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# Motivation Matters

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*Motivation Matters*

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**Abstract**

Research has shown a link between motivation and reading achievement among struggling adolescent readers. Numerous studies indicate that reading motivation and students' self-efficacy declines extensively in adolescence. The purpose of the study was to consider the relationship between student motivation and engagement, and its connection to instructional classroom practices that use real-world reading connections to student experiences, choice of books and materials to read, direct instruction for reading strategies, and student and teacher collaboration. During the six week study, the Serravallo Engagement Inventory and the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments were used to collect data from eight eighth grade students. Classroom strategies, including Save the Last Word for Me, Written Conversations, and Tweet the Text, provided the opportunity for peer collaboration and relevant links to current social media. Information gathered from student interest surveys enabled the teacher to create a classroom library of high interest reading materials. Therefore, having ample choice of reading materials contributed to longer sustained reading. Consequently, the implementation of student choice, peer collaboration, and relevant literacy tasks resulted in higher self-efficacy in adolescent readers as well as increased reading comprehension.

Key words:  *engagement, motivation, choice, struggling readers, adolescence, peer collaboration, self-efficacy*

Table of Contents

**Section 1:  Introduction**

*Introduction*

The role of motivation in literacy learning must be addressed by teachers (Gambrell, 2011, Duncan, 2013). Despite relative differences in defining the construct of motivation and its discrete features, there is a general consensus about motivation being the will, the desire, the urge, the intention and the decision to engage (or not to engage) in a certain reading activity (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010:  Schiefele, 1999). Daniels & Steres (2011) write, "The activities in which students engage, the interactions they have with peers and adults, and the physical characteristics of their learning environment all contribute to their motivation to learn and their desire to engage." (p.1). Reading motivation declines extensively in adolescence; lack of motivation, coupled with reading difficulties, can become a barrier in the engagement of reading activities that can quite possibly improve their reading skills (Daniels & Steres, 2011, Malaspina & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). Research on reading motivation acknowledges the importance of reading motivation in reading development.

Create classroom environments where students decide they want to engage and learn is paramount (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Motivation is internally generated but influenced by external factors (Schaffner, Schiefele, & Ulferts, 2013). Research indicates that middle schoolers like to feel that they are in control of their actions and decisions, and if they feel like they are under someone else's control, they feel less motivated (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Key features of researched reading programs that support motivation in reading are interest level of student texts, thematic units that are not only interesting but carry a certain level of relevance and importance in adolescents' lives, and peer collaboration and voice (Kim et al., 2016, Jang, Conradi, Mckenna, & Jones, 2015, and Gambrell, 2011). Thus, an instructional framework of combining motivational support and strategy instruction is important for academic success.

For teachers, the role of motivation in literacy learning is extremely important. The Program for International Student Assessment (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010) report found that interest in reading predicted students' reading comprehension (Gambrell, 2011). Also reported by the Program for International Student Assessment, students who enjoyed reading the most performed significantly better than students who enjoyed reading the least. One of the best ways to provide intrinsic motivation is to provide them with the gift of choice (Duncan, 2013, Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011). In a classroom that embraces the importance of motivation, where there is choice in the selection of reading material, students tend to be more engaged in meaningful literacy tasks such as reading (Duncan, 2013). When students have choice, the probability for increased motivation and engagement is enhanced, and students become better readers.

*Background*

Motivation to read can be defined as the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read (Gambrell, 2011). The best planned lessons, themes, and assessments will mean very little if students are not motivated to want to get better at reading (Duncan, 2013, Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011). Low-achieving middle school students struggle with low motivation to read. Many factors contribute to disengagement in middle school. Reading instruction is often disconnected from content, making reading tedious (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Textbooks are formidable, and students are expected to respond to text with formal criticism or outlining rather than personal reactions. Lack of engaging instruction and choice and variety in reading materials are factors directly related to reading attitudes and lack of motivation to read  (Moley, Bandre, George, 2011). Teachers encourage students to read more, not less, when providing experiences that are positive and motivating.

*Problem*

     Motivation for reading and learning, and students' self-efficacy in school often declines in adolescence (McTigue & Liew, 2009). According to McTigue and Liew (2011), self-efficacy refers to the belief that students can control their achievement outcomes. Students having high academic self-efficacy can predict perseverance on a difficult learning task which is then linked to positive academic motivation. Thirty percent of middle school students scored below basic in reading according to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 2017). This means these students cannot read and summarize at a fourth grade level. Such statistics suggest that a large population of older struggling readers may be at risk for having low self-efficacy with literacy if they experience difficulties or repeated failures (McTigue & Liew, 2009).

