TEACHING READING IN THE 21ST CENTURY (with Assessments and Lesson Plans Booklet), 4/e

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

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CHAPTER 3

Motivation and Engagement
Last year, Cynthia Sanchez switched from teaching first grade to teaching fifth grade, and her first year as a fifth-grade teacher was not an easy one. “What a difference four years make,” she sometimes sighed to herself. Of course, she had to learn to teach very different aspects of reading than she had taught in first grade. None of her students needed to work on phonemic awareness, only a few needed help with phonics, and most read fluently. She also had to learn to teach fairly sophisticated lessons in social studies, science, math, and other subjects. What turned out to be much more of a challenge than learning how to teach new material, however, was motivating students. Cynthia’s first-graders had come to school enthusiastic about their opportunities, excited about learning, confident that they could learn, and ready to put their best efforts into learning whatever subject they were studying. Some of her fifth-graders displayed very different attitudes. They were not enthusiastic about school or excited about learning. Nor were they confident about learning or prepared to put in their best efforts.

Cynthia soon decided that motivating and engaging students was her number one priority, and throughout the year she read everything she could on making motivation a top priority.
Making Motivation a Top Priority

As you will see in this chapter, Cynthia is not alone in realizing that motivation should be a top priority. Other teachers, reading authorities, researchers, and policy makers are increasingly realizing that motivation is essential to learning (Brophy, 2004; National Research Council, 2004; Pressley, 2006). In order for substantive learning to occur, students must have positive attitudes about themselves as learners, about their ability to succeed in school, and about the instructional goals they, their teachers, and their schools set. Students’ reading abilities will grow in direct proportion to the extent to which they see reading as a worthwhile and enjoyable activity that they can succeed at. In discussing ways to foster such positive attitudes, we consider the critical importance of success, ways of creating the sort of classroom atmosphere that has come to be called a literate environment, and the importance of positive attributions. We also consider a number of concrete approaches to motivating students, present an extended portrait of a teacher who is a superstar at motivating her students, and discuss ways of grouping students to foster positive attitudes. These building blocks of success are shown in Figure 3.1.

The Critical Importance of Success

A dominant thought underlying not just this section of the chapter but the whole of this book is the overwhelming importance of success. Research has repeatedly verified that if students are going to be motivated and engaged in
school and learn from their schoolwork, they need to succeed at the vast majority of tasks they undertake (Brophy, 1986; Pressley, 2006). This, of course, applies to reading just as it does to other schoolwork. Moreover, if students are to become not only proficient readers but also avid readers—children and later adults who voluntarily seek out reading as a path to information, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment—then successful reading experiences are even more important.

A successful reading experience has at least three features. First, and most importantly, a successful reading experience is one in which the reader understands what she has read. Understanding may take more than one reading, it may require your assistance or that of other students, and it will often require the reader to actively manipulate the ideas in the text. Second, a successful reading experience is one that the reader finds enjoyable, entertaining, informative, or thought provoking. Of course, not every reading experience will yield all of these benefits, but every experience should yield at least one of them. Finally, a successful reading experience is one that prepares the student to complete whatever task follows the reading.

To a great extent, children’s success in reading is directly under your control. You can select—and encourage students to select—tasks, materials, and supporting activities that all but guarantee success. For example, suppose you have a group of third-grade students who read at about 150 words a minute and you have a 10-minute period in which they will be reading. Giving these students a selection slightly shorter than 1,500 words will ensure that they at least have time to complete it, while giving them a selection much longer than 1,500 words will leave them frustrated and ensure failure. As another example, suppose you have a group of fifth-grade students who will be reading Pond & River by Steve Parker but who have virtually no concept of ecology—they have never even thought about the relationships among organisms and their environment. Preteaching the concept of ecology will greatly increase the likelihood that students will understand the selection and not simply flounder in a sea of new ideas.

**FIGURE 3.1**

The Building Blocks of Motivation

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**English Learners**

While success is important for all students, it is particularly important for English-language learners. Be absolutely certain to give English-language learners many tasks at which you are certain they can succeed.
Creating a Literate Environment

The phrase *literate environment* describes the sort of classroom, school, and home environment in which literacy will be fostered and nurtured (Goodman, 1986). A literate environment includes demonstrations of literacy in action by competent others, time devoted to the practice of literacy, materials that support engagement in literacy, choice about literate activities, and a safe and supportive classroom climate.

Modeling

Probably the most important component of a literate environment is the modeling done by people children respect and love. In the best possible literate environment, children’s teachers, principals, parents, brothers and sisters, and friends read a lot and openly display the pleasure reading gives them, the fact that reading opens up a world of information to them, the value they place on reading, and the satisfaction they gain from reading. To be most effective, of course, this modeling should occur not just once but repeatedly—all the time, really. Also, this modeling should include both repeated demonstrations—your reading along with students during a sustained silent reading period, your looking up in a book an answer to a question children have, and your sharing a favorite poem with your class—and direct testimonials—“Wow! What a story.” “I never knew what fun river rafting could be till I read this article; I sure wish I’d read it sooner.” “Sometimes I think the library is just about my favorite place.”

Third-grade teacher Mary Lou Flicker has her own testimonial to the power of modeling.

I never realized the importance of modeling the kinds of behaviors I would like my students to emulate until one rainy day in March. Normally the kids eat outdoors on picnic tables, but during this unusual California downpour we were forced inside for lunch recess. After the kids finished eating, I told them they could play games together quietly, draw on the chalkboard, read, whatever.

Instead of doing paperwork or watching the kids, I decided to read a book that a young friend had recommended, one of Barbara Park’s Junie B. Jones books, *Junie B., First Grader: Shipwrecked*. It turned out to be an extremely funny book that I enjoyed immensely. After I finished, I looked around the room. To my amazement, there in the library corner sat Ramon, one of my least-motivated readers, a kid who hardly ever read by choice, fully absorbed in a Junie B. Jones book. Later in the day, when I told Ramon I was so pleased to see him reading, he said, “Well, you looked like you was having such a great time reading that Junie B. Jones book, I just had to find out why!”

—Mary Lou Flicker, Third-Grade Teacher

Several things about this experience were motivating to students. First, Ms. Flicker modeled engaged reading. Second, she showed students how much she valued reading by spending class time on reading. Third, she praised her student’s good behavior.

Time

Developing a literate environment goes beyond demonstrating your own engagement with reading and includes scheduling class time for reading, whether
independent or assigned. Regularly scheduled time for independent reading such as sustained silent reading tells students that teachers really care about reading. Providing time in class to read assigned texts also tells students that reading is important. Too often, reading is relegated to homework or serves as a filler when there is time left after the “real” work of school is finished. But reading is the “real” work of the classroom! Time devoted to the pleasure of reading tells students that you value reading and want students to do so as well.

We know that reading independently improves reading fluency and reading achievement more generally (Allington, 1984; Knapp & Associates, 1995; Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2002), but most students do not do enough of it. Most authorities estimate that students spend only about 15 minutes per day doing silent reading in school. It’s difficult to become good at something that you do for only 15 minutes a day.

Fifteen minutes a day of in-school reading could, of course, be augmented with independent reading at home; but again, studies demonstrate that children, unless they are already avid readers, simply do not make the time to read at home. Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) discovered that among the fifth-grade students they studied, 50 percent read 4 minutes a day or less; 30 percent, 2 minutes a day or less, and 10 percent, not at all. They also found that independent reading time in school and time spent listening to books read aloud by the teacher were important factors in motivating students to read. All in all, we believe that students should do at least 30 minutes of in-school reading a day. This figure includes time spent reading in both language arts classes and other content area classes.

