



**WICHITA STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

## **Student driven projects and effects on motivation**

Item Type	Conference paper
Authors	Jacoby, Alison;Tasker, Leigh Ann;Koehn, Matthew
Citation	Jacoby, Alison, Tasker, Leigh Ann & Koehn, Matthew (2011). Student Driven Projects and Effects on Motivation. -- In Proceedings: 7th Annual Symposium: Graduate Research and Scholarly Projects. Wichita, KS: Wichita State University, p. 88-89
Publisher	Wichita State University. Graduate School
Download date	2026-05-16 18:22:29
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10057/3565">http://hdl.handle.net/10057/3565</a>

# Student Driven Projects and Effects on Motivation

Alison Jacoby, Leigh Ann Tasker & Matthew Koehn\*

Faculty: Kay Gibson & Charlene Laramore

Department of Curriculum & Instruction

**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to determine if student choice of projects would increase their motivation and engagement. Prior research has indicated that students will be self-motivated to work hard on a project when it is one they chose. This research study is a collaboration of three educators and the focus groups came from a middle school in an urban area and a high school in a rural community. This study showed us that most students preferred to have some aspect of choice in their learning and also that many students when given choice will show greater motivation and participation in the classroom having a greater sense of pride in their work.

## 1. Introduction

Many teachers in today's classroom struggle with students who are apathetic, disinterested or bored. The purpose of this research study was to examine if giving students a choice in what they could study while still maintaining the core academic concept led to greater motivation. This research study also wanted to know if greater autonomy (i.e. choice of topic, artistic styling) led to greater motivation after studies have shown that many upper level students, especially middle school students, feel that as they become more independent they receive less autonomy stifling their motivation[1]. This research study was done using a language arts class from Marshall Middle School in Wichita, KS and a high school art class from Hartford High School located in Hartford, KS, but was motivated to help improve the overall learning environment in all classrooms.

## 2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

The students in the language arts class were given the task of researching an American Tragedy and then reported their findings in a Microsoft Publisher Newsletter. They were given a rubric at the onset of the project and the class brainstormed possible ideas together. Students did not have to pick topics from a list or from the list generated by the class brainstorm; it was completely up to them which event in American history they chose to research. The assignment required students include: an explanation of the tragedy; two separate stories about the tragedy, perhaps individual accounts; two pictures with captions; as well as dialogue and statistics to go along with their topic. The STS teacher came in to give a mini-lesson on Microsoft Publisher, specifically about how to create newsletters. After the group brain storm and lesson about Publisher, students were allowed to use their time as they needed to work. On the last day of the project, students presented their newsletters in a small group setting. And the students whose consent and assent forms I had received went online to complete the survey.

The students in the art class had been studying a unit on the elements and principles of design. The research project was planned using a lesson introducing the new element of texture. The essential understanding was for the students to demonstrate understanding of the element of texture. The project directions explained the two types of texture-real and implied then outlined the choices for the students to pick that would enable them to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts. The list of choices was designed to reach multiple learning styles with an outcome where they could use their strengths. The choices ranged from the arts –dramatic, dance, musical, and visual including digital movies, photographs and technology to linguistic projects that could be combined with the visual arts. The process involved in the project involved planning, implementing and displaying a finished project along with a process paper. The students were given the choice to work individually or in groups.

At the end of the project the students completed an online survey that was geared to gauge their attitude and motivation towards the project itself. Data was also collected from the teachers who were supervising the project. Once collected and analyzed the data showed that the students preferred picking their own topics instead of being assigned them which is consistent with other academic research [2]. Also some students were willing to pick topics that were going to be more challenging again following the theme of current academic research [3]. One question in particular on the survey asked about the level of pride the students had about their project. Many students answered that they were proud of their project, having a sense of accomplishment. This statement is a good endorsement that

students who have more autonomy have a greater sense of motivation because they have taken ownership of the project [4].

### **3. Conclusions**

This research study has shown good evidence for the argument of allowing students to have choices in their education. This research has also shown that choices can be given even if the curriculum is strictly regimented, which is the case with some schools due to No Child Left Behind. When students are given choices they are given a chance to lead instead of follow and that appears, from the evidence gathered from this study, to give students greater motivation to work hard participate and take pride in their work. Ultimately that leads to classrooms where students are more actively engaged and not disinterested and apathetic.

### **4. Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge the faculties and administrations at both Marshall Middle School and Hartford High School. We would also like to acknowledge the parents who allowed their students to participate in this research study as well as the students who participated. Without you we would not have been able to conduct this research and contribute the knowledge that we have gained from it to our profession. Lastly we would like to acknowledge Wichita State University, and more specifically our facilitators Dr. Kay Gibson and Dr. Charlene Laramore for allowing us to be in the position to do this research.

### **References**

- [1] Hicks Anderman, L., & Midgley, C. (1998). Motivation and Middle School Students. *ERIC Digest*, 1-2.
- [2] Johnson, D. A. (2005). The Effect of Choice on Motivation. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 76. Retrieved from <http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5008550689>
- [3] Rich, M. (2009). A New Assignment: Pick Books You Like. *The New York Times*, 4. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/books/30reading.html?\\_r=3&partner=rss&emc=rss](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/books/30reading.html?_r=3&partner=rss&emc=rss)
- [4] Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. p. 90-91, New York: Riverhead Books.