Factors that Influence a Child’s Motivation to Read

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Abstract

This study focused on the factors that influenced two classified third grade boys’ motivation to read. The study consisted of observations and interviews. The students were observed in the library and in the self contained classroom. The results showed that students’ motivation to read was influenced by how students perceive themselves as readers, their attitude toward reading, the choices of material offered, the opportunity to self select, the ability to connect their outside interests, and the opportunity to engage in authentic reading experiences. This study gives a limited picture of the factors that influence the motivation of two boys. An implication is that teachers need to recognize and value students’ outside literacy experiences and afford the opportunity to connect them to school literacy experiences to increase students’ motivation and engagement with learning and ultimately increase school achievement.
One of my students, Quinten, was considered a non reader as tested on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessment. He would not engage during silent reading time, and had the potential to be quite a behavior problem. When I asked him about it, he told me there wasn’t anything in school that he liked to read. When I asked him what he liked to read, he went to his backpack and pulled out a video game manual. The vocabulary was quite complex, and it was written for an audience of reading ability of at least fifth grade. He took this manual, began at page one, and read every page to me. He did not read the words on the page as they were written, but he used the diagrams and headings to explain the entire game to me. I was fascinated by his enthusiasm and completeness of explanation. He had just demonstrated that he was very literate. When I asked him who had read this to him, he explained that he had to figure it out for himself. I questioned if he enjoyed the game and he told me he had just gotten it and had not yet been able to play it. He knew that this manual had information that was important and he had studied it before engaging in the actual playing. I asked myself, how can I bring this enthusiasm into his world at school and foster his literacy to help him better achieve in school.

Reading teachers, general education teachers, and special education teachers have been attempting to motivate the unmotivated, energize those students believed to be lazy, and engage students with best practices to remediate their deficits in literacy performance in schools. Students’ reading abilities are tested with assessments such as running records (Clay, 2002), the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2008), and the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, not to mention state tests. Students are determined to be reading at, above, or below grade level with measures of independent, instructional, and frustration
levels or exceeding, meeting, working towards, or not meeting standards. They are then grouped by ability or lack thereof for instructional purposes, with hopes that improvement in those measurable areas will increase motivation and therefore performance. Shouldn’t our efforts first be focusing on increasing motivation in hopes to increase performance?

Research Question

What factors influence a student’s motivation to read? Is it how he feels about himself? How he feels about the reading material? Or is it simply having the time and place for reading? The purpose of this paper is to look at research on how students perceive themselves as readers, their attitude toward reading, the influence of teachers and peers on children’s reading preferences, the choices of reading material offered and the opportunity to self select, the ability to connect their outside interest with school based literacy, the opportunity to engage in authentic reading experiences, and the effects these all have on students’ motivation and interests in reading. How can teachers engage the students in order to help them become successful readers and thus become more motivated to read, which will in a circular fashion contribute to their success?

Theoretical Background

What is literacy and how do people acquire literacy? Gee (1989) defines literacy as “the mastery of a fluent control over secondary Discourse,” (p.529) with Discourse being defined as “forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (p.526). Primary discourse is one’s first interaction with the world that is acquired unconsciously through immersion in one’s culture. This would be the informal, whereas, secondary is anything
outside primary discourse, such as school, community, or church where interaction would noticeably appear different from that within primary discourse. Once able to master a discourse outside of primary discourse, one is then considered "literate."

Larson and March (2005) refer to literacy as “a set of social practices that are historically situated, highly dependent on shared cultural understandings and inextricably linked to power in any setting” (Gee 1996; Irvine and Larson, 2001; Street, 1995).

Kucer (2005) also refers to literacy practices, and goes on to say, “literacy occurs because group membership requires it. The way in which literacy is used or performed by the participants within a particular social configuration (i.e. literacy practices) reflects the very nature of the group and the group’s position within the society” (p. 198).

This interpretation is supported by the sociocultural theory of literacy acquisition, with culture being defined by Moll and Gonzalez as “the ways we organize and make sense of all our experiences” (p162). Heath’s (1982) study is a classical example of culturally based impact on literacy, and founded a paradigm shift of research on literacy acquisition as sociocultural and not psychological. Literacy is acquired through interactions and relationships with people in their culture. Educators must now consider all of the experiences a child brings with him to the school setting, how he applies his background knowledge and experiences to his new expectations and experiences at school, and how his school experiences change his relationships in his cultural setting. How has this child acquired what he has come to know, and how has his culture impacted his literacy? How does his literacy conform to that of the dominant society, and what does the educator need to do to build on his strengths to help the child acquire that which he is lacking? This
research will look at ways to use this information to provide materials to motivate children to want to read.

Moll and González (1994) address this by focusing their writings on “how broader classroom conditions can be created that shape what it means to be literate in these settings (p. 158). This research looks at how these broader classroom conditions influence a child’s motivation to read, and therefore achieve literacy in this measure.

