

Reading Perceptions of Intrinsically Motivated High School Juniors

Judy A. Henning

Department of Teacher Education,
University of Nebraska Kearney
henningja@unk.edu

Sherry R. Crow

Department of Advanced Education Programs,
Fort Hays State University
srcrow@fhsu.edu

Introduction

The basic research question addressed in the study is “What are the experiences in the lives of juniors (aged 16-18) in high school that foster intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure?” An examination of these experiences can lead to an understanding of how juniors in high school are able to maintain their intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure to reap the academic benefits afforded to avid readers. It is the purpose of this study to provide educators and librarians with insight into high school students’ needs to facilitate reading for pleasure.

Literature Review

Students’ declining interest in reading can be tied to a lack of intrinsic motivation. According to a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2023 survey, only 14% of all students reported that they read for pleasure every day, down 3% from 2020 and 13% since 2022, an all-time low (Lonas, 2023). Less-motivated students are less likely to achieve and maintain good grades (Klapp, 2015), experience satisfaction with school (Tian et al., 2014), and maintain personal well-being (Assor et al., 2009).

On the other hand, elementary students who regularly read in their leisure time usually have larger vocabularies, better reading comprehension skills, better spelling and technical reading skills, than children who read less often (Krashen, 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011). Students who read on a regular basis are better critical thinkers and can expect improved employment prospects (Whitten, Labby, & Sullivan, 2019). Sandell (2022) found that pleasure reading allows adolescents to learn how to problem-solve through the experiences of the protagonists in their books.

As an instructional leader/partner in the school, the school librarian is responsible for encouraging the innate habit of reading for pleasure and knowledge (AASL, 2018). School librarians are instrumental in designing motivational reading initiatives to build excitement for pleasure reading. “Establishing a culture of reading in a classroom or a school is a vital piece of the foundational puzzle of education” (Cheney & Wander, 2022, p 16). These reading programs are usually coupled with locally designed reading promotions including sustained silent reading, book clubs, digital storytelling, student book talks, and reading competitions among classrooms with a theme that excites readers (Merga, 2021).

Research shows that school librarians are introducing students to bibliotherapy as a way to enhance the school’s reading culture. According to Onwubiko (2022), bibliotherapy is “an approach that will help librarians to better address emotional, behavioral, and social concerns of children” (p 1).

Methodology

The methodology was mixed method, patterned after the methodology used in the intrinsic motivation for information-seeking studies (Crow, 2011; Crow, 2015; Crow & Kastello, 2017). The instrument used to identify students who were intrinsically motivated to ready for pleasure was the SRQ-R ([Self-regulation Questionnaire – Reading](#)), an adaptation of the SRQ-A (Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire) (Ryan & Connell, 1989) for the domain of reading behavior. A total of 102 students from four midwest U.S.A high schools of an array of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds participated in this phase of the study.

A total of 28 students were identified as dominant for intrinsic motivation for reading by scoring 50 or above on the Relative Autonomy Index (Center for Self-determination

Theory, 2022), and having a .30 differential between their dominant and second dominant motivational orientation.

The 28 students identified as intrinsically motivated to read for pleasure were invited to complete a one-hour Zoom interview with the researchers in the spring of 2022. Fourteen students were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended.

Discussion and Recommendations

The study suggests strategies librarians and educators can implement to create a culture of reading. Findings showed the importance of fielding readers' advisory questions, which librarians often underestimate (Moyer & Stover, 2010). Librarians need to be aware of the rapport building that takes place when they help youth find their next "great read." They must know their collection, be readers themselves, and enjoy books (Moyer, 2007). Introducing students to new books can be used to begin the process of building a culture of reading while addressing the decline in reading for pleasure.

When discussing the reading episodes, informants revealed they read as an escape. Garner (2020) explained that reading escapism is a "common way to experience an 'escape' from unpleasant or difficult realities" (p. 5). This provides social emotional relief to students and further supports the importance of connecting students with a good read (Onwubiko, 2022).

An issue expressed by the informants was that there was no free time to read in high school. Lee (2020) said that for school districts to create a culture of reading, they need to establish a designated reading time for students. Students who are intrinsically motivated to read tend to be high achievers. If school administrators understood this, they would be more likely to allow more time for reading for pleasure.

