Focus and Motivation: Two Contributing Factors that Lead a Student to

Academic Success

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine whether or not a student's focus and motivation during a lesson is a contributor in their educational success rate. Six fifth grade students in an enrichment room from Cambria Elementary School, in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania, participated in the study that spanned through April to June of 2011. These students were the focus of the study because they lacked the focus and motivation that was needed when in the enrichment room. These students were seen three times per week for one hour each time. Teacher observations, student surveys, and the assessments that were given both before and after the implementation of the study were used to determine if these students had a higher success rate when they were more attentive and motivated to complete the lessons.

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Introduction

Action research enables me to reflect upon my teaching so that I can best help improve my students' lives while in the classroom and to learn how to teach to their needs (Mills, 2011). In this action research plan, I hope to discover what strategies will best help my group of students to succeed by helping them to stay focused and motivated for each lesson. This motivation for the plan came from my desire to have my highly gifted students motivated and wanting to learn. I am a novice teacher who was hired to instruct highly gifted students. Before I was hired, there was no set gifted curriculum, and the program was lacking in strength. Students would be seen by the reading specialist whenever she had time, and usually, it would only be to complete a logic puzzle. When I came aboard, the students and their parents were not happy with the program and wanted something done about it. Since then, I have been working to create a curriculum that enriches these students and is based upon their instructional levels and also their interests. Many students have changed their attitudes about the program and love to come to my classroom, but my fifth grade students have been slow to change their minds. They are not attentive during the lessons and often complain that they do not want to do what I have planned for them. They do not see the reason they should focus and be motivated in my room when they will just be leaving in four months anyway.

Context

During the 2010-2011 school year at Cambria Elementary School, I taught 24 students who were identified as "gifted" in grades ranging from first to fifth. I taught these students three times a week while the other two days were spent at their sister school. My action research focuses on my six fifth grade students. I chose this group of students because they lack the motivation and focus that is required of them throughout their year in enrichment.

Assumptions

One underlying assumption that I worry will affect my action research plan is the fact that I do not see my students every day but only see them three days per week. According to Guba (1981), persistent observation is the key to the data being credible. The focusing problem that my students have could be because of the inconsistency of the lessons and not have it all account for their lack of motivation or learning styles. Another assumption that might alter my plan is that these students at this elementary school are children of wealthy lawyers and doctors. I feel like these students are given everything that they want and are constantly told that if they do not

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want to do something, they do not have to. This might be the reason why they lack motivation and focus because they feel that they do not have to pay attention because they do not want to.

Area of Focus Statement

    "The purpose of this study is to identify effective ways to increase fifth graders' learning and motivation through strategies that help them to focus their attention and through teaching them to rely on their own learning strengths as they process content." I chose this statement as my area-of-focus because the lack of motivation and focus is apparent in every class that I teach but is most apparent in my fifth grade class. By studying and collecting data on this study, I hope to be able to allow my students to become more focused and motivated in my classroom.

Variables

        When thinking about my area-of-focus, I realize that there are variables that will affect this study. I think that my fifth graders do not focus or remain engaged during lessons because they do not know what way of learning suits them best. There are many methods out there that students use when learning and my students have not had that kind of information presented to them. Another reason why my students are not focusing is because they are unable to focus on one thing at a time. I have learned while teaching the gifted that their brains become overloaded with information both useful and useless. While in the classroom, these students can be thinking about five other things all the while trying to concentrate on what the teacher is teaching. The last variable is something that I need to change in the way I teach my students. My students have a hard time focusing and staying motivated because I do not allow for opportunities for them to practice inquiry based learning where curiosity is apparent.

Review of Literature

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) (2008). *Designing Strategies That Meet the Variety of Learning Styles of Students*. Retrieved on January 16, 2011 from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/recordDetails

    This source described a situation in two schools where students were not motivated to receive high grades. In this study, the students were given a survey to see what their learning styles were and from that survey, the teachers tried to teach each student individualistically. The teachers used methods such as chunking, small group leveled instruction, and differentiated instruction when teaching. At the end of the study, the teachers looked at the students' grades and they were shown to be higher than that of what they were initially without the tiered lessons.

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One question that I produced during reading this study was how the teachers found planning time and also teaching time to perform all of the tiered assignments. From what I interpreted, they had to plan more at home than what they were given during the school day.

A unique perspective that I came across while reading this study was that the authors included causes that the students are affected by to make them not want to remain engaged or motivated in the classroom. Causes such as learning being extrinsically valued, the change of the family structures, the constant desire to want to be entertained, the fact that teachers have a weight put on them to do well on the standardized tests. Lopez and Schroeder (2008) stated, "the demands on teachers are rigorous and individualized instruction or learning types are not always addressed." This is one of the main reasons why students are not receiving the kind of education that they deserve.

Center for Mental Health in Schools. (2008). *Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*. Los Angeles, CA: Author.

In this article, the authors outlined the three types of engagement, why students remain engaged, and how engagement in the schools can be measured. Intrinsic motivation is said to be the most fundamental way to engage and re-engage the students. This motivation must be used appropriately when students need to be re-engaged by allowing the student to have some choices and freedom in their learning so that they feel they are achieving it themselves. When the research came to a point that discussed how grades and assessments take the students from being intrinsically motivated to extrinsically motivated, a question arose. How can one transfer that motivation back to being intrinsic when both parents and teachers reward students for receiving good grades? In this research, extrinsic motivation is something that students should not have a lot of because they lose engagement when the reward or punishment wears off. The root of being engaged and remaining engaged is that of having intrinsic motivation.

