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The Impacts of Self-Efficacy and Intrinsic Motivation: Mentoring Students to Be Motivated Readers

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Introduction

Student motivation is a critical aspect of reading achievement, as those who are motivated to read will do so more frequently, thus improving foundational literacy skills (Brandt et al., 2021). Research shows a strong correlation between motivation and the amount of reading that is conducted, as well as a strong connection between motivation and reading success (Bates et al., 2016; Schiefele et al., 2016). The *Matthew Effect*, a phrase coined by Stanovich (1986), is particularly relevant when focusing on motivation, as rich readers, those who *do*, become more affluent in their knowledge of text, while poor readers are often resistant, are intrinsically uninterested, and have inferior understandings of the components of reading. Therefore, teachers of reading—which, in many ways, includes *all* educators—must be ever mindful of the importance to not just teach reading, but to also engage in practices that encourage students to want to read and that will "inspire children to value reading" (Brandt et al., 2021, p. 723).

Confidence and motivation are also fundamentally linked, as students who feel confident in their abilities become more inspired to cultivate those skills. Self-efficacy, the belief in one's own ability to succeed, is at the center of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997). Children are often are unmotivated to read, not necessarily because of inadequate aptitude, but because they doubt their abilities and have a restricted belief in themselves as readers. Those with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere when challenged, while those with low self-efficacy are more likely to give up when faced with adversity (Bandura, 1997). Schunk and Pajares (2009) also parallel the idea that students with high self-efficacy have higher confidence levels and are able to see complex reading tasks as challenges that they can overcome, while those with low self-efficacy see reading challenges as barriers that they cannot conquer.

The development of self-efficacy is based upon students' awareness of reading performance (Taboada Barber & Lutz Klauda, 2020). This does not mean that all children will be proficient, but self-efficacy is based on feelings of success in reading. As reading is a complex undertaking, students with low self-efficacy often avoid more challenging reading tasks, thus limiting growth (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997). Developing self-efficacy allows students to identify themselves as readers. Such identity is based upon one's experiences (Friedman et al., 2021). Reading experiences that are positive lead to a stronger self-belief system.

Literature Review

According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), motivation refers to an "individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (p. 405). Motivation focuses on one's feelings about

reading, while reading engagement denotes one's authentic, actual involvement in reading (Guthrie et al., 2012). Research attests that motivation is a key factor in reading, yet in recent years, there has been a steady decline in students' desire to read for pleasure. A study from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED, 2017) shows that children and adolescents are demonstrating both a lack of motivation and a desire to engage in reading. While this decrease was already occurring prior to the global pandemic, COVID-19 may have made exacerbated the issue, as schools were shut down and face-to-face learning ceased to exist for a period of time. While schools are, for the most part, now back to fully in-person instruction, this may be a time in history when decreases in reading motivation worsen, as studies, such as the work of Zaccoletti et al. (2020), are finding that children had lower academic motivation during pandemic-related school closures.

Reading motivation can be divided into two separate constructs: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic reading motivation is an internal desire to read. Those who are intrinsically motivated find the act of reading to be rewarding in and of itself (Schiefele et al., 2012). In contrast, external reading motivation occurs when students are laden with demands, expectations, punishments, and external rewards (Schiefele et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Simply stated, students with intrinsic reading motivation find reading to *be* the reward, while students who rely on extrinsic motivation *seek* rewards. It is important to note that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation "can spur children to acquire new knowledge and engage in productive behaviors" (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2020, p. 495). However, the research of Schiefele et al. (2012) clearly indicates that there is a strong and positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and reading achievement, yet no such correlation is found when using extrinsic motivating factors. In fact, external motivation has been found to be a negative factor in reading achievement (Schiefele et al., 2012). When children read to receive positive outcomes (e.g. good grades or tangible rewards), or to avoid negative outcomes (e.g. punishments or poor grades), they are not reading for intrinsic satisfaction; instead, they are doing so out of external obligation (Schiefele et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020).

