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## Adapting curriculum for autism in art education

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ADAPTING CURRICULUM FOR AUTISM  
IN ART EDUCATION

A Thesis Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

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Entitled: Adapting Curriculum for Autism in Art Education

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## Adapting Curriculum for Autism in Art Education

### Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) describes a complex group of brain development disorders characterized by difficulties in social interaction, communication and behavior. ASD is one of the nation's leading disorders, affecting nearly one in every 68 children (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, 2017). Currently there is limited understanding and research in ways ASD is being promoted and integrated within art education. This limitation has led to blurred understandings in how art educators can adapt materials, projects, and roles of paraprofessionals within the classroom. Societal views on ASD often deny the giftedness of these children and fail to see the effects that ASD dependence has on helping these students be successful. Many students with ASD are dependent on certified individuals within education to constantly help them find their unique path of learning. It is urgent that we deepen our research and understanding of how ASD students can be best served throughout their k-12 art education endeavors. This research will help identify where further applications should continue exploring the current areas lacking adequate ASD awareness within K-12 art education classrooms.

## Introduction

It is critical to continue exploring ways in which k-12 art education can better integrate modifications and adaptations for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through my role as a director in the sensory room of the University of Northern Iowa's Spectrum Project, I have been able to build relationships with numerous children on varying levels of the Autism Spectrum. This group is an extracurricular art, music, and drama opportunity for children with ASD. University of Northern Iowa students get to help work through the varying challenges and build relationships with the children over the course of a semester. Throughout my interaction with these k-12 children, I have grown to better understand this disorder and been granted an appreciation that all children have personal characteristics that make them unique. One thing I have learned is that every person with ASD is uniquely gifted to express and represent themselves in ways beyond understanding. With our assistance, these individuals can thrive to succeed within our evolving society. Children with ASD deserve equal opportunities as their peers. Children with ASD deserve support and model figures in their lives that strive to help them absorb life's greatest experiences.

Researching the topic of art and ASD has shown a gap in literature and awareness. By building on the research related to the role of assisting ASD integrated needs of students within Art Education, art educators are able to better explore diverse learner modifications and adaptations within k-12 art classrooms in order to provide current and future teachers with methods of integrating ASD needs into art instruction. As a future art educator, I want to understand the role of diverse learners with ASD within the art classroom, how paraprofessionals, professionals who work one to one with students within the classrooms, can

maximize ASD art lesson experiences, and how I can make lesson connections, material modifications, and classroom inclusiveness for diverse learners. Researching this topic led to limited results that only focused on artmaking experiences with children or the vast concept of ‘Special Education’ and my interest in exploring the depth of ASD integration. The purpose of this study was to explore how this understanding could be pushed further and be more specific for art education and ASD throughout research and analysis.

### Literature Review

Much of the research found contained similar results leading to conclusions that artmaking is beneficial for many students with ASD, but lacked depth in which art can be integrated into ASD needs. Studies conducted began to explore this area but concluded by encouraging further research in these areas. Moving forward I continued researching recent studies and written information on arts and ASD. I also surveyed art educators about the role of students with ASD within their classrooms then took their suggested concerns and ideas to create lesson adaptations, material modifications, improved paraprofessionals roles, and improved classroom dynamic suggestions as a result of current classroom educators needs and prior research suggestions. The results from this survey guided me towards my concluding responses of what teachers are currently seeking when it comes to adapting art education classrooms to support ASD learners.

As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017) and Autism Speaks organization, Autism Spectrum Disorder causes significant social, communicative, and behavioral challenges for people. How one

interacts and learns is unique from others; as Autism Spectrum effects how one thinks and problem-solves. People with ASD often have difficulties with social, communicative, and emotional skills. Some common characteristics of ASD include: repetitive behaviors, need of a structured routine due to troubles adapting to change, distant understanding of emotional connections, and difficulties paying attention (Autism Speaks, 2018). These characteristics of ASD range in a spectrum of abilities. How much assistance and guidance people with ASD needs ranges based on their unique skills dependent on their personal characteristics (CDC, 2017).

