MOTIVATING THE RELUCTANT ADOLESCENT READER

by

Jillene K. Dwyer

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

May, 2013
ABSTRACT

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Jillene K. Dwyer

Despite the fact that research has shown a strong positive correlation between reading and academic achievement, many adolescents who are capable of reading at or beyond grade level do not choose reading as an activity during their free time. The problem with such **illiterate** students lies in a lack of motivation to read rather than a lack of ability. While educators implement many remediation interventions for struggling readers, the issue of motivating competent readers to independently incorporate reading into their daily lives is largely under addressed. This study consists of a review of literature on the topic of reading motivation: why it seems to decline during the middle school years, why addressing the issue in schools is so important, and methods teachers and school librarians can apply to inspire adolescents toward a reading habit that will continue throughout their lives.
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CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Middle school teachers and teacher librarians see an extremely diverse range of reading habits among the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders they serve. Many educators are aware of the chronic issues surrounding reading abilities and how to best address their broad spectrum in the library and the classroom. A much more subtle and under addressed issue, however, is the prevalence of students who are not necessarily struggling readers in terms of ability, but who have low or nonexistent motivation to read.

A small number of students visit their school libraries multiple times a week, checking out the maximum number of books allowed at a time, asking what new books have come in, eagerly discussing with the library staff the books they have enjoyed or not. A far greater number of students come to the library only with their communication arts classes on their regular checkout schedule, and often do not check out a single book, even though many of them are competent readers. While it is understandable that a teenager who is not adept at reading does not enjoy it or select it as a recreational activity, the reasons surrounding capable readers’ low motivation are more obscure.

Purpose of the Study

Because of the research providing evidence of the various benefits of reading at all ages, teachers and school librarians have a responsibility to discern the factors contributing to low reading motivation in their educational environments and develop effective methods for increasing students’ desire to read independently.
This paper will examine relevant research and literature to offer insight into the causes of low reading motivation in adolescent students, the potential academic effects of students’ not participating in independent reading, the influence of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivational methods, new and alternative literacies, and ways educators can use current technology and other means to facilitate students becoming lifelong readers. The focus of this paper is on students whose reading ability is generally at or above grade level, but who rarely, if ever, choose reading as an activity during their free time.

In contrast to required reading in the educational setting, independent reading, by definition, is an activity that people choose voluntarily. The purpose may be for information or for pleasure, and the reading material and the time and place to read are a result of the reader’s personal choice and preferences (Cullinan, 2000). Independent reading means choosing to read over other activity options without external incentives or requirements (prizes, reports, assessments); the pleasure and satisfaction of reading being considered its own reward (Rosalia, 2002). Many different terms for “independent reading” are used throughout the literature on the topic, including recreational reading, voluntary reading, leisure reading, spare time reading, and reading outside of school (Cullinan, 2000).

The results of this study demonstrate that careful collaboration between school librarians and classroom teachers, using methods recommended by literacy experts, can provide a culture of independent reading that will motivate adolescents to read on their own and develop a lifetime affinity for reading. Teenagers not only benefit from the improved ability that frequent free reading develops; they realize an avenue of escape, a
way of extending their learning beyond the classroom, an igniting of curiosity, and a kindling of their desire to become lifelong learners (Gordon, 2010).

**Research Questions**

The research for this paper involved review of studies and professional development texts on the topics of reading motivation and free reading programs, as well as exploration of literature published in various education and library trade journals by library professionals and literacy experts. A few guiding questions were used to narrow the focus of the literature review:

1. What are the key reasons that many adolescents do not choose to read on their own time?
2. What is the relationship between free voluntary reading programs in schools and adolescents’ motivation to read in their own free time?
3. What are some strategies school librarians and classroom teachers can use to increase students’ motivation to read?
4. How can current technology be utilized to increase reading motivation among adolescents?

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study include the amount of quantitative action research that has been conducted, the amount of peer-reviewed literature published on the topic, and the difficulty measuring intrinsic motivation beyond student surveys and response questionnaires. The results cannot be generalized to the entire field of library instruction; but can be used to guide librarians and teachers with methods of increasing reading motivation.
Research Design

This study used guiding questions to review data and information from previously published books and journal articles, databases, and webinars. It did not involve any action research, but was an exploration of various education resources and a synthesis of the related meanings expressed therein.

Articles were retrieved from the following databases: Academic Search Elite, Library Literature and Information Full Text, and Education Resource Information Center (ERIC). Other articles were found in education and library trade journals, and information was gathered from books written by reading and literacy experts.

This study includes three chapters relating to various reasons for low reading motivation and educator recommended methods for increasing students’ desire to engage in independent reading. Chapter two is a review of the literature. The final chapter consists of answers to the research questions posed in chapter one, and a discussion that includes conclusions and recommendations. Teachers and school librarians have a responsibility to discern the factors contributing to low reading motivation in their educational environments and develop effective methods for increasing students’ desire to read independently.
CHAPTER 2:
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study cites research that demonstrates the various benefits of free voluntary reading, which establishes a foundation for the importance of building students’ reading motivation. The problem of aliteracy, or the situation of capable readers choosing not to read, is one that teachers and school librarians can collaborate to positively influence, if they are aware of effective strategies. Literacy experts and education researchers have begun in recent years to place higher priority on the topic of reading motivation than in the past, conducting studies, publishing journal articles, and writing professional development books for educators. There are various types of readers that have various purposes for reading, as well as purposes for not reading. This study examines those purposes and the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators on teenagers’ choice to read. Finally, the literature review explores a variety of approaches and strategies for developing a strong reading culture in schools.

