefits, and social benefits
• Advocacy is well and good, but to win the war you need the research data
• Reading myths can flourish when research is not taken into account, and these can be potentially harmful
WE WILL EXPLORE...

• Why (book) reading is still very important: my inbox wars
• Current popular reading myths and the research that deflates them: risky trends
• Youth sourced strategies to make them read more: from the source
1. AMMUNITION FOR ARGUING FOR MORE READING TIME IN YOUR SCHOOL

• Research links regular independent reading to cognitive benefit and literacy outcomes (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; OECD, 2010; Samuels & Wu, 2001; Stanovich, 1986; Thomson et al., 2012)

• “Time spent reading is related to reading success” (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999, p. 102)

• Literacy skill acquisition on a continuum (beyond independent reading skill)
FOR EXAMPLE (VOCAB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Reading Minutes Per Day</th>
<th>Words read per year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>4 358 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>1 823 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>282 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>8000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Cunningham and Stanovich, 2001)
OTHER BENEFITS

• Reading of fiction books = development of empathy and positive interpersonal characteristics (e.g. Comer Kidd & Castano 2013; Oatley, 2016)

• Regular reading = improved performance in mathematics (e.g. Sullivan & Brown, 2013)

• Regular reading = cognitive stamina & resistance to decline into old age (e.g. Vermuri & Mormino, 2013; Wilson et al., 2013), and even longevity (Bavishi, Slade, & Levy, 2016)
ALITERACY

• Aliteracy: whereby independent reading skill has been achieved, but reading will has not been fostered (Nathanson, Pruslow & Levitt 2008)

• Most (not all) individuals in Western society have achieved basic literacy skills by adulthood

• However, functional illiteracy, where literacy levels are not sufficient to meet current academic, vocational and social demands, is a widespread issue (Zebroff and Kaufman, 2016)
WHY IT IS A PROBLEM

• Use it or lose it: Gaps in reading= backslide (as seen on vacation) (Harris & Butaud, 2016; McGill-Franzen, Ward & Cahill, 2016; Shin & Krashen, 2008)

• Student engagement in recreational reading is in decline (e.g. Common Sense Media, 2014; OECD 2011), which becomes more marked as children move through the years of schooling

• Two of our biggest challenges: EXPIRED EXPECTATIONS and ORPHANED RESPONSIBILITY

• How do we decide what to do with our recreational time? (e.g. opportunity, access, value etc.)
READ ANYTHING?

- Books are still a beneficial text type (e.g. Spear-Swerling, Brucker & Alfano, 2010)

- Reading graphic novels, text messages, the internet (Baer, Baldi, Ayotte, & Green, 2007), and comic books (OECD, 2010) have not been found to offer equal literacy benefit, and fiction books are particularly associated with literacy benefits (OECD, 2011)

- For example, while paper book reading has been found to offer benefit for the development of reading comprehension and vocabulary, reading online emails or social networking sites is associated negatively with reading achievement (e.g. Pfost et al., 2013)

- Can “read anything” perpetuate literacy inequity?
2. MYTHS

- Assumptions = “facts” without research to support
- Pervasive and popular
- Exploited by commercial entities
THINK AND SHARE: DO YOU PREFER TO READ ON PAPER OR SCREENS? WHY?

Greenland is right inside; he is the best existing authority.

I will venture no nothing and say nothing; all the great

spars who never met; are adrift, and into the arctic

world; but, as for me, I cannot help it; and it shows

clearly, without a shadow of a doubt, that the

Greenland whale is a whale of the Greenland

world. It is not even by any means the largest of the

whales; yet, being so small, the Greenland whale, and the

proximity of ice and snow, which, till some seventy years

back, covered the then villages, or circular eskimo

settlements, and which ignorance to this present day still

rings in, all, make for scientific research and

whaling; this expedition has been every year complete.

Hertford and historical all the presentable; the homes in the

great ports of past days, will solely prove that the

Greenland whale, without new rival, was to them the

monarch of the seas. But the time has at last come for a new

proclamation—this is Chasing these heat, yet great people, all—
the Greenland whale is exposed; all the great spars who now

explain.
MYTH 1. ALL YOUNG PEOPLE PREFER EBOOKS.

- Why do we think this?
- Digital natives?
- Marketing
- We see kids with screens, but we don’t necessarily ASK them
WHERE TEENAGERS HAD ACCESS TO DEVICES...

