

ARTS EDUCATION INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES



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This resource provides arts program leaders and arts educators:

- Information about student-centered learning and instruction in the arts classroom
- Assessment tools to promote equitable assessment and grading practices
- Examples of student-centered arts learning approaches

Classrooms and schools where all students feel accepted as they are, respected as partners in their learning, and free to explore and take academic and artistic risks are essential to providing equitable arts learning experiences. Ensuring certain elements are present within an art program’s routine, structure, and instructional activities creates both equitable and engaging opportunities for arts learning.



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Elements of Student-Centered Arts Learning and Instruction

A student-centered arts education environment is foundational to developing student agency and voice within arts programs. Approaching arts learning through a student-centered lens creates opportunities to address the full set of [Oregon Arts Standards](#), including the artistic processes of create, present/perform/produce, respond, and connect. In student-centered classrooms, student agency fosters creativity and innovation, as students are given the freedom to explore, build their skills and confidence, and take artistic risks.

The following sections highlight important considerations to make when building a student-centered classroom within an arts program.

THE ARTS, THINKING, AND LEARNING



“Works of art provoke rich, multilayered meaning making in ways unlike other disciplines. They raise questions, evoke connection-making, and in many ways transform the shape of inquiry. In doing so, it has the power to transform a student’s historical inquiry into a personal and contemporary one.”

-Shari Tishman

- Tap into the power of the arts to help make student thinking visible¹ and highlight important critical thinking and observational skills for students. The analysis of and collective discussion around artworks and performances, utilizing simple questioning strategies and open ended prompts², leads to the development of these important skills.
- Implement [protocols](#) in the classroom to increase opportunities for student interaction and varied forms of engagement.
- The [Eight Studio Habits of Mind](#) from [Harvard Project Zero](#) provides a framework for the thinking processes that students engage with during creating, performing, connecting to, and responding to artwork. Learning these habits helps students grasp the process of arts learning at a metacognitive level, and to build an artistic practice that leads to high quality work.

1 Tishman, S. (2007). (rep.). Artful Thinking (pp. 3–5). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

2 Ritchhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison, K. (2011). Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners. Jossey-Bass.



CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS

- Create classroom agreements with students to ensure everyone is clear about the processes of caring for each other, the shared space, and instructional materials.
- Agree together on the process of repair and resolution of challenges or conflicts. Touch on these agreements every time the class meets.
- Build rapport and learn about each other with [circle practice](#) or sharing activity before creating together. Module 1 of Oregon Classroom WISE is focused on creating safe and supportive learning environments, and provides additional ideas and resources.
- Providing opportunities to explore and share through the arts without judgment can be beneficial to students' processing of difficult topics and life events.

Learn more about incorporating trauma-informed teaching practices into arts programs by utilizing the Oregon Department of Education's Integrated Model of Mental Health [Oregon ClassroomWISE](#) resources. For more information about restorative practices and Restorative Justice, see this [Restorative Practice/Restorative Justice](#) resource.

- ▶ [Access the Oregon ClassroomWISE Modules](#)





SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS THROUGH ARTS LEARNING

- The [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#) provide a framework to ensure all learners are able to access and fully participate in their learning. Utilize these guidelines to design instruction that provides a diverse array of opportunities for engagement in learning, representation of learning, access to learning, and expression of learning.
- Students experiencing disabilities must be provided the proper modifications or supports to participate fully in arts program activities. This can include modifying materials, tools, seating arrangements, or equipment as necessary to meet student needs and address student Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Plan in advance and discuss with the student and Special Education Department.
- Provide translated materials when helpful for students and consider linguistically responsive structures to any activities involving reading, writing, listening, and speaking that support students' needs. Linguistic supports include sentence frames, word banks, graphic organizers, visual aids, and more.
- Consider what Universal Design for Learning (UDL) looks like across program formats, for example, online, hybrid, or in-person.

The Oregon Department of Education's [Special Education website](#) and [English Learners Initiatives website](#) provide resources to support the varied needs of students. For resources when considering utilizing digital learning within an arts program look to [ODE's Key Components of Digital Learning Guidance](#).