Reading aloud to students is another way to demonstrate how much you value reading, and it also becomes an opportunity to teach students about the rewards that reading brings. What you choose to read aloud can serve to entice students to broaden the scope of their reading interests. It allows you to introduce new authors, new genres, and new ideas. It creates a communal experience that students can use to understand new texts that they read, new

Reading independently improves fluency; many children do not do enough of it.
ideas that they consider. Reading aloud offers you the opportunity to talk about writing in a way that is concrete and engaging; students enjoy learning about how writing works when they are engaged with a text.

Reading aloud can also become a way to share engaging fiction and nonfiction with students who might not be able to read it on their own. Students who are struggling readers are often given texts that they can read, but do not enjoy because the books were written for younger readers. One of the reasons to engage in the hard work of becoming a fluent, strategic reader is the joy that books can bring. All readers need to experience the power of a well-written story, poem, or piece of nonfiction so that they can remember the reward that reading can bring. Think of engaging with a text through a teacher read-aloud as a motivational carrot. If you have class sets of texts, it is sometimes worthwhile for students to follow along as you read. At other times, however, letting them just sit back and enjoy the pleasure of listening to a well-read story or informational piece is the best approach.

Time to demonstrate your engagement with texts, time for students to read silently, and time to read aloud are all important components of a literate classroom. Students also need time to talk about what they read with others. Although we often think of reading as an independent, solitary activity, those of us who are avid readers know the joy of talking about what we have read with others. The social nature of reading in the company of others can become a powerful motivating force, encouraging students to read, to read with understanding, and to share their ideas with others. When students have the opportunity to talk with one another about what they read, they come to realize that there are many ways to understand and respond to a text, and they also have the opportunity to enlarge their understanding and repertoire of responses by listening to the responses of others. Providing time for students to talk about texts with others helps them understand the dynamic nature of engaged reading, even as it motivates them to engage in more reading.

The Classroom

Another important component of a literate environment is the physical setting in which children read. In the best possible literate environment, the classroom is filled with books, books that are readily accessible for students to read in school or take home. The walls are covered with colorful posters that advertise books and the treasures they offer and that showcase students’ responses to what they have read. There are several inviting places to read—a carpeted corner where students can sit on the floor and read without interruption, bean bags or other comfortable chairs that entice young readers to immerse themselves in a book, places where students can gather in groups to read to each other or discuss their reading, and some tables for students to use to write about what they’re reading. An attractive space encourages people to spend time in it, and spending time reading and responding is exactly what you want to encourage. The floor plan in Figure 3.2 shows one way to arrange a classroom to invite literacy.

Materials

The texts that you select for your classroom library are another crucial component of a motivating literate environment. Certainly, some books will be in
FIGURE 3.2
Floorplan of a Classroom That Invites Literacy
your classroom because they fit within your curriculum. Other materials should be selected so that students have a wide variety of topics, difficulty levels, and types of texts to choose from. Still other books should be chosen to reflect the diversity of your classroom—the range of abilities, interests, and cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds of your students—as well as the diversity of the larger society outside your classroom. Reading well-written texts should become a tool students use to learn more about topics and ideas they are interested in, as well as supplementing their understanding of the curriculum. This kind of reading gives students a purpose for practicing the craft of reading.

In order to provide all students with appropriate texts and to match individual students with texts, it’s important that you assess your students’ attitudes toward reading and their reading interests. Some suggestions for doing so are given in In the Classroom 3.1. In Chapter 6, we give additional information on matching students and texts.

Assessing Students’ Reading Attitudes and Interests

It’s important that you get to know your students as readers early in the academic year. You can find out about their reading habits and preferences by having a one-on-one book conference with each of them, and with primary-grade children that’s what you need to do. But with older students, a faster and more efficient way to get the information you need is to have them fill out a brief written survey. You can easily create a set of interview questions or survey that will give you the information you need, with questions such as the following:

• Do you like to read? Why or why not?
• Are you reading anything for fun at this time? What is it? Why do you like it?
• Do you have any favorite authors or titles? Why are these your favorites?
• Is there a certain kind of text that you prefer—books, magazines, fiction, nonfiction, etc?
• How do you choose what to read when you go to a library or a book store?
• What do you do if what you are reading is too hard or too easy for you?
• What makes a good reader?

Finding out about your students as readers is vital to being an effective, motivating teacher. You can find books that will appeal to your students by looking at the following annotated lists:

■ The Children’s Choices list, which appears every October in The Reading Teacher
■ The Teachers’ Choices list, which appears every November in The Reading Teacher
■ The Notable Children’s Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies list, which appears in the May/June issue of Social Education
■ The Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children list, which appears in the November issue of Children and Science

Another effective strategy for identifying books that your students might enjoy is to talk with your school media specialist or the librarians at a local
library. These professionals are trained to recognize books that many children will find engaging. They also have access to the American Library Association’s resources and can give you lists of books that librarians have identified as being of interest to readers of various ages and levels of proficiency.

As we have noted, the social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of your students and of the greater society constitute yet another important factor in selecting books. Readers shape their views of themselves and of the world partly through what they read. Reading about people who are similar to and different from ourselves is important for all students. Recognizing yourself in a book is a powerful affirmation that you are part of the human endeavor—and the world of books. Recognizing the humanity of others who might seem different from ourselves is an important part of becoming a citizen of the world. Good books can act as both a mirror and a window for readers (Galda & Cullinan, in press), reflecting their own lives and offering them a chance to understand the lives of others. Perhaps the best books offer an experience that is similar to looking through a window at twilight. At first you can see through the window into another place, but, as the light gradually fades, you end up seeing yourself (Galda, 1998; Galda & Cullinan, in press). Thinking and talking about experiences like this can help students develop an understanding of themselves and others. And reading books from many cultures exposes students to many wonderful authors.

Since the early 1990s, the publishing industry has responded to the increasing diversity of North America by publishing a slowly growing number of excellent books that reflect this diversity. Unfortunately, the number of books by and about people of color published in any given year hovers around 3 or 4 percent—a far cry from the percentage of students of color who attend school. Books that reflect linguistic diversity (bilingual texts) or those that offer international perspectives are even more scarce. Nevertheless, over the past 15 years there have been a number of excellent books published that can enrich a classroom collection.

Well-written books offer readers authentic glimpses of others’ lives. When the portrayal of these lives is situated in a specific cultural context, it’s extremely important that it be culturally authentic. Evaluating the cultural authenticity of books about people from a culture different from one’s own is a challenge, but there are a number of resources that can help you find culturally diverse literature and that can help you learn how to think about issues surrounding cultural authenticity. Some of these resources are listed in Figure 3.3.

**Choice**

Scheduling ample time for reading and responding and finding materials that will engage readers are crucial components of a motivating literate environment. Add the element of choice to this mix, and it becomes even more powerful. Simply put, students need to have choices about what they read and what they do to respond to their reading. This does not mean that you never assign selections for students to read or tasks for students to complete after they have read. It does mean that you structure regular opportunities for students to choose their own reading materials and to choose their own response mode. Allowing students some choice often helps motivate them to spend time
Some basic questions to ask yourself as you are selecting culturally diverse literature are these:

- Does the book qualify as good literature?
- Is the culture accurately portrayed, demonstrating diversity within as well as across cultures if appropriate and avoiding stereotypes?
- Is the book a positive contribution to an understanding of the culture portrayed?

