

(CHAPTER 1)

Why Teaching Readers Is Different from Teaching Reading

Research demonstrates that student readers' growth is influenced by an array of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, conative, and epistemic factors (Pearson, Palincsar, Biancarosa, & Berman, 2020). Accordingly, they should each be a focus of reading curriculum and instruction. This is not an either-or proposition—we cannot attend to one at the expense of another, and we cannot rank order their importance. We must use our expanding, detailed knowledge of human development and reading development to shape instruction for teaching readers. When we teach readers (as opposed to teaching reading), we can focus on the range of factors that influence reading growth. In fact, as we help students develop the strategies and skills that will serve them throughout their lives as readers, we can connect this learning with such critical areas as metacognition, self-efficacy, mindfulness, and motivation and engagement.

All students benefit from a broad conceptualization of what matters in becoming successful readers (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013). The students who most need improvement in self-efficacy, who need positive motivation, engagement, enhanced reflection, and metacognition, are quite often our struggling readers. Our instruction must focus on these diverse student needs and learning outcomes, as students undertake acts of reading. However, the attention we give to struggling readers should not be interpreted as a “hands-off” message related to our more successful student readers. The continued development of accomplished student readers is just as important as the progress we seek

for our struggling students. A student who devours stories may need support to develop self-efficacy when reading history and science texts in fourth grade because self-efficacy is situational. In addition, the ongoing development of metacognition is critical for all students as they work independently with increasingly complex disciplinary texts, multimodal texts, reading on the Internet, and reading-related tasks.

In the following chapters, we will examine singly the factors that influence the course of students' reading development. I note that these factors are marked by interactions and interdependencies. For example, students who are metacognitive and self-aware are better able to identify, understand, and appreciate the relationship between their efforts and the outcomes of their reading. This awareness helps students build self-efficacy and agency and make accurate attributions for their reading performance, which in turn can motivate them to return to reading because they associate reading with success, positive feelings, and being "in control" of their world. One result is a beneficial cascade effect, in which improvements in one aspect of student reading flow into other areas and contribute to overall development.

This book focuses on the positive outcomes of teaching readers. We hope for these outcomes for each and every reader. However, we must acknowledge the challenges that some readers face. Struggling readers have their own sets of individual challenges, and they are often marked by dysfunctional interactions and interdependencies. A reader's low self-efficacy can lead to poor motivation, contributing to less actual reading, which prevents cognitive strategies and skills practice and the development of metacognition. Negative results follow and accumulate. Many student readers who struggle associate their past reading experiences with failure and unhappiness, a negative outcome that contributes to a lack of motivation and engagement with present and future reading. Detachment from reading, an inability to monitor their reading efforts, and a lack of self-awareness can lead these students to make erroneous attributions for their performance. For example, students believing that they are unlucky when they read, and not believing that their effort and attention can influence their work, avoid reading. The related poor motivation leads students away from, instead of toward, reading. I examine various means of reorienting these students to motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy. When teaching readers, we want to take advantage of the interrelated nature of the factors that influence students' reading development and build on positive experiences.

These influencers of student development—including metacognition, motivation and engagement, and self-efficacy—assume different roles in reading. They can be, simultaneously, both the conditions for, and the results of, reading. For example, motivation must be present for reading success as students begin a challenging text. And motivation can also be a result of an act of reading, based on the pride a student feels for a job well done with that challenging text, and the realization that reading opens doors to fascinating worlds. A series of successful or unsuccessful reading experiences produces positive or negative motivation, respectively. Positive self-efficacy can lead students to read more, with subsequent success reinforcing that habit. Negative self-efficacy leads students to steer clear of reading. Sufficient prior knowledge is necessary for a student to construct meaning from text, and gains in knowledge are a hoped-for result of reading done well.

Such influences on reading are dynamic, and they can change. A student's generally positive motivation to read can be worn down by a series of unrewarding, or failing, acts of reading. Likewise, a student's low self-efficacy for reading can change through a series of positive experiences that highlight student effort and result in success. The array of factors that influences reading is complex. Teaching in reference to them is challenging. However, the interrelationships of these factors suggest that we can help move students toward successful reading experiences and positive self-images as readers by taking strategic advantages of these relationships.

Keeping track of (let alone addressing and teaching to) the diverse individual differences in our students' reading development can be a monumental task, especially when we consider our already demanding instructional days. How can we find time to attend to motivation, self-efficacy, and metacognition when some of our students struggle to learn sound-symbol correspondences and reading comprehension strategies, and the curricular remedy is limited to repeating the instruction? How can we further contribute to accomplished student reader growth when we are hard-pressed to cover the content in content area reading? From one perspective—one that I encourage throughout this book—the positive interactions of factors like motivation and self-efficacy can support growth and create a synergy for our student readers. This outcome is a valuable return on our investment of teaching time and effort. Students who experience success are in a good position to appreciate and grow in relation to the myriad factors that contribute to their reading growth.

(CHAPTER REVIEW)

1. Describe how teaching readers differs from teaching reading.
2. What are the limitations of teaching only reading strategies and skills?
3. Describe one area of students' reading development that is not always addressed in reading programs.
4. Explain how one factor in reading development (e.g., motivation) can influence another factor (e.g., self-efficacy).
5. What is a possible benefit of teaching both strategies and skills and the factors sketched in this chapter?

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