



Matt: We have an amazing host by the name of Amanda [Koonlaba 00:00:29], I hope I said that right. [crosstalk 00:00:32] Did I say it right or no?

Amanda: [Koonlaba 00:00:33].

Matt: Koonlabla. Okay. [crosstalk 00:00:35]

Laura: Wow.

Matt: All right. So, you hosted the chat for us and you were talking about deconstruction, but we want to find a out a little bit about you and your journey through education.

Amanda: Okay. I have been teaching for 13 years and seven of those years were in a visual art classroom at the elementary level. I taught about 600 second through fifth graders every year and I think it was the first year that I was teaching art, I decided to start blogging because I just really fell in love with this whole idea of coming up with my own lessons because I really hadn't been able to do that creative lesson planning when I was teaching in a regular classroom.

Amanda: So, I fell in love with coming up with these art lessons and I wanted to be able to share and I started my blog Party in the Art Room and I had that blog for a really long time, but recently I started to make Party in the Art Room more of a local thing and I started a new blog called the Simple Art Class.

Amanda: So, that's where I'm sharing art lessons and things now.

Matt: That's awesome.

Amanda: Yeah.

Laura: So, you were a gen-ed teacher before you became an art teacher. What participated the change?

Amanda: Well, I taught, I had done my student teaching and the first six years of my teaching at a model school for arts integration and at the time, that school was the only school in our district that was arts integrated and we had a principle change at that school. I had the same principle the whole time and when she got ready to retire, an art teacher position came up at another school and they asked, they said, "We would like for you to come over here so that you could help us with our arts integration initiative."



Amanda: So, I took on that leadership role at the same time that I became an art teacher and I'm certified. My national boards are in visual art. So, I was qualified to do that and I was able to not just do the art teaching, I was able to work on the whole school arts integration initiative, which was really cool and rewarding.

Speaker 2: That must of been.

Laura: And Amanda, I don't know that a lot of people, I know that us who are involved with STEAM and working with Ed Closets and some different things on arts integration, have a good understanding of that, but for our non art friends or just generation education people, could you give us a little bit more of an understanding of arts integration and why you're so passionate about it?

Amanda: Yes. That's my favorite thing in the world to talk about.

Amanda: So, arts integration can take a lot of different forms, but really it boils down to you're using art forms to teach alongside the other contents. So, the students are learning both the art form and the other content.

Amanda: So, you might be teaching multiplication. I just got through doing a workshop on this concept. So, it's fresh on my mind.

Amanda: You might be teaching arrays, but you would have the students involved in an art process so that they're learning that multiplication at the same time that they are creating and designing art work.

Amanda: Now, it could just be one teacher in the school that teachers that way or where I was at, the whole entire school wanted to do it and our superintendents supported that. So, it really takes a completely overhauled culture of that school. There was no art presence there and when the arts integration initiative, after a couple of years, it just flourished and there was art everywhere. It just oozed from the building and the students and it was just such a positive change.

Amanda: So, when I talk about arts integration, it can be just one thing that's happening in somebody's classroom or it can be this huge cultural change for a school or a district.

Matt: That's amazing.



Laura: Well, I was actually just talking to another colleague in another Texas School District and they've started some arts integration campuses and I was talking to him about it because I had a lot of interest in it and I'm excited to hear that you've seen it in action actually change a campus culture. You said your superintendent was supportive. How did you foster that support? Because it sounds like then it precipitated to other schools a little bit.

Amanda: Yeah, you know, I think my superintendent at the time, we have new superintendent now. He's also very supportive, but it was the community. The parents and the community went to him and they said, "We want our school to have what the other school had," the school where I was, which was a model arts integration school. Parents and the people in the community went, "We think all of our schools, all of the children in this district deserve that."

Amanda: So, every school in my district became arts integrated.

Laura: That's really exciting to hear, yeah.

Amanda: They were so right too because I'm telling, when I walked out of that one school that was a model school and went to the other school, it was stark contrast. The inequity was crazy. It was heartbreaking.

Laura: Yeah.

Matt: I'm sure. I guess that leads into one of the questions that you asked. Is there, not just for art teachers, but for all teachers, is there an overlap in teaching challenges and learning challenges? And so, what kinds of challenges did you feel you were up against and how did you go about overcoming them?

Amanda: Well, the first thing that comes to mind is funding because in Mississippi, let's say your school wants to become arts integrated, there's a process that you can partner with the Mississippi's Arts Commission. They have a whole school's initiative and you can get some grant funding that way, but it's not going to cover everything and that grant funding is actually more for professional development and to bring teaching artists in, but you can buy supplies, right?

Laura: Yeah-

Laura: The reality is if you don't have art supplies, you're not making-



Matt: You don't have art.

