Approaches to Reading and Writing for Pleasure:

An Executive Summary of the Research

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Introduction

This Executive Summary was commissioned by the Mercers' Company as part of its three-year Young People & Education programme's 'Literature Special Initiative on Reading and Writing for Pleasure (2020-2023)'. It sought to establish:

> 'The approaches that seem to be effective in inspiring and encouraging children and young people to read and/or write for pleasure.'

Initially, two separate reviews of existing research literature on motivating young readers and young writers were undertaken, and then themes were identified within, and synergies across these reviews in relation to effective approaches. The resultant Executive Summary thus draws on both reviews and offers a synthesis.

A substantial body of research reveals that being a keen young reader has benefits; it is associated with academic, social and emotional outcomes, including, enhanced comprehension, enriched vocabulary and narrative writing, wider knowledge of the world, and better learning outcomes (e.g. Jouhar and Rupley 2021; McQuillan 2019; Torppa et al., 2020; Troyer et al., 2019). Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 'consistently show that engagement in reading is strongly correlated with reading performance and is a mediator of gender or socio-economic status' (OECD, 2021, p. 28). Writing research also evidences strong associations between motivation, self-efficacy and writing performance (Graham, 2017). Furthermore, choosing to read and write are associated with enhanced wellbeing (e.g., Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018; Kennewell et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023) and are valuable practices in their own right. Young people's volitional reading and writing matter.

However, children and young people's enjoyment in reading and writing is sharply declining. In the last Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) less than half of the ten-year-olds (42%) reported that they like reading (Mullis et al., 2023) and 18% were categorical that they did not. In the UK, just over a third of 8 to 18 years old indicated that they enjoy writing in their free time (Clark et al., 2023). In addition, such large surveys persistently indicate that more girls than boys, and more young people from higher rather than lower socio-economic backgrounds, voice positive attitudes to reading and writing. So, it is important that adults involved in supporting children's literacy development are aware of evidence-based approaches that effectively nurture young people's reading and writing for pleasure.

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Methodology

In alignment with the body of research literature on reader motivation and engagement, the concepts of reading and writing for pleasure in the two reviews were framed as volitional practices. Practices often undertaken in children's free time, and shaped by their own purposes and interests, including social and relational ones, in anticipation of some kind of satisfaction. In some countries, including England, reading for pleasure is mandated (DfE, 2014) and internationally a discourse around the importance of nurturing the habit of recreational reading in childhood is developing. In contrast, the term writing for pleasure is rarely used in policy, practice, or research contexts internationally, studies more commonly examine instructional practices and interventions which may lead to stronger written outcomes. Consequently, there is far less research on approaches that may motivate young writers than that devoted to motivating readers.

Both the reviews focused almost exclusively on the evidence base around volitional reading and writing in the primary and early secondary years (5-13 age range). In response to the remit of the Literacy Special Initiative Research and the work of the six programmes funded by the Mercers' Company (trustee of The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington) (2020-2023)[1], studies which focused on second language learning and English as a foreign language were excluded, and studies of digital approaches were mainly confined to the writing review. **The database searches** were systematically conducted using several research indexes, including for example: the British Education Index, EBSCO, the Education Resources Information Centre, Scopus and Web of Science and used a range of terms. For reading, these included *'reading for pleasure', 'reading for enjoyment', 'volitional reading', 'voluntary reading', 'leisure reading', 'engaged reading', 'independent reading', 'recreational reading* and *'free choice reading'*. For writing, the terms included *'writing for pleasure'*, *'writing for enjoyment'*, *'volitional writing'*, *'voluntary writing'*, *'independent writing'*, *'writer engagement'*, *'recreational writing'* and *'free-choice writing'*. Additional searches were conducted using terms linked to characteristics of reading and writing for pleasure as acts of volitional engagement, including for example *'choice'*, *'agency'* and *'autonomy'*, and some texts were gathered through manual searches in reference lists from retrieved articles.

Both the reviews prioritised **international peer-reviewed research** over 'grey' literature (e.g., evaluations, charity/ organisational reports, teacher case studies, graduate dissertations, magazine articles, government reports). This was to ensure the findings aligned with evidence-based practice, enabled the identification of gaps in empirical knowledge and could offer ways forward for the profession. Nevertheless, some key pieces of grey literature were drawn upon, notably surveys conducted by national and international bodies that provide insights into young people's attitudes to reading and writing. The search parameters were set to include peer-reviewed publications from 2000-2023, although to ensure a comprehensive understanding of approaches to nurturing volitional reading and writing, a few earlier studies of perceived significance were included, alongside some empirical research published in books. The research, drawn mainly from cognitive psychology and education, encompasses quantitative studies (e.g. of aspects of reader motivation) and qualitative studies (e.g. of children's lived experience of writing). Relatively few studies in this area use mixed methods. The former tend to draw upon large-scale self-report data from surveys and offer valuable correlational insights. The latter, which are smaller studies, tend to focus on children reading and writing in homes and schools and investigate the complex socio-cultural factors which interact to develop or constrain their engagement.

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In both reviews, once relevant papers were identified, syntheses of each text were entered into a template, with the following headings: full reference, verbatim abstract, approach and methods (including research questions where stated, research design, number and age of participants and country of origin), and key findings. Initially, the retrieved articles were grouped according to their respective foci, then all the research studies relating to a particular focus (e.g., children's agency as writers, opportunities for readers to interact socially) were re-read and summarised in a prose review. Members of the Open University team read across these focal reviews and in the process identified corresponding themes and insights, alongside a few additional themes which were then subject to closer examination.

After scrutinising the finally agreed themes arising from each of the separate research reviews related to reading for pleasure and writing for pleasure, synergies across these reviews were identified. These are now presented, with full recognition that, as noted earlier, the extant research literature that focuses exclusively on developing choice-led volitional writing is relatively small, compared to the number of studies that examine practices that nurture recreational reading. In addition, it is acknowledged that due to the complexity and multiple foci within the research literature, the synergies inevitably overlap and intersect in complex dynamic ways.

1 These programmes were led by Doorstep Library, Literacy Pirates, Ministry of Stories, Primary Shakespeare Company, World Book Day, and the National Literacy Trust together with the Reading Agency, who jointly led 'Get Islington Reading'.

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The first synergy relates to the construction of **young people's literate identities.** This attends to the importance of children developing a positive sense of themselves as readers and writers through their social interactions with others, whether at home, at school, or with peers in the community. In many respects this synergy represents the intended outcome of approaches that effectively encourage young people to read and write for pleasure.

The second synergy illustrates the mutually reinforcing connection between **intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and competence**. This synergy, linking to self-determination theory, highlights the importance of enabling young readers and writers to feel a sense of agency, competence and social connection through reading and writing**.**

Text access, time and space represent the third synergistic set of connections identified from the research literatures. This synergy draws attention to the importance of being offered dedicated time and space to access, choose, read and/or produce a range of personally relevant and affectively engaging texts as part of reading and writing for pleasure.

The fourth connection underscores the importance of **social interaction.** This synergy identifies the role that sharing and talking about texts plays, whether written or read, in non-assessed relaxed contexts. These are predominantly learner-led and enable teachers to get to know their readers and writers, to invest in and involve them personally and to act responsively. Such social interaction nurtures enjoyment and builds relational connections between readers and/or writers.

The final synergy identified attends to **role modelling and connected communities**, it recognises the value of adults sharing their own literate identities and the significant support that membership of different literacy groups and networks offers young reader and writers. This synergy underlines the importance of positioning reading and writing for pleasure as communal, collective and relational practices. The literature suggests that by doing so, connected communities can be developed that motivate and sustain volitional readers and writers.

The Executive Summary examines each of the five synergies in turn, offering evidence from the combined research literature. It closes with a summary, recognition of limitations and some recommendations for future research.

1. Young people's literate identities

Children and young people's sense of themselves as readers and writers is constructed and re-constructed by the literacy activities in which they engage, (both voluntarily or in response to request), at home (e.g. writing text messages, homework), at school (e.g. reading at break, written comprehension), and in wider 'community' contexts (e.g. fan fiction writing online, visiting the library). Their literate identities are thus always in flux, influenced by the environment, the text, their past and present experiences of literacy and by the identity positions as readers and writers that are made available to them by parents, peers, teachers and others, and those that they choose to adopt (Collier, 2010; Moje and Luke, 2009; Wagner, 2023).

