

THE
MERCERS'
COMPANY

Trustee to The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington

Reading and Writing for Pleasure: A Framework for Practice

Executive Summary



READING
FOR PLEASURE



CENTRE FOR
LITERACY AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE



The Open
University



Foreword

Children and young people's enjoyment in reading and writing is declining; UK and international studies indicate considerable cause for concern (Clark et al., 2022; Mullis, 2023). Yet research reveals that the habit of reading in childhood is associated with academic, social and emotional outcomes and can mitigate educational disadvantages associated with gender and socio-economic status (OECD, 2021; Torppa et al., 2020). Writing research also evidences strong associations between motivation, self-efficacy and writing performance (Graham, 2017). Additionally, reading and writing for pleasure ('R and WfP') are valuable in their own right. They play a pivotal role in supporting all children's learning and development, particularly the less advantaged. Young people's volitional reading and writing matter.

Commissioned by the **Mercers' Company** as part of its **Young People & Education** programme's 'Literacy Special Initiative - Reading and Writing for Pleasure 2020-2023' ('Literacy Special Initiative'), the Framework for Practice has been developed by **The Open University** ('OU'). The Framework draws together insights from the international research literature in these areas, and data from six London-based literacy programmes. These 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**, that jointly led '**Get Islington Reading**'. Within the Mercers' Company's Young People & Education programme's Literacy Special Initiative, all the organisations worked on individual specific programmes aimed at enriching young people's pleasure in reading and/or writing, predominantly with primary aged children. Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, these organisations offered a rich range of literacy programmes virtually and on doorsteps, in homes, schools, local libraries, outdoor centres, and in their own premises. These were often offered in collaboration with others.



The project aims and process

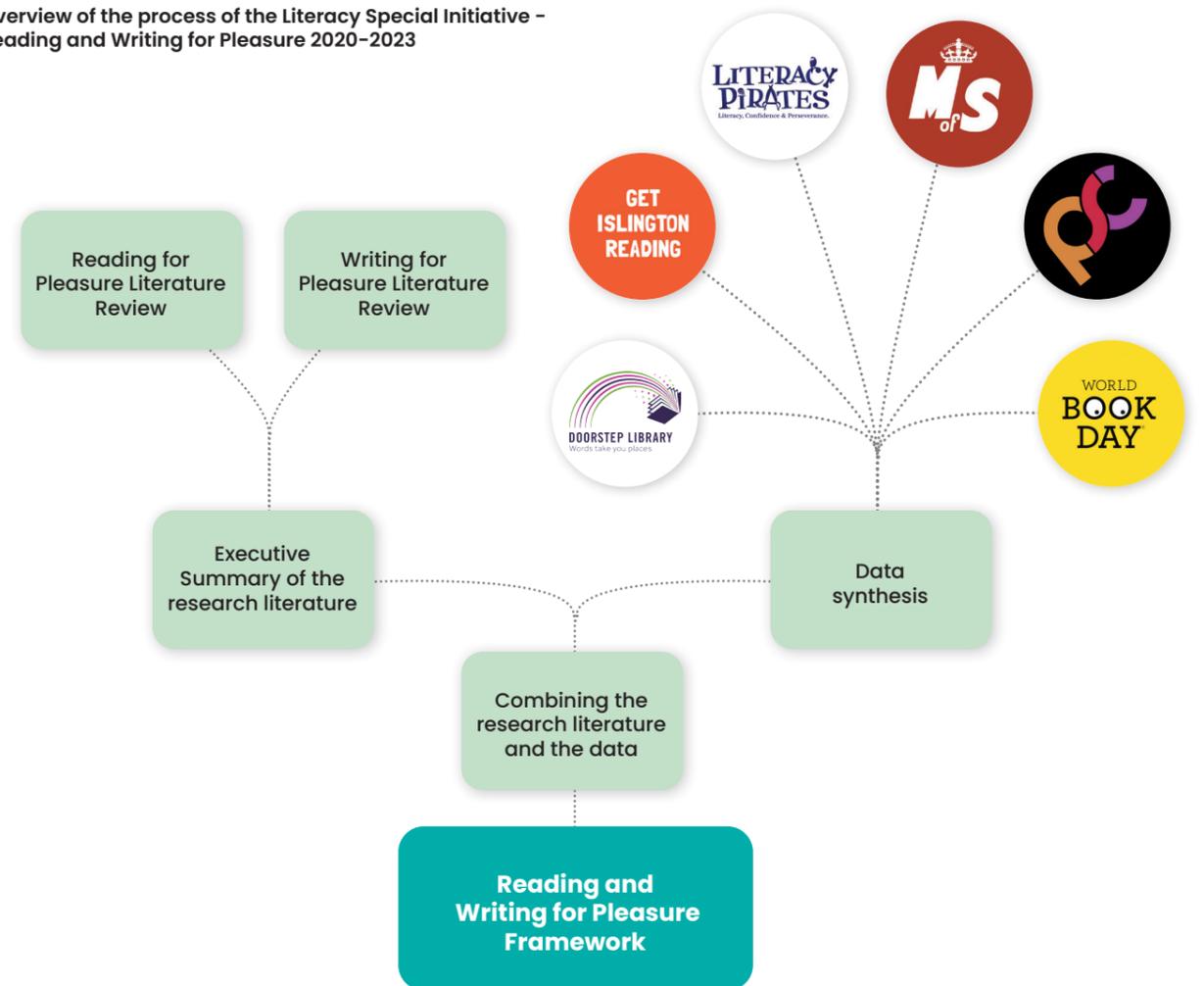
The Mercers' Company's Young People and Education programme's Literacy Special Initiative sought to establish:

