Chapter 1 Abstract

This chapter introduces the various ways in which the term 'reading' is defined and conceptualised, and introduce the concept of shared reading within this. We make the point that reading practices are embedded in wide and changing discourses influenced by socio-cultural and socio-historical factors. We then move to a discussion about young children's reading and the various ways in which their reading is conceptualised and perceived (eg. learning to read at school, decoding, reading to/with young children). From this we make the point that in comparison with other reading practices, shared reading has been very under-explored in the literature. We know that shared reading is crucial in supporting children's language development (Bus et al., 1995; Snow, 1994; Mol et al., 2008) but we know very little about how it does, and does not fit within the everyday practices of families from different socio-economic and cultural groups. In particular we have limited understanding about the barriers and motivations for parents to conduct shared reading activity with young children. This chapter explains how, by making sustained reference to a recent research study, this need is addressed in this book. This chapter is concluded with a brief introduction to the various chapters in this book.

Chapter 1: Reading With Young Children – an Introduction

When we think of children's reading, as an image, we are faced with a magnitude of possibilities. We may think of small chubby hands clutching a board book, or a teenager engrossed in a tale of wizardry. We might picture shelves of brightly coloured picturebooks in a library or bookstore, or we might see a child reading from a digital device. Some might see a five-year-old struggling to sound out a word in a reading scheme book, or a thirteen-year-old anxiously waiting to see if they will be asked to read aloud during an English lesson. Or we might see a parent reading a bedtime story to a child. Whatever images come to mind we can be assured that 'children's reading' is not a fixed concept. It can be a hobby, a task, a treat, a skill or a challenge. It can be the reward at the end of a busy day or it can be a chore to be confronted, endured or even avoided. It would be reasonable to suggest that those who are interested enough in children's reading to pick up this book, probably share a common desire for children to become confident, enthusiastic and independent readers, but it would be a mistake for us, the writers of this book, to assume that we share a universal understanding of what reading actually is and what is needed to help children to engage with reading. The very fact that reading carries a multitude of definitions is a recurring theme in this book and will be addressed in detail.

One important, but surprisingly under-researched activity, which features in the reading lives of some children, is that of reading with young children. Drawing extensively on a research study which was designed to investigate family reading practices, this book examines motivations and barriers to shared reading activity in homes. As authors, our interest in this topic stems from a variety of sources, both professional and personal. It would not surprise anyone to learn that we both enjoy reading as a leisure activity and our informal conversations with one another will often include reference to what we are currently reading, or a recommendation for a particular novel. Mel often speaks of the reading lives of her undergraduate students and is developing this as a research interest. In addition both Rachael and Mel share an interest in young children's reading, having worked together on the study reported in this book. This study built on previous research that Rachael has carried out, much of which has focused on the ways in which home and school discourses shape children's perceptions of reading, however Rachael's specific interest in shared reading in the home has also evolved from her own personal history as evident in the following vignette.

Rachael's Story

I grew up in a small flat, in a quiet town in the South West of Scotland. My parents were not readers; our home had few books and those that we did have tended to be 'information books' rather than fictional texts. What is more, these books were rarely read, evident in the fact that they often got used to prop up unstable furniture, or, on one particularly unfortunate occasion, balance a fish tank, which resulted in the book becoming so wet that the pages morphed into one gloopy lump. Yet 'story' was a valued feature within my own childhood. Despite limited funds, children's books were purchased, and these stories were read. My mother read to me regularly; bedtime stories were prioritised however shared reading could happen at any time of the day. My father rarely read to me, however he did tell stories of magical adventures of falling into strange lands (which I now recognise as being shamelessly based on Alice in Wonderland!).

I became a passionate reader throughout my primary years. Some of my fondest memories are of going shopping with my mother and returning with a new Enid Blyton book (or whole

set of books on one particularly joyful occasion) accompanied by a packet of chocolate raisins. I read these books over and over again, never questioning the disparity between the lives of the characters in the books and my own world (tuck-boxes and lacrosse did not feature in my own education) but simply enjoying the stories.

