

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN READING

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# MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN READING

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By  
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# MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN READING

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Motivation drives people to pursue or achieve something in their lives. Motivation is critical in learning and is highly focused on in the education world. Reading achievement is of high importance in schools today, leading to a great deal of research into ways to increase student success in reading. Many students lack motivation in reading, especially those students who struggle and/or have a reading disability. The key to increasing motivation in reading is engagement. Teachers are responsible for engaging their students in reading and related activities. Recommended practices include making reading and activities meaningful and valuable to students, enabling students to socially interact about what they are reading, providing opportunities for students to make their own choices in reading material and activities, and creating access to a wide array of reading materials and resources. Also, teachers must help students build self-efficacy by enabling students to begin with success and then gradually increasing the complexity of reading material and activities. Teachers also need to model and demonstrate the value and importance of reading, as well as their own motivation. Finally, students with reading disabilities can benefit from all of these practices, yet more research is needed into motivation in this area.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A male sixth-grade student with a reading disability walks into a special education classroom. He is instructed to read a page from his reading book. He proceeds to employ several tactics to distract the teacher from the activity, ultimately avoiding the task of reading. Later, in the regular education classroom, his class is given fifteen minutes of self-selected reading time. Here, he bounces between periods of attentive reading and periods of complete distraction. Towards the end of the day, the student, working independently and separately at his desk, attends to every detail of reading and discussion taking place in a nearby guided reading group. When questions are asked of the group members, the student relentlessly speaks out and answers the questions accurately. What is shaping this student? Each previously described situation involves the reading process, yet the student and his actions appear distinctly different in each. What causes these variations? What causes the distinct actions and behaviors? One of the main answers to these questions: motivation.

It is critically important for a student to have strong reading skills, as good readers tend to succeed in subject areas, including mathematics, social studies, and science (Melekoglu, 2011). However, reading ability does not stand alone in creation of a good reader. Results from the Program for International Student Assessment found that students who enjoyed reading the most performed significantly better than students who enjoyed reading the least; therefore, instruction that provides students with decoding and comprehension skills and strategies is not sufficient (Gambrell, 2011b). Gambrell states the profound understanding that if students are not motivated to read, they will never reach their full literacy potential. It can then be concluded that if students are not motivated to read, they will not reach their potential to succeed in school in general.

Furthermore, reading proficiency in primary grades is a strong predictor of achievement in upper grades and postsecondary education. When a student has a significant reading problem at a younger age, he or she lags behind peers and continuously struggles with reading difficulties at an older age. Disabilities in reading can also lead to more encounters with academic challenges, again demonstrating that reading skills impact overall school success (Melekoglu, 2011). Melekoglu determined that various deficits can lead to a negative attitude and low motivation toward reading for students with learning disabilities. Therefore, we can determine that motivation to read is just as critical to learning for students with learning disabilities as it is for students without learning disabilities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem to be addressed is: What factors affect motivation, specifically in regards to reading? Additionally, how can teachers manipulate these factors in order to increase motivation in their students, and, in turn, increase success and achievement in reading and other subject areas?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Extrinsic* (motivation) - the drive to achieve external rewards, such as money or social status (Girmus, 2011).

*Intrinsic* (motivation) - the inner drive or passion people have to excel in a particular pursuit (Girmus, 2011).

*Self-efficacy* – (in regards to Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory) the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Cherry, 2013).

### **Method of Approach**

A review of motivation was conducted. A review of literature relating to the following more specific areas was conducted: motivation in education, motivation to learn, motivation to

read, and motivation in relation to disabilities and special education. Literature was obtained through the EBSCOhost database, as well as additional online databases containing scholarly resources. Specific search terms included the following: motivation, academic motivation, reading motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, reading disabilities, special education, motivational factors, and attitude (toward reading). Findings were summarized and synthesized, and recommendations have been made.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### **Defining Motivation**

Motivation affects all aspects of a person's life and is shaped by numerous factors. Girmus (2011) presents a common theoretical framework for understanding the concept of motivation based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In this hierarchy, people are motivated to satisfy basic biological and psychological needs first, which include needs such as hunger, thirst, and safety. Following fulfillment of these needs, people strive to meet their social needs of belongingness and esteem. The final level of needs people attempt to achieve include spiritual needs and self-actualization. This theory creates a map for human motivation.

