



Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Professional Paper

Motivation

Paying Attention to Skill and Will in the Teaching of Reading

“Teaching reading, then, begins with helping children to want the life of a reader and to envision that life for themselves...Learners are willing and able to work on the particular parts of becoming stronger readers because they see the big picture of a literate life, they value it, and they consider this life as doable and worth doing.”

~ Lucy McCormick Calkins, 2001
The Art of Teaching Reading, p. 9

INTRODUCTION

Ask teachers about their top goals for students in terms of reading, and they will likely say that in addition to ensuring that students learn to read effectively and proficiently, they want them to develop a love for reading. Wanting students to read widely and willingly, both inside and outside of school is a worthwhile objective, since not only will students experience the richness of a “literate life,” but the more they read, the better readers they will become. “Various investigations have documented that the amount and breadth of reading are the single largest factor contributing to reading achievement” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 5). Unfortunately, recent pressures on teachers to prepare students for high stakes tests, and increased emphasis on documenting their efforts to meet standards has shifted teachers’ attention away from the goal of developing lifelong readers. However, because of the link between motivation and reading behavior (i.e., frequency and duration) and performance, any discussion of improving students’ reading *ability* must also include the importance of improving their motivation, or engagement in reading.

People often comment about the role that motivation plays in students’ reading habits or behaviors. It is common to hear statements about poor readers such as “Johnny simply lacks motivation to read a whole book,” or “Jenny’s reading would improve so much if she were just more motivated.” It would be easy to improve students’ motivation to read if motivation were a mere matter of “wanting” to do something, or wanting to attain a certain end. However, the variables affecting a learner’s motivation to learn particular concepts or to perform certain skills and demonstrate desired behaviors are numerous. They overlap and intertwine in a myriad of complex ways which differ from student to student, and situation to situation. Motivation involves needs and goals, but also values, beliefs, and past experiences. Over the past twenty-five years, researchers have studied the role of

motivation in learning generally, and the role of motivation as it relates to reading specifically. Much is now known about factors that influence students’ motivation to read and engagement in reading. These factors include students’ beliefs about reading and their own sense of efficacy. In other words, to be motivated students need to see the worthiness of the activity and believe that their efforts will be effective. Their locus of control also affects their motivation. They must believe that they have internal control over whether their efforts are successful rather than believing that the control is external and someone else is responsible for their success or failure in reading. Interest in the content of what they are reading, involvement in the reading material, and strategy use to facilitate comprehension of the reading also play vital roles in motivation and engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). This paper describes some elements in a classroom’s physical and social/emotional/intellectual environment as well as several literacy activities and interactions that should exist to improve students’ motivation to read.

A CLASSROOM CULTURE THAT IMPROVES MOTIVATION TO READ

The Physical Environment

Classrooms need to be information-rich, with well-stocked, well-used classroom libraries. Neuman (1999) found that preschool children exposed to quality children’s books outperformed a control group without the exposure on 4 out of 6 measures of literacy development. Several months later the experimental group still outperformed the control group suggesting that the effects were long-term. Unfortunately it appears that children from low-income backgrounds have minimal access to books. Neuman and Celano (2001) found approximately 12 books available per child in middle-class neighborhoods and 1 book available for every 335 children in low-income areas (as cited in

Neuman & Celano, 2004). Several studies have reported that many students retrieve books for independent reading from the school or classroom library (Fleener, Morrison, Linek, & Rasinski, 1997; Krashen, 1993; Lamme, 1976; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Perhaps those students benefiting the most from retrieving books from classroom and school libraries are those who have little or no access to books. In spite of this research, funding for classroom, school, and town libraries has seriously declined over the past decade. According to a recent position statement by the International Reading Association, "We must reverse this trend because children who have access to books are more likely to read for enjoyment, and thus increase their reading skills and their desire to read to learn" (IRA, 2000, p.1). Educators need to also pay attention to the types of reading materials in the classroom library, ensuring that the materials not only address a range of reading levels and interests, but that they appeal to both boys and girls. According to Knowles and Smith (2005), "Classroom libraries, librarians, summer reading, and required course reading lists do not reflect the kinds of books that boys enjoy most" (p. xi) which tend to be factual, humorous, with lots of visual stimulation and support for the text. Including a wide variety of types of texts, from newspapers and trade paperbacks to "classics" to comic books is essential. Allowing students frequent access to these materials and giving them the opportunity to take these materials home is essential, as many students are not able to borrow books from the public library, for a variety of reasons.

