What is reading for enjoyment?
Clark and Rumbold (2006, p. 6) state that reading for enjoyment ‘refers to reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else’s request we continue because we are interested in it.’

Reading for enjoyment reflects a positive attitude towards reading and a love of literature that some learners will develop naturally. Other learners may be more reliant on educators and families to help them discover the fun of reading for enjoyment and being transported to other times and places between the covers of a good book.

Why promote reading for enjoyment?
Reading opens doors to our inner and outer worlds, access to knowledge and power and can provide a lifetime of enjoyment. Research evidence demonstrates that reading for enjoyment is important for educational, social and personal development. It can have a major impact on children and adults achieving their life goals and raising their self-esteem.

The PISA 2009 report stated that: ‘Enjoyment of reading was found to have a strong relationship with [reading] performance.’ Thomson, Sue (2010, p. 21)

The more you read the better you get
Studies consistently support the theory that those who read more become better readers. Their literacy skills develop through reading more often. There is a direct relationship between reading volume and reading achievement, especially in the development of vocabulary, general knowledge, spelling and verbal fluency. According to Cuningham and Stanovich (1998, p. 147) ‘...it is the very act of reading that can build those capacities.’

This means that as educators, it is especially important to motivate struggling readers. Clark and Rumbold (2006, p.16) state that ‘Better readers tend to read more because they are motivated to read, which leads to improved vocabulary and better skills. As a result, the gap between good and poor readers grows over time.’

Reading opens up new worlds
Books make it possible for learners to be amazed by real and imaginary worlds beyond their experience.

The books you read as a child brought you sights you hadn’t seen yourself, scents you hadn’t smelled, sounds you hadn’t heard. They introduced you to people you hadn’t met, and helped you sample ways of being that would never have occurred to you. And the result was ... somebody who was enriched by the knowledge that their own particular life only occupied one little space in a much bigger world of possibilities. Spufford (2001, p. 10)
Improving reading can affect social change
Reading for enjoyment is recognised as a key factor in improving reading regardless of the occupational status of parents and is an effective way to lever social change. A positive attitude towards reading and choosing to read in free time affect not only reading performance but also success across the curriculum. Research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2002, p.3) showed that: ‘... 15 year-olds whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who are highly engaged in reading obtain higher average reading scores in PISA than students whose parents have high or medium occupational status but who report to be poorly engaged in reading.’

What promotes reading for enjoyment?
A number of key elements have been identified by researchers as having a major influence on encouraging children to read for enjoyment. These include:
• Freedom for learners to choose reading materials
• Access to a variety of quality texts in a print-rich home, site and classroom environment
• Time for reading at home and at school in a quiet, comfortable environment
• Being read to and experiencing shared reading
• Being motivated to increase the volume of reading
• Learners finding just the right book for their ability and interest. Allington (2001)
Learners are motivated by a site that has a strong reading culture, a classroom that engages learners in reading and taking reading materials home and a well-stocked library with qualified staff.

Reading enjoyment starts early
For many children the path to reading enjoyment begins long before they go to school and research shows the benefits of such activities as:
• reading aloud to children from birth
• engaging children with books as toddlers
• having children’s books and reading materials accessible to children at home
• sharing songs and rhymes with children.
All have a positive impact on fostering a love of reading, stimulating imagination and learning that reading is valued part of literacy learning. ‘The foundations of learning to read are laid down from the moment a child hears the sounds of people talking, the tunes of a song, and the rhythms and repetitions of rhymes and stories.’ Fox (2001, p. 13)

Developing a whole site reading culture
A whole site approach to a reading-rich culture includes developing positive dispositions towards reading for enjoyment. Creating a reading culture so that everyone knows it is ‘cool’ to read across all curriculum areas impacts positively on student literacy learning. Effective sites, led by the leadership team, work with the school community to share strategies to continually emphasise the message that reading for enjoyment is important as well as fun and will be included in the site literacy program.

