

Joy2Learn User Feedback Summary of Findings

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INTRODUCTION

EDC's Center for Children and Technology is conducting user research on the Joy2Learn website. This effort includes surveys and interviews with teachers in New York City and Los Angeles and LA-based teaching artists. This report provides a summary of their responses.

The information in this summary was drawn from several sources:

Surveys. A total of 31 teachers and teaching artists filled out the online survey. These included:

- Twenty-one of the teachers who attended the training in New York City
- Five of the teachers who participated in professional development and then used Joy2Learn in their classrooms
- Five teaching artists who worked with the Los Angeles teachers

Interviews. We conducted a total of seven interviews: four with New York City teachers, one with a Los Angeles teacher, and two with Los Angeles teaching artists.

Teacher reflection forms. The teachers who attended the New York City training were given a set of reflection questions to consider as they explored the site. Nine teachers chose to share their reflections with us.

All teachers and artists who participated in Joy2Learn in both New York and Los Angeles were contacted at least twice with a request to fill out the survey, and those that responded to the survey were asked if they would permit us to interview them as well.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Teachers taught grades 4 through 8 and a wide range of subjects, including art or visual art, English/language arts, reading, a writing workshop, math, science, social studies, history, and library science. There was one special education teacher and one gifted and talented teacher in the group, as well as two library/media center staff.

Sixty percent of the respondents have computers and internet access in their classrooms as well as in a lab or library media center. In most cases, however, classroom computers numbered only two or three. Some teachers also have access via mobile carts, in computer labs, and in library/media centers. For the most part, teachers have access to video players, as well, but are less likely to have access to smart boards, digital cameras, and video cameras.

About half of the respondents reported that their students use technology for class once a week or more, and about half once or twice a month or less. Seventy percent said their students use web-based resources in class.

The majority of respondents had not used online arts education resources before learning about Joy2Learn. Respondents felt that all the features listed in the survey were at least somewhat important in an arts education website. The features that got the highest ratings were:

- ease of use- rated very or extremely important by 80-90%
- variety of resources- rated very or extremely important by 80-90%
- connections to state and city learning standards- rated very or extremely important by 80-90%
- the inclusion of lesson plans- rated very or extremely important by 80-90%

Other features were important to fewer respondents:

- authentic artwork- rated very or extremely important by 60% of respondents
- working artists- rated very or extremely important by 50% of respondents

RESPONSES TO JOY2LEARN

What teachers liked most about Joy2Learn

All the teachers and artists who completed surveys and agreed to be interviewed were enthusiastic about the site. (It's important to note that teachers who were less than positive may have been less likely to respond to our requests for information.) Several aspects were mentioned most often:

Appealing and engaging. Teachers found Joy2Learn to be engaging, entertaining students and drawing them into the subject matter, or as one teacher put it: "not boring." They mentioned that the information on the site was both extensive and specific.

"...The students tend to reject before thinking things with which they are unfamiliar. They also say 'I can't' before they try. My hope is that this site would allow them to see and experience before they do."

Connections to real artists. Many teachers felt the artists were authentic in their presentation, and that students got the sense that they were sitting with the artist in his or her studio or workspace, having an actual conversation.

Connections to real life. The authenticity of the e-Presentations helped students to make connections between the art and artists on the site and their own experiences and feelings. Several mentioned the artists providing an example of what's possible, encouraging students to feel that they too could be artists and use art to express their own feelings.

"I am hoping my students can connect to the many achievements of African Americans (music and dance). I have a majority of African American (and Spanish) students. I would like to have them walk away with a sense of 'I can do that.' I want them to know that they can be anything!"

“My special needs students will connect with what’s familiar in the arts and real life experiences. The theme might center around “feelings” and then how all this relates to real life.”

Curricular connections. When asked how Joy2Learn might support student learning in the content areas, several teachers responded that Joy2Learn could help them make connections across all the disciplines. The specific subjects that were most frequently cited were literacy/English language arts and history/social studies.

“I was thinking to integrate the music component into my literacy. Our students are responsible for ‘publishing’ narrative accounts. Then we share with parents during Author’s Day. Instead of reading 30 or more papers the students could tell their stories in song or through dance.”

One teacher explained that Joy2Learn was especially helpful in drawing in students who had the most trouble with reading and writing. Teachers also made connections with math and science.

Interactivity. Several teachers mentioned the interactivity of the site- that students could choose their own paths through the material and engage in activities related to the artists’ presentations- as a plus.

Related activities. Teachers and artists alike appreciated the games and activities associated with each of the e-Presentations as a way to extend students’ engagement with the site.

Resources. A number of respondents appreciated both the lesson plans and the connections to standards, in New York City in particular.

A number of teachers reported that their school had no arts program, and that Joy2Learn would help them provide the only access their students were likely to have to the arts in school. The arts teachers who participated in the study saw Joy2Learn as a way to introduce students to specific disciplines that they could then expand on in class.

Ease of use. A number of teachers felt that Joy2Learn was self-explanatory and easy to navigate for students as young as 3rd grade.

Multiple access points. Several teachers valued the fact that Joy2Learn enables students to enter the exploration of the arts from different starting points and for different reasons. Exploration is encouraged by those activities in which there are no right or wrong answers.

How teachers have used or might use Joy2Learn with students

Teachers offered a number of ideas for how they have used or planned to use Joy2Learn in their classrooms. Many involved using the site as a pre-activity to introduce an artist, genre, or theme for further study. For example, students could view the studio-based parts of the site and/or curate their own exhibit on Joy2Learn and then visit a museum. A teacher in a school with a

half-year career exploration thought she would take her students to the theater and then have students use Joy2Learn to explore what kind of arts-related job they would like to do.

