

***Setting the Stage to Motivate:
A Look at Dr. Linda Gambrell's "Seven Rules of Engagement"***

Do you know Brick Heck? If you have ever seen the ABC television show, *The Middle*, you have probably noticed the endearing character of Brick Heck, a grade school student who *lives* to read. Notice that I didn't say *loves to read*--the way that Brick feels about reading goes way beyond love. Calling him a voracious reader doesn't quite do him justice. His happiest moments are spent in the library, and his best friends are the ones he finds in books. Old beyond his years and more than a little eccentric, Brick finds it hard to make friends at school. With the assistance of a school counselor and his parents, he is working on his social skills. But this boy has reading stamina to spare and hundreds of books on his "must read" list.

Unfortunately, not every student is a reader like Brick Heck. While there are children in every classroom who salivate at the mere thought of independent reading time, there are others who just *pretend* to read, as well as some who just plain *refuse* to read. Clemson University Education Professor and past International Reading Association President Dr. Linda B. Gambrell has seen them all—the engaged, the not-so-engaged, and the totally disengaged. In *Seven Rules of Engagement* (2011), she offers evidence-based suggestions for fostering students' motivation to read. As devotees of CAFÉ (Boushey & Moser, 2009) and Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006) will be quick to recognize, The Sisters' expert thinking about readers aligns with the views that Dr. Gambrell expresses in her article. Here is a close look at Dr. Gambrell's rules of engagement and how those principles correlate with the work of Gail Boushey and Joan Moser.

First Rule of Engagement:

Dr. Gambrell's first rule centers on helping students discover the relevance of what they read. She suggests that readers keep a journal and explore ways that they connect with their reading. The enduring popularity of some best-selling children's literature indicates that multitudes of readers definitely connect with fictional characters and their problems—just think of the dedicated readership of *Diary of Wimpy Kid* series and *Harry Potter* books. In response to fiction reading, a child can explore how he shares the character's dreams, talents, or problems. Many readers identify with nonfiction just as readily as they do with fiction. After reading nonfiction, students can write about a personal connection to the topic. Once a reader reveals that special love of snakes, castles, or heavy construction machinery, a teacher can use that knowledge to guide the child to related topics and further reading. The child's enjoyment of a topic and interest in reading more about it can foster intrinsic motivation.

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

The Sisters incorporate this same principle of connecting books and readers in CAFÉ (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Through short, targeted conferences that move students toward their goals, teachers can find out about students' connections to texts and promote voracious reading. The Sisters realize that the more students read, the more opportunities they have to connect with what they read!

Second Rule of Engagement:

As Dr. Gambrell explains, the second rule of engagement focuses on access to a rich variety of reading materials. A wide-ranging library filled with all types of genres created by all kinds of writers is apt to capture the attention of almost any reader. It's a solution for the children who lament "There's *nothing*...and I mean *absolutely nothing*... I want to read in our classroom library." Since teachers use persuasion every day on the job, they can use book talks to interest students in different titles. After listening to compelling 'teacher commercials' about texts, students are apt to flock to the bookshelves!

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

Supporting teachers with the design and management of a classroom library is a priority for The Sisters. They offer some valuable suggestions, including a video clip, about the classroom library (where the Brick Hecks of the world will undoubtedly be found) at <http://www.thedailycafe.com/members/267.cfm>. According to Joan Moser, this is a very workable system because children can find the books they want to read and return them to the correct tub! In addition, they provide some useful links that inform classroom teachers about high quality children's literature in "Keeping Up with Children's Books" at <http://www.thedailycafe.com/public/388.cfm>

Third Rule of Engagement:

Dr. Gambrell urges sustained reading time as the third rule of engagement. Giving students the opportunity to enjoy a "just right book" during the school day is a great gift. Although teachers may have no control over their students' lives after school, they can set aside some sacred time during the school day for independent reading. This sustained reading time provides the practice needed to build stamina and develop individual literary tastes. It also acts as a springboard to interest children in related topics. For example, a child reading about the moon is likely to become interested in learning about space exploration, equipment, and astronauts. Through wide reading, the reader can develop greater background knowledge that aids comprehension and builds a bridge to more complex texts.