Something that struck me as unique while reading was the concept of curiosity. When discussing how students remain engaged when they are intrinsically motivation, the quality that every student has that allows them to have that continued motivation to be engaged was curiosity. Curiosity "leads us to seek stimulation, avoid boredom, and learn a great deal." (pg. 7) That is true of every person because at least once in everyone's life have they been curious and want to learn more about what they were curious in. Curiosity is a good thing for students to

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exhibit and I can help them create the curiosity by planning lessons where the answers are not clearly seen so they will want to work for the answer.

Linnenbrink, E. & Pintrich, P. (2002). Motivation as an Enabler for Academic Success. *School Psychology Review, 31*(3), 313-327.

This article discusses how student motivation, in all of its forms, is an enabler for academic success. Since the social cognitive theory states that students can be motivated in many ways, this article discusses the four components of motivations which are self-efficacy, attributions, intrinsic motivation, and achievement goals. Each of these components where discussed by stating what they were, how they relate to school success, and are given suggestions on how to incorporate into instruction and assessment. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) state that motivation "is not a stable trait of an individual but is more situated, contextual, and domain-specific" (pg. 314). Students are not always motivated but are motivated during the subjects that they are interested in.

The component of motivation that I found most interesting was the concept of self-efficacy which means that students are more motivated to achieve at something they have a strong interest in. Self-efficacy has been linked to academic success and higher levels of achievement. Instructional practices that allow for self-efficacy should include tasks that allow students to be able to achieve all the while developing new capabilities. Just like this article, I can assess the amount of self-efficacy in my room by using self-report questionnaires like the Likert scale that I will be using.

Tomlinson, C.A. (2008). Making a Difference. *Education Week*, 2(1), 26-31.

This article was an interview with renowned education author and professor, Carol Ann Tomlinson. She believes in the concept of differentiated instruction to attend to students' varied learning styles in the classroom. In order to create a well-run classroom using differentiated instruction, a teacher needs to be in tune to what the students' learning styles are all the while bringing the classroom together as a whole and become a team of learners. One must also treat each student fairly by giving all students work that is "equally engaging, equally appealing, and equally important," so that they are all being challenged on their level and the way they learn

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best (Tomlinson, C.A., 2008). She also discusses how students are more engaged and motivated when the teacher is engaged and motivated in what they are teaching.

The eye-opening concept that I read in this article was that when teaching students, one must always "teach-up" the curriculum (Tomlinson, C.A., 2008). This makes sense because students are motivated to learn more challenging concepts than information that is purposely made easier for them. By starting students at a level where they are challenged and using a learning style that is comfortable to them, the engagement and motivation are activated longer.

Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2011). *Schooling Issues Digest: Student Motivation and Engagement*. Retrieved on January 17, 2011 from http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/schooling_issue s_digest/schooling_issues_digest_motivation_engagement.htm

This article is based on Australian education and outlines student engagement and discusses each of the three types. It then goes into school factors and how they influence engagement and student focus. More importantly, the research shows the students are more apt to engage in a topic or activity when it catches the students' attention, when they are challenged to work towards a goal that they don't know the outcome to, and when it is of value to them. If a learning opportunity does not have any of those components, the engagement and focus of the students will be lacking as well and, in turn, their grades will lack.

This article also discussed how research shows that students reported that they are more interested and engaged in the activity when their teachers are also motivated, respect their students, and actually listen to their students' opinions and ideas (Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2011). I can make the students more motivated and attentive in the classroom by first, making sure that I am attentive to their needs and opinions.

Ormrod, J.E. (2006). *How Motivation Affects Learning and Behavior*. Retrieved on February 9, 2011 from http://www.education.com/print/motivation-affects-learning-behavior/

The purpose of this article was to discuss how motivation correlates with a student's success rate in the classroom and their behavior. It first listed the different effects motivation has on learning and behavior by stating that motivation determines how students pursue a task, it increases a student's time on task, it leads to more of an effort to learn the material, and leads to

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improved performance in the classroom. "Students who are most motivated to learn and excel in classroom activities tend to be our highest achievers" (Ormrod, 2006). The article then discusses the two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic where it ends by stating that intrinsic motivation benefits the students in the long run.

This article is relevant to my study because I am researching how much motivation affects the way my students focus and succeed in my classroom. As read in this article, if a student has a large amount of motivation, then the likelihood that they will have academic success is greater than that if they lacked motivation.

O'Connor, T. (2011). Using Learning Styles to Adapt Technology for Higher Education.

Retrieved on February 9, 2011 from

http://www.indstate.edu/cirt.id/pedagogies/styles/learning.html

The point of this article is about using the students' learning styles to adapt the way a teacher teaches. Learning styles that are found throughout higher level education are discussed and I was surprised to find that it does not vary greatly from the learning styles at the elementary level. The same point is clear; teachers must identify the students' learning style and then teach the way that is most helpful to them. It then goes into the types of learning styles by discussing different models such as the social interaction model and the personality models. The article ends by incorporating technology and all its parts into lessons based on the different learning styles.

The part of the article that I benefited the most from reading is the part where the author talks about using learning styles when teaching. Here, it gives strategies to incorporate all the different learning styles when teaching and why it is so important. O'Connor (2011) states, "These strategies appear more responsive to students' needs. They seem to provide better learning opportunities." This article allowed me to see how, when using learning styles to teach, the students fair better academically than when they do without it.

