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## The Universal Art Class: Integrating Disability Studies into Art Curriculum to Create Engaging, Equitable, and Inclusive Lessons for Diverse Learners

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THE UNIVERSAL ART CLASS  
INTEGRATING DISABILITY STUDIES INTO ART CURRICULUM  
TO CREATE ENGAGING, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE LESSONS  
FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

A Directed Project to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master in Art History and Visual Culture

at

Lindenwood University

By

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Saint Charles, Missouri

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## ABSTRACT

The Universal Art Class: Integrating Disability Studies into Art Curriculum to Create Engaging, Equitable, and Inclusive Lessons for Diverse Learners

Stephanie McCoy, Master of Art History & Visual Culture, 2023

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This paper examines the transformative potential of integrating Disability Studies into the Art Curriculum, establishing “The Universal Art Class” as a framework for creating engaging and inclusive lessons tailored for diverse learners. The exploration begins by illuminating the foundational principles of Disability Studies and its relevance in the context of art education. Subsequently, the study navigates the intersection of Disability Studies and Art Education, highlighting the significance of this interdisciplinary approach in fostering a more inclusive learning environment. The research expands on practical strategies for integrating inclusivity into the art curriculum. These strategies encompass adaptations and modifications, collaboration, and observation and reflection.

Through a meticulous examination of inclusive lesson planning, this paper highlights the contributions of contemporary artists with disabilities including Stephen Wiltshire, Jeremy Sicile-Kira, Yinka Shonibare, and Tony Quan aka Tempt1. By showcasing these artists' achievements, the study aims to inspire educators to incorporate diverse perspectives into their teaching methods, promoting a broader understanding of artistic expression.

The insights derived from this project contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education and indicate the necessity of embracing diversity within the art classroom. The Universal Art Class model encourages educators to rethink traditional approaches. This framework aims to foster an environment where every learner, regardless of ability, can actively participate and flourish and to ensure that art education remains a dynamic and inclusive experience for all students.

## **Dedication**

To the students, whose resilience and determination have inspired the quest for inclusive education, and to all those striving for an equitable and accessible world.

## Acknowledgements

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family for their unwavering support and understanding throughout this significant endeavor. Your encouragement and belief in me have been the cornerstone of my journey.

I express my sincere appreciation to Lindenwood University and the dedicated professors whose guidance and expertise have enriched my academic journey. Your commitment to excellence has left a lasting impression on my knowledge and professional development.

I am deeply indebted to my committee chair, Stefanie Snyder, and my committee members, Mollie Bolton and Kelly Scheffer, whose guidance and wisdom were invaluable in shaping this project. Your insights and encouragement have illuminated this path.

To my esteemed colleagues, your contributions and shared knowledge in the realm of art special education have been instrumental in broadening my understanding. I am immensely grateful for your collaboration and collective wisdom.

A special tribute goes to the remarkable students of the Special School District who have been the driving force behind this project. Your courage, resilience, and unique perspectives have been my greatest teachers. You have been the catalyst for the creation of The Universal Art classroom.

**Your collective impact has shaped and inspired this project, fostering a commitment to creating a more inclusive educational landscape. Thank you for being a beacon of inspiration and motivation throughout this journey.**

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## **Autobiographical Statement**

My personal motivation for this project is driven by my passion for creating a quality art education for students of all ability levels. For the past 11 years, I have been teaching art for the Special School District of St. Louis County.<sup>1</sup> Special School District of St. Louis County, or SSD, is the largest specialized education provider in the state of Missouri. SSD is designed to equip and empower students of all learning abilities to excel to their greatest potential. This is realized through an inclusive, collaborative approach, supported by our comprehensive resources and deep expertise - all of which is centered on each student's unique needs. SSD provides special education services to students ages 3 through 21 in a variety of placements, which are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Services are based entirely on a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Placements range from SSD teachers providing special education services in the student's home school and district (partner district) to students attending an SSD special education school or a private separate agency. Ninety-seven percent of students receiving SSD services attend school in the district where they live. I work with the three percent at an SSD special education school. I work at one of the three SSD special education elementary schools. In my art classroom, I focus on the abilities of the students, meeting them where they are at, and promoting communication and independence. I work closely with Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs), Occupational Therapists (OTs), and Physical Therapists (PTs) in order to provide the necessary tools, modifications, and adaptations. I also work with many Paraprofessionals from all communities who support students

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<sup>1</sup> "About SSD," Special School District of St. Louis County, Blackboard, 2022, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.ssdmo.org/ssdmo>

throughout art class. This collaboration creates a very unique and individualized art program and allows me to focus on creating a unique and individualized art experience for all students.

