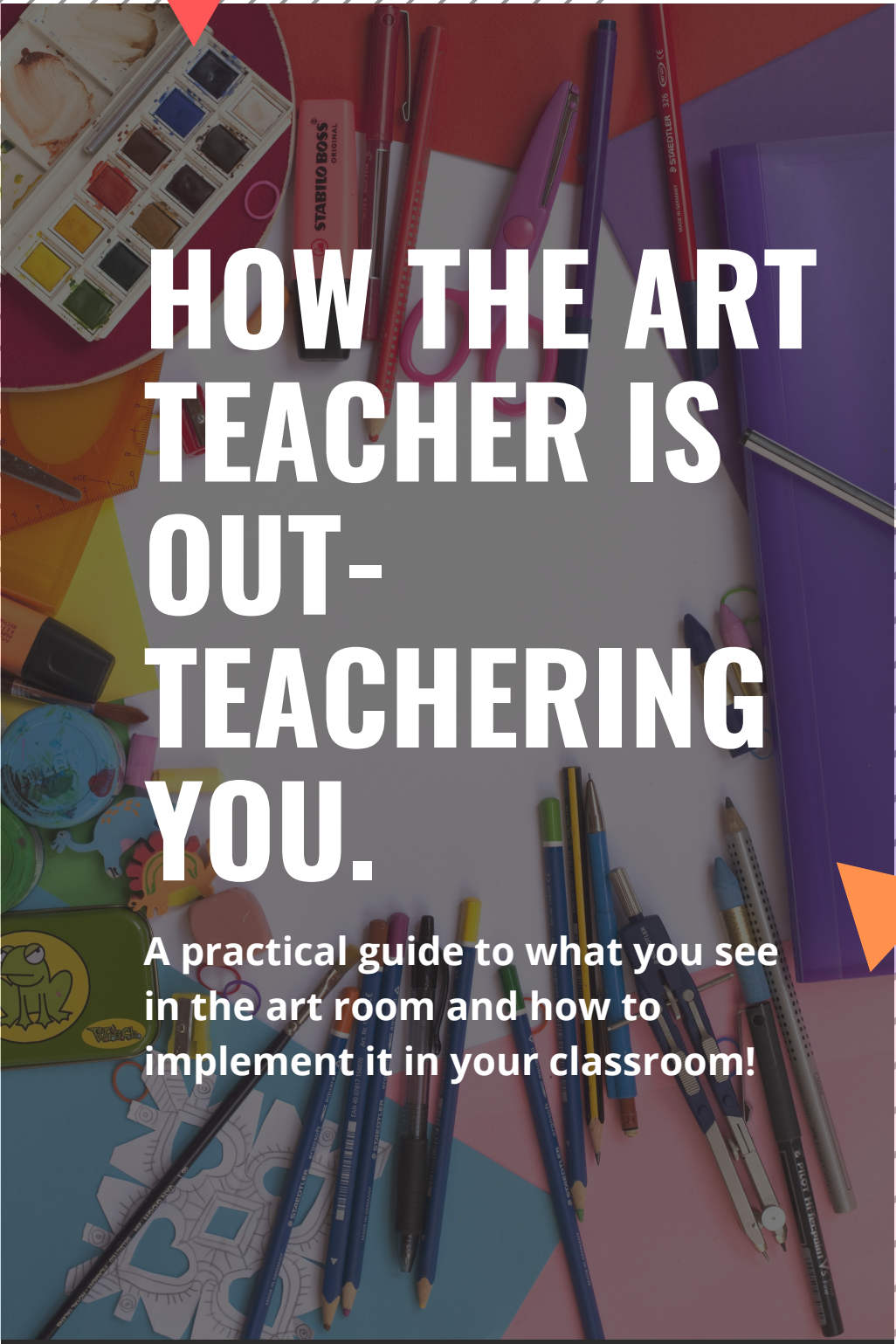




HOW THE ART TEACHER IS OUT- TEACHING YOU.

A practical guide to what you see
in the art room and how to
implement it in your classroom!

CHELSEA DELEON WALKER

Overview

"At a time when standardization is bleeding our schools and classrooms of their distinctive vitalities, the need for the arts and for artistry in what we do has never been more important."

Elliot Eisner₍₂₀₀₂₎

The art room is often a place of excitement, activity, chaos, and creativity. However, upon first look through the window into the art classroom, it can be difficult to understand what carefully orchestrated chaos the art teacher is using to accomplish their curricular goals. This misunderstanding of the art classroom has resulted in the diminution of its importance in the education of well-rounded students.

Art educators are naturally adept at engaging students and differentiating for all students. We utilize stools that are innate in our subject matter to reinforce learning and promote creativity. The information provided in this document is meant to educate fellow teachers, administration, and the educational community about what you can see in the art classroom and why it is indispensable to our students. The strategies that art educators utilize are not exclusive to the art room, and can be easily utilized to enhance any curriculum in a school building and you are encouraged to use them!

Big Takeaways

- ▶ Misconceptions about the art room
- ▶ What the arts teach
- ▶ How art promotes learning and engagement
- ▶ How to understand the art classroom when you are observing
- ▶ How to utilize the same strategies the art teacher uses to improve teaching practice

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Introduction

When you pop your head into an art classroom you are bound to see quite a few things happening. There will be students getting or returning supplies, getting or putting away artwork, talking to their peers, standing and working, and sometimes listening to music. Sometimes the teacher will be walking around, and others they will be working with a small group or the whole class. Each day is different and each lesson requires a new set of procedures. While looking into this unique world may give you some anxiety about the organization of it all, the truth is that in the art classroom art teachers are a facilitator rather than a dictator. While we artfully create engaging lesson plans and curriculum, we shape learning experiences around our students.

