A-10 Accommodations

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Teaching middle school art is naturally an exercise in accommodation. The nature of the subject is that many middle schools simply lack the resources to offer more than the bare minimum of arts education. No Child Left Behind has had an impact on many schools, including my own. According to a study done on the impact of NCLB on US public school arts education, 84% of respondents admit that NCLB has had a negative impact on their specialty. (Sabol, 2010) While about 54% indicate that NCLB has not had a generally negative effect on matters of school staffing, the impact is still very clear. In my school, the number of art and music teachers has been cut from eight to four in the last four years. These specialists were replaced with reading and math support teachers. While the amount of teachers in the school has not changed, the amount of arts teachers has. The immediate impact of this is a massive increase of class size. The study indicates that while staffing seems to have generally stayed the same, the workload of arts teachers has increased, and more importantly, the negative impact of conflicting scheduling and interruptions has increased.

Aside from the loss of arts teachers, I have noticed some major negative impacts. First, and perhaps most importantly since this can be related to all negative impacts that follow, is the increase of class size. My average class size has jumped from about 18 to about 25. Many of my classes are at maximum capacity. The increased number of students has lead to an increased number of identified students with IEPs and/or ESL issues that are appearing in my room, and an increased number of accommodations I am required to make. Art in
general easily lends itself to accommodation. In essence, I make accommodations for every student in my classroom. But never before have I been required to make so many changes, for so many different reasons. Three groups that I have identified in need of special accommodations in my room are handicapped, especially wheelchair bound, autistic/special ed, and black and latino minority.

I have a number of handicapped students that are bound to wheel chairs. The first and most obvious issue I have encountered is seating for them. My tables are very high, requiring tall stools. My handicapped students either have to drag themselves up into stools, or reach uncomfortably up to the table. So, I cleared space and brought in a smaller table that these students could easily access. In order not to allow them to not be isolated, I spread out students to the extra table and maintain assigned seats. Not only is giving the wheelchair bound students a place to work important, it is important to have them not be burdened with their wheelchair being in the way. The lanes between my tables are tight so I feel that allowing the wheelchair to be out of the way is important for self-conscious students who just want to be part of the crowd.

Another very important factor is accessibility to the table and safety. While one particular student who lacks the use of his legs is capable of pulling himself up to a stool where he can work with the rest of the students at the high table, the stool is hardly safe. And he needs to be able to reach the materials with the same ability as the rest of the students.
Another group that I have encountered that requires accommodations is minority population, especially black and latino boys. In reading Lisa Delpit’s book Other People’s Children, I was enlightened to some of the aspects of the culture of these subgroups interfering with traditional education and how teachers need to remove cultural bias from their methodology in order to teach them to the best of their abilities. In particular, it was interesting to see the cultural background behind black males and how they respond to their teachers, especially white ones. When I was earning my teaching degree, the trend of thought that I was introduced to was to show respect by phrasing instructions in the form of a question. However, I found out that this fails to get respect from black males who see you as being weak if you do not directly tell them what to do. There is a fine line between showing respect and earning it. So in my room I have been accommodating their cultural background by teaching myself how to address this issue. And it is a very fine line because I need to speak to different racial sub groups differently and many do not understand why I switch.

Special Ed students with severe disabilities such as autism are a third group that requires special accommodations in the art classroom above and beyond their IEP. I have an autistic student with pretty severe tactile issues. He simply will not touch materials that another student has touched. Within a classroom where all of the materials are in bins that all students at a table have access too, this is a pretty debilitating issue for this particular student. As an accommodation to him, and a few more students with similar issues, I have created special bins with labled and separate materials that they can use. This
particular student also has issues with too much sensory stimulation such as loud noise. While in general, I allow my students to socialize during class, I enforce more of a quiet time during this class. I didn’t tell the rest of the students about the reason why though. It is simply a means of accommodating the student without pointing out to the rest of the class that he is different.

In general, art is an easily adaptable class where accommodations are a natural process. Every student is different, and I make slight accommodations for each one of them in terms of assessment, or simply what I require from them for the final product. I make this easy by introducing general rubrics for assessment and open ended assignments to begin with. This allows each student to meet my requirements to their best ability through my guidance. Even if it means using completely different materials, or doing completely different assignments altogether.
References


