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# INVERSE INCLUSION A MODEL FOR PRESERVICE ART TEACHER TRAINING

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## Introduction

A university community-based intercession course offered preservice art teachers a unique opportunity to participate as learners in an inclusive art education environment that I refer to as *inverse inclusion*. Unlike the typical model of a K-12 inclusion classroom where a few special needs students are integrated into a class with typically-abled students, or reverse inclusion (Schoger, 2006), where a few selected typically-abled students are placed into a self-contained classroom for limited interactions, inverse inclusion assimilates preservice art teachers into a special needs classroom where they serve multiple participatory roles as art students (participant-observers[1]) alongside differently-abled[2] adult art students, as art teacher, as teacher's assistant, and as videographer. Their observations and interactions from these multiple roles, especially as participant-observer, provide preservice teachers with perceptive insights and perspectives about teaching, and nurture a better understanding of differently-abled students' personal interests and abilities. The experience informs their strategies in adapting art curriculum theory and practice to the particular needs of these students. The inclusive setting creates a supportive environment where open-ended curricula with enduring ideas connects to students' personal interests and motivates them to grow as individual artists. Student participant-observers closely observe special needs students' responses to studio activities and suggest adaptive curricula strategies as needed. Participation in this novel type of inclusion in a community-based art setting adds a beneficial learning dimension for preservice art teachers, and offers the differently-abled adults a unique opportunity to experience an inclusive art class, which is normally segregated.

Inclusive K-12 art education experiences for students referred to as special (Gerber & Guay, 2006), or differently-abled (Kraft & Keifer-Boyd, 2013) have been ongoing topics in education literature regarding students with physical and/or mental disabilities since the implementation of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and its amendment in 2004 (P.L. 108-446). The act mandated that differently-abled students be integrated into classrooms with those who are typically-abled.[3] This challenged art educators to work with parents, paraprofessionals or aides, and school counselors to develop IEP (Individualized Education Program) plans in art for every student with special needs, and to supplement their learning goals in an integrated classroom. With the inclusion mandates, many art specialists still lacked extensive training and confidence in teaching this differently-abled population (Keifer-Boyd & Kraft, 2003), resulting in misconceptions about these

[1] Participant-observer is the preservice teachers' role as an art student working side-by-side with special needs students. The term is typically used as an ethnographic research technique to better understand a culture by working alongside, interacting with, and observing them over an extensive period of time. I borrow the term to best describe this particular preservice teacher role as a student in the inclusive class and to differentiate them from the special needs students throughout this article.

[2] "Differently-abled" has been used by Kraft and Keifer-Boyd (2013) in referring to persons with mental and/or physical impairments.

[3] "Typically-abled" is a term that has been used by Kraft and Keifer-Boyd (2013) to refer to persons with typical mental and/or physical abilities.

students and a somewhat awkward relationship with them (Kraft, 2004; Dorff, 2010; Kraft & Keifer-Boyd, 2013). Art curriculum for this population had also been to a large extent teacher directed, "with little opportunity for thoughtful and creative engagement with artworks or with personal meaning making" (Guay, 2010, p. 113). To remedy these issues, university programs could encourage the informal, side-by-side exposure that students gain in an inverse inclusion setting, where preservice teachers' alternating roles among differently-abled learners offer them practical insights and understanding. These enable them to better design, adapt, and teach an open-ended curriculum that personally connects to student interests and abilities. The inverse inclusion experience can also aid in gaining trust and acceptance, and removing their own prejudices and biases through positive interactions with special needs students (Kraft & Keifer-Boyd, 2013).


