

Inspiring Students to Value Reading

Seven Salient Principles of Motivation

Have you ever seen a struggling reader rally his friends to buy the same book at a school book fair, and then spearhead a series of literacy circle activities during recess time? Uncommon at best, right? Recently, one fourth grade teacher in Utah County while implementing reading motivational principles in her classroom reported just such an incident. In her words:

“I have a group of boys in my class and one of them is a[n] extremely low reader and I don’t know if he has ever tried reading a chapter book or anything like that, and they made their own literature circle. Like they would talk about the book at recess and they all bought the same book at a book fair . . . and they would discuss it. He would tell me, ‘It’s getting really good!’”

Teachers of all age groups want to know how to instill in their students such a love for reading (O’Flahavan et al., 1992). However, knowing how to influence the desire to read is not always clear. Reading motivational principles are rarely emphasized in education programs, little attention is paid to motivation amongst state standards, and every teacher knows the challenge of moving away from extrinsic motivation and towards intrinsic motivation, especially when extrinsic rewards are so easily disseminated with their short-term positive effects.

Reading motivation is a complex multifaceted construct. Experts who have defined it have used several theoretical concepts to characterize its complexity (Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015). Motivated readers find reading useful, enjoyable, and important (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). They are more likely to be eager to read, more strategic in their reading practices, and more willing to talk about what they are reading. Motivated readers are often engaged in a variety of reading experiences (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Engaged reading and the motivation to read are

correlated by common outcomes. Both tend to produce an increase in how frequently students read and both tend to result in improved reading performance (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In a study where middle school and high school age students were being measured for their ability to read and comprehend narrative and expository texts, high achievement was associated with high engagement. In fact, highly engaged middle school students performed as well as low engaged high school students (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997). The younger, more engaged middle school students provided themselves with self-motivated reading opportunities that increased their knowledge as if they had four more years of formal education.

Although reading motivation tends to be high with young children, engagement in reading and motivation to read traditionally shows a decline by late elementary school and beyond. By middle and high school, the number of self-motivated readers decreases, as the poorly engaged readers become more numerous (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). This downward spiral is problematic because being able to motivate students to value reading has benefits not only vital to the reader’s acquisition of knowledge, but also has benefits vital to our classroom instruction. Engagement predicts students’ learning, grades, achievement test scores, retention and graduation (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Likewise motivation has been shown to increase the use of sophisticated prolonged strategies, more time on task, and higher reading achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

The Salient Seven Instructional Principles

Recognizing the potent contributions motivation and engagement have on student achievement, researchers have spent decades studying them (Gambrell, 1996; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010; Zimmerman, 2008). Several instructional principles and practices have been found to effectively stim-

ulate an interest in reading. We have categorized the findings of all these motivational practices into seven general principles and coined them the "Salient Seven." These instructional principles are: choice, collaboration, challenge, control, technology, authenticity, and proximate rewards.

Choice

Choice is an aspect of reading motivation that underpins all other reading motivational principles. Every other motivational principle we share will successfully engender the love of reading when established on or connected with student choice. Choice is the opportunity given to students to select or decide for themselves between two or more options. Unfortunately, when choices are too numerous (i.e. choose any text you want) or too complex (i.e. research this topic any way that works for you) students will flounder. Choices, when too numerous or complex, can be overwhelming and detract from the overall outcome. Choices are most effective when offered within parameters (Gambrell, 2011).

Students who are allowed choices within limits are more likely to put forth effort learning and understanding the materials they are reading (Schiefele, 1991). Choice is given when students are allowed to select the teacher's "read aloud" after the teacher has provided a synopsis about three possible books, or when leveled passages on a variety of topics are offered when students are being assessed for fluency ability. During Silent Sustained Reading, choices can be offered as to where students can sit within the classroom. Sometimes it is helpful to offer choice in partner selection during buddy reading, or when choosing members of a literature circle.

Choices allow students to engage in decision-making and provide a sense of independence, especially if related to their interests. One good example of the power of interest influencing reading motivation can be seen in reluctant readers who overcome their resistance when allowed to choose texts on topics they find exciting or interesting (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2007). Other options for decision-making would be to allow students to select reading goals, or which strategy to use to solve a literacy problem. These types of choices tend to stimulate positive feelings about effort and achievement (Katz & Assor, 2007), as well a sense of ownership and responsibility (Turner & Paris, 1995).

