

Reading Motivation in Middle School

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Why do some students enjoy reading, and others do not? Aliteracy, as defined by the College of Library and Information Science of the University of South Carolina, means having the ability to read but experiencing indifference and boredom with reading for academic and enrichment purposes. Aliterate students can read but they often choose not to read. Educators need to look at the reading attitudes of their students and better connect student interests with classroom experiences. This research will explore the interests and motivation of students to better engage them in reading.

Research shows that reading for enjoyment or academics benefits children in many ways, one of which is reading achievement (Cox and Guthrie, 2001). Children who do not read don't develop the reading skills necessary; therefore, they begin to feel more inadequate about their reading ability. Consequently, they become even more adamant about not reading. It is like a dog chasing its tail; the dog never catches up to the tail.

A recent survey done by McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) indicated that children's reading enjoyment had declined significantly in recent years. Likewise, as students enter middle school, their motivation to read begins to decline (Aarnoutse and Schellings, 2003). Reading motivation is defined in terms of beliefs, values, needs, and goals that individuals have (Guthrie and Wigfield, 1997). The closer the literacy activities match students' motivational beliefs, values, needs, and goals, the more willing students will be to read. Students often define reading only in an academic context, and this context is not inclusive of the types of reading they are engaging in outside of the

classroom; therefore, they may not be viewing their out of school literacies as valid reading (Pitcher et al., 2007). In turn, teachers may have more traditional approaches to reading which reinforces this notion.

Review of Literature

Motivation plays an important part in most areas of life, including education. It is especially essential in the area of reading. Classrooms are filled with students who never want to read and others who have a book tucked underneath their arms at all times. It is the goal of all educators to encourage those avid and reluctant readers alike to engage in reading activities at school and at home. The engaged reader is motivated, knowledgeable, strategic, and socially interactive (Gambrell, 1996).

In a study conducted by Gambrell (1996), elementary students were placed in a program that was designed to help them with their literacy development. The goal of the program was to increase student motivation for reading by providing them with a multitude of books, allowing them to choose what books they wanted to read. The study showed that the program increased reading motivation (Gambrell, 1996).

A study of reading motivation techniques with primary elementary school students (Burlew, Gordon, Hoist, Smith, Ward, Wheeler, 2005), targeted first, second, and third grade students in three elementary school districts. The problem of lack of interest in reading for enjoyment was documented with student surveys, teacher observations, and reading inventories. Students' negative attitudes and low self-esteem were found to contribute to lack of motivation (Burlew et al., 2005).

Additionally, a research study titled "What Johnny Likes to Read Is Hard to Find in School" provided evidence that students who have access to material of interest are

more likely to read and thus improve their reading achievement and attitudes (Worthy, Moorman, and Turner, 1999). This study examined the reading preferences and access to reading materials of sixth grade students from three middle schools in a southwestern U.S. school district. Through the use of student questionnaires, teacher /librarian interviews, and classroom observations, it was shown that the availability of the most popular reading materials was limited across the classrooms.

Motivation to read is essential in students' success throughout their education, and the types of reading activities students enjoy must be identified. In particular, research has indicated that students' motivation to read begins to decline in middle school (Eccles, 1983); therefore, educators need to make interesting reading material easily accessible to students.

Ivey and Broddus (2001) completed a study to elicit information on student preferences in reading and language arts classes, what motivated students to read, and how their language arts classes could meet their needs. An open-ended questionnaire and interviews with 1,765 sixth grade students in twenty-three schools revealed that students were motivated by self, environment, interests, and people (friends, teachers, parents). Students reported that they were against having no choice in the books they read because the material was either too difficult or not of interest to them.

Oldfather (1993) conducted research involving fifth and sixth grade students to discover what motivated them to read. Students emphasized the importance of free expression and a motivating teacher. "The most necessary attributes of a motivating teacher were caring, understanding, trusting, and respecting students' ideas, opinions, and feelings" (p. 679). Students must feel ownership over their learning.