In this sense, each young person is always in the process of becoming a reader/writer or learning how to be a reader/writer in different contexts, actively shaping and reshaping their identities and being positioned as particular kind of readers/writers by others. From both research and practice perspectives, positive literate identities are widely seen to be desirable. Existing studies indicate that they play a significant role in children and young people's wider sense of self, and their motivation and desire to read and write for pleasure.

Readers' identities

Even before a child starts school, they will have been positioned as readers in particular ways through their **parents' and caregivers' attitudes to reading and interactions around texts**. Studies indicate diversity in parents' attitudes and reading practices (Levy, Hall and Preece, 2018), and suggest that their own preference for print rather than digital texts influence young readers differently (Kucirkova and Littleton, 2016; Nicholas and Paatsch, 2017; Strouse and Ganea, 2017). Additionally, social interactions with grandparents and siblings are seen to support the habit of recreational reading and a positive sense of self as a reader (Cliff-Hodges 2018; Knoester and Plikuhn 2016).

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Readers' identities are commonly **associated with their perceived and received sense of 'ability' and self-efficacy** (Adelson et al., 2019). This in turn predicts reading attitudes and frequency (Guthrie and Davis, 2003; Schüller, Birnbaum and Kröner, 2017; Weber, 2018), and supports recreational reading. So positive reader identities matter – they can lead to and are derived from reading for pleasure – and are thus associated with many benefits (e.g., Rogiers, van Keer and Merchie 2020; Schugar and Dreyer, 2017; Sullivan and Brown, 2015; Torppa et al., 2020).

Young people's sense of competence as readers is in part **shaped by their understanding of what it means to be a 'reader'**. Contrasting perceptions are reported. Some studies show that 'readers' are perceived to be children who want to read, who know their own interests and preferences, and who regularly read for enjoyment in their free time (McGeown et al., 2020b; Scholes, 2019a). Other studies indicate that children see reading and being a reader as merely a matter of proficiency - a set of skills (Clark, Osborne and Akerman, 2008; Fletcher and Nicholas, 2016; Hall, 2012; Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). In this latter group of studies, 'good readers' were viewed, often by both staff and students, as those who read accurately, fluently and at speed and who demonstrate high levels of reading attainment. These perceptions had negative consequences for those children who were deemed to be 'struggling'; they were not supported to develop a love of reading since classroom practice primarily focused on skill development (Hall, 2012; Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). Thus, they retained a low sense of self-efficacy as readers and remained positioned as disengaged readers.

> '**Teachers' conceptions of reading and being a reader and the resultant models, texts and practices offered in school impact on students' reading identities.**'

Teachers' conceptions of reading and being a reader and the resultant models, texts and practices offered in school impact on students' reading identities. Those teachers who view literacy as a social practice, shaped by text, context and interactions, tend to have more expansive views of reading and writing, and are, the evidence suggests, better placed to appreciate and reinforce children and young people's identities as readers and writers within and beyond school (e.g., Brady, 2009; Cremin et al., 2015; Taylor and Clark, 2021; Vanden Dool and Simpson, 2022).

Studies also indicate the marked **influence of gender**, and its interaction with social class, ethnicity, texts and time for social interaction around reading, as well as teachers' and parents' gendered expectations of students (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Jang and Ryoo, 2019; Scholes, 2019a; Scholes, Spina and Comber, 2021). These factors combine in complex ways, creating both barriers and opportunities for the development of positive attitudes and reader identities.

In addition, young people's social networks have a strong influence on individuals' identities and can shape their relationship with reading (Compton-Lilly, 2006; McFarland and Pals, 2005). In exploring teenagers' reading identities, Sellers (2019) identified four perspectives on reading in their social groups, namely: 'resistant', 'indifferent' 'outsider' and 'social' reader, each of which shaped the young people's reading habits and practices. These and other studies demonstrate the power of peer relationships and community connections to impact on reading for pleasure. The relational nature of reading deserves further examination.

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Writers' identities

Research similarly highlights how children's experiences of writing (at home, in school and beyond), not only play a role in constructing their identities as writers, but also their expression of self (Ryan, 2017; Ryan and Barton, 2014). Through the act of writing, individuals can think through their ideas and make choices, also considering if and whether they wish to share their writing. Accordingly, **writing can be seen as a social mechanism for constructing and performing identity**.

Research suggests that the effective expression of ideas through writing is dependent on positive associations with writing and identifying as a writer. Those who are more self-assured as writers are more likely to engage with writing, persevere with the challenges associated with writing and, consequently, succeed in expressing themselves (Graham, Berninger and Fan, 2007; Pajares, 2003). Thus, creating positive writer identities matters - they support the construction and expression of self.

Writer identities, like those of readers, are heavily **influenced by school experiences,** with research showing that teachers' interactions impact upon young people's views of what it means to be a writer (Baker and Cremin, 2017; Bourne, 2002; Dyson, 2009; Rowe, 2009). In turn, as in reading, these interactions are shaped by the views teachers hold about writing; some retain limited conceptions of writing, seeing it as a creative aptitude (McKinney and Giorgis, 2009; Norman and Spencer, 2005) or a set of skills (Lambirth, 2016). Teacher feedback on children's writing (Graham and Harris, 2016; Marrs et al., 2016) and their perspectives are mirrored by children, who cite their compositional (Gadd et al., 2019), behavioural (Wray, 1995) and imaginative competencies (Bearne et al., 2011) as indicative of their status as writers. Narrow understandings of writer identities can be detrimental to children who perceive they cannot match such images, potentially resulting in negative attitudes and identities as writers (Clark et al., 2023). The use of ability groupings for writing also impact on writer identities, with those children in 'lower' groups having a weaker sense of self-efficacy and, consequently, often avoiding writing (Kervin, Comber and Woods, 2020; McCarthey, 2001).
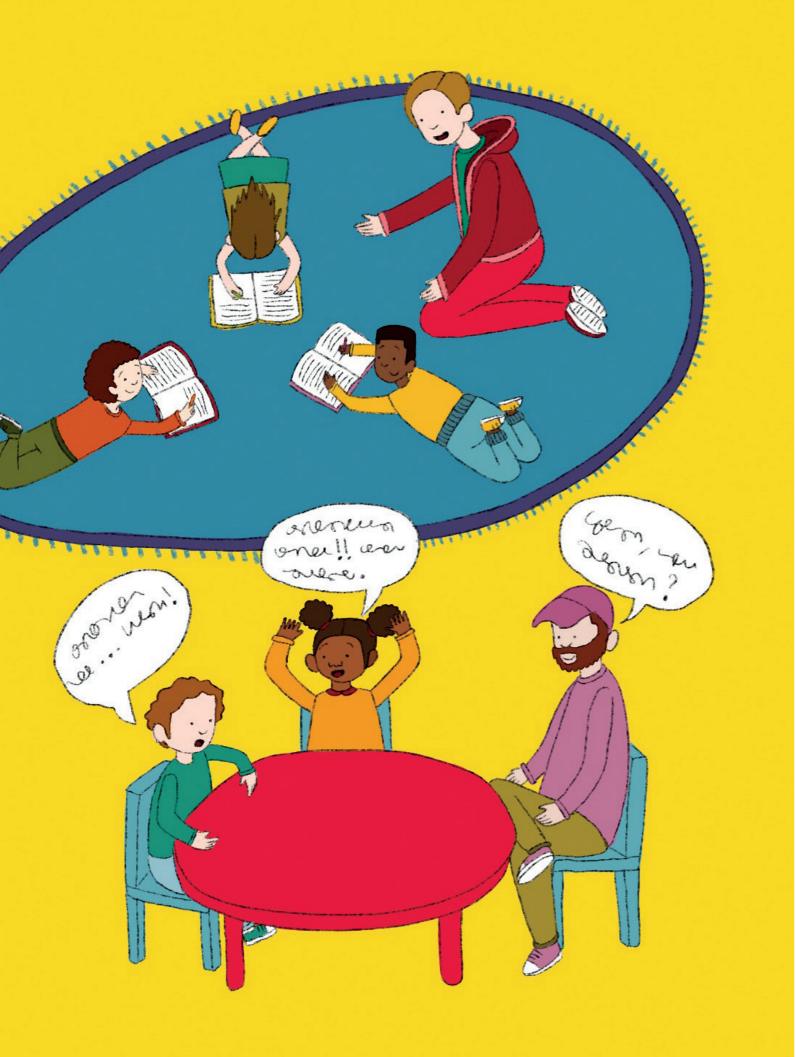
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Research does indicate, however, that **some teachers hold more holistic views of writers and writing,** see writing as a social practice (Ivanič, 2004; McCarthey, Woodard and Kang, 2014), and recognise the challenges experienced by writers in the process of composing (DeFauw, 2018). Additionally, when teachers and professional writers model these processes, they construct more nuanced writer identities that involve fluctuations in competencies (Cremin et al., 2020; DeFauw, 2018; Woodard, 2017). This demonstrates to the young that their writer identities are not fixed (Collier, 2010). Indeed, research shows that children can, with support, cultivate flexible beliefs about their writing competencies and identities (Limpo and Alves, 2017).

