



Reading engagement and enjoyment

What is reading engagement and enjoyment?

In recent years, increased attention internationally has been paid to the role engagement and enjoyment hold in reading providing a broader view of reading than simply a cognitive process. In addition to decoding and comprehending texts, successful readers are actively thinking about and focusing on their reading and dedicating time to reading (Mercer, 2019).

This broader view of reading, including engagement, is encompassed in the two major international reading assessment studies in which Australian students participate – the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The PISA tests measure 15 year olds' scholastic performance on reading and in 2018, the definition of reading was expanded to include reading engagement. Reading engagement as defined in PISA documents refers

This paper relates to the following Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Standard 1:

Know students and how they learn

- 1.2 Understand how students learn
- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- 1.5 Differentiated teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities
- 1.6 Strategies to support full participation of students with disability

Standard 2:

Know the content and how to teach it

- 2.6 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Standard 3:

Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

- 3.4 Select and use resources
- 3.5 Use effective classroom communication
- 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

Standard 4:

Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments

- 4.1 Support student participation



to the motivational and behavioural characteristics of reading, including interest and enjoyment of reading, a sense of control of what one reads, involvement in the social dimensions of reading and diverse and frequent reading practices (OECD, 2016). Similarly, the PIRLS 2021 assessment framework, which measures the reading achievement of Year 4 students, incorporates reading engagement in its definition of reading, including reading texts one values, participating in communities of readers and reading for enjoyment.

Reading enjoyment can be described as reading for pleasure. Reading enjoyment impacts reading engagement. Kucirkova and Cremin (2020) describe reading for pleasure as the reading a person chooses to do, which involves the intrinsic motivation that fuels reading engagement. Reading for enjoyment is related to sustained reading, or time spent on reading activities (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Students' positive experiences with texts effect their identity as readers, which in turn impacts their desire to read. Students who see themselves as readers are more likely to personally, aesthetically and critically engage with texts (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020).



What are the main aspects of reading engagement and enjoyment?

Reading engagement consists of several components including behavioural, cognitive, social and affective investment.

Behavioural engagement

Behavioural engagement includes time spent reading, frequency of reading and attentive participation in reading. Behavioural engagement in reading can occur both in the classroom and through out-of-school reading activities. In classrooms, it is relatively easy for teachers to observe behavioural engagement, as they monitor time students spend reading, the frequency with which students read and their reading behaviours (Lee et al., 2021).

Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement involves the reader's motivation to read and their ability to apply metacognitive strategies during the process of reading (Jang et al., 2022). Motivation to read and metacognitive practices (such as self-questioning, monitoring meaning and seeking to understand new vocabulary) are utilised by strong readers, who are thoughtful and purposeful in reading and

willing to apply effort to comprehend texts (Lee et al., 2021). Teaching and learning practices can positively impact cognitive engagement for students especially in communities where reading for pleasure may not be highly valued (Cremin, 2023).

Social engagement

Classroom practices can encourage social engagement involving the sharing of ideas between teachers and students, and between students and their peers. Analysis of PISA data highlights that teachers' enthusiasm and their stimulation of reading engagement were positively associated with students' reading enjoyment (Schleicher, 2019). This highlights the important role teachers have to both model talk interactions and encourage talk about texts amongst their students. Pedagogies involving talk such as peer tutoring, small group book discussions, sharing written or oral responses to reading and peer mentoring are linked to social engagement.



Affective engagement

Affective engagement relates to the feelings, perceptions and attitudes related to reading (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Positive affective engagement may encourage students to participate in reading and be motivated to invest the energy needed to comprehend texts. Affective engagement is difficult to measure, as it is not possible to directly assess students' internal states. Therefore, indirect measures are needed (Lee et al., 2021) such as the sharing of ideas and interpretations of texts and attitudes towards them.

Affective engagement is also impacted by the representation of diversity in texts. For students to develop positive attitudes about reading, they need to be able to connect their lives to the experiences presented in texts (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Therefore, addressing affective engagement will help teachers to support their diverse learners, including students from diverse linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability.

