

# The Relationship between English Language Arts Teachers' Use of Instructional Strategies and Young Adolescents' Reading Motivation, Engagement, and Preference

Michelle Varuzza<sup>1</sup>, Richard Sinatra<sup>1</sup>, Robert Eschenauer<sup>1</sup> & Brett Elizabeth Blake<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Education, St. John's University, Queens, New York, USA

Correspondence: Michelle Varuzza, Ph.D., Department of Education, Queens Metropolitan High School, Queens, New York, 11375, USA. Tel: 917-731-8419. E-mail: michellevaruzza@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Conducted at 10 schools in four communities, this study investigated relationships of young adolescents' reading motivation, reading preference, and reading engagement as influenced by their English Language Arts teachers' use of instructional strategies. Students in eight sixth grade (N=196) and nine seventh grade (N=218) classes completed a post Reading Behavior Survey and the Motivation to Read Questionnaire (MRQ) and a Class Strategies Checklist at the beginning and end of the academic year. The 17 teachers also completed a pre/post Strategies Checklist and a Survey. Mean MRQ difference scores were averaged by ELA class group. Scores in nine MRQ dimensions revealed a decline except for Challenge with a slight positive increase for seventh graders. These results confirm prior research findings that as adolescents move along in grade level their reading motivation decreases. However, 11 of the 17 class groups indicated some positive change in one or more MRQ dimensions with five classes revealing positive reading motivation growth in four dimensions. Enjoyable reading activities noted by all students involved receptive and expressive oral language. Such preference may have been due to large class populations of Hispanic, subsidized lunch, and limited English proficient students who found that oral language interaction helped them understand and enjoy the readings. The most preferred reading activity during out-of-school time was that of a social nature involving text messaging. Both this current and prior research suggest that successful teachers motivate their students through classroom interaction, challenging literacy activities and discussion about what was read.

**Keywords:** young adolescents, reading motivation, reading preference, reading behavior survey, English Language Arts teachers, class strategies checklist

## 1. Introduction

Often voiced by many educators is the comment, "This student is just not motivated," to describe a student's behavior, particularly when he/she is not achieving well in academic areas and/or performing below what the teacher expects the student can achieve. Motivation may be thought of as a general characteristic of a person and, as such, becomes a difficult construct to precisely measure. Moreover, motivation, behavior, and performance exist in a reciprocal relationship with motivation often acting as the influential force. Based on one's motivational level to succeed or achieve with a given task, one will behave in a certain way to attain a level of success or achievement in performance. The construct of motivation has also been theorized to exist at two levels- either intrinsic or extrinsic- both of which effect an individual's goals, self-efficacy, and external social influences (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999). Intrinsic motivation includes such activity as involvement, curiosity, social interaction, and challenges while extrinsic motivation is characterized by compliance, recognition, and getting good grades (Guthrie, Wigfield, & VonSecker, 2000; Sweet & Guthrie, 1996). Accordingly, individuals who are intrinsically motivated will perform because they are genuinely more interested or curious, rather than those who perform a task in hopes of receiving some form of recognition, behavior aligned with extrinsic motivation. The problem for educators becomes one of developing both levels of motivation to achieve maximum student learning success in structured settings.

### *1.1 Introduce the Problem*

The construct of motivation reveals its importance in the field of literacy, specifically with successful reading attainment. It has been found to be a significant predictor of students' text comprehension scores, strategy use, and reading engagement (Guthrie et al., 1999; Ruddell, 1997; Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). Both educators and researchers consider reading motivation to be at the core of many problems in learning to read (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzone, 1996). One model of reading suggests that the feelings a student holds toward the act of reading affects the student's level of motivation resulting in a choice to read or not to read (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). Those individuals, who are intrinsically motivated choose their own reading materials, set aside a time and place to read, and are able to cope with learning distractions, cultivate reading to become a lifelong, voluntary activity (Sweet & Guthrie, 1996). On the other hand, when an individual develops more of a goal-oriented view of reading, extrinsic motivation assists the person in developing skills but acquisition of such skills does not translate into lifelong, sustainable reading.

