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Factors motivating children to read

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Factors motivating children to read

Abstract

Reading is the most important skill learned by children during their educational careers. The ability to read is mastered by children through the careful guidance from teachers and parents. Adults tend to assume that providing children with the skills to read will foster a desire to read. Whether or not children pick up books and read them from front to back is dependent upon their motivation to read. The results of this review will provide insight into what factors are involved in reading motivation and what programs are available for children who lack the motivation for reading.

Factors Motivating Children to Read

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Tanya Marie Ossman

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Abstract

Reading is the most important skill learned by children during their educational careers. The ability to read is mastered by children through the careful guidance from teachers and parents. Adults tend to assume that providing children with the skills to read will foster a desire to read. Whether or not children pick up books and read them from front to back is dependent upon their motivation to read. The results of this review will provide insight into what factors are involved in reading motivation and what programs are available for children who lack the motivation for reading.

Introduction

Reading is indisputably the most important skill attained by children during their educational careers. The skill of reading enables students to open their minds to a world of possibilities that would otherwise be unavailable. The ability to read is mastered by children through careful guidance from teachers and parents, who provide the technical instruction required for the children to become independent readers. This technical instruction, which involves word attack skills, comprehension, phonics, etc., provides the tools necessary to read a book, but does not provide children with the motivation to read independently. Teachers tend to assume that providing children with the skills to read would foster a desire to read. However, this assumption simply is not the case (Yohe, 1997). Whether or not children pick up books and read them from front to back is dependent upon their motivation to read. Factors involved in children's motivation to read cannot be solely provided by teachers. But these motivating factors can be nurtured in the classroom environment through initiatives that encourage children to read independently.

The results of this review will provide insight into what factors are involved in reading motivation and what programs are available for children who lack the motivation for reading. These results are important because motivation is the most important underlying factor determining whether or not children will read on their own accord. Rich reading experiences are foundational to intellectual and academic development.

Therefore, this research review is structured around two important questions:

1. What factors influence children to be motivated to read?

2. What programs are available for use with children who lack motivation for reading?

(Wigfield & Grant, 1996) are cited throughout the text of this review as experts in the study of reading motivation. They have established the six factors of reading motivation which is detailed in the analysis and discussion section. They also clarify motivation because teachers often think that a student is motivated or isn't motivated, but motivation actually consists of beliefs, values, and goals that guide behavior.

The success of reading motivation programs relies on several factors, and requires the involvement of teachers, school staff, parents, and the community. Some of the programs that are available for use with children who lack motivation for reading are discussed under the program section of this paper.

Methodology

In order to investigate the children's reading motivational factors, the EBSCO academic database was searched. The search words used were "reading motivation" and "read and motivation." For the first search, 48 results were obtained, of which 11 were chosen for use in the review. For the second search, 60 results were obtained, of which 4 were chosen for use in the review. The information regarding factors involved in reading motivation was then extracted from the studies. The information found in the selected publications is summarized in the next section.

Analysis and Discussion

Key Factors for Reading Motivation

Motivation is an essential aspect to engaged reading activity, even among the brightest students. Furthermore, motivation is often characterized in either/or terms, as in

a student is motivated or a student is not motivated. Motivation is, in fact, a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of beliefs, values, and goals that guide behavior (Wigfield & Grant, 1996). The literature (Wigfield & Grant, 1996) indicates that the factors most important for motivating students to read may be reduced to six general features: a teacher that is a reading model, access to books in the classroom, opportunities to select books based on the student's own interests, familiarity with books, the presence of literacy-related incentives that reflect the value of reading, and social interactions with other people about books.

Also, Trouther (1980) suggested that there are several motivational practices often used in the classroom that tend to discourage reading. These practices include reading aloud in groups, always reading for details, as well as learning vocabulary by copying definitions from a dictionary. However, other researchers have found reading aloud to be beneficial for students' reading motivation.

