

Increasing Reading Motivation in Young Struggling Readers: Tips for Teachers



“It is clear that future attempts to remediate early reading difficulties need to attend to students’ reading motivational needs in addition to their reading skill needs” (Quirk et al., 2009).

Q: What is motivation?

A: Motivation is the reasons a person has for behaving or acting in a certain way. Children have motivation for all of their daily activities – including reading! Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation: behavior that is driven by internal rewards.

Intrinsic motivation is a type of motivation that arises from within the individual because the activity is naturally satisfying to him/her.

Examples of intrinsic motivation:

- ◆ “I am reading because I enjoy it!”
- ◆ “I am reading because I want to learn more.”
- ◆ “I am reading because I am excited to find out what happens next in the story.”
- ◆ “I am reading because I want to become a better reader.”

In these examples, the child’s motivation to read is due to the fact that they enjoy reading. Intrinsic motivations are positively correlated with reading achievement. Think about what students in your class might show this type of motivation.

Extrinsic motivation: behaviour that is driven by external awards.

Extrinsic motivation arises from outside the child, meaning that the child is completing the activity for reasons outside of the fact that it is personally motivating.

Examples of extrinsic motivation:

- ◆ “I am reading because my teacher told me I have to.”
- ◆ “I am reading because I’ll get a bad grade if I don’t do the reading.”
- ◆ “I am reading because I’ll get in trouble if I don’t do it.”

In these examples, the child’s motivation to read is coming from an external factor. Since the child’s motivation is not arising from internal factors, they may attempt to avoid the work. Unlike intrinsic motivations, extrinsic motivation is not correlated with reading achievement. Try to think of students in your class who may exhibit this type of motivation.



Q: What is the relationship between motivation and reading?

A: Current research suggests that there is a strong relationship between a child's motivation to read and their reading abilities. Further, student engagement in a subject is a predictor of their academic performance. Despite these findings, reading motivation is an overlooked factor in the discussion of building children's reading skills. Research has shown that children who are intrinsically motivated spend 300% more time reading than students who have low intrinsic motivation. Children become better readers by reading often. If struggling readers have low intrinsic motivation to read and are therefore not reading as often, they will continue to fall further behind. Reading at school during dedicated reading time is not enough to close this gap. Attempts to remediate reading difficulties should not only focus on building the child's reading skills, but also increasing the child's motivation for reading. Building children's reading motivation will allow them to grow into more confident, engaged readers. It is important to begin building this motivation early in the child's literacy career when it may not be obvious to the child why reading is important.

Q: Why do struggling readers have less intrinsic motivation than other children?

A: Struggling readers may have less intrinsic motivation for reading because reading is hard for them. Success is a powerful motivation, and these children have experienced little success in the reading department. As a result, struggling readers may have limited confidence in their reading abilities and may be less motivated to continue trying if they believe they are going to fail.

Where to start?

In order to incorporate a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach for reading motivation, it is important to first determine where each of your student's motivation for reading is coming. The following short questionnaires developed for research purposes may provide guiding questions to consider when assessing your student's reading motivation.



Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (<http://cori.umd.edu/measures/MRQ.pdf>)

This questionnaire is to be completed by the student and contains 53 items that reflect various elements of reading motivation..

Time to complete: 10 minutes

Young Reader Motivation Questionnaire – Student Form and Teacher Form

(<http://cori.umd.edu/measures/YRMQ.pdf>)

This questionnaire contains 11 yes/no questions to be completed by the student and 15 yes/no questions to be completed by the teacher.

Time to complete: under 5 minutes

The results of these assessments can guide the specific tips you decide to implement in your classroom and with each individual child, thereby incorporating a UDL approach.

Tips and Tricks for Building Reading Motivation in the Classroom

The tips provided will focus on four areas that foster reading motivation in struggling readers:

1. Interest
2. Ownership
3. Self-efficacy
4. Social Interaction

Below, there are many suggestions provided regarding how to foster reading achievement in the classroom. However, do not feel as though you need to incorporate every suggestion into your classroom on a daily basis. As you read through the list, think about your classroom dynamic, your upcoming topics of study and the struggling readers in your classroom. Try and begin with implementing five of the provided techniques. As you become more comfortable with the concepts, continue to incorporate new ones into your classroom.

INTEREST:

Children are more likely to read a book that they are interested in. There are a number of ways you can increase a child's interest in a book, thereby increasing their motivation to read.

