The impact of instructional materials on the motivational of struggling readers

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The impact of instructional materials on the motivational of struggling readers

Abstract
This literature review examined the impact that instructional materials have on the motivation and literacy engagement of struggling readers. Its purpose was to determine the influence instructional materials have on struggling readers' engagement with text, which instructional materials have a positive effect on struggling readers, the influence that informational text has on students' reading motivation, the impact of gender on the selection of effective instructional materials, and what instructional materials have a positive impact on struggling male readers. Through this review, instructional materials were found to have a positive effect on literacy engagement when they are at an appropriate level, relate to student interests and prior knowledge, are easily accessible, represent a balanced and diverse selection of text, and allow for freedom of choice based on gender preferences.
THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS
ON THE MOTIVATION OF STRUGGLING READERS

A Graduate Review
Submitted to the
Division of Literacy Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Kimberly Weeks
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This Review by Kimberly Weeks

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Motivation of Struggling Readers

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Introduction

This paper examines the topic of reading motivation and literacy engagement of struggling readers. It investigates the influence that instructional materials have on motivation, and the role that gender plays in the effectiveness of these instructional materials.

According to Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo (2000), a large percentage of students across the country have reported that they rarely, if ever, read for enjoyment. McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth (1995) discussed a condition known as aliteracy, in which poor attitudes and lack of motivation cause even fluent readers to choose not to read when given other options. They went on to say that students’ views about reading and about themselves as readers are positive in the early primary grades, but tend to decline in the upper grades, and that this trend is especially true for struggling readers.

Motivation is an important factor for a teacher to consider. Students who are motivated to read are willing to spend more time reading, and as Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater & Turner (2002) pointed out, time spent reading is tied to reading and writing competence. A study by Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) confirmed this finding. These researchers collected data from 155 fifth-grade students concerning the amount of time the students spent on a wide range of activities outside of the regular school day. The study revealed that time spent reading had a positive correlation with growth in reading proficiency.

Students who struggle with reading often enter a downward spiral. Constant failure leads to decreased motivation and self-confidence, which in turn leads to less time spent actually reading. This often leads to continued failure. According to Allington (1994), “children who read little are the children least likely to read well” (p. 16).
One goal of literacy education is to create engaged, motivated readers. Motivated readers choose to read for a variety of personal reasons including curiosity, involvement, social interchange, and emotional satisfaction (Guthrie, 1996). Readers who are motivated by these personal goals become self-determining. They generate their own literacy learning opportunities and take the first step toward self-direction. They are able to pursue their own interests, discover aspects of the world around them, solve problems, and interact with others.

According to Guthrie and Davis (2003), students who lack motivation to master the skills and content of reading instruction will have difficulty engaging with text. If these students struggle with reading already, it is unlikely that they will experience success with reading in the future.

Duke (2000) stated that informational texts can play an important role in motivating children to read. Informational texts can capitalize on children’s interests and curiosities, provide opportunities to support and develop areas of expertise, and create links to home literacy experiences. In a study of 20 first-grade classrooms, however, Duke reported that there was a scarcity of informational text present in the classrooms. A mean of only 3.6 minutes per day was spent with informational text despite its positive impact on reading motivation.

The role that gender plays in reading motivation and achievement has become a topic of interest in current studies and research as well. Brozo (2006) stated that the well-documented underachievement of males in the area of literacy is a challenge facing educators today, and may require a close look at the resources being used to enable boys to become engaged, competent readers. Sullivan (2004) stated that “if we want to transform boys into lifelong readers, we need to have a better grasp on the kind of reading that attracts them” (p. 36).
Rationale

As a remedial reading teacher, I have observed many students of varying ability levels demonstrate a reluctance to read and are disengaged while reading. This is concerning considering the important role that literacy plays in our world today. Reading and writing permeate nearly every facet of our lives.

In my work as a Title 1 reading teacher, I have noticed that a large percentage of the students in my reading intervention groups have been male. Many of them would not select reading as an activity of choice. For them, reading does not generate feelings of enthusiasm or excitement. Instead, they feel frustrated or bored and tend to avoid reading whenever possible. The effects of this lack of reading is evident in their performance on formal reading assessments administered each year.

My desire to positively impact the reading achievement of these students led me to pursue the topic of motivation in the area of reading. Creating a classroom climate that encourages all students to feel more interested, engaged and excited about reading is critical in helping students develop into readers that read for enjoyment, read to learn, and are able to function successfully in the world around them.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to synthesize the research concerning the motivation and literacy engagement of struggling readers. It focused specifically on investigating the impact that instructional materials have on struggling readers’ engagement with text.

