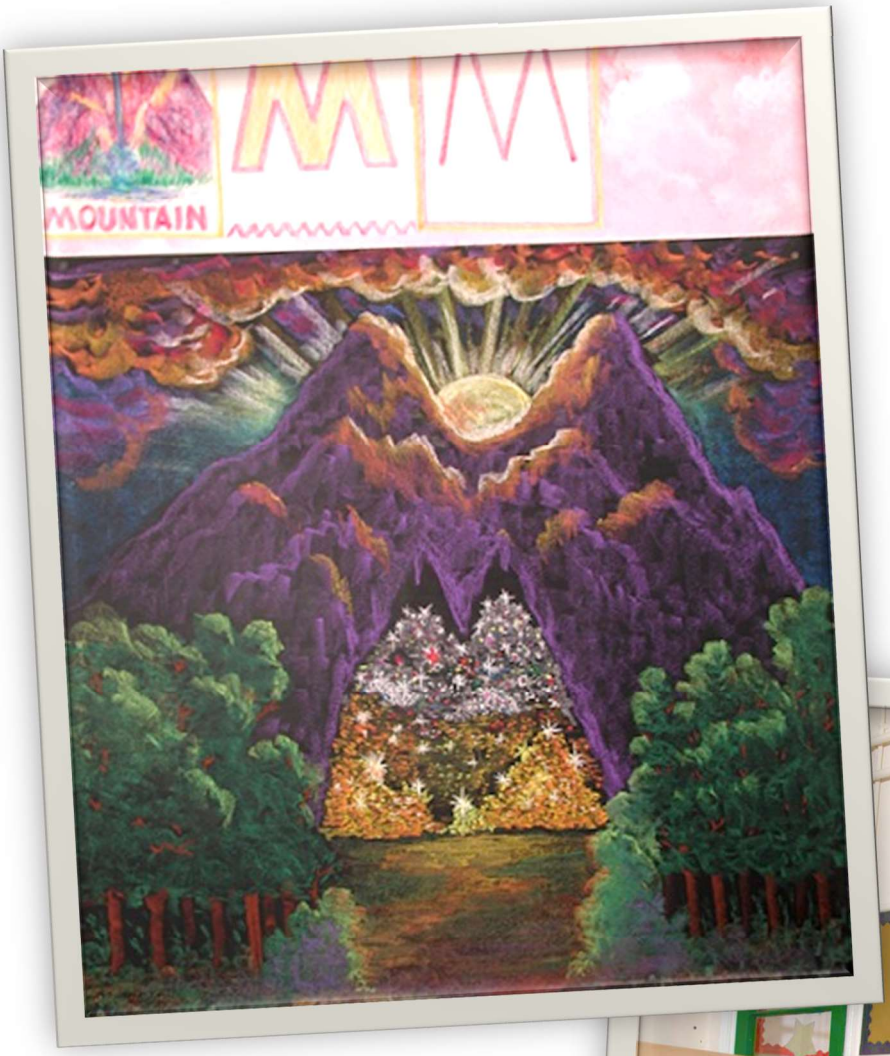
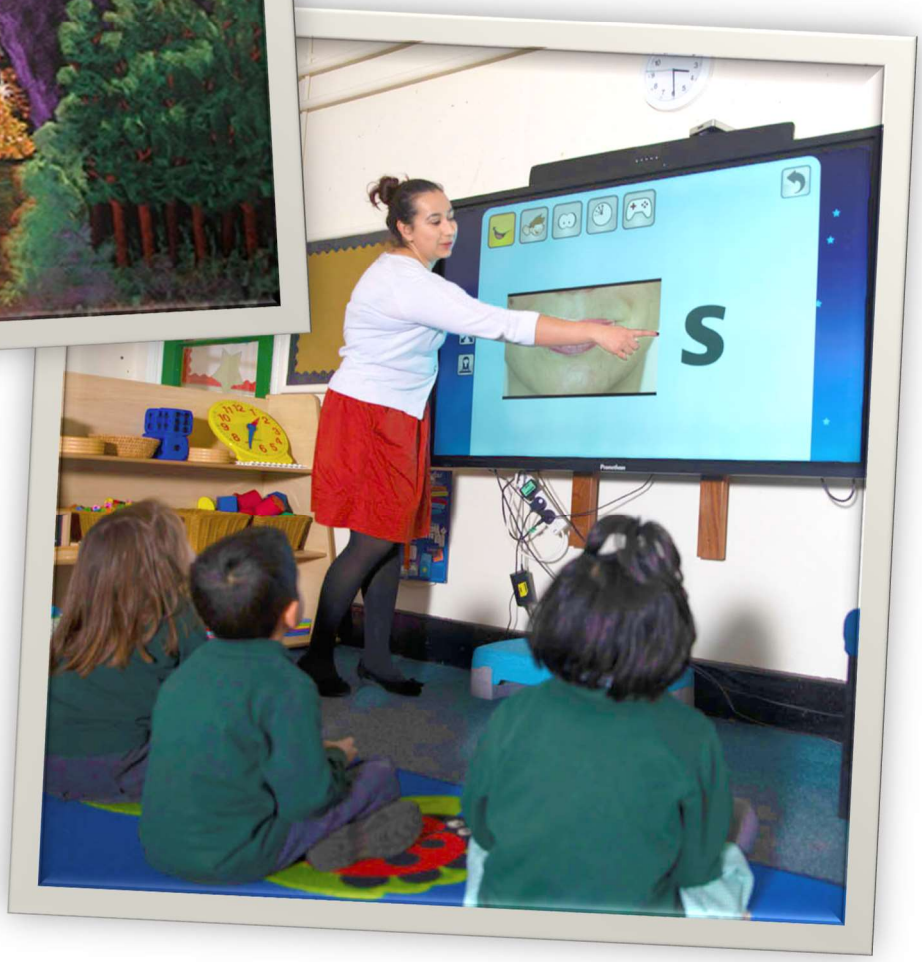
Waldorf Modern

Teacher Education



Learning to Read

A comparison between Waldorf and UK mainstream education



Gemma Gammon

2023

Graduation Project: Learning to Read

Gemma Gammon June 2023

Contents:

1 Introduction to research theme

The theme I will explore is a comparison between the effects of reading education following the Waldorf pedagogy vs. UK mainstream education. The key question I will seek to answer is:

What are the effects on children of beginning formal reading lessons later in life, such as in Waldorf education, compared to in UK mainstream education?

I will begin by briefly describing the place of reading in the recent history of the UK mainstream curriculum, followed by the history of learning to read the Waldorf way. I will then outline the current guidelines and methods of reading teaching across the main pedagogies found in the UK today.

I will compile my information about the outcomes for children from existing published studies and through my own personal research with families comprising tests, questionnaires and anecdotal evidence.

I will compare children's reading ability from both Waldorf and mainstream pedagogies at different ages, ascertaining if and when children who learn to read later catch up or even exceed the measurable reading ability of their earlier educated peers. As well as reading ability, the other effects I will explore include children's attitudes towards reading, enjoyment of reading and perception of their own reading ability.

As well as gathering information on children who have attended Waldorf schools and UK mainstream schools, I will also conduct research on children who are legally classified as home educated (i.e. attending an educational establishment between 0-17 hours per week). Within the realm of home education is a wide range of approaches such as child-led learning, pedagogy-led learning (e.g. Waldorf, Montessori, Charlotte Mason, Reggio Emilia and Forest School), employing private tutors, flexi-schooling, world-schooling, wild-schooling, home-schooling and unschooling, which I will also introduce for comparison.

2 Setting the theme into context

Herein follows an outline of the modern history of UK mainstream education in general contrasted with the history of UK Waldorf education. Then I will delve more deeply into the current statutory and non-statutory guidelines for the teaching of reading in both mainstream and Waldorf education in the UK today, before analysing the merits and downfalls of each on children's acquisition and enjoyment of reading.

2.1 History of UK mainstream reading education

Before the mid-18th century, children's books in England usually had religious or instructional themes, but by the late-18th century, books were designed to delight, and literature made for children was flourishing. The method of teaching reading by phonics began to be used after 1850, but the whole-word 'look and say' method, promoted by American psychologist Edmund Huey, became established in the UK in the 1940s. In the 1950s and 1960s the main characters used to promote this method were Janet and John (Westcott, 2012).

The 1944 Education Act put in place publicly provided primary and secondary education for all. However, the only specific requirement that it set out in relation to the school curriculum was that all schools should teach religious education. This meant that, aside from curriculum schemes run by some local education authorities, the curriculum for pupils aged 5 to 14 continued to be largely determined by their teachers, often on the basis of commercially available textbooks. The curriculum for older pupils tended to be based on the public examination syllabuses chosen by their teachers.

In the context of the economic downturn of the mid-1970s, James Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College speech, which sparked what became known as 'The Great Debate' about the nature and purpose of public education, reflected growing public concerns that the UK was not being well-served by its schools. The speech mooted the idea of a national 'core curriculum'.

Following the consultation, Parliament under Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher and her Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, passed the 1988 Education Reform Act, which established the framework for the National Curriculum. The key principles in developing the National Curriculum were that:

- it would be underpinned by two aims—and echoing the 1944 statement—to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life;
- it would be structured around 'Key Stages' and be subject-based, covering the 'core' subjects of English, mathematics and science, and the 'foundation' subjects of art, geography, history, music, physical education and technology, with all subjects studied from age 5 up to age 16, modern foreign languages from age 11, and
- the syllabus for each subject at each Key Stage would be set out in a 'Programme of Study', which would also include a scale of attainment targets to guide teacher assessment.

In terms of the reading curriculum, The Cox Report of 1989, which was commissioned to inform the English element of the new National Curriculum of the same year, stated:

"The pleasure principle should motivate the programmes of study, and always be given high priority. There is a danger, particularly in the final years of compulsory schooling, that little time is given to promoting reading for fun. Too much concentration on set texts for assessment purposes can turn pupils against reading." (Cox, 1989).

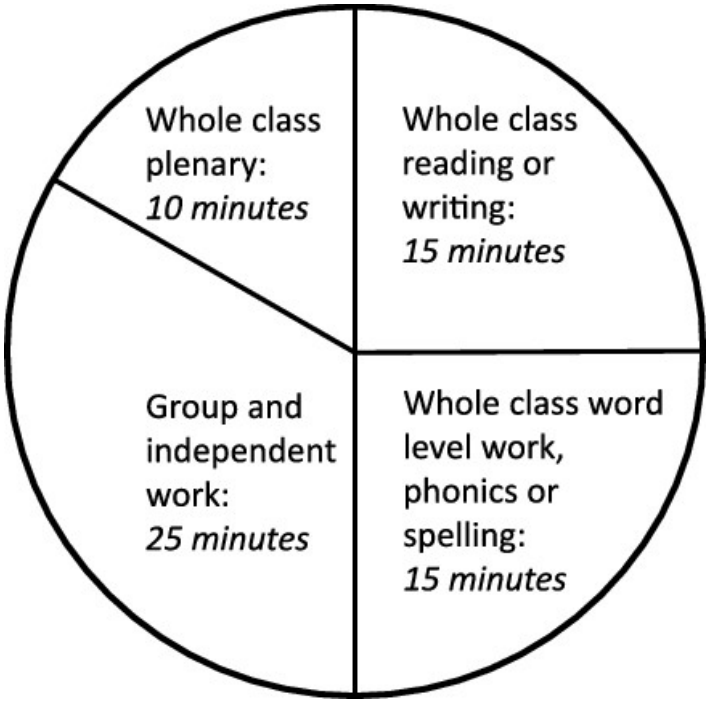
Most schoolchildren today would probably argue that Cox's advice is no longer being heeded. The Cox Report also advised, "It is a prerequisite of successful teaching of reading, especially in the early stages, that whenever techniques are taught, meaning should always be in the foreground," which one might argue has subsequently been ignored with the recent addition of nonsense words in current end of Year 2 phonics tests.

A revised version of the National Curriculum was introduced in 1995. The key changes included a reduction in the amount of prescribed content, the restriction of Key Stage testing to the core subjects and the replacement of a 10-level assessment scale for each subject with 8 level descriptors.

