

## ***Slow Torture, Magic Books* or Potentially Worth Further Exploring: Mapping Young Students' Thoughts About Reading and Creative Alternatives**

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### **Abstract**

Amid discourses that portray young people's changing relationships to text as jeopardizing democratic society and warranting urgent interventions, this paper maps primary students' conceptions of reading through three cartographies—simple, complex, and potentializing—using survey responses, logbooks, and co-creation sessions with 10–11-year-olds. Drawing on two Swedish Research Council–funded projects (“The Heart of Reading” and “How Hot Is the Book-Bot?”), it reveals how a simple, abstract cartography reinforces normative binaries of readers as either enthralled or disengaged. The complex cartography, grounded in students' concrete experiences, uncovers the spatial, temporal, bodily, and emotional dimensions shaping classroom reading. Potentializing cartographies capture students' curiosities, affirmations, problematizations, and individual variations in bodily and spatial preferences, showcasing diverse ways reading might unfold. Employing an interdisciplinary, post-qualitative cartographic approach, the study problematizes and pluralises the concept of reading, moving beyond narrow literacy discourses and the perceived “reading crisis”. It argues that leveraging students' openness to develop embodied, self-directed reading practices can enrich primary reading instruction. Ultimately, this work emphasizes the transformative power of questioning and reimagining conventional definitions of reading.

*Keywords:* young readers, reading and the body, cartographies of reading, primary education, literacy instruction

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## Introduction

Young people's reading is a matter of societal importance. Trends that repeatedly indicate that younger generations are consuming less literature evoke concern, debate, and prompt action. A myriad of reading promotion initiatives involve both public and private stakeholders in a shared vision of the crucial role that reading plays in various aspects of societal development. School is, in many respects, an obvious arena for these efforts; however, as Sundström Sjödin et al. (2024) demonstrate, the school often becomes “an object that is talked about and formed into opinions yet is not invited to become a subject with its own voice and agency” (p. 387). In this study, the school practice and the desired readers' own views is our focus.

As a part of that focus, we also choose to problematize reading as a bodily practice that is disciplinary of the reader's senses (McLaughlin, 2015). There is, often an overseen, bodily code of physical book reading that prescribes certain postures of the upper body (hands and arms) enabling the work of the eyes (McLaughlin, 2015). The design of classrooms and academic furniture mostly facilitate such, what could be labelled ergonomic reading postures, and hereby reaffirm a bodily reading code that is sedentary and quiet. In this paper, while we do recognize the physical and sensory relation between the reader and the text, we scrutinize the implicit discipline of young readers and hitherto narrowing conceptualization of how reading takes place that emerge in classroom reading, both today and historically (Elam & Widhe, 2015; Fatheddine, 2018). We argue that further consideration of what the body may and may not (want to) do while reading may have an impact on young students' views of reading and themselves as potential readers.

Seeking to meet this need for further problematization and pluralization of what reading is all about to young people in their early careers as readers, the study is motivated by the following remarks. First, it can be stated that rigorous effort is made, to foster students' reading development, within the framework of Swedish language instruction during the early school years. The focus is on decoding and language comprehension as entirely central aspects. An insightful effort to deepen and develop students' interest, engagement, and self-confidence in reading is equally crucial, although it does not receive the same self-evident prominence. Second, reading as a phenomenon is surrounded by norms and boundaries that narrow the understanding of what reading is and who qualifies as a reader. For reading instruction to be truly inclusive and reach all students, it requires a norm-conscious evaluation of pedagogical reading practices. Last, reading instruction must be grounded in students' own driving forces, which are influenced and evolve through multidimensional, social, and materially embodied interplay. Accordingly, this study scrutinizes what primary students associate to reading as an abstract idea, concrete reading experiences and experimental practice. The aim is to advance knowledge on what reading is all about to young people in their early careers as readers. We address the aim by the following research questions (RQ):

1. What ideas do students associate to “reading” in general?
2. How do students express their experiences of personal, concrete reading activities in school?
3. How do students co-create reading when encouraged to explore it differently?