The role of the reading teacher is varied, complex, and multidimensional, yet the role of the reading teacher is, above all, paramount. According to the International Literacy Association, "teachers matter more to student achievement than any other school-related factor" (ILA, 2019, p. 1). It is, however, not enough to teach children to read; although that, in and of itself, is a substantial task, getting children to desire to read in an intrinsic manner is an additional layer in the process (Brandt et al., 2021). Gambrell (2015) posits that teachers "have two equally important reading goals: to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read" (p. 259). Educators play a critical role

in creating safe spaces for reading to be enjoyed and practiced. The teacher sets the stage for this to occur, as teacher engagement and interactions with students in the classroom contribute to student success (Jensen, 2009). While there is no one "right" way to motivate students to learn, it is important that educators keep motivation at the forefront of daily teaching and learning and that teachers strive to cultivate intrinsic motivation within the reading environment.

One critical aspect of the social learning theory is based upon the ideology that children learn through the observations of others (Bandura, 1997; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2020). While Moats (2020) affirms that no one can teach what they do not explicitly understand, perhaps it can also be stated that no one can teach what they do not explicitly *do*, as children will learn from the practices and behaviors, and not merely the words, of teachers. When teachers deeply and actively engage in the reading process with students, the students are able to observe, and consequently decipher, that the teacher is invested in reading as a shared and lived experience and that reading has value and purpose throughout all stages of life.

The topic of student motivation in reading has been discussed and researched for years. In 2016, Sharp et al. analyzed and synthesized research on motivation; these were named *The Salient Seven* and showcase the fundamental principles that have been extensively recognized in research over the past two decades. These seven practices include: 1.) giving students choice and options in what they read; 2.) creating time for rich in-class discussions focused on literature; 3.) ensuring that strong instruction is occurring so that students learn skills that will help them to create goals in their reading; 4.) giving students challenging text while also allowing for scaffolding to occur; 5.) ensuring that literature is authentic to students' cultural identities, interests, and cognitive needs; 6.) allowing students to have print or digital options when reading; and 7.) building rewards that build intrinsic motivation (Sharp et al., 2016). When these are continuous precursors in the implementation of instructional practices, there is a greater likelihood that students will want to read (Sharp et al., 2016), which can ultimately allow for more authentic and intrinsic motivation to occur.

Theory to Practice: The Role of Teachers as Reading Mentors

The aforementioned research is consistent in providing vital reasons as to the importance of enhancing motivation in the classroom, and the work of Bandura (1997) clearly demonstrates the need for students to reach higher levels of self-efficacy for reading success. As the word "teacher" is also synonymous with the word "mentor," we must recognize that as educators, we are, in reality, reading mentors to our students. With this in mind, teachers must find tools and strategies that will support and motivate students in reading. The following are examples of practices that may be helpful in the reading classroom:

Make Goals for Yourself

Research shows that helping students to take part in their learning and to set goals for themselves is an important element in motivation (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). However, children can also feel a sense of disconnectedness if goal-setting is not explicitly modeled. When students see teachers setting goals for themselves, and when students are encouraged to set their own goals, it can inspire a spirit of achievement within the classroom. Teachers can also model how setting goals can help to strengthen self-efficacy.

Teachers can create specific reading goals for themselves and by doing so, can assist students to create their own reading goals. For example, at the launch of a new academic year, the start of a semester, or the beginning of a month, a teacher can announce to the class how many books s/he plans to read for pleasure in that particular timeframe. The teacher can then encourage the students to think about how many books they would like to set as a reading goal. Students can set individual goals for themselves, and can also collectively make a reading goal for the class (Brandt, 2021). During the timeframe given, the teacher can give students updates and allow students to share their own reading progress. Reading goals set for students can be adjusted as necessary.

In addition, goals could be created to help students create strategic gains in the amount of time spent on reading. Often, when students feel overwhelmed with the process of reading, the struggle to simply start reading can be daunting. As adults, we too can struggle to begin certain tasks, and by showing students how to set goals to start and complete projects, teachers can reiterate that working in small increments can help to accomplish the task, one step at a time.

Teachers across an entire school can also share in setting reading goals. For instance, at the beginning of the year, all interested faculty members can each decide on the number of books they would like to read for pleasure during the year. They can then keep track of their individual progress and conduct check-ins with one another for updates and support. While teachers' personal lives are very busy, and this may not work for everyone's schedule or in every school, this could be used as a method for showing students in all grade levels that achieving reading goals is something that they too can do.