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) and Student Achievement

Research continues to support the benefits that people gain from reading, and from independent reading in particular. Reading motivation is a key to adolescents’ self-efficacy (Gordon, 2010). Qualitative and quantitative research has upheld the theory that reading achievement is positively correlated with academic success, a positive attitude toward reading, and frequency of independent reading (Cullinan, 2000). This direct correlation demonstrates a “success cycle” in which people become more competent at that which they practice, and consequently derive more pleasure from the activity. Additionally, exposure to print is a strong indicator of spelling ability, vocabulary
knowledge, and general world knowledge (Cullinan). McPherson (2007) offers evidence of the correlation between engaged reading and achievement and cites research that suggests that motivated readers hold positive beliefs about themselves as overall learners (McPherson, 2007).

Author of *The Power of Reading* (2004) and one of the premier researchers of the effects of Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) on student achievement, Stephen Krashen claims that FVR programs, if kept in place long enough, are as effective as direct reading instruction in helping students gain on test results (as cited in Everhart, Angelos, McGriff, 2002). Results of various in-school free reading studies led Krashen to develop the “reading hypothesis,” which asserts that more reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development. He also asserts that children who do not develop a reading habit might be less successful amidst the complex literacy demands of modern society (Rosalia, 2002). Even if reluctant readers are not initially struggling readers, their reading ability might naturally diminish and begin affecting other areas of academic achievement (Worthy, 1996).

Krashen (2004) claims the cure for what he calls a “literacy crisis” is dependent on the increase of free voluntary reading. He identifies 51 studies that prove students in free reading programs perform better than or equal to students in any other type of reading program, and that students have higher motivation to read outside of school when they get to read in school (Miller & Anderson, 2009). Although creative library programming and teacher librarian book promotion can be useful for motivating some students, they are passive in nature. Giving students the opportunity to read in school is an active method of motivation that has proven more effective (Gordon, 2010). Krashen
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(2004) cites certain essential elements of a successful FVR program: freedom of choice in reading materials, a print-rich environment, access to large library collections, time for Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) in school, encouragement, comfortable places to read, and modeling of reading by parents, friends, and teachers.

SSR provides designated quiet time for students (and often teachers, administrators, and custodians) to read during the school day. Pilgreen and Krashen (1993) claim that students participating in SSR programs have shown significant increases in the amount of reading they do outside of school, and those effects remain years after the program (as cited in Gordon, 2010). Donalyn Miller, sixth grade teacher and co-author of The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child (Miller & Anderson, 2009), has observed that her students are much more likely to read a book if they started it at school, and that FVR or SSR frees them to read books they want to read, instead of switching between a book for school and a book of their own choosing. Despite the findings of SSR’s value and efficacy, however, reading researchers and other such proponents of SSR programs are discouraged to find that its practice in schools has actually declined (Gordon, 2010).

The Problem of Aliteracy

Regardless of the reasons underlying their aversion to reading, many people are what educators call “reluctant readers” or “aliterates.” These are people who have the ability to read but choose not to; and according to Cullinan (2000), they miss just as much as those who cannot read. Research suggests that only about 20% of American adults in 1994 who were able to read actually did so on a regular basis (Cramer & Castle, 1994), and that nearly 60% of adult Americans had never read a book, with most of the
rest reading only one book a year (Woiwode, 1992; as cited in Cramer & Castle). Over the course of a decade, the number of adults who do not read books continued to wane, as demonstrated by a National Endowment for the Arts (as cited in Layne, 2009) survey: Fifty-two percent of Americans age 18 to 24 reported reading no books for pleasure in 2002, which was a 12% decline from 1992. The decline for 25 to 30 year olds was 8%, and for 35 to 44 year olds, 11%.

Much like their adult counterparts, students have demonstrated a steady decline in the percentage that report reading for pleasure outside of school, according to National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics for the years 1979 to 2001 (as cited in Lesesne, 2006). Other research, including two self-report surveys by McCoy et al. (as cited in Cullinan, 2000), has also found a significant drop in students’ recreational reading during their middle school years.

The reasons underlying the decline of independent reading as students become middle schoolers are as varied as the students themselves. In a 2008-2010 Delaware Reading Initiative survey of students’ reading habits, teens who said they do not like to read cited several reasons: school reading is forced and offers little choice, reading is mentally and physically difficult because it requires focus and sitting still, and reading is boring and has no value for their life or their future (Gordon, 2010). Research conducted by Krashen and Von Sprecken (2002), however, makes a distinction by suggesting it is not the interest level or desire to read that declines as students get older, but rather the frequency of recreational reading due to more limited access to books and the pressure of other activities. For many students, low reading motivation is primarily a result of a lack of access to books that interest them (Shin, 2001).
Today’s students do face many more opportunities and competing demands on their free time than ever before. Television, video games, and the Internet are provocative options for teenagers, and increased participation in competitive sports and various lessons have led to what some consider an epidemic of overscheduling teens’ time outside of school (Layne, 2009). Another obstacle is the abundance of busy households, many headed by a single parent, with no time to model reading to their children. Such households often also necessitate a lot of teens’ time, helping with day-to-day duties. As with any skill, reading capability declines when not regularly practiced.

Some students stop reading because they lack confidence in their ability, especially if deficient scores on reading assessments have negatively reinforced that low confidence (Rosalia, 2002). Because abstract thinking does not fully develop until the adolescent years, reluctant readers in middle school may interpret books too literally, which can often have an adverse effect on their reading comprehension and appreciation (Stringer & Mollineaux, 2003). As children mature, the shift from concrete to abstract interpretations of text can parallel teens’ understanding of themselves. Attitudes of learned helplessness can also contribute to a lack of motivation to read. Some reluctant readers believe they cannot succeed, no matter how hard they try; resulting in the sense that they have no control over their achievement. According to McPherson (2007), reading specialists believe the most powerful tool for counteracting that impression is to repeatedly tell students they are capable, encouraging a strong concept of themselves as readers.