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

The OU team systematically reviewed the existing research literatures on R and WfP separately, and then identified themes within, and synergies across, these reviews in relation to effective approaches for 5-13 years olds. Whilst acknowledging the term writing for pleasure is rarely used in policy, practice or research, the OU team framed it as 'volitional writing', which, in line with notions of reading for pleasure, is seen to be driven by an individual's own goals and interests, which may include social ones, in anticipation of some kind of satisfaction.



Overview of the process of the Literacy Special Initiative - Reading and Writing for Pleasure 2020-2023



To understand the approaches used by the individual programmes, a range of data collection methods were deployed, including interviews, focus groups (with adults and young people), the gathering of documentation, cross-programme meetings and observations of the diverse activities offered. In recognition of the complexity of the programmes, the data analysis was underpinned by concepts from Activity Theory (Engestrom, 2001; 2014), this led to the identification of both unique and shared ways of working across the programmes. These insights were cross-referenced with those gained from the literature reviews. Commonalities in approaches, identified in both the research

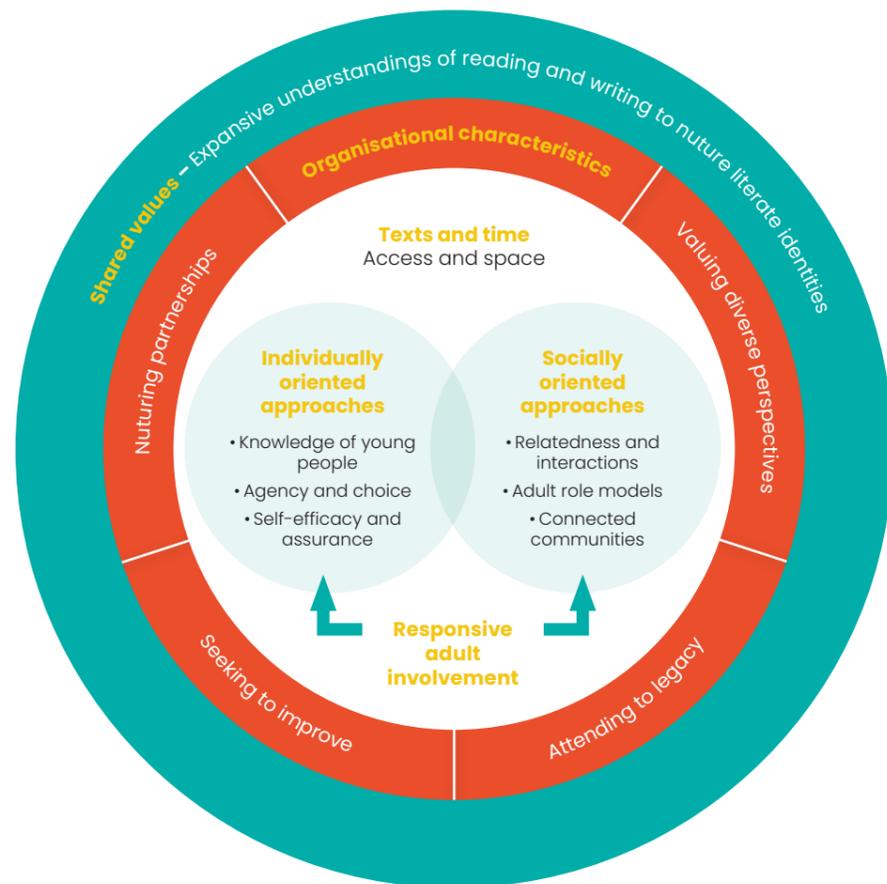
literature and the programme data led to the creation of this practice-focused Reading and Writing for Pleasure Framework ('the Framework').