Laura: Yeah.

Amanda: Not everybody can figure out how to do an art lesson with a stack of old newspapers and some glue and crayon and plus, you know, you want your students to have access to high quality materials too, but funding is a huge obstacle and it's an obstacle to teaching that overlaps and hurts the students and to deal with that, I just threw myself into grant writing and got really good at it, but the only way to get better at grant writing is to write a bunch of grants.

Laura: Yeah, just like anything else, practice, practice-

Matt: By doing.

Amanda: Anything I could find where they might be giving away money, I begged for it and there's an organization in Washington State. The name is escaping me right now, but I called them and I said, "I'm teaching 600 kids art and I don't have any supplies," and they bought about \$1000 worth of supplies and sent them to us and that got me through my first year.

Matt: Wow. I mean, I've heard things like organizations like Home Depot. They were doing some STEAM related grant for teachers and that was probably about two years ago and I don't know what's really come with that or if they're still doing that.

Laura: And in certain school districts, grant writing, that's a whole other, there's layers to policies and procedures.

Laura: Where we are, in a large school district, you have to get everything approved at various levels before you can grant.

Amanda: Yeah. You have to do that where I'm at too, but you figure out how to get it done.

Laura: Yep.

Amanda: And you form relationships with the people that you need approval from.



Laura: Yeah. I think that's it right there is forming those relationships, just like in teaching. If you don't have the support of the higher ups in your school districts, you're going to have a hard time pushing forward and making changes.

Laura: On that, it's interesting. I think as an arts supervisor, I think a lot about the funding part of it because if I have one school that has a very small budget and another school that has a large budget, I feel like there is an inequity there because kids aren't having the same experience and just like you said, some people that have been artists their whole lives and they've thrown themselves into really being innovators, can maybe come up with a lesson that is newspaper and glue and come up with something great, but I have a lot of young teachers that are still, it takes a lot time to perfect your craft as a teacher and it's really not fair that those teachers have to put in that extra layer of challenge.

Amanda: You know what Laura? That, you just hit the nail on the head of the whole theme of the art chat that I did. It doesn't have to be hard. We have to simplify this because I have, for a long time, like I said I've been blogging for a long time as an arts education blogger, I feel like there's some kind of competition amongst teachers. Nobody talks about it, but that has the cutest, best, art projects.

Laura: Yeah.

Amanda: And it's not fair because some teachers don't have funding and some teachers, like you said, they can't figure, they're trying to worry about classroom management and stuff. They don't know how to make a lesson out of newspaper and we don't need to compete because as teachers, if we're competing, than somebody's students are losing and we cannot let that happen.

Amanda: So, we need to simplify it so that it's accessible to everyone.

Laura: Awesome.

Matt: Well, I think what was amazing was that in your chat, the questions change from just being challenges to talking about things being complicated and how to simplify teaching, just basically teaching in general and so, you started to talk about that and then your very last question was, "What resources do you know of that teachers that are listening who aren't art teachers or who want to expand on their arts integration or their STEAM or whatever so it doesn't become so complicated?" Because there's lots of lessons out there that are probably really



good, but for general teachers or people who don't have an art background, they're like, "Oh my gosh, this is written almost in a foreign language."

Laura: Yeah.

Amanda: Yeah and because I have never taught in a school that was never arts integrated, I mean, I did my student teaching at an arts integrated school.

Amanda: So, I have no idea what it's like to not know what that is and sometimes when I'm talking to people, they look at me like they don't understand and I realize, "Man, I've got to take it down a notch," and we all gotta get on the level of the people that are new to this so that we can build them up so that their kids can benefit from it.

Matt: Absolutely. Do you have any resources you could suggest to some people about arts integration?

Amanda: I'm able, obviously, Education Closet has lots of great stuff, but my main thing is just reach out. If you find somebody listening to this podcast, you can reach out to me. You can reach out to somebody that you think, "Hey, I really like this lesson, but I don't understand one part," and actually, people do that all the time. They send me emails and they'll say, "I read this article that you wrote. Do you have a picture of what it looks like?" And in 20 minutes, going through the 20000 photos on my phone until I find it and send it-

Laura: That's important.

Matt: It is.

Amanda: Yeah.

Laura: Because at least the way I think about this Amanda is I feel like, probably all of us in this conversation right now are on a mission and we're advocates and similarly, I just had a young lady reach out to me pretty young teacher reach out on Instagram and she's only on Instagram and she said, "Hey Laura, I've seen Foot Grid, I've seen your pod, I've seen Seesaw, I don't know. I have K through two art room, how do I use these tools? How do I put them in the arts studio? What are the best resources?"