(Galda & Cullinan, in press)

As you are learning to evaluate literature in terms of literary excellence and cultural authenticity, you may want to rely on published lists of books that have been carefully evaluated by experts in the field. Here are some of the better ones:


You might also consult publication lists from publishers such as Lee and Low, Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, Kane/Miller Book Press, Open Hand, Children’s Book Press, Arte Publico, and North-South Books, all of which focus on culturally diverse literature.

And here are some of the major awards given for multicultural books:

- Notable Books for a Global Society (February issue of The Reading Teacher, International Reading Association/www.reading.org)
- Coretta Scott King Awards (American Library Association/www.ala.org)
- Pura Belpré Award (ALA)
- Mildred Batchelder Award (ALA)

FIGURE 3.3
Resources for Finding and Evaluating Culturally Diverse Books

reading. We recently talked to reading consultant Peter Dewitz, who had this to say about choice.

It’s absolutely unbelievable the effect that giving students some choice in what they read has on their motivation and interest in what they read. It doesn’t have to be a lot of choice. In fact, if we give them their choice among just two or three books, they are much more likely to do the reading and do it enthusiastically.

—Peter Dewitz, Reading Consultant

Independent reading is one such opportunity. Although students, especially those who are struggling readers and many English-language learners, need support and guidance in selecting books that they can and will want to read, students also ought to be able to choose their own books for independent reading. Some teachers insist that students choose only from the classroom or school library. We suggest that, if reading is the goal, students ought to be able to read
Alma Flor Ada. *Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English*. HarperCollins, 2001. Dedicated to Cesar Chavez, this alphabet book recounts stories of family farmworkers during that era. For example, “A is for árboles” (trees) shows the fruit trees—plum, pear, peach, and orange—that are so much a part of these families’ lives. 40 pages.

Debby Atwell. *The Thanksgiving Door*. Houghton Mifflin, 2003. After burning their Thanksgiving dinner, an elderly couple find themselves the guests of honor at the New World Café, a restaurant owned by welcoming Russian immigrants. 32 pages.

Carmen T. Bernier-Grand. *In the Shade of the Nispero Tree*. Orchard, 1999. Because her mother wants her to be part of the world of high society in their native Puerto Rico, 9-year-old Teresa goes to a private school but loses her best friend. 186 pages.


Ziporah Hildebrandt. *This Is Our Seder*. Holiday House, 1999. This book provides a simple description of the food and activities at a seder, the ritual meal of Passover, including an explanation of its historical and symbolic significance. 32 pages.


Dayal Kaur Khalsa. *How Pizza Came to Queens*. Clarkson N. Potter, 1989. When Mrs. Pellegrino comes to visit May’s family, she laments that there is no pizza. So May and her friends, with the help of the librarian who defines the word, buy the ingredients and get Mrs. Pellegrino to make pizza. 24 pages.


Lynn Reiser. *Tortillas and Lullabies/Tortillas y concioncitas*. Greenwillow, 1998. A young girl tells about tortilla making, flower gathering, dress laundering, and lullaby singing—activities her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother all did and that she does with her doll. The text is in English and Spanish and includes a musical score. 40 pages.

Lisa Shulman. *The Matzo Ball Boy*. Dutton, 2005. In this Jewish version of the “Gingerbread Man,” a lonely old bubbe makes a matzo ball boy in her chicken soup so he can join her for the Passover seder. 32 pages.

Janet S. Wong. *Apple Pie 4th of July*. Harcourt, 2002. After a young Chinese American girl frets that no one will come to her parents’ market to buy Chinese food on the 4th of July, she is happily proven wrong. 32 pages.

Paul Yee. *Roses Sing on New Snow: A Delicious Tale*. Macmillan, 1991. When the governor of South China visits Maylin’s home, she creates a new dish in his honor, and her lazy brothers try to take all the credit. However, their attempts to duplicate the recipe only infuriate the emperor, while Maylin triumphs, demonstrating that cooking, like painting, is an art. 32 pages.

all kinds of texts, including newspapers, comic books, and magazines. If we want students to spend time reading, we must allow them to choose what they read as often as possible.
Sometimes teachers are able to offer students limited choice even in the texts they read as a whole class or small group. Offering students a small range of titles, all of which will allow you to meet your curricular goals, helps students feel a part of the instructional environment. So, too, does offering choice about what to do with the texts they have read. By offering students various options for responding to their reading, you increase the likelihood that they will enjoy the task.

Time, materials, and choice all foster engaged reading. In the Classroom 3.2 offers a suggestion for helping students develop an interest in poetry by making use of these motivating elements—including time for browsing through books, something that often looks unproductive but has been found to be important.

### Poetry Browsing to Create Interest

Teacher lore has it that it is often difficult to get upper-elementary students engaged in poetry. Whatever the reasons, upper-elementary readers tend to avoid poetry, unless it is humorous verse by authors such as Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky. But this doesn’t always have to be the case. Amy McClure and her colleagues (McClure, Harrison, & Reed, 1990) found that, given time and choice, their upper-elementary students came to really enjoy poetry, even selecting books of poetry for independent reading. After assembling a collection of poetry that might interest their students, McClure and her colleagues added it to the classroom library, displaying it so that students were tempted to look at the books. Then they gave students time to browse—to dip in and out of books, finding poems they enjoyed and wanted to read to their buddies and then moving on. Over time, this freedom to simply enjoy and sample a lot of poetry without any task being assigned broke down the negative attitudes that students began with.
Classroom Climate

A final and equally important component of a literate environment is the atmosphere in which children read. In the best possible literate environment, everything that happens in the classroom sends the message that reading—including learning from what you read, having personal responses to what you read, talking about what you read, and writing about what you read—is fantastic! In such a classroom, students are given plenty of time to read, they are given ample opportunities to share the information they learn and their responses to what they have read with each other, they are taught to listen to and respect the ideas of others, and they learn that others will listen to and respect their ideas. A literate atmosphere is a thoughtful atmosphere in which values and ideas are respected—values and ideas in texts, one’s own values and ideas, and other people’s values and ideas.

This kind of climate is developed when teachers, in a positive and supportive manner, help students learn how to engage in discussions and other forms of sharing what they have read. One way students learn to do this is through your modeling how to be positive and supportive as you scaffold students’ reading experiences. Modeling and directly teaching students ways to conduct themselves in the classroom, coming up with an agreed-upon set of rules for the classroom, and prominently displaying the rules will also help set the right tone. Trust, respect, and responsibility are important ideas in a safe and supportive classroom, and talking about these concepts and how the successful operation of the class rests on them is crucial, especially at the beginning of the year.

Reflect and Apply

1. Describe a successful reading experience you have had and an unsuccessful one you have had. What could you or someone else have done to make the unsuccessful one more successful?
2. Look back at the floor plan in Figure 3.2. Identify a grade level you are familiar with, and sketch an alternative floor plan for a literate environment. The sketch need not be anything fancy, but the plan should clearly be one that lends itself to reading, writing, and discussion.
3. Identify a grade level, and then list the types of reading materials you would have in your classroom library (books, magazines, etc.), along with two or three specific examples of each type.

