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Using high interest reading material to motivate struggling and reluctant readers

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Using high interest reading material to motivate struggling and reluctant readers

Abstract

One of my great challenges as a second grade teacher is getting students who struggle with reading to become engaged, motivated, and enthusiastic about reading. This paper will look at different literature findings about using strategies that involve high interest reading materials to motivate readers. It will seek to determine the values of these practices for all students, but especially those who struggle as readers. It will also look at different types of high interest materials that could potentially motivate readers. This paper will provide resources to others looking to use high interest materials to motivate readers.

USING HIGH INTEREST READING MATERIAL TO MOTIVATE STRUGGLING AND
RELUCTANT READERS

A Literature Review

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

Nicolas C Hoover

University of Northern Iowa

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This review by: Nic Hoover

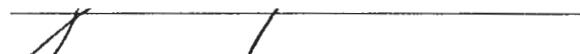
Titled: Using High Interest Reading Material to Motivate Lower Level Readers

has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Master of Arts in Education

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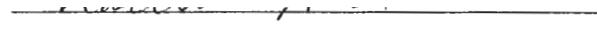
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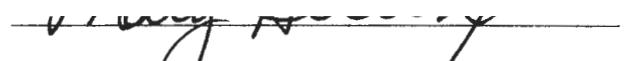

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

One of my great challenges as a second grade teacher is getting students who struggle with reading to become engaged, motivated, and enthusiastic about reading. This paper will look at different literature findings about using strategies that involve high interest reading materials to motivate readers. It will seek to determine the values of these practices for all students, but especially those who struggle as readers. It will also look at different types of high interest materials that could potentially motivate readers. This paper will provide resources to others looking to use high interest materials to motivate readers.

Introduction

The following statement from a CNN.com article by the Associated Press (2007) was music to almost anyone involved with literacy's ears. It started by telling readers that the 7th Harry Potter book had sold over eight million copies. A book selling over eight million copies in the first 24 hours means there are a lot of people out there reading, presumably kids reading by themselves in the middle of summer, or families reading together, all of the things that teacher encourage their students to do while they are away from school. But why was there this rush to read? Was this particular book assigned by teachers nationwide?

The CNN story continued by comparing the success and craziness that surrounded the release of this book was on par with the hysteria that surrounded The Beatles' first visit to America in the 1960s (Associated Press, 2007). This, again, was over a book, but it gets even better as you read on to a place where it talks about people using the weekend to read and discuss this book (Associated Press, 2007). Literature circles are popping up all over the country, people are talking about a book, not a television program, a movie, a video game, a song, or a political scandal, but a book, and no one to my knowledge was assigned to read this book or have a conversation about it. There were not pre-scripted comprehension questions assigned to these 8 million plus readers. Instead they had intrinsic joy of reading, the connection with characters, and the mental imagery that comes with reading. This was all the readers needed. The focus of this literature review is on exploring: why kids read, how reading choices help motivate readers, and how does motivation and high interest reading material help low level and struggling readers. In order to do this it is necessary to define some terms relative to this topic. Based on this review strategies and recommendations will be drawn for teachers and others to help them find and use high interest reading materials with students.

What are Struggling and Reluctant Readers?

Defining a struggling reader can be very difficult. Vacca (2001) defines a struggling reader as one who is “lacking competence with reading strategies and lacking confidence in oneself to make meaning with texts” (p. 8). Hall (2007) explains that there may be many reasons for a reader to struggle. The primary reason was cognitive disability, such as decoding words or comprehension. But she also identified inability to set goals for reading, inability to decipher text structures, difficulty defining main ideas, and struggles in applying reading strategies. She goes on to say that many struggling readers are, “students who are likely to have a long and negative history with reading in school” (p. 133). She argues that many students who struggle with reading believe that the effort they put in will not be rewarded due to a difficulty in comprehending text, and therefore they are not motivated to read. Early on, Dunston (2007) theorized that, “struggling readers were missing required skills that, once learned, would produce successful reading” (p. 329). Later she came to realize that such “skill and drill” instruction was not going to help solve all students’ reading problems.