It is also critical to acknowledge the following aspect of ASD, “Leo Kanner, one of the first researchers to recognize autism, pointed to its main feature, what he referred to as ‘autistic aloneness,’ as a description of the mental isolation of an individual with autism” (Kellman, 2001, p. 10). Individuals with ASD are challenged in ways that often lead to feeling defeated and this aloneness is often expressed through intensive feelings of anxiety and fear that manifest themselves in angry tantrums.

Students with ASD are widely seen throughout k-12 educational districts as being one of the largest disorders amongst children, commonly diagnosed by the age of two years old (CDC, 2017). Growing demand in research towards the inclusion of ASD integration within education challenges research to look into ways educational professionals can promote individualized instruction for these students. It is noted that, “there has been an extensive amount of research conducted over a long period of time on the artistic development of typical children in the field of art education” (Furniss, 2008, p. 11). Furniss continued to add that, “there is a limited amount of research on the artmaking of children with autism. Therefore, it is critical for more research to

be conducted in the field of art education to address the learning needs of these children,” (Furniss, p. 11, 2008). With this limited understanding on the artmaking of ASD children, many art educators lack the understanding of how to best adapt their lessons and classrooms to these students needs.

The benefits of artmaking for individuals with ASD encompass many areas. The art of some individuals with ASD indicates amazing levels of creativity and expression. Artists such as Jessica Park and Stephen Wiltshire showcase their own unique representations of art as professional artists (Furniss, 2008). This idea is pushed through Weed’s suggestion toward the classroom, “allowing less valid school topics, such as cartoon characters or superheroes, into the classroom would allow for their more complete inclusion into the classroom. Allowing students’ own idiosyncratic meaning to emerge in the classroom provides them the power to enter into social relationships in a different way” (Weed, 2009, p. 20). Art educators aware of the range of skills and behaviors can better assist students to create art and at the same time to improve their strengths and weaknesses (Alter-Muri, 2017). Students with ASD often excel through their artistic skills but lack communicative verbal skills in day to day encounters (Furniss, 2008). Throughout art experiences, these children are able to work through ways of expression that help build on their ASD limitations.

Art educator, Schleien (1995), researched the participation of children with autism in a community museum with collaborative lessons promoting interaction and collaboration amongst a range of ASD children. Results showed that by educating both older and younger children on ways to interact and help peers with ASD through a collaborative lesson communication was easily maintained amongst every group. It was observed that interaction with ranging ability



peers was often rarely reciprocated from the peers with ASD and the study neglected to observe effects of interaction when the lesson involved independent variables (Schleien, 1995). This research asked for further application in examining results within an art classroom and to explore ways these aspects can encourage ASD interaction through various forms of art lessons.

Understanding roles of paraprofessionals within educational contexts will help better determine their function in helping students with ASD in the art classroom. In a study conducted by Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008), both paraprofessionals and teachers were surveyed on their roles, responsibilities, and preparedness within the classroom. Results showed that the activities most often conducted by the paraprofessional included reinforcing concepts already presented by the teacher, assisting with the classroom and behavior management program, monitoring children outside the classroom, and assisting in daily planning. There were several activities that most paraprofessionals stated that they never engaged in or did so rarely. These activities were participating in legally mandated written individualized educational plans for students outlining goals, benchmarks, and outcomes for students and/or families, administering formal assessments, and implementing simple health-related duties (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008).

Art educator and researcher, Guay (2009), discussed how being a proactive art educator is critical in defining the role of the paraprofessional and art education. Guay stated that, “recent conversations with art teachers revealed a lack of knowledge about how to reach and teach students who sometimes displayed anger, who were resistant to art engagement, and who had meltdowns that were exhausting for the art teacher,” (Guay, 2009, p. 3). Guay went on to say, “supervisors expressed confidence that many of these incidents are preventable.

