A Practical Guide for Reading Motivation in the Elementary Grades

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Longstanding research has identified the role of motivation in literacy development and its strong relationship to academic success (Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2006; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Marinak, 2013). In an educational climate of high-stakes tests and teach-to-the-test mentalities, maybe it is time we choose a more appropriate mantra and one that supports students towards independent learning—the ultimate goal of literacy instruction. The positionality of "teach with the learner" seems more appropriate and positions students to contribute to their own learning, passing the metaphorical torch to the student through carefully crafted instruction with an emphasis on motivation.

After all, it is with motivation that independent learning endeavors are most rewarding and most likely to be repeated as evidenced by experts across disciplines and domains (e.g., voracious readers; skilled hobbyists; prolific writers; innovative computer programmers; master surgeons; and creative teachers). Despite the inherent relationship of motivation to literacy learning, "motivation has never been a hot topic within the twenty-year history of the *What's Hot* survey" (Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Grote-Garcia, 2016). The plethora of strategies and classroom practices in the extant literature are noteworthy but are dependent upon intangibles like one's ability to motivate and maintain motivation through diverse units of study and disciplines (Applegate & Applegate, 2010). These moving targets change alongside students' interests. Thus, consideration to students' motivation should always remain a staple in curricular planning and instruction. Gambrell (1996) furthers that "teachers have long recognized that motivation is at the heart of many of the pervasive problems we face educating children" (p. 17).

We think the attention to reading motivation in the elementary grades is long overdue so students can thrive as literacy learners (Ortlieb & Marinak, 2013). In this article, we explore the way that engagement, excitement, interaction, and efficiency can foster students' motivation to read. First, we review relevant literature around reading motivation in today's diverse elementary classrooms.

Definitions and Demands

Although motivation in literacy education has been studied over the past few decades, there are differing notions of what constitutes reading motivation and what practices are best-suited for diverse learners (Unrau & Quirk, 2014). According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), reading motivation can be defined as the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes,

and outcomes of reading. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are two aspects that differentiate a person's goal for reading. When students are intrinsically motivated to read, they are characterized as engaging in a reading act for its enjoyment or to gain knowledge about a topic of interest. On the contrary, extrinsic motivation is the desire to read to receive external recognition, such as rewards or incentives (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Intrinsically and extrinsically motivated children approach tasks for diverse reasons. Despite the nature of the student's motivation, both aspects have been studied to increase student engagement and the sustainment of motivation throughout literacy activities. Moreover, teachers must be cognizant of their key role in this process.

So with the bevy of assessment and instruction demands in place, are students actually getting enough time to actually read in the classroom? Hiebert (2009) found that students' reading motivation, or lack thereof, can be directly linked to the time spent reading in class. The International Literacy Association's position statement (2014) further suggests the need for policymakers to provide ample opportunities for leisure reading in classrooms. However, research indicates that only one third of youth (ages 6–17) indicate their class has a designated time for reading a book of choice independently, and only 17% do this every or almost every day at school (Scholastic, 2015). Moreover, research suggests that students desire more opportunities to engage in independent reading (Sibberson & Szymusiak, 2016).

Teaching Takeaways

Guthrie and Humenick (2004)'s meta-analysis of motivational studies revealed several practices that widely support students' intrinsic motivation: engagement, excitement, interaction, and efficiency. These practices can be fostered by choice of books or tasks, student collaboration in literacy activities, provision of interesting texts for instructional activities, and providing hands-on activities to make connections specific to book-reading activities. Open-ended tasks that give students choice, challenge, control, collaboration, construction of meaning, and consequences will be influential factors on students' engagement (Turner & Paris, 1995). *It seems obvious but it must be re-iterated that providing opportunities to engage is required for students to actually engage in the classroom*; their engagement is dependent upon instructional design. When teachers do not provide consistent opportunities for their students to engage in literacy, it becomes increasingly difficult to foster genuine reading motivation. The following sections describe a practical framework for creating and sustaining the motivation to read centered on the constructs of engagement, excitement, interaction, and efficiency.

