

Emily Dalglish

CEP 802

12/5/10

### **Motivation Case**

Justin is a second grade student. He seems to be a good kid at heart, but is a little rough around the edges. He frequently gets into trouble on the bus, playground, or any other “loosely” supervised areas. The other children accuse him of hitting or bullying on the playground. He is an average student, but he has very low motivation. He rarely completes assignments in class. Instead, he draws pictures, makes paper footballs, or collects pencil tips, straws, or other bits of garbage in his pencil box.

During independent reading, Justin refuses to read for the third day in a row. When the teacher tries to get him started, he complains that he doesn't like any of the books. Justin has repeatedly brought in thick chapter books far above his reading level. He claims that these are the only interesting books. His teacher has exhausted the classroom library searching for appropriate level and “interesting” texts for Justin. She has even spent time helping him look in the school library for books at his level. Justin's appeal that everything is “boring” is one he knows that no one can contradict.

Justin's parents got divorced last year. He often comes to school without a coat and receives “free or reduced lunches”. His first grade teacher says that he did well in first grade, but it was clear that the divorce had an impact on him

when he started having trouble towards the end of the year.

No matter what his teacher or parents have done this year, Justin just couldn't be bothered with school. He finds everything either boring, or he says that he can't do it because it's too hard. Justin could do well in school, but he just lacks the motivation to do so.

### **Motivation Assessment**

#### **Learner, Activity, Setting:**

Justin, a second grade student, has had trouble staying focused and motivated during independent reading. He attends a suburban school in a class of approximately 26 students. He is a participant of the "school of choice" program. His parents were divorced last year, and he has recently had an increase in behavior problems at school. Prior to the divorce, Justin was a good to average student with minimal behavior problems.

Students are allowed to select a variety of books to fill their bags for independent reading with. The only stipulations to book selection are that the books are the appropriate level (marked by colored sticker in designated bins) and that they choose a variety of genres, replacing finished books for new books every so often. This freedom in choice allows students to select books that they find interesting. Students are to read independently, using that time to practice the skill from the day's mini lesson, or a skill they have been working on in small group.

Justin sits at his table group (there are three other students, two girls and

one boy). Each of these other students is a self-motivated, independent worker who will set good examples for Justin and not be distractions.

**Observations of the Motivational Problem:**

During independent reading, Justin frequently attempts to read texts he has brought from home or the library that are far above his independent reading level causing frustration and off task behaviors. He has refused all suggested reading materials from the teacher (under claims that the suggested are “boring”). He begins independent reading by reading from his selected text. After five to ten minutes, he begins looking around the room, talking with neighbors, or playing in his pencil box. When redirected he will ask to go to the bathroom (claiming a stomach ache or an urgent need to go) or put his head down on the table and refuse to do anything.

**Target Model:**

**Task:** Under the workshop model, the tasks for students are naturally differentiated. Each student should be reading at his or her own independent reading level. The task for each session of independent reading is written on the board, given verbally at the beginning of independent reading, and once again as a brief interruption during independent reading.

**Authority:** As long as the texts that students read match their ability level, students are free to read on any subject they desire. A student may for instance, read a work of fiction, a work of non-fiction, and a poem all about iguanas, so long as each of these texts are at the student’s independent reading level.

During workshop, students also have an opportunity for partner reading. This

task involves a higher degree of teacher authority because students are assigned to specific partners and places where they are to read with their partners.

**Recognition:** Students are recognized at a class and school level for moving up reading levels, persistence, and achieving personal goals. Students who exhibit these behaviors may receive a “ticket” to win a drawing for lunch with the principal, a star with their name on it to be displayed in the school, or a positive note or call home to commend their efforts.

**Grouping:** During independent reading, the grouping goes from whole class (for the lesson) to individual to partner reading. The learning goals are not strongly emphasized with students on an individual level. Other than meeting lesson objectives, students are not encouraged towards setting and meeting individual goals.

**Evaluation:** Students are frequently checked on their skills. During individual conferences (each student is seen, on average, every other day), a student may exhibit any number of skills depending on what they are reading and what demands are placed on the reader. Students are given reading tests to move up levels. These involve reading a selected text (a running record is taken during some or all of the text depending on the level and then the student verbally answers comprehension questions). Students are encouraged to take these tests until they pass (a student would never “not be allowed” to move up a level or take a test unless they lacked the ability to do so). Evaluation is done on a daily basis during whole and small group instruction, as well as during

individual conferences. During individual conferences, the teacher always checks for comprehension (general and at a deeper level). In this way, the teacher can easily gauge whether a student is ready to move up levels.

**Time:** Students who require extra practice are pulled out to read with parent volunteers periodically. We also have student volunteers from older grades who listen to second graders read. There is lots of time to practice reading at school and at home! Students work on a "flexible" timeline in that students cannot be forced to move up a reading level before they are ready. Some student will progress rapidly, while others may stay at a certain reading level for months. If a student stays at a reading level for an extended period, that student may simply receive additional support and/ or instruction.

