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We love to read — a collaborative endeavor to build the foundation for lifelong readers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study targeted fourth grade at-risk children in a culturally diverse elementary school in a mid-sized city in the southwestern United States. The purpose of the study was to describe the nature of social interactions within the context of tutorial sessions and to identify common characteristics of highly-effective tutors in their interactions with older, at-risk readers.

“My favorite part was setting the goals. I liked that part the best because then with the goals, I had a reason to read!” remarked Kati. Kyle was equally enthusiastic about goal setting, “I think the best part about our reading project was accomplishing 50,000 minutes as a class. It really made the class and me feel good,” he commented. Eleni just plain enjoyed digging into good books and affirmed, “I want to read as much as I can so that is why I liked this part the best.”

While these remarks are representative of the majority of students in Kathi’s fourth grade classroom at the conclusion of their special reading motivation project, this enthusiasm had not always been the case. Teaching in a middle class community that comprises students from blue collar to professional households, Kathi sensed that her class had not consistently been “turned on” to reading. “While there were a handful of students who loved to read, the majority of kids only read what I assigned,” she explained.

Working together in a professional development school collaborative effort, Marjorie Hertz (assistant professor, Muhlandberg College) and Kathi Swanson (teacher, Lincoln Elementary School) felt it was important to encourage more students to read beyond obligation. This article will describe the reading motivation project they developed. The project was designed to encourage intermediate grade students to choose to spend more time reading beyond the classroom walls. Margie and Kathi were anxious to see if the use of goal setting and self-monitoring techniques would motivate students to read more frequently on their own. The project used largely observational techniques to assess the impact of the motivational program on the reading lives of the students.

DIMENSIONS OF MOTIVATION

Research provides insight into how to engage and motivate children, specifically how to plant seeds for lifelong reading. Teachers have long maintained that motivation is crucial if we are to set our students on the road toward becoming lifelong readers (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling and Mazzoni, 1996).

Children's motivations for literacy are multidimensional and complex. Motivation is based on both internal as well as external factors. Internal or intrinsic motivation relates to inherent interest in a task-engaging in an activity due to natural interest in the activity itself. On the other hand, external or extrinsic motivation relates to doing something in order to earn a reward or a grade. Extrinsically motivated students are not necessarily interested in the activity for its own sake.

It is important to encourage intrinsic motivation, as the quality of task engagement is higher when students are involved in a task for their own reasons. However, extrinsic motivational strategies can also be effective under certain conditions (Brophy, 1987; Fulk, 1994; and Tripathi, 1992). Opportunities to compete can add excitement to the classroom, and when used judiciously, rewards can motivate students to try that much harder. Brophy proposes guidelines for supplying extrinsic motivation. Rewards should be used in ways that support learning. In addition to drawing attention to the reward itself, teachers should encourage students to value their growing knowledge. Therefore, when integrating competition into instruction, Brophy suggests that teachers stress the content being studied rather than highlight who won and also lost. Teachers must also make sure that the rewards are used as incentives for everyone; all students must have at least an equal chance of winning.

Educators should recognize examples of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, specifically as they relate to the field of reading. The dimensions of children's reading motivations have been identified (Wigfield and McCann, 1996/1997) and a number of them relate to the amount of reading that students engage in during a school's reading program. Those dimensions relating strongly to the frequency with which children read include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors: social reasons for reading, reading efficacy, reading curiosity, reading topics aesthetically enjoyed and recognition for reading. Wigfield and McCann point out that overall, the intrinsic factors for reading correlate most strongly with the frequency with which students read.

Motivating children to engage in sustained literacy activities is a continuing challenge for teachers. Many students feel they are 'too busy' for free-choice reading (Whitney, 1991). Others are regularly attracted by modern technology, involved in outside activities and frequently have no one with whom to share books (Lange, 1994).

GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES

Goal setting and self-monitoring of behavior are effective strategies to help motivate children. Locke, Shaw, Saari and Latham (1981) describe a goal as what an individual is trying to accomplish. A key premise of goal setting theory and research maintains that human actions are directed by conscious goals (Locke and Latham, 1990).

A powerful tool, goal setting directs students to focus their attention, motivates them to persist in meeting the objectives and helps them to formulate strategies to accomplishing a goal (Locke, Shaw, Saari and Latham, 1981). As students progress toward their goals, their sense of self-efficacy or belief that they will be successful increases. Students who feel that they will be successful often choose to engage in tasks, put forth more effort, and persist when they encounter difficulties (Schunk, 1994).