Being literate requires constant change and adaptation. Luke and Freebody (1999) refer to literacy as “a malleable set of cultural practices shaped and reshaped by different, often competing and contending social institutions, social classes, and cultural interests.” Those who are literate are able to interact and fulfill the communicative and social demands of a specific instance, at a specific time, for a specific purpose, and can adapt for the next requirement of the next instance. In this research, the demands are to conform to the expectations of the school. One is expected to select and read material for a length of about fifteen minutes at a time. The purpose is to become a better reader and to demonstrate skill on state and district assessments. The main goal is to become a life long reader to conform to the social demands of the dominant culture.

The sociocultural theory, as stated by Larson and Marsh (2005) has “The child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems”(p.100). The connection between in and out of school literacies enables a goal of engaging students in meaningful authentic tasks that draw on their funds of knowledge, while expanding this knowledge to use literacy in new settings. Moll and Gonzales (1994) refer to this as “becoming literate by taking full advantage of social and cultural resources in the service of academic goals”(p.
Transcending the boundaries of school and guiding the students to use their experiences and resources to redefine themselves as learners enables them to be literate and therefore successful in the world both inside and outside of school.

Lankshear and Knobel (2003) believe everyone has multiple literacies and that everything is literate. Students are being exposed to a wealth of technology and new literacy very early on. They are coming to school with technology experiences, and educators need to incorporate technology into their school experience or risk losing opportunities for connecting their worlds in and out of school. Media literacy (Buckingham, 2003), digital literacy (Glistler, 1997), moving image literacy (Burn and Leach, 2004), and new literacies (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003) all involve literacy events mediated by new technologies (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Multimodal literacy experiences are changing the way literacy is acquired. Students are exposed to a storybook with pictures scanned on a smartboard, audio from a podcast, and a critical discussion PowerPoint presentation follow up. Not only does this type of experience connect in and out of school literacies, teach them to think critically, and promote fuller understanding, but also it is happening at very young ages.

New literacies and technology integration has changed literacy education. Lankshear and Knobel’s (2004) principles of learning include efficacious learning, integrated learning, productive appropriation and extension in learning, and critical learning. Learning should be connected in meaningful ways to learners’ practices, it needs to be holistic, and it should provide opportunities for real life application and critical response (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004 p.75). This connects their in school experiences
with their out of school experiences, links their background knowledge to their new learning, and facilitates success as lifelong learners.

Synthesis of Studies

How Do Students View Themselves as Readers?

Students who do not view themselves as readers will not be motivated to read (Strickland & Walker, 2004; Hynes, 2000; Taylor, 2004; Brozo & Flynt, 2008). Very few students will persevere in a task that they feel that they are unsuccessful. How has a student’s prior experiences with reading shaped their views of themselves as readers? What has been valued, reinforced, and praised? What has not? How have these experiences effected their motivation to continue reading? Strickland & Walker (2004) argue that once children have “re-valued reading” and themselves as a reader, they can move on to embracing reading and flourish. Hynes (2000) attributes her case study student’s success solely to his change in self perception as a reader. He believed that because he preferred non fiction and instructional manuals that he was not a reader. His engagement of the text was not valued by others; therefore, it was not valued by him. Hynes (2000) believed by showing her subject the importance of his reading that he changed how he viewed himself and gained the confidence necessary to convert his reading preference into a writing piece. He then shared his writing with his class, created a social connection with collaboration, thus creating the opportunity for scaffolding to explore other types of material and become more successful in the measures of literacy in schools. This leads us to ask, what are the measures of literacy in schools?

What are the Measures of Literacy in Schools?

Hynes’ student was able to read and understand complicated auto mechanic
Factors that Influence instruction manuals, yet he was considered a non reader as measured by school’s standards. Why is understanding the theme of a novel valued more than being able to understand and follow directions in a manual? What are the schools defining as literacy and how are they measuring it? Street (2005) argues that literacy is a complex set of practices that cannot be reduced to a set of mechanistic skills for measurement purposes. Many believe that schools should expand their definition of literacy to include students’ literacy performances outside the classroom, such as internet navigation and blogging, magazines and manuals, environmental competence, movies, television, and comic books (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Taylor, 2004; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Millard & Marsh, 2001; Brozo & Flynt, 2008; Alvermann, Xu & Carpenter, 2003). Some would contradict reference to these activities as literacy and that they are not worthy of inclusion in the educational setting, however, recent studies have shown that students actually have better engagement and understanding when they are able to connect their outside literacies to literacy activities in school (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Taylor, 2004; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Millard & Marsh, 2001; Brozo & Flynt, 2008; Alvermann, Xu & Carpenter, 2003). By valuing their outside literacies, students were more motivated to read in school. Therefore, literacy events and practices that occur outside of school, especially those that are part of students’ popular culture, must be recognized as valuable.

