

## **Building Life Long Readers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**While more and more students are becoming fledgling readers, it is of most importance to give these students the skills and resources to build them towards a life of reading for pleasure. This essay studies current research in reading and proposes strategies to remedy the current lack of motivation to read. The author first suggests giving students a better foundation for reading by using explicit reading strategies so as to make their reading less laborious. Students must next be introduced to critical reading to build emotion and motivation. Once interest and motivation has been achieved, classroom teachers must make themselves knowledgeable about reading preferences of today's students and provide authentic texts that suit the student's interest.**

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It comes as no surprise that today's students are not meeting reading standards across the country. Today's students are exposed to a greater variety of text and media than any previous generation of students experienced. Teachers must bear in mind this difference and take an untraditional approach to teaching reading by beginning to focus on teaching explicit reading strategies. Students do not enjoy reading because they struggle to find meaning in their reading. Teachers must set the momentum toward life long readers by beginning the journey in the classroom. Literacy instruction must change in order for students to connect to various types of texts and therefore find reading less laborious and move to an eventual appreciation for reading. Blanton, et al. (2007) argue that "pre-packaged, scripted, instruction and practice exercises are not an ideal approach to engaging" students in reading. Students need exposure to a variety of literacy activities that offer the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their reading in order to realize its importance.

In the era of video games and internet, teachers may draw upon student's yearning for interesting graphics and motion to aid their comprehensional abilities. Onofrey and Theurer (2007) suggest using visualization while reading to help student's follow story structure, as well as make connections with characters and settings. The authors posit that proficient readers visualize texts naturally but that struggling readers need the opportunity to first have the use of visualization verbalized to them so as to "see" the cognitive process (Onofrey & Theurer, 2007). Over time, emergent readers will be better able to recall details from the story from their use of visualization and will find that they take much more meaning from the text. Blanton, et al. (2007) encourages teachers to use other contemporary teaching strategies that better suits today's student's needs: Web Quests, Reciprocal Teaching, Question-Answer Relationship, Think-Alouds, Literature Circles, and Discussions. Such strategies better hold the students engagement and helps them to build skills inside the classroom. Using updated strategies such as these may be the key to bridging the transition toward becoming life long readers outside the classroom.

Yet another aspect of literacy instruction is critical reading. Students must be shown how to prevent themselves from becoming bystanders to thoughts, information, media, and text as related to reading for classroom purposes. Students will find reading much more enjoyable once they have been given the tools to interact with text in order to form their own opinions, note inequalities, and respond to ideas that they may agree or disagree with. Research by Hall and Piazza (2008) warns that students and teachers alike may first be apprehensive to take strides toward critical reading because it asks one to "examine their own beliefs and actions or that are not in line with their cultural expectations." Becoming critical readers helps students on the path toward life long readers because it gives students a sense of control over their reading. Students on their way to becoming critical readers will look for meaning in reading that they can relate to and experiences that mirror their own lives. The emotional connection to the text piques the curiosity of students and increases the likelihood of finding value in reading. Hall and Piazza (2008) suggest that teachers explicitly teach the critical reading process by first selecting a "thought provoking book" to be read aloud and to "pause periodically and explain the thoughts and questions that surface."

Perhaps the most obvious way to help students become life long readers is to incorporate trade books into the classroom. It seems more likely that students will read trade books for pleasure once they have matured. By incorporating trade books into the classroom, teachers have the opportunity to meet both state standards and their students need to interact with authentic text. Incorporating trade books into the classroom also leads to life long reading because it is less likely to frustrate emergent readers compared to a text book which is often written with advanced vocabulary and concepts that are covered in such isolation that it is difficult to make sense much less create in-depth understanding.

Weisenburger (2009) uses trade books to conduct Readers' Theater. She states that "Readers' Theater 'dramatizes' literature through a classroom performance and provides visual and oral stimulus to students who are not used to using imagination to appreciate" literature. In her research of incorporating trade books into content areas, Atkinson, et al. (2009) found that struggling readers were more apt to appreciate trade

books over text books because the characters were much more dynamic, interesting, and often told a more fascinating version of the same story.