In order to do this effectively we must share responsibility with students and teach them how to work in our unique environment. This document is meant to help you understand what you are seeing and how the art teacher creates the creative environment to maximize learning and engagement through encouraging self-guided learning. The art room is often misunderstood because it *looks* so different from a traditional classroom. This document will lift the veil on the art room and let you in on what we are actually doing in our classrooms, besides making pretty things to put on a wall or refrigerator!

Misunderstanding in the Art Room

The art room looks different from a traditional classroom, and is often misunderstood as a result. Art teachers endure remarks from parents, students, peers, and administration that minimize our importance to our students and, frankly, disrespects our profession as well students who enjoy art making. The arts teach important skills like communication, visual thinking, problem solving, perseverance, flexibility, and collaboration; in addition to our standards of art vocabulary, art history, techniques, criticism, and creation. Art teachers do have standards that they must teach their students like any other teacher and must figure out how to teach those standards in the time our students have with us (which may be as little as 45 minutes a week). Art teachers must give grades, talk to parents, go to conferences, participate in special education meetings, and attend professional development like all teachers. Therefore, moving forward through this document, remember that the art teacher is an specialized educator just like you, who has a lot of demands on their time and must make sure their students master their content!

Things the art teacher hears from colleagues: (that minimizes our importance to students)

"It's just art."

"I wish I could just spend all day coloring like you!"

"Your job is so easy."

"Will you decorate this poster for my classroom?"

"Can you use your class time for a project my students don't have time for in my class?"

"I can help myself to your supplies, right?"

"Why don't you become a real artist?"

"Do you actually give grades?"

"How much can you actually teach a kid about art?"

"Were you not smart enough to be a real teacher?"

"Did you actually have to go to college to teach art?"

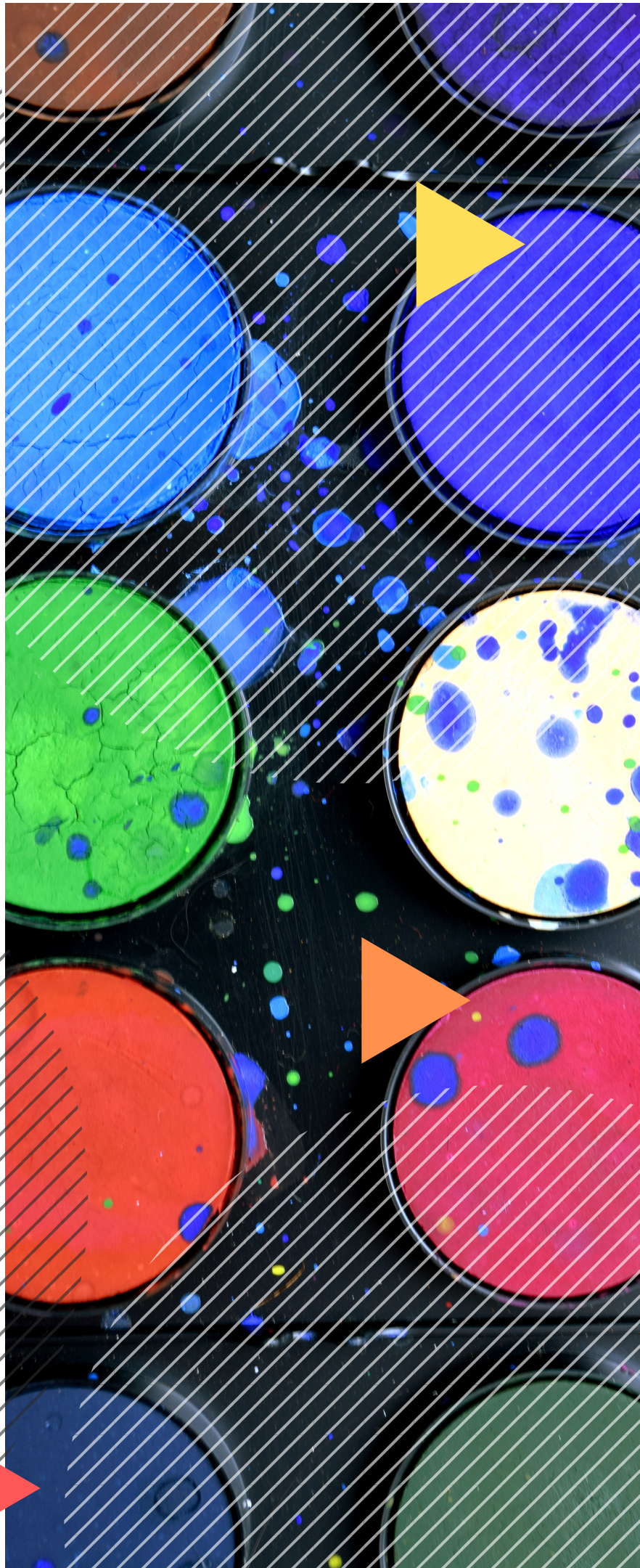
"Your class isn't important to the school because you don't have any high stakes tests."

"Do you get paid like a real teacher?"

The arts may embody one of the oldest forms of knowledge and knowing. By contrast, they continue to be seen as frivolous and trivial"

-Clover(2011)

1.
So What
are They
Really
Doing
Down
There in
the Art
Room?



What Skills Make Art Indispensable?