Figure: 1A

## Bridging a Gap for Preservice Art Educators

With the above goals in mind, I taught a two-week intercession course to better serve my art education students in an area that seemed lacking in their current university program requirements. The course bridged contemporary curriculum theory to practice, providing an inclusive, participatory learning environment for preservice teachers. Art education students who had already taken a required class for certification, Survey of Exceptionalities, still desired actual art teaching experiences with special needs students. Guay (2003), Lund and Massey (2004), and Kraft and Keifer-Boyd (2013) have noted that preservice art teachers had limited experience implementing art curriculum and teaching strategies within an inclusive art education environment. Keifer-Boyd & Kraft (2003) believed that confidence in teaching could emerge from increasing art teachers' inclusive classroom experiences. I responded by developing a special topics course that borrowed elements described in Kraft & Keifer-Boyd's (2013) chapter on Human Empowerment Through the Arts (HEARTS) to incorporate into my class. The authors described a three week intercession course where art and general education preservice students taught art to a mix of typically and differently-abled students from grades 9 to 12. They labeled the program HEARTS (Human Empowerment through the Arts). Its mission was "to create a reciprocal and nurturing environment accessible to everyone involved using art as a vehicle for a creative and expressive journey of self and others" (p. 55). The goals embraced art education curriculum frameworks including artmaking and art appreciation, as well as advances in sociological, cognitive, and sensory skills. Inspired by the HEARTS program, I wanted to increase my own preservice students' experience, empathy, and understanding of persons with different abilities, acquire confidence in how to prepare and teach flexible, open-ended curriculum, and create an inclusive multi-ability, intergenerational learning community.

I chose to work with an established art program for special needs adults (18 years and older) in the community, since this population had few opportunities for integrated art education experiences, regardless of the U.S. Department of Justice (2009) disability rights laws that guaranteed equal opportunities in inclusive environments. Riley (2011) notes that many of these adults become more isolated in group home settings or clustered housing (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2009) where personal care, job training resources, and other service facilities are often centralized and more easily accessible (Reinke, 2009). Even though group homes are more likely to facilitate community-based programs, such as shopping at the mall or participating in an art show at the public library for special needs artists, adults in group homes are less likely to participate in inclusive activities (Willer & Intagliata, 1984) with the exception of a few who hold part-time employment or enroll in university coursework.

This population of differently-abled adults comprises an increasing percentage of the adult and older adult population, living longer, healthier lives in clustered community settings or in more independent living situations (Elliott, 2004; Howden & Meyer, 2011). Yet, little has been written about their engagement with art education (Hoffman, 1992; Blandy, 1993; Kraft & Keifer-Boyd, 2013, & Carrington, 1994).

The intercession course described here addressed these challenges in a meaningful way. I created a novel inverse inclusion classroom where my art education students served primarily as student participant-observers alongside special needs students, and also performed

intermittent roles as teacher, teacher assistants, and videographers (documenting the lesson for teacher reflection). Teaching and learning in this type of inclusive setting personalized my students' understanding of this population. This article recommends the use of inverse inclusion as a method for higher education to begin bridging theories, research, and practices to better prepare preservice art teachers for teaching in an inclusive classroom.

## Program Description

The two-week intercession course for university art education students was an intensive teaching experience at an existing community-based art program for special needs adults aged 18 and older, particularly those with developmental disabilities. The non-profit organization that established the art education resource originated in 1976, and currently provides special needs adults with support while living with family, in their own homes, or in clustered duplex housing near the main program complex. Two facilities serve clients at separate locations: one for performing arts, recreation, advocacy, and skill building plus a separate structure devoted to visual art, where my art education students delivered team taught art curricula in conjunction with a University of Arkansas' three credit hour special topic intercession course in art education.

The course met daily from 1pm to 4:45pm for eleven days and included reading assignments, collaborative curriculum planning, ten two-hour team teaching experiences, reflections/ discussions, and preservice teacher research presentations on artists with special needs and artistic abilities. They led daily art instruction for a varying number of differently-abled adults at the program's visual art building.

While each university preservice teacher had opportunities to assume roles as the lead teacher, the teaching assistant, and the videographer (for teacher documentation) during the intercession course, they all participated most often as learners alongside seven to fifteen differently-abled adult students. During the lesson introduction, studio work, and closure, the preservice art teachers invited all participants (university students and adults with special needs) to be mentally, verbally, and physically engaged side-by-side as an inclusive community of learners.

