

MOTIVATING RELUCTANT READERS TO BECOME MATURE READERS

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For most teachers, one of the most difficult tasks is that of motivating reluctant readers in the classroom. It has been established in previous research that motivation tends to be the key to creating a positive reading environment that is conducive to learning in the classroom. The most successful approach to motivating students is to construct a positive reading environment for learning. The establishment of motivation in the classroom is paramount for academic success, and without it, little or no learning takes place. The usage of various meaningful material, such as books and magazines and positive communication by teachers will certainly improve motivation among students. This article will link previous research to that of classroom techniques and reveal procedures taken by this teacher to motivate reluctant readers.

One of the most serious problems encountered by teachers is the presence in their classrooms of pupils who seem unmotivated to learn. Yet, motivation is essential for academic success, and without motivation, teachers cannot expect much educational accomplishment. What is motivation?

While motivating all students is one of the most difficult assignments of teaching, there are various steps that teachers can employ to stimulate reluctant readers. Teachers can provide opportunities and incentives to facilitate learning in their reading class, thus creating a more attracting and stimulating environment. A positive change in the environment by teachers will enable them to capture students' interest and thus produce eager readers. In a recent article, Thein (1985, p. 104) defines motivation as "the process involved in arousing, directing, and sustaining behavior."

A study by Helmstetter (1987) concluded that apathy among eighth grade reluctant readers can be cured with five motivational phrases:

- (1) Discussing attitudes
- (2) a positive environment
- (3) sharing literature through oral reading
- (4) reading for an audience
- (5) active learning.

Stone (1984) believed that the achievement of motivation in the classroom is most effective if teachers set goals and obtain feedback from students.

In all, motivation of the reluctant reader is essential for academic success (Briggs, 1986; Heathington, 1979; Johns, 1978; Teale, 1978).

It is the intention of this article to address previous literature on motivation of reluctant readers and associate it with possible classroom applications that I employed for improving reading skills in the classroom. The students referred to in my report are eighth graders with reading grade equivalents ranging from 7.0 to a high 12.

Who Are the Reluctant Readers?

Most teachers (in every type of school and class) are faced with some students

that are not very interested in reading and seldom will engage in such activities, in or out of the classroom. These students could be called reluctant readers. According to Johns (1978), there are two types of reluctant readers. The first group can read but are not particularly interested in reading and are not classified by standard tests as being below grade level.

The second group of reluctant readers listed by Johns is comprised of students who can read quite well but choose not to read. Such students are at or above grade level.

Directing Positive Attitudes Toward Reading

Children's attitudes are very important to learning, and teachers should help to identify beliefs, special goals and develop positive attitude in skill performance. To measure students' attitude, the following "interest inventory questionnaire" developed by Swaby (1971, p. 321) is very appropriate (see figure). After surveying results

of the questionnaire, the teacher can then begin cultivating and directing a more positive environment for learning to read.

Teachers' Role

Teachers are generators in developing a positive environment in their classrooms. Attitudes and understanding exhibited by teachers can often be the difference between success and failure in classrooms. Stone (1984) generalized that a teacher can manipulate the learning environment to change a student's behavior toward reading. However, teachers occasionally find themselves unmotivated and without direction, thus, placing themselves in the same situation as their students.

I closely studied the attitudes (reading and behavior) of four classes. Two of these classes were manipulated by using positive verbal language. Phrases such as, "It would be most helpful if you would, . . ." "Thank you, . . ." and "I would like to apologize for, . . ." etc. Warm greetings and big-hearted

Figure. Interest inventory questions (written form).

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- Do you have a library card?
 - How often do you go to the library?
 - Do you like to be read to? What books do you like to have read?
 - Does someone read to you at home? Who?
 - Do you have favorite books or stories? What are they?
 - How many books do you own? Where do you keep them?
 - What kinds of stories do you most like to have read to you?
 - Can you read any books by yourself? Which ones?
 - What is your favorite TV show? Why do you like it?
 - Do you have any collections? What are they?
 - What sports do you like most?
 - What is your favorite part of the school day? What is your least favorite? Why?
 - Would you like to learn to read well? Why or why not?
 - If you could read anything you wanted to, what kinds of things would you read?
 - What do you not like to have read to you or to read?

Note: From *Teaching and Learning Reading. A Pragmatic Approach* by B. E. Swaby, 1971. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

smiles were always present. In contrast, my other two classes who received minimum praise and positive feedback presented more behavior problems and were less interested in reading. Thus, what is paramount here is that teachers can control the reading environment of their students with positive exchanges and help in producing life-long eager readers.

