



WELCOME TO READING STREETTM CHAPTER ONE READING AND HOME

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Reading Street is Egmont UK's study to help us understand the changing nature of children's reading for pleasure in the context of family life.

We're looking behind the headlines and the statistics that tell us reading for pleasure is in decline. For example, the National Literacy Trust found that in 2005, 40% of children were reading for pleasure every day, but by last year it was down to 30%. We want to understand why this is happening and also to understand why, in some families, reading still flourishes.

Over the past six months, we have followed the lives of twelve UK families selected from four regions: Edinburgh, Bristol, London and Manchester. The families have a range of levels of involvement with reading and different levels of engagement with digital products too. Each family was visited by our Consumer Insight team at the start of the summer holidays in July to begin the research, we followed up in October half term and have visited the families again this February to continue the study.

Our conclusions from this qualitative research are supported by a comprehensive quantitative omnibus study from a sample of 1,000 nationally-representative parents of children aged

2 to 16, for which the fieldwork was undertaken in January 2013. We're using our findings to shape our publishing strategy here at Egmont across our books, magazines, licensing and digital properties and we will be sharing what we've found in a series of instalments this year.

Reading Street™ will take us all closer to fully understanding reading for pleasure in the context of family life, what are the pressures on parents and what it's going to take to nurture and inspire the readers of the future.



Chapter One Reading and Home

Children are the same ... but parents are different

Although children's media consumption is changing rapidly, the fundamental aspects of being a child are timeless. What motivates a child is consistent with our own and our parents' childhoods: fairies and princesses are still magical, goodies and baddies still excite, and as they get older the need to push the boundaries and wanting to feel in control of their lives is still constant. It is not a new style of being a child that we have identified, but an evolving and moving style of parenting and attitudes to childhood.

Parenting is now a high-pressure job

Children are the epicentre of family life. Childhood has become a concept with a huge industry built upon it, with ideas around how to do it properly, how to do it well and how to deliver the perfect childhood. There is information overload: attached parenting, detached parenting, 'tiger mums,' The Contented Little Baby, French Children Don't Throw Food ... and so it goes on. Parents are overloaded by advice on how to be a parent. Amazon

alone offers 70,000 parenting books and people are surrounded by information and guides offering different styles and approaches to being a parent. Once seen as a natural stage of your life, parenting is now like having a high pressure job with an unachievable job description – complete with the competitiveness to be the best at the role.

"I check in the book bags of the children who come home for tea – I want to know what reading level they are on."

- MUM OF FIVE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

With this 'job' comes enormous pressure on parents to control and manage their children's lives in the best way they can, to help their child to compete, achieve and win in the modern world.

Change in parenting leading to pressure on reading for pleasure

Along with the pressure of adhering to the role of an ideal parent, parents are living

extremely busy lives and many admit to suffering from time poverty. A 2007 study showed 61% of families have both parents working and this number is growing as the economic situation leads to more people returning to work. In comparison, 33% of families had both parents working in 1976.

In the drive to provide a perfect childhood, parents push themselves to keep up with children's requests and to fill their time, leading to a growth in additional activities outside of school hours. There is also an anxiety around 'keeping up' as education becomes more and more about testing and measuring, and parents understandably want their children to do well.

Children's time is filled with activity driven by the priority to keep up academically, to keep up with homework and to keep up with peers in every way. Life is packed out. In this context, parents are equating reading first and foremost with learning, with 49% of parents thinking children's reading is essential for doing well in education.

"I check in the book bags of the children who come home for tea – I want to know what reading level they are on." – Mum of five-year-old girl

It is easy to see how this type of environment is impacting on reading for pleasure. The pressure of having to find the time to read

school books with children, combined with the demands of the schools' approach to measuring and testing reading, is making reading into work, not fun, for parents and children. Parents' limited time means that ensuring their child reads is often seen as a chore, and another thing to fit into their busy lifestyle. In fact, only 7% of parents see reading with children as fun for adults, and only 5% see it as the highlight of their day.

Reading for pleasure in conflict with the quest for family harmony

After spending time with our Reading Street families, it's clear to see that family life today is packed out. There is little down time and a lack of quality together family time.