Other studies on reading motivation have found that access to reading materials has an important influence on the amount students choose to read (McQuillan, 2001). In McQuillan's study, print access was examined in a comprehensive way as to include home, school, and community resources. Surveys and reading tests were administered to a class of eleventh grade students. Convenient access to reading material, which is consistent with previous research, was associated with more frequent reading. This was regardless of varying reading abilities. Additionally, free (voluntary) reading was associated with higher levels of reading proficiency. A way to accomplish this is to frequently expose students to literature in the classroom and offer a multitude of reading choices. Reading frequently can be enjoyable, can improve reading skill (Kuersten, 2002) and can lead to higher reading achievement (Gambrell, 1996).

Partin and Hendricks (2002) contend that teachers should offer multiliteracies. The scope of what is acceptable reading material needs to include the Internet, music, magazines, instant messaging, and newspapers. Ammann and Mittelstadt (1987) describe a high school intervention program which used newspapers to motivate students to read. Evidence showed that this approach improved students' reading habits and attitudes toward reading. In contrast, students felt negative toward traditional reading skills material.

Kitson, Fletcher, and Kearney (2007) present findings from an empirical study in progress that investigates how a teacher integrates technology to teach multiliterate practices when reading multi-modal texts, specifically an Interactive Whiteboard. Data based on observations, field notes, reflective journal entries, videotapes, and cultural artifacts were analyzed from contrastive and holistic perspectives. Results indicated a

lack of congruence between the teacher's actions and belief, given that her practices focused mainly on traditional print modes of communication.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study proposed here is to explore the value middle school students place on reading, their self-concept as a reader, and the motivating factors that affect reading interests and frequency. Interest in multiple literacies (different types of texts, such as: newspapers, novels, instructions on food packaging, television programs, advertisements, CD-ROM programs, email and Internet) will be explored. Additionally, student choice of reading material (students having a voice in choosing their own reading selections) will also be explored.

Research Questions

1. What are middle school students' attitudes about reading?
2. Are multiple literacies a motivator that helps generate student interest in reading?
3. Is student choice of reading material and activities a motivator that can generate student interest in reading?

Method

Participants

The targeted population is located in a middle class suburban community of Mobile, Alabama. 100 eighth grade students from Cranford Burns Middle School, which is under the supervision of the Mobile County Public School System, will be selected from a student body of 1000 students through the use of proportional stratified sampling.

The stratification variable is gender; therefore, the proportion of males and females in the sample will be the same as the proportions of males and females in the population. The population is composed of 55% males and 45 % females. Thus, 55 students in the sample will be randomly selected from the male subpopulation, and 45 students in the sample will be randomly selected from the female subpopulation. Together, these two subpopulations make up the total population of 1,000 students. The sample of participants will equal 100. Each participant will be given a coupon for Krispy Kreme donuts when he or she completes the research study.

Instruments

The Motivation to Read Profile (adapted version for adolescent readers) will be used to assess the value middle school students place on reading and their self-concept as a reader (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni, 1996) (Pitcher, et al., 2007). This is a public domain instrument that provides researchers/teachers with an efficient and reliable way to quantitatively and qualitatively assess reading motivation. The MRP, which was originally designed to be used for grades 1 through 6, includes two instruments, the reading questionnaire and the conversational interview. The modified version of the MRP (Pitcher, et al, 2007) includes questions about using electronic resources, schoolwork, projects, and what students choose to read and write on their own. Additionally, the language has been modified to be more adolescent friendly. For example, “When I grow up” was changed to “As an adult”.

The reading survey instrument/questionnaire consists of 20 items and uses a 4-point response scale. This self-report group-administered instrument assesses two specific dimensions of reading motivation, self-concept as a reader (10 items) and the value of

reading (10 items). The items that focus on self-concept as a reader are designed to elicit information about students' self-perceived competence in reading and self-perceived performance relative to peers. The value-of-reading- items are designed to elicit information about the value students place on reading tasks and activities, mainly in terms of frequency of engagement and reading related activities. The survey instrument has twenty items with 4-point rating scales. The highest total score possible is 80 points. On some items the response options are ordered least positive to most positive with the least positive response option having a value of 1 point and the most positive option having a point value of 4. On other times, however, the response options are reversed. In those cases it will be necessary to recode the response options. Items where recoding is required are starred on the scoring sheet. Enter the point value associated with the response given. To calculate the self-concept raw score and value raw score, add all student responses in the respective column. The full survey raw score is obtained by combining the column raw scores. To convert the raw scores to percentage scores, divide student raw scores by the total possible score, 40 for each subscale and 80 for the full survey (Gambrell, 1996).