## Literature Review

The centrality of decoding and language comprehension in early reading development has long been recognized as foundational to literacy acquisition (Hoover & Gough, 1990; Wren, 2001). These cognitive processes are essential for enabling students to access and understand written texts, forming a core of reading instruction (Kempe et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, inclusive pedagogical research has increasingly problematized traditional notions of reading by exposing the norms and boundaries that govern literacy practices. Street's (2003) critical framework reconceptualizes literacy, not as a decontextualized set of technical skills but as a social practice embedded in specific times and places. Building on this, New Literacy Studies (NLS) scholars have long argued that literacy emerges through interactions with local conditions, making it inherently heterogeneous (Hamilton, 2012). Moreover, NLS research draws attention to the hierarchies and power relations that privilege certain literacies over others. Hull and Schultz (2002), for example, demonstrated how schools often assume a singular model of reading that aligns poorly with many students' out-of-school experiences, thereby excluding those whose practices lie outside institutional frameworks. This literature underpins efforts to broaden the concept of reading in inclusive pedagogies by challenging entrenched literacy hierarchies and embracing multiple, context-sensitive ways of reading. Despite this nowadays long research tradition, the dominant understanding of reading is often shaped by normative frameworks that delineate who qualifies as a 'reader' and what constitutes reading, often neglecting students' own perspectives on reading and teachers' professional work in schools (Sundström Sjödin & Rahm, 2025).

Martín-Bylund et al. (forthcoming) illustrate how classroom reading in early years can be conceptualized as a sensory tug-of-war between individual reading and collective participation. This tension manifests physically in students' bodies and influences their capacity to engage in school-based reading activities. To students for whom reading remains a demanding activity, this contest presents additional challenges. Consequently, the social and bodily-material dimensions of reading are integral to understanding how students relate to and develop their literacy skills and themselves as reading subjects (Fatheddine, 2018; Glenberg, 2011; Kontovourki, 2014; Nielsen, 2011).

Furthermore, McLaughlin (2015) provides a detailed account of how reading must be understood as a bodily practice that requires sensory discipline. Historically, the body has often been regarded as an obstacle in relation to reading—a perspective rooted in the traditional dichotomy between body and mind that underpins Western educational practices. Classroom reading has at times been a disciplining activity aimed at eliminating the body as a disruptive element, thereby allowing the mind to work undisturbed, a topic discussed by Elam and Widhe (2015). Concurrently, the disciplining of vision—necessary for visual interaction with texts—does not necessarily entail sedentary behaviour. Early-year students, for instance, express that it is both possible and sometimes desirable to read while moving their bodies to some extent (cf. Bro Trasmundi et al., 2021; Mangen, 2013). Similarly, in a qualitative analysis of the multiplicity of dimensions that affect young bodies while practicing reading in classrooms, Martín-Bylund & Stenliden (2023) suggest a theorization of reading as a rhythmical practice, where students need to find ways of synchronizing various spatial, temporal, and bodily rhythms. The authors discuss the importance of primary reading instruction to provide students the opportunity of actively practicing such synchronization as a means of exploring and adapting individual reading styles.

Arvola et al. (2024) present a quantitative study indicating that students who move the most during the school day tend to value reading the least, whereas those who move the least tend to appreciate reading the most. There is a negative correlation between physical activity and enjoyment of printed books, whereas a positive correlation exists between physical activity and appreciation of screen-based reading. The study underscores the importance of considering the convergence of movement and reading and allowing students to explore different (bodily) ways of reading, thereby fostering the development of diverse ways of becoming a reader. What the body does while reading is shown to have an impact on the reading experience (Mangen, 2016).

Additionally, research indicates that affective factors such as comfort, safety, and motivation are crucial for developing positive reading experiences (Marinak et al., 2010; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001). As an example, interventions involving non-judgmental environments, such as reading with dogs, has demonstrated potential to enhance feelings of security and reduce anxiety associated with reading (Hall et al., 2016). Sundström Sjödin and Rahm (2025) discuss the paradox that, unlike teachers, dogs are deemed suitable for fostering such conditions. While creating a relaxed, inclusive atmosphere supports the development of confidence and autonomy in young readers, how this is reinforced within everyday practices of early literacy education still needs further attention.

Similarly, play-based and drama-informed literacy activities have been shown to promote authenticity, engagement, and social interaction, which in turn can drive literacy development (Fadool, 2009). Honeyford and Boyd (2015) demonstrate that the inventive space created through play- and drama-based literacy activities in leisure-time settings enables students to be more creative and autonomous, potentially increasing their confidence in reading and writing. These strategies highlight the importance of understanding students' intrinsic motivations and social interactions, aligning with the view that literacy development is a cognitively, bodily, and socially situated process.