## Open-ended Curriculum, Personal Connection, and Elaboration

The collaborative open-ended curriculum planning between myself and preservice teachers allowed for adjustments to improve instructional choices that offered every student, regardless of abilities, an opportunity to personally connect and be empowered through art education. Wexler and Derby (2015) suggest that "art educators should foster development of artistic identities of disabled learners, which requires devoted attention to recognizing and honoring such identities in learners' artwork" (p. 138). Dorff (2010), Eren (2010), and Koo (2010), also suggest that knowing and connecting with the interests of students and expanding on them is particularly important for persons with autistic behaviors.

For example, one lesson introduced everyone to the concept of landscape and their experience with familiar landscapes. The work of cityscape artist, Song Dong, offered examples of how a variety of materials and recycled objects could be used to create parts of imaginary cities or landscapes. The preservice teacher reminded students of films where miniature people

transformed everyday objects for other purposes, e.g., "The Borrowers" and "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids." The university preservice teachers contributed ideas and brought in recycled materials (small boxes, scrap paper, popsicle sticks, etc.) to create a miniature three-dimensional collaborative landscape onto a plaster land form. Both preservice teachers and the special needs adults discussed artists who created landscapes and possibilities for imaginative ones, and built their own personally meaningful buildings, towers, animals, plants, fences, and other elements including painted terrain onto the plaster base (see Figures 1A & 1B).

Figure: 1B

Another teacher introduced students to emotions portrayed in movie poster designs with an introduction and discussion about designers' use of elements of color, images, and typography in posters that express a mood or scene in a movie. Participants also shared their personal film interests. The preservice teacher photographed the participants prior to class with props. Later, students used photocopies of digital portraits in an ink transfer process or actual photocopies of themselves to include in their movie poster design. Participants chose their

favorite movie genre, from fairytales to action films, and depicted themselves in leading roles on their own film poster (see Figure 2).

Students easily connected with storytelling themes. Book illustration and/or authorship offered a variety of approaches to storytelling. Participants who loved to write and/or draw were able to express their personal stories, and in one case, elaborate on repetitive subject schema. The story theme offered one differently-abled student the opportunity to embellish her artwork with more detail and scope—Simplistic imagery (see Figure 3) became more complex (see Figure 4). It also allowed another to explore her interest in fairytales and writing (see Figure 5). According to Wexler and Derby (2015), "students disabilities are rarely encouraged to find their own symbols and metaphors that are carriers of emotions and internal conflict" (p. 138).

Figure: 2

In another unit, a student presented the concept of space and architecture, introducing the stained glass window as a way to enhance architectural space with color. The preservice teacher's curriculum idea was a response to the large windows and skylights in the art facility. During the introduction, she asked everyone to share what they knew about windows, their experiences with them, how they influenced one's feelings in an architectural space, and artists' use of color, design, and subject matter. Participants were able to share their own experiences with stained glass windows and talk about what they noticed in each of the artist examples presented. Students then created their stained glass design to display in the windows of their art building. Since many special needs students wanted to draw rather than work exclusively with shapes of color, we accommodated them by sandwiching their color tissue paper design between two pieces of waxed paper, allowing them to draw on top of the waxed paper with a permanent marker (see Figure 6). We made efforts to recognize and honor the personal interests of special needs learners, as suggested by Wexler and Derby (2015).

Figure: 3, 4, 5

Figures: 6 (top), 8 & 7

One preservice teacher introduced an approach to creating imaginative artwork inspired by abstract imagery from clouds in the sky or inkblots on paper, similar to a method Kornfeld (2012) used to engage adults in a drawing activity beginning with nonrepresentational imagery on paper. She began by showing everyone photographs of clouds. Most participants engaged in the discussion by commenting on what they imagined seeing in the clouds. The preservice teacher then shifted to Rorschach images and to how the artist, Jessica Nissen, transformed them into artwork. The preservice teacher also introduced Mequitta Ahuja, an

artist who used accidental inkblots as inspiration for her art. Most participants seemed to be engaged in the discussion by commenting on what they imagined seeing in the clouds. Students who were reticent to create artwork from their own or pre-made inkblots seemed to respond if their familiar preferred subject matter or interest was worked into the art process. One special needs student who repeatedly drew dog forms in crayon (see Figure 3) responded when a preservice teacher in the student (participant-observer) role introduced her to an ink form that resembled her dogs (see Figure 7). She began to add detail and create an inkblot that she expanded into a humanlike form (see Figure 8). Another person continued reading a magazine during the studio time until another preservice teacher in the role of student participant-observer demonstrated how to make an inkblot design onto a recycled magazine page, offering her an alternative possibility that the special needs student adopted (see Figure 9). Koo (2010) asserted that knowing student interests and expanding them through curriculum associations can prompt motivation, particularly with autistic students. Open-ended lesson ideas also allowed everyone to connect unique personal interests and artistic strengths as suggested by Kirk, Gallagher, and Coleman (2015).

