

Intergenerational Collaboration: A Professional Journey Begins

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ABSTRACT

Using a Professional Learning Community model six art educators from four school districts and one university have come together to form the Instructional Design Collaborative.

KEYWORDS

collaboration, PLC, professional development, intergenerational relationships; peer mentoring

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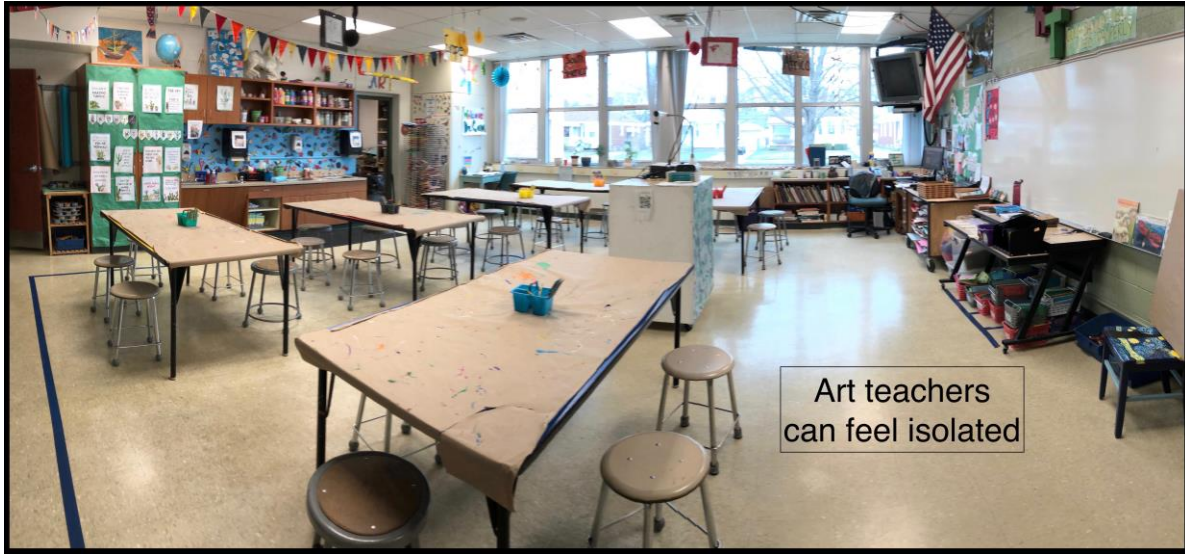
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Seeking Community

Being an art teacher can feel lonely, especially when he/she is the only person teaching art in the school. This seclusion can follow an art educator from their first year of teaching and into their third decade of professional service. Many art teachers work alone in classrooms filled with exuberant, fun, and creative ideas, and yet they have few colleagues with whom to share their enthusiasm for the visual arts. To exacerbate the situation, the one time a month when an art educator has time to gather with others it is usually at a staff meeting where the art teacher is required to sit through professional development activities that have little to do with the profession of art education. Given this lack of consideration for the needs of art teachers, art educators in Southeast Michigan have created their own professional community.



Building Community

Using a Professional Learning Community model (DuFour, 1998) six art educators from four school districts and one university have come together to form the Instructional Design

