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Motivating Students for Success in Art Education

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art and Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Art Education

by
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ABSTRACT

Motivating Students for Success in Art Education

by

Melissa Leonard

This study is intended to analyze the differences of elementary age students from two different public elementary schools and their motivation to learn about art. The analysis will compare and contrast the results of my efforts as an art educator to present the same curricular information to both groups of students.

I have examined the demographics, the parent involvement, and the other areas affecting the students of the two schools in which I have taught during my seven years as an elementary art educator. My purpose in completing this study has been to better understand how to meet the needs of my current students who seem to struggle considerably in the art classroom when compared to the students I have previously taught. I wish to better understand what shapes the minds and attitudes of our students today whom we teach in art programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Upon beginning this project of writing a thesis for my graduate studies work, I really was not sure what topic area I wanted to focus on. During discussions with my committee chair person and Art Education professor, Professor Emeritus David Logan, from East Tennessee State University, he inquired about my experiences at the school in which I currently teach.

When I initially enrolled at ETSU and met Professor Logan, I was working at an elementary school in Northeast Tennessee. Professor Logan visited my school, saw my students' work, and was very impressed with the learning that seemed to be taking place. After relocating to Georgia, I spoke to Professor Logan about my new school and started to answer the questions that he asked me in our conversation. My answers about my new teaching experience sounded very different compared to my past experiences. I told him about the changes that I had seen in student work, attitudes, and success since my new teaching position in Georgia had began. I tried to explain what I thought the differences were in a few sentences and expressed my personal frustration with trying to teach these students at the same level as my prior students. Professor Logan then asked me if I had thought of using this as a topic for my thesis work. I had not, but it seemed like the most obvious idea because it has been first and foremost in my mind since I began teaching at my new school.

To retain anonymity as well as for ease in readability, I will refer to the school in Tennessee as School A and the school in Georgia as School B throughout my paper.

School B was a new facility when I started working there. The community surrounding School B is being flooded with new housing developments and there was a definite need for a new elementary school because of overcrowding in the surrounding schools. It was a very exciting experience to open a new school. The faculty, students, and administration were all enthusiastic about this new start in our beautiful multi-million dollar facility.

I was starting out with a group of students who were new to me; therefore, I had to learn about their abilities and past experiences with art. I found that most students at School B were not as comfortable with art as my former students in Tennessee had been. I had many new ideas to expose my students to the wonderful world of art and I was enthusiastic about instilling a stronger interest and perhaps a love of art within each of them.

My curriculum in Georgia is very similar to the curriculum I had followed in Tennessee. The Georgia art curriculum is slightly more detailed and has a pacing guide for teachers to follow so that students hopefully will be taught the same art concepts at the same time to make transitions from one school to the next a smoother experience in a student's education.

During my three years at School B, I have began focusing a great amount of energy on creating lessons that will tie into Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum since I was not familiar with the Georgia curriculum. This is an area that is being emphasized by our state and county's current art curriculums and by our school system's art coordinator. This has also been a growing trend in art education throughout the past several years. I believe that these ties to the curriculum make the learning much more relevant in the lives of students and this type of learning is what truly affects us as we build on our knowledge of one subject area to the next.

I have found many ways to link what I am teaching to the regular classroom areas of study and have seen how this is making a positive difference in my teaching experience in this new environment. Because School B is a new school, we are still finding our place as a community of learners. It takes time to build a rapport with faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community so that your school has its own identity within the community. Our efforts to create this feeling of a close knit community is also challenged by the fact that our enrollment is growing towards eight hundred students and the community itself is full of newcomers because the area is filling up with new homes. I feel that my efforts to connect with classroom teachers and their studies have helped me to build a better relationship with them and to open up the lines of communication that can help promote a positive school environment for students.

I have been working very closely with the fourth grade team of teachers for the past two years. This partnership began as a result of a pilot program that our school was involved with at the High Museum of Art called “I See Literacy”. The pilot program’s goal has been to create workshops for teachers and a tour for students that would help in teaching students to read works of art. The pilot program has now turned into a completed project that offers these tours and workshops to all schools.

During this two-year pilot program the opportunity for me to build a strong relationship with the fourth grade team has helped our students grow immensely in their knowledge and comfort level of viewing and talking about artworks. During the first year of the pilot program, we were fortunate to have a special exhibit of glass artist, Dale Chihuly’s, artwork at the Atlanta Botanical Gardens. The fourth grade students had studied the artwork of Dale Chihuly the previous year when they were third graders. They were fascinated by his work and the glassblowing process. I had scheduled a guest artist come to our school to help the third grade students create a Chihuly inspired chandelier which is now on permanent display in our media center. When I heard about the exhibit at the Botanical Gardens, I knew that I wanted to plan something special for my students.

The fourth grade teachers had already scheduled a fieldtrip to the botanical gardens that school year. They wanted my help in planning the fieldtrip so that the students could learn more about Dale Chihuly’s sculptures and so we could make connections together with what the students were studying in language arts and with the I See Literacy Program. The result of our collaboration was a packet I created for students to use during their field experience at the gardens. The packet included different stops throughout the garden that allowed students to view works of art, write and sketch about what they saw, and to incorporate different viewing strategies that they had learned about in the “I See Literacy” program. Also, the ties to the language arts curriculum were very strong because I had worked with the fourth grade teachers in the creation of the packet. Some of the activities included in the packet involved students in

using adjectives to describe works of art, comparing and contrasting the sculptures with the plants or other objects, and a stop in the Japanese Garden to write a Haiku about their experience there. The students were very excited about the trip and they enjoyed the packet as well. We followed up at school by sharing their writings, sketches of orchids and sculptures, and photos with the entire school in a special display of their work. The classroom teachers also planned follow-up activities to incorporate what was learned from the field experience into their classroom studies.

In second grade we have studied Australian art and Japanese Sumi-e painting which correlated with the second grade studies of those countries. At the same time third grade was studying the Amazon, we were creating Frida Kahlo inspired portraits accompanied by the students favorite Amazon animal. These lessons and many more that I have designed, make curriculum ties to the Georgia state curriculum and have inspired our students to learn more about art history and a variety of artists. Teachers have consistently commented that their students will interject during a lesson in math, social studies, science, or language arts that they are studying this same thing in Ms. Leonard's art class.

These efforts have allowed me to gradually build more enthusiasm and support in our school for the art program. Even though we have had many successes at School B, it has not been an easy path. I see and feel the differences in my efforts as an art educator and my students' abilities at School B in creating art and expressing themselves creatively every day. What seemed so natural for my students at School A to experiment with different art materials and drawing and painting techniques now seem to be a laborious task for my students in School B. Much of what I see and hear that is different is the students' attitudes. The students' attitudes are different not just about art, but about working and trying new things. I constantly hear the words "I can't", "I need help", or the rolling of eyes and slumping in chairs at the idea of a new experience. We do overcome these to have the successes that I mentioned earlier, but it is with much effort and encouragement from me that allows us to do so. There is also a serious issue

with behavior at School B. Many times, my enthusiasm and high spirits for my new lesson are crushed when I am constantly interrupted with tattling, arguing, and bickering throughout a lesson or demonstration. Students' listening skills tend to be very poor most of the time. Even though they may seem to be looking and paying attention, they cannot follow directions after they are given without multiple repetitions. There also seems to be much less motivation to learn as well as a fear of failure at every point throughout a lesson. These interruptions in the classroom as well as the need for constant reteaching and review create a stressful situation for me as an art educator. As mentioned earlier, I am expected to follow a pacing guide within my curriculum. With only forty-five minutes per week for each student in art class, it becomes imperative to move quickly through lessons in order to keep up with the pacing guide. I am aware of how long it should take to finish a particular lesson from my years of experience as an art teacher, and I can see that it takes my students at School B much longer to complete any given task.

