
Students with Late Emerging Reading Difficulties: Reading Engagement, Motivation, and Intervention Issues

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This paper investigates the needs of students with late emerging reading difficulties focusing on the motivation requirements of these students. It is argued that educators need to enhance the readers' sense of self-worth and competence by providing materials and a learning environment that is challenging yet manageable. Because students with reading difficulties experience failure over a considerable period of time and have formed negative reading self-concepts, lower expectations, and a decreased incentive to try, this paper outlines suggestions on how teachers can better understand and address these problems, based on the authors' research using tutoring programs for students with reading and comprehension difficulties.

Reading difficulties and intervention

Australian research studies have consistently found that from 10-16 per cent of students are thought by teachers to have major support needs in literacy (Elkins, 2002; Loudon et al., 2000; Rohl & Rivalland, 2002). In response to this, a diverse and well-established tradition of early identification of reading difficulties exists within schools in both the private and public school sectors (Lo Blanco & Freebody, 2001; van Kraayenoord, 1999). While early intervention programs, such as Reading Recovery, attract government funding there does not seem to be the same commitment to assisting students with literacy problems beyond grade three (Worthy et al., 2002). Despite continued difficulties many students are not catered for in the upper primary grades and beyond (DeFord, Lyons & Pinnell, 1991; van Kraayenoord, 1999). Schools need to maintain the concentration of effort currently devoted to lower primary literacy teaching and early intervention programs, and to increase the number of effective late intervention programs beyond grade 3.

Late emerging reading difficulties

In addition to students with ongoing literacy problems, a large number of students not previously identified in screening tests for early intervention programs, begin to show signs of reading failure after year 3. This phenomenon has been widely recognised in

other countries as well and has been referred to as the 'year four slump' (Leach et al., 2003; Snow, 2002). Leach and her colleagues believed that poor performance on reading comprehension tests in year four were often the first indication that such students were having difficulty in reading comprehension. Literacy learning in the middle grades generally becomes more difficult because there is a separation of knowledge domains demanding higher-level literacy demands. Each subject in the middle years of schooling requires different genres and orientations of knowledge. For example, the reading and writing of science material is generally in stark contrast with the way English texts are presented (Lo Blanco & Freebody, 2001). Also, the demands on readers after year three become more complex as the words they encounter become more phonologically and morphologically complex. Sentence structures increase in length and contain more embedded clauses. Furthermore, readers need to decode written information much more rapidly and are expected to be more accurate.

Worthy et al. (2002) posited the inflexible structure of some existing intervention programs might be inappropriate for older primary students. In contrast, it has been found that students with learning problems most often need informed, flexible teaching methods to promote successful reading (Boss, 1999; NRP, 2000; Pressley, 2000; Westwood, 2003; Woolley & Hay, 1999). Although there are many intervention programs and materials in schools there is very limited research evidence as to the effectiveness of such programs (Elkins, 2002). Effective intervention teaching will require the development of well-documented late intervention programs. Existing research statistics are often not relevant or transferable to other learning intervention contexts (Louden et al., 2000). The reality is that the longer students with learning difficulties continue without adequate assistance in the upper primary grades the more pervasive their deficits will become. Consequently other areas of learning, self-motivation and behaviour will be affected (Turner et al., 2002).

Reading-related self-concept

A number of researchers have emphasised the notion that a major factor contributing to the development of reading ability and motivation, is the child's evolving self-concept (Chapman & Tunmer, 1997; Hay, Ashman, & van Kraayenoord, 1997). Self-concept is a general self-descriptive construct incorporating many forms of self-knowledge and self-evaluative feelings such as self-worth (McCombs, 2001; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Zimmerman, 2000). It is shaped by experiences with the environment, environmental reinforcements and significant others (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). It is a multi-dimensional representation of a person's perception of her or himself (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Martinot & Monteil, 1995). A variety of related factors are included in the self-system such as; self-concept, self-efficacy, expectations, attributions, as well as self-worth (Bandura, 1999; Borowski, Carr, Rellinger & Pressley, 1990; Chapman & Tunmer, 2003).

