



Columnist: Doris Guay

## Recently I read a book by Mark Haddon that my granddaughter shared.

The main character, Christopher, a teen with autism, has many strengths. He believes in his abilities to accomplish his goals and has the persistence to keep trying despite his ability constraints and the discouragement of others. Toward the end of the novel, Christopher runs away. Making his way, alone, through the great city of London, he solves one problem after another and asks for assistance when needed to find the place his mother lives, a place he has never been to.

For many of us, meeting the challenges of working with learners experiencing physical, developmental, emotional and/or sensory disabilities is as daunting as Christopher's journey. Through our teaching journey we continually need information, understanding, persistence, time, and confidence in our abilities to solve problems. We also need to seek the assistance, ideas, advise, and support of colleagues, mentors, and friends, in person and online.

Our SNAE Facebook page, a place for art teachers who work with learners experiencing disabilities and/or psychological trauma, is a special place where experienced art educators share with one another. Many times as I respond to questions, I recommend books and lesson resources that can provide a foundation for thought, problem-solving, and planning. The objective of this month's column is to recommend resources, those often mentioned on our SNAE Facebook page. Without continuing to learn, the constraints of our classroom challenges loom as large as Christopher's. I challenge all to read and/or reread relevant publications of NAEA, VSA of the Kennedy Center, and several independent publishers.

Particularly relevant to the questions and concerns of many SNAE Facebook communicators would be the texts *Reaching and Teaching Students with Special Needs through Art* (Gerber and Guay), *Understanding Students with Autism Through Art* (Gerber and Kellman), and *Including Difference: A Communitarian Approach to Art Education in the Least Restrictive Environment* (Kraft and Keifer-Boyd). These publications, available through NAEA (at a discount to members) and on Amazon, are foundational texts that provide background and ideas for teaching and managing classrooms that include learners with abilities that may be different from those of others in our classes. Visit the NAEA website to find resources useful for planning art curriculum for all students, including publications that address integrated/interdisciplinary curriculum, collaborative projects for social justice, thinking and designing to improve our world, global understanding through art, choice-based art education, and studio thinking. Also peruse the book offerings listed on the NAEA website—there are many helpful books for continued learning and daily planning.

Another important resource for curriculum and modifications for students who learn differently is the website, [education.kennedy-center.org](http://education.kennedy-center.org).<sup>1</sup> This is the site for VSA, the publisher of lesson materials for learners of different ages and abilities. *Yo Soy...Je Suis... I am... Because you are*, has been published online each year since 2015. Units (lessons) are substantive. They address National Standards and are focused on learning in, through, and about art in today's world. All lesson plans and their relevant resources can be downloaded and printed for use. *Start with the Arts*, developed for young children and designed to work with early childhood themes, is available. We have posted some of the more difficult to find resources on our Facebook page.

**So many of our learners come to school with heavy burdens from their homes and communities. They need our expertise, understanding, and ability to give them opportunities to work with art.**

In closing, I want to reference two additional resources that are my favorites. Published by Davis, *Teaching Meaning in Art Making* (Walker) is particularly valuable. This volume helps get students to make personal connections with their art, another frequent issue on our Facebook page. Personal connection keeps students engaged and keeps art education from succumbing to the trite. The last book to recommend is a 2018 publication of *Art for Children Experiencing Psychological Trauma: A Guide for Art Educators and School-Based Professionals*. So many of our learners come to school with heavy burdens from their homes and communities. They need our expertise, understanding, and ability to give them opportunities to work with art.

The 2019 NAEA National Convention in Boston is upon us. See you there. Believe, persist, and know you are your own and our greatest resource. We are all continuous learners! ■

### References

Haddon, Mark (2003). *The curious incident of the dog in the night time*. New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>1</sup> To access the resources, log in to the site, click on "Education," then click on "Art and Schools," then click on "The Arts and Special Education." Scroll down and click on "Resources for Educators and Parents."

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