

# MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO READ

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## Aim

With the goal of promoting the love of reading, the key is to motivate individuals to read and to make them keep on reading.

This review of related literature aims to identify the dimensions of motivation and suggest ways on how to motivate people to read.

## Background

The information found in this paper came from articles of different journals, between the years of 1995 and 2003, that have content regarding motivation and teaching strategies leading to readers' motivation.

Beginning with the dimensions of children's motivation for reading as related to reading activity and reading achievement, the four literacy personalities follow next. Such personalities aim to describe readers' characteristics as regards motivation to read. Then, the readers' struggles are described afterwards. In addition, suggested ways to motivate people.

## Dimensions of Children's Motivation

The dimensions of children's motivation are based on two theoretical positions: the engagement perspective and achievement motivation theory. The engagement perspective on reading incorporates cognitive, motivational, and social aspects of reading. Thus, engaged readers are described to be motivated to read for different purposes, make use of knowledge gained from previous experience to make new insight. On the other hand, the achievement

motivation theory suggests that individuals' competence and efficacy beliefs, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and purposes for achievement play a vital role in their decisions about which activities to do, how long to perform them, and how much effort to put into them. Along this line of thought, motivated readers are characterized to be occupied more in reading and will have more positive attitudes toward reading.

Three categories encompass the eleven (11) dimensions of reading motivation: competence and efficacy beliefs, goals for reading, and social purposes for reading.

The first category - competence and efficacy beliefs - includes self-efficacy, challenge, and work avoidance. Baker and Wigfield (1999) define self-efficacy as "the belief that one can be successful at reading." Challenge is "the willingness to take on difficult reading material," and work avoidance is: the desire to avoid reading activities. When students lack of sense of efficacy, they likely wish to avoid challenging reading activities."

The purposes children have for readings belong to the second category. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, achievement goal orientations, and achievement values are the motivation field dimensions falling in this category. Intrinsic motivation refers to being motivated, curious, and interested in an activity for its own sake while extrinsic reasons are typified by working for a reward or grade. A learning goal orientation describes the individuals as being focused on mastery and improvement, rather than outperforming others. Moreover, curiosity is defined as the desire to read about a specific topic of interest to a child, and is closely related to the literature on reading interest. Involvement is getting pleasure from the experience of reading certain kinds of literary or informational texts while importance of reading is related to work on subjective task values (Baker and Wigfield, 1999).

Three dimensions in the second category mirror the concepts of extrinsic motivation and performance goal orientation. A performance goal orientation is defined by working mainly to perform

well in the eyes of others. The dimensions summing up these concepts are: recognition, reading for grades, and competition. "Recognition [is] the pleasure in receiving a tangible form of recognition for success. Reading for grades [is] the desire to be favorably evaluated by the teacher, and competition [is] the desire to outperform others in reading" (Baker and Wigfield, 1999). These dimensions mirror the fact that children read more in school, where their reading performance is evaluated and weighed against others.

The third category concentrates on the social purposes of reading, which is based on the engagement perspective's principle that reading is essentially a social activity and that social aspect is the social reasons for reading, or the process of creating and sharing the meanings, gained from reading with friends and folks. The second aspect is compliance that is reading to meet the expectations of others.

## **Four Literacy Personalities**

In order to see the multifaceted reading motivation dimensions in children, Cole (2002) came up with a study among her students using a qualitative research approach. Her study resulted in identifying four literacy personalities.

Amy, the first literacy personality, was an intrinsically motivated reader who set her goals. She was inclined to read books that were related to thematic units and author studies used in the classroom. Furthermore, the social part of the classroom, such as reading stories to her classmates, also motivated her. Being able to express herself was also another motivating factor for Amy.

Cole (2002) observed that:

Her literacy personality was formed by her beliefs, strengthened by her reasons and purposes for reading, and confirmed by the affective reactions to reading she experienced. She became a strong, capable, outgoing

reader, which enabled her to be a good literacy role model for other students as well.

The second personality, Mark, was a serious learner whose parents believe that he must perform well in school. He mirrored his parents' values inside the classroom. Mark's teacher set literacy goals for him and he took them seriously, however, such goals did not intrinsically motivate him to read. Later on, he was exposed to genres like nonfiction and humorous books - such as the Goosebumps series by R.L. Stine and the Wayside School series by Louis Sachar - that he really enjoyed. It was at this time that he started setting his own goals and his reading really improved. Moreover, he was also motivated by social interaction with his friends. It was valuable to Mark that his peers approved of the books he was reading.

Mark's literacy personality was that of a well-educated, diligent student, but not always intrinsically motivated. Thus, Cole (2002) pointed out that "his personality required that his interests and choices be honored in the classroom as much as possible so that he would become engaged in reading and choose to continue his literacy progress."