Two types of goals are identified: product goals and process goals. Product goals emphasize what will be accomplished, whereas process goals stress the steps that students will take toward achieving their goals (Johnson, 1990). Teachers should encourage students to consider how they will achieve their product goals. For example, they might have them plan how to attain their goal by first answering the questions "how, where, when and who" (Piiro, 1987).

The positive effects of goal setting are influenced by the types of goals that students set. Goals exert their influence through three properties: specificity, difficulty and proximity (Locke, Shaw, Saari and Latham, 1981; Schunk, 1991). Specific goals provide clear indications of what is required. Goals that are difficult or challenging require effort or skill to accomplish. Finally, proximal goals can be reached relatively quickly whereas distal goals are accomplished farther in the future.

In addition to providing specific, challenging and reachable goals, there are several other factors that make goal setting effective. One is for teachers to be certain that students receive feedback. Feedback can be given by the teacher or monitored directly by the students (Johnson, 1990). Secondly, for goals to be effective, students need to accept them and commit to them. Teachers can promote goal acceptance by supporting students in the goal-setting process, listening to their thoughts about the goals, and encouraging them to ask focused questions (Johnson, 1990).

Teachers need to encourage students to establish their own appropriate goals and then fully support students in their efforts to meet their objectives (Marzano, 1992). Goals that students set themselves are often more effective than those mandated by the teacher (Spaulding, 1992). Once students have set their own goals they must be shown how to monitor their progress. Self-observation combined with appropriate goal setting has the potential to change student behavior (Mace, Belfiore and Shea, 1989).

Goal setting gives students a purpose as learners. Studies have also shown this intervention to provide a positive influence on students' academic motivation and learning in the classroom. Recently, Jenkins (1997) describes how she incorporated goal setting into her fourth grade classroom reading program by asking students to set goals as they read from books each month. Jenkins reports that when the students designed goals for themselves, their reading became more intentional as they learned about themselves in the process.

Carroll and Christenson (1995) describe a fifth grade classroom where student goal setting and self-evaluation are an integral part of the language arts curriculum. In the beginning many students had difficulty setting appropriate goals. The classroom teacher realized that she needed to help students by modeling those goals that she felt were important. In time, the fifth grade students found that they could set reading and writing goals for themselves and attain them. The goal setting process brought a focus to their learning. The students were increasingly motivated to meet the very goals that they had set themselves.

Schunk (1985) finds that participation in goal setting enhances the self-efficacy and skill development of learning disabled children. The subjects were sixth grade children who received subtraction instruction and subsequent practice over five consecutive school days. The children were assigned randomly to one of three treatment groups. One group set their own proximal performance goals; the second group had comparable proximal goals assigned; student in the third treatment received the training but no goal instruction. Participation in goal setting led to the highest self efficacy and subtraction skill for students. Schunk concludes that allowing children to participate in setting their own goals may enhance both their skills and sense of efficacy as they apply these skills.

A study by Bandura and Schunk (1981) demonstrates the advantage of setting proximal goals. Elementary school children ranging in age from 7 to 10 years old were given seven sets of subtraction problems to work on over seven sessions in a self-directed learning format. These children had been identified as individuals who displayed both a deficiency and low interest in math. In the proximal goals group, the examiner suggested that the children complete one set of problems for each session, whereas in the distal group the examiner suggested that the students complete all seven sets by the end of the project. Children in the third group were asked to work on the problems with no mention of goals. Bandura and Schunk found that providing children with proximal goals increased their motivation, self-efficacy and subtraction skills when compared to children who were given distal goals or no specific goals. In their discussion they noted how children who set attainable goals not only became more proficient academically but also became more engaged in activities for which they initially had little curiosity.

Schunk and Rice (1989) investigated the effects of setting process and product goals on fourth and fifth grade remedial reading students' self-efficacy and skill performance during comprehension instruction. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: process goal of learning how to use steps of the reading strategy; product goal of answering questions; general instructional goal of simply doing your best. All the students received 35 minute training sessions over 15 consecutive days. Analyses showed that students in the process and product goal conditions judged self-efficacy significantly higher than did students in the control condition. Those students who pursued a learning process goal had the highest comprehension. The authors speculate that the product goal students did not place as much emphasis on learning to use the steps of the reading strategy and therefore might not have applied it as diligently on the skills post-test.