Paraprofessionals are clearly needed in art rooms to help students learn,” (Guay, 2009, p. 7). It is

critical that the art teacher strives to build strong communication with the paraprofessional to help the paraprofessional understand what they can continue to build on with the student while also suggesting ways the art educator can challenge themselves to best suit the individualized needs of that student.

## Theoretical Framework

### Disability Theory

Creswell (2013) described Disability Theory with the following statement, “disability inquiry addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities... now, researchers focus more on disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 10). This theory looks into how disabilities can be focused on in ways that allow one to broaden individual understandings and broaden individual relationships with various individuals with disabilities.

Disability theory keys into how every aspect of interaction and involvement plays into how we respond through our various levels of understanding. Thinking about the effects of inclusiveness within schools, and the individuals involved in diverse learners, such as students with ASD, educational achievements, critically defines how students with ASD learn and understand within their contextual factors of classroom abilities. Improving research on students with ASD and art education allows for a more improved dynamic of learning capabilities. Reed (2009) discusses that it is critical for students with ASD and other disabilities be allowed within regular classrooms and to do this it is important students are taught how to interact and collaborate with various individuals (Reed, 2009).

Research shows that the “minority group model, advanced by major thinkers in the Disability Rights Movement, describes the diverse population of disabled people not as unwell and in need of fixing, but as being persecuted by a society that cannot accommodate for differences in people. It is society then, that needs to change, not the person experiencing a disability” (Reed, 2009, p.18). Reed continued to discuss that society has created the idea of what a well, able-bodied person consists of. This idea is structured about stereotypes, myths, and fears about illness and ability that oppresses people with disabilities, not their differences in ability (Reed, 2009).

### Methodology

Building research that analyzes how educators can better integrate students with Autism Spectrum Disorder requires critically analyzing what educators seek as prominent classroom concerns and challenges. Key authors Kellman (2001), Gerber (2010), Guay (2006), and Weed (2009), provide research analyzing multiple approaches towards meeting students needs and the individuals involved in helping students succeed. Beyond their findings, research continues to be limited in this specific field of study.

This project’s main goal was to build on previous research related to ASD integrated needs within art education, to explore diverse learner modifications and adaptations within k-12 art classrooms to provide current and future teachers with methods of integrating ASD needs into art instruction. In order to continue furthering art educators’ support to increase awareness and understanding and to find applicable source materials in helping student success, research needs to directly ask teachers what they seek as support. I conducted a survey

interviewing thirty art educators on this topic which helped analyze what current classroom conditions are and how we can further target individual teacher concerns. With this data I was able to help teachers grow to understand what they can improve on in order to maintain overall student learning.

Going forward with the project, I thought about what specific aspects of the art classroom students with ASD interacted with. With these generalizations, I developed questions to maximize teacher reflections covering these forms of ASD classroom involvement and interactions that would help me understand individual concerns and areas of improvement. With this information I then compiled the survey findings based on common themes within the responses, major challenges teachers are faced with, how teachers respond to those challenges, teacher takeaways, and what teachers want to see change through art education and ASD awareness.

These categorizations of the survey results allowed me to explore ways in which the information was relatable towards the literary review and my own personal suggestions educators and future art educators can begin to consider when teaching to diverse students. I concluded my analysis with ways in which the research can continue to build on providing further future findings and forms of classroom support for art educators.

### Instrument

I surveyed art educators directly in order to best understand what current and future art educators need as supportive guidance for catering classroom needs and adaptations for students with ASD. This survey was distributed to a group of ranging levels of experienced art educators

within a small rural state. This target group allowed me to seek responses from art educators anywhere from preservice through retirement. This allowed me ample forms of insights and experiences to consider and how each educator can speak of individual experiences, worries, and challenges associated with their role in currently educating students with ASD in their art classrooms.

