

Not enough bedtime stories for children

Only 13 per cent of parents read their child a bedtime story every night of the week, a survey has found.

The study, conducted by Littlewoods, investigated the shared reading habits of 2,000 mothers with children aged nought to seven. Only 64 per cent of respondents said they read their children bedtime stories.

The survey also found that in previous generations, parents read bedtime stories more regularly than their modern counterparts. Only 13 per cent of respondents read a story to their children every night, but 75 per cent recall being read to every night when they were kids. On average, today's parents read bedtime stories to their children three times a week.

The findings are all the more surprising since 87 per cent of those polled believe that bedtime reading is vital to children's education and development.

The poll discovered that nine per cent feel 'too stressed' to read bedtime stories while 13 per cent admit that they don't have enough time.

One of the major challenges appears to lie in getting children to pay attention to books. Nearly half of those surveyed said their children found television, computer games and other toys more diverting, while four per cent said their children do not own any books at all.

Meanwhile, in a separate survey by Oxford University



Press, some 44 per cent of 1,000 parents of six to 11-year-olds polled said they rarely or never read with their child after their seventh birthday.

The report draws on research from the National Literacy Trust which suggested that young people who read outside class are 13 times more likely to read above the expected level for their age. It also follows a study from London's Institute of Education which suggested that children who read for pleasure are likely to be better at both maths and English than those who rarely read in their free time.

Clare Bolton of the National Literacy Trust said: 'We know from our work with parents and children in communities across the UK that fostering a love of reading at home is crucial to children's future happiness and success.'

'Parents are really important reading role models and our research shows that children's attitudes to reading improve the more they see their parents read, so we'd encourage all parents to make time for enjoying a good book themselves.'

League table plans could marginalise the arts

From 2014, schools where students take dance and drama at GCSE will see them listed as one qualification in league tables, which risks marginalising performing arts, say headteachers.

Duncan Baldwin of the headteachers' union ASCL, said: 'Some schools may be tempted to say, "If we can't count both, we won't let pupils do both."' He added that the changes would also affect some other pairs of related subjects such as art and photography or music and music technology – which will no longer count as separate subjects for performance tables from next summer.

The government says it has taken this step because the subject matter is too similar in subjects like dance and drama. The principle behind 'discounting' very similar qualifications is to prevent some schools manipulating the performance tables by entering pupils for the same subject twice and having both grades count.

Mr Baldwin argued that some of the pairs of subjects which

will now cancel each other out are definitely distinct disciplines, and this is a debate about where you draw the line.

He added that the changes are concentrated disproportionately on arts subjects rather than on the humanities or sciences: 'History and ancient history will continue to be counted as separate subjects and there is maths in science subjects.'

'The question is – at what point is there sufficient overlap for them to be ruled effectively the same?'

In a statement, the DfE said: 'We use discounting to discourage schools from entering their pupils into a number of similar qualifications. As there are overlapping elements in the syllabuses for dance and drama and for art and photography, they will discount each other in the 2014 performance tables.'

The union has asked the DfE to reconsider some of its decisions, particularly on dance and drama, and is gathering evidence from subject specialists.

Making music improves behaviour

Making music can improve a young child's behaviour and problem-solving skills, recent research has revealed.

The study, conducted by the University of West London, built on existing research from 2012, which found that encouraging a young child to make music can significantly improve their pro-social behaviour (voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another), and aimed to investigate not only the effects of music making (singing or playing an instrument) on pro-sociality, but also its effects on problem-solving and whether there was a difference between boys and girls.

The investigators studied the pro-sociality, cooperation and problem-solving abilities of 24 girls and 24 boys, all aged four. The children were randomly assigned to either a 'Music group' or a 'No Music' group. Children in the 'Music' group sang and played the percussion bullfrog, while children in the 'No Music' group listened to a story. Following this, the children played two games requiring them to solve problems, cooperate, and help each other.

Music improved the helpfulness of both boys and girls, with the children in the 'Music' group over thirty times more likely to help than those in the 'No Music' group. Making music was also shown to improve cooperation – all children in the 'Music' group were six times more likely to cooperate than those in the other group.

Girls were over twenty times more likely to help after making music than boys, investigators discovered. They were also more likely to cooperate after making music. However, boys in the 'Music' group were four times more likely to problem-solve than girls.

Rie Davies, one of the study's three authors, said: 'This study...highlights the need for schools and parents to understand the important role music making has in children's lives in terms of social bonding and helping behaviours.'

'Music making in class, particularly singing, may encourage pupils with learning differences and emotional difficulties to feel less alienated in the school environment.'

Teenagers' creative idea is going global

Three teenage pupils are about to launch a global project backed by the world's biggest online names which aims to inspire, create and teach the next generation of Zuckerbergs.

James Anderson, Ollie Bredemeyer and Kamran Malik have created Thinkspace – an organisation which combines real-world classrooms with an online resource and social network with the aim of teaching people as young as 11 to create apps, games, websites and even social networks.

The project will be launched internationally this week, and is being backed by some of the biggest names in the technology industry, including Google, Twitter, Wikipedia, Apple and Microsoft. Stephen Fry, comedian and presenter credited with sparking the UK's interest in Twitter, is also lending his support to the project, as is business tycoon, Sir Richard Branson.

The three behind the scheme are all students at Devonport High School for Boys in Plymouth.

James Anderson, 16, said: 'A Thinkspace is an area within a school where people as young as Year 7 can come to

learn about, get involved in and discuss how to create the apps of tomorrow.

'The areas will be unlike any classroom you have seen before, it will be more like walking into the headquarters of Google or Twitter.'

'As well as desks and chairs, there will be beanbags and giant television screens – we want a space that inspires and allows creativity.'

Devonport High School for Boys has ploughed £10,000 into creating the world's first Thinkspace, an area at the school completely converted into a creative environment to learn to code.

Ollie, 14, said: 'A Thinkspace could take as little as £500 to create. We are deliberately coming up with systems that will allow schools across the world to create areas like this with as little equipment, money and resources as possible.'

Stephen Fry said: 'Plenty of kids play with and use their smartphones or other devices but never think of looking "under the bonnet" or considering whether they actually have it in them to be a coder, designer or developer themselves.'

'James' idea can so simply be copied in all schools. It's the students themselves helping each other, teaching each other, learning from each other, so it doesn't have the taint of the class area or the national syllabus about it, though I'm sure it'll be very, very useful academically too.'

'It's one of the smartest, simplest yet potentially powerful ideas that I've encountered in 20 years of being asked to look at the Next Big Thing. The school should be really proud of James and his team.'