The programmes in the Literacy Special Initiative differed in many ways, for instance, **Ministry of Stories** and **Primary Shakespeare Company** worked in primary schools, **Get Islington Reading** in local libraries and KS2/3 school contexts, **World Book Day** online and in the schools involved in trialling resources, **Literacy Pirates** in its own centre, and **Doorstep Library** in children's homes. Many operated in time and space beyond the school day, and involved a range of

people, including volunteers, public and school librarians, teachers, creative partners and parents, as well as staff from their own organisation. In contrast, research into approaches that motivate children to R and WfP has mainly been undertaken in 'traditional' classrooms with teachers.

Common features of practice were identified across the six programmes, albeit some were evidenced unevenly. Each of the programmes used different tools to understand efficacy in nurturing R and WfP. Whilst this was not the focus of the work, the data analysis indicates that all programmes impacted positively on children as readers and/or writers.

Reading and Writing for Pleasure: A Framework for Practice



Reading and Writing for Pleasure: A Framework for Practice

The Framework provides a research-informed basis for developing practice that nurtures young people's R and WfP. It includes the programmes' shared values and organisational characteristics that shape and support such work. These enabling features underpin their approaches to nurturing children's

enjoyment and engagement as readers and writers and deserve recognition.

The Framework indicates that a rich combination of individually and socially oriented approaches is optimal, mediated through the responsive involvement of adults. It highlights the child-led autonomy-focused nature of this work, and

the ways that relaxed interactions around texts forge social and relational connections of value between readers and/or writers. To enable this dynamic combination to function successfully, text access and dedicated time and space are essential. The layers of the Framework are described in this report.

Shared values

The programmes coalesce around their shared values and intent to nurture R and WfP, however this is more than a common aim. Programme staff hold expansive understandings of reading and writing; they recognise the importance of children's affective, creative and social engagement as readers and writers. Their conceptions, often linked to addressing disadvantage, are not limited by 'schooled' versions of reading and writing and they work to facilitate positive literacy experiences that develop young people's sense of identity as readers and/or writers. Significantly, the research literature shows that children's literate identities play a key role in their wider sense of self, and their motivation and desire to read or write for pleasure.

Organisational characteristics

Four facilitating features underpin the programmes' approaches to developing young people's positive engagement as readers and writers. These include working to nurture partnerships, valuing everyone's perspective, and constantly seeking to enhance the organisations' offer and legacy.

Nurturing partnerships

The organisations work to understand the specific local context and individual needs of its stakeholders. Demonstrating an open ethos, organisations tailor interactions and/or resources in response and work collaboratively with partners with which they build mutually beneficial relationships. Their listening stance and evident commitment ensure that they are trusted and valued by others as organisational allies who share the goal of developing young people's agentic engagement and pleasure in reading and writing.

Valuing diverse perspectives

The organisations draw on a range of voices through the processes of monitoring, evaluating, adapting and delivering activities. A consultative approach to programme design is taken, including finding ways to listen to and be led by young people. The expertise and skills of different partners and team members is recognised and capitalised upon. During programme delivery, a genuine dialogue about adults' diverse experiences as readers and writers is encouraged to support and motivate children and the expertise of creatives is harnessed.

Seeking to improve

These learning organisations continually seek to improve their programmes, variously using

feedback from informal interaction, session notes, structured evaluations, surveys, audits and stakeholder review meetings. Ongoing cycles of monitoring and refining the work are undertaken, which mainly focus on their impact on young people. These activities contribute to developments in training volunteers and help to foster high quality interactions between adults and children linked to the programme aims of fostering enjoyment in R and WfP outside of school assessment criteria.