Research and personal understanding of contextual themes associated with art education helped me pinpoint which critical aspects to analyze through the research and survey question creation. These common themes I included: lesson plan modifications, classroom materials, collaborative classroom dynamic, paraprofessionals role, and meeting individualized goals. With these themes in mind I was able to consider how students with ASD are involved in the diverse environment of art classrooms. This helped to best target these areas through specific sets of questions, which helped to maintain focus throughout the survey.

I generated a series of questions for the participants to answer. I began the survey by asking participants a few general questions about who they were to better understand the context of where they were from and the student audience they taught.

These questions consisted of

- what grade level the participants taught,
- what past levels the participants had experience teaching in, and
- how many years the participants had been teaching for.

These questions helped me to generalize how experienced the participants were when it came to an accumulation of past experiences with students with ASD and also their overall involvement through art education.

The second phase of the survey began by asking the participants about their experiences of working with students with ASD. If participants had any experience working with these students, they were asked to explain students characteristics. Then participants were asked what the school district currently offers as course options for these students. This enabled participants to respond with either: integrated or one to one classrooms, then to rank and further explain how much support is offered from the district for the educators to best meet the needs of these students.

By first asking participants if they had any experiences working with students with ASD, I was able to understand how aware they are of current stances on ASD education. This helped my analysis of how applicable their understanding of school district involvement and support affected the topic. If participants had experience with students with ASD, then they had experienced interactions pertaining to how the districts responded to the students' individual educational efforts.

Next, I asked participants a question that analyzed their students with ASD paraprofessional role and the expectations the teacher sets for this professional in helping guide the students success in the art classroom. Understanding that a critical component to ensuring students with ASD are granted every opportunity to succeed is knowing that these students have a professional with them throughout their education. This individual is to help advocate for the individual successes and struggles they face together throughout the day. Art educators commonly reflect on the struggles they face with these individuals as they can challenge the

purpose of the art classroom and finding individual success. This question allowed for real feedback on this topic of interest.

At this time in the survey, I had participants rank the common themes associated with the art classroom and students with ASD from most challenging to least challenging aspects of ASD classroom dynamics and inclusion. These common themes were the following: lesson plan modifications, classroom materials, collaborative classroom dynamic, paraprofessionals role, and meeting individualized goals. I then asked participants what makes these aspects so challenging in the classroom and how do they currently troubleshoot these issues. This ranking allowed me to best understand common issues educators face, why they have these challenges, and how they are attempting to solve these problems. This provided me with information and feedback of what specific areas educators are struggling with.

Lastly, I asked participants what they would like to do differently to meet the art education classroom needs of students with ASD, then to provide any additional feedback, comments, or concerns. Understanding what educators find challenging and getting time to write specific comments about their concerns helps to best analyze where to go forward with the research. This granted individuals a final moment to reason for their answers and to state overall concluding thoughts towards this topic and project.

## Results

The survey concluded with 30 responses, all from art educators with various backgrounds. There were responses from preservice through thirty years of teaching, with responses from varying grade levels of art education represented. When comparing survey data

there were several recurring themes consisting of the following pieces of information. These themes are based on common responses participants had within the survey. The first theme was that every educator expressed that they have had classrooms where they taught students with ASD. This demonstrates that the condition is no longer “rare” and that it is something everyone needs to acknowledge, as most educators will be presented with the challenge of teaching in diverse ways to students with various capabilities.

Another common theme was that classrooms receive “average” support and that students with ASD have a paraprofessional. Their role is to provide specific assistance in projects, to keep the student on task, and offer insights on student needs for teacher. Participants reported that a large challenge of meeting ASD needs is finding the support, time, and management in meeting those students’ needs alongside the rest of the classroom with various other students needs. Schools do support teachers, but this support could broaden and open up opportunity to ensure the students are given every opportunity to learn. Paraprofessionals are a great asset for students and teachers, but their training on art classroom expectations tends to lack ways to properly expand individual student creative growth.