Wigfield & Grant (1996) also described dimensions that could characterize reading motivation, which included reading efficacy, recognition for reading, the challenge of reading, reading curiosity, social reasons for reading, competition in reading, and reading work avoidance. These researchers also looked at what dimensions related most to the frequency with which children read. The dimensions that related most positively and strongly to reading frequency were reading efficacy, reading curiosity, the challenge of reading, social reasons for reading, and recognition for reading. A negative relationship was found between reading work avoidance and reading frequency. In regards to predictors of reading performance, reading efficacy and reading recognition

were the most consistent positive predictors, while reading work avoidance and social reasons for reading were the most consistent negative predictors.

Teacher as a reading model. Modeling may be one of the most effective strategies for teaching (Yadegari & Ryan, 2002). It is important for teachers to be explicit role models to children by showing that they value reading and enthusiastically share a love of reading with students. Teachers are explicit reading models when they share their own reading experiences with students and emphasize how reading enhances and enriches their lives (Gambrell, 1996).

Bouchard (2003) suggested that instructors are falling short when it comes to motivating children to read because teachers are not modeling good reading practices. This author stresses leadership as the necessary element involved in the promotion of reading behavior among children. This leadership needs to take place through the modeling of reading behaviors by all involved in education, including administrators and superintendents. Bouchard (2003) reported that over 50% of Canadian adults are alliterate, which means that they can read but choose not to. Furthermore, this author explains that simply presenting students with the tools to read does not seem to serve them well, since they turn into adults who can but choose not to read. Furthermore, Bouchard (2003) explained how once administrators and everyone involved in education starts reading, reading related activities and conversations will seem natural, and this will transfer to the reading practices of students. The love of reading is contagious, and teachers and librarians have the opportunity to make reading a desired pleasure for their students (Dalhauser, 2003).

Access to books in the classroom. Children are highly motivated in environments that are book-rich. A vital factor for reading motivation among children is a large, varied and often refreshed collection of books in the classroom library (Neuman, 2001). Positive first reading experiences require a book collection that is kept new and exciting in order to hold the attention and interest of new readers (Dalhauser, 2003). Gambrell (1996) suggests that increasing the number of books available to children in the classroom can have a positive effect on the amount and quality of the literacy experiences both within the classroom and at home. However, simply having books available is not sufficient for the development of highly motivated reading behavior. A combination of several other factors must be present to encourage book-related behavior. Children are more likely to want to spend time in the library area and actively engage in reading when the area and the books are physically attractive (Neumann, 2001). These library areas should contain ample space, comfortable furnishings, and open-faced bookshelves ensuring visibility of books, as well as displays and props.

Opportunities to select own books. Choice is a powerful factor involved in reading motivation. Gambrell (1996) found that the books and stories that children found the most interesting were the ones that they picked out because of their own reasons and purposes. Opportunities for choice promote children's independence and versatility as readers, which indicate a relation between choice and the development of intrinsic motivation (Gambrell, 1996).

There is value in allowing students to choose what they would like to read during class time. Time spent reading personally chosen materials in school increases positive

feelings about reading and improves achievement (Moss & Hendershot, 2002).

Providing autonomy to students in their choices of reading material increases their sense of self-efficacy. In order to provide autonomy to students the teacher must introduce a variety of literature and have this literature available for students to choose. If a teacher gets excited about a variety of genre, students are more likely to feel comfortable to try one of them. The child has a sense of security about this choice because it has already been prefaced for them. This choice will likely occur again therefore, providing autonomy to the students.

Familiarity with books. Gambrell (1996) recognized that level of interest was an important factor in reading motivation, and the interests of children are usually reflected in the books and stories they chose to talk about. In fact, interest seems to foster depth of processing and enhances the learning process. Curiosity was also acknowledged by the author as an important factor in motivation, and that the children in the study were curious about and more motivated to read books that were familiar to them.

Geier (2002) stressed the importance of practice in the development of reading skills, which ultimately results in familiarity with reading material. Children need to understand that practice is necessary in order for reading to become more enjoyable. This author also emphasized the importance of excitement to get children reading more often. It is also beneficial to gain the involvement of parents and the community at large in reading programs that promote motivation.

