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Motivating the Unmotivated to Improve Academic Achievement

Shelley B. Harris[1]
Sarah Collins[2]

Abstract

This study examines how low socioeconomic, upper elementary and middle school, non-ELL remedial readers have low motivation and a diminishing engagement in reading, writing, and language arts that leads to low performance and achievement. Parents and educators have a vision to provide readers with a self-directed motivation to read and hope that they will make engaging connections that will lead to future enjoyment of reading and achievement in academics. Historical theorists, parents, and educators have challenged and transformed this vision to prove that teaching styles and classroom environments, supporting materials and technology, family and educator support systems, interests of the learner, clear expectations, and higher order thinking skills can promote improvements in motivation and engagement that leads to improved achievement over time. This study indicates how good practices of the uses of dominant material, representation of practice with technology and supplemental material available, learner interests and choices, teacher and family roles and expectations, and motivational gains in achievement effect student engagement and motivation that affect achievement.

Keywords: Motivation, Engagement, Achievement, Strategies

Introduction

Low socioeconomic, upper elementary and middle school, non-ELL remedial readers have low motivation and a diminishing engagement in reading, writing, and language arts. Archaiccor responding Theorist agree with Dewey (1916) and are supported by more recent researchers such as Smith (1986) and Justice, Rice, and Warry (2009) in the facilitation of problem-based learning approaches to education that motivate the interests of learners. Dewey (1916) promoted collaboration, cooperation, and a democratic style of learning within education through the creation of "Activity Curriculum" which was designed to spark the curiosity and interests of the learners working in small groups to solve problems within interesting and stimulated experiences. More recent researchers resemble Lesley & Morrow (2012) in studies that describe authentic engagement in social, collaborative groups that guide learning in a physical classroom environment with literacy centers that facilitate a variety of materials and activities. Other studies and research supports that critical reasoning, teamwork, and self-perceptions can lead to the development of intellectual and academic skills that produce active, self-directed learners. Engagement Theory supports the use of themes in reading, an emphasis on student choice, the use of hands-on activities, availability of a wide variety of texts and genres, and social collaboration. Constructivists similar to Aria and Tracy (2003), Guthrie (2004), and Lau (2009) have done research that supports historical Schema Theorists comparable to Bartlett (1932), Rosenblatt (1978), and Anderson and Pearson (1984) that uses "humor-laced" vocabulary instruction, Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction, and highly engaging activities during the reading process to intrinsically captivate the learners (Tracey & Morrow, 2012).

[1] PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Educator and Leadership Preparation, Texas A&M University-San Antonio One University Way, Suite 269, San Antonio, TX 78224, Office: (210) 784-2548
[2] Graduate student, Texas A&M University San Antonio. Teacher, Medio Creek Elementary, 8911 Excellence Dr, San Antonio, TX 78252

Current research has proven that teaching styles and classroom environments, supporting materials and technology, family and educator support systems, interests of the learner, clear expectations, and higher order thinking skills can promote improvements in motivation and engagement that leads to improved achievement over time.

Graesser and D'Mello (2012) suggest that boredom can be improved by increasing challenges or providing easier material while making the environment and texts more engaging and intrinsically interesting. Pearson (2002) summarizes that with in all of the tools in our tool box to teach reading it is important to remember that students thrive in a child centered environment that considers whole language approaches with authentic texts. Koster, Kuipert, and Volman (2001) describe innovative schools that used open-ended activities with input from the students that focused on differences in learning styles and interests. Mason, Meadan, Hedin, & Cramer (2012) suggest that our students need positive, engaging activities facilitated by teachers and a support system that focuses on their gains more than their misgivings and builds upon what they do have instead of focusing on what they don't have yet. Roth (2013) and Rich (2008) are advocates for the growing digital age and argue that we should use interest in technology to motivate and challenge our readers in the 21st century. Cho, Xu, & Rhoded (2010) explain that students seemed less frustrated and gained more confidence and self-efficacy in their reading skills based on the content of the stories, collaboration and interaction among peers and volunteers, engagement in the act of reading, participation in oral reading skills and activities, and the quality and expectations of the instructors. Allington (2013) discusses ironic findings in reading program research because, "No research existed then, or exists now, to suggest that maintaining fidelity to a core reading program will provide effective reading lessons." Effective Reading Programs should follow research to provide a combination of direct and supplemental instruction with a gradual release of responsibility to inspire intrinsically motivated students guided by related strategies that make multiple connectivity to text impactful to learning (Allington, 2013).