In sum, while decoding and comprehension remain central, the recognition of the need to broaden our understanding of students' reading practices to include their bodily and sensory experiences, as well as their interest, engagement, and self-confidence still needs more attention. Such an inclusive perspective underscores the importance of allowing students to explore the concept and practice of reading in multiple ways, to develop their own individual styles and views of what reading may be all about to them (cf. Deleuze, 1995). To date, bodily, affective, and motivational dimensions of reading have struggled to gain visibility within often polarized debates on literacy (Sundström Sjödin, 2019).

### **Methodology**

The present study builds on data from two different projects concerning reading activities in middle schools; project A was conducted 2021 – 2024 and project B, which builds further on the former, was conducted in 2023 - 2025. Classroom fieldwork is the base for both projects focusing on reading activities and co-creation with students. Project B, as part of a larger Research-through-Design project (Ylirisku et al., 2016) employed a Wizard of Oz (WOz) prototype. However, that part of project B is out of the scope regarding the present paper.

## Participants

Project A involved two teachers, and their two school classes identified via municipal education administration. Initially, 55 students were connected to the study, of which 53 students participated. Project B involved four teachers, and their four school classes were identified via the same procedure as in project A. Initially, 94 students were connected to the study, of which 81 students participated. None of the participants in project B had participated in project A. In total 6 teachers and 149 students participated.

## Data Production

Data used in this study was produced by two different field works (project A and B). The focus was on activities related to L1 teaching and co-creation activities. The first was performed during a period of 4-5 weeks where the researchers spent 3 days a week at the two schools respectively. The second fieldwork field work was carried out through 3 rounds of 3-5 days at each of the school.

A survey was conducted with all students ( $n = 149$ ) to assess students' associations with reading in general (RQ1). Students expressed their experiences of personal concrete reading activities during their schooldays by writing in logbooks ( $n = 53$ ) (RQ2). Through three different co-creation sessions the students ( $n = 149$ ) explored reading differently compared to ordinary reading activities performed in the classroom; a) The *body* and *reading* by exploring bodily postures and motion while reading; b) the *space* and *reading* through "walk and talk" while visiting different spaces outside the classroom, and c) *attitudes* and *imagination* of reading by creating with Lego.

## Research Ethics

The Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2021-03319 and Dnr 2022-06914-01) decided that an ethical approval was not necessary for neither project A nor B. Study details were explained to guardians/parents via information sheets, and consent was obtained. Only those with their own and parental consent participated and they were also informed that they could take breaks or interrupt. All personal data was stored securely, and personally identifiable information was removed.

## Cartographic Analysis

Inspired by post-qualitative research (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lather & St Pierre, 2013) we employ an analysis based on cartography (Braidotti, 2010, 2019). As discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1988]) cartographies are critical and creative processes that produces new assemblages of thought and practice. Rather than seeking to represent realities, a cartographic method is employed to produce temporal maps for experimentation and critical scrutiny. In this study, such temporal maps are constructed to scrutinize and experiment with the concept of reading as viewed by young students. As discussed by Lenz Taguchi (2017), the value of a cartographic analysis, is that it opens for broadening and shifting transformations of our understanding of certain phenomena and concepts. This way, cartographies entail both dominant, normative perspectives of a phenomenon, as well as ramifications that may challenge these perspectives.

Working with the data of young students' first thoughts of reading as an abstract phenomenon, their expressed experiences regarding concrete reading activities in school, as well as of how they would potentially construct reading otherwise, three different cartographies are created as assemblages of thought and discussion.