The Social/Emotional/Intellectual Environment

In addition to having access to texts in the classroom, students at all grade levels need **time** to read, both in and outside of school. Practice makes perfect, as the popular proverb reminds us. Allington (2001) stated that the act of reading is powerful in developing readers who read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found that students who did not read during their free time outside of school ultimately lost academic ground, even those who were not originally labeled as remedial readers. Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) discovered hundreds of correlational studies which revealed successful readers simply read more in and out of school (Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, & Campbell, 2001). In commenting about the "remarkably consistent" link between free reading and literacy development, Krashen (1993) noted that "Nearly every study that has examined this relationship has found a correlation, and it is present even when different tests, different methods of probing reading habits, and different definitions of free reading are used" (p. 7). Time to read must be allocated in the daily classroom schedule to show that it is a valued activity and to give students a chance that they might not take outside of school to discover books that they enjoy.

Students need to be allowed to make **choices** about some of the materials that they read, especially for independent (free) reading, and for literature discussion groups. Choice about what books to read, and how to demonstrate an understanding of the book is critically important. Teachers must resist the temptation to control students' choices. For example, the growing practice of allowing students to borrow from the library and read only certain levels or types of books (i.e., a book that they can take a computerized test on) is a dangerous one and likely to mitigate against motivation to read. At the same time, teachers need to help students learn to make good choices, by teaching them how to select a book that they can read successfully (e.g., Ohlhausen & Jepsen, 1992; Routman, 2003). Teachers need to know their individual learners' interests and hobbies, and know the field of children's literature so that they can help to match students with books that will be interesting and satisfying.

Teachers need to **model**, through daily interactive read alouds the value of reading. In order to influence students' own reading, Routman (2003) advocates for teachers to make their "reading lives explicit" (p. 25). She encourages teachers to (pp. 23-37):

- Let students know what you are reading and what you read next;
- Share your passion for reading;
- Discuss the importance and pleasure of having a personal library;
- Talk about favorite authors and favorite books;
- Talk about how book clubs work;
- Explain how you choose books to read;
- Read a variety of genres;
- Maintain a reading record;
- Show your students how you read; and
- Demonstrate your pleasure in reading.

Students need **opportunities to interact with peers**, to communicate about books and their responses to books and the chance to collaborate with them on assignments. Cole conducted a study in an attempt to understand what motivated several second-graders to read (2002/2003). She found each student was motivated to read for different reasons and obtained a unique literacy personality. Most of the students in her study were motivated to read due to one or more social components of the classroom such as class discussions and acting out stories with peers. As a result of her findings, Cole suggested that teachers provide flexible literacy activities including those that allow for social interactions. Cole stated, "While some students learn efficiently on their own, many children need the support of peers and talk to learn and achieve" (p. 335). In addition, creating opportunities for productive social interactions increases students' effort and persistence,

which in turn increases students' sense of efficacy, competence, and locus of control (Turner & Paris, 1995).

The notion of a community of readers was documented by Hepler and Hickman (1982) after observing the influence of social interaction on students' reading. They reported that student's actions with and words about books were influenced by others. Incidental talk such as "Have you read this?" or "Listen to this!" (p. 280) appeared to motivate students to read books after hearing about the plot and knowing that at least one peer liked the book. Other researchers have additionally reported that the most avid readers are those who talk with their peers about books, share writing, and discuss homework with others (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999).

The Literacy Activities and Interactions that Take Place

The kinds of activities and interactions around text that teachers design can have tremendous impact on students' motivation to read. Learning tasks need to be authentic and perceived by students to be meaningful and relevant. They should be sufficiently challenging, neither too easy nor too difficult. Whenever possible, teachers should design "open" rather than "closed" tasks. In a study of first grade classrooms, Turner and Paris (1995) found that teachers who designed "open tasks" were most successful in motivating children to read and write. Open tasks were those with more than one correct answer, and more than one possible procedure to follow to complete. "Open tasks required students to set goals, select and organize information, choose strategies, and assess the final results" (p.664).

In a study conducted by Marinak (2004) literacy related rewards (books) did not appear to undermine intrinsic motivation to read, but token rewards that were not related to literacy (e.g., key chain, bracelets) undermined intrinsic motivation. This study supports the hypothesis posed by Gambrell (1996) that the extrinsic reward that is closer in proximity to the desired behavior is more likely to support intrinsic motivation.

REFERENCES

- Allington, R. (2001). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research based programs*. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.
- Anderson, R., Wilson, P., & Fielding, L. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, 285-303.
- Calkins, L. M. (2001). *The art of teaching reading*. New York: Longman.
- Coles, J. (2002/2003). What motivates students to read? Four literacy personalities. *The Reading Teacher*, 56(4), 326-336.
- Donahue, P., Finnegan, R., Lutkus, A., Allen, N., & Campbell, J. (2001). *The nation's report card: Fourth-grade 2000*. National Center for Education Statistics. Available Online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001499>.