Laura: And honestly, I'm not the best person to answer that question because even though I supervise art teachers, I'm not in the classroom every single day with K2. So, I said, "Are you on Twitter?" She said, "No." I said, "Okay, fine, I'll put it out to Twitter." So, I put it out to Twitter and immediately got responses and I just took screenshots of my Twitter responses and sent them to her because it's important, because she's looking and she needs that. She needs to know that somebody's going to try to help and I think everybody in PLN is willing to do that, to help others.

Amanda: Yeah. I mean, I don't, but I do not want teachers, I know that there are teachers that feel this way, but I don't want that. They're scared to reach out.

Laura: Yeah.

Amanda: They think that if they can't or they don't want to be seen as not knowing how to do their job or whatever it is, but we want to help because that's how we make change in this world is the more teachers we can help, the better the education is for the children and that is what drives me and I know that's what drives you guys.

Laura: Absolutely.

Susan: Hi there, it's Susan Riley from Education Closet. Isn't Amanda just fabulous? If you've loved listening to her, you'll love learning from her too. She has this fantastic online class called Managing the Arts Integrated Classroom and you can get 10 PB hours from taking it. Everything's online. So, you can view it in your PJs if you want. Learn all about it at educationcloset.com/courses.

Susan: Now, back to the conversation.

Laura: Well, I'm interested to hear, I want to go back a little bit in our conversation because you talked a little bit about the competition and I see this and it is something we don't talk about and it goes back to the thought about process versus product.

Susan: Right.

Laura: It really is, especially in our social media driven world, how cute is this border? How cute is that? You know? Especially when you're in your elementary levels and I'm not real big on that and I'm really trying to educate even the



administrators that I work with that to me, if the process isn't there, then who cares about the product? Because the process is where that learning occurs and sometimes the product might flop even though the process, the kids are really into it because they're taking risks.

Laura: So, talk to us a little bit more about that unspoken competition and process versus product.

Amanda: When you said that about trying to talk to administrators about it, I feel your pain. I mean, I'm having conversations with literally everybody, even the students, about how the end product is not the most important thing. I'm having conversations with parents and I really don't know why it's so hard to see that because it comes so naturally to me. That just makes sense to me, but I think one thing that teachers can do when they're in this situation of there's all this pressure on art teachers to produce thousands of pieces of beautiful, perfect work to hang up all over town, but the best thing that art teachers can do or teachers in general is to talk to the students about it so that when they come home, they know about the process and they can talk about their process and they know what all those supplies are called and they know how to use it and they know the vocabulary so that they can talk about the process with their parents and if an administrator comes in to observe you and talks to the kids, the kids understand the process.

Amanda: I think that's the best place to start-

Laura: I agree.

Amanda: In changing the way people look at visual art education and I face this at my school with the teachers. It's so hard to get them to focus on the process versus what they've got to hang up in the hallway. They were scared to even try stuff sometimes because they were afraid it wouldn't look good and I'm like, "It doesn't matter."

Laura: Right.

Amanda: You document the process. Take pictures of the kids while they're working.

Laura: Yes.



- Amanda: Write down some things you hear them saying to each other and then put that in the hallway with the work-
- Laura: Yes.
- Amanda: So everybody that walks down that hall, what your kids learned.
- Laura: Yeah. I'm really encouraging all of our teachers to put those essential questions and the standards when they hang their art and to hang the pieces that maybe aren't as cute, but I'm really working on that because we've had teachers say, "Oh, my grade level teams, they don't understand that we even have standards," and I'm like, "Well, how could they even think that we don't have standards?"
- Laura: So, just continue to educate everyone, the whole community, put it out there, put, like you said, we have iPads in our art rooms, take tons of pictures of the process, document, you can make little snippets if you take a bunch of pictures throughout, then you can put a little video together of the whole process in action and share that with people and then post those standards, post the essential questions, tell them what the [inaudible 00:16:08] understanding is supposed to be and then yes, when kids are asked, "What are you learning?" They can say, "I am learning about the element of line and contours," and those kinds of things. They can tell y'all about it.
- Amanda: And how powerful is it to put things like the vocabulary in the hallway when kids will go in the bathroom, they'll see that vocabulary word. Decorating the halls is a big deal, especially in elementary schools, but putting stuff like that out there, I even went so far last year as to start posting a teacher reflection with the displays that I did for my classroom. I would try to do one in each grade level hallway from the art room, just to model and I would type my own reflection. This is how we do it this time, but next time if I teach this again, I'm going to change this because this part didn't work and it was an honest, transparent reflection and I think it's great for teachers to do that because that's how we can teach each other.
- Laura: Right.
- Amanda: And communicate with [inaudible 00:17:00] in the building.
- Laura: Yeah.



