



NATIONAL ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

ART EDUCATION: From Challenges to Triumphs

TUESDAY, MAY 31 | 7-8 PM ET

View panelist bios, conversation recordings, and more at www.arteducators.org/community/town-hall

Triumphs often come about by overcoming challenges, and we usually learn a lot along the way. Join us for this candid and interactive conversation exploring the ups, downs, and in-betweens that have shaped us as visual arts, design, and media arts educators.



Paula Liz

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TIPS FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

- **Elementary Art Curriculum:** When I initially became an art educator, I desperately wanted to teach high school. However, the only job I could find was at the elementary level. Based on my personal experiences growing up, I thought elementary art would be too rudimentary and I would not be able to teach the big ideas and concepts that I wanted to explore. I struggled my 1st year, and I admit that I did a lot of projects that were focused more on the product rather than the process. But I soon realized that kids were, in fact, not “too young,” and I began to introduce contemporary artists, social justice themes, and critical conversations into my lessons.
- **Collaboration:** Often, art educators are the only ones at their schools, and it can be challenging to collaborate and share ideas with other art educators. Admittedly, it was not until the first round of quarantine in the spring of 2020 that I began to network and communicate more regularly with other art educators. It has made a considerable difference, and I have grown tremendously. I recommend that others seek to find community and support from other art educators to help reflect on and reform our practice.
- **Diverse Resources:** Many art history books, posters, and curricula for kids are centered on the Western canon. In my own K-12 art education experience, I was not introduced to a Latina artist—Frida Kahlo—until high school. As an educator, I made it my mission to ensure that my students saw themselves represented in the artists that I was sharing with them. With the other members of the [Anti-Racist Art Teachers collective](#), we have developed an online resource for artists of the global majority. This website is still an evolving and growing resource that we hope to continue to develop. Additionally, I struggled to find diverse resources for my students, precisely when it came to making self-portraits. I initially used facial features based on European standards that were not representative of my students. During my years of teaching, I have slowly created resources that reflect my diverse student population, and which I have recently uploaded online.

GO-TO SUPPORT RESOURCES

- [Art21](#).
- [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) groups (Art Teachers for Antiracist Curriculum).
- www.antiracistartteachers.org.

SELF-CARE SHARE

For self-care, I enjoy working out. I love running, and this past fall, I completed my first marathon. I also am an avid Orange Theory and Peloton member.



Ellen Winner

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TIPS FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

- **The Chinese Way Vs. The American Progressive Way:** In 1987, I observed preschoolers in China learning to draw. Children were taught to copy schemas in step-by-step fashion, starting one line or simple shape at a time. When learning to draw a goldfish, children were shown real goldfish swimming in their bowls. But instead of looking at the goldfish, children just copied the marks the teacher made on the blackboard. All they had to do was to copy each line that the teacher made on the blackboard, and eventually a complex goldfish (or other form) would emerge. What I saw was the diametrical opposite of Western progressive teaching. Children never invented their own way to draw a goldfish. And they never drew from observation of the 3D world. I assumed these children would be at a loss if given an observational drawing task. Yet when we asked children to draw a Western baby stroller (something they'd never seen before) from observation, most did beautifully. Their teachers were shocked. They expected students to fail without scaffolding and thereby embarrass the educational system. But the children's training in copying pictures seemed to transfer to drawing from observation. We give young children the freedom to invent their own goldfish schema, but we don't train them in skills. Which way is better? How would we decide?

- **A Destructive Work Can Lead to Something Constructive:** It has often been claimed that art education fosters overall academic growth (meaning the 3 Rs). Many art educators would like this to be true in order to strengthen the position of art education in our schools.

In 2000, Lois Hetland and I published a review of research on the link between art education and academic grades and test scores, reporting that we found no causal relationship. It was simply not the case that art education improved general academic performance; the claims were not true. We were shocked at the anger with which this report was received by funders and policy makers in art education. We were actually told that our work was going to ruin quality art education for American children, though no one argued that our report was factually incorrect.

We pushed back, saying that we were trying to change the conversation about art education in a way that really might strengthen the position of art education. And this is what led to our work on Studio Habits of Mind as the most important outcomes of art education. Sometimes, something perceived as destructive can lead to a constructive outcome.

- **Reggio Documentation Reveals Deep Thinking:** In the Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy, no artwork is sent home to be posted on the family fridge. This is because no artwork belongs to any individual child: All projects are collaborative. Records of children's art, along with initial sketches and transcriptions of children's conversations as they try to figure out what to do (e.g., how to show a person sitting down, a person seen from the back, make a clay figure whose head will not fall off, etc.) are meticulously documented in exhibits and in Reggio publications. For example, children spent months designing a curtain for the town's theater. An entire book is devoted to documenting this project—reproducing the many drafts children created and showing how children decided together on the final design.

Any parent reading this book can see how much this kind of art project challenges children to think, try things out, talk to one another, and learn from one another as they draw.

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GO-TO SUPPORT RESOURCES

- I always return to *Art and Visual Perception* by Rudolf Arnheim, particularly his chapter on child art called "Growth." Arnheim reminds me how much visual intelligence there is in the child's reduction of a complex form in nature (a tree, a person, an animal) to a simple structural graphic equivalent of that shape, which despite being a far cry from a realistic depiction, is clearly recognizable by all.
- *Making Thinking Visible: Children as Individual and Group Learners*, by Project Zero and Reggio Emilia (2001), helps us understand the importance (for teachers, parents, and children) of documenting children's work as a way of revealing how children think as they draw.
- Jonathan Fineberg's 1997 book, *The Innocent Eye*, illuminates how and why 20th-century modern artists (e.g., Klee, Miro) were inspired by child art, showing us the deep similarities as well as differences between the art of the untutored child and the art of 20th century modernists.

SELF-CARE SHARE

My self-care consists of reading fiction and nonfiction, and listening to recordings of both fiction and nonfiction while taking hour-long fast walks along the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When I read (or listen) to books, I am temporarily escaping into another world, and I find this both relaxing and exhilarating.



gloria j. wilson

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TIPS FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

- Acknowledge and understand one's position (sociocultural identity) and how that impacts attitudes, beliefs, and values, and thus, the system of teaching and learning
- Move beyond "good intentions" toward "impact"
- Deepen one's understanding of an ethics of engagement

GO-TO SUPPORT RESOURCES

- *The Origin of Others* by Toni Morrison.
- *The 1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah-Jones.
- *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin.

SELF-CARE SHARE

Prioritize connecting with loved ones and colleagues through nourishing social interactions, take long naps, take time for recreation (including making work and cycling), resist respectability politics, say "no" more often, dance it out (regularly).

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