Practical ideas for site leaders to promote reading for enjoyment:
• Have dedicated display space in key areas to display student work based on promoting books and feature reading eg artwork and electronic photo displays.
• Feature the enjoyment of reading, in newsletters and on the website and intranet.
• Organise whole site literature activities including Children’s Book Week and participation in the Premier’s Reading Challenge.
• Provide funding for a children’s book author or illustrator visits.
• Acknowledge reading growth or success at assemblies or through awards.
• Have reading days where all staff and volunteer adults read with, or at the same time as, groups of learners, modelling reading for enjoyment.
• Encourage parents and role-models to share their reading by coming in or reading via Skype.
• Encourage students to participate in state or national literary events or competitions run by media outlets or professional associations.

Influence of parents and carers
Learners who experience reading for enjoyment, valued both at home and at the site, are assisted in developing good life-long reading habits. The influence of the home environment is crucial to the development of positive attitudes to literacy skills and a love of reading and it is important that schools reinforce to parents that this continues after the child begins school.

Clark and Rumbold (2006, p. 24) emphasise that: ‘Research has repeatedly shown that parental involvement in their child’s literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.’

Pro-active sites take the initiative by providing information and practical training sessions for families to share how to encourage reading for enjoyment and the value of reading aloud with their child.

Providing take home resources, library borrowing cards for families and an adult section in the site library fosters a reading culture for all.
Developing a classroom culture of reading for enjoyment

Effective classroom teachers explicitly support the whole site reading culture within the classroom and incorporate further strategies to promote reading for enjoyment into a balanced literacy program. Teachers support learners by creating a text-rich classroom that recognises the varied interests and abilities of ALL learners.

An inviting reading area in the classroom with a continually changing collection of books from the school library encourages reading for enjoyment. The reading area includes a wide and varied choice of reading materials - big books, picture books, novels, and film tie-ins - with books chosen by learners.

Practical ideas for effective classroom teachers to promote reading for enjoyment:

- Read aloud to learners on a regular basis and include novels, poems and picture books discussing the illustrations, themes and characters.
- Provide time to read for enjoyment and model reading for enjoyment when the learners are reading.
- Provide time for learners to share ideas about books and participate in discussions (perhaps reading circles) to understand different points of view and experiences.
- Encourage learners to promote books they have enjoyed to classmates.
- Research authors and books using the internet.
- Invite older or younger learners (buddy classes) to participate with reading activities.
- Share and model your own reading.

Developing a school library that promotes reading for enjoyment

The school library is a key resource for educators, learners and families. It has the potential to be a powerhouse of reading for enjoyment. A reading rich library supports one of the key learning goals of every site - to raise literacy levels. It also promotes a positive whole site and classroom culture for reading for enjoyment. Classroom teachers reinforcing the value of the library and accessing it across the curriculum is very powerful.

Research shows that libraries staffed with trained personnel with excellent resources have a positive impact on learner achievement as well as reading for enjoyment. (Lonsdale, Michele. 2003.)

Practical ideas for school library staff to promote reading for enjoyment:

- Create a welcoming and exciting school library that responds to the needs of learners of all ages.
- Provide comfortable and inviting spaces to read in the library to encourage learners to spend time there actually reading. Cushions, beanbags and lounges work well as do adjacent outside areas.
- Have a well-stocked library with a wide choice of reading materials that children of all ages and abilities are interested in reading and give the learners an opportunity to recommend books for purchase.
- Create engaging displays in the library to raise awareness of new books and authors covering a range of genre and topics. Include fiction, non-fiction, all genres, graphic novels, picture books, poetry and plays to motivate library borrowing and reading.

