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IMPROVING READING WITH TARGETED STRATEGIES FOR A RELUCTANT ELEMENTARY READER

Amanda Bright

Indiana State University

Abstract When elementary school children struggle with reading skills, teachers and parents worry. When young children are reluctant to even engage in the act of reading, the situation becomes a dire. This action research project focused on a single first-grade male student who, despite support in the home and in the classroom, was averse to participating in any type of reading. Using a mixed methods approach, three research-based reading strategies were introduced to this learner to engage his sense of self-efficacy for the task, and both his responses, as well as the reactions of his parent, were analyzed. The action research found that through choice-based, interactive methods of reading instruction, the perception of ability regarding reading improved slightly for both the learner and the parent. Although limited in scope and sample, this action research provides support for both the usefulness of individual, responsive reading interventions as well as the application of self-efficacious strategies meant to help motivate a reluctant elementary reader.

Keywords: reading, strategies, reluctant learner, self-efficacy

Introduction

The words and phrases can be found throughout educational literature: reluctant, disengaged, unmotivated, falling behind, at-risk. More students are wearing these labels in schools and feeling both the stigma and effects of their meaning. The research is particularly pointed surrounding beginning readers. From kindergarten to first-grade, the foundation of basic literacy is supposed to be laid as a larger access skill for nearly every area to follow. “Reading difficulty is a particularly salient marker for achievement in young children because it is a primary focus of early education and a principal predictor of current and later achievement” (Grills-Taquechel, Fletcher, Vaughn, & Stuebing, 2012, p. 36). But often, young students are failing to engage with the printed word at this early stage, which puts their future in peril.

According to several researchers, the reluctant elementary reader occurs in specific varieties. Teacher Leah Moorefield noted that “reluctant readers may be divided ‘into three categories: those who can’t read, don’t read, and won’t read’” (as cited in Earl & Maynard, 2006, p. 163). By saying this, Moorefield has tapped into one of the most frustrating aspects of underachieving readers – their reason for struggling is unpredictably multi-faceted. Some children have a specific learning problem that prevents their ability to read, others have no interest and therefore do not gain the crucial practice they need to develop, while still others are smart enough to read well but simply choose not to (Ahmad Al-Saleem, 2012). In order to understand what is at the heart of a reluctant – and therefore struggling – reader, research, observation, and analysis needs to become personal. Acknowledging that unengaged readers are commonplace is a good first step, but will the analysis of an individual elementary reader in order to uncover and combat his status – cannot, will not, or do not – be applicable to other students in his situation? It stands to reason that it will, simply because even though there are three types of reluctant or unengaged learners, there is one common underlying cause: a lack of intrinsic motivation.

Although I am a college instructor, I have had many informal conversations with the mother of an incoming second-grader where these ideas are clearly echoed. He is a capable learner and reader, but he is uninterested and disengaged. He also makes numerous comments about his lack of ability. Although he sees the fault in himself, it surely does not rest there alone. Somewhere along the way, perhaps during his rocky kindergarten year, he deeply internalized the idea that he was below average in ability as a reader – and has continued to act on it. Although research speaks to the educational environment and learning opportunities that he received as the main culprit, the purview of this study was to focus on this student as an individual in order to ascertain if his internal perspective as a reader could be bolstered at this juncture. The purpose of this action research project was to look at how self-efficacy elements interact in a general education first-grader in order to find out what would motivate him to both engage in reading activities and then perhaps read more on his own. Although only a few reading activities and techniques were used, it was the commonality of the self-efficacious aspects of each that were measured and evaluated for effectiveness at this student’s ability to gain self-confidence and therefore be willing to engage in reading.