In 1996, concerns about the poor level of pupil performance in Key Stage tests prompted the then Secretary of State, Gillian Shephard, to oversee the addition to the National Curriculum of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, intended

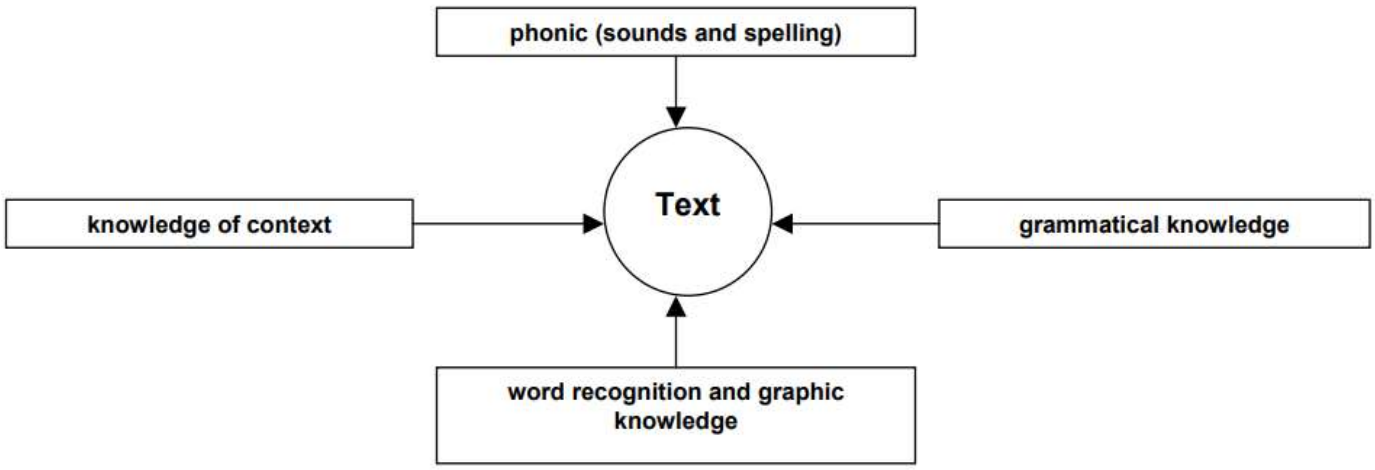
to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy in primary schools. At this time, whole language instruction and the Searchlight Model were still the norm; however, there was some attention to teaching phonics in the early grades. Teachers were expected to structure their lessons according to the Literacy Hour guidelines:

Structure of the Literacy Lesson – 'The Literacy Hour'



DfEE (1998)

The Searchlight Model



NLS *Framework for teaching*, p. 4

DfEE (1998)

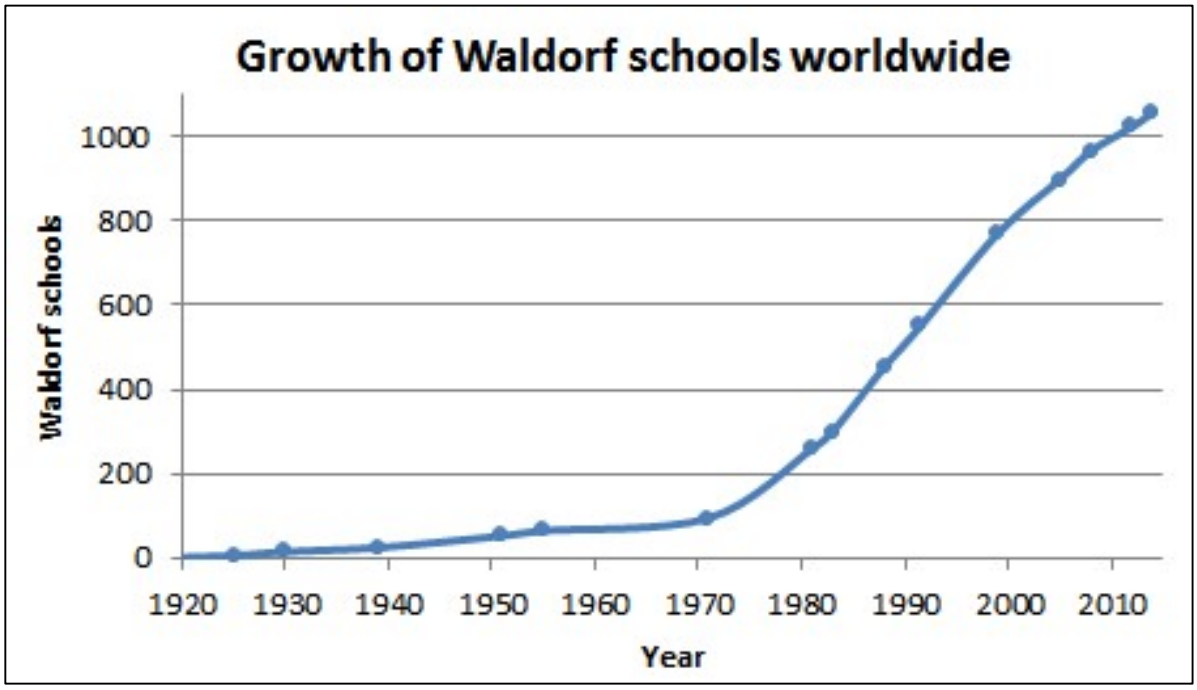
The National Strategies' programme was always intended to be a fixed-term intervention programme to secure improvements in standards. The paper manuals ceased to be published in 2006 and the website of resources closed down in 2011.

Interestingly, although the 2001 The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) demonstrated an improvement in literacy skills following the introduction of the NLS (or perhaps simply an improvement in teachers' ability to train children to perform well on the tests), the study also assessed children's attitudes to literacy. In this, England's 10-year-olds came near the bottom, showing much less liking for reading than their counterparts in both high test scoring countries such as Sweden and low test scorers as the Czech Republic (Mullis et al, 2003).

2.2 History of UK Waldorf reading education

The first ever Waldorf school was opened in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher and academic (1861-1925). Steiner held a series of three lectures in the UK in 1922, 1923 and 1924 introducing Waldorf principles, which were based on anthroposophy. The first Waldorf school in the UK opened in 1925, and currently there are around 30 in the UK.

The following graph taken from the Wikipedia website (2023) demonstrates the steady then rapid growth of Waldorf education around the world since its inception around one hundred years ago:



Waldorf education aims to provide an unhurried and creative learning environment in harmony with different phases of a child's development. Children should "find the joy in learning and experience the richness of childhood" based on their developmental stages, and education should "strive to develop pupils' intellectual, artistic and practical skills in an integrated and holistic manner" (SWSF, 2023). Children stay in Kindergarten until age 6 or 7.

Pupils start formal learning, including reading, in class one at the age of 6, the norm in many European countries. Cognitive skills can be introduced with relative ease if children have first had the opportunity to develop speech, co-ordination and their relationship to themselves, others and the world around them during the pre-school years and in Kindergarten.

The core subjects of the curriculum are taught in thematic blocks and all lessons include a balance of artistic, practical and intellectual content. Waldorf schools are always co-educational and fully comprehensive, ideally taking children from age 3 to 18. Whole class, mixed ability teaching is the norm.

Although there have been many books published suggesting Waldorf curricular and teaching activities, the author of one of these – Martyn Rawson – states that, "a definitive, universally valid, unchangeable Waldorf Curriculum doesn't exist." (Rawson, 2017). Rather, a Waldorf curriculum is simply any curriculum that enables integrated and holistic learning and development, and reflects Waldorf educational principles. Additionally, teachers are permitted much autonomy in developing their own planning based on their deep knowledge of the children with whom they work.

As Waldorf education always was, and still is, based on anthroposophy and the lectures of Rudolf Steiner, the advice regarding teaching children to read has changed little in the 100-year history of Waldorf education.

2.3 Current UK Mainstream education guidelines for teaching reading

Children in the UK must be in receipt of a 'suitable, full-time education' from the term following their 5th birthday. This is known as Statutory School Age (SSA). Children may attend private schools or be home educated, but the vast majority of children attend a state (mainstream) school.

Although Year 1 in schools is the year which caters for children aged 5-6 (the first year of SSA), it is widely expected that children enter their school career one whole year before this by joining the first class in school, known as Reception. Parents, in consultation with their chosen school, can choose to 'defer' or 'decelerate' their child (withholding their child from joining school until Year 1 age, beginning in Year 1 or entering Reception a year later than usual), but this is considered unusual. As the manager of an early years setting in Hampshire catering for children aged 3-7, I can confirm that the Local Authority request to be informed of the educational arrangements for children approaching their 5th birthday if they are not registered with a school in Reception class, *before the child has even reached SSA*.

All Ofsted-registered settings caring for children below SSA are legally required to adhere to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework (DfE, 2021). Within this document, 'Communication and Literacy' is listed a Prime Area for development, and 'Literacy' is a Specific Area.

Although in the statutory guidance there is not a specific curriculum for the teaching of reading, the EYFS does state that:

"Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive…it is crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading. Reading consists of two dimensions: language comprehension and word reading." (DfE, 2021, p. 8).

At the end of the 'Reception Year', children who are in a Reception class in school or at an EYFS setting such as a nursery or preschool must be informally assessed against a set of 17 Early Learning Goals, which must then be passed on to the child's Year 1 teacher. The ELG related to reading is as follows:

> Children at the expected level of development will:
> - Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs;
> - Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending;
> - Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words;
> - Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary.
>
> (DfE, 2021, p. 13)

This ELG implies that EYFS teachers will therefore have taught the children phonics skills, including reading digraphs and blending sounds to read words and sentences…*all before the child has turned 5*.

The current and statutory National Curriculum, which outlines Programmes of Study for reading at key stages 1 and 2, was published a decade ago in 2013. It insists that:

"During year 1, teachers should make sure that pupils can sound and blend unfamiliar printed words quickly and accurately using the phonic knowledge and skills that they have already learnt…learn new grapheme-phoneme correspondences and revise and consolidate those learnt earlier." (DfE, 2014).

Unlike in Waldorf education, great emphasis is placed on the early acquisition of reading skills:

"If pupils entering year 1 are still struggling to decode and spell, they need to be taught to do this urgently through a rigorous and systematic phonics programme so that they catch up rapidly." (DfE, 2014).

The words 'urgently' and 'rapidly' imbue a sense of panic in teachers delivering the National Curriculum, which is a far cry from the earlier EYFS recommendation that "it is crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading." (DfE, 2021, p. 8). **I feel the implication is that children may languish in the pleasure of books until they reach their sixth year, at which point browsing books for pleasure must be foregone in place of a rigorous attempt for teachers to ensure that children 'catch up' with their peers' word-reading ability, allowing no possibility that children this young are simply not ready for such intellectual work, or that it is acceptable for them to develop at different rates. There is no time to allow for the natural unfolding of the emerging reader.**

According to the Standards and Testing Agency (2022), by the end of Key Stage One – the year in which children turn 7 and therefore comparable to Class 1 in Waldorf schools – children in UK state schools are expected to:

- read accurately most words of two or more syllables
- read most words containing common suffixes
- read most common exception words

• read most words in KS1 books accurately without overt sounding and blending, and sufficiently fluently to allow them to focus on their understanding rather than on decoding individual words

• sound out most unfamiliar words accurately, without undue hesitation.

Interestingly, The Cox Report of 1989 suggested an inclusion in the teaching of reading remarkably similar to the foundation of reading in the Waldorf school: "Pupils' own writing - either independently written, or stories dictated to the teacher or composed in collaboration with other pupils - should form part of the resources for reading." (Cox, 1989).

2.4 Current UK Waldorf education guidelines for teaching reading

Waldorf education starts to set the foundation for reading in Kindergarten. Learning to read is allowed to evolve for each child in the same form as it evolved from the beginning of humanity: spoken language developed first, then people drew pictures to communicate their ideas, followed by symbols such as hieroglyphics and finally the abstract letters of our modern alphabets. Once there was a written language, people learned to read. This is exactly the sequence in which children master language, and it also is the sequence in which reading is taught in Waldorf schools.

During Kindergarten, the children hear stories and watch puppet shows of nursery rhymes, nature stories, folktales and fairy tales, which are frequently repeated for familiarity. Teachers are careful to use the original language of fairy tales without 'dumbing them down' or simplifying the language. Teachers are also careful to use clear speech and to enunciate in the anticipation that such speech will be imitated by the young children. This helps children later when the time comes to learn to write and spell. Through such frequent storytelling and related, child-initiated imaginative and make-believe activities, language skills are being developed daily. Whether young children can read or not, Waldorf schools avoid early readers of the 'see spot run' variety, and dry, lifeless textbooks.