Finally, you might want to consider choice in how students show their understanding of the books they read. One teacher observed by Turner and Paris (1995) provided book choice on a common topic of butterflies, but she also allowed students to choose an idea of their own that would demonstrate the personal influence of their butterfly reading. Students began writing about adventures with butterflies, exploring what it would be like to be a butterfly, or explaining the life cycle of butterflies. Choice permitted these students to become responsive to literacy as well as organize their literacy learning strategies.

Collaboration

Students love spending time with their friends. Capturing the need for social interaction is a great tool to boost reading motivation. Sharing reading is a social experience, whether students are reading in unison, discussing a novel, or working together to decode a book. There are several benefits to arranging for social collaboration in reading instruction. Langer, Close, Angelis, and Preller (2000) found when middle and high school students participated in peer discussions of text, they obtained a deeper and more complex understanding of what was read. Chinn, Anderson and Waggoner (2001) reported students who worked together on reading tasks were able to combine their background knowledge and skill sets to better learn from each other and build a shared understanding of the material. Students who work together are more willing to participate in group discussions. They engage more with one another, sharing more ideas and spending more time in meaningful discourse. They use more high-level cognitive processes, raise more questions as a group than as an individual, and have richer more complex discussions (Almasi, 1995; Block & Pressley, 2003).

There are many ways to include collaboration within literacy instruction. One way is to organize literature study groups. A literature study group is a group of students who have a similar interest in a book and meet together with the teacher to read and discuss that book. These groups give students the opportunity to discuss readings, clarify fuzzy parts, and share connections or favorite passages.

Another way to promote collaboration is through literature response projects. After reading a book

together, students work with peers to select and complete a project that demonstrates their collective understanding and connections to the text. Students pool resources throughout the process from conception to presentation as the teacher guides and facilitates them to a successful conclusion.

Cross-grade buddies can also increase motivation through collaboration. Some schools organize cross-grade buddies between an older grade and a younger grade. The two classes meet regularly to work on and help each other with literacy-related activities. This can include a variety of activities such as fluency checks, read alouds, reader's theatre, or writing activities. Both ages of students are challenged to work on their own needed skills. For example, a fourth grade class can work on story elements and plot by writing a reader's theatre as the younger students practice fluency by performing the play.

Finally, read alouds are a favorite time for teachers and students to share books, storylines, and literacy learning in an informal and delightful way. Teachers spend 10-20 minutes each day reading aloud as students listen and respond together. A spin on the traditional read aloud is for students to be readers. Students practice a selected book until proficient and then perform a read aloud to a small group of peers. The option to read to peers increases the students' excitement to perform and reread text.

Challenge

Challenge as a motivational principle, like choice, needs moderation. Too much challenge finds students feeling frustrated and overwhelmed, too little challenge creates boredom and low effort. Like Goldilocks' porridge, just right challenges are somewhere in between. An appropriate level of difficulty requires challenging, yet attainable, learning tasks. Moderately challenging tasks provide enough flexibility that students can cognitively wrestle with a problem, looking upon errors as a way to improve (Turner & Paris, 1995). Appropriate challenges are positively associated with achievement gains (Topping, Samuels, & Paul, 2008). Ultimately, students who are allowed to operate at these more moderately challenging levels find the challenge a reward in itself (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Conversely, there is nothing that squelches moti-

vation more than too much challenge and frequent failure. Students who continually fail or struggle in reading are less likely to try or attempt new or challenging tasks (Schunk, 2003). Modeling, providing extended guided practice, and releasing teacher responsibility to the student until they have achieved automaticity are still pedagogically sound principles for teaching essential skills of reading.

Finding the "just right" challenge for students is important. An ideal challenge is realized when a reader encounters new concepts and new language, building both vocabulary and comprehension. This type of learning often requires the help of someone who is more knowledgeable. Drawing from Vygotskian learning theory, research has verified that learning is facilitated when the learner has a "more knowledgeable other" to guide them within their "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). When students are supported in their struggle to read more challenging material by more capable others, they are able to read more complex materials (Stahl, 2009).

An example of this is the current practice of Close reading. Close reading is a reading instructional practice based on this idea of increased challenge with support (Fisher & Frey, 2012). During close reading teachers help groups of students with text that is more challenging than they would typically take on themselves. The teacher scaffolds the reading process as students complete several rereadings of the text. With each rereading the teacher focuses on a variety of skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, and thoughtful responses (Smyth, 2004; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Because of the high scaffolding, students are successful in the challenge.

