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Children's perspectives and experiences

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# Reading for pleasure practices in school: children's perspectives and experiences

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** In many educational systems internationally, promoting reading for pleasure (RfP) is embedded within curricula and practice. Primary school teachers regularly and routinely engage in activities designed to encourage and sustain children's reading enjoyment. However, what are children's perspectives and experiences of these different practices?

**Purpose:** This study sought to: (i) identify relevant research aligned with common classroom RfP practices and (ii) understand children's perspectives and experiences of these.

**Methods:** For (i), a literature review was undertaken to identify research relevant to RfP practices. For (ii), a total of 59 children (51% female) aged 8–11 from four demographically diverse UK schools (2 in Scotland, 2 in England) participated in individual or small group interviews, depending on their preference, to discuss their RfP perspectives and experiences. Data were analysed qualitatively.

**Findings:** The analysis indicated the diversity of children's perspectives and experiences of RfP practices. It allowed exploration of a range of experiences in relation to independent reading, teacher read-alouds, book-talk, reading diaries, quality of book provision, use of technology, annual events and the use of rewards.

**Conclusions:** This study provides insight into children's perspectives and experiences in relation to common classroom practices designed to promote RfP. It points to the need for more research to support teachers' understanding of the effectiveness of these different practices, and the ways in which they can be enacted to optimise children's reading experiences and outcomes. Indeed, it draws attention to a disconnect between classroom practice and academic research, raising important issues around classroom practice informing research priorities.

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reading; pleasure; enjoyment; classroom practice; primary; literacy practices

## Introduction

The notion of reading for pleasure (RfP) is of educational interest and relevance internationally (OECD 2021; Kirsch et al. 2002). Its significance as part of children's literacy development is reflected within primary curricula. For example, in Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence states that children at primary school should be able to

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'regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts which I enjoy and find interesting' (Scottish Government n.d., 30), and the national curriculum in England documents, in its programme of study for primary-aged children, that: 'Pupils should be taught to develop pleasure in reading' (Department for Education 2013, 11, 18). In the Northern Ireland Curriculum Primary, it is recorded that 'Children should be encouraged to develop a love of books and the disposition to read' (CCEA 2019, 20), while the Curriculum for Wales details that, during the primary years: 'Learners should be given opportunities to . . . read for different purposes, e.g. for personal pleasure . . .' (Welsh Government 2016, 5).

The relevance of RfP in the classroom is clearly seen through research highlighting the importance of volitional reading in primary schools (e.g. Cremin et al. 2014; McGeown and Wilkinson 2021). In the UK and elsewhere, many teachers regularly and routinely engage in classroom practices and initiatives to support RfP (e.g. independent reading sessions; teacher read-alouds; school book events). RfP practices typically seek to enhance children's reading experiences and/or outcomes – for example, aiming to increase children's reading motivation, engagement and/or enjoyment, volitional reading, appreciation of different genres, desire or ability to contribute confidently to and enjoy discussions about books, develop language or reading skills, etc. However, peer-reviewed research focusing on children's perspectives and experiences of school-based RfP practices is limited, and there is a surprising lack of the literature on the different ways in which these practices can be enacted, and on the effectiveness of these practices. Within RfP research, the complex concept of effectiveness is defined in different ways, and the understanding and use of it varies widely. As RfP practices often seek to achieve a number of outcomes, a broad definition of effectiveness is evident: precisely which reading attitudes, behaviours or skills are the subject of change is not always specified. Although not the focus of enquiry in this paper, the conceptualisation of effectiveness represents a critical consideration for future research into RfP practices, as noted later on.

This paper reports on a study which investigates children's perspectives and experiences of school-based RfP practices, and the various ways the practices are enacted. The research sought to better understand primary-aged children's experiences of the RfP practices they had encountered, and what they felt about them. Before detailing the empirical research, we present a review of literature carried out to identify research relevant to RfP practices.

## Background

### *The literature context*

To situate this study within the context of existing research on RfP practices, a literature review was carried out. This review was conducted using keyword searches, including general terms (e.g. 'reading for pleasure' OR 'reading enjoy' AND 'school' AND 'pedagogy' OR 'practice'), in addition to searches for specific classroom practices described by children during the course of the research study (e.g. 'book talk'; 'read aloud'; 'technology'), which were undertaken following the interviews. Furthermore, alternative terms were used where necessary (e.g. 'independent reading/sustained silent reading/Drop Everything and Read'). No inclusion or exclusion criteria were determined prior to the literature search, and the review included research from different international settings.