Self-concept has a motivating influence on a student's understanding of self-worth, which in turn, influences the level of academic effort and level of academic achievement (Hay, 1995a; Hay, 1995b; van Kraayenoord & Elkins, 1991). Self-worth is based on the feedback that others give and influences future reading success because it affects student motivational beliefs and future expectations (Ames & Ames, 1989; Canfield & Wells,

1976). Students with poor self-worth may develop reading comprehension problems. Their tendency is to ask inappropriate questions and their responses to questions are often impulsive. As a result the amount of positive interactions with teachers and peers may be significantly less than the more able students and this in turn adds to their developing poor self-worth (Bos & Vaughn, 2002).

Psychological needs

Self-worth from the learner's perspective is regarded as being related to motivation as manifested by thoughts and beliefs (Schunk, 2003). It has been found that students beyond year four become notably dependent on motivational beliefs (Combs, 2001; Cox & Guthrie, 2001). Social cognitive theory postulates that human achievement depends on interactions between thoughts, beliefs, behaviours and environmental conditions (Ames & Ames, 1984; Hughes, 1991). Researchers study motivation to understand the choices that individuals make, the degree of persistence they will devote and the amount of effort that they will use on a given activity (Wigfield, 2000). Ryan and Deci's (2000) approach to motivation focuses primarily on the whys of behaviour. It also focuses on choices based on psychological needs: a) the innate needs for competence, b) autonomy, and c) relatedness.

Autonomy incorporates the need for significance, self-actualisation and the need to know and understand. It is enhanced by a sense of purpose and control (Beach, 1994). Schunk and Rice (1991) demonstrated that these considerations are particularly relevant to students with reading difficulties who often believe that they have little control over their own academic outcomes. In contrast, a student's sense of autonomy maybe promoted by encouraging her or him to exercise choice in selecting books associated with personal interest (Barker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2000).

Another key component of motivation is related to the belief about one's own competence (Bandura, 1986; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Cole, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Learners who relate achievement to effort perceive themselves as self-efficacious and are more likely to persist at a task when they are confronted by difficulties (Bandura, 1999; Paris, Byrnes, Paris, 2001). Students with lower academic achievement and lower aspirations often avoid engaging in learning as a method of protecting their sense of self-worth (Corno & Rendi, 1997; Covington, 1992). Educators may enhance a student's sense of self-worth and competence by providing materials that are challenging, yet manageable (Baker et al., 2000).

As social beings, people have a basic need to be related to others in some way (Carrie & Skinner, 2003). Relatedness is a motivational need reinforced by positive feelings of belonging, acceptance and importance. Feelings of relatedness have been linked to important academic outcomes, including self-efficacy, engagement and achievement outcomes. Through personal relatedness students assess their personality and traits (Harackiewicz et al., 2002). For example, it has been found that the majority of learning disabled students compared themselves to regular classroom students when reporting their self-concepts (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Paying attention to how one performs compared to others is particularly evident during the middle primary years. Comparative personal judgments affect competency, expectancies about future success and potential

school performance (Pressley, 1998). By the age of 9 years some students begin to show signs of reading failure due to their disconnection with the community of active readers (Baker et al., 2000).

On the other hand, giving poorly motivated students the opportunity to discuss what they are reading in an accepting environment promotes a positive sense of relatedness (Barker et al., 2000). Carrie and Skinner (2003) found that students who exhibit a high degree of relatedness are more likely to display enthusiasm in participating in school activities. They have fewer negative emotions that lead to greater opportunities for learning and school success. A reciprocal relationship exists between relatedness and achievement because the combination of constructive engagement and higher performance attracts more support from teachers, parents and peers. This in turn promotes greater feelings of connectedness and belonging.

Engagement

Several researchers identified supportive social environments as significant factors influencing academic achievement and engagement (Carrie & Skinner, 2003; Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Hattie, 1992; Hay et al., 1997; Horner & Shwery, 2002; Swann, 1983; Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993). Personal expectations are often influenced by feedback from significant others (Covington, 1992). Thus, social interchange has been found to influence aspirations and achievement by shaping learners' goals, curiosity, emotional satisfaction, and academic self-efficacy (Guthrie, 1996; Harackiewicz et al, 2002; Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993; Trabasso & Magliano, 1996). This in turn influences motivation to read by directly affecting engagement during reading and persistence with text comprehension (Chaman & Tunmer, 1997; Vaughn, et al., 2000). The promotion of reading engagement for students with late emerging reading difficulties requires a co-ordinated emphasis on positive thinking, beliefs, imaginations and behaviour (Guthrie et al., 2003; Schunk, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000).

