

Teens Choosing to Read: Fostering Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Growth

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What is engaged reading, and how is it connected to not only students' reading comprehension and growth, but also their wellbeing? This session is based on the outcomes of research—involving hundreds of interviews and years of observations of classroom life—that focused on the experiences of students whose teachers arranged for them to routinely read and talk about compelling books of their choice. Beyond reading substantially more than they had previously, reading substantially more strategically than before, and improving state test scores, they reported positive changes in their social, emotional, and intellectual lives that they attributed to reading, the kinds of books they read and the conversations those books provoked.

Features of ELA classrooms that produced engaged readers:

- Teachers prioritized engaged reading; time to read every day
- Choice among personally relevant books that served as core of curriculum
- 150-200 books per class, no more than three copies of any title
- Instruction woven into teacher read alouds
- Students encouraged to talk about books
- No strings attached. No comprehension questions.
- Distributed teaching within the community
- These features made it possible for students to experience, simultaneously, a sense of autonomy, a sense of competence, and a sense of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Students reported the following kinds of growth, which they attributed to their reading experiences:

- Growth in reading achievement (including critical subgroups)
- Growth in reading strategic behavior
- Substantial increase in volume of reading
- Substantial increase in student-initiated talk, with each other, teachers, friends, and family members, both in and out of school
- Positive shifts in perspectives on family
- Socio-emotional growth

- Growth in agency over life-narratives/future
- Moral growth
- Shifts in happiness/mental well-being

These are references for the research on which the session is based:

- Ivey, G., & Johnston, P. (2023). *Teens Choosing to Read: Fostering Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Growth Through Books*. Teachers College Press.
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- Ivey, G., & Johnston, P. (2024). Volitional reading, “disturbing” books, and the transformation of readers. *Language and Education*. doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2317944

Here are some published blogs and other social media related to this research:

- Ivey, G., & Johnston, P. (2024, May). Improving teens’ reading and their wellbeing. ASCD Blog. <https://ascd.org/blogs/improving-teens-reading-and-their-well-being>
- Ivey, G. (2024, May). *Teens and Disturbing Books*. Academic Minute. <https://academicminute.org/gay-ivey-university-of-north-carolina-greensboro-teens-and-disturbing-books/>
- Ivey, G., (2024, February). How teens benefit from being able to read “disturbing books that some want to ban. <https://theconversation.com/how-teens-benefit-from-being-able-to-read-disturbing-books-that-some-want-to-ban-223533>
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- Johnston, P. (2024, November). How teacher language can build a more democratic classroom. <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/democratic-classroom/>
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