Girmus (2011) continues to explain the concept of motivation through another framework in which motivation is divided into two parts, intrinsic and extrinsic. He describes intrinsic motivation as "the inner drive or passion people have to excel in a particular pursuit" and extrinsic motivation as "the drive to achieve external rewards, such as money or social status" (p. 3). The Center on Education Policy (CEP) cites the ideas of Pintrich (2003) that intrinsic motivation involves the "desire to do or achieve something one truly wants to and takes pleasure or sees value in doing so" and extrinsic motivation involves the "desire to do or achieve something not for the enjoyment of the thing itself, but because doing so leads to a certain result" (p. 3). Motivation can also be both intrinsic and extrinsic.

#### **Motivation in School**

As the Center on Education Policy (2012) stresses, motivation affects every aspect of a child's academic life. This includes peer and staff relationships, assignments, homework, participation, assessments, challenges, and so on. Research has demonstrated that many students

are negatively affected by a lack of motivation. The CEP notes that a 2004 National Research Council report showed that motivation and engagement in school declines as students become older. It is certain that motivation is crucial for the learning process. As Girmus (2011) states, “A learning event does not occur without a preceding motivational event.” (p. 3). Without the desire, a student will not learn.

Many things can affect a student’s motivation, including each student’s own beliefs about motivation. A student’s motivation can be affected by how he thinks of his own capacity to learn (Barry, 2007; Murray, 2011 as cited in CEP, 2012). If he believes that capacity is limited or feels that his success is unlikely, his motivation will be low (Pintrich, 2003 as cited in CEP, 2012). A student’s concept of “knowledge” or “learning” can also alter motivation. If these concepts are seen as a fixed quantity possessed or not possessed, motivation is more likely to be lower than when the concepts are seen as being able to change and grow (Dweck, 2010 as cited in CEP, 2012). Finally, a student also needs to recognize a correlation between effort and success in order to increase motivation (CEP, 2012). Keep in mind, motivation ranges from child to child, and even from situation to situation for each child. CEP emphasizes that a child’s motivation in one class or subject area can be completely separate from factors that motivate that same student in another class or subject area.

A framework for student motivation is set forth by the CEP (2012) after drawing from the work of Bandura, 1996; Dweck, 2010; Murray, 2011; Pintrich, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000; and Seifert, 2004. A student’s motivation consists of four major dimensions: competence – the belief that they’re capable of doing something; autonomy/control – the ability to set appropriate goals and see a correlation between effort and outcome; interest/value – a vested interest in the task and a feeling that its value is worth the effort to complete it; and relatedness – the need to feel part of a

group or social context and exhibit behavior appropriate to that group. These ideas set the base for many suggested methods and strategies for increasing student motivation in school.

### **Motivation in Reading**

A newer theory regarding motivation specifically in the area in reading has been described by Gambrell (2011a). The “engagement perspective” theory is a combination of social cognitive theory, which emphasizes that “cognition is central to learning and that individuals learn by interpreting the behavior of others” (p. 6), and expectancy-value theory, which emphasizes that “motivation to engage in a behavior is the produce to the degree to which students expect to be able to perform the given task successfully (self-concept), and value the process of engaging in the task” (p. 6). The engagement perspective focuses on engaged readers that are intrinsically motivated to read for an array of personal reasons. Deci & Ryan, 1992; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Guthrie et al., 2007 as cited in Gambrell (2011a) show studies that demonstrate students’ intrinsic motivation as a factor in higher achievement and more positive classroom attitudes that students’ extrinsic motivation. Gambrell also cites Baker & Wigfield, 1999 and Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997 in the finding of nine components of a very multidimensional concept of motivation. These include curiosity, preference for challenge, task involvement, self-efficacy, competition, recognition, grades, social interaction, and work avoidance. As you can see, this list is comprised of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

De Naegel, Van Keer, Bansteenkiste, and Rosseel (2012) looked at motivation from the perspective of self-determination theory (SDT). They found that recreational autonomous reading motivation, which consists of intrinsic and well-internalized regulation, was associated with “higher leisure-time reading frequency, more reading engagement, and better reading comprehension” (p. 1019). Therefore, they suggest interventions should focus on increasing

autonomous reasons for reading in which children engage in reading for their own enjoyment and inherent satisfaction.

### **Motivation and Engagement**

Following the engagement perspective theory of motivation, Gambrell (2011b) presents seven research-based rules of engagement aimed at increasing student reading motivation. Her first rule is that reading must be relevant to students' lives. Teachers must help students find value and meaning in reading tasks and activities. Connections must be made between school reading and the students' personal lives. An example of this is a reading diary where students reflect on what they have read and how it connects to their own lives.

