What Is Engagement, How Is It Different From Motivation, and How Can I Promote It?

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Teachers of literacy should promote both motivation and engagement. Although some teachers use the two terms interchangeably, we argue that they are different in important ways. In this article, we aim to clarify these differences and to put a particular spotlight on ways of increasing students' engagement with their reading.

At a reading research conference last year, a group of professors were discussing what counted as engagement and on what basis we could infer that a student was demonstrating engagement. "I'm not sure about how to define engagement," said one Internet research guru, "but I can give you an example of low engagement: When a student in our Laptops in Schools project threw his laptop off a bridge and into the river, that was low engagement!" He may have been right. (Or, was this an example of high engagement, fueled by negative motivation?)

Defining Motivation and Engagement and Their Relation

Accomplished classroom teachers have always known the power of motivation but have not always been clear about its relation to student engagement. We often find the words *motivation* and *engagement* used together or interchangeably. So, let's start with definitions. Merriam-Webster defines *motivation* (n.d.) as "a motivating force, stimulus, or influence."

Irvin, Meltzer, and Dukes (2007) offered their account of how motivation and engagement are related: "Motivating students is important—without it, teachers have no point of entry. But it is *engagement* that is critical, because the level of engagement over time is the vehicle through which classroom instruction influences student outcomes" (pp. 32–33).

Guthrie (2001), who has studied both motivation and engagement for over three decades, defined engagement as "a merger of motivation and thoughtfulness" (p. 1). He characterized engaged readers as those who strive to understand. Engaged readers gain pleasure from reading and learning and are confident in their reading. "They are mastery oriented, intrinsically motivated, and have self-efficacy" (p. 1; see also Guthrie & Klauda, 2016). Given these characterizations, we can conclude that motivation is a mind-set (Dweck, 1986) that can lead students to engagement with reading, that motivation and engagement are central to student achievement, and that both are essential for students' ongoing literacy development and, therefore, for their success in school.

Motivation is somewhat like a reader's potential energy: It is what you have when you are ready to read, when your reading bike is paused, as it were, at the top of a hill. Engagement is more like a reader with kinetic energy: It is manifest when the reader is zooming down the mountain bike trail of a challenging text, fully absorbed, fully engrossed, totally immersed in the activity of reading.

Motivation and engagement have a reciprocal relation. They both influence, and are influenced by, students' reading experiences (De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012). For example, as students enter into acts of reading, their prior histories as readers impact their motivation and the possible levels of engagement that they will experience. Students who have experienced success in reading tend to look forward to reading more: They are motivated. Students who experience reading failure tend to be less motivated and, as a result, less engaged.

Students' ongoing reading experiences are key factors here. Student who are motivated to read but

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required to participate in school reading that they consider boring or irrelevant may approach subsequent reading tasks with lessened motivation, which will hamper their engagement and learning. When texts and reading assignments lead students to question the value of what is read and the value of what is to be done with the meaning that is constructed from reading, future motivation and engagement are at risk. A motivated but suddenly disengaged reader may struggle to maintain future motivation. In contrast, a reluctant reader who experiences engaging reading and related tasks may gain in motivation for future reading.

Promoting Motivation and Engagement

Given the reciprocal relation of motivation and engagement, it is important to consider classroom environments that promote both. Stanovich (1986) proposed the Matthew effect, which describes how readers' vocabulary and comprehension combine to boost students' reading growth: A well-developed vocabulary helps students comprehend the texts they read, and comprehending texts adds to the vocabulary that students use in subsequent reading. We propose that motivation and engagement are joined in a similar form of dynamic reciprocity: Positive motivation leads to increased engagement, increased engagement leads to continuing reading success, and this ongoing reading success leads to increased motivation. Thus, a key to students' reading achievement is creating classroom environments in which motivation and engagement thrive. Guthrie (2001) noted that engagement is closely related to the environments that we create in school: "Teachers create contexts for engagement when they provide prominent knowledge goals, real-world connections to reading, meaningful choices about what, when, and how to read, and interesting texts that are familiar, vivid, important, and relevant" (p. 1).

What characterizes classroom contexts that promote both motivation and engagement? Reading and related tasks must be situated in students' zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) so students regularly experience success as a reward for their efforts. When work is too difficult or too easy, we risk losing students to frustration or boredom. We must plan classroom work that allows students to work from positions of expertise and power. The benefits of prior knowledge for content domain learning are well documented. Equally, when students pursue learning goals with extensive prior knowledge, we can assume that, more often than not, engagement and motivation are operating. Curriculum and instruction should also focus on students' epistemological growth. Students learn that their knowledge matters when they are called on to critique and evaluate the texts they read, which can increase their motivation. When student feedback to peers encourages revision of thinking and writing, students are motivated by knowing that they helped a classmate. Finally, providing student choice can influence student achievement and motivation (Schunk & Bursuck, 2016).

