



Does family make a difference? Mid-term effects of a school/home-based intervention program to enhance reading motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of a school/home-based intervention program designed to enhance the reading motivation and comprehension of Swiss fourth graders ($N = 713$). In order to identify the specific contribution of the home environment, the program was implemented in one group *without* ($N = 244$) and in one group *with* ($N = 225$) parental participation. The intervention was based on the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) and lasted one school year. Effects of the treatment were investigated in a pretest–posttest control group design with follow-up. Multilevel analyses showed that the school/home-based intervention had significant effects on reading enjoyment and reading curiosity. Effects on reading enjoyment were still detectable at 5-month follow-up. However, no effects were found for reading self-concept or reading comprehension. The findings highlight the potential of the family in the sustained promotion of reading motivation.

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1. Introduction

Promoting reading literacy is a matter of worldwide importance. The declines in reading motivation that are typically observed in the elementary school years and beyond are thus a cause for serious concern (Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer, 1996; Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002; Meece & Miller, 1999; for the high school years, see Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001). Declines in academic motivation have been widely attributed to school factors (Gottfried, Marcoulides, Gottfried, & Oliver, 2009). However, home-based factors are probably just as relevant. According to Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993), family environment and parental support rank third in the list of factors influencing school achievement, after cognitive competencies and class management. Indeed, research has confirmed that family has a strong impact on reading motivation (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Leseman & de Jong, 1998). Although this research has focused primarily on young children, there is evidence that parental support for reading continues to relate positively to children's reading motivation in adolescence (Klauda, 2009). Both family status/structure variables and process characteristics (e.g., cultural practice in the family) are

important, the former often being mediated by the latter (Baumert, Watermann, & Schümer, 2003). Parental support for reading may therefore be an important point of intervention for measures to address decreasing reading motivation in the upper elementary years. However, although families have considerable potential to foster reading motivation (McElvany & Artelt, 2009), intervention programs connecting the family and school settings are rare (e.g., Morrow & Young, 1997).

Recent meta-analyses on the effectiveness of family literacy programs have shown mixed findings for reading achievement. Whereas Sénéchal and Young (2008) found a strong overall effect size ($d = .65$), and Mol, Bus, De Jong, and Smeets (2008) reported a moderate effect size ($d = .42$), van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers, and Herppich (2011) – using a more recent and broader database – found a significant, but small mean effect ($d = .18$). Van Steensel and colleagues highlighted the need for more rigorous methodological standards in family literacy programs.

In general, family literacy studies have focused on early literacy and not considered reading motivation in particular. Yet the family's primary task is not to instruct the child, but to provide motivational and emotional support where needed (Baker, 2003). Given this complementarity between family and school, it makes sense to foster partnerships between the two contexts in order to establish coherent, motivating learning environments for reading (Epstein, 2001). From this perspective, the aim is to foster both reading

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skills and the related motivational objectives, in order to prevent motivational decline and stagnation in reading development. Several recent reading intervention studies in the school context have successfully implemented this multiple-objective approach (e.g., Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Souvignier & Mokhlesgerami, 2006).

This article reports the effects of a school/home-based intervention program designed to enhance the reading literacy of fourth grade students and analyzes the respective contributions of school and family. Based on the principles of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) and interest theory (Krapp, 2002, 2005), the intervention program seeks to establish motivating reading environments. Effects on motivational and cognitive outcomes were evaluated at the end of the intervention period as well as at follow-up 5 months later.

1.1. Promoting reading motivation

According to motivation theory, there are two potential points of intervention for the promotion of reading motivation: the *person* and the *situation*. Recent programs designed to promote reading motivation have tended to focus on the second approach (Schiefele & Streblow, 2006). By activating situational interest on a repeated basis, these programs aim to develop general, lasting dispositions toward a topic or an activity. In the domain of reading, this means creating learning environments in which students are given repeated opportunities to read and work on texts of engaging content and form in attractive learning settings (Schraw, Flowerday, & Lehman, 2001). The maintenance of situational interest over time may lead to the development of individual interest. Hidi and Renninger's (2006) four-phase model of interest development elaborates on the distinction between situational and individual interest, differentiating each into two further phases of interest development (*triggered situational interest/maintained situational interest* and *emerging/well-developed individual interest*). According to Krapp (2002, p. 400), however, the transition from situational to individual interest is rarely made, because this process requires identification with the goals, actions, and topics related to this interest.