What I didn't realise at the time was that this passion for reading was not only a hobby, but was also laying a foundation for my eventual career, which has included research into children's perceptions of reading. Of course it is not possible to say with any certainty that my professional life developed as a direct consequence of being read to as a young child, however as a researcher of literacy practice, I cannot help but reflect on this relationship. I feel fairly certain that I benefitted hugely from being read to as a child, but as my interest in shared reading practices has developed, I have started to ask questions about parents' motivations for reading with their children. On a personal level, I do wonder what prompted my own mother to read regularly with me, despite the fact that she did not read for pleasure herself at the time (sadly she is no longer around, so I cannot ask this question to her directly). Given that this was a home where educational achievement was rarely discussed, I don't believe the activity was situated in a desire for educational endeavour. This raises very interesting questions for me about the reasons why parents, and particularly those living in disadvantaged communities, do or do not read with their children. There really is a need for some research into this….

This book is about reading with young children. However, any discussion about reading practices must firstly begin with an exploration of the term 'reading'. In particular it is important to reflect on the ways in which definitions of reading have changed over the years and consider the implications of this for children's present and future reading. We therefore begin with an exploration of the term 'reading', before moving on to the concept of 'shared reading'. The social and emotional benefits of shared reading are acknowledged before we turn to look at existing research into shared reading practices.

What is reading?

In recent years reading has tended to be conceptualised in terms of 'skill' and 'will'; to put it simply, this means having the practical skills needed to decode print and make sense of text and the motivation (will) to want to read (Logan et al., 2011; Medford & McGeown, 2011). Focusing attention on the concepts of 'skill' and 'will' does help to establish how many researchers and educationalists define reading. For example this can be seen in The National Literacy Trust's report on the *Read On. Get On.* (ROGO) campaign, which begins with an attempt to conceptualise what is meant by the term 'reading', with a view to understanding what it means to be a reader at age 11. What is clear from the outset is that the concern here is not to understand what 'reading' is as such, but to define the concept of 'reading well'. This seems to assume that we share a definition of reading that is rooted in achieving mastery in reading skill. Fortunately, others have presented definitions that offer more of a balance between the concepts of skill and will; Clark and Teravainen (2017: 2) argue that reading skills can be categorised as 'a composite of two main cognitive processes: technical skills and comprehension skills' (p2), however they stress that these cognitive processes alone do not define what reading is, as reading is a 'tripartite' of cognitive processes (decoding print and understanding text), affective processes (such as enjoying reading, confidence in reading etc) and behaviours (such as reading widely and frequently).

This definition suggests that teaching reading is a dynamic and complex process; it is argued that there is a need to teach skills so that children can decode print and make sense of what they are

reading, but this must be situated in a context that continually encourages the 'will' to read. This forces us to consider the ways in which school discourses and curricula present definitions of reading. As authors, we recognise that we are writing this from the vantage point of being 21st century British educational researchers, but it is simply not possible to talk about reading skills without facing the murky waters of 'phonics'. Over the years researchers have produced what Mc Guinness (2005: viii) has described as a 'huge and formidable' volume of studies which in various ways have tried to understand what helps children learn to read. As Lewis and Ellis (2006:2) point out, the fact that phonics is necessary in learning to read 'is not therefore at the heart of the current debate about the role of phonics', but rather the debate is now focused on what form of phonics should be taught, how much phonics should be taught, how often it should be taught and so forth. Phonics teaching must feature in the teaching of reading – but this raises serious questions about the extent to which phonics is allowed to play a central role in the how reading is *defined*. This is an important consideration and one that will be returned to at various points in this book.

