

Design Thinking: Creating a Curriculum Planning Aid for the Overwhelmed Art Teacher

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Abstract (Rupp)

In this paper, a team of four art educators describe how they use Design Thinking and the T-H-I-N-K model developed by Dr. Ingalls-Vanada (2014). The group of teachers explains how they apply the model to identify, understand, and address an issue in art education. The group focuses on a key problem for art educators, especially new teachers in the field. Together, they explain how they planned, consulted with others, and created a solution to address the problem. In closing the team reflects on their product and insights gained in the process.

Thinking (McDavid)

At the beginning of the Design Thinking process our group determined what irritates us as art educators. We discussed many issues art educators are faced with during a school year. Art educators are often asked to create posters and lend supplies to other teachers. At times, art educators are not taken seriously by administration. Art teachers have a limited amount of time with students and struggle to teach the standards each year. As a group we realized that there are an overwhelming number of standards. After going through our list, we decided to focus on new art educators. We wanted to create tool to help art educators to understand and utilize the standards.

As we interviewed art educators, we were able to better understand their needs. Dr. Kushins acknowledged that “beginning art educators struggle to translate standards and district goals into meaningful, teachable objectives. However, there is not a cohesive list of what students should be able to do at each grade level. At times, the standards can be vague. Participant “Jessica S”, a new art educator, acknowledges, “I need a way to organize the standards, so they are easy to understand.” She wanted to see them in a calendar form so that she could glance at it throughout the year. Another participant in our research, art teacher “Amanda R.” explained, “would like to see examples of what would hit the standard.” She wanted to see examples of a critique or an artist statement that could be incorporated into a curriculum planning template. Participant “Shelly B.” notes, “students come to me with different levels of *art knowledge*.” Having “firsthand experiences help us form personal connections with people” (Kelley & Kelley, 2013, p.21). We realized through empathy that the problem with the standards was the lack of organization. Educators need a template that could be adaptable for all grade levels and teachers across the nation.

Art and design education hold a significant role of teaching students about the value and importance of art. The state and national standards are a guide for art teachers. They spell out what every art student should know and be able to do in the arts. At times, these standards are complex and difficult to put into an understandable form. The goal of our design team was to create a tool that could help make these standards workable and approachable. Art educators need a tool to translate standards into a timeline of meaningful curriculum. By using the design

thinking process, we worked through a prominent issue every educator is faced with. Watson (2015) acknowledges that problem solving is about escaping stress and anxiety of life. Art educators need a simplified way to see and understand the standards as a tool for giving students the best art education possible.

Creating a template could help teachers in many ways. A template would allow teachers to feel at ease with the standards. Students will have better scaffolding into standards and techniques. A template would give teachers the ability to manage their time and supplies. Teachers can teach with a plan and purpose.

Have a Plan (Stein)

There were many problems that arose when thinking about art education. Several revolved around the actions of others, and their impact on the art teacher. While these issues are a problem, they heavily involve the thought processes of educators who are outside of the realm of art education. Keeping this in mind, our group decided to focus our attention on ourselves as educators, and our preparedness in teaching.

An issue that faces new art teachers as well as some veterans is a lack of guidance when it comes to teaching the standards. Curriculums vary from district to district, with some districts not providing a curriculum at all. This leaves art teachers with a massive amount of freedom when it comes to what, how, and when to teach specific standards. With this in mind, we began to search for the needs of our user, an overwhelmed art educator. Watson, (2015) describes phenomenological studies as the open-ended search for themes of meaning in a person's life. We used this study method to gather information that would help us clearly define a problem. Tanya McDavid used empathetic interviewing techniques in order to get the perspective of her mentee's, new art teachers working in her school district. We combined our own viewpoints with that of the new art teacher to create a list of needs to keep in mind when brainstorming solutions. Things such as planning, organizing, determining clear purpose, and simplification all came up as a high priority. With our problem defined and the specific needs clarified, we were then able to formulate an actionable plan.

Design thinking begins with posing a problem with an open-ended solution (Ingalls Vanada, 2014). Using analytical thinking and collaboration, we developed the research question of, "How can we support art educators in understanding the standards in order to create a

timeline for thoughtful teaching and art making?” This open-ended question encapsulated our list of needs and concerns while allowing for an open dialogue when discussing possible solutions.

Investigate (Stein)

After confirming our research question and goal, our team moved into the investigation phase of the design thinking process. In this phase, we discussed as a team several different solutions to the problem, and tried to push ourselves to think outside of any obvious solution. We continuously looked back at our list of needs, and referenced the research question in order to keep our solutions relevant and logical for the problem at hand.

Kelley and Kelley (2013) tell the story of Doug Dietz, a designer of medical equipment for GE. After creating a state-of-the-art MRI machine, Dietz faced a problem of the human factor. Children were terrified of the machine, and were not able to lay still enough for the procedure. This problem led doctors to an unfortunate, but obvious solution, to anesthetize their young patients for the entirety of the MRI scan. This solution was unacceptable for Dietz, and he began the process of design thinking in order to create a solution that would cater to pediatric patients. As we began our investigation phase, we realized that we were all thinking of the same, obvious solution to the problem. This solution would be to create a single template, which would organize standards and lessons into a chronological timeline. In discussing this solution, it was realized that this was the unacceptable solution to our problem.