Next, there was the struggling reader in Trae's literacy personality. The teacher's reading goals for him seldom motivated him to read, but those provided by his friends motivated him. When he sat by excellent student role models, such as Mark, Trae became motivated to read humorous literature, study animals, and read chapter books. Sustained reading and writing, however, did not appeal to him. He liked taking breaks to discuss a project with a classmate in the middle of an activity, and consumes the maximum time allowed to produce a short but excellent report.

Lastly, Brooke's literacy personality comes to the picture. Compared to the other case study, she treasured books the most and fancy having herself surrounded by literature. Although she was a motivated reader, it was not apparent in her behavior because she appeared to be off-task and daydreaming much of the school day.

Cole (2002) however, discovered that "this was not the case. Brooke was often engaged when she seemed off-task and she was sometimes experiencing flow when she was daydreaming."

Two characteristics of Brooke's personality became evident. First, she needed adjustment time to begin and to continue working on assignments and projects... Second, Brooke needed space. She got pleasure from working with classmates at times, but given the choice, she frequently preferred to read and write alone.

Thus, it was easy to get the wrong idea about Brooke's literacy personality. Cole (2002) mentioned that:

The distance she put between herself and the rest of the class could have been misconstrued as an attempt to escape from literacy activities, but it was Brooke's way of becoming more involved. The time she needed to complete assignments could have been seen as a lack of skill or ability, but Brooke was a talented reader. I saw growth in Brooke's self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation as her literacy personality was honored, and I tried to allow her to experience literacy in ways that were meaningful to her.

## **Struggles Encountered by a Reader**

After having been aware of certain literacy personalities of readers, it is also important to note the struggles that readers go through, Kirk (2001) mentioned that

[His] "first attempts at reading left [him] emotionally drained and intimidated... [He] remember[s] as a beginning first grader that the teacher placed [him] and [his] classmates into groups... She gave no placement tests; she simply put [them] where she thought they deserved to be, assuming incorrectly... that [they] already knew how to read

without ever having been formally instructed in such a complex school task."

The experience of imitating the sounds pronounced by his teacher afterwards left Kirk feeling dumb because he could not understand what the teacher was saying. The implied message seemed to him that "the teacher knew best and there would be no questioning her decision" (Kirk, 2001).

It was fortunate of Kirk that while he was on his third grade for the second time, Ms. Killgore resolved that she could teach him simple math problems. She used the pegs of a wooden toy cobbler's bench and demonstrated how to act and subtract by pushing the wooden pins through the holes while asking him questions. Her simple act of kindness and attention helped Kirk gain the confidence he needed.

Such newfound confidence enabled Kirk to pass his subjects, but the fear of failing often plagued him due to his early academic failure.

It was at the young age of ten that he finally learned to read at home by laboriously sounding out the words in a timeworn *Days and Deeds* basal reader.

## **Ways to Motivate People to Read**

After learning about the three categories of dimensions for reading motivation, the four literacy personalities, and the struggles a reader goes through, it would benefit us to be knowledgeable of suggested ways on how to motivate individuals to read.

The first category of the reading dimensions, competence and efficacy beliefs, comprise the dimensions of self-efficacy, challenge, and work avoidance.

For the self-efficacy and challenge dimensions, an assessment of the reading performance would primarily be needed followed by an informal reading inventory. Students or individuals can then be

matched with books so they could be more successful in reading. Hunt (1996) suggests that “many factors went into the match: interest, background, motivation, and type of book are some variables.” Likewise, reading real books can also help. Johnson and Giorgis (2001) propose that “accepting the responsibility to introduce children to books and to invite them to discover books that may become their favorites involves knowing what books will relate to children’s experiences and provide them with pleasure.” It would be good to recommend popular books, old favorites, and selections from all genres.

As regards work avoidance, the use of picture books, workshop for struggling readers, and using celebrities to motivate children to read can help. Carr, Buchanan, Wents, Weiss, and Brant (2001) advocate,

“Picture books can be used in content classes to motivate secondary-level students... [since] they are a source of personal pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction for all ages. Beyond aesthetics reading aloud carefully selected picture books can enhance motivation and learning in content subjects in several ways.”

Furthermore, workshops for struggling readers and the use of celebrities can be useful to tackle work avoidance of readers. Williams (2001) proposed a reader’s workshops for middle school students struggling with reading. She “inherited a classroom supplied with reading materials designed to teach and reinforce skills. Previous reading specialists had ordered most of the materials that filled the shelves in [her] classroom.” A readers’ workshop is a classroom organizational plan that allows students to select books for themselves and read and respond to them in class. Its basic components are: daily read-alouds, minilessons, status of the class, conferences, daily silent reading time, and sharing.

