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Social and cultural influences on children's motivation for reading

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In schools around the world, the most important accomplishment in primary grades is the ability to read one's native language, because it is the gateway for continued learning. Decoding print or characters into speech, however, is a minimal threshold that must be augmented with desire and interest in reading, thoughtful strategies, scaffolded instruction, and wide opportunities to read diverse materials if children are to become independent and self-regulated learners (Paris *et al.*, 1991; Snow *et al.*, 1998). Thus, students need to acquire and apply motivation to learn to read, to monitor and construct meaning from texts, to use reading instrumentally for various purposes, and to read for pleasure and enjoyment. In this chapter, we provide a summary of theoretical principles underlying motivated reading, consider some factors that enhance or inhibit children's engaged reading, and use distinctive cultural examples to illustrate the concepts.

Principles of motivation

Theoretical approaches to motivation, particularly academic motivation in schools, have changed during the past 50 years from behavioral emphases on rewards and punishments to cognitive emphases on self-determination (Schunk *et al.*, 2008). In a simplified manner, the shift in emphasis from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation has been part of the psychological proliferation of cognitive theories about how students view themselves, learning, and school. Traditional accounts of motivation often describe behavioural consequences that enhance motivation, such as gold stars, special privileges, or public recognition and praise. The success of these consequences depends on how the child perceives the people who provide them, the information value of the consequences about one's performance, and the type of activity that is reinforced, i.e. we know that children will work hard and value success when they get valued rewards from valued people. Performance and effort can be increased for instrumental reasons or extrinsic motivation, but there is considerable, yet controversial, evidence that tangible rewards undermine intrinsic motivation (Sanson and Harackiewicz, 2000). Some reconcile the discrepant findings by noting that external rewards that signal contingent improvement

in competence or learning may enhance intrinsic motivation, whereas ambiguous or non-informative consequences may be interpreted as demeaning (Schunk *et al*., 2008). External rewards given for instrumental reasons may not undermine motivation when the rewards are interpreted as independent of self-evaluation.

In contrast to past emphases on motivation for extrinsic consequences, cognitive constructivist accounts of motivation describe how personal interpretations of events, self, and others influence the direction and force of students' efforts. Because the theories emphasize personal will, choice, and control, they can be summarized generally as theories of self-regulation. Various theories emphasize goals (Pintrich, 2000), attributions (Weiner, 2000), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-worth (Covington, 1992), and self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000). The voluminous literature can be summarized with regard to four general types of personal interpretations. One, students interpret their behaviour in terms of goals, sometimes proactively and sometimes retroactively. In general, goals that are oriented toward performance standards and reward levels set by others do not sustain motivation as well as goals that are oriented toward mastery and personal standards. Two students interpret their behaviour in terms of control, and it is more motivating in academic situations for students to feel a sense of internal control over what they do and when they do it, rather than external control of their behaviour by teachers and others. Three students interpret their own successes and failures by making attributions of causality to internal (e.g. ability and effort) or external (e.g. other people or chance) factors that may be stable or unstable over time and contexts. In general, students who take responsibility for their actions show sustained motivation more than students who attribute success and failure to factors beyond their control (Paris and Carpenter, 2004). Learned helplessness and passivity in classrooms may be a sign that students believe their own efforts cannot help them to achieve success or avoid failure. Four students perceive their general competence and worth according to their levels of performance, the reasons for their performance, and the control they exercise. Obviously, students' interpretations of goals, control, and causes of success and failure are interactive and jointly influence students' self-concepts. More nuanced theories also emphasize how one's interest in the object or activity (Renninger *et al*., 1992), the degree of personal challenge in a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and the social nature of the situation (Paris and Turner, 1994) influence motivation for reading. Research has shown generally that students regulate their motivation when the tasks are interesting, challenging, and allow social collaboration, compared to dull, boring, or frustrating tasks that are done in solitude.

Motivation for reading

These general principles can be applied to reading at school. Students in school can be motivated to read by clear extrinsic rewards, including grades and public recognition that may lead to pride or embarrassment. Success can also be marked by membership in groups that are streamed by ability and access to special programmes or schools. Parents and teachers often refer to these public markers of success as incentives or threats to motivate students to work harder and read more. In the short run, extrinsic rewards may increase motivation for reading, but research suggests that students who work in an environment in which external rewards are frequent may become increasingly oriented to the rewards and performance goals such as grades, test scores, and task completion

(Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). They tend to choose easier tasks, get frustrated and give up easily, and use superficial strategies for learning – all reactions that undermine enjoyment and understanding while reading.