Because literacy engagement can be promoted by capitalizing on students’ interests (Hidi, 1991) this study examined literature concerning the use of informational text as a motivational factor.
Finally, due to evidence that boys are a growing subgroup in the category of struggling readers (Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen & Campbell, 2001), the role of gender in regards to the selection of engaging instructional materials was explored.

*Importance of Topic*

The issue of student motivation has both historical and current significance. According to a study conducted by Veenman (1984), motivating students was a primary concern of many teachers. Teachers involved in the study ranked motivation of students high on the list of perceived problems. Many teachers have used various educational practices to enhance reading motivation and encourage children to read, but have realized that these practices have not produced lasting effects (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). The critical role that motivation plays in literacy learning has created an interest among teachers to understand how motivation and achievement are related, and how to create a classroom that supports children in becoming highly motivated readers (Gambrell, 1996).

Evidence of a strong correlation between reading motivation and achievement has been documented through research (Walberg & Tsai, 1985). Children who are motivated to read will spend more time reading, and increased reading has a positive effect on reading achievement (Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). Because of this correlation between reading motivation and achievement, it is crucial to investigate how to best encourage and foster the motivation and desire to read.

According to a survey of 1200 students (Allen, 2003), motivation is strongly influenced by the types of books and instructional materials that are chosen. Starting with the right materials during instruction and reading aloud books that capture students’ interests can have an impact on the books they choose to read independently and on their success at becoming a fluent reader.
Selecting appropriate instructional materials becomes particularly important when the needs of struggling readers are considered. Time spent reading voluntarily has been shown to be considerably less for struggling readers than for proficient readers (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, & Turner, 2002), causing these students to continue to lose ground academically. When instruction and materials are interesting to students, learning motivation, effort, and attitudes improve (Hidi, 1991).

Due to the fact that males have demonstrated a tendency to score significantly lower than females on standardized measures of reading achievement (Grigg, Daane, Ying & Campbell, 2003), it has become necessary for educators to focus specific attention on improving the literacy success of struggling male readers.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2004) reported a long-term trend for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) covering the years 1971-2004, which indicated that females have consistently outperformed males in reading in all three age categories in which data was collected including nine-year-olds, thirteen-year-olds, and seventeen-year-olds. During this time frame, the average scale scores for females have ranged from 5 to 15 points higher than the average scale scores for males. Investigating the role that gender plays in the selection of effective instructional materials may help to lessen this gender gap and strengthen the literacy success of struggling male readers.

**Terminology**

This literature review contains terms which I will define to help with clarity and understanding. **Struggling readers** refers to students with average to above average intelligence with reading skills that fall two or more years below their intellectual level, but have not been identified as learning disabled (Hall, 2004). The term **informational text** refers to texts that
communicate factual information about the natural world, are usually focused around a topic or theme, and may contain technical vocabulary as well as charts, graphs or diagrams (Duke, 2000). Literacy engagement is defined as being motivated to read because of wanting to become involved in the text, wanting to fulfill curiosity, or wanting to share the social aspects of reading (Guthrie, 1996). Content reading is described as reading in a variety of subject areas for informational purposes (Walker, Kragler, Martin & Arnett, 2003). Scale scores are scores derived from student responses to assessment items that summarize the overall level of performance attained by that student (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) produces summary statistics describing scale scores for groups of students. For reading assessments, scale scores typically range from 0-500. Self-efficacy is defined as the belief that one can successfully complete a given task (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Self-efficacy has a strong influence on decisions to engage in activities such as reading. Archetypes refer to inherited ideas or thoughts that come from past experience and are present in an individual’s subconsciousness (Brozo, 2002).

Research Questions

This review of literature was guided by the following primary question: What is the correlation between instructional materials and struggling readers’ literacy engagement and motivation to read? This question was further defined by the following secondary questions: (1) What influence do instructional materials have on struggling readers’ engagement with text and the motivation to read it? (2) What instructional materials have a positive effect on struggling readers? (3) What influence does informational text have on students’ motivation to read? (4) How does student gender impact the selection of effective instructional materials? (5) What instructional materials have a positive impact on struggling male readers?
Methodology

In order to broaden my understanding of how the effective selection of instructional materials influences the engagement and motivation of struggling readers, I examined a variety of sources including books and journal articles. In this chapter, I discuss the models for research design, the methods for locating sources for this literature review, methods for selecting resources relevant to this topic, and finally, the procedures used to read and analyze all the sources used for this review. I will start with a brief description of my research design.