Connecting Popular Culture to In School Literacies to Increase Motivation

Alvermann, Xu, and Carpenter examine linking popular culture to literature, such as comparing the popular movie Cast Away to the classic book The Cay to teach reading and language arts. The students were motivated and engaged because the teacher had valued their preferences, incorporated it with literature widely accepted by schools, and
made the learning meaningful to them. Reading the book *The Cay* had a purpose. In another example, elementary school students learned sorting and classifying, standards in math and science, using their Pokemon cards. The students were so motivated by the project that they helped the teacher to outline the activities to be included. They then finished the unit with writing a paper on how to play a Pokemon video game (p152) connecting literacy, students’ outside interests, and content areas in a fun way. Older students were taught critical literacy skills by comparing media presentations of current events (p. 153). These teachers recognized the students’ literacy practices outside the school and used them to motivate and engage the students with literacy practices inside the school.

Another example of using popular culture to motivate students to read was with the introduction of a comic book library. Millard and Marsh (2001) conducted a study of the effects of a comic book lending library in the classroom and found that the shared family literacy experiences increased due to the project. What was once believed to be harmful to students’ literacy and morals (Meek, 1988; Watson, 1992; Baker, 1997 as cited in Milard & Marsh; Merisuo-Storm, 2006)), is now being examined as beneficial to some students’ learning styles, as a tool to bridge home and school connections, as well as scaffold other learning. Millard and Marsh (2001) compare the skills necessary for reading and understanding comic books to those needed to read and manipulate content area text books. Therefore, it can be stated that recognizing and valuing student’s outside literacy experiences and affording the opportunity to connect them to school literacy experiences can increase students’ motivation and engagement with learning and ultimately increase

What Materials Are Available For Students to Read?

If the availability of comic books in the classroom helps to promote reading in the classroom (Millard and Marsh, 2001), then it is important to ask what is being offered in today’s classrooms and how is it influencing student’s preference for reading material. Are students being given the option of selecting their own material or is it strictly teacher driven, and if so, what are the consequences? Research shows that students are more motivated to read if they are allowed to choose their own material, if they have a wide selection to choose from, and they are given ample time to engage in authentic reading experiences with their choices (Strickland & Walker, 2004; Worthy, 1996; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999; Taylor 2004; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Dreher, 1998; Brozo & Flynt, 2008, Hunt, 1997; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). It is much more pleasurable to read something that you choose than it is to read something that is required to read. Worthy (1996) interviewed a student who almost never read at home and found that the main reason was because he did not have access to the type of material that interested him (p. 485).

Studies indicate that not only is what is available to students a factor in their motivation to read, but also the influences of teachers and peers (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1996; Mohr 2006).

The Influence of Teachers and Peers

Librarians have stated that students’ choices reflect what their teachers have introduced in the classroom and series of books that are popular with their friends (Worthy, 1996), as well as their own personal preferences. Also, the librarians encourage students to
opt for what interests them over what is considered “quality literature” (p. 487). If a
teacher does not exhibit enthusiasm for a particular genre, the student is on his own to
discover this genre. Many students require direct instruction in engaging with texts outside
of their comfort level. Students who prefer nonfiction may need help with narratives, and
fiction lovers need instruction on nonfiction text features (Strickland & Walker; Galda &
Liang, 2003; Camp, 2000; Dreher, 1999). Students carry over the lessons from the
classroom to their reading selections in the library (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1996).
Using students’ interests, teachers can then select appropriate, engaging text to promote
literacy development, as well as content area instruction. By increasing motivation and
engagement, one can hope to see an increase in achievement.

Method

Researcher Stance

It is my belief that a teacher must collaborate with the student to create a learning
environment that will motivate and engage the child. The child must be given
opportunities to engage in authentic literacy experiences that link to his world outside of
school. The best way to accomplish this is to build a relationship with students, investigate
their learning styles, and their interests. Given the right circumstances, materials, and time,
they can be motivated to learn, and they can learn to love reading. Materials of high
interest should be offered and valued as important literacy practices. Sufficient time and
opportunity to engage in authentic literacy activities is important to their success, however,
so much time is spent on direct instruction of literacy materials chosen by adults that
students are not getting what they need.