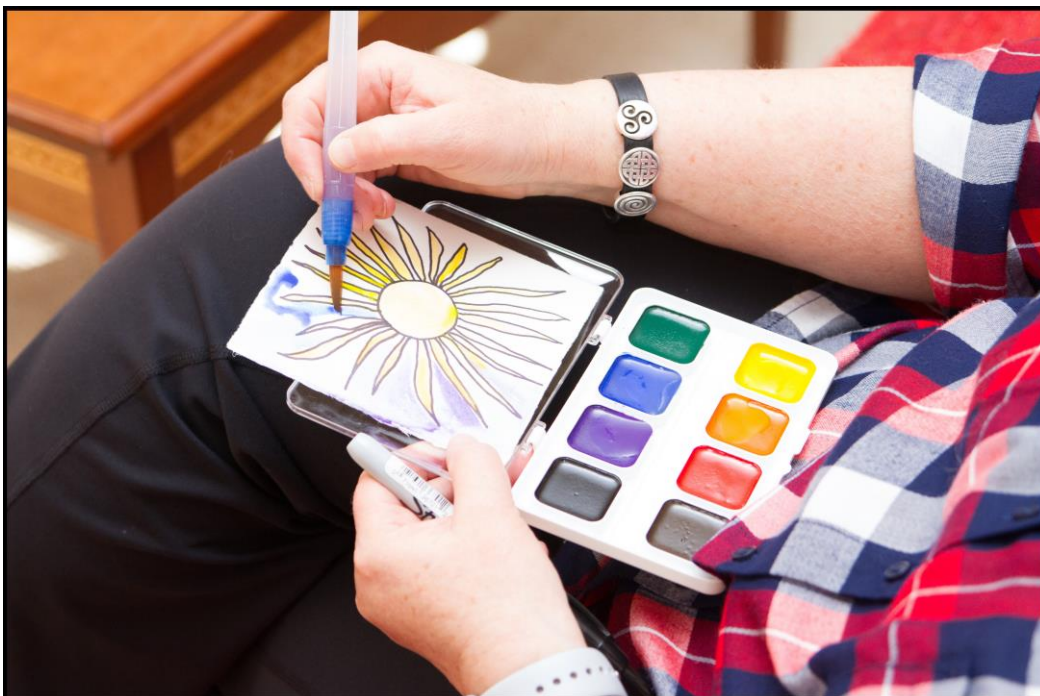
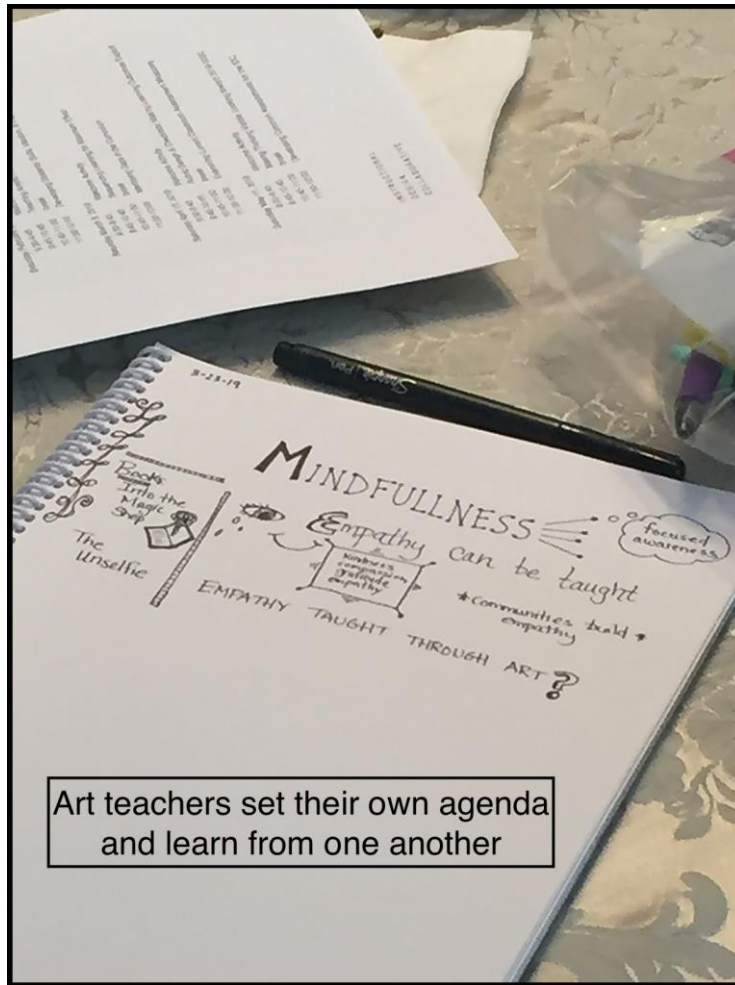
Collaborative (IDC1). The mission of the collaborative is to develop and connect the art education community to advance its professional development and build a culture of support and innovation. The IDC is a conceptual space that envisions professional development for art teachers and by art teachers. Since January 2019 the group has met five times, once each month to plan their own professional development. The monthly gatherings are sequenced and targeted to improve student learning while also building meaningful collaborative relationships among an intergenerational group of participants whose years of experience ranges from two to thirty-four years. The student populations they serve spans students with ages ranging from young fives to college undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students seeking teacher certification in art education.