I constantly discuss these differences in my students' behavior with my educational peers to try and come to some understanding of what is going on at School B that is so different. How can I help these students to succeed? How can I help them overcome their fears of failure and their lack of motivation to try new things? How can I help them to listen and follow directions better in the classroom with fewer disruptions? Is it just me that is having these problems, or are my colleagues seeing the same issues in their different subject areas and teaching environments? All of my colleagues have expressed the same frustrations in their own classrooms and are even amazed at the results of our efforts in the art classroom that they see on display in the hallways of our schools.

Knowing that I am very capable of reaching students at this level only makes the job seem more frustrating for me personally. I have asked myself many times, "what am I doing differently now?" It is not that my students are failing in art. I simply feel that their lack of social skills, and motivation to learn, or perhaps even their skills at becoming successful learners are

standing in the way of them reaching their full potential or as I like to tell my students “their personal best”. After considering the idea of researching and writing on this topic, I deemed it to be a perfect opportunity for me to answer questions in my own mind. Careful research and thought about the two schools in which I have taught allowed useful insight into my own methods of teaching as well as what is really going on inside the walls of my new school and the minds of my new students. It is my hope that through this project, I will become better equipped to meet students’ needs and guide them towards new levels of success.

Two questions needed to be addressed: how do I determine the needs of my students; and what do I consider to be the glaring differences in the two groups of students that I have taught at the elementary level? The most obvious difference at face value in the two groups is one of race. However, when you look more closely at what is going on in the classroom the most obvious difference in the two groups of students is their ability to listen and follow directions. My students in Tennessee were mostly Caucasian by a 73% to 27% ratio. My new school is mostly African American with very few Caucasian children. I never believed when I entered into my new position that this would make that much of a difference in teaching. After all, I did have experience teaching African American students and had seen no differences in my classroom and the way that I needed to approach their needs. Both schools were identified as Title I schools, so one would assume that the students’ educational needs might be similar because their socioeconomic backgrounds are relatively the same. I have considered many things that I will present in the paper, such as race, socioeconomic background, parent involvement, administration, and the attitudes of students, parents, and teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this paper is to help me to find out more about the differences in my current students when compared to my previous students’ abilities to learn. Since moving to my school in Georgia, I have found it very difficult to motivate students to learn, to keep the students that I teach interested in what is going on in the classroom, and to aspire to the same levels of

achievement in the subject of art education that seemed routine in my previous school. Questioning my own methods, I have asked other teachers in my school if they experience the same types of problems with lack of student motivation, misbehavior, and lack of effort in the classroom as I do. I have found that many other teachers do share in my feelings, but helpful suggestions typically are given only for a specific student, not in the broader question of how we can make a change in the school climate as it relates to student motivation and a desire to learn. I want to help my students overcome those things that stand in their way of achieving their greatest potential in art. I want not only to teach students the content of art, but to teach them how to be caring and responsible citizens in our world which I think is an important role in a teacher's job as well.

Research Direction

I have examined the topics of African American students, the effects of a low socioeconomic background on students, the effects of parental involvement on student achievement and motivation to learn, the positive effects of using character education in elementary schools, as well as the attitudes of African American students towards learning and their teachers. It is my hope that my findings will help me to better address the needs of my students so that they may be successful, eager learners in today's society.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a close look at what other researchers and educators have found when looking at African American students, the effects of a low socioeconomic background on students, the importance of parental support within the schools as a means of increasing student achievement., as well as the attitudes of African American students toward learning in general and their teachers in particular. I also discuss the uses of character education and Positive Discipline in the public schools and their effects on student behavior and academic performance.

One of the most perplexing questions in the minds of educators is how do we motivate students to learn? Students of low-socioeconomic minority backgrounds can face many challenges as they are generally thought to be “at risk” in the area of student achievement. This chapter will provide the foundation for understanding why these students may face unique challenges in the classroom and ways that educators can help these students to succeed.

There are researchers who have gone to students to look for answers as to what problems children feel they face in school today. I agree that it is important to look to students for answers to a variety of problems that occur in the classroom. For example, in the art classroom I feel that it is very beneficial to allow students to reflect on their choices as a consequence of disruptive behavior in the classroom. I do this by allowing students to write, or draw if the students are unable to write words or sentences, about what they were doing that had a negative effect on their learning and what they should do in the future to have a positive impact on their ability to learn. This allows students to see that they are in control of their actions and that they have the power to make choices that will affect their success in school. Children are typically very honest in their evaluations of their situation and can usually find solutions to simple problems in the

classroom if given the option. In a study conducted by Tucker, Herman, Pederson, Vogel, and Reinke (2000), African American high school and elementary students were surveyed to obtain their views on how to enhance academic success.

The survey was divided into four components. First, the students were asked what they considered to be problem behaviors in the school setting. Secondly, students were asked what causes behavior problems at school for African American children. Thirdly, students were asked what parents and teachers could do to help them make better grades. Lastly, students were asked how students could promote their own academic success.

The students involved in the study were asked about what they consider to be behavior problems in the classroom. When looking at the responses from elementary age students, the highest number of students responded that disruptive behavior or horseplay was the main behavior problem in the classroom. Other problems listed in order of highest level of responses include inattention/lack of motivation, physical aggression, disrespecting teacher, dishonesty, and anger/bad attitude. Their opinions of the causes of these problems are listed in order of highest level of responses and include lack of parenting/family, peer pressure, need for attention/power, don't know, lack of self-control (acting out), and racism/discrimination. The solutions for the problems as stated by the elementary students included having their parents help them to study as most helpful. Other solutions for help included the parents visiting the school and teacher and giving the students praise. The majority of students in this survey agreed that students could help themselves make better grades by studying, participating in class, asking questions, listening, and following teacher instructions.

These responses show that even though students can identify their needs, they may not be equipped to fulfill these strategies for academic success. This study also indicates that schools

could benefit from teaching students more effective self-control techniques for managing behavior and avoiding misbehavior. The students also indicated a need for positive social activities in their lives that would encourage positive behaviors and learning activities. More positive learning after-school programs could help facilitate these results. Recommended activities include the development of communication skills, public speaking skills, socialization skills, and age-appropriate daily living skills. More praise and encouragement from parents and teachers was consistently noted as a key factor in promoting good grades among African American students. In the area of homework help from parents to improve academic success, the researchers suggest providing help and training to the parents. We cannot assume they know how to effectively work with their children at home on homework assignments, especially in the older elementary years; perhaps because of new methods of teaching with which parents may not be familiar (Tucker et al., 2000 p. 217).

This point is true in the area of art education as well. By building more and more opportunities to connect with parents, art educators can help parents overcome their intimidation or lack of knowledge about art. Many parents of our children today have little or no experience in art so they may feel intimidated by the notion of attending an art exhibit with their child or they may not see the value of art education in their lives. I have had many conversations throughout the years with parents who tell me that their students are teaching them about art because of what they have learned in my classroom. The more that parents realize the value and importance of art education, the more likely they will be to encourage their students to participate and learn in art programs at school.