Besides the feelings and attitudes individuals hold toward the act of reading, educators themselves play a crucial role in developing students views of learning, of attitudes towards reading, and of influencing their levels of motivation (Marshall, 1987; Richardson, Andres, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). These researchers believe instructional orientation, teacher/ student relationships, and the teacher's own self-efficacy are important factors that influence students' levels of motivation and desire to succeed with reading. Efficacy affects how teachers view themselves, their potential influences on students, their capabilities to reach students, and the instructional methods they choose to use (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The surrounding environment managed by the teacher may also influence motivation and resulting behavior. The majority of a student's formal educational instruction is spent in classrooms managed by teachers. The climate and structure of the classroom itself can influence students' perceptions of their own capabilities or self-efficacy either positively or negatively (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). At the third and fifth grade levels, Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000) found that a classroom's climate and setting, the focus towards the learning of goals, the use of strategy instruction, and an orientation to mastery of tasks were associated with an increase in students' intrinsic motivation to read.

### *1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem*

#### *1.2.1 Motivation to Engage in Reading*

Reading motivation has been viewed as a multi-dimensional construct. While believing it is a difficult construct to measure, reading motivation has been defined as an individual student's excitement, enjoyment, and desire to read as well as the ability to remain on task when assigned specific readings (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzone, 1996). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) see reading motivation as the composite of an individual's personal beliefs, goals, and values as they relate to the processes of engagement, the topics, and the outcomes of a reading. Pecjak and Kosir (2008) add the notion of interactive positive relationships as they liken reading motivation to a diverse configuration of beliefs and goals that influence reading behavior and which interact in a positive way with one another.

The influence of motivation on reading behavior and the concomitant effect on influencing students' achievement has been of great concern among educators. When Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, and Cox (1999) examined reading motivation and engagement at third and fifth grade levels, they found that students with high levels of motivation were more likely to reveal consistent behaviors relevant to perceptions of themselves. The authors indicate that as motivation increased, reading engagement, higher levels of test comprehension and use of cognitive strategies also rose. Students who were positively motivated to read were found to be more likely to engage in reading activities because they believed in their abilities to succeed with the skills they possessed (Guthrie et al., 2004; Metsala, Wigfield, & McCann, 1996). Also, Sainsbury and Clarkson (2008) noted that students who held positive reading attitudes enjoyed and desired to read while those who felt reading was difficult and viewed it as a weakness of their abilities sought help and turned to adults to assist them with reading engagement and support.

Textual reading of modern times is composed of many multiliteracy formats such as newspapers, magazines, comics, internet sites, emails, text messages, and non-traditional books (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Pitcher et al., 2007). Studies with adolescents reveal that as age increases, multi-literacy readings were more frequently identified (Clark, 2005; Sainsbury & Clarkson, 2008). Yet as youths' reading tastes change with more offerings served, positive attitudes towards reading progressively decrease as students move up in grade level (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Sainsbury & Clarkson, 2008).

### 1.2.2 Teacher Influence on Reading Motivation

Many educators view teachers as models for students and have the potential to mold students' views of learning and levels of motivation (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Strommen & Mates, 2004; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). These educators noted a teacher's instructional orientation coupled with supportive teacher-student relationships were important factors that influenced students' views on learning and motivation. Examining reading motivation at the third and seventh grade levels, Pecjak and Kosir (2008) noted that teachers who stress the importance of reading, teach reading strategies, frequently incorporate reading into the class period, and give students the opportunity to choose what they read were more efficient in enhancing reading motivation than teachers who did not stress such activity. Also, teachers who offer continuous encouragement, coach and engage students, and use higher-level questioning are more likely to have students cognitively motivated, engaged, and able to monitor on-task behavior (Marshall, 1987; Pecjak & Kosir, 2008; Taylor et al., 2003; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Young adolescents believe that their teacher's book and author suggestions, enthusiasm and encouragement to read, combined with frequent in-class read alouds and access to a large classroom library all contributed to their reading motivation, behavior, and attitude (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Pitcher et al., 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004).