READING MOTIVATION PROGRAM

The research details successful reading motivation programs at the elementary level. If teachers are committed toward having their students' become lifelong readers, they must adjust their programs in order to motivate students to read for pleasure both in school and at home. Teachers might consider serving as reading models, building on experiences with familiar books and providing appropriate reading-related incentives (e.g., the books themselves). They can also provide opportunities for students to interact socially with others as they share books, and create environments in which a variety of books are readily accessible in classroom libraries (Gambrell, 1996; Palmer, Codling and Gambrell, 1994).

Another set of suggestions to promote literacy engagement includes: giving new attention to independent reading time; having students share responsibility for arranging the classroom library; inviting students to leave stick-on recommendations on the covers of books; and setting up partnerships of student readers to discuss the pages they read at home the night before (Calkins, 1996).

THE PROJECT — AN OVERVIEW

Our four month reading motivation project was implemented in a fourth grade class of 24 students. The program incorporated child-centered strategies shown by research to promote engagement in literacy: opportunities for choice, reflection and social interaction (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1993). A distinct feature of the project was the incorporation of metacognitive activities where students set weekly goals and monitored their progress as they reflected upon how they were growing as readers.

Each Monday morning from February through May, students spent approximately one hour in class participating in project activities. At the beginning of the class period, they were asked to evaluate their success in reaching two goals they had chosen on their own. Their goals fell into two general categories: time goal (minutes spent reading) and "who, what, where, when, and how" goal (the specific manner in which one reads). See Figure 1. The students were asked to read a minimum of fifteen minutes for at least four days of the week, yet they were free to go beyond the minimum requirement whenever they desired. In line with goal setting research (Johnson, 1990; Piirto, 1987), the goals chosen by

our students included both product and process goals. Students could strive toward accomplishing objectives relating to content (e.g., books chosen and minutes spent reading) as well as process (“where,” “when,” “with whom,” and “how” strategies to use when reading at home).

Figure 1. Possible Weekly Goals

Time Goal

I will read for – minutes for at least four days this week.
(15 minutes or more)

Who, What, Where, When How Goal

Who I will read to/with my mom, dad, brother, pet etc.

What I will choose a new type of book to read at home.
I will read – (e.g., mystery) books for the next few weeks.

Where I will read where no one can find me!
I will read outside on my back porch.

When I will read when I have dessert each night.
I will read right before I go to bed.

How I will read with more expression.
I will write about what I have read by filling in a post-it slip from my teacher.
I will P-mail my teacher.
I will tell my mom/dad about what I have read each day.
I will call up my friend/grandparent and talk to them about what I am reading.
I will write a short letter to my friend telling him/her why I like my book.
I will draw a picture of the favorite part of my book.

The fourth grade students recorded their two weekly goals on a specially formatted sheet that they kept in their reading journals, (see Figure 2). Students were asked to circle the days on which they read and indicate the number of minutes they read on each of those days. Their journals and books remained at home throughout the week. Each Monday morning they carried them back to school in their personally designed canvas reading bags which they had made as the kickoff to our project.

Figure 2. Kristen's Goal-setting Sheet

Week	Goals	Accomplished
2/24-3/2	1. I will read <u>40</u> minutes for at least four days this week. <u>MTWTHFS*</u>	<u>9/94</u>
(5) <u>DA.</u> Parent Initial	2. <u>I will write a few sens. on a post-it for my teacher.</u> 240	<u>RKH</u>
3/3-3/10	1. I will read <u>35</u> minutes for at least four days this week. <u>MTWTHFS*</u>	<u>RKH</u>
<u>CH.</u> Parent Initial	2. <u>I will read a poetry book for the week.</u> 210	<u>RKH</u>
3/16-3/17	1. I will read <u>40</u> minutes for at least four days this week. <u>MTWTHFS*</u>	<u>RKH</u>
<u>DA.</u> Parent Initial	2. <u>I will talk to my parents about what I read</u> 360	<u>RKH</u>
3/11-3/14	1. I will read <u>40</u> minutes for at least four days this week. <u>MTWTHFS*</u>	<u>RKH</u>
<u>CH.</u> Parent Initial	2. <u>I will call up a friend and tell them about my book.</u> 360	<u>RKH</u>

The students fell into a predictable routine for each session of the project. Without having to be told, they distributed calculators among themselves in order to determine the minutes spent reading that week. The students posted their cooperative groups' reading minutes on the board, and these were then totaled. Having students count and graph their reading minutes provided a natural way to integrate the mathematics curriculum with language arts instruction. By the second week of the project, the students decided that they would try to attain a collective goal of reading for 50,000 minutes by the end of May. A huge paper

bookworm was posted with each segment of its body representing the amount of minutes the students had read that week. The suspense had begun!