Thoughts

Progress in reading may be a reflection of personal needs and thoughts about self-efficacy (Spencer & Bornholt, 2003; Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Schunk, 2003; Vaughn, et al., 2002). For example, students with reading difficulties who have experienced failure over a considerable period of time have formed negative thoughts leading to low future expectations and decreased incentive to try (van Kraayenoord & Elkins, 1991). When students think that the cause of their reading problem is expected to continue into the future, disengagement and failure will be expected to follow (Hareli & Weiner, 2002). Without appropriate intervention strategies, a condition of learned helplessness may result. This, in turn, leads to an entrenched belief that failure is attributed to external factors such as low ability and task difficulty.

Beliefs

Expectancies for success are influenced by an individual's positive beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or longer-term future (Eccles, 1983). The individual's choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value that

activity. Students' positive beliefs about their efficacy to manage academic task demands can also influence them emotionally by decreasing their stress, anxiety, and depression (Zimmerman, 2000). Thus, causal attributions derived from previous successes and failures are hypothesized to form descriptive and affective beliefs that contribute to students' self-concept and motivation (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Schunk, 2003; Tabassam & Grainger, 2002). It has been shown by a number of researchers that causal attributions also influence academic effort, persistence and emotional reactions (Bandura, 1986; Coleman & Bornholt, 2003; Schunk, 2003; Vaughn et al., 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Therefore, beliefs about why one succeeds or fails at a task can affect one's future expectations and may be related to external environmental factors or internal past learning experiences (Cole, 2002). Internal factors may include ability and effort while externally controlled causes include task difficulty, the involvement of other people, and chance.

Imaginations

Students possess a complex system of beliefs, knowledge, and expectancies about personal abilities and goals as well as task attributes and values (Chapman & Turner, 2003). Positive personal beliefs have been reported to motivate appropriate effort allocation to a given task (Nelson et al., 1983; Vaughn et al., 2000). Goodman (1996) postulated the beliefs of the reader often dominate their literary development. This is because their beliefs in their efficacy influence the types of anticipating imaginations they construct and rehearse. Imagined scenarios may take the form of verbal or visual mental impressions. For example students who doubt their efficacy visualise failure scenarios and struggle with self-doubt by dwelling on the many things that can go wrong. It is therefore difficult for those students to achieve much while fighting self-doubt (Bandura, 1993). On the other hand, those who have a high sense of efficacy visualise success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance. Anticipating positive success scenarios involves the self-regulation of various beliefs that interact in numerous ways to determine types of tasks engaged in, persistence on tasks and levels of performance.

Engaging behaviour

Promoting reading engagement requires a co-ordinated emphasis on motivation as it relates to competence, autonomy and relatedness in reading instruction. Engaged readers are motivated to read frequently out of curiosity and enjoyment of learning (Baker et al., 2000; Woolley & Hay, in press). Engaged readers apply knowledge to answer new questions or to solve problems. Engaged readers are also readers that have a high degree of conceptual knowledge and are highly motivated. The risk is that many students may have reading ability but lack curiosity and the desire to read if motivation is treated as secondary to developing competency through the acquisition of reading skills.

Many factors contribute to the behaviour of disengagement in reading in the middle school years after the age of 9 years. For example one factor is when reading instruction is disconnected with the real life experiences of the students (Guthrie et al., 2003). This is often the case when learning experiences are extrinsically regulated without connections to student interest or background experiences. Studies have shown that intrinsically

motivated students who attach personal meaning to material being read are more curious and process the information at deeper levels. In contrast, when the gap between prior knowledge and new knowledge is relatively large; curiosity, self-efficacy and engagement in reading are low (Guthrie et al., 2000). Students can become more engaged if meaning and worth are explained and meaningful feedback is provided regularly by significant others (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Woolley & Hay, 1999).