Just because a student is able to read with skill does not mean they are always willing. This reluctance can also lead to reading and motivation problems. Clarke (2006) states, “being able to read doesn’t mean being willing or skilled at reading” (p. 66). He stated students at his Rhode Island school would often lament about reading not being “cool”, being unable to find a book they liked, and even admitted to hating reading. He continues by stating, “Many students view reading as a forced activity” (p. 67). Clive Elementary in the West Des Moines Community School District teacher-librarian Laura Swessinger echoes the statement of Clarke stating, “many reluctant readers find reading to be difficult. They often are slow readers who have not mastered comprehension strategies. When they have not developed skills they do not

find books that interest them and feel forced to read” (personal communication, September 11, 2007).

The authors all mentioned that struggling and reluctant readers lack skills necessary or desire necessary to be an efficient and effective reader. On the one hand, they talked about confidence and motivation, but on the other they also talked about a lack of skills, such as comprehension or decoding. Finding the sources of the deficiency of struggling or reluctant readers can be large challenge for teachers, and forcing them by making them read required texts may make the problems grow. However, using a variety of forms of text and finding reading materials that may motivate them to read could help.

What are High-Interest Reading Materials?

Finding a clear-cut definition of what makes reading material high-interest is, and was difficult, because that changes from reader to reader, but that makes identifying high-interest material no less important. Graves and Phillipot (2002) quoted Richard Allington after he observed remedial reading classes in which students did very little remedial reading. “If they don’t read much how are they are ever gonna get good?” (p. 179). Getting students to read is the problem facing many teachers today. Some teachers have looked more to student interests to motivate readers. The pair agrees with this possible solution and add, for students to view reading as purposeful and become life-long readers they have to read materials that are enjoyable and that they can understand. Hidi (2001) agrees that catering to students’ interest can be an important factor in developing readers, “we recognized that interest had an important role in readers’ text processing” (p. 192). She also discusses the work of Renninger and Wozniak (1985) regarding interests of young children where they determined that interests served as important factors in attention, recognition, and recall for readers. Thus, it is fair to conclude that

high interest, as it applies to reading, would be text that gains a student's recognition, holds their attention, and leads to their recall. Determining and locating such texts can help lead to students' motivation and as Oldfather (1993) is quoted as saying, "Motivation frequently makes the difference between learning that is temporary and superficial and learning that is permanent and internalized" (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 414). The goal for most educators is that their students find practical, real-world applications for their learning and can apply it as life-long learners, not just rote memorizers. If the objective is teaching reading strategies and creating confident readers, which were two main components that struggling readers lacked, and the text is only a vehicle, then it might be a good practice to find materials for teachers that can both motivate and teach skills.

Methodology

While clearly defining high-interest reading material was difficult, finding information relating to using and obtaining high-interest material was not. This topic has clearly become a priority, by not only reading educators, but also by publishing companies who are producing high-interest reading series to help motivate readers. The economics and "sell" of high-interest reading materials finding information that is free of publisher biased was more of a challenge than previously expected. The resources available through the Area Education Association (AEA) website such as EBSCO and ERIC had many articles that related to high-interest reading material and motivating readers. The relevance to my topic and the immediacy of information varied as greatly as the ideas presented. The internet also proved to be a valuable tool, as searches on high-interest reading and reading motivation both returned websites and discussions too numerous to view. Clive Elementary in the West Des Moines Community School District's reading staff most notably Kristin Shell (third grade), Connie Seery (reading resource), and

Laura Swessinger (Media Specialist/Teacher Librarian) proved to be invaluable resources through interviews and by pointing in to other new and valuable resources.

After the process of searching, locating, and reading the various resources that I came across it became obvious I need to define and narrow my search more clearly. This process led me to use motivation as a more central theme as opposed to one on the periphery. In choosing my resources I not only looked at the date, but also the source of the resources I used and choose those articles which I found to be the most relevant to the topic and issues I chose to address.

Literature Review

The Reluctance and Struggles of Readers: Why Some Kids Won't and Some Kids Don't.

Leigh Hall (2007) points to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to call out the deficiency of American readers. She references that NAEP (2005) shows “that 69% of eighth graders tested had mastered few of the skills needed to comprehend texts at their grade level” (p. 132). She also points out the NAEP assessment shows students struggle with inferring, integrating what they read into their lives, and analyzing what they have read. She states a number of reasons and calls on a number of sources to give possible explanations. These reasons can be summarized as:

- 1) Difficulty decoding words
- 2) Perception that comprehension is a word call-activity
- 3) Ability to recognize words, but inability to make meaning from them.
- 4) Inability to set reading goals for themselves
- 5) Inability to determine and analyze text structure
- 6) Inability to identify main ideas
- 7) Lack of knowledge and application of strategies to understand text.