As part of my project, I will be creating lesson plans centered around contemporary artists with disabilities and also piloting them in my art classroom. I have based my lesson plans on the works of Stephen Wiltshire, Jeremy Sicile-Kira, Yinka Shonibare and Tony Quan aka Tempt1. For the past four years, I have been building a Choice Art<sup>2</sup> based classroom. Choice Art is rooted in the Teaching Artistic Behaviors (TAB)<sup>3</sup> philosophy and promotes the National Core Art Standards in the Visual Arts.<sup>4</sup> The lesson plans I create will be “mini lessons” and will introduce the artists’ focusing on their work, philosophy, and methodology. Mini lessons that are Choice Art-based differ from traditional teacher-led lessons. These short 5-10 minute lessons are designed to spark conversation and inspire students to create their own unique work. Mini lessons promote students to develop their own personal opinions and ideas of artwork, share their personal opinions of artwork and explore new art styles and materials. After piloting my mini

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<sup>2</sup> Choice Art is a method of teaching art which seeks to develop the artistic thinking of students through centers and choices, encouraging them and teaching them to come up with their own ideas for art making. This approach facilitates differentiation, which easily meets the needs of a variety of types of learners.

<sup>3</sup> TAB is an art teaching philosophy based on the artist's practice. The TAB philosophy states that the child is the artist and the classroom is the artist's studio.

<sup>4</sup> “National Core Art Standards for Visual Art,” National Core Art Standards, Young Audience Inc. 2023, accessed November 12, 2023,

<https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Visual%20Arts%20at%20a%20Glance%20-%20new%20copyright%20info.pdf>.



lessons with students, I will be reporting on the overall reception by my students (what students liked/disliked), what should be praised (what went well), and the areas of growth and improvement. The creation of mini lessons and teaching them in my art classroom will be a distinctive and significant component of my work.

## Introduction

The prevalence of diagnosed developmental disabilities in children aged 3 to 17 years has shown a notable increase, as revealed by the CDC's National Health Interview Survey from 2019 to 2021, rising from 7.40% to 8.56% in 2021.<sup>5</sup> This category encompasses autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, and other developmental delays. With the growing number of youth identified with disabilities, the role of art educators becomes increasingly crucial in providing adequate support to students across various ability levels, including those with significant disabilities. Effectively communicating, modifying, and adapting art lessons to accommodate students of all abilities becomes imperative in the educational landscape.

The integration of Disability Studies into the realm of art education emerges as a pivotal avenue to effectively support students with disabilities. Art Education stands as a significant domain within the expansive scope of Disability Studies, holding immense potential in shaping the educational experiences of students with disabilities. Art educators possess the capacity to employ Disability Studies as a guiding framework in order to create a stimulating and all-encompassing environment that caters to students with diverse abilities. Furthermore, this project embarks on an exploration of lessons celebrating artists with disabilities, including Stephen Wiltshire, Jeremy Sicile-Kira, Yinka Shonibare, and Tony Quan aka Tempt1. These individuals exemplify the fusion of artistic brilliance with the experience of living with a disability, serving as inspirations for art educators seeking to enrich the educational experiences of their students.

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<sup>5</sup> Ginny Russel, "Time Trends in Autism Diagnosis over 20 Years: A UK Population-based," *Journal of Child Psychiatry* 63, no.6, (2022): 674.