Tucker et al. (2000) are not the only educators who have found evidence that parental involvement can have a positive impact on student achievement. Jonson states that “all children,

especially those from low-income and ethnically diverse families, experience greater accomplishment when teachers consistently involve their parents” at school (1999, p.121). Ninety percent of teachers report that they would like to have more home-school interaction in the form of “parent-school contacts about school performance and homework supervision or enrichment activities” (Moles, 1982, p. 44). Even with the research that supports the fact that parental involvement is important to a child’s education and parents’ responses that they also feel it is important to be involved in their child’s educational experiences, more than one-third of parents do not attend parent-teacher conferences, and almost two-thirds never even talk to teachers by telephone (Epstein, 1987). Johns states that “We need to have parents working with their children, communicating with their children’s teachers and participating in their children’s schools and classrooms” (1994, p.16).

Jonson (1999) notes that even though parental involvement is very important in schools, most teachers do not receive any training in teacher education programs on how to better communicate with parents or how to involve them in the lives of their children at school. She recommends that “effective communicators contact parents on a regular, frequent basis throughout the school year with phone calls, memoranda, notices, student work, and newsletters” (Jonson, p.122). I have observed all of these efforts being made by myself and other teachers at School B, with little or no response from parents. A study done by Winters (1994, p. 3) on the participation of African American mothers in urban schools found that “enhancement of competence, the development of skills, the actualization of potential and the impetus of motivation” are by products of parental involvement. Jonson states that “this powerful combination of benefits to the child will only accrue if the parent chooses to participate” (p.122). We are not able to make a parent choose to participate, but, hopefully, with continuous effort,

more and more parents will gradually come to realize the importance of their role of being actively involved in their child's school life as well as being actively involved in their art education. A correlation between home and school can be very positive in a child's life. "When parents and teachers display reinforcing expectations and behaviors, children are more likely to respond to these expectations and behaviors" (Wagenaar & Coates, 1999, p. 221). Wagenaar and Coates stated that the social class as well as neighborhood characteristics can have a positive influence on the cognitive development of children and they also note that "grandparents can greatly aid in the development of children, particularly in poor families" (p. 222).

Elementary art teachers normally teach such large numbers of students that calling the parents of each child to introduce oneself and to talk about their child's upcoming year in art is not a realistic option. I have always sent a letter home to parents at the beginning of the school year to introduce myself, to explain my classroom behavior plan, to discuss some of the things going on in the art room that year, and to let parents know about ways that they might contribute time or materials to the art classroom. My hope is that through this initial communication with parents, they will see that I have planned many exciting things for their child to experience during the school year and that art is a very important part of their child's life. Reinforcement of these ideas throughout the school year through different means of communication helps to build this support from parents and to better educate them on just what is going on in art class. Jonson (1999) recommends written communications as an effective means of getting parents involved in the classroom.

During the past several years, another common focus of schools, in addition to the importance of parental involvement, has been the implementation of character education. "Character education is commonly defined as the process of developing in students an understanding of, commitment to, and tendency to behave in accordance with core ethical values" (Milson & Mehlig, 2002, p. 47). Character education in the public schools is no recent

trend. In 1642, character education began in the public schools in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Children went to school to receive an education so that they could read the Bible in order to learn right from wrong (Vardin, 2003). Character education continued to be taught in American schools through the school texts known as McGuffey Readers. These textbooks were used “not only to teach students to read, but to develop virtues such as honesty, hard work, kindness, courage, respect for others, charity, and thrift” (Vardin, p.32).

Character Counts is a more recent program designed to help educate students in the area of character education. This program focuses on the Six Pillars of Character which are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. In 1992, The Character Counts program was founded “when the Josephson Institute of Ethics called together more than thirty educational leaders representing state school board, teachers’ unions, universities, ethnic centers, youth organizations and religious groups. The diverse group agreed that a common language of values, used pervasively and consistently throughout a community, would be the most effective means of reaching young people” (Scholz, Harms & Moody, 2001, p. 16). The Character Counts program is now widely used among schools and a variety of settings throughout the United States. I have had first hand experience with the benefits of this program in student behavior and character development in the schools that I will discuss later.

“Educators often find themselves teaching social skills, hygiene, human sexuality, family lifestyles, and ethics” (Brown, 2004, p.47). I believe that families provide the foundation for character development, but just as we find ourselves having to provide basic life skills like tying one’s shoes, writing one’s name, etc., that we might expect students to learn at home, we also find ourselves teaching many other things such as social skills and character education at school. If character education becomes a part of the regular curriculum, it can decrease the amount of time that students spend misbehaving or arguing with one another about problems in the classroom by helping to prepare students with a better environment and mindset for learning. First grade teacher, Singh started integrating character education into her regular first grade

curriculum, and said that in just five months “ninety percent of my students showed an increased understanding of the six character traits” (2001, p.49) outlined in the Character Counts Program.

In reference to noticeable effects of the integration of character education into her teaching,

Singh also stated that:

misbehavior occurred less frequently and was unlikely to escalate when we used our new character vocabulary to talk about a problem. Our classroom was a calmer, more positive place. Second, students began to hold one another and themselves to higher standards, though I doubt that they realized it. I began to hear less tattling and more conversations among students. Students began to use the character words to resolve conflicts (2001, p.49).

Art Educator Brown stated that after teaching a unit on character using shadow puppetry “the structure of the unit helped to build a school community by having students work together” (2004, p. 52). She also said “that fourth and fifth grade students involved in this project developed an understanding of puppetry and character education traits – a step toward applying these traits in their own lives” (p. 52). Art Educator Wales’ school district mandates that each school teach character education. He found ways to incorporate the character education into his art lessons. Wales states that:

the art classroom provides many opportunities to reinforce values. Students practice citizenship when they become involved in establishing and following rules and procedures. Students learn how to maintain and care for art supplies responsibly. They model kindness and courtesy when sharing and making requests. Students cooperate during cleanup and when working on group projects. They engage in goal setting when they plan projects and stay on task (2004, p.29).

“The literature on character education typically identifies teachers as a crucial factor in the development of character in youth” (Milson & Mehlig, 2002, p. 51). Art educators Wales and Brown have found ways to incorporate character education into their current curriculum either as

a requirement by their school or simply from a personal concern for students' needs in this area. Are teachers today being trained and prepared to engage students in meaningful character-building lessons, or is it something that most teachers or schools must take upon themselves to learn and train for? "In a nationwide survey, Jones, Ryan, and Bohlin found that 'despite widespread support for character education....[it] is not currently a high priority in the curriculum of teacher education' " (Milson & Mehlig, p. 48). This seems to be a shortcoming in teacher education programs today with the increasing pressure and high expectations being placed on teachers to serve as character educators. In a study done by Milson and Mehlig, it was found that most elementary teachers feel comfortable in the area of teaching concepts of good character to their students as well as being capable of exhibiting positive character traits to their students. Their findings also showed that more religious institutions incorporate the training of teachers in character education in their teacher training programs than do secular institutions (Milson & Mehlig). My question is why wouldn't we want to train teachers to better instill good character traits in their students? Why shouldn't we make sure that we are teaching students to communicate in order to solve their problems with the epidemic of violent situations in schools today? Even in elementary schools, students are acting out with violence to solve problems. Teachers need training on how to incorporate these ideas into their daily teaching so that they can help prevent these tragic situations from occurring. I am not suggesting that we stop focusing on our curriculum and take on the job of a parent to raise a child up, I am merely suggesting that we can incorporate simple lessons into our daily plans that remind students of how they can be more well-rounded citizens. This is especially necessary in a low-income school, although our high income students are certainly not immune from the effects of violence in schools.