The Importance of Positive Attributions

Ensuring that students have strong models of competent and engaged readers, providing them with ample time to read, creating a physically attractive classroom, and building a rich classroom library all encourage the development of motivated and engaged readers. So do giving them appropriate choices and creating a supportive classroom climate. However, it is also important to understand some of the internal factors that relate to motivation: how students’ perceptions influence their performance.
Educators and psychologists have been studying motivation for many years, and one of the most persistent findings is that the way people view their successes and failures, what has come to be called their “attributions,” has a powerful effect on motivation. A closely related finding is that the result of repeatedly failing is learned helplessness. Still another finding is the importance of giving students appropriate challenges. In this section, we discuss each of these important concepts.

**Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory helps to explain and underscore the importance of success to student motivation and engagement. Attribution theory deals with students’ perceptions of the causes of their successes and failures in learning. As Merlin Wittrock (1986) explains, in deciding why they succeed or fail in reading tasks, students can attribute their performance to ability, effort, luck, the difficulty of the reading task, or a variety of other causes. All too often, children who have repeatedly failed in reading attribute their failure to factors that are beyond their control—to an unchangeable factor, such as their innate ability, or to a factor that they can do nothing about, such as luck. Once this happens, children are likely to lose their motivation to learn to read and to doubt their ability to learn. From the children’s perspective, there is no reason to try because there is nothing they can do about it. Moreover, as long as they do not try, they cannot fail; you cannot lose a race if you do not enter it.

**Learned Helplessness**

As Peter Johnston and Peter Winograd (1985) have pointed out, one long-term outcome of children’s repeatedly attributing failure in reading to forces that are beyond their control is their falling into a learned-helplessness syndrome. Children who exhibit learned helplessness in reading are apt to be nervous, withdrawn, and discouraged when they are faced with reading tasks. They are unlikely to be actively engaged in reading, to have goals and plans when they read, to monitor themselves when they are reading to see if the reading makes sense, or to check themselves after reading to see if they have accomplished their reading goal.

Obviously, we need to avoid this debilitating cycle of negative attributions and learned helplessness. Second-grade teacher Jerry Costello suggests four approaches:

The first, and almost certainly the most powerful, way I have found to help students understand that they are in control of their learning is something I hear stressed over and over again by my colleagues and read in the literature: Make students’ reading experiences successful ones; make them so frequently successful for students that they will be compelled to realize that it is they themselves and not some outside force that is responsible for their success.

Second, I tell students that their efforts make a difference, and when they are successful in a reading task, I talk to them about the activities they engaged in to make them successful. If, for example, after reading an informational piece about dinosaurs, students successfully answer several questions that they generated before reading, we discuss how generating those questions beforehand helped them focus their attention so that they could answer the questions as they read.

Third, I avoid competitive situations in which students compare how well they read a selection to how well others read it and instead focus students’ attention on what they personally gained from the selection.
Finally, I try to provide a number of reading activities in which the goal is simply to enjoy reading, have fun, and experience something interesting and exciting rather than only offering reading activities that are followed by answering questions or some other sort of external accountability.

—Jerry Costello, Second-Grade Teacher

The Importance of Appropriate Challenges

Although we stress the importance of success, providing appropriate challenges for children is equally essential (Pressley, 2006; Taylor et al., 2002). Saying that students should succeed at the reading tasks you ask them to complete and that you should do everything possible to ensure success does not mean spoon-feeding them. Unless readers undertake some challenging tasks, unless they are willing to take some risks and make some attempts they are not certain of and get feedback on their efforts, there is little room for learning to take place. In order to develop as readers, children need to be given some challenges. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has learned from three decades of research on what makes people’s lives happier and more meaningful, facing and meeting significant challenges is one of the most self-fulfilling and rewarding experiences we can have. However, when we present students with challenges, we need to be certain that they clearly understand the goals toward which they are working, to give them challenges appropriate for their skills, and to provide them with whatever support they need to meet these challenges. This is, of course, true for all students, but it is particularly true for those students who have often found school difficult. In the Classroom 3.3, which is based on an article by Mary Beth Sampson and her colleagues (Sampson, & Linek, 1994/1995), you will see how one teacher creates a successful reading experience that includes providing appropriate challenges and supports for her students.

Providing Both Challenges and Supports

Five students sit at the same table reading about lightning bugs in their science texts. Sarah is reading merely to finish the assignment, daydreaming about what she will do that evening. Carlos, on the other hand, reads with enthusiasm—he had caught lightning bugs the night before, released them in his room, and fallen asleep to their steady blinks. Paul reads with the fascination of a new discovery. He has recently moved from Alaska, where lightning bugs didn’t exist. Marinda discovers something she didn’t know about lightning bugs and quickly moves from being a passive reader to being an actively involved one. Josh reads as he always does, word by word, with no real interest in the content. Around the room, other groups of five students also sit at tables reading the same text.

When they finish reading, Mrs. Tollison tells the class they will be exploring the topic of lightning bugs. They will be working in groups of five using an approach called Circle of Questions. After establishing the groups, she gives the groups three minutes to brainstorm the questions they have about lightning bugs.

After three minutes, Mrs. Tollison calls time, draws a circle on the board, and invites each group to share their questions. She writes the questions around the circle as the students share them. (See Figure 3.4.)

Mrs. Tollison next encourages students to review and examine their questions to see what categories of questions they can find. Using colored chalk, she circles items that belong in specific categories—for example, questions about what makes lightning bugs flash are circled in blue, questions
about physical attributes circled in red, and questions about reproduction circled in green. Each group then chooses a category in which to become an expert.

In their groups, students reread the text, searching for answers to the questions in their category. A recorder for each group writes down the answers and where they are found in the text. When all of the groups have finished researching their questions, the class meets as a whole, and the recorder from each group shares the information the group discovered with the class. Mrs. Tollison writes the answers and their sources by the appropriate questions on the Circle of Questions chart.

While Mrs. Tollison records the answers, students discuss whether the text adequately addressed their initial questions or if additional research will be needed to flesh out their knowledge.
Can you see how this activity appropriately challenged the readers who were introduced at the beginning of the scenario? Perhaps word-by-word reader Josh began to change his view toward reading that day. As his classmates generated questions they had about the text, he saw that all readers, not just himself, don’t understand everything they read. Carlos gained self-esteem because his knowledge of fireflies enabled him to answer many of the group’s questions. Paul discovered that an excellent way to clarify the ideas in a text is through group interaction with that text. Sarah, appointed recorder for the group, became an active, interested member of the team. Marinda came to realize that not all questions are answered by a particular text, and sometimes more questions are raised. The entire class was challenged to do what “real” readers do—actively construct their own questions about a topic and find the answers.

Another way for students to be both challenged and supported comes in reading discussion groups. Talking with others about what they have read, what questions they have, and how they reacted to the story, poem, or information they’ve just processed is a natural part of discussion groups. Successful discussion groups quickly become places where students can say, “I didn’t get it when . . .” and their peers can help them.

Concrete Approaches to Motivating Students

Like Jerry Costello, we believe that there are many teaching techniques that can break the cycle of learned helplessness and help our students become motivated and engaged readers. In this section of the chapter, we list some of the most powerful ways of doing so.