Within the context of this project, Disability Studies, inclusive supports, and engaging lesson plans celebrating artists with disabilities, converge to create a meaningful and equitable artistic experience for all students. The compilation of these components aims to chart a pathway for art educators, empowering them to integrate Disability Studies into their instructional framework, foster inclusive art environments, and ultimately create enriching, meaningful art experiences for students with disabilities.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In order to effectively assist students with disabilities, art education can benefit from incorporating and gaining access to material from the discipline of Disability Studies. In the art classroom, additional resources and services are necessary for children who have disabilities; hence, visual art instructors need to embrace Disability Studies in order to teach students with disabilities in the most effective manner. Art education is one of the many topics that are included in the expansive scope of the discipline of Disability Studies. The curriculum for Visual Art Education places an emphasis on both the creative process and the finished output. The Eight Studio Habits of Mind, Choice Art, and the art process have emerged as the primary focuses of the Visual Art curriculum as a direct consequence of the recent revisions made to the National Art Standards. Because of this redrafting, young artists are encouraged to experiment with new materials and come up with fresh conceptions. Art educators have the ability to use Disability Studies as a tool to facilitate the creation of an atmosphere that is welcoming and stimulating for all students of all ability levels. This literature review is compiled of several components including Disabilities Studies history, how Disability Studies can help art educators connect with and create meaningful learning experiences for students with disabilities, and instructional support for students with disabilities.

### **The History of Disability Studies and the Disability Rights Movement**

An individual with a disability is defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who

is perceived by others as having such an impairment. Though this is the ADA definition of disability, the field of Disability Studies has built a platform encompassing the individual disability and how the societal and environmental factors affect the individual. Disability is not only a set of physical or mental differences but the product of interactions between physical, cultural, and political environments shaping the perception and experience of different capacities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in 1990 after several decades of effort on the part of disability activists. The ADA "prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications and access to state and local government' programs and services."<sup>6</sup> Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects disabled students specifically because it "prohibits state and local governments (such as public school districts, public colleges and universities, and public libraries) from discriminating against persons with disabilities."<sup>7</sup>

The disability rights movement was spurred by a long history of discrimination against people with disabilities. People with disabilities were often shut out of public life, denied educational and economic opportunities, and seen as less capable than people without disabilities. The discipline of Disability Studies arose from the grassroots activism of disabled individuals. The passing of the American with Disabilities Act ensured equal treatment and access to employment and public transportation. Overall, this was one of the biggest achievements in the Disabled Rights Movement. The increased interest in Disability Studies has

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<sup>6</sup> "Americans with Disabilities Act." DOL. Accessed May 20, 2023.

<https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/disability/ada>.

<sup>7</sup> "Disability Discrimination." Home, May 19, 2023.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/faq/disability.html#disdisc1>.

provided a springboard for discussions regarding how disabilities are viewed and supported in our communities.

Author and Associate Professor of English and Associate Director of the Northeastern Humanities Center at Northeastern University, Sari Altschuler and Author and Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, Cristobal Silva's article "Early American Disability Studies" offers insight into the early history of American Disability Studies. Altschuler and Silva believe it is necessary to examine the history of disabilities to comprehend the current field of Disability Studies. In recent years, one of the tasks that has been included in the historical study of disability is tracking down instances of when and where disability was mentioned in historical records. This growing interest in disability prior to the mid-19th century brought to light one of the most crucial concerns, which was how contemporary terminology and theoretical models could be applied to times and places prior to the mid-19th century historical records.<sup>8</sup> In examining the history, Alschuler and Silva argue that the meanings assigned by society to various types of impairments are fluid, imprecise, and possibly even contradictory. They also argue that the spectrum of conditions known as disability encompasses a vast array of physical, cognitive, and sensory limitations and capacities.<sup>9</sup> Alschuler and Silva's comprehension of the fluidity of terms and disabilities/conditions is relevant to my research because the public school system and self-contained, special education school setting in which I work are accessed by numerous students with a wide range of significant disabilities. The unique abilities of the students I teach do not always correspond to

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<sup>8</sup> Sari Altschuler and Cristobal Silva, "Early American Disability Studies," *Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (2017): 4. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90009790>.

<sup>9</sup> Altschuler and Silva, "Early American Disability Studies," 4.

the assigned meanings and terms. This diversity in student population and abilities presents educators with a unique opportunity to construct, adapt, and modify learning experiences and settings for students based on their specific needs.