Gambrell's (2011b) second rule is that students need access to a wide range of reading materials. This must include books from an array of genres and text types, magazines, the Internet, authentic documents, and other varied resources. Having this variety of materials available to students also shows them that reading is a worthwhile and valuable activity. Examples of activities for this rule include teacher read aloud and "teacher book-selling sessions" in which the teacher shares about books.

Third, teachers must provide ample opportunities for students to engage in sustained reading. Gambrell (2011b) demonstrates that time spent reading during school can improve reading achievement. She suggests starting students with shorter periods of time when beginning the practice of sustained reading, and then gradually increasing over time.

Fourth, students need to have opportunities to choose what they read and how they engage in and complete literacy tasks. Choice enables students to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning, as they feel they have some autonomy or control. Gambrell, 1996; Buthrie et al., 2007; Schiefele, 1991; and Spaulding, 1992, as cited in Gambrell (2011a), found that students

who are allowed to choose their own reading material are “more motivated to read, expend more effort, and gain better understanding of the text” (p.175). Gambrell (2011a) does suggest that teachers work with students on learning how to choose appropriate reading materials.

Gambrell’s fifth rule of engagement states that students need opportunities to socially interact with others about what they are reading. Social interaction involves using writing and discussion to communicate with others about what a student has read. This can include talking with others about books he has read, reading with others, and exchanging books with others.

Sixth, students should have opportunities to be successful with challenging texts (Gambrell, 2011a). If a text is too difficult a child may give up, but too easy and he may get bored. By being challenging, text requires effort but still results in success. This again also goes back to the student feelings of capability and competence and the motivational affect it has on students. Most of all, it is students who are struggling that need to be focused on in this area, as Gambrell (2011a) points out, they often fail because they do not get the opportunities to progress and feel competent.

Finally, the seventh rule presented is that classroom incentives must reflect the value and importance of reading. Mainly, students need constructive, supportive, genuine teacher feedback, praise, and recognition. In regards to prizes, Gambrell cites Deci’s (1992) research finding that tangible rewards actually undermine motivation. However, Gambrell and Marinak’s (2008) study suggests that tangible rewards related to the desired behavior (reading), such as book rewards or extra time for pleasure reading or read aloud, do not undermine motivation. In summary Gambrell states that “highly motivated students who see reading as a desirable activity will initiate and sustain their engagement in reading and thus become better readers.” (p. 177).

Furthermore, Brinda (2011), an assistant professor, worked with middle school students to create a “ladder to literacy.” This process was created with the help of sixteen reluctant learners who were asked how teachers could help engage them as they were developing reading skills. The ladder’s steps include: introduce, encourage, comprehend, enjoy, motivate, discover, connect, discuss, and read. First, the teacher *introduces* the book in a way that activates interest, allows students to explore the book, and asks questions about the book. Second, the teacher *encourages* the students by presenting and connecting background information about the author, plot, setting, and other parts of the book. Third, throughout the book, teachers test student *comprehension*, but in less formal ways, such as group discussion, where students had more support from the teacher and peers. Fourth, teachers foster *enjoyment* by allowing students to share personal understandings and connections with the text. Fifth, students need to recognize their own personal *motivation*, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, as it emerges along the process. Sixth, students *discover* things about the book through reading and discussion, and especially through asking each other questions about the text. Seventh, students are encouraged to *connect* emotionally to characters, which also leads to making predictions. Eighth, students *discuss* the entire time they read the book and being provided support from both the teacher and the other students. Finally, students have now *read* the book, and also comprehended, enjoyed, and engaged.

### **Motivation and Teachers**

Teachers often have the critical responsibility to enhance motivation in the area of reading in their classrooms, which goes beyond just using certain reading activities to foster motivation. Teachers themselves must be motivational to their students. Girmus (2011) provides several skills and characteristics that motivating teachers possess. They create a positive, upbeat, and compassionate classroom with an emphasis on learning. The teacher must genuinely value reading

and be truly enthusiastic about reading. Teachers need to create and make clear high, positive expectations, as well as support them through scaffolding to help students be successful and reach goals. Classroom management needs to be well-developed and have effective procedures that students fully understand. Girmus points out that self-regulation is very evident in motivated classrooms, as teachers encourage students to take charge of themselves. Also, motivating teachers positively model for students in all aspects of the learning environment. Unmotivated teachers, Girmus stresses, can undermine student motivation. Factors that affect the motivational states of teachers are stress, a sense of self-efficacy, and emotion. Teachers need to be mindful of these factors in themselves in order to be most effective in creating a motivating classroom.