Ensuring Student Success

We have already noted that success is critical to student motivation: Ensuring student success is the number one thing you can do to get students motivated and keep them motivated. Here, we repeat that message to emphasize its importance. We also want to emphasize the importance of including a wide selection of materials in your students’ reading diet in order to ensure their success during independent reading, in small group work, and when they’re reading in content areas like science or social studies. Stocking every classroom library with materials—fiction and nonfiction—that span the reading levels of your students allows every student to select texts with which she can be successful. As students come to know the reading selections in the classroom and their own abilities and interests, they can begin to make appropriate selections. Being free to browse, to read a bit before deciding whether or not they will stick with a text, and to talk with others who have read that text helps students learn which books they can and want to read. This is also a perfect opportunity for students to share their evaluation of what they read with others, as described in In the Classroom 3.4.
Promoting Academic Values and Goals

Ultimately, motivation and engagement are intrapersonal values, and it is the student herself who must become motivated and engaged—with school and schooling. The fact is that a good deal of schoolwork is just that—work—and we need to find ways to help students truly value that work. One approach to doing so is to reinforce students when they demonstrate that they are valuing and “doing” school—for example, complimenting a student who has been getting her homework in daily. Another is to provide students with role models who express a commitment to education. Teachers are certainly important role models. But in some ways, other students are even more important role models. One of the many reasons that it is important for lower-performing students to be grouped with higher-performing students is that the higher-performing students can serve as academic role models. Another approach is for teachers to directly talk to students about the importance of school and the benefits of doing well in school.

Still another approach to promoting academic values and goals is to offer students choices, something we discussed earlier in the chapter. In fact, a large body of research and practice indicate that “students are more likely to want to do schoolwork when they have some choice in the courses they take, in the material they study, and in the strategies they use to complete tasks” (National Research Council, 2004). Situations that do not provide choices can leave students with a sense of powerlessness, and a sense of powerlessness is more likely to lead to alienation than to engagement. Saying that students should have choices does not, however, mean that they should have no structure and no limits. Students value structure, but it needs to be structure that affords them some opportunities to make choices.

Our final suggestion for promoting academic values and goals is to make learning experiences enjoyable. As Nel Noddings eloquently argues in Happiness and Education (2003), happiness should be a major goal of education, but frequently is not. We have already said that a good deal of schoolwork is indeed work, and there is no getting around that. But nothing says that work cannot be made as enjoyable as possible. If, for example, students are learning how to make inferences, the texts teachers find that require inferences can be ones that students will enjoy reading. For example, “getting” jokes often

Creating a Book Review File

While only a few students might read a book because you, the teacher, told them it was good, most students will read a book that a peer has recommended. Kathy, a third-grade teacher who has a way of maximizing her efforts, developed a quick and effective book review system. When a student finished reading a book, she went to the file (a small box of 5" by 8" index cards) and looked it up by the author’s name. If someone else had read it, there was a card on file; if not, the student created a card with the author’s last name, the author’s first name, and the book title. Then, either on a new card or below the comments of others on an existing card, the student wrote a one- or two-sentence opinion of the book. This file became a favorite aid when students were looking for new books for independent reading and often sparked impromptu conversations between students who had read the same book. It was also an opportunity for students to learn the difference between writing an opinion with a supporting reason and writing a brief summary. Summaries weren’t allowed in the file.
requires inferences, and reading them is wonderful practice. Stories also often require inferences about, for example, a character’s motivation for what she is doing. Speculating about why a compelling character is behaving in a particular way is much more interesting than filling out a worksheet designed to test students’ ability to make inferences.

Perhaps students are working on their critical thinking skills, learning how to distinguish between fact and opinion or how to differentiate fact, theory, and belief. They can spend time doing uninteresting worksheets, or they can read expository texts about things they are interested in and then discuss those texts, perhaps distinguishing between facts and opinion. Excellent nonfiction that begs to be analyzed in this way includes *Clouds* by Marion Dane Bauer for primary-grade children, *The Secret of the Sphinx* by James Giblin for intermediate-grade students, and *Are We Alone? Scientists Search for Life in Space* by Gloria Skurzynski for middle-grade students.

Finally, we have one suggestion about a widely used practice that very frequently does not promote academic values and goals. That practice is putting too much emphasis on extrinsic rewards. If the primary reason a student reads is to get points, a free pizza, or some free time on Friday afternoon, then she is not likely to do much reading when points, pizza, and free time are not in the offing. We are not suggesting that you can’t use some extrinsic rewards, but we are saying that you should use them in moderation. We say more about this later in the chapter.

**Fostering Higher-Order Thinking and Deep Understanding**

As you may have noticed, Chapter 11 has the same title as this section—Fostering Higher-Order Thinking and Deep Understanding. Our major purpose for devoting an entire chapter to these topics is that we believe they are absolutely crucial to success both in school and outside of school. Lower-order thinking and shallow understanding are not the cognitive tools students need to succeed, thrive, and contribute in the 21st century. Equally importantly—and very fortunately—emphasizing higher-order thinking and deep understanding in your classroom also motivates and engages students (Knapp & Associates, 1995; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). Completing a worksheet that requires a young reader to answer a set of rote questions on the events in Jerry Spinelli’s *Loser* simply is not as engaging as trying to figure what it is about Zinkhof that repeatedly gets him in unfortunate situations. Similarly, learning a little bit about a lot of topics is usually not as interesting as studying a few topics in depth. In fact, almost any topic becomes interesting once we begin to understand it deeply. Several years ago, adult author Mark Kurlansky wrote a book titled *Cod: A History of the Fish That Changed the World*. In researching that book, he became interested in salt (used, of course, in preserving cod) and wrote another book, this one titled *Salt: A World History*. One of us has read them both and found them fascinating. Even topics like cod and salt—as you learn more about them and discover the impact they had on civilization—become interesting. That does not mean we should ask elementary students to develop a deep understanding of cod or salt, but it does suggest that some pretty mundane topics can become interesting when we develop a thorough understanding of them.
Ensuring Active Participation, Using Cooperative Activities, and Including Variety

As we stressed in Chapters 1 and 2, students learn more when they are engaged in active learning rather than more passive activities. They are also going to be a lot more motivated when engaged in active learning. This is true for elementary students and for college students; if you are using this book as part of a college class, we hope you are engaged in active learning activities as part of that class. Such activities as constructing models, role playing, doing experiments, creating examples, and comparing and contrasting actively involve and interest students. Students in one study (Boaler, 2002), for example, noted that “you learn more by doing something on your own,” “you feel more proud of the projects when you’ve done them yourself,” and “because you had to work out for yourself what was going on, you had to use your own ideas.”

Cooperative learning is one form of active learning that has become very widely used, and this is fortunate. Importantly, the advantages of cooperative learning have been found to occur in a variety of domains. Students in cooperative groups showed superior performance in academic achievement, displayed more self-esteem, accommodated better to mainstreamed students, showed more positive attitudes toward school, and generally displayed better overall psychological health. Students in cooperative groups displayed better interpersonal relationships; and these improved interpersonal relationships held regardless of differences in ability, sex, ethnicity, or social class (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Moreover, cooperative learning has been shown to be successful in teaching students how to resolve conflicts (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Finally, cooperative learning can create a classroom in which students share the responsibility for each other’s learning rather than compete with each other—a very positive situation, particularly for students who often do not do well in school and may become alienated in classrooms where they are too often on their own and do not perform as well as their classmates (Cohen, 1994).
A number of authors (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Cohen, 1994; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994; Slavin, 1987) have described approaches to cooperative learning, and using more than one approach can provide variety and accomplish somewhat different purposes. Moreover, as the title of this section suggests, variety itself tends to be motivating and engaging for students. No one likes to do the same thing in the same way all the time, and sometimes adding variety just to add variety makes good sense. For example, if you typically have independent reading on Fridays, sometimes it might be good to put it on another day for no reason other than varying the schedule. Of course, too much variation is not the goal.

