

Building Motivation in the K-12 Art Classroom

Page Andrews

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Abstract

Student motivation is a universal challenge among teachers of every instructional level and content area. Motivation, particularly in the art classroom, is a challenge for many art educators. My study looks to unwind the intricate web of student motivation and to identify effective motivational strategies that art educators use on a daily basis within their classrooms. This qualitative study, conducted in a suburban school district, uses art educator's real life experiences and opinions to pinpoint useful motivational strategies.

Introduction

The challenge of motivating students in any classroom, including the art room, is a shared concern among teachers of every grade level and content area. My search to understand the complexities of student motivation led me to look for strategies that art teachers' use in their everyday teaching to motivate students. Through my study I found that even though motivation of students in the art room seems to be very mysterious, when art educators were surveyed, they shared many common responses to the challenge of motivation.

One response that echoed throughout my study was the importance of connecting student artwork to students own interests. This is a way that art educators can create an intrinsic motivation, motivation that comes from within, by having their art students create something meaningful to them. Although a variety of other strategies were

identified as having motivational influence, my research shows that the most significant motivational strategy was to connect art learning to students own interests.

This research question has evolved from my own teaching experiences. Students in my own classroom struggle at times with behavior issues, effort and staying focused. As a current teacher in a suburban elementary school, my own educational experiences tend to be my basis for understanding my students. I've struggled to understand how students can be apathetic and unmotivated in my classroom. My frame of reference for understanding motivation is built upon my experiences in school. My parents gave me unending opportunity and support which helped to build my confidence as a student. My parents also created high expectations backed by unconditional love. To this day, even though I know my parents will love and support me, no matter what, letting them down is not an option. I've always 'cared', and never considered the alternative, so an unmotivated student, without that internal drive or imposed high expectation, challenges my basis for understanding.

I began delving deeper into motivation as a way to understand my students and to understand my own motivation. I believed, and still believe, that understanding student motivation and identifying motivational strategies will improve my teaching. This interest in motivation led me to ask the question, "What strategies do art teachers use in their daily classroom to motivate students?" I wanted to know what current art teachers do to engage student's effectively.

Literature review

Motivation can often be categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Birdsell, Ream, Seyller, Zobott (2009) agree that a lack of intrinsic motivation is often found in a student who is not motivated from within and cannot engage themselves in learning out of curiosity, interest, or enjoyment. Garvis (2009) believes that the lack of intrinsic motivation means that these students often need an outside reward in order for them to maintain a desire to succeed.

Research suggests that students with high levels of intrinsic motivation, motivation from within attribute their educational results to internal factors that they can control and the amount of effort they put in (Pavlou, 2006). Students “also believe that they can be effective agents in reaching desired goals and are interested in mastering a topic rather than just rote-learning to achieve good grades” (Pavlou, 2006, pg 5).

Students who lack intrinsic motivation tend to suffer from low self-esteem and low self-confidence. Due to their poor self-image, these students feel that they can not set high goals for themselves because they will fail. Garvis (2009) goes on to say that these students also doubt their ability to learn and give up quickly.

Garvis (2009) goes on to say that students with a lack of extrinsic motivation often do not value rewards but rather rely on teacher or peer relationships as their motivating factor. A student's lack of extrinsic motivation is often a direct result of social or emotional issues. An educator's reality is that students vary in motivation hour to hour, day to day, and week to week. Teachers must have the strategies necessary to adapt to students ever changing motivational levels.

Almost everything teachers do in the classroom has a motivational influence on students--either positive or negative. This includes the way information is presented, the kinds of activities teachers' use, the ways teachers interact with students, the amount of choice and control given to students, and opportunities for students to work alone or in groups. Students react to who teachers are, what they do, and how comfortable they feel in the classroom (Kelly, 2009, pg 3).

Birdsell, et al. (2009) found that students who are motivated will direct more effort and behavior toward a particular goal, increase energy and persistence of an activity, increase cognitive processing, understanding of related consequences and an overall improved educational performance. For these reasons and more, it is important to understand the complexity of motivation, or lack of motivation.

It is clear from existing research that giving students an opportunity to make their own decisions around their education allows for more ownership and leads to increased motivation. Garvis, (2009) states that student's choices hold a lot of power. Students who

believe that they had made a choice to learn tend to be more motivated to complete the task or assignment.