Steiner advised against techniques used in standard Kindergartens that appear sophisticated on the outside but actually do nothing for the soul of the child:

"Children learn so much. They almost learn to read. They are given letters of the alphabet and asked to fit them into cut-out shapes, and things like that. It all looks awfully clever and one is tempted to think that it actually benefits the children. But it doesn't. Not in the least. The work they do in [standard] Kindergartens is soul-destroying. It affects the children's body and health adversely, because it weakens them in body and soul." (Wiehl & Auer, 2020, p. 101).

It is important to know that reading requires decoding skills that develop in children at varying ages. Waldorf educators understand that learning to read will unfold naturally in its own time when a child is given the proper support.

Formal instruction in reading, writing and other academic disciplines is not introduced until pupils are 6 or 7 years of age. Steiner believed that engaging young children in abstract intellectual activity too early would adversely affect their growth and development. He observed the effect of intellectual head-orientated work on the physical organism of the child and based his recommendations on that. He saw that the child until about 6½ is busy making up his own physical form, and must be free to build a healthy vessel for the soul and for the later intellectual powers to enfold.

In his 1919 lectures, Steiner said: "If we teach children reading and writing in the conventional way when we receive these children into school, we inflict damage on the head spirit they have themselves awakened before…reading and writing must be taught artistically if we want to do it well." (Saar, 2020, p. 253).

Unlike conventional schooling, Steiner advocates that for the good of the child's soul and social development, writing should be taught before reading: "Writing is a more life-filled activity than reading. Reading isolates us and lets us withdraw from the world." (Saar, 2020, p. 237).

Steiner describes that the ideal way to teach reading through writing is by introducing each letter of the alphabet by likening it to an object spelt with that particular letter at the beginning that could be drawn in an approximation of the letter shape, such as 'f' drawn as a fish. The logical explanation follows: "If you begin to appeal to the child's nature in this way, you take them back to earlier cultural eras, because this is how writing first evolved…all letters have evolved from such pictures." (Saar, 2020, p. 28).

Steiner also advocates learning to read by copying writing: "Make sure that they do not only learn with their eyes but also with their hands…the children will not learn to

read unless they form with their hands what they see, including the printed letters." (p. 30).

A well-known tool in the Waldorf world is to teach 'from the whole to the parts'. This also applies to the teaching of reading (through writing): children should first copy down an entire sentence, before the teacher then selects a key word and explains how this can be broken down into its individual letters and the sounds they each make ('phonics').

Though Waldorf schools are autonomous institutions not required to follow a prescribed curriculum (beyond what is required by local governments), there are widely agreed upon guidelines for the Waldorf curriculum, found in such publications as 'The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum' known colloquially as 'The Yellow Book' (Avison & Rawson, 2000).

Main academic subjects are introduced through two-hour morning lesson blocks that last for several weeks. These blocks are horizontally integrated at each grade level in that the topic of the block will be infused into many classroom activities, and vertically integrated in that each subject will be revisited with increasing complexity as students develop their skills, reasoning capacities and individual sense of self.

Experienced Waldorf teachers and mentors Patti Connolly and Janet Langley have compiled a website of inspirations for Waldorf teaching. Here they suggest the following end of Grade 1 learning checklist:

- Recognizes upper and lower case letters and can say their names and sounds
- Has achieved full phonemic awareness for all letters/sounds taught including correctly identifying and pronouncing sound of short vowels
- Correctly reads 70+ sight words
- Can decode CVC words and simple words using digraphs (sh, ch, th, wh, ng, oo) or consonantal blends (bl, cr, st, etc.)
- Actively engages in reading activities with purpose and understanding
- Can read 'memorized texts' using phonemic awareness to track words.
- Can read simple decodable-text that contains sight words and all phonics rules taught in 1st Grade.

(Connolly & Langley, 2017)

It is interesting to note that the reading expectations here are similar to those at the end of the EYFS, which is two years earlier.

2.5 Approaches of other pedagogies towards teaching reading

In addition to state schools, parents in the UK have various options for educating their children once they reach statutory school age. Parents may opt for a private education, or follow the path of an alternative education. Alternative education is simply education which differs from mainstream pedagogical approaches, such as my business, Free Spirits, which offers holistic education and childcare, focusing on developing the child as a whole physical, intellectual and spiritual being.

Why would parents choose an alternative to mainstream school, particularly given the time and financial implications of doing so? Many agree with the sentiments of international education advisor (and award-winning TED talk presenter) Sir Ken Robinson that **mainstream schooling is 'factory-style' education: efficiently processing children in batches according to date of manufacture into labour units ready for employment**. (Robinson, 2010).

Mainstream state schools deliver a curriculum with targets and expectations for children based on their age, regardless of their maturity and rate of development. Children aged 0-4 are generally 'allowed' to play and develop at their own rate without pressure, but once they reach school age, they are screened and tested and labelled as failures if they are not found to be meeting 'age-related expectations'. Moreover, the main focus of these assessments is on children's literacy and numeracy abilities, disregarding their abilities in creative problem solving, artistic expression, social skills, tenacity, innovation, dexterity and physical aptitude. This narrow focus of school assessments forces teachers to narrow the focus of their curriculum, placing disproportionate value on literacy and numeracy. Alternative education seeks to address this imbalance.

According to Wikipedia, roughly half of all UK alternative schools are Steiner Waldorf schools. Others include Montessori schools, Forest schools and home education co-operatives. Here are the approaches that each of these pedagogies follow for teaching children to read:

Montessori

Like Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori felt that children should learn to write before learning to read, since in doing so, children process the words more slowly and gain a deeper familiarity with it. The Montessori approach is similar to the Waldorf approach in this regard.

Children begin learning the letter sounds using sandpaper letters during the early years, which incorporate the sense of touch to further reinforce learning. While the child learns the letter sound, they trace the letter with their fingers on a textured sandpaper inscription of the letter, learning the strokes used eventually to write that letter on paper.

Once children have mastered the sounds associated with each letter, they will be shown the moveable alphabet, which will allow them to easily put letters together, sounding them out to spell simple, then progressively more complex, words. As children love to move, and learn by doing, the moveable alphabet allows them to begin 'writing' – even before they develop the fine-motor skills to control a pencil.

After mastering the skills associated with producing written letters and words, reading naturally comes as the next step. Children discover that they are now able to see printed words on a piece of paper and decode their meaning, and will suddenly show a new, heightened interest in the written word.

Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason was a British educator and reformer at the turn of the twentieth century. She proposed to base the education of children upon a wide and liberal curriculum. Her name is now given to an educational ethos following her principles which is utilised by many home educating families. Like the Waldorf pedagogy, the approach advocates delaying formal reading teaching until at least age 6, but recommends introducing children to letters and sounds in a natural, playful way before then, similar to the Montessori method. Mason advised sharing books with children, including alphabet books, and giving children 3D letters to play with, but without any drilling or specific exercises aimed at teaching children to read or write.

Charlotte Mason also advocated against the use of 'twaddle' with children, which includes being patronising, loquacious, worthless, irrelevant or contrived in teaching

approach. Like the Waldorf pedagogy, the Charlotte Mason approach champions the use of high-quality literature with children.

Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia approach to early years education was developed after World War II by pedagogist Loris Malaguzzi and parents in the villages around Reggio Emilia, Italy; the approach derives its name from the city.

The pedagogy views children as curious, intelligent individuals with the power and potential to develop and learn from their environment and the relationships they build with others. The approach generally applies to children up to the age of 6, and reflects a theoretical kinship with John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Vygotsky.

Although literacy and numeracy are recognised as important, Reggio Emilia-inspired settings place additional value on the many non-verbal 'languages' through which children communicate, such as gestures, glances and emotion. The topics and direction of learning come from the children themselves.

In terms of learning to read, the Reggio Emilia approach believes that students learn through discovery, using their own strengths. For example, students who are kinesthetic learners will learn literacy best through 'doing'. Kinaesthetic learners could write letters or words in a box of sand, or use moveable alphabet letters that they are able to put into place physically, achieving a hands-on approach that these learners will best suit. Activities such as these are ensuring that students are learning in a way that best fits their learning needs and by working together with the student's strengths, interests and abilities, the student is able to reach their full potential.

Forest School

The priority of Forest Schools is that children have regular contact with the natural world over a long period of time, learning to explore and manage risks, and acquire hands-on skills. Rather than teaching literacy skills per se, Forest Schools enable children to develop in other ways that will eventually prepare them for work of a more academic focus, such as resilience, concentration, risk-taking, self-motivation and confidence-building. Forest Schools employ lots of high-quality verbal

communication due to the low staff:child ratios, and such oral work lays the foundations for phonics and other pre-literacy skills.

In the UK, the Forest School movement generally refers to regular outdoor sessions as part of a wider curriculum offering (provided by traditional schools or as part of home education), and therefore the acquisition of reading and writing skills is not a priority for the children during their time outdoors. However, there are many 'Forest School' outdoor nurseries which are becoming ever-more popular in the UK, which are obliged to fulfil the literacy requirements of the EYFS. This is generally achieved through high-quality communication and oral pre-literacy skills, but can also incorporate using the natural environment as reading and writing stimuli, such as reading signs and labels, forming letters with twigs and other natural materials, and using sticks or fingers to write in mud and sand.

Home Education

In the UK, the favoured term for children being educated chiefly by their parents is home education – not home schooling – as the latter implies that school is being replicated at home (home schooling is a *type* of home education), whereas in reality, being home educated more often means getting out and about into the 'real world' to learn about the world from first hand experiences, rather than going to school to learn about it from secondary and tertiary sources.

There are as many different ways to home educate a child as there are children, because the 'curriculum' is generally centred around the child. Some families outsource particular areas of learning by employing private tutors or by sending their children to educational groups such as gymnastics classes; some families undertake some formal learning at home using workbooks, textbooks and other secondary sources of information; whilst others are much more casual and unstructured in their approach, holding faith than their children will learn what they need to learn when they need to learn it through participation in daily life. Families who actively avoid any type of learning situation that replicates school are known as following an unschooling approach.

Sending children to school only part-time is called flexi-schooling; employing a nature-based approach is called wild-schooling, and using a travel as a means of education is called world-schooling. The philosophy that most home educating families have in common is the belief that children do not need to go to school in

order to receive an education, and that their children's educational needs can be catered for in an individualised, flexible approach, making little (if any) use of standardised testing or placing any pressure on children to learn skills such as reading before they are ready.

Unschooling

The term 'unschooling' was coined by John Holt, an American educator and theorist. Home educating parents who follow the unschooling approach choose to let their children lead their own learning at their own pace and based on their own interests. Rather than deliberately trying to teach their children to read, unschoolers instead provide their children with a holistically nourishing environment and the choice of whether or not to engage with educational activities. Unschooling parents read to their children and share their own natural interest in books, and reading is learnt in a very natural, casual way, with concepts only being specifically taught if requested by the child. One mother well-known within the unschooling community, Joyce Fetteroll, has been oft-quoted as saying:

"Schools place emphasis on [early] reading not because it's the best way to learn but because it's the most efficient way to run assembly line learning." (Fetteroll, 2019).

Unschoolers pride themselves on a completely individualised and laid-back learning approach for each and every child.

In her popular blog, unschooling mother Lisa Nielsen muses on how the reason that children need to learn to read so early in school is because **in school, children read about doing things instead of actually doing things**. When children live life outside of school they actually get to do things, so it's not as important to read about them in order to learn (Nielsen, 2011).

Another much-followed blogger known only as Sara of Happiness Is Here explains of the unschoolers' approach to reading, "Children who teach themselves to read, do it joyfully. They are intrinsically motivated, not focused on meeting others' expectations. They are free from coercion, comparison, and standardisation." (Happiness Is Here, 2017).