Social interactions with peers can positively impact on students' writer identities. Opportunities to be apprenticed as authors alongside others (Cremin, 2020) and discuss writing choices and challenges helps children reflect upon their writing, develop a positive sense of self as a writer and appreciate their peers as writers (Harmey, 2021; Hawkins, 2019; Jesson, Fontich and Myhill, 2016). Additionally, **writing in different social settings can help young people re-position themselves as competent writers**, and as active members of online writing communities (Black, 2005; Olin-Scheller and Wikström, 2010).

To summarise, the extant research literature which examines children and young people's literate identities indicates that these are shaped by adults and children's beliefs about reading and writing which frame what a 'good' reader or writer is deemed to be able to do, and what counts as 'good' reading or writing in the particular context. Readers' and writers' identities are negotiated and co-constructed in and through interaction with others in different social environments and influences their motivation and desire to read and write in their own time.

2. Motivating readers and writers

Learners have to discover, in their own ways, what reading and writing are good for, what is in these things for them. They have to want to read with desire and to write with intent beyond that of pleasing adults (Meek 1991, p.77).

Reading motivation, a complex multi-dimensional concept (Baker and Wigfield, 1999; De Naeghel et al., 2012; Watkins and Coffey, 2004), encompasses intrinsic motivation (e.g. involvement and curiosity), extrinsic motivation (e.g. competition, recognition and reading for grades), and social motivation, (e.g. relational reasons for reading, such as sharing texts and meaning making with friends and family) (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997). Research persistently indicates that **intrinsic motivation is more closely associated with reading frequency and skill than extrinsic motivation** (e.g., Becker, McElvany and Kortenbruck, 2010; Hebbecker, Förster and Souvignier, 2019; Marinak, et al., 2015; McGeown et al., 2012, 2016; Miyamoto, Pfost and Artelt, 2018; Wang and Guthrie, 2004). Even in the early stages of learning to read, **reading competence and intrinsic motivation are mutually reinforcing** (Guay et al., 2019; Schiefele, Stutz and Scaffner, 2016; Vaknin-Nusbaum et al., 2018). Studies also highlight other dimensions of reading motivation, including, environmental factors, (e.g. the way the classroom is organised socially), the nature of the texts, relationships and readers' personal preferences (Cantrell et al., 2017; McGeown et al., 2020b; Neugebauer and Gilmour, 2020).

Writing studies also show complex nuanced relationships between **motivation and positive attitudes towards writing**, **self-efficacy and writing skills** (Graham et al. 2017; Zumbrunn et al., 2017), and the presence of four key motives for writing: curiosity, competition, grades and social recognition (Ng et al., 2021). Also, that the nature of the writing environment impacts upon young people's desire to write (Myhill, Cremin and Oliver, 2023), that autonomous writing motivation makes a positive contribution to students' writing performance (De Smedt et al., 2018) and that highly motivated writers hold multiple motives for writing, whereas weakly-motivated writers are more focused on grades (Ng et al., 2021).

One framework often used to conceptualise and promote motivation in educational contexts **is Self-Determination Theory** (SDT) (Jang, Reeve and Deci, 2010; Ryan and Deci, 2000). This highlights the fundamental human need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and suggests that teachers who support these needs will create classroom cultures that encourage students to engage in various tasks. SDT has been used by researchers as a lens to explore readers' intrinsic motivation, it is also used, although less commonly, to understand young people's motivation to write.

Developing readers' autonomy, competence and relatedness

Research reveals that supporting young people's autonomy, competence and relatedness as readers is advantageous. Reading for pleasure pedagogy which explicitly encompasses attention to these human needs has been shown to successfully motivate both elementary-aged readers (De Naeghel et al., 2012; Kennedy and Shiel, 2010; Orkin et al., 2017) and adolescents (De Naeghel et al., 2012, 2014; Neugebauer and Gilmour, 2020). Multiple other studies, whilst not connecting explicitly to SDT, also identify **autonomy and agency, self-efficacy, relatedness and sociality are critical to the development of recreational readers** (e.g., Boyask et al., 2022a; Cockroft and Atkinson, 2017; Cremin et al., 2014; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Kennedy, 2018; Moses and Kelly, 2018, 2019). Collectively, these studies show that when adults focus on supporting the development of young readers' agency and choice, plan structured opportunities that are responsive to their needs and interests as readers, and build close interpersonal connections and relationships with them around reading, this impacts positively on their identities as readers.

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Wider educational evidence suggests that if teachers share control in the classroom with their students this leads to increased intrinsic motivation, participation, and enthusiasm for learning (Zhou, Ma and Deci, 2009). Reading research also indicates that finding ways to **nurture children's agency and autonomy as readers** is fundamental to enabling recreational reading. By offering a choice of texts, getting to know readers, and involving them in decisions, teachers enable children to exercise control over their reading lives (e.g., Alexander and Jarman, 2018; Cremin et al., 2014; De Naeghel et al., 2014; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Kennedy, 2018; Ng, 2018; Reedy and De Carvahlo, 2021). Some of these studies also highlight that autonomy-supportive teachers explore what counts as reading, its relevance in their students' lives and their rights as readers.

Young people who see themselves (and are recognised by others) as able and assured readers, tend to read more frequently and have more positive attitudes to reading than their peers who do not consider themselves to be 'good' or confident readers (Lindorff, Stiff and Kayton, 2023; McGrane et al., 2017). Moreover, motivated readers develop a stronger sense of their own self-competence and confidence and vice versa (De Naeghel et al., 2012; Kennedy, 2018). Enhanced assurance both increases students' willingness to persist in the face of challenges and influences their confidence in discussing texts (Cantrell et al., 2017; Ho and Lau, 2018; Moses and Kelly, 2018). In terms of fostering children's **sense of success, their competence, self-esteem and self-efficacy as readers**, studies show the marked value of adult support and guidance (in choosing books of interest for instance) and offering positive

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messages and feedback about students' growing competence as readers. They also indicate the contribution of a planned, structured, and yet informal approach to nurturing recreational reading, through relaxed engagement in reading time, and shared read alouds, low key book talk, recommendations and space to respond personally to texts (e.g., Cremin et al., 2014; De Naeghel et al., 2012, 2014; Kennedy, 2018; Moses and Kelly, 2018; Nolen, 2007; Weber, 2018).

Young people want and need to feel connected to and accepted by others and are thus more likely to engage as readers if those around them value the activity and relate to them through reading. Studies evidence that connecting to peers (Sellers, 2019), parents (Merga and Ledger, 2018), librarians (Cremin and Swann, 2017; Merga and Ferguson, 2021) and book characters (Gabriel and Young, 2011) can enrich students' pleasure in reading and desire to read. Many studies highlight **the impact of adults who invest in their relationships with young people as readers** and in particular the positive influence of teacher involvement. Educators who participate in discussions, and engage affectively, show through their behaviour that they are interested in and appreciate the young people's perspectives (Cockcroft and Atkinson, 2017; De Naeghel et al., 2016; Neugebauer and Gilmour 2020). Survey data also affirm the significance of teacher relatedness, indicating for instance that

it is predictive of kindergarten children's intrinsic motivation for reading one year later (Guay et al., 2019). Furthermore, perceived **teacher involvement in reading** has been identified as more strongly associated with teenagers' intrinsic reading motivation than autonomy or competence (De Naeghel et al., 2016). This involvement can also include teachers explicitly positioning themselves as adult readers and developing reciprocity in reader relationships with the young (Cremin et al., 2014; Merga, 2016).

Developing writers' autonomy, competence and relatedness

In a not dissimilar manner, studies show that children who experience agency over their writing experiences are more intrinsically motivated to write (Cremin, 2020; Kissel and Miller, 2015; Myhill, Cremin and Oliver, 2013). Such **autonomy takes various forms,** for instance being able to make choices over content, process, purpose, audience, the environment and the written output. Writerly autonomy is particularly keenly desired when children are engaged in creative narrative writing; they value the freedom to control the fictional worlds they have created (Healey, 2019; Nolen, 2007). However, for complex institutional reasons, often linked to assessment and cultural conceptions of writing, studies indicate that authorial agency is often somewhat constrained in school (e.g., Cremin and Myhill, 2012; Kervin, Comber and Woods, 2020; Peterson et al., 2018; Yoon, 2015).