8) Long and negative history with reading (Hall, 2007, p. 133)

Hall (2007) explains that these difficulties and inabilities can drive students away from reading, “They don’t view reading to be worth their time or energy. Students may act out and “engage in behaviors designed to keep them from reading”” (p. 133).

Pamela Dunston (2007) discusses that during her time as a reading teacher and working with struggling readers, her biggest obstacle was overcoming their own negative feelings about themselves and readers and their thought that reading leads them nowhere. She continued talking about the poor self-efficacy of her students stating that by the time her students had become junior high school students they had received poor grades repeatedly, suffered taunts from classmates, and had seen very little change in their reading ability, if any at all. Furthermore she stated that some students with reading problems, “used their academic standing as a basis for their personal reputations” (p. 329).

Bill Clarke, a teacher at a charter school in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, also noticed reluctance toward reading among his students. He said that the students had a feeling that reading is forced upon them. He also noticed that struggling readers demonstrated confidence problems that went untreated. He stated, “Students often know they are struggling with reading, but have few chances to talk about it” (Clarke, 2006, p. 68).

Hall (2007), Dunston (2007), and Clarke (2006) all talk about the schools role in furthering this skill deficit and reluctance to read by limiting reading instruction as an independent course of study, like math, science, or social science. All three call on schools to show the interdependence of reading across the curriculum. Dunston (2007) discusses a time during a staff meeting when the whole staff was informed that they would be asked to teaching a reading lesson in addition to their content. “Nearly every teacher in the meeting vociferously

stated that his or her or her particular content area was what he or she was paid to teach and that reading instruction was *my area*” (p. 331). She states that most staff members implemented this reading instruction with a silent reading time, despite her suggestions of using the time to teach content related vocabulary or making graphic organizers related to the concepts being taught. Another study by Hall (2007) echoed the sentiments of Dunston, that too few teachers apply reading strategies outside of reading time. Hall gives the possible reason as being fearful that using content related time for reading strategies will cause the mandated curriculum, which will be assessed in a state or national exam, to go uncovered. Hall argues that this isolation and lack of focus on reading skills can be damaging for struggling readers.

With this negative perception, lack of skills, and isolation of reading instruction it becomes very easy to see why the problems some readers have persist, and why some students turn away from reading.

The Effects of Motivation on Reading Success

Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) compiled research from the past several years that demonstrates and discusses the impact of motivation on a student's reading success. The first portion of information they gleaned came from a large group of researchers conducted in the 1980's and 1990's, “Research over the past 20 years demonstrated that students' motivation is the primary concern of many teachers, and many classroom teachers acknowledge that a lack of motivation at the root of many problems they face in teaching” (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 414). Another group that spanned the 1980's concluded, “That motivation plays a major role in learning” (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 414). They also found a passage written by Oldfather (1993) that suggested, “Motivation frequently makes the difference between learning that is temporary and superficial and learning that is permanent and internalized” (Edmunds &

Bauserman, 2006, p. 414). The two developed their own study, in which they asked their students what motivated them to read. They placed students in the following categories:

- 1) Motivated Above -Grade Level
- 2) Motivated On-Grade Level
- 3) Motivated Below- Grade Level
- 4) Unmotivated Above-Grade Level
- 5) Unmotivated On- Grade Level
- 6) Unmotivated Below-Grade Level (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 414)

They then selected three students at random from each category to study further and to specifically determine their motivation towards reading and the reasons for that motivation. Each child was interviewed using the Conversation Interview portion of the Motivation to Read Profile by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzone (1996). This interview was used on 91 fourth graders at their midsized southern United States city. After conducting the interviews they analyzed the data and coded it into six categories. The six categories from Edmunds & Bauserman (2006) are listed below with the three main factors for each category:

- 1) Factors that get children excited about reading narrative text
 - a) Personal Interests
 - b) Characteristics of Books
 - c) Choice
- 2) Factors that get children excited about reading expository text
 - a) Knowledge Gained
 - b) Choice
 - c) Personal Interests

- 3) Factors that get children excited about reading in general
 - a) Characteristics of books
 - b) Knowledge gained
- 4) Sources of book referrals
 - a) School library
 - b) Teachers
 - c) Family members
 - d) Peers
- 5) Sources of motivation
 - a) Family members
 - b) Teachers
 - c) Themselves
- 6) Actions of family members, teachers, and peers
 - a) Buying or giving children books
 - b) Reading to children
 - c) Sharing books (p. 416-420)