Next, the students shared their successes in achieving their individual “who, what, where, when or how” goals. Volunteers discussed the manner in which they had read at home that week. They occasionally displayed a visible product that they had created (e.g., posters, pictures, letters, poems, etc.).

A vital component of our project was allotting time for students to think about their at-home reading. They were given the opportunity to reflect upon their reading experiences by responding in their journals to a specific prompt. Some of the prompts that we used were: “Why would you recommend your book?”; “How did you accomplish your goal this week?”; “Why is reading a good thing?” and “What happened when you read with someone at home?”.

The students took turns sharing their responses orally by participating in what was termed the “hot seat.” Small groups took turns sitting in the hot seat by forming a circle with their journals in hand to discuss their written reflections. The rest of the class gathered around the inner circle and were encouraged to submit their own questions written on small index cards. Toward the end of the activity, hot seat members took turns responding to these questions.

Students selected their books for the reading motivation project in various ways. The fourth grade students either read selections that were in line with the monthly book theme promoted by their teacher, or they chose another selection that interested them. Kathi exposed her students to such themes and genres as historical fiction, nonfiction and biographies. Students were free to choose books from the classroom, school or public libraries, or from their own homes. Kathi made time to conference with her students in order to guide them to appropriate books based on their interests and abilities.

Throughout all segments of the weekly project both Kathi and Margie served as role models as they demonstrated how they participated in the very same activities. During each session they shared their own at-home reading goals. With time for reading at a premium, both explained that they read professional journals along with the newspaper, newly published children’s books and other personal selections. To personalize their outside interests Kathi brought in her cooking magazines and Margie shared anecdotes and illustrations from David Halberstam’s *The Fifties*.

At the close of each weekly session, the students were asked to choose a new set of personal goals. They either chose their goals from those listed on several large charts posted on the walls or they were free to choose a separate goal of their own. We allotted time to discuss the selection of appropriate and realistic goals. Likewise, we shared our own goals for reading in the coming week.

METHODOLOGY — HOW WE ASSESSED THE PROJECT

We were anxious to learn the extent to which fourth graders would become more committed toward reading at home and therefore examined their attitudes and thoughts about reading throughout our four-month project. In our study we collected data by drawing upon the written and oral comments of students, the classroom teacher, along with the students' responses to a reading motivation survey.

Each week, we asked students to respond in their journals to one of the "specific prompts" that we supplied. Using information obtained through these weekly written reflections, as well as class discussions, we gained a well-rounded picture of the students' thoughts about reading. We regarded the students' written reflections as an indicator of their mind-set towards at-home reading and of their understanding of the best ways to approach this activity. Additionally, student comments shared during the hot seat and panel discussions helped us gauge the classroom climate for independent reading.

Kathi, the classroom teacher, kept anecdotal records containing her observations of the reading motivation project. She conveyed her ongoing analysis of project events during weekly discussions with Margie.

At the beginning and end of the reading motivation project, we administered the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni, 1996) to the class. This survey is a self-report, group-administered instrument that assesses two dimensions of reading motivation: students' self-concept as a reader and value of reading.

STUDENTS RESPOND TO PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The students' desire to read for pleasure along with their understanding of how best to approach at-home reading can be gauged by their responses to the various activities of the reading motivation project. Goal setting and reflective journal writing were at the heart of the project's endeavors. However, students also participated in "hot

seat” and panel discussions and responded to open-ended questions and surveys.