Problem Statement

Low socioeconomic, upper elementary and middle school, non-ELL remedial readers have low motivation and a diminishing engagement in reading, writing, and language arts that leads to low performance and achievement. Educators have observed low socioeconomic environments where many students are coded or labeled to have learning disabilities, or are in the process of being tested for special education categorized disabilities. Tier three populations have many students who have simply lost the ability to motivate themselves or be motivated by others. In light of this, students are falling into a shadow of despair, low test scores, larger gaps in retained information, more opportunities to tune teachers out, and less opportunity to be successful in the future. Graesser and D'Mello (2012) observed scenarios of emotions that are connected to comprehensions made during the reading process in their article, "Moment-to-Moment Emotions during Reading." They described links between emotions of boredom, frustration, and confusion compared to flow and engagement in reading outcomes in a broad array of learning environments. They emphasized a cognitive disequilibrium that train wrecks from slight confusion into states of frustration that cannot be resolved because the student gets stuck and slips into boredom that leads to the disengaged learning processes (Graesser & D'Mello, 2012).

As we move into the future of reading, we have to combat the growing reliance on the internet and engage the reliance on "screens" to entertain us (Roth, 2013; Rich, 2008). Roth (2013) is a pessimist for the future of reading and reading instruction of serious novels because, though they will still be written, the serious readers and the interests to read them and understand them is not. He stated that, "Kids today, don't have the antennae anymore to pick up what's in a serious novel. Their antennae have shriveled up from all of the screens" like TV, movie theaters, internet, tablets, smart phones, computer life, etc. Opportunities for concentration in silence to read a serious novel are available less and less (Roth, 2013). Kids are, "addicted to the internet" by going through an extensive daily process of "checking email, perusing social networking sites, reading messages or posting personal updates, searching music videos on YouTube, blogging, etc." (Rich, 2008). In the end, "almost no schools in the United States have anything in place that much looks like what the research says young children need to become engaged readers" (Allington, R. L., 2013).

Proposed Solution

Undoubtedly, Graesser and D'Mello (2012) state that it is important to stop and question students to check for understanding and emotional states, provide opportunities for verbal expressions to monitor emotions as they

read, keep the lines of communication and interaction open, and use computer programs to non-invasively probe and analyze expressions.

Boredom can be improved by increasing challenges or providing easier material while making the environment and texts more engaging and intrinsically interesting. Frustration can be decreased by providing an Auto Tutor or peer helper. Confusion can be eliminated by keeping students in an optimal zone of confusion to promote comprehension (Graesser & D'Mello, 2012).

Specifically, Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013) describe a quantitative study of one thousand one hundred fifty-nine seventh grade reading and language arts students representative of the ethnicity and gender represented at public middle schools in one district in a mid-Atlantic state in their article, "Modeling the Relationships Among Reading Instruction, Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement for Adolescents." The method of the study was administered by teachers that were trained, observed, monitored, supported, and motivated to provide six week segments of ninety min daily interventions with two different reading programs to chart the correlation between instruction, achievement, and engagement on motivation in reading. Both reading programs, Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) and Traditional Reading and Language Arts (R/LA) Instruction, used expository text to identify main idea, sub-concept understanding, reasoning, summary of a paragraph, and full-passage summaries. The study was used to help turn around fourth grade predictors for selection of English courses in tenth grade, dropout rates, and patterns of avoidances of reading. Positive and negative motivations were examined; such as intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, perceived difficulty, value of text, devalue of text, peer reading or pro-social goals, anti-social goals, dedication, and avoidance of reading (see Tables 1-2 & Figures 2-3 in appendix on page 17-18, Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013).

In the CORI reading program students chose readable texts to read aloud, provided connections to topics, and collaborated with peers throughout activities. Benefits of reading were emphasized, modeled, linked, and related to choices of the students. As a result the positive motivations; intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, value of text, peer reading or pro-social goals, and dedication to reading, went up after the six weeks while the negative motivations; perceived difficulty, devalue of text, anti-social goals, and avoidance of reading, decreased. The Traditional R/LA Instruction proved to show weak relationships, and non-significant corrections towards improved motivation in reading (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013). Data was collected through a series of pre-intervention and post-intervention assessments; including Woodcock Johnson III Reading Fluency Assessment and the Motivations for Reading Information Books in School (MRIB-S) questionnaire. Outcomes proved that students are more successful when they can choose from readable texts that can be read aloud and understood literally while providing links to other texts and topics. When students can make a choice in content of reading, they have a greater investment and commitment to the text and the related learning connected to it. Through small team interactions, students can share ideas, discuss topics, create together, and expand on teacher and peer feedback. Setting goals, linking learning to the students, and linking one concept or content to another concept or content gives relevance to the reading and activities to support it. Overall, when students are involved in setting reachable goals within engaging instruction and provided with opportunities to discuss and implement appropriate feedback, engagement, achievement, and motivation; all improve (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013).