Although the focus was on practices within primary/elementary school contexts, we recognise that some practices may also be employed in secondary/high school contexts. The further paragraphs give details of the main practices identified, grouped by the nature of the practice, initiative type or activity.

### *Independent reading*

Time to read independently (e.g. Drop Everything and Read – ‘DEAR’) is widely used in the UK and internationally, to provide children with an opportunity to read independently and silently (usually a book of their choice) on a frequent basis (sometimes daily) for a relatively short period of time (e.g. 10–30 min) (Lee-Daniels and Murray 2000). During independent reading, there are typically no interruptions, nor tests/assignments on what has been read. Children simply have time to read for pleasure: and, in some cases, teachers read for pleasure during this time, too (Methe and Hintze 2003; Widdowson, Dixon, and Moore 1996). Independent reading can be implemented in different ways, with sessions differing widely in terms of timing, duration, frequency, opportunities for pupil book choice, quality of book choice, comfortable spaces to read, level of teacher input and encouragement (Allred and Cena 2020; Pilgreen 2000). Whilst independent reading/DEAR has been widely used for over 50 years (Lee-Daniels and Murray 2000), evidence of its effectiveness is questionable (e.g. research into sustained silent reading in class; National Reading Panel, 2000). Indeed, the ‘effectiveness’ of independent reading is likely to vary considerably, based on numerous factors, such as children’s depth of enjoyment/interest/engagement while reading (Pilgreen 2000).

### *Whole class teacher read-aloud*

Teachers reading aloud in class can increase children’s access to a wide range of books, exposing children to more diverse books and authors than they would naturally encounter (Gambrell 2011; McGeown and Wilkinson 2021). Furthermore, teacher read-alouds can allow children to access more challenging books, books that they may not be able to read independently with the level of fluency required for deep engagement (Cremin et al. 2014). Reading aloud also exposes children to rich and diverse language that they may not be able to access in books independently, which can enhance vocabulary (e.g. Elley 1989) and has been linked with literacy development (Mol and Bus 2011). Furthermore, teacher read-alouds can help children to develop positive attitudes towards reading. For example, Merga (2017) found avid readers linked read-aloud experiences at school with developing their identity as a reader. The effectiveness of teacher read-alouds is likely to vary greatly and be determined by the extent to which the book aligns with the children’s existing interests, preferences, lives and/or successfully introduces children to new genres or topics that they enjoy.

Books to be read aloud are typically selected by teachers, with consideration given to topic, genre and representation in this decision-making process (Conradi Smith, Young, and Core Yatzeck 2022). That said, Conradi Smith et al. (2022) found that most books selected by teachers are dated (e.g. average year of publication 1994 – i.e. well before the children being read to were born). It is likely that, when it comes to whole class read-alouds, the extent of children’s involvement in choosing books will be variable. Research demonstrates that choice is important for reading enjoyment (Guthrie et al. 2007; Lorilynn, Sharp, and Gardner 2021); therefore, offering children some involvement in

this process may be beneficial (e.g. from a selection curated by the teacher). The value of student choice in this context is an area in need of research.

### *Book-talk*

Creating and supporting opportunities for children to share, recommend or discuss books with each other and their teacher creates communities of readers within a school (Cremin et al. 2014). Indeed, research-informed practices to promote students' motivation to read include social practices (Guthrie et al. 2007). More recently, Neugebauer and Gilmour (2020) reported that classrooms with intimate and personalised book-talk between teachers and students were more effective in supporting students' motivation to read than classrooms with limited or fewer in-depth discussions. Similarly, Fisher and Frey (2018) highlighted book-talk and book blessings (highlighting, recommending, and putting recommended reading materials on a special shelf) as approaches to increase children's engagement in reading.