Types of goals chosen by students

As documented on their goal setting sheets, students chose a variety of goals throughout the project. Over the four month period the “where” goal was the most preferred, although the “what” and “how” goals were close favorites. A popular example of the “where” goal, picked by virtually every student was, “I will read where no one can find me!” Curiously, in examining the goals chosen by students from the first through the second halves of the project, there was a considerable increase in the use of only one particular goal — the “what” goal. The incidence of “what” goals nearly doubled from being chosen 25 times (18% of the goals) during the first half of the project to being chosen 45 times (32% of the goals) during the project’s second half. Later in the project there appeared to be a greater interest in choosing goals relating to the types of books being read. Frequently appearing examples of “what” and “how” goals were: “I will look for something different to read, like an adventure story”; “I will read a chapter book, a good one”; “I will e-mail my teacher”; “I will call up my friend and tell him/her about my new book.”

Journal reflections

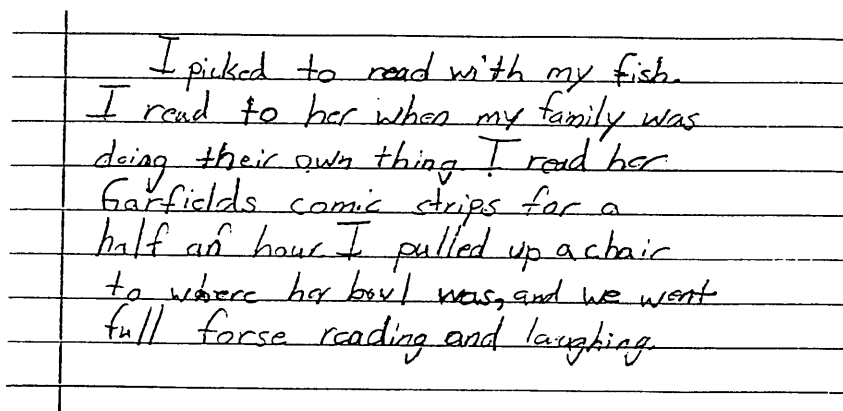
The students’ weekly journal reflections served a dual purpose. First, they encouraged the students to think for themselves about the “what, where, why, when and how” of reading at home. Second, the written reflections gave us a feeling for their attitude toward and understanding of this endeavor.

One series of prompts asked the students to think about goal setting: what goals worked well for them, how they actually attained their goals’ and how their goals changed over time. The students responses were quite revealing. Some students felt that the goals they chose were just right. Savannah claimed, “My goals were perfect for me. It was easy to read 35 minutes. It was also easy to keep a log. After reading I went into my journal and wrote what happened in the story.” On the other hand, other students realized that they needed to modify their goals. Nate explained, “One goal was hard for me because I can’t read a “grown-up” book. I didn’t understand some of the words in it... I think I just went too far.” (This led to a class discussion of choosing appropriate books.)

Journal writing heightened the fourth grade students' awareness of how best to read at home. Responding to the prompt "How did you accomplish your goal?", the students relayed how they had maneuvered to find the best place and right time for their at-home reading. Kim seemed to enjoy companionship while reading, at least in the form of a family pet (See Figure 3). On the other hand Kyle explained, "I usually read at nighttime so no one will bother me. I read in my room because I have a sign, 'Do not come in without knocking!'"

Figure 3.

Kim's Journal Response: How Did You Accomplish Your Goal?



I picked to read with my fish.
I read to her when my family was
doing their own thing I read her
Garfields comic strips for a
half an hour I pulled up a chair
to where her bowl was, and we went
full force reading and laughing.

Several students realized the value of changing their goals occasionally. Kim put it this way, "I have been picking goals that have been too easy for me... Since we were having a long weekend I picked harder ones. I am selecting more challenging books and they are much more interesting."

We realized the importance of encouraging the students to assess the content of their stories in addition to the processes they used when they wrote in their journals each week. Of interest, during the project the students frequently chose books in keeping with the literary theme of the month. Historical fiction was clearly the most popular theme. Specific

titles that truly engaged the students were: *To Be a Slave* by Julius Lester; *Runaway to Freedom* by Barbara Smucker; *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, by Choi SookNyul; *Behind the Attic Wall* by Sylvia Cassedy; and *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry.

Two of our journal prompts relating to story content asked the fourth graders to respond to the questions: “Why would you recommend your book?” and “Tell us about what you read.” The students’ genuine enthusiasm for the stories came through loud and clear in their responses. For example, in keeping with the monthly theme of historical fiction, Scott read *To Be a Slave* and explained why he couldn’t put his book down. “I liked this book because I love history and slavery is fun to learn about. History is cool because you get to learn about what you couldn’t explore because you weren’t born yet,” he said.