Similarly, Cho, Xu, and Rhoded (2010) describe a qualitative study of as many as five hundred thirty-seven public school students consisting of a majority of Hispanic, low socioeconomic, free lunch recipients, with twenty-five percent of ELL students in central Virginia in their article, "Examining English Language Learners' Motivation of, and Engagement in, Reading: A Qualitative Study." The method of this study was administered by trained graduate-student instructors who led small group interventions for two months, three times per week, for thirty minute sessions. The entire study took place for twenty-four weeks. Throughout the interventions Directed Reading-Thinking Activities we're used within the intervention program selected to reduce the academic gaps among non-ELL remedial readers and ELL students. Instructors used high interest story books and chapter books to build motivation through high-interest yet challenging reading materials as well as inspire an emotional attachment to the text in hopes for an expression of, "Reading is fun!" Researchers found, from data collected in forty to fifty minute interviews with the instructors and students, that points of view, perceptions, feelings, and recollections of motivation, engagement, progress of comprehension and prediction skills, and ELL literacy practice showed a positive effect on students' reading achievement. Based on the content of the stories, collaboration and interaction among peers and volunteers,

engagement in the act of reading, participation in oral reading skills and activities, and the quality and expectations of the instructors, students seemed less frustrated and gained more confidence and self-efficacy in their reading skills.

"The findings indicated that collaborative learning not only creates more opportunities to listen and speak, but also provides opportunities for students to help each other comprehend stories" (Cho, Xu, & Rhoded, 2010). Additionally, Mason, Meadan, Hedin, and Cramer (2012) describe a qualitative study of twenty low achieving, general education fourth graders attending two mid-western elementary schools in their article, "Avoiding the Struggle: Instruction That Supports Students' Motivation in Reading and Writing About Content Material."

It focuses on improving the motivations of learning extrinsically and intrinsically in reading and writing to improve reading comprehension and writing communication skills. Strategies such; as Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), TWA (Think before reading, While reading, and After reading) and PLANS (Pick goals, List ways to meet goals, And make Notes, then Sequence notes) were used to improve factors of motivation. Through these interventions, students improved their interests in content and object specificity, self-regulation of feelings, thoughts, and actions, self-efficacy in producing outcomes, and perceptions of confidence in learning by becoming better readers. By setting goals and engaging in working to meet those goals, students began building successful perceptions. As students found a purpose in learning, their engagement seemed to improve as did their motivation to continue to engage (Mason, Meadan, Hedin, & Cramer, 2012). The TWA and SRSD approaches are "strategies" that seem to be a beneficial addition to instruction of motivation. Our students need positive, engaging activities facilitated by teachers and a support system that focuses on their gains more than their misgivings and builds upon what they do have instead of focusing on what they don't have yet. This seems to be different perspective compared to what is done and what is easy (Mason, Meadan, Hedin, & Cramer, 2012).

Besides that, Pacheco and Goodwin (2013) put together a qualitative study of twenty seventh and eighth grade students that represent an even population of proficient and struggling students from two middle schools in Southeastern United States to showcase problem solving strategies of the different groups in their article, "Putting Two and Two Together Middle School Students' Morphological Problem-Solving Strategies for Unknown Words." The study focuses on multiple interviews of theorists and researchers' strategies in enhancing vocabulary instruction through morphologic instruction. The method of the study allowed researchers to respond during twenty minute interviews led by the authors of the article. The data collected ranges from strategies such as part-to-whole, parts-to-whole, analogy, and whole-to-part as effective instruction in teaching vocabulary. Researchers supported parts-to-whole instruction more than other strategies as the main strategy for instruction for proficient and struggling readers (Pacheco & Goodwin, 2013). In the growing digital age, it is imperative that we use interest in technology to motivate and challenge our readers in the twenty-first century. Computer based learning can connect what we do as teachers to what students want to do as another resource or strategy to connect students to learning. Students can research, present, discuss, and create meaning through multiple sites, apps, and applications that only foster educational problem solving and growth as an independent, worldly citizen ready to take on the challenges of the future in general(Roth, 2013; Rich, 2008).