     Teaching children to read and write is challenging and complex process; however, without considering student motivation literacy instruction becomes a daunting task. Motivation is often overlooked and is one of the most essential components of helping children grow as readers and writers (Duncan, 2013, Worthy, 2002, Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011). Teachers strive to help middle school students be strategic, independent readers. They want them to successfully read and comprehend a text, think critically about its content, and discuss their thoughts with others (Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011).  Effective intervention in middle schools needs to address the reading gaps in basic reading as well as address the problem with student motivation and engagement.

*Solution*

     According to Gambrell (2011), intrinsic motivation to read should be given a high priority in the reading curriculum. Gambrell (2011) described the following key researched-based practices for promoting students' intrinsic motivation to read. Students are more motivated

to read when reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives, have access to wide range of reading materials, and ample opportunities to engage in sustained reading (Gambrell, 2011, Schiefele & Loweke, 2017, Guthrie et al., 2004). They also need opportunities to make choices about what they read and how they engage in and complete literacy tasks. Further, students increase their motivation when they have opportunities to interact with others about the text they are reading (Gambrell, 2011, Guthrie at al., 2004). Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is a way to teach children to read as well as a means to motivate them to become lifelong readers. Motivation is often overlooked and is one of the most essential components of helping children grow as readers and writers (Duncan, 2013, Worthy, 2002, Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011).My action research will focus on the implementation of student choice (of books), collaboration with peers, adjusting learning tasks to student needs combined with direct strategy instruction. Thus, teachers can help to close the gap for struggling readers with the implementation of evidence-based practices that instill a love of reading while advancing achievement.

*Theoretical Perspective*

The theoretical rationale for this paper is based on Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) engagement perspective of the development of reading comprehension. The acquisition of reading strategies and reading comprehension skills demand that students expend a large amount of effort and motivation (Stipek, 2002). At the same time, outstanding teachers invest substantial time and energy in supporting students' motivation and engagement in reading (Dolezal, Welsh, Pressle, & Vincent, 2003). The connection between student effort and teacher investment is a confluence of student acquisition of reading strategies, comprehension instruction, and motivation. My study will consider the connectedness between student motivation and

engagement and my instruction using classroom practices that use real-world interactions to connect reading to student experiences, choice of books and materials to read, direct instruction for reading strategies, and student/teacher collaboration.

Motivation theory holds that when teachers focus on student motivation of struggling readers student achievement increases guided the following research. My study will involve several students who struggle to read and write, but who frequently lack the motivation, and therefore become disengaged. My study will show how students make the transition from disengaged learners to readers who are engaged and motivated, as well as students using reading strategies effectively. Engagement theory encompasses the reader's full attention to the text-at-hand, and the cognitive strategies that he summons when the need arises (2004). Through the teacher's deliberate and strategic support, the reader becomes immersed in the comprehension process. Increased motivation and engagement allow the student to continue to become invested in the reading process. My action research project will be guided by the premise that struggling readers can increase reading comprehension with motivational support with in the classroom and from the teacher.

*Research Questions*

While there is agreement among literacy researchers that students who read more become more proficient in reading comprehension and those who do not read are putting their reading progress in jeopardy, there is still the struggle to motivate students to want to read. The following questions will guide the research to finding out how important motivation is to reading success for struggling readers.

1. How is student motivation enhanced when reading tasks are relevant to their lives?

2. What are the strategies to help struggling readers strengthen their interest in reading?

3.  How does ample classroom sustained reading support student motivation?

**Section 2:  Review of Literature**

*Introduction*

Motivation and engagement have long been an elusive construct when connected to struggling adolescent readers. Research over the past 20 years demonstrated that students' motivation is a primary concern for many teachers, and numerous classroom teachers acknowledge that a lack of motivation is at the root of many of the problems they face in teaching (Edmunds, 2006, Veenman, 1984). The purpose of this study was to identify a curricular methodology that would encourage students at the middle school level to self-select and pursue the relevant topics of their lives while becoming immersed in comprehension strategy instruction that would ultimately yield increased literacy achievement.

A search of the databases ERIC and Google scholar yielded full-text articles on educational literature and resources with links to full-text documents. The following keywords were used to further my research with the databases: motivation, engagement, struggling readers, adolescence, effective reading strategies.

*Historical and Theoretical Perspective*

John Dewey believed education should include socially engaging learning experiences developmentally appropriate for young children (Dewey, 1938). He stated that effective education came primarily through social interactions and that the school setting should be considered a social institution (Flinders & Thornton, 2013) which was quite a different set of beliefs from other philosophers that supported a more traditional classroom setting. He shared the belief that children are unique learners and teacher instruction should be driven by students' interests.