Kristen was equally enthusiastic about her book, *Behind the Attic Wall*. She recommended it because, “It will keep you in suspense until you hear chattering behind the wall. It gets really exciting when an orphan girl named Maggie moves in with her two aunts and meets their talking dolls named Miss Cristabell, Timothy John and Juniper.”

The students wrote honestly about what they had been reading and supplied logical reasons for why they did or did not like their selections. They defended their opinions in an intelligent manner. For example, after reading *Runaway to Freedom* Stephanie claimed, “I don’t like the book so far because it is sad. People ran away to freedom from slavery and got caught, whipped or shot. Then the people were lonely because they were getting hurt. That’s why the book is sad in the beginning. Now at the end it’s not sad anymore. Lots of slaves are running to freedom.”

In their discussion of why they would recommend their books, the fourth grade students explored what they had learned while at the same time citing details showing knowledge of content. After reading a section of *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George, Brian explains, “So far this is a really good book. I read a part that told me that a boy lived in a treehouse with a fireplace and a hawk and he called him Frightful. It’s very exciting because Sam and Frightful are trying to survive after Sam ran away and captured Frightful. I did not finish my book but so far it is really good. I even learned how to season my food.”

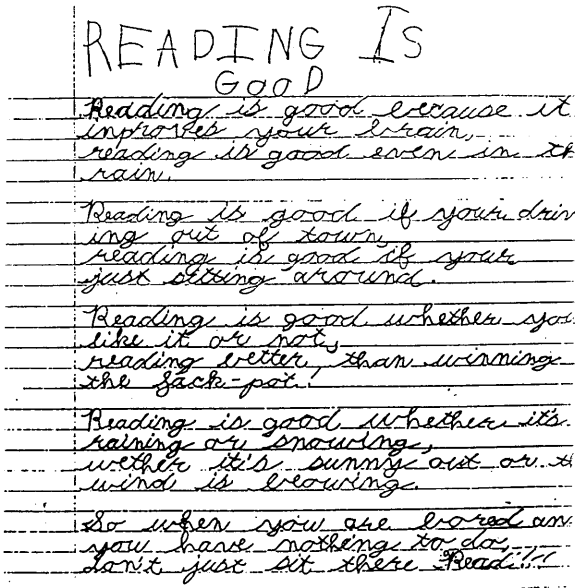
In her journal entry Danica seemed impressed with what she had learned when she stated, “I read half of *Come This Far to Freedom*, by Angela S. Medearis. It told a lot about when Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat for a white man to sit and when Martin Luther King was shot... and a whole lot more.”

Panel discussion: Why reading is a good thing.

Midway through our project we felt that student interest might be waning. Instead of merely telling the students why reading is so important, we decided it would be more helpful to ask them to consider "why reading is a good thing." To cultivate intrinsic motivation, we wanted the students to search within themselves and decide what they truly valued about reading.

The students responded with numerous ideas of their own. Many shared that they loved the time "to be alone with yourself"; "to improve your work skills... and get another 'wrinkle' in your brain"; "to learn how to make things"; "to learn about new people, places and things in history"; and "to have a chance to relax." Shane's poem, "Reading is Good" said it all (See Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Shane's Journal Response: Why Reading is a Good Thing

We also asked the students to identify four of their classmates whom they considered to be the most interested in reading. This afforded the students an opportunity to choose role models from among their peers. We assembled a panel of the top four vote-getters to discuss their ideas about why they valued reading. The panelists discussed quite frankly why they liked to read, while acknowledging the distractions of television and after-school activities. They also offered their advice for readers who were “on the fence.” In the words of one of the panelists, “Just start and try to read more and more. Maybe you’ll like it!”

Hot seat activity.

One aspect of our project that the students particularly enjoyed was the hot seat activity. This gave them an opportunity to chat about the ideas that they had first written about in their journals. While the inner circle shared their responses, many enthusiastic questions emanated from the outer circle of students as well. These questions included: “Why did you want to pick harder goals?”; “Can you explain more about your book?”; “Why did you finish the book when you just said you didn’t like it?”; and “Are you going to read more books by this author?”.

Kristin expressed her classmates’ sentiments regarding this activity when she stated, “I liked this part the best because you got to share interesting or exciting things you learned. Also if you were in the middle circle you were the only ones who could talk?”