Engagement
"My favorite time of the day is independent reading. It is fun to pick my own book out to read and just read for fun."
Alexander – age 7

It is imperative for teachers to designate specialized times for students to engage in leisure or independent reading. Many schools have attempted to implement allotted leisure and/or independent reading time, but it is often the first component cut due to instructional time demands of current curricula (Miller & Moss, 2013). Fifty-two percent of children report that in-school reading opportunities are their favorite parts of the day or wish it would happen more often (Scholastic, 2015). Previous classroom practices have been referred to as *D.E.A.R.* (Drop Everything and Read) or *SSR* (Sustained Silent Reading) but were often unsuccessful since students were not always held accountable for their reading during that time (Duke, 2016).

How can a practice with such good intentions fail? One answer is the lack of teacher guidance. Too often students choose books without teacher monitoring; thus students may self-select books that do not extend their literacy development (too difficult or too easy), or they might not have a purpose or genuine interest in their selection. Using an instructional framework supports this practice whereby teachers can support this practice by modeling the behavioral model the behaviors of appropriate book selection along with demonstrating the process of how to make meaning from the text (Miller & Moss, 2013). In addition, for independent reading (IR) time to be successful, teachers must design opportunities for students to actively read and respond to print and/or digital literature. Candid discussions and iterative teacher feedback are essential components for the students to continually develop as independent readers. Teachers who take the time to explicitly teach IR practices will create a classroom filled with productive IR experiences (Miller & Moss).

To make IR effective, teachers can:

- Include a designated time for sustained, independent reading every day (the word *silent* has purposely been omitted). Finding time can be one of the biggest challenges to independent reading, but it is necessary to incorporate reading time (throughout the disciplines) to grow independent readers. Although there is no definitive answer in regard to the amount of time, most teachers will allocate about 20 minutes. Time spent on task might vary according to students' needs (struggling vs. proficient readers) and grade level, so teachers need to set time to confer and assess throughout the year. While it is common practice to save IR for the end of the day, that might not be the most beneficial time. IR can and *should* be infused anywhere into the class schedule.

- Be a role model for the students. Teachers demonstrate the value of reading by engaging in the task themselves and can foster student motivation when they are viewed as avid readers (Marinak & Gambrell, 2016). One simple yet effective way for teachers to publicize their reading habits and generate interest is to create a *Be a Role Model* poster (Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013). The poster should be hung in a highly visible area of the classroom (or on door) and include the following: "Mr./Ms. (name) is reading…," book title, picture, author, and followed with "Ask me about it!"

and "What are you reading?" Teachers can use the IR time to read a section of their book which can serve as a catalyst for classroom discussions and dialogic conversations by sharing something about their book. For example, Ms. Baker shared:

> When I was reading *Girl on a Train*, I explained to my students how the author wrote the book using various characters' perspectives, which gave me a deeper understanding of both the characters and how the events unfolded. John, my fifth-grade reluctant reader, was able to relate my story to his current book, *The Lemonade War*, also told from the two main characters' point of view. This ignited a classroom discussion about characters that ultimately led to a unanimous vote to read the next book in the series! I always wonder if I would have generated such genuine interest in the series had I not been reading and discussing my book.

Students need literacy role models in their lives, and teachers are ideal candidates for this distinction.

- Promote collaboration. Similar to the foundation of adult book clubs, social interaction motivates independent reading (Gambrell, 2011). Teachers can encourage pairs of students to read the same book during independent reading, thus fostering an organic discussion of the story following IR time. Whether it is teacher-centered or student-centered, students who partake in these interactive discussions become accountable for their learning (Miller & Moss, 2013) as they share their reflections with peers and gain diverse perspectives and communicative proficiencies in the process.
- Students should be held responsible for their independent reading. While reading stamina is a goal, print or digital reading logs can be utilized to extend beyond the quantity of pages or time spent reading and give students opportunities to react or reflect. In the beginning of the year, teachers can prepare a list of sentence starters for students to use when constructing a reader response. Sample starters might include: *I wonder why…?; Why did…?; I was reminded…; I noticed…; I was surprised…; I don't understand…; I liked that…* In addition, reading logs can help students establish realistic reading goals, gain insight into their reading behaviors (i.e., a student might notice a trend of reading one particular genre over another or even notice a pattern with their attention span), and give students a sense of purpose for their reading.