3 Investigating the theme as to its defining characteristics:

3.1 Existing research regarding the timing of and approaches to learning to read

There has been much research into how and when it is best to teach children to read. As well as many individual published authors, the educational committees and institutions listed below all **advocate for delaying the formal teaching of reading** (as is the practice in Waldorf schools) compared to UK mainstream schools:

- The Cambridge Primary Review 2009 (Robin Alexander)
- The Bullock Report 1975 (Alan Bullock)
- The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) 2008 (Anna Riggall & Caroline Sharp)
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006 & 2009

Having read into the findings of many researchers, it is clear that several conclusions can be drawn, as follows:

CONCLUSION 1: Students who learn to read later (such as by attending Waldorf schools) catch up, then perform as well as or better than their earlier educated peers.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 54 member and non-member nations intended to evaluate educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' performance in mathematics, science, and reading. Its aim is to provide comparable data with a view to enabling countries to improve their education policies and outcomes.

PISA studies from both 2006 and 2009 found that compared to state school students, European Waldorf students are comparable in reading ability, and that there was "**no association between school entry age and reading achievement at age 15**" (PISA, 2009).

Academic Dr Sebastian Suggate has conducted several studies over many years into the connection between children's reading ability and the age at which they were first taught to read. His 2009 studies delved more deeply into the results of the PISA studies alongside his own research, in which he controlled for the children's home

literacy environments, the economic situation of their parents, parental education, school decile rating, vocabulary development, ethnicity and sex. Suggate concluded that, "**teaching children to read from age five is not likely to make that child any more successful at reading than a child who learns reading later**, **from age seven**. There is no solid evidence showing long-term gains for children who are taught to read in Kindergarten. In fact, **by fourth grade and beyond, these children read at the same level as those who were taught to read in the first grade**," (Suggate, 2009a). Fourth grade in New Zealand is equivalent to UK Year 5, or Class 4 in UK Waldorf schools, during which year children have their 10th birthday.

Suggate conducted another study comparing Waldorf and state school students in New Zealand. He found that the Waldorf students, who had no formal instruction in reading in pre-school or Kindergarten, **caught up in reading ability by around age 10**, at which point there was "**no difference in reading achievement between children who had been given early instruction in reading and those who had not.**" (Suggate, 2009b).

In 2013, Suggate again drew the same conclusions from a different study:

- Around age 10, children learning to read at seven had caught up to those learning at 5.
- Later starters had no long-term disadvantages in decoding and reading fluency.
- The later starters had slightly better reading comprehension.
- Focus on teaching reading early could be relaxed.

(Suggate et al, 2013)

In 'Writing to Reading the Steiner Waldorf Way' written by Waldorf teachers and authors Abi Allanson and Nicky Teensma, they say, "In our school, the median reading level at the end of Class 2 was above average for their age according to a standardised test [Salford Reading Test], despite not having had any formal reading instruction in Class 1 [p. 221]…In a Steiner school, children in **Classes 3 and 4 begin to match standard reading levels** and are no longer 'behind' because of the later start to formal learning." (Allanson & Teensma, 2018, p. 216).

In fact, it is difficult to find research advocating *against* the later introduction of formal reading lessons, except in cases where the alternative is a home-educating scenario in which parents possess insufficient oral language skills on which to form the base of their children's early literacy.

However, a valid point is made in The Rose Review regarding the unique complexity of the English language, and Rose explains the benefits of an earlier start: "An appropriate introduction to phonic work by the age of five enables our children to cover ground that many of their counterparts in other countries whose language is much less complex phonetically do not have to cover…" (Rose, 2006). This, of course, is only a valid point for those children who learn to read by phonics, which is not the case for all children.

CONCLUSION 2: Children attending play-based Kindergartens perform better academically in later years than children attending more academic Kindergartens.

After having compared children who began reading lessons at different ages, Suggate went on to compare the effects of children having attended different types of Kindergartens. He and his team compared children who, at age 5, had spent a year at either 'academically focused' or 'play-arts focused' Kindergartens and found that in time **the two groups became inseparable in reading skill** (Suggate et al, 2013).

A study with similar outcomes was conducted in Germany where play-based Kindergartens were being transformed into early learning centres in the 1970s. The study compared 50 Kindergarten classes using each of the two approaches. The children were followed through grade four, and **those from the play-based programs excelled over the others on all 17 measures, including being more advanced in reading** and mathematics and being better adjusted socially and emotionally in school. As a result the German Kindergartens again became play based (Darling-Hammond et al, 1992).

Researcher Rebecca Marcon found negative effects of overly directed preschool instruction on later school performance in a study of three different curricula, described as either 'academically oriented' or 'child-initiated'. **By third grade, her group of 343 students displayed few differences in academic achievement programs**. After 6 years of school, however, Marcon discovered that:

"**Students who had been in the groups that were more academically directed earned significantly lower grades compared to children who had attended child-initiated preschool classes. Children's later school success appears to have been enhanced by more active, child-initiated early learning experiences**." (Marcon, 2002).

Similar results have been found that students from play-based preschools and Kindergartens performed better than otherwise comparable children from academic-based preschools and Kindergartens by **fourth grade and beyond, on measures of reading** (Goldbeck, 2001 and Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

It is interesting to note how findings have remained the same over time. Nearly one hundred years ago, Dr. Arnold Gesell found that all children go on the same path of development, albeit at different rates. For example, some children learn to walk as early as nine months, some as late as 15 months; both are normal, and the early walker is not a better walker than the later walker. The case is similar with the age that children learn to read: it is quite normal for children to learn to read between the ages of three and seven, but **by the end of third grade, early readers have no advantage over later readers**. Some later readers even go on to become the top in their class. Reading early is not an indicator of higher intelligence. In fact, children at the top of their class in Kindergarten only have a 40 percent chance of being at the top of their class at the end of third grade (Gesell, 1925).

A report by the Cambridge-based *Primary Review* found that "**educational alternatives, including Steiner-Waldorf schools and home schooling, produce better academic results.**" (Alexander, 2009).

CONCLUSION 3: Children are capable of learning to read with no formal schooling.

In his journal article, Frank Smith asserts that, "Children learn to read by reading" (p. 297) and that, "Children probably begin to read from the moment they become aware of print in any meaningful way…not only are the formal mechanics of reading unnecessary in these initial stages, they may well be a hindrance…words do not need to be in sentences to be meaningful, they just have to be in a meaningful context." (Smith, 1976, p. 321). This implies that words and sentences found in a child's day-to-day environment may well suffice for reading instruction.

In 2010, psychology researcher and scholar Peter Gray surveyed unschooling families on learning to read and found that of 21 children, "None of these children has difficulty reading today." (Gray, 2010). The following table summarises the age at which these children were able to read despite having been 'unschooled'; the majority were aged between 5-10 years old:

Age at which learnt to read	**Percentage** (rounded)
Age 4	10%
Age 5-6	33%
Age 7-8	29%
Age 9-10	24%
Age 11	5%

It is important to note that motivation and environment play an important part in un schooled children's ability to 'pick up' reading. Gray devised the following Seven Principles of Learning to Read Without Schooling:

> *1. For non-schooled children there is **no best age** for learning to read.*
>
> *2. Motivated children can go from apparent non-reading to fluent reading **very quickly**.*
>
> *3. Attempts to push reading can backfire.*
>
> *4. Children learn to read when reading becomes, to them, a means to some valued end or ends.*
>
> *5. Reading, like many other skills, is learned socially through shared participation.*
>
> *6. Some children become interested in writing before reading, and they learn to read as they learn to write.*
>
> *7. There is no predictable "course" through which children learn to read.*

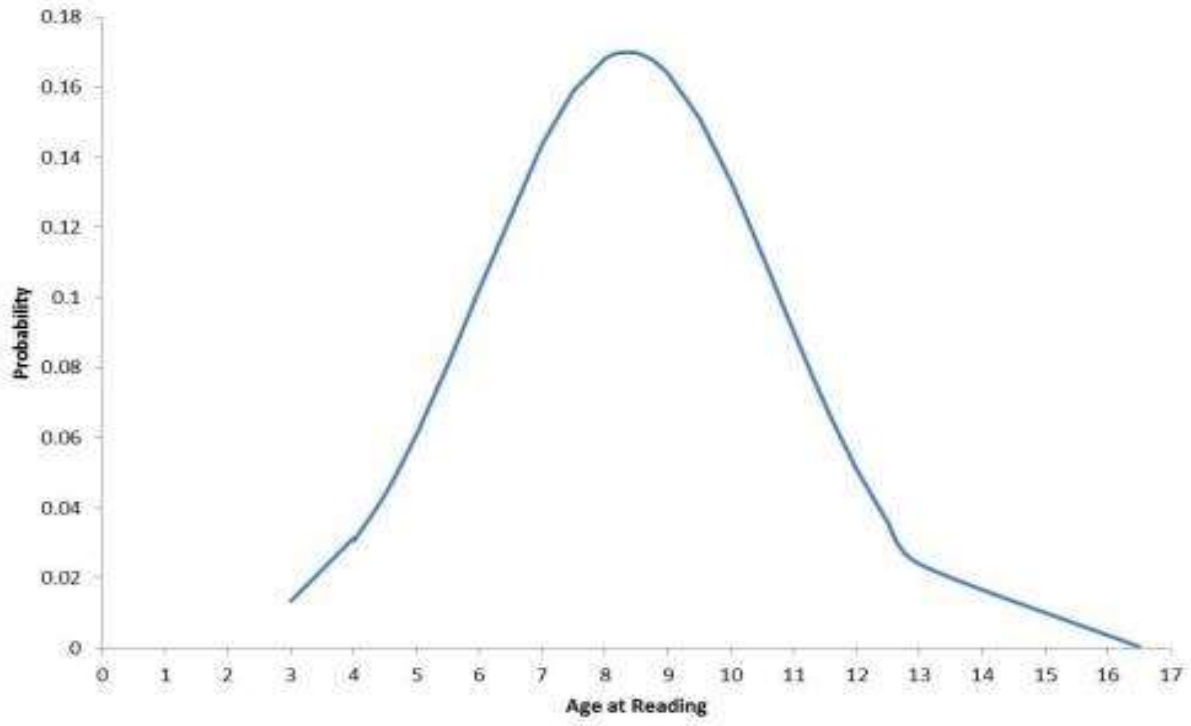
Grey also noted that: "At Sudbury Valley [school], there are no formal reading classes and no adult-imposed pressures to learn to read. Yet all of the students, in their own time, learn to read. Here, nobody cared if they could read. The pressure was off."

Students of Peter Grey, Savio & DelGaudio (1989), identified 16 pupils who had learned how to read since enrolling in the democratic school and had received no systematic reading instruction. Their main findings were that pupils began their first real reading between ages 4-14, and they learned quickly when they were truly self-motivated to do so. Attempts by parents to teach reading to unmotivated children

generally failed and often seemed to delay the child's interest in reading. Being read to and engaging in meaningful ways with literary material with skilled readers (older children or adults) was the most effective way to facilitate learning. Finally, there was no systematic relationship between the age at which students had first learned to read and their involvement with reading at the time of the interview.