Design
Since the purpose of this paper is to look at various factors that affect students’ motivation, performance, and interests in reading, a combination of observations and interviews was used. Reader’s surveys were collected and questions were asked during interviews to see how students perceive themselves as readers and their attitude toward reading. These questions were repeated monthly for four months to note any changes. Teacher and librarian book talks, assignments, and author studies were tracked to note the students’ reactions and the influence of teachers and peers on children’s genre preferences. Students’ book choices were documented through reading logs, observation notes, and interviews. Students were asked why they chose a particular book and how they felt about reading it. These conversations were recorded to ensure accuracy of documentation. If the book was connected to an outside interest, it became clear through the conversations. It was also important to note if they really read the book or if they chose it for appearance sake, since they attended class in the Library with their same aged peers and not necessarily their classmates. The choices and genres of reading material offered in the classroom and the opportunity to self select were inventoried, as were the students’ reactions to new literature that was added to the classroom. Students and caregivers kept track of at home reading titles on students’ daily reading envelopes, and students kept a reading log of independent reading time spent in school. Titles, authors, and responses to the books were documented by the students. Minutes spent in authentic reading tasks was tracked by the teacher and confirmed by the classroom teaching assistant for accuracy.

Observation notes taken during Library were given to the Librarian and classroom observation notes were given to the Teaching Assistant for clarification. Finally, students and caregivers were interviewed to see if there was an increase in motivation. Fountas and
Pinnell Benchmark reading assessments were given at the beginning and ending of the study to determine if there was an increase in target performance.

Setting

District: The Suburban Central School District is the largest suburban school district in the county, and the eighth-largest district in the state. Student enrollment is just under 13,000. There are 3800 professional and support staff. 30% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. 79% of the student population is Caucasian, 11.2% Black or African American, 6.9% Latino or Hispanic, and 2.8% Asian or Pacific Islander. There are 13 elementary schools, 4 middle schools and 3 high schools. Per pupil expenditures is approximately $14,000.

School: Edison Elementary School opened in an existing one story school building in September, 1990 after 14 months of intensive planning by a team of volunteer teachers, parents, central administration, and partners from business, local universities, and the community. In October, 1989, a list of commitments was generated which would provide the framework for the new school and against which all work to date has been measured.

Edison Elementary is a K-5 building with 416 students, 24 teachers, 1 reading specialist, 4 teaching assistants, 2 speech therapists, 1 occupational therapist, 1 part time physical therapist, a counselor, part time psychologist, assistant principal and principal. Edison has the Edison Plan which puts the commitments into action and outlines the shared decision making process. It takes the place of a mission statement. On the school’s website, the plan is defined as:

The means for turning the school’s thirteen commitments into actions that provide quality education experiences for our children. Within the context of the Suburban
Central School District's Strategic Framework, this plan reflects the school community's desire to create a school that is guided by the decisions of those who are directly affected by those decisions. Our decision making is enhanced when all stakeholders are involved in setting expectations and assessing our progress in meeting them. Parents, staff, and community members are partners in this process. Because each voice is important, consensus is the primary means of decision making.

Edison Elementary is considered a school of choice rather than a neighborhood school. Parents have to apply and selection is done by lottery with siblings guaranteed admission after acceptance. The exception is students requiring 12:1:1 classroom support. They are placed in the school because of their level of need for a smaller teacher to student ratio and available space in the program.

Classes are grouped into families, with one kindergarten, one first grade, and one second grade class. The students move up together and are then re mixed for third, fourth, and fifth grade in a family group. Again, the students stay together and switch teachers, with the exception of one family group that have teachers that loop for third and fourth grade. One family group includes the full day self contained 12:1:1 classroom, one includes the half day 12:1:1 class, and the third includes all students receiving resource room and consultant teacher support. Each family group has a teaching assistant that works with them. Class sizes range from 19 in Kindergarten, to twenty five in intermediate grades.

Edison Elementary School promotes itself as a professional learning community as a whole. Under this umbrella, teachers are divided into family groups and involved in
Factors that Influence professional learning committees. A representative from each family group is on each committee. Representatives report back to and get feedback from the family group for shared decision making. No decisions are made until every family group has given input and no meetings are held without a representative from each family group. Each committee is devoted to a different area of need in the Edison community.

Nineteen percent of the students at Edison Elementary qualify for free and reduced lunch. Eighty Nine percent of the students are Caucasian, five percent are African American, four percent are Latino or Hispanic, and one percent is Asian. Twelve percent of the students are classified as a student with a disability.

Classroom: The observations took place in a full day self contained 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade 12:1:1 classroom consisting of three third grade students, four fourth grade students, and three fifth grade students. There is one teacher and one Teaching Assistant. An additional aide was added to the classroom on March 9, 2009. There are five boys and five girls, and among them there are five Caucasian students, four African American students and one Hispanic student. The adults in the classroom are all Caucasian females in their forties.

Participants: Since the class size is small, and the needs and abilities of the students vary widely, it is hard to get a representative sample of the group as a whole. This study will focus on the individuals rather than trying to formulate a blanket statement about all of them.