Students’ overall attitude toward reading and goal setting.

At the beginning and end of the project, the students completed a survey, the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP), a measure of their self-concept as readers and their value of reading. Their response on the MRP showed no significant difference between pre and post-test means ($t=1.31$, $p=0.205$). Eleven students (approximately half of the class) did increase their scores on this survey. However, statistical analysis revealed normal fluctuation of data (See Table 1).

We felt, however, that the students’ ongoing written and oral responses were more indicative of how their interest in reading had grown. Toward the end of our project, we wanted to give the students a chance to describe how they felt about reading for pleasure at home. We asked them to consider the question, “Has our project made you want to read more, the same, or less than before. Tell us why.”

*Table 1*Pre-Post Test Comparison of Total Scores on Motivation to Read Profile

Pre Test		Post Test		P
Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
63.04	(7.38)	61.57	(10.22)	0.205

Approximately three-fourths of the class (17/24 students) replied that they now thought they were reading more. They provided a variety of explanations. A number of students cited the “push” to reach their goals as their prime reason for reading. Goal setting seemed to give the vast majority of the fourth grade students a sense of purpose. As they met with success, many felt empowered to “climb higher” by reading more minutes, choosing different books or finding new places to read. Explained Danica, “Reading at home has made me read a lot more than I did before. I’m trying to reach my goals. We started reading at home because we were supposed to read four days a week and now I do!”

Others noted that by choosing interesting goals, they now had some compelling reasons to pick up a book. Tiffany remarked, “I read more because I pick fun goals. I have a rope swing that I love to read on.” Some students seemed to realize that reading can actually be a viable alternative to the numbing distractions of modern technology. Stated Davin, “I hated to read. Now it is OK because of the goals I pick and the fun we have here. I think this project helped a lot. Now I understand that reading books is better than just sitting around and watching TV!”

We noted that a few students appeared a bit anxious about the requirement to set weekly goals. They preferred to read only what and when they wanted to read. As Bethany expressed, “Setting goals hasn’t helped me much. I do plan to continue reading but not setting goals.”

Many students in the reading motivation project became enveloped in the world of books. Two examples follow. Hubert maintained (accurate or not), “Now I’m reading ‘millions’ of books. I bring more books home and don’t want to stop. Last night I stayed up till 12:00 reading *George’s Marvelous Medicine*.” In the same vein Mark shared, “I’m reading more in bigger books like *White Horses Running*. I really get into bigger books. They get so interesting and I can’t stop reading them.” Hubert’s and Mark’s realization that they could successfully

complete several books and read “bigger books” appeared to impact on their reading attitudes and habits. The two boys’ growing sense of self-efficacy seemed to hasten their desire to read for pleasure.

Yet, there were a handful of students who felt they were still reading the same amount by the end of the project. One student actually claimed that she was reading less. The explanations were two-fold. Some felt that they had always read a lot in the beginning. So it’s hard to read more than I had.” Others specified that they did not like feeling that reading was required. Explained Eleni, “I read a lot before... it’s like you’re making me do something I am already doing.”

Record-keeping snags.

While the students as a whole felt that they benefited from keeping a record of their weekly goals, they needed to be reminded to return their journals with a complete and accurately recorded goal sheet each week. Even with class discussions about the importance of being prepared for class, there were invariably a few students who either forgot their journals or only completed part of their goal sheets.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All in all, we felt that the “I Love to Read Project” was a positive experience that impacted on the reading lives of the fourth grade students in Kathi’s class. The project involved several requirements along with incentives to instill motivation. Students were expected to set weekly goals and record the minutes read. Of importance, we were very careful to build opportunities for choice within the structure of the project. Each week students chose their own two goals. The class also decided to set a group goal of reading for 50,000 minutes. Indeed, what better endorsement for student choice than the fact that many students established time goals that exceeded the 15 minute requirement!

We maintain that under certain circumstances carefully selected external requirements and incentives are necessary to pave the way for more intrinsic reasons to read. There simply are times when nine and ten year old students may need some external structure and incentives to pique their curiosity before they willingly tackle new projects on their own. Clearly, Kathi’s students would not have read to such a degree and enthusiastically reported their reading had it not been for the parameters we established through our project. As Brophy (1987) explains, well-conceived extrinsic motivational strategies can be effective under certain conditions.