Instructional Materials and Application

It goes without saying that the use of instructional materials which are relevant, meaningful, and stimulating to students will aid teachers in motivating students. However, teachers often overlook materials that could motivate the reluctant readers. Some teachers are more concerned about text-related materials because they are overly concerned about covering the course material (Thein, 1985). Over presentation of such materials can be too difficult or not very interesting to the reader.

To increase the potential for reward and satisfaction in the classroom, Johns (1978) and Thein (1985) found that the usage of a wide variety of reading materials such as paperback books, magazines, newspapers, and high interest but low level materials was helpful. My classroom contained a wealth of these reading materials. New magazines and paperback books were displayed each week. All materials were made possible by a generous wholesaler.

The developing of a special board with some sort of positive statement each day will help create a conducive learning environment for reading. For example, my board contained a different statement each week, such as, "Kindness is just something you can't give away, it keeps coming back to you," or "If you fail to solve a problem, it doesn't mean you are a failure; however, it does mean you don't have an answer yet." Classrooms filled with attractive, attention-getting material will no doubt stimulate stu-

dent interest.

Developing a Reading Program

A reading program should be constructed to meet the need of its readers. So often students vividly complain about not having enough time to complete their reading. In developing a successful reading program, I investigated other studies and found these methods to be helpful:

1. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR).

Students should be given sustained periods of time to read on their own without interruptions. Hunt (1970) refers to this type of activity as SSR. The amount of time devoted to SSR is optional with each teacher. However, I assigned twenty minutes daily to this activity. Each student should be free to choose any relevant material he/she desires. The entire class, including the teacher, must take part in sustained silent reading (SSR) if the program is to be successful.

2. Oral Reading By Teachers.

Youngsters of all ages should experience the pleasure of oral reading. Teachers should make every attempt to read daily to their students. Such oral reading should be considered an essential part of a daily reading program (Johns, 1978). Reading orally motivates students to embark on other areas of interest. Note: Teachers should not become discouraged if some students fall asleep as they read to them.

3. Grouping.

Group participation is paramount in developing a positive learning climate. Briggs (1986) believes that grouping should be flexible and at certain times a student should be afforded the opportunity to work with whomever he/she chooses. This type of grouping assures confidence from those who would otherwise lack direction and motivation. Vari-

ous activities should be assigned to each group. Group interest was more effective when I assigned each group a specific topic for discussion and possible solutions. Some examples of these topics were "What can be done to alleviate world hunger?" or "What can be done to help the growing number of homeless people in our City?" After thirty minutes of brainstorming, each group would present its findings to the class for discussion.

Of course each of these methods is flexible and, each teacher should employ a technique that best meets the needs of his/her students.

Other Ideas

The previous suggested ideas to motivate reluctant readers seem to be most effective in the everyday task to stimulate unmotivated readers. Other ideas such as 'contracting' might help in motivating the reluctant reader to learn. For example, Greenwood (1985) suggested that teachers could develop a 'contract' to motivate a student to read or participate in sustain silent reading. Greenwood concluded that specific stated objectives (teachers dictated) depending on the needs of a student could motivate the reluctant reader. I might add that I used a contract to state which academic objective (s) each student would perform for a letter grade.

Teachers could have students write book summaries and evaluations which could be filed in the school library for future references.

Encouraging each student to secure a membership card from the public library and scheduling guest speakers are excellent methods of stimulating students to become participants in class activities. Finally, parents should be encouraged to express an interest in what their children read and to provide a variety of reading materials out-

side of the school environment.

Summary

Many readers who are reluctant readers present enormous problems to classroom teachers. In most cases, reluctant readers often can read but choose not to read. In order to alleviate some of these difficulties, motivation becomes important. Teachers must employ strategies and techniques that will or bring about positive attitudes and instill confidence in reluctant readers. Motivating students to learn can be accomplished by reconstructing the classroom environment. Because many reluctant readers are not naturally motivated nor do they employ intrinsic motivational efforts, the teacher must therefore employ extrinsic or outside strategies that will motivate and encourage students to read for satisfaction (intrinsic) and reward. Teachers who exhibit positive attitudes and expectations will see their students develop and grow.

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Author Notes

The treatment of participants (humans) was in accordance with the ethical standards of the APA.

This hypothesis was assumed and then tested after other similar studies.

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