



A LITERACY PATH WHITEPAPER

Motivation and Engagement

The BRAVE Perspective



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Motivation and engagement are a primary vehicle for improving literacy.

Irwin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007

ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that motivation and engagement influence students' reading development and reading achievement. Motivation to read is "the drive to read resulting from a comprehensive set of an individual's beliefs about, attitudes towards, and goals for reading" (Conradi, Jang, & McKenna, 2014). Motivation and engagement influence our students' reading behaviors with important consequences for reading development. In fact, motivation is one of the strongest psychological variables influencing students' reading achievement (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014).

Despite their importance, motivation and engagement are rarely the focus of reading instruction. Motivated and engaged readers bring enthusiasm, attention and effort to each act of reading in the classroom. These student readers gravitate to situations that feature reading, leading to continued practice with reading and learning from text. Motivated and engaged students assign high value to reading, appreciating how it informs, entertains or persuades. These students identify as readers, indeed, this part of their personalities encourages further reading. An ongoing classroom challenge is to combine teaching reading strategies and skills with motivating and engaging classroom texts and tasks.

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Motivation and Engagement: The Research

Motivation and engagement play an essential role in learning to read, and this influence is well-documented by decades of research. In fact, it is impossible to imagine the effective teaching of reading when students' motivation and engagement are lacking. Research demonstrates that reading motivation and engagement contribute to students' reading achievement across grade levels (Barber & Klauda, 2020). The effect of reading instruction on reading achievement is mediated by students' reading motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). Critically, the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage can be “pushed back” in schools and classrooms where students have access to a rich print environment and become actively engaged with literacy (Cummins, 2015).

Motivation cues students' attention and effort while reading, and engagement reflects “the quality of students' participation with learning activities” (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Engaging classroom environments provide motivation for students to use their strategies and skills and enhances their reading development (Afflerbach, et al., 2013). Motivated readers give time and effort when reading, in school and out of school (Alexander, 2003). In contrast, struggling student readers often lack motivation and related engagement. This creates a decided disadvantage because without motivation and engagement, student readers' attention, perseverance and learning opportunities are limited. Student learning of essential reading strategies and skills suffers.



Motivation is one of the strongest psychological variables influencing students' reading achievement.

Guthrie & Klauda, 2014

Engaged reading represents “a merger of motivation and thoughtfulness” (Guthrie and Klauda, 2014), and engaged readers are intrinsically motivated, possess self-efficacy, and focus on mastery of strategies and skills. Observation of students who are motivated and engaged reflects the research evidence: these readers find reading pleasurable and rewarding, they read with confidence, and they regularly apply effort when needed. Motivation is a crucial mindset (Dweck, 1986) that contributes to both reading development and reading achievement.

Motivation and engagement have a reciprocal relationship: Engagement influences motivation, and vice versa (Afflerbach, 2016). Motivated student readers expect to be engaged with reading, in school and out. In turn, engagement optimizes students' experiences and achievements with reading, adding to students'



positive experiences with reading. Students who have experienced success in reading look forward to reading and they are motivated to read more. This “return to reading” for motivated students provides them with further practice of their strategies and skills. There is a contrasting reciprocity for struggling readers: lack of motivation to read is an obstacle to engagement and without engagement students’ reading experiences are lessened. This leads to lowered motivation for future reading, less reading and ongoing struggles to learn.

Our long-term teaching goals, for students’ successful, wide ranging and independent reading, are achieved as students develop motivation, knowledge of reading, text processing skills and strategies, and personal commitment (Alexander, 2003). Forzani and colleagues (Forzani et al., 2020) note that readers’ cognitive strategies “...are recruited, energized, and sustained by motivational processes during reading.” Across the school years, the texts and tasks that students encounter are of increasing complexity and challenge. Accordingly, motivation to read should develop correspondingly to provide support for students as they face the ever-growing demands of reading:

To master the skills and strategies...children must commit time and effort to learn them; thus students must be motivated to learn and then utilize them fully.

