Helping students develop the reading habit is clearly linked to the notion that the more students read, the better readers they become.

(One wish that most early childhood and elementary teachers have for their students is that students will develop a love of reading. This is such a universal wish in part because we want our students to enjoy reading and to choose to read for both information and pleasure. We know that students who enjoy reading are likely to choose to read more often than students who do not enjoy reading. We also know that the more students read, the better readers they become. The bottom line is that reading proficiency has been linked to a better and more productive academic, social, and civic life. We really don’t need to be convinced that reading is a good thing for our students. The larger question is: How do we help our students develop the reading habit?

It is important that we recognize we have two equally important reading goals: to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read (Hiebert, 2009; Kasten & Wilfong, 2005; Malloy & Gambrell, 2012). The first goal deals with developing students’ reading proficiency; the second deals with helping students develop the reading habit. Teaching students specific reading skills is important, but it is equally important to give them the time and opportunity to read so that they develop a love of reading (Hiebert, 2009; Spiegel, 1982).

Research on increasing reading motivation has burgeoned over the past two decades, providing information that informs classroom practice. There are a number of research-based practices that are critical to supporting students’ motivation to read, including providing access to a wide range of reading materials (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Kim, 2006; Neuman & Celano, 2001), opportunities for students to self-select books (Guthrie & McPeake, 2013; Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Rettig & Hendricks, 2000), and providing experiences that engage students in social interactions about what they are reading (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011; Guthrie, Wigfield, & VonSecker, 2000).

A recently released national survey (Scholastic, 2015) on students’ reading habits revealed several factors that are powerful predictors of whether a student will develop the reading habit. First, frequent readers reported a high level of reading enjoyment; second, frequent readers reported that reading for pleasure is important; third, frequent readers reported having more time for independent reading during the school day...
“We have two equally important reading goals: to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read.”

than did less frequent readers. Of particular interest is the finding that only 33% of students ages 6–17 reported that their class had a designated time during the school day to read a book of their choice, and only 17% reported that their class engaged in independent reading almost every day. Of particular importance is the finding that school plays a bigger role in reading books for pleasure for students in lower income homes. Approximately 60% of students ages 6–17 who live in a home with an annual income of less than $35,000 reported that they read for fun mostly in school, while only 32% who live in a home with an annual income of $100,000 or more reported reading for fun in school. The findings suggest the importance of providing time to read during the school day to support students in developing the reading habit.

Recent research has focused on broader issues of reading motivation that hold promise for classroom practices and have potential for increasing students’ motivation to read. Studies conducted over the past decade suggest a number of instructional practices that promote and sustain students in developing the reading habit.

**Design Reading Instruction Based on Principles of Motivation**

The old question, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” has some relevance here. With reading motivation and reading proficiency, we have a similar dilemma: Does reading motivation increase reading proficiency, or does reading proficiency increase reading motivation? Recent research has revealed some interesting insights about early reading motivation and reading proficiency, suggesting that it is as important to motivate children to read as it is to provide instruction to improve reading proficiency.

A study by Bates, Gambrell, D’Agostino, and Homer (2014) was conducted with 1,334 first-grade children who received Reading Recovery (RR) instruction and a comparison group of 472 who did not receive RR instruction. Prior to the initiation of the study, there were no statistically significant differences between the students in the RR group and the children who were in the comparison group with respect to reading motivation and proficiency. The primary purpose of the investigation was to test the hypothesis that an intervention based on principles of motivation is likely to support the development of both reading proficiency and reading motivation. RR instruction is based on principles of motivation that include interest, challenge, collaboration, and self-efficacy (Bates et al., 2014).

Two measures were used in this study: the Me and My Reading Profile (MMRP; Marinak, Malloy, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2015), and the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OELA; Clay, 1993). The RR group and comparison group were administered both measures prior to the implementation of the RR intervention and at the end of the study.