Pursuing this further, Patarapichayatham, Fahla, and Roden (2014) describe a quantitative study of twenty thousand four hundred ninety-three third through eighth grade students during the 2012-2013 school year from the Garland Independent School District in Garland, Texas in their article, "Predictability Study of ISIP Reading and STAAR Reading: Prediction Bands." The method of the study was to use the supplemental technology support of Istation and data collected from monthly Istation Indicators of Progress, or ISIP scores, to predict passing STAAR test score projections for each increasing level and phase of the assessment. The study is intended to prove the program's success as well as show that through making results of reading ability and deficits immediate and providing differentiated instructional opportunities to modify continuous growth, teachers, school administrators, and parents can expect how students will perform on the STAAR (Patarapichayatham, Fahla, & Roden, 2014) Overall data collected at the Middle of the Year (MOY) has been gathered to predict success at a ninety-five percent accuracy based on certain levels of success with this online reading program that continuously instructs and assesses basic skills in comprehension, spelling, vocabulary, connected text fluency, understanding across genres, understanding and analysis of literary texts, and understanding and analysis of informational text. Certain predictions can now be made for grades three through eight like, "A group of fourth grade students who have scored one thousand seven hundred ninety-eight or higher on ISIP (Istation's monthly Indicator of Progress) will almost certainly (ninety-five percent

accurate) pass the State of Texas Assessment Academic Readiness (STAAR)" (Patarapichayatham, Fahla, & Roden, 2014).

Following this further, Koster, Kuipert, and Volman (2011) describe a qualitative study of five primary, "traditional" or "innovative" schools across the Netherlands who support and have a relatively high level of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a supplemental, integrated practice in the classroom that leads to more engaging learning activities. The traditional schools practice a direct instruction model of a fixed curriculum that supports standard teaching and learning materials. Innovative schools practice a collaborative instruction model of a more open curriculum that supports self-regulated learning. The methods of this study were administered over a two year period, 2007-2008 & 2008-2009, to enhance learning arrangements that involved ICT. Through observations and interviews of students and teachers, educational goals, instruction, and exercises were reported and analyzed.

Goals were set to make instruction more engaging or motivating for students, catered to student differences in learning abilities, maintain or increase learning achievements, offer more efficient teaching and learning opportunities, and activate students in the learning process. In both growing suburban and small rural areas, enabling students to choose from activities in multiple intelligences made education more meaningful to them. Traditional schools stayed close to curriculum and used ICT to supplement extra practice on exercises and assignments in a variation of instruction to gain knowledge. Innovative schools used open-ended activities with input from the students that focused on differences in learning styles and interests. Both were beneficial, but innovative schools experienced a need for more time and support in the ICT implementation process. Students increased motivation, learning results, and self-directed learning abilities while teachers were able to differentiate more for each student (Koster, Kuipert, & Volman (2011).

Conclusion

In final analysis, some of the most pivotal movements in reading education in the last one hundred years are dependent upon a common set of criteria and practices, materials available, roles of the teacher and learners and dominant pedagogical practices of the time periods. The reading scenes went through reforms from drill and kill before the 1900s, isolated and combined analytic phonics approaches throughout 1930-1970, and a cognitive revolution from 1970 to the end of the twentieth century, with a social whole language approach in the eighties, focusing on readiness skills to read and comprehend (Pearson, 2002). These movements in reading education spotlight that the pendulum is swinging back to some of the most basic skills in teaching phonics, reading skills, and with controlled text (Pearson, 2002). It is important for teachers of reading and language to know and understand these movements and their impact on reading pedagogy today because by acquiring the knowledge of the past, educators can use the history of reading development to tackle problems not yet solved in reading to better the future of a balanced approach to literacy (Barry, 2008). Reading and language movements are heading toward a criteria of authentic instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of a culturally and ability diverse population. By providing ample practice for phonics and skills with teachers who use multiple strategies, resources, and manipulatives to facilitate learning, educators will create "meaning maker" learners that are independent in creating a purpose of their learning and its connection to their future learning and success (Pearson, 2002; Barry, 2008; Roth, 2013).

