



Climbing the Mountain

Sustaining Motivation and Engaging the Reluctant Reader

In Western industrialized countries in particular children are learning to read, but not becoming readers. It is clear that this is a deep-seated problem, and that the problems seem to start early. Research indicates that there are things we can do, but it may involve changing the whole way we approach teaching children to read.

Reasons why children may show reluctance to read:

- **Difficulty** – It seems to be an underlying assumption that reading materials must present difficulty in order to help the child progress to the next level. But research does not support this and in fact usually indicates the opposite. Whilst children need and thrive on challenge, can you imagine trying to master a task where once you got the hang of one part of it, you were never allowed to practise, consolidate or enjoy that part of the activity again? What would that do to your motivation? Now imagine you're trying something difficult for the first time, a particular DIY task for example, for which you have no instructions, nor have you had the chance to watch anyone else do this particular thing. Imagine that during your very first attempt at this activity, someone you respect and look up to is staring at you throughout the whole thing....

It's difficult to break out of the cycle of 'this is how children learn to read', but if children are constantly pushed to read (possibly exclusively) texts that they find very challenging, without any prior experience of the text *and* under scrutiny, it's easy to see how motivation can wane.



- **Irrelevance** – How many books have you read with characters or situations you can relate to? If you are an active adult reader the answer is probably 'quite a lot', and if we think about it – why on Earth would we want to read a book where we can't relate? Now think about your child and the books they read. Is the same true? Quite possibly not.
- **Lack of Enjoyment** – the top reason given by teenagers for their reluctance to read is not that they find it difficult or that they can't. Very few say this in fact. The most common reason given is that it is dull.

What impression of Reading are we giving to the next generation? Do we offer it as a reward? Something to be treasured? We're all very keen to get across that message, but what are we saying subconsciously? *"Read two pages and you can play on your X-Box..."* So tempting to say, but it's not hard to see the underlying message. How about flipping that around? With the right choice of material, Reading can be the reward!

- **Lack of Belief** – Many children don't see themselves as being 'Good' at Reading, and this is quite probably connected with the 'Difficulty' aspect discussed above. Do we give children those 'Mastery Moments': *"Wow you read that whole sentence! Do you remember at the start of the year, you would have found that quite tricky! But now look at you, you little superstar!"*

So what do we do..?

DON'T

W ide Range

Expose your child to as wide a range of Reading material as possible. Remember not everyone likes novels, and boys in particular often prefer non-fiction. All Reading is valuable!!!

O wn Interests

What are your child's hobbies? Is this a way in? There are whole series of books about Football, for example. Librarians and Booksellers would be able help...

R eal and Relatable

Again, Librarians and Booksellers would be invaluable here. Try to find books where the characters, situations or topics dealt with mirror in some way your child's own experience. Not everyone has a brother, a sister and a dog named 'Spot'!

R ewards

Reading can itself be a very powerful motivator. Even children who are reluctant to physically read tend to still like choosing and buying new books, so why not make this a special treat they have to build up to? Of course, there's nothing wrong with other rewards as well, so long as we're careful about the message we're giving out...

Y es I Can!

Tirelessly remind your child how well they have progressed and how much they have achieved. Ensure they are able to see this for themselves as well by being allowed to read books they can actually read!



What if the problems seem to be more deep-seated, or my child is a little bit older?

- Intensive teaching programmes and tutoring etc can help, which is why we use 'Freshstart' here at Lyminster Primary School.
- It can be very effective to give older reluctant readers a specific goal: *"What do you really want to be able to read?"*
- It may also be helpful to make very explicit why they should learn to read, for example by discussing the need to read a manual in order to pass the Theory Driving Test.
- There's usually an 'in' – something they're interested in that you can use. If not, or if this doesn't work – try creating a new 'in'. Encourage them to try a new hobby or give them a new experience. You could be surprised where this leads...
- Pushing too hard can be counter-productive – be patient, positive and subtle.

Are there any other strategies specifically for boys?

- Male role models are proven to be important. Circumstances can make this difficult, but at your discretion it may be worth approaching people your child looks up to – football and sports clubs for example may, or can be willing to, run schemes.
- Boys often learn best when engaged actively and competitively. Try shorter and more intense bursts. If your son is at the stage of learning key words, make this into a game.
- Boys also tend to hate the feeling that they're being tested or put on the spot. So why not let them, turn the tables? Ask them to ask you questions on what they have been reading (formulating the questions requires quite a lot of understanding on their part, so this is a sneakily effective tactic).
- Patience is again important, particularly if you also have daughters who may have found this process easier. Developmental and neurological reasons are at least partly behind why boys generally learn to read at a slightly slower rate than girls, plus in my experience boys tend to have 'bumpier' learning journeys than girls, with sudden surges in between periods of seeming to coast. If this sounds familiar, you may not actually have a need to worry.
- Boys are often more inclined towards non-fiction, comics and other texts that are less 'traditional' reading materials. Don't be afraid of this, as they are no less valuable than prose fiction.