Visual Thinking

- ▶ Provides constant real time assessment
- ▶ The ability to visualize and connect thoughts (Ackerman, 1974)
- ▶ Teaches students to see with a sensitive, critical, and knowledgeable eye (Landau, 1986)
- ▶ Language is not the limit of cognition, we can learn through images as well (Eisner, 2002)
- ▶ Visualizing outcomes and the ability to influence decisions (Siegesmund, 1998)

Communication

- ▶ Provides students with an outlet for self-expression and individualism
- ▶ The ability to explain and verbalize thoughts, ideas, and decisions
- ▶ Understanding when and how to use verbal or visual modes of communication (Stoops, 1966)
- ▶ Art is the only language which is ubiquitous, universal, and timeless (Caldwell, 1960)

Innovation & Creative Problem Solving

- ▶ Visualizing original ideas and solutions
- ▶ Planning and implementation through problem solving
- ▶ Learning creativity through choice and flexibility (Kulinski, 2018)
- ▶ Encouraging self-directed curriculum through idea exploration (Rufo, 2012)
- ▶ Critically reflecting on decisions (Freedman, 2010)
- ▶ Promoting forward thinking in visual and productive economies (Freedman, 2010)

Character Development

- ▶ Accepting and celebrating diverse perspectives and world-views (Eisner, 2002)
- ▶ Learning patience, perseverance, and follow-through
- ▶ Teaching flexibility and to work with unexpected outcomes.
- ▶ Developing growth mindsets
- ▶ Self-Reflection
- ▶ How to make good judgements based on knowledge (Eisner, 2002)

How Our Students Learn with Art

Learning in the art classroom is unique because we offer students a completely hands-on experience and an opportunity for a self-guided curriculum. The excitement students experience when coming to the art room has a lot to do with the structure of how we encourage our students to learn. The skills we teach in the art room go far beyond learning to utilize paint, render things realistically, or learning to color (in fact we never "color").

Art educators are aware of the uniqueness of the environment we provide to our students and we are extremely adept at finding evidence of student learning and cognition in their visual artifacts. If you hand a crayon to a toddler, they

are fascinated to find that they can make marks with the magical crayon! But as children grow, and before they can read and write, they use drawing and mark making as a method of communicating. Therefore, art is evidence of thinking long before we consider written communication.

The drawings of children do not attempt to create artistically realistic scenarios but rather construct art works that represent "forms of logic" (Leeds, 1989, p.98) that convey visual thinking. Sometimes art can also be utilized by children to reiterate gained knowledge and to aid in retaining that knowledge (Dissanyake, 2003). If you are paying attention, that means that the cute stick figure drawing your students give you is an



**Hands-On
Learning**

**Collaboration
and
Socialization**

**Exploration
and Play**

**Self-Guided
Inquiry**

**Open-Ended
Problems**

**Building
Relationships**

attempt a literal record of thinking that uses symbolism to commemorate an importance experience or thought. Pretty advanced stuff would you not agree? Therefore, in the art classroom we are utilizing universal means of communicating to get students to think.

Perhaps the best part of the art classroom is that there are no wrong answers. There are merely different modes of exploration. Mistakes are encouraged because they are a demonstration of learning and growth. Art also enables students to continuously edit, change, and fix mistakes without fear of bad grades or other looming negative consequences. This creates a low-pressure environment where students appreciate the experience and, interestingly enough, do not realize how much they are learning through their explorations. If you walk into an art classroom you will notice that it is unique because it is often filled with chatter and discussion, and dare we say, even laughing?

We encourage students to talk and engage with each

other because part of the creative process is learning to work and collaborate with others. Vygotsky (1929) believed that children learn and develop by interaction with people and their environment. Today a student's environment ranges from their home, school, to their online presence. If we consider how socializing is changing rapidly through the advent of social media and the internet, it is becoming increasingly important the we teach students to engage with each other face-to-face and how to appropriately foster relationships.

While the art room has specific outcomes in mind when engaging in the creative process in order to guide students and accomplish specific learning targets art teachers utilize strategies like self-guided inquiry, open-ended problems, exploration, play, and socialization to teach their students to come to unique solutions and ideas. Attempting to incorporate these strategies into other subjects in schools will doubtless pass on some of the art room enthusiasm to other subjects

Why Art Isn't At The "Core"



marginalized because we do not "contribute" to the scores on those tests. The increased standardized testing that Eisner (2002) warns about, takes students away from intrinsically-motivated learning and pushes them to rote memorization.

As we prepare our students for standardized tests that require the regurgitation of information, we are taking time away from teaching our students that problems often have more than one solution and that mistakes are the beginning of learning. This makes the art classroom one of the last places in the school that promotes self-guided learning and exploration of content.

Because the art classroom exists outside the "core," there is often a misunderstanding between "core" and "non-core" teachers about the purpose of art in our schools. This misunderstanding exists because our methods of teaching are so drastically different.

Returning to, or even attempting, teaching methods that incorporate or integrate arts-based teaching methods will encourage a greater connection between students and their subject matter. The result will be transformed curriculum where teachers and students may perhaps feel less constrained by standardized testing. The arts remain a way to encourage real-world learning in our curriculums that is missing in so many "core" classes. It may be time for all educators to redefine what the actual "core" of what we are teaching our students should be.

When we think of "core" curriculum, we doubtlessly think of math, science, reading, writing, and social studies. These are the subjects in which students participate in high stakes tests that impact a school's achievement standings. The arts and elective courses have no large standardized tests that define their achievement and therefore do not receive the same amount of attention, funding, or importance.

Unfortunately, even though we manage to escape the onslaught of testing that is imposed on our students, our importance in the school is often

Arts Integration is:

- ▶ Including art making in your lesson plans to promote in depth engagement with content
- ▶ Collaborating with your art teacher on arts-based strategies to utilize in your classroom
- ▶ Asking the art teacher to lead staff-wide professional development on how the arts can promote greater understanding in content areas
- ▶ Using art materials to provide hands-on learning and applications to standards

Arts Integration Can Be:

- ▶ Collaborating on a mutually beneficial unit or lesson that builds connections between your subject and art
- ▶ Working as a curriculum team with your art educator to build a unit of instruction that connects to art making and accomplishes standards for all classes and teachers.

