

Motivating adolescent readers

EDUCATORS CAN USE THE LATEST RESEARCH ON READING MOTIVATION
TO INCREASE STUDENTS' CHANCES FOR SUCCESS

by **Carla Thomas McClure**

For young children, motivation to become a good reader is frequently cited as an important factor in attaining proficiency, along with access to reading materials, development of reading skills, and early success as a reader (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Because poor readers tend to read less on their own time and therefore get less practice than good readers, they often begin falling behind early in their school careers. Some studies indicate the cycle may begin as early as 1st grade (Morgan, Fuchs, Compton, Cordray, & Fuchs, in press). To put the brakes on the cycle of early reading failure, experts recommend that educators target both reading skills and motivation.

Once students reach middle school, however, even “good readers” often seem less interested in reading. So, just as students’ academic reading assignments become more challenging, teachers are faced with a challenge of their own: how to get students to read more (a necessary part of improving reading achievement), to learn from what they read, and to sustain interest in literacy activities.

The research on reading motivation is not robust enough to provide a sure-fire solution to this dilemma. A recent study, however, offers interesting insights. The study began when a team of researchers adapted the Motivation to Read Profile for use with adolescents.

What is the Motivation to Read Profile?

The Motivation to Read Profile was original-

Keys to motivating teen readers

- Recognize the multiple literacies students are involved in outside of school and find ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction.
- Model your own reading enjoyment.
- Incorporate engaging activities, such as literature circles and book club, into regular instruction.
- Include reading materials of varied formats, levels, and topics.
- Incorporate elements of choice in readings and projects.

Source: *Pitcher et al., 2007*



ly developed by the national Reading Research Center to assess the value elementary school students put on reading and their self-concept as a reader. The instrument was informed by research and theory on motivation and by analysis of existing instruments that measured reading motivation and attitudes toward reading. The Motivation to Read Profile consists of a 20-item survey and a conversational interview. The teacher reads the survey items to the class and asks students to mark their responses individually. One item, for example, asks students to complete the statement “Students who read a lot are _____.” Response choices are very interesting, interesting, not very interesting, and boring. The conversational interview includes 14 questions

EDVANTIA™

Carla Thomas McClure is a staff writer at Edvantia (www.edvantia.org), a nonprofit research and development organization that works with federal, state, and local education agencies to improve student achievement.

designed to help teachers gain insights into students' narrative, informational, and general reading habits and attitudes.

How was the Profile adapted for use with adolescent readers?

After reviewing the research on adolescent literacy and learning, a team of 11 researchers revised the language and content of the original survey to include items on the use of electronic resources, the kinds of academic work students enjoy, and the reading and writing students do on their own. Interview questions were adapted to help teachers learn more about in- and out-of-school literacies and technologies.

How did the researchers administer the new Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile?

Eleven researchers at eight sites administered the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile to 384 students who attended schools in various areas of the United States and the Caribbean. The sample comprised an ethnically diverse group of students in grades 6-12. Survey responses were collected from all 384 students, and 100 of these students were interviewed.

What did the researchers learn?

Discrepancies between survey and interview responses led to an intriguing discovery — several teens who indicated on the survey that they didn't read much later revealed during interviews that they spent hours each week reading online content. But they didn't think such activities "counted" as reading. In general, analysis of student responses revealed a disconnect between academic and other forms of reading. Outside of school, many students use e-mails, instant messaging, chat rooms, online news sites, and other

Internet resources. At school, however, reading is mostly limited to a small pool of print resources. There, students may have little opportunity to choose what they read, engage in reading activities that seem purposeful and meaningful, discuss readings with peers, use online literacy tools, and connect academic and personal interests.

What's the "take-home lesson" for teachers?

The researchers concluded that "using adolescents' preferred reading materials and modes of instruction" can lead to "increased motivation, and perhaps to improvements in reading outcomes." They caution against overgeneralization of their findings. Based on their study and their understanding of others' research, however, they suggest five ways to motivate teen readers (see box on p. 9).

References

- Gambrell, L.B., Palmer, B.M., Coddling, R.M., & Mazzone, S.A. (1995).** *Assessing motivation to read.* University of Georgia and University of Maryland: National Reading Research Center.
- Morgan, P.L. & Fuchs, D. (2007).** Is there a bidirectional relationship between children's reading skills and reading motivation? *Exceptional Children*, 73(2), 165-183.
- Morgan, P.L., Fuchs, D., Compton, D.L., Cordray, D.S., & Fuchs, L.S. (In press).** Does early reading failure decrease children's reading motivation? *Journal of Learning Disabilities.*
- Pitcher, S.M., Albright, L.K., Delaney, C.J., Walker, N.T. Seunarinesingh, K., Mogge, S., et al. (2007).** Assessing adolescents' motivation to read. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(5), 378-396. ♦

Read the article

The Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile, intended for use with students in Grades 6-12, is included in an article published by Sharon M. Pitcher and colleagues in the February 2007 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. The article is available online, for a small fee, from the International Reading Association at www.reading.org.

Using the Motivation to Read Profile with your students

You can administer the Motivation to Read Profile to your students and use the results to plan instructional activities that will hold their interest and support their development as readers.

The original instrument, developed by Linda B. Gambrell and colleagues for students in Grades 1 through 5, is available through ERIC:

www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/14/04/a6.pdf