The use of non-fiction in the classroom may be advantageous for reading motivation (Dalhauser, 2003; Moss & Hendershot, 2002). Dalhauser (2003) emphasized the importance of the availability of books that appeal to the interests of students, and

remarked that boys often enjoy non-fiction, such as books about dinosaurs, sharks, or tractors. Non-fiction trade books may have great potential for the motivation of reluctant readers, since students have curiosities about a range of real-world topics (Moss & Hendershot, 2002).

Familiarity with written materials other than books may improve reading motivation as well. Trouther (1980) suggested alternate strategies for the encouragement of reading among children, including the use of newspapers or starting a comic book club. The different factors of reading motivation, including knowledge, skills, values, intent, awareness of success, personal needs, and aspirations, may be fostered through the use of non-conventional reading materials, such as greeting cards, sheet music, directions for assembling bicycles, and various operations manuals (Trouther, 1980).

Neuman (2001) stressed that the more contact children have with books, the better readers they will become and the more they will read. Struggling readers, especially, need an environment that encourages them to read and write without intimidation, and 30 to 40 minutes should be devoted each day to silent sustained reading (Yadegari & Ryan, 2002). Bell (2003) suggested that every class should be started with students doing some type of reading exercise, whether silent, in groups, or teacher-led. This increased reading can be promoted by teachers reading to children daily and by having children interact with books often in the classroom library area. This author also explains how certain characteristics and design features strongly influence whether or not library centers may be used by children to their full potential. First of all, the library areas must be stocked with a variety of good books that will challenge students of different skill levels and reflect different interests. This collection of books should contain some permanent books

as well as some revolving books that change every few weeks. In order for children to be interested in reading, their interest and enthusiasm must be sparked by books. Children's involvement with books can be fostered by reading to them daily and by encouraging children to interact with books through extensive use of classroom libraries.

Literacy related incentives. According to Gambrell (1996), there is also great importance in the types of incentives given to children for reading behavior. Gambrell (1996) suggests that using books as tangible rewards for reading teaches children to value books and reading. Furthermore, in order to foster the development of an intrinsic desire to read, books provide the most effective tangible reward. Reading-related rewards increase children's motivation to read and the frequency of reading activities.

Cole (2002) investigated the possibility that different literacy personalities exist, which each contained different opinions, feelings, and choices that were underlying factors for intrinsic motivation. From this study, the researcher devised practical ideas for teachers that desire to discover and value the different literacy personalities in their classrooms in order to promote intrinsic motivation to read. These ideas included the provision of a rich, literate environment in the classroom, a wide variety of reading experiences in groups and individually, opportunities for students to express their opinions regarding reading, thematic units and author studies, and opportunities for social interactions regarding reading.

Metsala & McCann (1997) recognized the challenge that teachers continually face in trying to engage students in the cognitive activities required to gain the skills to read and to continue to read based on their own will. These authors suggest that the different dimensional aspects demonstrated by Wigfield & Grant (1996) can be captured as

different broad questions that children can ask themselves. Examples of these questions would be “Can I do this task?” which reflects the dimension of reading efficacy, or “Do I want to do this task, and why?” which reflects values for learning, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motives for reading. Intrinsic motivation stems from the individual’s own interests, while extrinsic motivation emerges from compliance with parents, teachers, or peers, often through the form of some type of external reward. Both kinds of motivation can help increase reading among children. However, there is a wealth of evidence that intrinsic motivation results in more sustained involvement in different activities, including reading (Metsala & McCann, 1997). Moreover, in order to facilitate reading motivation among children, intrinsic motivational dimensions should be fostered by instructional programs.

