



# Reading *in the* 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Manifesto

The National Literacy Association strives to ensure that 99% of children develop adequate literacy levels and a love of reading. We need to make sure that, on leaving school, our young people can take their rightful place in society and meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both socially and in the workplace.



# Reading *in the* 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

## A Manifesto





## **NLA** advocates and campaigns for:

- a less prescriptive, more creative approach to reading and other aspects of literacy which recognises that children learn in different ways and progress at different rates. However, every child needs to experience the fun, pleasure and enjoyment of becoming literate.
- more emphasis on the importance of developing the skills of listening and speaking – a curriculum that includes storytelling, reading aloud, drama and role play.
- children's diversity to be reflected and celebrated in books. We want to see imaginative and inspirational learning materials that give a positive view of different cultures, religions, gender, abilities and disabilities.
- giving teachers and children more scope for developing and exploring creative approaches to reading, writing and other literacy skills.
- greater access to books and other reading materials for children from backgrounds where reading skills are poor or not always seen as a priority.
- training and support for teachers, carers, other professionals and parents on the imaginative and appropriate use of ICT, including ebooks and other new technologies.
- a further expansion of support for disadvantaged parents of pre-school children to enable them to help their children.



# Introduction

We are at a turning point in the history of reading. Generations of us have grown up with books, in their printed form, being central to our lives. Now, the first screen-based generation is emerging. This should not be seen as a threat, or the start of a battle between those who want to hang onto the security of the past and those who cannot wait to make the most of technological advances. Rather, it should be seen as a time of new opportunities, when the engagement with literacy can come in many forms.

The NLA has always had a particular concern for those who, for very many different reasons, struggle to become literate. Children learn in different ways, and the more ways there are of developing an interest in reading, the more likely it is that children will want to become immersed in the written word.

This Reading Manifesto grew out of the Literacy Forum that ran alongside this year's Education Show in Birmingham on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2010. Chaired by the President of the National Literacy Association, Professor David Crystal, and attended by well over 100 representatives from schools, libraries, local authorities and publishers, the Forum provided an opportunity to hear from a number of eminent speakers, as well as gathering the views of the delegates who attended.

What came across clearly was that, whereas books have been seen previously as central to reading, children and young people's interest in reading may develop through using technology and the Internet. It is reading that counts, not the medium through which it is enjoyed. Once the interest is there, both screen-based books and those we can hold and handle can lead into the world of knowledge and of the imagination.

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# What Children and Young People Can Do

Children and young people are reading more than ever before, using the new technologies that are available to them, including texting, the Internet and social networking sites. They should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to:

- make their voices heard. Their views are important. Children and young people need to play an active negotiating role in deciding what to read, how to read and when and where that reading takes place.
- recognise the importance of reading in all its forms, so that they are able to read for information and for pleasure. Without that skill, they will find it almost impossible to participate fully in adult life.
- change the perception of reading books, so that it is seen as 'cool'. Young people are greatly influenced by peer pressure. If they see their friends reading, they will read. If they see their sporting or showbiz idols getting into books, they will get into books as well.
- learn to use a range of books and technologies. There are some things that the internet does better than books and vice versa. They have to work out what best fits their purpose.
- make time for reading in all its forms – in and outside school.





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# What Parents and Carers Can Do



Parents and carers are the most important people in their children's lives. Their involvement in developing reading through providing a wide range of experiences and a language-rich environment is vital. Let's encourage them to:

- become involved in their children's reading from birth to adulthood. You are never too young for a story; you are never too old for a picture book. Children and young people need to see the adults around them reading: newspapers, a book, a magazine or the internet. The important thing is to be reading.
- be aware that listening and speaking skills are an important part of learning to read. Playing word games like I-Spy, reciting nursery rhymes, singing songs, making up a story and reading aloud are all vital. Children love to hear familiar voices.
- share books with children. It is never too young to start. Even tiny babies love to hear a story, and just watch how they respond to a lovely, squidgy bath book! Talk to young people about what they are reading at school, on the net or discuss an item in the newspaper.
- understand that babies and young children respond more readily to human contact and the real world, whereas older children enjoy using technology.
- learn alongside their children by improving their skills and awareness of new technologies, including Internet safety.
- make sure there are books and reading materials in the home, readily available and at hand. Visit bookshops and chat to staff about suitable books. Good quality, inexpensive books can also be found at car boot sales and charity shops.
- join a library. It's free! Libraries give more than a great choice of books. They have CDs, DVDs and internet access.
- make the most of projects like Bookstart (giving books to babies) and supermarket schemes that give books in return for vouchers.

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# What Educational Professionals Can Do

Educational professionals, whether working in early years settings or with primary or secondary aged pupils, are involved in the development of children's reading. Many have worked tirelessly to improve standards of literacy. To enhance further children's enjoyment of reading, they need to:

- make their voices heard. Decisions about reading and how to teach reading should be informed by research and professional practice.
- give more time and emphasis to the teaching of reading in Initial Teacher Training. This should encompass a whole range of approaches to reading, as well as familiarity with the richness of children's literature.
- be enabled to identify and help children who are having difficulty in acquiring reading skills, including accessing one-to-one support.
- take responsibility for keeping up-to-date with new literature and developments in new technologies.
- make the library, a school librarian and book provision a priority when setting budgets. Develop strong links with libraries and the school library service. Schools should be book-rich environments.
- recognise the value of reading in all its forms, from classics to comic books and from searching the internet to texting. Pupils should be taught to discriminate between fact and opinion and how to choose the medium that best suits their purpose.
- find a way of allowing pupils to bring mobiles to school, so that they can be used to enhance literacy skills.
- take advantage of the freer curriculum by incorporating a range of creative approaches, including bringing in authors and poets, illustrators, musicians and theatre groups.
- encourage children to enjoy reading for itself and not merely for text analysis. Children who grow up responding to the power of words, poetry and stories will be the ones keen to become lifelong readers.
- realise that reading is the responsibility of every teacher. Across the curriculum, in all subject areas, every teacher should be looking at imaginative ways to support and encourage children's reading, not least by being a role model – pupils need to see their teachers reading both for pleasure and for information.



