Practical Classroom Implementations that Yield Results:  
A Book Review of  
*Maximizing Motivation for Literacy Learning: Grades K-6*

Reviewer: Rebecca Benjamin  
University at Albany, State University of New York, Albany, NY  
Schenectady City School District, Schenectady, NY


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The extraordinary influence of motivation for engaged and accelerated learning has been documented throughout decades of educational research (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Guthrie et al., 1996; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Irvin et al., 2007; Weiner, 1990). Marinak, Gambrell, and Mazzoni have seized the opportunity to present elementary educators with an accessible array of methods that promote literacy motivation, confidence, and value. They situate their ideas within the existing literature, referencing research that has correlated successful literacy learners with students who were motivated to engage in literacy activities, confident that they could succeed in literacy tasks, and able to recognize authentic value in the experiences associated with literacy learning (Deci, 1992; Eccles, 1983; Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonsk, Humenick, & Littles, 2007; Mitzelle, 1997; Schiefele, 1991).

This book is part of the Teaching Practices That Work series, edited by Lapp and Fisher. This collection is designed to provide school instructors with models of teaching and learning that can successfully be integrated into their own classrooms. They aim to supply teachers with tools they can use amidst the challenges of drastically differing student needs arising from growth in “linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity” (p. ix) in student populations. Maximizing Motivation for Literacy Learning, like the other books in this series, was written by a team of educators who are experienced and up-to-date in their knowledge of classroom lessons and techniques.

The authors are quick to define “motivation to read” (the likelihood of choosing to engage in reading, p. xiii), link motivation to engagement, and interactively engage their readers by providing a “Myths and Truths” survey in the introduction. This inclusion allows readers to evaluate a list of items pertaining to “nurturing intrinsic reading motivation” (p. xi). The activity provides a framework for readers to consider their pre-conceived notions of motivational literacy strategies as individuals, colleagues, or students, and allows them to use that framework as a scaffold for expanding their theoretical knowledge and classroom applications. In the conclusion, the authors return to this initial survey, providing answers and substantiation through references to the literature and practical examples from their text.

Maximizing Motivation for Literacy Learning is organized into seven sections, consisting of an introduction, three chapters of lessons (referred to as “methods”), a case study, motivational assessment instruments, and a conclusion. The introduction provides the survey questions and an explanation of the “five general principles of motivation that support literacy motivation” (p. xiii). These principles recommend that teachers:

- Maximize the motivational context of the classroom library;
- Maximize opportunities for students to engage in sustained reading;
- Maximize opportunities for students to make choices about what they read and how they engage in and complete literacy tasks;
- Maximize opportunities for students to socially interact with others about the texts they are reading;
- Maximize opportunities for students to engage in literacy tasks and activities that are relevant to their lives.” (p. xv)

The inclusion of these principles works to educate readers on the potential value and benefits of the classroom methods that will be presented in the latter chapters.

The methods are divided into sections that focus on “Motivating Classroom Communities,” “Promoting Self-Concept as a Reader,” and “Promoting the Value of Reading.” All of the methods presented contain teaching models that are well-aligned with current educational standards, can be easily replicated in current classrooms, and are mostly well-substantiated in the literature. In addition to a clear explanation describing the activity, each method is
also accompanied by information regarding the relationship between the presented activity and acquiring motivation for literacy learning. Explicit steps for classroom implementation are provided for each method in a practical “How It Works” section, which allows teachers to recognize the ease of practical application. Some of the methods are accompanied with opportunities for extension. Marinak, Gambrell, and Mazzoni, through the act of providing classroom-ready plans for school activities, have done the work of moving theoretical motivational research to implementation, allowing teachers to immediately put these methods into practice.

One method that was described in the “Promoting Self-Concept as a Reader” section clearly portrayed effective instruction by using strategies of engagement and student choice to further literacy motivation. This method presented the notion of allowing students to assume the role of “Expert” and the responsibility of “Teacher,” in a method entitled “Experts Teaching” (p. 41). This method referenced research on applying a jigsaw lesson (Aronson et al., 1978) to a classroom unit or topic. It incorporates strategies to build intrinsic motivation, including processes of allowing students to self-select the specific content they will be reading within that overarching unit, allowing student choice in the groups within which they will work, and providing students with time to collaborate with classmates. The students then work in their groups to build their expertise on their chosen topic and determine how they want to share their newfound knowledge with their other classmates.