Reading instruction began as an Alphabetic Method supported by reading belief embedded daily prayers, the Bible, and the dictionary. It moved into the first curriculum to focus on culturally neutral stories and went back and forth between part to whole and whole to part phonics that converts letters to sounds and blends sounds to words. Modern readers shifted toward silent reading and a breakdown of meaning into smaller parts of each read instead of memorizing the story and reciting it. New curriculum focused on an emphasis of meaning through language interactions (Barry, 2008). As the past became present, it is clear that students made improvements if they integrated language with good teaching of appropriate leveled material in a balanced approach to literacy. Going back and forth from oral to silent reading and readability to readiness focusing on skills to read and comprehend, teachers have many tools to put in tool boxes of instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners (Pearson, 2002). Within all of the tools in the tool box to teach reading, it is important to remember that students thrive in a child centered

environment that considers whole language approaches with authentic texts. Just as the history of reading development plays a huge role in tackling problems in the future, so does the history of assessments.

High stakes assessments provide an accountability system that guides curriculum reform, leads to an abandonment of that curriculum when teachers think they can miseducatively teach the test, demotivates learners and teachers when they are used to evaluate holistic success in learning and professionalism, and veers from good practices that have been proven and practiced in history. Students need a robust accountability system because students, mostly in low income and/ or minority units, are graduating without skills for successful lives (Seattle Times Editorial, 2013). In understanding that educators need to plan to provide a flexible, step-by-step intervention that works no matter where students' levels may fall. Students have gaps at different levels and with different parts of the reading instruction. Reading and language instruction has and never will be a cookie cutter program that every student fits at the same time. Movements of the past have shaped the movements of reform made in the present and guide the movements educators make in the future.

The same factors continue to be at play. Educators watch the pendulum of history swing back and forth to only repeat good practices of the uses of dominant material, representation of practice with technology and supplemental material available, learner interests and choices, teacher and family roles and expectations, and motivational gains in achievement. As teachers learn about the good practices of the past educators, use the parts to create a whole language model of success for our students.

Appendix

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations in Innovative Reading/Language Arts Context (Pre- and Postassessment)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Intrinsic	—	.45**	-.32**	.74**	-.71**	.60**	-.27**	.63**	-.73**	-.13**	.00	-.18**	-.16**	-.10**	.24**
2. Self-efficacy	.34**	—	-.74**	.50**	-.40**	.50**	-.29**	.61**	-.47**	.22**	-.01	-.03	.04	.27**	.25**
3. Perceived difficulty	-.23**	-.71**	—	-.37**	.39**	-.36**	.33**	-.47**	.51**	-.21**	.06	.06	-.02	-.28**	-.29**
4. Value	.60**	.42**	-.28**	—	-.81**	.72**	-.40**	.79**	-.74**	-.12**	.06	-.16**	-.16**	-.09**	.17**
5. Devalue	-.61**	-.31**	.34**	-.74**	—	-.58**	.43**	-.67**	.81**	.11**	-.02	.18**	.16**	.09**	-.19**
6. Prosocial goals	.45**	.38**	-.20**	.61**	-.47**	—	-.43**	.75**	-.57**	-.01	.16**	-.06	-.05	.02	.14**
7. Antisocial goals	-.21**	-.22**	.24**	-.36**	.45**	-.39**	—	-.51**	.44**	-.11**	-.18**	.00	-.02	-.15**	-.07*
8. Dedication	.52**	.50**	-.35**	.78**	-.62**	.63**	-.42**	—	-.68**	.03	.11**	-.12**	-.06	.07*	.23**
9. Avoidance	-.66**	-.42**	.46**	-.59**	.72**	-.40**	.41**	-.60**	—	.00	.03	.13**	.10**	-.03	-.23**
10. Informational text comprehension (pre)	-.05	.26**	-.30**	-.03	.00	.06	-.17**	.11**	-.17**	—	-.07*	.30**	.30**	.72**	.06
11. Gender	.02	-.02	.06*	.11**	-.06	.22**	-.18**	.16**	-.04	-.09	—	-.05	-.10**	-.06	-.03
12. Ethnicity	-.13**	-.03	-.00	-.14**	.15**	-.01	-.02	-.06	.05	.28**	-.06	—	.36**	.23**	-.17**
13. Free and reduced-price meals	-.17**	.04	-.05	-.09**	.01**	-.01	-.07*	-.02	.01	.31**	-.08**	.34**	—	.32**	-.05
14. Informational text comprehension (post)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.11**
15. Instruction	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
M (pre)	1.98	2.91	2.22	2.65	2.59	2.72	1.66	2.81	2.70	16.02	—	—	—	—	—
SD (pre)	0.60	0.57	0.65	0.65	0.74	0.58	0.66	0.62	0.68	4.62	—	—	—	—	—
M (post)	2.15	3.07	1.97	2.60	2.57	2.79	1.58	2.88	2.55	16.06	—	—	—	16.30	—
SD (post)	0.68	0.63	0.67	0.74	0.79	0.63	0.61	0.65	0.73	4.68	—	—	—	4.64	—