An even more comprehensive survey of 85 unschooled children concluded that **the average age of learning to read was 8.4 years**. Its author found that, "32% of children were reading before the age of 8. Nearly 50% of children learnt to read between the ages of 8 and 10. About 17% learnt to read after the age of 10." (Isaac, 2016). These findings are summarised in the table and graph below:

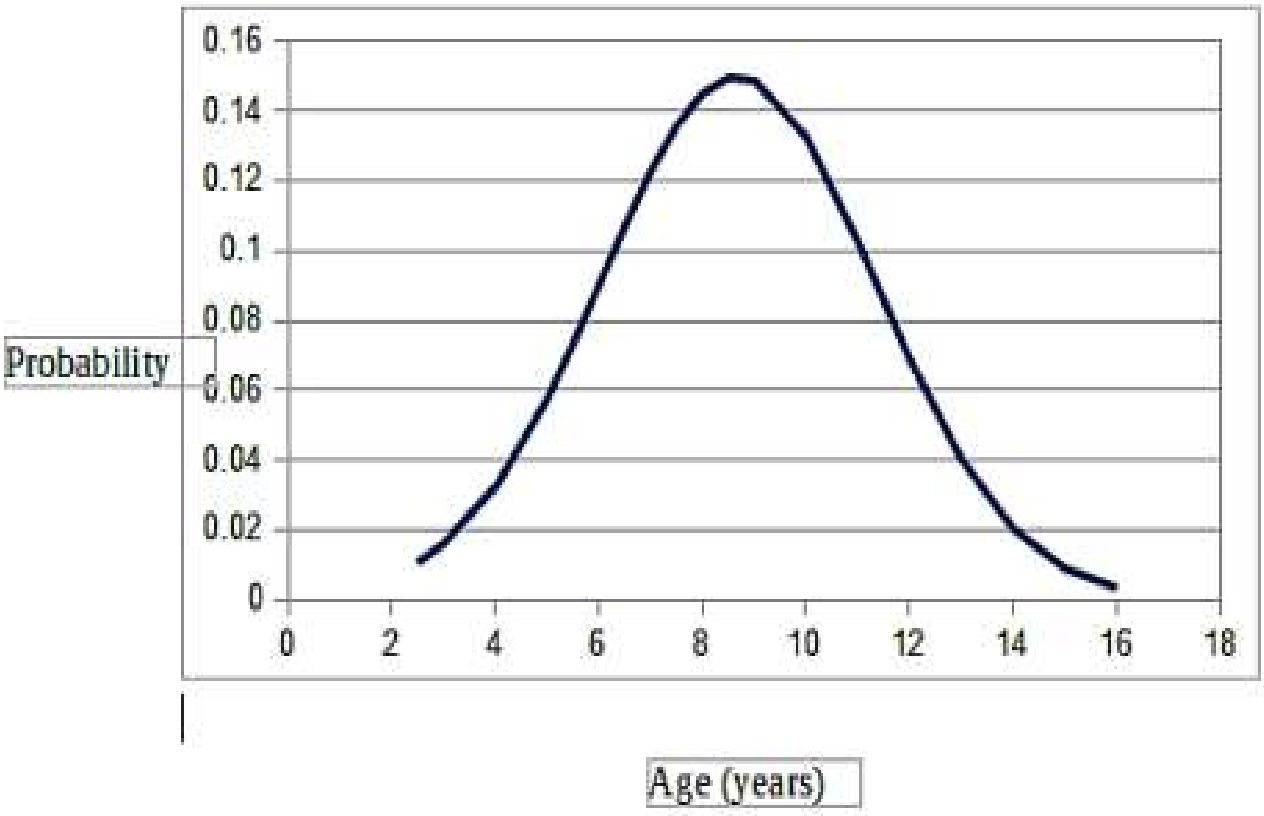
Age at which learnt to read	**Percentage** (rounded)
Aged 3-8	32%
Aged 8-10	50%
Aged 11+	17%



(Isaac, 2016)

Jo Isaac repeated this survey in 2018 with 109 children. **The mean reading age was 8.7 years**, whilst the median and mode were 9 years old, again summarised in the following table and graph:

Age at which learnt to read	**Percentage** (rounded)
Aged 3-8	44%
Aged 9-12	50%
Aged 12+	7%



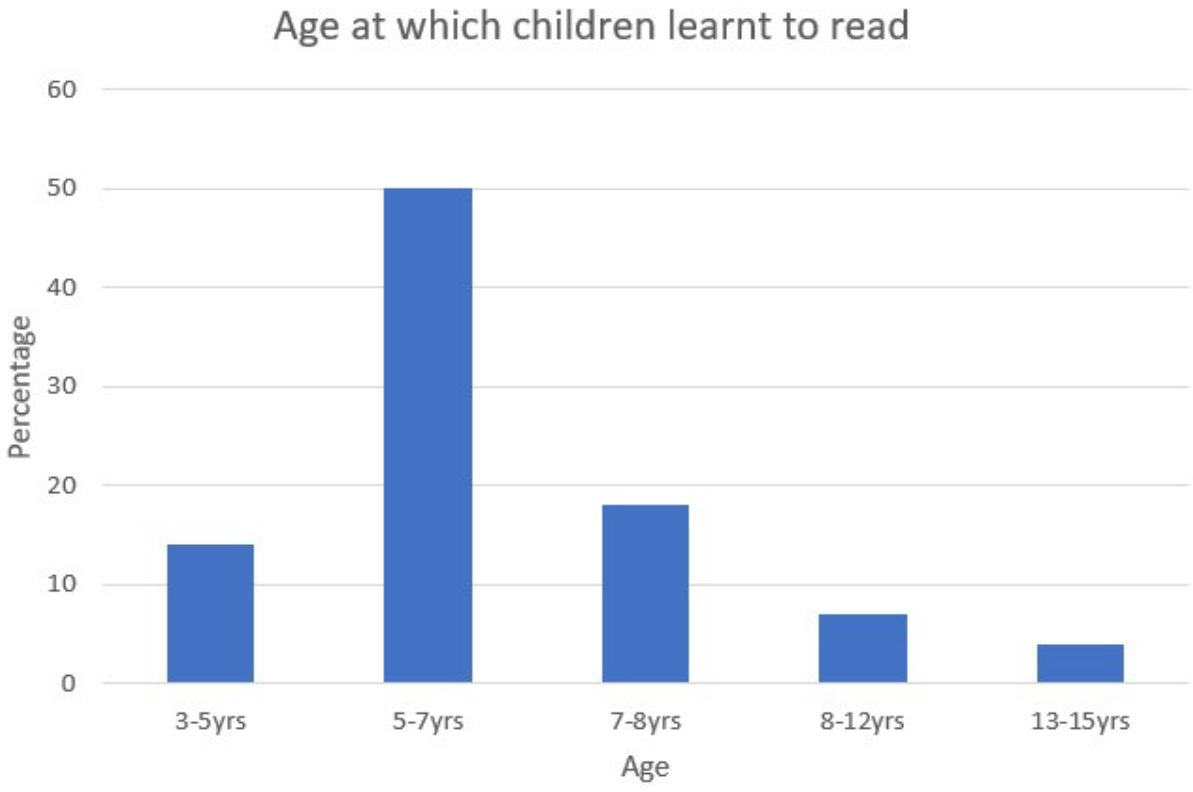
(Isaac, 2018)

In order to explore unschoolers' experiences in learning to read within a self-directed learning environment, Riley (2018) interviewed 28 unschooled adults aged 18-52 and found that:

- All 28 adults were able to read yet had been 'unschooled'
- There were lots of books in their home

- Each participant recalled being read to each and every day
- In 46% of respondents, reading seemed to happen naturally, with little to no teaching, just a result of one's intrinsic motivation to read.

Age at which learnt to read	**Percentage** (rounded)
Aged 3-5	14%
Aged 5-7	50%
Aged 7-8	18%
Aged 8-12	7%
Aged 13-15	4%



(Riley, 2018)

It is not clear why Riley's results indicate that unschooled children learn to read, on average, at an earlier age than those in Jo Isaac's study, but as the results were gathered on the basis of participants' memory and without the use of standardised testing, it could be that the definition of being 'able to read' differed between the two surveys. Additionally, the participants in Riley's study all came from supportive,

text-rich environments, whereas this information is not known regarding the participants of Isaac's study.

Goodman & Goodman (1976) boldly state, "Instruction does not teach children to read. Children are in no more need of being taught to read than they are of being taught to listen." In their estimation, since learning language is about function and meaning, a teacher or other guiding adult needs to provide a context for children to respond to written language that is motivating and meaningful to them.

CONCLUSION 4: Children will be ready to learn to read at different ages, and this difference should be respected.

The Bullock Report of 1975 which was commissioned to inquire into the teaching in schools of reading advised that: "There is no one method, medium, approach, device, or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read." (Bullock, 1975, p.77). Bullock went on to make some rather salient statements:

- There is no one point to which the term 'reading readiness' can reasonably be applied
- If he makes too early a start the burden of learning may retard his reading development and make reading a chore rather than an enjoyable experience
- A number of studies have suggested that a mental age of about six is necessary before reading instruction can be effective
- To communicate anxiety to the young child by driving him is a harmful practice. Let a child be put in situations which stimulate him, with materials that fascinate him, and there is no need to fret about the right mental age to start reading.

(Bullock, 1975, p.100).

The 2006 independent review of the teaching of early reading by Jim Rose put the decision of timing back in the hands of teachers:

"When to introduce phonic work systematically is, and should be, a matter of principled, professional judgement based on careful observation and robust assessment." (Rose, 2006).

Experienced Waldorf teachers and widely published authors Kevin Avison and Martyn Rawson freely admit that young children are quite capable of applying their intelligence to tasks such as learning to read and write, but warn that if this intelligence is not first given time to develop social awareness through such things as creative play, "Higher skills may become anti-social, focussed upon controlling rather than communicating and sharing…their social competence may be limited." (Avison & Rawson, 2000, p. 24).

Michael Rose, NESTT tutor and a founder teacher of the York Steiner School, explains in agreement with Piaget that children should be given around seven years to grow into their physical body and that, "Intellectual consciousness *actively inhibits* the spontaneous genius of imitation and associative imagination." (Rose, 2007, p. 107). However, he goes on to say that Steiner himself regarded the most developmentally appropriate time for children to be reading was from their twelfth year – around the beginning of Piaget's 'formal operational' stage (Rose, 2002, p. 125).

In her job evaluating children for learning difficulties, Susan Johnson – a behavioural and developmental paediatrician and a certified Waldorf teacher – found that, "Most labels occur when we teach children to write, read and spell too early, before they are neurologically ready." (Johnson, 2017). Johnson suggested the ages at which children may be ready to start to phonetically read due to myelinating both sides of their brains were not until ages 6½-8 years for girls, and 7½-9 years of age for boys. Johnson also believes that, "Reading should be taught in schools only after children have developed the left side of their brains for phonetic-based reading and also developed bilateral integration pathways (connecting the right and left side of their brains together)." The common Waldorf practices of therapeutic eurythmy and form drawing are good examples of such useful cross-lateral movement activities (Johnson, 2017).

In Steiner's 1923 lecture (AP 1996, p.94), he advised that children taught according to his methodology "…will be able to read in due course – perhaps a few months after their ninth year. It does not really matter if they cannot read earlier…"

The main disadvantage children (and their parents) face from not being able to read as early as their peers seems to be concern and disapproval from mainstream society.

CONCLUSION 5: Parental influence has a great effect on children's reading acquisition.

The Rose Review (2006) states: "An early start on systematic phonic work is especially important for those children who do not have the advantages of strong support for literacy at home…As the National Literacy Trust's recent survey shows, **children's attitudes to reading are greatly influenced by parents and carers**."

The Bullock Report of 1975 also recognised that, "**The language climate of the home has a critical bearing on preparation for reading**…The opportunities should be natural and not forced, and the outcomes of reading should be rewarding…look upon reading as an activity with a purpose. From the beginning it should be established as a thinking process, not simply as an exercise in identifying shapes and sounds."

As mentioned earlier, when Riley discovered that the 28 children he surveyed from an unschooling background were somehow all able to read by adulthood, he noted that they all came from supportive families and text-rich environments in which books were shared between parent and child on a daily basis. Bullock also recommends daily reading between parent and child – but only that of high-quality texts:

"We have argued for the parent to introduce the child to books before he starts school, but we do not include reading schemes among them. Once a child begins to read the first book of a graded series there is a great temptation for the parent to think in terms of rate of progress. When this happens, parent and child begin to lose the excitement and sheer pleasure that the first contact with books should provide." (Bullock, 1975).

CONCLUSION 6: Teaching approach affects children's enjoyment of and therefore progression in reading.

In China, Hu et al (2018) researching teacher-child interaction quality, attitudes toward reading, and literacy achievement of Chinese preschool children found that: "**A teacher's emotional support during preschool has a positive effect on children's reading attitudes, which in turn has a positive effect on their reading and vocabulary learning outcomes in later grades**." (p. 19).

The emphasis on warmth and loving relationships in the Waldorf early childhood classrooms and in grades 1-8 (in which class teachers remain with the same set of students throughout) are consistent with these findings. As teachers and students develop strong relationships in the grades, literacy learning continues with beautiful speech recitation, many modes of writing, drama experiences, public speaking experiences in school-wide assemblies and presentations, and other artistic experiences that further enhance literacy learning. The development of reading skills is maintained at a consistent rate through teachers' deep knowledge of the children.

A 2012 study of Waldorf pupils in Germany concluded that, in comparison to state school pupils, Waldorf students are significantly more enthusiastic about learning, report having more fun and being less bored in school, more often feel individually met, and learn more from school about their personal academic strengths. Compared to state school pupils, more Waldorf pupils felt that their school environment was pleasant and supportive and that they had good relationships with teachers. Waldorf pupils were also found to have significantly fewer physical ailments such as headaches, stomach aches, or disrupted sleep (Jiménez, 2012).