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By contrast, some studies reveal that **writing by choice at home supports independence** (Puranik et al., 2018; Skibbe et al., 2013). There, children and young people are not only able to make choices about their subject matter, but also about the amount of time they spend writing and whether they wish to share it with others (Chamberlain, 2019). Such insights hint that the increased autonomy associated with home writing may be associated more with satisfying internal desires than external expectations, and thus is likely to impact on children's intrinsic desire to write. By ensuring children have regular supported opportunities to write, free from the assessment pressures in school, young writers can be enabled to exercise their authorial agency (Chen and Rutherford Vale, 2020; Cremin et al., 2020; Lines, 2020).

For children to feel comfortable as autonomous and agentic writers, studies indicate that they need to feel that they are competent, capable writers (Graham, Beringer and Fan, 2007; Pajares, 2003;). There is a **reciprocal and reinforcing relationship between autonomy and competence**: the more confident and autonomous children feel about writing, the more writing they do, the more competent they become, which feeds back into their confidence (Graham, Berninger and Fan, 2007). However, the inverse also exists as children with a reduced sense of self-efficacy tend to avoid writing (Kervin, Comber and Woods, 2020; McCarthey,2001). Differences in feelings of self-efficacy often arise from the feedback of trusted or authoritative others, such as friends, teachers, or professional writers (Bourne, 2002; Cremin et al., 2020; Graham and Harris, 2016; Marrs et al., 2016). The evidence therefore highlights the need for supportive writing environments where

constructive feedback enables children to feel competent. This can be enhanced through support for ideas generation (Cremin et al., 2020; Gadd et al., 2019) or reassurance in the face of writing challenges (DeFauw, 2018). Additionally, studies show that offering **real world writing activities and a focus on audience**, **can provide opportunities for children to engage with and succeed at writing**, supporting their sense of writerly competence (Chen and Rutherford Vale, 2020; Cummings, McLaughlin and Finch, 2018).

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Through writing, ideas are shared with readers, hence, a **key motivation for writers is creating connections with others and maintaining these reader-writer relationships** (Myhill, Cremin and Oliver, 2021, 2023; Ryan, 2017). Studies indicate the value of collaborative writing practices (Aguilera, 2021; Collier, 2010; De Smedt et al., 2019), regularly sharing extracts from children's free writing with peers, and teachers' positioning themselves as writers alongside their students to help build connections between writers (Baker and Cremin, 2017; Connolly and Burn 2019; Zumbrunn et al., 2019).

To summarise, research indicates that to motivate the young as recreational readers and writers, it is vital to offer them agency, enable them to feel competent, and provide opportunities for them to engage socially in a culture which profiles and values reading and writing for pleasure. Additionally, their access to texts, time to read and the nature of the social interactions involved will influence their engagement, as well as the presence of adult role models and the opportunities to participate in and become members of connected communities of readers and writers. Existing research into each of these influential factors is now examined.

3. Text access, choice and time

To support volitional reading and writing, studies indicate that issues of access, choice, time and space need to be addressed and supported. Empirical research also indicates the importance of range and diversity, both in reading (Guthrie et al., 2007; Hempel Jorgensen et al., 2018; McGeown et al., 2020b; Moss and McDonald, 2004) and in writing (Barrs and Horrocks, 2014; Fletcher, 2016; De Smedt et al., 2018; Zumbrunn et al., 2019). Studies emphasise that leisure reading and writing is choice-led and access to a wide range of texts is essential, enabling children to exercise their agency and rights as readers and writers.

Text Access

Research reveals a clear **link between text access and reading for pleasure**, whether in schools (Kennedy, 2018), libraries (Nielen and Bus, 2015), neighbourhoods (Neuman and Celano, 2012) or at home (Lindsay, 2010). Additionally, there is strong evidence of a relationship between book ownership and reading attainment, with the volume of reading being seen to impact on reading stamina and motivation (Evans et al., 2010; Lindsay, 2010). Parents' positive attitudes to reading also influence children's access to texts and their subsequent engagement with reading (e.g., Evans et al., 2010; Gilleece and Eivers, 2018; Ho and Lau, 2018; OECD, 2021). However, studies highlight that in areas of poverty, children experience significantly reduced access to print resources and that these '*book deserts*' have consequences for the wellbeing of

families and development of positive readerly dispositions (Neuman and Celano, 2012; Neuman and Moland, 2016).

Resource inequalities in many countries have led to multiple **book distribution programmes** which are generally seen to make a valuable contribution. Research into these interventions illustrates that some not only directly increase children's access to texts, but also increase parental engagement with reading activities (de Bondt, Willenberg and Bus, 2020; Neyer, Szumlas and Vaughn, 2021; Ridzi, Sylvia and Singh, 2014), which in turn impacts on children's reading competencies (Skibbe and Foster, 2019). The factors seen to mediate these findings, include the duration of involvement in the programme (Tura et al., 2021), and the quality and quantity of interactions offered to the caregivers who are encouraged to read with their children (de Bondt, Willenberg and Bus, 2020).

> 'The calibre and nature of the available texts impact on the sustained engagement and enjoyment of readers.'

Studies suggest that the **calibre and nature of the available texts impact on the sustained engagement and enjoyment of readers**, with edgy, affectively engaging high-interest books being seen to entice many readers (Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Kim et al., 2016; Troyer, 2019; Westbrook et al., 2019). A reciprocal relationship between being able to access such challenging texts and being intrinsically motivated to read has been noted (Schaffner, Philipp and Schiefele, 2016). However, other studies identify concerns about young readers being demotivated by reading overly demanding or 'classic' texts that they may

'Studies clearly demonstrate the positive consequences of adults finding out about young people's reading interests, identities and attitudes and honouring and responding to these.'

perceive they cannot connect to with ease (Hiebert, Wilson and Trainin, 2014; Locher, Becker and Pfost, 2019; Trudel, 2007). These studies point to the role that teachers can play in mediating access to appropriately challenging and relevant texts, with research showing feedback and encouragement support children as they access stretching texts (De Naeghel et al., 2012). Additionally, adults can provide proxy access to such texts through shared readings, with research suggesting this is particularly motivating for 'struggling' readers (Westbrook et al., 2019).

Fewer studies examine the relationship between **access to texts and volitional writing**. However, research does indicate a mutual relationship between reading for pleasure and engagement in writing, whereby positive experiences in reading lead to the desire to replicate such sensations as a writer and to use writing to make sense of the world (Barrs and Cork, 2001; Fox, 1993; Sénéchal, Hill and Malette, 2018). Additionally, research shows that the wider a child's reading repertoire the broader their range of writing styles, with some indication that increased confidence and competence towards writing in such styles accrues from their text preferences as readers (Taylor and Clarke, 2021). This relationship, some studies suggest, is dependent on identifying text features while reading so as to use similar features when composing (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000; Graham, 2020; Lines, 2020). In so doing, children may become more aware of their own authorial choices, fuelling their motivation to write (Marinak et al., 2012; De Smedt, 2018). Nonetheless, it can be challenging to make connections between reading experiences and writing opportunities, and research notes the role of supportive and knowledgeable adults in enabling this (Graham, 2020; Graham and Perin, 2007; Lines, 2020). The interplay between children's reading and writing for pleasure arguably deserves closer scrutiny.

Choice and reading

Multiple studies attest that **enabling children to choose what they read** is **critical in supporting young people's engagement in volitional reading** (De Naeghel et al., 2016; Guthrie et al., 2007; McGeown et al., 2020b; Moss and McDonald, 2004; Tegmark et al. 2022). Choice is enabled by access and ensuring children are afforded the autonomy and appropriate support needed (Cockroft and Atkinson, 2017; Ives et al., 2020). Research indicates that young people feel they would be more interested in reading at school if they knew there was a choice of texts that reflected their lives, interests, and home-based reading preferences (e.g., Cantrell et al., 2017; Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2020a; Reedy and Carvalho, 2021; Scholes, Spiner and Comber, 2021; Wilhelm, 2016). Moreover, they report feeling validated when they can access personally relevant texts and feeling motivated when bringing texts from home (Ng, 2018; Vehabovic, 2021).