While avid readers enjoy the search through the shelves for that perfect book, reluctant readers often do not possess good search and selection strategies, which can
make a trip to the library an overwhelming and unsatisfying experience. According to Mackey and Johnston (1996), such readers have no received categories for dividing a large collection of books into meaningful and manageable subsections in their minds, so they do not know how to locate books that may interest them. When teachers and librarians hand reluctant readers a recommended book or preselect a book that all students will read together, they actually undermine the selection process, which is a necessary mastery for students to become readers. Mackey and Johnston suggest several methods for increasing student awareness of selection strategies, including having students work in small groups with different books, asking them to share with each other their own tactics for picking the right book out of the mass, and reading the beginning part of a book aloud to assist weaker readers in “tuning the voices on the page” (Meek, cited in Mackey & Johnston). Another selection activity involves distributing three or four books to each student in a class and asking them to choose the most appealing one and reflect in pairs on the guiding criteria. Teachers can also foster the selection process by allowing students the opportunity to make choices from a manageable collection of books (like a class library) with a broad range of offerings, including graphic novels, nonfiction, sophisticated picture books, and books about a variety of cultures.

**Reading Motivation in Education Research and Policy**

Although teachers and librarians have long dealt with reading motivation issues, those issues have only in the last couple of decades begun to gain attention on broader levels. A 1992 poll of International Reading Association members in the U.S., conducted by the U.S. National Reading Research Center, showed that four of the top ten research areas teachers considered most important were related to reading motivation (Cramer &
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Castle, 1994). Despite that fact, numerous researchers and authors believe that the issue of reading motivation deserves much more attention than it is currently receiving in the education field. Stephen Layne, literacy consultant and author of the book Igniting a Passion For Reading (2009), believes the affective domain of reading is largely ignored in schools, primarily because it is not considered a curricular objective. Layne claims that the mechanics of reading (phonetics, fluency, comprehension, semantics, and syntax) require the majority of teachers’ effort and focus, in preparation for standardized tests. Factors of student motivation, interest, and attitude toward reading are not typically measured, tested, or legislated, so they are rarely given consideration in district strategic plans or in teacher education courses. Miller and Anderson (2009) agree that the way to help students develop a lifelong love of reading is for it to become a necessary and valued part of every school day. Dr. Ron Myers, principal at Miller’s school, wholeheartedly supports her efforts, saying, “Reading must lead our agenda as public school teachers and administrators, not in a way that is narrowly defined but in a way that helps students discover their own sense of purpose” (p. 180).

Literacy experts and authors like Miller, Layne, and Kelly Gallagher (author of numerous books on reading and writing) are dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of building students’ reading motivation; not only through their writing, but by serving as consultants and keynote speakers at educator professional development meetings and conventions all over the country. Similarly, library organizations and other groups with a literacy focus are developing programs to specifically target aliterate readers. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA, a division of the American Library Association) has created an annual book recommendation list for ages
12 through 18 called “Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers.” Stating that their mission is to find the “right book for the right teen at the right time” (Watson & Stencel, 2005, p. 8), the Quick Picks Committee searches for books that will spark teens’ interest in books and reading. The committee pays close attention to cover art, illustrations, title, tone, content, and other aspects that would draw a reluctant reader to pick up a book and want to read it (2006 Quick Picks Committee). They are on a constant quest for “gateway books:” books that a reluctant reader will select, read in entirety, talk about with friends, and then request another similar title. Because YALSA’s purpose is fostering teen empowerment and encouraging teen participation, the Quick Picks Committee involves teens (preferably reluctant readers) in reviewing and commenting on the selected books. Each year the final list includes about 80 books and features a Top Ten Quick Picks of the committee members’ favorite titles.

**Types of Readers**

Students’ attitudes about reading are determined by their prior experiences, and by middle school they have usually characterized themselves as readers or nonreaders (Miller & Anderson, 2009). Miller believes in using more positive terms than “struggling” or “reluctant” to describe what she has discerned from her experience with sixth grade students as three types of readers: developing readers, dormant readers, and underground readers.

Developing readers are those whose reading ability is below grade level and reading scores on standardized tests are historically low (Miller & Anderson, 2009). Although they are usually targeted with intervention or remediation, those settings typically give them little opportunity to actually practice reading, resulting in their
reading 75% less than their peers in regular classrooms. Miller recommends that developing readers need instruction on reading strategies and substantial time for independent reading. They need to experience success on their level to begin to develop a sense of themselves as capable readers.

Dormant readers, who make up the largest segment, are capable readers who read only to fulfill assignments or pass tests; they do not view reading as an enjoyable or worthwhile activity outside of school. Miller and Anderson believe these students have simply never had proper support or modeling to show them that reading can be enjoyable, and that they fly under many teachers’ radar because most of teachers’ energy and instructional resources are spent on developing readers. A classroom setting that gives these dormant readers a chance to enjoy reading on their own terms is necessary for them to realize that reading can be a worthwhile investment of their free time.

Underground readers are gifted, avid readers who view school reading as completely disconnected from reading they do on their own. Miller believes their reading needs go unaddressed because teachers are focusing on the more obvious needs of developing and dormant readers. They are often unengaged in whole-class reading activities and lessons because most units are designed to support readers at or below grade level and do not meet underground readers’ ability and level of sophistication. According to Miller and Anderson, the use of too many terms coined by educators (real reading, authentic reading, independent reading) has contributed to the disconnect some students feel by differentiating how students supposedly read in school from how they read in the rest of their lives.
Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Researchers and educators with a particular mission to “reach” reluctant student readers propose a myriad of different methods and approaches based on psychology, research, experience, and educational pedagogy. The debate over whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation has more influence on reading habits is evident throughout the literature. Many librarians and reading teachers demonstrate a belief in extrinsic motivation by using competitions and incentives to encourage reading (Gordon, 2010). Widely used programs such as Accelerated Reader (AR) and Reading Counts rely on point systems in conjunction with rewards or grades as an external motivator for students.