Permission for participation in the study was solicited from the families of all ten students. Only two consented. The first is an eight year old Caucasian male, Ralphie (not his real name). He resides within walking distance to the school with both biological
parents and two older brothers. His parents are both deaf. He is classified with Other Health Impairment, suffered a stroke in utero, and has complications such as hemi paresis on the right side, seizure disorder, and cognitive, speech, and language delays. He has attended Edison since Kindergarten and was nonverbal upon entering school and has received speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy since his arrival. He scored a one on the third grade ELA state exam.

The other child, Quinten, is an eight year old African American boy who lives with his aunt, his twin sister, his older brother, his cousin, and her infant daughter. He is classified as a child with Speech and Language impairment and suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and severe attention issues, but is otherwise physically healthy. This is his first year at Edison Elementary. He scored a one on the state ELA exam and is at the emergent reading stage.

Data Collection

Observations: Students were observed in the library during their book choice time and in the classroom on Mondays for Book bin selections. They were observed during silent reading time to see what they read and how long they were engaged. It was noted if they stayed with the same book or if they switched books during one reading period. They were also observed during interactive read alouds and guided reading. Tape recorders were utilized to better document data for small group instruction and work times.

Students reactions were recorded when new books were introduced to the classroom library, as well as when new genres were introduced during read alouds and lessons. Their reading behaviors with the senior reading buddy were documented with a check list completed by the senior reading buddy.
Interviews: Students were asked an initial set of twelve questions to understand how they viewed themselves as readers, how they felt about reading, and their preferences for reading material, their outside interests, their computer access and usage, and their television viewing habits and preferences. From there, they were interviewed following each library period and Monday book selection. Tape recordings helped with documentation.

The boys began with the first interview believing that they were good readers and that they enjoyed reading. This remained the same except for Quinten in month three answered “No” to both. Quinten felt that he was a good reader from the very beginning but would often state during class that he could not read and would shut down. Things that they enjoyed reading at school reflected their selections for their free choice picks, and Ralphie stated in Month two that he liked Jan Brett books. Ralphie answered that he read library books and homework at home all four times. Quinten’s response went from nothing, to homework, to nothing, and finally “my video games.” They both have computers and internet access at home, but both stated that they are not allowed on them. Ralphie did not see his parent read in the first interview, and later answered, “email” “the phone book, and TV guide.” Quinten did not see his aunt read for three out of four surveys, and finally answered that she read the mail and my notes the fourth time. For activities outside of school. Ralphie liked to drive with his dad, play outside, and watch his forty two inch television. Quinten liked to play soccer and play his video games. Favorite television programs were RAW Wrestling, Sponge Bob, and Drake and Josh for Ralphie, and Family Guy and Basketball for Quinten.
Artifacts: Students’ reading logs, at home reading envelopes, response journals, and various classroom work samples were collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using an interpretive approach. I created lists to keep track of the students’ choices in their library selections, their book bins selections, the Raz-Kids reading, and time on task. Their reading assessments were scored according to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessment system.

Findings and Discussion

Library Book Choices

Quinten: The students attend Library class with the general education third grade class. Quinten was observed choosing three types of books. In the beginning of the study, he chose books from one shelf in the library, labeled “Popular Choices.” He would follow the pack of boys over to the shelf. The books were all very thick, such as Harry Potter and The Hobbit. His selection process involved watching the others and then choosing his own. He would flip through the books briefly, or select a book that was a popular choice of the others that the librarian had mentioned was back on the shelf. The books were significantly above his reading level. When asked about his choices, he explained that “The pictures are cool” or “Everybody likes this book.” When he would return from the library, he would always show the other students in the classroom his choices. He would walk from desk to desk and read their facial responses to his choices. He would then leave his book on his desk for all to see for the entire week, only to return it at the library next class. He never read them. When asked why he chose books he did not read, he stated that “I cannot read any of the books in there.”
Later he began choosing non fiction picture books about sports. He would occasionally look through these during reading time. He stated that he choose them because he liked the sport, the team, or the specific player on the cover.

Lastly, Quinten chose non fiction books as directed by the librarian to assist him in his animal research project. His animal of study was the Musk Ox. He appropriately chose books that featured animals from the polar region. Back in the classroom, he gathered information from the pictures and the maps, and asked an adult to read the words for him.

**Ralphie:** Ralphie demonstrated similar behaviors in that in the beginning he would gravitate with the others to the popular choices shelf. Then he began to branch off towards the non fiction area. He would go to an eye level shelf, pull a book down, but not off of the shelf, and look at the cover. He would do this three or four times before making a selection. He chose the Classic Cars book four out of the 16 weeks, stating that there are lots of pictures to look at and lots of different types of cars. He once chose *There’s a Chef in My World!: Recipes That Take You Places*. When asked why he chose that book, he pointed to Emeril and said, “It’s about a chef, and I like chefs.” When given the animal research project, Ralphie was able to locate non fiction books about his topic, the walrus. He selected two and used them in his research. Twice he did not select any books in the library stating that he did not have sufficient time. And once, during our Jan Brett author study, he selected *The Owl and the Pussy Cat*, which was illustrated by Jan Brett. It had been on top of the shelf at eye level. He was so proud when he came into the room and showed me the book. He said, “Look, a Jan Brett book!”