Effective library staff actively encourage reading for enjoyment when they are passionate and knowledgeable about literature for children and adolescents and are able to promote books that foster a love of reading. They have the training and expertise to purchase the reading materials that will appeal to a diverse range of learners. They also:

- Support educators so that both fiction and non-fiction resources matching the learners’ interests are brought to their notice.
- Provide class ‘book chats’ to promote books to encourage learners to read more widely and to try different authors.
- Use the strategy of reading a small section of the book aloud to the class to ‘hook’ them into the book so they will want to finish reading it for themselves.
- Guide learners to choose an appropriate library book which suits their level of reading development and interests and:
  - Promote the ‘five finger test’ that involves opening the book at any page and for the reader to read the page of text. Whenever the learner comes across a word they don’t know they raise a finger. If five fingers on one page are raised, the book is probably too difficult for the learner at this stage, and they should look for another book. An alternative is for the learner to borrow the book if they know they have someone else who will read it to them.
  - Encourage learners to read the blurb.
  - Encourage learners to recommend good books to classmates.
- Encourage families to be borrowers and library users by welcoming them and including younger children.
Reading for enjoyment in the curriculum

One of the three organising strands in the Australian Curriculum English is the central strand of Literature. Quality texts are at the heart of the English curriculum. Literature includes a broad range of texts such as novels, poetry, short stories, plays, fiction including picture books, multimodal texts such as films and a variety of non-fiction. The Literature strand emphasises an enjoyment in how English language can convey information and emotion, create imaginative worlds and aesthetic and other significant experiences. It aims to support learners to:

- access a broad range of literary texts and develop an informed appreciation of literature
- develop English skills for lifelong enjoyment and learning.

A balanced, integrated, systematic and explicit literacy program will be enhanced by an emphasis on encouraging reading for enjoyment that overarches all aspects of literacy. This includes speaking and listening, reading and viewing, writing and representing and multimodal skills.

Reading for pleasure and understanding need to be a valued part of every curriculum area to develop a community of readers who reflect on their reading.

Reading for enjoyment positively impacts on the development of literacy skills and knowledge including phonics, fluency and comprehension. It also leads students to ‘acquire an increased vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and become good spellers.’ Krashen (1993, p. 85)

Site participation in the Premier’s Reading Challenge (PRC)

Educators find that involving their site in the Premier’s Reading Challenge is a very effective way to motivate Reception to Year 9 learners to read for enjoyment and to improve literacy levels as the program is specifically designed for this purpose. Many site leaders include PRC in their site literacy plans. Students have the incentive of a range of certificates and medals that encourage them to read for enjoyment year after year.

A number of benefits have been identified by participants, educators and parents, including that the Challenge:

- Provides a whole-site focus for reading and raises the profile of reading within the site with more family members supporting their children’s efforts
- Is an inclusive program that encourages learners of all abilities to read more books, including boys and those who may have been reluctant to read, resulting in an increase in their self-esteem
- Provides a strong motivation and purpose for learners to read, resulting in them being enthusiastic about spending more time reading more books more often and encouraging each other to keep reading
- Encourages learners to read a wider variety of good quality books and increases library borrowing and discussions of books at school and at home
- Provides awards that are a valuable recognition for learners who are excellent readers, right through to those who have struggled with reading.

Using Public libraries

Assisting learners to discover the potential of their local public library as a source of reading materials and for advice about books and authors is very beneficial. This is a way of motivating learners to discover a greater range of interesting reading materials and establish a life-long practice of visiting the public library for enjoyment.

Public libraries have many programs to encourage the development of literacy skills and the enjoyment of reading ranging from those designed for very young babies and toddlers through to school holiday programs for primary students and book clubs for secondary students. Public libraries encourage class visits and public librarians are often keen to visit schools in their local council area.

SELF REVIEW

Where and how does reading for enjoyment occur in your classroom program?

How does your site promote a culture of reading?

How are families involved with and informed about the importance of reading?

What resources are available to support independent reading in your classroom?

What more could you do to promote reading for enjoyment with your learners?

References


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Lonsdale, Michele 2003, Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement, ACER.


Shape of the English Curriculum 2009, ACARA, National Curriculum Board.

More resources are at <www.decs.sa.gov.au/literacy>