### *Reading diaries*

Documenting reading practices is a well-established pedagogical approach used in many primary schools. Reading is commonly set as a homework task (Medwell and Wray 2019), documenting reading frequency and volume via a reading log or diary. However, Pak and Weseley (2012) emphasise that reading logs can cause some children to disengage with reading. Keeping a record of books in order to promote RfP is a far less common practice. Cremin (2019) suggests that creating a personal reading history as a metaphorical *river* can be a way in which children may share their own reading journey with their teachers and classmates, drawing or illustrating their reading habits and activities along an image of a river. Teachers are then able to widen their knowledge of the reading preferences of their class, and the visual rivers can be displayed around school to promote reading to other children (Cremin 2019). In Scotland, an initiative called the First Minister's Reading Challenge (Scottish Book Trust 2021) includes activities which are based on documenting reading practices (e.g. the pupil reading journey, which encourages children to document their own personal progress with reading). However, there is a lack of peer-reviewed research examining the effectiveness of these practices.

### *Quality book provision*

In the UK, there is no statutory requirement for schools to have a school library (National Literacy Trust 2022), and one in seven state primary schools who responded to a survey said that they did not have a dedicated school library space (National Literacy Trust 2022). For schools that do have a library, there are still questions around whether the provision is modern and relevant for the school community. Quality provision is essential: books and other texts available need to align with the interests, skills, lives and experiences of pupils, but also offer opportunities to extend their knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of different texts and reading experiences (McGeown and Wilkinson 2021). The importance of provision is demonstrated in a large-scale interview study of children's suggestions of practices to support their reading motivation and engagement (Tegmark et al. 2022), where the most common response highlighted the desire for more interesting texts and also texts at a suitable level. This points to the need for quality texts not only aligned with students' interests but abilities, too. Finally, the financial costs of purchasing books

disproportionately affect families with low incomes (Picton et al. 2023); therefore, a supply of high-quality books in schools is essential to support efforts to reduce inequalities in home provision.

### *Annual events*

Book and reading events held on an annual or regular basis, typically involving the whole school community, can provide visible opportunities to celebrate books and reading. For example, having been started nearly three decades ago as a worldwide celebration of reading and books, World Book Day now takes place in over 100 countries globally ('About World Book Day' 2023) and has the potential to encourage quality reading experiences among children, often based on their favourite books and book characters (Picton, Goodwin, and Clark 2021). Children can dress as their favourite book character, take in their favourite book and participate in reading activities in school. Furthermore, receiving a book token can increase access to, and choice of, a new book. Being able to purchase a book they might not have been able to afford otherwise gives children autonomy to select a book (albeit within restrictions), which aligns with their own interests (Picton, Goodwin, and Clark 2021).

Annual events beyond the school context include the UK Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge. It is designed to encourage reading during the summer holidays – a time when, traditionally, a summer dip or plateau in reading can be observed (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2001; Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988; Cooper et al. 1996). Research undertaken on the 2009 challenge suggests that it has been successful in boosting children's reading over the school summer holidays (Kennedy and Bearne 2009). As the 2009 report also notes that it tended to be completed by children who were already 'committed readers' (Kennedy and Bearne 2009, 10), such studies highlight the importance of considering, more generally, how far annual book events and initiatives may be useful – or could become more useful – for promoting RfP among reluctant readers. There is a lack of research examining this and the broader research question as to what extent annual reading events contribute to motivating all children to read.

### *Use of technology*

Technology is increasingly being used to help students identify, recommend and share their thoughts on books and connect with others (locally, nationally and internationally) who have similar reading interests. Furthermore, it can connect children with their favourite authors and access literacy events and activities offered by different organisations (e.g. 'Authors Live' 2022). The use of technology within RfP pedagogy tends to be influenced by teachers' own perspectives, confidence and practices with technology, as well as access to technology provision in the classroom (Picton 2018). To date, there has been very little research exploring the diverse ways in which technology can be used to support RfP pedagogy. Of the research identified, activities such as blogging have been found to facilitate social activities across the whole class, such as reading and commenting on classmates' book reviews online (Johnson 2010). Micro-blogging sites have been used, too, in the classroom as a medium in which teachers, children and authors can interact together (e.g. Carpenter and Krutka 2014; Marich 2016). However, safeguarding considerations and protocols are clearly vital when planning to use technology to support RfP pedagogy.