Models for Research Design

Various sources have influenced the writing of this literature review. As I was beginning my research, I looked at an article by Hall (2004). This article provided an example of what a quality literature review looked like, and gave me a direction for what I needed to be looking for, thinking about, and including in my own research. The review by Hall started with a clear introduction and purpose for the review. The methodology chapter of this review was particularly helpful as it explained the process of gathering relevant literature, and what factors were considered in regards to the inclusion or exclusion of studies. Hall’s review analyzed the topic of helping struggling readers comprehend expository text, so the search terms used to gather information for this review were helpful as I began my own search.

Several other articles included as examples in my research course also provided a model to follow. One was a literature review by Joseph and Seery (2004), which examined the use of phonetic analysis strategies or phonics instruction with students with mental retardation. The other was a literature review by Harris, Baltodano, Artiles, and Rutherford (2006), which analyzed literature to determine the extent that cultural factors were considered in the development and implementation of reading interventions for youth in correctional facilities.
Each of these reviews provided an example of a well-written abstract, and a general guideline as to the basic components of a literature review.

A graduate paper by Shaffer (2007) also served as a model in the writing of this literature review, particularly for the Methodology chapter. This paper was a good reference point regarding wording and the actual layout for this chapter. Shaffer provided clear examples of pertinent information to include in each section. I also used it as a guide after I wrote other sections of the literature review. Having another paper to look at was helpful in ensuring that all major sections of the research paper were included.

Methods for Locating Sources

I began my search by reflecting on my personal experience with struggling readers. I generated a list of key concepts and terms that I felt would provide a general direction for my search. These concepts included the terms motivation meaning students' willingness to participate in reading activities; engagement referring to students' active involvement in literacy activities; struggling readers referring to students who experience difficulties in the area of reading; and effective literacy instruction meaning the practices and materials that teachers use to engage students in the literacy process.

After making an initial list of related concepts, I turned to online search engines to see what journal articles I could find on the topic of motivating struggling readers. I used my list of key concepts as search terms. Various databases were included in my search: Expanded Academic ASAP (Thomas Gale), Education Full text (Wilson), Academic Search Elite (EBSCO), ERIC (EBSCO), and JSTOR. I found a variety of articles related to reading motivation. I was able to access a majority of the information immediately with full-text articles.
The reference pages of the articles I had found were utilized as a guide to additional pertinent information on my topic.

I was interested in investigating the impact of instructional materials, including informational text, on the motivation of struggling readers. Adding search terms such as *informational text, expository text* and *content reading* expanded my information on this topic. An article by Dreher (2003) was one of the first articles I found. Dreher discussed the topic of using informational or non-narrative text to motivate struggling readers. This article referenced other valuable literature related to this topic.

A second area I was focusing on had to do with the issue of gender. I was interested in what the literature had to say in regards to the achievement of males in the area of reading, and more specifically, what instructional materials have been shown to have a positive impact on struggling male readers. I looked up results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004) on the Internet and discovered that females have consistently outperformed males in the area of reading according to long-term trend results. Other research also supported the fact that boys were a growing subgroup of struggling readers and that informational text was one type of instructional material that could be utilized more extensively to spark the motivation and engagement of male readers. I did an Internet search using the terms *struggling male readers, and effective instructional materials*. I came across a preview for a book entitled *To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader: Engaging Teen and Pre-teen Boys in Active Literacy*, by William Brozo (2002). I ordered a personal copy of this book as it had a wealth of helpful information on my topic.
I also found several other books at Amazon.com that had been referenced in some of my articles. I decided to purchase these books also due to the probability that they would be helpful not only for my research, but for my teaching practice as well.

**Methods for Selecting Sources**

In my search for sources, I found a variety of articles and book titles useful for researching the topic of motivating struggling readers. To determine whether or not to use these sources, I considered the following: (a) Whether the sources were research-based, (b) whether the sources specifically discussed key concepts such as reading motivation, struggling readers and instructional materials, and (c) the age of the students discussed in the research.

I limited my search to literature that dealt mostly with primary-aged children. Although one of my books talked about adolescent and pre-adolescent males, I felt the information was applicable to the age-group in which I was most interested.

I also searched primarily for literature regarding the needs of struggling readers. Again, although some of the research about reading motivation was directed towards students of varying degrees of reading ability, I considered including it if it provided a foundation about reading motivation in general or had sections applicable to struggling readers. For example, an article by Guthrie (1996) did not specifically address the needs of struggling readers, but it provided a thorough description of literacy engagement and why it is important. This information supports the need to investigate ways to increase literacy engagement for struggling readers.

