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# The Effect on Motivation and Confidence of the Art Student of Low Socioeconomic Status

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The Effect on Motivation and Confidence of the Art Student of Low Socioeconomic Status

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### **Abstract**

This action-based research study used student and teacher surveys, as well as researcher observations to examine the effect of formative assessment and exploratory art education strategies in a high poverty school district. Both student perception of ability and confidence in the arts is often based on their previous experiences and past exposure to the arts. This research study sought to investigate students' experience of art class through exploratory learning, along with the use of formative assessment, to best inform students ways to be successful while fostering a growth mindset. Success was shown by completed student work, held to a high standard by the student. Student engagement and growth through motivated learning, greatly depended on their attendance in school and knowing that their progress and presence mattered. Relationship helped provide validity of formative feedback for the students and increased the chance of taking creative risks in exploratory activities. Findings supported that in order for an exploratory approach and formative assessment to be successful, student attendance and teacher-student relationships were most critical in their success.

## Introduction

The privilege of a teacher is to empower students and allow them to realize that they have the ability to succeed in education. When a student happens to fail to see this about themselves, it is often likely due to a lack of confidence in perceived skills and abilities or that they lack any skill or ability at all (Stiggins, 2009). Some would say that their mindset is fixed, that they view their intelligence and abilities as unable to change (Dweck, 2006). Often the case with the visual arts, students begin to lose confidence and thus motivation beginning in early adolescence (Amorino, 2009). When children reach adolescence there is a decline in their artistic expression. They equate good art with technical skills and see this as an unattainable goal and as a result lose confidence and motivation (Amorino, 2009). Many believe students can be asked to simply use their imaginations or to be creative. In addition to developmental changes, students may experience, as Stiggins (2009) noted, negative past experiences with assessment. Their experience, having been either positive or negative, caused the student to draw conclusions about themselves as a learner. Their perceptions can be either good or bad, depending on these experiences. If their conclusion is that they can not be successful at learning, based on negative experiences with assessments, students stop believing they *can* learn, and may eventually stop trying (Stiggins, 1999). However, when assessment is done right it becomes a positive collaboration between both the student and the teacher. During the ongoing process of formative assessment, students and teachers observe learning and improve future instruction and learning by applying what they know about the process (Wylie et al., 2012). Although many educators are lacking proper preparation for using assessment properly and effectively (Stiggins, 1999). In the

end, the student should feel empowered to learn and the teacher empowered by teaching. This is the case for any discipline of education, including the visual arts.

### **The power of assessment and classroom practice**

For students who had seen themselves as low performing, teachers use frequent formative assessments to help students gain skills. Students often especially lacked confidence in the arts, amplified by adolescence when students equate ability with technical skill (Amorino, 2009). Often, this means that teachers must ultimately change their own classroom practice in order to most effectively make use of formative assessment techniques. Formative assessment worked properly to help students grow in academic skills, the teachers used formative assessments to lead to adjustments in how the students are being taught (Black & Wiliem, 2010). As evidenced by the many studies that were examined in Black and Wiliem's meta-analysis on feedback, constant and constructive criticism had powerful consequences to improve the overall confidence and self-esteem of the learner. In order for teachers to have effectively used assessment to increase student achievement, teachers must be adequately prepared through proper professional development (Harnett, Mastrorilli, & Zhu, 2014). Formative assessment is connected to what happens in the moment of instruction and in learning, not something that only occurs quarterly or once each semester, but as a continuous process which had aimed to reinforce the learning intentions for all students (Stiggins, 1999). It is critical to involve students in the assessment process, to show exemplars, and that by giving feedback to one another, students will know and have recognized the demands of the assignment or task. Ultimately upon knowing the expectations, clearly laid out for them, students will be more likely to work to meet those demands (Wylie et al., 2012).

### **Perceptions of those in poverty**

Black and Wiliem's (2010) found that the use of effective teaching techniques and formative assessment increased intrinsic motivation and confidence of students. However, researchers have not addressed how formative assessment can help to increase the motivation and confidence of students in the visual arts that are of low socioeconomic status. In addition to the loss of motivation and confidence for art students, students in poverty see themselves as encountering barriers to education at all stages of their lives (Beegle, 2003). Beegle's study of people in poverty, found that a staggering 98% of respondents stated that they did not view education as important at all. Many (96%) of these people shared that education was not valued in the home, barely discussed, not perceived as important, and simply something that they had to do because "it was the law" (Beegle, 2003 p.14). Beegle also discovered that teachers typically are not equipped with the understanding of what it is like for students in poverty. Mainly, there was a lack of understanding of the distinct differences in communication, a key component in effective formative assessment (Beegle, 2013). Through a look at the beliefs of these students and their perceptions of assessment, along with focus on an action study- changing the practices in the classroom, will hopefully reveal how effective assessment can help to improve motivation and confidence in such students (Creswell, 2015). Using a qualitative ethnographic method can help the researcher to determine if formative assessment can help to increase motivation and confidence, specifically of students of low socioeconomic status (SES) in art. By exploring the benefits of both assessment and strategies, specifically sensitive to students of low SES, teachers of any subject can be empowered through their practice to best impose a positive effect on

students living in poverty. Researchers of existing studies have clearly shown positive effects of formative assessment and of effective classroom strategies on all students across all subjects.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Effective assessment and achievement of academic standards**

Upon personal reflection of her use of formative assessment in her own classroom, teacher Sass-Henke (2013), noted the effect that using well-executed assessment had. Sass-Henke specifically noted that an increase in the number of students who were able to meet the benchmarks after careful planning of formative assessment strategies. In particular, she reflected on how she used pre-assessments to determine how she needed to shape what and how she taught the curriculum to her students (Sass-Henke, 2013). When corrective activity, such as individual feedback about classwork occurs throughout a classroom assignment or activity, the number of students needing extra practice was reduced greatly (Sass-Henke, 2013). She highlighted, in her experience, that remediation must happen in the classroom and not as homework, as that rarely made a difference as an effective vehicle for formative assessment (Sass-Henke, 2013). Formative assessment additionally can help a student triumph over fixed mindset which Dweck (2006) describes as the opposite of the desired growth mindset. With formative assessment students have the opportunity to see where they can make adjustments to their learning and teachers can see what can change about their learning, putting into practice the means to capitalize on the growth mindset (Glaus, 2016). Also found to be successful in student motivation, were the results of a study of portfolio assessment. Researchers found that using portfolios had proved successful in increasing goal orientation and sophistication of student work, while being utilized to document ongoing growth of the student's skills (Underwood,



1998). However, Underwood also found that when scoring portfolios as a means of summative assessment, this use of portfolios increased levels of anxiety in the students. Ultimately, the purpose of effective assessment included the learner as a part of the process of their learning, thus having engaged them as partners in the process (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005), not having created anxiety. Having been involved in the process, students took control as a result of the student-involved classroom and communication, which became a source of confidence and not one of anxiety (Stiggins, 1999). The type of formative assessment which has the most positive effect is ongoing formative assessment, allowing students to address any misunderstandings or mistakes. Ongoing formative assessment, through teacher observations and questions asked of the students help both the teacher and the student make adjustments to the process of teaching and student learning (Cauley & McMillan, 2010).

Learning expectations and success criteria worked together to allow students to know what they needed for quality work. Students knew what the outcome was, what was expected of them, and the goals that they had worked towards. The learning expectations were presented in such a way that the students understood and that students and teachers had a shared understanding of what the expectations were (Wylie et al., 2012). Through these clear learning targets using teacher provided examples, students' clarity about the expectations increase thus increasing their ability to set goals for their learning (Cauley & McMillan, 2010). Also, through an effective formative assessment process, students will know these learning expectations (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). The feedback that the teacher gave during formative assessment, provided guidance for the students' goals, clarified those goals, and helped the students achieve

the goals according to what the student needed. Ultimately, this dictated how the teacher approached the student's learning and their instruction (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

### **Effective teaching strategies and increased motivation and confidence**

It is the goal of every good educator to be an effective one. In measuring the effectiveness of an educator, the student's learning, motivation, and engagement can be examined. In her research with adolescents specifically, Dweck (2006) found that students who exhibited a fixed mindset were more likely to exert less effort and that they showed less motivation. She refers to this as low-effort syndrome. The student's fixed mindset is detrimental to their confidence, and ultimately their motivation towards building their intelligence. With frequent formative assessment students learn more because teachers can be always "fine-tuning" their instruction, ensuring the student gets meaningful feedback, helping students to see concrete ways to improve (Cauley & McMillan, 2010). When using effective teaching strategies, teachers hold the power to help increase a student's motivation and build their confidence, to foster the desired growth mindset. Often, specifically in the discipline of the visual arts, students hit a point in their education, primarily during adolescence, in which they begin to lose confidence in their skills, and lack the motivation to be creative (Amorino, 2009). With strong pedagogy, an art teacher can build an experience for students to maintain confidence and foster motivation. In Amorino's study, students of low-middle to low socioeconomic status experienced the Artistic Impetus Model. Through the use of creative sensory experiences, despite the students established beliefs about art and their skills in the visual arts, there was an increase in both student motivation and confidence. Through new and unique sensory based experiences, student involvement and engagement was increased and students were more likely to come to class and

be motivated by trying new experiences. During Amorino's study, students used time at the end of each class to meet as a group in which they took time to discuss their shared and individual experiences, their outcomes, and ways they increased their understanding. It was during the student-centered discussions that the students employed self-assessment, and used the opportunity of communication amongst teacher and students to increase their learning (Stiggins, 2009). When feedback pointed to goal attainment learning was increased, and therefore so was the student's confidence and motivation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

In the framework proposed by Brookhart (1997), assessment is recognized as a primary way for students to know what their weaknesses and strengths are. Central to instructional experiences, assessment is essential in helping students gain information about their learning. The students view of classroom tasks is of great importance. The more that the students view their task as attainable and enjoyable the greater the student motivation and effort. A distinction between tasks is made in the framework. A task is either a mastery or performance type of task. A task that is of the mastery orientation is related to more positive attitudes about the task. Brookhart (1997) implies that the some task in class are more apt to be mastery and some more performance. Given this implication, students that do a mastery task are more engaged than when they are engaged in a performance task. More value is being placed on the mastery tasks and therefore more effort is invested as it is a more highly motivating task for the students (Brookhart, 1997). As a motivating task, the students exhibited that the task was more cognitively engaging due to the involvement of the ego. Brookhart shares that the formative assessment strategies are important to a successful increase in engagement and motivation. She proposes that strategies which aim to help the student improve are more likely to increase a

student's motivation versus one which is judgmental. Equipping students with information on ways to improve their work is empowering to the student to do better the next time.