### Rewards

Points, certificates, stickers and other visible rewards are used in RfP pedagogy, although their effectiveness in relation to sustaining reading for pleasure is questionable, as such rewards would be deemed extrinsic motivators, which may undermine intrinsic motivation (Schiefele et al. 2012; Troyer et al. 2019). That said, children themselves report that prizes are motivating: for example, in one study, 48% of primary school students stated that prizes would motivate them to read, compared to 18% who stated that a library visit would be motivating (Clark, Torsi, and Strong 2005). Interestingly, this suggests misalignment between children's perspectives of motivating practices, and adults' (e.g. teachers' and/or researchers') perspectives of appropriate practices which are likely to lead to sustained RfP.

The previous sections help build a picture of the range of school and classroom practices that focus on promoting and supporting RfP, and reflect the value of research studies that investigate these practices. As mentioned above, though, the picture is far from complete, and more research is needed into RfP practices, including children's experiences of, and perspectives on, RfP practices.

### Purpose

In primary schools across the UK and elsewhere, teachers are implementing numerous practices to encourage children to read for pleasure. However, we have insufficient understanding about children's experiences of these practices. In the context of four geographically dispersed schools in the UK, and demographically diverse students, this study sought to address the following research questions: (1) *What RfP practices do primary school children (aged 8–11) experience in their classrooms?* (2) *What are children's perspectives on and experiences of these RfP practices?*

### Methods

#### *Ethical considerations*

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Moray House School of Education and Sport Ethics Committee, University of Edinburgh, prior to data collection. Informed consent was given by all school head teachers, parents and pupils. The study was preregistered (see McGeown et al. 2021). The consent materials included an accessible information sheet, which described participants' right to withdraw, confidentiality, health and safety considerations (mitigation against COVID-19) and the procedures for management and sharing of data (including procedures for ensuring anonymity). It clearly stated that participants were free to withdraw from the research without repercussions. All pupils were assigned a unique pupil code and any identifiable information was stored separately from the interview transcripts. All demographic details in this paper are reported in an aggregated manner (i.e. not by school).



## Data collection

A total of 59 children (51% female) between the ages of 8 and 11 from four primary schools (two in Scotland and two in England) were interviewed. Schools were approached through prior connections and had different demographic profiles. When categorised according to the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) (whereby a score of one equates to the most deprived 10% of geographic areas per country and a score of 10 equates to the least deprived 10%) (Noble et al. 2019), the schools in this study had scores of 2 and 6 (Scotland) and 1 and 10 (England). Schools one and two were located in suburban areas in south Scotland, while schools three and four were located in the suburbs of a large northern English city. Teachers were asked to invite pupils with diverse reading attitudes and skills to participate. According to teachers, 45% had high, 31% medium and 24% had low reading motivation/enjoyment, while 42% had above average, 28% average and 30% below average reading skills. Approximately, 10% of interviewed pupils had special educational needs (SEN) and 32% spoke English as an additional language (EAL). EAL pupils had preferred languages including Bengali, Urdu, Polish and Punjabi. All schools received book tokens to thank them for their participation.

Children who consented to take part were given the option of involvement in small group or individual interviews, to ensure that all could participate in a way that felt most comfortable for them. Individual interviews were conducted to ensure that in-depth personal accounts of reading experiences were understood; we anticipated that individual interviews may be preferred by those for whom reading was a sensitive issue. Conversely, group interviews facilitated understanding of social context and it was considered that the data would likely be shaped by group interaction (e.g. discussion and debate of 'good' reading practices). Group composition was organised by the children's teacher, who selected children who they thought would feel comfortable discussing this topic with one another.

In all, 47 children participated in small group (groups of 2–4) and 12 children participated in individual interviews. Due to COVID-19, interviews at schools one and two took place online, whereas all others were conducted in person. Interview questions were developed by the authors. These were open questions, generated with the aim of asking about existing RfP practices; specifically: (i) *Can you tell me of any activities that already happen in your school to encourage you, and your friends, to read books?* (ii) *Do you think these activities work? In other words, do they make you want to read more books, or do you enjoy reading more? If yes, why? If no, why not?* Children were encouraged to elaborate on their responses, and additional follow-up questions were asked for clarification or greater depth of insight. Interviews were recorded with a dictaphone and were individually transcribed by the first author and a trained research assistant. Transcriptions produced by the research assistant were then checked by the first author. Altogether, there were 27 transcripts arising from the data collection (i.e. 12 transcripts of individual interviews and 15 transcripts of small group interviews).