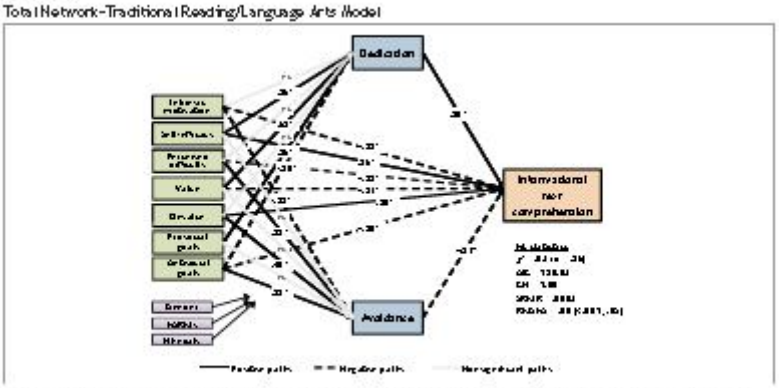
Note. $N = 1,020$ (pre). $N = 970$ (post). Preassessment is shown in the lower left. Postassessment is shown in the upper right.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

TABLE 2
Fit Statistics

	Fit Indexes					Model chi-square comparison
Model	$\chi^2(df)$ (p-value)	AIC	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA (90% CI)	Change in $\chi^2(df)$
Traditional reading/language arts models (April)						
Total network	0.03(1) (.86)	180.03	1.00	.0003	.00 [<.001; .05)	–
Full mediation	119.51(7) (.00)	267.51	.99	.034	.13 [.11; .15)	$\Delta\chi^2 = 119.48$ $\Delta df = 6$; $p = .001$
Dual effects	27.26(3) (.00)	203.26	1.00	.009	.09 [.06; .12)	$\Delta\chi^2 = 27.0$ $\Delta df = 2$; $p = .001$
Intervention reading/language arts models (June)						
Total network	0.13(1) (.72)	238.13	1.00	.0004	.00 [<.001; .03)	–
Full mediation	85.64(10) (.00)	285.64	1.00	.013	.08 [.06; .09)	$\Delta\chi^2 = 85.51$ $\Delta df = 9$; $p = .001$
Dual effects	1.11(3) (.78)	235.11	1.00	.001	.00 [<.001; .04)	$\Delta\chi^2 = .98$ $\Delta df = 2$; $p = .05$

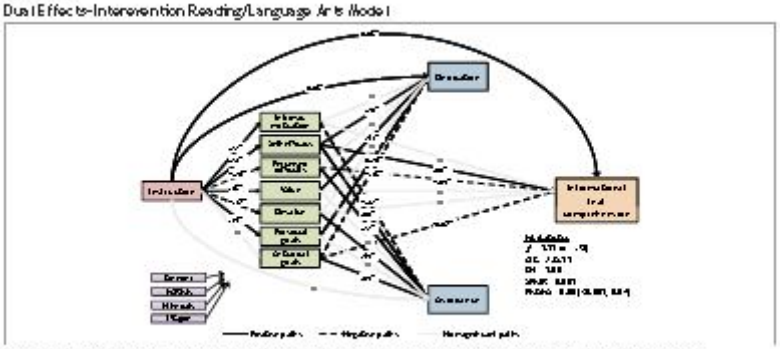
Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion. CFI = comparative fit index. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. SRMR = standardized root mean residual.

FIGURE 2
Total Network–Traditional Reading/Language Arts Model



Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion. CFI = comparative fit index. FIML = full-information maximum likelihood. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. SRMR = standardized root mean residual.

FIGURE 3
Dual Effects–Intervention Reading/Language Arts Model



Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion. CFI = comparative fit index. FIML = full-information maximum likelihood. ITC pre = Informational text comprehension pretest. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. SRMR = standardized root mean residual.

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