One of the key themes that appeared in several categories was the need to give students choice in what they read. They state “One way to increase children’s desire to read is to let them choose their own books” (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 420). They also pointed out the need to give students time to read the books they have chosen. Another key theme in the study was the characteristics of books. The authors noted “exciting book covers, action packed plots, and humor” (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 417). In addition to the books themselves, it was also apparent that teachers, families, and the school library play a key role in motivating students to

read. The authors share that all three entities can work together to provide students extensive access to books. They offer suggestions such as access to book clubs, trips to the library, and take-home literacy bags, which could include books, as well as games, crafts and activities. In their conclusion to their study the authors note that motivated readers spend more time reading and increased reading leads to reading achievement, as well increase the chances that children will become life-long readers.

The Effects of Interest in Reading

So far, it has been stated that readers struggle for a number of reasons which can lead to reluctance and lack of motivation by readers and that motivation can be key in determining reading success. There is an apparent cycle, in which lack of skills leads to low motivation, which only furthers the lack of development of skills. One of the things mentioned repeatedly in the finding by Edmunds & Bauserman (2006) as a motivating factor is personal interest. It is safe to assume that most students, even the unmotivated readers, have something that interests them. Hidi (2001) noted that her past papers have “Demonstrated that the affective factor of interestingness of ideas also had an important influence on how discourse was processed and recalled” (p. 192). She also noted that interests play an important role in processing and recalling information because reader interests serve as “powerful determinates of children’s attention, recognition, and recall” (Hidi, 2001, p. 192). She distinguishes interests into two different categories, individual interest and situational interest, and describes the differences as, “Well developed individual interest in an area may help individuals cope with relevant, but boring texts” and “Situational interest elicited by texts or presentations may maintain motivation even when individuals have no initial interest in the topic” (Hidi, 2006, p. 194). In referring back to motivation, individual interest connects with personal interests and situational interests

connect with characteristics of the book. Hidi pointed out several studies that show “that children’s comprehension, inferencing, and retention is facilitated by personally interesting text segments as well as passages written on high interest topics” (Hidi, 2001, p. 195-196). Hidi (2001) also makes reference to a study by Krapp (1999) where the researchers concluded that “interest did not simply enhance the amount of recalled text information, but had a strong influence on the quality of learning” (p. 196). While researchers realized that individual interest is just that, individual, they also concluded that six factors could help illicit situational interest.

Those six factors are Ease of comprehension

- 1) Text cohesion
- 2) Vividness
- 3) Reader engagement
- 4) Evocative emotional reactions
- 5) Prior Knowledge (Hidi, 2001, p. 197)

In trying to decipher why interest played a role in reading and learning Hidi (2001) remarked, “One possibility is that interest activates text processing strategies” (p. 198). Hidi also used the findings of Wade et al. (1999) who reported that “The connections readers made between information and their prior knowledge or previous experience increased their interest” (p. 197).

In another series of studies, Asher (1979) tried to determine first if the relative interest of a passage had different impacts on different genders, and secondly if the relative interest of a passage had a different impact on different races. While these studies are dated, both taking place in the 1970s, they still can give readers an idea of the influence of interest on students. In building a purpose for his study Asher discussed why interest may play a role in comprehension.

He stated, “First, children may attend less carefully or work less persistently at comprehending material which is uninteresting. Second, children may have less knowledge about topics they lack interest in and perform poorly due to limited background information” (p. 686). The first study in 1974 showed that girls performed better than boys on reading passages that were deemed to be of low-interest, but when the passage was high-interest the discrepancy disappeared. The 1979 study as it related to race showed boys still being highly affected by interest, but this time in contrast to the first study, girls were also highly affected by interest. In terms of race, “Both black children and white children showed better comprehension of high-than low-interest material” (Asher, 1979, p. 689). The results of black (African-American) students encouraging were encouraging to Asher, “Given that the passages were in difficult standard English” (Asher, 1979, p. 689). There was an achievement gap based on the race of the students, which he concluded could be because of a lack of decoding skills or background knowledge on the part of black students. In the study, he also pointed out that the boys strongly aligned their interests along masculine topic lines as opposed to feminine topic lines, while girls were not so polarized, noting “girls interests were moderately related to feminine sex typing and only somewhat negatively related to masculine sex typing” (Asher, 1979, p. 689).