**Conclusion:** In this second grade classroom, learners are largely intrinsically motivated. The external motivators used are minimal, including a statement of praise, a "ticket" for an opportunity for lunch with the principal, or a star and recognition in front of the school. Each of these external motivators has a "lottery" effect. In other words, a student is not guaranteed anything (except the promise of becoming a better reader) for finishing books.

### **Motivational Intervention**

As a means of synthesizing the overarching course themes that seem particularly relevant to Justin's case, I have selected the areas of course content that appear to feed into one another, may be developed into specific action points, and that may also be applied to Deci and Ryan's three psychological

needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness as well as the TARGET structure. These include Justin's beliefs (that he is not self-determined and an over-estimation of his reading ability) and the strategies of gaining situational interest, changing the student groupings, introducing self-monitoring, goal setting, and allowing students to see and discuss their reading evaluations openly with the teacher. Each of these strategies may be applied with the intended outcome of rectifying Justin's erroneous beliefs and thus increasing his motivation to learn, thus time on task, and eventually his reading ability as a natural result.

Justin currently believes that he has little, if any, self-determination concerning his activities during reading as evidenced by his refusal to try teacher-selected texts and participate at the appropriate times. These behaviors directly indicate a desire for increased self-direction. Justin's feelings of self-determination must be increased. Brophy states that, "if we feel self-determined, then, for practical purposes, we are self-determined, even if extrinsic incentives are in effect or if our behavior is constrained in various ways (154)." By gaining Justin's situational interest during the mini-lesson through selecting texts that match his interests and ability level, when Justin seeks to read these materials he will feel not only self-determined but autonomous and under no coercion of the teacher.

Another tactic that may increase Justin's feelings of self-determination, while meeting his need for relatedness, is through practicing reading with a

peer he admires. Given this option on certain days during a portion of individual reading time, Justin's feelings that he is in control of how he spends his time may increase. Additionally, practicing skills that he has learned in the mini-lesson and worked on individually with a peer gives him the sense of collaboration within the classroom and that ideas carry over from one context to another.

The increase in Justin's feelings of self-determination will theoretically transform his lacking motivation into a newly found intrinsic motivation. Where previous intrinsic motivators in the classroom had failed him, increasing Justin's sense of self-direction as well as introducing self-monitoring may prove exceptionally beneficial for him.

Stipek suggests, "One simple method that has been used to help children begin to take responsibility for their own behavior is to have them keep a record of it (2002)." This strategy also allows Justin some control over his environment that he may not otherwise sense he has. A time-sampling method is one way to institute self-monitoring. In this technique, students record their activity every five minutes. Furthermore, since the goal is to increase Justin's time on task, this goal is congruent with what researchers have found: "self-monitoring is more effective in increasing desired behaviors than in decreasing undesirable behaviors" (Stipek 2002). After reflecting on this activity log, Justin will be able to set some realistic goals for how he spends his time. With more suitable level texts in hand and an ideal of how his time is currently spent, Justin now needs

to be fully convinced that these particular texts really will be more gratifying than the challenging books he had previously selected.

Stipek sites research that indicates students in the first year or two in elementary school generally have exceptionally high self-perceptions of ability that decrease to more realistic levels through their academic careers. As evidenced by his continual selection of and attempts to read texts that are far above his level, Justin is no exception to this research. While obviously it would not be desirable to undermine Justin's perception of his ability, it is, however, necessary for his academic progression that he attains a more realistic perception of his reading ability. As students' time in school increases, Stipek mentions the increased exposure to various academic demands, evaluations, and relationships with teachers as reasons for the change in student perception. Justin is not a below average student, thus his perceptions of his reading ability have not been changed because he sees peers whom he realizes are not as good at reading as he is, reading the leveled classroom material. However, with the proposed student-groupings, Justin may see students he admires who are better in reading than him, yet who are still unable to read the types of books he has been selecting. This collaborative effort may prove beneficial in yet another aspect of Justin's progression.

Another reason Justin's self-perception is skewed may be intentional. Stipek writes that, "students sometimes undermine their own self-confidence by aspiring to unrealistic goals and failing to meet them... Teaching students to set



goals is important because they will need this skill when their achievement pursuits are not monitored on a day-to-day basis” (2002). In either case, an over-estimation of his abilities or self-handicapping, Justin needs to develop a correct estimation of his abilities. This may be achieved, as Stipek mentions, through goal setting. This technique, also used to help increase students’ self-perceptions, may give Justin a presently lacking sense of fulfillment.