Despite the widespread use of extrinsic motivation techniques, however, much of the research contradicts its effectiveness. According to one study of junior high school students, Accelerated Reader was actually a negative motivational factor for advanced readers, largely because of the students’ lack of freedom in choosing reading materials and the limited supply of AR titles in the school library (Haycock, 2005). Alfie Kohn’s book Punished by Rewards: The Trouble With Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A’s, Praise, and Other Bribes claims that extrinsic motivation can actually work against the very behaviors and attitudes it tries to influence, including independent reading. He uses examples and research to demonstrate how rewards can punish those who do not receive them, rupture relationships between students and between students and teachers, ignore the reasons for a desired behavior, and discourage risk taking (as cited in Johnson, 1999).

Programs that award points or grades for reports or summaries turned in to the teacher become extrinsic punishment for aliterate readers who don’t do the writing...
assignment, usually because they didn't read the book (Gordon, 2010). Kohn asserts that people are likely to believe a task must be undesirable if an extrinsic reward must be given to ensure its performance (as cited in Johnson, 1999). Most reading experts agree that extrinsic motivators actually undermine students’ intrinsic motivation to read by devaluing the activity of reading (Rosalia, 2002) and by suggesting that students are naturally averse to reading and must be rewarded for doing so (Gordon, 2010). Krashen (as cited in Everhart et al., 2002) also believes that incentives are not necessary for students to achieve in reading, that they will achieve as much by having read alouds, book discussions, and access to good books.

Summer reading programs that offer incentives and rewards are another widely used example of extrinsic motivation. They have become a popular attempt to stem the loss of learning that occurs during summer break from the school environment. Research shows family income is the greatest predictor of setbacks in reading comprehension and word recognition during the summer months, making the socioeconomic achievement gap even wider during that time (Gordon, 2010). Low-income students demonstrate a loss of three months grade level equivalency, compared to a one-month loss for middle to upper-income students. The effect is even greater for students with special education needs and English language learners who speak another language at home. Although summer reading programs are well-intentioned efforts to promote reading, they can have a negative effect on motivation. They often undermine free choice by requiring reading from a prescribed list, disregard transliteracy (reading across non-print media formats), and lack stimulating tasks that would increase situational interest.
Many students are unfamiliar with educational settings that promote intrinsic motivation. They could benefit from reading programs that de-emphasize extrinsic rewards and promote social responsibility, setting personal and group goals, taking ownership for actions, and developing individual and group motivated critical thinking and reasoning skills, strategies that will help them become self-directed learners and readers (McPherson, 2007). In order for students to fully engage in reading, they must view it as a pleasurable activity. Doug Johnson (1999) advocates finding ways to use reading motivation programs like Accelerated Reader carefully, and without all the prizes and rewards. He references one Tuscaloosa, Alabama, librarian who has had good luck modifying AR so that the only reward is recognition of kids as they move from one point club to another. Her library circulation numbers showed the success of her program: 43,000 books read by 270 kids in seven months.

Gordon (2010) cites Krashen’s pleasure hypothesis in proposing that students need the opportunity to discover reading as its own reward, which requires educators to broaden their definition of what qualifies as reading to meet all kinds of readers where they are. One researcher discovered in a qualitative intrinsic motivation study that different students have different “literacy personalities” (Cole, 2003). Using Pintrich and DeGroot’s three categories of general motivation constructs, Cole organized the facets of intrinsic reading motivation into beliefs, affective reactions, and reasons and purposes for participation and engagement. She proposes that teachers can support students’ intrinsic motivation by getting to know their literacy personalities and responding to their individual needs in those areas. Teens who say they like to read mention various intrinsic motivators as contributing factors, saying they feel free to choose the right book, feel
transported by reading, and feel it meets their intellectual and emotional needs (Gordon, 2010).

**Developing an Independent Reading Culture**

Dr. Rob Furman, an elementary principal near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and author of *Instructional Technology Tools*, believes in fostering an “independent reading culture” in schools (Digital Media for Social Learning community, 2013). He is convinced that students will be motivated to become lifelong readers if they are part of a school environment that recognizes the benefits of a reading program and wholeheartedly supports designating time for truly independent reading during the school day. He asserts that educators should spend more time showing students how to love reading than focusing on evaluating skills. In his book *Igniting a Passion for Reading*, Layne (2009) outlines a number of key factors for educators to include in the formation of a school culture of independent reading: choice, access to books, knowing students and books, reading role models, reading aloud, library programming, social aspects of reading, incorporating technology and Web 2.0, and expanding the concept of literacy.

**Choice**

Engagement is considered by many educators to be the most important condition for learning and a successful classroom (Miller & Anderson, 2009). Reading is engaging for students, according to Miller, if it is free from anxiety, has personal value, offers success, and is modeled by a respected person. One method of fostering the engagement that leads to intrinsic reading motivation is to provide students with access to a wide range of reading material and to give them autonomy in choosing what they read and how to respond after reading (Cullinan, 2000). Respecting students’ choices, regardless of the
perceived quality of the literature, ensures that interest remains a primary motivator (Worthy, 1996). Miller and Anderson (2009) believe that allowing students to self-select the books they read is the most important motivator for students to “embrace their inner reader.” That freedom of choice empowers and encourages students, strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, gives them an element of control, and promotes positive attitudes by valuing the reader. Reading programs that use competition and artificial measures of success cause students to read for points or rewards instead of reading what they would really like to read (Gordon, 2010).