## Data analysis

The transcribed data were analysed using an inductive data-driven approach to thematic analysis, applying the six phases outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006). To do this, both

authors read through the first six interview transcripts (Phase 1). During this process, initial codes were created (Phase 2) which generally consisted of a brief summary of the interview content (e.g. mentions use of rewards; DEAR always first thing in the morning). Once these six transcripts had been coded, the authors collated all codes to identify broader themes (Phase 3) which reflected the various RfP practices (e.g. read-aloud, technology, reading diaries, etc.) outlined above. The authors discussed the themes to ensure there were clear and meaningful distinctions between each and that they accurately and completely represented the breadth of RfP activities mentioned by children in the first six transcripts (Phase 4). Following this, the first author continued Phases 1–4 with the remaining transcripts ( $n = 21$ ), integrating this with the initial six transcripts. The authors engaged in ongoing discussion together regarding any new themes that were identified. Checks were made by both authors to ensure that all RfP practices cited by children in the interviews were included within the final themes and that the diversity and complexity of children's perspectives and experiences were also represented (Phase 5), prior to it being written up by both authors, with suitable extracts selected to exemplify points (Phase 6).

## Findings and discussion

### *Children's perspectives and experiences of reading for pleasure practices*

This section presents details of the RfP practices described by children, and their perspectives on, and experiences of, these practices. Findings are organised according to the major themes (i.e. practices) generated from the data analysis process. Where relevant, anonymised extracts from the data are included to exemplify points made by children. These have been contextualised with reference to relevant literature, as we seek to situate and add depth of insight to the different practices.

#### *Independent reading*

Independent reading was frequently mentioned by the children. It was sometimes built into specific times in the school day, albeit for different reasons: 'My teacher, at the start of the day when she's doing the register [...] she gives us a bit of time for reading'; 'Our teacher, she does [reading for pleasure] at the start, cos not many people like going to school so at the start of the day we have time to read which a lot of people do like'. Children's experiences of independent reading varied, with some having opportunities and the confidence to switch books they were not enjoying: 'I had a book that I didn't really like so I swapped it for a book that I really do like'. However, others described their feelings of a lack of control over independent reading time: 'The thing I don't like about that is I don't know when the teacher is going to say stop so I don't know whether to read another page or not'.

Providing children with a sense of control over their independent reading activities (e.g. through personal choice and the opportunity to swap books) is central to supporting their motivation to read (Guthrie et al. 2007; McGeown and Wilkinson 2021); however, a lack of influence over the timing or duration of their reading activity could undermine their sense of overall control, which is important for teachers to consider. Whilst there are discussions about the effectiveness or value of independent reading time in class (National Reading Panel, 2000), there has been recognition of the significance of independent reading outside

of school (Torppa et al. 2019). It must be borne in mind that, for some children, independent reading outside of school will only take place if children are introduced, and encouraged, to read books in school. Furthermore, evaluations of the ‘effectiveness’ of independent reading in class tend to have a precise focus on particular aspects, examining specific outcomes such as reading achievement or fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Independent reading, when aligned with children’s interests and preferences, has potential to contribute to a much wider range of rich and diverse benefits – for example, relaxation, escapism, new knowledge acquisition (McGeown and Wilkinson 2021; McGeown et al. 2020), opportunities to explore personally meaningful content (Kuzmičová and Cremin 2021; McGeown and Wilkinson 2021) and wellbeing (Clark and Teravainen-Goff 2018). We argue that, as a common classroom practice (Lee-Daniels and Murray 2000), more research examining the different ways in which independent reading is, and can be, implemented effectively is essential, with an exploration of the broader benefits of reading books included within this.

