



Matt Grundler: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura, again with the Creatively Connected Classroom. We have an amazing host with us, I know I say that every week, but an amazing host with us today by the name of Matt Cockrell. So we just want to tell you thank you Matt for coming in and having a conversation with us.

Laura Grundler: Related to your really great chat that we have that sparked a lot of new voices in the Twitter chat and really kind of a fun experience on Twitter so we're hoping to kinda extend that into this conversation.

Matt Grundler: And think outside the box.

Laura Grundler: Definitely outside the box. So Matt, could you tell us a little bit about you and what you do. I know you're doing some really creative things in the classroom and online, so tell us about yourself.

Matt Cockrell: Well, I'm originally from Southern Ohio. Went to college for a year, didn't work out for me so well. Go into the golf business. Did professional work with that in three different states: South Carolina, Indiana, and Virginia. Did it all the way up to 2005. Went back to college, Moorehead State University, got a BA in Art. In Georgetown College got a Masters in Education from there.

Matt Cockrell: From that point I started to sub. I started to sub during my Masters Program then you know after I completed that I got my first job at a small independent school, it was a K12 school. So all grades in one building, small public school so that was interesting.

Laura Grundler: I bet you learned a lot.

Matt Cockrell: There were a lot of jobs to be had, let me say that.

Laura Grundler: Yeah, yeah-

Matt Cockrell: So not only did I teach all grades, with art, I taught, let's see- they had me do a career options class which was...What are we gonna do with this? [inaudible 00:02:19] So let's see I drive a school bus, I did that. So I had a bus route as well. I coached golf, started their gold team actually. I



was there for four years and then I came to my current school. I'm in my fourth year now here. And I'll tell you what, I feel so blessed to be here just because as an art teacher, at least here, you have the freedom to do what you want, to teach what we want, to let kids make their own choices, to just run with it and whatever happens, happens. And if you mess up, that's fine, you know we can roll into the next thing. You guys know what I mean.

Laura Grundler: Oh yeah.

Matt Grundler: Uh huh.

Matt Cockrell: When I got here I started to embrace that whole technology thing. I was never into that, of course I never grew up into that too. You know, that came around what, 2005, something like that? You know, first cellphone in 2008 so flip phone with the cord that comes up right? Just not being brought up into that whole era and you know all our kids now they know so much more about technology than any of us put together. And just trying to figure it out and trying to embrace it and roll with it and integrate that within the projects and lessons that we do and just shaking it up.

Matt Cockrell: I remember art in high school in Ohio, it was so boring. Gosh, it was so boring. We did watercolor trees and we did calligraphy, but it was with markers and we traced it.

Laura Grundler: Uhhhh-

Matt Cockrell: How much fun is that? It was so boring, I did not want to take art. My mom made me take art. Yes, you love art. Yes I love art, mom. Yes I love art, we don't do anything but I love art. I think about that with my kids here that I teach and I think gosh, what would I think if Mr. C. Presented me with this lesson? Gosh, that is so boring, Mr. C. Gosh, what else can we do with that? So just trying to shake it up and do something different and just take that risk. Because if I'm not willing to take that risk they're not gonna take that risk for me.

Matt Grundler: Absolutely, absolutely. Wow. Yeah I mean I guess that's what is your motivator for your topic which was outside the box. And I have to say that I really enjoyed seeing some of the challenges you give the kids,



especially with the ceramics and then throwing on the wheels and your big throw down with Russ-

Matt Cockrell: Russ Richmond-

Laura Grundler: Russ Richmond, yeah-

Matt Grundler: So I really enjoy it and so what you had kids throwing on the wheel blind folded.

Matt Cockrell: Oh yeah.

Matt Grundler: I thought that was [crosstalk 00:05:14]

Laura Grundler: It's funny how in this conversation we talk a lot about people being fearful of technology which is not one of my fears. However, you know, I have a fear of throwing on a wheel because I could never get the dang thing balanced. And I think getting it centered is the hardest part. And when I saw you put the blindfold on the kids, I'm like, that's it. That's genius.

Matt Cockrell: You gotta feel it.

Laura Grundler: You gotta be able to feel it. You can't, it's not something you need to be able to see it's something you need to be able to feel. And I thought that was genius.