Literature Review

This action-based research for Kyle is not, of course, a unique endeavor. Struggling learners have existed since the beginning of education, and particularly in the years following the 1980s and its emphasis on failing schools and falling scores, teachers and parents have worried. Historically, school was not for everyone, so the readers who likely would have been most reluctant simply were not asked to read or engage in the process far beyond a basic level. However, today’s society and educational needs are dramatically different, and “compounding the challenge is the reality that today’s classrooms are filled with students with increasingly diverse needs, stemming from differences in their home languages, learning abilities, and literacy experiences” (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003, p. 118). The literature tends to fall on one side or

the other of the paradigm: either authors talk about theoretical abstractions or specific lesson plans regarding motivation for readers. It seems like fewer studies work to marry the general behavior or disposition of the student with a precise methodology.

Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Efficacy. It is the ideas of Jean Piaget that first took the desire for motivation inward from the primarily extrinsic notion of motivation until then. “[W]e often seem to stifle the child’s natural curiosity. In school, children become disinterested, lazy, rebellious, and frightened of failure. The major task of education, it would seem, would be to liberate the bold curiosity with which children enter life” (Crain, 2011, p. 150). Albert Bandura, in the 1960s and 1970s, altered the natural curiosity concept by applying a more social and observational context, noting that when students “see value” in learning, intrinsic motivation and therefore engagement will follow (Daniels, 2010).

Other researchers start from the student instead of the teacher as well, when analyzing intrinsic motivation. Joseph Sanacore (2008) built his argument for creating motivated and self-led readers around personal relevance. Through an extensive set of surveys, Sanacore prescribed strategies about fostering a desire to read for the rest of students’ lives because of a personal investment and therefore personal choice. This overarching theory, however, begs the question of what students will find personally relevant. Individual associations are often difficult for teachers to manage with many students, so some educators are moving toward text choice in order to spur engagement and independence. Idit Katz and Avi Assor (2007) noted that self-determination was a crucial factor in moving reluctant readers to become self-sufficient readers because of self-efficacy. Personal relevance is even more punctuated when goal-setting is involved, and research published in *The Reading Teacher* noted the power of inviting struggling readers to name what they will achieve (Cabral-Marquez, 2015). However the students’ own views and perspectives are involved, a number of researchers assert that self-efficacy, and therefore, intrinsic motivation, comes from a relationship to the personal.

Addressing of Internal Psychological Needs. Whether it is through the establishment of relevance, choice, or goals, there are still real challenges to getting to the core of a student and his or her struggle to read. The issues of self-confidence and anxiety come to mind, and for educator Erika Daniels (2010), students cannot be made to want to learn. Daniels (2010) asserted, “another, even simpler, strategy for increasing motivation is acknowledging students’ fears, worries, and anxieties. By honoring their feelings and listening to what they are going through, motivating teachers indicate that the feelings are legitimate” (p. 28). Once students know that struggling is acceptable, they are less reluctant and more willing to engage of their own volition to improve, Daniels (2010) claimed. As a next step after the proactive address of the psychological components and personal relevance, a number of educators have also outlined methods both inside and outside the classroom to propel intrinsic motivation for struggling readers.

A Path Toward Becoming a Motivated Reader. The theorists and the pragmatists rarely meet in the middle, instead prescribing a single concept or activity to solve the problem of the reluctant reader. When multiple methods are employed, in the form of reading programs, they pull from so many ideologies and incorporate so many variables that it is challenging to tell what is working and what is not. However, many studies, whether implicitly or explicitly, came back to one idea echoed in the work of Annette Earl & Sally Maynard (2006). Earl and Maynard surveyed 14 readers at length and saw it was a lack of confidence in their ability that drove the reticence. The authors found that when children were given responsibility for their own progress as readers (and therefore valued the process) they improved and succeeded. They also added the component of enjoyment to self-efficacy: “If reading is associated with being fun, it is automatically granted a purpose and requires no further justification; it is given status and becomes something the child wants to do” (Earl & Maynard, 2006, p. 178). Therefore, three strategies selected for this action research project were pulled from literature and focused on facilitating intrinsic motivation in students through building their self-confidence.