Students can have increased motivation when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process, and that motivation declines when students have no voice in the class structure. Giving your students options can be as simple as letting them pick their lab partners or select from alternate assignments, or as complex as contract teaching wherein students can determine their own grading scale, due dates and assignments. (Garvis, 2009, pg 4)

My research found that building intrinsic motivation through intended student and art connections is a widely used and highly effective motivational strategy. The question therefore was how art teacher build intrinsic motivation in their students.

Methodology

Sampling

The population targeted for my study was art educators teaching at the kindergarten through twelfth grade level. Out of the 14 teachers targeted, 11 teachers chose to participate in either a survey or interview. The method of sampling was a convenience sampling.

Art teachers from one suburban school district and from other rural school districts were invited to participate in an online survey. The survey was sent via email to all art teachers with the understanding that the participants were adults and could therefore choose to respond or not. They were assured confidentiality and anonymity

through a cover letter. Two elementary art teachers were selected for interviews. Permission was obtained for the interviews and both participants agreed to be audio-taped. Participants of the interviews signed an informed consent letter which clearly explained that their interview was voluntary, anonymous and participants could withdraw at any point without penalty.

Prior to implementing the study, permission was obtained from the SUNY Oswego Human Subject Committee. The names of the participants are omitted as a way to maintain participants' anonymity.

Participants

Eleven (11) art educators participated in the survey, nine surveys were completed and two interviews were conducted. The participants varied in age, gender, years teaching, and instructional level. The age of the participants ranged from twenty eight through sixty and consisted of both male and female. The years teaching also varied from art educators teaching between three years and twenty five years. The instructional level ranged from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The participant's who took part in the interviews also varied in age and teaching experience. Participant A, to protect her anonymity will be referred to as Deborah, has taught for fifteen years and is in her early forties. Participant B, referred to as Kathy, has taught for 3 years and is in her early thirties. Both Deborah and Kathy teach art to grades Kindergarten through 5th at suburban elementary schools

Instruments

The first instrument used was a survey, administered via email to nine participants. This four question survey asked open ended questions about the participants' classroom, art projects, and student motivation. All questions in the survey were open-ended.

Question one asked participants to describe their classroom during their busiest teaching time. Question two asked more specifically about the art projects assigned to students and their level of enjoyment. Question three and four focused more on motivational strategies and suggestions for new art teachers on engaging students in the art classroom.

The second instrument used was an interview. Two participants were chosen for an interview. The interview questions were similar to survey however due to the manner of interviews, response guided, participants were allowed to respond freely.

Procedure

Prior to starting the collection of data, I received approval from SUNY Oswego Human Subject Committee. I immediately sought approval from my Principal. I also applied for approval from my Superintendent by submitting an application.

I then created a survey using SurveyMonkey.com and submitted this survey to participants via email. Once all the survey data was collected, I organized, coded, and summarized the completed surveys to synthesize pertinent information.

The nine teacher participants completed surveys and two participants completed interviews. The online survey was sent via email and participants chose to consent by returning a completed survey. Interviews were conducted at a designated location and time chosen by the participant. The administration of the survey and the interviews was expedited due to limits of research. The completion of the survey and interviews took place over a four week period.

During the last week of research I interviewed selected participants. A Letter of informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews. The interviews were transcribed using audio-recorder, organized, coded and summarized.

Results

Surveys

A four question survey was administered online to nine participants. Throughout the survey, participants continuously referred to connecting art to students' interests.

Although other strategies were identified, the theme of students' connection to art was prominent.

Question one asked participants to describe their classroom during their busiest teaching time. Themes that emerged within their responses included describing active learning, organized learning, and individualized instruction. Responses included describing active learning in the art room as "hands-on", "moving around a lot", "actively and productively working", and "lots of activity." Participants referred to organized learning environments "students in their seats with the focus on [the teacher]", "action is organized", and "mild to light socialization." Responses also included individualized instruction. Participants described working with students "one on one", "interactions between teacher and students", "helping students individually", "I move from student to student talking individually."