### **Teacher preparedness for effective teaching and formative assessment**

Stiggins (1999) believed that teachers were less than adequately prepared to meet the needs of their students in the area of assessment. Stiggins proposed that there was a lack of teacher access to professional development in the area of assessment. The results from the 2014 *Arts Achieve* study in New York City supported such a proposition. Primarily, the aim of the study was to begin to equip teachers that took part in the study with the tools and resources for effective teaching and the use of formative assessment strategies (Harnett et al., 2014). It is in developing the key practices of feedback, planning, and instructional modifications of the teacher, in connection to formative assessment, where many educators seemed to be lacking in an adequate skill set (Wylie et al., 2012). Effective use of assessment is often overlooked in pre-service programs. Researchers found that during in the *Arts Achieve* study, there was not only a need, but a great benefit to focused professional development in the realm of assessment strategies (Harnett et al., 2014). Amorino (2009) found that investing time and money helped increase teacher preparedness in the area of formative assessment, helping students' success, motivation, and confidence. The teachers became more comfortable with using assessment, were more confident of themselves, and therefore were more likely to buy into the value of student feedback (Amorino, 2009).

### **Summary**

Researchers have found that strong formative assessment practices and effective teaching techniques have increased the academic success of students. In art education specifically,

students often begin lose confidence and lack motivation as they anticipate failure. With successful teaching techniques like that of the Artistic Impetus Model (Amorino, 2009), which utilized formative assessment to build confidence and encourage motivation, there was created a big difference in motivation and confidence in students of all kinds. With proper professional development and execution of formative assessment, teachers increased the likelihood of empowering and effectively teaching to all students. With mastery type classroom tasks, along with informative formative assessment, students showed an increase in their motivation and in their engagement for the tasks (Brookhart, 1997). Students in poverty often perceive that teachers do not know “what to do with students like them” (Beegle 2003, p.15) and have historically seen the teachers as the enemy. In Beegle’s study of people in poverty, she learned that many saw teachers as not caring about them, and they believed teachers thought they could not be successful. In this study, teaching techniques and formative assessment strategies will be investigated, specifically: what are the most effective teaching techniques and formative assessment strategies to increase intrinsic motivation and confidence in art students of low socioeconomic status? Further, how can art students living in poverty benefit from formative assessment so that they know that they can succeed in education?

## **Research Design**

### **Purpose of Research**

Past research has shown the many benefits of formative assessment on student achievement. By expanding upon this past research, while exploring the impact that formative assessment has on a student’s motivation in the art classroom, the focus of this research is able to be focused on a student population within a rural community with a high rate of poverty. The

rural setting, which the research took place, in particular provided access to a variety of students who lived in a rural community. I wished to examine whether the motivation of students living in poverty is affected by the use of formative assessment strategies. Specifically, within the visual arts classroom, I hoped to determine if through the use of best practices in formative assessment and effective art pedagogy, students of low socioeconomic status would demonstrate an increase in both motivation and academic performance. This research and its findings potentially could be used in informing others of effective ways in which educators could use assessment and teaching techniques to motivate all learners, and specifically those in low socioeconomic situations.

### **Research Question**

Through this research, I hoped to find what the most effective teaching techniques and formative assessment strategies are to increase intrinsic motivation and confidence in students of low socioeconomic status. By using best practice in art pedagogy and having used effective formative assessment, students' learning would be addressed in such a manner that they would begin to recognize their growth. Carol Dweck (2006) speaks of the importance of a growth mindset. A growth mindset is encouraged by helping students to see where, in their work, improvements can be made. It is with the use of formative assessment strategies that students come to know of the improvements which could be made (Cauley & McMillan, 2010).

This study aimed use of changes in instruction, in cooperation with formative assessment strategies, to make a positive impact on student achievement and motivation. Through this research, teaching methods and formative assessment methods were used with a test group of students to examine whether or not the practices helped to improve the motivation and achievement of the students. Working with adolescent students, Amorino (2009) used a teaching

strategy called the Artistic Impetus Model. While researching the effects of this method, he found that adolescents showed an increase in creativity and engagement while increasing the use of sensory activities in the creative process. Also, as a result of this research, Amorino (2009) also determined that this technique of teaching had a significant impact on raising art to a level of importance which held it to a higher standard as a truly academic subject. As a part of the teaching technique, Amorino (2009) used time to talk with students, and also had the students talk among themselves about both the process and the outcomes. Students' perception of the discipline of art, as well as perceived ability to make art, drove much of Amorino's study. Perception surveys helped provide a clearer picture of students affected by the changes made during the research process checking their student's interest and perceived ability.

Research in the area of formative assessment, and its effect on student motivation and achievement among students living in areas of rural poverty, is not plentiful. More specifically, there is little research in the area of art education on rural poverty and the effect of teaching techniques and formative assessment strategies.

The type of data necessary for undertaking this action based research was demographic data, perception data, and student learning data. As a result of collecting multiple sets of data, I was able to draw more reliable conclusions about the relationships among the various data collected (Creswell, 2015). As a result of answering the research question educators have a greater understanding for how a student population living in rural lower socioeconomic conditions can benefit from increased motivation and greater levels of achievement.

## Core Concepts

The importance of clear expectations and how to get to the expected standards of learning have been proven critical in raising student achievement. Black and Wiliem (2010) state that to attain improvement in student achievement the priority “has to be the promotion and support of change within the classroom” (p. 146). Their conclusion help support the importance of this research. By making a change in both instruction and assessment in the classroom, students benefited from that change. Giving feedback on both a student’s strengths and their weaknesses with formative assessment has shown to improve student learning (Black & Wiliem, 2010).

Using effective formative assessment strategies and proven teaching strategies helped determine how students benefited from them. In the theoretical framework proposed by Brookhart (1997), “the classroom assessment environment reflects the classroom instructional process” (p. 165). Brookhart also stated that the teacher is the one that makes decisions about assessment, the frequency of them, and the instructional function. The decisions that teachers make about these specific aspects in their classrooms have a significant impact on the students according to the framework which Brookhart presents. Helping to drive the classroom process is the instruction, learning objectives, and the means in which the learning is assessed (Brookhart, 1997).

The research done in the area of formative assessment has shown that when students know both what the objectives are for their learning and ways that they can improve it, they show greater motivation and achievement. Research has also shown that with an explorative approach to art education that students were more empowered and that they showed greater motivation and greater learning (Amorino, 2009). The manner in which they defended their



research was adequate in helping to understand the impact that the formative assessment had, as well as the success which Artistic Impetus Model demonstrated in the urban environment (Amorino, 2009).

### **Approach**

A change in practice was implemented and its effects studied to investigate this research question by using action research, as action research is the best way to enable reflection on practice (Creswell, 2015). Practical action research allowed for examination of the effects that changing assessment practices and teaching methods had on the motivation of the students. In using action research I was able to continue work with students in situations of poverty while being able to see the effects of my work with a particular demographic of students. By collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data I ensured that the data is both reliable and valid, leading to findings which aid others in the area of the research question (Creswell, 2015). Action research ultimately allowed for the development of an action plan. This plan, has the potential to benefit others in education working with a similar demographic.

As I take investigative action in the realm of both instruction and assessment, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data which helped build a complete picture of the effect that change will have on the students. Prior to having made changes in my practice and at the start of the research project, I collected student perceptions. I collected the same perception data after changes were made in practice, at the end of the research project, and I compared them with each other. Students' perceptions about art class and their ability helped to frame the research by allowing for better understanding of the students' experience coming into a learning opportunity specifically within the discipline of art. Through perception data, I built a base understanding

about each student's individual perception as it related to prior experience in art class as well as the perceptions of the group as a whole.

In addition to student perceptions, I also sought out the perceptions of the students' general and special educational teachers as to their experience with arts integration within their particular disciplines as it pertained to the amount of arts exposure that the students have outside of the art classroom. By identifying ways teachers exposed their students to arts opportunities, I hoped to identify whether this had some influence on student motivation in addition to the formative assessment and teaching methods used in the action research. Student learning data was collected using pre and post work samples as measurement of student skills as they are developed through practice. Demographic data was collected and used to illustrate a clearer picture of the school district, school, and classroom. I gathered demographic data which helped describe the economics of the school district by town. I looked at average household income for each town within the school district. In addition, I looked at the middle school specifically, using the statistics for free and reduced school lunch, and my students' parents occupations. By collecting a broad variety of demographic data I understood the economic profile for the students I worked with. I used this data to help draw conclusions and I found patterns about students who are not intrinsically motivated, as well as those who are.

I collected observational data using field notes, both descriptive and reflective notes were taken in order to maintain means of collected insights as they related to possible themes and patterns which developed as a result of the action research (Creswell, 2015) Process data helped me to reflect upon the possible effect that the process itself had on the students' successes and failures given the actions taken to help foster improvement in student achievement and

motivation. Weaknesses of this approach were that while a change in practice took place, there was be little time for independent research beyond the action. While the change was happening in the classroom I needed help to learn how to be a good researcher. By using what I had learned in my graduate work done thus far, I began to compensate for this weakness (Creswell, 2015).

### **Methods of Inquiry**

Using an action based design, with a mixed method approach, was complementary to this research. The strength of a mixed method approach considered that gathering both qualitative and quantitative data, the many types of data helped to build a clearer picture of the research problem which was being investigated. However, a clear understanding of both types of data collection is paramount. Additionally, a true mixed methods approach would have been very time consuming with large amounts of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2015). A particular downside to this approach is that connecting both strands of data is time consuming and often requires more than one researcher doing it in order to do it justice.