The value and utility of the methods that are developed by Marinak, Gambrell, and Mazzoni in Maximizing Motivation for Literacy Learning are enhanced by their flexible application. The methods have been developed with current research in mind, and the references for the research theory and classroom resources are provided throughout the book. Additionally, these authors draw on their classroom experiences and present methods that have been successful with students, and they provide a case study chapter to assist readers in visualizing implementation. The activities described can be applied to a variety of class levels, topics, and reading materials that teachers have available, without requiring educators to adhere to specific programs or curricula. While the methods are presented with strong foundations (and reasoning based on motivational theory and research) for activities, the implementation is left very open-ended and can be adjusted as any educator determines necessary for their situation. The methods promote intrinsic motivation through engaging literacy tasks, allowing teachers to strive for this desired goal within the context of their local school system demands and resource accessibility.

Directly after the three chapters of classroom methods, there is a case study example describing a situation where the authors worked as consultants for a public elementary school’s literacy program. As an educator, I found this example refreshingly reassuring. The description portrayed a school facing many challenges; challenges with which countless other teachers are struggling right now. These challenges result from pressure to push students to higher levels, while working to meet current requirements at building, district, and state levels. This case study described teachers as “frustrated by rigid, uniform expectations” (p. 113) and students who were disengaged from literacy learning in general - situations that are disheartening despite their familiarity (Washer & Mojkowski, 2014).

Throughout the case study, this common problem of disengagement was addressed through creative re-purposing of classroom teachers and support specialists in the construction of a schedule that many schools would be able to replicate with their existing resources. Methods that had been identified earlier in the book were put into action, and the case study described authors and educators using them in the intervention process for this school. References to some of methods that were introduced in prior chapters, within a context where they were supported with research-based evidence and examples of success, validated my confidence in the
suggestions that Marinak, Gambrell, and Mazzoni had proposed.

The assessment chapters (which contain The Motivation to Read Profile and The Motivation to Write Scale) examine tools that some of the authors had developed in an earlier project (Gambrell et al., 1996). These tools had been utilized in the case study, and their incorporation allows any educator reading this book access to the same initial assessments that could be used in an analysis of their classroom. These tools can offer assistance as educators work to plan their own literacy value, engagement, and motivation interventions. The assessment tools do contain supporting information that is referenced at other points in this text. However, their inclusion allows these chapters to function as stand-alone texts that could be used specifically for supporting knowledge and administration of these tools.

While the information and suggestions provided throughout *Maximizing Motivation for Literacy Learning* are extremely valuable, the order of presentation might be enhanced to support reader clarity. Occasionally, the methods that are described allude to other methods that have not yet been explained, and the presentation could be improved through re-ordering methods within a chapter. Additionally, “Promoting the Value of Reading” conveys the importance of an initial goal under which “Motivating Classroom Communities” and “Promoting Self-Concept as a Reader” would fall, which presents some fodder for consideration regarding moving it from the last chapter of methods to the first.

Throughout the book, there are a variety of helpful tools in the form of assessments, teaching aids, graphic organizers, and classroom charts that provide teachers with resources that support quick implementation of these lesson and activity suggestions. A reference section in which all of them could be found would be even more useful, and a CD supplement or access to an electronic website source would provide a greater level of convenience to educators attempting to quickly access and use these resources. References to classroom technology and instant polling options could help teachers implement these suggestions without necessitating the devotion of time to preparing hard copies of these teaching tools.

Practitioners, administrators, and teacher-education students could all benefit from the information provided in *Maximizing Motivation for Literacy Learning*. College classrooms and professional development sessions alike could benefit from discussion and planning sessions based around the material that Marinak, Gambrell, and Mazzoni have provided. One such method is titled “Promoting the Value of Literacy at Home,” which the literature suggests is a key element necessary for elementary students to improve their literacy exposure (and as a result, their value, confidence, and motivation) (Marinak & Gambrell, 2009). While this book is intended for practitioners and focused on application, the research theory behind motivation and engagement for literacy success is introduced and explained in-depth in the introduction with full citations and references, and these references are then used throughout the book. The methods described are pertinent and accessible, grounded in research, and can easily be worked into a classroom routine while maintaining post-common core expectations and standards.
References