Methodology

Research has illustrated that self-efficacy and self-confidence are crucial to becoming a successful reader, and this positive self-perception can then mean a “lifetime zest for learning” (Sanacore, 2008, p. 43). However, having influence over intrinsic motivation for another individual is a tall order. This action research project combined several research-based strategies that aimed to create an inward sense of competence. The directional hypothesis was that a seven year old, and his mother, would see an increase in reading engagement due to an intentional focus on strategies meant to build self-efficacy in reading.

The target for this action research project was a seven-year-old Caucasian male named Kyle, a pseudonym in this action research study. He was from a middle-class family with educated parents, both with advanced degrees, and he lived in a mid-sized town in the Midwest. The data from this research could be more widely applicable to other first-grade students in a similar environment, particularly those who do not see themselves as good readers. The mother in this action project was also a component of the research for her knowledge of both his struggles and successes as a reader, both in the classroom and in the home.

Since the goal was to measure and demonstrate self-efficacy, a mixed methods approach was used. It is a challenge to illustrate a more positive sense of self-confidence for a reader with only data, so through triangulation, a general and valid trend appeared regarding Kyle’s feelings about his ability and enjoyment for reading from the beginning to the end of the study.

Procedures for Data Collection. The framework of the research happened in three stages: a pre-assessment, followed by three specific learning tasks, and finally a post-assessment.

Pre-Assessment. The action research project began with a pre-assessment to establish quantitative data that assessed both Kyle and his mother's disposition and attitude toward Kyle's reading. Four questions were assessed on a Likert-type scale rating from 5 = excellent to 1 = not good at all. The questions were asked in order to understand feelings about reading, how good he believed he was at reading (self-efficacy), and the quantifiable future prediction of the ability to improve reading independently. Also, Kyle's mother was given an additional qualitative questionnaire for the purposes of providing background knowledge and artifact-style details about Kyle's reading perceptions. That questionnaire asked for comments or characterizations from former teachers and the mother's hopes for Kyle's feelings toward reading in the future.

Learning Tasks. For the second stage of research, Kyle was asked to engage in three separate learning activities, a few days apart, in which he read and either talked about or wrote about what he read. During the learning tasks, observational field notes were collected, along with some audio recordings. After the conclusion of each of those activities, Kyle was asked to complete a qualitative questionnaire regarding his experience with the reading task that included questions regarding enjoyment of the reading task, how it differed from previous reading experiences or assignments, and a self-perception component that ascertained how well Kyle believed he did on the assignment.

Reading Task No. 1. Kyle explored the picture book strategy that allowed for both creativity and choice on the part of the student. This technique was based on the idea that to enhance narrative reading skills students should be "provided with diverse and complex narratives that demand particular cognitive skills for engagement, such as keeping track of numerous possibilities, and understanding that it isn't always 'necessary to think in a straight line to make sense'" (Pantaleo, 2009, p. 205). The children's book *Does a Kangaroo have a Mother, Too?* by Eric Carle was the basis for the task. Kyle looked at a number of images from the book, four of his choice, and then developed a two- to three-sentence narrative in writing of his own creation. He read his writing aloud for others. Then, a final illustration from the book was chosen, and a fully developed narrative was verbally dictated and recorded about the picture. Kyle, again, read the full narrative (a full page in length), and a printed copy was created for him to keep as further encouragement of achievement. As an extension of the activity, he was asked to read the full narrative from the last illustration aloud for another family member at a later time.

Reading Task No. 2. Kyle participated in "Readers Theater," where he and a friend chose from a selection of one-page scripts that were at a second-grade reading level (Clementi, 2010). Once a script was chosen, they chose roles and read through the script one time

aloud together. Once unsure words were clarified, the two went to a separate room to practice reading through the scripts at least five times to gain fluency. The performance aspect of the strategy for a struggling reader is key: “The activity culminates in a performance, where even the most reluctant readers are stars” (Clementi, 2010, p. 85). When they felt prepared, Kyle and his friend performed the script as theater in front of a small audience two to three times to work through staging. The scripts had humorous aspects, and although movement was up to the performers, they had to stay within the script and were encouraged to read straight from it. As an extension of the activity, Kyle was given two copies each of the script used and two others scripts that were not selected to act out with family and friends at a later time.