Since the topic of my research dealt with the impact of instructional materials, I excluded literature that focused primarily on effective instructional strategies. Although these two issues are closely related and valuable topics, the scope of this literature review was limited to the selection of effective instructional materials.
Procedures for Analyzing Sources

After I selected appropriate journal articles, I read the abstract if applicable and skimmed the article for the main points and key terms it contained. I then reread the article closely and highlighted important information. I also made notes in the margins when I noticed ideas that connected with information from other articles.

As I read the articles, I started to categorize them according to the main theme of the article. The categories included (a) struggling readers, (b) literacy engagement and motivation, (c) informational text and (d) literacy engagement of males. I labeled each article with a sticky note, which stated the main themes found in that article. Most articles fell into more than one of the categories since the main themes often overlapped.

I went through the books in a similar manner. I first skimmed through the book to get an overview of the major concepts covered within the book. I used the same categories with the books as I did with the journal articles, and put sticky notes on specific pages of the books that offered valuable information.

The procedures discussed in this section helped me sort and organize the research, which made it easier to categorize the information and address the research questions in the literature review.
Results

This review of literature examined the issue of motivating and engaging struggling readers. The significance of motivation in regards to the reading achievement of struggling readers was discussed. The influence that instructional materials have on engaging students with text was examined, as well as the motivational impact of informational text. The role of gender in the selection of materials that promote engagement with text was investigated. The selection of effective instructional materials in regards to the motivational needs of struggling male readers was also discussed.

There is evidence to support the link between reading ability and motivation and attitudes towards reading. McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth (1995) conducted a study of reading attitudes of 18,185 elementary students in grades 1-6. This study found that students with low reading ability demonstrated the strongest trend for negative attitudes towards reading for recreation.

Motivation impacts the amount of time students spend reading, both in and out of school (Dreher, 2003). Children who are more motivated to read will spend more time reading. This increased amount of reading has a direct impact on reading and writing competence (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater & Turner, 2002; Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990). Struggling readers tend to avoid reading, and therefore do not get the practice they need to become proficient (Dreher).

What influence do instructional materials have on struggling readers' engagement with text and the motivation to read it?

The influence of instructional materials on literacy engagement is an important consideration to make when working with struggling readers. In a study by Ganske, Monroe and Strickland (2003), 191 teachers completed a survey on which the teachers listed their three most
pressing questions about working with struggling readers and writers. The results of this survey led the researchers to conclude that the problem of motivating struggling readers and writers was a prevalent concern among participants. Ganske, Monroe and Strickland argued that efforts to motivate struggling, disengaged learners should start with a consideration of the classroom environment, including the reading materials that are present. Having an adequate number of texts at students’ instructional levels as well as books on a wide range of topics that tap into students’ interests can positively influence the motivation of struggling readers.

Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater and Turner (2002) reported similar findings in their study of twenty-four struggling, resistant readers in grades 3 through 5 who were tutored for one or two semesters by university students. The researchers stated that several factors have been shown to positively influence struggling readers’ motivation to read including (a) providing materials and instruction that are interesting to students, (b) having access to a wide range of inspiring reading materials, and (c) developing positive social interactions around literacy.

Primeaux (2000) reported on a survey completed by Ivey and Broaddus (1999) in which over 1700 middle school students were questioned about what inspired student engagement in classroom reading. Three areas that were found to be critical to reading engagement included: (1) student choice of reading material, (2) personal interest and involvement with text, and (3) having enough time to read. Ivey and Broaddus concluded that helping students identify their own interests and instructing them on how to make age-appropriate choices would motivate students to stay with a book better than having the teacher always try to force student interest for teacher-selected materials.

The importance of interest for motivation and learning has been documented in other research studies as well. Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, and Turner (2002) concluded that a
responsive approach combined with interesting and appropriate text and student choice may be the best way to reach readers who have struggled in the past, and have developed a resistance to reading. Hidi (1991) also studied the effects of text-based interest on learning, and concluded that interesting materials have a positive impact on learning and motivation. By providing students with materials that are personally interesting and relevant, learning, motivation, effort and attitudes improve. Using materials that students prefer leads to a variety of academic and affective benefits including enhanced fluency, vocabulary, linguistic competence, confidence, and motivation.