Another way teachers can provide appropriate challenge to students is through the types of tasks they assign. Open literacy tasks provide challenge for all students, regardless of ability level (Turner and Paris, 1995). Open literacy tasks are tasks that allow many learning levels for students to work and complete assignments, as opposed to just one right answer or format. Open tasks allow all students to work at their own level while still meeting the assignment objective. One good example of an open task is writing. Writing can easily be an open task because both advanced writers as well as struggling writers can participate in the task as they work at

their own level while still meeting the expectations of the teacher. For example, an early reader/writer may be responding to the read aloud, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, by focusing on representing every sound of the words they are writing in a response journal. A more proficient reader/writer may be working on the same response assignment but focusing on a more advanced skill of organizing thoughts into paragraphs and/or determining unique publication options. Each can be pushed within their own developmental stage as they complete the same task.

As students are given choice to moderate literacy tasks, the students themselves find the optimal student-challenge match (Allington, 2002). Turner and Paris (1995) found challenging tasks stretching and pulling learners in a variety of productive ways. Students were naturally drawn to using more organizational skills and more self-monitoring strategies. They also used more and varied reading strategies and persisted longer at what they were doing. Importantly, the students who were given literacy tasks having more than one right answer seemed to adjust the task to making it more challenging in appropriate ways.

When students are supported in their struggle to read challenging material by more capable others, they are able to read more complex materials (Stahl, 2009). "Supported struggle" is helpful for student achievement when difficulties increase (Tulis & Fulmer, 2013). Interestingly, students have reported actually enjoying challenging tasks more and persisting longer if there is a low level of anxiety due to the moderate difficulty of the task they have been given (Tulis & Fulmer, 2013).

Control

Although the motivation principle of control has strong overlap with that of choice, control has unique distinctions. The distinguishing factor between simply making choices and having control over learning is the end goal. The Oxford Dictionary defines control as the power to 1) direct the course of events or 2) influence behavior. If the end goal is an event, then to direct the course of that event requires a series of choices needed to accomplish the task. This differs from the motivating principle of choice that refers more to isolated opportunities for personal preference. So for

example, in order to complete a required literacy unit, students can take control by directing what decisions are made about such things as relevant topic, needed resources, task outlines, options to demonstrate understanding, presentation method, needed time, etc. This series of decisions influences the task's completion. Teachers appropriately release this decision-making autonomy to students as they are ready. When teachers make all the decisions and control the learning environment, students feel under-valued and disengage more quickly in the activity. However, when teachers support students in making choices, the task feels more authentic and students begin to feel ownership and connection to the learning (Turner & Paris, 1995). This control should be scaffolded over time by providing necessary levels of support (Wigfield, 2004). This supervised control helps students become goal oriented, and begins a habit of making and using literacy options independently. These traits, found in motivated readers (Wigfield, 2004), are vital to becoming lifelong readers.

The principle of control is also relevant in assuring that students feel more power in the process of learning to read. Remember that control is also defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the power to influence behavior. In this case, the end goal is the behavior of successful reading. For students to feel motivated to read, they have to feel that they can be successful in the process. We can give students the power to influence their own reading behavior by explicitly providing instruction and guidance in necessary literacy skills needed for a task (Reutzel & Cooter, 2015). For example, students who are struggling with comprehension can be given instruction on how to recognize text structure and appropriate graphic organizers. As teachers model and provide guided practice, students quickly learn to autonomously identify the text structures and use the appropriate organizer to improve their comprehension (Taylor & Beach, 1984). The scaffolded instruction becomes a bridge to their independence, allowing the students more control over their ability to succeed in the reading process.

In order for students to increase their sense of control in the reading process, it is also imperative that students are made privy to their progress. Charts or reading logs controlled by students gives them the power to keep track of such things as the number

of books read, new words learned, or the amount of time spent. These tracking tools help make the process more concrete for students. They can actually see their own improvement. Students who have always struggled with reading rarely see the need to try because nothing seems to change their struggling status (Torgesen, 1998). But when students can actually see their improvement, they feel more in control and take responsibility for themselves as learners, self-regulating by setting goals and working until goals are reached (Turner & Paris, 1995).

Technology

Technology is an integral part of society and a high motivator to students. Students use and enjoy technology for most every aspect of life. If they are native to technology then technology can become a motivator for reading and writing (Fox, 2014). In a meta-analysis of research that supports technology use in the middle schools, scholars found digital tools and learning environments were beneficial to students' reading and writing (Pearson, Ferdig, Blomeyer, & Moran, 2005). Another study comparing standardized test scores to implementation of technology in the classroom found that the option to use technology boosted student performance (Middleton & Murray, 1999).