In a discussion on academic Kindergartens, professor of child development David Elkind (2001) argues that since there is no solid research demonstrating that early academic training is superior to (or worse than) the more traditional, hands-on model of early education, educators should defer to developmental approaches that provide young children with ample time and opportunity to explore the natural world on their own terms. This includes having the freedom, time and resources to explore and enjoy quality children's books which spark an interest in learning to read.

The Bullock Report of 1975 also recommends the use of 'real books' as opposed to those in a reading scheme which are "an artificial distinction and an unnatural restriction of reading experience" (p. 113), and recognises that they are generally only useful from a logistical point of view for a teacher having to manage the literacy instruction of a large number of pupils at a time. Bullock also highlighted the importance of relationships in schools in the context of teaching children to read: "There should be more opportunities for children to be in a one to one relationship with adults in school." (Bullock, 1975, p. 520).

3.2 Focus on Finland

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 54 member and non-member nations intended to evaluate educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' performance in mathematics, science, and reading. Its aim is to provide comparable data with a view to enabling countries to improve their education policies and outcomes.

Since the publication of the first PISA results in 2001, Finland has been seen as a major international leader in education. It has consistently ranked in the very top tier of countries in all PISA assessments over the past decade, and its performance has been especially notable for its remarkable consistency across schools. So what is the secret of their success? Some key components of the Finnish education system are:

- Prior to starting school, Finnish children must participate in one year of compulsory free pre-primary education, which is often play-based and outdoors in nature
- Most Finnish children are reading before they start school
- Finnish children start formal education aged 7
- Teachers are able to exercise an enormous degree of professional discretion and independence: the national core curriculum functions as a framework, leaving teachers the freedom to decide what they will teach and how
- Assessment in Finnish schools is a classroom responsibility; the only external testing in comprehensive schools is done on a sampling basis and there is little pressure on teachers
- Finnish classrooms are typically described by observers as learner-centred
- Finnish teachers are highly educated; a Master's degree is the norm
- Teaching is an attractive profession in Finland: their primary teacher education programmes are able to attract ten applicants for every slot.

(OECD, 2010)

During my four-year B. Ed. (Hons) primary teaching degree course, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to spend a month on a teaching placement in a middle school

in Oulu, northern Finland. From the window of my accommodation, I could see the Kindergarten children at play. They were outside in all weathers, having fun in the snow with their friends. Once the children started school, the atmosphere was relaxed and convivial between students and teachers. The children did not have to wear a school uniform, and they exchanged outdoor shoes for slippers on entering. The classrooms were warm and welcoming, and class sizes averaged less than those in the UK.

The teachers were happy and relaxed. I was amazed to discover that, unlike in UK schools, there was no requirement to submit any planning or other documentation, and teachers could be as spontaneous and flexible as they liked in the delivery of their lessons. For example, the teachers were able to take the children out on a bike ride through the village on a whim without having to seek parental consent or complete risk assessments. The children were naturally quiet and subservient, and I witnessed no behavioural issues in the class.

At lunchtimes, the teachers were allowed to consume alcohol in the staff room and were offered a massage by the visiting masseuse. With teachers treated with so much trust, respect and independence, it is no wonder that teaching is such a highly sought-after profession in Finland. I am sure that the teachers' high quality of life, and the healthy work-life balance afforded by the Finnish education system, inevitably feed down to the children, who are equally unpressured and permitted to enjoy their education unfettered by tests and targets – much like in the world of Waldorf education.

3.3 Results of my own personal research

I conducted my own personal research during May-June 2023. I devised a questionnaire which I then made interactive via Mailchimp. This produced a weblink which I could distribute to parents.

My survey comprised a commonly-used test called the Burt 1974 Reading Age Test, 20 questions for parents to ask their children regarding their opinions and attitudes towards reading and how they learnt to read, opportunities for parents to state their child's reading ability at various ages, questions regarding the children's educational provision past and present, and finally an open question inviting parents to freely give their own views on how the educational setting, teaching approach and age at

which children are taught to read affects children's reading ability and attitudes to reading.

I distributed my survey among my own personal network of fellow parents, and I also posted it on many national and international Facebook groups for parents in general and parents home educating their children, including those following unschooling and Waldorf principles. My introduction on each site was tailored to the audience, but generally contained the following introduction:

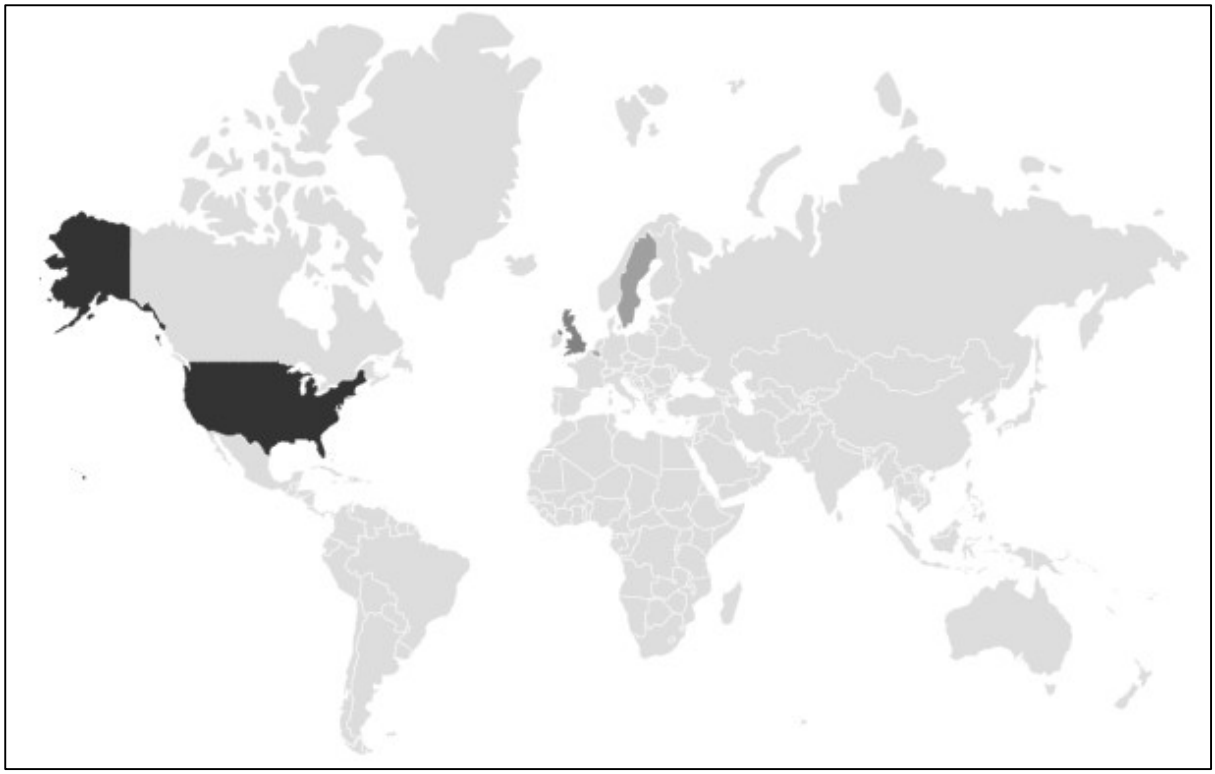
"I'm studying a diploma in education and for my final project I'm comparing approaches to learning to read. My two main questions are, 'When can children who are taught to read at a later age (or not at all) read fluently?' and 'How does the approach to teaching reading affect children's attitudes towards reading?'

A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix. The weblink to the survey is:

https://us10.list-manage.com/survey?u=4ea5355de18b783a5cea14873&id=8c823ca86d

I received 43 returned surveys. A few of these were unusable as they had only been partially completed.

The following chart and map provided by the Mailchimp server shows the location of my survey respondents:



(Mailchimp)

My survey revealed that, on average, children whose parents stated that the majority of their educational provision was home education or alternative education (including attending Waldorf settings) **received higher scores in every area compared to children attending mainstream settings**. The areas in which this was the case are 'reading age', age of reading fluency, enjoyment of reading and self-esteem.

For the questions requiring children's responses, the children could choose from a list of five 'emoji' faces ranging from very sad to very happy. When very sad faces were chosen, this equated to a score of 1, and very happy faces received a score of 5. These scores formed the basis of the average scored listed below out of 5.

The results are broken down as follows:

Reading age

- Out of 10 mainstream-schooled children currently aged 5-14, the average reading age according to the Burt Reading Age Test is 1 year 3 months above average.

- Out of 27 alternatively-educated children currently aged 3-14, the average reading age is 1 year 4 months above average.

Age of reading fluency

- Out of 7 mainstream-schooled children who are fluent readers, the average age of attaining fluent reading was 7.
- Out of 15 alternatively-educated children who are fluent readers, the average age of attaining fluent reading was 6.

Enjoyment of reading

- Out of 12 mainstream-schooled children, the average enjoyment level (Q6-10) of reading/books was 3.9 out of 5, and these children generally preferred playing to reading.
- Out of 31 alternatively-educated children, the average enjoyment level of reading/books was 4.2 out of 5, and these children generally preferred reading to playing.

Attitude towards self as a reader

- Out of 12 mainstream-schooled children, the positivity of their attitude towards themselves as a reader was 4.0 out of 5.
- Out of 31 alternatively-educated children, the positivity of their attitude towards themselves as a reader was 4.1 out of 5.

Capacity of choice to read

- Out of 12 mainstream-schooled children, the average score that children gave when asked if the choice to read without being forced was theirs (Q13) was 3.9 out of 5.
- Out of 31 alternatively-educated children, the average score that children gave when asked if the choice to read without being forced was theirs was 4.4 out of 5.

Reading lessons

- Out of 12 mainstream-schooled children, 17% were certain that they currently have reading lessons. 83% believed that a teacher had helped them to learn to read, 92% believed that a parent had helped them to learn to read, and 33% believed that they had taught themselves to read.

- Out of 31 alternatively-educated children, 26% were certain that they currently have reading lessons. 23% believed that a teacher had helped them to learn to read, 74% believed that a parent had helped them to learn to read, and 74% believed that they had taught themselves to read.

This chart summarises these results:

	Mainstream-schooled	**Alternatively-educated**
Average reading age	1y 3m above average	1y 4m above average
Age of reading fluency	Age 7	Age 6
Enjoyment of reading	3.9 out of 5	4.2 out of 5
Attitude towards self as a reader	4.0 out of 5	4.1 out of 5
Capacity of choice to read	3.9 out of 5	4.4 out of 5
Main sources of learning to read	Parents, then teachers	Parents and self equally

My results are comparable to those of existing studies which conclude that children who are taught to read in mainstream settings (and therefore from an earlier age) eventually enjoy reading less, and read as well as or even less well compared to their alternatively-educated peers. The children in my results (of all educational backgrounds) attain reading fluency at an earlier age than those stated in other surveys. This could be because parents may be more willing to participate in a survey regarding their child's reading ability if they know their child is a successful reader.

In terms of the open question towards parents, here are a few notable responses (unedited):

Parent 1:

"Eva taught herself to read age 2. She was reading simple books like Dr Seuss at that age and Harry Potter age 4. She learnt by listening to me read a lot and she liked to follow the words as i read. I never suggested she do this she simply did it.

At school she was forced (her word) to learn phonics in spite of already being a free reader. It turned all her enjoyment into a task to be completed under the eye of the adult.

She wouldn't have wanted to be separated out either as this would have alienated her from the other children.

I believe that children learn to read when they are ready, which is taught when they feel an intrinsic motivation. Given that reading is such a huge part of our culture (even Minecraft addicts benefit from reading) it seems inevitable that children will be motivated to learn at some point. It seems to me that they each learn differently and so is better to follow the child and adapt the approach to their lead or needs. It also seems fruitless and damaging to force the child to read when they are not ready. Had i been trying to teach a 2 yr old to read that would seem ludicrous... yet clearly she was ready. It seems equally ludicrous to me that my son was required to learn at 4 when he had shown absolutely no interest. He still age 10 will never pick up a book and read despite being a free reader. Clearly this could be a personality preference however i feel that the pressure he was under at school turned him away from anything to do with reading or writing to the extent that he still would choose not to do these activities and feels very damaged by his experience at school."