Furman’s idea of an “independent reading culture” includes teachers allowing students to read what they want without judging their choices (Digital Media for Social Learning community, 2013). Students who say they do not like to read often blame the fact that most of their school reading is mandated by teachers, giving them little choice in the matter. Teachers often do not value materials like comics, magazines, blogs, and websites as actual “reading,” so students who enjoy those materials continue to view themselves as nonreaders, further perpetuating a lack of self-efficacy (Gordon, 2010).

**Access to Books**

Another step in building a school reading culture is to ensure that all students have access to numerous books that fit their reading levels, interests, and genres. Krashen (as cited in Gordon, 2010) has determined that students with easy access to books and time for recreational reading experience more academic gains, but many students do not have books at home or available time for reading. Although most schools have libraries, literacy experts strongly advocate for teachers to build rich classroom libraries and to allow class time for FVR or SSR (Layne, 2009).
Shin (2001) conducted a research study to examine the effects of a self-selected reading program by providing daily access to popular books and silent reading time. After the six-week summer school reading program, the students who had consistent access to high-interest reading material (primarily magazines and *Goosebumps* books by R.L. Stine) and participated in regular Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) sessions showed higher gains in reading comprehension scores and vocabulary tests than the control group. Results from the student interviews revealed 86% of the students had begun to read more at home since the program started. Students also stated they liked reading better and will continue to read after the program ends. Shin concluded that children develop positive attitudes toward reading when they are allowed the opportunity to self-select literature and are exposed to a print-rich environment. Likewise, Cullinan (2000) concludes that essential factors in fostering reading enjoyment include giving adequate time for independent, self-chosen reading; demonstrating the value and pleasure of reading and writing; and making technology available in the search for information.

**Knowing Students and Books**

Educators are in a unique position that combines a broader awareness of reading with specific personal knowledge about students (Mackey & Johnston, 1996). Mackey and Johnston stress the importance of teachers and librarians not only knowing the books that are available, but fully utilizing their knowledge about students’ individual abilities and preferences to motivate them. In this way, classroom teachers take on some of the readers’ advisory role that librarians have historically fulfilled. Simon (2012) encourages student educators to foster “connoisseurship,” a deep, sustaining understanding of students as a basis for knowing and teaching individuals based on their needs. He says,
“Connoisseurship is fundamentally about working against assumptions of standardization: cultivating understandings of students not as a collection of performance indicators, but as complex individuals within an individual community” (p. 523). Simon believes that appreciation is best achieved through intentional inquiry, asking about and truly listening to students’ beliefs.

Layne (2009) advocates several methods for teachers to get to know their students’ preferences in order to make informed reading recommendations, including genuine conversations with students, giving interest surveys and reading self-assessments, and having students share goals to stretch themselves as readers. Just as important for teachers, according to Layne, is being well-versed and current on young adult literature. Referencing or subscribing to reliable journals, library organizations, and websites that list, review, and promote good children’s books can keep teachers aware of quality available literature as it is published; and reading as many young adult books as possible gives teachers and librarians an edge when it comes to helping kids find the right book. Book chats that include an engaging hook and a possible excerpt are an effective way to promote books to entire classes of students.

As teachers identify strategies lacking in certain individual students, they can model and teach those strategies, allowing time for students to practice (McPherson, 2007). Teachers build readers’ confidence and motivation by helping them develop reading stamina and by teaching them how to curate their own reading lives using tools such as GoodReads.com, StudentPublishing.com, and various edublogs (Digital Media for Social Learning community, 2013). Researcher John Guthrie (cited in McClure, 2008) has identified “ten elements that set the stage for engagement and motivation in
reading: conceptual orientation, real-world instruction, autonomy support (providing students with meaningful choices), interesting texts, strategy instruction, collaborative learning, teacher involvement (e.g., interest in student knowledge, preferences, and abilities), appropriate rewards and specific praise, and evaluation aligned with instructional purposes” (p. 75).

**Reading Role Models**

Many children and adolescents do not see adults reading on a regular basis, because busy schedules and increased demands on parents and teachers mean that many adults have trouble making reading a priority in their lives, even if they enjoy it. It is difficult for kids to connect reading to their future and view it as an enjoyable activity if they have no adult role models for it. Miller (2009) says it is crucial for teachers to become role models since many students do not have adult reading role models at home. Layne (2009) encourages teachers to share their reading experiences with students, telling them about books with which they have made a connection during their lifetime and posting a teacher reading log that shows what they are reading and how they rate it. He says that teachers must read materials at the interest level of their students, so they can make educated recommendations. Applegate and Applegate found that teachers’ reading habits and views on reading not only influence their students’ motivation, attitude, and reading behaviors; they are linked to students’ reading achievement (as cited in Miller, 2009).

**Reading Aloud**

*Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* (cited in Layne, 2009) gave numerous recommendations to parents, calling reading aloud “the
single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading” (p. 52), and stressing that it should continue through all grades. Although many people associate read-alouds with elementary school circle time, literacy experts and researchers believe it is an invaluable tool at all age levels. Layne believes reading aloud is the best strategy, claiming that it is the most “seductive” method of bringing books to kids, fosters discussion, and allows teachers to model various reading skills and strategies. Because of a two-year difference in adolescents’ reading and listening levels, reading books aloud can also give students access to books with more complex texts and more mature vocabulary than they would be able to read on their own. When introduced to novels or stories in a group setting, students are more motivated to search out similar books on their own (Folios, 2006). To be successful, read alouds should include suspense, drama, adventure, witty dialogue, and humor.