Reading Task No. 3. Kyle participated in the Imagine, Elaborate, Predict, and Confirm (IEPC) strategy (Wood & Endres, 2005). This strategy sparked intrinsic motivation because “by closing their eyes and using their senses to imagine a scene, character, event, or object, students have the potential to become active, eager, and engaged participants in a reading lesson” (Wood & Endres, 2005, p. 346). A sheet that had a category for each letter of the strategy drove the activity: IEPC. The first stage of the activity involved Kyle seeing the multiple pieces of artwork in the first chapter of the first book of *The Dragon Masters* series. He was asked to use sensory details and closed-eyes imagination to associate, predict, and guess what could be involved in that chapter. Question probes were also used, along with a few key words from the text to spur answers, which were recorded in the *I* column. The elaboration phase was next, where Kyle took his initial sensory perceptions and added to them with as much detail as possible from the artwork and his own thoughts. Again, extra-textual questions were used as prompts at this stage for assistance, although creativity and open-endedness was encouraged; findings were then recorded in the *E* column (Wood & Endres, 2005, p. 349). The third stage was prediction, in which Kyle created a few predictions based on the imagining and elaborating regarding the text, noting that proof of his predictions would be tracked. We then dove into the text to see if those imaginative, elaborated upon predictions were accurate, circling the ones that were correct from the sheet, or amending other predictions as needed. The purpose of the activity was not to “get it right” as much as it was to explore – incorrect predictions ended up as useful for discussion as correct ones. As an extension of the activity, the entire book, and the others in the series, were left with Kyle and his mother to continue the pattern.

Post-Assessment. After the three learning tasks and qualitative responses were complete, Kyle and his mother completed the post-assessment, which was a mirror of the pre-assessment, using the Likert-type scale and the same questions. Both Kyle and his mother were also asked to provide anecdotal detail in a semi-structured interview form on each question that was recorded through field notes or on the post-assessment itself.

Results and Discussion

The action research project procedure was implemented in three sessions. All sessions took place in Kyle's home, with a seven-year-old friend also participating in the activities, as needed by the strategy.

Pre-Assessment Data. Kyle's mother was given an artifact collection document in order to gain narrative-style information for background and context regarding Kyle's reading. Also, both Kyle and his mother were given the quantitative pre-assessment using the Likert-type scale to create a baseline for both perspectives and dispositions regarding reading.

Qualitative. In the qualitative questionnaire completed by Kyle's mother, she identified a dual nature to Kyle's ideas about reading. She noted that he "loves to be read to every night" and exhibits a "fun, happy, and imaginative" demeanor when someone reads to him. However, she said he does not like to read on his own, and she listed the adjectives "difficult," "forced," and "mad" to describe his reaction to being asked to read independently. Regarding his former teachers' responses, again, his mother acknowledged a duality. In kindergarten, "he started off very slowly and after receiving extra help improved very much. The confidence he gained was noticeable." In first grade, his teacher "always said he did well, but [he] struggled with [letter] blends. He didn't take time to sound out words, just guessed." As an outpouring of these facts, his mother noted that Kyle has not, under any circumstances, "pursued reading on his own." However, her hope is that Kyle can "enjoy reading as a hobby. He has a great imagination, and I think he can grow that even more by reading. But, he currently sees reading as punishment/work."

Quantitative. For the Likert-style scale pre-assessment, both Kyle and Kyle's mother were asked to rate, on a 1-5 scale, and their responses to four questions are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Student Pre-Assessment on Perception of Reading Skills

<i>Scale: 1=not good at all; 2=only a little good; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent</i>	<i>Kyle's responses</i>
1. How do you feel about your reading ability?	1
2. How good are you at reading?	4
3. What are the chances that you will get better at reading?	5
4. What are the chances that you will start reading more on your own?	1

Table 2: Parent Pre-Assessment on Perception of Student Reading Skills

<i>Scale: 1=not good at all; 2=only a little good; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent</i>	<i>Kyle's mother's responses</i>
1. How do you feel about Kyle's reading ability?	3
2. How good is Kyle as a self-motivated reader?	1
3. What are the chances that Kyle will improve greatly with his reading capability?	3
4. What are the chances that Kyle will start reading more on his own?	2

Learning Tasks Data. All of the data collected during all three reading tasks was qualitative in nature, including observational field notes, audio recordings, and an open-ended questionnaire after each activity.