Matt Cockrell: And I think something else I figured out about kids, I don't know it all, I'm just rolling with it, you know? I'm trying to figure this out with kids, I finally figured it out that they're worried about what their friends think.

Laura Grundler: Yes.

Matt Cockrell: Especially high school kids, they don't want to do it because, well what if my best friend sees me doing this and I'm not cool anymore. Then I'm not gonna try as much or whatever. So that's where that blindfold comes into play too and then they can just feel it out and it's just them. Just them in that moment and it's so much easier for them to figure out too. So something else that I do as well first thing you know you're missing the cleb and building this up. They had one wheel when I got here and the kiln room was a storage room. They had two fully functioning kilns



there was just like stuff sitting on top of it and I was just like okay I'm gonna use this.

Matt Cockrell: So I fund raised, I started to do the fundraiser, I've been doing that art calendar for seven years now and it makes pretty good money that we can purchase these things. The board went in on half on a pugmill with me. I was able to fundraise half, they went in half on the other and I convinced them of the feasibility and why it was important. So I keep track of the numbers every year and how much we save and that kind of thing. So we were able to get that, we got a slab roller, we got five new wheels. One just came last week, I went ahead and ordered another one this past Friday with our art calendar money. You know, just trying to build it up and trying to do these things that these kids wouldn't do unless they went to college and majored in art. What can I do in high school that I'm not gonna get to do anywhere else. How many of these kids from these lower income families are they gonna move up, hopefully they do. I guess just giving them that chance and that opportunity to do things.

Laura Grundler: That's what it's all about, Matt. For us as believers in the power of the transformative power of experiencing art and making art, giving all kids access is the most important thing no matter what they're financial or what other obstacles might stand in the way, I think it's our mission as art educators to make sure all kids have that access, you know.

Matt Cockrell: Our principal harps on equity all the time, equity, equity, equity. And that just rings through my head every time that we do these projects. Equity, how can I get everybody involved on the same level? How can I do that? With the clay I know I can do it and trying to to do that with every other project it's hard. It really is difficult, but it's doable. Definitely doable.

Matt Grundler: One of your question that you were talking about, and I think a little bit leads into fear that Laura was talking about earlier, is that collaboration piece, you know? Not just student collaborating with each other, but teachers

Laura Grundler: Oh we see that a lot.

Matt Grundler: Collaborating with each other. A lot of people are very fearful, oh well this is my little lesson, this is my baby I don't want to share it with



anybody. What do you say to teachers or how do you get those ones that are a little hesitant to jump on board with the collaboration train?

Matt Cockrell:

Last year I wen through and I did 20 collaborations at our school with other teachers. And half of those collaborations were, 'Oh cool, we get to do an art lesson. Can I sit in there with you and make it too?' Did they do their part in it? Of course not. It was like a cool project to do with their class. Was it a collaboration? I'd call it that, per say, but then those other half, you know they understood what that meant: collaboration. They taught a little bit and I taught a little bit and you know kids learned. But this year I haven't really done as many of those because it's hard to get teachers convinced that art is good for their students and they're gonna learn something. It's really hard to get teachers to figure that out and they just think, 'Well, we're just down here just coloring in a coloring book or goofing off or whatever', you know? And there's nothing educational about what we're doing, you know? I hate to say that, but it's true.

Matt Grundler:

No, it is.

Laura Grundler:

So how do you get them past that because we are huge believers in arts integration and that's part of the reason we're aligned with Education Closet because art is something that connects to every part of our lives. I mean every part of our lives, there's not one subject area that does not bridge into the art world. So why is it so hard for other educators to see those connections or feel comfortable making those connections?

Matt Cockrell:

What I've done this year that I didn't do in the past, I did this year, I started right before our throw down with Russ Richmond, I brought a couple 8th grade teachers down and of course, 8th grade they're on their own thing and high school's a bust, but just the planning worked out for that class. They were able to come in and throw on the wheels with us with my students teaching them how to throw. Maybe kinda get them fired up about art and maybe if they had that interest then when the collaboration of the throw down happened that they'll bring their class.

Laura Grundler:

Yeah.