Analyzing the portion of the survey where participants ranked various challenging elements of art education based on meeting ASD needs also yielded a particular theme. A popular pick for the most challenging aspect was providing lesson plan modifications for individual students to meet IEP expectations. IEPs and personal creative achievements was the second highest most challenging aspect. Creating a collaborative whole-classroom dynamic, which involves maintaining positive classroom culture and collaboration, resulted as the third highest challenge, leaving maintaining paraprofessionals roles and adapting classroom materials



as levels of least challenging.

With these mean-based results, one must also consider that every response on ranking challenging aspects was different and yielded limited specific similar trends. It was shown that lesson plan modifications are the most challenging for many educators, but for every ranking option all five choices were picked as feasible levels of most challenging for every participant involved in the survey. This interesting result challenged every aspect of ASD and art education research, as every challenging element of art education could use further research to best help educators understand how they can relate content to students with ASD.

A clear finding was that every ASD experience was unique to that educator, as every ASD student has individual needs. With the lack of one “common concern” educators have in meeting diverse student with ASD needs, awareness of the varying spectrum of this disorder becomes its most challenging aspect. Indeed this disorder requires tedious dedication towards finding ones’ strengths that help promote learning and growth. Through ASD that process is different for every child and every individual involved.

### Major challenges

Some of the generalized major challenges teachers face when working with students with ASD are organizing modifications and remembering specific needs. Participants stated that maintaining control and ensuring student support in the classroom are major challenges they face. Knowing what works and what does not work in the students’ homeroom is critical information that can be neglected to be shared with various other teachers beyond their home room and various other classrooms. This level of knowledge and understanding did vary across

the participants responses as some teachers had no explanation whereas others were invited to student IEP meetings and given 504 plan information.

Participants also stated that providing the right tools for students was a major challenge teachers faced. Finding what works best for individual students with ASD, maintaining interests and engaging them throughout their learning was stated by various individuals. Being in an art classroom there are many forms of modifications or adjustments that can be made to the useable materials but pinpointing those changes then promoting various forms of materials and styles is a critical challenge for teachers. Through my experiences working in Spectrum Project, I noticed the tendency for students with ASD to find one or two things they are interested in then refrain from any new elements, especially in the art classroom.

Considering the trial and error of finding what works while being successful in the classroom is stated throughout the survey. Promoting continued exploration takes strategic planning and alterations for these students, while trying to encourage their creative growth on top of maintaining classroom order and control can seem like a nearly impossible feat for many art educators. Multiple participants stated that their districts have students with ASD placed in integrated classrooms with their peers and neglect to promote one to one classroom learning opportunities. With lack of time and resources, this form of education for students with ASD does allow for limited segregation from peers but becomes challenging for educators to find time to dedicate energy into specific student needs (Guay, 2006, p. 4).

Maintaining control of the classroom through an ASD breakdown was the final common concern participants mentioned throughout the survey. These breakdowns can be alarming and triggered by various contextual classroom factors. In these moments art educators need to allow

for the student to regain control and awareness while also allowing for the class to continue uninterrupted. As I noted through Spectrum Project, pinpointing what caused the breakdown can be difficult, considering the climate of the art classroom. Allowing for the student to find time to regain awareness and return to the classroom often provides to be a large challenge for many educators.

### Discussion

In response to challenges educators are facing, this is how participants are currently responding within their classrooms. There were numerous key findings throughout the survey, some overarching themes were:

- *Educators are scaffolding student one-to-one instruction.* To scaffold information is to break it down into step by step tasks for students. Students with ASD find this a critical element to help them break down lesson objectives into manageable tasks (Weed, 2009). Doing this helps lessen the burden of over stimulating the brain into thinking objectives are achievable.
- *Finding ways to use different materials that work individually for students (ex. washing hands multiple times when working with clay).* Often, students with ASD will approach situations wanting to maintain in control of their environments and themselves. Aspects of the art classroom may seem unapproachable and could go against students conceived notions about how art is perceived. With this in mind, students may be hesitant in trying various materials. Allowing students to rationalize ways to allow for exploration while maintaining in control of themselves and their choices is a beginning phase into engaging

in the art classroom materials (Weed, 2009).