At the conclusion of the study, students who received RR instruction had higher reading proficiency and reading motivation scores than the comparison group. Of particular interest was the finding that the control group declined in reading proficiency and reading motivation over the course of the study. In keeping with the Matthew effect (Stanovich, 1986), motivation to read and reading proficiency increased for children who received RR instruction while motivation to read and reading proficiency declined for the comparison group.

These findings suggest the importance of designing interventions that are based on motivational principles, especially for students who are at risk of reading failure.

**Make Reading Relevant to the Real World**

Twenty years ago, Turner (1995) emphasized the important relationship between motivation and the construction of meaning. One way to make literacy learning meaningful and relevant for students is to focus on more authentic literacy tasks and activities.

Authentic reading and writing experiences are analogous to those that people encounter in their day-to-day lives, as opposed to typical classroom activities such as completing worksheets or answering teacher-posed questions. More authentic literacy tasks acknowledge and play into students’ needs and interest in doing things that are “real life.” According to Purcell-Gates (2002; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007), authentic literacy tasks and activities involve meaningful, purposeful, and functional experiences that motivate and engage students.

Some might argue that incorporating authentic, real-world learning experiences in the classroom is rarely possible. Rather than thinking of classroom literacy tasks as “authentic,” it may be more realistic to think about authentic tasks and activities on a continuum from less authentic to more authentic, always with the goal of increasing the authenticity...
of the learning experience. A number of scholars believe that the concept of moving everyday life experiences into the classroom is essential to the process of literacy learning (Brophy, 2004, 2008; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Neuman & Roskos, 1997).

Purcell-Gates (1996; 2002) proposed two criteria for determining the authenticity of literacy tasks. First, the text read or written by the student is authentic if it exists outside of a learning-to-read-or-write context. For example, a worksheet on creatures of the sea would not be an authentic text, while a book from the library on creatures of the sea would be. Second, the purposes for which the text is read or written are authentic if the text is used outside of the classroom context for those same purposes. For example, having students answer teacher-posed questions about a text would be less authentic, while a peer-led small-group discussion would be more authentic because readers often participate in book club discussions in the “real world.”

Authentic reading, writing, and discussion tasks were explored in a study by Gambrell and colleagues (2011). In this year-long study of students in third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade classrooms, reading, writing, and discussion were examined within the context of a pen pal intervention focusing on authentic literacy tasks. Throughout the year, students and adult pen pals read the same high-quality children’s books (fiction and nonfiction) and exchanged letters about the books. The adult pen pals encouraged students to engage in close reading of the text by posing higher order questions such as “Let me know what you think about…” or “I’ll be interested to know if you agree with…” The teachers supported students in reading the books and letters from the pen pals, writing letters to the adult pen pals, and participating in small-group discussions. Students participated in at least two small-group discussions of each book. The discussions were purposeful and authentic because talk focused on issues and questions raised by the adult pen pal. The goal of the small-group discussions was to help students develop thoughtful responses to the questions posed by the adult pen pal.

Data sources included pre- and postintervention scores on literacy motivation, transcriptions of small-group discussions, and transcriptions of interviews with key student informants. The major finding from this study was that there was a statistically significant increase in students’ literacy motivation over the course of the school year. Findings integrated across quantitative and qualitative data sources suggested that authentic literacy tasks have the potential to support and sustain students’ literacy motivation. In addition, the analysis of the students’ small-group discussions revealed that students engaged in high-quality talk about the books they were reading. The finding that motivation increased from pre-intervention to postintervention is of particular interest, given that previous research indicates that motivation decreases across the school year and as students progress up the grade levels (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995).

Marinak (2014) suggests that we need to consider ways that students can respond to texts that are in keeping with what they experience in the real world. She describes how to simulate tweeting to encourage students to summarize and share what they are reading in a way that represents what they experience in the real world. Tweeting is something that most students know about, and they think it is cool. Tweets are short, 140-character messages often posted to Twitter (www.twitter.com). They are meant to be succinct and to the point.