Attending to legacy

The organisations' values underpin their work on making a lasting impact. The adults involved are committed to developing children's attitudes to and pleasurable engagement in literacy, many see this as every child's right. Volunteers voice a sense of communal engagement, a desire to give back to their communities and redress inequalities. Creatives share a love of their craft and seek to instil this in children, and in some cases, practitioners. Published anthologies, films, author events and performances create other forms of legacy, alongside support for families. The organisations' approaches aim to lead to lasting change in the ways young people, teachers', parents', or others' view and experience R and WfP.

Texts and time

Both the research literature and evidence from the programmes show that accessing texts and having time and space to engage with them are key to R and WfP. The importance of providing myriad opportunities for children to choose from a rich range of diverse texts is clear. This might include regular sharing, browsing, recommending, gifting, and lending texts as well as enabling text ownership. Children are more motivated when the texts available are culturally relevant and connected to their lives and interests.

When time is set aside – at home, in school, in a library, or as part of wider community events – and opportunities are offered to ‘just’ read and write, children are enabled to exercise their agency and make choices as readers and writers. They begin to expect, depend upon and look forward to this time which benefits from a carefully curated balance of familiar routine and flexibility, accommodating both extended periods of quiet, immersed engagement in reading and composing texts, and vibrant interactions with others about these.

The combined findings also point to the value of physically inviting and relationally informal environments which are often learner shaped and owned. Environments that are perceived to be safe, social, and non-judgemental, support young people to take risks as writers and to engage more deeply as readers, alone and through interaction with others.



Individually oriented approaches

Individually oriented approaches are a key feature evident in the research literature and the programmes' approaches. They comprise three strands, developing knowledge of the young people, and nurturing their autonomy and agency and their self-efficacy and assurance as readers and writers. These strands emphasise the volitional nature of R and WfP.

Adult foregrounding of the voices of children and young people and seeking to understand their unique interests, lives, and literate identities is evident in both the research and the work of the programmes. This knowledge is developed through prioritising adult-child relationships and interactions, and offering opportunities that enable children to share something of themselves and their own personal, cultural,

and literary experiences. When their views about R and WfP practices are sought, heard, respected, and most significantly, acted upon, this widens children's rights as readers and writers and enhances their involvement.

Nurturing young people's agency and autonomy as readers and writers is motivating and supports the development of positive literacy identities. Both the programmes and the research literature show that child-led text choice and access to personally relevant reading material that responds to individual and collective interests is vital. Enabling the young to discriminate and make wise choices as readers matters. Young writers too are motivated by being supported to exercise their authorial agency, write for personal and real-world purposes, experience the use

and value of writing, and draw upon their lives and experiences of multimodal texts to express themselves.

Fostering young people's sense of self-efficacy and assurance as readers and writers is also seen to be critical. Mutually reinforcing relationships exist between competence and motivation. Studies in this area and the programmes, show that supportive environments, constructive feedback, and responsively structured, yet informal R and WfP opportunities can foster children's sense of self-efficacy as readers and writers. Drawing on personalised understandings of individual learners, adults build their perceived competence and confidence in one-to-one and group conversations and persistently celebrate their contributions, imaginative engagement and other successes.

Responsive adult involvement

Attuned and responsive adult involvement mediates and motivates young people's engagement as readers and writers, individually and collectively. The combined evidence indicates that adults who develop children's R and WfP, nurture connections and relatedness, engage affectively and through their behaviour show that they are interested in and appreciate the young people's perspectives. Their personal involvement may include support for text selection, affirmative feedback and guidance when encountering challenges, and the tailored provision of opportunities for children to be inspired by books read aloud, by recommendations, and by participation in informal interchanges around children's texts – written or read. They may also offer space to consider the experience of being a reader/writer.



Socially oriented approaches

Socially oriented approaches to R and WfP are at the heart of the programmes' practice and are extensively evidenced in the research reviewed. These are facilitated by responsive adult involvement, and underpinned by social interaction, relatedness, and role modelling. They can enable the development of connected communities of readers and writers.