The United States Congress's passing of the ADA approved access to public and private sector employment, buildings, transportation, and communications services to people with disabilities. Douglas Blandy, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at the University of Oregon who specializes in Disability Studies and art education, explains how the concept of disability is typically used by activists and scholars in the Contemporary period; "Disability is not an inherent condition of people, but a condition experienced under certain circumstances as a result of human-made environments."<sup>10</sup> This passage reinforces the definition of the social model of disability. Other models of disability include the medical model, the functional model, and the relational model.<sup>11</sup> In general, the majority of Disability Studies scholars support the social model because it recognizes that the social and physical environment is what is oppressive toward disabled people, as opposed to viewing disabled individuals as responsible for the ableism they experience on a daily basis. The anti-discrimination legislation of the Americans with Disabilities Act spawned a new generation of Disability Studies academics.<sup>12</sup> Disability is

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<sup>10</sup> Doug Blandy, "Conceptions of Disability: Toward a Sociopolitical Orientation to Disability for Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 32, no. 3 (1991): 133, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1320684>.

<sup>11</sup> Disabled World. "Models of Disability: Types and Definitions." *Disabled World*. March 30, 2022. <https://www.disabled-world.com/definitions/disability-models.php>.

<sup>12</sup> Blandy, "Conceptions of Disability," 135.

more flexible than the vast majority of other forms of identification since it is possible for anyone to experience it at any time.

The fact is that a person with a disability may need additional support in certain areas of their life, but not necessarily to be cured from their ailment. The understanding is that disabilities are a part of the individual and while it may impact their life in a variety of ways, good or bad, it still remains part of who they are. Instead of attempting to "solve" disability like a problem, there must be a reframing of people's fundamental issues and concerns. This concept is so important when studying disabilities. Disability Studies is a field that places value on disability, rather than seeing it as a deficit. Disability Studies allows us to keep a concentration on the unconventional and unique qualities that impact a person with a disability. Who determines what is "beneficial" in the first place, and what could cause our definitions to change over time, are questions we must continually ask.<sup>13</sup> Scholars like Tobin Siebers, author of "Disability Aesthetics," view disability art as one of the forms of innovation that disabled people contribute to the world. Siebers considers disability to be unique and innate. Siebers also argues that the way a disabled person's artwork is perceived by the world and the production of knowledge should be valued in and of themselves, without comparison to able methods of interacting with the world.<sup>14</sup>

In Doug Blandy's article on special education and disability policy, Blandy references Johnson and Murphy's perspective on disability. This perspective is referred to as the

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<sup>13</sup> Altschuler and Silva. "Early American Disability Studies," 10.

<sup>14</sup> Siebers, Tobin. "Disability Aesthetics." *PMLA* 120, no. 2 (2005): 542–46.



functional-limitations paradigm.<sup>15</sup> This perspective implied that disability was defined as a "health-related inability" or a restriction on the quantity or type of work a person could perform.<sup>16</sup> The approach is based on unwarranted and untenable assumptions regarding the relationship between impairments and productivity.<sup>17</sup> According to critics of the functional-limitations perspective on disability, this has contributed to a range of social issues confronting disabled individuals in the United States. In 1987, 50-80% of disabled individuals were unemployed.<sup>18</sup> The functional-limitations approach to people with disabilities has failed everyone involved. In special education and disability policy, this is being challenged by sociopolitical orientation. Disability is not the result of a child, adolescent, or adult's inability to adapt to society expectations; it stems from the incapacity of society to adapt its demands to the individual. The sociopolitical perspective on disability is merely the most recent step in an evolutionary process that began with caretakers for individuals with disabilities between 1700 and 1920.<sup>19</sup> Despite a horrifying history of ableism and maltreatment against them, disabled people are gradually gaining respect for their valuable worldviews.

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<sup>15</sup> Blandy, "Conceptions of Disability," 133.

<sup>16</sup> "Civil Rights for Disabled Americans: The Foundation of a Political Agenda." Civil Rights FOR Disabled Americans: The Foundation of a Political Agenda | Independent Living Institute. Accessed May 20, 2023. <https://www.independentliving.org/docs4/hahn.html>.

<sup>17</sup> "Civil Rights for Disabled Americans: The Foundation of a Political Agenda." Civil Rights FOR Disabled Americans: The Foundation of a Political Agenda | Independent Living Institute. Accessed May 20, 2023. <https://www.independentliving.org/docs4/hahn.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Blandy, "Conceptions of Disability," 135.

<sup>19</sup> Blandy, "Conceptions of Disability," 136.