1. Invite a local author into the classroom to speak about a book

Before the author arrives, spend time reading the author's book and have a classroom discussion about the book. Ask each child to generate one question to ask the author about his or her book. The excitement of having a guest in the classroom and being able to ask them a question may increase struggling reader's interest in the book, thereby increasing their motivation to read it.

2. "Honour" books

Research suggests that children are more likely to pick a book when the teacher has done something to make that book special. Regularly "honour" books by:

- ♦ Provide a quick introduction to the book, read a few pages of the book or ask the students questions about the book to pique their interests. This may instill in children an interest to find out what is going to happen in the book.
- ♦ Have a special place in the classroom for "honoured" books.
- ♦ Provide your students with the opportunity to bring in a favorite book from home to "honour" at school. Children may be motivated to read their friend's favorite book, or may be motivated to read a few different books so that they can bring their favorite one into the classroom to share.

3. Pick books related to a unit theme the class is currently studying

Read books to your class that are related to the larger theme the class is studying. For example, if you are completing a science unit on living things, read a book that is related to this theme. Additionally, have these types of conceptually related books available for children to read during silent reading or to bring home at the end of the day. Students are more likely to be engaged if there is an ongoing, relevant conceptual theme. These types of thematically related books are also helpful for struggling readers because it activates the background knowledge the student already has for the topic and thereby brings a sense of familiarity. Additionally, it is a great way to continue targeting unit vocabulary.

4. **Pick books that connect to real-life experiences**

Pick books to read that children will have real life experiences with. For example, if you are reading the book “If You Take a Mouse to School” by Laura Joffe Numeroff, remind your students that just like the mouse, there was a time when they were coming to school for the very first time. You can ask your students questions like, “What did you do on your first day of school?” “What did you think school was going to be like?”, “Did you have fun on the first day of school?”. Use a UDL approach to specifically tailor questions to every child in the class in order to ensure they are given a chance to make a connection to a real-life experience. To tie these experiences back to the book, remind the children that reading the story will reveal if the mouse’s first day of school activities were like your students. Children will be more motivated to read when they see connections between their own lives and the text at hand.

5. **Incorporate hands on experiences related to book themes**

If you are reading a book with a theme that children will not have personal experiences with, incorporate a hands-on experience related to the book before reading it. For example, if you are completing a unit on owls and reading a book on the survival mechanisms of the owl, you might plan for a dissection experiment where the children look for animal bones, skulls and hairs in the owl pellet. After completing this hands-on activity, the children will have had a personal experience with the formerly unfamiliar topic. The connection the students have now made with the topic may increase their motivation to learn more about it.

6. **Offer book choices that are culturally relevant**

Ensure that texts related to the various cultures represented in your classroom are available for selection. This may be especially motivating for struggling readers who are not used to seeing their backgrounds reflected in classroom materials.

7. **Find high interest, low vocabulary books for children**

Look for books that have controlled vocabulary and reading difficulty levels, but plots and topics that are age appropriate. This is critical for older children who are struggling with reading.

OWNERSHIP:

The inquiry based approach to education places the child at the center of the learning experience. Children develop a sense of ownership when they are given the opportunity to guide their learning. Children are more likely to remain engaged in the reading material when they have a sense of ownership over their reading.

1. **Offer book choice during independent reading time**

During independent reading, allow students to choose their own book. At first, provide limited choices (e.g. provide two texts from which the child can select one to read). Ensure the available choices are relevant to the child and at an appropriate reading level. Provide feedback to the child about their choice and, when necessary, help the child make an appropriate choice. As the child begins to demonstrate an ability to manage choice, introduce more texts into the array. Offering children choice provides the child with a sense of responsibility over their reading, and may therefore increase their motivation. Further, offering choice aligns with the UDL principle of multiple means of engagement.

“Choosing inspires me to read more because I get to pick something interesting to me instead of my teacher telling me what to do.”

2. Allow students to choose the teacher read-aloud book

On occasion, provide children with the opportunity to choose the book you read during read-aloud time. Manage the amount of choice students are given by offering several possible book titles. Hold a vote to see which book the students would like you to read.

3. Offer choice about how long independent reading will last

Over the span of a few months, provide each child with a choice of how long the silent reading period will last. The options can be set by the teacher (e.g. “10 minutes or 15 minutes?”). This type of choice will provide the child with feelings of being “in charge”. When a child has chosen how long the class will read for, they will feel a sense of responsibility to read for that allotted time and will likely follow through with their choice.