A point also to be considered is the number of teachers today that have not received an in-depth amount of teacher training. Many adults today from various professional backgrounds are entering into the teaching profession because of a shortage of teachers in some states. In some instances these states require very little training as long as a person is able to pass the

PRAXIS exam. Are these teachers truly ready to deal with all of the situations that we face in the classroom today?

Since I started teaching at School B, the differences in the mindset of my students, their lack of enthusiasm for learning about art, and their inability to focus when compared to my former students at School A have been very perplexing. The situation has caused me to reevaluate every aspect of my teaching to measure my own effectiveness as an art educator. One area that I have often pondered is whether differences in cultural backgrounds between my students and I might have any significance. Is it possible that I am not able to provide the same level of education to these students because they do not relate to me as a white teacher?

Casteel (2000) surveyed 160 seventh grade African American students to find their opinions on the how their Caucasian teachers treat them in the classroom, their preferences in race of classroom teachers, how they relate to their Caucasian teachers, and how these teachers relate to them as African American students. In this particular study Casteel found the following:

African American suburban seventh grade students from a low socio-economic population do not believe their race is a significant factor in the way they are treated in the classroom by their Caucasian teachers. Specifically, African American students felt their teachers were fair and were able to relate to them. Furthermore, in this study, students believed that most of their teachers liked them, did not try to embarrass them, or unduly punish them because of their race. Also, students felt that the grades (good/poor) they received did not correlate to their race (p.146).

This research points to the fact that it is possible that there may not be a difference in the ability for African American students to relate to their Caucasian teachers in the classroom.

A case study by Monroe and Obidah (2004) delves into another point that I have pondered while teaching at school B. I have noticed a difference in the way that some African American teachers speak to African American students and the way that I was used to hearing teachers at School A speak to students when addressing behavior issues. When I had just started

teaching at School B, I often felt that some teachers used unprofessional tones and responses to students when dealing with their behavior. I have come to realize that the difference is purely one of cultural differences. This is the topic of a case study conducted by Monroe and Obidah. They refer to this ability of an African American teacher to control classroom behaviors of African American students in a way that might relate better to students' everyday language as "cultural synchronization" (p. 256). They observed and documented conversations and classroom management strategies of an African American teacher in an African American middle-school classroom. Their findings suggest that this "cultural synchronization between the teacher and her students contributed to an effective style of classroom management that differs from traditional models" (p. 256). These researchers argue that other researchers and teacher educators must realize that when dealing with low-income African American students who attend urban schools the element of culture definitely shapes the means for determining what effective classroom management truly is.

Another question that educators might ask is whether or not African American students might be at a disadvantage in the classroom environment because of differences in their learning styles. Durodoyle and Hildreth (1995) addressed this issue of specific learning styles in African American students. They discuss the differences in the cognitive styles of field independence and field-dependence or field-sensitive. The field-sensitive mode is relational or characterized by the inability of the individual to separate parts from the whole (p.2). Many studies have found that African American students have field-sensitive tendencies and that children of the majority culture have more field-independent tendencies that are more analytic. Durodoyle and Hildreth also stated the following:

The tendency for schools to ignore the field-sensitive cognitive style sometimes engenders the negative mislabeling of the African American student as incompetent, lazy, or unwilling to learn. This may be exemplified by the faulty use of standardized

testing and assessment, which may not accurately depict the abilities of African American children (p.3).

I tend to disagree with the idea that African American students might be at a disadvantage due to their specific learning styles. Schools today and teacher education programs are constantly addressing the issue of different modes of learning with our students. I feel that teachers are typically aware, as am I, of the different learning styles of students and, therefore, try to teach in ways that will address a variety of learning styles to better meet the needs of our students.

Art Educator Simpson states “that a whole population of students exists for whom traditional education has proved not to be the answer. This population is particularly evident in urban schools” (1995, p.1). Simpson is convinced that “art education can and does play a vital role in the lives of many of the urban students for whom it is a course of study” (p. 1). When speaking about educational policy changes that should be made in the area of the arts Simpson states the following:

They must also reflect an awareness of the importance of the arts as a way of knowing about the world, as a way of making nonviolent statements about social and environmental problems, as a way of working cooperatively with one’s fellow students, as a means of validating one’s personal ideas, and as a way of gaining cognitive and technical skills that could help to break the poverty/disadvantage cycle.

Some of the things that Simpson has found in research to be successful in dealing with these students is for art teachers to design their curriculum around the issues that the students are facing on a daily basis, also the teachers often reward students with stickers or other simple awards for completing a portion of their assignment to make students feel a level of success and to encourage students to stay focused and to not be afraid to try new things (1995, p. 3). Better teacher training is also a solution that Simpson points to in her research. She says that “training teachers to know the population they serve is critical if they are to make effective choices about what they teach and how they teach it” (p.3).

CHAPTER 3

EXPERIENCES TEACHING IN NORTHEAST TENNESSEE

I will begin by discussing my experiences as an art educator at an elementary school in Northeast Tennessee. Prior to working in this school, I had taught one year at the high school level, and then I worked one year as the Manager of School and Youth Programs at a small Arts Center. It was merely circumstance that led me to the elementary school that I would come to love and teach in for four years.

Demographic and Other Background Information on School A

The demographic information in this section is based on the 2001-2002 school year which was my last year as an art teacher at School A. School A is a small city school located in Northeast Tennessee. The school campus is surrounded by a residential area. All students attending the school live within one and one-half miles of the school. The school serves a diverse student population of 484 students. Seventy-three percent of the students are Caucasian, 21% are African American, 5% are Hispanic, and 1% is Asian. Approximately 57% of the student population qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program. Approximately 15% of the students are bus riders. Because of the number of free or reduced lunch students and accompanying socioeconomic needs, School A is a Title I School and receives federal money that is used primarily for its reading program.

The average daily attendance for School A is 93%. The student transfer rate is 11% of students transferring out and 16% transferring in. The number of parent volunteer hours for the school year is 2,500. Programs implemented to increase community involvement and participation in school activities include Parent Teacher Organization meetings, Student Art Show, Christmas Musical, various reading programs, visiting authors, resident artists, musical performances, Field Day, Awards Day, and multicultural activities.

Reflections on School A

I was not a new teacher when I accepted the position at School A, but I was new to teaching art at the elementary level. My experiences as a student teacher, during which I taught at four different elementary schools with a wonderfully creative and experienced mentor teacher, did well to prepare me for this teaching position. As I entered into this job, I quickly found that I had much to learn and very big shoes to fill. The teacher, who had held the position as art teacher at School A, had retired after 30 years of teaching there. She was well known and loved in the community and had left me with an enormous amount of resource materials and lesson plans to comb through for ideas and inspiration.