However, there is the desire for this to change. 60% of parents wish they had more time together as a family, and parents idealise family time and long for family harmony.

"We really don't get to spend much time the three of us because of my shifts, so we really look forward to days we can spend as a family." – Mum to boy, age 3

During our time with the families we have seen real extremes of control and lenience. Parents' attempts to carve out family time together are often abandoned, outweighed by the desire for family harmony and to avoid conflict and confrontation with children.

"For the sake of the family we have stopped arguing with our fifteen-year-old son now. It's not worth it." – Dad of 15 year old

Children's use of technology fuels the potential for confrontation, but often parents choose to avoid conflict. 50%

"We really don't get to spend much time the three of us because of my shifts, so we really look forward to days we can spend as a family."

- MUM TO BOY AGE 3

of parents of 5–7 year olds worry about their excessive use of screens, but only 20% try to restrict it. In our Reading Street™ families, there were few restrictions on time in front of the TV once obligations had been fulfilled such as homework and activities. In fact, parents see gaming or screen time as a 'safe place' for their children: they are not outside (with all the associated parental fears of outside dangers) and they are occupied.

In our quantitative study, 85% of parents interviewed believed today's parents are less strict about saying no to children. The main reason for this, agreed by 47% of parents, is the feeling of guilt at the lack of time spent with children. Other reasons cited include 44% believing it's harder to say no when their children's friends get/do what they want and 41% identifying that it's less stressful for the parents.

However, parents are less likely to admit that they themselves aren't always strict in saying no to their own children, compared to views about parents in general, with nearly a quarter saying it doesn't apply to them. They also tend to give different reasons for their own lack of strictness, most commonly saying this is for the sake of family harmony. A quarter of parents reveal it is less stressful to just say yes and deflect from arguing.

"For the sake of the family we have stopped arguing with our fifteen-year-old son now. It's not worth it."

- DAD OF 15 YEAR OLD

You can see how this impacts on reading. For the parent it is easier, for the sake of family harmony, to allow a child to engage in screen time rather than encourage them to read. In the past, before the presence of technology, screen time would perhaps have been reading time, but now children are constantly surrounded and distracted by digital activity.



Teaching reading vs. nurturing the pleasure of reading

Once a child reaches school age, reading is seen as a learning tool, so not surprisingly around half of parents see teaching children to read as a shared activity between parents and teachers. However, this is a key point: the emphasis is all about teaching to read as opposed to joyful immersion in stories. So even at the age of five, reading is task-based. It's not about fun. In the quest for achievement, the idea of reading as a pleasurable activity is getting lost.

The majority of parents are being guided to see reading as firmly linked to learning and the impact of school reading is clear.

"I'm keen to let him read alone when he is able to read more efficiently by himself."

- PARENT OF A 5 YEAR-OLD BOY

54% of 5–7 year old boys read every day for school, but only 16% read every day for pleasure. Meanwhile 53% of 5–7 year old girls read every day for school, but only 29% read every day for pleasure.

These statistics underline the impact of approaching reading as task-based in a context of competition and academic achievement. Because reading is largely seen as learning the skill, when children can read well enough independently, parents feel they can 'legitimately' forget about it – obviously an appealing thought when free time is so very tight. The busier the family, the more likely it is that reading is viewed as a skill to be learnt.

At the same time, three in ten parents expressed some concern about their

53% of parents wish they had more time for reading with their children.

child's reading level in school. Parents were more likely to be concerned about the reading level of their male than their female children for all 5+ age bands, with concern greatest for boys aged 5–12 (37%) and least for teenage girls (22%).

As one parent of a five-year-old boy said: "I'm keen to let him read alone when he is able to read more efficiently by himself."

Although our research shows that in family life today time is being lost for reading for pleasure, the want and hope to ignite reading for pleasure is still apparent across parents and children: 53% of parents wish they had more time for reading with their children.

There is no doubt from our research that parents feel their children reading is a very good thing. Parents love the idea of their child reading or reading more. Our study has taken a look at what is driving this desire ...