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICES

- Zaretta Hammond, teacher and author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, has proposed that culturally responsive teaching is a *process*, not just a set of best practices (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Research and learn the differences between various frameworks for culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies. Find, adapt, and implement a framework used by school, district, or education teams to ensure that equity is centered in the educational environment. If this does not yet exist, share one with colleagues and begin a discussion to promote shared learning around these frameworks.
- Start with connection and inclusion. Provide students time for relationship building and opportunities to share stories and artwork from their lives. Center learning activities in student's lived experiences.
- Maintain high expectations for all students. If a student is not meeting co-developed expectations, continue to work with them and develop a plan for them to get there.
- Include diverse examples of languages, races, ethnicities, cultures, gender identities, and abilities in and around the classroom, in materials such as books and videos, decor, and featured artistic works.
- Move beyond the surface level when teaching or sharing about objects, materials, and work from artists of different races, ethnicities, cultures, gender identities, and abilities other than one's own. Ensure understanding of what respectful use looks like with any artistic works. Understand the background of artists and the inherent meaning of works before sharing.

The Oregon Department of Education's [Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices](#) provides examples and resources to help implement these practices in any school program. Consider the Oregon Department of Education's [Aligning for Student Success Professional Learning Resources](#), including the Engaging Equity online modules, for learning around equity with school and district staff.

- ▶ [Access the Aligning for Student Success Page and the Engaging Equity Online Modules](#)



MEANINGFUL, AUTHENTIC STUDENT CHOICE AND VOICE

- Provide performance and presentation opportunities for students' original works, and highlight student driven choreography, writing, directing, composing, curating, and staging of performances and events.
- Connect to learning goals across content areas ensuring development of cross-cutting skills while promoting the transfer of learning between different learning environments.
- Provide service learning opportunities for students through the arts. This might include fundraising, building awareness of student causes, and making student-driven change in their community.

- Encourage a classroom structure and establish practices based on desired behaviors and/or principles that encourage [critical thinking](#) and creative development.
- Reflect with students on their learning. Give them time to learn and share about their own learning process and needs around arts learning.

For an inspiring example of an Oregon school program that centers student voice, refer to the feature on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary school and KSMoCA in [Communicating the Benefits of Arts Education](#).

- ▶ Access the [Communicating the Benefits of Arts Education](#)



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND AUTHENTIC AUDIENCES

- Invite mentor artists and industry professionals to share their work with students and engage in dialogue based on student interests.
- Discuss school and community needs and provide students with opportunities to help meet those needs through creative expression.
- Find creative ways to showcase student work. In addition to school-based celebrations, create community connections for students to perform or present work for an authentic audience and make a difference in the community.

To connect with arts organizations and teaching artists in various regions of Oregon, refer to the [Oregon Arts and STEAM Education Organization Lookup Tool](#) compiled by the Oregon Department of Education. For schools around the Portland Metro Area, the Regional Arts & Culture Council's [Artlook Map](#) provides additional opportunities for arts organizations and schools to connect.



- ▶ Access the [Oregon Arts and STEAM Education Organization Lookup Tool](#)



EQUITABLE ASSESSMENT IN THE ARTS

- Balance a focus on process and product when designing classroom activities and instruction - both experiences are important for standards-aligned arts learning.
- Incorporate balanced assessment practices, focusing on formative assessment strategies and student driven assessment to empower students as partners in their learning.
- Be clear with expectations and purpose when utilizing summative assessments. Consider employing and/or designing rubrics with students to assess performances or products.
- [Guiding Principles for the Assessment of Arts Learning](#) from the World Summit on Arts Education provides a framework for assessing the quality of assessment structures and applications when planning assessments for arts programs.

Explore resources from [Arts Assessment for Learning](#) and some of these [Formative Assessment Resources](#) from the Oregon Department of Education for ideas to implement more formative assessment strategies in the classroom.

Performance-Based Assessment Tools

Performance-based assessment is essential to the process of evaluating arts learning. The National Coalition for Arts Standards' (NCAS) 2021 [National Arts Standards Model Cornerstone Assessments](#) and discipline specific MCAs provide models for standards-based teaching, learning, and assessment in the five arts disciplines of Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts.



Discipline Specific Model Cornerstone Assessment Resources from NCAS



▶ [Dance](#)



▶ [Media Arts](#)



▶ [Music](#)



▶ [Theatre](#)



▶ [Visual Arts](#)

The [Arts Impact Curricula](#) program in Washington State developed these performance-based assessments to help assess the success of both students and arts educators based on common criteria for performance.

[Criteria-based Checklist & Student Self-assessment](#) (text version of [Criteria-based Checklist & Student Self-assessment](#)) This example includes both a criteria-based checklist, completed by the teacher, and a student self-evaluation form.

[Peer Reflection](#) (text version) This form is just one example of how students can be involved in observing and recording criteria. Peer reflection can be used in combination with other assessment tools.