### *Whole class teacher read-aloud*

Another common practice mentioned by children was whole-class reading, where the class reads the same book together, usually with the teacher reading aloud. In line with previous research (Gambrell 2011; McGeown and Wilkinson 2021), children perceived shared reading as an opportunity to discover authors and genres that they might not have usually read: ‘sometimes it’s mainly books that I wouldn’t read in the first place, and sometimes it’s books that I think I would read’. In some cases, this encouraged children to challenge prior misconceptions: ‘because when we read the book, you see that it’s not that boring and you want to read more’. Furthermore, consistent with previous research (Cremin et al. 2014; McGeown and Wilkinson 2021), some children mentioned how they enjoyed being read to: ‘[the teacher] reads it, and it’s kind of nice to hear someone else read’, observing that they found it calming: ‘someone reads it and you can sit back, draw and just relax and listen to the book’. Children’s explanations suggest that the practice of teachers reading aloud may inspire independent reading, provided that children are engaged with the book selected. Further, it seems that listening to the teacher read aloud has the potential to support children’s momentary wellbeing (see also McGeown and Wilkinson 2021).

Although they were not directly asked, children did not spontaneously mention that they were a part of the book selection process for whole class reads, similar to findings of Conradi Smith et al. (2022). Selecting books aligned with all children’s reading interests is challenging but important, as poorly selected read-alouds have the potential to put some children off reading. Indeed, children often have very strong views on their reading preferences: ‘I know the type of the books that I like to read and the books that I don’t like to read’. Supporting existing preferences, whilst also introducing children to new genres, is a crucial balance for teachers to navigate when using whole-class reading to promote RfP.

### *Book-talk*

Book-talk featured strongly in children’s descriptions of RfP practices, aligned with research highlighting the significance of this practice (e.g. Cremin et al. 2014). Book-talk included recommending books: ‘We also do where you would recommend a reading book for some people who might want to read it’. This was viewed positively, as noted by one:

Yeah like I'm reading a book right now from one of the recommends, and I'm really enjoying it and it's really funny and it's making me feel like I want to read more, like at home I'm reading in my spare time, and all of that.

Interestingly, though, not all children enjoyed book-talk, but not because they didn't enjoy reading: 'If I'm reading a book that someone else had read, they'll spoil it for me'. It is noteworthy that other research (e.g. Guthrie et al. 2007) has similarly found that even confident readers who enjoy reading sometimes prefer not to discuss books with others (Guthrie et al. 2007).

Experience as a reader was mentioned by one participant as being necessary for making useful contributions:

If there's somebody that's read a lot of books before, then it might be quite easy for them to tell about the books, so they can tell other people what books are good and what books are bad cos they've read a lot of books.

More broadly, in terms of children's ability to recommend or discuss books with others, this draws attention to the need for children to be taught the requisite skills explicitly to do this well (Guthrie et al. 2007). For book-talk to be enjoyable and productive, it is likely that children will need enthusiasm and knowledge to underpin their conversations about books and the skills and confidence to share their thoughts and experiences of reading. Simply initiating and allowing time for book-talk is unlikely to be rewarding for all children: instead, building a foundation of enthusiasm, knowledge and experience will be key to the development of this practice.

### *Reading diaries*

Written activities around reading included recording reading practices (e.g. by making reading rivers), reflecting on what has been read (e.g. via reading diaries) and recommending books to others (e.g. through book reviews) (e.g. Cremin 2019; Pak and Weseley 2012). In Scotland, the First Minister's Reading Challenge Reading Passport (Reading Passport 2022) is utilised widely as a reading diary activity. One child described using the passport as follows:

So once we've finished a book you'd go into your reading passport and write about the book ... you put a personal comment, like what you enjoyed about the book and what you didn't enjoy about it.

It was evident from the analysis that children felt these could benefit reading practice; as one remarked, 'I think getting the reading passports ... would maybe encourage us to try to like finish more books but also like read them properly because we have to do like a personal comment at the bottom of it'. This last remark draws attention to the necessity for reading diary activities, whether through a reading passport or other diary-style practice, to be implemented in ways that are meaningful to the child, pointing to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Schiefele et al. 2012). In other words, all RfP practices should be designed to promote intrinsic reading motivation rather than extrinsic reading motivation. When contributions to a reading diary involve meaningful engagement for children, these are likely to be internally rewarding, but if simply intended to 'prove' reading, this could be seen as an extrinsic motivator. Raising teachers' awareness of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic

reading motivation (McGeown 2013), in addition to the complex relationship between these (McGeown, Norgate, and Warhurst 2012) is important to ensure that RfP practices do not inadvertently undermine an intrinsic desire to want to read.