Invest Time in Reader Interests

We must be mindful that we all have our own individual likes and interests, as do our students. Not all students are going to like all books, and some book genres may not always be as appealing as others. In his book, *The Rights of the Reader* (2015), Daniel Pennac reminds us that readers have the choice to stop reading a book if it is not of interest or is too complex. Although we want to expose students to a wide array of reading materials, we must remember that student motivation is tied to interest. When a child becomes disengaged in a

text, but is not permitted to seek out another, more suitable text, that student can easily become disconnected from reading altogether. It is important, therefore, to give students choice whenever appropriate (Turner & Paris, 1995).

If students do not see the personal connection to what they are reading, motivation to do so can suffer (Assor et al, 2002). Students must understand the value of their reading so that it can become authentic to their learning (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Students who understand the purpose of their reading, as well as how it is applicable to their own lives, will become more motivated and invested in the reading process. As well, teachers who create reading-rich classrooms, filled with texts in which students truly see themselves, and others, in positive ways, allow for such rich authenticity to occur (Bishop, 1990; Temple et al., 2019).

There is a strong correlation between choice and feelings of self-efficacy, as students given choice feel more in control (Taboada Barber & Lutz Klauda, 2020). When applicable, teachers can give students choice about what they read, where they read, how they read (e.g., digital formats), if they read with a partner or independently, and in given response to the literature opportunities (Turner & Paris, 1995). Such choice can make tremendous impacts in students' desires to read. Additionally, teachers can help students recognize that everyone has different reading interests and that it is perfectly permissible to read texts that may not be read by others. For instance, graphic novels are extremely popular with many students because they are an interesting way to engage in a story. Due to such interest, there are many books, originally published in traditional novel format, that are now being published in graphic novel format (Springer et al., 2017), and such variations means more differentiation in choice. By recognizing 'classic' books in various forms and genres, and by keeping abreast of new book selections being published in those genres, teachers can help students select books that meet their interests and reading needs.

Children learn about reading and about connections with text through interactions and discussions with others. Through this, children better understand their reading identities (Wagner, 2018). It is vital that while we mentor students to have their own reading identities, we must also think about *our* own reading identities; not only are we educators, we should also be recognized as readers. In that context, teachers can, and should, take time in class to discuss their own favorite books, their favorite literature genres, and their favorite authors, all while helping students to grow a list of their favorites that are unique to their interests and that are relevant to who they are as readers. Below (Table 1) is a list of example questions and conversational starters that could occur in whole group, small groups, or partner discussions, noting that these could be initiated and/or facilitated by both teachers and students.

Table 1. Examples of questions and conversational starters for book discussions.

A book that I am reading right now is ____.
The name of the author is ___. I have/I have not read other books by this author before.
I would/would not recommend this book because _____.
On a scale of 1-10 (or five stars), I would give this book a _____ because _____.
Under which literature genre does this book fall?
Why did you choose this book to read?
Do you want to continue reading this book? Why or why not?
Would you want to read another book by this author?
Can you think of a friend who might enjoy this book?
Would you want to reread this book? Why or why not?
How did this book make you feel?

How well did you relate to the main character (or the theme/message of the text)?

It is important to note that students should be able to ask the teacher about their own reading, thus creating a dialogue that allows students to see reading to be a lifelong habit.

Fan the Flame for Self-Efficacy: Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection

According to Wigfield et al. (2015), many children in the primary grades begin their formal education with a strong sense of competence, as children typically view the process of learning to be an exciting journey for which they will master. Most children are enthused by the prospects of learning how to read, but for many students, this optimistic attitude simply does not last, especially when reading becomes a struggle (Wigfield et al., 2015). Children's beliefs in themselves and their feelings of competence begin to decrease as children move into older elementary grades and beyond, making them less eager to read (Jacobs et al., 2002).