The data that was collected through both qualitative and quantitative means helped to gain a broader understanding of the problem, the people, and circumstances being researched, as well as illustrated the best solution after the data was thoroughly analyzed. The data helped paint a picture of the students. This will helped me to best understand the research problem. By collecting demographic data I was able to gain a clearer understanding of the student population and the community as a whole. Having a clear understanding of qualitative data, such as where the student's skills began and to where their skills progressed to as the action research happened was important in helping to understand the impact of the action having used a collection of both qualitative and the quantitative data.

## **Setting**

Data was collected in the context of the art classroom within a middle school setting. The Mt. Blue Middle School is a part of the largest school district within Franklin County, RSU# 9. The largest town, the location of the middle school is the county seat. Perception data was gathered using Google Forms for the surveys and the data was stored in the Google Sheets that are automatically generated with the use of the form. Using the Google Form helped me in organizing and sorting through data. I used a password protected Google account to store this data.

## **Sampling/Participants**

The participants of the study were students from three middle level art classes. I chose one sixth, one seventh, and one eighth grade class from my active classes. I selected participating groups by choosing groups that are all on the same rotational day. The students had block scheduling which meant that we had a blue/gold day rotation and as a result the students attended art class every other day for a trimester. Participants were chosen using purposeful sampling in order to best understand student motivation in the context of the art classroom (Creswell, 2015). This sample of students provided a manageable amount of subjects in which to gather data from. I was also able to gather data from a range of students from a variety of grade levels, abilities, and socioeconomic situations. The surveys were completed by all of the students participating in the research project, therefore there was little to no sampling bias. Potential issues were that students may not have been completely honest when completing perception surveys. Additionally, trouble with data happened with poorly written surveys. All students in the selected classes were invited to participate, received a consent letter for their parents and one for

themselves. The letters contained in them sufficient explanation which informed both the student and their parents of the reason for research and the action which took place in the classroom. The call for student participation in the perception surveys was clear and straightforward. There were no negative consequences for not participating, thus participation did not provide any negative outcomes for students or their parents.

Teachers that were invited to participate are teachers that are from the school PLC groups, one each from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Teachers were in regular education as well as special education teachers having worked with that particular community.

### **Methodology**

This study was an action based with a mixed method data process. Data was analyzed and presented narratively. The goal of this study was to determine if the changes made within the context of action research make a difference in motivation and student achievement of students from a rural, high poverty school. This method was best as it provided the greatest amount of data in which to examine. The benefits of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data was that different data types helped give a clearer understanding to the many aspects and factors that had influence over a student's motivation and achievement in art class. A potential drawback of this method was that it was an overwhelming amount of data, making organization and analyzation cumbersome.

### **Operational Measures**

For this research study, I collected perception data using surveys from students at the beginning and end of the study. I used Google Forms to help collect and organize this data. In addition to student perceptions, I also used Google Forms to collect teacher perceptions.

Questions for students were written to best understand how students perceived their past experience in art and their performance in it. Perception surveys were written by the principal investigator. Questions were carefully crafted to ask teachers about their perception of art class, their prior experience with arts integration, and their students' current exposure to arts experiences in their classroom. Focusing on all these aspects encouraged a wider understanding for perceptions and the reasons behind them. By using the perception data from both the students and their classroom teachers, I was able to draw conclusions from perceptions about art at the start of the research, at the end, and then compared if student motivation was affected.

I will be collecting demographic data, more specifically, I will be looking at the economic data about the communities are a part of the school district. I will access this information by using city-data.com. This online resource for demographic data about specific towns will provide median household income and income distribution by town. Individual student demographic data will be drawn from the demographic profiles which I have access to and additionally student attendance and whether or not the participating students are receiving special education services, have a 504 plan, or are a part of the gifted and talented program. Both the demographic data related to economics of the individual towns and individual student data helped to frame my findings as these all may have had potential influence over a student's motivation and achievement.

Learning data, which was collected throughout the research project, ensured that student achievement would be most accurately examined, and helped provide a greater understanding for the impact of the formative assessments and teaching strategies.

## **Data Collection**

Firstly, I began by selecting the class groups which I performed the research. Prior to beginning to collect data, both students and teachers were given the consent forms which were filled out and returned in order for participation. Collection of perception data began with a survey which was prepared and shared via Google Forms with all students and teachers participating in the research project. Students who chose to participate used their laptop, provided by the school for accessing and filling out the perception survey in class. This data helped me understand what the students believed about their art ability and to what degree they valued art class before the action starts. Demographic data for participating students was collected using demographic data accessed information provided by parents and stored in Powerschool. Data describing the broader demographics of the towns within the school district was collected from city-data.com and also from school demographic records. I researched and compiled data for each town in the school district, specifically I gathered information concerning average household income. Demographic data was helpful in understanding each of the communities' economic profiles. Teacher perceptions of those who agreed to participate in the research, were also collected using Google Forms. They were invited to participate and asked to fill out the survey in Google Forms. The perception survey that the teachers are asked to complete addressed the teacher's view of arts integration in their own classrooms and what were the barriers to arts integration based on their past experience. These surveys helped me in understanding if there was a relationship between the students' exposure to arts activities outside the art classroom and if they could have had any influence over student achievement or motivation inside the art classroom.

All the perception data, as well as the demographic data, was analyzed by the principal investigator. Student learning data that is collected was collected prior to a lesson, before instruction took place, as well as after instruction and practice. Thus, the students produced work samples that were a piece of evidence of their growth in a particular skill. I used Padlet to collect pictures of both the pre and post work and stored it all on Padlet. I photographed the artwork samples which showed growth, after which I attached them to the Padlet boards which are private only to me. This learning data helped show individual students' growth. To wrap up the collection of perception data, students filled another survey out. The second survey was collected using Google Forms. This data was collected on student perceptions after the action occurs within the classroom.

### **Data Analysis**

Data quantitative in nature was analyzed and synthesized using narrative description. Using a Likert scale, questions on the surveys asked students what they thought about, or felt about both art class and their ability in it. Answers for the questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics in such a way that graphs and tables will be used to illustrate the data. From this data, narrative analysis helped to describe trends and patterns that I saw developing from the data which I gathered. Students answered questions qualitative in nature. Qualitative data was analyzed descriptively as well.

### **Expected Findings**

Based on what I have learned from prior research, I believed that with a change in my current practices, both in formative assessment and in my teaching strategies, that there would be an increase in students' motivation, engagement, and achievement. Studies which utilized



formative assessment showed that students' achievement conveyed an increase as a result of clear feedback in ways in which the students could improve their work. I believed that the data would show that when students know what the expectations are, how they can improve to meet them, and learn to use a growth mindset that they will also display improved confidence in the arts. My research supported prior research in the areas of the positive impact of formative assessment. My findings fostered forward progress in addressing the motivation of students. In particular, I saw that the findings will enhance understanding in the area of art education, in particular concerning those students who are living and attending school in communities which experience rural poverty, as the research pertained to this demographic is very limited. Given the changes in approach, I believed that the students will increasingly think more positively about art class as a result of their experience during the study.

### **Potential Issues and Weaknesses**

Often, a student's perspective about what is important to be learning in school does not include art. Unfortunately, it is this attitude that can easily impact negatively a student's mindset concerning their ability. Also, it is the students who often have these preconceived notions about their skills which prevents them from seeing the potential for growth. I believed that it is these possible mindsets which could have an affect on the students' willingness to participate in the study or in collecting perception data which is truly honest and forthright. One way in which I attempted to avoid this was the quality of the questions written on the survey. With clear questions, I got answers which got the information which I sought.

The overall design presented a challenge to execute as it had many aspects to it. The ultimate goal of the design was to gather many different types of data in order to examine as

many aspects of the issue as possible. In doing so, there was some trouble keeping the data organized and later, the amount of time it will take in analyzing all of it. In the analyzation of the plethora of data, it was difficult to keep all data organized and to be able to adequately address each well. To lessen the effects of an overabundance of data it was important to spend time carefully discerning which data was most valuable and worth examining.

### **Research Narrative**

Research has shown the positive effects of formative feedback. As evidenced by the many studies examined in Black and Wiliem's (2010) meta-analysis on feedback, constant and constructive criticism had powerful consequences to improve the overall confidence and self-esteem of the learner. I also have noticed throughout my career that indeed many students have overcome low motivation and low confidence with extra the effort and attention to formative feedback. I wanted to see if my own research, supported by my previous informal observations, held true in my own classroom and experience. Having researched formative assessment as well as various approaches to teaching art, I found overwhelming research on the positive effect of formative feedback in various school settings and subjects. I wanted to find out if the same held true for the discipline of art. In addition to finding much research on formative feedback, I stumbled upon the Artistic Impetus method of teaching and learned about a more exploratory approach to teaching art. Using this research, I designed my own research.

When I thought about the research I could undertake and what would be most valuable to my own practice, as well as others, I turned my attention to student motivation and confidence, and in particular as they related to the subject area of art. Primarily, I made this decision because, having taught for many years and in the same school district, I had observed that in the

past students have often had disheartening outcomes due to their lack of both motivation and confidence in art. I became curious as to why so many students were not confident, and lacked the motivation to complete the work.

### **Student Demographics**

I began noticing that the students who often exhibited low motivation and low confidence were often students who lived in situations of high poverty. Western Maine has many instances of both situational and generational poverty. I've worked with thousands of students over the years and I've observed that student outcomes often are shaped by economic situations at home. I desired to explore more on whether a student's economic background had any effect on their motivation and confidence. I wanted to examine further the ways that I could change my own practice in the art classroom that would make a positive impact in both student motivation and confidence in the art classroom despite these student's economic background. I approached this project looking to examine the demographics of the community, the school, the class, and the students. I hoped to find whether the changes that I made in my own practice, would have an effect on student motivation and confidence, and among students living in situations of high poverty in particular.

### **Time and Support**

The amount of time students spent in art class had a large influence in the execution of this research. By understanding the time that the students had spent receiving an art education prior to their time in middle school, as well as their attendance in class, I encountered clear evidence that there was great importance in being present in class and it being tied to a student's motivation.

I examined also the support of the arts by both the students' core subject teachers through arts integration. I invited several colleagues to fill out a survey which asked about the time which they devoted to arts integration. I learned from them about the time they spent, as well as the barriers they perceived having to effective time spent with arts integration in the core subjects. In addition to arts integration, I examined the amount that is given to art class and time which is taken away or lost. I looked at the time students spent in art class coming up through the district as students, as well as the barriers to the consistency of that time. I wanted to know how it may have related to student motivation and confidence.