Naimie, Z. & Siraj, S. (2010). Hypothesized learner's technology preferences based on learning style dimensions. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, *9*(4), 83-93.

Student's learning styles were addressed in this article and how they related to student achievement. It was discussed in this article the effects that matching and mismatching lessons

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to learning styles have on students and their ability to perform in the classroom. This data states that there is a positive correlation between using student's learning styles to teach and their achievement levels. This article also stated that, "students will learn more and will enjoy the class experience and environment when they can use their preferred learning styles" (Naimie & Siraj, 2010, p. 85). The results of this report, which involved 310 students and four teachers, show that students learn more when teachers adapt their lessons according to the learning styles that are found in their classroom.

This article is useful to my plan because I plan on using my survey to gain knowledge of the learning styles in my classroom and from there, plan on teaching using lessons that address those styles. This reinforces my research question which asks if there is a positive correlation between teaching using learning styles and the academic success of the students. A unique perspective that I took from this article was that teachers should not just teach using the learning styles but also, after helping the students to identify their styles, help them to widen their learning style to create a "learning comfort factor" (Naimie & Siraj, 2010, p 85).

Rabideaus, S. (2005). Effects of Achievement Motivation on Behavior. Retrieved on February
17, 2011 from http://www.personalityresearch.org/papers/rabideau.html

This piece of research discusses how achievement motivation affects a student and their rate of success. It describes achievement behavior as an interaction between variables in the classroom and the student's motivation to achieve. Rabideaus (2005) states in this article that, "our behaviors, actions, thoughts, and beliefs are influenced by our inner desire to succeed." We are more likely to succeed, however, when we are involved in activities that result in challenging and more increased effort. This article then goes into discussing mastery goals and how they are helpful in increasing student success and motivation. Mastery goals are set by students who like challenging tasks, stay persistent even when failing, always remain positive while learning, and enjoy the task that is set before them.

As stated in the article, students with these types of goals often have intrinsic motivation which, in turn, directs them to want to succeed and master the information.

A unique perspective that I found while reading this information was that a study was conducted on students solving unsolvable problems to see if their motivation and effort diminished when they were not successful. The results showed that the students held the same

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amount of motivation and effort through the entire study. This was unique because it showed that low motivation and effort may not be the reason for poor performance.

Florida Education Association (2010). *Time-on-Task: A Strategy that Accelerates Learning.*
> Retrieved on February 17, 2011 from http://feaweb.org/time-on-task-a-teaching-strategy-that-accelerates-learning

Time-on-task is a widely discussed topic and has been for many years. This article says that learning is directly correlated to time so in other words, true learning happens when students are actively engaged during the time they are given. A study, the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES), showed that teachers who gave more time to a specific academic area produced students who have higher achievement levels. This study also produced results where students achieved at a higher rate when they had more time allotted to engagement in the content and not seatwork.

What I found to be interesting in this article was the statement, "Success breeds success" (Florida Education Association, 2010). After thinking about this statement, I fully agree with what the author was trying to say. For students to be successful in the classroom, the teacher needs to be successful in engaging the students and instructing the material.

Research Questions

> *How does helping students to focus on one thing at a time impact student motivation and success?

> *How does allowing students to process learning through their individual learning styles impact success and motivation?

> *What is the correlation between motivation and academic success?

Interventions

An intervention that I plan on using to collect data is to have students journal after each lesson about their motivational level or their attentiveness during the lesson. This piece of data can capture the essence of what is happening to each student and their attentiveness while in my classroom (Mills, 2011). I want them to be able to point out when and why they are not motivated and/or focused during the lesson. Along with their journaling, I will also complete a checklist at random times during the lesson that allows me to see what students are and are not

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focusing. Once I have my students' journals and my checklists, I will compare my findings to my grade book to see if focusing is related to the grades they are receiving.

Another intervention that I will plan on completing is having my students complete the "Ways of Learning" survey. Even though this source of data is quantitative, it still produces descriptive results (Mills, 2011). Once I complete the scoring of each survey, I will sit down with each student and discuss the results with them. Maybe my students do not know what way they like to learn or learn best and this would give them that information. An intervention that I can take from the previous intervention is to use the results of the Ways of Learning survey; create groups based on what method of learning students scored highest on. Working with students who have like-learning methods will help them stay on task and work together.

The last intervention that will be used is to first give students a survey after each lesson that is taught during the data collection period. This quantitative source of data will allow me to track specific periods where students were motivated or not. I can then compare these surveys to my grade book to see if motivation is correlated to higher grades. Lastly, I will give them a grading guide to see if they are motivated to receive the higher grade. If they choose to do more work for the higher grade, then I will know that their motivation is what gets them to be successful in school.

Data Collection

Research Questions	Data Sources		
	1	2	3
1. How does helping students to focus on one thing at a time impact student motivation and success?	Have students complete journal entry about ability to focus during lessons.	Teacher observation checklist to be used while students are working.	Use student reflections and teacher checklists and compare them to grade book.
2. How does allowing students to process learning through their individual learning styles impact success and motivation?	Have students complete the Ways of Learning survey to identify learning styles & supplement continually throughout the action plan as a	Provide lessons that attend to each of the student's learning styles.	Learning style rating sheets completed after each lesson.