## **Disability Studies in Art Education**

Understanding the history and current state of Disability Studies is useful and in some cases imperative to individuals pursuing or in the art education field. Disabilities diagnosis is on the rise and in order to educate an individual with a disability, people must have some understanding of Disability Studies. According to a UK population-based cohort study, “Time Trends in Autism Diagnosis Over Years,” there was a 787% exponential increase in recorded incidence of autism diagnoses between 1998 and 2018.<sup>20</sup> Having a solid understanding and an interest in following the current state of Disability Studies will help an art educator become more knowledgeable, creative, and most importantly effective.

Art teachers are increasingly asked to work with students who have severe and/or many physiological (i.e. sensory and physical) disabilities. According to a study performed by Author and Visual Art for Disabilities Specialist Stephanie Cramer, Visual Arts teachers felt less equipped to work with children with physical, visual, severe, and many disabilities (PVSMD) than teachers of children without disabilities.<sup>21</sup> Wexler gave case "stories" and lesson plans that assist readers in understanding the importance of emphasizing self-awareness and community.

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<sup>20</sup> Ginny Russel et al. “Time Trends in Autism Diagnosis over 20 Years: A UK Population-based ...” *Journal of Child Psychiatry* 63, no.6, (2022): 674.

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Cramer, Mari Beth Coleman, Yujeong Park, Sherry Mee Bell, and Jeremy T. Coles, “Art Educators’ Knowledge and Preparedness for Teaching Students With Physical, Visual, Severe, and Multiple Disabilities,” *Studies in Art Education* 57, no. 1 (2015): 6.

According to the data, more than 70% of art teachers "felt unprepared or only somewhat competent" to deal with students with significant difficulties (PVSMD).<sup>22</sup>

Doug Blandy suggests that art teachers should collaborate with disability rights advocates to promote equality.<sup>23</sup> Blandy believes that graduates of preservice art education programs should demonstrate a minimum level of understanding and sensitivity to problems pertaining to disability rights.<sup>24</sup> In order to attain this level of understanding, pre-service art educators can partake in socially reconstructive education. Socially reconstructive education is defined as an educational process in which students explore why some groups are repressed. Blandy says that what we may encounter is consistent with the bigger social shifts that are already occurring, and the traditional functional constraints perspective on disability is being superseded by a sociopolitical one.<sup>25</sup> Blandy asserts that in order to gain credibility among disabled people, art instructors must be willing to join the disability rights movement.<sup>26</sup> Blandy also believes that in order to be competent in dealing with people with disabilities, one must acknowledge the necessity of advocating on their behalf and more specifically, art teachers should be responsible for lobbying on their students' behalf.<sup>27</sup> Within the context of intercultural education, pre-service art teachers should be conversant with students with disabilities and fully understand the federal

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<sup>22</sup> Cramer and Colemon, "Art Educators' Knowledge and Preparedness," 8.

<sup>23</sup> Doug Blandy, "Assuming Responsibility: Disability Rights and the Preparation of Art Educators," *Studies in Art Education* 35, no. 3 (1994): 181.

<sup>24</sup> Blandy, "Assuming Responsibility," 180.

<sup>25</sup> Blandy, "Assuming Responsibility," 182.

<sup>26</sup> Blandy, "Assuming Responsibility," 187.

<sup>27</sup> Blandy, "Assuming Responsibility," 187.

and state legislation protecting people with disabilities from discrimination and promoting equity in cultural organizations.<sup>28</sup> Personal accounts from individuals with disabilities should be seen as an integral component of the education of future art teachers. Students should be encouraged to join disability rights groups, and art education programs should actively recruit students with impairments. This is why I believe it is advantageous and necessary to develop art teachings centered on artists with disabilities. Creating lessons centered on artists with disabilities provides students and instructors with a unique learning opportunity.

According to the late John Derby who was an independent scholar and secondary art and postsecondary art educator for over 20 years, Disability Studies are an important resource for expanding the concept of disability in art education,<sup>29</sup> Derby's article, "Confronting Ableism: Disability Studies Pedagogy in Preservice Art Education," investigates how disability studies may critically evaluate disability discourses in art education, such as those that support special education and the usage of negative metaphors for disability<sup>30</sup> without critical reflection.<sup>31</sup> Disability is frequently pathologized in people's minds as if it were infectious. The discipline of Disability Studies includes scholars of the literary, performing, and visual arts. Art educators were traditionally the first to welcome children with disabilities into regular schools. Literature

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<sup>28</sup> Doug Blandy, "Assuming Responsibility," 182.