The art curriculum for School A allowed for much flexibility and creative input from teachers. It included basic concepts that were to be taught at each grade level that generally consisted of the basic elements and principals of art. The grading system for art education was an “S” for satisfactory or “U” for unsatisfactory for both an academic grade as well as a behavior grade for all students with the exception of fifth graders who could also receive an “E” for excellent. There were no requirements on how grades were to be obtained as far as a particular amount of written assessments that needed to be given within a given grading period. Generally, elementary art teachers within the school system would give grades of “S” unless they had documented a number of failing projects or a number of behavior incidents for a particular student. The grading requirements for art teachers at the elementary level were very lax and could be decided on by the individual teacher as long as their methods were deemed to be fair and consistent.

I taught all students at School A in grades kindergarten through fifth including our behavior modification classes which made up our special education inclusion department. These classes would come to me in two separate groups of kindergarten through second and then third through fifth. These students attended a separate art class until they were mainstreamed into the regular classroom.

The climate at School A was exceptionally good. Most of the teachers at the school had been there for many years and lived in the community. Teachers with 10 to 20 years of experience took me under their wings to help me with any questions or problems that I encountered as a first year teacher in their school. I began to learn how to deal with students in a very caring yet authoritative manner from my peers. In a study by Baker (1999), he found that caring and supportive relationships with teachers can help achieve school satisfaction among students. The students at School A seemed to have this type of satisfaction with their teachers. Even students entering into the school during the middle of the school year were met with open arms and it was stressed by classroom teachers that their classmates make these newcomers feel welcome and to be a friend to help them when needed. This type of supportive climate carried over naturally into the art classroom. Students were very helpful to one another and to me in general. School A did have its own behavior issues. Within our small school system, we were considered to be the school with the greatest number of minority students, the greatest transition rate, the lowest socioeconomic background among students, as well as the greatest number of behavior problems. I learned very quickly how to effectively manage student behavior in the classroom through fair and consistent discipline strategies. Therefore, I rarely had a serious problem in my art classroom. Teaching the students with behavior disorders in our special education program that I mentioned earlier also helped me in finding ways to deal with serious behavior issues in the art classroom. Overall, the students respected me and did well to listen and follow my instructions. They exhibited a great deal of respect for me as an art teacher.

A study by Tucker et al., (2000) indicated that schools could benefit from teaching students more self-control techniques for managing behavior as well as help with other strategies for achieving academic success such as listening, asking questions, and following teacher instructions. Some time before I came to teach at School A, there had been extensive faculty training in a social skills program that stressed listening skills and voice levels in the classroom.

Each classroom had posters that would remind students of the steps needed in order to listen and follow directions well. They included steps such as listen to the directions, repeat the directions back to yourself, ask questions if you do not understand, and then follow the directions. These steps served as a good reminder in how to instruct students to do a better job at listening and following directions and were referred to often and understood by students because it was a school-wide plan of instruction. The school-wide policy on voice levels was also very helpful because it helped students to remember how to maintain a classroom environment that was conducive to learning.

Another school-wide program at School A that I always felt was extremely helpful in teaching students problem solving strategies was the program of Positive Discipline. The entire faculty was asked by our principal to read a copy of the book, *Positive Discipline in the Classroom* by Nelsen, Lott, and Glenn (1993) so that we could train ourselves to equip our students with the skills outlined in the book. Next, there were several team meetings that involved us working together to discuss findings from the book and ways that we could implement the Positive Discipline strategies in the classroom. This program was started in School A in the 2000-2001 school-year, and I found that it had a very positive influence on student behavior. Teachers were now reinforcing positive behaviors in students, and students were now equipped with ways to solve problems with their peers on their own. Students talked more about their feelings and in doing this they seemed to be more understanding of one another's needs and, therefore, more eager to help one another. Students learned that there were choices to be made in getting along with one another and that sometimes those choices involved staying away from someone you could not get along with. I was always amazed at how well students could grasp the strategies taught within this program. Students were given a wheel of choice that offered them several different ways to approach problems they might have with peers in order to relieve the teacher of the burden of dealing with small incidences of mistreatment of

students or disagreements in the classroom as well as a removal of almost all tattling within the classroom environment. After these concepts were taught, implemented, and consistently reinforced in the regular classroom, students would come to the art room equipped with skills of talking through their problems. I remember one second grade class in particular, Ms. Flora's second grade class, whose students would say things to one another like, "I didn't like it when you snatched the paper out of my hand. It made me feel sad." In turn, the other student would typically respond by saying something like, "I'm sorry", and then both students would return to their work, happy that they had solved the problem. By giving students the skills that they needed to discuss their feelings and frustrations openly and calmly with one another, most problems could be solved quickly and without the involvement of the teacher. These behaviors were not an instant result. Behavior did improve greatly in our school with the consistent implementation of these strategies from our classroom teachers.

One last program incorporated into the curriculum at School A that had a positive impact on student behavior was the Character Counts program emphasizes the Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. This program was started and taught by our guidance counselor and then reinforced and revisited by classroom teachers. Students were introduced to the pillars of character and were rewarded and encouraged when they followed the concepts learned in this program. Each year the guidance counselor would find a creative way to display students' names who were exhibiting the traits of good character. Teachers would recognize students by giving them a slip of paper signed by the teacher indicating what the student had done to show good character. Then that student would have his or her name displayed in a central location within the school as a reminder that those students were following the Pillars of Character. This program worked very well and tied in nicely with the Positive Discipline mode of teaching because it gave students a better vocabulary

to receive more specific compliments from teachers to encourage good behavior in the classroom. For example, a teacher might say, “I like the way that Johnny is being very responsible right now and is cleaning up when asked”, and all of the students understanding the concept of responsibility would want to be responsible too, just like Johnny, so that the teacher might reward them with a compliment as well.

It is also important to remember that all students need praise. Both of these programs stress finding positive things to say to every student. All students do good things at some point throughout the day. No child misbehaves all the time. We as teachers need to make sure that we recognize those good moments instead of always focusing on the bad. This can become more challenging for an art teacher who teaches so many students throughout the day, but I have found that when I try and make a conscious effort to point out good things that a student who is typically considered to be bad by other students is doing, they respect you more and therefore perform better in your classroom. This idea of rewarding or recognizing good behaviors as taught in the Positive Discipline and the Pillars of Character programs provided a very positive school climate where you continually heard teachers referring to the good things that they saw happening around them instead of the negative things that students might choose to do. I also feel that it helped to establish a very pleasant and calm tone among our teachers and students that made School A a place where learning could easily take place because students sensed that they were part of a very non-threatening and safe environment.

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIENCES TEACHING IN METROPOLITAN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

After growing up and living my entire life in Northeast Tennessee, with the exception of one year of teaching in a high school in Nashville, Tennessee, the desire to live in a more metropolitan area brought me to Atlanta, Georgia. I was hired as an Art Specialist in the spring of 2002 to work in a new elementary school that was still under construction. The idea of working in a brand new facility and starting an art program from the ground up was exciting to me. The school's projected enrollment was around 580 students. I would soon find out that I had much to learn about the challenges of being a part of the production of opening a new school.

Demographic and Other Background Information on School B

The demographic information in this section is based on the 2004-2005 school year. School B is located in a large metropolitan school district. The school campus is surrounded by a rapidly growing residential area. Out of the 783 students currently enrolled at School B, 87% are African American, 7% are Hispanic, 3% are Caucasian, 2% are Multi-Racial, and one percent is Asian. Sixty-six percent of students receive free lunch and 10% receive reduced lunch. School B, like School A, is a Title I School. The average daily attendance is 96%, and the mobility rate for students is 45%. The number of students enrolled in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program is 3%.