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	motivational tool.		
3. What is the correlation between motivation and academic success?	Student Survey: Motivation	Compare student surveys to teacher grade book.	Motivational Grading Guide-students are given choice to decide what grade they want for the amount of work on each grade

For my first research question, I chose data sources that brought the attention to the area of student focus and how it relates to motivation and success. These sources incorporate both the student's observation and teacher's observation of the focus during a lesson. The student's journal entry lets the student reflect on how well they paid attention during the lesson. The checklist that I will use to observe students while they perform tasks during a lesson enables me to reflect on how well they focused. I can then use my student's journal entries, my checklists, and the last data source which is my grade book and compare the grades they received to the lessons where it was apparent that they were fully focused on the content.

The next set of data sources will be used to answer my second research question which discussed the different learning styles. The first source will be used to help me to be able to see how my students like to learn so that I can then use those findings to complete my second source which is to create lessons that are based upon the learning styles of my students. The survey will also be used after I have taught the lessons according to the students' learning styles by giving them the survey that they completed back. They will then complete the last two columns which ask for them to give their opinion on how well the lessons met their learning style and what could have been changed to make them better. The last source will be used after the survey has been taken, and after each lesson as been taught using a different learning style. The students will rate how each lesson met their style of learning. These three sources of data will work together to first, find their learning style, be brought lessons based on those results, and then have them evaluate if they are more successful when being taught they way they like to be.

The last research question deals with the amount of academic success students have when they are motivated and the data sources help to gather that information. First, each student will be given a survey after various lessons to which they must answer about their motivation level. I

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will then use this survey and compare it to my grade book and the grades that the student received while being motivated or unmotivated. My last source of data I will use to see if students will work and be motivated to achieve a higher grade by giving them a motivational grading sheet. This sheet I will give them at the beginning of a task/project. There will be two different grades and the amount of work they have to complete to be given each grade. The type of work that they choose to do will allow me to see if they were motivated to complete the work for the higher grade or if they were unmotivated and took the lower grade.

I will analyze this data by first looking at what information the sources gave me and writing down my findings. I will take each research question and group the data that I received for each question. This way it will be easier for me to view the results according to each question. Once I have all of the data recorded so that I can view it all together, I will summarize the key findings. Lastly, using the key points, I will reflect upon the data. By writing out the data, summarizing, and reflecting, I will be able to move onto the next step in finding the answer to my research questions (Korzym, 2010l).

The next step after analyzing the data sources is to interpret what was found. I will again, take each research question and their data sources and work to interpret them. Since the majority of my data sources are qualitative, I will sort through the data and code what I find (Mills, 2011). This means that I will look for any patterns in the data such as the correlation between student focus and motivation or motivation and academic success. If there are patterns, I then will reflect on how the patterns came to be and how these patterns, if positive, can remain in place.
Data Analysis

Question #1: How does helping students to focus on one thing at a time impact student motivation and success?

First Data Source: The first source that I used in order to find the answer to my question was the journal entry the students completed on their focus throughout different lessons (See Appendix B). This journal entry contributed to this study by allowing the students to voice their thoughts on their focus during the lessons. Since they were the purpose of this study and their thoughts were voiced in the journal entries, I was able to see second hand how often the students thought that they focused during my instruction. When looking at the data, out of the 43 journal entries that I received, only two entries wrote about lack of focus during the lesson. This means that 78.5% of the time, I believed my students were focused on the lesson. My students wrote

that they were focused because the topics included in the lessons were interesting, they were able to have a choice in what project they completed, and liked to research for their projects. The lack of focus was created because a student did not like debating or offering their opinions and they wanted full class periods to work on their projects.

Second Data Source: The teacher observation checklist that I used contributed to this study because many times the students do not realize that they are not focusing and the observation of someone else can point out all the times that they have to remind the students to get back on track (See Appendix C). My students have a tendency to go into a dreamland when I use a lecture-based instruction so this observation checklist allowed me to see how often my students faded out of focus. I used this checklist once every three class periods and tallied how often I had to tell the students to get back to the task at hand. Out of five observation checklists completed which totaled five hours of classroom observation, I had to remind students to stay on task 46 times. This shows that every 6.5 minutes I had to remind one of my six students to get back to work or to focus on the lesson. Because of my checklist, I found that a lot of time is wasted telling my students to focus and remind them what they were to be doing. It also showed me that by the time one student loses focus and returns to their task, another student will be losing their focus.

Third Data Source: My last source that I used to go along with this question was to compare the first and second data sources to my grade book to see what the students' grades were when they were not focused and when they were. I used this to see if focus really does have an influence on what grade a student receives. Each class period I had my students complete a puzzler, a worksheet, or a project and I graded them on their work. When looking at my grade book, I see that focus was not a contributor to how well my students did on their work. My students received all of their points on their work during the days that I had to return them to the task or the days where the students stated that they were not focused. This leads me to believe that since my students are gifted and have the skills needed to complete the work, they would have received a 100% no matter what they were doing.

The information that I collected shows that my students focused during around 80% of my instruction time especially when I gave them time to research and work on their projects. This information also showed me that my students that I chose to collect data on need to be directed back to the lesson every 6.5 minutes which shows that focus is lost every six minutes

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making it hard for them to follow the lesson. All of this data does not reflect poorly on their grades received. There is no correlation between the student's lack of focus and the grades that were given. Students are more likely to focus on instruction that is based on their learning style so learning styles could be a contributor in a student's academic performance.

Question #2: How does allowing students to process learning through their individual learning styles impact success and motivation?