Parent 2:

"I like early phonics teaching in YR through play, EYFS etc but wish this approach continued through Y1 and Y2. I think that children are pushed to read a bit too early and dislike the y1 phonics testing. I have noticed within some mainstream schools that that I have worked in that introducing book quizzes and more independence around reading books has helped with children's interests but feel that some reading lessons are too prescriptive and structured."

Parent 3:

"My child learnt to read mostly on their own, with some familiarisation by us parents. We have always read to our children and listened to audio books. My child is an advanced reader."

Parent 4:

"I was lucky that Zoe's nursery was full of the children of scientists (workplace nursery) so the start she got with reading and language in general was excellent just because

she was surrounded by the children of parents with a higher than average educational level. She is also exposed to a wide vocabulary at home and a love of words has certainly passed through the generations. That may explain why her Burt Reading test age comes out quite high, she was able to figure out some of the words as she has heard a lot of them in conversation and always asks what a word means if she comes across one she doesn't know. Her last school reading test had her about a year ahead rather than two.

We tended to read factual books rather than stories once she moved past picture books as they just engaged her more. We would read a section then end up having a 10 minute conversation about what we'd read (just because she was so curious) before carrying on with the page. It was a real effort to get her to read school books for a long time as she was not interested in the stories or subjects they covered. So while school gave her the tools to physically read, I believe the enjoyment of reading came from home.

She still does not enjoy reading some of the curriculum reading books that are sent home and I have to persuade her to read them, but if it is a subject she is interested in she'll read the whole book in one sitting (currently reading Emerald level). I think finding the right material for each child to read is key to allowing them to learn the skill they need and to find enjoyment in reading.

Note: Covid interrupted her normal schooling, lockdown occurred in year 2. Zoe continued to attend school (and did the same on line lessons as the rest of her class but in the school building rather than at home) as I was a key worker but no reading books were available. I increased the amount we read together during that time to ensure she continued to progress."

Parent 5:

"I am surprised to discover that by age 10 she still isn't Reading given her thirst for knowledge. She listens to audio books for hours a day and has an incredible vocabulary.

One of her main issues is a short term memory issue - by the time she has sounded out a part of the word she can no longer remember the part before. This has not changed at all with age. We try to encourage practice but do not enforce.

Any break in reading and she drops ability greatly.

As of this week we have taken her to see a Cranial Osteopath as I feel there is a blockage preventing this.

One day after seeing the cranial osteopath she is reading more fluently than before. I feel there is a link between the slight adjustments she had done and her ability to read. Today she recognised a new word the second time she came across it which has never happened before in 6yrs.

In retrospect I wouldn't have bothered to try teaching her at 4, I was just following school policy as the older 2 were at school."

Parent 6:

"There are multiple factors that imapact reading ability and attitude.

Probably the biggest influence on reading and lots of other things is the people: parents, peers, teachers, online influencers.

A very good reader ahead of typical for year thanks to good teachers at school and encouragement at home up to age of 9.

Trauma of violence at home plus move to a school where more violence and trauma experienced turned a good reader into a 100% refuser. No books read for over a year.

No longer at school. Now home based.

Is mostly home alone due to working full time, so limted opportunity to help.

Slowly rediscovering reading but lack of books that Mc finds interesting and few books without trauma triggers.

VR and other tech media take up most of MC attention. finds books less engaging.

Recent progress made with help. 2 books read in 8 months."

Parent 7:

"Charlie learned to read in a state school from reception age. He did not enjoy the process and neither did we, his parents.

Since leaving school he's been happy to listen to audio books but avoids reading unless he has to and never reads for pleasure. It feels as though he lost the love of reading through being forced to do it when he wasn't ready."

Parent 8:

"Harry had no real interest in learning to read until he was around 7. Initially when learning (via phonics method) he found it very frustrating and was adamant he couldn't read. We dropped it for about six months then noticed he was reading things in public. He became interested in learning then and within maybe 6 more months of dipping in and out of learn to read books he was reading above his age level. He now devours books and audiobooks. His comprehension and vocabulary are outstanding. People often comment that he speaks like a Victorian gentleman."

Parent 9:

"My daughter was left to her own devices with regards to reading. I would encourage and answer her questions about letters, sounding out, etc. She was frustrated around age 6 about not being able to read chapter books so she very quickly learnt to read which took approximately 6 months. She has continued to improve steadily and now reads daily for fun."

Parent 10:

"I have 4 children who are all at different reading ability which is directly related to how much they enjoy reading. This is my eldest child and we tried to "force" him to read at 5.5 yrs old and it was distressing for him. We tried again at 6.5 yrs which was again distressing for him. We decided to leave him to it and he chose to start reading on his own at 8.5 to 9 yrs old. This is in stark contrast to my daughter who was left entirely to her own devices."

Parent 11:

"Allowing a child to be developmentally ready before you begin teaching reading is such a gift. Waldorf is such a wonderful approach because the letters are taught using images from fairy tales. My son has always loved looking at books & being read to but now at 7 he's so proud of being able to read simple books to himself. And I can't believe how many sight words he's picked up on his own outside of our phonics instruction."

Parent 12:

"I think teaching children to read is a waste of time and frustrates the child and turns them off to reading.

Instead, model reading; read to the child often; spark their curiosity; and go to the library to answer their questions. This gives them the unspoken message that everything you ever wanted to know comes from books, and the way to access that is by reading.

This ensures that the child will on their own try to decode reading as soon as their brain is able. When they start, reading happens almost overnight, with no tears, and perfect reading comprehension."

Parent 13:

"As an ex teacher, I have been amazed at how naturally both my children have learnt to read. We have always read to them, they have listened to stories, they have books around them and we visit the library. Both have learnt to read naturally, without forced stages/only being allowed to read certain books, and both their reading ages are well above their actual ages. It has been eye opening for me!"

Parent 14:

"The pressure to learn to read straight away at 4/5 is quite off putting. A slower pace allows for more time and enjoyment in being read to and discovering the type of books you like before the expectation of having to read to yourself. Picking up the beginnings of reading naturally makes for a easier transition into independent reading in my opinion even if that's 'later'. I also think taking the pressure off having to perform reading tasks allows for a much better comprehension of all sorts of texts. Being free to absorb and emerse yourself in spoken language is more enriching than being able to read a simple levelled book but not enjoy or understand it."

Parent 15:

"As a primary school teacher myself, I believe parents should be better educated as to how to support their child with prereading skills. Many believe their child should learn the letter sounds and are keen to get them reading before school age when really they should be developing key foundation skills such as oral blending and segmenting and playing with rhyme. The school uses twinkl and has a very slow but steady approach to developing reading. Knowing this, I was keen for my youngest to not learn sounds before school but instead have a strong base upon which knowledge has been developed and now she is flying."

Parent 16:

"I feel quite passionately that although the above may reflect that my son learnt to read because of school. He a tally only attended a mainstream setting for 3 no this at age 6 before I deregistered him. During that time at school he learnt yo read very quickly having not attended reception year and missing regular introductions of phonics. He started yr 1 in September and could read fairly fluently age appebooks by Christmas. From then he was home educated until the following September during which time I allowed him to be completely child led with reading. He flourished and loved it choosing to read every day for at least an hour at bed time.

He returned to school for Yr 2 on a flexi basis in September. Being told he has to read certain books for at least 5 mins per day everyday and record in his reading record stripped the joy out of reading. Whilst I understand that some children aren't perhaps as interested in being this self directed, for him, the methods they use at school for 'encouraging' reading, writing and learning as a whole has been wholly detrimental to the natural enjoyment of learning (most noticeably reading). I opt to completely disregard the reading options sent home and my children go to bed and read read independently everyday and love reading.

Hope this is helpful."

Myself as a parent and teacher:

When I had my first child, the teacher in me was excited about all the teaching possibilities this would afford me. I was looking forward to teaching my daughter to read. However, following the Waldorf ideology, I was aware that I ought to be patient before this began, and simply enjoyed books with my daughter on a daily basis, occasionally pointing out words or letters and explaining what they said, being careful not to 'test' her too much on what I had told her. We also enjoyed looking at alphabet books together, and on her request, I explained the effect and purpose of a few punctuation marks. She always appeared intelligent and inquisitive, ever since she was a baby.

When my daughter was exactly 4½, she was given an Usborne set of 50 progressive reading books for Christmas. At this point she knew the sound that each individual letter of the alphabet made, and we had enjoyed oral language such as playing with rhymes and making up songs, and orally segmenting and blending words. The Usborne books were surprisingly engaging for a graded reading set of books, and written in rhyming lines. The range included retellings of traditional tales as well as more contemporary stories. They began by having the majority of the text intended to be

read by an adult, with a few words and phrases read by the child. This gradually transitioned to text for the child only to read. At the end of each story there were a few comprehension-based puzzles which my daughter also enjoyed and insisted on completing before we could put the book away.

I had expected that my daughter would take a couple of weeks to learn the new content introduced in each book (not that I wanted her to learn it at that age – however, she was always obsessed with books and wanting to know what things said, so reading these books was always completely led by her). To my surprise, she was getting through one book a day and retaining the information, so she went from only being able to read individual letters to fluently reading entire books containing the full complement of phonics sounds (and some non-decodable words) within the space of about 6 weeks. We are now 6 months on, and she is a fluent reader, reading with full, appropriate expression and fully understanding the text. Aged only 4 years 11 months, she has a reading age of 8 years 10 months according to the Burt Reading Age Test.

My son is aged 3¼ and is also showing signs of becoming an early reader. Being the second child, he benefits from slightly less parental time and attention compared to his older sister at the same age. He loves books but not with the same obsession as her. He adores playing with language, making up words, rhymes and songs, and pointing out similar vowel sounds (assonance) between sets of words. When I am tutoring, he often chooses to join me for lessons despite them being aimed at older pupils, and will pick up on particular phonics that I am teaching, taking great delight in spotting them in print later on and writing them with his bath crayons, or finding sticks shaped as particular letters. The other day he was playing with some letter tiles at Free Spirits and spontaneously (and knowingly) arranged them to spell 'dog'.

Again, I am not formally teaching my son to read or write in any way, I am simply reading to him for pleasure on a daily basis, modelling natural reading in my environment, and enjoying playing together with oral language. It seems to be doing the trick.

4 The relevance of my project in a personal and professional context

I chose this theme for my project in order to produce concrete evidence to back up assertions that children's eventual academic attainment is not hindered (and may actually be helped) by delaying formal education (with a specific focus on reading).

This would enable teachers following the Waldorf or unschooling pedagogies to feel more assured in choosing their alternative educational approach.

A year and a half ago I opened my own business, Free Spirits Education & Childcare. We currently cater for around 20 children aged 3-7 who all attend part time (on average 2 days per week). The target market for my business is home educating parents who favour an alternative, holistic approach to their child's education, such as that of the Waldorf philosophy, which is my leading pedagogical influence. Parents considering my setting are often concerned that by not sending their child to a traditional school, they might be doing them an educational disservice and that their child will forever be 'behind' their peers.

I would like to share the information, insights and implications from my research with potential and existing clients in order to provide reassurance that my approach will not academically disadvantage their child, and may even benefit them in the long term.

Due to my personal bias towards Waldorf education, and the fact that I have chosen to home educate my two children during their early childhood years, there is potential for there to be weaknesses in my research. On a personal and business management level, I would like the results to work in my favour and show a positive impact of delayed formal teaching. This bias might consciously or subconsciously affect the information I choose to utilise and therefore affect my conclusions.

Due to time constraints and potential lack of cooperating families, my sample size might be too small from which to draw useful broad conclusions. I have endeavoured to monitor and offset these weaknesses where possible.

There are many other factors that impact children's academic attainment, such as subjectivity of data, participants' honesty, parental ability and involvement, and other family and personal circumstances surrounding the child. This might make it difficult to isolate educational approach as the key influential factor in children's acquisition of reading skills. The impact of other factors on learning to read could also usefully be studied in the future, such as: socio-economic background, cultural and religious factors, type of educational establishment attended, SEN (including dyslexia, ADHD and EAL), disability (such as blind/deaf students), use of technological aids (TV, websites, apps), the effects of Covid-19, and the four temperaments.

5 Conclusions

I now return to my original question of this research project:

What are the effects on children of beginning formal reading lessons later in life, such as in Waldorf education, compared to in UK mainstream education?

