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Snapshots issue 1: How engaged are Australian Year 4 students in their reading lessons?

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SNAPSHOTS

Global Assessment // Local Impact

AUGUST 2013



by Nicole Wernert

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This Snapshot draws
on data from the ACER
report, *Monitoring
Australian Year 4 student
achievement internationally:
TIMSS and PIRLS 2011*

How engaged are Australian Year 4 students in their reading lessons?

- ▶ Only one third of Australian Year 4 students are engaged in their reading lessons.
- ▶ Student attitudes to reading (confidence, motivation and enjoyment) are strongly related to engagement in reading lessons
- ▶ Understanding what the teacher expects and not becoming distracted in class have a significant relationship with reading achievement.

In order to learn, students need to have some level of engagement in their classroom activities. The Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011) investigated student engagement in reading lessons via a series of questions about students' experiences in their reading lessons. According to PIRLS, a third of Australian Year 4 students were engaged with reading lessons, whereas more than half were only somewhat engaged and more than a tenth were not engaged.

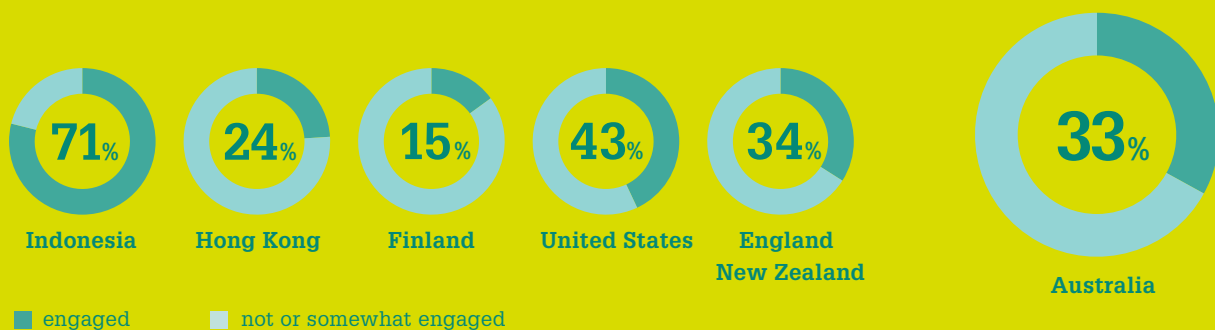


Percentage of Year 4 students engaged, somewhat engaged or not engaged in their reading lessons.

DID YOU KNOW?

The percentage of students engaged in their reading lessons varied widely across countries:

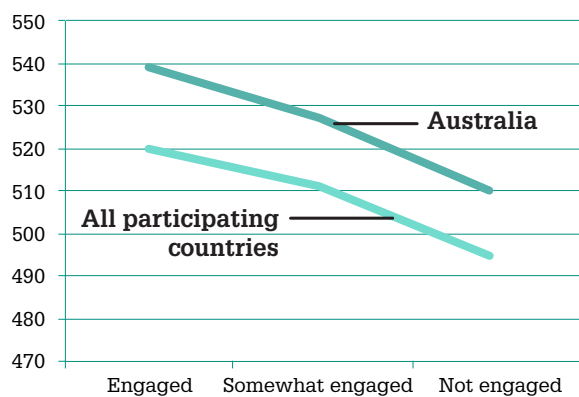
- Indonesia was the country with the highest percentage of engaged students – 71%.
- Hong Kong and Finland (two of the highest achieving countries in reading) had two of the lowest percentages of students who were engaged – 24% and 15% respectively (*however, it was still the more engaged students WITHIN these countries who did better on the PIRLS assessment*).
- The United States had 43% in the engaged category, close to the average of all participating countries (42%).
- New Zealand and England had percentages of engaged students similar to that of Australia – both 34%.



How is engagement related to achievement?

For all participating countries, there was a positive relationship between students' level of engagement during reading classes and higher average reading achievement.

Australian students who were engaged with reading scored significantly higher in reading than students who were somewhat engaged and both of these groups of students scored significantly higher than students who were not engaged.



Average reading achievement score by level of engagement in reading lessons

Are confidence, motivation and enjoyment of reading related to engagement?