Social interactions around reading and writing that value children's interests and views and foster relational connections enable them to feel recognised and accepted as readers and writers. This can be intensely satisfying and motivate R and WfP. Studies indicate, and the programmes evidence, that non-hierarchical, trusting relationships influence and can even undo young people's assumptions or negative attitudes towards reading and writing. Such relationships are facilitated by conversational exchanges and spontaneous interactions around texts that are being written and read. Often, these are centred around young people's ideas and led by them, enabling individuals to make choices about how they participate and their reading and writing foci. Informal peer support,

playful activities, and reassuring structures around R and WfP that prioritise equality of participation and develop mutual respect, set the foundation for such interaction.

Adult role models demonstrate their personal engagement as readers and writers and thus encourage young people to R and WfP. Both the research and the programmes indicate that some adults share and reflect upon their literacy experiences and in the process enhance the authenticity, real-world relevance and pleasure to be found in R and WfP. Positioned as fellow readers and writers, these adults may voice their personal and emotional response to texts, write alongside children and express their own compositional challenges and satisfactions. They invite the young people to do the same and sensitively build on their responses.

The creation of connected communities of readers and writers shape young people's literate identities and their desire to engage in R and WfP. Strongly evidenced in the programmes and increasingly documented in research, these communities connect children and their families, educators, school and public librarians, volunteers, authors, professional writers and other creative partners in diverse clusters and affinity groups. Operating in different spaces, offline and online, such connected communities not only widen young people's R and WfP networks but can increase their awareness of and pleasure in the communal, collective and relational experience of being a reader/writer.





Recommendations and implications

Reading and writing for pleasure urgently require a higher profile in education, both to raise attainment and achievement and to increase children's engagement as motivated and socially engaged readers and writers.

The Framework, developed from the Literacy Special Initiative, funded by the Mercers' Company (as trustee of The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington), offers a strongly research-informed basis for practice in all contexts where the aim is to develop young people's R and WfP – these include homes, schools, public and school libraries, online literacy spaces and local communities.

The Framework reveals that effective approaches for nurturing R and WfP are framed by expansive understandings of literacy, which recognise young people as readers and writers, not pupils 'doing reading and writing' and which focus on them personally. The values-driven programmes in the Literacy Special Initiative, whose work is not defined by curriculum expectations, clearly evidence this egalitarian emphasis on children as experts, and respect their views, ideas and rights as readers and writers.

Access to diverse, relevant texts and dedicated time underpin the optimal individually and socially oriented approaches to R and WfP which are mediated through responsive adult involvement. Individually, in the sense that they are learner-centred, autonomy-focused and sensitive to young people's own interests, literate identities and wider cultural practices. Socially, in the sense that they include rich opportunities for informal interaction around texts that are inclusive, non-hierarchical, involve adult role models, and nurture the creation of positive connections and communities of readers and writers. These approaches reflect relational pedagogy in action.

Literacy organisations, schools, teachers, student teachers and librarians can make use of the Framework to affirm and celebrate, question and challenge their practice, and in the light of this, identify priorities for development. Additionally, the Framework offers an opportunity to develop a shared vocabulary around these foci, with volunteers, partners, stakeholders, funders, governors and trustees. It also demonstrates to these and other colleagues, the value of current practice, and the potential for enrichment to maximise impact on young people as readers and writers.

It is recommended that within and across organisations committed to enriching R and WfP, all the adults involved are supported to:

- 1 Review their practice to develop positive literate identities for all children, consider their long term aims and the partnerships that could support these.
- 2 Explore and potentially broaden their conceptions of literacy and reader and writer identities.
- 3 Ensure that young people have access to a rich choice of texts and dedicated time and space to read and write primarily for enjoyment.
- 4 Invite and respond to young people's views about R and WfP, developing their agency and supporting their self-efficacy as readers and writers.
- 5 Embed opportunities for relaxed and supportive social interaction around R and WfP, and authentically model their own pleasurable engagement and challenges.
- 6 Develop nurturing relational practices that create connected communities of readers and writers.

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To find out more

Read the **Approaches to Reading and Writing for Pleasure: An Executive Summary of the Research Literature** and The Report on **The Mercers' Company Literacy Special Initiative – Reading and Writing for Pleasure 2020–2023**.



The Open University
Reading for Pleasure I Research



The Mercers' Company
Insights and Learning

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