

## Boys' attitudes and reading preferences

It's important to remember, as mentioned in the Welcome, that we do not teach standardized children. For instance, differences in literacy achievement among boys and among girls is greater than the average difference between boys and girls. It's also important to remember that though gender is a way we all think about human identity, it is a complex construction, and it is not the only element of identity: race, ethnicity, social class, and many other issues impact literacy achievement. That said, on average, it is not just in English test scores that boys and girls differ. They also have different attitudes towards reading and some of their reading choices are different. Research tells us that, on average:

- Boys are less enthusiastic about reading and less likely to choose to read.
  - A recent survey<sup>4</sup> shows that 21% of nine-year-old boys said they were not interested in books compared with 13% of girls; 46% of boys said they read only if they had to, compared to just 26% of girls.
- Boys spend less time reading.<sup>5</sup>
  - 45% of girls reported that they read for enjoyment for more than 30 minutes each day compared to 30% of boys.
- Boys are less likely to discuss what they are reading.
- Boys have different reading preferences than girls.<sup>6</sup>
  - Boys generally enjoy reading narrative – although a bit less than girls. In general they prefer fast-paced adventures, mystery, horror, and humour. They often enjoy reading series and serials, identifying with a character, a set of characters, or a continuing story over many books.
  - They enjoy books which match their “image” of themselves, of who they are or who they want to be, and this might include stories based around hobbies and interests. Boys like to see an immediately functional application to what they are reading.
  - Boys tend to have a stronger preference for non-fiction than girls. When provided with a list of genres from which to select, 28% of boys chose non-fiction as one of their top three genres, but only 13% of girls did.<sup>7</sup> This can be explained by boys' desire for immediate functionality.
  - Boys enjoy visual and multimodal reading opportunities such as comic books, graphic novels, IT, and web based reading. Research shows that visually supported literacy is essential to their engagement and growth in literacy.
- The content of what they are reading can impact on boys' comprehension.
  - Recent research<sup>8</sup> shows that boys' levels of interest in a particular topic appears to directly influence their level of understanding, i.e., pre-existing interest and motivation boosts boys' engagement with – and subsequent understanding of – a text. However, research also shows that teachers can create new interests through pre-reading and frontloading new reading and instruction, and that such interventions lead to the same benefits as reading about something you were already interested in and knew about.
- Boys like to be able to see a purpose in what they do and make links to other learning both in and beyond school.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the many, often complex factors that impact on boys' reading are outlined on the following pages. But lack of motivation and negative attitudes towards reading are two factors most commonly encountered by teachers – the “don't,” “don't want to,” and “can but not interested” readers. A negative circle can develop whereby boys who can't or don't read fall further behind and become even less motivated. Researchers in the area of motivation have argued that motivation is the prerequisite to reading and learning, that it leads to a continued impulse to read and learn, and that its importance cannot be overestimated. So not only is it important to provide motivating reading materials to our students, but even more so we must work to provide motivating contexts for learning.