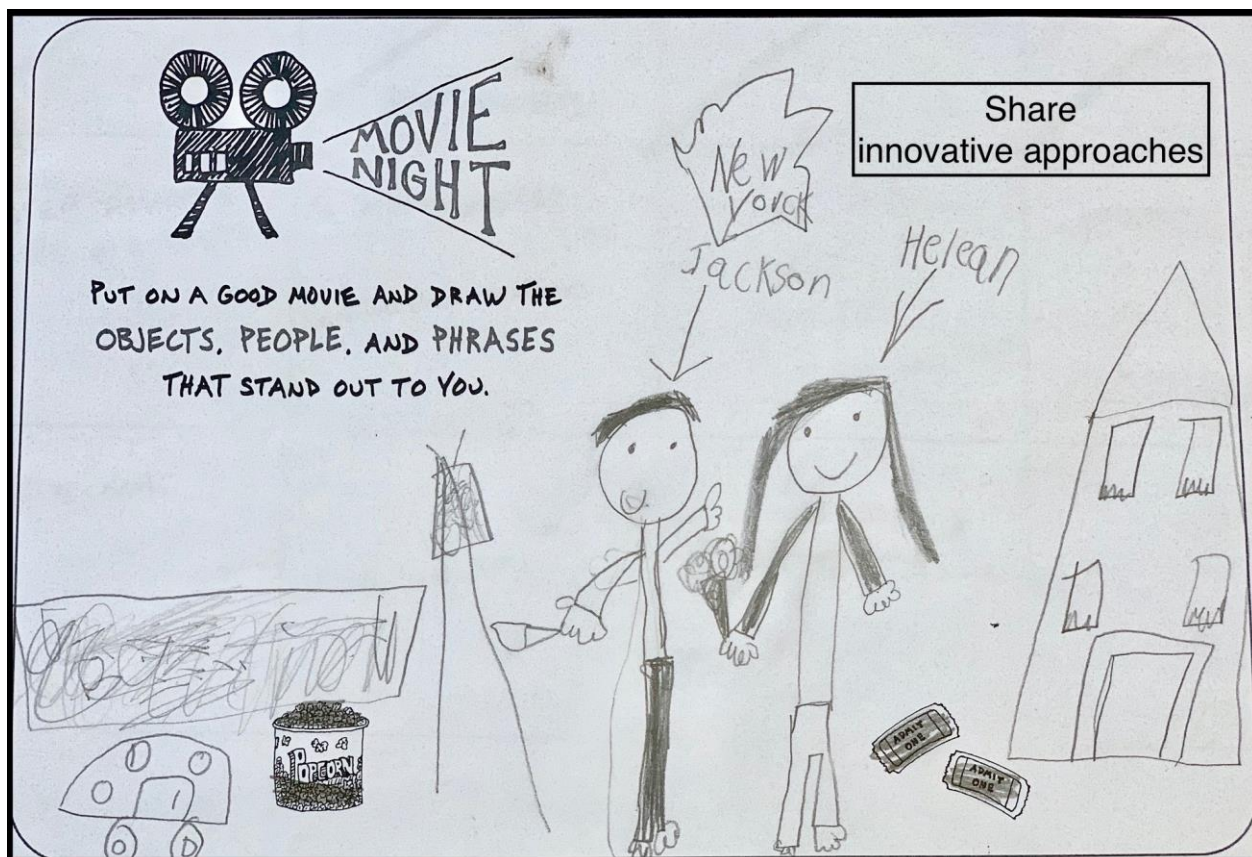
Sharing Learning

IDC members are lifelong learners, engaged in continuous improvement. For instance, during the April convening two members shared ideas gathered from their travels outside the state. The founder of the IDC shared a strategy of Visual Notetaking learned while she attended the National Art Education Association School for Art Leaders at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. She delivered a brief presentation, showed examples of visual notetaking samples collected from pre-service teachers, and then led members in visual notetaking as a form of reflection during a 20-minute mindfulness exercise.

¹ The IDC was founded as a capstone project for the School for Art Leaders, sponsored by the National Art Education Association.



Afterward group members shared their meditations and reflected upon times when they too have used visual notetaking as a strategy in the visual arts classroom. Through discussion a question was raised: How can a visual notetaking strategy be used with younger children? One of the new teachers quickly spoke up and shared photos she had taken of her kindergarteners using visual notetaking to document what they were seeing in a short art movie shown to the class.



The IDC focus had been on making writing more visual, yet in that moment art teachers looked at the work of a five-year old whose world was already embedded in the visual. The realization of this spontaneous connection excited everyone at the table.

A second group member shared her experience of attending the 2019 Learning and the Brain Conference held in San Francisco, California.

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2019 - CONFERENCE