By the end of our project many of Kathi's students were showing signs of reading for intrinsic reasons. This was quite evident in a number of ways: students' weekly journal responses and "hot seat" discussions; "Why Reading is a Good Thing" panel discussion, the end-of-project poll and the accompanying open-ended question, "Has our project made you want to read more, the same or less than before? Tell us why." By the conclusion of our four-month endeavor almost three-fourths of the students reported that they were reading more than they had been at the beginning of the project. Furthermore, the fact that the "what" goals were chosen almost twice as frequently during the second half of the project is potential testimony to the heightened interest students showed in the content of their books. The students' journal responses also demonstrated genuine excitement for their books and when applicable, frank interest in the subject matter — certainly intrinsic reasons for reading (Wigfield and McCann, 1996/1997). Many students were able to discuss the plot knowledgeably and analyze thoughtfully why they did or did not enjoy their books.

Equally important, virtually all of Kathi's students had a clearer personal understanding of why it is important to read and a more defined approach toward how, when, where and with whom they might read at home. Their journal responses and oral discussions were indicative of more reflective readers who understood and valued the activity in and of itself. The students were able to articulate why they felt they should read for pleasure, note the types of books they enjoyed and explain how they preferred to read at home.


By the conclusion of the project, Kathi felt that her students' literacy growth was evident when she cited what her students were actually doing, not merely saying, about reading. Kathi explained, "By the end the students were beginning to select their own books based on content and author as opposed to the number of pages (e.g., the shorter, the better). When they came to me asking for suggestions of books on a particular topic or author, I knew that they were developing an interest in reading for its own sake. I could see my students beginning to become more mature, self-directed readers."

We cannot help but refer to the research cited earlier that refers to the value of goal setting as a powerful motivational tool (Locke and Latham, 1990; Locke, Shaw, Saari and Latham, 1981). When students set their own goals, they are more focused, assume more responsibility for their own learning and enjoy themselves in the process. Among our students perhaps Kristin is the best example of how goal setting can have

such a powerful effect. In response to the end-of-project question, she explains what the project meant to her (See Figure 5).

Figure 5.

Kristen's Explanation: What the Project Means to Me

Goals help or encourage you by letting your imagination run free. If you just read because someone tells you to, you're not really going to be happy and you will not enjoy your book. By using goals it lets your mind come out on paper. It's also fun to make goals. You can read outside, inside, in the car, and anywhere you can think of. I  keep reading over the summer with my handie reading bag.

We were initially puzzled by the results and the lack of a significant difference on the mean scores of the Motivation to Read Profile. However, we soon recognized that a large percentage of students had initially responded in February with surprisingly high scores to many of the questions on the profile and that there might not have been much room for improvement. Of note, the initial survey was administered during a particularly high-interest literature unit on slavery which might have inflated the students' "pre-project" responses. We also wonder if the fourth grade students had sufficient maturity to respond reliably to a survey instrument. We feel strongly that the students' journal responses

and discussions expressed over time are more indicative of their changing attitudes and commitment towards at-home reading.

We wish to address the concerns of the few students who reported feeling pressure to meet their goals. In retrospect, perhaps we overemphasized asking students to record the exact amount of time they read in the program. Instead, we could have asked students to focus more regularly on an aspect of reading that is intrinsically motivating — the content of their books. We might direct them to describe in their journals one episode of their story that they could discuss at the following class session. In keeping with the success of our hot seat activity, we feel that allowing additional time for oral discussion is warranted. Namely, future reading motivation projects should allot even more time for students to share the content of their books with each other.

Based on our experiences we offer the following recommendations for future reading motivation projects:

We wholeheartedly propose that a form of goal setting and reflection be incorporated into future reading motivation projects.

- We recommend that students record their thoughts about a story episode in their reading journals that they would subsequently like to discuss in class.
- We suggest allotting additional time for students to share the content of their at-home reading books with each other via oral discussion.
- Although we do feel that students should read at least four days per week, we do not favor having them record the amount of time they read at home each evening.

Our reading motivation project fulfilled our hopes of building a foundation for reading for the students in Kathi's classroom. In a project of but four-months time, we felt we were able to shape many enthusiastic, knowledgeable, committed young readers. We sensed that we heightened the students' awareness of paths that can lead to fulfilling experiences. Hopefully, Kathi's students will choose these paths, the ones that point in the direction of lifelong reading.

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