Re-Imagining the Studio Art Classroom: From Tired to Inspired

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Even in Art classrooms this sentiment is more true than not:

“We’re educating kids out of their creative capacities” –Sir Ken Robinson
Understanding How Art Learning has been Contributing to ‘21st Century Learning’ for Centuries
“I am an artist when I look at a bird until I feel feathery too…and at an orange until I know what it is to be perfectly round.”

Pat Lowry Collins, *I Am an Artist*, 1992
Consider This:

For centuries, artists have been studying the natural world...to know more, to understand better, to see more closely.

But in schools, we place student artists in artificial worlds that do not function very well and that inhibit them in more ways than we currently understand. We lock materials away. We put our students in windowless rooms. We manage ‘behavior’ by overmanaging access. We do not trust them to care for the space with us.
The Problem
An Epiphany Moment
Dissertation Title:

‘Making Do’ or Making Progress?
A Study of the Design and Arrangement of
Eighteen K-12 Multi-Purpose Studio Art Classrooms
Given the existence of the National Art Education Association’s professional recommendations for the design of studio art classrooms in schools, along with scholarly and practice-based notions of human flourishing for children, how are both interpreted in selected public and private schools in three different geographic areas of the United States of America, and to what extent do they make the well-being and flourishing of individual art teachers and their students possible?

**The Bottom Line: Where the Physical Space, Learning, Creative Activity, and Human Flourishing Intersect**
Participant Schools

- 18 K12 Schools
- 3 Geographic Regions across the U.S.
- 6 Schools in Each Region
- Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels
- Public and Private
- High, Middle, Low Socioeconomic Demographics
- New and Older Buildings
- High, Middle, and Low Commitment to the Arts

Note:
The impetus for this selection breadth was to test or double down on known assumptions about what dynamics create the current design and arrangement issues or problems found in studio art classrooms.
Data Collection:

Site Visits

- 1 Full School Day Per Site
- ‘A Day in the Life’ of the Multi-Purpose Studio Art Classroom

✓ NAEA Design Standards Checklist
✓ Detail Photographs (200+ per site)
✓ Teacher Interviews
✓ Class Observations—at least 3 class sessions observed on the day of
✓ Field Notes
✓ Floor Plans
A Word of Caution about the NAEA Design Standards

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17 NAEA Categories
117 Specific Checkpoints
3 Emergent Categories
NAEA Categories

- Universal Design/Access
- Space Allotments
- Location of Art Rooms
- Patio and Outdoor Spaces
- Art Educator’s Office
- Basic Furnishings
- Walls and Floors
- Storage (Construction)
- Storage (Types)
- Presentation Space
- Lighting
- Acoustics
- Sinks
- Technology
- Security
- Safety
- Ventilation
Emergent Categories

- Unintended Consequences/Design Gone Wrong
- Limitations of Materials due to Space Limitations
- **Management Practices
- **Instances of ‘Making Do’
General Conclusions:

• ‘Making Do’ is the accepted and expected practice in art classrooms, old and new
• Art classrooms are not designed for intuitive use and need further examination of their needs, functional implications, and stored materials in order for these spaces to work better for students and teachers
• It takes a village—architects, designers, administrators, facilities personnel, product designers, and teachers need to understand the problems and work together to resolve them
• Management problems are overwhelming but a well-designed art classroom will drastically reduce these problems
• Well OR poorly designed studio art classrooms have pedagogical and curricular implications for art teachers and their students  (Example: Site 1’s Kiln Access)
‘Making Do’
A Hard Habit to Break
My glue storage, not refined but it works!
The best thing is it works so naturally for the kids (4-14)
The 1/2 toilet paper rolls are glued together. And the spaces are small enough that the bottles easily slide right into place.
Don’t know if this is on Pinterest or not. My apologies if this is old news! 😞
“Students can discuss mathematics while seated in a room under a gymnasium but should they? Teachers can handle storage problems by walking back and forth to utility rooms down the hall, but is that the best use of their time and energy?”