**Making Connections to Students’ Cultures and Lives Outside of School**

It is not at all surprising that students are more engaged and motivated to learn if they feel that what they are learning is related to their out-of-school lives. While not every topic in the curriculum is going to be connected to students’ home lives and cultures, many of them certainly should be. One of the easiest ways to do this is to carefully select the reading material for your classroom so that it reflects the issues, concerns, and cultures of your students, as we discussed earlier in this chapter. At the same time, however, we must admit that assuring cultural matches is easier said than done.

Kristen, a teacher who works with Somali immigrants, discovered that there was very little literature available that accurately reflects the lives of her students, so she decided to ask students and their families to create books for their classroom library. She asked students to get family members to tell them stories—stories about life in Somalia, stories about their journey to America, stories about the things that happened to them when they arrived. She then asked students to tell and write stories about their own lives. And she gave her students cameras to take photographs of people and places in their home and neighborhood. Next, she typed up their texts, and the students arranged the photos or drew pictures to illustrate them. Then they put their books together, complete with title page, dedication page, and “publishing” information. The result was a number of books, bound at a local copy center, that had content culturally specific to Kristen’s students. Kristen didn’t stop there, of course; she found trade books and magazine articles that related to her students’ lives in other ways, and she added these to her growing library.

Her students invested in the classroom library by writing some of the books and were motivated and eager to read their own books, those of their peers, and the trade books and magazine articles that Kristen gathered. Her effort to find selections that were culturally relevant to her students became a wonderful opportunity for writing and a strong motivator for reading for these students.

While a culturally diverse library is important no matter whom you teach, it’s also important to think about the universals that engage all students. Reading fiction that explores topics such as family, friends, and issues of growing up (such as Lindsay Lee Johnson’s middle-grade novel *Worlds Apart*), nonfiction about the wonders of the natural world (such as *Penguin Chick* by Betty Tatham), and inspirational biographies (such as *The Sky’s the Limit: Discovery by Women and Girls* by Catherine Thimmesh), can draw your students into the world of reading and help them realize that reading, even the reading they do in school, often relates to their lives outside of school.
Class projects can also help students connect home and school. Rather than researching and writing about a topic that has little connection to their community, students can choose to pursue a topic that has relevance to their lives. For example, a group of sixth-grade students in the Pacific Northwest spent a year doing research and writing about how pollution had destroyed the salmon stream that ran by their school. They read, discussed, and wrote while they also cleaned up the stream. The result was a cleaner stream, heightened community awareness of issues of pollution, and a book, *Come Back, Salmon!*, that chronicled their project. Eventually, the salmon even came back.

Your students all come from families and communities that have, as Moll (1992) describes it, “funds of knowledge.” It's up to you to tap into that knowledge and bring it into your classroom. Connecting school and home is an important part of helping students value what they are learning in school.

**Praising Students, Rewarding Them, and Helping Them Set Goals**

Praise can be a very effective motivator, and it is certainly a widely used tool. Nevertheless, praise is not without its potential drawbacks. Most importantly, it must be honest, and students must perceive it as honest. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), effective praise is given only in response to students’ efforts and achievements, specifies just what students have accomplished to earn the praise, and helps students better appreciate their work. Guthrie and Wigfield also note that effective praise makes it clear to students that they should attribute their success to effort and fosters their understanding of the strategies that they used to accomplish the task for which they are being praised.

Rewards other than praise—points, stars, books, pizzas—can sometimes be effective in the short run. However, one of the most consistent and strongest cautions in the literature on motivation is that extrinsic rewards can undermine motivation in the long run (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; National Research Council, 2004; Stipek, 2002). When students become accustomed to getting extrinsic rewards for reading, they may begin reading solely or largely to get the extrinsic reward and actually discontinue reading when the extrinsic rewards are no longer available. Our goal should always be to demonstrate to students that reading is worthwhile for its own sake—for the learning, enjoyment, and satisfaction that it brings. Our greatest tools in accomplishing this goal are giving students good books and other materials to read and scaffolding their efforts so that they can successfully do the reading.

Goal setting is another important component of motivation. Students who set goals to learn certain content or processes—such as understanding a difficult concept or being able to self-check as they read—are more motivated to learn than students who do not. Teachers who help their students set appropriate learning goals are helping to foster students’ long-term engagement and learning (Ames, 1992; Maehr & Midgley, 1996)

**Factors That Undermine Motivation**

In order to understand just what something is, it is often useful to understand what it is not. Although we certainly do not want to dwell on the negative, we do want to list some factors that undermine motivation. Pressley and his colleagues (Bogner, Raphael, & Pressley, 2002; Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley,
& Vincent, 2003; Pressley et al., 2003) have identified a number of these factors. A few of them are listed in Figure 3.5. Pressley et al. (2003) provide a much longer list. Most unfortunately, when Pressley and his colleagues (2003) observed primary-grade classrooms, they found many of these factors present.

### Reflect and Apply

4. Explain two or three things you might do to help a shy second-grader who tends to lack confidence in her ability develop a more positive attitude toward herself as a learner.

5. Now explain two or three things you would not do so that you do not further undermine her attitude toward herself as a learner.

6. Suppose you want to convince your fourth-graders that although schoolwork can be challenging, it is worth doing well and doing their schoolwork well will give them a sense of accomplishment and pride. Jot down what you might say to them.
Nancy Masters is truly outstanding teacher who was observed by Pressley and his colleagues as part of their in-depth studies of motivation in primary-grade classes (Bogner et al., 2002; Pressley et al., 2003). Here is a description of her efforts taken from Pressley (2006).

On a typical day, Nancy Masters used more than 40 different positive motivational mechanisms to inspire and engage her students. Her classroom was filled to overflowing with motivating activities and positive tone. Cooperation was emphasized consistently during both whole-group and small-group instruction. Thus, when students read books with partners, Ms. Masters reminded them that, “The point is, you’re supposed to help your partner.” She provided reassurance and interesting scaffolding when students took on challenging activities. Thus, before a test requiring application of phonics skills, Ms. Masters reminded her students of the phonics they had been learning and emphasized that they should apply what they knew about phonics on the upcoming test.

Ms. Masters emphasized depth in her teaching, covering mature and interesting ideas. For example, during Black History Month, students not only completed detailed group book reports about five prominent African Americans, she led a discussion about the Jim Crow laws, one in which the students participated enthusiastically, demonstrating they had learned a great deal about discrimination during the month. During this conversation, Ms. Masters talked about different ways that people can affect social change, covering civil disobedience, disobeying unjust laws, and working within the system to change such laws. She and the first-grade students discussed equality and inequality, with student comments reflecting their grasp of some very difficult concepts.