However, technology can also be a detriment to reading motivation (Putnam, 2005). One study showed that if students are not native to technology, it could hinder motivation (Fox, 2014). Also, when students are limited in choice to only using technology, motivation can wane (Stewart, 2012). Therefore, teachers must be vigilant in selecting programs and uses that enhance the teaching objectives, but still motivate students. There are many good options for using technology that can ultimately enhance learning and student engagement (May, 2003). Marsh (2011) notes that digital tools and the Internet offer digitize speech, ebooks, educational apps, video websites, online games, and social networks, all of which respond to students' natural tendency to explore and interact with their environment. These resources can support and motivate them when given new concepts, skills and strategies.

Technology can be useful in every instructional area. For instance, during Silent Sustained Reading or guided reading, teachers can use computer pro-

grams such as EPIC which provide not only digital options for varied reading passages, but also allows the user to select the difficulty level for that text. This way all students can read from the passages at their own level. This same program would also lend itself to cross-curricular study. If a teacher were covering a science unit on plants, for instance, he/she would be able to pull up an informational passage on plants and adjust the reading difficulty for students of all reading levels. So while science concepts are being taught, teachers can also focus on and apply reading skill and instruction. Additionally, comprehension and literature response projects can be done digitally using PowerPoints, Prezis, digital stories, timelines, blogging, story-related Instagram feeds, or web pages. Such options allow students to demonstrate comprehension of texts using technology during and after the reading process. Finally, fluency can even be addressed with digital resources. Teachers can use apps that include leveled passages, a timer, and options for student progress reports that track progress over time.

Allowing students to use high-quality digital options can increase motivation to read and complete the related task (May, 2005). For struggling or resistant readers, this medium may provide the needed push to engage in the process (Cutler & Truss, 1989).

Authenticity

Authenticity is defined by experts as the quality of realness or being genuine, being the "real McCoy" as some people say. An authentic experience is perceived as giving meaning or purpose to one's life and is associated with positive emotions such as feeling satisfied, experiencing joy, having a sense of pride, and even receiving aesthetic pleasure. Authenticity is important to literacy instruction because it has a powerful intrinsic effect on motivation (Vannini & Burgess, 2009).

One way to make a classroom more authentic is to create a context for learning resembling actual life reading tasks. Integrating reading instruction into science and social studies curriculum can make the task seem more relevant. For example, taking a walk outside the school to encourage real-world observation fosters interest. Having hands-on activities related to the reading allows for close-up participation that has an authentic feel. One study found

one-hour of hands on activity supported ten hours of extended, engaged reading, writing, and discussion (Wigfield, 2004). In another study, the students took a walk in a woodland area looking for birds, brought in a variety of bird feathers they compared and contrasted, and dissected owl pellets (Guthrie et al., 2006). In this scenario, creating a reason for studying a topic involved interacting with the real world and engaging students in experiences that made reading seem important.

The teacher also plays a big role in creating an authentic classroom. Authentic classrooms are deliberate and intentional. The teacher is enthusiastic and has a genuine love for books (Gambrell, 1996), is positive and excited about teaching reading strategies (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007), and enjoys talking about what she or he is reading (Gambrell, 1996). In other words, authenticity is also found in the genuine involvement of the teacher. Teachers who model an authentic enjoyment for reading by sharing their own reading experiences with their students demonstrate the value of reading in their own lives. They establish, by example, the benefits and enjoyment of reading and learning. As teachers genuinely share a love for reading, they demonstrate how reading develops vocabulary, aids their ability to articulate their thoughts, and helps them become more effective writers. Not surprisingly, this kind of teacher modeling increases students' achievement (Gambrell, 1996).

In our own observations, we have seen that teachers who value authenticity in their classroom are those who integrate and mirror life experiences by having students collect information, make connections, solve problems, research topics, and make decisions as they read out of a variety of interesting books on a given topic. Teachers can include newspapers, magazines, and other interesting text. The teacher is genuinely involved in what his or her students are reading by joining in discussions about books, intentionally demonstrating a supportive and caring literacy-rich, classroom environment.

One teacher brought in live crabs for observation, welcoming authentically generated questions asked by her students as they observed the behavior and eating habits of the crab over several days. She sent her students off on their own to discover the answers to their questions. Library time was made

available, self-appointed homework was encouraged but not mandatory, several texts all focusing on crabs were provided on a designated table in the classroom. More questions surfaced forcing her students back for more reading and investigation. As investigations came to a completion, she held a class discussion on what they had learned and suggested their newly earned knowledge deserved to be noticed. Students readily agreed and began working on their own response projects that would be presented with their grade-level peers.