## Results

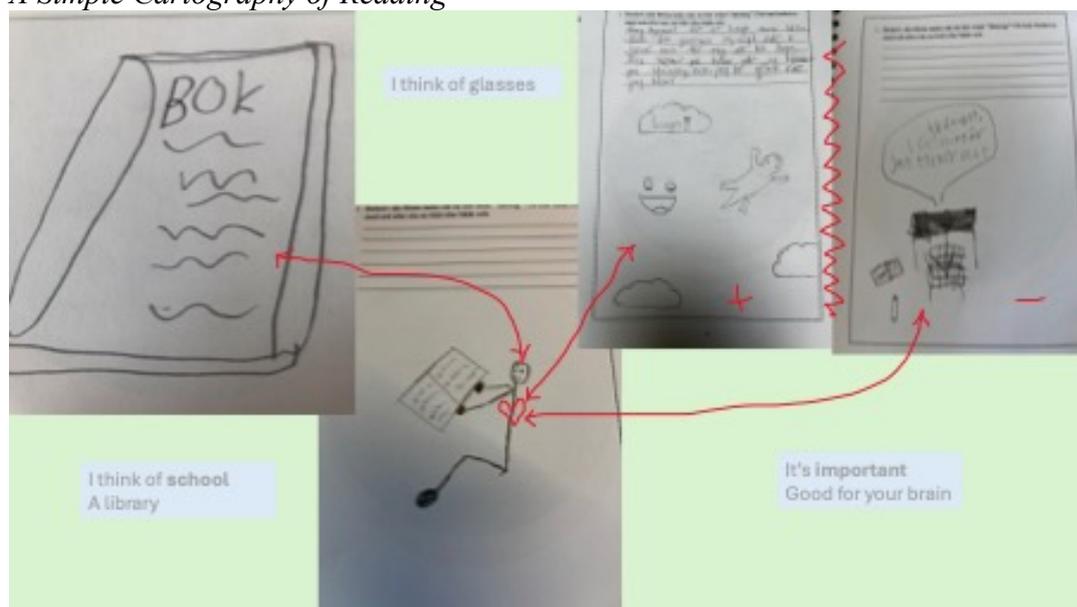
We present the cartographic analysis in relation to the three research questions, as follow.

### Mapping Students' Abstract Ideas of Reading

This section presents the results regarding RQ1, *What ideas do students associate to "reading" in general?* To answer this question, we mapped reading as it may occur to students when thinking about it in abstract terms and rather fixed ideas, building on students' verbal and visual answers to the survey question "What is your first thought when you hear the word 'reading'?" With the students' answers, we created an initial map, a temporal cartography of reading, around three main clusters that were associated to each other as a collective reading imaginary.

#### Figure 1

*A Simple Cartography of Reading*



Students' first thoughts about reading clustered around the reading object, represented in Figure 1 by a student's drawing of a book. In the survey it was also expressed verbally in terms of "book", "a book", "books", "a good book", "I think of a book", or, as one student put it, "an often rectangular thing that contains a lot of letters and paper". Words like "paper", "letters", "front page", "document", specific book titles and the name of a digital application for e-reading were also traced and added part to this cluster. The reading stick figure drawn by one student represents a different cluster in students' answers, around the reading act and its subject, where students wrote things like "you read", "I read" "we read together", "I think of someone who reads". Yet another cluster emerged around attitudes, feelings and preferences regarding reading, represented in Figure 1 by the two drawings to the right. The way these attitudes were emotionally expressed in words and drawings invites to tracing a

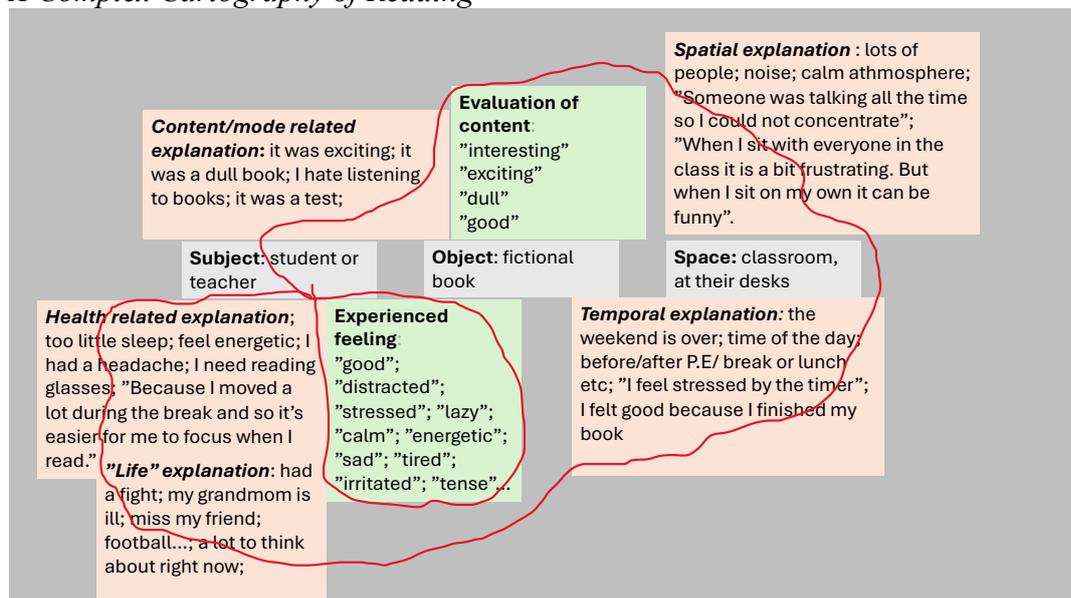
sharp division between students who are passionate and those who are reluctant about reading. While several students express their thoughts about reading in terms of “magic and imagination”, “so much fun”, “cool”, “good”, “cozy”, “easy” or “it’s my favourite thing”, others think of reading as “slow torture”, “boring”, “I don’t like it”, “I thought I was going to die” “not again” or “difficult”. One student brought up both poles when writing “It can be funny or boring but it’s important”.