Resources That Are Being Used to Motivate Readers

Hi/lo books. “Hi/Lo” books are books written about a high-interest topic at a lower reading level. Several major publishing companies are marketing “hi/lo” books in bundles for teachers, students, and families. Kelly (2007) in previewing her list of *The Top 10 Hi/Lo Booklists for Reluctant Readers* makes the following assertion, “Kids and teens reading below grade level are more apt to want to read a book if it is not only at their reading level but also at their interest level” (p. 1). In an overview for their Cover-to-Cover series of “hi/lo” books

Perfection Learning (2007) gives the following rationale for such a series, “Struggling Readers need to read materials that are interesting and instructionally appropriate. Their reading should be extensive and varied (p. 1). They claim that their series will give many choices to teachers and students that encompass many different topics (Perfection Learning, 2007). They also cite reasoning given by two leaders in literacy learning, first Routman, who in 2000 said that readers need to be surrounded with authentic texts” (Perfection Learning, 2007). Then discussing the work of Fountas & Pinnell, who in 1996 identified six factors that teachers should consider when matching books to readers:

- 1) Page Length
- 2) Size and Layout of Print
- 3) Language Structure
- 4) Text Structure and Genre
- 5) Predictability and Pattern of Language
- 6) Illustration support (Perfection Learning, 2007, p. 2)

Perfection Learning is certainly not the only company to produce “hi/lo” books or series.

In fact, Graves and Phillipot (2002) went in search of such a series for an article they wrote in 2002, called *High Interest, Easy Reading: An Important Resource for Struggling Readers*. Their search consisted of looking through catalogs of publishers at a convention hosted by the International Reading Association (IRA). Of the 60 publisher’s catalogs that they searched, they found 12 had materials that matched their criteria of high interest with low readability. Their criteria was that the material, “be identified in the publisher’s catalogue as high-interest, easy reading, have a reading level lower than its interest level, and be identified in the catalogue as

appropriate for reluctant readers or for English-language learners” (p. 180). They found that those 12 publishers had over 200 series and over 2,200 books available.

Some popular themes that appeared repeatedly in searches for high interest books were: mysteries, adventures, sports, animals, classics, humor, fantasy, science fiction, cultural and traditional tales, biographies, and current events.

Benefits of “hi/lo” books to readers are:

- 1) Deal with topics and situations that appeal to readers
- 2) Lack challenging vocabulary and syntax
- 3) Are straightforward and well-organized
- 4) If it is a series, readers can locate additional and similar books
- 5) They tend to be shorter allow struggling readers a sense of accomplishment when the finish a book. (Graves and Phillipot, 2002. p. 181)

Comic books and graphic novels. “Graphic novel is a term used by librarians, educators, and booksellers to indicate a publishing format—books written and illustrated in the style of a comic book” (Smith, 2007, p. 1). One of the on-going debates in literature instruction is the value of using comics and graphic novels in teaching students to read. Proponents state that getting students to read is the key and state that the same skills can be taught using comics. Opponents counter that these types of books have little or no academic value and lack the text structure needed to be successful in reading. Jacquie McTaggart (2005) gives her rationale for using comics and graphic novels in her classroom as, “Clearly, comics and graphic novels do not constitute what most of us consider to be good literature. However, before we can make kids read what we want them to, we must first make them want to read” (p. 1). Along those lines, Smith (2007) states, “Graphic novels powerfully attract and motivate kids to read. Many public

librarians have built up graphic novels collections and have seen circulation numbers soar” (p. 2). McVicker (2007) offers that comics make sense in a class with struggling readers because, “They view it as recreational reading rather than academic reading. Children have a feeling of connection or familiarity with comic characters like Garfield or Big Bird due to exposure before formal school” (p. 87). She discusses how comics actually might require more comprehension skills than other texts because, “comics require the reader to blend the print and the graphics to comprehend the intended communication” (p. 86).

Parsons and Smith (1993) came up with 30 ways for educators to use comics with their students to help motivate students while also teaching necessary literacy skills among those were:

- 1) Gather a number of historical or literature based comics
- 2) Pick frames from a comic book and study the pictures to determine mood
- 3) Use cartoons to determine point of view, both character’s and the illustrator’s.
- 4) Take a survey to find out which comics people like best and why.
- 5) Find comic books that relate to other areas of the curriculum, for example historical comments for social studies.
- 6) Use comics to teach values and character education.
- 7) Compare super heroes.
- 8) Use comics to discuss conventions of writing.
- 9) Remove the captions for a comic and have students write new captions for that comic.
- 10) Use comics to identify protagonists and antagonists, as well as character development.
- 11) Create curricular comics by gather facts.