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# What Publishers and Booksellers Can Do



Publishers and booksellers have created a wealth of books for young readers to enjoy. Some may feel challenged by the fast growing developments in technology; others see it as an opportunity. It is important that they:

- publish high quality books in all genres with words and images that reflect and celebrate the strong diversity of our society. This will offer choice to all our children and be a real investment in a reading nation.
- continue to expand the number of books which attract the older, less confident reader.
- produce books and reading resources for the school market that look as enticing as those produced for other outlets.
- recognise the move into a digital age, as the demand for ebooks increases. This need not herald the demise of the traditional book. Ebooks should be published with the same high-quality design and content as traditional publishing and incorporate all genres.
- sponsor authors and illustrators to go into schools and parent groups. This increases awareness of companies and their products. If children are excited and inspired to read, they will become the book-buyers of the future.
- work with the media, schools and parent groups to change attitudes to reading and to promote the concept that 'Reading is Cool'. We need bookshops and libraries featured in popular TV programmes and to see sports stars and other celebrities reading books and magazines as part of their lives.
- encourage supermarkets to stock a wide range of books and place small books and babies' books near the checkout instead of sweets.





# Did you know that ....?

Poor literacy and numeracy results in a cost to industry of £4.8billion per year.  
*IIP, Improving Literacy, Language and Numeracy 2006*

60 per cent of young people who pass through Young Offender Institutions are estimated to have difficulties with speech, language and communication.

*Bercow Review 2008*

10 per cent of households with babies and toddlers have fewer than 10 books, with 1 per cent reporting they have no books at all.

*Bookstart 2009 National Impact Evaluation*

Seven-year-olds in England who do not reach the 'expected level' for their age are treated as failures, at an age when children in other countries who outperform us are just beginning formal education.

Prisons are required to have libraries, but not schools or other communities.

While phonics may develop the skills of reading, children may be disinclined to use them unless their reading experiences encourage autonomy, enthusiasm, achievement and enjoyment.

*United Kingdom Literacy Association*

By 2020, 80 per cent of all internet access will be via the mobile phone.  
*iMedia Breakthrough Summit, Florida, 2009*

Reading for pleasure has been shown to be more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status.

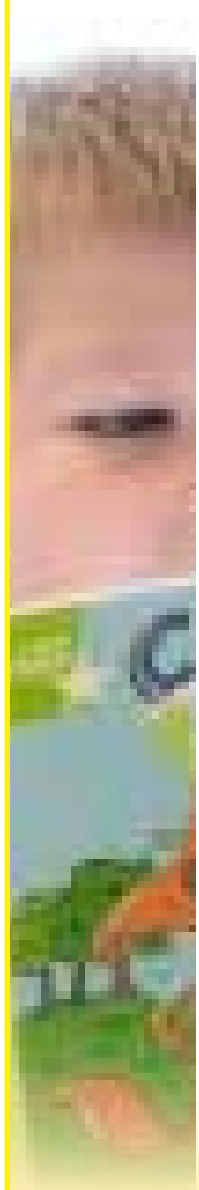
*OECD, 2002*

70 per cent of households in the UK (18.3 million) had internet access in 2009 (rising to 80 per cent in London).  
*Office of National Statistics, 2009*

52 per cent of 9-year-olds, rising to 95 per cent of 15-year-olds, use a mobile phone.  
*Ofcom Report on UK Children's Media Literacy*

## How to Make a Difference

- 1.** Make libraries and librarians a statutory requirement for all schools and communities, so that libraries are seen to lie at the heart of learning.
- 2.** Reinforce the message that the medium (books and/or technology) is less important than reading itself.
- 3.** Ensure that storytelling, singing, poetry and drama are given a higher profile, through spreading the message that a literate nation is a happy and prosperous one.
- 4.** Remove prescription from the teaching of reading, so that teachers can respond to the individual needs, experiences and interests of their pupils.
- 5.** Abandon the notion that children are ready for the formal teaching of literacy skills at a set age. Other nations, who later outstrip us in reading, allow their young children to be active and creative, and learn through play, when English children are being tested and assessed.
- 6.** Reduce the emphasis on testing and 'league tables'. Ensure that children and young people have time to enjoy whole books rather than extracts, and that those who need more specialist help receive it.
- 7.** Encourage publishers to produce a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction books (in traditional and ebook format) which reflect diversity and include different genres, by persuading them that a more literate nation will be a book-buying nation.
- 8.** Ensure that good quality books are available in as many outlets as possible, from bookshops to supermarkets.
- 9.** Harness the power of the media in generating a groundswell of opinion that 'reading is cool', by showing celebrities and people of all ages acting as role models for reading.
- 10.** Include an understanding of new technologies in Initial Teacher Training and continuing professional development, so that book-based generations are able to use the skills of a screen-based generation to support reading in all its forms.







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