Thus, following students’ first thoughts on reading we create a simple cartography of reading, including relations of an object (a book) a subject (the reader) and to the reader attached feelings or attitudes. This simple cartography invites to rather normative categorizations of readers as passionate or reluctant. It is important to also mention the minor variations in the map, that reflect voices of students thinking of “school” and “library” as related to reading, thus bringing the place for reading as potentially part of the cartography. Likewise, motives for reading, “it’s good for your brain” and resources, “glasses” are associated by single student voices. This cartography, based on students’ first associations to the word “reading”, invites to thinking of reading and young readers as entrapped in expected behaviours of reading and binary logics. In the next section we shift to mapping concrete reading experiences, creating a different cartography.

### Mapping Students’ Reading Experiences in School

The second research question, *How do students express their experiences of personal, concrete reading activities in school?* was addressed by working with students’ logbook entrances as made after different reading activities in class. In the log books, the activities clustered around the reading object being most often a fictional book that students say they find “interesting” (but also, “exciting”, “boring”, “tiring”). The mostly used space is the classroom where students sit at their desks and students express, they feel “good”, “distracted” etc. The cartography in Figure 2 is made with these entrances, as they gathered as repetitive ingredients in students’ documentation of their experiences. This cartography also entails students’ open-ended explanations (orange) of their feelings, as also expressed in the log-books.

**Figure 2**  
*A Complex Cartography of Reading*



In Figure 2, the reading subject, object and space (light grey) are temporally fixed as repetitive ingredients of the reading activities in school. Students' explanations (orange) of their expressed feelings and evaluations (green) are associated both to fixed ingredients, as content- and mode related (object), health related (subject), spatial- and temporal (space) but also to other phenomena – like having had a fight, worrying about grandmom, missing a friend - that are not logically/rationally, but rather bodily associated to the reading situation.

Thus, through mapping concrete experiences of reading activities in school, this cartography, compared to the first one, gets more complex, adding several different relations and dimensions playing a pragmatic role in the expressions of how reading is affectively experienced. The cartography in Figure 2 can this way be seen as involving both entrapment in normative practices and potential empowerment, when opening for a consideration of how reading does not occur between subject and object in a vacuum but as an entanglement with space, time and bodies. This potential empowerment will be further elaborated upon in the next section.

### Mapping Students' Reading – As It Could Be

*How do students co-create reading when encouraged to explore it differently?* is the research question we employed to three different co-creation sessions as presented in this section (Figure 3a, b, c). The sessions all have a different focus and in creating a common cartography, we map them one at a time, starting with an episode from a session in project A, where students were encouraged to read the way they liked, in the school yard. One of the students directly opened his book and started running around the school yard, while keeping the book open, facing his eyes, as showed in Figure 3a.

#### Figure 3a

##### *A Curious and Joyful Cartography of Reading*



**Read the way you like!**

As Patrick stops, he pants heavily. When he is asked whether he could read anything at all while running, he says yes and that he likes running. After a few seconds, he admits it was difficult and that he only managed to read a couple of lines.