As conclusions to many of these art units, all students had opportunities to talk about their work and display it in the art building or at the university. One student shared her fairytale story that emotionally moved the preservice teachers. She read, "Once upon a time there was a princess named Margaret. She was in love with Ray, a prince. Age or disability didn't matter at all." This artwork was a powerful affirmation that art can elevate special needs students to a level of acceptance through open-ended curriculum encouraging personal art interests, as did the support and adaptations generated primarily by preservice teachers as student participant-observers.


Figure: 9

## An Inclusive Learning Experience

The university students realized how theory and research applied to their inclusive classroom experiences. Rotating preservice teacher roles as teacher, teacher assistant, videographer, and student offered them opportunities to gain broader and deeper experiences with special needs learners. Whether preservice teachers were instructing an art lesson or creating art in this inclusive environment, they gained a comfortable familiarity and sensitivity through their interactions with special needs students. A similar effect is evidenced by Carrigan (1994) through partnering differently-abled adults with typically-abled college students in a small group studio setting. Preservice teachers recognized, valued, and accepted everyone's diverse artistic abilities as starting points for curriculum motivation and adaptations.

When I asked preservice teachers to reflect on what they learned at the end of the intercession course and its future applicability, they identified the following attitudes, dispositions, and instructional strategies through what they read and experienced in the classroom:

1. *"Special needs adults are not very different than your average students. . . . They are eager to learn and have great potential . . . . and should not be underestimated" (student written reflection).*
2. *All students should experience success.*
3. *Be flexible with expectations and goals with patience, understanding, and acceptance to allow student uniquenesses to emerge.*
4. *Every student is unique, and every day is different.*
5. *Open-ended curriculum encourages student choice, and connects with individual interests and/or experiences.*
6. *Take time to interact and learn more about students.*
7. *Use multiple modes of learning to reinforce objectives (visual, tactile, kinesthetic, etc.).*
8. *Create a classroom environment that has limited distractions where work stations are organized and safe.*
9. *There are many ways to engage students about their art and the work of others with open-ended questions and dialogue.*
10. *Plan extensively with modifications for differently-abled students. Consider how to visually and verbally reinforce instructional processes and goals with table toppers, handouts, etc.*

Although adjustments to the physical environment (Wexler & Leuthi-Garrecht, 2015), and adaptive tools (Coleman & Cramer, 2015) were not addressed in this article, preservice teachers identified some of the most crucial elements to consider for teaching special needs students through their inverse inclusion experience.

## Conclusion

Inverse inclusion is a new model for art educators to train future teachers and for researchers to study at other easily accessible community-based sites and locations with differently-abled learners. Preservice teachers' experience rotating between roles as teacher, teaching assistant, videographer, and student participant-observer offer multiple perspectives and opportunities to better understand the individual interests and abilities of special needs students and learn to be innovative and flexible in adjusting or guiding curricula to enhance motivation and artistic development. The intercession course became more than bridging theory to practice—the multiple roles during inverse inclusion offered lenses that enabled preservice teachers' to gain insights into the complex dynamics of the inclusive art classroom. Open-ended curriculum with enduring ideas personally connected to differently-abled learners, as preservice teachers' multiple roles encouraged recognition of students' personal interests in subject matter, media, and unique abilities. These implications suggest that a community-based collaboration that is similar to the one described can also augment preservice teachers' preparation for teaching special needs students in a K-12 inclusion classroom. The uniqueness of this program was inverse inclusion, the opportunity for students to spend extensive amounts of time interacting with special needs students in a variety of roles. This model can expand educational opportunities for preservice teachers, as well as special needs adults, who experience limited inclusive art education.

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