Wigfield, et al., 2016

To summarize, research repeatedly finds that motivation and engagement are not a “warm and fuzzy” extra component in efforts to improve students’ reading. In fact, motivation and engagement are “a primary vehicle for improving literacy” (Irwin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). All reading programs introduce, teach and reinforce necessary strategies and skills. However, the fuel that drives students’ learning and use of these strategies and skills is motivation and engagement.



Motivation and engagement are a primary vehicle for improving literacy.

Irwin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007

How BRAVE Uses Research Evidence to Create Motivating and Engaging Curriculum

Research describes how students build and maintain motivation and engagement with reading. The BRAVE Program takes this research and uses it to craft reading lessons and assess student progress.



The fuel that drives students' learning and use of these strategies and skills is motivation and engagement.

Afflerbach



Belonging

Reading thrives in community.

The B in BRAVE reminds us that Belonging, and related social connections foster students' reading motivation and engagement. An individual's relations to others is one of the three universal psychological needs that motivates humans to act. Nurturing and positive social relations in school have strong impact on students' attitudes towards learning and academic success, and thus motivation. BRAVE provides a reading community, and belonging to the community of readers contributes to students' motivation to read more closely and engage in more complex thought about the text's meaning.



Reader Agency

Confidence fuels effort.

The R in BRAVE relates to Reader agency and students' self-perceptions. These self-perceptions include students' feelings of self-efficacy. Students with high self-efficacy believe that they can succeed in reading and related tasks. These students give necessary effort with their reading skills and strategies to comprehend text and work on related reading tasks, even as they become more challenging. Self-efficacy develops when students experience success in reading, and are aware of that success. Thus, BRAVE matches students with texts with which they can experience success. Having confidence in one's reading ability is necessary for motivated reading. Reading experiences paired with ongoing success build, maintain and strengthen self-efficacy.





Affinity

Liking sustains reading.

The A in BRAVE refers to Affinity, as motivated and engaged readers have a true liking and enjoyment of reading, not just in a particular context, as when their teacher expressively reads a funny poem, but as a stable, individual characteristic as when the student has a consistent, long-term interest in reading a certain genre. These students are driven by the feelings of pleasure and involvement they experience while reading. This intrinsic motivation guarantees ongoing engagement because students (like other human beings!) like to return to experiences that are fulfilling and that provide happiness. BRAVE provides reading experiences that nurture students' liking of reading are essential for a successful instructional program.



Value

Reading earns its place in a student's life.

The V in BRAVE refers to Value because motivated and engaged student readers develop the understanding that reading is useful in their lives. These readers value reading as it helps them develop knowledge, learn and understand, be entertained and pursue their personal interests. Curriculum that helps students experience the value of reading as a tool and to better themselves is essential. Students learning the value of reading return to it as a rich and wonderful resource. This "returning" to reading creates ongoing motivation to read. BRAVE incorporates engaging texts and tasks that help students appreciate the value of reading.



Engagement

Where motivation becomes action.

The E in BRAVE represents Engagement, and engagement represents the culmination of motivated student readers with high-quality curriculum. Each letter in BRAVE indicates a potential path for engaging readers and building and sustaining reading motivation. Belonging reminds us that students thrive in social settings in which they can read, discuss, share and collaborate. Reading agency reminds us that students must believe that they can succeed at reading and related tasks to be motivated. Affinity tells us that helping students develop a liking for reading is a further key to motivation and engagement. Finally, Value creates motivation and engagement as students grow to understand that reading can help them reach goals in and out of school, can entertain and can help them pursue their interests and curiosity.



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Editor's note: Two citations are preserved as written by the author. Cummins is cited as 2015 in the body and 2016 in the references; Conradi, Jang, & McKenna is cited inline as 2014 but no year appears in the reference list. These discrepancies were not silently corrected.