Picture and field notes from Co-creation, Project A, 2021-10

The student, Patrick, like almost all students from both projects, demonstrated great openness, curiosity and joy towards experimenting with different – and what could be deemed both realistic and unrealistic – ways of reading. This is an important dimension of this third cartography, that recognizes students' willingness as a part of what and how reading or readers in early reading instruction could be. The green marks highlight the affirmative

approach as expressed by Patrick as he explores the conjunction of reading and running in the school yard. Patrick is optimistic about his attempt, but, as highlighted in yellow, he also admits it was difficult to read this way while running. There are both “pros and cons”, thus the combination of running and reading – may it be with audio books, a tread mill or something else – could still be worth a further, and more nuanced exploring.

The following episode from another co-creation session in project A, constituted a walk-and-talk around the school facilities, imagining what reading would be like in different spaces. This is illustrated in Figure 3b which reflects a stop with one group in the PE-hall.

**Figure 3b**

*A Wondering and Problematizing Cartography of Reading*

**What would reading be like here?**



Transcript of recording and picture from co-creation, Project A, 2021-10

Researcher: What would reading be like here?

Max: I would **lie down, put out the carpets and relax.**

Peter: take a lot of blocks and **build a hut**

Max: Yes, and, and, **sit and chill there...and read** +

Peter: It would have been **fun to climb the wall bars** and **sit up there and read**, but, although **it's scary**, I **don't think I would like to do it.** -

Max: But yes, **build a hut, that would have been so good.** +

Researcher: Why would that have been good?

Hanna: **Comfortable/Nice**

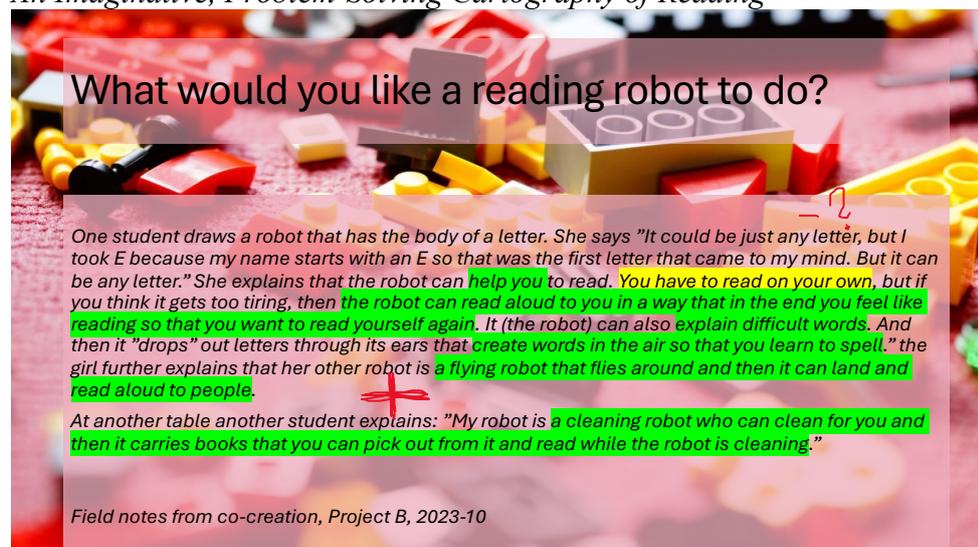
Max: **You can lie on a carpet** +

Researcher: What do you think? Would you like to read in the PE-hall?

Hanna: **Rather not...it's rather big, and then you can look around and...then you can get stuck in that.** I think it's better to be outside, or something smaller maybe. -

In Figure 3b, the green highlights show students engagement with the spatial potentials for reading in the PE hall. All students seem attracted to the “chilly”, relaxed, comfortable and perhaps cozy setting for reading that they imagine creating with the gymnastic equipment. On the other hand, as highlighted in yellow, both Peter and Hanna also express some hesitation to the high altitude and big size of the hall, which they relate to scare and distraction. Importantly, not all students express the same thoughts, and there is no common conclusion to be made about the PE hall being an apt or unapt space for reading. Rather, the walk-and-talk, it can be argued, sparks students’ thoughts about themselves as individual readers with different, spatial needs or priorities.

Finally, we make a last figure from a co-creation session in project B, where students were encouraged to work with Lego and/or drawings, imagining desired possibilities with a reading robot. Crafting the robots, students were asked to talk about their creations, explaining their abilities. In Figure 3c, the ideas of two different students are expressed.