Parent attendance for school sponsored events this year is definitely on the rise. So far this year out of four Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and various other school sponsored activities, we have had 2,666 parents attending. This enormous increase in parent attendance is owed in part to our new full-time parent liaison whose duties and responsibilities include planning events that will increase parent participation within the school. We also have implemented monthly activities for parents including, Donuts for Dads and Muffins for Moms programs which invite parents to come out in the morning to read with their children in the

media center, monthly newsletters to keep parents informed about what is happening in our school, and parent workshops. Although these programs have been successful in bringing parents into the school, teachers still complain about a lack of parent response when needed for classroom help during the school day, including special events within the classroom, holiday parties, chaperones for field trips, as well as low attendance for parent-teacher conferences.

There are many instances where parent attendance in planned activities is extremely low. Just recently, School B planned a workshop for parents of third and fifth grade students to assist them in learning more about how to help their children prepare for the CRCT state standardized test that will be given this spring. All third and fifth grade students must pass the test in order to be promoted to the next grade. Out of 127 fifth graders and 117 third graders, the parents of 5 fifth grade students and 10 third grade students attend the evening workshop.

Another similar situation was a special Family Day event planned by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta for three area schools, including School B. Fourth and Fifth grade students from our school who have been involved in the two-year “I See Literacy” partnership with the High Museum of Art were invited. The parents were notified by flyers explaining the event that included free admission for the student’s entire family in the High Museum, free lunch, free transportation by bus from the school to the museum, hands-on activities for parents and students at the event, and a special student exhibition of artwork to be on display. Students were encouraged by their classroom teachers and by me to attend. The students were very familiar with the High Museum of Art at this point because they had visited the museum on two different field trips during the school year. The parents of the students were aware of our partnership with the High since it began. Students were excited to have their artwork on display at the High Museum of Art. Out of approximately 200 students, only three students and their families attended this special event.

The most attended event by parents this school year at School B, in fact, the most attended event ever in the three years of School B’s existence was the Fashion Show, Talent

Show, and Dessert Tasting Event that took place at School B in December. Approximately 250 people attended that event.

These statistics may lead one to believe that parents at School B are not attending and perhaps not interested in school sponsored events that promote student achievement and the arts. It also points to the fact that there is a need for me to evaluate what is getting the attention of parents and to plan more art events that they would feel comfortable attending and would enjoy so that they go away with a stronger desire to see their students succeed in art.

Reflections on School B

Although the initial projected enrollment for School B was 580 during the 2002-2003 school year, our current enrollment for the 2004-2005 school year is 783 and growing. It is believed that our enrollment will continue to climb and we will have portable classrooms added to our school campus as early as next school year to accommodate growth. This year an itinerant art specialist was added to work one day a week in order to teach additional classes that would no longer fit into my schedule of 30 classes per week. Next year, the itinerant art specialist will undoubtedly be needed to work more days. Our school also has an adaptive art specialist who works one day a week and services those children who are in special needs inclusion classrooms.

Another topic to consider is how the size of our school affects the feeling of community within it. Do students feel like they are a part of a family or does it feel more like a large corporation at work? This is another ongoing debate in the field of education now. Many school systems have decided to create smaller elementary schools in order to foster a feeling within students of being more comfortable and perhaps less intimidated about the schools they attend. I have noticed a difference myself in not even knowing the entire faculty at School B whereas at School A, I knew everyone by name within the first year. Part of that difference can also be attributed to the newness of School B as well as the high turnover rate of faculty since our inception.

At School B, I teach students in kindergarten through fifth grade one day a week for a 45 minute class period. Art specialists in my school system are required to give grades to all students, with kindergarten through first grade receiving grades of “S” for satisfactory, “N” for needs improvement, and “U” for unsatisfactory in the areas of art academics and behavior. In second through fifth grades students receive a letter grade of A, B, C, or F in the area of academics, and for behavior grades of “S” for satisfactory, “N” for needs improvement, and “U” for unsatisfactory are given. All art specialists in my school system are required to give at least nine grades per semester for each student taught. Therefore, I am required to give between 5,500 grades and 6,000 grades per semester. Out of those thousands of grades, at least four of the grades given must be in the form of written assessments which equals out to approximately 2,000 to 3,000 written assessments to be graded per semester. Just the grading alone requires a tremendous amount of time and paperwork at the elementary level.

Since my first year at School B, I have always felt that we needed to implement a character education program. I feel that our students do not have the vocabulary that allows them to understand when I am complimenting specific positive character traits that I see students using in the classroom. My training in character education and Positive Discipline in the classroom has carried over into my teaching at School B, but is now much less effective because the students do not have the background and training from their general classrooms that allows them to pick up on my character vocabulary and praise techniques as easily. I also have less time to contemplate the good things that are going on because there are so many behavior issues to deal with within any given class. When I ask student now if they have tried to talk out their problems with their classmates, their answer is typically “no”, or even if they do answer “yes”, the discussion was not generally done in a kind way, but instead in a manner of demanding one’s wishes to another.

One might ask why I have not tried to implement such programs in our school. I did speak to my principal during the first year of School B, but she was feeling somewhat overwhelmed, I believe, with all of the things that needed to be done during the first year of this

new school's opening, so she suggested that I implement the program and she would support me. I in no way felt that I could take on such a task, and I actually feel that such a school-wide program should be administered by the school counselor, not the art teacher, so I too feeling overwhelmed with the new school year, just let the idea rest. After our first year in existence, we lost our principal during the first nine weeks of our second school year to a promotion within the school system. So again, our school felt as if it were starting over once more. After an interim principal for a number of weeks, our new principal was hired at the beginning of the second semester of the 2003-2004 school year.

CHAPTER 5

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOLS A AND B

Looking back at my first impressions of School B, I felt that the core curriculum should include some time teaching character education and social skills. I immediately recognized the differences that I was seeing in the students' abilities at School B to manage their own behavior as well as their lack of problem-solving skills. As I mentioned before, there was a heavy emphasis on this at School A. I have often felt, and heard other teachers in School B comment that it seems as if we spend more time solving problems, teaching students social skills, and trying to get students to listen than we spend teaching the curriculum. Therein lies a serious problem. As stated by Tucker, et al. (2000), even though the African American students whom they surveyed could identify their needs in making better grades, some students are not equipped to fulfill these strategies for academic success. If the training is not taking place at home, then I feel that we must incorporate these success building strategies into our curriculum to help students succeed.

The feeling of a calm and safe environment that I mentioned earlier that is present in School A is not present in School B. It is my belief that because students are ill equipped with problem solving strategies and are not being taught character education as an area of emphasis within our school, the climate is much louder, much more negative and aggressive, and there are many more behavior issues within School B than School A. Teachers at times are at their wits' ends for ways to solve the overwhelming behavior issues that they encounter within a given day. This frustration is coupled with the fact that the administration seems to place all of the responsibility of dealing with these issues on the teachers.