### **Motivation and Confidence**

I designed a survey which I gave to my students who participated in the study at the start of the project and then again administered at the end. I hoped that the survey gave greater insight to student perception concerning both their ability and motivation. All who assented to participation in the research did not take the surveys. Though most students did take both surveys, and it was this data that I looked at, in particular, to help in a clear illustration of whether student perception changed from the start to the finish of the research project.

Examining and increasing student motivation and confidence was the primary focus with this research. By looking at student's motivation and confidence before and after the use of exploratory methods and formative feedback I aimed to identify initial student perceptions and examine if motivation and confidence could change with a change in both teaching methods and assessment. Giving a perception survey to students aimed to help recognize what students thought about their ability and their motivation towards art activities, I wanted to learn whether

the formative feedback and exploratory approach to art education made a difference in the overall student perception in art.

### **Teaching Methods and Formative Feedback**

I had settled on using an explorative approach to teaching art and additionally, formative feedback. I decided also how it would manifest itself in my classroom. I initially decided on trying to do both an exploratory method and formative assessment at all three grade levels which I taught: grades six through eight.. After getting permission to conduct my action based research, I collected my data. Though my initial intentions were to use both the exploratory approach and to give formative feedback at all three grade levels, I adapted my research. I encountered that the variety of curriculum proved that it was not possible in each grade level to do both changes. Therefore, I adapted my research according to the current curriculum and class structure. The sixth grade curriculum offered the greatest opportunity to make a shift to a more exploratory approach to art education. Utilizing a new lesson, I introduced my sixth graders to various art mediums, each day using a new medium or art material, and explored the possibility of those. Later, these artworks were torn into pieces, and from those pieces, the students created a final and more polished piece of work. The opportunity for formative feedback among the grade six class took the form of group discussions and individual verbal encounters where the students' exercised their knowledge of the Elements and Principles of Art. The seventh grade curriculum offered an opportunity for a more constructive use of formative feedback as lessons were presented in a more structured manner, specifically with techniques to improve and grow their drawing skills. The emphasis with this grade level was more pointed and concentrated to concretely give formative feedback with students having received sticky notes. Students also

were given verbal feedback constantly throughout the activity. In addition to the feedback, I introduced a project which allowed the students to use a variety of mediums to complete a project. Students were taught and practiced skills in drawing. Students incorporated any previous knowledge of mediums, explored and executed their final projects. Lastly, in the eighth grade I allowed for emphasis on both formative feedback throughout and an exploratory approach with various materials as they executed their projects, which was focused on making a sculpture of an object of their choice.

I collected evidence and artifacts of student work which helped me to see how learning data was helpful in shedding some light on student motivation and confidence. Photographing their work, I was able to refer back to the outcomes of their work over the duration of the research which manifested in the art assignments and projects assigned and thus executed by the students.

Through my focus on exploratory teaching methods and by giving valuable formative feedback, I aimed to measure student motivation and confidence and the effect of both. I wanted to gain a greater understanding of how demographics, perception, and learning data completed my understanding of both the problem and the solution for student motivation and confidence.

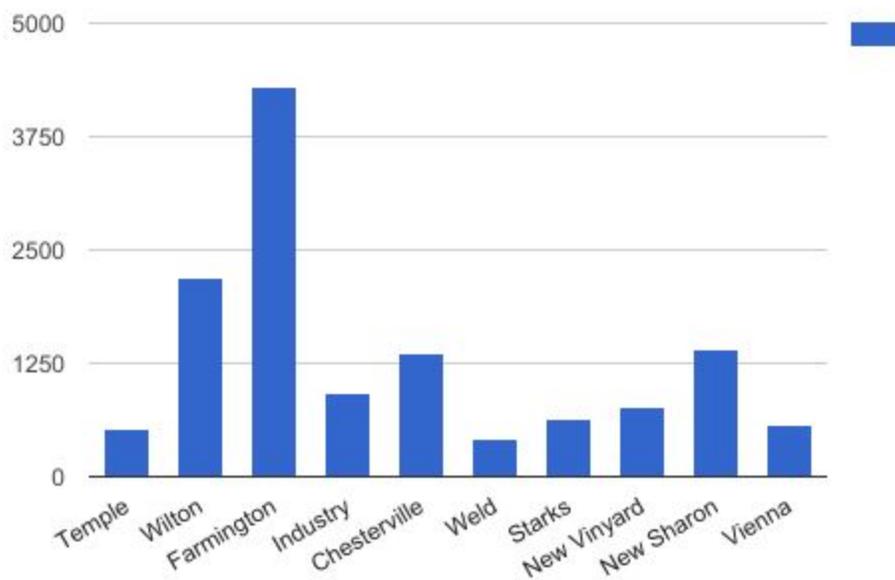
### **Data Analysis / Interpretation of Findings**

Having a better understanding of the area in which these students call home helped to paint the economic landscape in which the research took place. Mt. Blue Middle School is a part of Regional School District #9 in the western foothills of Maine. The student body has a total of 519 students. The school is comprised using the middle school philosophy in which the school organizes the students into “communities”. Communities are formed by first addressing the

caseloads of the teachers and the number of students receiving special education. Next, an even amount of boys and girls are placed on the communities with consideration of which of the three sending schools they had attended. The seventh and eighth grade community teachers loop with their students, teaching them for two years. The sixth grade teachers do not loop, only having their students for one year. The sixth grade has only recently joined the middle school, four years ago. There are two communities per grade level, grades six through eight, for a total of six communities in the school. There are 171 students in the sixth grade, 182 students in the seventh grade, and 166 students in the eighth grade. Students in communities are with four core teachers who teach the core subjects of math, language arts, science, and social studies. Students in the seventh and eighth grade have trimester offerings of exploratory classes which include: visual art, woodworking, and Spanish. In addition, they are also given one semester of physical education and one of health and wellness. The schedule configuration has been changed every year for the last five years. The schedule is a block schedule with alternating days with eighty minute core classes and fifty minute exploratory classes. Sixth grade has seven weeks of exploratory classes, and a semester of physical education and health and wellness each.

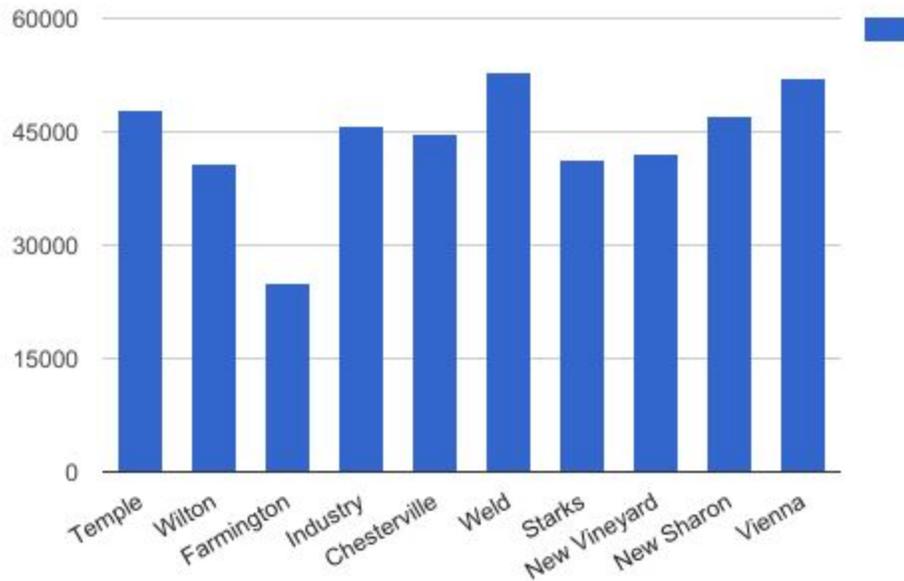
The western foothills of Maine are home to the University of Maine at Farmington and the town of Farmington is the county seat. The economic base in the area is varied. The school district is the largest employer in Franklin County, followed by hospital, the university, and the former paper mill. The mill has shut down many machines and has forced many in the area out of work. This has caused some economic depression in the area. In addition to these, there are also farm and forestry jobs. The population trends median household income, broken down by town within the district helped paint a picture of the economic profile of the area.

### POPULATION BY TOWN RSU #9 - 2010

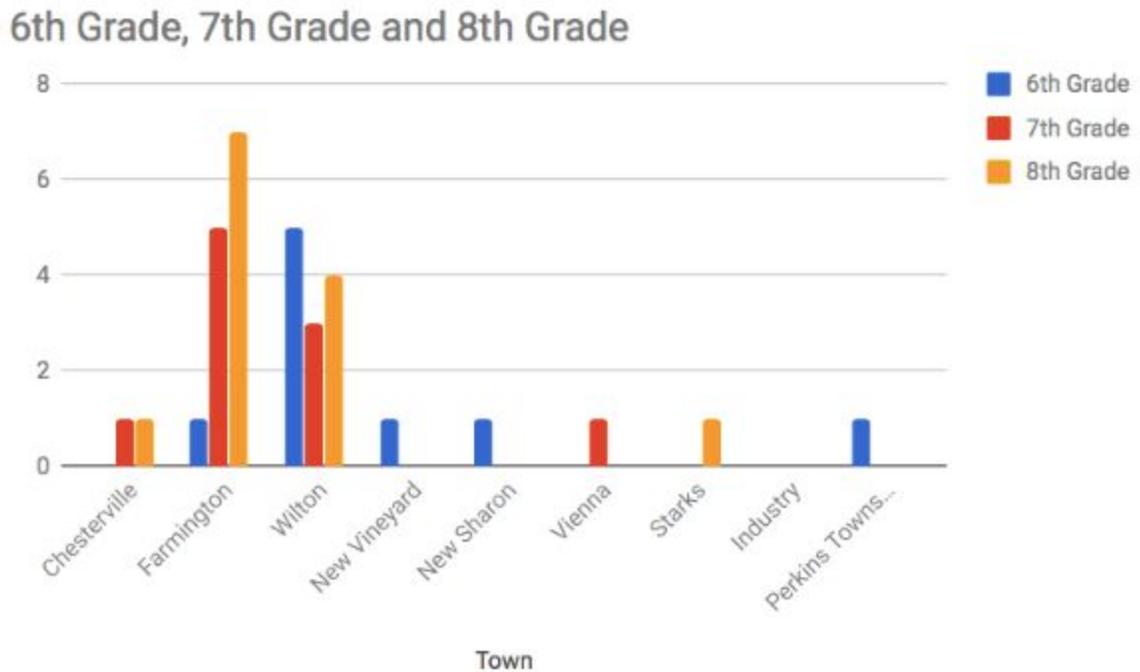




## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME - RSU #9 2015



The highest population is in Farmington, also having the least amount of median household income, \$25,052. This is significant and worth noting because this is where many resources are located. The court system, county jail, and services provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Western Maine Homeless Shelter, and Western Maine Transportation Service make Farmington and outlying areas attractive for a variety of practical reasons. Often those individuals and families requiring these particular resources, are of lower income. This may be the reason for the highest population as well as the lowest median income.