Snow, 2002
Space Allotment
All 3 are new schools

Overpopulated classroom
1/3 Recommended Sq ft. This classroom houses up to 40 bodies Grades 5th and 6th
1/3 Recommended Sq ft. This classroom houses 25 bodies K through 8
Meets Recommended Sq ft. per 25 students, 2nd-5th Grades
ADA and Accessibility Issues
Instructional Technology
Technology for Students
Computer Stations in Middle and High School Art Rooms
Digital Media Labs Housed within or Specifically Attended by Art Students and Taught by Art Faculty
Exceptional Find:

Small Urban Public School for Special Needs Students

Digital Media is regularly integrated with traditional materials to assist students in meaningful ‘making’ experiences
Furnishings
Tables and Seating
Paper Storage
Standard Bin Storage Option
Mobile Cabinets

Virco offers a variety of 36”, 66” & 72” high cabinets with thermofused melamine panel surfaces and a range of shelf configurations for storing textbooks, notebooks and related educational materials. Two models are available with either 15 or 30 tote trays; another double-faced mobile cabinet features 12 spacious cubicles per side. For teachers and students who need a place to keep oversized projects and art assignments, three Virco mobile cabinets include full-width paper drawer storage.

2509-24DF
Double-faced cabinet with twelve 14½"W x 11½"D x 12¾"H cubicles and two hinged doors on each side. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 66"H.

2513
Two adjustable steel shelves. Two 13¾"W x 19½"D x 11¾"H file drawers. Two 44"W x 24½"D x 3½"H paper drawers. One 12" coat rod. One 18"W x 11¾"H vanity mirror. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 66"H.

2501
Four adjustable steel shelves. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 66"H.

2601
Five adjustable steel shelves. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 72"H.

2502
Eight 24"W adjustable steel shelves. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 66"H.

2501-30TT
One fixed/move adjustable steel shelves with 30 tote trays. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 66"H.

2301DFD
Double-faced cabinet with one adjustable steel shelf on each side. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 36"H.

2301-15TT
One fixed/move adjustable steel shelves with 15 tote trays. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 36"H.

2321
One paper drawer and one adjustable shelf. Two hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 36"H.

2325
Five 44"W x 24½"D x 3½"H paper drawers. No hinged doors. Cabinet is 48"W x 28"D x 36"H.

Mobile Cabinet Accessories

253424
34"W x 24"D steel shelf for mobile cabinets.

254824
48"W x 24"D steel shelf for mobile cabinets.

TT1412
14½"W x 11½"D x 3½"H tote tray with card holder.

TT0919
9¾"W x 19½"D x 4½"H tote tray with card holder.

TT1419
13½"W x 19½"D x 4½"H tote tray with card holder.
Flat Files
Patio and Outdoor Spaces
Unintended Consequences
Trends in Art Education Pedagogy

**Choice-Based Art Education** (Child-Choice-Based Curriculum, ‘Center’-Arranged Art Materials)

**Teaching for Artistic Behavior** (Studio Habits of Mind as Central to Curricular Goals—Assumes Student as Artist, in the traditions of artistic practice—aka how adult artists work)
If you could design your ideal high school TAB classroom, how would you build for centers/areas around the classroom?

I am currently designing a new art room for our new high school. I currently teach modified choice & hope to transition to TAB in the near future.

I need storage help. I have this fantastic room, but it is a multipurpose room, and my principal says it needs to look less like an art room when I’m not here and they use the space for meetings. Currently I move supplies over to condense space and cover them with plastic tablecloths when I’m not here otherwise people help themselves to supplies. I cannot put all supplies away in cupboards because I have a 30 minute morning and afternoon duty each day I’m here. He suggested I look at other furniture options, but I don’t even know where to start. Because of two sets of double wide swinging doors and an unused, mounted smart board, the wall space is lacking. Any suggestions??

I love this shelving unit but it’s really a section of old countertop and my administrator wants to replace it with a “real” piece of furniture. I can’t find anything that is open, no cubbies, flat, real wood and about counter height. Thoughts?

[Imagery of a classroom and shelving unit]
A Revolutionary Approach: Seeking to Shift the Paradigm from Tired to Inspired
Three Words to Design By

Aim to build studio art classrooms that will:

**INVITE** students into a hospitable, responsive space where ‘good things happen’

**DELIGHT** the senses and the soul

**INSPIRE** creative ingenuity, curiosity, rich learning experiences, vested interest in the care of the studio environment
Designing for Intuitive Use:

It’s an iterative process—it’s never going to be perfect the first time
Invite

DELIGHT

Inspire