- 12) Use science fiction comic books to discuss technology.
- 13) Create a classroom comic book use students and teachers as characters.
- 14) Write a persuasive piece explaining the values of comics and why they should be used in the classroom. (Pearson & Smith, 1993, p. 3-13)

Some ways to use comics in the classroom are to use them to teach genre and text structure, use comics to teach picture and context clues, use them to teach vocabulary, to teach inference, and to teach deductive reasoning (McVicker, 2007).

McTaggart (2007) sums up the argument for using comics and graphic novels in the classroom as, “I believe we can encourage reluctant readers by meeting them on their own turf and teaching them their way—at least part of the time” (p. 2).

Newspapers. “Use of newspapers in the classroom can make a major contribution to (students) growth of ability and interest in reading” (Vockell & Cusick, 1995, p. 359). “The comprehensive, current information in newspapers enhances every subject” (Moorefield, 2003, p. 58) “Newspapers enhance both reading and writing development. They provide text that is interesting” (Manning, 2001, p. 93). She also proclaims that all teachers she knows find the paper to be their most useful and comprehensive resource (Manning, 2001).

Teachers, for a long time, have used newspapers to teach current events and world happenings, but several authors have offered up a number of other suggestions. Moorefield (2003) designed a scavenger hunt that include, finding a job, write about a world event, cut out a clothing advertisement that would be appropriate for tomorrow’s weather, write about an event coming to town, write a who, what, when, where, why, and how about a local news. Also suggested were strategies to incorporate newspapers across the curriculum. In social studies have students look at visuals such as maps and timelines. In science, have students look for

natural events, endangered animals, and efforts of environmental groups. In math, give them a budget and send them shopping. Rhodes (2002) suggests sending students on a \$100 shopping spree, going on a state scavenger hunt (finding news from different states), reading and writing a help wanted sign, describe setting, action, characters, and dialogue for a comic strip. Naylor (2006) describes a sequencing activity where students try to re-arrange a cut-up comic strip into sequential order; this could also work for a short story, and also describe using the newspaper to teach weather specific vocabulary. For primary students, Manning (2001), claims newspapers teach students mini lessons, such as reporters and editors, as well as the sections such as sports, weather, editorials, and so on. In addition use the newspaper and talk about headlines as attention grabbers and the appeal of newspaper titles such as gazette, herald, news, register, telegram, times and tribune. Segall & Schmidt (2006) convey the value of newspapers by using the research of Street (2002) when stating, “Now more than ever newspapers supplement the traditional textbook, serving as “living textbooks” from which students can learn the concepts and generalizations underlying the social studies program” (p. 92).

Hip-hop lit. “One of the hottest literary phenomena of recent years has been the explosion of what has been variously termed hip-hop, street, or urban fiction” (Wright, 2006, p. 42). By highlighting urban fiction, “librarians can attract some of our hardest-to-reach students” (Meloni, 2007, p. 38). “The genre reflects the culture of the streets set in the urban world of hustlers, gang members, thugs, wannabe rappers, and their girlfriends” (Meloni, 2007, p. 38). Wright (2006) adds when talking about the content of hip-hop literature, “this genre often presents cautionary tales freighted with the conviction of those who have done the crime – and the time” (p. 42).

As far as the worth for reluctant readers, Wright (2006) proclaims,

For libraries, the message is loud and clear; street lit is creating huge numbers of new readers. Although these readers range across the socioeconomic spectrum, from prisons to college campuses, many of them tell us repeatedly that if it weren't for street lit, they probably wouldn't be much interested in books. (p. 43)

Not all who have come across hip-hop lit think it is a positive for readers, "These critics complain that "urban lit" glorifies drugs and violence, reinforces stereotypes, and makes room for books filled with misspellings and incomprehensible slang" (Meloni, 2007, p. 39). To which, Meloni (2007) rebuts that, "supporters respond that underneath the entertainment, the stories teach lessons" (p. 40). This genre, according to Meloni, opens up reading to people who would never set foot in a library or bookstore.