- Matt Cockrell: And then did and those same teachers that threw, they came down. So I had five 8th grade teachers come down. Now last year, that actually did happen last year. Now that I think about it, I had, let's see, we have something at our school called the pineapple chart. You guys ever heard of that? Pineapple chart?
- Laura Grundler: No.
- Matt Grundler: No.
- Laura Grundler: No, tell us.
- Matt Cockrell: Basically it's in our mail room, go into our mail room and it's written up on the wall. Days of the week, the periods of the day. If you have something cool going on you could put that up on the wall and a teacher can come down to your classroom to view it, just observe it. They could walk in for five minutes, stay the whole period, you know there's no expectations for that teacher. Just to come and see what's going on in that class.
- Matt Cockrell: I did several of those and I had some teachers come through and walk through, that kind of thing. Not as many as I would've liked, but I got some. So that's something that we started last year that we continue on through this year as well. But I tell you what, with the collaborations, what I've really really worked on this year is the collaborations with my Twitter colleagues, like Russ Richmond in Oregon. We did a throw down which was awesome. I've got another one with Ann Wyler in Canada.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah we've seen all the memes.
- Matt Grundler: We've seen the back and forth there.
- Matt Cockrell: Well I know you have.
- Laura Grundler: U.S. Vs. Canada, it's been hilarious.
- Matt Cockrell: Oh yeah.
- Laura Grundler: But what a great, I mean so you're in Kentucky right? So your kids have experienced other kids in classes in both Oregon and now they're about



to go experience Canada? Wow! I mean there's global collaborations in connections for kids I think would be very eye opening.

Matt Cockrell: Right, right. So yeah, working with that, I'm sorry, working with that and with these throw downs I'll tell you why I'm getting a lot of real good feedback from that from these other art teachers that want to do the same thing. Leann Harrison in North Carolina, Paulie Letterer she's in Carmel, California. And then Justin Markeraft in Wisconsin. So they all want to do the same thing that we are, some kind of throw down. And I've kinda had this thing going through my head because I think right now, I don't know, it's been like this, the band teacher and I we eat lunch everyday and we talk about where education is. It's in this rut, it's in this rut. We're just in the same methods, we're there. How can we get out of that rut? And just talking with them about this throw down, he's just like that's a way to get that wheel rolling and rocking and get it out and maybe we can teach in a different way and different methods. And I'm willing to risk it, I'm willing to put myself out there for that. I mean, it's important. It's exciting.

Matt Grundler: Yes, it's awesome.

Laura Grundler: And I think that it doesn't have to be limited to ceramics in the art room or the art teachers.

Matt Cockrell: Oh yeah.

Laura Grundler: You know, like when you said band teacher, I'm like 'dude, why don't you have, we do a lot of jazz, we have smaller ensembles with our older kids with jazz, and I'm thinking, 'God, how cool would it be to improv jazz throw down?' That would be amazing, you know?

Matt Cockrell: It's always the art teacher and music teacher that always sit there and they brainstorm those ideas together because I was thinking about my last year, well actually the past couple years when I was teaching elementary before I moved up, that we would do a whole segment based on the Harlem Renaissance and it was just cool to have her teaching that as well [crosstalk 00:14:47]

Laura Grundler: Yeah I think that well even what if you did a throw down in history? Like in Texas we learn about Texas history and you could do a Kentucky history



vs. Texas history or I don't know. I just think you're onto something, Matt. I think that we're just kind of in this, you're right. How do we break out of the box? How do we get out of the rut? How do we do things in a way that captures kids' imaginations and even to your point about bringing other teachers into your classroom and just giving them a little taste of the art. You said that your kids, your students, taught those teachers how to show them how to throw. How did that go and what was that like for your students to be the teachers?

Susan: Hey there, it's Susan from Education Closet. Happy Valentine's Day! If you're these ideas for out of the box thinking, be sure to register for our free arts integration and STEAM summit that's taking place next week. There's over 50 sessions, that's right, 50 with incredible ideas for infusing creativity throughout your curriculum. Learn all about it at EducationCloset.com/STEAM-Summit. Now, let's get back to the conversation.