Some success has been demonstrated also through the use of extrinsic motivational factors. Yohe (1997) found motivational success through the use of a reading motivation/management system called the Electronic Bookshelf, which showed that technology could be the driving force that motivated students to read and keep them reading. With this system, the teachers have an incentive program built into the classroom reading program. The teachers are able to set parameters for the number of books that students must read or the number of points that must be accumulated before the system moves the students to higher award levels. The awards involved in the program give students a reason to read, which is considered by some to be important. Yohe (1997) claimed that being rewarded for reading achievement motivated children to continue reading. Some of the incentives used included a wide range of gifts, the

announcement of award winners on a morning television news program, and the display of award winners' names in the school, also, at the end of the school year, three winners in each grade level win a prize of \$50.00, and the overall top winner in each grade have their names place on a plaque in the school. The most beneficial aspect of the Electronic Shelf program is that for the first time for several years, students realize that they must read an entire book in order to be successful (Yohe, 1997).

Although the extrinsic motivational factors used by the instructor in the example above may have increased the frequency with which children read, and therefore improved their motivation, some may argue that these external rewards are harmful. Johnson (1999) maintains that extrinsic motivation does not help in the achievement of long-term desired behavior, and that it actually works against building positive attitudes and habits. This extends to the realm of reading motivation among children.

Johnson (1999) describes how rewards can act as punishment for those who do not receive them, and that rewards can disrupt relationships between students and their peers as well as teachers. Also, it is described how rewards have the potential to discourage risk taking, and they ignore the reasons for a desired behavior. Furthermore, this author explains how extrinsic payment is understood by humans as resultant of tasks that are undesirable and not enjoyable. The author explains the sentiment held by some researchers that programs that provide food rewards for reading are creating a generation of chubby children who do not, and will not, read for enjoyment.

Social interactions. Social interactions are important for the development of reading motivation (Gambrell, 1996; Metsala & McCann, 1997). Gambrell (1996) maintained that students that took part in frequent discussions about their reading with

others were more motivated and had higher achievement scores than did students who did not have these types of social interactions. Neuman (2001) suggested that children need time to interact with books and have the opportunities to talk about them every day.

Overall, social interactions have a positive effect on reading achievement demonstrated by children, and constructive social interactions should be encouraged.

Whole-class shared reading provides a social interaction in which reading motivation may be maximized (Bailey, 2003). Bailey (2003) claimed that whole-group shared reading builds fluency, confidence, as well as the ability to read with inflection and expression. It also strengthens vocabulary skills as well as an understanding of various literary concepts. Shared reading is described as a method that helps students of all abilities succeed. Above-average students are benefited because they develop high-level literacy skills, which help them understand concepts such as protagonism versus antagonism, foreshadowing, and irony. Whole-group reading also allows above average students to develop and utilize more effective strategies for the analysis of unknown words. Average students benefit from whole-group reading, because it allows them to read on grade level in a risk-free environment and to gain better comprehension through teacher-led whole-group discussions. Below average students benefit from whole-group reading, because they can learn through modeling from the teacher and classmates, and they have the opportunity to learn advanced literary concepts through whole-group discussions. It is important to develop a classroom atmosphere in which students are supportive of each other's reading efforts (Bell, 2003).

It is through social interactions with other students, as well as between students and teachers, which teachers are able to assess whether students had acquired skills

necessary for life-long reading (Yadegari & Ryan, 2002). These skills include an ability to conceptualize beyond literal interpretation, make inferences, incorporate prior knowledge into a reading situation at hand, empathize with characters, and identify the purpose of an author.

Programs

The success of reading motivation programs is contingent on several factors, and requires the involvement of teachers, school staff, parents, and the community. Staton (1998) explained that a key aspect of reading motivation is information, and that librarians are a crucial force in the reading motivation of children. This author described a number of activities that help motivate children to read and to develop an intrinsic desire to read. Including giving children time to read, emphasizing the importance of practicing reading, using reading as a reward, providing access to appropriate books, flexibility, reading aloud to students, talking about books, the involvement of families, using children to assist with each others' learning, combining variety and challenge in reading, as well as encouraging motivational literary projects. Staton (1998) also stresses the importance in ensuring that students of all reading abilities are able to attain success by participating in motivational activity. Also, it is essential to find the motivational activities that work best for the whole class.