In a study by Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez, and Teale (1993), data was collected in 183 regular education classrooms. The study was designed to obtain information regarding the availability of trade books in classroom libraries. The researchers concluded that the need exists for high-quality classroom libraries in elementary schools. They argued that students who have access to a wide range of reading materials are more likely to read than those who do not. Well-designed classroom libraries allowed children to interact more with books, demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading and spend more time reading voluntarily. Children with access to quality literature of varying genres and levels of difficulty exhibited higher levels of reading achievement.

Roller (1996) provided an account of her insights and experiences in working with struggling readers at the University of Iowa Speech, Hearing, and Reading Clinic’s Summer Residential Program. According to Roller, students make the most progress when the level of text difficulty is matched with students’ reading abilities. This allows students to experience success and feel more competent, which leads to a willingness to engage in reading, put forth more effort and tackle new challenges.
Guthrie (1996) presented his vision of literacy engagement which was based on experiences with children and input from teachers. According to Guthrie, “the art of educating for literacy engagement is to link students’ intrinsic motivations to classroom activities” (p. 436). Teachers must know how to promote literacy engagement in order to teach reading well. Guthrie stated that book selection is a vital step in designing an engaging classroom context. In order for students to link literature-based knowledge with real-world interactions, a variety of texts and genres about key concepts are needed. However, he cautioned against thinking that materials alone produce engagement. He pointed out that materials alone cannot teach. Educating for literacy engagement utilizes appropriate materials along with the processes of observing, searching, comprehending, collaborating and communicating.

What instructional materials have a positive effect on struggling readers?

Helping students who struggle in the area of reading is a common goal of many educators. Examining which materials have a positive effect on the reading ability of these students can help teachers tailor their instruction to better meet the needs of struggling readers.

In a case study of one struggling third-grade reader, Cole (1998) examined how the textual structure of basal-like materials could scaffold reading instruction for the student. According to Cole, the needs of struggling readers are directly influenced by the materials being used. Cole investigated the differences between beginner-oriented texts and aesthetically constructed texts. Beginner-oriented texts are those that demonstrate a greater use of high-frequency, controlled vocabulary and contained simplistic sentences. These texts were written primarily to promote fluent decoding skills. The purpose of aesthetically constructed texts is not to teach children to read, but to provide enjoyment, entertainment or information. Aesthetically constructed texts contain more complexity in terms of sentence structure and vocabulary.
According to Cole (1998), a majority of students experience success with literature-based instruction that incorporates primarily aesthetically constructed texts. However, some children come to school with limited experience or interactions with print. Their simplistic oral language does not match up with the complexities found in many aesthetically constructed texts currently used in many classrooms. These students often struggle when they encounter less patterned, less predictable text. Cole suggested that carefully selected age-appropriate beginner-oriented texts should be made available to struggling readers to offer them a scaffolded approach to helping them learn language complexities. Providing repetitious experiences with this simple text structure may help some struggling readers move more easily into fluent reading of more complex text structures.

Margolis and McCabe (2006) described five principles of motivation and discussed how teachers can apply the principles with struggling readers within the framework of mandated instruction. These principles include (a) using materials and assignments that promote successful performance, (b) increasing expectations of success by ensuring adequate background and vocabulary, (c) creating value by linking instruction to readers' interests and goals, (d) creating value by temporarily using extrinsic reinforcers, and (e) teaching struggling readers to make facilitative attributions. Margolis and McCabe suggested that teachers routinely give struggling readers materials on which moderate effort will likely produce success. Showing students how new materials resemble those on which they have previously succeeded can increase students' expectations of success and strengthen their self-efficacy and motivation. Routinely experiencing success on a task such as reading typically encourages the development of high self-efficacy toward that task.
In addition to matching materials to the reader's ability, Margolis and McCabe (2006) reiterated the fact that instructional materials must be interesting and important to struggling readers. If readers believe that the materials relate to goals and interests that they value, reading tasks become more motivating and worthy of effort.

In a study of how to make reading meaningful, interesting, supportive, and accessible to struggling readers, Worthy (1996) argued that in order to make progress in reading, struggling readers must have opportunities to independently read material that is at an appropriately challenging level. However, Worthy also stated that matching readers to appropriate levels of reading materials is not enough. Student interest is also an important factor to consider in material selection. Worthy suggested categories of reading materials that are both interesting and supportive of the needs of struggling readers, as well as reluctant readers. These categories and examples of each include (a) repetitive texts such as pattern books, poetry and verse, and jump rope rhymes; (b) performance texts such as speeches, and readers theater pieces; and (c) popular texts such as series books, popular magazines, sophisticated picture books and nonfiction books.

What influence does informational text have on students' motivation to read?