First Data Source: I had my students complete the Ways of Learning survey because I needed to find out what they thought they learned best by doing (See Appendix D). I then took the results and created lessons that included some of the learning strategies that the students liked. As seen in the graph below, if a student received a 4.34 – 5.00 the strategy was a strong preference. The main ways the students liked to learn were group/peer/self instruction, lecture-based learning, project-based learning, and discussion. I made sure to include these strategies when planning my lessons for my last instruction unit to see if the students would be more successful and motivated to complete the lessons when based on their learning style.

Ways of Learning Survey Results
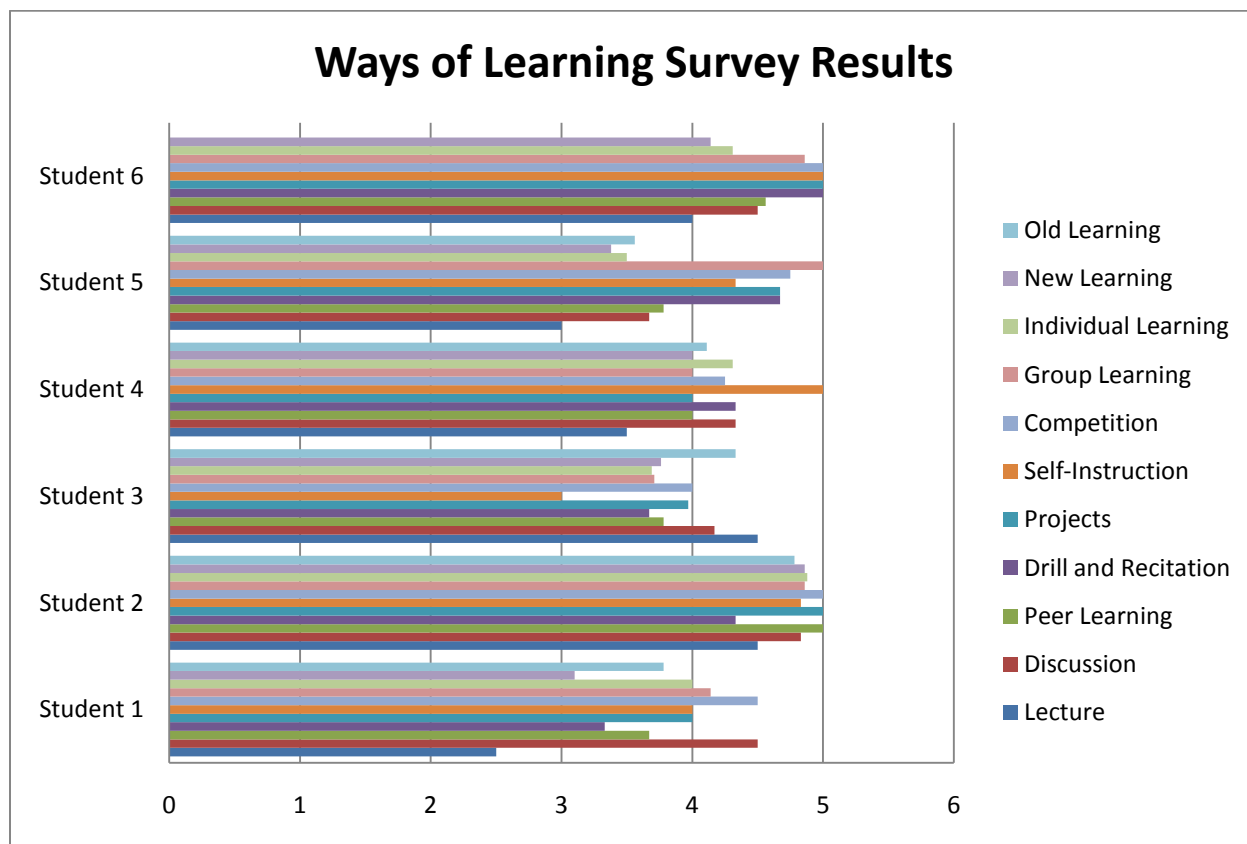
Second Data Source: My next data source complimented the survey that the students took in order to find their learning styles because I used that information and created lessons that

incorporated the data I received from the survey. This contributes to the question because I used the lessons and the learning styles in the lessons to see if the students were motivated and more successful when given lessons based on how they liked to learn. At the end of the unit, I gave my students back the Ways of Learning survey that they did initially and had them complete the last two columns. These columns, when completed, showed me that three of my six students received a 40/40 which means that they were motivated at all times when given lessons based on their learning styles. My other three students received a 38/40 which shows that they were motivated 95% of the time when given lessons based on their learning styles.

Third Data Source: My last data source contributed to the question by having the students rate how the lesson was adapted to their learning style (See Appendix E). Since each student learns in different ways, I did all that I could to use their learning styles in each of my lessons. This data was helpful because it had the students rate how well I taught to their learning style and why or why not it was helpful to them. I received 43 rating sheets in which students had to rate the lesson on a scale of one to five. Of these 43 ratings, I received 35 of them with a score of a five. The other eight rating sheets had scores less than five and reasons why they were not the highest score possible. Because of these completed rating sheets, I have learned that the students rated my lessons being adapted to their learning styles as 4.65 out of 5. The comments that the students wrote to back up their scores showed that they learned best when they have time to research, when they get to choose what it is they learn, and when they can teach what they learn to others.

From the data I used, I came to the conclusion that my students are highly motivated when they are provided with lessons adhered to their learning styles. These results are based on the rating sheets that I had the students complete after each lesson that I used their learning styles which I received from the survey. My students were very motivated during these lessons but did the motivation of the students help lead them to academic success?