During Reading Task No. 1. For this task, Kyle listened to the directions of the picture book-driven activity devised by Pantaleo (2009) and asked: "Can I answer whatever I want?" He shouted "yay" when the answer was yes, and he specifically chose the four images from the picture book that the writing would be focused upon. As he worked, Kyle giggled as he looked at the Eric Carle (2000) book regarding his own sentence construction. He was focused for at least five minutes for each image and its corresponding writing. After each set of two to three words, Kyle re-read his sentence, but didn't make any changes. He laughed throughout and completed the task by writing both legibly and inside the lines. When asked to share his sentences for each picture from the book, he complied, but did stumble over some of his own writing as he read. The actual written expression was unclear. One reproduction stated the following: "big kanwroo have goo goo babe. Big thige have babs. Do you were shad. Penqawin have fligrs evne I know that." As the task went on, he started to ask fewer questions about the task (from four for the first photo, to no questions for the last one). For the second half of the assignment, Kyle chose an elephant picture from the book, and he verbally constructed a narrative entitled "The Diary of Mr. Elephant Guy Who Gets Hurt Very Badly." During the writing of the story, an incorrect set of verbal grammar was employed, so leading questions were asked as to the correct form of verb tenses when they went awry: "Do you mean 'land' or 'landed' here; which sounds right?" Each time, Kyle self-corrected himself. The full story was then typed up and both emailed and printed out for Kyle, who was asked to share it with his father by reading the full text of the story to him aloud.

After Reading Task No. 1. Directly after the first reading activity was complete, Kyle filled out a questionnaire (although part became semi-structured interview) regarding the task. His answers to three of the questions (what he enjoyed most, what was different than other reading assignments, and why he would like to do the activity again) were all “being silly.” When asked how well he thought he did on the reading assignment, Kyle answered “grat” (great). His mother reported that Kyle did indeed read the full story to his father that night from the printed copy, and he said he wanted to take the electronic version of the elephant narrative and make a full book out of it with pictures. In her after-reading task questionnaire, Kyle’s mother noted he had “a lot of fun” doing the task, which was in juxtaposition to his normal disposition with reading because he “usually despises writing and doing any ‘work.’” His mother also noted that during the course of the activity, which she observed, she felt that Kyle “had confidence in himself” and that she thought he would like to engage in this type of activity again.

During Reading Task No. 2. The second activity employed the technique of Reader’s Theater (Clementi, 2010). Out of three second-grade level scripts, Kyle chose *TV Repair Person* (2016), which is a short, two-person play about a television repairman who comes to another man’s house to fix his set, only to pull everything out of the set before realizing it was not plugged in – and charging \$87 for the house call. During the activity, Kyle said he was “excited” to start. When he fully understood the nature of the task, he maintained his focus for approximately ten minutes. Once he and his peer selected roles, they read the script out loud. Kyle had a few stumbles when reading, but he continued the script from beginning to end. The boys then went into another room to practice, where they read the script through at least five times. For the performance, Kyle requested a larger audience and to do the entire reading twice. The first read-through had two inaccurate lines, but Kyle noticed and corrected the errors on the second read-through. Then, the third through fifth read-throughs, now incorporating staging, were completely accurate. Kyle was willing to read aloud in front of others for this activity, and he was given the scripts he practiced along with two other sets of scripts, which he was encouraged to do with other family members.