Nancy Masters’ teaching connected across the curriculum and community, between school and home. During the first month of the school year, she took her class to visit the kindergarten room. In doing so, she began to become acquainted with her future students while forging connections across grade levels for the kindergarten and grade-1 students. Her students wrote in their journals about this visit. When they wrote stories a few weeks later, Ms. Masters held out as a carrot another visit to the kindergarten room. She told her grade-1 students, “Maybe we’ll show the kindergarten [your stories].” Nancy also pointed out times when students’ home experience connected with school. Thus, when a student read the word “little” very quickly, Ms. Masters commented, “Have you been working at home with your Mom? I’m so proud of you!” In doing so, she simultaneously emphasized the importance of effort and homework while connecting to the student’s home life. Ms. Masters also hosted a career day during which parents talked about and demonstrated their professional skills. After the visits, the students wrote in journals and did an at-home art project about their favorite profession. This special home assignment complemented the regular homework, which consisted of reading 15 minutes a night, doing a short math worksheet, and practicing spelling words.
Nancy Masters gave many opportunistic mini-lessons. In-class assignments seemed appropriately challenging and engaging (i.e., students could not finish them quickly, and they seemed interested in them). Her emphasis on good literature, the writing process, and comprehension were apparent during every class visit. Also, the class constructed many products, which were tangible evidence of accomplishment, including big books that were displayed prominently in the classroom and discussed often. Ms. Masters promised the class that each one of them would be able to take home one class-constructed book at the end of the year. She made many across-curriculum connections for her students (e.g., having students use the internet and the library to find material about Black History Month, material then used in writing an essay).

Ms. Masters expressively communicated with students. As she read to students, she modeled her interest and enthusiasm and reflected her curiosity about what would happen next in a story, often creating a sense of suspense about the events in a reading. When the class received a new basal reader, she opened it and said, “A brand new book!! It’s like a present. I know you want to open it and look inside. Go ahead and look inside. See anything interesting? Anything you’ve read?”

Ms. Masters provided clear learning objectives and goals. Thus, at the beginning of the school year, she had the students copy stories she had written on the board, explaining they were copying stories so that “You can see what good writing looks like.” Similarly, when she taught strategies during writing workshop, Ms. Masters emphasized that use of the strategies would help students write as they needed to write by the end of grade 1.

Nancy Masters emphasized effort attributions. Thus, on the day report cards were distributed to students, she told the students twice that their most important grade was their grade for effort. She and her students often used the term “personal best” to describe how they were doing.

Nancy Masters monitored the students well. She often said, “When I come around, I want to hear you reading or helping your partner or discussing the story.” During her walk-arounds, she provided help to students who were struggling.

Of course, Ms. Masters’ efforts to motivate her students paid off. There was consistently high engagement in her class. The pace was always quick. The assignments were always interesting. She excited her students about their work. Her students were always engaged in productive work!

**Grouping Students for Instruction**

One of the most important decisions you make in your classroom, and one that will have a huge effect on motivation and engagement, is that of how to group students. Students can be grouped in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes, yet in all too many cases grouping has not been used effectively and has had a negative effect on many students, specifically those students placed in the low-ability groups. In this section, we discuss some of the reasons for grouping, some of the problems grouping has produced, various types of groups, and some guidelines for grouping.
A typical class of 25 to 30 students brings with it 25 to 30 different sets of interests, abilities, attention spans, personalities, and reading skills, and it is very difficult to attend to each of these when working with the class as a whole. When teaching the entire class as a single group, teachers tend to teach to an imaginary mean; that is, they gear their instruction to what they perceive to be the middle range of interest, attention span, personality, ability, and so on. Such instruction does not meet the needs of those who are not in this range. Furthermore, in large-group situations, it is tempting for the teacher to do most of the talking, asking only an occasional question and, even then, allowing only one or two students to respond. Thus, most students play a passive role.

Dividing students into smaller groups is often helpful for a number of reasons. First, keeping smaller groups of students on task is generally easier than keeping larger groups on task. Smaller groups tend to facilitate direct instructional engagement for more children and for a longer period of time. Second, smaller groups allow you to provide instruction designed to meet the needs of specific students, thus individualizing your reading program. Finally, smaller groups allow more students to be actively involved in instructional activities. In a group of five, for example, it is possible for each student to respond to a question before you either run out of time or test the patience of the other students.

Given these advantages, it is not surprising that students have often been grouped for reading instruction. However, grouping has typically been based exclusively on reading ability. During much of this century, American students have been grouped homogeneously for reading instruction, with the typical classroom having one high-, one middle-, and one low-ability group (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). More recently, teachers and researchers have discovered that ability grouping results in a number of disadvantages, particularly for students in low-ability groups. As compared to students in other groups, students in low-ability groups are
often given less time to read, spend more time on worksheets and less time being actively instructed, and are asked fewer higher-order questions. Additionally, lower-ability-group students often suffer affective consequences of grouping, including lowered self-esteem, lowered motivation to succeed, and negative attitudes toward reading (Allington, 1983, 1984). Finally, there is much concern about the permanence of group membership; students who are placed in a low-ability group in kindergarten and first grade are all too likely to stay in the low-ability group throughout the elementary school years (Juel, 1990).

These findings have led teachers to develop a variety of grouping options, many of which deliberately include heterogeneous groups of students. Having a variety of reading groups gives children opportunities to learn how to interact with and learn from others who are in some ways different from them. Using a variety of groups also allows you to create appropriate groups for the various goals you have for students. Some of the many useful types of groups include Proficiency Groups (short-term groups of students who share a common strength or a common instructional need), Deliberately Heterogeneous Groups (groups specifically set up to counteract the potentially negative effect of proficiency groups), Formal Cooperative Groups (heterogeneous groups of students specifically taught how to work together as a team), Interest Groups (short-term groups of students sharing a common interest), Literature Groups or Literature Circles (a particular sort of interest group in which students read the same selection and meet to discuss and respond to it), and Project Groups (groups designed to work together on a particular project, such as making a video or preparing a dramatic presentation).

In deciding how to group students, there are many factors to consider. Here are some of the most important ones:

- Your general instructional objectives
- Your specific objectives for individual children
- The material your students will be reading
- Your students’ individual strengths
- Students’ abilities to work with others in the group
- The number and types of groups you can successfully manage
- The absolute injunction that no student be repeatedly assigned to the low-ability group

Having presented a variety of options for grouping, we obviously believe that students will profit from participating in many types of groups. Still, becoming adept at grouping students is a challenge. We suggest that you meet that challenge by first becoming comfortable with two or three types of grouping and then gradually adding other grouping alternatives as your classroom management and grouping skills become stronger.

We do not mean to suggest that there is no place for whole-class instruction. Whole-class instruction does have a place. Whole-class instruction is useful when you wish to reach all students at once. Spending five or ten minutes with the entire class before students begin working individually or in small groups allows you to touch base with all students, answer their questions, and hear their concerns. However, because lengthy whole-class
instruction seldom continues to command students’ attention and often
invites off-task behavior, whole-class instruction should generally be kept
brief and focused. In the Classroom 3.5 is based on a small-group activity
found in Structuring Cooperative Learning: Lesson Plans for Teachers (John-
son, Johnson, & Holubec, 1987).

Primary-Grade Cooperative Learning to Solve Story
Problems

The purpose of this lesson is for students to work together to find the answers
to a set of story problems that require mathematical reasoning and the use of
addition and subtraction.

Procedure:

• Assign three students of varying abilities to work together as a group—
  perhaps one high-, one medium-, and one low-achieving math student.

• Tell students you will give each group a set of ten story problems. Their job is to
  read each story problem, write a math sentence telling what happened in the story,
  and then figure out the missing number. Next, show them how they are to read and write
  their answers.

  1. Put a problem on the chalkboard or an overhead projector, and read it aloud. For example:
     Erika checked out 5 library books. She finished reading 2 and returned these to the library.
     How many books does she have left?
  2. Model the mental processes you go through to arrive at the mathematical sentence: 5 – 2 =?
  3. Perform the operation: 5 – 2 = 3

• Explain to students that you want one set of answers from the whole group, one set that they
  all helped find and agree upon.

