



research summary

Attitudes to reading at ages nine and eleven

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Introduction

In June 2007 NFER ran a reading survey questionnaire to determine current attitudes to reading. The questionnaire was completed by year 4 and year 6 children (aged about 9 and 11 respectively) in a nationally representative sample of 61 schools. This questionnaire was previously run in June 2003. The survey provides unique evidence of attitudinal change.

The questions in the survey included a mix of positive and negative statements with which the children were invited to agree or disagree (with a 'not sure' option in the middle). The questions dealt with enjoyment of reading and confidence in reading. Reading enjoyment is defined as having a positive response to certain questions, for example, 'I like reading stories' and 'I enjoy reading', and a negative response to questions such as 'I don't like reading at home'. Reading confidence means a negative response to questions such as 'I like reading with a grown up to help me', or 'I think reading is difficult', statements which indicate a need for support with reading.

Key findings

- There was no significant difference in reading enjoyment between 2003 and 2007. This is in contrast to the comparison that was made from 1998 to 2003, when enjoyment significantly declined.
- There was no significant difference in reading confidence between 2003 and 2007. This is in contrast to the comparison that was made from 1998 to 2003, when confidence significantly improved.



- Enjoyment of reading poems declined significantly in all groups.
- Comics were reported as being more popular than stories, poems and information books.

Current attitudes to reading

- Overall, girls enjoy reading more than boys.
- Reading enjoyment declines between year 4 and year 6.
- In year 4 children tend to be less confident readers, needing more support.

General changes since 2003

Overall, attitudes to enjoyment of reading and children's confidence and independence as readers have remained much the same between 2003 and 2007. The worrying decline in enjoyment which was identified in 2003 seems to have halted.

A substantial majority of children still enjoy reading stories (69 per cent in year 4, 61 per cent in year 6).

Since 2003, the enjoyment of reading poetry at school has greatly declined. This is highly significant for both boys and girls in both year groups. In 2003 60 per cent of pupils in year 4 and 45 per cent of pupils in year 6 liked reading poems, compared to 47 per cent of year 4 pupils and 36 per cent of year 6 pupils in the 2007 survey. This was mirrored in responses of children's reading preferences at home.

Reading comics, however, has overtaken other text types in popularity since 2003. Whilst they were popular in 2003, they are now the most popular, since enjoyment of reading stories and information books has fallen by comparison.

Reading at home generally has declined with children saying that they now read fewer stories, newspapers, information books, and poetry than in 2003. However, children are less likely to prefer television over reading.

Specific changes since 2003

There were some notable changes in year 6 girls' opinions on specific questions, in particular:

- enjoyment of reading stories declined significantly since 2003
- enjoyment of going to the library declined significantly since 2003
- enjoyment of reading silently alone decline significantly since 2003.

These specific findings related to year 6 girls' enjoyment appear to be in contrast to the overall findings. However, once all background factors had been taken into account, there was no significant decline in enjoyment overall for the year 6 girls, or for any other group.

Conclusions

The findings of the 2007 survey suggest that reading enjoyment and confidence in reading have not changed significantly since 2003, which is reassuring after the large decline in enjoyment that was seen between 1998 and 2003.

This survey deliberately uses the same questionnaire as that used in 2003. This gives reliable results over time. However, it takes no account of the contribution of computers to children's literacy and leisure activities, an area which has grown enormously.

These findings do, however, show that books and paper-based reading both at home and at school continue to play a central part in children's lives.

These results cannot be compared directly with the recent Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), as the PIRLS results were based on a comparison from 2001 to 2006, whereas this survey covered the period 2003-2007. PIRLS showed a small but significant decline in reading enjoyment (based on their own index) and reading self-concept, with no significant change in reading for fun outside school. Given the differences between the two studies, the results can be seen as compatible.

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About the study

The 2007 survey involved 2278 year 4 pupils and 2199 year 6 pupils in a sample of 61 schools in England which was nationally representative in terms of school size, attainment band, and region. Schools in London boroughs were slightly over-represented at the expense of counties.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 items. The first 13 were first person statements expressing an attitude to reading, some negative, for example, 'I am not interested in books', and others positive, for example, 'I like reading comics or magazines'. Question 14 asked how often children read at home, and question 15 asked what material children read at home. The final three questions asked about reading support at home.

Publication and dissemination

The final report is available on the NFER website at www.nfer.ac.uk.

Contact details

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