

# Inspirational Impetuous: Lifelong Learning

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Adolescents' motivation is a critical factor for reading success. The lack of motivation adversely affects adolescents' abilities to enhance vocabulary and reading comprehension skills as well as developing powerful reading strategies (Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008). Starting in the fourth grade, students' academic expectations increase due to high stakes testing. Researchers analyzed questions 8 and 16 from the Motivation to Read Profile focusing on participants' perception of readers and beliefs about how much time they would spend reading as adults. Results showed 80% of all 3rd and 4th grade participants had a positive outlook on reading in their future.

## **Statement of Problem**

Starting in the 4th grade, students' academic expectations increase due to high stakes testing mandated by the state. In the state of Texas, all 4th grade students are required to take a standardized assessment in the area of reading. Adolescents' motivation is a critical factor for reading success. The lack of motivation adversely affects adolescents' abilities to enhance vocabulary and reading comprehension skills as well as developing powerful reading strategies (Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008). It is generally acknowledged that motivation plays a critical role in learning (Gambrell, 1996). Lack of motivation affects students in all content areas.

## **Research Questions**

This research study has two research questions. To what extent do 3rd and 4th grader's attitudes toward reading change in a year? The

null hypothesis is there will be no difference in the median attitude score between 3rd and 4th grade students. The research hypothesis will be the median attitude score of 4th graders will be higher than the median score of 3rd graders. The second research question is to what extent are student's perceptions about people who read a large amount related to perceptions about how students feel about reading in their future?

## **Research Methods/Design**

The design for this research was quasi-experimental. Participants were given both the reading survey and conversational interview portion of the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 2009). The survey consisted of 20 items, used a 4-point Likert-type response scale, assessed students' self-concept as readers, and assessed the value students place on reading. The survey's internal consistency rated moderately high in the area

of reliability for both 3rd grade (.70) and 5th grade (.76) with the inter-rater agreement of .87. Researchers found this assessment tool to be a good match for the research questions being posed.

### **Review of Literature**

An abundant amount of current research is centered on reading attitudes and interest. Engaged readers are motivated to read for different purposes (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). When students have a positive attitude toward reading they will engage in more reading. When students feel successful in an activity they are more likely to engage in that activity.

Overemphasis on testing plays a major role in destroying the love of reading in America's classrooms (Gallagher, 2009). This is ironic because most schools have a mission statement that values reading. Many schools have removed novels from their curriculum in favor of more test preparation time. This denies students the foundational reading experience needed for developing deep thinking (Gallagher, 2009). Students need to be given much more freedom to choose what they want to read rather than what adults think they should read (Strauss, 2008). Power of choice will help increase both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to read as well as help develop necessary foundational skills needed to be a life-long reader.

Research indicates that when students are given a choice in the selection of reading material, they are more motivated to read (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000). Choice is vital in selection of reading material in order to motivate students to become life-long readers. Providing effective literacy instruction, creating student interest, affording students' choice, and using literature that is teacher created, will help students become motivated to read. Morrow (2004) discusses the importance of stimulating motivation in the classroom by setting the stage

for providing students with reading materials, choice, challenges, and collaborative experiences. This environment allows students to choose both expository and narrative text to read alone and with others.

Stanovich (1986) discusses the importance of instructional quality for children whose reading abilities are lower due to their biological and environmental restrictions, and stresses the importance of parental and school related instruction. In his discussion of the Mathew Effect, Stanovich (1986) reflects on previous work by Rutter and Madge (1976) and explains the causes for this effect. Rutter and Madge (1976) found instruction of children with lower reading abilities inferior when compared with instruction of children with higher reading abilities. Consequently, Stanovich (1986) suggests that differences in instructional quality create differences in reading ability among children. There is a growing advantage embedded within instructional quality leading toward children's reading progress. Prior knowledge gives children the ability to connect new learned information with past experience. This link motivates children to create more connections, therefore learn more information. The Matthew Effect is the connection meaning, "the rich-get-richer," and "the poor-get-poorer." Children who read well and have good vocabulary are the same children who will read more, learn more, and view the learning as interesting and relevant. In comparison, the children who are not armed with adequate vocabulary and knowledge are children who read less and feel a great challenge to make connections with new information. Therefore, the growth of reading is hindered (Stanovich, 1986).