When students perceive an experience to be authentic, they judge the experience as relevant, valuable and worth their efforts (Vannini & Burgess, 2009). Most people respond positively to authentic literacy tasks. Authenticity has the effect of more frequent reading and writing and more engagement in different types of reading and writing. Additionally, the amount of conversation and discourse become higher as students talk and share with one another what they are reading and writing about (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002).

Proximate Reward

All students are motivated by rewards or incentives to some degree. Whether those rewards are external or internal, students seek for reinforcement in what they do. Research shows that continual emphasis on external rewards diminishes reading motivation and engagement over time (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). Extrinsic incentives, such as a trinket from a treasure chest or a coupon for pizza, draw more attention to the trinket or pizza than to the real focus of the activity, which is reading. Conversely, intrinsic reading incentives are rewards that give the reader personal satisfaction and point the students back towards the act of reading. When rewards or incentives do this, we call them proximal rewards. The reward proximity hypothesis (Gambrell, 1996) states that only rewards similar to the goal itself inspire lasting involvement. Marinak and Gambrell (2008) found support for the reward proximity hypothesis when they had teachers give students a book as a reward for reading, while other teachers provided a token. Students who were given a book were more motivated to engage in other reading activities than those who received the token or less proximal reward. Reis and Boeve (2009) also found that giving a book of choice as a reward was a key factor in helping academically gifted students

persist in their reading of difficult texts.

Consider using rewards or incentives proximal to the reading process. Examples of proximal rewards in the classroom would include receiving a new book by the same author after finishing an author study, earning a read-a-thon for accomplishing a reading goal, earning extra time on literacy-related software as a reading reward, getting to perform a Reader's Theatre for another class as motivation to read and practice the script, meeting a favorite author after reading books by that author, even something as simple as earning extra time to be with a friend in an awesomely decorated reading nook. These can all be a motivation and reward for student reading. Many of these ideas, and more, will be discussed in context in the conclusion section as we wind up the struggling fourth grader scenario where we started. Proximal rewards emphasize the real value of the reward (i.e., books, self-selection, time) and point students back to the desired behavior of reading (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008).

Conclusion

Returning to our struggling fourth grade reader who initiated his own literacy circle during recess, his uncommon response to reading begs the question, "What did that teacher do to instill in this student such a desired response to reading?" Focusing on only a couple of principles at first, this teacher decided to begin incorporating motivational principles in doable small steps. She first worked on choice where she updated her literacy circles to smaller groups of students and allowed them a choice in books out of a list of titles. Second, she incorporated authenticity by sharing with her class what she was reading and discussing the interesting topics, characters, and plots from her "at home" reading. These two motivational principles gave way to implementation of more principles that just bubbled up.

Her students started wanting to report what they were reading at home and begged for a weekly scheduled time they could share what they were reading. A special stool was designated as the "sharing stool" and students vied for the opportunity to share their books. The teacher decided to add choice in what she read to the class during her daily read aloud, and after sharing a brief synopsis of the different books possible, let students vote. The

books that did not win the read aloud vote were snapped up for Silent Sustained Reading and shared and traded amongst her students. Those books were almost talked about more than the read aloud choice the teacher was reading to them. She gave students control on how they would respond to the books that they had read during literacy circles and found that their creative approaches were stimulus for more and more interesting and exciting ways to share the literacy circle books. She let students set their own goals on how many pages or how much time they would read at night and as a reward gave them an opportunity to meet a real author. Goals were set and exceeded by everyone, including her struggling and once reluctant readers.

If you look carefully at the motivational instructional principles this teacher put into place, you will observe several of the salient seven: choice in reading material, small group collaboration during literacy circles, control over response projects, authenticity demonstrated by her personal interest in reading, and a proximate reward of an author visit. The only instructional principle not obvious, but reported at an end of the year interview, was challenge. This teacher reported challenging her students to read books of their interest that were slightly above their performance level. Only technology remains as a motivational principle unused by this successful teacher.

We conclude that the salient seven motivational instructional principles work! They enhance enjoyment and satisfaction. We believe that choice, collaboration, challenge, control, technology, authenticity, and proximate rewards produce motivated readers that are goal oriented, who work until projects are completed and comprehension is clear. These motivational principles when implemented into literacy instruction can inspire students to choose to read and to believe in themselves as readers, even if at first this wasn't true.

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