Dewey went on to proclaim schools and classrooms should be representative of real life situations, allowing children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings (Dewey, 1038; Gutek, 2014, Williams,2008). He viewed classrooms as places where students should be constructing their own knowledge through personal meaning, as well as seen as a social entity for children to learn and problem-solve together (Williams, 2017). According to Dewey's philosophy, children should be learning by doing and solving problems through hands-on approaches. Guthrie and Wigfield write, "Dewey assumed authentic learning depended on intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and socially constructed meaning" (Guthrie & Wigfield, pg.4)

Like Dewey, Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical framework included the idea that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. His theory also encompassed the potential for cognitive development as depending on the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD): a level of development attained when children engage in social behavior. Vygotsky called the rarified realm between a learner's present performance level and just beyond the learner's grasp as the 'zone of proximal development'(Silver, 2011). A student's Zone of Proximal Development is defined as the student's range of ability with assistance from a teacher or more capable peer (Silver, 2011). Silver (2011) wrote, 'With the right motivation, students will reach beyond their comfort zone to achieve their personal goals' (p.2).

"Motivation frequently makes the difference between learning that is temporary and superficial and learning that is permanent and internalized" (Oldfather, 1993, as cited by Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). The role of motivation in learning has been examined in numerous research studies (Deci, 1971, 1972a,1972b; Lepper & Greene, 1975; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973; Loveland & Ollie, 1979, as cited by Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006) and the

research supports that motivation is a primary concern for teachers as it plays a major role in learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dweck & Elliot, 1983; McCombs, 1989, as cited by Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). However, up until the 1990's, few studies have been conducted to determine the role of motivation in reading.

From 1985-1992, approximately nine studies per year were conducted on how motivation plays a role in reading development. In 1992, the National Reading Research Center (NRRC) was partly funded to research the connection between reading as a language and a cognitive endeavor and reading motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The NRRC 5 year longitudinal study was guided by engagement theory: engaged readers are motivated, strategic, knowledgeable, and socially interactive. The research provided understanding and learning of how prekindergarten through grade 12 students acquire reading competencies. Further, the research provided teachers with the knowledge about how to enable students to develop into proficient, motivated, lifelong readers (Baumann & Duffy, 1997).

*Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction*

The National Reading Research center, along with John T. Guthrie and associates (1997), investigated students' reading motivation and created a framework, Concept-Oriented reading Instruction (CORI): an approach for engaging students in literacy events (Guthrie, Aloa, Rinehart, 1997). CORI's instructional framework focused on seven principles for creating engaging classrooms, including real-world observation, themes, self-directed learning, strategy instruction, social collaboration, self-expression, and coherence in the curriculum. The CORI study served as the inspiration for my work in view of the fact that CORI provides specific guidance for teachers in using motivational support practices, thus expecting more benefits to student motivation and engagement than with similar traditional instructional frameworks.

Guthrie and Klauda (2014) conducted a study of CORI focusing on four motivational-engagement supports provided by the teachers: (1) competence support, (2) choice (intrinsic motivation), (3) emphasis on importance of reading, and (4) collaboration. The study included 615 grade 7 students attending four middle schools in a rural public school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which language arts instruction was embedded with explicit supports for student engagement and motivation through the lens of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI), which emphasized text comprehension and student motivation (Guthrie and Klauda, 2014).

Choice has rarely been studied as an experimental variable in classroom motivational studies (Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010);  however, Guthrie and Klauda's (2014) study found that the benefit of choice combined with other motivational-engagement supports increases motivation (2014). Additionally, the findings confirm that the motivational-engagement supports of collaboration in literacy activities correlate to reading engagement, as does competence support and emphasizing the importance of reading.

 In a study in which 845 students received the Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) within a traditional reading and language arts classroom, Guthrie, Klauda and Ho (2013) confirmed the association between motivation and increased text comprehension because the curricular methodology emphasizes support for motivation, engagement, and cognitive strategies in reading informational text. The purpose of this study was to first investigate whether motivation was associated with engagement directly or whether its connection to achievement occurred through engagement, and secondly, to examine the relationships among reading achievement, motivation and engagement using CORI (2013). CORI emphasizes support for reading motivation, reading engagement, and cognitive strategies for reading informational text

(Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013). Additionally, CORI was associated with increased motivation, engagement, and achievement relative to the traditional reading and language arts instruction.

*Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention*

Characteristics of motivation were directly embedded into the CORI program, which directly influenced the design of Strategic Adolescent Reading Program (STARI) (Kim et al, 2016). The STARI intervention program was designed to promote engaged reading and consequently reading skill growth. The program addressed components for skilled reading, such as decoding and fluency, while also including reading strategies critical to literal and deep comprehension.

A yearlong study placed 483 students in grades 6-8 either in a controlled classroom setting or assigned to the STARI supplemental reading program as the experimental group, which examined the efficacy of a multicomponent reading intervention. The study assessed behavioral engagement by measuring how much of the STARI curricular activities the students completed during an academic year and collected teachers' ratings of their students' reading engagement (Kim et al, 2016).