After Reading Task No. 2. In his after-reading task questionnaire and semi-structured interview, Kyle again reported that “being silly” was his favorite aspect, although this time, he asked for specific direction on how to spell silly and then corrected it in two places on his questionnaire. The difference in this reading activity, in his mind, was the ability to “walk around,” and he noted the value of movement and independence when a follow-up question was asked as to why that was important to him. Again, Kyle noted that he would be willing to engage in this type of reading activity again, and he described the activity itself as “great” – using correct spelling this time because he asked for guidance. Following this activity, his mother noted that Kyle enjoyed himself and that acting out plays and scripts is something he has always liked to do, so he was involved in the activity. However, Kyle did not do the scripts later in the week with family members. He read a few lines on one of the scripts, deemed it too difficult for him, and stopped, according to qualitative responses from his mother.

During Reading Task No. 3. With a series by Tracy West (2014) called *The Dragon Masters*, the Imagine, Elaborate, Predict, and Confirm (IEPC) reading strategy was used to engage Kyle in independent reading (Wood & Endres, 2005). At the beginning of the session, Kyle was reminded that he was a good reader (as evidenced by the two previous activities). Using the first chapter in book one, Kyle looked at each of the five drawings in the chapter closely. For each drawing, he was asked to do each of the first three stages of the strategy. For imagine, he was asked to talk about how the scene in the book smelled, felt, sounded, tasted, etc., using sensory detail to explain what it would be like to be in that drawing. For elaborate, he was asked to dive deeper into explanation or description about that initial detail. Then, in predict, he was asked to postulate what was happening in the story based on that image. Kyle spent approximately 15 minutes on the task in total, without any breaks. In the first image in the text, he saw a boy holding a worm and smiling. In the imagine phase, he said the boy was feeling the worm in his hands. In the elaborate phase, he said the worm felt “disgusting and slimy,” but that the boy liked it. In the prediction phase, Kyle said the boy probably “felt good” at home with his friend the worm “guy”. The qualitative collection of IEP then continued with the four other images until the ultimate predictions were made.

After the first three sections of the chart were complete, Kyle read the first chapter to confirm or deny his predictions. His friend read the first paragraph, but then Kyle read the next two paragraphs of text out loud on his own. There were four places where he didn't know the word so he just guessed, but he read the entire assigned section. He then continued to alternate reading several paragraphs at a time with his friend until the chapter was complete. Throughout, he used the chart to confirm predictions, noting with a smile when one of his ideas happened just the way he thought it would in the book, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Qualitative Data for Reading Task No. 3

Imagine	Elaborate	Predict	Confirm
"Feeling worm"	"Disgusting and slimy"	"Boy feels good at home"	"Boy IS happy at home"
"Feeling onion"	"In field"	"Boy poor and lives in country"	"Boy is from onion farm in small village"
"Feels hot outside"	"He might faint"	"He try to find water"	
Smell of horses and manure, barn"	Yucky smell"	"Mommy doesn't want boy to leave but boy leaves (with man)"	"Soldier did arrive on a horse; mother did plead for her son to stay"
"Traveling in a maze"	"Feels lost an scared; could fall in the river"	"Going to castle at the end or death in a snowy place"	"Trip to castle was long"
"Feel door made of wood"	"Scared and man running up the stairs"	"He is scared and alone"	"Boy was very alone and scared behind the door (down the stairs)"
"Breaking glass of a window"	"Burning of fire and smoke there"	"Dragon broke out of the place; magic door?"	"Red dragon broke through (using magic!) and breathed fire"

After Reading Task No. 3. In his after-reading task questionnaire, Kyle had similar answers about this activity as the previous two, but he also noted that this assignment was different because it had "reading" – a traditional book concept instead of other tools. His mother asked him if he would continue to read the books, with both the strategy and on his own, and the response was noncommittal. The four books in the series were left with him, and both the strategy sheets, as well as models for the parents.

