Based on achievement goal framework, this study explored the relationship between teacher’s classroom support and reading behaviours of disadvantaged students. Research shows that struggling readers need high levels of teacher support. However, little research has been done in Australia to explore how teachers support reading engagement of disadvantaged students in their classroom. Given the persistently low achievement levels of disadvantaged students in national literacy tests, understanding the relationship between teacher’s classroom support and students’ engagement responses will provide insights into ways of supporting disadvantaged students’ reading engagement.

Method

Three Year Five classrooms from low SES schools in South-East Queensland were chosen for this study. Each classroom was observed for 130 to 135 minutes, totaling 395 minutes. The observation focused on teacher’s instruction, flow of activities, reading activities and responses of selected students. Two observers recorded the field observation for each class. Post-observation, notes were compared, discussed and discrepancies resolved. To analyse the observation, a coding framework based on achievement goal theory was developed to classify teacher’s instruction, verbal interaction and classroom activities into different categories: mastery focus, performance focus, general classroom management focus. Students’ responses were coded into engaged, disengaged and non-response categories.

Results

This research found two types of classrooms with varying levels of mastery support. The high mastery teachers demonstrated a clear mastery focus in their teaching with one classroom coded 100% mastery-focused in all the entries. These teachers scaffolded concepts and guided activities using varied materials and appropriate timeframes. They prompted conversation to expand student understanding. Limited time (6.4% entries) was spent on behavioural management.

The Medium Mastery/Medium Performance classroom was coded with 63% mastery-focused and 37% Performance focused in all the entries. However, over 50% of all the mastery-focused entries were in the form of evaluative comments, closed questions and one-way responses. This teacher rarely encouraged student involvement and often failed to support deep learning. 20% of interactions in this classroom were classified as focusing on behavioural management.
Students showed high levels of engagement in the high mastery classrooms. Conversely, more incidences of non-response and avoidance were recorded in the classroom with low level of mastery support.

Conclusion

This main finding is consistent with research on achievement goals and warns against focusing overtly on promoting achievement using testing regimes such as NAPLAN. Creating mastery-oriented classrooms may hold the key for promoting sustained engagement for disadvantaged students.