The conversational interview is made up of three sections. The first section explores motivational factors related to the reading of narrative text (three questions). The second section focuses on information about informational reading (three questions). The final section gives attention to more general factors related to reading motivation (eight questions). The interview consists of 14 scripted questions that are open-ended to encourage free response and assess narrative reading, informational reading, and general reading. The interview provides information about the individual nature of students'

reading motivation as follows: what books and stories are most interesting, favorite authors, and where and how reading material is located that interests them the most. This allows for exploring more fully the personal dimensions of students' reading motivation. Additionally, questions and prompts were added relating to technological, family, and out-of-school literacies. To learn more about technology, questions such as the following were included: "Do you have a computer in your home?" "How much time do you spend on the computer each day?" "What do you like to read on the Internet?" To learn more about literacy practices in the home, the following questions were added: "Do you write letters or emails to friends or family?" "Do you share any of the following reading material with members of your family: newspapers, magazines, religious material, games?" The interview is designed to initiate an informal exchange between the researcher and the participant and to allow the participant to raise ideas and issues related to personal motivation. The primary purpose of the interview is to provide insights into students' reading experiences. Responses given are then analyzed to determine if students provided any confirming evidence regarding their self-perceived competence in reading as they reported on the survey/questionnaire instrument (Gambrell, 1996)(Pitcher, et al., 2007). After field testing and the use of investigator triangulation, the results of these data analyses revealed a moderately high reliability and the participants responded consistently on both types of assessment instruments and across time.

Procedure

Instruments: Motivation to Read Profile survey instrument

The administration of the reading survey/questionnaire instrument takes 15-20 minutes. It is designed to be read aloud to students to help ensure the veracity of student responses. The 100 participants in the sample population will be administered the survey/questionnaire at the same time. The participants will be informed that the instrument will not be graded. They are to be told that the information provided by them can be used by their teachers to make reading more interesting for them and that it will only be helpful if they provide honest responses.

Distribute the copies of the survey/questionnaire and ask students to write their names on the space provided.

Directions: Say: I am going to read some sentences to you. I want to know how you feel about reading.

There are no right or wrong answers. I really want to know how you honestly feel about reading. I will read each sentence twice. Do not mark your answer until I tell you to. The first time I read the sentence I want you to think about the best answer for you. The second time I read the sentence I want you to fill in the space beside your best answer. Mark only one answer. If you have any questions during the survey, raise your hand. Are there any questions before we begin? Remember: Do not mark your answer until I tell you to. OK, let's begin.

Read the first sample item: Say:

Sample 1: I am in (pause) sixth grade, (pause) seventh grade, (pause) eighth grade, (pause) ninth grade, (pause) tenth grade, (pause) eleventh grade, (pause) twelfth grade.

Read the first sample again. Say:

This time as I read the sentence, mark the answer that is right for you. I am in (pause) sixth grade, (pause) seventh grade, (pause) eighth grade, (pause) ninth grade, (pause) tenth grade, (pause) eleventh grade, (pause) twelfth grade.

Read the second sample item. Say:

Sample 2: I am a (pause) female, (pause) male.

Say: Now, get ready to mark your answer.

I am a (pause) female, (pause) male.

Read the remaining items in the same way (e.g., number _____, sentence stem followed by a pause, each option followed by a pause, and then give specific directions for students to mark their answers while you repeat the entire item) (Pitcher, et al., 2007).