The single template solution was an issue for the technical and human factor (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). Art educators teach different levels of education and for varying periods of time. Some art teachers work in elementary and teach for a period of 9 weeks. Other art teachers work in secondary education and teach for a semester of anywhere from 6 to 12 weeks. The variety in time periods and levels would render a single template insufficient from a technical standpoint. Even when focusing on one level and one time period, the human factor means that not all teachers will find the same template helpful. If a teacher is confused or frustrated by the organizational format or wording, then the solution would not be successful. This discussion was key in shaping more realistic ideas.

Our brainstorming then took a shift to focus on an approach that could be used regardless of grade level taught, or time period used. The first thought was to create a step-by-step guide, walking a teacher through how to decide on themes and concepts while looking for connections to standards. This led to a conversation on how to share this information with the art education

community in the most accessible format. One idea was to create a seminar type presentation led by a veteran art teacher, possibly at the National Art Education Association conferences. An idea was then added that a short workbook be created to aid in the teaching and learning process.

While these ideas sounded good in theory, we agreed that they were not accessible to all teachers, since not all teachers attend these conferences. The idea was then shared of creating an easy to navigate website. Housed on the website could be tabs for each level of education; elementary, middle, and high school. In each section, multiple formats would be available for teachers to look at and use in their own practice. The idea of multiple formats fixed the human factor issue, and the organization by education level satisfied the practical factor. This new idea of a website answered the research question, and our group was ready to move to the next phase.

New Ideas (Testa)

In order to design and create meaningful solutions to problems in education, a design thinking approach to art education works to find and understand solutions. Level four “N” or new ideas is the stage of development where new ideas can lead to prototypes. In the project guide it states, “Prototypes help others see what the world would be like with your idea” (Ingalls Vanada & De, 2011, 2014). The process of creating a prototype and adapting the design allows for solutions that solve possible problems and works towards creating a successful design. To achieve design success a growth state of mind is needed. One must put aside preconceived notions of what can and can’t be done. Kelley & Kelley (2013) writes “if you currently feel that you are not a creative person—if you think, “I’m not good at that kind of thing” – you have to let go of that belief before you can move on” (p. 30). The impact of meaningful prototyping and adapting designs can change the world and how we view it. “Design is filled with optimism, hope, and the joy that comes from making things change by making things real” (IDEO). For our collaborative T-H-I-N-K Tank challenge we addressed different types of prototypes and delivery methods for a curriculum guide, or year at a glance for art educators. We thought of a template, a book, one single template, multiple templates. At first, we thought of creating a template, after creating a prototype and adapting our ideas we decided to create an online resource or website that would allow K-12 art educators a space to develop a meaningful curriculum. This resource features different styles of templates art educators can use to plan out their year, whether they teach Elementary, Middle, or High School.

Know (Rupp)

As a result of the Design Thinking process, we as a team were able to create an online resource for art educators that was a collaboration of our own vision strengthened by the input and feedback of others in our field. Each of us as art educators entered this collaborative design process with what Pierto (2011) describes as core attitudes of creative people: self-discipline, openness to experience, risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, and group trust (p. 13). Having these attitudes, we were able to grow closer as teammates, expand our thinking, share responsibilities, and experience a sense of accomplishment by making a small, yet meaningful contribution to the field of art education.

After sharing our website with other art educators, we revised our site based on feedback. We realize that new teachers could benefit from seeing completed curriculum guide templates, so we made the decision to add a tab of examples from our own individual schools. We also added a section to link the National Art Standards so art educators can easily access the standards as they construct their own curriculum plans using our templates. In addition to our new understandings about how we can help new art educators through the design thinking process, we came to realize that all four of us use the Design Thinking process on a regular basis in our daily lives and in our art classes.

In Conclusion (Stein)

The use of the Design Thinking Process formalizes and standardizes a process for solving problems. After an investigation of issues that affect art teachers, our team decided to address the issue of overwhelming standards. This phase led us to interview not only ourselves as educators, but also new teachers to the field. After reviewing these concerns, we formulated a question which would help us to focus our energy into a sufficient solution. The research question led to a brainstorming phase, where the discussion of multiple ideas changed our thinking about what a good answer would be. A prototyping phase allowed us to see the level of helpfulness that could be achieved, by showing a prototype to those new teachers we had interviewed previously. In the end, we finalized a website resource, which provides universal templates for each education level. With the process completed, our team felt that we had achieved a level of success not possible without the collaboration and experimentation that Design Thinking provides.

Resources

Chapters 1: Kelley, T. & Kelley, D. (2013). *Creative confidence: Unleashing the creative potential within us all*. New York: Random House Publishers.

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Ingalls Vanada, D. (2014). Practically creative: The role of design thinking as an improved paradigm for 21st century art education, *Techne Series: Research in Sloyd Education and Craft Science A*, 21(2), 21-33.

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