  I expect to see all of you helping and all of you sharing. If you don’t understand or agree,
  ask the others in your group to explain that problem again. If you still think they are
  wrong, explain your answer to them and see if they agree with you. [Dramatizing, or role-
playing, this situation can be helpful in getting students to understand and use this
process.]

• Tell students that when they finish the ten story problems, each group member should sign
  his or her name to the group’s paper.

  Signing your name shows me you each helped, shared, and understand. Your group should
  try to answer all the problems correctly. If your group gets nine or ten correct, that means
  you have done a super job!

• While students are working in their groups, try to interfere as little as possible. However,
  occasionally ask individuals to explain one of their group’s answers.

• As a group finishes, quickly score the answers. Ask each member of the group if he or she
  participated and how he or she felt about the task. Praise groups that get nine or ten correct.
  Try to help groups who got a lower score discern what went wrong and what needs to be
  done to be more successful with similar tasks in the future.

• After the lesson has been completed, try to determine if students met the conditions you set
  out. Did all or most of the groups solve the story problems correctly? Do you need to teach
  more on story problems? Did students demonstrate understanding of the cooperative goal
  structure? What cooperative skills need to be taught in a future lesson?
7. Reread the description of Nancy Masters’s motivational activities in her first-grade class, and pick out five activities that would work just as well with fourth- or fifth-graders. Now look back at the description, and see if you can find any activities that would be inappropriate for fourth- or fifth-graders. How many did you find? What does this suggest about the extent to which motivational principles are applicable across grade levels?

8. Because grouping can have such a strong effect on students’ learning, it is important that you fully understand its possible effects. Toward this end, get together with a small group of your classmates, generate a list of positive and negative effects of grouping, and brainstorm a list of ways in which you can maximize the positive effects of grouping and minimize the negative ones.

**Strengths and Challenges of DIVERSITY**

All students need and deserve our very best efforts in assisting them in becoming motivated and engaged readers. Here we deal with two topics that are extremely important for all students but absolutely vital for students who face more challenges than do many of their classmates.

**SUCCESS**

All children need success, but for those children whose preschool experiences have not helped them develop the proficiencies school requires or for those older children who have not met with much success in their first few years of school, fostering success will be both more crucial and more difficult. For these students, success may require a great deal of scaffolding on your part. Perhaps you will read a story to the child several times before she attempts to read along with you, and then you and the child will read the story together several times before she has developed the proficiency and confidence to try reading it by herself. This is particularly true for those students who have repeatedly failed in school, have come to attribute their failure to factors outside of their control, and have fallen into a syndrome of learned helplessness. Not only must these children be led to success; they must also be brought to realize that success is under their control—something they can do something about.

Other students, those whose preschool experiences have served to prepare them for school and who handle routine school tasks competently, will often be able to succeed at typical literacy tasks without a great deal of scaffolding from you and will need sturdy scaffolding only with more challenging tasks. Still other students will succeed independently most of the time and will need significant scaffolding with only the most difficult tasks. Providing appropriate challenges will be your main concern with these students. The youngster who comes to school already reading should not be
required to wade thorough a word-study curriculum that she has already mastered or be limited to only very brief and very easy reading materials.

GROUPING
Similar considerations for accommodating diversity exist with grouping. One key, as we have already noted, is flexibility: using several different sorts of grouping. Thus, if you want to group students who are having particular difficulty understanding the concept of plot so that you can review the concept, it is important to also include each of these students in heterogeneous groups or interest groups to avoid the students’ stigmatizing themselves or being stigmatized by others. Similarly, it’s important to see that both low- and high-performing students are sometimes grouped for instruction and that grouping is often based on a criterion other than reading proficiency. Thus, in addition to pulling aside a group that is having problems with plot, it may be useful to pull aside a group of your most proficient writers and give special attention to a concept such as audience. Or, to take an example of grouping on a different criterion, you might assemble a group of students with particular skills in painting to work on scenery for a class skit.

Finally, when students are grouped heterogeneously, it is important that all believe they are spending their time usefully. In a heterogeneous group of writers, for example, it is important that the less-proficient writers learn something and get opportunities to contribute, but it is equally important that the more-proficient writers learn something and not feel that they have been relegated to helping the less-competent writers and are learning nothing new themselves.

In summary, we readily admit that making adjustments for differences among students is challenging. There are no perfect answers or solutions; many of the choices you make will be compromises, choices that have both advantages and disadvantages. Still, there are some general rules beyond the specific suggestions we have just made here. Remember that each student is an individual with both emotional strengths and weaknesses and cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Over time, all students need and deserve an abundance of success, appropriate challenges, the opportunity to work with others with similar strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunity to work with others with quite different strengths, weaknesses, interests, and concerns.

Concluding Remarks
Creating motivating and engaging classrooms is absolutely essential. Creating motivating and engaging classrooms means creating a literate environment—a place, a space, and an atmosphere—where reading and learning thrive. In motivating and engaging classrooms, students learn to attribute their successes and failures to factors under their control and to avoid learned helplessness. And in motivating and engaging classrooms, teachers employ myriad approaches to motivating students—including but not limited to ensuring student success, fostering higher-order thinking, and making connections to students’ cultures and lives outside of school.
We close the chapter with two sets of recommendations, found in Figure 3.6, for motivating students. The first is a set that Pressley and his colleagues (2003) gleaned from the work of Brophy (1986, 1987), recommendations made nearly 20 years ago. The second is a set that one of us (Graves, 2004a) gleaned from the work of Pressley and his colleagues (Bogner et al., 2002; Dolezal et al., 2003; Pressley, in press; Pressley et al., 2003). As you read them, we hope that you will notice two
points. First, the two sets of recommendations overlap a good deal with each other. Second, both sets overlap a good deal with the recommendations we make in this chapter. Our point is this: We know how to motivate and engage students; our task is to put this knowledge into action.

In the remainder of this book and in our day-to-day teaching in our own classrooms, we keep these recommendations at the center of our thinking. We encourage you to do the same. With motivation and engagement, great things are possible: Students can learn deeply, they can remember important information, and they can use what they learn in school in their lives beyond the classroom. They can do all of this while enjoying the activities in your classroom, enjoying school, and becoming committed lifelong readers.

**Extending Learning**

1. Spend some time observing a classroom at a grade level you find particularly interesting. Take notes on what you see. What opportunities for engaging in literacy activities are present? How welcoming is the physical setting? What materials are available? Then watch how the teacher and students interact in the classroom. Is the atmosphere safe and supportive? Are students enthusiastic and engaged? Finally, create a list of things to do and a list of things to avoid doing in order to best motivate students.

2. The lists that you created in the above activity represent your judgment based on your observation. There are other sources of information that deserve to be considered. One is the teacher you observed. Talk to the teacher and get his or her perceptions on what motivates students and which specific things he or she does to motivate them. The other source is, of course, students. Talk to a half dozen or so students and get their perceptions of what is and is not motivating in their classrooms. Once you have the teacher’s and some students’ perspectives, compare them to your lists and revise or fine-tune your lists as seems appropriate.

For a look at literacy instruction in a contemporary classroom, go to Allyn & Bacon’s MyLabSchool.com. In MLS Courses, click on Reading Methods. There you will find a wealth of resources, including video clips and case studies about a range of literacy topics.