- *Maintaining organization to reduce clutter and noise.* When considering triggering aspects that affect students' overall willingness to engage and perform in certain climates, the demographics of an art classroom can lead to many overstimulating experiences. Teachers find that maintaining organization and calming attributes within the classroom will help students with ASD remain comfortable within the classroom (Gerber, 2006). The art classroom can easily turn into an overwhelming experience for students; limiting the amount of clutter and noise will in fact lead to positive response from ASD student participation.

*Fueling fine versus gross motor strengths and being aware of how these contribute towards students individual learning styles.* Taking time to get to know the students individually and what forms of motor strengths the students achieve through help art educators pinpoint how to modify and adapt learning aspects to promote individual learning and growth. Maintaining positive interactions with paraprofessionals about what the student struggles with and succeeds with will help determine these motor characteristics as these professionals spend the most time observing the student, recognizing what they need for assistance.

### Going Forward

Participants mentioned several ideas they find helpful when thinking about their overall interactions with students with ASD. First being that every child is unique. Art means and looks entirely different for every child regardless of being with ASD or not. Many of these recommendations and noticeable issues are applicable for students with ranging abilities regardless of if they have ASD or not. Part of being an educator is taking on the tasks that make

us most nervous because those often lead to remarkable results. Working with a student with ASD and finding methods that work for their learning is something worthy of being nervous to tackle. Finally, art education can be an asset for the learning and growth of students with ASD. Being able to understand these students and their academic needs can be promoted through art making. When considering how these students analyze and categorize information, art can be utilized as an asset of explanation and communication.

Ensuring that the art classroom maintains a set of characteristics inclusive for all students is critical in helping promote learning and growth. It is critical to keep the art room a safe and inclusive environment. Educating educators and students about acceptance of all students regardless of ranging abilities and being an inclusive role model promotes a classroom that is safe and inclusive. This inclusive approach will help eliminate the “afterthought” mindset of lesson planning. Being aware of ranging students abilities and opportunities to adapt lesson objectives to benefit overall maximum creative approaches should always be a main component of writing lesson plans. Avoiding lessons that lead to single solutions will help allow various creative approaches for individual needs. Paraprofessionals can be tremendous assets for ASD learners potential but require further understanding of their roles in the art classrooms and how they can best benefit the student. Promoting paraprofessionals as allies instead of bystanders and utilizing their role in the art classroom maximizes student success.

A common suggestion made was to provide an Art Educators Association course about Autistic Students and Creativity or online tutorial about best practices. There were many participants that voiced interest in including Personal Development days centered on teaching educators about ASD and making centered trainings on how art educators can best meet these

students' needs. One response stated that a workshop could be held through Art Educators of Iowa to help educate specific teachers. Allowing teachers the opportunity to learn and freely seek support in their classroom needs would allow for more open conversations about what works and what does not. Considering how ASD is a spectrum disorder, this would be an interesting approach to creating more awareness and assistance for educators when teaching art to children with ASD.

### Recommendations

Considering all of the research and information provided through the survey, the following are suggestions of ways in which art educators can strive to make their classrooms inclusive for all students. These areas of suggestions all target the key components of the survey, serving as a way for participants to begin seeing how these changes can develop their classrooms. These suggestions consists of the following aspects of art education: lesson plan modifications, classroom materials, collaborative classroom dynamic, paraprofessionals roles, and meeting individualized goals.

Lesson plan modifications can help promote all students' success by beginning to consider some of the following changes. By beginning lesson planning with a mindset considering diverse projects, teachers are able to think of projects with diverse outcomes, avoiding projects that have narrow results. This will help students think broadly and challenge various outcomes, using creative forms of interpretations and allowing for a wider range of artistic development (Guay, 2006). By incorporating artists with ASD within lesson plan examples, students can begin to understand that diverse people can be artists. This allows

students to begin to understand individuals beyond what we commonly assume about them and begin seeing peers as potential professionals as well. By considering fine versus gross motor skills, teachers will look into how to key into specific individual learning traits and how to promote diverse learning skills.