I was surprised and delighted to find so much information already published (and from well-respected authors and establishments) championing the later formal teaching of reading than is current practice in the UK mainstream education system. The research findings (including my own) have positive implications for me personally as a Waldorf-inspired parent and teacher, and as a business owner advocating against sending children to mainstream schools during Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 (and signing them up to attend Free Spirits Education & Childcare instead).

I have summarised key facts from various findings in the tables below:

When do children 'catch up' with peers if taught to read later?

Study	**Catch-up age of readers taught aged 6 or later**	**Later readers' ability compared to peers'**
The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2007	(Before age 15)	Comparable
The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009	(Before age 15)	Comparable
Suggate, S. 2009a	Age 9	Comparable
Suggate, S. 2009a	Age 10	Comparable
Suggate et al 2013	Age 10	Exceeded
Allanson and Teensma 2018	Age 8	Comparable
Darling-Hammond et al 1992	Age 9	Exceeded
Marcon, R. 2002	Age 8	Exceeded
Goldbeck, S. 2001	Age 9	Exceeded
Schweinhart & Weikart 1997	Age 9	Exceeded
Gesell, A. 1925	Age 9	Comparable
Alexander, R. 2009	-	Exceeded
Average	**Age 9**	

At what age are unschooled children able to read fluently?

Study	**Age of reading acquisition for unschooled children**
Gray, P. 2010	6
Isaac, J. 2016	8
Isaac, J. 2018	8
Riley, G. 2018	6
Johnson, S. 2017	8
Gammon, G. 2023	6
Average	**Age 7**

I can now draw the following ten conclusions:

CONCLUSION 1: Students who learn to read later (such as by attending Waldorf schools) catch up, then perform as well as or better than their earlier educated peers.

CONCLUSION 2: Children attending play-based Kindergartens perform better academically in later years than children attending more academic Kindergartens.

CONCLUSION 3: Children are capable of learning to read with no formal schooling.

CONCLUSION 4: Children will be ready to learn to read at different ages throughout their childhood, and this difference should be respected.

CONCLUSION 5: Parental influence has a great effect on children's reading acquisition.

CONCLUSION 6: Teaching approach affects children's enjoyment of and therefore progression in reading.

CONCLUSION 7: My survey revealed that, on average, children whose parents stated that the majority of their educational provision was alternative education (including attending Waldorf settings) received higher scores in every area from reading ability to attitude compared to children attending mainstream settings.

CONCLUSION 8: Compared to children who have been educated via mainstream schooling, alternatively educated children from my survey enjoy reading more, have a more positive attitude towards themselves as a reader, feel they have a greater capacity of choice to read, value themselves highly as the key 'teacher' of their acquired reading skills (alongside their parents), and have a higher average reading age.

CONCLUSION 9: The age at which unschooled children are able to read reasonably fluently is on average 7 years old.

CONCLUSION 10: Children who begin formal reading lessons aged 6 – as opposed to aged 4 – 'catch up' with the reading ability of their peers by the time they are on average aged 9, at which point their reading skills become just as good if not better.

Given that there is such a wealth of research proving the benefits of a more relaxed approach to the teaching of reading, why is this not reflected in the expectations of UK mainstream schools? I believe that it is down to the Government's impatience, accountability, fear, competitiveness, lack of trust in teachers, and desire to be proactive. The attitude of our education system as a whole is one of stress, which is one of the leading causes of our nation's teacher retention issues. Teachers are expected to demonstrate challenging levels of achievement in their students proven by test results, losing sight of the whole purpose of education and the nature of child development.

That is not to say that we shouldn't be ambitious for our children, but we should go about helping them to make progress with more wisdom and compassion. Opposed to an excess of testing, my first teacher mentor often used to say, "You don't fatten a pig by weighing it." We need to take away the weighing scales and trust that progress will be made by providing an educationally nutritious environment from which children may feed as and when they are hungry for it, developing and unfolding at their own natural rate. After all, education is a journey, not a race.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: My survey

How and when do children learn to read?

Thank you so much for completing my survey.

As part of my dissertation research for my Alternative Education Diploma, I'm comparing different ways that children learn to read, and how different approaches affect children's enjoyment of reading. Whether your child can read yet or not, your responses in this survey will be truly valuable.

My two main questions are, 'When can children who are taught to read at a later age (or not 'taught' at all) read fluently?' and 'How does the approach to teaching reading affect children's attitudes towards reading?' I would love to have as many parents as possible complete my survey with their child (aged 3-18). If you are unable to complete all sections, **even partial responses will be helpful.** If you have several children, please complete one survey per child.

I have worked in education in a variety of roles and settings (including as a school class teacher, private tutor, SEN teacher and home education centre manager). Please provide me with your email address if you would like to be sent the results of my research, or if you would like any further information, advice or resources.

The survey starts with a quick word reading test for your child and questions on how they feel about different aspects of reading.

Please open the Burt Reading Age Test in a new window and write down here your child's current reading age in years and months:

Parent's Name (Please use a nickname if you wish to remain anonymous.)

Child's Name (Please use a nickname if you wish them to remain anonymous.)

Email address (Only necessary if you wish to be sent the research results.)

How old is your child in years and completed months?

How does your child feel about reading? Please ask your child or complete the following questions on their behalf.

Do you like reading/looking at books?

How regularly do you like to read?

Do you like listening to stories being read to you/audiobooks?

Do you choose to look at books in your spare time?

Do you enjoy getting books from the library/shop?

Do you like reading more than playing?

Do you feel ok about trying to read difficult books?

Do you always have a choice about whether or not to read, without anyone forcing you?

Do you like trying to get better at reading?

Do you have reading lessons?

Have you enjoyed learning to read?

Has a teacher helped you learn to read?

Has a parent helped you learn to read?

Have other children (e.g. friends, siblings) helped you learn to read?

Have you taught yourself to read?

Does reading help you to learn things?

Is reading easy?

Can you read most things that you want to be able to read?

Are you good at reading?

Do you think you will keep getting better at reading?

How has your child's reading progressed as they have got older?

The options are designed to be progressive, although I realise not all children will learn to read in this linear manner. Nevertheless, please choose one best fit option for each question showing the furthest level you feel your child reached at each age.

Notes:

1. 'Read sounds' means the child can say the sound the letter makes, not give the capital letter names, e.g. 'e' would be the 'eh' sound, not the 'eee' name.

2. CVC words are 3-letter words with a consonant, vowel, then consonant.

3. A digraph is when 2 letters together make 1 sound; a trigraph is when 3 letters together make 1 sound.

4. Non-phonetically decodable words are words that don't sound as they would if sounded out letter by letter.

How would you describe your child's reading ability during the year after they turned 3?

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)

How would you describe your child's reading ability during the year after they turned 4?

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 4

How would you describe your child's reading ability during the year after they turned 5?

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 5

How would you describe your child's reading ability during the year after they turned 6?

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 6

How would you describe your child's reading ability when they were aged 7 and 8?

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 7

How would you describe your child's reading ability when they were aged 9 and 10?

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 9

How would you describe your child's reading ability when they were aged 11+

- ○ Non-reader
- ○ Can read sounds for roughly half the letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read sounds for all letters of the alphabet
- ○ Can read CVC words (e.g. cat, pen, mop, sun)
- ○ Can read single letters, CVC words, and some digraphs/trigraphs (e.g. th, sh, ph, dge, tch, igh)
- ○ Can read typical 'age appropriate' books
- ○ Fluent reader: can read most types of text, including text aimed at adults (e.g. newspaper)
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 11

Which types of education did your child receive at each age?

Here I hope to make the link between children's educational provision and their reading ability and attitudes.

Many children will have experienced multiple educational approaches at any one time, however, to simplify my results, please choose the option that your child attended for the **highest number of hours during a typical weekday.**

Which type(s) of education did your child receive the year after they turned 3?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting

Which type(s) of education did your child receive the year after they turned 4?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 4

Which type(s) of education did your child receive the year after they turned 5?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 5

Which type(s) of education did your child receive the year after they turned 6?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 6

Which type(s) of education did your child receive when they were aged 7 and 8?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 7

Which type(s) of education did your child receive when they were aged 9 and 10?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 9

Which type(s) of education did your child receive when they were aged 11+?

- ○ Home educated: unstructured/child-led
- ○ Home educated: semi-structured
- ○ Home educated: structured/adult-led
- ○ Home educated: philosophy-led (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Charlotte Mason)
- ○ Attended a philosophy-led setting (e.g. Montessori nursery, Waldorf school)
- ○ Attended a mainstream private school/nursery
- ○ Attended a mainstream state school/nursery
- ○ Attended a Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting
- ○ N/A: My child is not yet 11

What are your thoughts on how the educational setting, teaching approach and age at which children are taught to read affects their reading ability and attitudes to reading?

Submit

7.2 Appendix B: Burt (1974) Reading Age Test

Burt Reading Test Instructions

- Be casual and relaxed in introducing the test, which you might want to refer to as a 'reading activity'.
- If possible, use a print-out of the reading words rather than reading on-screen.
- Cover up the harder words and reveal each group of 10 words in turn.
- Ask your child to read out each word in order, left to right.
- Keep a private note of how many words were read correctly.
- Give encouragement, but do not reveal which words were read correctly.
- Do not deliberately pre-teach any of the words.
- Do not help your child in any way.
- Mistakes that are instantly self-corrected are counted as correct reading.
- Correct guesses are counted as correct reading.
- Do not read the incorrectly read words to the child; instead, just suggest moving on to the next word.
- Stop once 10 errors have been made in a row, or if the test makes the child feel uncomfortable.
- Use the results chart to convert the number of words read correctly to the 'reading age' of the child in years and months.
- 'Reading age' means the age of children who got the same score in a sample of 2,200 children aged 4-12.
- The test is 95% accurate in determining the 'reading age' of a child within 6 months' accuracy.
- Leave a gap of 6 months before attempting the test again.

to is up he at
for my sun one of

big some his or an
went boys that girl water

just day wet pot things
no told love now sad

nurse carry quickly village scramble
journey terror return twisted shelves

beware explorer known projecting tongue
serious domineer obtain belief luncheon

emergency events steadiness nourishment fringe
formulate scarcely universal commenced overwhelmed

circumstances destiny urge labourers exhausted
trudging refrigerator melodrama encyclopaedia apprehend

motionless ultimate atmosphere reputation binocular
economy theory humanity philosopher contemptuous

autobiography excessively champagne terminology perambulating
efficiency unique perpetual mercenary glycerine

influential atrocious fatigue exorbitant physician
microscopical contagion renown hypocritical fallacious

phlegmatic melancholy palpable eccentricity constitutionally
alienate phthisis poignancy ingratiating subtlety

Results Chart

Score	Reading age: years and months
2	5.3
3	5.3
4	5.4
5	5.5
6	5.5
7	5.6
8	5.6
9	5.7
10	5.7
11	5.8
12	5.9
13	5.9
14	5.10
15	5.11
16	5.11
17	6
18	6.1
19	6.1
20	6.2
21	6.2
22	6.3
23	6.4
24	6.5
25	6.5
26	6.6
27	6.7
28	6.8
29	6.9

Score	Reading age: years and months
30	6.9
31	6.9
32	6.10
33	6.11
34	7
35	7.1
36	7.2
37	7.3
38	7.4
39	7.5
40	7.5
41	7.6
42	7.7
43	7.8
44	7.9
45	7.10
46	7.11
47	8
48	8.1
49	8.2
50	8.3
51	8.4
52	8.5
53	8.6
54	8.7
55	8.8
56	8.9
57	8.10

Score	Reading age: years and months
58	9
59	9.1
60	9.2
61	9.3
62	9.4
63	9.6
64	9.7
65	9.8
66	9.9
67	9.10
68	10
69	10.1
70	10.2
71	10.3
72	10.4
73	10.6
74	10.7
75	10.9
76	10.10
77	10.11
78	11
79	11.1
80	11.3
81	11.4
82	11.5
83	11.6
84	11.7
85	11.9

Score	Reading age: years and months
86	11.10
87	11.11
88	12
89	12.1
90	12.3
91	12.4
92	12.5
93	12.6
94	12.7
95	12.9
96	12.10
97	12.11
98	13
99	13.1
100	13.3
101	13.4
102	13.6
103	13.6
104	13.7
105	13.9
106	13.10
107	13.11
108	14
109	14.1
110	14.3