### 1.2.3 Reading Motivation over Time

There is strong evidence indicating that motivation to read changes over time. As students move up in grade level, their motivation to read diminishes (Bokhorst-Heng & Pereira, 2008; Kelley & Decker, 2009; Lau, 2009; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Adolescents' reading motivation, interest, and engagement declines with grade level as they are more involved in recreational activities and television and believe they do not have to read (van Schooten & de Gloppe, 2000). Compiling data from motivational surveys and interviews, Kelley and Decker (2009) found that sixth and seventh graders had higher reading motivational levels than the eighth graders (N = 1080) across all the motivational dimensions studied. Investigating motivation to read with students in the Chinese educational system, Lau (2009) found that students at lower grade levels (primary, N = 648) had more motivation to read than students at higher-grade levels (junior secondary, N = 519) with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation declining with grade level.

### 1.2.4 Importance of Problem Exploration

Both within and outside of the United States as students move from elementary to middle school, their levels of motivation increase, but by the time students finish grade eight, their levels of motivation and reading behavior have dropped significantly (Kelley & Decker, 2009; Lau, 2009). Despite evidence of motivational decreases, it is not clear as to what factors contribute to the downturn. One way to study the influence of student, teacher, and classroom orientation factors on adolescents' reading motivation would be to investigate the motivational and behavioral changes that occur during one school year with the same body of students, served by the same teacher in the same classroom setting. This type of investigation would differ from comparing the motivational level of one grade level of students with another differing grade level of students. Thus, the present study addressed the lack of research investigating adolescents' motivation and behavior towards reading over one full academic year. The study also examined what influence English Language Arts teachers had on intact classes of young adolescents relative to their motivation and behavior towards reading during the same academic year in efforts to identify specific teacher methodologies and management styles that might positively impact reading engagement.

Students are typically taught by three different ELA teachers between grades six through eight. By designing an investigation focusing on the relationship between levels of reading motivation growth and instructional strategies used in an ELA classroom throughout the year, research may be able to identify teacher influences that affect motivation at the middle school grade levels within a year time period. This one-year investigation allows future researchers to expand over a three-year study following particular students' changes in reading motivation from sixth to eighth grade rather than comparing sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels of motivation from one grade level to another at one given time. These potential studies can further strengthen existing research that suggests reading motivation changes over time from the beginning sixth to eighth grade levels.

### 1.2.5 Research Questions

Based on the literature review, this study focused on the following research questions:

- (1) Do individual ELA class groups, taught by the same ELA teacher, indicate change in motivation as measured by the *Motivation to Read Questionnaire* (MRQ; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) over one academic year?

- (2) What classroom strategies are used more frequently in an ELA classroom where reading motivation may have changed over time?
- (3) According to students, what types of reading do they do and enjoy?
- (4) According to teachers, how do they motivate students to read in their learning environments?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Identify Subsections

In New York State, the academic school year begins in early September and ends near the end of June. This study began in late September, allowing teachers and students to get adjusted to the new school year and ended in June.

Convenient samples of 10 Pre-K to grade eight parochial schools with a prior affiliation with St. John's University participated in the study. Principals of each school were introduced to the purpose and procedures of the study prior to the September start date. The schools were located in four boroughs/counties of the state: two in the borough of Manhattan; five in the borough of Queens; one in the borough of Brooklyn; and two in Suffolk County, Long Island. The school student populations reflected a wide range of ethnicities, proficiency with the English language, and eligibility for subsidized lunch. The two Manhattan schools had relatively equal male and female populations, ranged from 39% to 98% Hispanic with four percent White, had 100% eligible for subsidized lunch, and had from 13% to 98% limited English proficiency (LEP) students. The Brooklyn school had slightly more females than males, had a 41% Hispanic and 48% White population, had 54% eligible for subsidized lunch, and had 37% LEP students. The five Queens schools had very equal populations of males and females, ranged from 12% to 98% with Hispanic students, ranged from one to 84% with White students, had from two to 78% eligible for subsidized lunch, and had from 24% to 100% LEP students. The two Suffolk county schools each had higher female than male populations, had from zero to 49% Hispanic students and a range of four to 65% White Students, had from 16% to 86% eligible for subsidized lunch, and had six and 84% LEP students at two of the schools.