Post-Assessment Data - Qualitative. After the self-efficacy strategies employed, Kyle noted that he enjoyed the activities. Although during the next few weeks he did not pick up a book on his own to read, he did ask to try the reading activities again, according to his mother. He described the reading tasks as “fun” and was willing to do more because they allowed him to “be silly.” For his mother, she has not seen substantial change in his desire to be independent due to a growing self-efficacy. She noted he “never on his own [reads]; I have to be with him.” In much the same vein, she believes at the end of the project that “if Kyle finds something that fascinates him, I think he will find that he loves reading. But he isn’t patient enough yet nor interested in sitting down to ‘relax’ with a book.”

Post-Assessment Data - Quantitative. Using the same Likert-type scale at the end of the learning tasks, Kyle and his mother produced the following responses, as noted in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: Student Post-Assessment on Perception of Reading Skills

<i>Scale: 1=not good at all; 2=only a little good; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent</i>	<i>Kyle's responses</i>
1. How do you feel about your reading ability?	5
2. How good are you at reading?	5
3. What are the chances that you will get better at reading?	5
4. What are the chances that you will start reading more on your own?	2

Table 5: Parent Post-Assessment on Perception of Student's Reading Skills

<i>Scale: 1=not good at all; 2=only a little good; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent</i>	<i>Kyle's mother's responses</i>
1. How do you feel about Kyle's reading ability?	3
2. How good is Kyle as a self-motivated reader?	1
3. What are the chances that Kyle will improve greatly with his reading capability?	4
4. What are the chances that Kyle will start reading more on his own?	3

Looking at the qualitative and quantitative data together, using triangulation, it seems clear that the techniques may have slightly improved Kyle's reading comprehension abilities and motivation to engage in reading activities.

Mixed Methods Data Discussion. For a seven-year-old boy who was reluctant to read and lacked apparent intrinsic motivation to do so, Kyle was willing to engage in reading-centered activities through the process of this research. He demonstrated his increased self-motivation through both his focused engagement in activities (increasing time on task with each activity) and desire to continue learning using the research-based strategies, in our assessment sessions and afterward.

Qualitative. As evidenced through his questionnaire answers, Kyle is looking for fun to be a component in reading; however, he is also interested in open boundaries and creativity. His favorite aspects of the learning tasks were the chances to express himself, have choice, and see reactions to *his* thoughts and theories. He was increasingly willing to engage in the reading. His mother did not see a real change in his willingness to read independently, but she did note that after each reading task, he was engaged and happy to be participating and reading. Particularly in the second and third reading tasks, Kyle was more confident in his ability to read – enough to perform in front of others and read from a novel aloud, as well as through his more careful consideration and effort during reflection on qualitative responses. This exposure to strategies meant to promote self-efficacy for Kyle did provide some progress toward motivation to continue reading – there were no external rewards for doing so. Ultimately, however, the goal of picking up a text himself – because he believes he can just sit and read it – was not reached within a few weeks of the conclusion of the research.

Quantitative. For the pre- and post-assessments, the goal was to see a numerical change from the beginning to the end when measuring Kyle's self-efficacy and perception of himself as a reader. The quantitative change in Kyle is seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Kyle Data from Pre- to Post-Assessment

<i>Scale: 1=not good at all; 2=only a little good; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent</i>	<i>Kyle's responses (Pre-Assessment)</i>	<i>Kyle's responses (Post-Assessment)</i>
1. How do you feel about your reading ability?	1	5
2. How good are you at reading?	4	5
3. What are the chances that you will get better at reading?	5	5
4. What are the chances that you will start reading more on your own?	1	2 (1 at first)

The data above illustrates a change for Kyle. Although his day-to-day behavior of independent reading has not developed, he has – at some level – gained a more positive view of his own reading ability through the reading tasks. He still seems dubious about reading on his own (even to the extent of changing his self-ranking mid-answer), but otherwise, all of the numbers that represent the possibility of reading independence and self-efficacy demonstrate growth. This was after only three reading tasks, but his enjoyment for these types strategies were a win on some personal level.

For Kyle's mother, the data is a bit more realistic, as she is viewing external behavior rather than just internal disposition regarding reading in a learning environment, noted in Table 7.