There are also intrinsic factors that motivate reading. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) identified curiosity, preference for challenge, and involvement (a construct similar to 'flow experiences' [see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990]) as three fundamental aspects of intrinsic motivation for reading. Each of these constructs helps students maintain effort in reading tasks. When coupled with mastery goals and a sense of control, students with intrinsic motivation are also likely to avoid distractions and use effective reading strategies so they can complete the tasks. However, as students move from primary grades to middle school and high school, many researchers have noted paradoxical developmental shifts of decreased intrinsic motivation and increased extrinsic motivation (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). One possible reason may be the development of more accurate self-appraisal of abilities whereby some children try less because they believe that success is beyond their reach. A second possible reason for the developmental change in student motivation is the change in pedagogical practices. By grades 6–8, students are more oriented to performance goals and extrinsic motivation because teachers emphasize comparisons among students, group students by ability, and use tests and grades as indicators of ability and motivation (Wigfield *et al.*, 1996). This means that the interplay between external and internal motivation to read can shift over time under the influence of changing conditions at school.

As research on achievement motivation in academic settings proliferated, reading researchers extrapolated the studies and theories to situations in which children are learning to read or having difficulties sustaining motivation to read. Motivation to read is more than enjoying reading and more than trying hard. The term 'engaged reading' has been used to describe the dynamic interactions among factors during reading including interest, expectations, goals, strategies, and the 'flow' experience. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) said that engaged readers 'coordinate their strategies and knowledge (cognition) within a community of literacy (social) in order to fulfil their personal goals, desires, and intentions (motivation)' (404). Children who have difficulty becoming and staying engaged in reading in school often have difficulty focusing their attention, applying learning strategies, avoiding distractions, and monitoring their own behaviour, all symptomatic of poor self-regulation skills (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1997). Engagement is a useful term because it includes behavioural, cognitive, social, and even emotional aspects of reading, and it calls attention to the enactment of motivated reading in specific situations.

Engaged reading is directly related to reading achievement in brief situations involving intensive reading, and also longitudinally when engagement reflects sustained opportunities to read in and out of school across years (Campbell *et al.*, 1997). When students are deeply engaged in meaningful tasks, they exhibit a motivational 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in which they lose track of time because they are so thoroughly immersed in the task. Flow is a satisfied state of consciousness associated with intense concentration, effortless control, and deep enjoyment. Schallert and Reed (1997) describe 'involvement' in reading in similar terms. Engaged or involved readers are not distracted easily; they sustain attention through difficulties and focus on making sense of what they read. Engaged readers are on 'auto pilot', with little metacognition or cognitive monitoring needed. Involved readers may have heightened emotional arousal and reactions to text that may intensify the experience (Nell, 1988). Not surprisingly,

engaged or involved readers read more often for pleasure and have better comprehension. Thus, it is important to identify and support opportunities and teaching strategies that promote engaged reading.

Policymakers and curriculum developers must recognize that engaged reading is a function of specific literacy activities within family, community, and school practices (McNaughton, 1995). From this point of view, the degree of students' engaged reading is related to particular goals and ways of participating in literacy events, whether it is based on worksheets or projects at school, recreational reading, or internet games at home. Becoming more expert and more motivated is a function of how much the activities are valued, supported, scaffolded, and extended in the learners' immediate community.

Contemporary schooling practices ideally are designed to encourage students to become engaged readers who are self-regulated in their interactions with texts. Students need to acquire and apply motivation to learn to read and monitor and construct meaning from texts and to use reading instrumentally for various purposes. The increasing need for facility with non-routine cognitive and analytic tasks will require students to collaborate and synthesize, to search and access across disciplinary boundaries, and to be versatile, applying depth of skill to a progressively widening scope of situations and experiences, gaining new competencies, building relationships, and assuming new roles. We need to ask, 'What are the conditions in communities and schools that enable the development of engaged reading in these schooling practices?' and conversely, 'What might be the conditions that place this development at risk?'

In the next section, we describe several distinctive cultural phenomena that shape children's motivation to read. These examples of cultural ideologies and pedagogies illustrate how we need to consider more than the individual's orientation to the task of reading in order to understand why and when some children read avidly and others do not. The goals for reading, in school and out, are fostered by parents and teachers who scaffold reading to ends they value for academic success and personal growth. These ends are often interwoven in the fabric of education so they may not be apparent to students.