During implementation of this aspect of the intervention, it is important to graph the results with Justin. This will help him to visually see his progression. The teacher will meet with Justin weekly to set goals and to discuss and graph how he has met his goals each week and finally, set new goals for the upcoming week. The teacher will help guide Justin toward setting small, achievable goals for a rapid sense of accomplishment. Justin’s meeting personal goals will add to his feelings of self-determination (*he set the goal and achieved it*) as well as competence (*he is meeting goals and making progress*). Aside from the obvious meeting of goals, another way to measure success with Justin’s goal setting is that his time on task will increase. With a personal and realistic goal in mind, Justin now has something to work toward and in turn increase his motivation to learn. With a more positive outlook on his achievement, the final hurdle to overcome in motivating Justin is how he will be evaluated.

In chapter seven, Stipek outlines some key points for ensuring that evaluations aid students in maintaining positive achievement-related beliefs.

Some of these points include providing students with clear, specific, and informative feedback, having students keep personal progress records, giving students opportunities for private interactions with the teacher, and teaching students to evaluate their own work. One of the current formats for evaluation in reading workshop is through a running record. In this evaluation, the teacher keeps on going notes on students' progress. This information is generally not shared with the student, but kept for the teacher and any individuals (aides, reading specialists, administrators, parents) whom the teacher feels it necessary to share with. As a part of this intervention, this record may now be shared with students. Opening this documentation to the students helps them to see and evaluate their own progress. It is a means of providing students with "clear, specific, and informative feedback". It may also include the students' personal log of progress (or the aforementioned goal sheet and graph). This running record is kept during times of one on one conference (and occasionally a note may be added based on something that happened during whole or small group instruction). During individual conferences, the teacher will help students to evaluate their own progress (going over how the student believes he or she has met his or her goals for the week). This revised form of evaluation will contribute to Justin's positive outlook on his progress in reading. Where previously he may have been skeptical of what the teacher thought or what his progress was (other than knowing what reading level he was at), Justin will now have a clear picture of where exactly he stands academically and what he needs to be working towards. Developing this framework for evaluation sets

Justin in an ideal mindset for a learning goals orientation. By framing the running record evaluation as a “record of success” rather than anything intimidating or externally located, Justin and his peers, need not feel apprehensive, but rather motivated by this portfolio.

Through meeting Justin’s needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and applying the strategies of gaining his situational interest, changing the student groupings, self-monitoring, goal setting, and allowing students to see and discuss their reading evaluations openly with the teacher Justin will discover that he has more self-determination than he originally thought and gain a realistic picture of his reading abilities. He will experience an increased motivation to learn and thus increased time on task and eventually an increased reading ability as a natural result.

### **TARGET model application**

**Task:** While under the current reading workshop model, tasks are naturally differentiated; an added dimension to this differentiation has been added through personal goal setting. By having students set and achieve individual goals (changing the classroom climate, not only Justin’s perspective), this helps further ensure that they are working at the appropriate skill level and varies what a given student may be working on at any particular time.

**Authority:** Justin apparent lack of self-determination further illustrates the importance of task authority. His personal voice is allowed greater expression through the proposed student groupings with a peer he admires, selection of

when to read alone, with a partner, or by listening to a book on tape, and personal goal setting. As Justin's self-monitoring abilities increase, there may be opportunities for him to explore greater freedom within the classroom (where and he and his partner read etc).

**Recognition:** Previously, there was no set plan for personal goal setting and achievement of personal goals. While some students may off-handedly mention a personal goal, it was not a program in place. With a focus on setting and achieving personal goals, students may now be recognized for their accomplishments in this area rather than for moving up reading levels alone. This recognition may come in the form of personalized accolades from the teacher during individual conferences (which is more genuine than sweeping statements made before the entire class), the reward of a new book, or a phone call or note home. Brophy sights research suggesting that the only effective form of external reward for reading progress is with additional reading materials (2010). Additionally, by rewarding students for meeting their goals, each student has an equal opportunity to be rewarded. Previously, Justin may have felt that he would never earn a reward ("so why bother?").

**Grouping:** With the proposed intervention and restructuring of grouping, there is a new focus on individual learning goals. Students will also be allowed more flexibility in grouping when reading with a partner (in Justin's case he will be working with a peer he admires or with another student who is interested in reading the same things he is versus pairing strictly on ability level). This collaboration aids in a sense of relatedness within the learning community.

**Evaluation:** In restructuring the evaluation process, students have an open portfolio in which the teacher gives constructive feedback, personal goals are set and achieved, and a graph of the student's progress is kept. This form of evaluation is flexible and personalized in order to best meet the student's needs.

**Time:** In reading workshop, time is and will continue to be, flexible. Students will be encouraged to set and meet weekly personal goals. However, if a goal is not met on a certain week, the student will be encouraged to keep working until the goal is met and revise it if necessary.

### **References:**

Brophy, J. (2010). *Motivating Students to Learn* (3rd Ed.). New York: Routledge

Stipek, D. (2002). *Motivation to Learn: Integrating theory and practice* (4th Ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.