Imposing on the Arts:

- ▶ Asking an art teacher to dedicate their class time to a craft that you did not have time to fit into your unit of instruction.
- ▶ Asking if your students can color a picture during art time.
- ▶ Telling the art teacher to plan a project around ocean ecosystems because your students are learning about it in science.
- ▶ Assuming that the art teacher does not have standards to teach and therefore has time to dedicate to non-collaborative projects.

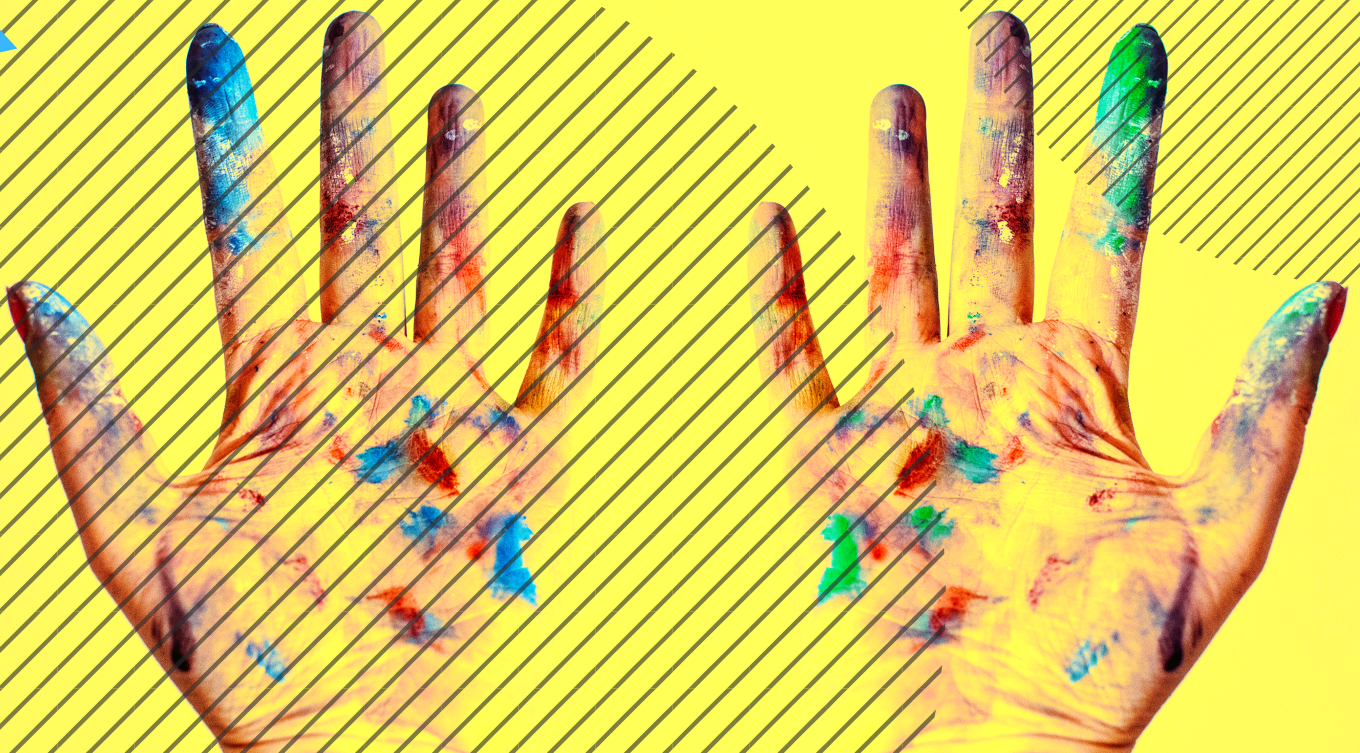
Integration or Imposition

Arts integration an educational key word that floats around from time to time. Art educators welcome arts integration, but there are quite a few misconceptions about what arts integration is and what it is meant to accomplish. Arts integration is when a teacher utilizes the arts as a method of learning where students engage in the creative process to achieve objectives through exploring connections, constructing, and demonstrating understanding (Silverstein & Layne, n.d.). Most art educators are excited to collaborate with you to come up with a great plan for integration in our curriculum or yours, but we are often discouraged from collaborating because our peers often mistake integration and instead become an imposition.

Arts integration is essentially learning to teach like an art teacher by allowing students to respond to problems and construct their own responses. This method of teaching builds deep cognitive connections because the students is "making meaning" (Gude, 2010) with information rather than simply regurgitating. In order to effectively integrate the arts we must consider the previously mentioned misconceptions about the art room and remember that art educators are busy educators that have their own standards to accomplish before the end of the school year. Art teachers are thrilled to help you integrate art, but make sure you are attempting to integrate and impose on art curriculum.

2.

Why Does it Always
Look Like Chaos? Is
That Paint in the
Teacher's Hair?



Movement, Noise, and Chaos

The answer is, yes! Yes, there probably is paint in the teachers hair. Yes, it looks a little chaotic in the art room. Yes, everyone gets out of their seat occasionally without asking. Yes, the students are talking while they are working. And yes, some of them are listening to music. Yes, there are spills and messes, but it is all part and parcel of the art environment.

Usually the first thing students say when they come into the art room on the first day is "We can talk?" Students have a hard time at first processing that it is indeed okay to talk in the art classroom. Socialization is unique in the room because they learn through discussing and communicating new ideas and thoughts with peers (Vygotsky, 1929). Teachers can generally admit that sometimes students learn better from their peers than they do from our instruction.

The art room encourages collaboration, talking (as long as hands are working), and embracing individual learning styles. This means we encourage talking, standing, moving, and listening to music. We do not arbitrarily give students run of the classroom, but we give students clear procedures and expectations that they must follow in order to be able to deviate from the traditional classroom. When you walk in the art room it may look like chaos, but really it is carefully organized classroom environment that runs surprisingly smooth.

The art classroom encourages all of this "chaos" and it is facilitated by the art teacher. The art teacher themselves rarely sits still or remains quiet. They often hide among the students and guide individual instruction through one-on-one conferences and checks for understanding.