<sup>29</sup> John Derby, "Confronting Ableism: Disability Studies Pedagogy in Preservice Art Education." *Studies in Art Education* 57, no. 2 (2016): 102–19.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45381428>.

<sup>30</sup> for example, using words like "crippling" to describe a negative experience or "blind spot" to describe something overlooked

<sup>31</sup> Derby. "Confronting Ableism," 102–19.

on art education mirrors the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA and the dominance of special education in the instruction of handicapped children in public schools. Beyond special education contexts, critical art education research broadens the concept of disability. The close relationship between art education and Disability Studies facilitates communication, acceptance, and comprehension between the "abled" and "disabled" communities. Art was an integral part of bringing attention to Disability Studies, and it should be accessed and utilized to enhance one's understanding of the field.

### **Inclusive Classroom Supports for Art Education**

Along with advocacy, proper educational supports are a necessary component of art education for students with disabilities. Active engagement in the art classroom affords students with disabilities the opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas. Students with physical, visual, severe, and multiple disabilities can engage more completely with imaginative adjustments. Few studies demonstrate the effectiveness of assistive technology in facilitating impaired students' access to the art curriculum. To fully engage students with more severe disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, tasks must be changed or modified. Examples of changes include increased time to finish assignments, decreased assignments, and the use of specialized equipment. For children with physical, visual, severe, and multiple disabilities, art teachers require a broader grasp of accommodations. Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for students with disabilities should include the necessary accommodations, modifications, and assistive technology devices for art class participation. The majority of respondents reported using large-handled paint brushes, whereas just a minority reported

employing a multitude of AT solutions. Findings suggest that teachers of special education should do a better job guiding and assisting art educators.<sup>32</sup>

The educational style of partial participation allows the learner to perform as much of the work independently as feasible while receiving assistance for the remainder. A pupil with many difficulties could paint but not create a mobile. The opportunity to make tweaks or modifications will depend on the cognitive ability of each individual student. Adaptive art materials should be regular equipment in the art classroom for all kids, not only those with disabilities. Like many traditional educational tools, traditional art tools lack versatility. However, this does not mean that educational tools and creative tools cannot be adapted or modified, making it more accessible for learners with disabilities. For example, a pencil or a paintbrush possesses a long thin stem for the operator to grip. A student with a disability who struggles with fine motor or “gripping” may find this thin stem difficult to hold. A modification to make this paintbrush more accessible would be simply building up the thin stem of the paintbrush to make it thicker and therefore easier to grip. This is a very simple approach to modifying tools in order to create a more accessible and independent experience for a student with a disability. Students who are unable to sketch by hand are permitted to use alternate means to gather or generate pictures that might be incorporated into an artwork. When children have limited physical capabilities, battery-powered scribbling devices might provide them with a way to “color.” Doodle Doug is a scribbling instrument that is often placed on a surface and adjusted by a child. Magnification devices, such as Closed-Circuit Television, can magnify text, images, and other items. Many

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<sup>32</sup> Mari Beth Coleman and Elizabeth Stephanie Cramer, “Creating Meaningful Art Experiences With Assistive Technology for Students With Physical, Visual, Severe, and Multiple Disabilities,” *Art Education* 68, no. 2 (2015): 6–13.

students with impaired eyesight are able to see their assignments with greater clarity due to increased illumination. Students with severe vision problems may use tactile tools to supplement or replace their visual experience. Generally, high-tech communication devices allow the user to navigate between software-programmed interfaces. Students with disabilities must have the same or better access to art-making opportunities as their classmates. In order to achieve this, art educators must explore the many modifications and assistive devices to incorporate into the art classroom in order to make it more accessible.