Among the test groups, both the seventh and eighth grade groups have the greatest number of students living in the town of Farmington, with Farmington with the lowest median household income.

### **Time and Support**

Regardless of where the students live in RSU #9, the amount of time of their previous exposure to an art class prior to middle school, is consistently the same across the school district. This consistency of art exposure in the grade school helps to understand that any student, having attended school in RSU #9, had a similar experience regardless of which sending school they attended. Staffing at sending schools has been fairly consistent for the past fourteen years and within the last three, very consistent.

### ***Sending schools and time spent in art class:***

**Cushing:** k-2 have 30 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of art education / year*

**Academy:** grades 3 have 30 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of art education / year*

Grades 4-5 have 40 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 24 hours of art education / year*

**Mallett:** k-2 have 30 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of scheduled art education / year*

**Cascade Brook School:** grade 3 has 30 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of scheduled art education / year*

Grades 4-5 have 40 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 24 hours of scheduled art education / year*

Life Skills have 30 minutes a week but miss a lot for bowling and dances

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of scheduled art education / year*

-note significant time lost due to Life Skills activities

Day Treatment has 30 minutes a week all year

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of scheduled art education / year*

**Cape Cod Hill School:** k-3 have 30 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 18 hours of scheduled art education / year*

Grades 4-5 have 40 minutes per week all year

*This is the equivalent of 24 hours of scheduled art education / year*

*The average student (not including those in Life Skills or Day Treatment) will receive, if going through the district from k-5 a total of 120 hours of scheduled art education.*

**Mt Blue Middle School:**

Grade 6 has art for 8 weeks per year, every other day for 50 minutes.

*This is equivalent to 14 hours of scheduled art education per year*

Grade 7 and 8 have art for 12 weeks per year, every other day for 50 minutes.

***This is equivalent to 25 hours of scheduled art education per year***

Time given to the subject of art is limited in the greater scheme of the time given to other school subjects. In a perfect world, students would be receiving education in the visual arts an equal amount to other subjects. However, despite the consistency of teachers and the time allotted in the grade school, actual time in class continues to vary across the school district due to circumstances often that are out of the control of the art specialist. Art class is often pushed to the side as other subjects and activities take priority over them. In the middle school, there is a similar treatment of the exploratory classes, in which art is included, where class time is lost for field trips, school community activities, school wide activities, snow days, testing, and assemblies. These circumstances could lead to a mentality that art is not a valued or that it is not a valuable subject by students and parents alike. Additionally, student and teacher relationships had less time to be built and flourish.

Time is a significant factor. Both the time which is spent by students in art class, as well as the time that it takes for students artwork to be created. Both of these factors could likely lead to a student's success in art. Some students in the test groups did not complete art assignments due to absences. I observed that students who missed school due to illness or those having gone on vacation, or the occasional truant student, most often felt overwhelmed and never completed their art by the end of the art rotation. Looking at the student attendance, it is noticeable that there are many students in the test groups who missed several days.

*Student attendance data in test classes during the research time*

***Guaranteed whole day lost in red***

**Attendance Codes:**



**Seventh Grade**

	DA	DR	DP	A	D	EI	ET	A M A	UT	PE	TM	TP	IS S/ OS S	ED O	F	GS
34 35							xx		x	x			xx x			
34 14				xx x	xx											
33 60					x	xx xx										
20 28				x			x		xx xx x							
32 12							x									
32 14				x												
33 31					xx x		xx xx xx		x							
30 27					x	xx xx xx x			x	x						
30 53					xx	xx	x									
23 64				x												
33 78							x									xx xx x

**Eighth Grade**



One individual, John (all names are pseudonyms) in the sixth grade showed both motivation and steady progress until his family went on vacation. The art rotation ended and he never returned to finish his artwork.



Time must be both available during the school day or after school, and the student must be willing to utilize this time. Presumably, student perception about art as a subject, as well as their ability to do it must be high in order for the student to find value in taking time to complete the work resulting from one or more absence. In the student perception data, John saw himself as having both good art skills and high motivation, however he demonstrated something very different by not returning to complete his artwork.



Another student, an eighth grader, found herself in a similar situation. Sue, due to dismissals and all day absences, fell significantly behind. Returning to school she worked hard until coming in on the last day in class, she knew she wasn't going to finish and she quit. Sue was highly motivated in the beginning of the art project. She rated herself in the student survey as possessing high motivation, and further, she demonstrated high motivation during the exploratory process. At the beginning of the project, Sue engaged in the process, and tried various ways to use the available recycled materials to create her lightbulb sculpture. She actively manipulated the materials, as well as acquiring and bringing in materials from home, to create her lightbulb. She added paper mache and painted her sculpture. However, after her extensive numbers of absences, she ran out of time. She gave up and refused to work on the project on the last day of class. I invited her to come into finish outside of class, she nodded her head in agreement, and she never showed up to complete it. Her perception of her art skills, from the perception survey were good and her motivation high. Her absences, and having to take time outside of class time and not, had a huge impact on her successfully completing her artwork.

*Sue's incomplete lightbulb sculpture*

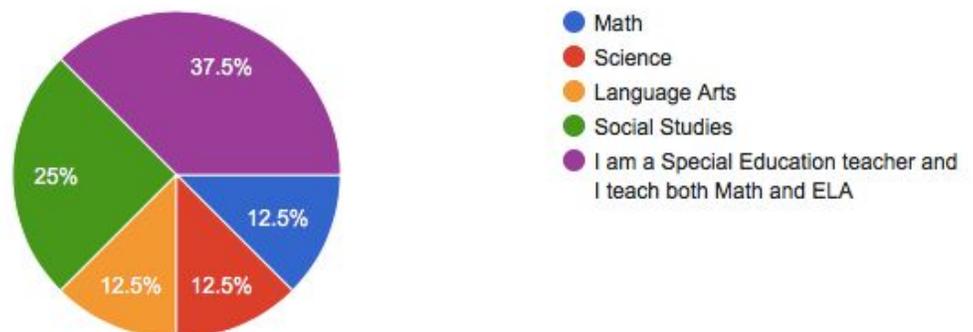


Time and time again during the art rotation, students who missed class rarely made up the missed class time. When school closure due to snow days contributed to missing valuable class time - that time was not made up either. Students see the time that they are enrolled as art students as finite, and when they moved on to other exploratory classes, they did not make the time to return to complete any missing artwork. With a fixed end to the trimester and time lost due to the occasional snow day, testing, or student assemblies, this meant that when the trimester ended, so did the opportunity for students to finish work.

I wanted to know if time spent outside the art classroom where students were exposed to arts activities helped to reinforce the importance the subject of art. Middle school teachers from the three communities I worked with were asked to share how often they used arts integration in their own classrooms. I gained a better understanding of the value that core subject teachers placed on art activities and integration. Of the responding nine teachers, the subject they taught varied. Each grade level was also represented. Sugarloaf community teaches eighth grade, Bigelow community teaches seventh, and Kineo community teaches sixth.

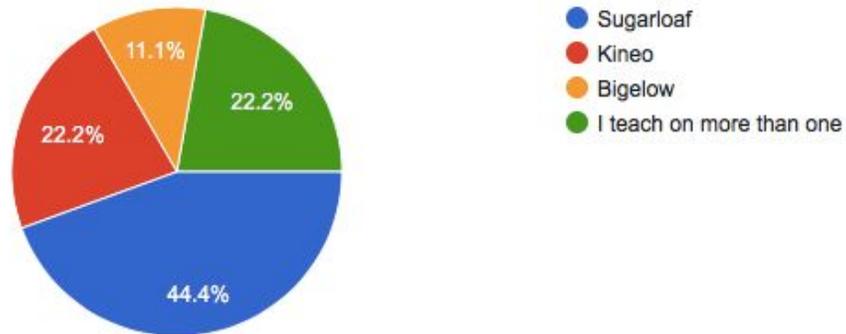
### What subject do you teach?

8 responses



## What Community do you teach on?

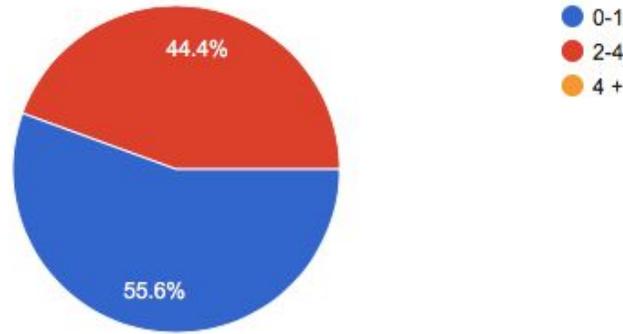
9 responses



The number of teachers responding from the eighth grade Sugarloaf Community was the highest, with only one seventh grade teacher who responded and two from the sixth grade community. The teachers were asked how often they included the arts in their individual subjects.