“I’d use the E-Presentation/Elizabeth Murray during social studies and literacy. Her painting ‘Night Empire’ could be a starting point for NYC’s modern history. I’d also read ‘NYC’- based chapter books like Judy Blume’s Tales of a 4th Grade Nothing.”

“As an arts educator I could use this site as a starter. This is a new and wonderful tool for hooking in the students that may be initially reluctant in exploring the arts. This site can also be used as a bridge to connecting the arts with literature, social studies, and biographies.”

Challenges to using Joy2Learn

Teachers discussed several challenges to using Joy2Learn effectively that were specific to their own skills and environment, rather than the site itself.

Competing accountability and curriculum expectations. A common challenge for classroom teachers across the board is the amount of material they’re expected to cover in the course of the school year, which precludes them addressing topics or engaging in activities that don’t directly contribute to student learning in those areas. In addition, with the prevalence of high-stakes testing, when time runs short, those activities that aren’t directly related to preparation for tests can fall off the priority list.

Technology access. A number of teachers found it challenging to engage all their students with Joy2Learn with only a few computers in the classroom. Some used a smart board or other tool to present the site to the whole class, others had students work at the computers in small groups and in shifts, and still others let students work with Joy2Learn when they had finished some other task ahead of their peers. Further, approximately 40% of the teachers we heard from had no computers or internet access in their rooms. Where teachers had access to multiple computers in a lab, they often found it difficult to schedule time for their class because the lab was so much in demand.

Teacher technology expertise. One teacher felt that she didn’t have the technology expertise herself to use the site well, and believed the same to be true of many of her peers.

Areas for improvement/expansion

Teachers would like to see more artists represented on the site to give students the opportunity to explore several approaches in each genre, and to see the “different ends of the spectrum.” One teacher suggested including more older artists, and a few suggested the possibility of including or connecting to local artists and information:

“As a NYC teacher of 4th grade our Social Studies curriculum is titled ‘New York: then and now.’ I would like to be able to incorporate more aspects of the website into the curriculum. Right now there are not many. So if you were to expand the

site... it would be beneficial for 4th grade teachers to have access to information about New York.”

An arts teacher wished for more extension activities that promoted critical thinking and analysis.

A number of comments addressed issues of navigation:

“There is a lot of information on the site and somehow it should be condensed so it is easier to navigate through.”

One teacher explained that it was difficult finding the way back to areas of the site previously visited. Another wanted to be able to search the site to locate specific information.

Several respondents also suggested including a site map to facilitate navigation.

Several suggestions pertained to communication, ways for teachers to share ideas and lesson plans, a forum for students to ask and respond to questions, and an ask-the-artist blog among them. (It is not clear in the first two cases whether teachers had seen the student and teacher discussion forums.)

One respondent felt that the visual art activities would be better if they connected to the artists’ work.

Some suggestions for improving the site contradict what others found to be benefits. For instance, several teachers suggested making the site more user-friendly for students and adding interactive games.

EXPERIENCE WITH JOY2LEARN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The most common comment on the professional development session attended by New York City teachers was that they appreciated being able to explore the site on their own with the support of trainers and experts in the arts fields.

“I enjoyed the encouragement from staff developers while I explored the site. I appreciated the awesome ‘art setting.’”

The most common challenge cited was not enough time (though one California teacher noted that she and her colleagues had only one day of professional development to prepare them to teach new math). Some New York City teachers felt the training started too early, not leaving them enough time to get to the training site at the end of the school day.

Additional professional development

Teachers had a number of suggestions for further professional development, many of which involved modeling and real-life examples of teachers and students using the site.

Follow-up meetings for teachers. “The workshop was great. We now need a follow-up to review the site and the experiences shared from using the site.”

Presentations by experienced teachers. One respondent suggested professional development sessions run by teachers who had experience with the site and were currently using Joy2Learn with students, in which they demonstrate lessons.

Examples of students working with Joy2Learn. One teacher suggested a video of students working with Joy2Learn to provide examples of the different ways that students engage with and navigate through the site.

Strategies for whole-class lessons. Especially given the limited number of computers in classrooms, teachers would be interested in learning ways to use Joy2Learn with the whole class.

Strategies for teaching particular topics. Most teachers saw potential connections with specific subject areas and topics, and would appreciate additional approaches to those topics and strategies for addressing others.

Strategies for using Joy2Learn with different groups, such as students in special needs or gifted and talented programs.

Strategies for helping students create their own masterpieces.

More information on particular artists as background and context for lessons using Joy2Learn.

Several respondents said that online video clips of teachers and students using Joy2Learn could be an effective substitute for face-to-face training in certain cases.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

A number of teachers suggested further professional development sessions and additional lesson plans. Several teachers expressed interest in seeing lesson plans that other teachers create, especially standards-based activities, as well as information on how experienced teachers have implemented the lesson plans. One arts teacher, for instance, developed Joy2Learn “mini-lesson sheets” for her colleagues. One teacher suggested student worksheets for each E-Presentation to help focus and guide students’ explorations.

One teacher felt that the lesson plans specifically for arts classes could be stronger, one suggested including guidelines for differentiated education in lesson plans, and another suggested producing a Joy2Learn DVD for teachers without internet access.

CONCLUSION

Teachers and artists who agreed to participate in this study were very positive about their experiences with the site to date and the potential for expanded use. They had no trouble envisioning how Joy2Learn could support their curriculum in a wide range of subject areas and

across the curriculum. This was true across the board, including for New York City teachers, who had only one introductory training session. This suggests that Joy2Learn as it currently exists can be a powerful and easily accessible teaching and learning tool.

The kinds of changes and additions teachers suggest mainly fall into the category of expanding what's already there- more artists, more styles, more lesson plans, more professional development. While a number of respondents felt the site is user-friendly and easy to navigate, enough disagreed that it would be worth it for developers to revisit the issue.