In the classroom, Book Tweets are messages that students write on sticky notes about what they are reading and post on a Twitter Board (classroom bulletin board or dry-erase board). However, before Book Tweeting, students need to know and follow the rules of Classroom Book Tweets:

- The tweet must be about a book, poem, or article you have recently read.
- The tweet can be no more than 140 characters.
- Remember that the character count includes spaces and marks of punctuation.
- Begin your Book Tweet with a hashtag. A hashtag is a word or an unspaced phrase that begins with the hash character (#).

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- Remember that your hashtags should include your first name and words that summarize the text. Hashtags will allow us to group your tweet with similar Book Tweets.
- Include a reply box in your Book Tweet.

Classroom Book Tweets provide an example of how teachers can move a literacy task from less authentic to more authentic. Having students write a summary of a book they have read is less authentic, while simulating the use of tweets represents a real-world mode of communication. Classroom Book Tweets reflect real-world use of technology and provide a motivating way to encourage students to share their ideas about texts they are reading. Book Tweets invite interactive, ongoing conversations about texts as well as practice summarizing and selecting words carefully.

The potential of creating more authentic literacy tasks and activities to synergistically enhance the reading, writing, and discussion skills of our students holds great promise for enhancing motivation and reading proficiency. Inquiry-based learning and project-based learning are other examples of curricula that acknowledge the importance of creating learning tasks that are authentic and relevant to students’ lives.

Provide High-Interest, Moderately Challenging Reading Texts and Tasks
The Common Core State Standards focus on supporting students in reading challenging text (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). While we must keep in mind that students need success to be motivated to continue in their learning tasks, research is clear that it is success at challenging tasks, rather than easy tasks, that increases motivation and builds feelings of self-confidence and competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Both flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) suggest that moderate challenge supports motivation. On the other hand, research indicates that excessive challenge can undermine both motivation and persistence in completing learning tasks (Schweinle, Turner, & Meyer, 2006). These theories suggest that learning is enhanced when reading tasks and activities are moderately challenging.

Several studies point to the benefits of having students read moderately challenging texts. One study explored the development of fluent and automatic reading of students in second-grade classrooms (Kuhn et al., 2006). Kuhn and her colleagues reported that increasing the amount of time children spend reading appropriately challenging text with scaffolds leads to improvement in both word reading and reading comprehension. A more recent study provides some insights about the important role of topic interest when students are reading challenging materials. Fulmer and Frijters (2011) studied students’ reading motivation while reading excessively challenging text. They found that high topic interest played a buffering role; students were able to read and comprehend challenging text better when the text reflected a topic of high personal interest. Thus, in this study, students were able to read and comprehend challenging text when the text was on a topic of interest to them. Students in this study who read a text for which they rated themselves as most personally interested reported higher interest and enjoyment and lower ratings of attributions of difficulty, and students were almost twice as likely to persist with reading tasks. This research lends support to the notion that challenging text may be less problematic if students are personally interested in the topic of the text.

Conclusion
As Hiebert (2009) states, “the measure of whether we are successful as literacy educators is whether individuals turn to texts for information, restoration, inspiration, and enjoyment” (p. xii). Encouraging the love of reading and the development of the reading habit is a challenging process for the classroom teacher and requires thoughtful attention to creating and implementing reading instruction that is built upon principles of motivation (Gambrell et al., 2011).

It is clear that adequate skills alone are not sufficient to assure that students will develop into motivated and proficient readers. If students don’t develop the reading habit, it is unlikely that they will reach their full literacy potential. Helping students develop the reading habit, it is unlikely that they will reach their full literacy potential.”
habit should be an essential part of the reading curriculum simply because it is too important to be left to chance. Recent research suggests that we can support students in developing the reading habit by designing instruction based on principles of motivation, making reading more relevant to the real world, and providing high-interest, moderately challenging reading texts and tasks.

REFERENCES