His library books would go directly into his backpack, and he almost always had them to return on the proper day. When asked each week if he had read them, he
responded, “Yes.” His parents stated he only looked at the Classic Cars book, and had not read *Harry Potter*, Emeril, or *The Owl and the Pussy Cat*. His animal research books stayed in school in his desk.

*Book Bins*

Students were given the opportunity every Monday to either return books and choose new ones from the classroom library, or keep the ones they had in their book bins. The classroom had a large amount of non fiction books in the beginning, along with popular favorites such as Dave Pilkey’s Captain Underpants series, Pokemon, and Magic Tree House. The reading level of these books was above both boys, although they would choose them as their free choice picks. There was also magazines that were age appropriate, such as *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Ranger Rick*, *Kids Discover*, *Nick Junior*, *Zoo Books*, and a few comic books.

The requirement was to have at all times four “Just Right” and two “free choice” books. Time was given daily to read independently, with a buddy, or small group. If reading was done with someone else, it was directed that behavior remain on task or students would be asked to read alone. The goal was to read for twenty minutes and behavior was monitored with redirection and adult proximity. Students would record what they read in their reading log and periodically conference with a teacher briefly.

*Quinten*: Quinten always complied and chose four just right books. He would go directly to the Award Reading Program bin and grab four random books. He did not appear interested in these books, but he followed the rules. He would read them only when prompted and only when an adult was sitting next to him. His free choice books reflected his personal interests. When popular culture books such as Pokemon or
Transformers were brought into the classroom, he was quick to select those. He would also choose Spider Man comic books, Sports Illustrated for Kids, and bring his own video game manuals from home. Usually, he was able to sit and read these for a maximum of ten minutes without prompting. By reading, he would demonstrate right to left directionality, attend to the pictures, and discuss and share with his classmates.

*Ralphie:* Ralphie did not adhere to the four just right books rule, and filled his bin with large non fiction picture books, such as Ripley’s Believe it or Not, Creepy Creatures, and Guinness Book of World Records. He would also grab all of the Pokemon, Captain Underpants, and Jack Sparrow books he could get his hands on, not adhering to the six book limit. When the series of I Can Read books were brought into the classroom, he quickly chose all of the Cars and Star Wars books. He was very quiet and engaged with his books during reading time. It was observed that he did not read the Pokemon, Captain Underpants, or Jack Sparrow books, but kept them in his book bin. He was also observed choosing and reading books from the Christmas basket and books that had been read aloud in class.

*Senior Reading Buddy*

*Quinten:* Quinten would read his Award Reader books or *Green Eggs and Ham* when prompted with the senior reading buddy but discontinued reading with her after he overheard her say that “he had memorized those books and was not really reading.” I saw the hurt in his face when she said this to me. The next time she came, he stated that he did not want to read with her anymore because she breathed on him.

*Ralphie:* Ralphie was the reason I had asked the reading buddy to come. He did not have anyone to listen to him read at home as both his parents were deaf. Every
Monday he would come into the room and say, “Mrs. G is coming today and I am first to read to her” He loved this activity and always took an extra turn if someone was absent. He usually chose Dr. Seuss or his I Can Read books and would read with inflection and enthusiasm. He would also read his writer’s notebook to her and his animal report.

E-books

A subscription based program called Raz-kids allows children to listen to or read books on the computer. They are the same books that are offered in the leveled book baskets, although Quinten never chose those books. Raz-kids was an option during silent reading time.

Quinten: Quinten was very engaged with Raz-kids, and would sit and listen for periods of more than fifteen minutes, sometimes up to thirty at a time. He would read the non fiction texts in a level first, and then go back and read the fiction texts. When he finished all of the books at his independent level, he did not want to go on the site anymore. The Raz Rocket was installed, similar to Webkins, where he would earn points for listening to, reading, and taking quizzes, and make purchases for his rocket. He was very motivated by this, but learned how to beat the system and earn points by simply clicking through the pages. The rocket was disconnected and so was his interest. He was informed that if he wanted the rocket to be reinstalled, he would have to demonstrate appropriate use of the site, and not cheat for points. He complied by beginning back at level A, and following the pattern of listening to the book, reading the book, and taking the quizzes. He showed excellent comprehension scoring eight out of ten or above until he reached level G and had scores that dropped to six out of ten. If given an audio splitter to enjoy the reading with a buddy, he would require them to sign in under their name as to not have any discretion on
Factors that Influence his printout. When reading with a buddy, he was willing to listen to and read books beyond his independent level and would jointly participate in the quizzes.