**Figure 3c***An Imaginative, Problem-Solving Cartography of Reading*

The green colour in Figure 3c highlights potentially positive competences of the created reading robots. The sentence that is in yellow, however, provides the negative sounding condition to the first student's robot, that "you have to read on your own". The problem that is addressed, is related to reading as a demanding activity. Thus, from this perspective, the positive dimension of the robot's competences is that it would help to make reading on your own less tiring, triggering the student's motivation like a reading buddy, helping to explain difficult words, and modelling spelling through creating words "in the air". The same student's other robot may address the same problem but does not seem to build on the same negative condition, since it just flies around and reads aloud to people. The second student in Figure 3c, builds a cleaning robot that carries books. For this student, the imagined problem that the "reading robot" solves, is different. Perhaps it is about not having enough time for reading and thus, not being able to read when you must clean up your mess. If the robot cleans for you, you have more time for reading.

In sum, with the outcomes of co-creation sessions with students, a different cartography of reading is mapped. The three different Figures 3a-c show just a few potential dimensions of such a cartography, where we have highlighted students' affirmative approach to experimenting with reading in (un)conventional ways as well as the variations in why, what and how different students may want to approach such an exploration. Figure 4 is an attempt of illustrating the multiple dimensions by which students may engage in similar explorations of reading in school.

**Figure 4**  
*A Potentializing Cartography of Reading*

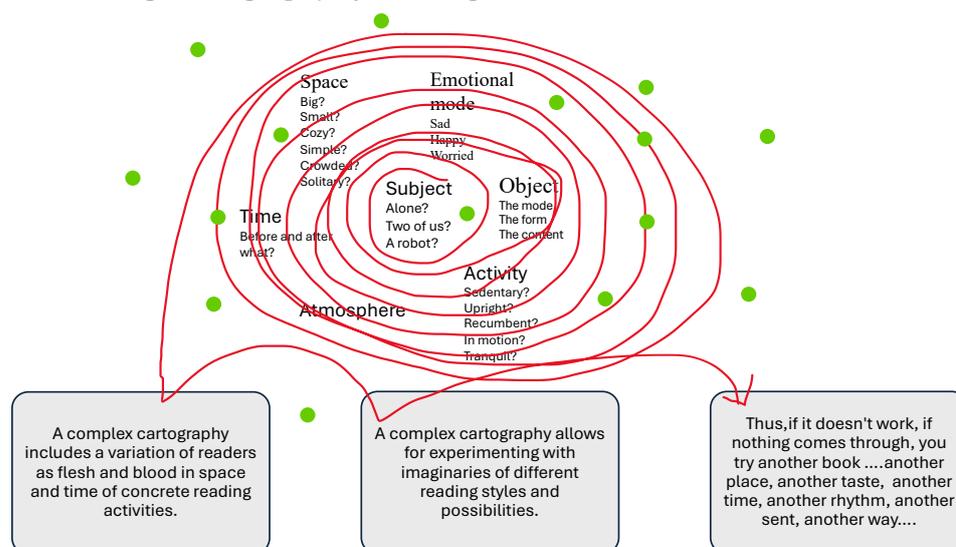


Figure 4 seeks complexity but can never become complex enough. Therefore it should be read as open ended, potentially including multiple possibilities for experimenting with and doing reading in various, both conventional and unconventional ways. This is an invitation to thinking with the concept of reading but also to practicing reading – and reading instruction – in multiple ways, which will be further discussed in the following.

### Discussion

This study has mapped reading in terms of simple, complex, and potentializing cartographies. It underscores the limitations of traditional decoding-and-comprehension models and the value of a broader, more inclusive understanding of literacy. The simple cartography mirrors longstanding instructional emphases on decoding and language comprehension as the bedrock of early reading development (Hoover & Gough, 1990; Kempe et al., 2011; Wren, 2001). By collapsing reading into an either-or category of “enthralled” or “spark-lost” readers, it reproduces normative binaries that can marginalize students whose embodied and contextualized reading practices deviate from institutional expectations (Hamilton, 2012; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Street, 2003). The fact that the simple cartography is created with students’ own first associations to the word “reading”, shows how students early on absorb and repeat a stereotypical image of what reading is and categorize themselves as either part of that image or as non-readers. Anyone concerned with fostering new generations of readers, should counteract this trend, for a greater amount of students to stay longer with the potential of becoming a reader.