In terms of word recognition, basic reading comprehension, and morphological awareness, the students placed in STARI outperformed the students in the controlled classroom. STARI activities helped overcome disengagement by using themes specifically designed to link to students' social and cultural experiences. In addition, STARI provided ample opportunity for students to express personal connections and opinions on the texts read (Kim et al, 2016). Linking skills such as decoding, fluency and comprehension in cognitively challenging texts and tasks further supported reading motivation.

*Engagement*

According to Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, and Burrowbridge (2015), engagement is a multidimensional construct comprised of affective engagement, into which the features of interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm are embedded. Behavioral engagement component refers to effort and time on task. Cognitive engagement includes strategic behavior, persistence, and metacognition (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Malloy, Parsons, & Parsons, 2013; Parsons, Nuland, & Parsons, 2014, Shernoff, 2013). Since engagement is explicitly associated with reading achievement, it must be a vital component of classroom instruction (Ivey & Johnston, 2013 as cited in Parsons, Malloy, parsons, and Burrowbridge, 2015). Therefore, teachers dedicated to providing engaging tasks are ultimately providing their students meaningful works that leads to greater understandings of new and challenging content.

Parsons et al (2015) explored sixth grade students' engagement in literacy tasks in a yearlong study which examined the features of certain tasks to determine what made them engaging or disengaging. The project identified 10 tasks in which students were most engaged and 10 tasks in which they were least engaged. Results were based on classroom observations documenting assigned tasks and students' behavioral engagement, post observation student interviews documenting their affective and cognitive engagement, and a rubric to rate the academic tasks (Parsons et al., 2015). They concluded that collaboration and teacher support were important aspects for being engaged in academic work. Cognitive engagement increased with activities that included differentiated support for students at varying levels of need. Student choice in an activity also increased engagement (Parsons et al., 2015).

On the other hand, tasks that were too hard or did not provide opportunities for cognitive connections in meaningful ways were not engaging. They also found that the use of worksheets

tended to decrease student engagement. Consequently, recommendations included the avoidance of rote activities and lower-level activities which held little sense of purpose for students (Parsons et al., 2015). In order to increase student engagement and productivity, teachers must be aware of student confusion and frustration and thus provide support where it is needed (Parsons, 2012 as cited in Parsons et al, 2015).

*Conclusion*

Researchers agree that  motivation refers to a student's goals, values, beliefs, and dispositions towards reading (Kim et al., 2016; Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012 as cited in Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015). Further, motivation has been linked with reading achievement in a variety of studies (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015; Shaffner, Schiefele, & Ulferts, 2013), that demonstrate that students go beyond surface level understanding and engage in deep processing when motivated to read. Therefore, supportive motivational classroom instruction encourages student autonomy and peer collaboration. A cyclical process, the positive interactions between students and the teacher facilitates an increase in productivity, which in turn, leads to enhanced self-efficacy.

## Section 3:  Methodology

Motivation frequently makes the difference between learning that is temporary and superficial and learning that is permanent and internalized" (Oldfather, 1993, as cited by Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). The role of motivation in learning has been examined in numerous research studies (Deci, 1971, 1972a,1972b; Lepper & Greene, 1975; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973; Loveland & Ollie, 1979, as cited by Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006) and the research supports that motivation is a primary concern for teachers as it plays a major role in learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dweck & Elliot, 1983; McCombs, 1989, as cited by Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Student motivation and engagement are commonly cited as barriers to the success of adolescent literacy interventions (Kamil et al., 2008; Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005; O'Brien, Beach, & Scharber, 2007; Solis et al., 2014 as cited in Kim et al., 2016)), and yet, they are rarely at the core of an intervention plan. This study aimed to provide educators with motivational and engagement strategies for struggling readers.

*Participants*

I am a certified K-6 teacher with a master's degree and a remedial reading certification. There were nine 8th grade students (n=9), consisting of 5 boys and 4 girls, two of whom were English Learners (EL). The remedial reading class was selected according to reading performance and convenience sampling.

The demographics of the suburban town school district, set in the Northeast region of the United State, consisted of  81.3% White, 8.5% Hispanic, 2.3% Black, 5.1% Asian American, .2% American Indian, and 2.6% two or more races. Students enrolled in Pre Kindergarten-12 grade receiving Special Education services was 10.9%,  and 9.3% of students were eligible for

free or reduced priced meals. The classroom in which the study took place mirrored the population of the district.

The study was carried out over a six week period midway through the school year. Although the small sample class size of eight students was not sufficient enough to provide generalized results, the purpose of this action research was to identify effective strategies to improve motivation and engagement in struggling readers. If successful, I would be able to incorporate my findings into a framework for professional development that includes classroom motivation and engagement for struggling readers.

*Materials*

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is a reliable tool to identify the student's independent and instructional reading level and to document progress through one on one formative and summative assessment. The assessment enabled me to observe and quantify student reading behaviors, engage in comprehension conversations that go beyond retelling, and make informed decisions that connect assessment to responsive teaching. I administered the benchmark assessment at the beginning of the study in order obtain information on the students' comprehension level. This information allowed me to formulate lessons that would allow explicit teaching for student's individual needs.