Strategies to Motivate Readers

Several of the authors and researchers give strategies for teachers to use when working with students who are struggling or reluctant readers. Edmunds & Bauserman (2006) offer several recommendations for classroom teachers among them are: self-selection, creating what they call three-piece kids, which include an expository book, a narrative book, and a poem contained in a plastic bag and relating to one subject that may interest students, and also self-discovery bookmarks, where students make a checklist of genres and interests that will impact their reading choices. The importance of an extensive classroom library is also discussed by the pair. They also recommend, "Teachers provide families access to books through inexpensive book clubs and the use of take-home literacy bags that include books for parents and children to read together, as well as interactive games, crafts, and activities that involve books" (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 422). One other activity that the two discuss is called Critic's Chair, which allows students to praise and critique books.

McPherson (2007) also discusses about the importance providing “A variety of reading materials that captivate students’ attention and that are written at students’ independent reading levels” (p. 3). She gives suggestions such as comics and graphic novels, mysteries, video game instructions, the internet and more traditional texts. McPherson also talks about the importance of the school library in increasing motivation by providing access to real-world texts and creating hands-on activities to accompany what students are learning about. “Research into children’s choice of reading materials suggests that when the teacher or teacher-librarian encourages students to choose their reading material and have input and control into their learning activities, students are often intrinsically to deeply engage with the text” (McPherson, 2007, p. 4).

Dunston (2007) offered up strategies for working with struggling readers, those included: purchasing trade books, subscribing to a variety of periodicals, using comics to teach prior knowledge, having content teachers teach specific vocabulary, have teachers work with students in different settings to increase their comfort zone, video tape and invite others to observe and critique your teaching to help improve methods. When working with students, “build on what a student already knows and can do and celebrate each student’s achievements with enthusiasm and praise” (McPherson, 2007, p. 335).

Carbo (1997) in discussing the importance of valuing reading styles suggests that “Reading styles instruction can help even the least academically talented youngsters become proficient readers” (p. 38). In discussing reading styles she gives readers several strategies for working with readers they include:

- 1) Provide a relaxing, literature rich environment.
- 2) Stock classroom libraries with books, magazines, newspapers, TV and movie schedules, catalogs, menus, reference materials, and so on

- 3) Model reading habits during independent and read-aloud times
- 4) Observe your students carefully
- 5) Use colored overlays to minimize visual problems
- 6) Help students understand their own reading style
- 7) Provide opportunities for movement, the authors provide four levels of activity:
 - a) Physical breaks (sharpening pencils, getting a drink, passing papers)
 - b) Movement while working (stand at desk, sit on rug)
 - c) Manipulative and learning games
 - d) Engaging real-life experiences (mime, puppets, and role play)
- 8.) Help parents understand reading styles (Carbo, 1997, p. 38- 42)

Benefits of Using High Interest Materials to Motivate Readers

There have already been several benefits mentioned for using each type of high interest material, in addition to those Laura Swessinger the teacher librarian at Clive Elementary refers to a positive cycle that develops as a result of using high interest material, “The students feel successful; that makes them like to read; the more they like to read the more they read; then they become better readers and the cycle repeats itself” (personal communication, September 11, 2007).

Asher (1979) states that children put less effort towards understanding information that is uninteresting (p. 1). He also conducts a study that shows students scoring considerably higher (between four and seven points on a twenty-one point scale) on material that they rated high interest than on material that they rated low interest. He uses his study to claim that gender and racial reading gaps can be closed by using high interest reading material.

Clarke (2006) stated that when his school started using high interest material and giving more attention to struggling readers, the reading scores of their 10th through 12th grade students, “showed an average increase of nearly two reading grade levels” (p. 69). He also stated improvements in students’ attitudes toward reading, their ability to use what they read, their understanding of the need for reading, and their joy of reading.

Many authors and researchers mentioned the value of using various forms of literature across the curriculum to help meet the needs of diverse learners. Smith (2007) states that graphic novels “can be useful tools for helping students critically examine aspects of history, science, literature, and art” (p. 3).

Challenges of Using High Interest Materials to Motivate Readers

Hidi (2001) states that, “ideally catering to students’ individual interests seems to be the most appealing way to promote learning in the classroom, utilizing individual interest in educational settings can be a very time consuming and effortful task” (p. 203). She continues by saying that, “Teachers may also have problems providing each student with individualized programs as not all children have interests that are adoptable within school settings” (p. 203).

In addition to the concerns addressed by Hidi, other concerns that surfaced were the amount of resources that are available and making one’s self aware of these materials. There are various concerns that being unfamiliar with individual texts can lead to, let alone the concern of learning about an entire genre; some of these concerns could be the age appropriateness, the content appropriateness, the academic appropriateness, the educational value, and the possibly unawareness of something better being available.