In the section that follows, we discuss what it means to be a motivated reader by examining specific instances of engaged and disengaged reading by students. We begin with an example of how the cultural press for early academic success is mediated by families who encourage their children to learn at an early age. Next, we consider how procedural instruction by teachers can lead to students' compliant cognition. Then we discuss how an emphasis on external, instrumental goals such as test preparation undermines engaged reading. Examples from Singapore and New Zealand illustrate the principles.

Kiasu in Singapore

Learning to read has usually been regarded as a task taught by teachers, beginning in the first year of school, but the timing varies around the world because students in some countries begin formal schooling at age 5 years, e.g. New Zealand, whereas students in other countries may begin as late as 7 years, e.g. Scandinavia. With more countries providing preschool education and with the press for early success, reading instruction has become a task for parents and preschool teachers. In Singapore, as in many countries around the world, parents are motivated to prepare their young children for school with early literacy experiences. Mee and Gan (1998) found that 95 per cent of Singaporean

parents believe it is important to learn to read in two languages, namely Chinese, which is spoken by 75 per cent of families in Singapore, and English, which is the language of instruction in Singaporean schools. Thus, parents begin instruction at home for language learning and reading. The term 'kiasu' means 'to fear falling behind' and refers, in this example, to Singaporean parents who provide extensive (and often expensive) preschool instruction to learn to read beginning at age 3–4 years.

Why do Asian parents press their children for early reading success? Mainly, they want children to have a head start on academics because, in most Asian countries, education is streamed according to ability from an early age. Preschools and kindergartens are funded usually by private, not public sources; the best preschools have competitive admission criteria, and children in Singapore are expected to know how to read English and their mother tongue language when they begin Primary 1 at age 6 years. In countries where democratic and universal education are new, meritocratic beliefs mean that Asian children are often streamed into ability tracks in primary grades, and, like many eastern European countries, an examination by grade 4–5 is used to track students into academic or vocational preparation. Because access to educational opportunities is determined by tests and achievement in primary grades, Singaporean families work for an early start in reading achievement.

Parental anxiety, kiasu, is thus a proactive source of motivation to help children excel early. Motivation to read for pleasure or as a social activity for preschoolers is less important than acquiring reading skills ahead of their peers. However, the competitive intentions driven by kiasu may not lead to effective pedagogy. Many parents teach memorization of 'sight words', a practice consistent with learning to read characters in Chinese, and direct instruction in decoding English. Bedtime reading is uncommon in many Asian countries compared to didactic reading instruction. Mee and Gan (1998) found that only 31 per cent of Singaporean parents read aloud to their children, but 69 per cent of parents try to teach their children how to read at home. Furthermore, 66 per cent of parents bought mock examination materials to use with children who are learning to read. Similar experiences of 'highly motivated' parents and children are reported in Asian countries from India to Japan, raising a concern for a pedagogy that may misdirect adult instruction as well as children's initial learning and motivation for reading. One problem is that children may believe that reading is like memorizing words, so they fail to learn adequate decoding skills. A second problem is that the lack of good models of spoken English, and daily use of oral English, means that many children may learn dialects that include non-standard grammar and articulation. A third problem is that reading is tied to performance goals, workbooks, and test results from an early age so that children exposed to this type of pedagogy may adopt superficial or instrumental goals of task completion and text interpretation rather than deep strategies for constructing meaning (Luke *et al.*, 2005). Although this might be in some senses preparation for later secondary schooling conditions more focused on extrinsic motivation, given our view of engaged reading, the practices may be at odds with contemporary needs in schooling for engaged reading.

Proceduralization of complex pedagogies

A different threat to engaged reading is the kind of proceduralization of instruction that is common in a growing number of classrooms. During the past 30 years, teachers have

been asked to apply increasingly cognitive and metacognitive principles in their literacy instruction. Although there are clear benefits for these kinds of instruction in research settings and select classrooms, in the face of the need to extend pedagogies across many classrooms there is also a clear risk of oversimplifying a complex pedagogy into a set of rules, steps, or procedures to be followed. Many teachers and students appear to follow paths of least effort, often with enthusiasm, as they sidestep the hard work of monitoring and repairing comprehension. Likewise, they avoid explicit teaching of reading strategies and skills, modelling how and when to use them, and scaffolding their instruction to individual students in favour of following simple procedures for turn-taking, periodic questions, or mechanical application of skills in worksheets.