Tutoring

A major limitation of many intervention programs is the large amount of teacher time that is needed to run them, finding the appropriate personnel and the high cost of providing trained teachers for one-on-one tutoring (Westwood, 2003). However, one-on-one tutoring environments utilising teacher aides, volunteers or peer tutors have been shown to produce consistently positive results (Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Collins & Matthey, 2001; Rohrbeck et al., 2003; Woolley & Hay, 1999; Woolley & Hay, in press; Woolley, 2003). Research has also positively demonstrated that when the focus is on meaningful engagement with books and on self-improvement the downward spiral of reading and comprehension failure will be broken (Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Romeo, 2002; Woolley & Hay, in press). Thus older primary students may be more responsive to personalised, and supportive social environments especially when combined with interesting and appropriately levelled texts with scope for student choice (Woolley & Hay, 1999; Whitehead, 2002). (See, Woolley, 2003, for details of tutoring program.)

A number of studies have noted that there are significant effects on motivational beliefs and engagement in reading as a result of tutoring (Cohen et al, 1982; Overrett & Donald, 1998; Topping et al., 1995; Woolley & Hay, in press). Students lacking a sense of achievement in reading may need individualised programs to boost their self-efficacy and motivational beliefs (Wigfield et al., 2000). In developing positive behaviours students often need supportive social environments for self-improvement to take place (Hay, 1995). One-on-one tutoring can minimise negative ability-related social peer comparisons that lower students' self-efficacy and improve a sense of self-efficacy (Ames, 1992; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Meece, 1991; Schunk, 2003). Recent studies have emphasised the interpersonal aspects of tutoring programs and their positive effect upon the developing self-system involving the interaction of learning partnerships (Neuman; 1995; Wilson & Moon, 1991). Students' social relationships with significant others are critical in influencing student relatedness and academic success.

Well-trained tutors foster good reading self-concepts and help students satisfy psychological needs related to autonomy, competence and relatedness. They have demonstrated that they are instrumental in fostering positive thoughts, beliefs and imaginations that promote engaging behaviours with print. Such qualities are shaped by significant others in supportive settings (Cole, 2002). Tutors are able to provide supportive environments when they share thoughts, beliefs and feelings (Topping, 1987; Grimes, 1981; Juel, 1996; Wasik, 1998b). By receiving informed feedback students develop positive motivational beliefs as well as a self-regulating focus (Guthrie et al., 2000; Paris & Winograd, 1989; Schunk, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000).

Motivational engagement is self-directed and elicits positive emotions during learning. There are three aspects of motivational engagement according to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) that become more clearly defined and increasingly play an important role in motivation after grade three. Firstly, personal interest reflects the individual's preferences and is intrinsically motivating when students are given choice. Second, the notion of utility value refers to the importance that the individual places on a task in relation to its usefulness or relevance. Finally, value beliefs are the measure of importance that the individual places on an activity's worth in relation to the individual's goals in life. The values that students hold are important for self-regulation and impact their attitudes toward reading (Horner & Shwery, 2002; Schunk, 2003).

Summary

The promotion of reading engagement for students with late emerging reading difficulties requires a co-ordinated emphasis on competence, autonomy and personal relatedness in reading instruction. If there is an overemphasis on reading skill development with little time devoted to such motivational beliefs then educators risk creating an environment filled with seemingly skilled readers but with little motivation to read. On the other hand, engaged reading combines processes focussing on strategic conceptual knowledge, motivation and meaningful social interactions during literacy activities. An emphasis on engagement integrates cognitive emotional and the social dimensions of reading with reading instruction. This gives new meaning to the concept of a "balanced reading instruction" (Pressley, 1998). Personal beliefs about the value of reading and intrinsic motivation can be strengthened with emphasis on student interests and choice.

Well-trained tutors have consistently demonstrated that they are able to assist students with poor literacy skills to become motivated and self-regulating readers. They can foster better self-concepts by promoting positive thoughts, beliefs, imaginations and engaging behaviours with print. This leads to an upward spiral of successful encounters with texts and builds self-efficacy, confidence and achievement.

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