

The Indispensable Art Teacher, Part I



Exhibit your students' work on a regular basis to make a memorable impression.

Donalyn Heise and Melody Weintraub

With an unstable economy and the pressures of high-stakes testing, schools are challenged to provide high-quality education in spite of ever-shrinking budgets. How can you increase the odds that your school's art teaching position will not be cut? This article presents attitudes and strategies for making yourself indispensable.

A Dime a Dozen or One in a Million?

The arts are an absolutely essential part of every child's education. Yet art positions are often the first to be eliminated in difficult economic times. By collaborating with colleagues, acting professionally, advocating for your program, being resourceful, and staying abreast of best practices through professional affiliations, you can

increase visibility and help secure your vital position while raising the standard of professionalism among your colleagues. Get your program noticed and appreciated by the community, and it will be difficult to separate the success of the school from the input of the indispensable art teacher.

Collaborate with Colleagues

Explore ways to contribute to the school environment by collaborating with other teachers. Just be careful not to set yourself up as the "decorative doormat"! Meet with other teachers on a regular basis to discuss team teaching and integrating lessons across disciplines. Not only will

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this enhance student learning, it will inform your colleagues of the essential learning addressed in the artroom. If team meetings are scheduled during the related arts period, ask colleagues to send you a curriculum map, so that you can coordinate your lessons with the learning going on in the other classes.

Always Act Professionally

Acting professionally means understanding that the choices you make in your workplace will effect how others (including your students) view your profession. Take the "higher ground." Watch out for the pitfalls to professionalism, like faculty-lounge gossip, fudging on timesheets, being rude to colleagues, taking sick days when you're not sick, procrastination, poor planning, and classroom venting.

Teaching is a tough job. Sometimes our efforts are overlooked and under-appreciated. Write down your personal mission statement. Make it brief and post it on your desk where you will see it throughout the day. Having that goal before you will remind you to make the right choices for the right reasons. Acting professionally means you do what is right, even when nobody's looking.

Make a Memorable Impression

The best way to be an unforgettable person is to make sure that you are thoughtful to others. Write thank-you notes when you get praise from your administrator. You may be the only faculty member to do so. Random acts of kindnesses towards your colleagues, administrators, and school personnel makes the work environment better for them and for you.

Exhibit your students' work on a regular basis to make a memorable impression. When displaying student work in the hallways, also display a

brief statement describing the focus of the lesson. This creates a learning opportunity for everyone who sees the work. Linking student work to an art concept, historical artist, culture, or art movement creates a context for the work. This makes it more than just a “pretty picture” for those who see it. When displaying student work, always make sure that it is mounted in a presentable fashion and properly labeled with each student’s name and grade.

Another way to be remembered is to make sure that you take advantage of publications (yearbooks, journals, newsletters, magazines) to let others know what is going on in your classroom. Take photos often, and be the first teacher who submits articles and photos. In some cities, these articles are then submitted to local publications. If your photo or article makes it in your city’s newspaper, be sure to send a copy to your principal. 📧

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