*Ralphie:* Ralphie appeared engaged with Raz-kids and quickly recognized some of the books as the ones that had been sent home for homework, however, after looking at the report, he did not use the program as was directed. He did not listen to the book, read the book, and then take the quiz. He became obsessed with mastering the quizzes. He would take and retake the quizzes up to seventeen times to get a perfect score. Whether this was to get it right or to get the bonus points for a perfect quiz was unclear. When the rocket and points were disconnected, he began listening to the nursery rhymes and song books and the books that were part of reading groups or homework. He also chose books of interest such as *Alternative Fuel Cars, Ships and Boats, Robots, Wing Visits Singapore,* and he found *The Owl and the Pussy Cat.*

Ralphie’s reading envelope was filled out every night, although there were days he said he did not read. Quinten did not fill out his reading envelope and only read at home once or twice a week.

*Guided Reading/Read Alouds*

Both boys were engaged with all types of read alouds and did not appear to show a preference towards fiction or non fiction. They usually contributed to the discussions and demonstrated adequate comprehension of the material. Only Ralphie chose the books that were read aloud for independent reading. When given extension of learning tasks that required independent reading, Quinten showed inconsistency in his performance. If he felt the material to be too challenging, he would shut down and repeat either, “I can’t read” or “I need help!” He would not attempt to decode words and relied on words committed to
memory. He would use picture and context clues to figure out unknown words, and would look at the first letter. Despite targeted instruction, he only showed little improvement. His perception of his abilities as a reader definitely affected his motivation to initiate given tasks.

Measurable Achievement

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment was given to each child at the beginning and end of the study. Ralphie went from level F (middle of grade 1) to level J (middle grade two), and Quinten went from level B (middle Kindergarten) to E (middle first grade).

Conclusion and Implications

Students’ Perceptions of Themselves as Readers and Attitude Towards Reading

Students who do not view themselves as readers will not be motivated to read (Strickland & Walker, 2004; Hynes, 2000; Taylor, 2004; Brozo & Flynt, 2008). Consistent with the research, Quinten’s perception of his ability to be able to read the given material definitely affected his participation. If he felt the material was too difficult for him, he would shut down and just repeat, “I can’t read.” The minute he told himself he could not do it, he was not able to without one to one assistance. The material given to him was at his instructional level, but his perception of his abilities brought him to frustration.

He needed constant encouragement and reassurance that he was a reader and could do the work.

Choices of Reading Material Offered and the Opportunity to Self Select:

As I was able to find books that reflected their interests and were closer to their reading level, they became more engaged with the expected literacy practice of reading by
decoding the words and discussing the book as demonstrated in class performance during reading time. Students need to be supplied with a lot of choices and materials that reflects their interests (Strickland & Walker, 2004; Worthy, 1996; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999; Taylor 2004; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Dreher, 1998; Brozo & Flynt, 2008, Hunt, 1997; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). They should be given the opportunity to read traditional books, magazine, comic books, and e-books. Educators should interview their students and keep abreast of current popular culture to ensure inclusion of those materials in the classroom.

Studies indicate that not only is what is available to students a factor in their motivation to read, but also the influences of teachers and peers (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1996; Mohr 2006). When in the library in the presence of their same aged peers, the students were motivated to choose and be seen with books that looked the same as their peers, however, these choices were not for reading, but for appearance and acceptance by their peers. Only once did Ralphie choose a book in the library that reflected what the teacher had shown enthusiasm about in the classroom. In the classroom, the students gravitated towards items of or in relation to their popular culture and outside interests.

The Ability to Connect Their Outside Interest with School Based Literacy

It is important to know what the child is already practicing as literacy, what is valued in his culture, and how we can use that as a scaffold to bridge the in school and out of school literacy practices. (Marsh 2006; Morrell & Duncan-Andrane 2002; Alvermann, Huddleston, & Hagood 2004; Vasquez & Smith 2003). Integrating popular culture into the classroom can help. Popular culture can help to increase motivation (Marsh 1999, 2006; Vasquez & Smith 2003; Alverman, Xu, & Carpenter 2003; Norton 2003; Alvermann,
Factors that Influence (Huddleston, & Hagood 2004) and provide a scaffold to in school literacy practices (Marsh 2006, 1999; Morrell 2002; Alverman, Xu, & Carpenter 2003; Alvermann, Huddleston, & Hagood 2004). Again, educators need to know their students’ interests and build on their strengths to foster engagement in authentic reading experiences.

The Opportunity to Engage in Authentic Reading Experiences

The students were given the opportunity to read purely for the enjoyment of reading, not to write a report, or to take a test. They were able to choose books of their liking and were able to share the experience with a friend. Magazines and video game manuals were acceptable choices during this time, as long as they were reading. Children who spend time reading perform better in school than children who do not (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999).