I administered a reading interest survey to determine students' interests, habits, and attitudes about reading. The teacher made reading interest survey was administered in written form before the six week study begins in order to provide a wide range of classroom texts for the students. The texts provided were comprised of high interest topics and relevance to the student's interests.

I have adapted Serravallo's (2014) *Student Engagement Inventory*, an instrument for teachers to record student behavior during independent reading while observing student distractibility, avoidance behaviors, and engaged behaviors. The engagement inventory will allow me to evaluate the extent to which a student encounters challenges during independent reading or group work that may compromise his ability to remain engaged and motivated. A code for recording behaviors during independent reading includes the following categories: C=chatting, E=engaged, S=smiling, SB=switching books, T=looks at teacher, W=looking out window, and Z=zoning out (Serravallo, 2014).

Additionally, I used Q-t-A, (Beck & McKeown, 2002), a method by which students learn to examine content in a way that allows them to see beyond the text to pose questions to the author, to enhance reading comprehension and, consequently teach students to actively build understanding as they read (Beck & McKeown, 2002, as cited by Sencibaugh J.M., & Sencibaugh, A.M., 2015). I focused lessons on reconstructing and extending author meaning, and using discussion commentary to construct new questions that lead to developing more evidential insight. The QtA method engaged students in reading all the while solidifying understanding of the text.

*Procedure*

I observed and collected data at the beginning, during, and end of the six week study using Jennifer Serravallo's Student Engagement Inventory. My observations took place during three different literacy tasks:  independent reading, collaborative work, and written responses. Before implementing any reading strategies, I assessed student engagement behaviors using Jennifer Serravallo's Student Engagement Inventory to gain baseline data. I observed and

recorded the students' behaviors in each of the three categories bi-weekly throughout the six weeks. The post assessment data was comprised from the last observation.

After analyzing the reading interest surveys, I provided the students with a wide range of texts in which they could choose from for independent reading. These options included, but not limited to, traditional printed chapter books, magazines, news articles, novels, informational texts, and biographies. The wide range of reading materials were comprised of high interest student topics. Imbedded in the class period each day was 10 minutes of independent reading with a book of their choice.

Once pre assessment data was collected, I provided explicit instruction on QtA in order to increase engagement, thereupon increasing comprehension. Instruction took place 5 days a week during reading class as we read a whole class novel. I formulated questions and statement starters requiring students to extend meaning of the text rather than merely retrieving information. The students were required to ask questions of the author and the text ultimately prompting them to stop and think about what they were reading. Instruction was modeled during whole class discussion and during small group instruction.

## Section 4:  Data Collection

*Introduction*

The purpose of the six-week action research project was to explore how students can make the transition from disengaged learners to  engaged and motivated readers using effective reading strategies. Student engagement data was collected throughout the study using the Serrevallo Engagement Inventory (2014).  During three different literacy tasks at three separate times during the six week time period, data was collected. During the six week study, the data collection occurred during each of the three tasks- silent reading, collaboration with peers, and written responses- at the beginning of the study, midway through the study and then again at the end of the study. Pre-assessment data provided a baseline for engagement in each literacy activity, while the data collected midway during the study served to gain insight to identify adjustments and modifications that needed, followed by recalibration of procedure and strategy. Post-assessment provided results of the improved student engagement for the six week study.

The second set of data used during this research project was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (2011). The assessment enabled observation and quantification of student reading behaviors, engagement in comprehension conversations that go beyond retelling, and as well as making decisions that connected assessment to responsive teaching.

*Pre-Assessment*

Table one represents the percentage of students engaged during three different literacy tasks pre-study and post-study. A total of eight students were pre-assessed with the Serravallo Engagement Inventory (2014) during independent reading, peer collaboration, and written response work. The following key code enabled recordings of engagement behaviors :

C=chatting, E=engaged, SB=switching books, T=looking at teacher, W=looking out the window, Z=zoning out. Independent reading was observed for 10 minutes in which 38% (n=3) of the students were completely engaged for the entirety of the observation. During the pretest observation of independent reading, 38% (n=3) of the students were observed chatting at the onset of the observation but then engaging in their books. One student was observed completely disengaged and then switching books while yet another student was observed completely disengaged and consequently looking out the window. The pretest observation for independent reading garnered results that 75% of the students were engaged during independent reading, therefore leaving 25% of the students not engaged at all.

Peer collaboration was observed during pretesting for a total of 20 minutes using the Serravallo Engagement Inventory (2014). Results showed 13% (n=1) of the students were completely engaged in the group work with no distraction, 50% (n=4) of the students were engaged but showed a little distractibility with chatting, while 38% (n=3) of the students were observed looking out the window or completely disengaged in the task at hand. As shown in table one, 63% of the students were seen as engaged in peer collaboration and 38% were not engaged.