The next time you look into the art room and think about how chaotic it might look, remember that the art teacher has encouraged art room behaviors and taught procedures to facilitate them. These behaviors look like chaos to a traditional classroom teacher, but are actually skills like collaboration, cleaning up after oneself, recognizing individual learning needs, and taking responsibility for individual learning. These procedures and behaviors are the key to making the art room function.

Encouraging these skills enables art teachers and you, if you choose to include arts based strategies in your room, to facilitate self-directed learning.



Procedures You Don't See

The art classroom cannot function without procedures! When you walk past the art room and think you're watching an explosion of materials, children, voices, and movement, remember the procedures that your art teacher has implemented in order to facilitate such an individualized environment.

What You See:

- ▶ Something is buzzing. Everyone is out of their seats and moving around! Billy almost spilled a cup of water on another student. The teacher is all the way over there. There is a line at the drying rack and Tessa is being bossy. Four kids are washing brushes at the same time and giggling at bubbles! The kids are playing on the carpet and not sitting quietly! The horror! What a disorganized mess!

What We See:

- ▶ The clean up timer has indicated cleanup time. Students have practiced and watched a demonstration on how to clean up after painting and students begin carrying out their clean up jobs. Billy said excuse me and let the friend he almost ran into go to the sink first to empty his water cup. Tessa is helping students at the drying rack by giving them a second hand for their wet papers. Students that had the job of washing brushes are working together to get all the brushes cleaned for the next class. Everyone is sitting on the carpet waiting for dismissal after their jobs were completed. What a successful day!



Individualized and Self-Guided learning is perhaps the most beneficial aspect of art education. Developing a curriculum that assists students in participating in a self-guided curriculum is a way to promote student engagement in the art. The question, however, is how do art educators promote what Eisner (2002) defines as self-initiated learning?

The arts are unique in that our assessments are performance based projects. These projects are guided and facilitated by the art educator throughout its ideation, conception, implementation, reflection, and submission. Often, you will find, in art classes that projects have guidelines, but have a large element of openness to give students flexibility. Open-ended problems teach students how to problem-solve, communicate, and implement their ideas. By offering students a chance to put their original idea into an existing project structure (i.e. the guidelines) we allow students to make their own plan to solve the problem. The teacher then acts as a facilitator that guides the student through solving the problem.

Open-Ended
Problems

Teacher
Facilitator

Ideation to
Planning

Individualized and Self-Guided Learning

Example Assignment:

Sculpture students must create a coil built vessel of no less than 12 inches tall. Students must decorate the vessel in such a way that tells a personal narrative. Students must sketch their ideas, refine ideas, explain their concept to their teacher and table, then begin creating. The project has an assigned due date.

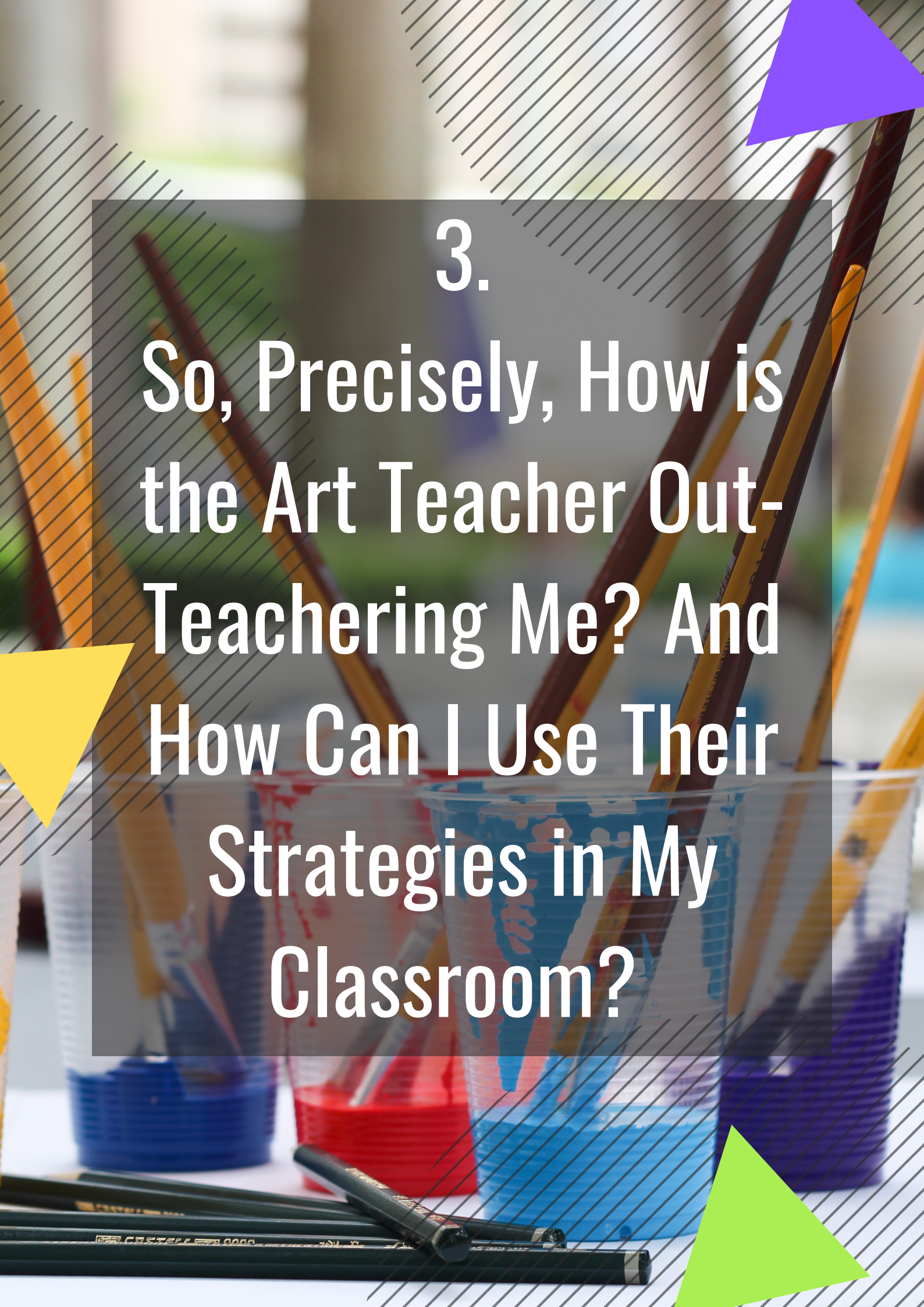
Individualized and Self-Guided Learning:

Students use prior knowledge to create individualized sketches based on student interest and aesthetic preferences. Students explain their sketches to their peers and teacher, select their most promising sketches, and combine them into a polished state and use a plan for creation. Student begins creating the piece that is unique from their peers. The teacher individually helps guide the student in construction or decoration techniques that will result in the desired product. Student has developed an individual idea, self-guided its creation, and has created a unique project that fulfills the requirement to the open ended project.

A Review of Why the Art Room Isn't Mass Chaos and Is Surprisingly Effective and Efficient:

- ▶ The arts embrace individual learning styles and needs
- ▶ The art room encourages communication and collaboration
- ▶ Art teachers teach art room behaviors and procedures that are not always observed
- ▶ The arts deliver open-ended problems with multiple solutions
- ▶ Art promotes self-guided inquiry into individually relevant solutions and ideas through exploration
- ▶ The art educator acts as a facilitator to individual learning journeys



The background features a blurred image of various art supplies, including pencils in containers and paint containers. Overlaid on this are several geometric shapes: a large purple triangle in the top right, a yellow triangle in the middle left, and a green triangle in the bottom right. A series of thin, parallel diagonal lines sweep across the entire image from the top left towards the bottom right.

3.

So, Precisely, How is
the Art Teacher Out-
Teaching Me? And
How Can I Use Their
Strategies in My
Classroom?

Procedures, Procedures, Procedures!

An Example of Procedural Mastery:

In a single lesson an art teacher may teach procedures for all of the following:

- How to hold a paintbrush
- How to apply pressure to a paintbrush
- How to "dip the toes" of the paintbrush in the paint
- How to wash the paintbrush when changing colors
- How to put away their paintings
- How to wash the paintbrush's "hair"
- How to return to their seat with a damp sponge and clean their table.
- How to behave on the carpet when the teacher is finished cleaning their tables

We have already addressed the importance of procedures in the art classroom. Effective procedures make the art classroom function. The art educator has a procedure for every tool, technique, and process they teach their students. It is important to understand the way that these procedures are delivered to students.

The art teacher is the master of the "I do, We do, You do" method of instruction. We ensure that we include our students in procedural instruction so that when they are left to work independently they understand how to utilize the materials and tools around them by using the procedures we have taught them..

What to steal from an art teacher's procedural knowledge?

- Make a list of what you want your students to be able to *do*.
- Break each item into small steps
- Have you taught procedures for these steps before?
- Will you be scaffolding on prior knowledge or are there some students who no prior knowledge?
- How can you make the procedures memorable?



Masterful Differentiation

Differentiation is one of the greatest strengths of the arts. Not only do we teach students to celebrate their differences and embrace their uniqueness, we also practice these skills as educators.

The art teacher teaches everyone. This applies to elementary school teachers who teach every student in the school to the high school teacher who receives a classroom full of students that have extremely varied art skills. We welcome one and all in our classrooms and practice inclusion not only in the relationships we build in the classroom, but also in how we instruct our students.

We have talked about self-guided learning and open-ended assignments. One of the key things we do is to let students self-guide

their learning and address open-ended assignments. Students work at their level of achievement or experience, and due to the individual nature of our assignments, we are able to meet students at their skill level and accommodate their learning needs. In the art classroom instruction is delivered to the class as a whole and is then facilitated individually between one-on-one conferences between teachers and students offering optimal checks for understanding, immediate feedback, and individually tailored differentiation.

What to steal from an art teacher's differentiation strategies?

- Have your students help you differentiate by allowing them to self-direct their learning through individualized projects.
- Check frequently for understanding by helping facilitate their projects in one-on-one conferences
- Differentiate for different skill levels by scaffolding and reviewing information.

Constant Formative Assessment

our students, we talk with them about where they are and how they are feeling about the days work and content. This ensures that there are no surprises from day-to-day, and we are always aware of where our students are in their learning.

examples

- **How are you feeling about the (insert project or assignment here) today? Can I help you at all?**
- **This part of the (insert assignment here) looks like it needs some attention. Where are you struggling?**
- **If you are finished, do you feel proud of this? How can we make you proud of this?**
- **It looks like you are struggling with (insert aspect of instruction here) lets break this down some more.**

These prompts are not ground breaking and are rather simple. However they are often overlooked as a formative assessment strategy. When you approach students in a consistent way that addresses their needs and reinforces that your job is to help them feel successful, they will respond in a manner that helps you help them.

When art teachers have their official observations throughout the year, we often encounter observers that are looking for how we utilize assessment in our classrooms. Art teachers give grades and we have standards, so obviously we assess our students. However, assessment functions differently in the art classroom. The majority of our assessments are formative, and if you don't know what to look for, you may miss how well it is integrated into our daily habits in the art room.

Through constant formative assessment and feedback we assist our students and differentiate for them throughout every assignment. So when their summative performance assignment is due, we know exactly where our students will perform because we have facilitated their learning throughout the development process. Therefore, summative assessments become less daunting to students because we are constantly talking and analyzing student performance and mastery of the content.