The conversational interview is designed to increase understanding of students' reading motivation in an informal, conversational approach. The entire interview takes 15-20 minutes; however, it can be conducted in three 5-7 minutes sessions, one for each of the three sections of the interview. Duplicate the conversational interview so that you have a form for each child. Complete the interview individually with each participant. Choose in advance the section(s) or specific questions you want to ask from the conversational interview. Reviewing the information on students' surveys/questionnaires may provide information about additional questions that could be added to the interview. Familiarize yourself with the basic questions provided in the interview prior to the interview session in order to establish a more conversational setting. This open-ended, free response, semi-structured interview will likely lead to additional questions such as the following: Why do you feel that way? Can you give an example? How did that make

you feel? Select a quiet corner of the room and a calm period of the day for the interview. Allow ample time for conducting the conversational interview. Follow up on interesting comments and responses to gain a fuller understanding of students' reading experiences. Record students' responses in as much detail as possible. If time and resources permit, audiotape answers to be transcribed after the interview for more in-depth analysis. Extend, modify, or adapt the 14 questions outlined in the interview, especially during conversations with individual students. (Reprinted with permission from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) (Pitcher, et al., 2007).

Data Analysis

The survey instrument includes 20 closed-ended items, each rated using a 4-point rating scale. Means and frequency distributions will be used for these items. I also will use one-way analysis of variance to determine if different kinds of participants (as determined from the demographic data) differ on their mean responses on the 20 items. The open-ended items from the interview protocol will be transcribed to text and then analyzed inductively for themes and patterns in the data.

Appendix: Motivation to Read Survey Instrument and Motivation to Read
Interview Protocol

Figure 1
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Sample 1: I am in _____.

- Sixth grade
- Seventh grade
- Eighth grade
- Ninth grade
- Tenth grade
- Eleventh grade
- Twelfth grade

Sample 2: I am a _____.

- Female
- Male

Sample 3: My race/ethnicity is _____.

- African-American
- Asian/Asian American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
- Other: Please specify _____

1. My friends think I am _____.

- a very good reader
- a good reader
- an OK reader
- a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.

- Never
- Not very often
- Sometimes
- Often

3. I read _____.

- not as well as my friends
- about the same as my friends
- a little better than my friends
- a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is _____.

- really fun
- fun
- OK to do
- no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can _____.

- almost always figure it out
- sometimes figure it out
- almost never figure it out
- never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.

- I never do this
- I almost never do this
- I do this some of the time
- I do this a lot

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand _____.

- almost everything I read
- some of what I read
- almost none of what I read
- none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are _____.

- very interesting
- interesting
- not very interesting
- boring

9. I am _____.

- a poor reader
- an OK reader
- a good reader
- a very good reader

(continued)

Figure 1 (continued)
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>10. I think libraries are _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a great place to spend time <input type="checkbox"/> an interesting place to spend time <input type="checkbox"/> an OK place to spend time <input type="checkbox"/> a boring place to spend time | <p>16. As an adult, I will spend _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> none of my time reading <input type="checkbox"/> very little time reading <input type="checkbox"/> some of my time reading <input type="checkbox"/> a lot of my time reading |
| <p>11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> every day <input type="checkbox"/> almost every day <input type="checkbox"/> once in a while <input type="checkbox"/> never | <p>17. When I am in a group talking about what we are reading, I _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> almost never talk about my ideas <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes talk about my ideas <input type="checkbox"/> almost always talk about my ideas <input type="checkbox"/> always talk about my ideas |
| <p>12. Knowing how to read well is _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> not very important <input type="checkbox"/> sort of important <input type="checkbox"/> important <input type="checkbox"/> very important | <p>18. I would like for my teachers to read out loud in my classes _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> every day <input type="checkbox"/> almost every day <input type="checkbox"/> once in a while <input type="checkbox"/> never |
| <p>13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> can never think of an answer <input type="checkbox"/> have trouble thinking of an answer <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes think of an answer <input type="checkbox"/> always think of an answer | <p>19. When I read out loud I am a _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> poor reader <input type="checkbox"/> OK reader <input type="checkbox"/> good reader <input type="checkbox"/> very good reader |
| <p>14. I think reading is _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a boring way to spend time <input type="checkbox"/> an OK way to spend time <input type="checkbox"/> an interesting way to spend time <input type="checkbox"/> a great way to spend time | <p>20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> very happy <input type="checkbox"/> sort of happy <input type="checkbox"/> sort of unhappy <input type="checkbox"/> unhappy |
| <p>15. Reading is _____.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> very easy for me <input type="checkbox"/> kind of easy for me <input type="checkbox"/> kind of hard for me <input type="checkbox"/> very hard for me | |