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

Helping students to build toward sustained reading time is a hallmark of The Sisters' work with Daily 5 (2006). Working incrementally toward stamina, students gradually become capable of maintaining their focus on a text. Boushey and Moser (2006) observe that "Students are actively engaged in the reading process when they have the stamina to read on their own" (p. 20).

Fourth Rule of Engagement:

The word "choice" sums up the fourth rule of engagement. When students are taught how to select "just right" books based on their independent reading level, they are empowered. For children who feel more overwhelmed than empowered about self-selection, Dr. Gambrell suggests the idea of "bounded choice." Knowing students' reading tastes and "just right" levels enables the teacher to offer them a few options. A conference setting is the perfect time to discuss these choices with the child. This approach still provides the

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exciting possibility of choice, but makes the task more manageable for readers who feel overwhelmed.

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

Like Dr. Gambrell, The Sisters recognize the importance of choice as a reading motivator. After children are trained in the I PICK method, they can fill their book boxes with picture books, chapter books, and magazines that interest them and match their independent reading ability. After all, the two *Is* in I PICK stand for **I Choose a Book** and **Interest—Does It Interest Me?** (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 30).

Fifth Rule of Engagement:

As anyone who has been in a book club can attest, talking about books is fun. Children are all about talking and having fun, so why not use these natural inclinations to focus on books? According to the fifth rule of engagement, teachers can draw upon children's social natures to encourage them to talk about books. Hearing about a book from a classmate can pique their curiosity and motivate them to read it themselves. Sharing ideas about books with classmates promotes critical thinking and builds a community of readers. As Dr. Gambrell suggests, pairing students for a brief exchange about books can be very effective.

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

Talking about books is one of The Sisters' favorite things to do, and they share that enthusiasm with students. The Sisters' professional development website TheDailyCafe.com is filled with great ideas about encouraging students to discuss books, including a practical student partnership concept called reading duos at <http://www.thedailycafe.com/public/515.cfm> With summer beckoning, children can stay connected with books and find ways to talk to their classmates about them. DailyCafe contributor Trish Prentice offers suggestions about summer book clubs for students at <http://www.thedailycafe.com/Book%20Clubs.pdf>.

Sixth Rule of Engagement:

In general, people want to experience success--they want to feel respected for what they can do and what they are on the cusp of being able to do. Most seek to avoid frustration and embarrassment about what they cannot do. When it comes to reading, students are no different. In the sixth rule of engagement, Dr. Gambrell recognizes the importance of matching students with texts that respect their capabilities and provide that extra bit of challenge to advance them. On the other hand, she understands that a steady diet of texts that are too easy may bore readers.

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

In the *Daily 5*, The Sisters prove that a "just right" book and a motivated reader are just the perfect recipe for success (Boushey & Moser 2006). As The Sisters emphasize in *Daily 5*, students must have a "just right" book in order to process the text dependently. Their practical *Shoe Lesson for I PICK Good-Fit Books* is a memorable way to teach students how a "just right" book makes it possible for them to grow as readers (p. 30).

Seventh Rule of Engagement:

Incentives for reading—to give or not to give? Every educator grapples with this dilemma. Based on the seventh rule of engagement, Dr. Gambrell indicates that student motivation is increased not through a prize that is unrelated to the act of reading, but rather through recognition and respect for the reader. Tokens of recognition that are related to reading such as bookmarks, free books, and extra pleasure reading time in school can be motivating. On a practical note, Dr. Gambrell recommends that teachers periodically look through their classroom libraries for potential give-aways. These books can be set aside or labeled with tape. When several dozen are collected, they can be offered to students on special days of the school year.

Linking to The Sisters' Work:

In the conferring work that is such an integral part of CAFÉ, The Sisters demonstrate how to fuel student interest in reading; being part of a community of enthusiastic readers is a powerful motivator. What could be more motivating than talking with a trusted teacher who knows and values the student as a reader? Since students' growth as readers has such urgency, the teacher keeps conferring notes about each child's strategy work and focus (Boushey & Moser, 2009, p. 56). Over time, the teacher moves from conferring to coaching, assisting children in meeting their goals and guiding them to formulate new ones as they grow more capable as readers.

“The Seven Rules of Engagement” offer teachers valuable advice for guiding students on the path to becoming lifelong readers. Following these seven suggestions can transform disengaged readers into engaged ones!

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