Morning Concurrent Sessions: 'B' (Morning Break)			
10:10 am - 12:20 pm 1) The Science of Altruism/Goodness Rooms: Terrace (2 Floors Below Lobby)	10:10 am - 11:10 am 2) The Roots of Empathy in School Rooms: Gold (Lobby Level)	10:10 am - 11:10 am 3) The Science of Mindful Kindness Rooms: Grand (3 Floors Below Lobby)	10:10 am - 11:10 am 4) Empathy & Training Rooms: (Lobby Level)
11:20 am - 12:20 pm Part II: The Fear Factor: Neuroscience of Empathy, Altruism, and Psychopaths Abigail A. Marsh, PhD (Break Spring 11:30-11:30 AM)	11:20 am - 12:20 pm Part II: Nurturing the Roots of Empathy in Education Mary Gordon (Break Spring 11:30-11:30 AM)	11:20 am - 12:20 pm Part I: Promoting Prosocial Behavior: Teaching a Mindfulness-Based Kindness Curriculum Lisa Flook, PhD	11:20 am - 12:20 pm Part I: How Compassion Meditation Transforms the Brain and Altruistic Behavior in Young Adults Helen Weng, PhD
1:45 pm - 5:20 pm 1) Collaboration & Prosocial Skills Rooms: Pavilion (Lobby Level)	1:45 pm - 3:00 pm 2) The Science of Gratitude Rooms: Terrace (2 Floors Below Lobby)	1:45 pm - 3:00 pm 3) Educating Kind, Compassionate Kids Rooms: Grand (3 Floors Below Lobby)	1:45 pm - 3:00 pm 4) Empathy & Prosocial Technology Rooms: Crown (24th Floor in Tower)
1:10 pm - 4:10 pm Part I: (All Ages) Developing Collaboration and Inclusion Through Empathy Britt Andreatta, PhD (Break Spring 3:00-3:10 PM)	1:45 pm - 3:00 pm Part I: Gratitude Works! The Science and Power of Gratitude Robert A. Emmons, PhD (Break Spring 3:00-3:10 PM)	1:45 pm - 3:00 pm Part II: Hacking School Culture: Designing Compassionate Classrooms Ellen Feig Gray, MA, CPP, CIPK	1:45 pm - 3:00 pm Part I: The Role of Socio-Emotional Health and UDL in Promoting a School Culture of Empathy Helen Weng, PhD