**Per week on average- How many lessons or activities use arts integration?  
(this could be at discussion/journaling, drawing/illustration, sculptures,  
painting, printmaking, etc.)**

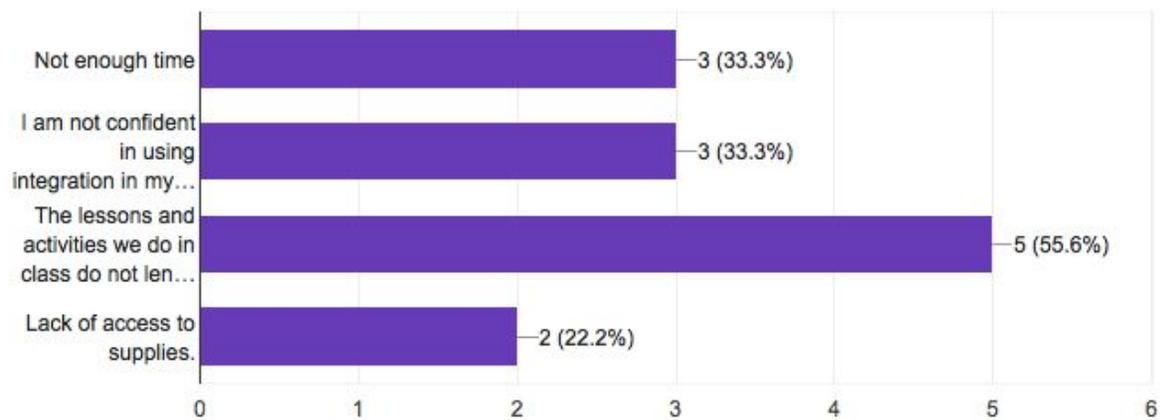
9 responses



The greater amount was only 0-1 times per week and expanding on this I asked the teachers what they felt were the stumbling blocks for effective and frequents arts integration.

**What is the biggest reason you would be prevented from allowing for arts integration in your classroom?**

9 responses



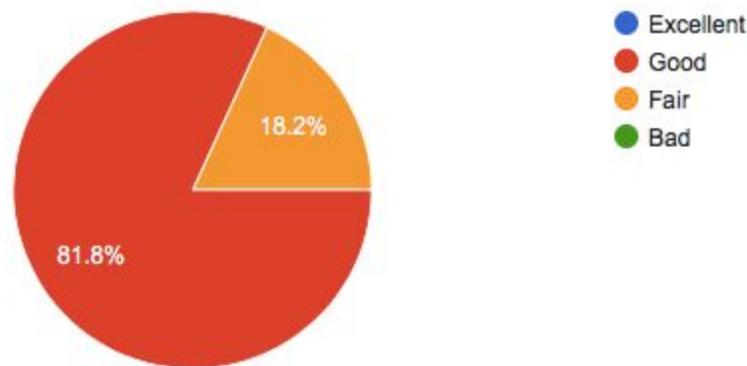
The biggest reason that teachers cited as preventing arts integration was that their subject matter did not lend itself to arts integration. Additionally, there showed a lack of time and teacher confidence to arts integration. With increased emphasis on test scores and student proficiency, teachers are feeling though they are pressured more and more to meet certain expectations in the education of the diverse group of students they serve. One teacher reached out as an extension to the survey and shared several thoughts about arts integration and in particular the issue around meeting the many number of standards. She cited that “it is all that (she) can do with herself to keep herself motivated to ‘stay on track’ with current Language Arts standards.” She said she struggles with “the idea of ‘is this really a meaningful discussion/activity/assignment/etc.’” and how to “connect it to one of the standards.” She expressed that she was sad that just within the last 2-4 years so many additional expectations have come into play limiting the time she has to integrate the arts as she had done in the past. She stated, “SLO’s, I-Observation, and other things within that realm” that she was not “putting the time into creative planning and expression she once had”. In addition to her reflections on the lack of time because of standards and expectations in meeting them, many of the additional thoughts she shared concerned the management of art supplies and student behaviors while using the art materials. Positive perception about art can be fostered by core subject teachers. However, lack of teacher confidence, time, and access to materials prevented an effective and consistent arts integration among the teachers surveyed. This, in turn, makes arts integration difficult and thus difficult to be counted as a deciding factor in art students’ motivation and confidence.

### **Motivation and Confidence**

Data that I collected with a perception survey before the action, as well as after the action, showed the students' perception of their ability, as well as their perceived level of motivation when approaching an art project. Eleven students, various grade levels six through eight, filled out the survey prior to beginning their work in art class before the research commenced. I asked them how they viewed their art skills. A majority of students stated that they saw their skills as good.

### How would you describe your art skills up to this point?

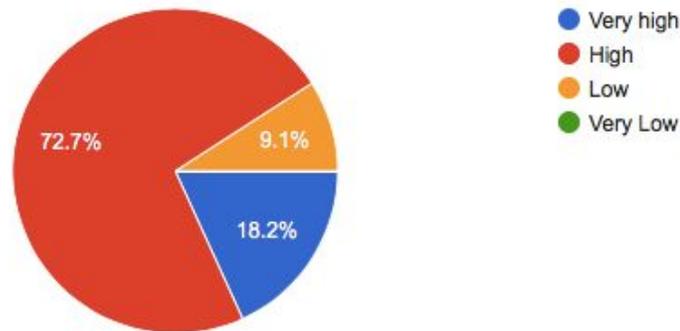
11 responses



The data told me that my students had an overall positive perception about their art skills at the beginning of the course. Only two students saw themselves as having fair skills. This was promising to me and I felt good about the results of the initial survey as the research began. In addition to their skills I asked them about how they viewed their motivation when they were given an art project.

## How would you describe your motivation level when approaching an art project?

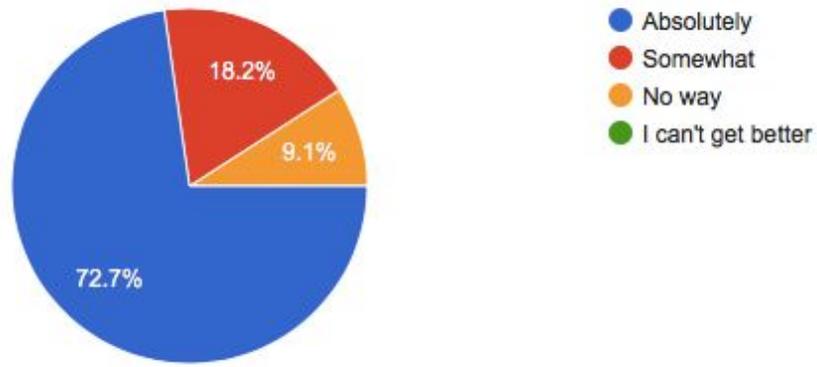
11 responses



The student who answered that his motivation level was low, Nick, also viewed himself as having fair art skills. An other art student, Alex, expressed that he saw his skills as low, however, he also said his motivation was high. From these survey questions, I couldn't confidently say that there was any sort of relationship between their perceived skill level and motivation.

## Do you want to get better at art?

11 responses



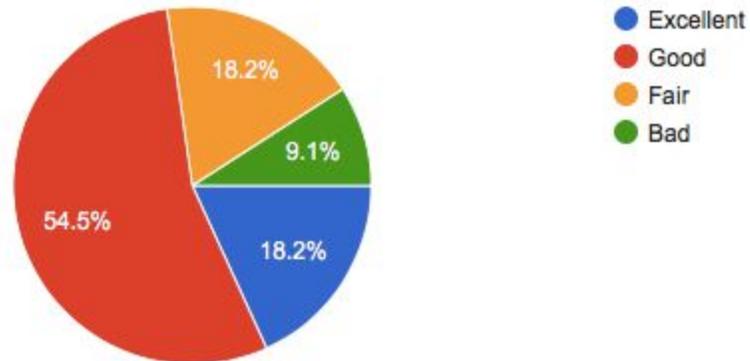
Despite his perceived “fair” art skills, Alex’s high motivation level was additionally supported by his desire to “absolutely” get better at art as expressed in the survey. During his projects he was motivated and exhibited this motivation with engaged behavior during class. He worked to get his projects completed on time. Alex additionally missed several classes due to illness, and still completed his work on time and with a good attitude.

Nick’s project was also completed on time, he had a good attitude while working, and seemed to enjoy the process. However, this particular student, on his post instruction survey expressed a different view of his art skills.



## How would you describe your art skills up to this point?

11 responses

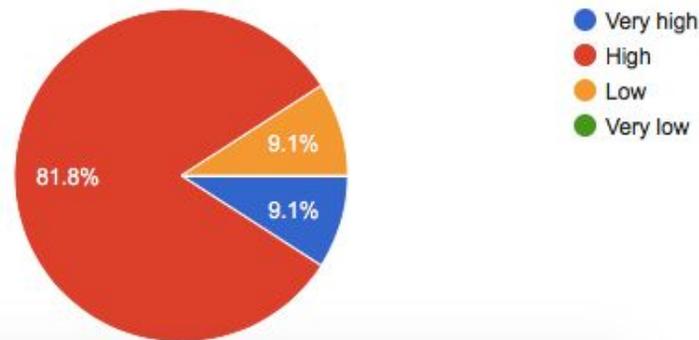


Nick now, at the completion of the trimester and the research project, said he saw his skills as bad. This shift in viewpoint could be as a result of the survey being given on a different day and after experiences the students had had throughout the semester with their art. This was not the only change from pre-instruction to post-instruction survey data. More students saw themselves as having both excellent or fair skills.

The motivation data changed slightly after the action based research. One student reported seeing themselves as possessing a very high level of motivation and only one having a fair level of motivation. Though slight, there seems to be evidence of elevated motivation from the pre-survey data.

## How would you describe your motivation level when approaching an art project?

11 responses



Something that the perception survey data didn't show was the change in motivation among students whose parents didn't sign to give their students permission to participate or students not assenting to participate in the research project. One student in particular, came into class with a negative attitude about both his ability and art class in general, and with the proverbial chip on his shoulder. Instructing students to draw can be challenging regardless, however, when a student has a negative self view the job becomes even more challenging. I worked hard to give feedback to each of my students and this formative feedback seemed to increase this particular student's motivation and engagement in my class. After he completed his assignment, he sought the opportunity to create even more art, he got his classmates involved in a printmaking activity that was not even part of the curriculum. He showed motivation to learn a new art medium and showed his enthusiasm with a positive attitude. As the teacher I developed a relationship with my students and he trusted me. I know this was the case because he took risks in class, and outside of class he often would approach me and he engaged in conversation and

openly shared about his life. The rapport I built with my students helped to create trust and fed student confidence and increased motivation.

