

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Developing Student Motivation to Read

John T. Guthrie, Ph.D. • November 2010

Topic: Improving K-3 Reading Comprehension  
Practice: Engage Students With Text

### Highlights

- Dr. John Guthrie, professor of human development at the University of Maryland, overviews five ways to support student motivation and engagement in reading.
- Guthrie describes the role of (1) building student confidence, (2) giving students choices, (3) developing student interests, (4) promoting student collaboration, and (5) using thematic units, and he illustrates each with examples.

### About the Interviewee

John T. Guthrie is the Jean Mullan Professor Emeritus in the Department of Human Development at the University of Maryland. He received his Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Illinois in 1968. He is a member of the International Reading Association Reading Hall of Fame, and he received the Oscar Causey Award from the National Reading Conference. He is a Fellow of the American Education Research Association and the American Psychological Association. Dr. Guthrie is principal investigator of a five-year

NICHD-funded grant targeting adolescent reading engagement of information text, focusing on all grade 7 students in a district from 2007 to 2012. Co-authored with former students, *Engaging Adolescents in Reading* (2008) is his latest book. From 2002 to 2007, Dr. Guthrie was principal investigator of a five-year federally funded grant to examine Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction in a district-wide intervention. His findings on this project are published in articles and the book *Motivating Reading Comprehension: Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction*, co-edited with Allan Wigfield and Kathleen C. Perencevich (2004). Dr. Guthrie has published articles such as “Reading Motivation and Reading Comprehension Growth in the Later Elementary Years” in *Contemporary Educational Psychology* (2007) and “Contributions of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction to Knowledge About Interventions for Motivations in Reading” in *Educational Psychologist* (2007).

## Full Transcript

I’m John Guthrie. I am a professor of human development in the University of Maryland.

It’s key to help children build a sense of confidence in reading, and the way teachers do build confidence is by enabling students to succeed in the tasks that they face every day. The first absolutely crucial element in helping the students build confidence is to have easy texts: texts they can handle or words that they can read or tasks, like phonics tasks, that they can do successfully.

Many kids are faced with books that are too hard, tasks that are marginally beyond them. And so a good teacher who is building confidence is starting with competence, being sure the students are very securely grounded in tasks they can do, books they can read well enough to enjoy to develop an interest. And then their competency will build, and their confidence will build, as they get bigger tasks. So easy texts is key point number one.

Key point number two: praise children’s success. Kids will succeed if you get the right texts for them, and they love to hear that they’re doing it well, and they can almost not hear it enough. And praise is best when it’s very specific: “Susie, that was an outstanding sentence that you just read out loud for all of us.” That’s the kind of thing children can benefit from. And so praise is especially valuable.

Also, helping children set their own goals in reading. A child might be good at reading a page but might stop after that page. So you might help the child; say, “All right, what is your goal for tomorrow? You already know how to read one page. Can we go to two pages for tomorrow?”

Beyond the choice of one book to read, there are many other choices teachers can learn how to give. For example, which part of the book do you want to read? Maybe all children in the classroom are expected to read the same book at a given time in the curriculum. Does that mean the teacher can give no choices? Not at all. So they can have many choices. Some kids in kindergarten like to read to an animal, or read to a friend, or pretend to have an animal to read to. And so they can choose who they want to read to. Many of

these choices teachers can bring into the experience that a student has every day. Good teachers are giving five choices every lesson; not just once a day, but every lesson five choices brings the student's interests, the student's competencies, the student's self into the lesson.

A motivating environment helps young children in the K-3 period to discover that reading can help them pursue their interests. Even young children, age two or three, have interests. Some children like fantasy stories; other children like butterflies. And when children realize that you can read about a butterfly or you can read about a fantasy as well as hear a story about make-believe, they become intrigued. So they are able to expand their interests through books.

Teachers can motivate students in the classroom by giving them chances to be social in their reading, and many little opportunities for collaboration can come up every day and every lesson. So teachers can support motivation by helping kids collaborate as partners. For example, a teacher might say, "Read the first half of the story with your partner; read it together. After you read it, tell your partner what you think the most exciting part of the first half of the story was." So this is a collaborative activity, very simple, it can happen daily. And there is a range of other collaborations that teachers can get started without too much complexity.

Help the students make connections in their reading. We teach thematic units. So there might be a thematic unit of survival in the wilderness, and how do animals survive, how do plants survive, and how do humans survive in the wilderness? And students can read about this for six weeks or 12 weeks. They can read stories; they can read poems; they can read biology about plants and animals. And when they do this integrated multi-genre reading, they are able to connect.

We had a classroom of children in the lower grades that had worked in a 12-week concept during a reading instruction unit. This group of 12 students, in the last week of school, set up a lending library. They went home and read these books to their siblings and came back and told the story about how their siblings liked what they were able to explain to them, what they were able to read to them. And so this class formed their own library of reading these books long after formal instruction had really ended in the school. And this is engaged reading. Those kids have become engaged readers.