Strategies for Educators and Their Effects on Students’ Motivation to Read

Students demonstrate multiple literacy practices while engaging with popular culture. They read magazines, search the internet, send emails, understand rules and practices, and hold discussions. They do all this without being assigned to do so by a teacher. They are practicing literacy with enthusiasm. Educators need to take this enthusiasm and this culture, and bring it into the classroom. Research has found that students demonstrate increased motivation to participate in school based literacy events that include popular culture (Vasquez and Smith 2003, Alvermann, Huddleston, and Hagood 2004, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade 2002, Alvermann, Xu, and Carpenter 2003, Marsh 1999). If educators can incorporate popular culture into the learning environment, then the students will be more motivated to learn, and they will use what the
literacy practices they are using outside the school to scaffold literacy practices within the school (Alvermann, Huddlestion, and Hagood, 2004).

Literacy is acquired through interactions and relationships with people in their culture. Their exposure to popular culture may be more than their exposure to school based literacies. If educators use popular culture in their classrooms, it may serve as a bridge between the two and a motivational tool to increase time spent reading.

Limitations

This study only examines a limited amount of the factors that influenced the motivation of two third grade boys classified with a disability. The observations took place while I was the classroom teacher responsible for the entire class, and therefore were not always with full attention. I relied on the students to log their daily reading. While both boys demonstrated an increase in their reading levels and ability to maintain attention to reading, it is not clear if it is due to a four month growth in maturity, effectiveness of explicit reading instruction, or increased motivation due to the selection of reading material. Also, it would have been interesting to interview the boys at the beginning and then again at the end to see if their self-perceptions changed. The results cannot be generalized without further studies of a larger study group.

Further Research

Further research would be to look at the nature of the classifications and the implications on their learning and also how their home literacy practices affect their learning. Other forms of technology integration should also be investigated to continue to engage the students in literacy practices.
This research informed the choices I made about the materials that I brought into
the classroom to help motivate the students to read. It also broadened my views on what is
considered literacy to include such practices as reading a video game manual or books
about popular movies. As teachers, we need to expand our definitions of literacy to align
with the current research and learn to recognize literacy events and practices that occur
outside of school as valuable. Recognizing and valuing student’s outside literacy
experiences and affording the opportunity to connect them to school literacy experiences
can increase students’ motivation and engagement with learning and ultimately increase
school achievement (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Taylor, 2004; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Millard &
1. *Do you like to read?*

2. *Are you a good reader?*

3. *What types of things do you like to read at school?*

4. *Do you read at home?*

5. *What types of things?*

6. *Do your parents read?*

7. *What types of things?*

8. *What do you like to do when you are not in school?*

9. *Do you have a computer at home?*

10. *Do you have access to the internet at home?*

11. *What types of things do you do on the computer?*

12. *What do you watch on TV?*

References


The child’s readiness for learning implies that all areas of mental development are ready to adopt the rules of school life. Why should a preschooler be psychologically ready for school? This can be clearly demonstrated with a real-life case study. At the age of 6.5 years old, Simon already knew how to read, write in capital letters and knew almost all of the names of dinosaurs. However, the boy was experiencing issues with their behavior: he would throw tantrums for any reason and deny to respond to the demands of adults, together with being ill-disciplined. Simon barely interacted with other However there are other crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. These factors can be broadly categorized as internal and external. It is their complex interplay that determines the speed and facility with which the new language is learned. Internal factors.

Age: Second language acquisition is influenced by the age of the learner. Children, who already have solid literacy skills in their own language, seem to be in the best position to acquire a new language efficiently. Extrinsic motivation is also a significant factor. ESL students, for example, who need to learn English in order to take a place at an American university or to communicate with a new English boy/girlfriend are likely to make greater efforts and thus greater progress. Children can either read them themselves or they can just listen to the teacher’s voice. According to my experience games are the most favourite activities. Children use both visual and aural channels and moreover they need to speak and come to an understanding with others in order to get what they want. Body movements and physical activity are essential when incorporating playing games. To be able to deal with a task or an activity successfully children need to master appropriate skills and knowledge.

By no means teacher plays very important role in activating children’s motivation and there are many factors that influence the learner’s determination. Teacher should provide interesting materials that are attractive for children, full of pictures and lively activities. This research paper discusses Factors affecting motivation of students and highlights answers three questions related to academic success. They argue that needs can be ‘strong or weak’ and that they are influenced by environmental factors. Accordingly, unmet needs motivate students to satisfy them. The suggestion by Epstein (1994) and Schultheiss (2001) as reported by Pintrich (2003) that ‘individuals do not need to know what they want in order for motives and needs to influence them’ is totally unfounded. In order to succeed in a research methodology module, students need to know the benefits that derive from the module.