

Increasing the Amount of Time that Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities are Authentically Engaged During Art Instruction

Abstract

Students with significant Cognitive Disabilities are often left out of special activities like Art, P.E. and Music because these students have many physical and cognitive limitations. This study will attempt to identify strategies to increase authentic engagement of these students during Art instruction.

Statement of Problem

Often students who have significant cognitive disabilities do not participate authentically in specials classes such as Art, Music, and Physical Education. Sometimes elective classes are not even offered to this population. Many students with significant disabilities have little or no use of their hands, and often their hands are fixed in flexed, non-functional positions. Although it may be difficult to provide hand-over-hand instruction, it can be very effective. Students may also participate in many other ways without physical movement or motion. There are many other ways to engage students while they wait turns for one-on-one instruction. Students can be engaged by using switches, making choices or watching visual lessons on the white board or iPad. It is right and fair that we as educators do everything possible to help these students become authentically engaged in their art projects. All students, no matter their disabilities, should have a chance to experiment and attend to Art and all its mediums.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this project is to determine how to increase the time that students with significant disabilities are authentically engaged during art class and what strategies are most effective to ensure authentic participation.

Literature Review

There has been an enormous amount of research in the fields of special education and Art. However, combining these two topics and researching the authenticity of participation in art class by severely disabled students is a topic that has been less researched. Therefore, I will be researching how to authentically engage students with significant disabilities in art class.

When a teacher plans instruction for students who are severely disabled, one of the most significant challenges is always going to be how to integrate opportunities for authentic instruction. Having trained, effective paraprofessionals in the art room helps increase the time students are authentically engaged. Another way to engage students in an art room is by having the students attend to a video or iPad with visuals. Research in a number of studies has shown technology to be a valuable tool in teaching students with special needs (Light & McNaughton, 2012). Recent developments in mobile technology, including the introduction of the iPad and other smartphone and tablet devices, have

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provided important new tools for communication (Diagnan, 2010). Depending on the number of students in a class, as well as the number of adults, a system of rotation focusing on smaller groups should be established. Numerous studies have been conducted over the past three decades to support the benefits of cooperative learning (Gillies, 2003). Having the class divided up into small groups instead of working with one large group will help to increase the times students are authentically engaged in art.

Research Methodology

The action research will take place in my Art room with two classes of students who have intellectual disabilities. Of the 18 students in these two classes data will be taken on six total students, three students from each class. From the elementary class data will be taken on two African American girls and one Caucasian boy. In the high school class data will be taken on two African American boys and one African American girl. Data is going to be taken by four paraprofessionals and myself. Frequency of student engagement will be logged by the teacher and paraprofessionals. A teacher made student checklist will also be used to record eye gaze, nodding, smiling, looking, excitement, touching, and reaching. A teacher made chart to log students attending to videos during the last 15 minutes of class will also be utilized. The teacher and two different paraprofessionals will alternate to log the charts. Finally, a teacher observation form will be used by the students' classroom teachers to see if their students seemed more engaged throughout their school days due to this intervention.

Findings or Results

To date, the information available in this field of study is extremely limited. I will collect data and provide concrete evidence as I complete this project.

Implications in the field

Depending on specific school schedules, between one tenth and one fifth of the school day for students with significant disabilities is spent in specials classes. Further, many schools look at specials as the most viable time to include students with significant disabilities with typical students. It is crucial that this time is as productive as possible instructionally.

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References

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