Excitement
"I love it when my teacher reads aloud because she brings excitement to the words and I picture myself in the story."
Olivia – first grade student

Trelease (1989) stated that reading aloud can be an effective advertisement for the pleasures of reading. While it is commonplace for teachers to encourage parents to read aloud with their children, we find that we, as teachers, often need reminders ourselves of the effectiveness of allocating instructional time to reading aloud with our students. While it is a common practice in primary and elementary classrooms, its prevalence may dissipate as the grades progress. Teachers of all grade levels need to be aware that this research-based practice also enhances achievement for all students irrespective of ability (McQuillan, 2009). As teachers read aloud, they model appropriate fluency, teach new vocabulary, syntax, and expose students to texts or genres that they might not ever have opportunity to engage. Reutzel (2008) indicated that reading aloud emphasizes the importance of reading and can ignite students' desire to learn to read.

Teachers who incorporate read-alouds in their routines can:
- Read a variety of genres and text structures to their students and read often (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006): fiction, non-fiction, magazines, newspapers, poetry, biographies, graphic novels, realistic fiction, informational texts, and online texts. Exposure to multiple genres allows students to learn about different text structures. As students become more acquainted with these structures, they will have less difficulty navigating similar texts they encounter across the disciplines.
- Choose challenging texts slightly above grade level. A student's listening comprehension ability is oftentimes higher than reading comprehension (especially in the elementary grade levels); therefore, reading material above the students' level is an ideal approach to immerse them in literature beyond their independent capabilities. Teachers can capitalize on this opportunity to whet their students' appetite and promote the value of reading which in turn can be the stimulus for future independent reading (Rasinski & Young, 2017).
- Introduce discipline specific text sets that include online articles, pop culture, and sports news (e.g., using SportsVu technology to analyze player movement, tendencies, and statistical proficiency vs. traditional basketball game planning; the story of Alexander Hamilton told through Lin-Manuel Miranda's perspective compared to the story found in history books). Diversity of perspectives within disciplinary learning promotes critical thinking and compels learners to understand that there are differing viewpoints on issues, despite not always agreeing with all of them (Damico, Baildon, Exter, & Guo, 2009/2010).

Interaction
Providing social opportunities for collaboration and engagement in literacy instruction contributes to reading motivation. At the very nature of what it means to be human, we are social beings; we want our ideas to be heard; we want our work to have merit; and we want to learn through doing. Students' intrinsic motivation to

read is connected to feeling socially supported in the classroom (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). This support extends beyond the teacher's role and into student interactions in small and large groups. Peer ideas and discussion spark curiosity and interest in what other students have to say as well as contribute to building confidence when approaching new tasks (Ortlieb, 2010; Turner & Paris, 1995). When children model reading behaviors and strategies for one another, classrooms become safe havens, also known as low-risk environments. Low-risk environments can be especially beneficial for introverts or those who experience difficulties in reading. Thus, collaboration can encourage students to put forth more effort and increase their academic stamina.

Teachers can promote these high growth environments through the following:

- Socratic Seminars: These student-led discussions align with Socrates' view of the power of questioning and acknowledge the social nature of learning (Israel, 2002). Beginning with an authentic text (preferably one that lends itself for students to make real-world connections), the leader begins the group discussion with open-ended questions to foster critical thinking, active listening, and thoughtful responses. The focus of the Socratic seminar is on the student-centered inquiry and exploration that leads to insightful and thought-provoking discussions (Frey, Fisher, & Hattie, 2017). *Note: For this method to be effective, the teacher plays a pivotal role in planning and establishing the classroom community early in the school year.
- Digital storytelling: Storytelling has been a powerful tool used to transfer knowledge, information, and values for centuries. While this is not a new pedagogical approach in the classroom, with technology being more easily accessible in the classroom, teachers can take advantage of digital storytelling as a tool to enhance the learning experience (e.g., Slidestory, WeVideo, Adobe Slate, Toontastic). Through digital storytelling, students use their own voice, graphics, animation, and music to tell stories. This process promotes autonomy since students are engaged in activities that require strategic thinking and ongoing self-monitoring. Thus, digital storytelling can be an ideal activity to give students ownership of their learning (Chapman & Ortlieb, 2015).
- Double questions: Questioning has long been known to be an effective strategy for reading comprehension. Double questions put the students in the role of teacher as one student asks another student a question that builds from the initial teacher question. Students demonstrate knowledge of story elements or informational knowledge through inquiring about that which they read (Doveston & Lodge, 2017).
- Buddy Reading: Remember that this is not exclusive to the literacy block but can extend to all the disciplines. The structure of informational text is often more complex than narratives and can be intimidating for our struggling readers. Pairing students of mixed-abilities offers opportunities to engage in texts that he or she might not have had exposure prior to this partnership (McRae & Guthrie, 2009).

Efficiency

The efficient teacher not only designates time in the day to read, but supplies a variety of texts and genres to support the students' reading habits. Just as relevancy of a task is highly associated with reading motivation, choice is also a powerful motivating factor. The importance of choice is found in every avenue of life from choosing a career to what to have for lunch—we have come to expect options and reading is no different. "When students choose texts they are interested in, they expend more effort learning and understanding the material" (Turner & Paris, 1995, p. 664). Teachers can nurture motivation, promote independence, and lead students towards academic achievement through supporting their self-selection of texts. By investing time in the beginning of the school year and learning students' interests (that change over time), teachers can customize and re-shuffle their libraries to entice students.

While a print rich classroom will support students reading, some students need much more to peek their interest. Ortlieb (2015) explains that we must expand beyond traditional notions of literacy and optimize reading experiences that have wide appeal (e.g., pop culture, cultural relevancy, and cross-disciplinary topics). The efficient teacher equips the classroom with various mediums to support literacy development and motivation.

Efficient teachers can:
- Administer reading attitude surveys or reading motivation questionnaires. These valuable tools provide insight into students' reading habits, values, and interests (Guthrie, 2013). Similar to how we plan instruction to meet their academic needs, this information is helpful for teachers so instruction will also meet their students' affective needs. Two measures used to assess student motivation are:
    - The Motivation to Read Profile-Revised (MRP-Revised; Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013) measures existing reading motivation for students in grades two through six (can and has been used with adolescents and high school students).
    - The Me and My Reading Profile (MMRP; Marinak, Malloy, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2015) assesses motivation levels of students in kindergarten through grade two.

  Students' attitudes and interests change as the school year progresses, so administering these questionnaires multiple times during the year will help teachers compare the shifts or fluctuations in student motivation. Teachers can use this information, in combination with their observations, to plan for relevant instruction that will foster student reading motivation (Marinak et al., 2015).
- Provide multi-sensory opportunities to read through listening centers, computer stations, interactive Smart Board activities, and apps on Ipads or tablets.

- Research and prepare a list of websites to support topical reading as well as websites with options for students' responses.

Conclusion

It is every teacher's wish to create classrooms that foster the love of literacy. "Motivated readers who see literacy as a desirable activity will initiate and sustain their engagement in reading and thus become better readers" (Gambrell, 2011, p. 177), and reading proficiency can result in higher academic achievement. With every call heard for increasing student achievement, we must echo the need for elevating student motivation to read. Each student brings a unique literacy background to the classroom; some being immersed in rich literacy experiences from birth, and others whose bookshelves are barren. Yet, those previous experiences do not ensure or predict positive reading growth in the future; it is incumbent upon all teachers to consider engagement, excitement, interaction, and efficiency towards promoting students' reading motivation. Being a listener is key to effective communication; and being receptive to students' voices and interests towards literacy development is no different. We can make an indelible impact on our students' reading motivation by efficient planning, providing opportunities for engagement, and leading children to get excited about reading through interactivity.

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