There is no doubt that the schooling system is responsible for how many of us come to define what reading is, and how we perceive ourselves as readers, however it is useful to look back at the ways in which reading practices have been perceived, and influenced, by socio-cultural and socio-historical factors over the years. Crucially, it is important to remember that reading is a human-made construct, which developed from the creation of the Phoenician alphabet during the 12th century BC. While there are examples of people reading and writing throughout the decades to follow (see Styles, 1997 for example), concerns about one's ability to read did not originate much before the nineteenth century, because up to this point, being unable to read was regarded as a 'cultural norm' while being able to read was an 'exception to this norm' (Ramsey-Kurtz, 2007: 19).

Eric Havelock (1976) argues forcibly that as human beings have used oral speech for far longer than the comparatively late invention of alphabetic literacy, then this should take precedence within a definition. He states:

> 'The biological-historical fact is that homo sapiens is a species which uses oral speech manufactured by the mouth, to communicate. This is his definition. He is not, by definition, a reader or a writer…The habit of using written symbols to represent such speech is just a useful trick which has existed over too short a time to have been built into our genes' (Havelock, 1976, p12)

This view is supported by Galbraith (1997) who states that while some scholars make a sharp distinction between 'literacy' and 'orality', others take the view that the two cannot be easily separated. She herself argues that history teaches us to be cautious about making such distinctions because as recently as in late nineteenth century Britain 'there was no clean break between orality and literacy, but instead a mix of the two within individual life cycles and in families and communities' (Galbraith, 1997, p3). Having closely examined the historical development of literacy, Harvey Graff takes this point further when he asserts his growing belief that literacy is '*profoundly misunderstood*' (italics in original) (1987, p17). He argues that many discussions about literacy flounder because 'they slight any effort to formulate consistent and realistic definitions of literacy, have little appreciation of the conceptual complications that the subject of literacy presents, and ignore – often grossly – the vital role of sociohistorical context' (1987, p17).

Even the briefest glance back into the socio-historical context is valuable in the introduction to this book, because it firstly reminds us that learning to read print is not part of 'natural' development but is something that humans have learned to do to communicate. Even if, just for the moment, we suspend concerns for promoting the 'will' to read, and just focus on skill, we see that reading is quite

simply an ability to decode a human-made symbol and attach established sound and meaning to that symbol, or collection of symbols. What is more we know that young children start doing this from a very early age; way before they start school they may recognise icons, pictures, car badges, labels, shop signs, food packaging and so on. The point we are making here is that established definitions of reading, which focus on the decoding of print, are somewhat naïve, not just because they ignore the complexity of reading practices, but because they also fail to recognise that decoding print is just one of the ways in which humans have been bringing meaning to symbol for hundreds of years.

Yet there is no doubt that the ability to decode print remains central to many definitions of reading in society today, evident in the fact that there is serious international concern about children who fail to master this skill (Wheater et al, 2014; Mullis et al, 2011). This is not to say that this concern is unfounded. The 1970 British Cohort Study, for example, revealed 'a strong link between poor basic skills and disadvantaged life courses when participants were aged 34 (Bynner & Parsons 2006), with a disturbing picture of limited life chances, quality of life and social inclusion' (Levy et al, 2014). This same study, which followed 16,567 babies born in Great Britain in the period 5–11 April 1970, surveying them again in 1975, 1980, 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2000, found that improvement in reading skills for men was linked to increased home ownership and better employment prospects, while women were found to have experienced similar socioeconomic benefits as their reading improved. What is more, these stronger prospects were also associated with reports of better mental health, physical health and general well-being (Bynner & Parsons, 2006).