Studies clearly demonstrate the positive consequences of **adults finding out about young people's reading** interests, identities and attitudes and honouring and responding to these. Routes to establishing such knowledge documented in research projects include discussions (Ng, 2018), surveys (Reedy and Carvalho, 2021), home visits (Cremin et al., 2015), interviews (McGeown et al., 2020a; Webber et al., 2022) and reader self-reflection activities (Cliff-Hodges, 2018; Cremin et al., 2014). Studies indicate that those educators who are seen to effectively support reading for pleasure, seek young people's perspectives, listen to and respect their views, discern how they would like to be supported and then tailor their education practices accordingly. However, these adjustments are not only individually focused, but are often planned for groups and the wider collective.

School library research additionally highlights **the need to recognise readers' diverse preferences** and that these vary over time in response to trends, changing interests and inclinations (Hartsfield and Kimmel, 2021; Rudkin and Wood, 2019). Scholes and her colleagues (2021) underscore this, noting that individual reader's identities are not fixed. Additionally, studies indicate that to reflect children's contemporary preferences, a wide range of texts and formats, including digital and audio is helpful (Clark and Picton, 2020; Jang and Ryoo, 2019; OECD, 2021). Also, that to support young people's investment in reading, the range needs to include both culturally relevant texts (Clark and Fleming, 2019) and **enticing fiction**, since this affectively engaging genre plays a significant role in supporting reading for pleasure (Jerrim and Moss, 2019; Leino et al., 2017). Studies show that narratives evoke emotions, and cue memories that resonate and help readers make connections, thus fostering deeper engagement which in turn often drives further reading (Kuzmičová and Cremin, 2022; Mar and Rain, 2015). There is less research examining non-fiction and its relationship to recreational reading, and a debate about gender-based preferences persists, with some studies indicating boys prefer non-fiction texts (Ives et al., 2020; OECD, 2010), whilst others show this is not necessarily the case (Scholes et al., 2021). This work suggests educators must resist gender stereotypes that can negatively impact on authentic reader identities (Hempel Jorgensen et al., 2017, 2018; Scholes, 2021).

Enabling relevant and engaging text choices is also seen to involve **considerable adult knowledge and support** (Weber, 2018). Research indicates this involves creating a balance between offering a range of appropriate text recommendations and stepping back to let children make the final decision (De Naeghel et al., 2016; Ives et al., 2020). This strategy is particularly important for less-experienced readers who may struggle to make effective, independent choices of texts (Graham and Perin, 2007). In such instances, children value the recommendations of trusted adults (Guthrie et al., 2007) who need to be well-informed readers of children's texts, able to offer guidance and tailored recommendations. Researchers thus argue that educators have a professional, social and moral responsibility to know a wide range of texts that reflect children's contemporary realities, although the evidence suggests this remains a significant professional challenge (e.g., Adam, 2021; Clark and Teravainen, 2015; Conradi Smith, Young and Yatzeck, 2022; Cremin et al., 2008a, 2008b, 2023; Farrar 2021).

Choice and writing

Writing research also indicates that **young people enjoy being able to exercise their agency as writers** and choose the content and form of their writing (e.g., Barratt-Pugh, Ruscoe and Fellowes, 2020; Collier, 2017; Cremin, 2017; Dyson, 2010; Kissel and Miller, 2015). Studies indicate that young people take considerable pleasure in the autonomy, creativity and self-expression associated with making such choices and are motivated by being offered authorial agency (Barrs and Horrocks, 2014; Fletcher, 2016; Zumbrunn et al, 2019). However, for some, choosing what to write can present difficulties. Indeed, research identifies children and young people's ideas generation as sometimes needing adult support (Gadd et al., 2019), although much depends on the context and wider school practices.

When children have little control over the texts they are writing, this can create adverse responses and trigger anxiety (Marrs et al., 2016; Zumbrunn et al., 2017), but choice and being able to participate in genuinely purposeful real world writing activities can motivate writers. Children and young people appear to develop an increased desire to write

when they come to appreciate the use, value and relevance of writing in their own lives and are enabled to write for their own personal purposes (e.g., Brady, 2017; Bruning and Kauffman, 2016; Colognesi and Niwese, 2020; Gadd and Parr, 2016; Young and Ferguson, 2021).

Several studies show that young people particularly appreciate and enjoy being free to **draw on their own cultural resources** and integrate their lives and text experiences into their compositions (e.g., Barratt-Pugh, Ruscoe and Fellowes, 2021; Boscolo, Gelati and Galvan, 2012; Graham and Harris, 2016; Parry and Taylor, 2018). Unsurprisingly therefore, the importance of teachers getting to know the children and young people they work with is highlighted, in order to understand their existing writing habits and practices and wider personal interests (Chamberlain, 2019; Hull and Schultz, 2002).

Outside of school, research reveals that when young people choose to write, they compose a range of purposeful and personal texts, linked to their own contexts and interests (Brady, 2017; Chamberlain et al., 2020; Connolly and Burn, 2019). Some view themselves as regular writers through choosing to write online on social media platforms (Clark and Dugdale, 2009), and, drawing on their own cultural resources, exercise their agency and choice in fanfiction spaces for instance (Curwood et al., 2013). However, their home writing choices are not necessarily known in school, and this can reduce their pleasure and desire to write in the classroom (Gardner, 2013; Lenhart et al., 2008).

'Young people enjoy being able to exercise their agency as writers and choose the content and form of their writing.'

Time to read and write

Approaches that support reading and writing for pleasure indicate that consideration of the time afforded to young people to immerse themselves in reading and/or composing texts is vital (Cremin et al., 2020; Moses and Kelly, 2019; Ng, 2018). **If time to read is intentional, well-planned and supported as part of a wider comprehensive approach** it can make a contribution to developing volitional reading and positive reader identities (Cremin et al., 2014; Cuevas, Irving and Russell, 2014; Kennedy, 2018; Merga and Mason, 2019). These and other studies commonly demonstrate that offering time to discuss texts with others as part of reading time is of value, alongside periods of quiet. Furthermore, research shows that many children are socially motivated to read, driven and encouraged by their relationships or desire for connections with others, so time and space for social interaction around reading is enabling (Neugebauer and Gilmour, 2020; Wilhelm, 2016).

Physical and social spaces also influence children's engagement

in volitional reading. The co-creation of an invitational, low stakes and often social reading environment, is seen as supportive, whether in classrooms, libraries or the wider school building and grounds (Cremin et al., 2014; Kennedy, 2018; Reedy and De Carvahlo, 2021; Stewart, 2018). Research indicates that young people appreciate being involved, and value reading spaces and libraries designed to accommodate different uses: as comfortable quiet reading spaces; as forums to meet with peers, to participate in clubs and use technologies; and as contemplative oases (Loh, 2016; Merga and Ferguson, 2021; Willis, Hughes

'Approaches that support reading and writing for pleasure indicate that consideration of the time afforded to young people to immerse themselves in reading and/or composing texts is vital.'

and Bland, 2019). Online spaces, such as BookTok, can also create opportunities in which agency and autonomy are exercised as well as peer-led interactions (Jerasa and Boffone, 2021), thus motivating further reading.

There is less research that tracks the nature or consequences of **setting time aside for writing for pleasure** in school, closer documentation of such practice and its nature would be valuable. However, some studies do acknowledge that if children are to develop as competent and motivated writers, time for exploration and innovation are needed, as well as direct teaching and scaffolded instruction (De Smedt et al., 2018; Gallagher and Kittle, 2018; Graham, Harris and Santangelo, 2015). Other studies indicate that offering time to choose to write, at writing tables in the early years, in writing journals and in 'just writing /free writing time', as well as integrating choice-led writing into play, drama, storytelling and multimodal activities can support children's intentionality and desire to write (e.g. Cremin, 2020; Dyson, 2010; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006; Rowe and Neitzel, 2010; Rowe, Shimizu and Davis, 2021; Rumney, Kuksa and Buttress, 2016). Research also indicates that some children make time to write at home (Brady, 2017) and that online spaces in which they can engage in their own time support young people's volitional engagement in writing (Lammers and Marsh, 2015).

To summarise, to nurture reading for pleasure young people need access to a wide range of enticing texts that are culturally relevant and diverse. Well informed teachers and other adults, with strong text repertoires can support students, by getting to know them as unique readers, supporting their choices, and mediating any particularly challenging texts. Young writers too, develop an enhanced desire to write when teachers get to know them, offer authorial agency and choice, enable them to write for personal and real-world purposes, and draw on their cultural practices and experiences. Research suggests assigning time and space within the curriculum and creating a supportive environment, both physically and socially, can help to motivate volitional reading and writing.