Question #3: What is the correlation between motivation and academic success?

First Data Source: The students had to rate how motivated they were after each lesson which helped me to see if there was a contributing factor among the student's motivation and their success with their school work (See Appendix E). These motivation rating scales were completed after various lessons which included the students being instructed using their learning styles. This data was helpful because it allowed me to see how motivated my students are during

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each lesson and if they were not motivated, helped me to see why they were not and what I could do to help make it better. I received 43 rating sheets in which students had to rate how motivated they were during the lesson on a scale of one to five. Of these 43 ratings, I received 40 of them with a score of a five. The other three rating sheets had scores less than five and reasons why they were not the highest score possible. Since I had these students complete this rating sheet, I learned how often the students were motivated during the lessons by receiving a score of 4.86 out of 5. The only reason given by the students that made them motivated or not motivated during the lesson was how interesting the topic was to them.

Second Data Source: Comparing the motivational rating sheets to my grade book allowed me to see if motivation was a contributor to the success of the student. Throughout this unit, I had students complete activities based on Atlantis. When looking at my grade book, there was no significant change in the grades of the students. If the student gave a score of a one for their motivational level, it did not show in their work. The students were receiving A's on all activities whether or not they were motivated. One trend I did see in my observations but was not reflected in my grade book is that the less motivated my students were, the longer it took them to complete the activity. This makes me believe that the students will work hard to get that A no matter if they were motivated or not but the length of time that they use to complete the activity varies on motivational level.

Third Data Source: The motivational grading guide showed me how motivated my students were to receive the highest grade possible (See Appendix F). They were given a list of projects based on the same topic and each project had a different amount of points assigned to it. In order to receive a 100%, the students had to earn 70 points on this assignment. The grading guide allowed them to be able to see how well they would do with what projects they chose to complete. This would allow me to see if the students were motivated to get that 100% or if they would only work as hard as needed to pass the project. The students far exceeded the amount of points that they had to receive to get the 100% as seen in the graph below. This showed me that when my students are allowed to choose what project it is that they would like to complete, they are more motivated to want to complete the project.

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Scores based on Learning Styles Atlantis Projects

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6
Points Received	87	105	70	92	70	80
Points Available	70	70	70	70	70	70
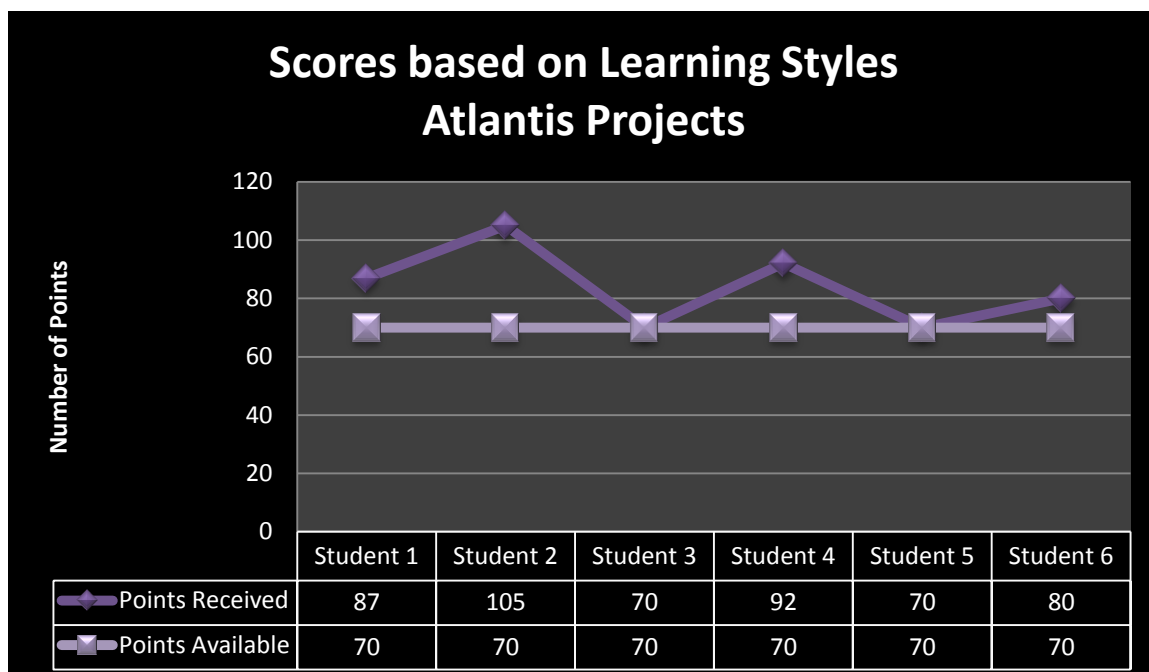
The conclusion created by collecting this data showed that the students were more motivated during the lessons that they felt were more interesting to them. Even though their motivational level did not reflect on their grades, the amount of time it took them to complete each activity varied according to the level of motivation during the lesson.

By collecting and analyzing this data, I came to a conclusion that my students were more focused and motivated during a lesson when it was based on their learning styles and interest levels. The students made sure that their grades were always the highest marks received whether or not they focused and were motivated which lead me to believe that, with this group of students, the amount of focus and motivation does not contribute to the high grades received. The focus and motivation does contribute to the length of time spend on an activity. Now that this data has been collected and analyzed, a plan must be made on how to deal with these students.