SELF-EFFICACY:

A child with a high amount of self-efficacy believes in his/her abilities to succeed in accomplishing a task. These children believe they will read well and are able to persist in the face of reading difficulty. Struggling readers often have low self-efficacy. Increasing struggling reader’s self-efficacy can increase their motivation to read because it increases their confidence and willingness to try difficult reading tasks.

1. Provide the student with specific feedback

Zentall and Lee (2012) state that providing a child with generic, nonspecific praise (e.g. “good girl”) after the child fails at a task decreases motivation because it expresses a stable factor that the child cannot change. Specific praise that communicates realistic expectations and links the child’s behaviour to the task they completed increases their motivation (e.g. “good girl who works hard to finish reading the story”). During 1 on 1 or group reading times, provide struggling readers with specific feedback concerning their reading performance. This will help the child gain self-confidence in the skills they already possess.

2. Evaluate the child’s performance on their reading accuracy and effort

If struggling readers know that they are only being assessed on their reading accuracy, they may feel less motivated to work hard at the task because they believe they will fail. Evaluating a child on their reading accuracy AND effort level may help increase the child’s self-efficacy because it will show the child that they possess strengths important for reading (e.g hard work). Additionally, removing the focus from grades may take pressure off of the child and allow them to enjoy reading for reading.

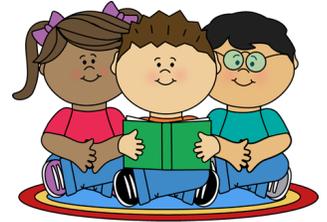
3. Provide opportunities for the child to experience reading success

Ensure that the books the child is reading are written at appropriate reading levels. Children should be reading books that are slightly above their current reading level. If a book is too easy, the child may lose motivation to continue because the task is boring. If a book is too difficult, the child may lose motivation because they are not experiencing success. Finishing a book that is challenging, but still at an appropriate reading level, provides the child with a sense of accomplishment. It may also give them the confidence to try and read another challenging book!



SOCIAL INTERACTION:

Children love spending time with their peers. Students often show more enthusiasm for a task when they have the opportunity to collaborate with a peer. Giving children time to work with peers on reading activities may increase their motivation to read.



1. Discuss books in small and large groups

Discussing books with their peers may provide struggling readers with new perspectives on the book and reading in general. Other student's excitement about reading may be contagious and help the struggling reader learn that reading is fun!

2. Play games that involve reading

Young children love playing games and having fun. In your classroom, have reading games such as "Sight Word Bingo" readily available for children to play during free time.

Quick and Easy Tips (that you are probably already doing!):

1. Share your love for reading with your students

When your students are reading during silent reading time, pick up a book and read too! At the end of silent reading, explain to your children that you love to read and are excited to keep reading your book to find out what is going to happen next. It is important that struggling readers see that reading can be fun and that their teacher values reading.

2. Have a balanced book collection in the classroom

A balanced book collection is one that contains a variety of texts (e.g. magazines, books, newspapers, fiction, nonfiction, etc.). Ensure that the texts you have available represent the various reading levels of each child, thereby incorporating a UDL approach. Every few weeks, bring in new texts in order to keep the children excited about the books.

3. Discuss the importance of reading

Throughout the day, make comments regarding the importance of reading. For example, during math instruction explain that even though the child is focusing on math, they are using their reading skills to read the question.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/teacher-practices-impact-reading-motivation>

This article titled, “Teacher Practices that Impact Reading Motivation” provides a detailed explanation of how educators can strengthen the breadth and depth of a student’s reading by building the child’s motivation to read.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/simple-practices-nurture-motivation-read>

This article titled, “Simple Practices to Nurture the Motivation to Read” contains additional information on a few of the tips and tricks discussed above.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-motivation-what-research-says>

This link titled, “Reading Motivation: What the Research Says” provides more information on the research discussed above. It also contains tips for teachers on how to increase the reading motivation of their students.

http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/balancedliteracydiet/Motivation_for_Literacy/index.html

This link contains more information regarding reading motivation in school aged children.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/top-10-resources-reading-motivation>

This webpage titled, “Top 10 Resources on Reading Motivation” provides links to 10 different articles that discuss building reading motivation in struggling readers.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/when-kids-hate-read>

This resource can be shared with parents of struggling readers. It contains information concerning what parents should and should not focus on when assisting their child with reading.

<http://www.cori.umd.edu/>

Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is a reading program designed for struggling readers. This program combines reading strategy instruction, conceptual knowledge in science and support for student motivation. For more information, click on the provided link.

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