Clearly, children who struggle to read print in text are at a disadvantage, but the question here is not so much about whether children should be taught to read in school (of course they should) but how definitions of reading that are embedded in schooling systems can impact on children's confidence and motivation for reading. Rachael's (author) previous research showed that the twelve young children in her study entered formal schooling with broad and sophisticated definitions of reading, and largely positive perceptions of themselves as readers, however these constructions were threatened by the school discourse (Levy, 2011). In particular it was evident that the ways in which reading scheme texts were perceived can have a profound effect on children's self-perceptions of reading and their wider relationships with text. This study revealed that many of these children came to believe that reading was, in fact, the decoding of print in reading scheme books, and being 'a reader' meant that a child had completed all of the stages in the scheme, and had thus been awarded the status of being 'on chapter books' (sometimes also referred to as being a 'free reader'). This has serious implications, as the stringent use of reading schemes in Reception was seen to actively discourage some children from reading and enforced negative self-perceptions of being a non-reader. Moreover, this study showed that by defining reading in this way, reading schemes did little to promote meaningful engagement with texts.

This is not to say that reading schemes do not have a place in teaching reading. However, bearing in mind the fact that reading print is a relatively 'new' human phenomenon, and the call to recognise the role of socio-historical context in defining what reading is, it is important to give serious consideration to the ways in which we have come to define what reading is. This is especially salient given the fact that constructions of reading are again changing in line with the development of digital technology. This raises all sorts of interesting questions about reading, starting with – what is 'text'? Traditionally, the word 'text' has been used to mean 'print'. For example, when we hear the phrase 'reading the text', it is often assumed that what is being read is the printed text, rather than another mode such as a visual image. But this raises further questions about text, namely what is 'a

text'? Given that the word 'text' is commonly used to describe printed text, does a text have to contain print in order to be defined as 'a text'? And what does this mean for definitions of reading?

There is general acceptance that materials such as books, comics, magazines and newspapers are texts, even if there is little or even no printed text within (take children's wordless picturebooks as an example). However, advancements in technology mean that texts are becoming increasingly multimodal, meaning that they often use a combination of modes such as sound, image, moving image and so on. In 2003 Bearne argued forcibly that schools need to recognise these new forms of text in the curriculum, given that they are so evident in children's everyday lives – another point that we will return to later. The point we are making here is that the construction of 'text' is growing and now includes digital and screen texts, but this is not just about the physical media - it is about how these texts are accessed and understood. As Marsh and Singleton (2008, p. 1) point out, "technology has always been part of literacy", be it a pencil, book, tablet etc. However, as the literacy experience will inevitably have been influenced by the nature of the technology, literacy practices that have been mediated by digital technologies have been termed 'digital literacies' (Carrington & Robinson, 2009).

The extent to which definitions of the term "digital literacy" should include the encoding and decoding of alphabetic print, has been well debated by others. For example, Kress (2003) argues that 'literacy' refers to "lettered representation", and as a result we need to find other ways to describe how digital texts are read, understood and used in terms of their broader symbolic representations. Merchant (2007, p. 121) agrees that the term "digital literacy" relates to more than a general confidence in handling screen texts and should be orientated towards the "study of written or symbolic representation that is mediated by new technology". In other words, he appears to be arguing that the term "digital literacy" can help to redefine conceptualisations of literacy as an ability to understand the many sign and symbol systems in existence within all manner of texts today, including the ways in which children make sense of texts within their home environments. Marsh (2005) also acknowledges that while the term "points towards the ways in which lettered representation is being transformed and shaped by digitised technologies" (p. 4), she also recognises that "there are distinct aspects of text analysis and production using new media"(p. 5) that cannot be described in the same way as the more traditional literacy practices.

This has implications for young children entering the school system today; as Albers, Frederick and Cowan (2009) point out, these children are not only regular users of a variety of digital and paper texts, but are developing the skills "to help them make sense of complex multimodal features" (Levy & Marsh, 2011). What is more, given that many young children develop skills in reading digital texts before starting school (Marsh et al, 2005), they can face a challenge when entering formal schooling, as definitions of reading are dominated by the schooled discourse which emphasises decoding print in books (and these are often reading scheme books). Again, it is not the purpose of this book to explore how children read in this multimodal world, but it is important to recognise from the outset that even though the school discourse promotes a singular and dominant definition of reading, it is an emerging construct that is shaped by social, historical and technological factors.