Note. Adapted with permission from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996)

Figure 2
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile
conversational interview

Name _____

A. Emphasis: Narrative text

Suggested prompt (designed to engage student in a natural conversation): I have been reading a good book. I was talking with...about it last night. I enjoy talking about what I am reading with my friends and family. Today, I would like to hear about what you have been reading and if you share it.

1. Tell me about the most interesting story or book you have read recently. Take a few minutes to think about it (wait time). Now, tell me about the book.

Probe: What else can you tell me? Is there anything else?

2. How did you know or find out about this book?

(Some possible responses: assigned, chosen, in school, out of school)

3. Why was this story interesting to you?

B. Emphasis: Informational text

Suggested prompt (designed to engage student in a natural conversation): Often we read to find out or learn about something that interests us. For example, a student I recently worked with enjoyed reading about his favorite sports teams on the Internet. I am going to ask you some questions about what you like to read to learn about.

1. Think about something important that you learned recently, not from your teacher and not from television, but from something you have read. What did you read about? (Wait time.) Tell me about what you learned.

Probe: What else could you tell me? Is there anything else?

2. How did you know or find out about reading material on this?

(Some possible responses: assigned, chosen, in school, out of school)

(continued)

Figure 2 (continued)
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile
conversational interview

3. Why was reading this important to you?

C. Emphasis: General reading

1. Did you read anything at home yesterday? What?

2. Do you have anything at school (in your desk, locker, or book bag) today that you are reading?

Tell me about them.

3. Tell me about your favorite author.

4. What do you think you have to learn to be a better reader?

5. Do you know about any books right now that you'd like to read?

Tell me about them.

6. How did you find out about these books?

7. What are some things that get you really excited about reading?

Tell me about....

(continued)

Figure 2 (continued)
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile
conversational interview

8. Who gets you really interested and excited about reading?

Tell me more about what they do.

9. Do you have a computer in your home?

If they answer yes, ask the following questions:

How much time do you spend on the computer a day?

What do you usually do?

What do you like to read when you are on the Internet?

If they answer no, ask the following questions:

If you did have a computer in your home, what would you like to do with it?

Is there anything on the Internet that you would like to be able to read?

D. Emphasis: School reading in comparison to home reading

1. In what class do you most like to read?

Why?

2. In what class do you feel the reading is the most difficult?

Why?

(continued)

Figure 2 (continued)
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile
conversational interview

3. Have any of your teachers done something with reading that you really enjoyed?

Could you explain some of what was done?

4. Do you share and discuss books, magazines, or other reading materials with your friends outside of school?

What?

How often?

Where?

5. Do you write letters or email to friends or family?

How often?

6. Do you share any of the following reading materials with members of your family:
newspapers, magazines, religious materials, games?

With whom?

How often?

7. Do you belong to any clubs or organizations for which you read and write?

Could you explain what kind of reading it is?

Note. Adapted with permission from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996)

MRP reading survey scoring sheet

Student name _____

Grade _____ Teacher _____

Administration date _____

Recoding scale

1=4

2=3

3=2

4=1

Self-concept as a reader

Value of reading

*recode 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

*recode 4. _____

*recode 5. _____

6. _____

*recode 7. _____

*recode 8. _____

9. _____

*recode 10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

*recode 15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

*recode 18. _____

19. _____

*recode 20. _____

SC raw score: _____/40

V raw score: _____/40

Full survey raw score (Self-concept & Value): _____/80

Percentage scores

Self-concept _____

Value _____

Full survey _____

Comments: _____

Note. Reprinted with permission from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996)

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