Table 7: Kyle's Mother's Data from Pre- to Post-Assessment

<i>Scale: 1=not good at all; 2=only a little good; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent</i>	<i>Kyle's mother's responses (Pre-Assessment)</i>	<i>Kyle's mother's responses (Post-Assessment)</i>
1. How do you feel about Kyle's reading ability?	3	3
2. How good is Kyle as a self-motivated reader?	1	1
3. What are the chances that Kyle will improve greatly with his reading capability?	3	4
4. What are the chances that Kyle will start reading more on his own?	2	3

There was either a slight increase or a status quo finding for each area, which in the short time frame that this project was completed, is understandable. It is particularly notable that although her view on Kyle's current ability is unchanged, her prospects for his reading future have improved through the observation of the reading tasks.

Limitations

Modern research on reluctant readers comes from a variety of perspectives and philosophies, but most acknowledge that for long-term investment and success – in addition to the role of a high quality school reading environment – intrinsic motivation through self-efficacy is important. Although a longitudinal study would be the most appropriate for Kyle to truly judge this, the strategies that emphasized the intrinsic elements through these reading strategies, such as autonomy, creativity, and choice, did interest Kyle – to the point where he was asking for another reading task. Therefore, the findings of this action research, however limited, are evidence for the greater body of work on particular strategies and how they can promote motivation and perhaps later more self-efficacy for reluctant readers.

Conclusion

Although this research project was based on a single first-grade reader who struggled with the motivation to pick up a book, his reluctance is indicative of a larger trend. "Experts in the field of reading motivation identify the lack of student engagement with

literacy as one of the most severe crises of our schools. That makes finding ways to increase reading motivation a top priority” (Cabral-Márquez, 2015, p. 471). The goal of this project was the same – to help Kyle choose to read of his own volition because he felt capable to do so. Yet, although the data suggested that Kyle’s general disposition toward reading had improved – particularly regarding his self-perception and willingness to engage, the research project was not a complete success. In the weeks following the implementation of the strategies, his mother did not see a large change in his reluctance or his feelings about himself as a reader. However, during the reading comprehension activities themselves, and in the post-assessment, he did improve in willingness to practice, so there is hope for forward movement. It was a breakthrough, particularly from his mother’s perspective, when he asked to do more reading, or work with a text longer, because the request was counter to his normal learning disposition regarding reading.

Educational Implications. Even with a number of complicating factors, the findings have some applications and implications for the educational community. It is clear to researchers that reluctant readers vex teachers. According to Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland (2003) in a large-scale study of educators, both new teachers and veterans said struggling readers were one of their biggest concerns. “Their questions focused overwhelmingly on their need to learn instructional strategies and skills to improve students’ literacy” (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003, p. 471). As an educator, I know that it is much easier to rely on extrinsic strategies for engaging reluctant readers, rather than strategies that are simply about reading itself. It should be noted that, in this specific study, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires used are not scientific in nature, but as an educator, the qualitative data does support the notion that both reading ability and confidence were improved for this student through these reading comprehension activities. This project then did breathe more life into the premise that by providing self-efficacious strategies, motivation to read can be improved for a reluctant reader. Of particular note are the activities that were used in this action research and their success with this learner in this environment, especially when paired with individual intervention. Indeed, with this learner, it was the personal attention, creativity, and direction that created a motivation to read, which is notable. The complicating factor is, of course, time and the ability to work with individual learners, but it is a goal to which both educators and parents should strive.

About the Author

Amanda Bright is a former professional journalist who later spent a decade as a scholastic journalism adviser and English teacher in Illinois. Currently, Bright is a journalism instructor at Eastern Illinois University and a doctoral student in Curriculum, Instruction, and Media Technology at Indiana State University, where she also serves as the Media Content Coordinator for Indiana State Online. Bright serves as the Social Media Director and Web Co-Administrator for the Illinois Journalism Education Association and is on its Board of Directors. Email: amandabright2002@gmail.com

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