

Interviewing the School

Pam Stephens

Finding the right job is more than discovering a place to work and earn a living. As we have explored in each column this year, fulfilling your own goals as an art educator is more than landing a job; it's about finding your bliss and loving every moment of what you do. A pointer that I give to my own students who are preparing to teach art is to interview the school, the faculty and administration, and the community prior to accepting any teaching job. This month's column provides insights in how to interview a school.

Fulfilling your own goals is more than landing a job; it's about finding your bliss and loving every moment of what you do.

A Scenario

Let's pretend that you have been invited to join the faculty of a school in a highly regarded district. The position of art educator on this campus is considered a plum assignment. Being the thoughtful person that you are, you ask to tour the campus before accepting the job. After being granted permission, now what? What is it that you will be looking for to let you know that the school is truly welcoming of the arts?

Seeking Clues

1. The first thing you should look for is artwork exhibited throughout the school. Are student-made works of art displayed alongside reproductions of masterworks?
2. Where is the artwork displayed? You would expect that the art room would have plenty of original student artwork, but what about the other classrooms? Is artwork displayed in the entrance area, the office, or other public spaces?
3. What is the quality of student-made artwork? This isn't to say


that you are looking for perfection; rather, that you should be looking at the content of the student work. Are the student-made art objects original looking or do they appear to have been made from a template or formula? Original artwork made by students should exhibit variations from one piece to the next.

4. Is there evidence of meaningful art learning in classrooms other than the artroom?
5. Are objectives for the displayed artwork plainly evident? A surefire method of advocating art learning is for each display to have brief wall text that includes state or national standards met by the assignment.
6. What sort of space does the artroom occupy? Is it equal to other classrooms?
7. What sort of technology is available in the artroom? Is it equal to the technology in other classrooms?
8. What kinds of art resources, materials, tools, and equipment are available? Is there evidence that the art teacher is provided with more than basic paper, pencils, scissors, and glue?
9. Look for subtle clues such as the use of timelines. Are artists or art styles represented on timelines that you see in the school?

resented on timelines that you see in the school?

10. Does the library have a selection of art books for various grade levels?

Closing Thoughts

These are but a few visual clues to help you determine if a school values the arts in its curriculum. What other clues would help you to decide if a school was the right fit for you? Share your ideas and comments with others. Send your thoughts to Pamela.Stephens@nau.edu. 

Pam Stephens is associate professor of art education at Northern Arizona University and is a member of the SchoolArts advisory board. Pamela.Stephens@nau.edu



If students are offered opportunities to explore art ideas in various classrooms, it's a good guess that the school values the arts as a part of the curriculum.