### 2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

This investigation focused on reading motivation, reading behavior, and reading engagement strategies noted by sixth and seventh grade students who were taught by one ELA teacher throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. Data was collected by 17 teachers from 414 students at the 10 participating schools. Eight teachers taught sixth grade and nine taught seventh grade ELA classes with two of the teachers responsible for both grade level classes. They ranged in teaching experience from two to 30 years with four teaching five years or less and four teaching for over 25 years. A total of 196 sixth graders and 218 seventh graders participated in the full-year ELA classes, and they completed all instruments used in the study. No teacher or student participant dropped out of the study.

### 2.3 Sampling Procedures

All sixth and seventh grade students completed the MRQ (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), a Class Strategies Checklist at the beginning and end of the study, and a Reading Behavior Survey at year's end. The 17 teachers completed a similar version of the Class Strategies Checklist both at the beginning and end of the study and also completed a survey at year's end to describe their experience with their classes.

#### 2.3.1 The Motivation to Read Questionnaire (MRQ)

Wigfield and Guthrie (1995) created the MRQ as a way to measure students' reading motivation. The original MRQ was normed on fourth and fifth grade students and designed to assess eleven unique dimensions of reading motivation compiled into four subcategories (Self-Efficacy, Intrinsic Motivation, Social Motivation, and Extrinsic Motivation). The authors revised the original 82-item instrument to 54 items still categorized into 11 motivational scales (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). To determine if the MRQ could be reliably used with young adolescents in upper grades a test/retest reliability analysis was conducted on the revised MRQ with 62 ninth graders prior to this study. Results indicated that nine of the scales yielded acceptable correlations ranging from .46 to .86. Because low test-retest reliability coefficients were obtained for the scales of Compliance and Work Avoidance, only the following nine scales; Reading Efficacy, Challenge, Curiosity, Involvement, Importance, Recognition, Grades, Social, and Competition were used in pretest/posttest fashion to measure changes in adolescents' reading motivation. For each item students responded to a 4-point scale by selecting either a 1 (very different from me), a 2 (a little different from me), a 3 (a little like me) or a 4 (a lot like me).

### 2.3.2 Reading Behavior Survey

A two-question Reading Behavior Survey was partially based on the work of Ivey and Broaddus (2001) in which survey questions were modified in a checklist format. Checking off as many choices that applied, one question asked, “Which type of reading activity do you enjoy most in the ELA class?” and the other, “What type of reading do you do outside of the classroom?”

### 2.3.3 Student Class Strategies Checklist

The Class Strategies Checklist was used in pre/post fashion to elicit from participants what activities and behaviors they wished the ELA teacher would provide before the school year began and indicate what was actually experienced during the school year. During both administrations, students could check off any number of 15 statements, such as “encourages me to read, explains why reading is important, uses challenging activities/tasks, encourages me to do my best,” as well as add suggestions on the line marked “other.”

### 2.3.4 Teacher Class Strategies Checklist

The Teacher Class Strategies Checklist mirrored the statement items on the Student Class Strategies Checklist. Teachers were asked to check off what activities/behaviors they anticipated offering during the academic year and then the activities/behaviors they actually implemented during the year in their ELA classrooms. In their voice, statements read, “encourages students to read, explains why reading is important, encourages students to do their best,” and “implements challenging activities/tasks” as well as “other.”

### 2.3.5 Teacher Survey

The first three questions on the seven item survey asked teachers to supply demographic information regarding gender and years of experience. The following questions required a written response relative to one’s reading teaching philosophy, beliefs of motivation, and instructional orientation. The seven questions follow:

- 1) Please circle one:            Female                            Male
- 2) How many years have you been teaching?
- 3) How many years have you been teaching ELA?
- 4) In brief, what is your philosophy in regards to teaching reading?
- 5) In your opinion, what is the number one thing that a teacher can do to get students motivated to read?
- 6) How would you describe your students’ overall motivation to read (high, average, low)? Please elaborate. What makes you believe their motivation is high, average, or low?
- 7) In regards to motivating students to read, please describe what you felt were your most **successful teaching practices and/or strategies** this year and why you felt they were successful.