4. Social interaction

Historically, reading and writing have been characterised as individual activities, often undertaken in privacy or isolation. More recently however, their profoundly social nature has been recognised (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Brice Heath, 1983). Research examining reading for pleasure highlights the significant social interaction involved in being a reader and in making sense of texts (e.g., Boyask et al., 2022a; Cremin et al., 2014; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Maybin, 2013; Merga et al., 2018; Neugebauer and Gilmour, 2020; Ng, 2018; Sellers, 2019). In a not dissimilar manner, young people's engagement in writing and sense of themselves as writers is, research reveals, influenced by opportunities for interaction (e.g., Dyson, 2003; Fisher et al., 2010; Myhill and Newman, 2019; Myhill, Newman and Watson, 2020). Writing studies though, tend to focus more on talk as a tool for deepening students' metacognitive understanding of writing, than on developing their desire to write.

Qualitative research studies which examine choice-led reading and writing in classrooms and other settings, show that **the literacy environment foregrounded, is frequently a highly social one**. In these contexts, multiple facilitated yet relaxed interactions and spontaneous conversations around texts occur, many of which are student-led. For example, with students sharing and discussing texts (their own and their peers compositions and professionals' publications), recommending texts to one another and engaging in related interactive activities (e.g., Cremin et al., 2014; De Smedt, Graham and Van Keer, 2019; Fisher and Frey, 2018; Harrington, Milne and Boyask, 2021; Kennedy, 2018; Moses and Kelly, 2018; Ng 2018). In such environments, some students come to value reading and/or writing for the social connections and affinity networks that are created (Dyson, 2020; Merga, 2017; Sellers, 2019). Thus, the available research indicates that reading and writing for pleasure are nurtured and enriched by social interaction. As Britton (1983, p. 11) enigmatically observed, '*reading and writing float on a sea of talk*'.

'Research indicates that reading and writing for pleasure are nurtured and enriched by social interaction.'

Social interactions around reading and writing for pleasure at home

In homes, reading interactions and conversations take multiple forms with varying intentions, such as practicing decoding skills, developing comprehension, relaxation, and enjoyment. Research indicates that home reading interactions can become dominated by school-set expectations and routines (Marsh, 2003; Thomson, 2002), with parents concerned to 'get it right' once their child starts school (Levy, 2009). Studies also indicate that a range of **unique, culturally related, interactive reading and literacy practices** are part of daily life in families, and that these are not always recognised or valued by schools (Cremin et al., 2015; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Levy, Hall and Preece, 2018; Little, 2021).

Significantly, **shared book reading is positively associated with children's attitudes and enjoyment of reading** (Anderson et al., 2019; Boerma, Mol and Jolles, 2018; Vuong et al., 2021). This is often child-led and positively contributes to parent-child relationships (Levy, Hall and Preece, 2018). However, some parents may be unsure about the value of reading in their home language and inadvertently restrict children's multi-literate identities and opportunities to enjoy home language texts (Hu, Hao and Yang, 2021). Other work on shared reading interactions, highlights the value of 'non-immediate talk', which goes beyond the information in the book, making connections to past experiences, other texts, and the wider world, and encompasses socio-emotional talk (De Temple and Snow, 2008; Schapira and Aram, 2020). Studies of book gifting programmes also indicate that a focus on frequent, quality caregiver interactions substantially contribute to their impact (de Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020).

> 'Studies of volitional writing online suggest that for some young people social interaction around writing – afforded by fanfiction or engaging with a writing mentor for example – is highly motivating.'

Scant studies exist in relation to interactions around writing at home, but studies of volitional writing online suggest that for some young people social interaction around writing – afforded by fanfiction or engaging with a writing mentor for example – is highly motivating (Connolly and Burn, 2019; Curwood, Magnifico and Lammers, 2013; Olin-Scheller and Wikström, 2010). Additionally, in exploring children's out of school literacy-linked activities, Cummings, McLaughlin and Finch (2018) found that whilst several factors influenced their engagement, social interaction was salient, related to a desire to maintain relationships and share enjoyable moments with others.

Social interactions around reading for pleasure at school

Multiple empirical studies indicate the positive **influence of school-based opportunities to talk about books on motivation, engagement and recreational reading,** although much depends upon the nature of this interaction (Ho and Lau 2018; Hudson 2016). These opportunities are seen to emerge in the context of common practices to support reading for pleasure, such as reading aloud, time to read, and activities oriented around informal book talk. These activities often involve adults providing guidance in response to challenges, and giving positive messages about students as readers, thus increasing their willingness and ability to discuss texts in depth and enhancing their desire to read recreationally (De Naeghel et al., 2012, 2014; Moses and Kelly, 2018).

Reading aloud to children for the purpose of pleasure offers rich opportunities for self-expression, dialogue and social interaction that can create connections between readers, deepen understanding, and fashion a sense of community (e.g. Batini, Bartolucci and Timpone, 2018; Leung et al., 2018; Moffat, Heydon and Iannacci, 2019; Torr, 2007). Interactive read-alouds frequently involve modelling the dynamic engagement of a reader, encouraging children to think and talk about the text through open-ended discussions, co-constructing meaning and making intertextual connections (Batini, 2022; Maloch and Beutel, 2010; McClure and Fullerton 2017; Zucker et al., 2021). Studies tend to indicate that read aloud interactions are relaxed and conversational and have the potential to advance children's engagement and enjoyment.

However, **the impact of read aloud on young people's recreational reading** has not been the focus of research attention. Indeed, relaxed book blather may be viewed as 'luxury' by some educators, since it is not focused instructional time. Adults who read to children may need help to value such low-key book chat (Moffat, Heydon and Iannacci, 2019; Preece and Levy, 2020) and more research is needed to understand the kinds of read aloud interactions that optimally nurture the follow through to independent volitional reading.

Opportunities for informal book talk can support children's desire to read and positively shape their attitudes to books and reading (Merga 2018; Moses, Ogden and Kelly, 2015; Neugebauer and Gilmour, 2020). Both planned and spontaneous, informal book talk is recognised as influential in nurturing recreational readers (Batchelor and Cassidy, 2019; Coakley Fields, 2018; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Mottram, 2014). While such talk includes teacher-led book promotions and recommendations to the class and individuals, it also encompasses child-led opportunities to endorse, critique and discuss texts, and participate in wider conversations about recreational reading and being a reader. Characteristically informal, and voiced in non-assessed contexts, this talk is dialogic, free-ranging and perceived to be less hierarchical or teacher-led than the traditionally conceived and documented discourse of reading instruction (Cremin and Swann, 2017; Fisher and Frey, 2018).

> 'Both planned and spontaneous, informal book talk is recognised as influential in nurturing recreational readers.'

Research studies show that young readers' informal interactions and conversations about texts tend to coalesce around common interests, connections, affective and personal responses, and peer recommendations. Researchers reveal that **young people value this talk which is triggered by texts and their social relationships** (e.g., Alexander and Jarman, 2018; Francois, 2013; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Maybin, 2013; Mottram, 2014; Neugebauer and Gilmour 2020). Notably, some of the studies, of informal talk about texts and being a reader, show that these interactions not only influence children's later reading choices, but are also associated with increased agency, motivation, persistence and reading volume. Whilst teacher feedback regarding children's choice-led reading appears not to have been specifically examined, it is implicit in the relaxed reader-to-reader relationships documented, and the positive and affective stance adopted by educators, some of whom position themselves as fellow readers with views of their own (e.g., Cremin, 2010; Ivey and Johnston, 2013; Merga, 2020; Neugeberger and Gilmour, 2020; Ng, 2018; Reedy and Carvalho, 2021). Social interactions around reading are seen to shape positive reader relationships among peers and between children and adults, which not only widen young people's reading networks, but can contribute to a re-visioning of reading as a communal and collective experience.

'Social interactions around reading are seen to shape positive reader relationships among peers and between children and adults, which not only widen young people's reading networks, but can contribute to a re-visioning of reading as a communal and collective experience.'