Question 1: If I were to walk into your classroom during your busiest teaching time, what would I see?	"Hands-on" "Moving around a lot" "Actively and productively working" "Lots of activity." "Students in their seats with the focus on [the teacher]" "Action is organized" "Mild to light socialization." "A lot of interactions between teacher and students" "Helping students individually" "I move from student to student talking individually."
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Question two asked which art projects their students enjoyed the most and the least. Common responses included identifying specific materials, clay, drawing, and mixed media. Participants referred to “clay projects”, and “ceramics” as a “favorite” for students. Drawing was also identified as a favorite more specifically, “perspective”, “rendering from a still life”, and doing “preliminary sketches.” Participants also described “glass”, “plaster”, “papier-mâché” and, “sculptural projects” as student favorites.

<p>Question 2: Which art projects do you find your students most enjoy? Least enjoy?</p>	<p>“Clay projects” “Ceramics” “Perspective Drawing” “Rendering from a still life” “Preliminary sketches” “Glass” “Plaster” “Papier-mâché” “Sculptural projects”</p>
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teaching methods to motivate students. These responses included “short teacher

demonstrations”, “examples of past projects”, “talk up artist or activity” and, “create a piece of [teachers] own [art] for each project.”

Question 3: What strategies do you use in your classroom to motivate students?	“Relating assignment to student” “Set criteria or goals for each student” “Asking students what interests them” “Project ideas that relate or draw from students own experiences” “Real world applications” “Students work is their signature” “Short teacher demonstrations” “Examples of past projects” “Talk up artist or activity” “Create a piece of teachers own art or each project.”
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“identify their artistic strengths on build on them”, “let them come up with their own ideas” and, “build something with them, not for them and not in spite of them.”

Question 4: What advice would you give a first year art teacher about motivating students in art?	“Be patient, calm, confident, respectful, motivated, excited, enthusiastic, and a good listener.” “Ask a student what THEY like and then work together to brainstorm something about them” “Help students develop their own ‘style’ of work” “Make is personal” “Identify their artistic strengths on build on them” “Let them come up with their own ideas” “Build something with them, not for them and not in spite of them.”
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In general participants emphasized the importance of making instructional content connect with student's interests. By making personal connections to the art assignments, participants overwhelmingly believe that students will be more likely to be engaged in their art.

Interviews

Two participants, referred to as Deborah and Kathy, were interviewed and asked a series of response-guided questions. The major theme that arose from the interviews was the importance of making art connections to students' personal lives. However other themes including the strategic use of materials as related to motivation and teachers as art facilitator emerged.

Deborah and Kathy discussed the importance of connecting art assignments to students' interests. Deborah explained that they "talk one on one" with an unmotivated student and "ask why or how [together they] could change [the project] to make it something that [the student] would like." Students were also mentioned as being motivated by "making their own direction in a project", and doing "projects that are

relevant to [the students.]” Deborah went on to say that students “like to have their modern life included in their artwork”, and enjoy being allowed “to get a littler more unique with [their art] and make it original and personal.”

The use materials in the art room surfaced during both interviews. Deborah stated that students were more interested and engaged when using different art materials, “a variety of materials keeps it fun and different.” Kathy stated that “[Students] get more excited and enjoy projects that are busier or messier.” Kathy went on to explain the word “busier” as having, “more parts or different materials that they are not used to that they have to put together.” When asked the reason behind students’ enjoyment of certain materials, Kathy explained that materials that they “don’t do that often” are more enjoyable than materials used repetitively. One material identified as a motivating material was “clay.”

Another theme mentioned was the role which both participants took on within their own classrooms. Kathy described, “I do other things to help them to be motivated, let them sit with their friends and sit where they want to.” Kathy went on to explain that they give, “general encouragement” and they “[bring] up ideas for [students] to choose from.” Deborah also described their role as visual art facilitator, “I use a lot of books and a lot of visuals.” When explaining other ways teachers can motivate their students, Deborah explained that their “excitement can do it” and sometimes they have to “really buy [students] into what they are doing, really talk it up.”

These interviews revealed three common motivational themes. However the emphasis on connecting students work to their own interests resonates throughout the interviews.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify specific motivational strategies that art educators use on daily basis within their classrooms. After collecting, organizing the data, I was able to conclude that connecting students' art work to their own interest and lives is an effective strategy that art teachers use every day in their classrooms. Although a variety of other strategies were identified and discussed, this strategy was repeatedly emphasized as a key to student motivation.