We argue that the development of motivation and engagement should be viewed from both short-term and long-term perspectives. In the short term, students should have daily opportunities to grow their motivation, engagement, and enthusiasm. These opportunities should occur across the curriculum. Long term, we want consistent experiences across the school years to help students further develop and maintain their motivation and engagement. We should be wary of situations that may result in a negative Matthew effect—where motivation and engagement are locked in a downward spiral. Experiences with reading that have outcomes that include failure on an academic task, diminished self-efficacy, or ego threat can lead a student to withdraw. When a student is focused on protecting the self from situations that are predicted to be negative, motivation and engagement suffer.

Motivation can enable engagement, but it is not enough. The contexts in which students read and what students are asked to do with the meaning they construct are as important as the state of readers' motivation. A motivated reader may suffer lack of motivation if school reading and related tasks are not engaging. For example, consider students learning about World War II. A mandated curriculum might consist of a single textbook that provides an authoritative narrative of history (the authority derives from the fact that there is no counterfactual or complementary account of what is contained in that single source): the textbook. Student learning in relation to this history text might be assessed with a series of multiple-choice quizzes and tests. Assessment then focuses on recall of the facts of history. The opportunities for student engagement are limited and proscribed by the curriculum. Students who are typically motivated to read history and engaged in learning it may be less than enthused because the materials used and the teaching approach operate against engagement.

In contrast, other students encounter history in a curriculum that helps them learn to read like historians. This curriculum employs texts with contrasting and sometimes conflicting accounts of historical

events, and students have a voice in choosing a topic on which they will be assessed. They might be offered topics such as these:

- What art was inspired by wartime events? Choose one specific work of art that tells a story about the war.
- What part did animals play in World War II?
- What impact did the war years have on the rights of African Americans?
- Conduct an interview with a person who lived during the war and seek that person's recollections about the war. Discuss the meaning of the word *history* in the light of what you learned from that person.
- What part did letter writing play in World War II? Draw on government instructions concerning letter writing, and extracts from archived letters.

As required by this curriculum, students must both research additional sources and construct meaning from the texts they encounter. Students must determine the relevance and trustworthiness of the sources they meet. In this curriculum, students are active evaluators of text. They are placed in a powerful position to judge the veracity of text, which feeds their motivation and engagement.

As illustrated by these two brief sketches, the nature of reading-related tasks and activities that follow the construction of meaning influences further engagement and motivation.

Motivation and Engagement Connect to Other Aspects of Literacy Development

In the reading research literature, motivation and engagement are seen as scaffolding students' cognitive growth: Motivated and engaged students enhance their reading strategies and skills. These students also demonstrate superior learning and retention of content area information as they read in science, history, and other subjects. We acknowledge the powerful influence of motivation and engagement on learning, but there are other benefits, too. It turns out that motivation and engagement operate in other dynamic and reciprocal relations: with self-efficacy and metacognition.

Self-efficacy is one's belief in the ability to be successful in specific situations (Bandura, 2006). Students with high self-efficacy look forward to reading in school. They identify themselves as readers and view reading as a way of learning, of being entertained, and of interacting socially with others' efficacy. These students are efficient, and they are confident that they possess the tools to read and succeed in most situations (Schunk & Bursuck, 2016). Readers with self-efficacy believe in their ability to meet reading challenges. Thus, they enter acts of reading with habits of motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2009). As self-efficacy is constructed in relation to prior experiences of success, student readers who possess it expect to succeed and are motivated to persevere when faced with reading challenges. These students engage with reading, partly because they identify as readers.

Readers who are metacognitive not only monitor meaning as it is constructed but also understand the connections between different aspects of their reading. Students who succeed at reading and understand the role of effort in that success appreciate the connection between effort and accomplishment. This knowledge feeds successful readers' ongoing motivation to read. Knowing the nature of their reading success, readers develop high self-efficacy, and efficacious readers are more motivated and engaged than those with low self-efficacy. Metacognition can also help students understand the reasons for their motivation and engagement (or lack of it).

Assessing Motivation and Engagement

Assessments of students' reading development typically focus on cognitive strategy and skill development. We hope that this column is helpful in describing motivation and engagement as both outcomes of and actors on students' reading. Irvin et al. (2007) reminded us that "motivation and engagement do not constitute a 'warm and fuzzy' extra component of efforts to improve literacy. These interrelated elements are a primary vehicle for improving literacy" (p. 31).

If we believe that motivation and engagement have the potential to enhance students' reading processes and products, we should prioritize the assessment of their development. There are helpful interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to help us evaluate the state of students' motivation and engagement. The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP; Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) consists of a reading survey

with Likert-type scale items, and a conversational interview. The MRP is designed to provide useful information about the state of students' reading motivation, and the contextual factors that influence that motivation. Using MRP results, we can anticipate situations in which student readers will be engaged. McKenna and Kear (1990) developed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to examine students' attitudes. Recent work extended the measure of reading attitude to adolescents (Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013), from which we may divine information that can be used to create classroom reading situations that promote motivation and engagement. Motivation and engagement are closely related. Understanding them as individual constructs is important, but perhaps more important is the understanding that one influences the other. Certainly, creating reading curricula and reading classrooms that encourage both should be an urgent priority.

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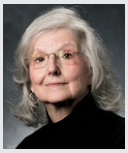

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