### **Teaching Methods and Formative Feedback**

Utilizing an exploratory approach when I taught the curriculum, students tried different approaches to their art, tried various art mediums, made mistakes, and saw how all those experiences resulted in a polished piece of work. In the sixth grade class I introduced several different art mediums. Each day the students experimented with a new medium. While they were trying various art mediums, they also were exposed to the Elements and Principles of Art. They explored the use of them in particular, line, shape, space, color, contrast, and texture. From the first to the last experimental piece, students demonstrated better understanding of these. Their increased understanding of design likely stemmed from the formative feedback that they were given as they proceeded through each of the exercises.

Once the initial exploration activities were completed, students tore and then reassembled their art into an entirely new piece of artwork. This piece which demonstrated a cohesive composition from three very separate experiences and art mediums. After, they decided on an animal and created the eyes, nose, with some also choosing to do the ears, from paper and oil pastel. Finally students added the finishing step of adding texture with black india ink.

**Reconstructed piece**



**Animal eyes and nose (and ears) being added**



**Parts glued and fur textures added with india ink**



Hollie, created a goat and was very engaged as a result of this exploratory approach. She came in outside of class to work on completing the work when we lost class time due to a snow

day. The resulting piece was fun, and more importantly it showed growth in design skills over the duration of the project. Increased motivation is evidenced in her willingness to complete the work she had started and also found value in doing.

Formative feedback for my seventh grade students helped to increase my students skills in drawing. Initially, students were asked to draw the most difficult thing for artists to draw -hands. Following a series of drawing exercises focused on drawing the hand, students showed marked improvement.

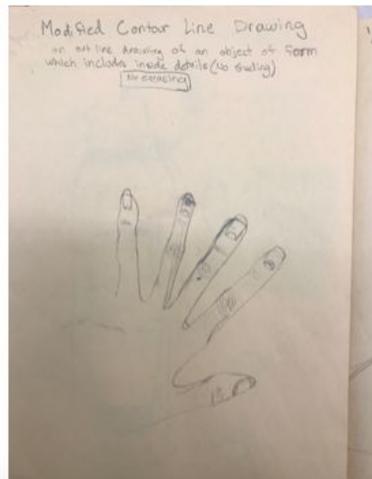
**Pre-Instruction drawing**



**Second attempt - with instruction in contour drawing (shows student's own self assessment)**



**Third attempt - with instruction in modified contour drawing**



By the third and final drawing of the exercise, this student, Sally showed an increase in detail representation and proportion. During each of the post instruction drawings I rotated around giving the students formative feedback. I used each drawing as information as to what each individual student needed to work on to improve their drawing skills. After the initial hand drawing exercise students moved onto drawing still life objects.

**Student choice for still life - sticky notes used to provide feedback**



Through the use of sticky notes that I gave the students, I shared with them feedback. I presented in a more concrete way feedback for the students so they later reflected on it. Using formative assessment, drawing lessons proceeded with more practice and with deeper understanding until students had created the final drawing project.

**Sally's final line drawing****Line drawing cut into four sections****Sally experiments to get the correct color by mixing oil pastel**

Evident in the detail of her drawing, the unique perspective, and her very challenging objects, Sally showed improved skill. Though she struggled, she persevered in drawing some very difficult objects which she had chosen herself. Formative feedback gave Sally the information she needed to stick with her drawing and learn to tackle the challenges she encountered.

**Sally's finished piece**



Evidenced in her final and completed art piece, Sally understood and utilized a color scheme. She also took great care in executing her design using each medium. Her work was neat and carefully done. Sally's project showed how both formative assessment and motivation in utilizing formative feedback resulted in a successful piece of art. Sally was very proud of her artwork, took her time, and completed it with great care.

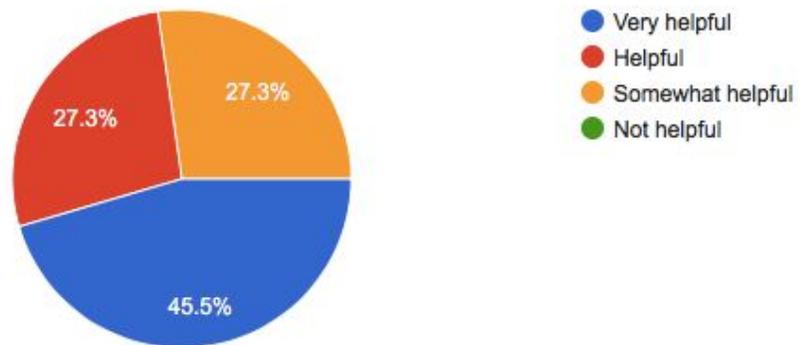
Perception survey data taken before the research began showed that a greater amount of students reported that they found formative feedback very helpful than what was shown in the post survey.



*Pre instruction survey*

**When you receive constructive criticism or feedback on your art do you find it**

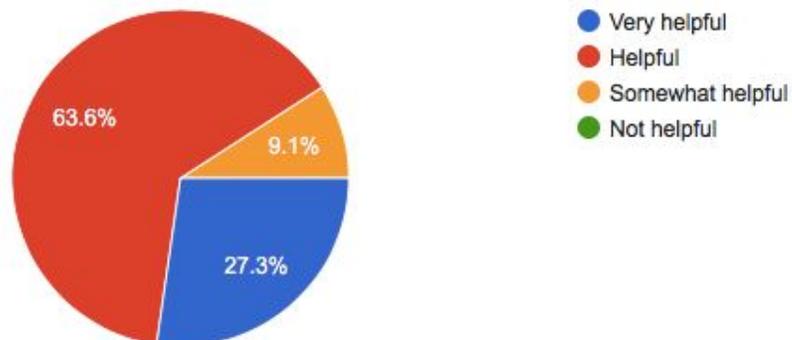
11 responses



*Post instruction survey*

**When you receive constructive criticism or feedback on your art do you find it**

11 responses



Less students expressed they found formative feedback somewhat helpful on the second survey. This was evidence that more students came to see the value of feedback to their learning. The number of students in the pre survey reported that formative feedback was somewhat helpful, and it went down to one student from three students.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

I have made several conclusions from the data that I collected. Student demographics helped me to understand some of the effects on student perception and student motivation. I concluded that I couldn't draw any concrete conclusions about any particular group of students. In particular, students from certain socioeconomic backgrounds. I learned that students were both motivated and unmotivated and that the factors for motivation had a number of causes, and couldn't be pinned to one's level socioeconomic status. Specifically, I couldn't find a strong correlation that students were lacking motivation based on their economic status at home. I saw that one of the biggest influences to student motivation was their attendance in class. Student attendance had one of the greatest effects on positive student perception and motivation. The students who are absent frequently, or had planned absences, failed to complete their work. They fell behind and missed important content, instruction, and work time. They were unable to keep up with their work, the process, and as a result struggled to catch up, directly leading to a negative perceptions of skills, motivation, and the subject of art in general. The students which attended school regularly, participated in the class, are were up to date with assignments, demonstrated positive attitude, perception, and motivation. Students from both middle and upper class families, and families in situations of high poverty fell behind, lacked motivation, and engagement if they didn't attend class regularly. The formative assessment strategies could work

to help those students if they weren't in class to receive the feedback. If students missed class they missed the important opportunities to use exploratory learning to build their confidence and motivation.

Additionally, the data also suggested that students enjoyed the exploratory learning process. I observed increased student engagement in the classroom setting, and it was clear that the students enjoyed having the opportunity to manipulate various mediums and being able to exercise choice about what they created and how they did it. Throughout each of the projects student were engaged. By exploring, the students were able to make choices about their artwork, and allowed for increased ownership over their art. Ownership over their work, allowed for students increased value in what they were doing, thus they had increased amount of pride in both their work and its outcome. However, this engagement unraveled for students as they were absent, or when class time was lost for other reasons. This showed the importance of student attendance so as not to miss instruction and having had the opportunity to create from that instruction.

In order to continue fostering student growth and positive student perception, formative feedback must be a priority for any teacher. Though tedious to manage and monitor by the teacher(s), student benefits far outweigh the work by the teacher. These methods fostered and encouraged a growth mindset which is especially important for an art student, when many believe they are stuck at the skill level they find themselves at at that current moment, as supported through Amorino's (2009) research. Implementation of formative assessment strategies takes dedication to see through by both the teacher and the students. Teachers should be adequately prepared to use formative assessment strategies and be confident in using them. It

is important to continue using these strategies, even when it seems cumbersome tedious. By establishing high expectations for the quality of work and level of thinking students will need, they will rise to those expectations. Donna Beegle (2003) expressed this in her experience especially among students who lived in high poverty situations. While they are in the midst of their work, I asked questions which helped them to reflect on both their process and the outcomes which helped to guide the exploratory approach using the formative feedback as the channel by which it was accomplished. Given the benefits, the implementation can be expanded further across curricula. It would be necessary then to do some professional development with teachers unfamiliar with the variety of formative assessment methods. Expanding the practices, working collaboratively, and assessing the success of these changes will help to make certain that the strategies are working. Being consistent will ensure that the students know what to expect in the process and begin to see the benefits from it.

Holding students to high standards is paramount. It is important to expect great things of their work and thoughtful execution of it. When students do not have an opportunity to do this, due to absences, there must be time provided and space for the student to make up the time and work accordingly. This could be during the afterschool program, recess, or study hall. As a school, the importance of attendance and daily participation must be encouraged and enforced. Whatever chronic issues prevented students from coming to school should be addressed with the family and students through the office as well as the teachers. Getting the support and encouragement will reinforce the benefits of education and hard work which are essential in helping students attend to the work they missed when absent. An educator's interest in a student's overall success is the cornerstone to building relationship. Relationship made the

formative feedback more successful as students trusted me. It takes time to establish relationships and it is essential to make connections with students. This is especially important when working with students in poverty. Donna Beegle found in her research that students wanted teachers who believed in them and found value in them as people, and “showed them what was good about them” (Beegle, 2003). My research and experiences told me this as well, building meaningful relationships helped to build confidence and engagement. Regardless of economic status, all students want to know they can be successful, that they matter, and that they were wanted in school. With absences, it was hard to establish the relationships necessary for the greatest amount of success when formative assessment is used. When using exploratory learning students must trust the teacher. Trust meant that the students felt comfortable taking risks, which happened very often when exploratory processes are being used.