Social interactions around writing for pleasure at school

Interaction and peer collaboration are also widely recognised as supportive of writers, and the available research indicates that teachers harness **talk to help young writers generate and test ideas, work together, reflect on their writing, and respond to the writing of others** (e.g., De Smedt, Graham and Van Keer, 2019; Dobson and Stephenson, 2019; Myhill, Cremin and Oliver, 2023; Myhill, Newman and Watson 2020). Talk is also used to help them consider their identities as writers. Drama and improvisation are seen to be valuable ideational tools, contributing to more positive attitudes, to motivating writing and to the quality and quantity of children's writing, in part through inhabiting another point of view in role (e.g. Bearne and Grainger, 2004; Cremin et al, 2006; Dobson and Stephenson 2018; Dunn et al., 2013). Young children's participation in oral storytelling and enactment of their own tales can also trigger the desire to draw and scribe others' narratives with authorial agency and intentionality (Cremin et al., 2017; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006).

Research further reveals that **talk and collaboration during the process of writing** can be motivational (Graham and Harris, 2016) and that children's desire to engage in social relationships often serves to prompt informal interactions around writing (Dyson, 2000, 2001; Dyson and Dewayani, 2013). Additionally, opportunities to collaborate through co-production ('distributed authorship' and 'peer-assisted' writing) foster

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young people's need for connection and relatedness and appear to positively impact on their writing motivation and engagement (Aguilera 2021; Cremin, 2020; De Smedt, Graham and Van Keer, 2019; Myhill and Jones 2009). The interactions which are seen to be most supportive in developing engaged writers, are largely learner-led not teacher-led, demonstrating the teacher's interest in the child's writing, respect for their authorial agency, and enabling the young writer to take control of the compositional process based on affirmative feedback and critique (Graham et al., 2014; Harmey, 2021; Harmey and Rodgers, 2017; Hawkins, 2019). These studies suggest that **talk serves to engage and motivate young people as writers and contributes to self-regulation and enhanced self-efficacy**, which not only influences their pleasure in the process, but positively shapes their literate identities. However, there are no known studies that track the relationship between such supported informal interaction at school and the frequency or nature of children's volitional writing at home.

To summarise, opportunities to support children as positively engaged readers and writers, benefit from being highly social and interactive. These invite and sanction open-ended discussions about texts, both those being read and composed, and enable learners to position themselves relationally, facilitating interaction and collaboration that motivates and engages them. They support the development of positive attitudes to reading and writing. Sustained opportunities for social interaction around reading and writing, whether at home, school or online, contribute to the formation of networks and connected communities which may, in turn, stimulate and sustain young people's engagement as readers and writers.

5. Role models and connected communities

In literacy environments, adults can adopt (or be assigned) multiple identity positions, for instance as gatekeepers, curators, mentors, monitors, assessors, fellow readers and/or writers. Research suggests that those adults who are engaged readers and writers themselves can become role models and, in this position, positively influence young people's engagement in volitional reading and writing (e.g., Kucirkova and Cremin, 2017; Ng, 2018; Rowe, Shimizu and Davis, 2022; Woodard, 2017; Zumbrunn et al., 2019). By reflecting on their own experience of reading and writing, studies indicate that adults may come to question 'schooled' or received perceptions of reading and writing, re-consider what counts in their context and take a broader view.

'Research suggests that those adults who are engaged readers and writers themselves can become role models and, in this position, positively influence young people's engagement in volitional reading and writing.'

Research studies additionally indicate that young people are supported by the creation of communities of readers and writers. These allow for student and teacher agency, different views and perspectives and recognise the social and relational nature of literacy (Boyask et al., 2022; Cremin et al., 2014; Dobson and Stephenson, 2017; Ng, 2018). A sense of social connectedness is evident in the literacy networks, subgroups and communities that nurture and sustain young people's engagement as volitional readers and writers within and beyond schools.

Reading role models

Parents who read or show reading enjoyment at home shape children and young people's motivation. By role modelling their engagement, and reading, singing songs and rhymes together, visiting libraries, discussing texts and making life to text connections, parents demonstrate the value they assign to reading for pleasure (Scholes, 2019b; Wiescholek, et al., 2018). Significantly, teenagers whose parents report enjoying reading the most, (and are thus likely to model their engagement) have a higher index of reading enjoyment than those whose parents report not enjoying reading (OECD, 2021). Support for such modelling has been found to impact positively on families' shared reading practices and children's engagement (Anderson et al., 2019).

Few studies of librarians focus specifically on their own readerly identities, but when young people's views are sought, some view both their **librarians and their teachers as readers**, since they are seen to model and share their affective pleasure in reading, participate in discussions and make text recommendations (e.g. Cremin, 2010; Cremin and Swann, 2017; Merga, 2016, 2020a; Merga and Ferguson, 2021; Methe and Hintze, 2003). The young people report being influenced by these reading role models. Some studies also show that teachers

who ascribe the most value to reading in their own lives, appear to set more time aside for children to read, discuss and recommend texts and share reflections from their own reading more frequently than their peers who ascribe less personal value to reading, and who do not position themselves as fellow readers (Cremin, 2019; McKool and Gespass, 2009). Such teachers, who are readers in their personal lives and committed to developing recreational readers in their professional lives, are described as Reading Teachers (Commeyras, Bisplinghoff and Olsson, 2003; Cremin et al., 2014; Simpson and Cremin, 2022). It is argued that these 'Reading Teachers' reflect upon reading and being readers themselves, find out about the children as readers, and adjust their practice to make the experience of reading more authentic, relational and relevant to the young, through adopting 'pedagogies of re-connection' (Comber and Kamler, 2004).

Connected communities of readers

Whilst research has not directly examined **families as connected communities of readers**, studies do highlight that family reading practices are often child-led and thus relationally responsive to the young people's needs and interests (Levy, Hall and Preece, 2018). Also, that parents appreciate the interpersonal connections that shared reading offers (Brown, Westerveld and Gillon, 2017; Merga and Ledger, 2018). Additionally, neighbourhood reading interventions have been seen to increase children's recreational reading by drawing families into communal experiences, albeit temporarily through summer reading programmes, library events and public read-alouds for instance (Compton-Lilly, 2016; Mahasneh et al., 2021).

Libraries can also create communities of belonging that enable reading for pleasure to be a shared experience for those students who identify as readers and wish to engage with others

around texts in the safe space for reading that the library provides. Formal book clubs, informal book chats, and relaxed encounters in the library are seen to nurture connections between readers and encourage volitional reading (Cremin and Swann, 2017; Merga and Ferguson, 2021; Willis, Hughes and Bland, 2019).

The recent research attention being afforded the conceptualisation and examination of communities of readers affirms the significance of staff learning about young people's reader identities, and participating themselves as adult readers, although this stance is not always made explicit (Milne, Harrington and Boyask, 2022; Vanden Dool and Simpson, 2021). Studies show that educators who create connected communities of readers also intentionally offer **sustained social and relational opportunities to nurture recreational reading as a collective** (Boyask et al., 2022; Cremin et al. 2014; Lenhart et al, 2017). They may do so for instance through establishing 'books in common', inviting and offering space for debate and differences of opinion about texts, valuing recommendations, and supporting spontaneous book blether and considering what it means to be a reader. In these and other ways, relational connections are made between individuals and between groups of readers, between adults and other adults, adults and children, and children and children (Batini et al., 2020; Boyask et al., 2022; Lenhart et al, 2017; Mottram et al., 2014). In the process, affinity groups around particular texts, genres, interests and series may iteratively develop. Such communities, characterised by reciprocity and interaction, are underpinned by reader relationships not by the requirement to read or by the provision of reading for pleasure activities and routines; they evidence a strong sense of social connectedness (Boyask et al., 2022; Cremin et al., 2014; Ng, 2018).

> '**Such communities, characterised by reciprocity and interaction, are underpinned by reader relationships not by the requirement to read or by the provision of reading for pleasure activities and routines.**'

Writing role models

Studies indicate that **teachers' investment in writing** can enhance their students' experiences as writers. Writing alongside pupils, sharing and discussing writing with them can support positive attitudes to writing amongst the young and has the potential to make the writing process more enjoyable (Augsburger, 1998; Cremin et al., 2017; Zumbrunn et al., 2019). Even teachers who lack confidence as writers can support children's motivation to write by taking on a visible writing identity, sharing their own challenges and relating to children as writers (Cremin and Baker, 2010; Gardner, 2014; Woodard, 2017). Teachers' histories, identities and confidence as writers, appears to shape their practice, influencing whether they follow skills-based models or offer more reflective, writer-oriented community-focused approaches (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). Extended opportunities to write and consider the experience are seen to impact upon teachers' self-confidence and approaches, which in turn, can lead to changed practices that foreground agency and purpose in writing, and impact on children's motivation to write (Cremin et al., 2020; Gardner and Kuzich, 2022). Some adults are seen to position themselves as **fellow writers in the classroom** to offer children

living demonstrations of how, what and why they might write. Through engaging reflexively in the experience, research suggests that these teachers adopt an insider's perspective on the writing process and serve as potent writing role models (Baker and Cremin, 2017; Rowe, Shimizu and Davis, 2022).