## 2.4 Procedure

In August at an Institute for Catholic Schools held at the University, school principals were apprised of the study and asked if they would seek permission from their sixth and seventh grade teachers to participate. Teacher participants then attended two orientation and training meetings also held at the university during the end of September 2011 and early May 2012. During the initial meeting the purpose and design of the study was explained along with the procedures for the administration, collection, and return of student and teacher instruments to the lead researcher. The first set of student and teacher instruments were administered in October 2011 and again at the end of May/beginning of June 2012. Under no circumstances was this study intended to have any sort of intervention; teachers were expected to teach their English Language Art class as they regularly would with respect to their teaching philosophy, state standards, and school district expectations. As participants in this study, the only procedures teachers had to follow were completing their teacher instruments and faithfully administering the student instruments at the beginning and end of the study.

Teachers administered the student instruments during their regularly scheduled ELA classes. The administration of all student instruments took place over three days during 15-20 minutes of the opening of the class period. Students responded to the first 27 items of the MRQ during the first day and the remaining 27 on the second day. For each item, they were asked to select one of four choices ranging from one (very different from me) to four (a lot like me). At the third day sitting, students completed the Reading Behavior Survey and the Class Strategies Checklist. This procedure regarding administration days and time served to minimize environmental limitations.

Teachers were requested to emphasize to students during both phases of the data administration that all responses to items and questions were anonymous and under no circumstances would their answers affect them academically. During each administration day, ELA teachers read from a prepared script provided by the lead researcher and prior to the MRQ testing, three practice items were accomplished. For the Reading Behavior Survey and the Class Strategies Checklist, students were instructed to check off as many items they felt applied to them. Teachers completed their version of the Class Strategies Checklist in October and June and the ending Teacher Survey during a time and setting in which they felt comfortable.

### 2.5 Research Design and Data Analysis

This study, based on a quasi-experimental design, used the mean subscale scores of the MRQ. A mean difference score for each of the nine dimensions of reading motivation between the fall and spring scores were computed for each student and then averaged as a class. The class average, referred to as the mean difference subscale score for each dimension, was used as a way to identify each individual class's positive or negative changes among reading motivation dimensions for the academic year. The calculated class mean difference subscale scores were ranked from the least amount of change to the greatest amount of change per teacher per dimension.

Responses from the Reading Behavior Survey were examined in order to better understand what types of reading activities students enjoyed about their ELA class throughout the academic year and what type of reading they accomplished outside of the classroom. Both the student and teacher versions of the Classroom Strategy Checklist were analyzed to gather a better understanding of what instructional strategies were used in the ELA classroom throughout the year. The surveys provided by teachers of classrooms where growth in reading motivation was found on the MRQ were coded to find strategies teachers felt were most successful in motivating students throughout the year. Using the data from the Reading Behavior Survey, both versions of the Classroom Strategies Checklist, and the Teacher Survey, an association between ELA teachers' use of instructional literacy strategies with growth in dimensions of reading motivation among ELA classrooms could be established.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Findings regarding whether Individual Class Groups, Taught by the Same ELA Teacher Indicate overall Academic Year Change in Motivation as Measured by the MRQ

The mean difference subscale scores of the MRQ were examined for all 17 class groups (N = 414 students), for the eight sixth grade class groups (N = 196 students), and for the nine seventh grade class groups (N = 218 students). A negative difference indicated a decrease in a reading motivation dimension while a positive mean difference score indicated a positive motivational change. Table 1 reveals that for almost all dimensions and for all class groups, that a negative direction in mean scores occurred except for the motivation dimension of Challenge for seventh graders with a slight positive score of .02

Table 1. Mean difference subscale scores by MRQ dimension and sample population

	Sample Population N = 414	Sixth Graders N = 196	Seventh Graders N = 218
Efficacy	-.07	-.08	-.06
Challenge	-.01	-.05	.02
Curiosity	-.09	-.15	-.05
Involvement	-.08	-.07	-.08
Importance	-.14	-.13	-.16
Recognition	-.14	-.16	-.13
Grades	-.13	-.14	-.11
Social	-.22	-.26	-.18
Competition	-.07	-.13	-.02

The MRQ subscale dimension of Social indicated the greatest decrease of mean scores for both grade levels while the least amount of decrease was noted for the dimension of Challenge. The reason for the decline in the Social subscale mean scores may be due to the content of the seven items. Almost all of the items refer to social

interaction regarding reading with family members and friends. One item has to do with library visits with family. Young modern-day adolescents at the sixth and seventh grade levels would more likely engage in social interaction and networking with family and friends through electronic means and not place “reading” high on their social media discussions. On the other hand, the five items of Challenge may have appealed to the inquisitiveness of young adolescents in that the items referred to being challenged and reading difficult and interesting materials.