### *Quality book provision*

Pupils' access to quality books which are aligned with their own interests, abilities and experiences is essential (e.g. Tegmark et al. 2022). Children's input into new book purchases can represent child-centred approach to furthering this; one participant explained how 'The teacher wrote [a quiz], to ask if what books people want in school and don't have'. However, not all children had input into their schoolbook provision, although it was clearly felt to be important: 'I think they should do what we're doing now, they should maybe ask kid's opinion'. Other children suggested that provision in school was not the issue, instead the concern was access and time to choose from the books that were available: 'You can't read some other books that are in year 6 library and you have to just try to read the books that are on the shelf, even if you don't really like them'; 'Well sometimes it's difficult because we only have a limited time to choose a book in the [area]. We have two minutes I think'. These points are interesting, as access to book provision in school has typically focused on the presence or absence of sufficient quality books and not on the restrictions (time or otherwise) imposed on children to access what is available. Easing these restrictions has potential to increase children's perceptions of, or even actual access to, quality books available in school.

Although access to lots of books was seen in a positive way by some: 'I think easy because there's loads of books in the [area] that you can read', it is noteworthy that, for less experienced readers, the choice of books available may be overwhelming: 'I think it's quite difficult because in the school there's lots of, a lot lot of books'. All children will benefit from strategies to support reading choices (Merga and Mat Roni 2017), but supporting and scaffolding reading choices is particularly vital for less experienced readers. Teachers (Cremin et al. 2014) and school librarians (Merga 2019) can play a role in supporting children's reading choices. Whilst books do need to be available in appropriate quantities, above all, quality provision is about the quality of content, and how books are presented and showcased to encourage reading and facilitate student choice (McGeown and Wilkinson 2021).

### *Annual book events*

In the interviews, many children mentioned annual book and reading events involving the entire school, or whole school 'readathons': '[event] is quite fun because you get to read a lot of books and just talk about books'; 'Yeah, like on [event] we had like who can read the most books'. Children acknowledged that such annual occasions could be a gateway to new authors and genres: 'I discovered lots of books in that competition', although they were more circumspect as to the extent to which these types of events, including readathons, might motivate RfP: 'I don't think it makes you enjoy more reading books, I think it just makes you more competitive'; 'Because like it's a competition and everyone wants to read more books and I don't think people enjoy reading books when they're doing rushed reading'. The dimension of competition sits within extrinsic reading motivators (Schiefele et al. 2012) and, in this instance, clearly illustrates that even as a well-intentioned practice, competition has the potential to undermine reading enjoyment and intrinsic reading motivation.

### *Use of technology*

Technology was used in one school to share children's favourite reads with the wider community and recommend books to others: 'I picked [book], because I think it's really funny ... you pick the book author, describe the book a bit, and then you just wait really just see if it [the video] goes viral'. Some children felt this might be particularly effective to encourage RfP among others; as one explained:

Well, if, maybe the book author likes it as well, like ours was [author] ... she liked it and I thought maybe after it goes viral a bit then lots of other children start to read more books and then carry on, till eventually everybody starts to like books.

Technology does offer a powerful approach to promoting RfP beyond the school context and the use of social media can develop new and exciting relationships with favourite authors (e.g. Johnson 2010). However, teacher confidence is likely to determine when and how technology such as social media is used (Williams 2020). Furthermore, the different ways in which technology might be explored by children to promote their reading enjoyment and experiences (e.g. videos, photos, blogs, recommendations, comments and drawings) each raise safeguarding considerations (see Marich 2016 for recommendations). Whilst teachers and parents/guardians may be responsible for consent, making sure that children understand how, and where, their videos/pictures etc. will be used is essential to develop understanding of the implications of using technology in relation to RfP. There is a need for research examining the effectiveness of practices in this area.