- Most never read books on a computer (68%) or a phone (86%) (Merga, 2014d)
WHAT ABOUT AVID TEEN READERS?

• Avid readers (at least 2x per week)
• Only 24% of these students with access frequently read books using an eReader
• 12% of avid readers with access frequently read books on a computer
• only 7% of avid readers with a mobile phone used it frequently for reading books (Merga, 2014)
YOUNGER CHILDREN

• They also generally underutilise devices for reading purposes, even when they were daily book readers.
• Access to mobile phones was associated with reading infrequency.
• Reading frequency was less when children had access to a greater range of these devices (Merga & Mat Roni, 2017b).
• As per on next slide, daily readers are not reading on the devices they have access to.
Table 8
Percentage frequency of device use for reading book for daily reading students with access to devices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading frequency on devices</th>
<th>iPad/Kindle %</th>
<th>Computer %</th>
<th>Mobile phone %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>
MYTH 2. BOYS PREFER READING EBOOKS

http://experimentalgameplay.com/blog/2010/10/boys-and-girls-in-october/comment-page-1/
GIRLS VS BOYS

• Girls tend to significantly outperform boys in international literacy testing (ACARA 2015; NAEP 2015; OECD 2015a) & have a more favorable view toward reading and engage in the practice with greater frequency than boys (e.g. Merga, 2014b; OECD, 2010).

• Improving boys’ attitudes toward reading and promoting greater frequency of engagement in the practice can improve boys’ performance.
IT’S NOT ABOUT SEX

• Gap is socio-cultural rather than have a biological
• Reading may be culturally constructed as typically feminine practices (e.g. Alloway et al., 2002; Martino, 2001; Morgan, Nutbrown and Hannon, 2009; Nichols, 2002)
• Parents tend to read more with young girls than boys (Baker & Milligan, 2016).
• HOWEVER attitudes toward reading may not be as unfavourable as generally viewed (e.g. Clark, Osbourne & Akerman, 2008; Merga, 2014c)—be careful not to re-inforce this in efforts to address it (see previous work, Merga 2017)
SPECULATION THAT BOYS PREFER EBOOKS BECAUSE...

• “It is certainly the case that there are gamelike features in using a laptop, a tablet, or a phone, and these may enhance boys’ motivation” (Harrison, 2016, p. 222).

• But if this were proven (and it has yet to be), what would that mean for sustained attention?

• Aside from intervention supported contexts, boys may not read eBooks more frequently than girls, with previous UK research suggesting that 8% of girls read eBooks compared with 7.7% of boys (Clark, 2012).
OUR RELEVANT FINDINGS (WASCBR): READING

• While device access was negatively associated with reading frequency for both genders, its negative impact was more significant for girls than boys (Merga & Mat Roni, in press)

• % Daily reader device use by gender where access available in table below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>iPad/Kindle</th>
<th>Computer</th>
<th>Mobile phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
NEGATIVE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF EBOOK MYTHS IN REAL LIFE

• Implications for educators wishing to match resourcing with student reading preferences
• Pertinent in the context of the movement toward “bookless” libraries (Merga 2014d; Merga, 2015b)
• $ cut from paper resourcing (school and public libraries in WA, other states, USA)
• Reduced access to preferred modes could impact on reading frequency and concentration
• Supports homogenous construction of young people and gender stereotypes
MYTH 3. BOYS DON’T LIKE FICTION.

• Why do we think this?
• Clinging to biological determinism despite the fact that it is repeatedly disproven
• There’s a gap after all in literacy attainment (and it’s easier to ascribe it to sex and biology rather than face our hegemonic construction of masculinity)
• We are told this by organisations such as the OECD
• OECD refers to a website: boys ‘often don’t feel comfortable exploring the emotions and feelings found in fiction’ and expounds the importance of ‘boy-friendly non-fiction’ (Scieszka, n.d.)
• Again, maybe we don’t ASK boys (blue-box boys?)
Table 1. Percentage of boys and girls who reported that they read the following materials because they want to ‘several times a month’ or ‘several times a week’
Adapted from Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators – © OECD 2011
Indicator A6: Engagement in reading and performance
Chart A6.5. What boys and girls read for enjoyment, OECD average
Version 1 – Last updated: 26-Aug-2011
ISABR

As per Figure 1 below, only 17.2% of male ISABR respondents mostly read non-fiction, with 49.4% reading mostly fiction, and a third of respondents reading ‘around equal of both’.

