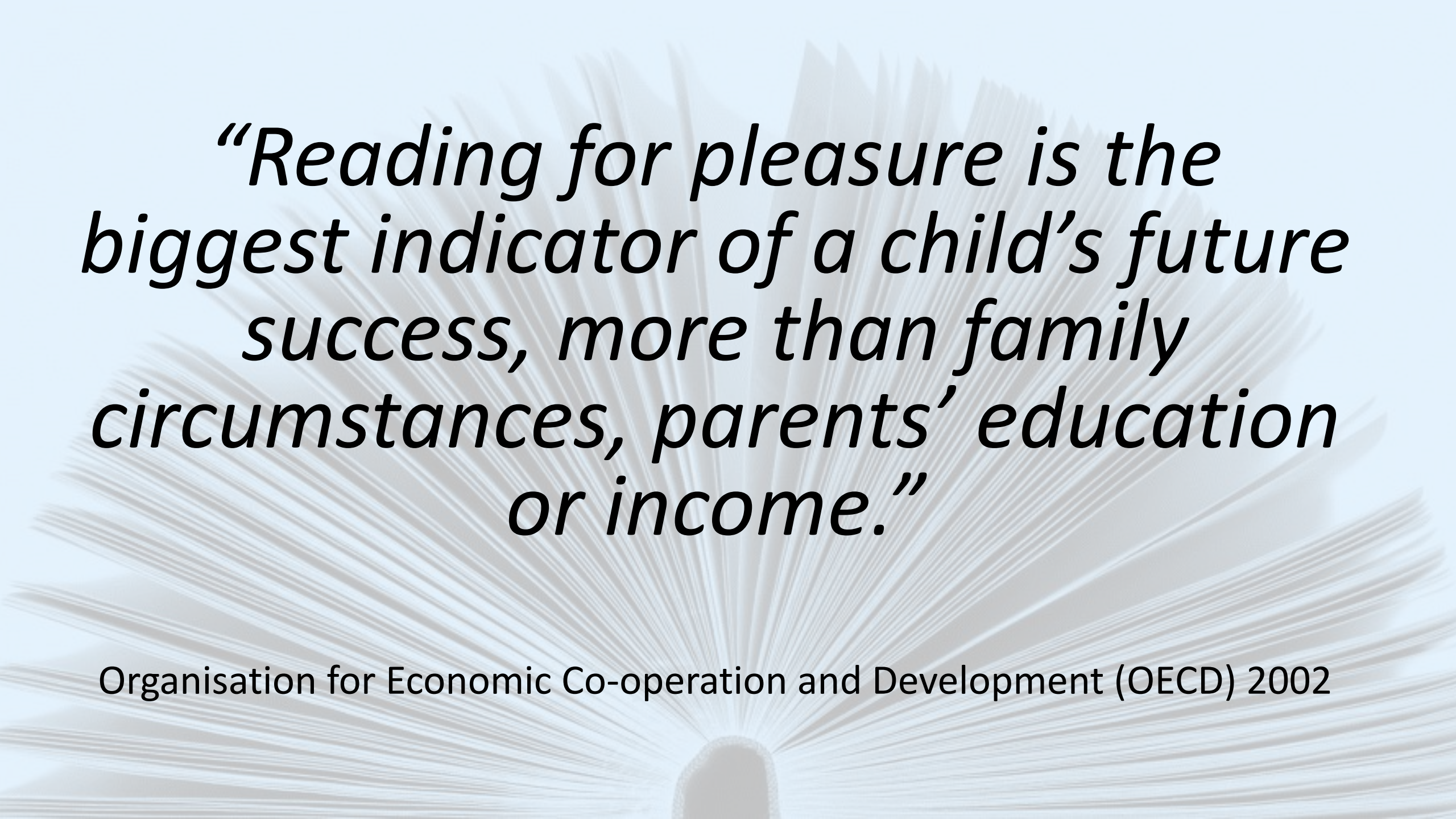




The Brain and Reading for Pleasure

**Mr Richard Carrier
Progress Tutor (Literacy)**

Adapted from 'Teenage Brains and Reading for Pleasure' by Nicola Morgan



“Reading for pleasure is the biggest indicator of a child’s future success, more than family circumstances, parents’ education or income.”

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2002

Why does it have to be for pleasure?