Informational text can have a positive impact on students' motivation to read. According to Guthrie (1996), intrinsic motivation and sustained literacy engagement can be developed by linking reading and writing skills to content areas through the use of nonfiction trade books. Nonfiction material, such as informational text, enhances understanding. It allows students to inquire about and investigate the real world. It is the genre most likely to spur children's passion and wonder for learning (Harvey, 2002).

Caswell and Duke (1998) discussed the link between students' interests and improved literacy development. Through their experiences of observing and tutoring students at the
Harvard Literacy Laboratory, they found that non-narrative texts sometimes provide "a way in to the world of literacy" (Caswell & Duke p. 108), especially for struggling readers and writers, which narrative texts do not. They reported that students who found the processes of reading and writing difficult were more willing to persevere when high-interest reading materials were utilized. They found that non-narrative texts capture students' interests by building upon and increasing background knowledge and supporting home literacies. Students can assume the role of expert on a specific topic, which can be a powerful experience for struggling readers. The researchers concluded, "non-narrative texts capitalized on children's interests, which in turn led them to be more purposeful, perseverant, active, and prolific readers" (Caswell & Duke, p. 114).

Although narrative texts are the predominant source of reading material in most primary classrooms, (Caswell & Duke, 1998), there is research support for including a balance of non-narrative text as well. Dreher (2003) stated that a balance in the types of materials that children read is correlated with achievement. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) interviews with fourth grade students, those students who read a variety of materials, including stories, magazines and informational text, showed higher levels of achievement than students who read fewer types (Campbell, Kapinus & Beatty, 1995 as cited in Dreher, 2003).

Dreher (2003) also stated that another reason to offer balanced opportunity to interact with a variety of literature is that students like both stories and informational texts and can handle both. Informational books allow teachers to tap students' interests and appeal to their curiosity, which is a powerful motivation for reading. Nonfiction is a versatile genre that can capture the interests of struggling readers and provide the incentive needed to get them to read (Harvey, 2002).
Dreher (2003) discussed the benefit of teachers reading aloud informational text to students. Because students' listening comprehension is better than their reading comprehension until about sixth or seventh grade, reading books aloud gives struggling readers the opportunity to experience books that are above students' reading levels. Something they can rarely do on their own. Interactive reading of informational text helps to build background knowledge and vocabulary, and helps students make connections among different books.

Yopp and Yopp (2000) reported on the various purposes informational texts can serve in the primary-grade classroom. In addition to motivating students by capitalizing on their interests, early experiences with informational text may benefit students by preventing or lessening difficulties with this type of material in the future. Traditionally, upper-elementary students are required to read more informational materials than in previous grades. Without significant previous exposure to this type of text, students struggle with reading to learn with this material.

In her study of content area reading in the primary classroom, Guillaume (1998) listed five propositions to support the use of informational text in primary grades. First, she stated that knowledge is power. The more ways we have of gaining information to build knowledge, the more empowered we become. Second, younger children can learn through text, and older readers should continue to refine their skills and find new ways to understand text. Third, content areas, such as science, social studies and mathematics, often fuel questions. Fourth, reading and writing experiences permeate all of the content areas. They can encourage careful thinking and student participation. Finally, reading and language arts skills, such as decoding, are embedded within the content areas. A meaningful context is provided in which to practice those skills.

Gambrell (2005) reported on the increasing attention that researchers and educators are giving to the role of expository text in early literacy development. In addition to traditional
printed text, Gambrell pointed to electronic forms of informational text as a motivating factor for many students. The search for information and flexible access to the Internet has resulted in an increase in the reading of informational text by students.

*How does student gender impact the selection of effective instructional materials?*

Educators today are faced with the challenge of a growing gap between the reading achievement of males versus females (Brozo, 2006). In a report that presented the results of the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress, Grigg, Daane, Ying & Campbell (2003) compared students’ performance in 2002 to the results from 1992, 1994, and 1998. The researchers concluded that boys in elementary school through high school have consistently scored lower than girls on standardized measures of reading achievement.

This achievement gap has created a need for educators to rethink the types of materials they are using in their classrooms. In his book, Brozo (2002) shared experiences and ideas related to the issue of helping males develop literacy engagement. According to Brozo, one of the main concerns is that language and literacy teachers are more apt to select and use narrative fiction that may be less appealing to boys. Taylor (2005) summarized current research regarding issues that boys face with literacy, and stated that boys are making meaning with texts, but not in ways that are always recognized by schools. For example, boys often prefer magazines, Internet sites, and informational text. It is important that the preferences of boys are addressed in the literacy classroom in order to promote their reading engagement.