In addition to read-alouds in the language arts classroom, reading aloud throughout the content areas can be just as useful a method of engaging students in those subjects’ content. Reading a topic-related picture book or an article allows teachers to show their enthusiasm for a concept, motivates students to read more on the topic, and helps with vocabulary acquisition (Braun, 2010). Teachers can use read-alouds as a hook to engage students in a topic and then encourage them to independently seek out other reading material on a certain topic of interest.

**Library Programming**

The school library is the “hub of literacy learning,” according to the American Association of School Librarians “Position Statement On the School Librarian’s Role In Reading” (2010). Various purposes of school library programs put librarians in leadership
roles for developing reading comprehension strategies and for promoting free independent reading. According to the position statement,

- School librarians take a leadership role in organizing and promoting literacy projects and events that engage learners and motivate them to become lifelong readers.
- School libraries provide students, staff, and families with open, non-restricted access to a varied high quality collection of reading materials in multiple formats that reflect academic needs and personal interests. (¶5)

Library programming is most engaging when it involves active learning experiences like poetry slams, literacy projects, and author visits (Moreillon, 2009). Garnering investment and participation from colleagues, parents, and community can help solidify engaging programs to align with school culture, student interests, and academic goals. Active promotion of literacy celebrations sponsored by American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and American Library Association (ALA), like Children’s Book Week, Teen Read Week, and Banned Books Week, bring school wide attention to reading at various points during the year. Librarians can also involve students with One Book reads and state book award programs.

Layne (2009) offers many creative ideas for classroom teachers and librarians to celebrate books. A “golden recommendation shelf” spotlights an elite selection of books deemed worthy of special recommendation by the teacher or librarian. First Read clubs allow select students to preview brand new books when they arrive, before they are offered to the entire school population. Young Adult (YA) Café is a once-a-month breakfast that features a different staff member each time discussing his favorite young
adult book. Read Aroun$ds allow students to “sample” a selection of books and keep or trade them according to their personal interests and preferences. Featuring a Picture Book of the Month reminds adolescent readers that picture books are not only for elementary kids, but can address some mature, complex topics with creativity and simplicity.

Author visits can create excitement for students and inspire them toward more reading and writing (Layne, 2009). Students enjoy building connections with a favorite author and learning what motivates him to write. Some advance preparation is necessary to ensure a successful event. Students need to have read the author’s books, teachers should do promotional book talks or read-alouds, the event should be well publicized, lists of student questions should be developed, and plenty of books should be available for purchase and autographing. If time constraints or costs are prohibitive, a “virtual” author visit may be a good alternative, which can sometimes be arranged directly with an author or through a service like the Skype an Author Network (Digital Media for Social Learning Community, 2013).

Social Aspects of Reading

Because adolescents are very social, it follows that encouragement of student interaction and cooperative learning environments is another effective tool for increasing reading motivation (McPherson, 2007). Allowing students to interact with each other about what they are reading gives them opportunities to reflect and to exchange recommendations with each other (Worthy, year). Mackey and Johnston (1996) assert that, while it is important to respect young people’s choice not to read, “it is also vital to give every young person the opportunity to discover reading as an unthreatening, unpressured, enjoyable pastime” (Conclusion, ¶1). Many students will be more motivated
to read if it is a collaborative, rather than isolated activity, which can be achieved through shared reading blogs, book clubs, literature circles, and online student book reviews (Gordon, 2010).

Cooperative learning activities in which students have a chance to discuss their feelings with classmates reduce teenagers’ egocentrism and help students feel less alienated (Stringer & Molineaux, 2003). The creation of multiage partnerships, in which an older struggling reader reads to a younger child, gives authenticity to reading and improves both students’ self concept and attitudes toward reading (Worthy, 1996). In addition to collaboration between students, teacher-parent collaboration and teacher-librarian collaboration are features of effective programs encouraging reading (Cullinan, 2000). Collaboration to develop and implement literature-based reading programs with motivational components has the greatest effect on reading motivation and ability among students (Haycock, 2005).

**Incorporating Technology and Web 2.0**

Because of the pervasive use of computers, tablets, and mobile devices among teenagers, the reading associated with their use has almost become its own genre. Many characteristics of the Internet—graphics, sound, animation, video, and its interactive and social nature—make it an effective tool for engaging students’ interest (Rosalia, 2002). Rosalia offers several ideas for incorporating the Internet into reading motivation strategies. “Keypal” relationships are today’s version of pen pals and can help students connect with other students and classes around the world. Web sites that publish student writing, like Kidpub and TeenInk, motivate young people to express themselves and take pride in published work. Students can make deeper connections with their reading by
participating in online book discussion groups and blogs, message boards, and topic-specific chat rooms. Visiting author web sites provides an effective way for readers to learn more about their favorite authors, explore new books being published, and discover new authors and works to expand their reading. Often more influenced by the opinions of peers than teachers, students can also find reading web sites that include book reviews written by kids their age, and they can share their own reviews with others. E-zines and Webzines provide an alternative form of reading to printed materials and may seem more accessible to some reluctant readers.

Integrating current technology and reading expands the boundaries of the classroom and increases student participation and engagement (Simon, 2012). Students are comfortable with technology as a way of life, and they tend to be self-directed learners who thrive on free choice, social interaction, and hands-on experiences (Gordon, 2010). Teachers will create a more effective reading experience by utilizing technology to meet students where they are.

