



Return on Investment

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Overview

1. Benefits of reading
2. However, it matters...
 - *What* readers are reading
 - *How* they are reading

1. Benefits

- a. Cognitive abilities
- b. Physical Health
- c. Mental health
- d. Emotional intelligence
- e. Morality

a. Cognitive abilities

- The Life Project: UK cohort study
- Overcoming socio-economic gap
- Parenting: a good learning environment
- Reading to children correlates with good school performance
- Leisure reading associated with better scores,
 - Irrespective of background and IQ
 - Better than parent with university degree

a. Cognitive abilities

- Critical Thinking
 - Curriculum utilizing the overlap between critical thinking skills and skills needed to understand literary texts (Koek et al. 2017)
 - Koek et al. (in prep):
 - Moments of insight connected to
 - disruptions in automatized consistency building
 - working on a new consistency

a. Cognitive abilities

- 'Need for Cognitive Closure':
 - The need for quick judgments and an aversion of ambiguity and confusion.
 - Sticking to first judgment, not interested in additional information,
- Reading either essays or stories (Djikic et al 2013)
 - Comparable in readability
- Reduction of Need for Cognitive Closure in the story condition.
 - Stories without schematic representations and flat characters. (cf. Van Peer, 1986)

b. Physical Health

- Longevity (Bavishi et al. 2016)
 - Representative US sample of N=3635
 - Controlled for age, sex, race, education, comorbidities, self-rated health, wealth, marital status, and depression
 - A 20% reduction in risk of mortality over 12 years for book readers as compared to non-book readers.
 - A 23 month survival advantage for book readers.

b. Physical Health

- Books significantly more protective than reading periodicals or newspapers.
- Causes?
 - Deep reading: “a slow, immersive process; this cognitive engagement occurs as the reader draws connections to other parts of the material, finds applications to the outside world, and asks questions about the content presented” (Bavishi et al. 2016, p. 44)

c. Mental Health

- Reading in prison
 - Self-report (e.g. Waxler 2008; Billington 2011; Curry et al. 2003)
 - Field experiments (e.g., Schutt, Deng, Stoehr 2011)
- Effects: improvement of life satisfaction, self-concept, life-style, reduced recidivism
- But: causality unclear

c. Mental Health

- Shared reading
- Groups: patients with chronic pain, dementia, or prisoners (Billington et al. 2014, Billington 2013).
- Effects:
 - Increased sense of purpose in life (Longden et al 2015)
 - Reduced pain
 - Well-being
 - Quality of life
 - Sense of achievement and self-worth
- But: small sample sizes, sometimes no control conditions

d. Emotional Intelligence

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Empathy

EQ: Self-awareness

- Some indications that reading literature stimulates self-reflection (Miall, 1995; Kuiken et al. 2004; review: Koopman & Hakemulder 2015)
- Some stories are for pleasure (hedonic motivation), others are for reflection on the meaning of life, the search for truth (eudaimonic motivations; Oliver & Raney 2011, 985).
 - Tragic stories, producing mixed feelings/being moved are more likely to initiate reflection (Bartsch et al. 2014)

EQ: Self-regulation

- More intentional concentration when reading books as compared to playing games (Tellegen et al. 2002).
- Frequent readers (9-17 y) know how to use the mood regulation effect of reading flexibly, and read more often in search for quiet and seclusion than infrequent readers (Van der Bolt 2000).
- Reading is a more effective way to reduce stress (heart rate/muscle tension) than music, a cup of tea, or a walk (Lewis, 2009)
 - Longer and complex texts require a longer attention span and control of impulses than hypertext reading (cf. Car 2010).

EQ: Empathy

- Overlap in activation of area's involved in theory of mind and processing stories (Mar 2004)
 - Some stories (literary) may be a better work-out than others (popular; Mulder et al. 2017)
- Established experimentally that reading literature enhances theory of mind (Kidd & Castano 2013)
- Several failed attempts to replicate (e.g., Samur, 2018)
 - Nevertheless, a meta-analysis shows that reading fiction has a stronger relation with socio-cognitive variables than non-fiction (Mumper & Gerrig 2016)

d. Emotional Intelligence

- Meta-analyses show that EQ predicts
 - Academic performance (Perera & DiGiacomo, 2013)
 - Job performance (O'Boyle et al. 2011)

e. Morality

- Observations in a 13-week course on Moral Leadership at Harvard Business School (Brokerhof et al. in prep)
- Participants: N=58, about 30 years old
- Each week a book
- Discussed from several perspectives

e. Morality

- Preliminary results
 - Moral leadership from abstract to concrete and personal
 - From rigid thinking to different perspectives and relativism
 - Two routes/locus of accountability:
 - Self
 - Other
 - Phase of complexity
 - Phase of integration

But it matters *what* we read

- Books (instead of periodicals)
- Tougher work-out for theory-of-mind
- Non-schematic representations (round characters)
- Fiction (e.g., for socio-economic abilities)
- Longer, complex texts (e.g. delay of gratification)
- Thought-provoiking stories

And it matters *how* we read

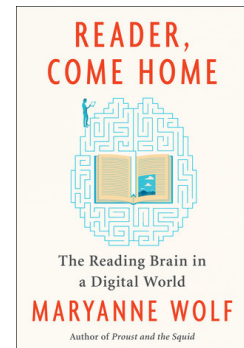
- Formal training
- Attentive reading
- Engagement (imagery, identification, resonance) so as to enhance
 - Simulation (embodied cognition)
 - Reflection
- Interaction with other readers

Conclusion

- Leisure reading and reading to children:
 - Overcoming socio-economic gaps
- Literary reading: Skills that any citizen, employee, manager can use
 - Enhanced critical thinking
 - Reduced need for cognitive closure
- Reading can be healthy
 - Interaction about reading may enhance well-being and sense of purpose
- Reading can enhance aspects of emotional intelligence
- Literature can stimulate moral reflection about leadership

Implications in present context

- Turning point in our culture
 - Skim reading as the new normal
 - Capacity to concentrate dwindles
 - Attention span declines (Baron 2014)
- Deep reading endangered
 - At cost of the life of contemplation
 - “time to think our own thought” and go beyond the wisdom of the other. (Wolf 2018)



Recommendations

- More good readers of good books
 - Stimulate engaged reading
 - Interaction about reading
- Train ability to switch reading modes
 - Especially deep reading training (“if you don’t use it, you lose it”)
- O yes, and more research of course

Thank you



For questions, comments, discussion, and ideas about collaboration:

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