Matt Cockrell: I do that with a lot of projects in here not just with ceramics, with calligraphy, with watercolor, with pastel. Because with high school, it's not like elementary. When I taught elementary, everybody gather around the table. And then I'll show everybody at one time. With high school, you know, you gotta go table by table. I'll go to the first table, get them to be masters for three or four days solid, and then I just disperse them out across the class and they teach three to four kids. Just like I took a group to National Handwriting Day the other day, January 23rd. [crosstalk 00:16:41] It was the second year we did this, we branched out a little bit, we went to two schools this year. Next year we're thinking about doing two days so we can go to more elementary school. Just that literacy piece, how do you incorporate literacy into art? Great way right there. But getting kids to learn from kids, you know they learn so much more, they really do. I could sit there and yak, yak, yak all day long and they just look at me like I've lost my mind.

Matt Cockrell: But these kids teach these kids, I don't really know, of course they learn more, but then also those kids that are teaching it reinforces it in their brain and it makes them that much better.

Laura Grundler: Yeah, you know, speaking of National Handwriting Day, I'm going to physical therapy for rebuilding my foot right now, and there's a couple



young kids in there that are doing their pt hours, whatever they're doing. And it's funny, that's this one kid, Tacoby, and he keeps talking about how angry he is that he did not learn cursive handwriting and that he cannot read it or do it. And you know, it's true. We've got to go back sometimes to the basics and it is a perfect connection to the visual arts, the language arts, and literacy. It just makes so much sense.

Matt Cockrell: How can we bring these basics, like these old school art forms like calligraphy out into the 21st century? How can we do that? And that's something that rolls through my head every single day. How can I bring more of those traditional art forms out so that kids are gonna be more engaged, you know?

Laura Grundler: Yeah, we do know. Only because I was just on Twitter right before we started visiting right now and a lot of the teachers were talking about tradigital. It's something that Cathy Hunt has talked about and Tricia Fuglestad, who are both pretty phenomenal digital slash traditional art educators. And I think that that to me is kind of the key that tradigital which is very much what you're doing. Your kids are making traditional art, but you're interacting with it in a digital way with sharing it between countries and states and all these different things. So I think that that's pretty profound if you think about it, how do you bring these traditional forms into the 21st century?

Matt Grundler: So I loved during the chat that you were hosting, I loved the fact that you gave two of the questions that were all based around resources and things that were non-traditional materials, you know? They were more or less challenges and there was some joking going back and forth about it was like a MacGyver challenge, basically where you had a pinecone and some other things. But you had one that had to do with a map of the states, the U.S. states, a quote, and some kind of drawing medium, whether it was like charcoal or pastel, and then you were also talking about how do you connect that all through the language arts.

Matt Cockrell: Right-

Matt Grundler: So I'm curious is that something that you've done or what would that look like for you?



Matt Cockrell: I try to do that on every project, how do I connect other subjects or other ideas to our projects? So I'm currently working on this one for Art 2 and I'm at stage one of stage five. There's gonna be five stages to it. That's how many ideas I've built into it. So right now I'm working with, well I'm not working with, but I'm thinking of the National Park Conservancy Association, they do the conservancy for all the National Parks and Monuments across the country. So basically students will have to go in and find an article of advocacy that they are currently pursuing and try to incorporate that with a quote and then what art materials I'm going to lay out ten different art materials out so you have to incorporate all this into one. I'm only on stage two right now. I don't have them Friday to get that figured out yet.

Matt Cockrell: I remember my first school. Thinking like this reminds me of my first school where there was no budget and the principal at that first school said, "Well you can write it off on your taxes." And I thought, 'I am totally not doing that.' So what do we have just sitting around or I sent so many emails and so many little notes to parents 'do you have anything you can donate.' It's amazing what you get, right? You guys know what I mean?

Matt Grundler: Yeah-

Laura Grundler: Yeah-

Matt Cockrell: Random. How can you use the donated stuff to make awesome art? Like the kids have to be so creative and I think of a junk sculpture when I think of that, you know? Just throwing all the junk together to make one thing. But creativity, creativity. And I thought about the two questions on the art chat: how can I get the people on the art chat to - I want to see what they go, how can they be highly creative in this one moment, this one incident? I want to see what you go kinda thing. Just like my kids, just like my students.