- Amanda: But yeah, I really encourage people to not just put the standards in the central questions, but vocabulary too.
- Laura: Definitely.
- Amanda: And student reflections.
- Laura: Yes.
- Amanda: You might not every time have time for every student to write this six page reflection, but early finishers can do one. Yeah-
- Amanda: We can't keep competing and doing the dog and pony show thing. We gotta be open and transparent if kids are really going to learn.
- Matt: I hear you, yeah. I mean, the more and more you were saying that about where the learning happens and connecting it with the other classrooms, the other teachers, when you have that vocabulary out, you start talking about it and they're like, "But that's math related." No, it's art related too and all of a sudden they're like, "Oh," and then it just changes their whole outlook on it.
- Amanda: And I think we do in isolation as human beings, but especially in schools and that thing is isolated. It's all connected and I really feel very strongly with an arts integration and STEAM are the way that we are intentional about the way we do it.
- Laura: Yeah.
- Matt: Yes, intentional, for sure.
- Matt: Okay. So, what is one major thing that you would suggest to simplify your teaching?
- Amanda: I think the first place to start is going to be looking at classroom management. What is wasting time in the room, right? I think that's a really good place to start.
- Amanda: You need to sit down and you need to think about, for instance, this happened to me last year. I was having way too many kids having to go to the bathroom to blow their nose because that's where the tissue was, right? So, I bought a toilet paper roll holder and hooked it over the door of one of the cabinets so they



could just get the toilet paper off and not have to go all the way to the bathroom for that, right? That was a simple thing that saved some time.

Amanda: So, to simplify what you're doing, start there. Look at little bitty things in the classroom management plans that can be tweaked and to maximize the time that you have with the kids because nobody ever feels like they have enough time with their students, right? You need more time. So, you gotta start looking at ways to simplify that stuff and then from there, you can start looking at your lessons and every lesson doesn't have to have sequins and glitter on it to be an art lesson.

Laura: Sorry, I just, I love it because it's so true.

Amanda: I mean, it's cute and looks good on when you make a pin for Pinterest, but-

Laura: We're not making pins for Pinterest-

Amanda: We're making little human beings, you know?-

Laura: They can think for themselves and apply knowledge where it needs to be and make those internal connections.

Amanda: And I think another thing that is helpful when you're trying to simplify is to actually do the project from start to finish yourself. Use the exact same materials and as you're working, think about what trouble is going to come up for the kid-

Amanda: They're going to have a hard time cutting out these little bitty pieces. So, what can you do to go ahead and have a plan to support them when they get to that point? Don't just wait until disaster happens and then try to figure out how to fix it. Think ahead.

Laura: Absolutely. Right now I'm in the zone of working with first year teachers and some of our student teachers and all of those tips are excellent and I can't wait to share with, well, all teachers, but especially with a lot of the younger-

Matt: Some of the things they don't necessarily tell you.

Laura: Yeah. There's a lot they don't tell you.

Amanda: All those little classroom management hacks, I guess is the word, you don't learn that in college.



Laura: No.

Amanda: I really don't want any teacher to go for three years like I did and not know about this stuff because I had to figure all this stuff out and it took me a while. It took me at least three years before I felt like I knew what I was doing or was even close to knowing what I was doing.

Amanda: So, I don't want any other teachers to feel that way and that's another thing that drives me to do what I do.

Laura: We're here for them.

Matt: That's awesome.

Laura: So, what is one thing you would love the audience to take away from our conversation today?

Amanda: Oh, one thing from this conversation. We lucked out.

Laura: Yeah, we have.

Amanda: This has been my mantra lately of just life in general is just onward and no fear. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to reach out, don't be afraid to try new things, don't be afraid that the product's not going to look great, just no fear.

Laura: No fear.

Amanda: That would be the thing to take away. Yeah.

Laura: Yeah.

Matt: Absolutely.

Laura: Well, Amanda, as always, we enjoy visiting with you and we don't get to see you enough in life, but love what you're doing for the community. Keep up all the amazing work and thank you.

Amanda: Thank you guys for letting me come on here.

Matt: Absolutely. We appreciate it.

Amanda: It's an honor.



Susan: Heads up, seven ups friends. If you've been enjoying these episodes, be sure to subscribe to the Creatively Connected Classroom Podcast. You'll get a notification every time we release a new episode each and every week and take a screenshot and put it on your favorite social media. Twitter, Insta, Facebook, you name it. Tag Education Closet and K12 Art Chat so we can reach out and say thanks and if you really love us with all the feels, give us a review and/or a rating over on iTunes. It helps others find the show and connect with our incredible community.