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## Maximizing Student Motivation: A Course Redesign

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### Abstract

This paper explains the process of redesigning a course to maximize student motivation, satisfaction, and learning. The process is applicable across all disciplines in any institution. Student evaluations from the old design garnered complaints of irrelevance, inefficient use of class time, and a lack of student engagement. The redesign was grounded in motivational research. The redesign included eliminating the textbook, individualizing assignments, providing direct application, and offering student choice; the course evaluations improved.

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*Keywords:* student motivation, student choice, course evaluation, student satisfaction, course revision

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### 1. Introduction

*1.1 Problem statement: University students in the teacher education program were unmotivated to learn in a critical course meant to develop teaching skills for the language and literacy development of the children they would soon teach.*

University students, known as teacher candidates, were unmotivated in a course titled “Language and Literacy Fundamentals.” The course is the first course in a series of reading courses that help prepare teacher candidates to instruct children to develop reading and writing skills. The course is by nature a survey course exposing the fundamentals of learning to become literate. The emphasis is on how children learn to speak, listen, read, and write. Children begin learning literacy skills at birth with rapid development in the first three years of life. The early childhood majors viewed this as important information but the middle childhood majors saw it as irrelevant. The

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course was getting poor student evaluations from both groups. The complaints included irrelevant content, inefficient use of class time, unchallenging material, meaningless assignments, poor textbook quality, and “I’m not learning.”

### 1.2 Aim of the study: Investigating the effects of a course redesign grounded in the motivational literature.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a course redesign based on the work of Williams and Williams (2011). The goal was to redesign a course to maximize student motivation, satisfaction, and learning in such a way that the process could be duplicated and applied across disciplines in any institution. This study adds to the body of research supporting the valuable influence motivation plays on successful learning.

## 2. Methodology

This qualitative purposive case study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) explains the redesign of the course, Language and Literacy Fundamentals, the first of a series of required courses in a 12 semester hour block of reading instruction for all early and middle childhood education major teacher candidates seeking a teaching license. The Student Instructional Report II (SIRS) was administered to the class of 28 students; it provided quantitative data pointing to dissatisfaction. The early childhood majors wanted more application and pragmatic assignments in the course. The middle childhood majors found the course to be irrelevant to their licensure area because the course content focused on the early years of language development, age birth to eight. The SIR data were reviewed, analyzed, and coded resulting in the decision to focus on the overall satisfaction score and four major themes: class time, challenging and meaningful assignments, relevant material, and level of student learning (see Figure 1). The satisfaction levels are far below the comparative mean of 4.26 for four-year institutions.

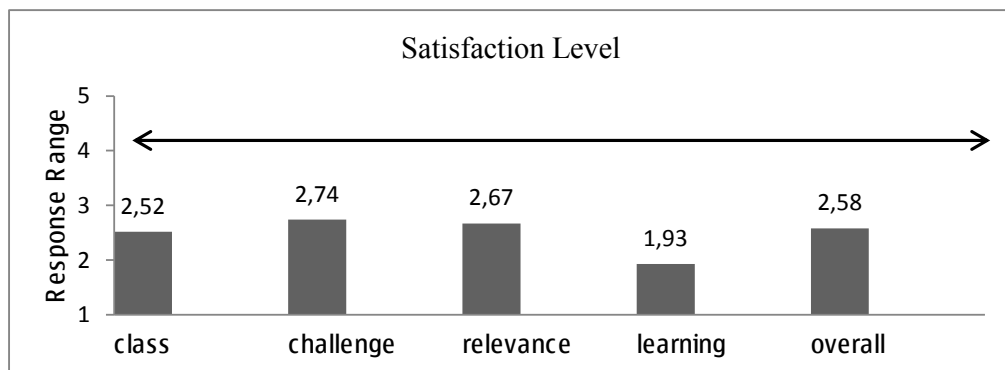


Figure 1. SIR Satisfaction Levels Pre Redesign of Course

Williams and Williams (2011) discuss five *key ingredients* generating motivation: student, teacher, content, method, and environment. The redesign of the course, Language and Literacy Fundamentals, focused on the “content” and “method” *ingredients*: particularly the elements of student ownership, student choice, and real-life application.

Student ownership is expressed through mutual goal setting and individualizing learning assignments (Lent & Gillmore, 2014). Students become more responsible for learning, thus empowering them to engage their personal interest; critical thinking and evaluation skills. Student choice is fully supported in the research (Katz & Assor, 2007; Celikoz, 2010; Simmons & Page, 2010). Student choice proved to be motivational in this particular course redesign; people generally like choice. People also clamour for application and meaningful experiences so it is no

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