Beside cognitive and rational processes, the emotional quality of learning is equally important for interest development. Thus, it is postulated that a person will only engage continuously in a certain action if he or she rationally considers it to be sufficiently important and/or if he or she experiences the process as positive and emotionally satisfactory (Krapp, 2002). This allows a direct connection to be made to self-determination theory (SDT; Krapp, 2005). According to Deci and Ryan (2002), what is crucial for the development of lasting intrinsic learning motivation is the fulfillment of a person's basic psychological needs for *autonomy*, *competence*, and *social relatedness*. It is possible to capitalize on this relationship in educational contexts by developing approaches that address these basic psychological needs, thus facilitating positive motivational experience in learning.

In this study, the focus lies on promoting intrinsic reading motivation. *Enjoyment*, which is activity-related and considered to be a key factor of intrinsic reading motivation (reading for the enjoyment of reading; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is one central outcome variable. Effects on *curiosity* as an integral part of intrinsic motivation, representing the desire to gain understanding about a topic of interest for its own sake (Krapp, 2005), are also analyzed. Beside these two aspects of intrinsic reading motivation, we assess the program's effects on reading self-concept – that is, the perception of one's own competence in reading – which is closely associated with motivation and reading outcomes (Chapman & Tunmer, 1997). Previous intervention studies targeting (intrinsic) reading motivation have shown moderate but significant effects on curiosity,

involvement and self-efficacy (e.g., Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2007). Likewise, interventions targeting self-concept have been found to have modest but significant effects when being linked with academic activities (for an overview, see Elbaum & Vaughn, 2001). O'Mara, Marsh, Craven, and Debus (2006) found that interventions are much more effective when a specific domain of self-concept is targeted directly.

1.2. Motivating reading environments at school and at home

School and family are considered to play complementary roles in promoting reading literacy (McElvany, 2008). In the following, we outline theoretical considerations on how reading instruction might be embedded in motivationally supportive environments in the school and family, respectively.

According to the principles of SDT, teachers can foster students' situational interest by offering them opportunities for choice (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). Allowing students to select their own material to read independently enhances their experience of *autonomy* (Deci & Ryan, 2002). It also allows them to pursue their existing interests, which in turn plays an important role in fostering motivation (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2002). Furthermore, an optimal level of challenge (i.e., the choice of appropriate texts, achievement grouping) and meaningful performance feedback can enhance students' perceived *competence* if provided in an autonomy-supportive context (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Further in line with SDT, cooperative learning in small groups is highly motivating in the classroom context because it fulfills the need for *social relatedness* (Lou, Abrami, & d'Apollonia, 2001). Characteristics of cooperative learning settings include positive interdependence, individual responsibility, helpful face-to-face-interactions, and feedback (Slavin, 2005). Several of the methods developed to promote reading comprehension are based on cooperative learning (Guthrie et al., 2004; Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

The same theoretical considerations apply to family context, and particularly to the homework situation. However, the advantage of the family over the school environment is that it has the potential to facilitate highly adaptive interactions. According to McElvany and Artelt (2009), some clear advantages of home environment are: (1) the intensity of the one-to-one interaction between parent and child, (2) the opportunity to establish a strong tradition of positive reading behavior, and (3) the possibility of direct feedback. In her discussion of parental behaviors that are conducive to motivation, Grolnick (2003) – with reference to the principles of SDT – advocates autonomy-supporting rather than controlling behaviors. Indeed, research on homework support has shown that parental control and interference may have demotivating effects (Grolnick, 2003; Niggli, Trautwein, Schnyder, Lüdtke, & Neumann, 2007), whereas motivationally supportive family environments foster reading motivation. Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein, and Serpell (2001) reported that the affective quality of shared reading in first grade was a significant contributor to children's reading of challenging texts in third grade, even after controlling for first grade word recognition skills (see also Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). In their study, positive affective interactions during shared reading were associated with meaning-related talk, whereas negative interactions were associated with parental attempts to instruct and control their child. Groeben and Schroeder (2004) also found affective quality to be important for motivationally supportive reading socialization. They noted that parent-child interactions may impact the child's motivation if the child is considered to be actively involved in the process of constructing meaning when talking about texts. Other aspects of the family environment that foster reading motivation are engagement in

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