

How to Be a Highly Effective Art Teacher

Donalyn Heise and Melody Weintraub

Advocacy begins at home, so keep in touch with parents or guardians through e-mail, phone calls, or face-to-face conferences. The more you can involve parents in the learning environment of your classroom, the more they will assume a vested interest in the success and survival of your curriculum.

If a family member uses art in the workplace or as a hobby, ask him or her to come and speak to the class about it. Ask your students if they have a family member who sews, carves, weaves, makes furniture, sculpts, dances, or tells stories. These art forms can inform and enlighten learning in the artroom, as well as strengthen community connections.

Establish the Essentials

Students should understand that you value all educational disciplines. Show them the art connection to those disciplines, but be sure to validate the general importance of education as well. Students should understand the learning objectives for each lesson. Help them see the progress they are making in understanding new terms, skills, and concepts. One way to do this is to introduce sketchbook journaling, which should include writing as well as drawing.

Know What's New

The highly effective teacher is the one who commits to being a lifelong learner. Stay informed about innovations in arts education by reading arts education magazines, periodicals, journals, and websites.

When your administration sees that you are implementing the latest approaches, backed by research, they may be more likely to approve professional development opportunities for you. If you attend seminars and workshops, be sure to document how you used what you learned in your classroom, and share it with your principal.

Find a Niche

Perhaps you can start an art club and have students create school spirit by painting faces on game day. Whatever niche you choose, it should help make you a visible part of the learning environment. Your efforts will send a positive message not only to the administration and your fellow teachers, but also to your students and their parents.

Study Your Students

Keep a card file with your students' basic information. Leave space to write down specific things that help you remember that student, in case you ever need to address a specific issue with parents or administrators. It's also nice to keep a current parent contact log with a brief description of the conversations and results.

Carry the Card

Join your professional organization. Many organizations offer benefits and incentives for members. For instance, the National Art Education Association offers professional development, leadership and grant opportunities, resources, and networking. It provides an instant community of art educators, artists, museum representatives, and others who believe in the power of art. It provides access to the most current research in the field and best practices in arts education. Professional development possibilities include the national convention, state conferences, and online resources. Monthly publications and newsletters help keep us informed, motivated, and connected.

Grab That Grant

Stop whining about funding or the lack thereof. There's probably a grant out there for your wishes. For some administrators, nothing says "indispensable" better than showing them the money. Do your homework and find funding that offers what you need to implement

innovative art education. Give yourself a deadline and go grab that grant! ☞

Grant Resources

NAEA Foundation: www.arteducators.org/olc/pub/NAEA/grants

Anyone Can Fly Foundation: www.anyonecanflyfoundation.org

National Endowment for the Arts: arts.endow.gov/grants/apply/Artsed.html

US Dept of Ed Grants: www.ed.gov/programs/artsed/index.html

Grant tips, grant sources: www.arteducators.org/olc/pub/NAEA/grants/grants_page_5.html

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Be sure art is always visible in your school. Teach with weeklong art displays from companies such as Teacher's Discovery, teachersdiscovery.com.