Student attitudes to reading (confidence, motivation and enjoyment) are strongly related to engagement in reading lessons:

- Students confident with reading are more likely to be engaged in reading lessons (46% of confident students are engaged compared to 16% of students who aren't confident).
- Students motivated to read are less likely to be *not* engaged in reading lessons (5% of motivated students are not engaged compared to 54% of students who aren't motivated).
- Students who like reading are more likely to be engaged in reading lessons (54% of students who like reading are engaged compared to only 8% of students who don't like reading).



ASK YOURSELF

How do you support engagement in reading in your class? In your school?

WHO IS MORE ENGAGED IN READING LESSONS, BOYS OR GIRLS?

Only 26 per cent of Australian Year 4 boys were engaged in reading lessons compared to 39 per cent of girls.



39%



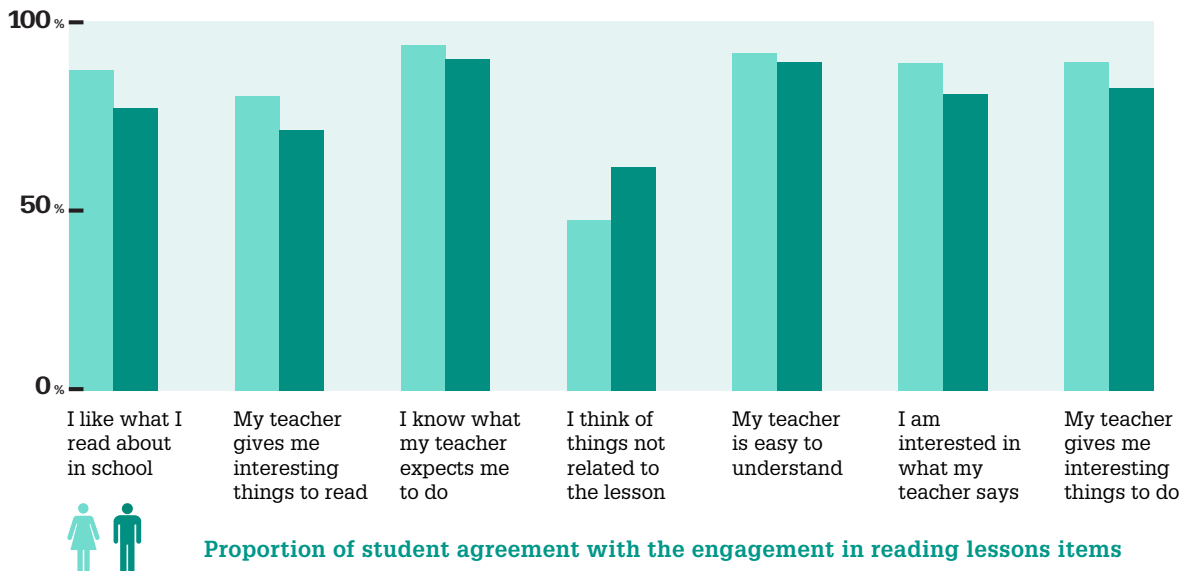
26%

DID YOU KNOW?

Australian girls scored significantly higher in reading achievement than Australian boys.

What constitutes being engaged in reading lessons?

A student's level of engagement in reading lessons was based on their level of agreement with seven statements. The percentage of boys and girls who agreed or strongly agreed with each of the seven statements is shown below.



- In the main, the majority of Australian students responded positively to these statements, with over 70% agreeing with all but one of the statements.
- Disappointingly, only 46% of students have their minds on their lesson, with 54% stating that they think of things not related to the lesson!
- Girls were more likely to agree to these statements than boys, with the largest gap

for the statement *I think of things not related to the lesson*.

For each of these statements, except for the second (*My teacher gives me interesting things to read*), students indicating that they were engaged in their reading lesson had higher reading achievement than those that were not. The most substantial difference, of around 30 score points, was for the statements *I know what my teacher expects me to do* and *I think of things not related to the lesson*.

ASK YOURSELF

How do you think your students would respond to the seven statements?

How do you make sure that students understand what you expect them to do?

What strategies do you have to reduce distraction and increase time on task in your classroom?

The data presented here are drawn from the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011), part of a suite of international comparative education studies that Australian students take part in, including the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which are part of Australia's National Assessment Program. Further information about Australia's participation in TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA can be found at www.timss.acer.edu.au or www.acer.edu.au/ozpisa.

Nicole Wernert is a Research Fellow in the National Surveys research program at ACER.