Taylor (2005) suggested that educators should continue to expose boys to literature that they may not demonstrate an interest in, but that they should also build on boys’ current interests and allow them to have some choice in the selection of texts. Brozo (2002) stated, “Choice and control are two ingredients commonly missing in instruction provided to adolescent boys who
are not reading as would be expected for their grade level and who are disinterested and reluctant readers” (p. 18).

Wilhelm and Smith (2005) summarized the findings of one of their earlier studies concerning the literate lives of 49 males in middle school and high school. This study sought to understand how the boys used literacy and what conditions promoted it. Wilhelm and Smith suggested that because different boys will like different texts, it may be important to also think about the contexts in which the selected texts and materials are used. The authors described five conditions that have been proven to promote the literacy engagement of males. These include (a) having control over the reading and feeling competent, (b) reading material that is at an appropriate level, (c) understanding the purpose for the reading and receiving immediate feedback, (d) having an opportunity to read for enjoyment in the present moment, and (e) being involved in reading that has a social dimension.

What instructional materials have a positive impact on struggling male readers?

Brozo (2002) proposed that in order to help struggling male readers achieve engaged reading, teachers must use literature that speaks to unique male interests. This literature can serve as an entry point into literacy for boys. According to Brozo, “once entry points are found, boys may develop a sense of self through active literacy and increase their chances for an expansive intellectual journey” (p. 3). The primary goal is to capture the imagination and then keep the students reading.

Brozo (2002) suggested that informational books and stories containing positive male archetypes be used because of their likely appeal to boys, and because of the importance of reaffirming boys’ inherent goodness as males.
Brozo (2002) stated that teachers cannot transform boys who are struggling, unengaged readers into skillful, enthusiastic readers just by handing them a story with positive male archetypes, but finding the right books can help reacquaint these students with the joys of literacy. It may cause them to start looking for additional exciting, personal, and meaningful literacy experiences.

In a study of what motivates boys to read, Sullivan (2004) stated that there is a disconnect between the type of reading that is encouraged at school, and the type of reading that truly interests boys. According to Sullivan (2004), many boys are drawn to stories containing action, color, and motion. Examples of motivating materials for boys may include sports and adventure stories, fantasies and nonfiction titles, which help satisfy boys’ desires to make sense of the world and test its boundaries.

Sullivan (2004) cautioned schools and teachers against dismissing books that boys may prefer just because they don’t fit the popular standard of quality literature. Allowing boys to read materials that appeal to them makes it more likely that they’ll read other books.

A study by Blair and Sanford (2004) also focused on the issue of how school-based literacy practices may not match up to the literacy needs of boys. Blair and Sanford completed a two-year study in elementary and middle school classrooms that explored the question of what literacy for boys looks like, and how it may be different from the traditional notions of school literacy. They stated that the wide range of texts read by male readers such as newspapers, manuals, sports statistics, Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokémon cards and the Internet can be used to scaffold their interaction with increasingly complex texts.

Cavazos-Kottke (2005) provided a first person account of research that investigated the kinds of texts that engaged the imagination of boys, as well as what teachers can do with this
knowledge. Increasing students' freedom of choice and creating an individual diet that capitalizes on their interests can have a positive effect on the motivation of struggling male readers. Cavazos-Kottke reported that boys who had rejected reading rediscovered their passion for it "once their academic and recreational literacy practices could converge" (p. 458).
The purpose of this literature review was to learn about the impact that instructional materials have on the motivation of struggling readers. I have completed a second phase of data analysis whereby I looked for recurring themes and trends across all the data using the constant comparative method. After grouping the data that contained similar concepts into the categories of (a) struggling readers, (b) literacy engagement and motivation, (c) informational text, and (d) literacy engagement of males, I looked for relationships and ideas that these categories shared. I found four common themes and trends. This chapter is organized with subheadings for each theme and trend and provides further discussion for each one. Limitations of this literature review as well as recommendations for teaching practice are also discussed.

**Themes and Trends**

The following themes were found through a second phase of data analysis: (a) accessibility and time, (b) motivating factors of instructional materials, (c) balanced use of instructional materials, and (d) literacy engagement of struggling male readers.