Classroom materials can challenge students with ASD as many art supplies tend to present unique difficulties for these students. In order to promote exploration there are a few suggestions teachers could attempt. These ideas come from my experiences with Spectrum project and through the research of Kellman (2001), Guay (2006), and Gerber (2010).

Differentiate textures and offer various materials for students to try out. Letting students have the control in which materials they want to use will offer options that could potentially be considered for students. Collaborating with paraprofessionals on students responses towards materials will help the teacher better understand what the student responds to. Being able to consider how transitions within classroom tasks can be promoted for students to continue their routine art experience is also critical in material use and fluidity of the classroom.

Collaborative classroom dynamic involves how the classroom interacts as a whole; whether that be through classroom discussions, group projects, or classroom set up. By making sure that group work is inviting to multiple styles and interpretations, all types of students will find a way to take part in the interactions and project. Whole group conversations can be promoted in ways that allow for various individuals to respond, striving to hear multiple opinions. Lastly, offering a quiet space students can regain control of themselves and the situation they may be facing, can allow for positive experiences as large class work may become over stimulating and challenging.

The paraprofessionals can help promote the purpose of the art classroom by allowing ample time to understand individual expectations better. This can be encouraged through a welcome letter stating the role of art room and the teacher's genuine excitement to working alongside this individual to begin seeing how to build the student's creativity and art skills. Encouraging open dialogue about the student will also help encourage individual artmaking. Paraprofessionals should be aware of the importance of scaffolded support and effects of hand-over-hand instruction, guiding gestures and mark making over students hands, as being the most aggressive strategy to get students to be as independent as possible.

Lastly, meeting individualized goals consists of how we as educators ensure that students with ASD are meeting their unique artmaking skills. One must consider how to meet the various documents expectations through IEPs, 504 plans, and the art room expectations. By promoting personal achievements and avoiding generalized goals we can begin to see the unique goals every student will have. Whether that be trying a new material for the first time, finishing a project completely, maintaining on task, or achieving a skill, regardless of the process it took to get there, those should be the things we acknowledge as a met goal. Assuming that every student will have the same goals met at the end of every project misses the importance of what we should really be encouraging through art education (Gerber, 2006).

### Conclusion

Through this research I learned to better understand my role in helping students with ASD in my future art education classroom. By basing my project on the opinions of current art educators, I was able to better understand real classroom concerns and help support those



teachers with their classrooms. Much of the preliminary research for this project yielded similar and limited findings on art and ASD integration. This research project can further clarify how materials, lessons, classroom dynamic and procedures, and the role of the teachers and paraprofessionals can be used to best help students with ASD build on their individual and unique creative art processes. Exploring sensory aspects will promote these positive experiences within the classrooms.

Students cannot begin to understand if we do not teach them about Autism Spectrum Disorder. It is our job to educate, inform, and advocate for every student's creativity and inclusion of individuals with ASD as professionals, creators, peers, and people. Whether that be allowing classrooms the freedom to talk about ways we can learn to understand each other or by taking the time to educate students about each others abilities instead of allowing for continued improper bias towards disabilities. Students depend on us and our support in their education.

We are not growing as educators if we are not asking questions. ASD is unique for everyone and requires our own research into individual needs. There is no one solution that will 'fix everything'. When thinking about the best interests for students it is critical we continue to learn ourselves, ensuring we are able to grant students with what they need specifically. Helping every student may sound unrealistic, but simply finding a starting point to begin a process of trial and error is the least we can do to promote ourselves as educators.

A teachers mindset means everything when it comes to helping educate student with ASD. Students have ASD, but students are not only the label or the things they can not perform as others can. There is no "average student," everyone requires diverse approaches towards education; ASD is not an exception of that. With this research, art educators can begin to see the

importance in furthering ASD integration in the art classroom and striving to promote inclusive classrooms for everyone.

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