Together this raises two important points that rest at the heart of the study presented in this book. Firstly, this book begins with the assumption that most of us want children to become confident, motivated and engaged readers, but in order to achieve this we must acknowledge that despite narrow schooled definitions of reading, it is a fluid construct. Given this understanding, the aim should surely be to support children in becoming confident in handling text in general – recognising that text now comes in many forms including paper and screen-based media. But how can this be achieved? This brings us to the second point which relates to the need to step outside of the school

context and focus on the home. In recent years researchers have become increasingly aware of the importance of the home environment in supporting children's development in literacy, but we still have a lot to learn. In 2005 McGuinness (2005; 410) argued that even though it had been known for over a decade that the home environment plays a critical role in supporting children's reading, 'reading researchers have failed to take into account the impact of the home environment', focusing instead on the children 'with reading problems, with the goal of finding out what's wrong with them'.

Over the last few decades, numerous studies have identified the home literacy environment as a key factor in children's language and literacy acquisition (Griffin & Morrison, 1997; Park, 2008; Brown et al, 2013). For example, there are a number of studies that support the view that parents who promote reading as a valuable and worthwhile activity are more likely to have children who are motivated to read for pleasure regardless of their social background (Baker & Scher, 2002). Further study has found substantial differences in home literacy environments between children from high and low socioeconomic families and used this to explain educational differences between children from these groups (Brooks-Gunn et al 1996; Duncan et al, 1994), however this is not to say that families in low socioeconomic groups have 'poor' home literacy environments. Findings from OECD (2002) indicate that while socio-economic status does have an impact on academic achievement, factors such as parental involvement with reading can in fact 'compensate' for low family income and educational background (see also Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). In a similar vein, the EPPE Project, in an extensive study of early childhood provision, reported that 'for all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income' (Sylva et al., 2004:ii).

So what is meant by a 'quality' home literacy environment? This is not at all straightforward to answer. As we have already established, reading is a shifting construct, shaped by social, cultural and historical factors, so it is to be expected that families will have developed their own literacy practices which includes unique and individual perceptions of reading and engagement with text. Yet we also know that the school discourse not only presents a narrow and static definition of reading, which is governed by a focus on accurately decoding print in books, but that this discourse is dominant in society. This creates something of a tension for the study of reading with young children in families, however the first step in addressing this tension is to recognise that it exists.

We know that there are a number of benefits associated with reading with young children. For example it has now been well documented that children who are read to regularly in the preschool years are more likely to learn language faster, enter school with a larger vocabulary, and become more 'successful' readers at school (Bus et al, 1995; Mol et al, 2008). The purpose of this book is to explore family reading practices, and the barriers and motivations to reading with young children in homes, with a view to supporting more families in reading with their children. However, this book is not about helping families to prepare their children for school. Rather this book is about *understanding* what families do in terms of reading with their children. It is about understanding what reading means to them, why they read, how they read and what influences reading activity. Given that further study has stressed the importance of understanding and valuing the literacy practices in the home and building on existing *funds of knowledge* within (Moll et al, 1995; Reese and Gallimore, 2000), this book seeks to understand the ways in which reading fits within the context of everyday life and family practices. It should be stressed at this point that this book will make regular reference to 'parents', however it is intended that the term is used broadly and includes any adults in the child's home, or indeed their lives, who have responsibility for care-giving.

Reading with young children can of course take on many forms and mean different things, but it generally includes sharing a text with a child. For this reason, the term 'shared reading' will appear regularly in this book. The next section takes a specific look at the term 'shared reading', exploring how it has been perceived in the literature, and what is generally meant by the term.

What is 'shared reading'?