When children are able to feel successful in their reading abilities and are able to see progress and growth in who they are as readers, their experiences with reading will be more positive (Schiefele et al., 2012). Teachers who celebrate small growths and encourage students to believe in themselves are motivating students to feel more confident in their reading skills. The work of Bandura (1997) postulates that when individuals see gradual improvements in their skills over time, even when encountering failures and challenges, feelings of mastery begin to emerge. As the role of an educator is to help children to ultimately achieve independence, we must teach children to be in control of their successes, as well as to recognize areas of need. Therefore, it is important to mentor students in the processes of self-evaluation, self-monitoring, and self-reflecting.

It is not enough for teachers to recognize the growth and gradual improvements of students; while this, of course, is of vital importance, it is also critical that students begin to see such improvements for themselves. One simple way to do this is by giving students self-assessment tools that ask for both strengths/improvements and areas on which to work. By ensuring that the students must rate themselves more in what they accomplished, and less in their areas of need (e.g., three checks, two wishes; two things I did well today, one area I want to keep working on), students begin to recognize that they are making progress, thus enhancing self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.

Teachers are typically seen as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) within the reading classroom (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers are experts, yet this does not mean that the teacher is all-knowing. It is therefore important that teachers

become willing to create a space where learning is not a practice limited to students; teachers who are intentional co-learners with students allow the erudition process to become more engaging and meaningful for all. Furthermore, students who are encouraged to recognize mistakes as learning opportunities (Vygotsky, 1978) can become more willing to continuously try, thus steadily enhancing their self-efficacy and personal reading growth.

Reclaim the Joy of Reading

"In light of our current test-focused educational climate, some teachers think their focus must shift away from motivation to read in favor of rigorous, core-focused instruction" (Springer et al., 2017, p.43). Although the joy of reading is often dimmed by the onslaught of high-stakes testing and state and federal mandates, such as Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), it is important to remember that reading simply for the purpose of passing a test does not lead to reading engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2017; Schiefele et al., 2012). These high-stakes assessments can make it difficult for teachers and administrators to keep intrinsic motivation in the forefront of academic practices (Taboada Barber & Lutz Klauda, 2020). It is essential, perhaps now more than ever, that teachers are able to reclaim the delight of reading in the classroom.

Since the publication of the report *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985), there has been constant support of reading aloud to young children for the building of foundational skills. Reading aloud to young children has been labeled the most important means of preparing young children for reading success in older grades (Anderson et al., 1985). There is little question that read alouds, both in educational and home environments, are critical for forming early acquisitional skillsets. However, in an era of heightened accountability, the power of read alouds in upper elementary grades (and beyond) has been underappreciated and devalued in recent years (Ledger & Merga, 2018). Routman (2018) reminds us that being read to not only enhances literacy success, being read to also leads to feelings of enjoyment. Results of a recent study by Ledger and Merga (2018) demonstrate the need for reading aloud to students well past the primary grades, as read alouds help students in *learning* to read, but also help students in *loving* to read, and there should always be time for that in any classroom.

Conclusion

Motivation to read is a critical component for success, and it is imperative that we mentor students, regardless of grade level, to engage in texts that inspire them to discover-or rediscover-the joy of learning and reading. There are many methods to enhance motivation, and there is definitely no 'one size fits all' approach to engaging students. We must always remember that teaching

children to read is only one part of the whole picture; teaching students to enjoy reading is an exceptionally vital component in the reading process (Gambrell, 2015).

The ability to help students become empowered by their reading progression, and mentoring them to set, and achieve, realistic goals for themselves, are critical characteristics of being transformative educators. To do this, teachers can give students more autonomy in their reading choices, allow them to engage in meaningful discussions, and allow students to see the power and the joy of the printed word, as such practices can support students' self-efficacy.

While teaching students, we must also never overlook the fact that reading can be a joyful experience for us, as well. It is sometimes easy to get overwhelmed by the demands of teaching reading that we can let the spark associated with being a reader diminish. When educators express delight in reading, such enthusiasm can truly transform the ethos of the classroom environment, as well as the culture and climate of the entire school. Students should not only see teachers as *leaders*, they should also be able to see their respective teachers as *readers*. Perhaps, therefore, the most effective way that a teacher can be a mentor to students is by modeling good reading habits and attitudes.

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