A successful program was demonstrated by Gambrell (1996), who indicated that the first-graders and parents who participated in Running Start showed statistically significant increases in reading motivation and behaviors. These results suggest that a classroom-based, 10-week motivational program can enhance the reading motivation and behaviors of children as well as the number and quality of reading experiences at home.

Gambrell (1996) also examined whether Running Start would benefit children from schools with lower reading achievement scores. The results of the study indicated that the children that take part in Running Start were more motivated to read, spent more time reading on their own, engaged more often in discussions about stories and books with friends and family, took more books home from school to read, and spent more time reading with family members. In addition, parents who had children in Running Start spent more time reading with their children, and provided an overall book-rich environment. These parents also reported that their children enjoyed reading and spent more time reading than matched school parents. Furthermore, the results of this study provided evidence that a motivational reading program has the power to enhance the reading motivation and behavior of children from schools with low literacy achievement and can increase both the quality and quantity of literacy practices within the family. Gambrell (1996) also found that the effects of the motivational reading program extended into the long term.

Goal setting and achievement were explained by Sideridis (2002) as being important for the motivation of students. This author suggested that teachers show students the value of education, teach students how to set high but realistic academic goals, and cultivate in students the importance of achieving goals using intrinsic, extrinsic, or other motivational strategies. Programs that incorporate goal setting may be beneficial in achieving reading goals.

Programs that involve parent and the community may be beneficial for reading motivation. Dalhauser (2003) described a project called "Special Friends," in which teachers pair up students with members of the community who spend thirty minutes a

week having lunch and reading together. This program starts in kindergarten and the relationship between the adult and the child continues as the child moves up through grade levels. This program is especially beneficial for “at-risk” children who need increased support in their reading practices.

Johnson (1999) suggested some reasonable guidelines that could be followed for using reading motivation programs. These guidelines include programs that stress personal and individual accomplishment, programs that set goals and promote collaborative work, programs that include various reading materials, ensuring that the program fosters life-long reading beyond the constraints of the program, and choosing programs that stay away from material rewards and instead focus on intrinsic motivation.

An environment enriched with books, as well as parental support are associated with the long-term positive effects of the motivational reading program. Overall, the results of the study conducted by Gambrell (1996) indicate that a motivational reading program can foster a physical environment and social interactions that act to encourage and support children in the development of their love of reading. Teachers can help aid reading engagement in children by fostering their confidence in their reading ability, and by providing a variety of books available to students that reflect different interests and curiosities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Reading motivation among children is a multi-faceted construct involving several different dimensions. The six key factors for reading motivation were detailed within this literature review. The six factors mentioned were the factors that influence children to be motivated to read. Modeling has been proven to be one of the most effective strategies for

teaching. It is important that teachers model reading on a daily basis. It has also been proven that children are motivated to read in environments that are book-rich. Children need a wide range of books to choose from. Children must have positive first experiences when choosing books and reading them. In my research it was stated that children found the books and stories most interesting that they were allowed to pick out based on their own reasons and purposes. It has been proven that time spent reading personally chosen materials increases positive feelings about reading and improves achievement. Students must have a familiarity with books in order to foster success. These dimensions may be helped, or hindered, through classroom factors involving the teacher, curriculum, and social interactions. Literacy related incentives have great importance when books are given as tangible rewards because this teaches children to value books and reading. Children need to have time to interact with their peers about their reading. This social interaction has a positive effect on their achievement. Several programs have been initiated throughout the country in attempts to foster a love of reading among children. In order for any program to be successful it requires the involvement of teachers, school staff, parents, and the community. The findings of this review and the current educational climate indicate a need for further research into how reading motivation is affected by an educational environment that is heavily focused on standardized testing and ability grouping. This type of research could direct policy makers towards initiatives and programs that best serve the motivational interests of children.

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