Kinniburgh and Byrd (2008) note the importance of using trade books in the class room by saying that “children’s books explore and discuss ideas in ways that do not always arise naturally from subject-area textbooks.” Perhaps Palmer and Stewart (1997) best conveyed the need for trade books for today’s learners as a means to creating life long readers by saying trade books, “accommodate a variety of interest and reading abilities, and because of their visual appeal and engaging writing style, can tantalize young people to pick up a book and seek information.”

The best way to expose students to trade books in hopes that they will read for pleasure is to surround them with trade books in the classroom that they may enjoy. Jacquelyn Hoffman, et al. (2009) states that “teachers, librarians, and literary critics often have significantly different opinions than children about what constitutes a good book.” Such a statement shows the necessity in being aware of students reading preferences and making those genres of books readily available for students to pick up, peruse, and begin to read. Cameron and Jenkins (2008) note that, “the genres students are exposed to in the classroom are controlled by the teacher. Limited genre exposure can limit selection by the students, and as byproduct, may affect comprehension and motivation to read.”

Teachers may want to be educated on the type of text that different students prefer to read for pleasure. Research by Clark, et al. (2008) shows that females enjoy reading “magazines, fiction books, email and blogs/networking sites,” as opposed to males, who prefer to read “newspapers and graphic novels.” Such information can help a teacher find the type of trade books that mimic the format, ideas, and topics that students read outside of the classroom to offer similar books inside the classroom. Hoffman, et al. (2009) list features of books as indicators of success for different students depending on age and sex: personal interests, characters, visuals and illustrations, action, adventure and mystery, and humor. Hoffman, et al. (2009) concluded their findings by stating that student interest influenced the genre of books they chose. Further, no matter the genre, students’ selections and decisions to read should be rewarded by allowing them to read the text they choose, even if it does not match the teacher’s expectation.

### **Implications for Teaching**

The research conducted on various aspects needed improve the likelihood of students becoming life long readers should be noted by effective teachers. The effective teacher will work to teach explicit reading strategies no matter what content area they teach and work diligently to adjust varying reading strategies to fit the content area. Teachers must also keep up to date on new and improved reading strategies that fit the needs of contemporary learners. The teacher will realize that it is perhaps not the concepts and ideas that much change, but their approach to teaching them. Such a teacher will be flexible and enthusiastic towards broadening their repertoire of methods to teach the same concept. The classroom teacher must take strides to assure that they are modeling and verbalizing their cognitive processes so as to help struggling readers know how, why, and when to use certain reading strategies to build comprehension.

Once students have mastered comprehension through the use of explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies, the student is ready to be transformed into a critical reader. The effective teacher will use authentic literature to prompt students to think critically about text that they have encountered. The teacher will guide students through the emotions elicited by the trade books and help them to put words to their thoughts. The teacher will help the students to the realization that critical literacy is a right and privilege and that it is up to the student to take their own unique stance to the text to form an opinion, thus giving the students independence and ownership in their reading. Such strong feelings and emotion can lead to motivation toward reading.

At this point in the continuum toward becoming a life long reader, students have been taught how to read more effectively through the use of explicit reading strategies and have been given the tools to read text interactively through critical literacy. Next, teachers must make themselves aware of what students actually want to read, and the reading preferences of students. The effective teacher will be aware of current trends in reading and offer such selections in the classroom and will further consult with students to find their criterion for favored trade books. This teacher will also provide students the opportunity to read books of their choosing through out the school day.

### **Further Research and Questions**

Some research has suggested that students be allowed to read any genre of text that they are most drawn to in the classroom. It seems that such a statement may result in inappropriate texts being brought into the school. There must be some way that teachers can allow students the freedom to read the genre of trade book that they prefer but still keep some boundaries. Further research may need to be conducted on adults who are avid, life long readers. It would be interesting to note their responses when asked what events, books, and instruction molded their appreciation for reading. Perhaps responses can help contemporary educators mold a new generation of life long readers.

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