Chapter 7
Engaging Teachers With Students: Reaching Reluctant and Struggling Readers

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ABSTRACT

To motivate struggling and reluctant readers, teachers must first learn about students and their abilities. This knowledge will allow teachers the opportunity to mold units of instruction and present students with texts framed in a manner that will connect their experiences with the material. This chapter provides strategies for engaging with students to learn more about their personalities and reading abilities. Also included are strategies for connecting complex texts with student interests for reluctant readers as well as instructional methods to assist struggling readers.

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INTRODUCTION

How does one become involved in his or her community? How does s/he learn to care about the issues that impact his/herself and his/her neighbors? How does s/he empower him/herself and others to create genuine change to improve the lives of those in the community?

To become civically engaged, community members must have the ability to educate themselves on the issues – political, social, legal, local, and national – that impact the members of the community. Thus, to become involved and create genuine change, all citizens must have the skills and the resources to obtain information critical to the public. These skills are rooted in the citizen’s ability to gather, synthesize, and evaluate information – also known as critical literacy. Community members must be able to critically analyze political issues placed on the ballot, evaluate information from news sources that relates directly and indirectly to their communities, as well as scrutinize the backgrounds and political stances of those running for offices which represent them.

These skills should not be limited to those who naturally gravitate to the written word, not just those who found school a breeze, but all citizens. According to the United States Census Bureau (2018) only 40% of males between the ages of 18-24 and 46% of females in the same age bracket voted in the 2016 Presidential Election. That means after they leave our secondary schools, less than half of our students are making their voices heard. Why is this the case? Is it because we have not empowered them with the confidence to do so?

While student council, model U.N., and debate team are excellent practice, it is only after students leave secondary school that their civic influence on their communities becomes impactful. Once those graduates reach the age of 18, they are all legally granted the power to affect great change – they are all empowered with the right to vote. Therefore, as educators, it is our duty to empower all of our students with the ability to think for themselves, to critically analyze the vast amounts of information readily available to them, and most especially - to engage with the written word. That task is no easy feat. Too many of our students have fallen out of love with the written word by the time they reach secondary school. Calderon (2017) found that while 66% of 5th graders in the U.S. find schoolwork important, only 28% of 11th graders do, and only 17% of 11th graders claim they try their best in school – that’s staggering. Perhaps the most significant find is that 67% of 5th graders feel their teachers care about them, while only 24% of 11th graders feel the same way (Calderon, 2017).
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