Written work was observed for 20 minutes during pre-testing using the SEI (2014). During the pre study observation, 13% (n=1) of the students were completely engaged in the written assignment while 50% (n=4) of the students were observed as being engaged yet chatting at times. Twenty five percent (n=2) of the students were not engaged at all and looking out the window. Table one shows that 63% of the students were engaged at some point during the written activity, consequently 38% were not participating.

The second data collection reflected student assessment from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (2011). The grade level letter correspondences for Fountas and Pinnell include: T=middle of 5th grade, U=end of 5th grade/beginning of 6th grade, V=middle of 6th grade, W=end of 6th grade/beginning of 7th grade, X=middle of 7th grade, and Y=end of 7th grade/beginning of 8th grade. At pre testing, 25% (n=2) of the students tested at reading level T which is equivalent to the middle of fifth grade, 25% (n=2) of the students tested at a reading level U which is equivalent to the end of fifth grade, 25% (n=2) of the students tested at reading level W which is equivalent to the end of sixth grade, and 25% (n=2) of the students tested at reading level X which is equivalent to the middle of seventh grade. The data shows that the students in the six week study are reading below eighth grade level.

**Data Analysis**

*Midway through assessment*

Additionally, data was collected midway through the study to gain insight in order to identify adjustments and modifications to help focus the students on the given literacy task. The results showed that 75% of the students were engaged during independent reading, leaving 25% of the students not engaged at all.  Sixty-three percent  of the students were engaged in peer collaboration and 38% were not engaged.  Lastly, 63% of the students were engaged at some point  during the written activity, consequently 38% were not participating. Students who did not demonstrate engagement were either chatting, not engaged at all, or looking out the window.

A variety of strategies were used to increase engagement during silent reading. For example, I reassessed individual students' independent reading book choices for appropriate reading level. While most students were open to new suggestions, a few remained uninterested in selecting a new book. Secondly, seating arrangements were created to promote engagement for

the students who were chatting. In addition, I conferred with disengaged students as needed to confirm the students' understanding of task, clarify directions, and moved seating as needed. Furthermore, students looking out the window had their seats moved so their backs were to the window.

*Data Interpretation*

Eight students were assessed at post testing using the SEI (2014) during the three literacy tasks: independent reading, peer collaboration, and written work. An analysis of the independent reading scores showed a 13% increase in engagement from pretesting to post testing. Both Peer collaboration and written work scores showed an increase of 25% of engagement from pretesting to post testing.

The data results from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (2011) posttests were compiled from eight students. Post testing results revealed six of the eight students tested increased at least one letter level: two students increased from level T (the middle of fifth grade) to U (the end of fifth grade), two students increased from level X (middle of 7th grade) to Y (end of 7th grade/beginning of 8th grade), one student increased from level U (end of 5th grade/beginning of 6th grade) to V (middle of 6th grade), and one student increased from level W (end of 6th grade/beginning of 7th grade) to X (beginning of 7th grade). One student increased by two levels: increased from level W (end of 6th grade/beginning of 7th grade) to Y (middle of 7th grade), and one student remained at the same reading level as the fall assessment: level U (end of 5th grade/beginning of 6ht grade). The post test revealed that 38% (n=3) of the students were at level U which is equivalent to the end fifth grade, 13% (n=1) of the students were at the reading level W which is equivalent to the beginning of 7th grade, 13% ( n=1) of the students were at reading level X which is equivalent to the middle of 7th grade, and 38% (n=3)

of students scored at the reading level Y which is equivalent to the end of 7th grade. Even though the results indicate the students were not reading at grade level at post testing, they did demonstrate an increase in reading achievement by at least one level during the intervention period.

Three themes emerged in the analysis of the study: engagement in independent reading, engagement in peer collaboration, and engagement in written work. These results suggest that providing struggling readers with choice within the classroom, implementing activities that are relevant to their lives and presenting them with ample opportunities for peer collaboration helped to foster motivation and engagement in literacy activities. Students are more motivated to read when reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives, have access to wide range of reading materials, and ample opportunities to engage in sustained reading (Gambrell, 2011, Schiefele & Loweke, 2017, Guthrie et al., 2004).

**Section 5:  Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusions**

Although often overlooked, motivation is one of the most essential components of helping children grow as readers and writers (Duncan, 2013, Worthy, 2002, Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011). The purpose of the six week study was to show how students made the transition from disengaged learners to readers who were engaged and motivated by using reading strategies effectively, resulting in literacy achievement. Students participated in a multitude of activities to elevate their reading comprehension during the six week study. The literacy activities were designed around relevance to students' lives, peer collaboration, and the ability to promote choice, in effect creating high academic self-efficacy.