Supporting diverse reading preferences involves teachers knowing their students' interests and preferences, as well as having knowledge about the range of texts that may support these. This may involve helping to forge stronger links between home and school reading. Additionally, teachers need to support students to engage with texts with which they may not have any initial interest. This point is particularly important to ensure wide reading across a range of curriculum areas.

Why is reading engagement and enjoyment important?

Engagement and enjoyment play a critical role in reading achievement (Lee et al., 2021; Schleicher, 2019). Experiences of positive reading motivate readers to further engage with texts (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Data from PIRLS demonstrates the relationship that exists between reading achievement and engagement and enjoyment. Year 4 students who said they liked reading scored higher than those who said they did not (Schleicher, 2019). Research suggests that reading engagement and enjoyment not only predict students' literacy skills but also possibly serves as a protective factor enabling students to become resilient learners (OECD, 2021) and lessen the effects of low socioeconomic status on educational achievement (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Reading frequency has been linked to reading achievement. It is more likely that engaged and motivated readers will be frequent readers with a cumulative effect of strong readers being more motivated to read and to be involved in diverse reading experiences (Jang et al., 2022). Reading frequently requires sustained commitment to a task and contributes to increased reading comprehension (Cremin, 2023). Jerrim and Moss (2018) also identified the positive effect of reading fiction. Their study demonstrated that 15-year-olds who read fiction frequently have stronger reading comprehension skills than their peers. Reading of comics, newspapers, magazines or non-fiction texts had less positive effect due to requiring less

cognitive demand and sustained concentration. However, reading information text for enjoyment develops skills in comprehending the complexity of information text potentially transferrable across the curriculum (Cremin, 2023).

Engagement in reading has been linked to the development of empathy and imagination in children. Empathy acts as a tool for engagement in reading and, it in turn, provides young children with the opportunity to think about the feelings of characters and develop their ability to empathise (Kucirkova, 2019).

Furthermore, engaged reading has been linked to writing achievement. Sénéchal et al., (2018) reported that primary aged students who were engaged readers of fiction and read frequently, wrote narratives that were more coherent. Additionally, they observed that engaged readers adhered more to writing conventions, suggesting that engagement with reading is linked to spelling and accurate use of punctuation, as well as vocabulary development (McQuillan, 2019).

Kucirkova and Cremin (2020) draw on emerging research to urge teachers to consider reading for pleasure, alongside decoding and comprehension. They argue that association between reading enjoyment and the motivation to read, frequency of reading, volume of reading, engagement in out-of-school reading and academic attainment makes reading enjoyment an important area to address in classroom practice.



How can reading engagement and enjoyment be supported in the classroom?

There is a strong correlation between reading engagement and enjoyment, literacy development and aspects of socio-emotional development that indicate that these are worthwhile areas for teachers to address (Afflerbach, 2022). This is particularly important for vulnerable students (Jang et al., 2022) and may include:



the use of digital texts to enhance interest



activities where students can share and discuss texts with others



modelled teaching practices, such as the use of think alouds



the explicit teaching of reading skills, including phonological awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency, oral language and vocabulary.

The classroom environment

Reading engagement and enjoyment is closely related to the classroom environment (Afflerbach, 2022).

- **Behavioural engagement**

Teachers can attend to behavioural engagement by ensuring students have time to read and access a wide range of texts. Including [Independent reading](#) in the teaching of reading provides opportunity for sustained reading of texts students can read independently, are interested in and enjoy, as well as learning how to read. Some students may need support to focus on their reading. This may involve minimising distractions, creating a quiet space, or using noise reducing headphones. Some students may benefit from support to build their reading stamina, for example, by providing a timer and helping students to monitor the number of minutes spent with a text.



- Teachers can make reading engagement behaviours explicit for students by using teaching practices, such as [Modelled reading](#) and [Shared reading](#). Talking about texts in the context of pleasure, reading aloud to the class and demonstrating emotional connection with texts have a positive effect on students' reading engagement and enjoyment (Merga, 2016).

- **Cognitive engagement** For students to cognitively engage with reading having the decoding and comprehension skills necessary to read the text will assist precise and deep reading. Disengagement with reading may occur when a text is too difficult to decode or comprehend. Therefore, ongoing reading instruction in the areas of phonological awareness, phonics, oral language, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension is needed alongside opportunities for independent reading and reading for enjoyment.