Researchers Chall and Jacobs (2003) took an in depth look at the 4th grade slump in children who were classified as low-income based on eligibility for free lunch. They found students who had previously scored well within the norm during the 2nd and 3rd grades began to decline around 4th grade. These struggling students

had most difficulty with defining abstract and academic language. This struggle put 4th graders approximately one year behind their peers and more than two years behind by 7th grade. Word recognition and spelling was the second most difficult for low-income 4th grade students. By the 6th and 7th grades these same students began to struggle with oral and silent reading comprehension. Research (Wren, 2003) suggests that without intervention the gap between struggling and non-struggling readers increases. When the struggling students reach the 4th grade it is nearly impossible to overcome the difference. Intervention at this time is only successful with 13% of students. Many states implement benchmark assessment in the 3rd or 4th grade; at this point odds are children who are not reading fluently, will not.

Students' lack of motivation in reading can be tied to having difficulty in reading. In 2001 the US Department of Education reported that 37% of 4th graders failed to learn to read (Santapau, 2001). Baker and Wigfield's (1999) findings were that teachers must think about children's reading motivation as multifaceted. Children should not be characterized as either motivated or not motivated to read. Instead, they are motivated to read for different reasons or purposes, and it is important to distinguish among them.

### **Data Collection/Participants**

Data collection for this research project began in the spring of 2011 at a suburban, North Texas elementary school. There were a total of 40 participants in this study. There were a total of 20 female and 20 male. Students' socio-economic status was categorized into three areas. These areas were students who qualified for free lunch (3rd grade, 85%; 4th grade, 75%), students who qualified for reduced-priced lunch (3rd grade, 10%; 4th grade, 15%), and students who did not qualify for either free or reduced lunch (3rd grade, 5%; 4th grade 10%). Third grade participants consisted of Hispanic (60%), African American

(25%), and Anglo American (15%) students. Fourth grade participants consisted of Anglo American (40%), African American (30%), and Hispanic (30%).

Researchers began with a table of random numbers. This table was used to obtain a randomized sample for each group, which was then stratified. The principal provided researchers with a specific campus location for administration of the MRP. Administration of the MRP was conducted over the course of two weeks. Results were analyzed using member checking and by construct using descriptive statistics. The researchers conducted a Mann-Whitney Test and Spearman's Rank Correlation Test.

### **Delimitations/Limitations**

There was only one delimitation for this study. This study was delimited to one elementary school setting with grades three, four, and five. The major limitation of this study was each researcher's ability to encourage students to accurately answer individual questions. However, 96% of all students did clearly answer questions.

### **Results**

Researchers analyzed questions 8 and 16 from the MRP. Question 8 focused on participants' perception of readers. Fifty percent of 3rd graders believed that people who read a lot are very interesting, 35% felt that people who read a lot are very interesting, 10% felt people who read a lot are not very interesting, and 5% felt people who read a lot are boring. Fifty percent of 4th graders felt people who read a lot are very interesting, 20% felt that people who read are interesting, 20% felt that people who read a lot are boring while and only 10% felt people who read a lot are not very interesting. See Table 1.

Question 16 focused on participants' beliefs about how much time they would spend reading as adults. Forty-five percent of 3rd graders

**Table 1. Contingency Table With Frequencies**

How do students feel about people who read a large amount?