As for using celebrities to motivate students to read, Towell (2001) found that “Modern technology can be used in a positive way,

however, through educational television, books on audiotape, or interactive storybooks on the computer... [Moreover] many celebrities have jumped on the literacy bandwagon." Susan Sarandon and Billy Crystal read popular children's books in the HBO network show *Goodnight Moon and Other Sleepetime Tales*. Oprah Winfrey also promotes books on her book club list for adults.

The goals for reading category, on the other hand, include dimensions of curiosity, involvement, importance, recognition, grades, and competition.

To address the curiosity of readers, reading real books that enable children to wonder, raise questions, and explore topics of interest would be agreeable. Examples of children's books of this dimension are: Sally Hobart Alexander's *Do You Remember The Color of Blue? And Other Questions Kids Ask About Blindness*, Jean Craighead's *How To Talk to Your Dog*, and Sandra Markle's *Down, Down, Down in the Ocean?*

As for involvement, the use of music and literature can aid in motivating students. Towell (1999) suggests, "Children can be motivated to learn by reading the words of popular songs as portrayed in picture books. Many picture books come with their own tapes such as "Halley Came to Jackson" by Mary Chapin Carpenter and the "Teddy Bears Picnic" by Jerry Garcia and David Grisman. The teacher must make sure the students learn the song. She could use a tape, cd, or keyboard to teach the tune.

Moreover, to attend to the dimension of importance, reading real books will benefit readers who thrive with this motivation. Thus, reading books that are particular to their interest should be done.

Next, the dimension of recognition entails the use of drama in the classroom. Since individuals with this motivation are satisfied when they are recognized for being a good reader, teachers can interpret literature by the use of drama in various ways, including media and popular culture or television. Ferree (2001) mentioned that:

"teachers need to engage students in discussion about the uses they have for a range of texts, encouraging them to probe and resist popular cultural text in the same way that we teach students to interact with canonized texts... A critical literacy program should include: a deconstruction of media texts, an analysis of audiences, an examination of media as industry, and students' production of their own texts."

As for grades and competition dimensions, speedwriting would be enjoyable for readers. To employ this teaching strategy, Luse (2002) mentioned:

Students were told they would have 1 minute to write all they could about [a topic]. If they didn't know anything about [the topic], they were to write what they might want to know, why they would want to know that information, or anything else they thought pertinent.

After one minute is over, the students count the number of items they have written and put the number on the margin. Those students who are fond of competing enjoy this activity the most.

The third category, which is the social purposes for reading, comprises two dimensions: social, and compliance.

Regarding the social dimension, Moulton and Holmes (1995) found that a 47-year-old plumber, Len Trenton, could still learn to read through the help of his family. "Once the student invited the family to take part in his learning, his reading improved, and the frequency and nature of family interactions changed, as well."

The last dimension – compliance – necessitates that the reader become more stimulated to read beyond the call of duty or a school requirement. Integration of technology can help in this situation. Morrow, Barnhara and Rooyakkers (2002) mentioned that:

The changing constructions of literacy within new technologies will require us to train new teachers to prepare children for these changes... The World Wide Web has created the necessity for new literacy abilities such as search and navigation strategies and synthesis and critical thinking. Technology can be used as an instructional tool to support literacy development. Computer technology is effective when it is used to supplement, not to supplant, the teacher.

Thus, through the use of computers, children can be motivated more to read. A television can be installed in the classroom for film shows, if available; or the teacher can bring the class to the media room where students can view film clips projected on a wide screen panel.

## **Conclusion**

Through the knowledge of the dimensions of reading motivation, which were grouped into three categories namely: competence and efficacy beliefs, goals for reading, and the social purposes for reading; we can say that motivation is multifaceted and there can be a combination of more than one dimension in a particular reader. Such dimensions would then help teachers, and even readers, to be aware of the factors that affect their drive to read. Afterwards, the suitable strategy for reading motivation can be then implemented. Again, the strategies can also be a blend of many ways to motivate people to read since several dimensions could be involved.

The four literacy personalities also gave examples of how such dimensions affected children's reading and their needs also varied, which the teacher addressed.

Moreover, the struggles faced by a reader during his early academic years and the kindness of his teacher in third grade that boosted his confidence showed how motivation was affected by the two different teaching approaches.

Next, the ways on how to motivate people to read based on the category and the specific dimensions followed to address the varying needs of the readers.

With these objects in mind, teachers and readers alike can be informed about the factors that affect reading motivation and the means to motivate people, both children and adults, to read and keep on reading.

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