The findings also illustrate the importance of having a culture of reading in the home. School librarians can support families by offering a Family Reading Night or Family Book Clubs to encourage reading in the home.

Students felt autonomous when they were allowed to choose their own reading materials. Professors should instruct pre-service teachers to provide a choice of reading materials for students. School librarians should make sure they have a variety of materials for students in both print and digital formats.

References

- American Association of School Librarians (2018). *National school library standards for learners, school librarians, and school libraries*. ALA Editions.
- Assor, A., Kaplan, H., Feinberg, O., & Tal, K. (2009). Combining vision with voice: A learning and implementation structure promoting teachers' internalization of practices based on self-determination theory. *Theory and Research in Education* 7(2), 234-243.
- Center for Self-determination Theory. (2022). *Self-regulation questionnaires*.
<https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/self-regulation-questionnaires/>
- Cheney, C., & Wander, P. (2022). The library learning commons as home base for establishing a reading culture. *Teaching Librarian*, 29(3), 16-18.
- Crow, S. R. (2011, March). Exploring the experiences of upper elementary school children who are intrinsically motivated to seek information. *School Library Research*, 14.
http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol14/S_LR_ExploringtheExperiences_V14.pdf
- Crow, S. R. (2015). The information seeking behavior of intrinsically motivated elementary school children of a collectivist culture. *School Library Research*, 18.
<http://www.ala.org/aasl/slr/volume18/crow>
- Crow, S. R., & Castello, L. (2017). A tale of three cities: Fostering intrinsic motivation for information seeking in children of diverse cultures. *International Education Studies*, 10 (5). <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ies/article/view/68009/36901>
- Garner, J. (2020). "Almost like Freedom?": Prison Libraries and Reading as Facilitators of Escape. *Library Quarterly*, 90(1), 5-19.
- Klapp, A. (2015). Does grading affect educational attainment? A longitudinal study. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 22(3), 302-323.
- Krashen, S. (2005). Is in-school free reading good for children? Why the National Reading Panel Report is (still) wrong. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(6), 444-447.
- Lee, L. (2020). Schoolwide strategies for promoting a love of reading. *Edutopia*.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/schoolwide-strategies-promoting-love-reading>
- Lonas, L. (2023, July 13). Reading for fun plunges to 'crisis level for US students. *The Hill*.
<https://thehill.com/homenews/education/4093843-reading-for-fun-plunges-to-crisis-level-for-us-student>
- Merga, M.K. (2021). What is the literacy supportive role of the school librarian in the United Kingdom? *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 53(4).

- Mol, S. E., & Bus, A. G. (2011). To read or not to read: A meta-analysis of print exposure from infancy to early adulthood. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(2), 267–296.
- Moyer, J.E. (2007). Learning from leisure reading: A study of adult public library patrons. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 46, 66–79.
- Moyer, J.E. & Stover, K.M. (eds). (2010). *The readers' advisory handbook*. ALA.
- Onwubiko, E. C. (2022). Application of bibliotherapy by school libraries as a tool for enhancement of reading culture and good behaviors among students. *Library Philosophy & Practice*, 1–30.
- Ryan, R. M. & Connell, J. P. (1989). Perceived locus of causality and internalization: Examining reasons for acting in two domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 749-761.
- Sandell, M. (2020). Teaching social emotional skills through literacy. *Digital Commons@Hamline*. Hamline University.
https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1597&context=hse_cp
- Tian, L., Chen, H., & Huebner, E. S. (2014). The longitudinal relationships between basic psychological needs satisfaction at school and school-related subjective well-being in adolescents. *Social Indicators Research* 119(1), 353-372.
- Whitten, C., Lobby, S., & Sullivan, S.L. (2016). The impact of pleasure reading on academic success. *The Journal of Multidisciplinary Graduate Research* 2(4), 48-64.

Biographies

Judy A. Henning is an Assistant Professor and the program coordinator for the School Librarian program at the University of Nebraska Kearney.

Sherry R. Crow is Professor and Department Chair of the Advanced Education Programs at Fort Hays State University.