The two-year Delaware Summer Reading Initiative involved teachers and 500 high school students to develop a summer reading web site, for which students helped select titles and write annotations (cited in Gordon, 2010). At the end of the project, students were surveyed on their attitudes and behaviors toward reading; results showed that 90% of the students liked the web site and that students were 4.2 times more likely to read because it sparked their interest. Furman (cited in Digital Media for Social Learning Community, 2013) recommends using technology to provide creative opportunities for student dialogue about books using tools like blogs, Google Hangout, Skype, video book
chats, and ePals. He also encourages students to “curate” their own reading lives with sites like Goodreads.com, StudentPublishing.com, and various edublogs.

Encouraging students to blog and publish writing online can help them connect their reading and writing with a larger audience, giving them purpose. A fifth grade teacher writes about her success using student blogging for reading and writing activities in her diverse classroom (Wells, 2006). After her students read books, she has them write character sketches and book reports in blogs, which other students then enjoy reading to get peer book recommendations. She has seen significant improvement in her students’ reading skills and motivation, claiming that students are motivated by the pride of ownership they get from having writing published on the web.

Another example of technology fostering motivation is an urban Los Angeles middle school that connected reading and writing with social media and mobile devices in a program called “ReadReviewRecommend” (Ercegovac, 2012). Designed to provide expert guidance and allow students free choice in reading, the project was a blog in which students curated lists of books, wrote reviews, and assigned descriptive tags to facilitate access and discovery for other students. The project gave students’ reading a social environment and connection, making it engaging across various comprehension levels, preferences, and technology capability. They were able to build important 21st-century skills by becoming creators, curators, and consumers of online products.

Technology also brings readers and authors together. In addition to possible opportunities for student groups to Skype with authors, teachers increase student engagement by visiting authors’ web sites and using tools like TeachingBooks.net for instructional collaboration (Moreillon, 2009). Feeling that they have inside information
about books and authors is a motivating factor for all readers, especially adolescents. Many authors of young adult books promote books and engage teens by meeting them where they are—in the online world. They take advantage of the Internet’s interactivity to build relationships with their fans: creating blogs, responding to reader e-mail, and maintaining MySpace and Facebook pages (Beaman, 2006). Some—like Sarah Dessen, Lara M. Zeises, and Stephenie Meyer—are even creating and posting playlists for their novels that offer a behind-the-scenes “soundtrack” for their writing.

**Expanding the Concept of Literacy**

The traditional definitions of “reading” and “literacy” are changing. Students have access to a much broader scope of reading material and technology than ever before. According to Simon (2012), "However difficult, expanding what counts as literacy in school is an essential aspect of encouraging students' learning" (p. 523).

Noted reading and technology authority Dr. William Valmont (as cited in Rosalia, 2002) believes that teachers should determine whether or not their definition of literacy includes visual arts as well as language arts. “Students…are interpreting and constructing nonverbal messages using sounds, images, graphics, photos, videos, animations, and movement” (p. 170). Valmont believes the focus of literacy should be “capturing the interest of children who are growing up processing information through many channels” (p. 170).

Mackey and Johnston (1996) propose that the many types of “fictional experience” available to kids today, including television, video, film computer games, and more, should not be undervalued, just as educators teach reluctant readers not to undervalue the power of print. Because many unmotivated readers lack the ability to
visualize what they read, allowing them to read magazines, Web sites, and graphic novels
gives them the benefit of illustrations and graphics to bridge the gap between print and
meaning (Rosalia, 2002). Providing reluctant readers with access to texts that engage and
interest them is one of the keys to inspiring them to choose to read. Matching books to
students’ reading levels and supporting reading of noncanonical materials (comics,
graphic novels, ‘zines, blogs, and wikis) are effective ways to increase motivation
(McPherson, 2007).

Research conducted by Pitcher (cited in McClure, 2008) in which adolescent
students took surveys and participated in conversational interviews, showed discrepancies
in responses indicating that teens who spent hours each week reading various online
content did not consider these activities “reading.” Consequently, the researchers
suggested “educators might improve students’ motivation to read academic content by
incorporating into classroom instruction the multiple literacies that students engage in
outside of school” (p. 74). Students who read real-world materials in real-world
interactions, such as hands-on learning activities, experience an increase in reading
motivation (McPherson, 2007).

Changing ideas about what constitutes “suitable” reading material for school are
broadening the scope of opportunities for all readers. When Mackey and Johnston (1996)
asked numerous high school students what they liked to read, students whose teachers
perceived them as non-readers actually claimed to read a variety of texts. Boys mentioned
enjoying hot rod magazines, comics, newspaper sports sections, girlie magazines, gory
books, and guitar magazines; girls cited authors V.C. Andrews, Christopher Pike, R.L.
Stine, and women’s magazines; and boys and girls both said they like Stephen King.
Cullinan (2000) also asserts that “light reading” has been shown to become a stepping stone to further reading, making students more fluent readers in the process. Miller (2009) asserts that teachers need to validate students’ reading choices, even if they feel they lack educational value. To feel part of a reading culture, students need to feel that teachers trust them as readers, even allowing them to reread favorite books and to abandon books they are not enjoying.

Many researchers and educators concur that series books are an effective method of engaging reluctant readers. Reading series books helps students develop fluency and the linguistic competence necessary to read higher quality material (Cullinan, 2000) and “provide[s] readers with a sense of mastery over the conventions of reading” (Worthy, 1996, p. 210). As readers become familiar with the structure and boundaries of a particular series, they increasingly develop stamina and confidence while enjoying the novelty of various plot lines (Mackey & Johnston, 1996). Mackey and Johnston caution teachers, however, to be wary of series created especially for weak and reluctant readers that may “offer a reductive form of engagement.” Books with constant action as the main focus may cause readers to miss important lessons about pace, rhythm, and plot and character development.