The mean difference subscale scores for the nine MRQ dimensions for all 17 class groups ranged from a positive .34 to a negative -.58 for the dimension of Curiosity having six items. Eleven of the class groups revealed a positive change in one or more of the subscale dimensions with five class groups indicating positive change in four MRQ dimensions. Six class groups had a negative change from October to June with all nine MRQ dimensions. Positive motivational growth occurred for Challenge for seven class group teachers, Curiosity for six group teachers, and Competition for five group teachers. Social was the only MRQ dimension that indicated negative change for all 17 teacher class groups.

### *3.2 Findings regarding What Classroom Strategies Were Used More Frequently in the ELA Classroom Where MRQ Dimension Scales Revealed Positive Change*

The responses on the Class Strategies Checklist of five class groups that showed a positive change in at least four MRQ dimensions were analyzed to determine what strategies were associated with the positive change. Students and teachers could check off up to 16 strategies that occurred in the ELA learning environment. The MRQ dimension of Challenge indicated a positive change for four class groups (range .05 to .25). Recognition (range .02 to .16); Grades (range .03 to .09); Competition (range .13 to .32); Efficacy (range .03 to .26); and Curiosity (range .07 to .34) showed a positive change from three class groups; and Involvement (.13) from one class group.

The seven ELA classroom strategies most associated with positive changes in the MRQ dimensions for all five class groups were group work, encouragement, clear instructions, positive feedback, getting along with students, fun activities, and challenging activities. Interesting topics was a strategy frequently noted by four class groups and setting clear goals a strategy noted by three class groups.

Four of the class groups were at the seventh grade level and one at the sixth grade level. Two of the schools were located in Manhattan, two in Queens, and one in Suffolk County, Long Island. From 74 to 100% of the schools' students were eligible for subsidized lunch (with two schools at 100%); from 39% to 98% of students were of Hispanic/Latino background; and from 6% to 98% were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

### *3.3 Findings regarding What Types of Reading Experiences and Activities do the Sixth and Seventh Graders Enjoy most in the ELA Classroom and Accomplish outside of the Classroom*

The sixth and seventh graders checked any number of 10 items relative to what they enjoyed doing with reading in and outside of the ELA classroom. For both grade level groups (N = 414), the five reading activities of Teacher Read Aloud (N = 238), Reading Plays (N = 235), Short Stories (N = 223), Silent Reading (N = 222), and Student Read Aloud (N = 205) were enjoyed by roughly 50% of all students. The selfsame five reading activities were also the most enjoyed by each grade level group. Reading poems (N = 184) and Class Reading (N = 180) were the next favored activities of both student groups with Book Discussions (N = 163) and Reading Novels (N = 157) noted to be the least favored.

Table 2. Reading activities enjoyed the most by students during ELA class at 10 schools

Reading Activities		Sample Population N = 414	Sixth Grade N = 196	Seventh Grade N = 218
Teacher Read Aloud		238	110	128
Reading Plays		235	121	114
Short Stories		223	108	115
Silent Reading		222	109	113
Student Read Aloud		204	93	111
Reading Poems		184	80	104
Class Reading		180	91	89
Book Discussions		163	83	80
Reading Novels		157	79	78

The types of reading activities enjoyed most during out-of-school-time by roughly 50% or more of the population were Text Messages (N = 281), Mysteries (N = 280), Adventure (N = 278), Magazines (N = 252), Book Series (N = 232), Fantasy (N = 227), Scary Stories (N = 220), and Emails (N = 200). The least favored reading experiences meriting only double digit responses were Newspapers (N = 94), Biographies (N = 93), and Autobiographies (N = 75). The most enjoyable reading genre for sixth graders was Adventure (N = 143) and the least enjoyable was Autobiography (N = 33). For seventh graders, the most enjoyable way to read was through Text Messages (N = 165) while the least enjoyable was with Newspapers (N = 40).