Applying metacognition assists reading engagement. Part of being an effective reader is noticing when they have not understood while reading, however, younger students or poorer readers sometimes do not notice when they have not understood a text (Afflerbach,

2022). Teachers may need to scaffold students' metacognitive processes by helping them to set goals, monitor comprehension, re-read, answer and ask questions about texts and talk about texts.

- **Social engagement** Reading is often viewed as an individual activity, but when students engage in [dialogic practices](#) about their reading, they can enhance their understanding of the text, as well as their engagement and enjoyment. Talking about texts can stimulate social experiences, empathy and perspective-taking (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Class discussions in either small groups or with the whole class are commonly used to engage students in talk about text. [The role of the teacher](#) in discussions, is to model, and scaffold to maximise students' participation and active critical reflection and analysis about text. Establishing a community of readers in the classroom who talk about the texts they read can impact students' sense of belonging and positively impact reading engagement (Afflerbach, 2022) and enjoyment.

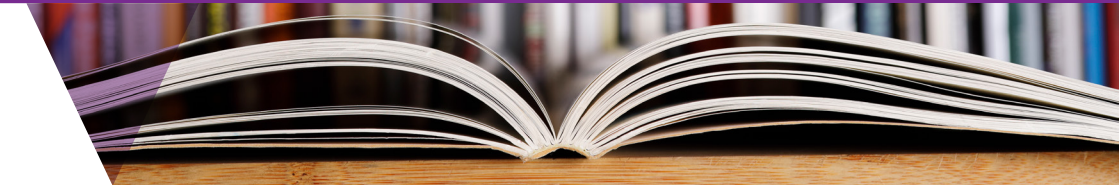


- **Affective engagement** Reading aloud to students has been identified as a strategy that targets affective engagement. When teachers read to students and invite students to predict, imagine and participate, they help connect the text to students' own lives and the world (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). **Phonological awareness** can be enhanced by listening to the rhymes and rhythms of language read aloud by a competent adult. Reading aloud and modelling positive attitudes towards texts may be particularly important for students who lack an adult reading role model (Merga, 2016). Through the social aspect of sharing a text and dialogic interactions, the aesthetic pleasure of texts can be highlighted to support students' engagement and enjoyment. **Visual** and **multimodal** texts may also promote reading engagement and enjoyment (OECD, 2021) and are useful to use as shared text, accessible to all students.

Selecting texts

Providing students with a choice of reading materials can influence their engagement, enjoyment and achievement by establishing students' sense of control and autonomy (Afflerbach, 2022). Teachers can engage in authentic discussions about the types of texts the students enjoy or why they want to read particular texts. Students may bring to school texts from their out-of-school environments or teachers may present a wide range of diverse texts. To support students' wide reading, it is useful for teachers to know their students' interests and backgrounds and engage with families to include students' out-of-school literacies in the classroom.

The use of digital texts may promote reading engagement and enjoyment (OECD, 2021). However, teachers should critique digital texts as they do print texts to determine their quality including addressing the English, visual aspects and accessibility of the text and its potential for social interactions.



Suggestions for further discussion

Establishing classroom environments for reading engagement and enjoyment

1. How can we monitor our students' behavioural engagement?
2. What aspects of reading do we need to focus on so that our students become more engaged in reading?
3. What texts do our students like to read and how can we use these in the classroom?
4. What aspect of diversity is underrepresented in the texts we have available at our school?
5. How can we incorporate texts written in languages other than English?
6. What criteria do we use to critique digital texts?
7. How can we improve the ways we model reading engagement and enjoyment?
8. Do we encourage reading for engagement and enjoyment with literature through activities such as the Premiers' Reading Challenge?

Out-of-school reading engagement and enjoyment



1. How can we encourage and support parents and carers to use home reading practices that address engagement and enjoyment?



2. What are the out-of-school reading practices our students engage with and how can we incorporate these in our classroom?



3. Who can we invite from the community to talk to the students about reading and reading engagement?



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