### **Paraprofessional Support in the Art Classroom**

Paraprofessional support in the art classroom is another useful resource for the art education teachers to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences for students with disabilities. Over the past decade, the number of paraprofessionals in art classrooms has grown. Currently, approximately 5.5 million kids with disabilities are enrolled in schools, and many of them are enrolled in art classes.<sup>33</sup> How can art educators utilize paraprofessionals most effectively to assist students with disabilities? Respect and appreciation for paraprofessionals in inclusive art classrooms is vital. Many teachers believe that a paraprofessional will be responsible for the majority of a student with a disability's planning, adaptation, supervision, and instruction. This may seem obvious, but research indicates that it is not always the case. It is never safe to assume someone's prior art material knowledge and usage.<sup>34</sup> Paraprofessionals should be included in art room demos and investigations of materials. Instead of asking children

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<sup>33</sup> Corrie Burdick, and Julie Causton-Theoharis. "Creating Effective Paraprofessional Support in the Inclusive Art Classroom," *Art Education* 65, no. 6 (2012): 33.

<sup>34</sup>Burdick and Causton-Theoharis, "Creating Effective Paraprofessional Support," 34.

to linger on beliefs such as "I am not an artist," teachers must equip them with art knowledge and experience wherever feasible. Respect for pupils who are accompanied by a paraprofessional requires that both the student and their support system be welcomed. Creating an accessible physical setting and learning about student preferences for resources, subject matter, and amount or type of support are examples of this type of consideration.<sup>35</sup> Students are often required to employ unfamiliar materials or procedures when creating art. A direct line of sight to the art teacher is also an imperative component in order to facilitate proper communication. In the art classroom, the paraprofessional can play an important role in facilitating visual access for pupils. Art paraprofessionals must be familiar with ongoing art projects, procedures and processes, available adjustments, and instructional strategies to be implemented.

Many art studio materials can be adjusted using commonplace items, such as paintbrush handles and bar pads. Time for necessary communication can be created via educational videos, cooperative learning, and reinforcement activities. The term fading is used to denote the deliberate loss of support in the art classroom. Fading allows children to interact with materials and peers without the presence of a paraprofessional. In an art classroom, the goal of the paraprofessional is to assist students with impairments in becoming as independent as feasible.<sup>36</sup> Frequently, paraprofessionals are requested to provide a variety of services to students who do not rely exclusively on them. Imagine an inclusive art classroom in which paraprofessionals and art teachers collaborate to encourage the most independent and unrestricted artistic expression from all pupils.

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<sup>35</sup> Burdick and Causton-Theoharis, "Creating Effective Paraprofessional Support," 35.

<sup>36</sup> Burdick and Causton-Theoharis. "Creating Effective Paraprofessional Support," 33–37.



## **Conclusion**

To ensure that students with disabilities have access to and are included in an art classroom, teachers must have knowledge of and apply Disability Studies, demonstrate flexibility in offering adaptations and modifications of lessons, provide adaptive materials and tools, and access appropriate supports, such as physical and occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, and paraprofessionals. Creating a genuinely inclusive art classroom requires a student-centered approach in which modifications are made based on the student's physical and intellectual needs. My experience designing and implementing adaptive art courses for students with disabilities has afforded me the chance to develop as an educator. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with such talented, diligent, and tenacious students. My objective is to share my years of experience and expertise with other art educators in order to equip them and their students with the appropriate tools and resources to support their art goals and personal development.

## **Research Methodology**

My directed project research will include qualitative text analysis, field research, observational analysis, lesson plan preparation, cooperation with professionals, and reflexive analysis. I will do qualitative text analysis focused on Disability Studies Ideologies and resources for students with disabilities using a collection of texts on the subject. To ensure relevance, the scope will be narrowed based on the specified topic. Field study will involve documenting practical discoveries, problems, and triumphs through reflective practices and structured observations, drawing on my 11 years of experience teaching art to students with special needs.

The observational analysis component will observe and assess the impact of adaptations and modifications, including cooperation efforts with inclusion-specialized specialists, in a methodical manner. The preparation of lesson plans will turn study findings into tangible practices for an inclusive art classroom. Collaboration with experts including occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language pathologists will ensure that their expertise is integrated. The observational analysis component will assess the impact of the integration of Disability Studies methodologies on the engagement, participation, and production of art lessons centered around artists with disabilities. Finally, reflexive analysis will entail constant critical reflection on my own teaching methods and experiences, allowing for continuous development throughout the study process. This comprehensive technique attempts to provide a thorough understanding of inclusive art education by connecting theory and practice.

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