Despite the fact that shared reading has been fairly well researched, and this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, it is surprisingly difficult to locate a definition for the term in the literature. Given the discussion above, we take the view that shared reading describes an activity where a child is engaged in focusing on a text with another person (usually an adult) for a sustained period of time. We agree with Yuill and Martin (2016: 2) who argue that the joint attention on a text 'fundamentally involves the shared construction of meaning', suggesting that an element of shared understanding is created by the event. As discussed in the previous section, young children now engage with a variety of texts that include digital and multimodal formats (Marsh et al, 2005; Carrington & Robinson, 2009), meaning that family shared reading may now centre on technological devices such as laptops, mobiles and tablets (Aliagas & Margallo, 2016). It is apparent that the literature also suggests that much of the reading that takes place between young children and their parents still involves the use of books (Dickinson, 2001; Denny et al, 2010). For this reason, shared reading is often described in the literature as 'shared book reading' (SBR), 'joint book reading' or 'parent-child book reading' (Kucirkova et al, 2018). Even though many of the parents in this present study spoke largely about books, we feel it is important to use the word 'text' rather than book in defining shared reading activity.

Shared reading can be sub-divided into two quite different activities; reading to/with a child and listening to a child read. Both types of shared reading have their advantages, with Martin-Chang and Gould (2012: 871) arguing that they are both 'fundamentally sound activities that create prospects for developing literacy appreciation and reading skill', however they tend to be born from different priorities and offer different opportunities for fostering literacy development. For example, 'literacy appreciation', which includes factors such as positive attitudes about reading, tends to be prioritised when adults are reading to children, while 'skill improvement' is more likely to be the focus of attention when children are reading to adults (Martin-Chang & Gould, 2012: 855). Similarly, de Jong, Mol, & Bus (2009) and Mol, Bus, de Jong & Smeets (2008) also argued that there are likely to be positive, but different consequences associated with shared book reading depending on whether children are listening to a story or reading a text to someone else.

Although there are obvious links between these two different types of shared reading, this book is primarily concerned with reading to/with children, rather than listening to children read. One reason for this is that as children progress through their early years in school, the priority often seems to shift from reading to children, to listening to children read. As Wolfendale stated in 1985, the 'time-honoured means of parents helping their children learn to read is by listening to them reading' (35), and indeed most schools continue to ask parents to listen to their children read, especially in the early years, though it should be acknowledged that many schools also encourage parents to read to their children. But there is a shift in perception of value. It is often regarded as more important that children 'practice' their reading as often as possible, as this is the 'real work' of early years education, while reading to children is seen as being altogether more inconsequential. Yet there is substantial evidence to show that there are significant benefits in adults reading to children in their homes. For example, it has been recognised that sharing books with children facilitates a particular kind of talk because speech, during book-reading, is more complex than during caretaking or play (Snow,1994). In other words, it is the talk that surrounds shared reading activity

that is so valuable, as it provides opportunities for parent and child to talk about all kinds of concepts that may not have otherwise arisen. Snow (1994) summarises this nicely when she states that in shared reading the book becomes:

> …a microenvironment within which certain kinds of events are likely to occur, events like: learning new words, asking why questions, learning scientific facts, or seeing connections between one's own life and others' lives…the talk is the site of the learning; the book-reading is important because it is the site of the talk

> (Snow, 1994:271)

Talk occurring between parent and child during shared reading activity is often more complex, in terms of sentence structure and vocabulary, than talk which happens during other activities such as free play, sharing meals and so on. This was evidenced by Fletcher and Reese (2005) in relation to picturebook reading with children under the age of three. However, this is not just about the structure of language during shared reading activity. The text becomes a focal site of engagement for parent and child, offering numerous opportunities to talk about issues, experiences, events, concerns, identities and so on.   It should also be noted that the text which is central to this activity may well be a book (in paper or screen format), but it could also be any other artefact such as a picture or photograph.