Professional writers too, whether on residencies or standalone visits, often position themselves as role models, sharing their enthusiasm for the art form, their commitment and determination to write and the strategies they find successful (Owen and Munden, 2010; Xerri, 2017). Additionally, by modelling their challenges, offering an authentic audience for children's writing and finding way to integrate writing into wider real-world collaborations, studies show professional writers appear to increase children's writing confidence and desire to write (DeFauw, 2018; Rumney, Kuksa and Buttress, 2016). Research also indicates that teachers can learn from professional writers. By adopting the craft knowledge and pedagogical practices demonstrated by professional writers, offering children choice and agency, valuing personal non-assessed writing, positioning students as authors, and writing alongside them, studies show increased students' enjoyment and engagement as writers (Cremin et al., 2020; Myhill and Cremin, 2019; Myhill, Cremin and Oliver, 2021). Such approaches foreground children as authors with rights and choices, not merely producers of school writing.

Connected communities of writers

Young people participate in **different writing networks** at school (Dyson and Dewayani, 2013; Elf, 2017), online (Curwood, 2013) and at home (Brady, 2017; Chamberlain, 2019). To serve their own purposes and in response to their interests, they may also choose to write with others in the local community (Chamberlain et al., 2020). In school,

if writing is framed as a personally purposeful, imaginatively engaging and socially supported experience, this can create a sense of belonging and community that motivates young writers (Cremin et al., 2020; Dobson and Stephenson, 2017, 2019; Zumbrunn et al., 2017).

Studies indicate that some teachers and professional writers seek to create a **shared writing culture** in which the young are enabled to move with assurance between personal and social spaces for writing (Baker and Cremin, 2017; Connolly and Burn 2019; Myhill, Cremin and Oliver, 2023; Thomson, Hall and Russell, 2006). In recognition of the social nature of writing and learning, these communities aim to be inclusive, they offer considerable support as the young orchestrate the demanding challenge of becoming authors and can enhance young people's sense of autonomy and motivation as writers. Additionally, research reveals that in connected writing communities, where a **shared communicative purpose for writing** exists, young people's writing is often published - through performances, readings, plays, debates, the production of anthologies, and the co-creation of diverse digital resources, as well as through focused attention to the audience for their writing (Chen and Rutherford Vale, 2020; Dobson and Stephenson, 2019).

'If writing is framed as a personally purposeful, imaginatively engaging and socially supported experience, this can create a sense of belonging and community that motivates young writers.'

To summarise, research indicates that adult involvement and authentic demonstrations of the experience, pleasures and challenges of being a reader and/or a writer can positively influence children's own literate identities. Through role modelling and the creation and support of various connected communities and kinship groups, adults invest in and involve young people, offering them agency and space to participate on their own terms. This supports the development of positive dispositions and enhances their volitional engagement as readers and writers. Nonetheless, more work is needed to understand the diverse needs and interests of different groups, to consider those members who may only be peripherally engaged, and to explore wider communities of connection that stretch beyond the bounds of school and encompass families and local community members.

Conclusion

In order to halt the persistent international decline in students' attitudes to and enjoyment of reading and writing, professional understanding of the empirical research base is needed, alongside urgent collective action from policy makers, literacy organisations, parents, schools and teachers. Nationally, multi-agency approaches that can capitalise upon the expertise of diverse organisations are needed to help turn the tide and enable all children and young people to become motivated and engaged readers and writers.

Prior to summarising the identified synergies between the research literatures on reading and writing for pleasure, **the parameters and limitations of this review** are noted. The two separate reviews that were thematically analysed and combined, focused almost exclusively on studies involving 5–13-year-olds from 2000-2023. These reviews indicated that the evidence is uneven; there are far fewer studies which attend to children's volitional engagement in writing, this has not been extensively examined in research. While the studies included are drawn from cognitive psychology and education, most of those that address the review's core focus on approaches that inspire and encourage children's reading and writing for pleasure, examine practice in classrooms. There is much less research that focuses on volitional reading or writing in school libraries, in children's lives at home, online or in

'Looking across the studies included, very few track differences in children's pleasure and engagement as readers or writers over sustained periods of time and even fewer consider children's literate identities in the round.'

the community. Furthermore, looking across the studies included, very few track differences in children's pleasure and engagement as readers or writers over sustained periods of time and even fewer consider children's literate identities in the round as readers, writers and oral communicators. Notwithstanding these limitations, synergies were able to be identified within and across the two separate reviews about approaches that nurture children and young people's engagement in reading and writing for pleasure.

Multiple factors shape children's lived experience of reading and writing and influence whether they choose to read and write volitionally in their own time. Across both reviews the significance of developing young people's literate identities was foregrounded. Those children and young people with a positive sense of self as readers and writers, enjoy and engage in reading and writing more frequently than their less assured peers. So, building positive literacy histories and positioning children as readers and writers matters.

This links to the second synergistic connection, the relationship between motivation and self-efficacy and the value of enabling children to experience agency, competence and develop relatedness – social connections to others through reading and writing. Studies also commonly show that effective educators ensure texts of cultural and emotional relevance are available to choose from or be inspired by, and that guidance for text selection is given. Also, that children's choices as readers and writers are respected, and time and space is set aside for them to read and compose texts that serve their own personal purposes alongside authentic reasons to write for real audiences.

Another synergy identified in the research literature, involves the provision of multiple opportunities for supported social interaction, and relaxed conversational engagement around texts in non-assessed contexts. Often linked to texts read aloud, to critiquing and discussing texts, to the generation of ideas for writing, and sharing their compositions, such interactions are seen to socially motivate young readers and writers. The adults facilitating these learner-centred, autonomy supportive approaches, not only work to get to know the children individually as readers and writers, but listen to and respect their thoughts about texts, and their voices as writers. In addition, the adults actively seek the young people's views about volitional reading and writing, and tailor their practice in response. This enhances the children's involvement and rights as readers and writers.

In addition, the evidence suggests that some adults are involved as fellow readers and writers, role modelling their engagement and building relational connections that positively impact on young people's dispositions, desires and literate identities. These relational connections motivate engagement and are evidenced in relatively non-hierarchical relationships with young people,

'These relational connections motivate engagement and are evidenced in relatively non-hierarchical relationships with young people, and are typified by mutual respect, close bonds and learner agency.

and are typified by mutual respect, close bonds and learner agency. The informality of these relationships, and the practices associated with them, resonate with notions of relational pedagogy that represent another way of seeing education, one that recognises humans as social and collective beings and re-orients the focus 'from individuals, groups and their practices onto relationships' (Ljungblad, 2021, p. 863). This final synergy indicates that through positioning reading and writing for pleasure as communal, collective and relational practices, educators can enable the creation of networks and connected communities that can sustain reading and writing for pleasure.

This Executive Summary reveals there are several lacunae in the research into approaches that nurture young people's volitional reading and writing, areas which would benefit from closer examination. These include research that explicitly examines the role that social motivation plays in the experience of being a reader/writer, the nature of the reading-writing connection and the interplay between children's literate identities since 'experience in reading is intrinsically bound to experience in writing' (Parry and Taylor, 2018, p.109). In addition, studies that surface the motivational affordances of a range of writing

contexts at school, at home, in extracurricular and online spaces would be valuable, combined with the development of creative ways of capturing writers' authentic practices and perspectives, especially over time. Finally, research that seeks to characterise and understand children's cognitive, affective, social, and behavioural engagement in these literacy practices could help the education profession develop a richer, more rounded picture of young readers and writers with potentially positive consequences for relationally responsive and supportive practice.

The insights from this Executive Summary of approaches which encourage reading and writing for pleasure, have been combined with the data from the six literacy programmes involved in the Mercers' Company Special Initiative (2020-2023) in order to create a **Reading and Writing for Pleasure Framework for Practice.** The Framework provides a research-informed basis for developing the individual, social and relational practice that nurtures young people's volitional engagement as readers and writers. It offers guidance and practice focused recommendations for adults committed to enriching children's reading and writing for pleasure.

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