

Guthrie, J. T., & Davis, M. H. (2003). Motivating struggling readers in middle school through an engagement model of classroom practice. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 19*, 59-85.

Key Words: motivation, content area literacy, pedagogical models.

Summary:

This article explores motivational issues and classroom practices that act as barriers for struggling middle school readers. The authors present motivation theory as a framework to outline a model of engagement in literacy.

Assumptions:

- Many struggling readers in middle school are disengaged from reading.
- Reading instruction in the middle school setting is often disconnected from context, textbooks are difficult, and students are expected to respond to text with formal criticism rather than personal reaction.
- Struggling readers have a tendency to be unmotivated, demonstrate self-handicapping strategies (avoiding academic tasks), and have low self-efficacy.
- Struggling readers in middle school are lower in cognitive competence and intrinsic motivation.
- Teachers who emphasize task goals and place emphasis on students' understanding and learning help students maintain intrinsic motivation developed in elementary school.
- Engagement must be consistent and continuous to ensure the acquisition of cognitive strategies.

Findings:

- Two paths for developing reading motivation are: connect current intrinsic motivation to reading and build stronger intrinsic motivation for reading.
- Six characteristics must work together to foster engagement: knowledge of goals, real-world interactions, abundance of interesting texts, student choice and self-determination, direct strategy instruction, and collaboration.
- The engagement framework incorporates explicit support for cognitive strategy growth within a framework of learners' personal and social needs.

Conclusion:

Disengagement within the middle school population is approaching "crisis proportions" because students are given less choice, do not see how school connects to their everyday lives, and may feel isolated. This article advocates for teachers to use the engagement model of instruction in order to help students believe in themselves and gain the skills necessary to be competent readers.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Identify struggling readers early in the school year.

- Find ways to learn about and build struggling readers' intrinsic motivation.
- Learn about the engagement model and find ways to use it instructionally.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Provide professional development to help teachers learn about the engagement model and its application to their teaching.
- Help teachers explore transition issues from elementary to middle school.
- Help teachers learn about the role that intrinsic motivation plays in promoting lifelong learning.