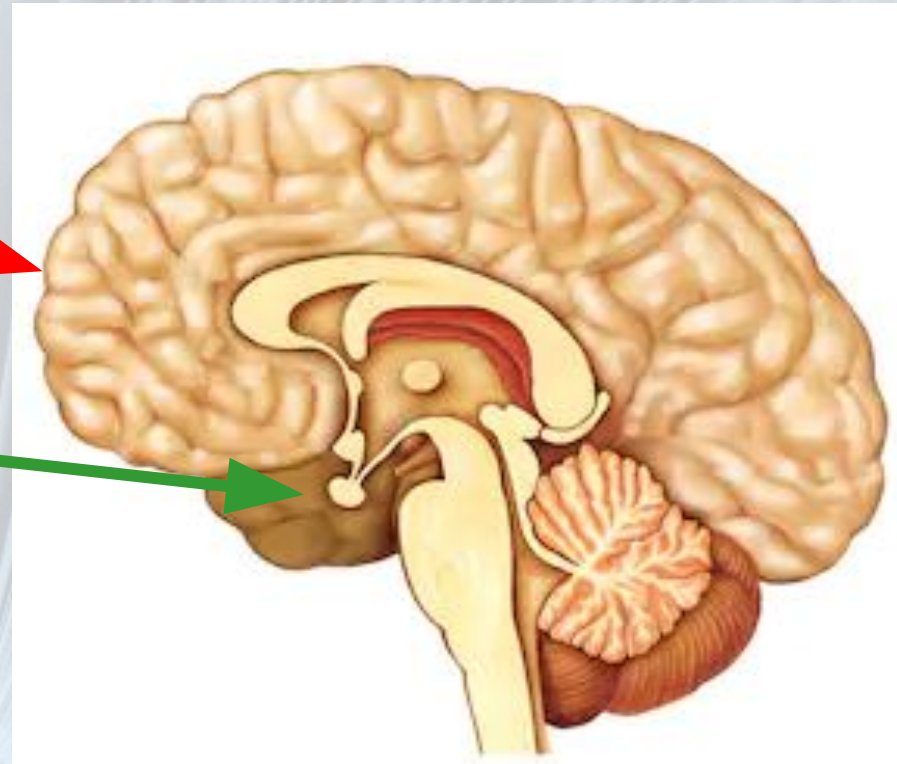
- To be an *expert*, myriad hours of practice is required.
- Saying “It’s good for you,” works poorly with children, especially if they are reluctant/struggling readers.
- It must be *for pleasure* or they won’t do it!

Understanding the Neuroscience

Prefrontal cortex develops last (mid-20s):

“control centre” – logic/reason, decision-making, impulse control, prediction

Limbic system, with amygdala – emotion, impulse, reward, reaction, instinct



Understanding Motivation

Both *can* work but
limbic system
motivations work
better and for longer
in most people. We
do what makes us
FEEL good!

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What motivates our **prefrontal cortex**?

- Reading uses (exercises) lots of brain areas
- Science shows that **daily** reading for pleasure:
 1. Improves knowledge and vocabulary
 2. Raises self-esteem and reduces anxiety
 3. Takes your mind off negative thoughts and worries
 4. Helps sleep
- Teenagers who read daily do better at school (on average)

What motivates our **limbic system**?

(Remember, this is about feelings, emotions, getting the benefits NOW)

Things we might enjoy about reading (or listening to a story):

- Feel any emotion you choose
- Laugh
- Read about amazing events/inspiring people
- Read about people like/different from you
- Go on adventures without being in danger
- Learn interesting facts and new words
- Become knowledgeable/expert
- Relax – have a break from your worries

Digital Vs. Print

1. Online:

- Mostly information/non-fiction
- Shorter texts; shallower reading
- Competition for attention:
 - on the screen
 - trying to multitask, occupying brain bandwidth
 - exhausting
- Can hinder sleep

Digital Vs. Print

2. Offline (e-book readers)

- Growing evidence implies that digital reading *slightly* impairs comprehension and recall
- Some may find digital reading harder to get fully 'engaged'.

For reading for pleasure, it doesn't matter what we read, as long as we're engaged.

What about those who really dislike books?

- Little, often and easy
- Read to them/with them or use audiobooks
- Narrative non-fiction
- Fact-based novels (eg. Historical fiction)
- Facts about/behind fiction
- Never undermine or judge their choice

Top Tips

1. Read yourself – show that you value that time
2. Give time, permission and space
3. *Discuss* the benefits you/they want from your/their reading
4. Don't judge- there's nothing wrong with 'comfort reading'
5. Limit (but don't ban) computer/smartphone/TV. Have whole family 'switch-off-screen' times.