Action Plan

This study enabled me to realize that my fifth grade students are successful whether or not they are motivated throughout a lesson. I observed them to be off-task at numerous times throughout each lesson but in the end; they still received high grades on their assignments. When I started teaching to each student's learning style, their motivation was heightened and the grades did not change. However, I came to a conclusion that motivation does not have an effect on the students' grades but it does have an effect on the time it takes the students to complete an

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assignment or project. If I teach to the students learning styles, they exhibit a motivation to want to complete the assignment at a much faster pace.

This research project has taught me that motivation does not outwardly affect the academic success of a student but more so the time it takes the student to complete the assignment. This will impact my teaching because instead of just teaching the same concept in the same way to every student, I will instead create lessons that adhere to each student's learning style. The students would all be receiving the same information but the way in which they receive it would be different and much more interesting when it's in their learning style. The time off task would be lessened and my students' motivational levels would skyrocket. They would feel more productive, confident of their work, and successful.

When thinking about the future, I will definitely continue to have my students complete the learning style inventory survey. This was a very helpful tool when trying to choose how I should teach the lessons to my students. There are many different ways of learning and my future students may exhibit different learning styles than what these fifth graders exhibited. Not only did the inventory survey help with trying to figure out how to teach to the students, it also gave the students a chance to tell me what I should change or keep the same. I will also be keeping this aspect of the survey the same because I want the students to be able to let me know what something is not working. This is beneficial to both my teaching but also to the students receiving my teachings.

Another aspect from this project that I plan on keeping the same and extending further was that of the Atlantis project. The students were very motivated to complete the projects because they were able to pick what projects they wanted to complete. This project had my students be motivated and successful in school. I plan on extending this idea into all my units that I teach my students. My novel units, my math units, and my science/social studies units can all incorporate the use of the projects by choice.

One aspect of this project that I plan on changing when implementing in future classes is that of the amount of reflections the students had to complete. I made them complete a reflection after every lesson and because of this; the students became very discouraged to complete the reflection. I plan on changing the amount of reflections to one per week. This way I am still receiving my feedback but the students do not have to complete a vast amount of extra work.

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A last step that I plan on implementing is to take these students a step further with their assignments. I found that if the project or assignment is motivating to the students and they are receiving high scores, I should challenge them to complete more difficult assignments and projects. Since my students would remain motivated, it would allow me to see how difficult of information I could teach them. The research then might yield lower scores because of the more difficult work or lack of motivation because it was too hard for them. I want to push them until any of these two factors are present.

This project can be very helpful to a professional learning community (PLC) when trying to understand why a particular group of students does not exhibit the motivation or attention while in school. The members of the PLC can follow the steps that I completed to find out where the problem lies. More than likely, the problem will lie in the teaching style of the teacher. From the inventory survey that was included in this project, the PLC can use that to find the learning styles and vary the teaching style to meet their students' needs.

Overall, this research project was helpful in allowing me to see how my students learn. Before this project, I would not differentiate based on their learning styles because I thought differentiating was just about the academic levels of a group of learners. Through completion of this project, I now realize just how important differentiating a lesson based on learning styles is because it impacts the motivation that a student possesses while in the classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Research Questions	Data Sources		
	1	**2**	**3**
1. How does helping students to focus on one thing at a time impact student motivation and success?	Have students complete journal entry about ability to focus during lessons.	Teacher observation checklist to be used while students are working.	Use student reflections and teacher checklists and compare them to grade book.
2. How does allowing students to process learning through their individual learning styles impact success and motivation?	Have students complete the Ways of Learning survey to identify learning styles & supplement continually throughout the action plan as a motivational tool.	Provide lessons that attend to each of the student's learning styles.	Learning style rating sheets completed after each lesson.
3. What is the correlation between motivation and academic success?	Student Survey: Motivation	Compare student surveys to teacher grade book.	Motivational Grading Guide-students are given choice to decide what grade they want for the amount of work on each grade

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Appendix B

Name: Date:

Lesson Focus Journal Entry

<u>Directions</u>: Write a short journal entry telling if you were focused and attentive during this lesson. Explain in the entry why you were or why you were not and then tell what made you focus or what could be done to help you focus next time.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Appendix C

Teacher Focus Checklist

Date: Lesson:

Place a tally mark each time a student was off task during the lesson.

Appendix D

How Do You Like to Learn?							
Name_____ Age _____ Grade_____ Date_____ Directions: Please check the box that best describes your feelings about the statements below.							
Way of Learning	Really Dislike (1)	Dislike (2)	Neutral (3)	Like (4)	Really Like (5)	Did this motivate me to succeed?	How can I make this better?
1. Someone explaining to me what I am supposed to do							
2. Discussing things with others so we can understand them							
3. Studying with a friend to master difficult material							
4. Giving answers out loud when the teacher asks questions							
5. Making something that applies what I have learned							
6. Being given some materials or a task to learn on my own time							
7. Having a contest in class to see who has learned the most							
8. Teaching something to someone else in my class							
9. Having to learn new materials very quickly so that I must stay alert							
10. Finishing assignments where I find out right away if I am right							
11. Acting out a situation or event I have learned about							
12. Teacher explaining a concept or idea to the class							
13. Working on practice problems to be sure I have understood what I was learning							
14. Working on a task where the questions are ordered							