Grade Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Grades Valid</i>				
1.00	10	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
2.00	7	35.0%	35.0%	85.0%
3.00	2	10.0%	10.0%	95.0%
4.00	1	5.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Total	20	100%	100.0%	
<i>4<sup>th</sup> Grades Valid</i>				
1.00	10	50.0%	50.0%	50%
2.00	4	20.0%	20.0%	70%
3.00	2	10.0%	10.0%	80%
4.00	4	20.0%	20.0%	100%

responded they will spend some of their time reading when they grow up, 40% said they will spend a lot of time reading, 10% responded they will spend very little time reading, and 5% responded they will spend none of their time reading. Sixty percent of the 4th graders responded that when they grow up they will read some of the time, 20% responded they will read a lot of the time, 15% responded they will

spend very little of their time reading, and 5% responded they will spend none of their time reading. See Table 2.

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that the mean attitude score of 4th graders will be higher than the median score of 3rd graders. The results of the test for how the students feel about people who

**Table 2. Contingency Table With Frequencies**

How do students feel about reading in their future?

Grade Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Grades Valid</i>				
1.00	1	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
2.00	2	10.0%	10.0%	15.0%
3.00	9	45.0%	45.0%	60.0%
4.00	12	40.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total	20	100.0%	100.0%	
<i>4<sup>th</sup> Grades Valid</i>				
1.00	10	50.0%	50 %	50.0%
2.00	4	20.0%	20 %	70.0%
3.00	2	10.0%	10 %	80.0%
4.00	4	20.0%	20 %	100.0%

read a large amount were in the expected direction and significant,  $z = -.528$ ,  $p < .05$ . The 4th graders had an average rank of 21.40, while the 3rd grade had an average rank of 19.60.

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that the mean attitude score of 4th graders will be higher than the median score of 3rd graders. The results of the test for how students feel about reading in their future were in the expected direction and significant,  $z = -1.175$ ,  $p < .05$ . The 4th grade had an average rank of 18.52, while 3rd grade had an average rank of 22.48. See Table 3.

about people who read a large amount and perceptions about reading in their future, which was statistically significant ( $r_s = .329$ ,  $p = .038$ ). See Table 4.

### Discussion/Conclusions

Research results provide positive implications for participants' reading future.

According to past research the 4th grade slump is evident and has not magically disappeared (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). However, according to the results of this study 80% of

**Table 3. Mann-Whitney Test: Ranks**

	Grade Level	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
How do students feel about people who read a large amount?	3 <sup>rd</sup>	20	19.60	392.00
	4 <sup>th</sup>	20	21.40	428.00
	Total	40		
How do students feel about reading in their future?	3 <sup>rd</sup>	20	22.48	449.50
	4 <sup>th</sup>	20	18.52	370.50
	Total	40		

A Spearman's Rank Order Correlation was ran to determine the what extent the students perceptions about people who read a large amount related to perceptions about how students feel about reading in their future. There was a strong, positive correlation between student's perceptions

participants had a positive outlook on reading in their future.

In 2007, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network did a study where

**Table 4. Correlations**

		How do students feel about people who read a large amount?	How do students feel about reading in their future?
Spearman's rho	How do students feel about people who read a large amount?	Correlation Coefficient Significance (2 tailed) N	1.00 -.329 p=.038* 40
	How do students feel about reading in their future?	Correlation Coefficient Significance (2 tailed) N	-.329 p=.038* 40

\* Significant at .05 level

researchers spent thousands of hours in more than 2,500 1st-, 3rd- and 5th- grade classrooms. Researchers found that teachers are spending way too much time on drill-and-kill activities. As a result, students were not getting enough time developing deeper problem-solving and reasoning skills. The students were spending way too much time listening to their teachers and not enough time developing critical thinking skills through collaborative work. One of the casualties of this testing era seems to be the death of sustained silent reading (SSR) (Gallagher, 2009). SSR has been removed from schools to give students more time to prepare for exams. In *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research* (1993), Krashen notes that in 38 of 41 studies, students given free voluntary reading time did as well as or better in reading comprehension tests than students given traditional skill-based reading instruction. Reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed. Children who do the most recreational reading become the best readers.

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