When teachers turn instruction into a set of procedures to follow, neither teachers nor students are required to think deeply – just follow the steps and complete the task. This approach has negative influences on children's beliefs about reading and hence their motivation to read. Students focus on procedures, rules, and getting the job done, rather than thinking about the meaning of text or connecting the task to other things they are learning. Early intensive ethnographic studies described how children at the beginning of instruction develop concepts about reading that reflect the practices in the classroom. For example given an instructional regime in which flash cards dominated instruction, some children developed ideas about reading based on identifying words in isolation and having attempts corrected by the teacher, which for some children was associated with a reluctance to try new words (Francis, 1982).

Effective oral reading of rich narrative texts in early reading instruction, where the goal is comprehension as well as accuracy, requires children to be able to monitor and resolve unfamiliar words in context. Overt self-corrections indicate that monitoring and revising is taking place. In some instructional programmes, self-corrections have a high probability of occurring, so explicit instruction to develop self-monitoring is not needed; but other forms of instruction can increase dependence on the teacher's corrections (McNaughton, 1987). For example limited wait time after a reader's error reduces self-correcting and maintenance of accuracy through instructional dependence. Alternatively, there is evidence that over-reliance on prompts to use the semantic and syntactic information in the post-error sentence can produce a style of guessing, which is a problem for developing independence in word solving (Tunmer and Chapman, 1999).

The risk of proceduralization may, however, be particularly high in reading comprehension instruction. A great deal of research provides considerable evidence for the significance of developing comprehension strategies through explicit deliberate instruction (Pressley, 2002). However, there could be a problem with instructional packages presented in a formulaic way, because they undermine strategies being deployed selectively to construct appropriate meanings from texts (Paris and Cunningham, 1996; Baker, 2002). Procedures such as questioning and summarizing can become surface rituals, practised out of context, or actual reading of texts, engaged in for their own sake and divorced from the goals of reading (Afflerbach *et al.*, 2007). When this happens, students may believe that reading (at least in schools) is reduced to following a few steps and completing the task at hand, low-level performance goals that may inhibit effort and engagement.

Two intervention studies in school reform, one in the United States (Moats, 2004) and one in New Zealand (Lai *et al.*, 2009), have identified this problem through analyses of instructional features in low-performing schools. Moats (2004) described how teachers taught vocabulary without using the words in context and without teaching strategies

to garner meaning from the text. In New Zealand, analyses of instruction for Maori children (from the indigenous community) and Pasifika children (from Pacific Islands families) in low-performing urban schools, revealed that explicit strategy instruction frequently occurred, but often it was given in a formulaic way and without reference to effective use in texts. For example in guided reading lessons, students generated many predictions about narrative or expository content of texts, but rarely checked and were rarely prompted to check the accuracy of these predictions using evidence from the text. Systematic observations revealed that prompting to check predictions occurred only nine times in 16 hours of observations.

Many students in upper primary grades exhibit fast and efficient decoding but have low comprehension scores, a pattern identified across studies (Paris *et al*., 2005). Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) observed fluent readers who displayed 'excessive elaborations', i.e. guessing, when they tried to answer questions about text. In the intervention study reported by Lai *et al*. (2009), students were taught to control these strategic acts. The focus was on use determined by the goals of constructing, checking, and using appropriate meanings from texts (Pressley, 2002). This involved, among other things, teachers modelling and guiding the checking of meanings from the text and other sources. The increased self-regulation of checking was associated with significant gains on tests of paragraph comprehension. Successful intervention studies suggest that the solution to the risk of proceduralized and routinized instruction lies in the increased knowledge teachers need to understand the nature of comprehending, learning, and effective teaching. The features of effective comprehension programmes have also been identified by researchers implementing school reforms in reading (e.g. Taylor *et al*., 2005), who point out that teachers need to teach and model thoughtful strategies, provide challenging tasks, and ask higher-order questions about texts. More generally, this carries implications for the features of effective teacher education and professional development. The issue here is the balance between teachers' learning and carrying out predetermined patterns of instruction known to be effective, or developing as 'adaptive experts', with a body of knowledge and procedures, who can use and modify known instructional methods to solve issues of effective practice (Bransford *et al*., 2005; Robinson and Lai, 2006).

Finding that the problem exists across countries suggests that there is a generalized risk to motivation through the proceduralization of instruction. From the teacher's perspective this can be examined in terms of whether the teacher has the pedagogical content knowledge and the role within a professional community to act as an adaptive expert, rather than acting more like a technician. Defaulting to routines and formulaic teaching may therefore be a product of wider contextual influences, such as the manner of teacher preparation and the forms in which instructional packages and professional development are delivered.