School activities must be implemented that foster intrinsic motivation and allow students to discuss enjoyable books and join in a classroom or school wide reading community. The following are suggestions of activities to implement:

- Literature discussion groups – small groups of students choose a common book to read and engage in natural, open discussions with one another about their reading (Daniels, 2002)
- Idea circles – three to six students share a concept to research using multiple texts and formulate an evolving consensus about the concept (Guthrie & McCann, 1996)
- E-mail – classes at different schools send e-mails about suggested books
- Interactive read alouds and open-ended discussions – reading aloud to students at any age has many benefits, including fostering students' interest in books (Miller, 2002; Rasinski, 2003); teachers facilitate discussions relating to the read aloud with open-ended statements or questions
- Book talks – students briefly describe a book and explain why they liked it to a large or small group
- Newsletter – classroom newsletter includes a column written by students about "good books"

CONCLUSION

There's no doubt that the act of reading fosters better readers. "The last twenty-five years of reading research confirms this simple formula—regardless of sex, race, nationality or socioeconomic background. Students who read the most, read the best, achieve the most, and stay in school the longest. Conversely, those who don't read much, cannot get better at it" (Trelease, 2001, p. 7). Educators must create a classroom culture that facilitates motivation to read and implement literacy activities and interactions that cause an increase in students' motivation so that not only will students have the skill to read but the lifelong desire for the will to read.

- Fleener, C., Morrison, S., Linek, W., & Rasinski, T. (1997). Recreational reading choices: How do children select books? In W. M. Linek & E. G. Sturtevant (Eds.), *Exploring literacy* (pp. 75-84). Platteville, WI: College Reading Association.
- Gambrell, L. (2000). Creating classroom cultures that foster reading motivation. In N. Padack, T. Rasinski, et al (Eds.). *Distinguished Educators on Reading: Contributions that have shaped effective literacy instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Gambrell, L. (1996). Creating classrooms cultures that foster reading motivation. *The Reading Teacher*, 50, 4-25.
- Guthrie, J., & Anderson, E. (1999). Engagement in reading: Processes of motivated, strategic, knowledgeable, social readers. In J. T. Guthrie & D. E. Alvermann (Eds.), *Engaged reading: Processes, practices, and policy implications* (pp. 17-45). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.). *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume 3*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. (1997). *Reading Engagement: Motivating readers through integrated instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Helper, S., & Hickman, J. (1982). "The book was okay. I love you" – Social aspects of response to literature. *Theory Into Practice*, 21(4), 278-283.
- Knowles, E., & Smith, M. (2005). *Boys and literacy: Practical strategies for librarians, teachers, and parents*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Krashen, S. (1993). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Marinak, B. (2004) *The effects of reward proximity and choice of reward on the reading motivation of third-grade students*. Available Online at <https://drum.umd.edu/dspace/bitstream/1903/1969/1/umi-umd-1920.pdf>.
- Neuman, S., & Celano, D. (2004). Save the libraries! *Educational Leadership*, 61(6), 82-85.
- Neuman, S.B. (1999). Books make a difference: A study of access to literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34(3), 286–311.
- Ohlhausen, M., & Jepsen, M. (1992). Lessons from Goldilocks: "Somebody's been choosing my books but I can make my own choices now." *The New Advocate*, 5, 31-46.
- Reynolds, M. (2004). *I won't read and you can't make me: Reaching reluctant teen readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Routman, R. (2003). *Reading essentials: The specifics you need to teach reading well*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Trelease, J. (2001). *The Read-aloud handbook*. NY: Penguin.
- Turner, J., & Paris, S. (1995). How literacy tasks influence children's motivation for literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 18(8), 662-672.
- Worthy, J., Moorman, M., & Turner, M. (1999). What Johnny likes to read is hard to find in schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34(1), 12-27.

This FLARE Professional Paper was developed (June, 2006) by the following FLARE Faculty Fellows (*in alphabetical order*):

Deborah Harris, PhD, Florida Atlantic University
 Wanda Hedrick, PhD, University of North Florida
 Lunetta Williams, PhD, University of North Florida
 Nancy Williams, PhD, University of South Florida

FLARE Center
 Teaching Academy – Suite 403
 University of Central Florida
 4000 Central Florida Blvd
 Orlando, FL 32816-1250

Phone: 407-823-4785

FAX: 407-823-4682

<http://flare.ucf.edu>

FLARE is a Project of the University of Central Florida College of Education and administered under a grant from the Florida Department of Education and Just Read, Florida!