Figure 1. Response to the question ‘Do you mostly read fiction or non-fiction books?’
WASCBR
As per Figure 2 below, only 8.6% of boys preferred to read books about information and facts. Nearly half (48%) preferred fiction, and the remaining 43.4% were happy to read either.

Figure 2 Response to the question ‘If you have to choose a book to read, what type of book do you prefer?’
NEGATIVE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF NONFICTION MYTH

• The perpetuation of such myths may contribute to male reading infrequency as fiction reading is more strongly associated with literacy benefit

• Leads to re-enforcement of unhelpful stereotypes of masculinity

• Leads to homogenisation (absolutely counter-intuitive for most people who actually know some boys)

• Reading of fiction= fostering of empathy and perspective taking
THINK AND SHARE: WHAT DO YOU LIKE?

• Turn to a person near you. Ask:

• A) What kinds of books do you like? Why?

• B) If you do not like reading books, what do you prefer to do with your free time?

• Use this information to recommend a book to your partner (e.g. if they do not like reading books, but enjoy playing Diablo on their PlayStation, you might recommend a good fantasy book)
3. HOW TO GET THEM READING MORE? INSIGHTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE
A. KNOW THEM

- Know the current and evolving interests and aspirations of your individual students, and be a wide reader yourself

- “She shows you what books are really good. And she listens to what interests we have. So she offers me books as well, because she knows what I like, and, yeah, she’s really good. She listens to people so she knows what books they like.” (WASABR teenager)

- Just as we (adults) have diverse preferences, so do they

- What does this look like? Letter to the teacher, book clubs, student-lead book discussions and debates, recommendation systems on the LMS etc.
B. MODEL

• Teacher modelling of personal enjoyment of recreational book reading

“ I’m not sure how he likes reading books, because I’ve never really heard him talk about reading books, other than the ones we read at school, so, I couldn’t give you a true opinion on that.” (WASABR teenager)

• “I don’t know, because I don’t see her reading; she’s always teaching or working on her laptop” (WASCBR child)

• Librarians can also be important models
WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

• From the obvious to the more subtle
• Be seen to be 1) reading 2) independently 3) whenever you can
• 1) Talk about books 2) in the context of pleasure
• 1) Read to the class 2) with expression 3) and emotional connection
C. SUPPORT ACCESS

- **Providing Access**: Sending books home to read for pleasure should not end in early primary school.
- Let parents know this remains important
- What does this look like? Providing time for students to visit and use a school or public library, or in-class library, for the selection of books to read for pleasure etc.
- Our recent research suggests that even where students have access to school libraries, these are underutilized by teachers during class time
- Important because “as children grow older, they are less likely to visit libraries during their free time compared to during the school hours” (Merga & Mat Roni, 2017b), and they are also more likely to become alliterate.
D. KEEPING PLEASURE IN FOCUS

• Fostering pleasure rather than skill or test focused reading

• “they expect you to just read mainly what you have to do for an assessment or something, but in primary school they’d always take us to the library, or get books out that you like.” (WASABR teenager)

• What does this look like? Talking about books in the context of pleasure, not always in an anatomical way etc.

• Libraries and librarians can play an important role in addressing this imbalance by creating spaces for and facilitating reading for pleasure
BUT ALSO A PROBLEM EARLIER

• Lucian did not know if his teacher liked reading, though he felt that his teacher viewed reading as important, “because we’re reading quite a lot this term and we’ve all had reading tests”. Similarly, though Veronica was not sure if her teacher liked reading, she felt that her teacher regarded reading as important, as “we do reading comprehension things, we do reading tests, and like, we did one the other day and we did English”. (WASCBR children)

• Is reading a thing we just do to pass tests? Why is this an issue? EVT etc.
E. EXPECT IT

• Expecting students will read both at school and at home
• Risks becoming an orphaned responsibility and young people transition from learning to read to reading to learn
• “...some of them have been encouraging, some of them have just quite a neutral perspective on it, yeah. They don’t like not recommend us, but they don’t go out of their way to recommend any books to us, or anything like that.” (WASABR teenager)
• What does this look like? Reminding young people that reading is important, reminding them about the benefits of reading, expecting that they fit it into their daily lives, asking them to share book recommendations, etc.
F. FEED IT TIME

• Using practices that encourage reading for pleasure, such as reading aloud to students and silent reading.