This strategy lends itself to art classrooms that are centered on the students' interests and fit student need to making learning engaging. The data collected also connected to my literature review by showing that students with high levels of intrinsic motivation, motivation from within attribute their educational results to internal factors that they can control and the amount of effort they put in (Pavlou, 2006).

The importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors was prevalent in both my literature review and my results. My findings were consistent with similar research. Birdsell , (2009) Ream, (2009) Seyller, (2009) Zobott, (2009) Garvis (2009)

and Pavlou (2009) agreed that a lack of intrinsic motivation is often found in a student who is not motivated from within and cannot engage themselves in learning out of curiosity, interest, or enjoyment. My research also was consistent with Garvis (2009) who believes that, “Students can have increased motivation when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process, and that motivation declines when students have no voice in the class structure.” Garvis (2009) goes on to state that, giving students options can be as simple as letting them pick their lab partners or select from alternate assignments, or as complex as contract teaching wherein students can determine their own grading scale, due dates and assignments.

I studied the differences between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and was able to identify these concepts within my research results. I found through my results that art educators worked hard to create both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors. These findings were consistent with my literature review where Garvis, (2009) states that student’s choices hold a lot of power. Students who believe that they had made a choice to learn tend to be more motivated to complete the task or assignment.

Limitations

The largest limitation I faced was with the time frame permitted for research. Although the correct procedures were followed, permission for the research took longer

than anticipated. This delay in obtained permission led to a reduction in available time for data collection. It also resulted in low participation and the use of a convenience sampling. Despite these limitations, useful motivational strategies were identified.

Implications

It takes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies to engage students in the art classroom. My research results show that current practices are effective in motivation students within the art classroom depending on how well they are implemented. These strategies, although common, are so imbedded in art educators daily planning and managing that they are not often verbalized or shared with colleagues.

Recommendations for further work

From this research, I found that there are specific strategies that art educators use in their classrooms. Further research could be used to look at a larger sample of art educators from a variety of school communities. A more diverse sample may prove different results and bring in more viewpoints. I would also recommend that this study be conducted on students at both primary and secondary levels as a comparison of strategies. It would also be worth doing research on art educators perceived motivational strategies and if they align with students opinions on being motivated.

This research identified specific strategies to motivate students in the art classroom. With so many challenges to teaching, this research allowed me to make sense of the complexities of student motivation. This research has the potential to help art educators strengthen their daily practices within their art classrooms.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Appendix B: Survey

Appendix C: Interview

Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Page Andrews and I am currently a graduate student at Oswego State University, working on my thesis. In order to complete my thesis, I am conducting research into the factors influencing the motivation of students in the Art classroom. My research involves surveying Art Educators. In order to be able to better understand and more effectively work with students, I have generated interview questions for Art Educators. These interview questions have been approved by the Faculty Research Committee on Human Subjects at the State University of New York at Oswego. The interview includes questions about motivation in the art classroom. The responses provided by every participant in this study will be kept confidential. Participants may withdraw at any time from the study without penalty.

By participating in this survey, you will contribute valuable information based on its Art Educators personal experiences as a teacher. It is my hope that this information will help other art teachers to understand how to improve the experiences of their current and future students.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Page Andrews by email. If you have any other questions, please contact Dr Friedman, (312-3474) chairs of the Human Subjects Committee, SUNY Oswego.

Sincerely,
Page Andrews
State University of New York at Oswego

I have read the above statement about the purpose and the nature of the study, and freely consent to participate.

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Signature	Date	Experimenter's Signature
Date		

Appendix B:

Online Survey

1. If I were to walk into your classroom during your busiest teaching time, what would I see?

2. Which art projects do you find your students most enjoy? least enjoy?

3. What strategies do you use in your classroom to motivate your students?

4. What advice would you give a first year art teacher about motivating students in art?

Appendix C: Interview Questions: Response guided

1. If I were to walk into your classroom during your busiest teaching time what would I see? Hear? What would be going on?
2. What projects do you use to motivate your students?
3. How do you motivate students in your classroom?
4. What advice would you give a new art teacher about motivating students?