Although educators have traditionally relied on picture books and novels to motivate readers, research supports the implementation of “whole literature”—inclusion of nonfiction information books—across literacy programs both for reading instruction and motivation (Doiron, 2003). Studies show that many children enjoy and even prefer information books for recreational reading; teachers may miss opportunities to engage those readers if they reserve the use of those texts solely for research and information
retrieval activities. For some readers, nonfiction provides as much an escape as fiction, and its targeted interest areas and presentation in easily digestible pieces (sections, pictures, graphics) may offer greater appeal to reluctant readers (Watson & Stencel, 2005). Nonfiction books about drawing, animals, cars, and sports are particularly popular with middle school students (Worthy, 1996), demonstrating that not all nonfiction library purchases are necessarily required to support curriculum (2006 Quick Picks Committee). Poetry collections are another type of literature that might have appeal for teens because they often include sophisticated poems that appeal to older readers while providing the support of predictable text (Worthy, 1996).
CHAPTER 3:
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The numerous benefits of reading, which extensive research has demonstrated, provide a strong argument for educators to develop and implement effective reading motivation strategies. The literature reviewed for this study addresses the research questions posed in chapter 1 about the key reasons that many adolescents do not choose to read on their own time, and the relationship between free voluntary reading programs in schools and adolescents’ motivation to read on their own. Other questions include what strategies school librarians and classroom teachers use to increase students’ motivation to read and ways that current technology is utilized to increase reading motivation among adolescents.

Factors of Adolescent Aliteracy

Although frequency of independent reading has been shown to decline during the middle school years, some research attributes the decline to an increase in other options of free time activities rather than a decrease in interest. Sports, music lessons, television, video games, and the Internet provide seductive alternatives to reading and often consume what little free time adolescents have. As chapter two discusses, many other factors conspire to negatively affect the motivation of teen readers, including changing self-concept, lack of confidence in their abilities, a perceived scarcity of interesting and engaging reading materials, and a lack of effective book selection strategies. Students often claim that they have little choice in what they read at school, a lack of autonomy that contributes to a sense that reading is a forced activity without personal relevance.
Additionally, changing home and family structure has led to an increased number of homes run by single parents, a situation that often demands a lot of teenagers’ time and energy helping with household duties and sibling care. Many single parents do not have the time to serve as good reading role models for their children, which means those children do not grow up viewing reading as an integral and valuable part of adult life. Lack of ready access to books in many homes also puts children at a disadvantage in terms of reading ability and motivation before they even begin school.

The Effectiveness of Free Voluntary Reading

Researchers and literacy experts in the literature review believe in a strong positive correlation between free reading programs at school and students’ motivation to read on their own. Krashen asserts that students will only discover reading as its own reward if they are allowed to self-select their reading material. Miller agrees that freedom of choice empowers and encourages student readers by rewarding their interests and giving them an element of control. Layne’s book is dedicated to “igniting a passion for reading,” outlining numerous strategies for teachers to implement toward that end. Furman’s concept of an independent reading culture encourages schoolwide efforts to support students in choosing what they want to read and discovering ways to expand on books and genres they enjoy. The literature indicates that students who are effectively guided to find enjoyment in reading during the school day are more likely to continue it as an activity outside of school.

Methods of Reading Motivation

According to the literature in chapter two, building students’ intrinsic motivation to read is more successful than extrinsic rewards and motivation. The various experts
Motivating Readers

cited herein offer numerous methods for supporting that intrinsic motivation, including offering free choice of reading materials, providing easy access to books in a variety of reading levels and genres, knowing students and books to facilitate making good individual recommendations, serving as reading role models, utilizing read alouds and other methods of sparking interest in books and authors, and having solid library programming that promotes reading and teaches good book selection strategies.

Teachers and librarians collaborate to develop engaging options for students to make extended reading connections beyond the book, such as exploring author web sites, planning author visits, facilitating book groups and discussions, and involving students in recommending book acquisitions for classroom libraries as well as the larger school library collection. Reading programming and promotion should focus on making students authentic and invested stakeholders rather than offering rewards or false measures of reading success. Respecting student opinion and choice gives them confidence and encouragement that will be a benefit as they develop their own reading lives.

**Using Technology as a Motivator**

Teachers can capitalize on students’ familiarity with technology and utilize its social aspects and interactivity to increase reading motivation. Some web sites and applications encourage reading through book blogs, discussions, peer reviews, video book chats and trailers, and social media. Others help students extend their reading by giving them a place to curate book lists, publish their own writing online, connect with authors and peers, and stay current with new books and series being published. Meeting students where they spent much of their lives, which is largely in the world of the
Internet, gives relevance to their reading and provides motivation for personal investment.

To effectively incorporate technology into reading programs, educators need to change and expand their previous definitions of literacy and what counts as “suitable” reading material. By supporting and validating a broader reading experience, one that includes web sites, online magazines, blogs, wikis, and online articles, teachers demonstrate an appreciation of today’s expansive information environment and a respect for student autonomy. Adolescents who connect their digital lives with reading are more likely to view reading as relevant and valuable to their future.

**Conclusion**

Literature and research provide a broad scope of strategies to advise educators how to best address reading motivation issues. Broadening conventional definitions of literacy to incorporate emerging trends in reading and technology will keep reading programs current and relevant to today’s students. Continued commitment to providing a print-rich environment that serves a wide spectrum of interests and abilities helps level the playing field for reluctant readers in the school setting. Educators who design meaningful, collaborative reading activities and strive to reach individual reluctant readers with “just the right book at the right time” (2006 Quick Picks Committee) are making an investment in those students’ future success.

Many students will be inspired to enjoy a lifelong love of reading. Others will never be avid readers. Teachers and librarians have a responsibility, however, to do everything they can to foster a level of reading motivation that supports students’
development into informed and literate adults, capable of navigating an increasingly complex world of information.
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