



Motivating Students to Learn and Achieve in Art

Motivate (v) – to provide with an incentive; to move to action; to impel

Pam Stephens

As a teacher candidate, the act of motivating your students to learn and achieve in art might seem to be a daunting chore. Perhaps you are asking yourself how you, as a novice educator, can go about setting the stage for quality art learning that leads to student achievement. While there is no singular or simple answer to that query, this article provides three key conditions to contemplate as you develop your teaching strategy. Keep in mind that students who are intrinsically motivated to learn are more apt to achieve and produce higher quality work. Extrinsic rewards such as candy, parties, or other treats are short-term approaches that rarely contribute to learning and achievement.

1. Help students become active participants in their own learning.

Allow students to have input into setting classroom policies, procedures, goals, and activities. Students who set guidelines are more likely to live by them. Here are two examples. First-grade students who set rules about acceptable limits for talking in class usually become self-enforcers. High school students who are provided opportunities to select whether to work alone or in a group are more apt to stay on task.

2. Help students develop a sense of competency.

Students of all ages feel capable and more confident in their learning when they are provided opportunities to triumph over challenging assignments. Provide coursework that prompts students to think deeply about their beliefs or actions. For instance, students of all ages are capable of contemplating who can be an artist or what can be an art. Further, make sure that assignments stretch imaginations. Instead of giving rigid instructions, give flexible parameters that encourage varied and unique solutions.

3. Help each student feel a vital part of the learning environment.

Use an active listening approach. Always clarify that you understand what a student asks or responds. Ask: “Do I understand correctly...?” to make sure that you correctly comprehend the conversation. Avoid sarcasm in all responses to student inquiries or comments. Be clear in approval and disapproval of student actions. Discipline in private; praise in public. ☺

Reference

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Fourth Ed., 2000. Retrieved from www.bartleby.com/61/

Checklist of Student Motivators

- Praise for a job well done.
- Good phone calls or notes home.
- Display student work.
- Attend events with students.
- Say “thank you” often.
- Laugh when the occasion calls for it.
- Greet students by name, not only in the artroom but elsewhere.
- Let students know that you love what you do.
- Model that learning is a life-long endeavor. Remember that gaps in your own knowledge are opportunities to learn with your students.

Photo: Student teacher Shelly Scott actively listens and provides feedback about a student's artwork.

Dr. Pam Stephens is a SchoolArts advisory board member and she coordinates the art education program at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff. Send questions or comments to Pamela.Stephens@nau.edu