In order to aptly expose students to feedback which helped them build their skills and confidence, thus their motivation, successful formative assessment and exploratory learning depended upon several things. Teachers must have professional development in the area of formative assessment. It was apparent that a student’s attendance was of utmost importance as well. While a student is in the classroom they are both exposed to opportunities that if they otherwise wouldn’t be if they missed school. Being in school allowed student and teacher relationship to be established and thrive. Students trusted to hear feedback. Students trusted to take risks. Being in school, a student’s attendance was paramount in helping to increase motivation and build student confidence.

### **Personal Learning Reflection**

When I decided upon a research question, I wanted to make the research as meaningful to me and my practice as possible. I knew that I would be spending a significant part of my life collecting, analyzing, and then writing about my experience and findings, therefore I reflected upon the struggles I have had in the past and the various tools I had learned through workshops and conferences. I decided that home, here in Farmington, was the most important place to begin. After I learned about the huge impact poverty has on education after a workshop day with Donna Beegle, I was inspired and reflected upon the experiences I have had in the past teaching at a school in a high poverty district. I reflected on the many times students expressed that they didn't understand why they needed to learn about art. I had many students with negative attitudes about their art ability. I had noticed it was often that students were likely living in high poverty households. I wondered if there were connections between the two. I wanted to help these students to see that their ability was not a fixed thing. I wanted them to know that art could be something positive they could do and that it was important, and that art was all around them.

Having done this research has impacted my life as a teacher in a number of ways. I have been able to reflect on my teaching in ways I had never done before. I've found myself using reflective practices to analyze the changes which I made and continue to make in my classroom. I have found additionally that my teaching has been reinvigorated in an exciting way. I have seen my students' success, and my own, in ways that I have found refreshing and fun.

The process of research has been a daunting one. Having never done any professional research before, I have had to learn an entirely new process. I have found that the process of

research is not neat, in fact it can be downright both confusing and messy. Reflecting upon the research question and the process which I have embarked on the past several months I have decided that I had chosen a question which was very complicated with many aspects to it. I can honestly say that the data I collected was numerous and sorting through this was overwhelming, making sense of it all was a challenge, and deciding which data was most valuable and telling. I learned that this process caused me to eat drink and dream research. I constantly thought about my research and what it might be showing me about my students and my teaching.

This research has helped me to learn that I can grow as an educator. I have found myself climbing out of the rut I had found myself in. The journey that graduate school has been for me has helped me to see I truly make a difference in my students' lives if I apply current strategies for teaching to address the ever changing issues I encounter on a daily basis, and in particular in the area in which I live. I am fortunate to have had this experience and overall I have learned an amazing amount about myself, my students, and my teaching.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Parent Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Danielle Guerrette and I am your child's art teacher. This year as a part of my masters program in Educational Leadership at the University of Maine at Farmington I am conducting research on how the use of formative assessment can influence a student's motivation, confidence, and achievement in a high poverty school district. I believe that as your child's art teacher it is important that I help them to see that art is an opportunity to grow in ability and in creativity. It is through assessments that I will be able to encourage students in understanding the ways in which their skills, and thus their work, can improve. Once a student is aware of what ways they can make improvements, they can begin to make changes in their work and therefore see progress in their learning. For my part in the research, I will begin by giving students surveys which ask them about their previous experience in art class, as well as about the kinds of assessments they have experienced during art activities. They will be given this survey at the beginning and at the end of the research. In class, I will be very deliberate about the way that I give students feedback on their work. I will be doing so in such a way that the feedback will focus on day to day progress and student growth. It is through these formative assessment strategies that I aim to increase communication with your child about their own specific learning needs in my classroom. There will be no punishment for not participating in the research project and no detraction from the education that which they will receive.

Thank you for your consideration for your child's participation in this project. I believe that they will find the assessments valuable and helpful to their growth as an art student. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any concerns or questions that you may have.

Thank you,  
 Danielle Guerrette  
 Mt. Blue Middle School  
 (207)778-3511 ex.238  
[dguerrette@mtbluersd.org](mailto:dguerrette@mtbluersd.org)

By signing this you are giving your consent for your child to participate in this research study.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

### **Appendix B - Student Consent**

I am doing a study to see if formative assessment tools help to improve student motivation, confidence, and achievement in a school district with a high rate of poverty. I believe greatly in the importance of giving feedback to my students. Giving you, my student, feedback on your work is critical to your knowing ways that you can improve in your artwork.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked about your experience with art class, art assessment, and overall feelings about your art class experience. You will be asked, in the form of a survey, both the beginning of my study and at the end as well.

There will be not penalty for not participating in this study. By not participating your grade will not be impacted in a negative way. If you do choose to participate, your grade will not be impacted positively either. The risks you may experience could possibly be that you may feel uncomfortable with sharing your opinion about your experience in art on a survey. The benefits to participation is that you will experience greater feedback about your artwork as well as increased growth in skill and motivation.

If you sign this paper, you are assenting to fill out two surveys and offer your input about your experience in art class as a result of the teaching and formative assessment strategies. You may stop participation in the study at any time you wish.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

**Appendix C - Teacher Consent**

I am doing a study to see if formative assessment tools help to improve student motivation, confidence, and achievement in a school district with a high rate of poverty. I believe greatly in the importance of giving feedback to my students. Giving my students feedback on their work is critical in their knowing what are ways they can improve in their work.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked about your experience with arts integration in your own classroom and your overall feelings it. You will be asked, in the form of a survey at the beginning of my study.

There will be not penalty for not participating in this study. The risks you may experience could possibly be that you may feel uncomfortable with sharing your opinion or experience with arts integration. The benefits to participation is that you will have an opportunity to reflect upon your own practice in the classroom.

If you sign this paper, you are agreeing to fill out one survey at the start of my research and offer your input about your experience with arts integration in your classroom. You may stop participation in the study at any time you wish.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

## Appendix D - Administrator Consent

Dear Dr. Ward,

As you may know I am currently enrolled and working to earn my masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine at Farmington. As the capstone of my work thus far, I am required to conduct a research project. I have chosen to see how formative assessment and teaching strategy can affect the motivation and achievement of my students attending school in a high poverty school district. My research will begin in December pending IRB approval and end with a presentation in May on the UMF campus. Research will occur during my class times with consenting students from one sixth, one seventh, and one eighth grade class. For the intended research I will be using the Artistic Impetus method of teaching art, in which students will experience art in a highly exploratory manner. In addition, these students will be given formative assessment frequently to help guide them towards greater progress and learning. The student population which will be used may have students who are receiving special education services as well as students who have been identified as gifted and talented.

What I am asking:

- Permission to use the Artistic Impetus method when I teach
- Permission to give two separate surveys to my participating students, with the first being given at the start of the research and the second upon concluding the research.
- Permission to gather demographic data from Powerschool, specifically there town of residence and their parent's occupations.
- Permission to access demographic data about the number of students receiving free or reduced meals here at school, as well as student attendance.
- Permission to give perception surveys to the community teachers to inquire about their perception and experience with arts integration in their own classroom.

I will:

- Inform parents of the nature of my study and gather consent forms from the parents of the students choosing to participate.
- Inform students of the nature of my study and gather consent forms from them as well.
- Inform both the parents and students that participation is voluntary and will not impact their scores for the class.

I will not share with anyone information which is identifiable about certain participating students. If you have any further questions about this research project, please contact myself or Dr. Chris Strople at UMF.

By signing this form you are consenting to allow me to collect surveys from both my participating students and colleagues, access Powerschool for certain demographic data, and collect demographic data from the school also about attendance and free and reduced lunch numbers.

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(printed name)

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(date)

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(signature)

## Appendix E - Surveys

### Student Survey

1. Where did you attend grade school?
  - a. Cascade Brook
  - b. Academy Hill
  - c. Cape Cod Hill
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Are you
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to identify
  
3. What extracurricular activities (activities after school hours) do you participate in?
  - a. Dance
  - b. Organized school sports
  - c. Town rec sports
  - d. Music lessons
  - e. Art lessons
  - f. Boy/Girl Scouts
  - g. 4H
  - h. Voice lessons
  - i. Music groups (fiddlers, jazz band etc.)
  - j. Martial arts
  - k. Religious youth groups
  - l. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How would you describe your art skills up to this point?
  - a. Excellent
  - b. Good
  - c. Fair
  - d. Bad

5. How would you describe your overall art class experience up to this point?

- e. Excellent
- f. Good
- g. Fair
- h. Bad

6. How would you describe your motivation level when approaching an art project?

- a. Very high
- b. High
- c. Low
- d. Very low

7. Do you want to get better at art?

- a. Absolutely
- b. Somewhat
- c. No way
- d. I can't get better

8. When you receive constructive criticism or feedback on your art do you find it :

- a. Very helpful
- b. Helpful
- c. Somewhat helpful
- d. Not helpful



**Teacher Survey**

1. What community do you teach on?
  - a. Redington
  - b. Bigelow
  - c. Katahdin
  - d. I teach on more than one
  
2. What subject do you teach?
  - a. Math
  - b. Science
  - c. Language Arts
  - d. Social studies
  - e. I am a Special Education teacher and I teach both Math and ELA
  
3. Per week on average- How many lessons or activities use arts integration? (this could be art discussion/journaling, drawing/illustration, sculptures, painting, printmaking etc.)
  - a. 0-1
  - b. 2-4
  - c. 4 +
  - d. Other
  
4. What sort of arts integration do you allow for your students in class?
  - a. Art discussion
  - b. Art journaling
  - c. Drawing/illustration opportunities
  - d. Poster making
  - e. Digital art opportunities (presentations, movie making, etc.)
  - f. Collage
  - g. Printmaking
  - h. Sculptures
  - i. Other
  
4. What is the biggest reason you would be prevented from allowing for arts integration in your classroom?

- a. Not enough time
- b. I am not confident in using arts integration in my lessons and activities.
- c. The lessons and activities we do in class do not lend themselves to arts integration.
- d. Lack of access to supplies.