Most of our formative assessment occurs during daily class discussions. Art teachers are constantly walking around their classrooms and facilitating the making process. While working with

Why You Should Take the Time To Actually Get to Know Your Students:

- ▶ Easier Classroom Management!
- ▶ More easily facilitated differentiation because you can discuss their needs with them
- ▶ A more positive classroom environment built on trust that you, the teacher, are there to help students succeed
- ▶ Promotes a precedent of care. You care to get to know them. You care about how they understand and perform in your classroom.
- ▶ Assessment becomes easy! You spend time with your students and you always know where they are in their learning.



Incorporating Play, Perseverance, & Problem-Solving

In the era of instantaneous information and instant gratification technology students are not learning how to look for and find answers to problems. This, combined with the educational climate of having curriculums whose sole purpose is to increase standardized test performance, students are often scared to play, experiment, persevere, or problem solve to come up with unique answers. We have taught them that there is one right answer, either A, B, C, or D. This makes the arts unique, and makes arts integration indispensable to our students. The arts remain one of the few curriculums that encourages students to play and experiment to come up with unique solutions to solve unique problems. Incorporating aspects of lessons that encourage students to persevere to find an answer through play and experimentation does wonders for their cognitive abilities and engages them in the learning process. Because, let's face it, how fun is it to be told the answers to everything without being able to figure it out on your own sometimes?

What Play Does

- Develops an Openness to Experience
- Develops the Ability to Experiment and Be Unhindered by Mistakes
- Naturally Encourages Perseverance in a Low-Stress Environment
- Increases Self-Evaluation and Reflection
- Fosters Deep Engagement
- Builds and Enhances Creative Responses
- Develops Communication and Sharing Skills
- Fosters Self-Trust
- Teaches Problem-Solving

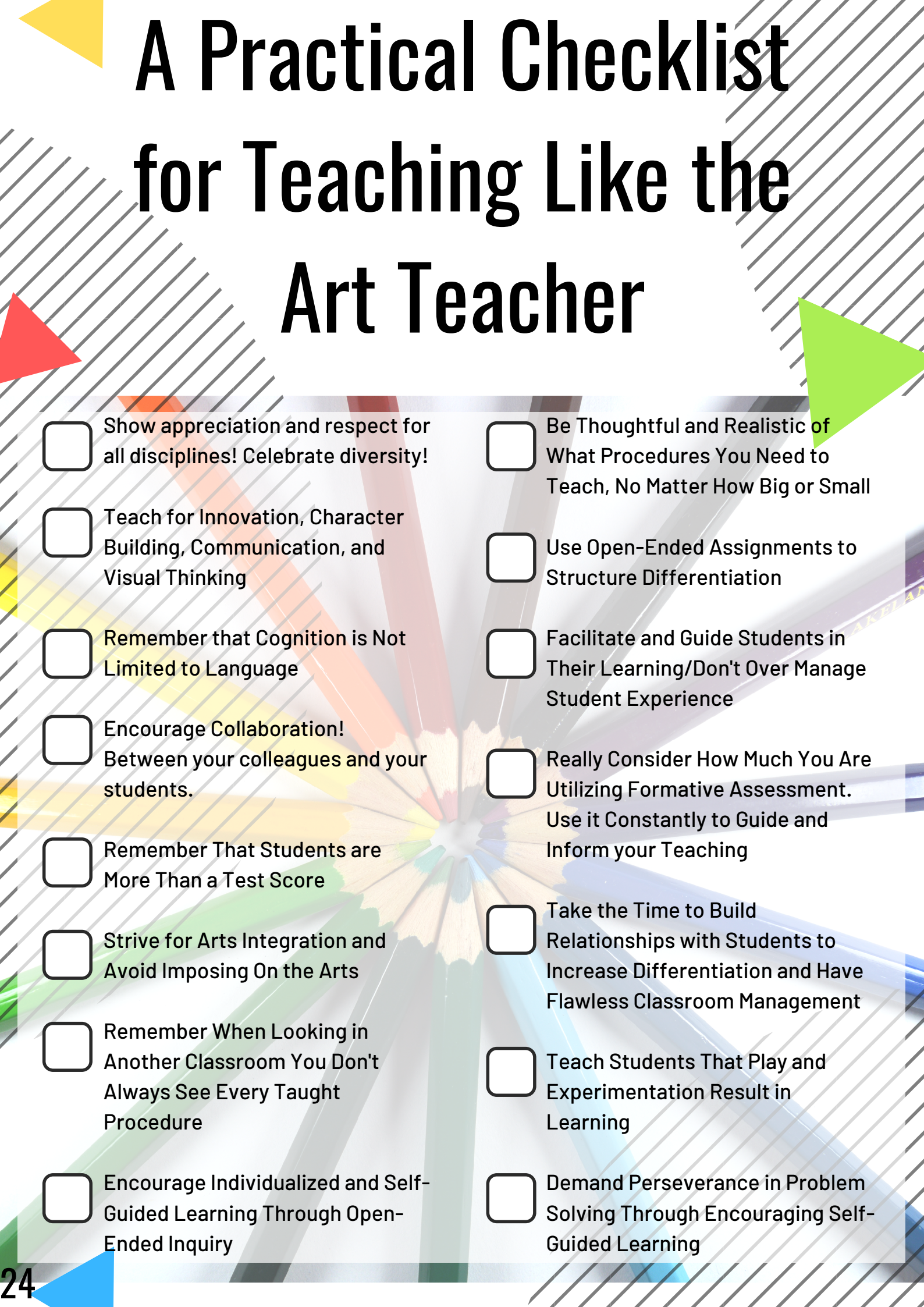
(Gude, 2010)