At School A there was a definite feeling of unity in responsibility for dealing with school related issues among teachers and administrators. Teachers there were very active and well trained in dealing with behavior issues, but when things became extreme, there would be a joint

effort of the grade level involved to work together as a team, and then for the entire faculty to work together as a team to implement new strategies that would help in dealing with the specific problems that we were facing in our classrooms. These strategies were not handed down randomly and forced upon the faculty by the administrators. Problems were openly discussed in faculty meetings at appropriate times so that the entire faculty could make suggestions and voice their opinions as to what would work best for our school. The Principal of School A, in turn, would support the faculty's concerns by providing needed training or support as was necessary to help solve the problem in the best way possible. An example of this was the implementation of a character education program within our school as well as the Positive Discipline approach to dealing with behavior issues.

This brings up another point which is the importance of administration being available to listen to the needs and concerns of the faculty and to be ready to make changes and seek out strategies that may be implemented to deal with a school's specific needs. I feel that School A was run in such a fashion for the most part, and that School B's administrators fail greatly in the area of listening to the needs and concerns of their teachers.

Another obvious difference to me in the two schools in which I have taught is the contrasting sizes of the two school systems. School A is located in a small town and a small school system consisting of 10 schools. School B is located on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area and is in an extremely large school system consisting of 88 schools. Because of the large size of the school system of School B, there are greater demands that are placed on teachers. Teachers often complain about huge amounts of paperwork required by our schools system. The time spent completing paperwork takes away from time and energy that could be spent by teachers to plan and work on new ways to provide for the specific needs of the students that they teach. I have already mentioned the responsibilities that I have as an art teacher in School B when it comes to grading. I have definitely felt the difference in the time that must be allocated in preparing assessments and rubrics as well as recording, averaging, and entering

grades for so many students. There are many things that I used to have time for, such as creating more displays, more extensive planning, creating better visuals for lessons, and gathering resources for lessons, that I do not have now.

With these added pressures on teachers as well as less support from administration and parents and more problems and issues to deal with among students in the classroom, comes lower teacher morale and a high rate of burn out for teachers in a school like School B. As also mentioned before, there is also a difference of parental involvement in School A and School B. I believe that this difference contributes greatly to the lack of motivation of students and the levels of frustration among teachers at School B. "Lack of parental interest in schooling and support for education is a frequently mentioned problem in national teachers' surveys" (Johns, 1994, p.16). Parents are needed to volunteer in the classrooms and in other areas of the school. Parents are also needed for support with issues in behavior and achievement with students. If the parents are not supportive of the teachers when contacted about issues with students, it makes the teacher's job much more challenging, as well as creating greater challenges for students who might be motivated to achieve greater success if they knew that the expectations of their parents were high.

Lastly, another difference between the two schools is a cultural difference or one of race. To what extent this difference might affect the motivation of our students I am not sure, but my research leads me to believe that students at School B are not less motivated because they are African American, but that they may be less motivated because of some type of cultural difference that keeps them from feeling the drive towards success. Teachers must be aware of the cultural and racial differences among their students in order to better meet their specific learning needs, but I definitely think that the students at School B have the same potential for succeed as the students at School A. The students at School B need more training in how to control and manage their own behaviors in order to be more successful students.

There are some similarities between the two schools as well. Both schools have very hard working teachers who are very dedicated to helping students succeed. The students both schools serve are largely from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The school systems of school A and School B have a strong support for the arts beginning at the elementary level and have for a number of years, and both school systems are very well funded from the communities that they serve.

CHAPTER 6

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

Although I feel that the success of students is a school-wide effort, and I am always open to ideas for collaborating with fellow teachers in order to help students, the ideas for change that I will address will be ideas that are specific to my teaching in the art classroom.

From my research and experience, I believe that the greatest contributing factor in helping students to be more motivated learners is to have parents who are more involved in their education. Therefore, I see parent involvement as the greatest area of emphasis for me in my efforts for changing the mindsets and behaviors of the students I teach at School B. During my eight years of teaching, I have seen that when parents are more involved, students become more excited about learning and about their successes. They love receiving positive reinforcement and praise not only from their teachers, but from their parents as well. Art is a subject area that usually has an end product that is produced during the learning experience. Having the parents more involved in the school to see the wonderful results of their child's achievements in the arts can have a very positive effect on the parent's attitudes about the learning that takes place in the art classroom.

I have several different ideas for achieving greater parent involvement in the arts at School B. These ideas have been generated both by me from much thought and deliberation on the topic as well as listening to the ideas of fellow art teachers and reading about the successes of other art educators.

One curriculum related activity that I developed when working in Tennessee was the use of Portfolio Reviews with my third through fifth grade students. I would create a two or three page sheet that would be attached to a student's work when it was to go home around the end of the six-week period that outlined the different art lessons that students had been introduced to in their art classes during that time period. The Portfolio Review served two purposes. One was to

inform parents of the content of the lessons covered, and the other was to involve parents and their children in a discussion about the concepts, vocabulary words, and art history that had been studied. This included questions that the parents could ask their students in order to conduct an at home review of content while opening up conversations with parents about what goes on in the art classroom each week. I received several positive comments from parents in Tennessee when I was using the Portfolio Review. I have not tried this format of parent communication in Georgia, but I believe that the implementation of this in the next school year will gradually get more parents involved by allowing them to see the significance of their child's artwork, and that more students will be inclined to make sure their parents see their artwork and the Portfolio Review once positive reinforce from parents slowly begins to build.

Another outreach tool that I implemented at the end of this school year was an Art Newsletter. I did not receive much of a response from it, but I did have a couple of parents comment on their appreciation of being kept informed about all of the happenings in the art department. Again, I feel sure that with time, more and more parents will begin reading and responding to the news in the Art Newsletter. Many other art educators that I have spoken with also see this as a very effective means of communicating with parents, and some produce the newsletter with their grade level team of teachers that includes the art, music, and physical education programs.

As mentioned earlier, each year, I send out a letter at the beginning of the year that briefly discusses the art program objectives for the school year as well as my classroom management plan and provides parents with a list of desired donations that includes recyclable materials. I have met a few parents through their response to the donated items list at School B over the past three years, and I would like to continue sending this letter at the start of the school year, along with an invitation for parents to come and visit their child in the art classroom. I also have found that starting off the school year by letting parents know what your expectations for behavior are by sharing your classroom management plan will help you later if a problem arises

with a student in the classroom and you have to contact the parent. This way the lines of communication have already been established in a positive way, even if you do need to contact a parent with a concern.

Another idea to increase parental involvement in the art classroom is to send out a survey at the beginning of the school year to ask parents about ways that they may be able to contribute to the art classroom during the school year. This survey would include things such as donations, sharing travel experiences relating to a specific area of study in the art classroom, having parents who work in a profession with an art background come into the classroom to talk and share with students, and volunteering time to prepare materials or help out with the annual school-wide art show.

In both School A and School B I have involved students in the production of an end of the year school-wide art show. Each child exhibits one piece of artwork that was produced during that school year in art class. At School A this had been a tradition for many years so the event was anticipated by all and was well attended and many parents volunteered their time to help in the preparation of the show. At School B, however, this is a new experience for most students and parents. After three years, students now anticipate the event each year, and parent attendance continues to gradually build. The conjunction of the Art Show along with the Spring Music Concert helps with attendance as well at School B. I would also like to work with the parent-teacher liaison to create more parent volunteers for the preparation of the art show in the future.