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from easiest to most difficult							
15. Sharing my own ideas with others in the class							
16. Learning new facts, ideas, and concepts every day at school							
17. Being allowed to work for a long period on something that interests me							
18. Learning how to do something by role playing							
19. Reading a book to learn about a new topic							
20. Working on assignments that ask me questions on work I was assigned to study							
21. Becoming an expert on a topic so I can teach it to someone else							
22. Working to finish learning about a topic with other students							
23. Going off on my own to study a subject I like							
24. Having a competition to see if my team can answer more questions than other teams							
25. Discussing an issue on which several students disagree							
26. Being given time to review and practice for a test							
27. Listening to the teacher lecture on a topic							
28. Finding out the big idea behind what I am learning							
29. Learning how to solve a problem from another student in my class							
30. Teacher calling on students to recite information such as math facts or states and capitals							
31. Planning a project I will work on myself							
32. Working on a project with other students who have the same interests or abilities							

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33. Being able to skip parts of a subject when I already know them							
34. Listening to a guest speaker							
35. Playing a game using flashcards to practice what I have already learned							
36. Teacher leading a discussion on a new topic							
37. Working with others on a project with little help from the teacher							
38. Working by myself to learn something new							
39. Being allowed to move through new material as quickly as I can learn it							
40. Learning a concept by playing a game							

How Do You Like to Learn? Results

Instructions
Use the points from each box and add them together. Divide that answer by the total number of items in that category to find the average. An average scale of 3.67-4.33 indicates the activity is a *preference*, while a mean score of 4.34-5.00 indicates the activity is a *strong preference*.

Lecture: Items 1,12,27,34. Divide by 4= _____

Discussion: Items 2,8,15,25,36,37. Divide by 6=_____

Peer Learning: Items 2,3,8,15,21,22,29,32,37. Divide by 9=_____

Drill and Recitation: Items 4,30,35. Divide by 3=_____

Projects: Items 5,32,37. Divide by 3= _____

Self-Instruction: Items 6,23,31,33,38,39. Divide by 6= _____

Games, Competition: Items 7,24,35,40. Divide by 4=_____

Group Learning   Items 2,22,24,25,32,37,40. Divide by 7= _____

Individual Learning: Items 1,5,6,9,10,17,18,19,20,21,23,29,31,33,38,39. Divide by 16= __

New Learning: Items 1,2,5,6,9,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,23,27,28,29,36,38,39,40. Divide by 21= _____

Old Learning: Items 3,4,7,8,11,13,20,24,35. Divide by 7=_____

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Appendix E

Name: Date:

Learning Style Rating Sheet

<u>Directions</u>: Circle the number that represents your opinion to the statement. Tell why you chose that number.

1. This lesson was interesting and I stayed focused throughout.

    1   2   3   4   5
    _____

    _____

2. I was motivated to want to stay on task, pay attention, and complete the lesson.

    1   2   3   4   5

    _____

    _____

3. My preferred learning style (the way I like to learn) was used when completing this lesson.

    1   2   3   4   5

    _____

    _____

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Appendix F

Atlantis: The Lost City

For this unit, you will be completing any of the projects that are on the next page. Each project has a point value beside it showing how much that certain project is worth if completed well. Some projects are more in-depth than others so they are worth more points. Once a project is completed, the student will present it and have it on display until the end of the unit. **All projects are due by May 9th!**

Grading System:

To receive an A, you have to receive 60-70 points.

To receive a B, you have to receive 50-60 points.

To receive a C, you have to receive 40-50 points.

The way to receive the points is to choose projects (you will have to choose more than one) and complete them according to the instructions. There will be a grading rubric attached so you know what you must do to receive all of your points.

It is your choice! If you want that A, do the work and get the points!

Project Ideas

1. A major publishing company has asked you to write a fairy tale about Atlantis. Write about the continent and how you think it might have been destroyed. You might want to include illustrations. **20 points**

2. The lost continent seemed to have disappeared. What would happen if all the students in your school disappeared? Write and illustrate a children's book describing the events as they

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might have occurred. Where did the students go? How did they get back? (If this project is chosen, I will give you the materials to write a book). **50 points**

3. Create a perfect imaginary place that you could discover. Develop a plan on how you are going to get there. Write a log about your journey and discovery. Describe the climate, products, people, and any other life-forms. Design a map of the area complete with a key. **30 points**

4. You are the travel and convention director for the Atlantis Chamber of Commerce and have been asked by the board of directors to design a commercial that would entice tourists to your paradise island. **50 points**

5. Design a new piece of equipment that might be used to investigate the disappearance of Atlantis. How does it work? What does it look like? **40 points**

6. Write and illustrate a comic strip about the sinking of Atlantis and how it might have happened. **20 points**

7. Pretend you have just invented a time machine that allows you to travel back in time. Since you can't control where it sends you, you happen to end up in Atlantis the day the continent is going down. Videotape interviews with citizens of Atlantis on this fateful day. **40 points**

8. What would you do if your city started sinking? List ten things you would do and ten things you would take with you. Where would you go? Why? What would you do when you got there? Ask several class members the same questions and chart or graph your results on the computer using Microsoft Office. **20 points**

9. It is believed that if Atlantis did exist, it probably sank in the Atlantic Ocean. Make a diorama of what you think the remains of this city might look like now. **30 points**

10. Find out all you can about Atlantis. Use a variety of resources. Don't limit yourself to the internet or the encyclopedia. You can either create a slideshow revealing the facts you found or you can create a game that others can play to test their knowledge of Atlantis. **30 points for slideshow. 40 points for game.**

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