• “My fifth grade teacher read my favourite series to the class, just the first book, and encouraged me to finish it, and now I read it every summer”. (ISABR participant)

• What does this look like? Regular time for reading aloud and silent reading beyond the early years, time to talk about books in the context of pleasure, etc.
G. TEACH AND SHOW THEM HOW TO BE A READER

• How to choose—teach strategies, demonstrate (see figure below for how students choose)

• How to know when to give up—teach strategies, demonstrate

• “My 5th grade librarian was the first person to explain the difference between fiction and non-fiction reading. She showed me the US history section of the library and I fell in love. Ten years later I'm in college studying history and philosophy. It was one of the most defining moments of my lifetime and she has no idea what she did for me.” (ISABR participant)
H. TALK (MORE THEM, LESS YOU, THOUGH YOU MAY NEED TO MODEL THIS)

- Enjoyment of discussion about books may be related to **common interests**, enjoyment of discussion to facilitate **critical exploration and comprehension**, and the possibilities provided for **recommendations and access**.

- Adolescents’ interests in and ability to engage in book discussions was shaped by **mutual text exposure, opportunity, personal preference, disinterested peers and social status maintenance** (Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2017)
THIS MEANS

• **Special Interest Groups** (for recreational reading discussion) can facilitate critical exploration and comprehension

• **Allowing** students to have opinions and to respectfully dislike

  “We’re talking about favourite characters, and I prefer the evil character as I find them quite interesting. Like we were just, yeah, talking about the interesting characters, and you know the stereotypical good person is always going to win and that, I can sometimes find it quite boring, so I quite enjoyed the evil character, so that’s what we were arguing about [chuckles].”
  (Chris)

• Make it **safe**, provide **opportunity**
OTHER MODELS...GUSHING ON GOODREADS WITH THE GIFS

Fabian rated it 5 stars • review of another edition
Shelves: favorites

It's incredibly difficult to find substance in the ordinary. This novel in episodes, all revolving around the ever enigmatic Olive, does something extraordinary: each tale is so rich with description, so tangible (I believe I breathed in the saltiness of the Maine coast, practically) that they ...transcend. There is actually nothing innovatory in Elizabeth Strout's fantastic short story collection but she knows perfectly well how to orchestrate a fabulous and gut-wrenching short story: every sin ...more
I: RECRUIT PARENT ALLIES

• Support parents to avoid expired expectations & continue (hopefully) reading aloud at home for as long as possible

• Build parental efficacy, and let them know what a supportive parent can do

“Parents who continued to encourage their children’s recreational book reading into adolescence were encouraging and responsive to their children’s individual taste and preferences. They were active in modelling keen reading, providing informed recommendations for their children, and facilitating access to books” (Merga, 2014)

• Parent skill level issues are NOT a deal breaker (e.g. sharing audiobooks)

• What does this look like? Letters (SMOG readability), emails, training sessions, one to one support etc.
FOR EXAMPLE

“I loved it! Some of my fondest memories were of my dad reading to me. I loved that he used different voices for different characters. Mum was not so good at reading aloud. She stumbled and didn't have the right flow. But I enjoyed being close to her physically. It allowed me to cuddle, smell and get a close up look at her while she was reading. I got to know her while she was reading.”

(parent from the RAS study)
USE THESE FINDINGS

• Arguing for $$$ for resourcing for paper books as well as eBooks.
• Arguing for time/space for reading for pleasure at school, and reading aloud beyond the early years.
• Feeling free to talk about books in the context of pleasure WITHOUT CRIPPLING GUILT due to the competing curricular demands 😊
• Ending the tyranny of boys/girls books—treat young people like the diverse group of readers that they are
• Maintaining or creating a valuing of reading for pleasure in your class context
• Power to model because it’s important
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

• What are the biggest barriers we face to implementing these ideas and strategies?
• What are possible solutions?
• Other questions?


• Merga, M.K. (2016). "I don’t know if she likes reading": Are teachers perceived to be keen readers, and how is this determined?" *English in Education, 50*(3), 255-269.


AND IN PRESS (COMING SOON!)

- There are a number of additional peer-reviewed papers currently in press, so please follow my work on Research Gate.


FOR REFERENCES OR FURTHER INFORMATION, GET IN TOUCH:

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