Another idea for increasing parent support and enthusiasm for the arts at School B is to work with the parent-teacher liaison on the Muffins for Moms and Donuts for Dads programs that were mentioned earlier, so that this program would not only provide a time for parents to read with their child in the Media Center, but also allow time for them to view a small student gallery of work that would be on display in the Media Center at the same time.

I am also interested in developing an evening of art where students and parents come out and participate in art activities led by our fourth and fifth grade students. I would also like to see our students perform in some type of skit perhaps relating to a specific period of art or perhaps acting out the lives of particular artists we have studied in order to give them the chance to make use of their natural abilities to speak and perform in public. This is a strength of many of our students and I feel that they would certainly rise to the occasion. All of these opportunities to involve parents in the arts in a non-threatening way will hopefully help parents to become more supportive of our arts program.

I have been steadily increasing the amount of art displays that I have in the community at School B over the past three years. I feel that this is an important part in motivating students as well because they enjoy seeing their work as they visit different locations within the community with their families and friends. It is a challenge to find good locations within the community of School B because the area is somewhat rural without a wide array of businesses that lend themselves to art displays. One surprisingly successful location that I choose this year for a student art display was a local Dairy Queen. To my surprise I had more students comment on seeing artwork there than I had for any other business partner that I had used for student displays previously. This proved to me that it is important to know your population. It is good to know places that your families and students frequent in order to make those places a destination for future displays. Again making students feel proud of their successes can help increase motivation for learning.

One school in our school system has had success with the implementation of “Specialist Week”. Parents are invited to come in and observe special classes, such as art, music, and physical education during this week. They send home a schedule with students so that parents can sign up for a class to attend with students. The sign up procedure also helps teachers plan how many parents to expect. Again, partnering with the music and physical education teachers can be an effective way to reach out to more parents.

Another idea suggested by Johns (1994) was implemented in Ohio art classrooms. Art teachers that she surveyed had suggested or provided art enrichment activities for students and their families to do at home that might involve an upcoming television show about art or schedules of museum exhibits that the family might attend. I think that this idea could work well with our population, especially because our school has been involved in a two-year pilot program with the High Museum of Art. This partnership has at least made more students and parents aware of what the High Museum of Art has to offer. The Museum also offers free admission to local residents on the first weekend of each month. This would be a good opportunity to send home a reminder about the free weekend admission that could include an activity packet for students and parents when they visit the High. The packet could be created so that it reinforces concepts being taught currently in the art room as well. The High Museum often creates its own family brochures or gallery guides for special exhibitions that are used to foster parent and children involvement in the viewing of art. The parents of our students often frequent the areas that surround the High Museum, but I want to continue to encourage them to see the High Museum as well as other local galleries and museums as wonderful places to experience art with their children.

As previously mentioned, I feel that character education is a great area of need at School B. “Teachers claim that by integrating character education into the curriculum, students understand and are more empathetic towards others, and that this understanding helps to create a school community” (Brown, 2004, p.48). It is my hope and belief, that by educating students about how to be more responsible and caring students, we will make our school a safer, more secure environment for students to learn in, thus motivating students to do their best at learning each day.

Art educator Wales (2004) incorporates character education into the art classroom by using the three areas of art history, art production, and classroom procedures to teach and reinforce the character words that are being learned by students in his school. For the area of art

history, he recommends the book *Jonkonnu*, which is a book about the life of Winslow Homer and his 1876 visit to Petersburg, Virginia. He states that “as the story unfolds, many character traits emerge for discussion: tolerance, respect, kindness, confidence, and cooperation” (Wales, p.29). I often use books in the art classroom to teach art history and to introduce students to the lives of artists. I think that the idea of finding books that incorporate character education concepts or finding situations in books that I already read to students that could reinforce these ideas is a wonderful idea for me to be able to begin to help students in the area of character education. Wales also teaches character education through art production by allowing students to create posters that illustrate scenes showing a specific character trait. He also emphasizes character traits such as citizenship, responsibility, cooperation, kindness, and courtesy in his classroom procedures. Reading this made me think of ways that I could emphasize those character traits with simple visual reminders throughout the classroom. Perhaps a sign that says, “be RESPONSIBLE, help take care of art supplies” or another by the sink or other clean up area that says, “good CITIZENS help clean up”. Perhaps others, such as, “you are being KIND and COURTEOUS when you share – way to go!” could be used as well. These little reminders can serve as instantaneous positive reinforcement to any child who reads and identifies with what is being said in the message about good character.

I was also introduced to the concept of using character education as a continuing theme in the art room for the entire school year by a fellow art teacher in Georgia. She tied character education into the various projects that she did. The art lessons had a wide range in concepts and cultures taught, but all directly related to character education. I remember one lesson that she taught was a study of Greek art. In teaching about the different architectural styles of Greek columns, the students created the Pillars of Character and drew different Greek columns in the traditional Greek styles while labeling them with words that relate to a specific Pillar of Character as outlined by the Character Counts Program. The implementation of these types of lessons throughout the school year at School B could help educate students about character traits

that we would like to reinforce in our school. Working with the music teacher and physical education teacher to build units that cover specific character traits would also be very successful because then each child in the school would be exposed to different ways to apply the character words to their everyday lives through the various lessons taught by each individual specialist teacher. Brown suggests that “a teaching strategy such as collaboration in groups can be used to integrate character education with art education” (2004, p.50). Students can work in groups to discuss narrative images that may reflect some type of moral issue. A good activity would be to allow students to present different solutions or endings to the problem or issue presented in the image. Art is a wonderful medium to allow students to express themselves in a positive way. Students need to learn to channel their violent or aggressive tendencies into something more positive. The arts provide a perfect place for students to do this. That is why I feel that implementing character education concepts in the art classroom is ideal.

Another idea for a way to teach character education concepts in the art classroom suggested by Brown is to allow students to develop shadow puppet shows based on cultural stories that are concerned with character education traits. She involved fourth and fifth grade students in a unit on Indonesian shadow puppets and the stories from that culture as well as others in order to illustrate certain character education traits (2004). These students then shared their learning with the other grade levels by performing their puppet show in front of the various grade levels during a series of performances. This idea not only teaches students about character traits by reading and studying different stories and situations, but it also directly involves them in various aspects of good character by allowing them to work collaboratively towards a final goal. This idea could be easily implemented in the art classroom in various ways and could also involve classroom teachers to get them involved in what is taking place in the art classroom which can also create a greater sense of community within the school.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Real change for our students must come in the form of a united body of teachers and administrators that is clear about the specific needs of our students and what we agree upon as the best means for encouraging those changes to occur. In a large school system, many demands are placed upon schools. Often these demands involve the implementation of new programs that are system-wide. Some of these programs might not be in the best interests of each school involved and the particular needs of its students. I believe that it is necessary for each individual school to be very clear about its goals for student achievement. In order for this to occur, teachers must be aware of their students' needs including their successes and their failures in the classroom and must be able to clearly articulate those areas of concern to parents and administrators in order to help every child succeed in order to achieve his or her personal best in life.

I believe that through these combined efforts, students at School B can be better motivated to learn. In the art classroom, I hope to implement new ways of motivating students that will include more Positive Discipline strategies, increased parental involvement, and the implementation of character education into the art curriculum. It is my sincere desire to see all of my students succeed to the best of their abilities. I hope to learn more about the lives of my students and their individual learning needs so that I can better assist them in achieving these goals in art education and their daily lives.

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