However, in a country such as New Zealand the cultural practices associated with literacy and the nature of students' learning may add to the risk. The presence of deeply ingrained patterns of learning through imitation and recitation of texts, and the role of authority in guiding learning may limit sustained motivation and engaged reading in the ideal school reading practices of independent problem solving and negotiating meanings. Jones (1991) described the ways in which Pasifika girls in a New Zealand high school negotiated a change in classroom instruction. Through their questions and patterns of non-compliance in the classroom discourse, they shifted the teaching that was focused on discussion and inquiry towards a pattern of presenting information to

be copied. But rather than this merely being work avoidance and cognitive economy that is misdirecting instruction in the classroom, the students' lack of engagement reflected beliefs about their motivation to engage in particular practices that were not generative for school learning

The motivational costs of instrumental goals

Many students are motivated to read better in order to score well on academic tests, specifically high-stakes tests. Some teachers and parents deplore this kind of instrumental motivation as counterproductive for the development of independent readers, while others applaud test-taking skills as necessary for academic success. Certainly, the increased use of high-stakes tests throughout the world in the past 30 years for educational tracking and access to better opportunities has increased the time spent in school on learning to take tests. Singapore education is driven by high-stakes tests, beginning with the Pupil School Leaving Exam (PSLE) in primary grade 6 and continuing in the O level and A level exams taken in secondary school. The high-stakes test results are used to rank order the schools in Singapore, and the rank is public information, published in performance league tables and signalled by awarding medals of achievement. Likewise, students are tested, streamed, and ranked beginning in primary grades, and both students and parents know the comparative information. Thus, kiasu that drives parents to help their preschoolers get a head start also motivates families to succeed on high-stakes tests.

The cultural ethos for education in Singapore is so deeply entrenched in testing that teaching to the test and learning for the test drive the pedagogy of most parents and teachers. Most students go to at least one or two tutors after school and on weekends, and most parents buy commercial materials such as practice tests and test-taking tips every year (Tan, 2007). After-school learning is a primary activity for students in most Asian countries. Students are motivated to succeed on tests so the pedagogy of drilling, memorizing, and taking practice tests takes precedence over reading for pleasure or other purposes. When test-taking skills undermine good reading strategies by teaching short-cuts to identify correct answers, or undermine enjoyment and free reading, then both teachers and students are at risk for being motivated to read for instrumental ends that do not sustain a life-long love of reading.

Although the Ministry of Education issued broad initiatives called 'Thinking Schools, Learning Nation' and 'Teach Less, Learn More' to decrease the emphasis on didactic teaching and exam preparation, the practices in classrooms have been slow to respond (Tan, 2007). Consequently, learning to read is focused on completing specific tasks and meeting specific standards. Reading, like other school subjects, is highly instrumental for Singaporean students. Perhaps it is not surprising that their test-driven pedagogies have produced students who score above most countries in international comparisons (e.g. PISA and TIMSS), but it may be surprising to note that Asian students consistently report lower self-concepts and more anxiety than students in other countries (Wilkins, 2004).

The motivational costs of reading for instrumental purposes, such as scoring well on high-stakes tests, is a global issue because testing has become so pervasive as a means of identifying and sorting high achievers. These kinds of threats, such as the pressures from high-stakes testing, to the motivation and academic success of students most at

risk, have been noted by many researchers (e.g. Berliner, 2006). It is clear that assessment practices that emphasize normative, comparative, public use of performance data may undermine children's motivation to read for pleasure, mastery, and learning. The increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing may motivate children for the test, but the unintended consequences may be overwhelmingly negative for children's motivation to read, particularly for children already at risk (Paris and McEvoy, 2000). Thus, pedagogies for reading instruction must also promote better assessment techniques so students are motivated to succeed for their own mastery goals.

Conclusion

Students in school are motivated to read for many purposes. Some are instrumental, such as pleasing parents or teachers or receiving high marks on examinations. These goals engender superficial engagement with reading that yield modest effort and superficial comprehension. Other goals are personal and may be oriented to mastery and personal satisfaction. Research has shown that sociocultural orientations to reading and schooling may foster either deep or superficial goals. Likewise, teachers' pedagogies may foster engaged or disengaged readers. Teachers are faced with the task of interpreting cultural, familial, and personal orientations to learning that affect children's motivation to read in their classrooms. It is a difficult task in a short period of time, but it is essential for teachers to understand students' motivation for reading so that they can accommodate the differences among students in their choice of materials, methods of instruction, and types of assessments. Insightful teachers who are attuned to their students make these choices every day so that their students are challenged and take control of their own learning.

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