Even though the study was performed with a very small sample size of eight students, reading achievement increased. Additional research is needed using larger sample sizes and collecting data from two or more classes in order to confirm the relationship between academic achievement and engagement and motivation.

*Responses to Research Questions*

To answer RQ1: *'How does ample classroom sustained reading support student motivation?'* we look to The Program for International Student Assessment (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010) report which found that interest in reading predicted students' reading comprehension (Gambrell, 2011). In similar fashion, my study included the provision of intrinsic motivation with the gift of choice (Duncan, 2013, Moley, Bandre, & George, 2011), which in turn, facilitated an increase in motivation and engagement in students. In a classroom that embraces the importance of motivation, where there is choice in the selection of reading material, students tend to be more engaged in meaningful literacy tasks (Duncan, 2013, Schiefele & Loweke, 2017). Serravallo's Reading Interest Survey (2014)

provided a plethora of information about students' reading interests, and disinterests, which guided students to the selection of high interest reading materials. Providing independent reading time for students allowed them to deepen engagement with self-selected reading materials and pursue topics of interest.

The second question addressed in the study was, '*How is student motivation enhanced when reading tasks are relevant to their lives*?' Students were more motivated to read when reading tasks were relevant to their lives and they had choice in learning outcomes, which is supported by Kim et al (2016). One of the goals of the research was to increase motivation and carry a certain a level of relevance to the lives of adolescents, which affirms findings by Kim et al., 2016, Jang, Conradi, Mckenna, & Jones, 2015, and Gambrell (2011). Learning activities that include relevancy to students' home and social lives were paramount in promoting student engagement (Kim et al., 2016, Jang, Conradi, and Gambrell, 2011). While it can be challenging to obtain relevant reading materials that are also at the appropriate reading level for struggling readers, it is one of most important steps to take in order to help those struggling to engage. *Scholastic Action* magazine offers age-appropriate stories at accessible reading levels that enables students to engage in reading activities that interest them.

The third question in the study was *'What are the strategies to help struggling readers strengthen their interest in reading?'* In the study, I found myself striving to help middle school students become strategic, independent readers. I wanted them to be able to read and comprehend a text, think critically about its content, and discuss their thoughts with others, a conclusion shared by Moley, Bandre, and George (2011). Essential to helping struggling adolescent readers overcome lack of motivation and engagement was the implementation of classroom strategies and literacy activities. Incorporating Daniel's and Steineke's (2013)

strategies *Save the Last Word for Me* and *Written Conversations* allowed students to become engaged in the reading and motivated to participate in conversations with peers. During peer collaboration, students articulated their responses with enthusiasm and confidence that was not evident prior to the incorporation of the strategies. Another powerful strategy that engaged my students was Daniel's and Steineke's (2013) *Tweet the Text* because of its' relevance to their social media world and their lives outside of school. The students asked when they could 'tweet' again. Providing well thought out strategies appropriate to each learner was essential for success. The implementation of evidence-based practices that instilled a love of reading while advancing achievement helped close the gap for struggling readers.

*Discussion*

One of the guiding questions in the action research study was 'How does ample classroom sustained reading support student motivation?' Following the completion of the study, I now wonder what 'ample' time really entails? Is it 10, 15, 20 minutes of independent reading each class period? For some students, the independent reading time in school is the only time they read independently. Would 20 minutes of in school silent reading help those struggling with reading?

Administration of Serravallo's Reading Interest Surveys (2014) provided valuable information regarding student reading interests, which informed recommendation for appropriate book titles. Equally important, the surveys provided insight to students on a personal level, thus allowing to develop stronger relationships with the students. Therefore, a future research question would be, 'How important is the personal relationship between a teacher and a struggling adolescent reader?'

*Next Steps*

As of this writing, I have shared my findings at Sacred Heart University's 7th Annual Literacy Conference, and I look forward to the preparation of this manuscript for publication on *Digital Commons,* the university repository for scholarly research. Lastly, I plan to share my findings with colleagues in order to emphasize the importance of how engaging students can lead to academic achievement.

*Recommendations*

Going forward, the research should include a double-blind comparison of two or more classes in which one or more classes would be structured around the concepts of providing student choice, ample peer collaboration and creating lessons that are relevant to students' lives, while traditional instruction occurred in the second class. Additionally, conducting further research across a longer period of time would affirm the link between student choice and reading engagement and motivation. Further research could include different grade levels.

*Conclusion*

Students are more motivated to read when reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives, have access to wide range of reading materials, and ample opportunities to engage in sustained reading (Gambrell, 2011, Schiefele & Loweke, 2017, Guthrie et al., 2004). Instructional activities such as Daniel's and Steineke's (2013)  strategies *Save the Last Word for Me, Written Conversations,* and *Tweet the Text* provided opportunities for student relevance and peer collaboration. Developing a classroom library with an abundance of relevant and high interest reading materials provided increased engagement in sustained reading. Ultimately, the project confirmed that teacher and peer collaboration, along with activities that are relevant and

engaging, contribute to adolescent learners' motivation to learn and their desire to engage with

literacy based activities.