Other challenges were addressed by Hall (2007) when she stated that “teachers are often knowledgeable about their subject matter, few have been prepared to provide their student with

literacy instruction” (p. 132). Hall continued by adding, “teachers who feel pressured to cover the curriculum and ensure that students have specific knowledge to pass state and national exams may believe that they cannot sacrifice any amount of additional time” (p. 133).

Conclusion and Recommendations

When I started researching for this paper, I had already made my mind up that using high interest material was a good idea. I wanted to work harder to find new resources and ideas to meet the reading needs and wants of all of my readers, but especially to help those readers who are reluctant. This journey led to finding genres that I was unaware or had little knowledge of. This was very rewarding. I knew very little about graphic novels, but this quest has allowed me to learn not only what a graphic novel is, but also some of the more recommended ones and some practical uses for graphic novels in my classroom. The research supported the use of non-traditional literature such as comics in the classroom. I have already made plans to use many of the suggestions mentioned by Moorefield (2001), Rhodes (2002), Naylor (2006), and Manning (2001) for using the newspaper in the classroom, as well as some made by Parsons and Smith (1993) and McTaggart (2005).

Another very valuable aspect of doing this research and literature review was the great suggestions made by so many authors. Edmunds & Bauserman (2006) gave great advice when they mentioned the factors that got students interested in books. Among them were their pre-existing personal interests, the characteristics of a book, having a choice in what they read, and the knowledge they gain from reading a book. Hidi (2001) also gives a helpful list of criteria teachers and parents should look for when selecting books for children, they were: Ease of comprehension, text cohesion, the vividness of the pictures, how in engaging the book is, if the book is evocative, and how much prior knowledge the student brings to the book.

After the reading of the literature I have done and the conversations that I have had, I would make a few recommendations for teachers before getting started. First, it is very important for teachers to have a variety of reading conversations with their students. Teachers will do well by identifying their interests, seeking out books with them, and discussing those books. Secondly, teachers do not have to do this alone; they can use articles, students, and co-workers. For me, one of my most valuable resources has been my teacher-librarian. Third, EBSCO is such a valuable resource for teachers. I was able to find articles about almost anything that I was looking for. There is so much in the way of professional literature available for teachers, until recently I did not realize how valuable these resources can be. Next, I would recommend going into all this with an open mind and a willingness to be flexible. One of the most difficult factors about this undertaking, is allowing students more choice and flexibility in their reading. This requires teachers to trust the selections their students will make. Remember that the primary objective is the transmission of reading skills and the enjoyment of reading on the part of the student. It is also important to remember that many of the same reading skills can be taught in a wide variety of texts. McTaggart (2005) says it best when she says, "If they don't learn the way you teach, teach the way they learn" (p. 1).

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Appendix 1

From: <http://education.uncc.edu/dbtaylor/Resources/IntInv1.pdf>

Reading Interest Inventory

1. Do you like to read?
2. How much time do you spend reading?
3. What are some of the books you have read lately?
4. Do you have a library card? How often do you use it?
5. Do you ever get books from the school library?
6. About how many books do you own?
7. What are some books you would like to own?
8. Put a check mark next to the kind of reading you like best and topics you might like to read about.
 history travel plays
 sports science fiction adventure
 romance detective stories war stories
 poetry car stories novels
 biography supernatural stories astrology
 humor folktales how-to-do-it books
 mysteries art westerns
9. Do you like to read the newspaper?
10. If 'yes', place a check next to the part of the newspaper listed below you like to read.
 Advertisements Entertainment Columnists
 Headlines Comic Strips Political Stories
 Current Events Sports Editorials
 Others: (please list)
11. What are your favorite television programs?
12. How much time do you spend watching television?
13. What is your favorite magazine?
14. Do you have a hobby? If so, what is it?
15. What are the two best movies you have ever seen?
16. Who are your favorite entertainers and/or movie stars?
17. When you were little, did you enjoy having someone read aloud to you?
18. List topics, subjects, etc. which you might like to read about:
19. What does the word 'reading' mean to you?
20. Say anything else that you would like to say about reading:

from "'But There's Nothing Good to Read' (In the Library Media Center)," by Denice Hildebrandt, *Media Spectrum: The Journal for Library Media Specialists* in Michigan, Fall 2001, p. 34-37.