### 3.4 Findings regarding What Teachers Reported on Their Surveys

Responses from the 11 teachers whose ELA classes showed growth in one or more MRQ dimensions were analyzed. Eight teachers who believed that one of their responsibilities was to motivate students taught classrooms where Reading Efficacy and Challenge grew over the 10-month period. Many of these teachers noted that expressing their own love of reading to their students served as a technique to motivate them to read. Three of these teachers felt that one of their most successful ELA strategies was that of allowing students to engage in points-of-view about a reading assignment.

Nine class groups indicated positive growth in the intrinsic motivational dimensions of Curiosity, Involvement, and Importance. The 14 items on the MRQ in these three categories all related to the individual's own beliefs and values, i.e., "I like to read about new things" (Curiosity); "I feel like I make friends with people in good books" (Involvement); and "It is very important for me to be a good reader" (Importance). Teachers of these class groups expressed the importance of reading in everyday life when describing their philosophy of teaching. A seventh grade teacher of 13 years experience and whose students were 100% eligible for subsidized lunch wrote on the survey, "Literature is a passport to the other worlds and perspectives in life. My job is to enable students to see that in all that they read."

These teachers also stressed the importance of using student interest as a way to maintain reading motivation. Two teachers noted that they assigned additional reading assignments for specific topics that students enjoyed and others noted that the use of activities such as acting, debates, and games kept students highly engaged.

Five class groups indicated positive growth in the Competition dimension. Teachers who taught these classes noted that Read Alouds and Group Work were two of their more successful ELA strategies. Competition items included, "I like being the best at reading" and "I like being the only one who knows an answer in something we read."

## 4. Discussion

The present study adds to previous research findings that as students get older and progress in grade level, their levels of reading motivation decline (Bokhorst-Heng & Pereira, 2008; Kelley & Decker, 2009; Lau, 2009; Ryan



& Patrick, 2001). Furthermore, the present study revealed that even within the same grade level over one full academic year, young adolescents at the sixth and seventh grade levels at 10 schools decreased in all nine dimensions of the MRQ save one, regardless of the instructional beliefs and practices of their 17 English Language Arts teachers.

However, decline in reading motivation for all nine dimensions of the MRQ does not occur for individual class groups taught by the same ELA teacher over the year. Eleven of the 17 class groups indicated some positive change in one or more dimensions of the MRQ with five class groups indicating positive growth in four dimensions of reading motivation. What are the factors that occur between a teacher and students in a structured classroom environment that allow positive change in reading motivation to occur for some teachers and not for others who were dealing with similar age levels of students? The six teachers who registered no gains from their class groups on any MRQ dimensions taught in three of the 10 schools. Five of their class groups were made up of predominantly White students (range 45% to 65%) with a range from 16 to 54% for subsidized lunch benefits. The remaining class group was composed of 86% Hispanic/Latino seventh graders with a 68% subsidized lunch benefit.

Four seventh grade teachers and three sixth grade teachers at three locals implemented seven instructional and classroom management strategies noted on the Class Strategies Checklist that were associated with positive change in MRQ dimensions. The classroom management and positive behavioral strategies common to these teachers were: *offering encouragement, providing clear instructions, offering positive feedback, and getting along with students. Providing challenging and fun activities* and allowing for *group work* were instructional ELA strategies students favored of these teachers. What common characteristics of these class groups may have influenced positive motivation in the seven MRQ dimensions and on the Class Strategies Checklist? All seven teachers taught classes that had very high minority student populations who were also eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Two of the schools had subsidized lunch eligibility for 100% of the students. Four teachers taught classes in which 86% to 98% of the student population was of the Hispanic/ Latino culture.