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Appendix A

Serravallo Reading Interest Survey (2014)


Name:_____
_____


Do you like to
read?


How much time do you spend reading?


What are some of the books you have read lately?


Do you have a library card? How often do you use it?


Do you ever get books from the school
library?


About how many books do you own?


What are some books you would like to
own?


Put a check mark next to the kinds of reading you like best and topics you might like to read
about:

_____ history _____ travel _____ plays _____ sports

_____ adventure _____ romance _____ poetry _____ science fiction

_____ biography _____ war stories _____ car stories _____ supernatural stories

_____ humor _____ mysteries _____ folktales _____ how-to-do-it books

_____ art _____ westerns _____ novels _____ astrology

_____ detective
stories

Reading Interest Survey

Do you like to read the newspaper?

If yes, place a checkmark next to the part of the newspaper listed you like to read:

_____ headlines _____ editorials _____ sports

_____ advertisements _____ columnists _____ entertainment

_____ comic strips _____ political stories _____ current events

_____ others (please
list):

What are your favorite television
programs?

How much time do you spend watching television?

What is your favorite
magazine?

Do you have a hobby? If so, what is
it?


What are the two best movies you have ever seen?


Who are your favorite entertainers and/or movie stars? When you were little, did you enjoy having someone read aloud to you?


List topics, subjects, et cetera that you might like to read about:


What does the word 'reading' mean to you?


Say anything else that you would like to say about reading:

Appendix B
Serravallo Engagement Inventory (2015)

## Engagement Inventory

NOTE TO TEACHER: Kid-watch and record student behaviors during 5–10 minute increments

| Names | Time/Environment | Time/Environment | Time/Environment | Time/Environment | Time/Environment | Time/Environment | Notes |
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**KEY:** C = Chatting    E = Engaged    S = Smiling    SB = Switching Books    T = Looking at Teacher    W = Looking Out Window    Z = Zoning Out

Table 1
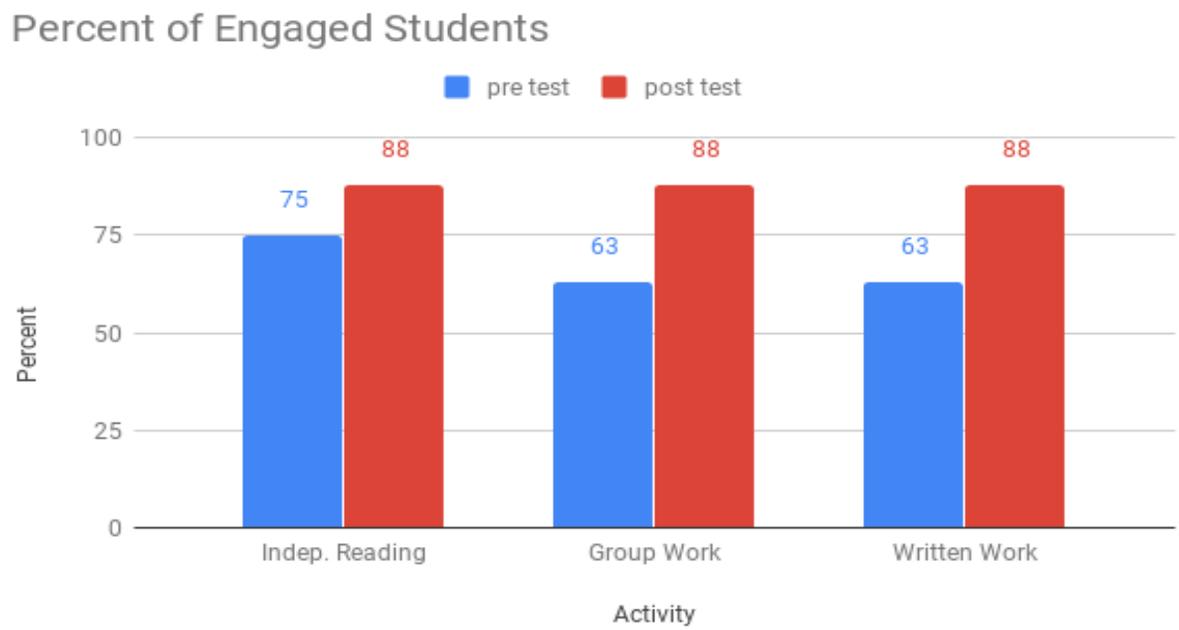Percent of Engaged Students

## Percent of Engaged Students

Table 2
Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (2011)



Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (2011)