Some of the most important benefits of reading for pleasure are being missed

We asked parents to prioritise the three most important benefits of reading to younger children from a list of ten benefits. The results show that reading is associated with



betterment and educational advantage above everything else.

From the list, the top three benefits identified by parents are:

1. **Language development (64%)**
2. **Improving imagination (51%)**
3. **Giving them a head-start at school (37%)**

In stark contrast, only 11% cited their social development, 10% their child's emotional development and just 8% thought increasing their self-esteem was one of the most important benefits of reading.

We also asked parents to prioritise what they think are the main reasons for children themselves reading and under half (43%) say it's for pleasure, 21% attribute it to intellectual development, 20% to entertainment, 12% to education and 4% to emotional development.

It appears life has become so busy and hectic that equating reading with a moment of calm and a pure unadulterated pleasure seems to have passed parents by.

In conclusion, it's time to reassess the value of reading for pleasure

As we finish the first chapter of Reading Street™, we can draw a number of conclusions:

Over half of parents wish they had more time for reading with their children, but ...

- The role of parenting is changing and this is having an impact on reading for pleasure as a pastime.
- Fitting in and prioritising reading can put a strain on family harmony, which is increasingly precious.
- So parents' approach to reading, the reluctance to say no and the rise of screen time is squeezing reading for pleasure.
- Many parents do not associate reading with their child with a pleasurable experience.
- Despite wanting to help their children succeed, many parents don't realise that reading for pleasure will bring their child the advantages that they hope and strive for. In fact, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2002) found that enjoying reading is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status.

We believe that the key benefits of reading for pleasure need greater focus and promotion.

Reading: Squeezed from All Angles

It's tempting to point the finger at one single cause when we read headlines and statistics that say reading for pleasure is in decline, whether that's time poor parents, target-driven schooling or the rise of screen time. As our Reading Street research unfolds over the months we're finding a very different story. What we're starting to see is a combination of circumstances, happening at the same time, all of which are cranking up the pressure on reading.

But we're also seeing families where reading still flourishes and we know that millions of children's books and magazines are bought every year. That's worth remembering as we embark on our next chapter.

We will be taking a closer look at when reading for pleasure turns into reading for targets, and the impact that has.

Thanks for reading. We hope it was a pleasure!

About Egmont UK

Egmont is the UK's leading specialist children's publisher for babies to teens, inspiring children to read through more than 30 million award-winning books, magazines, ebooks and apps each year. We're proud to be home to many of the world's favourite stories and best-loved authors, illustrators and characters such as Michael Morpurgo (War Horse), Andy Stanton (Mr Gum), Enid Blyton, Julia Donaldson, Lemony Snicket, Michael Grant (Gone series and BZRK), Winnie-the-Pooh, Tintin, Mr. Men, Thomas & Friends, Ben 10, Angry Birds and Minecraft.

Egmont UK is part of the Egmont Group which was founded in 1878 and owned by the Egmont Foundation, a charitable trust dedicated to supporting children and young people. It is Scandinavia's leading media group and Europe's largest children's publisher telling stories through books, magazines, film, TV, music, games and mobile in 30 countries throughout the world. www.egmont.co.uk

So why Reading Street™? And why now?

Like many parents, teachers and authors, we hear every day that children's reading for pleasure is under threat. Is it? Or is it just changing to reflect a new media environment? As a children's publisher this question is incredibly important to us, so we're setting out to find out more.

Now more than ever, reading is hitting the headlines. Libraries are closing, one in three children aged 11–13 don't own a book (Source: NLT), and the UK is way down in the world literacy rankings. Yet children still love stories and everyone agrees that reading is important.

While the government is taking action in schools, and charities are encouraging people to volunteer as reading helpers, we feel it's also important to understand reading in the context of family life and what it takes to inspire children to read.

At Egmont we're already experimenting with new ways of telling stories on the digital devices children love most: games machines, smartphones and tablets. And we're working with schools to teach literacy through magazines.

We'll be sharing our findings and thoughts on our Reading Lives blog.

Please join in on our blog: <http://readinglives.egmont.co.uk/> and talk to us on Twitter: @EgmontUK #ReadingLives

We hope you'll enjoy this journey with us.