By examining the responses and results of the Teacher Survey, the Class Strategies Checklist, and the student Reading Behavior Survey aspects of successful instruction in some sixth and seventh grade classrooms can be identified. Classrooms where motivational dimension scales indicated positive change over the school year were associated with student enjoyment of teacher and student read alouds, the reading of plays, short stories, and poems, silent reading, class reading, and book discussions (see Table 2). Apart from the choice of silent reading and possibly short stories, the common thread through most of the enjoyable activities was the use of oral language in the context of a reading event. This preference to be engaged in receptive and expressive oral language events may have been due to the makeup of the class groups. Class groups from most of these 10 schools were made up of large populations of Hispanic/Latino, subsidized lunch, and Limited English Proficient students. Possibly these students enjoy the oral language experiences as these help them both understand and enjoy the content. The five class groups composed of larger populations of White students also participated in the rating of the activities. Another explanation may be that sixth and seventh graders prefer reading activities when someone else is engaged in the actual reading and during listening, they become involved in the meaning and enjoyment of the text. Teachers did report that they used the read aloud to motivate students to read. The use of this strategy may have influenced the high enjoyment rating scores given by students for short stories and silent reading if teachers used an initial read aloud to whet students' mental appetites to pursue subsequent silent reading.

While the MRQ Social Dimension scores decreased the most for all class groups, possibly due to the focus of the items themselves, three of the most highly rated reading sources accomplished during out-of-school time were those involving a social nature. Text messages (N = 281) and emails (N = 200) require social contact with adults and peers and magazine reading (N = 252) for this age group often involves reading about prominent entertainment and sports figures with whom the young adolescents often admire and wish to emulate.

Today's youth can engage in reading behavior through many multiliteracy formats. Future researchers may find that the MRQ Social Dimension items need to be enhanced with items reflecting reading engagement through technological or multiliteracy means. Use of such additional assessments may reveal high motivational levels to engage in reading and supportive literacy behavior for modern-day adolescents.

The researchers questioned whether years of teaching experience would make a difference in the findings. In a subsequent analysis, we compared the MRQ, Class Strategies Checklist, and Reading Behavior Survey results for four teachers with experience of five years or less with those of four teachers with 25 or more years of teaching experience. Class mean difference scores on the MRQ dimensions indicated no significant difference

based on years of experience. Both teacher groups noted that capitalizing on student interest was one of the best motivators for young adolescents. They noted that group discussion, reading aloud, play acting, use of technological resources, and grouping struggling with stronger readers were classroom strategies that highly engaged student interest to achieve motivation. Student responses on the Reading Behavior Survey indicated that for both teacher groups, students preferred: (1) engaging in group work, (2) fun and challenging activities, (3) interesting topics, (4) receiving positive feedback, (5) clear instructions, and (6) teachers that stressed the importance of reading.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings in this study of young adolescents and their teachers are closely aligned with those teacher practices that influence high levels of reading involvement in elementary classrooms (Taylor et al., 2003). Both the present research as well as that of Taylor et al. (2003) indicated that successful teachers motivate their students through high interaction, offer challenging literacy activities, and engage students in discussion about what they read.

The study, however, had three major limitations. The first involves the construct of motivation itself and the difficulty to assess it accurately. Since behavior, performance strivings, self efficacy, and internal and external reward beliefs can affect one's motivation in either positive or negative ways, assessing motivation for individuals becomes difficult and even more so for class groups. Present instruments serving to measure literacy motivation such as the MRQ may not succeed in assessing the multidimensional factors that contribute to motivation.

Generalizability of the findings poses another limitation since a convenience sample was used in this quasi-experimental study. While 414 seventh and eighth grade adolescents and 17 ELA teachers participated in the study, their ten contributing schools were located in the downstate region of New York. Results obtained through the use of the MRQ, survey, and checklist instruments may yield differing results for young adolescents and their ELA teachers from other regions of the country.

The final limitation resides with the study procedure. Survey and self-report checklist instruments were used to gain insight into students' literacy behavior and ELA teachers' perceptions of their literacy instructional practices. Such self-report instruments have limitations based on the fidelity of the responses. Classroom observations and student and teacher interviews or focus groups would further operationalize the findings in terms of specific behaviors that may be witnessed relative to the construct of motivation.

Future researchers may wish to replicate the study with a random sample of participants to make the findings more generalizable to young adolescents at the middle school level. However, since results of the present study suggest that differing student populations react to an individual ELA teacher's instructional pedagogy in differing ways, additional studies may also investigate discrete student populations' level of motivation within literacy instructional pedagogy.

Since motivation has such multidimensional components, a need also exists for researchers to refine and improve instruments that attempt to operationalize and measure the dimensions of this construct across age level groups.

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