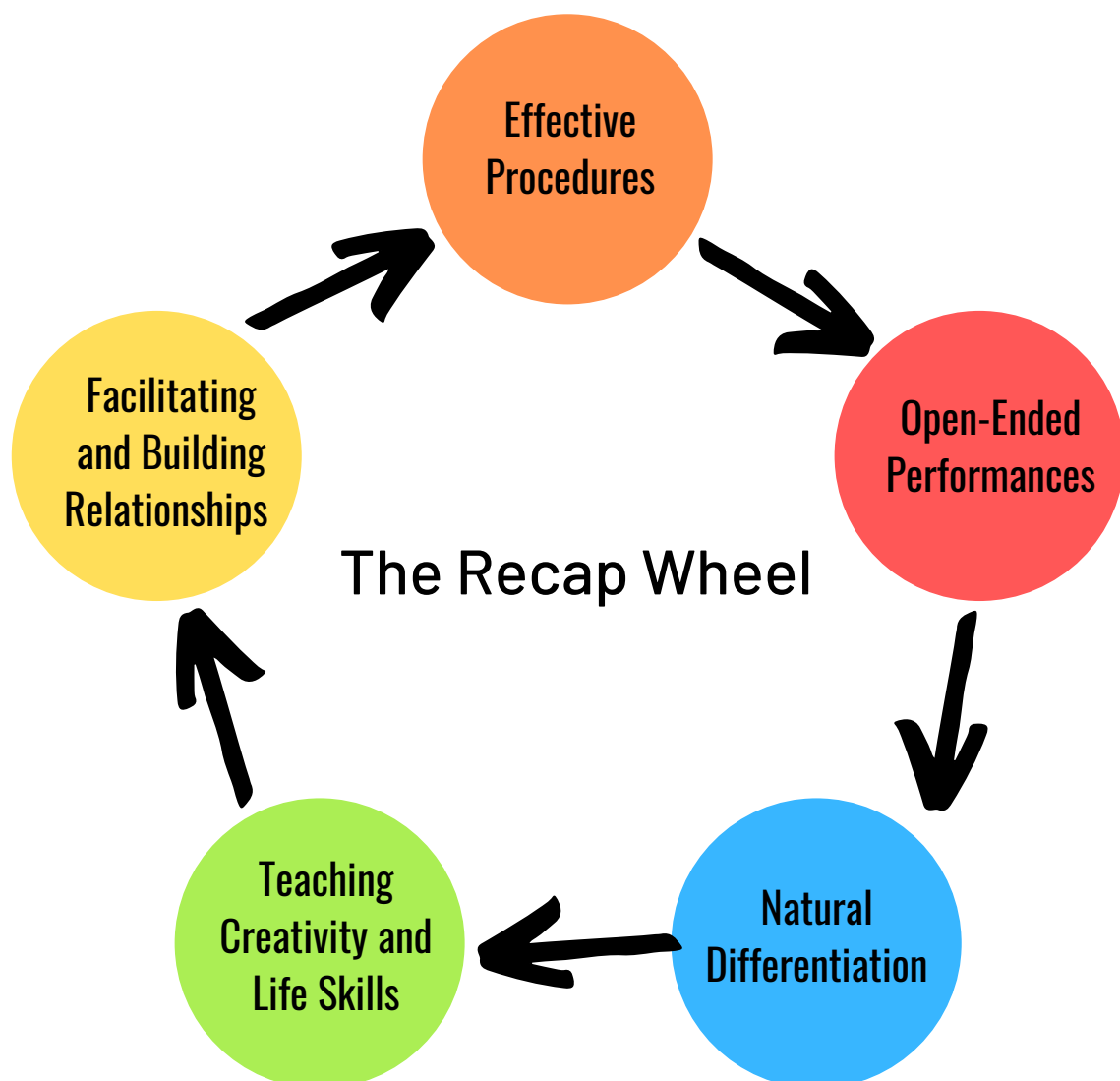
4.
You like
it? You
Want it?
Use it!
Steal it!

A Practical Checklist for Teaching Like the Art Teacher

- 
- ☐ Show appreciation and respect for all disciplines! Celebrate diversity!
 - ☐ Teach for Innovation, Character Building, Communication, and Visual Thinking
 - ☐ Remember that Cognition is Not Limited to Language
 - ☐ Encourage Collaboration! Between your colleagues and your students.
 - ☐ Remember That Students are More Than a Test Score
 - ☐ Strive for Arts Integration and Avoid Imposing On the Arts
 - ☐ Remember When Looking in Another Classroom You Don't Always See Every Taught Procedure
 - ☐ Encourage Individualized and Self-Guided Learning Through Open-Ended Inquiry
 - ☐ Be Thoughtful and Realistic of What Procedures You Need to Teach, No Matter How Big or Small
 - ☐ Use Open-Ended Assignments to Structure Differentiation
 - ☐ Facilitate and Guide Students in Their Learning/Don't Over Manage Student Experience
 - ☐ Really Consider How Much You Are Utilizing Formative Assessment. Use it Constantly to Guide and Inform your Teaching
 - ☐ Take the Time to Build Relationships with Students to Increase Differentiation and Have Flawless Classroom Management
 - ☐ Teach Students That Play and Experimentation Result in Learning
 - ☐ Demand Perseverance in Problem Solving Through Encouraging Self-Guided Learning

Recap and Summary

Building an environment like the art classroom takes time, practice, and a carefully developed curriculum. Utilizing arts based learning strategies increases understanding, engagement, and application of skills and knowledge. Hopefully through this document you have developed a greater understanding of what is really happening in your school's art room. Now you should be able to look past the paint splatters and into the carefully constructed procedures and open-ended assignments that promote self-guided student learning. You should know the difference between arts integration and arts imposition, and how to ask to collaborate with your own art teacher. And, lastly, but also most importantly you have hopefully gained some insight into how the art teacher teaches, and have learned a few strategies that can promote creative growth in your own classrooms.



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