*Accessibility and time.* One theme was the idea of adequate access to instructional materials and ample opportunities for struggling readers to spend time reading both in and out of school. The research in this study supported the need of struggling readers to have access to classroom reading materials, and opportunities to browse, read and interact with books and texts that are at a comfortable reading level for them (Allen, 2003; Allington, 1994; Dreher, 2003; Ganske, Monroe, Strickland, 2003; Primeaux, 2000). Several studies linked the importance of the amount of time students actually spent reading to their reading and writing competence (Dreher, 2003; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Gambrell, 1996; Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater & Turner, 2002). It was noted that the decline in the amount of time spent voluntarily reading is
Motivation of Struggling Readers

Motivation of Struggling Readers (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater & Turner, 2002.)

Motivational factors of instructional materials. Research from this analysis consistently listed two specific factors that are connected with materials considered to be motivating and engaging. One of these factors is interest. Having a strong interest in what is being read is key to a student’s literacy development and engagement with a text because it can lead students to more purposeful reading and writing (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Guthrie, 1996). Interest helps improve learning, effort, attitudes, motivation and processing of text on a deeper level (Brozo, 2002; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Taylor, 2005; Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater & Turner, 2002). Interesting materials can also motivate students to read beyond their average readability level (Worthy, 1996).

Choice is the second important motivational factor. Allowing students to choose the books they want to read has been shown to have a positive effect on reading motivation (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Gambrell, 1996; Primeaux, 2000). Giving struggling or reluctant readers choice of reading materials and control over reading tasks can help them rediscover a passion for reading (Brozo, 2002; Cavazos-Kottke, 2005).

Balanced use of instructional materials. The importance of providing a balance in the type of genre used with struggling readers was another common theme in the literature. Having a diverse, but balanced range of literature available for students to read and explore is critical for meeting the varied needs of each student and is linked to reading achievement (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Dreher, 2003; Palmer & Stewart, 2003). Several studies mentioned the need to expand on the use of informational text in the classroom, but not at the expense of fictional text. A balance is needed in order to tap the personal interests of all students and to help them understand the
value and uses of various genres (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke, 2000; Gambrell, 2005; Harvey, 2002;)

**Motivation of Struggling Readers**

A final theme was the consideration of the literacy engagement of struggling male readers. It is important for schools to recognize the types of texts and reading materials that struggling male readers may find motivating. Matching the unique interests, needs, and experiences of males with materials used in the classroom is important for engaging them in literacy tasks ((Blair & Sanford, 2004; Brozo, 2002; Brozo, 2006; Cavazos-Kottke, 2005; Sullivan, 2004). A number of studies discussed common textual elements that tend to promote the literacy engagement of struggling male readers including highly visual texts, texts with functional or usable information, texts that challenge the status quo, texts that build on current interests and competencies, and texts that support social communities and interactions with others (Blair & Sanford, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Wilhelm & Smith, 2005).

**Limitations**

One limitation I encountered while conducting research for this review was that there is not much existing literature on the impact of instructional materials on the motivation of struggling readers. The search results were narrowed because of this.

There is a large amount of literature concerning the reading motivation of students in general, effective ways to use instructional materials, and instructional strategies that have been proven to be successful, but this information was outside the scope of this literature review.

**Recommendations**

Based on the research presented in this literature review, I recommend that teachers carefully consider the selection of instructional materials used in the classroom due to the
influence these materials can have on reading motivation. In our efforts to help all students make gains in reading achievement, providing instructional materials that promote a desire to read is critical.

The motivational needs of struggling readers are of special concern. In an attempt to help these students develop a positive attitude towards reading and help them see reading as useful, purposeful and enjoyable, teachers need to select and make available materials that appeal to these students’ interests. Materials that build on students’ existing background knowledge can also foster a positive attitude towards reading by enabling students to feel successful and knowledgeable about the topic. These materials should also be made available to students. Although it’s important for struggling readers to have materials that are at an appropriately challenging level, interest and background knowledge can enable students to read and comprehend materials at higher levels than they normally do.

Having a classroom library which contains a wide variety of reading material, including a balance of both fiction and nonfiction titles, is helpful in meeting the diverse needs of students. Allowing students to have a choice in what they’d like to read tends to have a positive influence on reading motivation. Struggling readers, in particular, need ample time and opportunities to read and engage with texts that are appropriate for them.

Struggling male readers also present a unique set of concerns. It is recommended that schools widen the scope of acceptable reading and instructional materials to include those favored by struggling and reluctant male readers. Doing so can help these students become engaged with reading by connecting it to their social and recreational interests.

By being cognizant of the motivational impact that instructional materials can have on all students, educators can create classroom environments in which the diverse needs, interests,
questions and goals for each student are addressed, and the creation of lifelong readers and learners is encouraged.
References


