

**“Struggling and Reluctant Readers:”
A 2006 SAG Session Summary**

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I attended a half-day workshop called “Struggling and Reluctant Readers: Keeping Them Motivated.” This was an important theme for the presenter to share with the group. Pat Opitz, from the Winnipeg School Division, did an excellent job of giving participants “ready-to-use” literacy strategies that would motivate every student to read.

Keeping students motivated to read is the key. The session involved a discussion of factors that affect reading comprehension. These included student attitude, time, vocabulary and world knowledge, text type and genre. However, the factor that stuck out for me was “understanding and use of strategies.” As teachers, we strive to help our students learn and enjoy the process of reading. The key to keeping students motivated is to have a good understanding of the many reading strategies available. As well, teachers need to develop a strong connection with their struggling reader(s) so they can better understand what the student(s) requires for holding their attention and interests.

The Frayer Model was one strategy Pat discussed to help students understand what they are reading. It can be used for any word or idea. A page might be divided into four parts: the definition, characteristics, examples and non-examples. I really liked this strategy because it was concrete. Students who are struggling readers are often at a stage of getting the basic understanding of what they read. Some are not ready to think “outside the box.” With having the non-examples section, students are able to easily say what something “is not,” which then reinforces a concept.

Another activity Pat shared was a word cycle. The group of attendees was given a list of twelve words. We were to choose eight and put them in an order that made sense to us. We used sticky notes for the words and this was a great tip for me because it gave me a chance to move words around. This would be helpful for any reader. During the process of arranging the list of words on the cycle, I was able to shift and change them if there did not seem to be a connection. This will help students in language development, especially if they are slow in getting words on to a page. Sometimes when students are given an activity like the word cycle, they spend too much time erasing or ‘whiting out’ words and less time thinking about the connection of words. The use of sticky notes was a great idea that I will take back with me to my classroom. The idea of this activity is to encourage all students to problem solve when arranging a set of words for a certain concept.

Overall, even though the session could have extended to a full day, each participant in Pat’s session was clearly engaged and able to take something from her strategies and tips that they can integrate into their daily instruction.