### *Rewards*

A final theme evident across interviews was reading to receive a reward. For example, the children explained, 'If we read, in class or at home, then our parents can say that we read and we get points'; 'Erm, if someone has done something good involving reading, they get a reading lanyard as a reward or treat for something in class'; 'We once did who can read in the most unusual place and we got awards for who does reading in the most unusual place'. Each of these different reward scenarios points to the use of extrinsic motivators to promote RfP, in the form of recognition or rewards/awards (Schiefele et al. 2012). There is a considerable body of research which questions the value of extrinsic motivators to inspire, and more importantly, sustain, a love of reading (McGeown and Wilkinson 2021; Schiefele et al. 2012). The children themselves were sceptical about whether these would support or sustain RfP; as one observed, 'Like, it's good, but sometimes you try so much and you don't even read, you just want them [the prizes]'. Other children felt that they did put in the effort, but were disappointed that this was not acknowledged. For example, one explained as follows:

When you want it so much and you're trying so hard to get it, but you don't get it, you want it and you want to be successful ... but you never get the success you hoped for and then you're a little bit disappointed in yourself.

This point illustrates, more generally, the potential for reward activities to inadvertently undermine reading motivation and highlights that some RfP practices could prove to be counterproductive, depending on how they are implemented.

## Further discussion

This analysis of children's perspectives and experiences offers rich insight into our understanding of common practices designed to promote RfP in primary school classrooms. Practices described include independent reading sessions, whole-class teacher read-alouds, book-talk, reading diaries, quality book provision, annual book events, use of technology and the use of rewards. However, despite conducting a comprehensive literature review, there was surprisingly little peer-reviewed literature to underpin our knowledge and understanding of the effectiveness and intended outcomes of these common RfP practices, which illustrates a disconnect between classroom practice and academic research.

Furthermore, there was a lack of available research on how different children (e.g. differing in reading attitudes, abilities or demographics) respond to the same RfP practices, or investigation of how the same RfP practice (e.g. independent reading) can be enacted in different ways, potentially leading to different experiences and outcomes. While there is a strong narrative within education of 'research-informed practice', this article calls for more 'practice-informed research': that is, academic research which is either driven by 'problems of practice' (i.e. teacher identified research priorities) and/or driven by 'typical classroom practice' (i.e. common practices informing research priorities), as referred to in this article. The disconnect between research and practice has been discussed both in academic research (e.g. Joyce and Cartwright 2020; McGeown et al. 2023) and policy (e.g. Scottish Government 2017). Misalignment clearly has consequences for teachers' engagement with academic research (Lowden et al. 2019; Nelson 2019).

## Limitations and further research

The research reported in this paper aimed to understand children's perspectives and experiences of RfP practices. Notably absent are the perspectives and experiences of teachers and other school staff involved in implementing these. Recent research highlights that teachers' perspectives are insufficiently sought in relation to academic research into classroom practices (Steel, Williams, and McGeown 2021); therefore, this represents an important avenue for future research. Specifically, a better understanding of the decision-making process regarding which practices teachers choose to implement, when, why and for whom, as well as the enablers and challenges to implementing these practices would be of interest. In addition, it would be valuable to understand teachers' own perspectives on the effectiveness of these practices in their classroom, and their own perceptions of priorities, in order to guide future academic research in this area.

Finally, we recognise that the contribution of this research article is limited as it cannot evaluate the 'effectiveness' of different reading practices nor discuss the full range of ways in which these practices can, and often are, enacted. Each of these practices can be carried out in a broad range of ways: such differences in implementation have potential to result in considerable differences to children's reading experiences and outcomes. Instead, this article provides insight into existing research examining common RfP practices and children's perspectives on and experiences of these. We recognise that these findings cannot be generalised; that was not our intention. Rather, we sought to carry out in-depth qualitative analysis of rich data to ensure that children's perspectives and experiences inform future research and practice in this area. In doing so, we hope we have provided a

useful source of knowledge for teachers and a call for academic researchers to prioritise future research so that it aligns more closely with classroom practice and recognises the importance of including children's voices in research.

## Conclusion

This study is offered as a reference point for teachers and researchers interested in school-based RfP practices. It provides an overview of common classroom practices to support RfP, a research overview in relation to each and analysis of children's perspectives on and experiences of these. The article is also a call for more research which is more closely aligned with 'common classroom practices' or 'problems of practice', exemplified within the context of the RfP literature. We recognise that all RfP practices, although defined in a specific way (e.g. book-talk, independent reading) can be enacted in very different ways, aligned with (or not) children's interests, preferences, abilities and experiences. We need more academic research to allow teachers to make research-informed decisions about their classroom practices.

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