

Online Special Education Resources

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As inclusion brings more students with special needs into the general education classroom, regular teachers are learning what art teachers have long known. It is not easy to teach classes that combine general education and special education students. It is even more difficult when teachers have little or no training in special education.

1 Council for Exceptional Children

Thanks to the Internet, there are several resources, literally at one's fingertips. The first is The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). CEC is a national and international organization and, as the largest special education organization, has held national conferences since 1923. Their comprehensive Web site, www.cec.sped.org, provides information about special needs students, teaching methods, research, and the current laws that impact our classrooms. There are links to each of the seventeen divisions within CEC (e.g., students with learning disabilities—DLD; students with behavior disorders—CCBD; students with developmental disabilities—DDD, students who are gifted—TAG; Early Childhood—DEC; and Teacher Education—TED).

2 VSA arts

The second source of information, the VSA arts (formerly Very Special Arts) Web site, www.vsarts.org brings the arts and special education together. The VSA arts Web site provides a wealth of information about publications, research, and resources about special needs students and the arts. It showcases the many festivals, teacher training workshops, and research activities in a visually exciting format.

Detailed research reports on arts for special needs students can be accessed through their research link. Information about the K–12 art curriculum and specific lesson plans can be linked through their site or www.k12.ed.art and www.k12.ed.special:k-12Net.

3 NAEA Special Needs Group

A third resource is provided by The National Art Education Association (NAEA) Special Needs Issues Group through Southern Connecticut State University. Their site, www.southernct.edu/~gerber/SEDarts/, focuses specifically on art education for special needs students. There are links to past NAEAnews "Special Needs" columns that contain information about teaching practices and teachers of art to special needs students. Other links connect to professional

organizations and references for books and articles about special education and the arts.

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No Easy Answers

Still, for those looking for a quick and easy way to teach special needs students, there is no easy answer! If there were, we would probably have found it and "cured" all special needs students by now. Professional information can help understand special needs students. But, ultimately, it is the art teacher's knowledge of the student's needs and their professional judgment that determines how art can help us. Sometimes, that judgment may conflict with current educational pressures and well-intentioned educational practices may be contrary to the student's educational and emotional needs.

I felt this conflict many years ago as an undergraduate student-teacher teaching art to students with mental retardation. One of my art educa-



tion professors encouraged us to free our students from the color dictates of holiday art lessons (e.g. using red and green for Christmas, orange and black for Halloween). On the surface, this suggestion appeared to encourage more creative responses, but for students with mental retardation, it seemed to be counterproductive. Their classroom teaching focused on the skills needed to become part of the community. In other words, they were learning to be like everyone else. Encouraging students with mental retardation to choose their own holiday colors would be interpreted by others, not as creative choice-making, but as a lack of awareness of the appropriate colors. This experience pointed out the crucial role that the teacher's professional judgment plays in teaching.

The Web sites described here can add information to art teachers' professional knowledge and can guide their judgment about their special needs students. ☺

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