She prepared a brief presentation to help IDC members understand the range of concepts covered at the conference. She brought two books that she found especially engaging and gave the IDC members a synopsis of each. Through conversation members learned what leading researchers from the fields of Neuroscience, Psychology, Social Work, and Education, had to say on the topic of Educating with Empathy. Dr. Jamil Zaki, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, spoke at the conference advocating for the benefits of empathy as creating happier and less stressed people, a happier and more involved community, generosity towards strangers, and greater open mindedness. He also brought attention to the modern barriers of empathy; as cities become crowded and full of strangers, he asserted that there tends to be more solitary living, intensified feelings of being alone in a crowd, and greater reliance on social media for communication (Co-author. Personal Notes. February 17, 2019).

With this new information IDC members began sharing examples of empathy being incorporated into the existing school curriculum. They made one another aware of additional sources for learning about empathy such as Howard Gardner's The Good Project² and The Why You Matter Project³ developed by local art teachers Geo Rutherford and Laura Naar. By learning about empathy IDC members began considering it a topic for lesson design and children's artmaking.

Becoming Connected

Work within the IDC has provided renewed energy for those who have been in the profession for 30+ years, and it adds confirmation to those starting in the field that their ideas are valuable and valued within the art education profession. An IDC member with three years of teaching experience explained that:

For me, one of the most challenging parts of being a Visual Arts teacher has been to find a source for professional development where I can interact with other art educators in person and with regularity. The IDC has provided me with an opportunity to collaborate with a wonderful group of supportive, passionate, and strong educators who share my interests and provide a variety of insights into our profession that have helped me to consider my own practices through a new lens. Becoming a part of this intergenerational organization is truly inspiring. The strengths of each of our members coming from their different levels of experience and education help all of us to grow in these areas as well. From the beginning the IDC has been about growing and lifting one another professionally with the help of each one of our members, and we have held true to this as we look forward to the upcoming year.

² <http://thegoodproject.org/>

³ <http://www.whyyoumatter.org/>

Another IDC member with 17 years of teaching experience described the value she saw in working alongside fellow art educators:

When art educators work together, we challenge one another to think, rethink and re-evaluate thoughts and ideas. We discuss what we are teaching, how and why. We begin to use common language which helps us to understand what quality work is. When our peers are advocating for our success, we begin to work more deliberately, and with more focus. Working through the creative process with others builds strong sense of community and trust. Trust grows the longer we work together because we develop a sense of respect for the learning and growth of our peers demonstrated in their work, and in our own.

The more we realize that working together fosters positive relationships, the more we will grow as artists and as art educators. Building rapport with colleagues increases success for everyone.



Meeting with a community of art teachers fosters a place of belonging where members are able to support and encourage one another. In just 10 hours of working together members feel more connected and empowered. Moving forward IDC members have planned a three-day work session for the summer and are planning a collaborative

partnership to pair IDC teachers with pre-service art teachers attending university so that teachers-in-training can develop lessons for real, rather than fictitious, classrooms. The goal of this work is to inspire college students by providing authentic classroom experiences which will help them to be ready to teach on day one of student teaching.

Reach out and Become Intergenerational

The purpose in sharing this professional learning community - collaborative is to encourage art educators to step out of their classrooms/work-spaces and to reach out into the art education community. Do not settle for working alone or accept professional development that does not include the needs of the art teacher. Look for art educators who are just getting started, those working mid-career, and especially find those near retirement. Form your own professional learning community. Partner with an art education professor at a local university. This person is likely authorized to award professional development credits for the work you are already doing.

With a team of art educators, professional development credits available, and through careful documentation of your work and accomplishments, you will make a strong case for your administration to allow you to engage in the rich and rewarding work of professional development in the visual arts.

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Resources

- Bloom, P. (2016). *Against empathy: The case for rational compassion*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Press.
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- Rhode, M. (2013). *The sketchnote handbook: The illustrated guide to visual note taking*. United States: Peach Pit Press.
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