While the specific content of the talk will be dependent on the individual child, parent and text, the point to recognise is that shared reading offers unique possibilities for talk that are highly beneficial. This appears to be related to the kind of interaction that occurs between parent and child during shared reading activity, which can be described as *joint attention (JA).* 'Joint attention' describes a situation where parents and children are jointly fixated on a particular object and coordinate visual attention together. Studies into child development have suggested that joint attention has less to do with a child following an adults' gaze but occurs when the gaze of both parties is coordinated and jointly focused on the object (Yu and Smith, 2007; Baldwin and Moses, 1996). This is critical when considering shared reading activity as the mutual focus on a text fosters joint attention between parent and child. This is important because further studies have shown that language acquisition is facilitated by joint parent– child attention, given that joint attention between parent and child is itself known to be a predictor of children's language skills (Kucirkova et al, 2018; Karrass et al, 2002).

Shared reading clearly has language benefits for young children however these are not the only advantages. Further study has shown that shared reading can facilitate a number of social and emotional benefits including the fact that it can enhance the relationship between parent and child. This is discussed next.

Social and emotional benefits in shared reading

There is much to suggest that parents and children enjoy shared reading. For example in the opening pages of her book 'Help your child love reading', David (2014) recalls her own experiences in reading with her son, saying 'I can honestly say that reading to and with him is one of the most joyful and pleasurable things we do together'. While research has tended to focus more attention on the language benefits of shared reading, rather than the socio-emotional advantages, it is not hard to find evidence of the pleasure that can be found in shared reading, for both parents and children. For example, Scher and Baker (1996) found that only 4% of their socially and culturally diverse sample of parents reported that their first-grade children did not like having someone read to them, suggesting that this is something that children generally enjoy. Similarly, studies have also suggested that parents often value the affective dimensions of shared reading; for example, in their study of 119

parents, Audet et al (2008) found that these parents reported that their goals for shared reading included bonding with their child, soothing their child and enjoying books, together with the more 'educational' goals to stimulate development and foster reading.

Research with babies and very young children has also shed light on the affective benefits of shared reading activity. Evaluating a book programme for mothers and their seven-month-old babies, Hardman and Jones (1999) noted that interactions around books with these young children were social rituals providing opportunities for social interaction and physical proximity. As there was a lack of emphasis on following a storyline at this early age, their observations suggested that the book facilitated social interaction between parent and child, which included the child touching, chewing and looking at the book. As a consequence, the value of the activity appeared to be in enabling social interaction and close contact, rather than developing skills in reading as such.

Shared reading can be a highly enjoyable activity, facilitating closeness and strengthening the relationship between parent and child. While this is a valuable aim in its own right, research also indicates that the stronger the affective-emotional relationship during shared reading, the more likely the language benefits for the child. This was seen in Britto et al's (2006) study of mothers reading to their children, which concluded that a mother's praise and enthusiasm during shared reading encouraged the child's verbal participation. Similarly, other research has suggested that a strong affective-emotional climate encourages the child to focus attention on the text and show enthusiasm for the reading experience. Children in these situations were also more likely to co-operate with the mother's requests which in turn led to more frequent shared reading activities (Bus et al 1997; Leseman & de Jong, 1998). There are also suggestions in the literature that secure attachments between parents and children are associated with activities such as shared reading (Frosch et al, 2001) however given that many of these studies tend to take a very binary view of attachment we do feel that caution is needed in making claims about the relationship between shared reading and parent-child 'attachment'.

That said, when we bring this all together, we can see that shared reading has a number of benefits for both parent and child; while there is much to indicate that shared reading promotes language development in children, it also provides an opportunity for parent and child to enjoy time together and develop their relationship. What is more, the literature also suggests that the relationship between parent and child can influence the shared reading experience, with securely attached children being more likely to experience enthusiastic and focused shared reading activity. This may not be terribly surprising in itself, as it stands to reason that difficulties in the relationship between parent and child will likely be reflected in the activities that they share. However, given the importance of shared reading in terms of language development, and the need to encourage the activity in children's homes, this does remind us that the relational aspects of shared reading must be acknowledged in research to understand how it operates in families.