[Annotated Rubric for Teachers](#) (text version) In this example, a four point weighted rubric scale is used in both a teacher checklist and a student self-evaluation.

[Autonomy Rubric for Teachers \(A.R.T.\) from Arts Impact](#)

The Autonomy Rubric for Teachers (A.R.T.), is designed as a tool for facilitating continuous growth in teacher practice.

Source: [Arts Impact Assessment Tools](#)



Student-Centered Arts Learning Approaches

Along with employing well-known instructional strategies such as direct instruction, modeling, discussion protocols and guided release, educators can apply various approaches to ensure space for student voice and choice in their instruction. These are just a few of the student-centered approaches that apply in an arts learning context.



CHOICE-BASED

In choice-based arts learning, students are presented with a range of art learning options or activities, and they are encouraged to choose the options that best meet their individual learning needs and interests.

Choice-based learning offers educators the opportunity for modeling, practice, and guided release, through the development of different technical skills with artistic media. However, in this model, students are able to choose which technical skills they want to develop and what they wish to express with these skills. Choice-based learning could also involve students working in small groups or collaborating with their peers, allowing them to share their knowledge and expertise and learn from one another. Together, these experiences encourage students to take ownership of their learning and artistic development.

An example of choice-based learning in the arts could be students learning about different art media techniques through mini-lessons at stations in their classroom, and choosing which media and techniques they want to focus on. After time to practice, students could propose an idea for a capstone project, and work toward sharing this body of work in an art show or gallery.



DESIGN THINKING

Design thinking is an instructional approach that encourages students to use a creative and iterative process to solve problems and create innovative solutions. This approach is based on the idea that the same design principles used by professionals in fields such as

engineering, architecture, and product development apply in educational contexts, helping students develop skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. The design thinking process in education, as defined by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, consists of five stages: discover, interpret, ideate, prototype, and test.

Design thinking is often used in hands-on, project-based learning environments, and applies to a wide range of subjects and topics. It has been shown to promote higher-order thinking skills in the learning process (Razzouk, 2012).

An example of a design thinking project in the arts classroom could be students designing an approach to share their work with the school community. This could lead to many different design projects; for example, designing a website to exhibit student performance highlights or portfolio work, or designing a community event to spotlight student artistic achievements.



INQUIRY-BASED

Inquiry-based learning focuses on students actively exploring and discovering new knowledge and concepts through asking questions and conducting investigations. In an inquiry-based arts learning environment, students are encouraged to ask questions, seek out information, and engage in hands-on activities and experiments to learn about a particular topic. This approach is designed to promote deep understanding and critical thinking skills, as students are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives and draw their own conclusions based on the evidence they gather.



PROJECT-BASED

Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional approach that involves students actively exploring and investigating real-world problems or challenges through hands-on, experiential activities. In a project-based arts learning environment, students work on a long-term, open-ended art project or piece that requires them to use a range of skills and knowledge to research, design, and create a product or solution to a problem³.

Inquiry-based learning often begins with a driving question or problem that students are asked to explore and investigate. Through this exploration, students develop artistic research skills, collaboration and communication skills, and engage in opportunities for both teacher and peer feedback.

An example of inquiry-based arts learning in action could be students researching the question “What makes music enjoyable?” Students could research their favorite music genre, learn about the structure of musical works in the genre, develop specific composition skills, and create their own music based on this investigation.

PBL is designed to engage students and promote deep learning by allowing students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations. In PBL, students are actively involved in defining the goals, processes, and products of their projects. This provides many opportunities for problem-solving and critical thinking. Projects often involve the use of collaboration and communication skills, as students work together to research, plan, and execute their projects.

An example of project-based learning in action could be students integrating arts learning across disciplines while writing, performing, choreographing, and producing a musical to raise awareness of an issue they have deemed important.

This work is funded by the Expanding Access to Well-Rounded Courses Grant, a 5-year, 9.8 million dollar Federal grant that ODE received from the US Department of Education in 2020. The Arts Access Toolkit is a portion of the work of the [Well-Rounded Access Program](#), along with supporting access projects for courses in the arts and STEAM across the state. Over time, the Well-Rounded Access Program team hopes to continue to develop and refine this resource with the collaboration of administrators and educators statewide. If districts or schools have additional resources, examples, or success stories to contribute, please contact the Well-Rounded Access Program team at ODE.WRCoursesGrant@ode.state.or.us.



3 [PBL Works, Buck Institute for Education](#)