### **Motivation and Textbooks**

It is well known and very evident that student motivation in general often decreases as students move from elementary to middle school. Furthermore, textbooks often have a strong negative impact on reading motivation in the middle grades. Several challenges lie in teaching with a textbook at this level. As Guthrie & Klauda (2012) point out, middle school reading goes beyond just requiring basic reading skills; it requires higher-order reading comprehension and reasoning. Textbooks also bring about boredom, as even students who enjoy reading find them dry and uninteresting. Many students will avoid textbooks whenever possible. Another problem Guthrie & Klauda point out is that most textbooks are written for the 20 percent of students at the middle ability level, meaning those at a higher level may already know the information and those at a lower level may struggle with decoding and recognizing vocabulary.

Guthrie & Klauda (2012) explored ways to overcome textbook challenges by surveying more than 3,000 students and conducting extended interviews with more than 250 students. Their research led to creation of five crucial practices that motivate adolescents to read informational

texts. As you will see, many of these practices and ideas overlap with Gambrell's (2011) seven rules of engagement previously discussed in this paper.

First, Guthrie and Klauda (2012) suggest that students need to develop dedication, including time, effort, and persistence. Since textbooks rarely help students develop dedication, it is the responsibility of the teacher to incorporate a variety of texts that go beyond the textbook, including related trade books, internet resources, and journal articles. Teachers need to create comprehensive units of study that enable students to read extensively and in-depth. By using additional text resources, students also develop higher-order reasoning as they integrate information across the texts to develop understanding of a topic.

The second practice suggested is for students to build self-efficacy, which means a student must believe that they can comprehend informational text. However, Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda (2012) found that nearly one-half of middle school students are intimidated by science and history textbooks. Many teachers avoid the textbook, but these researchers say this is a mistake. Guthrie and Klauda say that students build their self-efficacy as readers and learners through repeated experiences of successfully learning from their textbooks. By gaining expertise in a topic through the use of a textbook, students develop a belief in themselves as readers (Guthrie & Klauda, 2012). Teachers assist in this practice by matching text to students' levels, which might include again using trade books and online materials. This is especially important for students that are struggling to read at the level of the textbook. Teachers are also encouraged to use different media, such as videos, to help students gain background knowledge about a topic before interacting with the textbook information. Building self-efficacy in reading textbooks also involves task selection. Guthrie and Klauda emphasize importance in gradually increasing task complexity in order to help students gain confidence in higher-order thinking with informational text. They also emphasize

importance in teachers providing encouraging feedback to help students gain confidence, as well as aiding students in setting and meeting their own reading goals within the textbook.

As mentioned previously by other resources, Guthrie and Klauda (2012) stress the practice of showing students the text's value. When something is viewed as valuable, students are more likely to do it. In their research, Guthrie, Wigfield, and Klauda (2012) found that 45 percent of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in their study felt that reading informational text was a "waste of time." In order to show students a text's value, teachers need to help them understand that the benefits of reading the text extends to a variety of situations. As noted by others, Guthrie and Klauda (2012) also place importance on making textbook information relevant to students' personal lives. Students also need opportunities to perform concrete tasks in response to the informational text they read in order to see the value in it.

Another commonly addresses motivational strategy discussed that is again evident in Guthrie and Klauda's (2012) suggested crucial practices is the use of social motivation. Social dynamics are very powerful at the middle school level and can have a strong impact if teachers use them to their advantage. Teachers can create numerous opportunities for students to collaborate in order to increase social motivation. Such activities include paired activities, read-and-shares, and small group discussions. Activities must be accountable, interactive, and text-based and have appropriate degrees of structure in order to be effective.

Finally, another practice already emphasized, is giving students choices (Guthrie & Klauda, 2012). Students need to feel in control of their world at this level, and providing chances for students to make their own choices in regards to textbook reading and related activities and tasks can support that. Examples the researchers suggest are allowing students to choose which paragraph to emphasize in a comprehension activity and which examples to read more closely. As

Guthrie and Klauda (2012) state, “making a choice is its own reward, but it also enables students to make reading relevant to themselves” (p. 68).