Laura Grundler: Absolutely. I loved that you challenged the participants of the chat like that because sometimes just like anything else, we've been doing the chat for almost four and a half years or something. It's nice to have something -

Matt Cockrell: A little different -



- Laura Grundler: A little different to challenge them, to really make them think and to get into the how can I do things differently? What's gonna make a difference? Speaking of that, it's a little bit of a twist, I'm going somewhere else right now, but I keep coming back in my mind. You said that you started out in 2005 or something that you were a golfer? You went to college then you became a golfer and then went back to art school and then education?
- Matt Cockrell: Yes.
- Laura Grundler: So I guess my point of all that is I kinda love that path and that it's non-traditional and that I'm wondering, do you share your story with your kids and other people because wow, that's really what it's all about. Just wow, tell us more about that.
- Matt Cockrell: I do because the kids that I love that I have in class are the kids that have the D in every single class. The kids that barely roll into class as the bell rings. Or the kid that sleeps through the whole period. Or the kid that like throws the big fit because I have to actually work. You want me to put it away too? Are you serious? Those are my favorite kids.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah I fully get that.
- Matt Cockrell: How can I get those kids onto the next level? Yes during art, yes yes that kind of thing. But how can I get them to be successful onto the next level. And you're right Laura, I talk about what I did in my path to where I am now and it wasn't straight up high school to college to teach. It was a different path and I didn't graduate with a great GPA. I had a 1.8 out of high school. I didn't have a great ACT because I didn't push that. I think I had a 15. But I use that stuff when I tell them kids, when I talk to these kids. Am I advocating college? Yeah sort of, but a path that's right for them. How to get them to what they want to do and just try to help them to be as successful as they can be.
- Laura Grundler: That's so authentic, I mean just to even hear that there's, look you have a Master's degree in Education and a BA in Art and you had a one something in high school. Like that's really powerful stuff and that's hope and kids need hope. They don't get enough hope. And there's not people that believe in them and I'm happy that you share that with them and I'm happy that you're sharing that with us today. So thank you. As we



come to the end of our podcast interviews, we always like to ask our last question. Matt, would you like to ask it?

Matt Cockrell: Oh me?

Laura Grundler: Matt Grundler.

Matt Cockrell: Oh sorry, sorry.

Laura Grundler: Not Matt C.. Yes.

Matt Grundler: So basically are there any other, I mean we've talked about a lot of things, are there any other parting words that you could share with our listeners about out of the box thinking and such?

Matt Cockrell: Well before I do that, thanks for having me on. I appreciate everything that you guys do and the PLN. When I found that and I found you guys on Twitter it was just like, oh this is the coolest thing I've even seen. Talking about art, I mean, yeah.

Matt Cockrell: Thank you guys for what you do. I appreciate it.

Laura Grundler: You're welcome. We appreciate it.

Matt Grundler: We appreciate you.

Matt Cockrell: It's tough to find other art educators, people that are into the same thing that you are, even in your own district. But it's tough to find people to connect on the same level about things. I appreciate everything you guys do.

Laura Grundler: That's part of the reason that podcast is called the Creatively Connected Classroom is it you have to have your tribe. You have to have your people that get you. If it's not us, we hope to be able to connect people to others, someone else that can do that for them so yeah.

Matt Cockrell: Well I guess if I have some parting words I would say don't be afraid to do something new. Even if you've never done it before I do things that I've never done before. You know I did a project this year where I didn't know if it was gonna work. It was by a Dutch artist named Max Zorn. If you guys have ever heard of him, but he does plastic over top of the



lights. The plastic tape just to get to different shadow and light effects. That bombed big time, that bombed bad. And you know it happened to be something that I purchased because I wanted to try it. I wanted to do it the next day and I went and purchased all the dolls. It's gonna work great, it's gonna work perfect, and it didn't happen and the kids hated it. It bombed and I was out \$30.

Matt Cockrell: Don't be afraid to step out of the box and do something different. If you're not willing to take that risk your kids aren't gonna take that risk. Be real, it's about relationships. It's about that positive relationship and do the best you can, do the best you can.

Matt Grundler: Awesome.

Laura Grundler: Love it. Well thank you so much, Matt, for visiting with us today. It's been a real treat to get to know you on Twitter and have this conversation with you today. We hope that you continue to connect with others and encourage your colleagues out there in the universe to push forward and to be real, be authentic, and to try new things. And we really appreciate it so much.

Matt Cockrell: Right. Thanks guys.

Laura Grundler: Thank you.

Matt Grundler: Thanks, Matt.

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