Helping struggling readers succeed is one of the greatest challenges teachers face. These students, whose reading ability falls well below grade level, face formidable obstacles themselves. Despite being not often actively supported by other programs, research shows both increasing reading motivation and time spent reading significantly improve achievement and are particularly critical for struggling readers. Book Trust's program helps them become more motivated to read and spend more time reading on their own.

Most programs targeting struggling readers focus on decoding skills, fluency practice, and comprehension strategies. Because there is strong evidence that such instruction leads to growth in reading achievement, this makes sense. However, equally rigorous research proves that *how motivated* children are to read and *how much* reading they do also strongly influences their achievement. Intrinsic motivation to read has a causal effect on reading fluency and comprehension.[1]  When *motivation* to read increases, so does *ability* to read. Motivation also has a causal relationship with how much time students spend reading, which in turn has its own significant effect on reading achievement.[2] Students read more when better motivated to read, and they get better at reading the more they read. Over time, these gains feed on each other to accelerate literacy learning.

The converse also is true. As students become less motivated, they read less, and have more difficulty improving their skills, which leads to further demotivation. Over time, this creates a vicious downward spiral for struggling readers, which researchers call the "Matthew effect."[3] The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.

They do, unless we reverse the cycle. That requires attention to all three dimensions. Schools that fail to provide support for increasing motivation to read and amount of reading miss an opportunity to change the direction of struggling readers' trajectories. Because literacy is essential learning: in all subjects, in the workplace, and in civic engagement, the consequences of our failure haunt students throughout their lives.

Book Trust helps build struggling readers' *intrinsic* motivation. Students may be willing to read to get artificial rewards—stickers, pizza parties, and the like—but such incentives make them *less* motivated to read without them. Research shows that only true intrinsic motivation will support sustained reading growth.[4] Intrinsic motivation flourishes when students get to make choices, perceive themselves as competent, and feel supported and connected.[5]

Book Trust's program activates each of these sources of motivation. Every month, students served by Book Trust choose one-to-three books that become part of their personal libraries, for reading in school and at home. Choosing books each month helps students build autonomy. As readers, they are in the driver's seat. That doesn't mean, however, that they don't need a map. Book Trust's program is *teacher-led, and student-driven.* Using resources provided by Book Trust, teachers support students in choosing books connected to their interests; books challenging enough not to bore but easy enough for students to read on their own. As students choose books they love and read them successfully, increasingly they see themselves as capable readers.

Book Trust also supports teachers in creating a culture of literacy in their classrooms, within which students celebrate reading for its own sake, share their reading experiences with peers without judgment, and ask for help without stigma. In such classroom environments, students feel safe and supported as they build relationships around the shared experience of reading. And, through its support of family literacy, Book Trust

cultivates environments for shared engagement around books at home as well. Struggling readers, often faced with frequent assessments that single them out as lacking, particularly need—and benefit from—supporting relationships.[6]

While all students need coaching and practice to consistently choose the books that will engage and challenge them, support is doubly important for struggling readers. The pool of books that are right for them is likely to be smaller. Many of the books that are easy enough for them to read independently may be targeted at much younger children, with topics and formats that do not align with these older readers' interests and preferences. Struggling readers need the opportunity to choose from a wide selection of books to find titles that fit ability level, interest, and life experience.[7]

Book Trust maximizes the likelihood of a good match by enabling students to pick from an expansive catalog rather than being limited the books currently available in their classroom or school library (if they go to one of the shrinking number of schools that still have one) or on their bookshelves as home (if they are lucky enough have even a few books at home).

Numerous studies have shown that access and exposure to print is crucial for reading achievement and that providing opportunities for book ownership can powerfully increase motivation to read.[8] Having access to books at home is also a necessary precondition to any effort to significantly increase the amount students read outside the school day. Reading achievement and low social economic status are strongly correlated, and students in low income communities are much less likely to have access to books or the opportunity to own books of their own.[9] So, while they are those most in need of ready access to a wide variety of books, struggling readers are among the least likely to have it.

By helping students build a personal library of books available to read both at home and at school, Book Trust addresses this critical need as well. Book Trust builds motivation to read and increases access through choice, support, and ownership. Schools that enhance their regularly reading instruction with Book Trust's program multiply struggling readers' chances to thrive.

## Endnotes

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