Researching shared reading

We know that shared reading is good for children, with many of the benefits being discussed in this introduction. We also know that not all children are engaged in shared reading activity in their own homes (Britto et al, 2002). This suggests a need to understand the factors that both encourage and prevent parents from reading with their children, in an attempt to find ways in which to support more parents in reading with their children. But we need to be careful. We also know that many reading interventions with families simply do not work (Justice et al, 2015), often because the intervention has failed to acknowledge the socio-cultural dynamic of the individual family. This

suggests a need to understand what families do and how shared reading fits, or not, within the context of their everyday family lives.

So far, much of the research into shared reading has tended to focus on how the activity promotes literacy development (Bus et al 2007; Mol et al 2008) or what parents do during the activity to foster this development (Price et al 2009; Baker et al 2001). Far fewer studies have attempted to understand what parents think about shared reading and explore the barriers to engaging in the activity. Among those that have, such as Harris et al (2007), parents have been restricted to selecting from a set of fixed responses, which may not measure the things that are most relevant to them. Lin et al (2015) considered a broader range of barriers to reading with children, showing that mothers are more likely to report child-centred barriers than any other type; however, the authors acknowledged the limitations of restricting the barriers that parents could report. They called for interview methods to be used to identify additional factors that prevent parents from reading with their children. The study presented in this book addresses this, by enabling parents to express in their own way how shared reading is perceived in their homes and how it fits, or does not fit, within everyday family life.

Overview of the book

Having introduced the concept of shared reading in this chapter, and explained our justification for focusing on this, the next chapter (Chapter Two) takes a step back and explores how the overall concept of 'reading' can be understood when we explore it from a sociological perspective. We look at how the home and school contexts are responsible for the socialisation of reading, concluding that reading is a value-laden activity, embedded in discourses of power and shaped by systems and beliefs. Chapter Three returns to a focus on shared reading, exploring how factors such as culture and ethnicity, as well as social factors, are linked with shared reading in families. This chapter also shows how shared reading is a highly complex phenomenon, influenced by social and cultural structures as well as the unique features of everyday family life.

Chapter Four moves to the research that is presented in this book. We introduce the study and explain the methods that were used to conduct the research. We focus attention on the process of developing the in-depth interviews which allowed us to gain an insight into the lives of our participants. Chapters Five to Eight present a detailed overview of what we learned from talking to the parents in our study.   Chapter Five demonstrates how reading was an everyday practice for many of the families in this study; we show how these families used shared reading to structure and manage daily life as well as display aspects of 'being a family'. Building on this, Chapter Six explored parents' motivation for reading, focusing on the link between enjoyment and feedback within the activity and showing how these factors are part of a reciprocal cycle that develops within shared reading relationships. Chapter Seven turns to potential barriers to shared reading, demonstrating that just as shared reading can happen for many different reasons, there are a number of factors that can inhibit or prevent the practice from taking place. By getting to know the families in this study we grew to understand how immensely important it is for parent and child to enjoy the activity, suggesting that it is not enough for practitioners to simply encourage parents to read with their children, but they must support parents in finding ways to make the activity enjoyable for all. Chapter Eight concludes this section of the book by exploring the parents' own relationships with reading and the ways in which this linked with shared reading practices with their children. This chapter shows how for some of the parents in this study, shared reading with their children had a positive impact on their own relationships with reading which they both recognised and valued.

The final two chapters of the book turn to the implications of this study for practitioners working with families. By reflecting on the data presented in Chapters Five to Eight, we present a new definition for shared reading in homes that is characterised by 'The Four T's' of Text, Talk, Time and Togetherness. Chapter Nine examines how this understanding, and indeed the findings presented throughout this book, can be used by practitioners to support their work with families. Chapter Ten brings the book to a conclusion by demonstrating how shared reading in the home offers a very different definition of reading to that of the school, which, we argue, can inhibit shared reading practices and in some cases stifle children's engagement with reading altogether. By making this comparison transparent, we conclude this book by showing why it is important for parents to continue shared reading practices after their children start school, and into the future for as long as they can.