Upon implementing these five practices fully for at least four weeks, Guthrie & Klauda (2012) found in a project at the University of Maryland that student motivation to read informational text was increased, as well as their achievement. The researchers feel that “by providing engaging, supportive classroom instruction, effective teachers can help middle school students overcome their initial reluctance and master the art of learning informational text” (p. 68). It is only natural to believe that these same practices can have similar effects with textbooks at all academic levels, especially since so many of the concepts seem to apply in all areas of reading in general.

### **Motivation and Disabilities**

There seems to be very little research that focuses on motivational factors for students with disabilities, and what I have found is mainly centered on specific commercial reading programs. However, many of the strategies and practices already discussed in this paper are strongly recommended for students with disabilities, and many are practices that are already often suggested for students with special needs in general.

A study performed by Melekoglu and Wilkerson (2013) found that an eighteen-week structured, research-based reading program for students with reading disabilities at elementary and high school levels that included methods such as whole-group, small-group, and technology-integrated instruction created no significant change in motivation to read for students with disabilities. In fact, motivation scores declined. On the other hand, scores for students without disabilities in the study showed a slight increase in motivation.

Zentall and Lee (2012) performed a study in which a combined motivational intervention was administered to eighty second-grade through fifth-grade students, each in one of three groups: labeled as or at risk of ADHD, labeled as or at risk of a reading disability, and non-disabled. The intervention attached a positive label associated with a specific reading behavior accompanied by challenging the student to perform better than previous or better than another student, which involves both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The intervention included both antecedent priming and praise as a consequence. As the authors point out, priming, or preparing the student for a particular purpose, can activate positive self-perceptions and lead to the student interpreting his environment in accordance with these perceptions, which can lead to improvement of performance. As cited in Zentall and Lee (2012) & Markman and Dweck (2007), generic praise that is nonspecific decreases motivation after a student fails because it shows a stable factor that cannot be changed. This is why praise as a consequence must be specific and connected to the behavior. Results of Zentall and Lee's (2012) study showed that the combined intervention was effective for students with reading disabilities (with and without ADHD).

### **Summary**

In summary, motivation is critical in learning, especially for students who struggle in reading. It can be intrinsic, extrinsic, or both. Motivation is tied very closely to engagement, and so the focus of increasing motivation is often on engaging students. Student motivation tends to decrease as they get older, and so engagement becomes more crucial as students go through middle school. Teachers are responsible for working to increase motivation through classroom management and academic activities, as well as being motivated themselves. There is little research in the area of motivation in students with disabilities.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the review of existing literature related to factors of motivation the following conclusions can be drawn. Motivation is critical for a student to be successful. Each student's motivational factors vary based on the individual and the situation. Reading motivation relies heavily on engagement. A few common practices are suggested for engaging students. One necessity is that students need to feel that the reading and related activities are meaningful and valuable in their lives. Second, students need opportunities to socially interact about what they are reading. Students also need a wide array of text material from which to choose, which connects to the need students have of choices and control in their reading. Additionally, it is critical that students build their own self-efficacy in reading, which is built through reading and succeeding with the right level of challenging texts.

The conclusion is also drawn that teachers are central to the process of building student motivation. A teacher needs to create a safe, respectful, and supportive learning environment, as well as model not only effective reading strategies, but also motivation in him- or herself. Demonstrating the value of reading and related activities is also essential of the teacher. It is the teacher's responsibility to implement the preceding practices in a way that best suits his or her students.

As for students with disabilities, the conclusion can be drawn that more research is needed in this area. However, all of the practices recommended for increasing student motivation in reading can be effective for students with disabilities as well.

Based on these conclusions and findings, it is recommended that, for the student discussed earlier, several strategies be implemented. First, the student needs to have more control, which I feel would be very motivating for this particular student. I recommend that the teacher and student visit the library, where the teacher can model strategies for finding an interesting yet appropriate book. I also recommend that the teacher and student work together to choose reading activities that would be more meaningful for the student. The student should also have opportunities to discuss the book he is reading with his peers in some way, which I feel would fit in well in the classroom while the others are sharing about what they are reading as well. Back in the resource classroom, I think it would also be important for the teacher to perform some read aloud from the student-chosen book in order to demonstrate proper strategies, as well as her enthusiasm and enjoyment in reading. For this particular student, it is also crucial that the teacher help build his self-efficacy. The teacher needs to create a progression of lessons/activities that will allow the student to have some success earlier on, yet provide increasing challenge.

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