In contrast, a complex cartography resonates with New Literacy Studies’ reconceptualization of literacy as socially and materially situated. Students’ logbooks from diverse reading activities in school, revealed the spatial rhythms, temporal flows, bodily movements, and emotional fluctuations that shape their engagement with texts. These findings align with recent work framing reading as a rhythmical, body-mind practice requiring sensory discipline and synchronization (Bro Trasmundi et al., 2021; Martín-Bylund & Stenliden, 2023; McLaughlin, 2015). Created with students’ concrete experiences from everyday reading activities in school, the complex cartography includes rather expected experiences, but as

these are contextualized, the cartography invites to scrutinizing whether there is room for adaptation and improvement. This way, the complex cartography could also support the view that movement and reading are not inherently opposed but can co-exist in diverse ways that honour student agency (Arvola et al., 2024; Mangen, 2013).

A potentializing cartography of reading, extends this perspective by mapping students' curiosities, affirmations, and individual variations in reading through bodily, spatial and material imagination and experimentation. It foregrounds affective and motivational dimensions, such as comfort, safety, and intrinsic interest (Marinak et al., 2010; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001), and echoes research on non-judgemental interventions—from reading with dogs (Hall et al., 2016; Sundström Sjödin & Rahm, 2025) to play- and drama-based activities (Fadool, 2009; Honeyford & Boyd, 2015)—in fostering positive, empowering reading experiences. In relation to reading as we know it, some experiments, like running while reading a physical book, may be considered too “crazy” or unrealistic. However, the same example may also be considered as too stuck to a stereotyped practice of traditional book reading. The point is that what may come about through working with a potentializing cartography of reading, is not any best or better general practice of reading. Rather, it is the process of open and non-judgemental exploring of multiple, (im)possible reading practices, that may embrace more young students to stay longer with the idea of themselves as readers.

Collectively, these cartographies illustrate that primary reading instruction must transcend narrow technical skill-driven frameworks and embrace the heterogeneity of student experiences. Pedagogically, this suggests designing learning environments that integrate flexible spaces, movement-friendly practices, and co-creative text engagements. Such environments can harness the social, bodily, and affective dimensions of reading, thereby cultivating each child's unique trajectory as a reader.

At the policy level, our findings caution against reductive interpretations of large-scale assessments and alarmist “reading crisis” narratives. When quantitative metrics overshadow qualitative nuances, they risk entrenching monolithic literacy standards that fail to account for the rich, embodied practices of diverse learners. Policymakers should, therefore, include cartographic and post-qualitative approaches alongside standardized measures to capture the full spectrum of early reading development.

## Conclusion

Guided by an interdisciplinary cartographic lens within a post-qualitative framework, we generated three “maps” of reading:

1. A simple, abstract cartography that collapses reading into a binary—young readers are either enthralled or have already “lost their spark”.
2. A richer, experience-based cartography, grounded in students' concrete encounters with texts, which exposes reading's spatial, temporal, bodily, and emotional dimensions and invites more empowering imaginaries.
3. A cartography of reading's potentialities—how it could (or must) be—that captures students' affirmations, curiosities, and varied bodily-spatial priorities alongside their frustrations.

We argue that leveraging students' openness to discover their own embodied reading practices is crucial to primary-level instruction. More broadly, continually questioning what

reading is—and what it might become—opens transformative possibilities for reading pedagogy.

This study is limited by its focus on 10-to11-year-olds within Swedish schools and by the scope of its co-creation activities. Future research should apply cartographic analysis to younger and older cohorts, diverse cultural contexts, and digital reading environments. Longitudinal investigations could reveal how students' cartographies evolve over time and in response to targeted pedagogical interventions. By continuing to question what reading is—and could be—education can move toward a more inclusive, dynamic, and humane literacy practice.

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### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

In preparing this manuscript, the authors made use of OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4) solely for language refinement, phrasing suggestions, and stylistic polishing. All substantive intellectual contributions, including conceptual framing, data analysis, interpretation of results, and overall argument, were developed entirely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the paper, and confirm that no AI system played a role in the generation of the core ideas, analyses, or conclusions.

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