

They may have the same name, but their views couldn't be more different! Join Matt as he sits down with guests Matt Cockrell and Matt Weimann to explore the world of education.

Show Transcript

Speaker 1: You're listening to the Creatively Connected classroom podcast, episode number 39.

Speaker 2: Welcome to the Creatively Connected podcast from EducationCloset, connecting teachers and ideas, one glue stick at a time. Here's your hosts and K-12 art chat founders, Matt and Laura Grundler.

Matt Grundler: Hey everybody, this is Matt Grundler running this podcast today, the Creatively Connected Classroom. The reason why I'm running solo today is because we have our chat from a couple of weeks ago, which was taken over as the Matt Chat and we have several Matt's with us today. Hopefully one other one will be joining us. So I just want to say thank you to our Matt's that are here and hopefully we'll get a last one to pop in. So as always, let's just kind of give a quick rundown of who you are. I know both of you guys have already hosted and have already done the interview with us, but just want to thank you guys for being here and tell us a little bit about who you are.

Matt Cockrell: Hey, I'm, I'm Matt Cockrell. I am a high school teacher in Shelbyville, Kentucky. My last K-12 art chat was how to step outside the box. We did our podcast about that. Just kind of breaking free of what's traditionally done. And that's really what I'm all about. What's traditionally done and what can we do to go to the next level? That's where I am.

Matt Weimann: And this is Matt Weimann. I'm a third grade teacher in Pennsylvania in the Lehigh Valley. I teach at Willow Lane Elementary. I teach third grade. I'm regular ed, but I use a lot of art in the classroom and I consider myself a relatively creative person and I like to approach things differently.

Matt Grundler: I think that's a common thread we all have.

Matt Weimann: I know.

Matt Grundler: I am Matt Grundler and I recently... Or I should say I just finished my first year of teaching middle school after moving up from the elementary level where I taught for 14 years in Plano, Texas. I think, like I said, we have a very common thread here where we want to see more and we want to push those boundaries a little bit more as far as what kids can make and how they can feel included and all that stuff. Alright. So we started out with Matt Weimann's question of how can you help people feel confident to give it a go, even if they think they're no good? Do you have a lesson or something that you do to help build up the confidence deficient? We always get those people that always think, "Oh, I'm not good at art or I'm not creative at art or I'm not this or I'm not that." So, they instantly build this wall. So what do you, Matt Weimann, we'll start with you, as far as your thought on it all and what you go to.

Matt Weimann: Well, I think probably myself along with many other people have multiple strategies and no one strategy works with all kids, right? So every kid is different, it's funny that we're all named Matt. I just can't get over it. But like you said on the chat, we all approach things differently and we have totally different personalities. We come from different places in the country, same idea as far as feeling comfortable within art, the art world and using art. So sometimes this question, first of all, came from a PD where it wasn't a third graders that spurred on the question was actually adults. And I think in my experience, third graders, and you don't really have to twist their arm to do art. All I have to do is say, "Okay everybody, we're going to do some drawing." And they are like dancing in their seats, right?

Matt Weimann: But when it came to adults, if you could tell me if you have the same experience, everybody gets increasingly uncomfortable the older you get, it seems, when you're asked to do any kind of performance or any kind of art. And it was a PD where people were asked just to sketch something. And we were supposed to put ourselves in students' shoes and no one wanted to. I was like, "Come on guys." And how I helped the adults in this case, try to deal with it, was just doing something ugly and fast and I was like, "Look, there you go. Here's an example." No one could do worse than this. I think that's probably a strategy we use in the classroom with all different ages, too. There is no wrong answer.

Matt Grundler: Yeah, absolutely. No, I think that's the thing is you can, once you break down that uncomfortableness or that, I guess it's a confidence problem. What I do is I have my students get feedback from each other. They'll work through something and then I'll be like, "All right, go talk to two different people and get feedback on it." And then I think asking your peer is a little bit scary at the same time, but it's also helpful and a little less scary at the same time too, I guess, if that makes sense.

Matt Weimann: I was just gonna ask if you've ever had a bad experience, have you ever had students be a little bit overly critical, either in middle school or younger grades?

Matt Grundler: I think we have a big conversation with them ahead of time. Even my fourth and fifth graders, we talk about the difference between being helpful and not being helpful. We talk about how, yeah, if you tell someone, "Hey, that looks fabulous, that looks great, you're amazing." But I say, "Is that really... Are you just being nice to be nice? Or are you being...?"

Matt Cockrell: Matt, I see where you were saying, too. I teach high school and in high school, my kids know that I'm not going to straight off just be like, "That's the best I've ever seen," because I know that they're going to... They're like, "Okay, well it's good enough for him. It's good enough for me." And you know, they're not going to want to push themselves to go beyond the grade level. "I got my A, well why do I need to make that even better than what it is? Cause he says it was okay."

Matt Grundler: Yeah. And I know a lot of teachers, there's an elementary teacher I took that idea from, they have this rhyme, it's called ask three, then me. So basically like asking three friends, getting some feedback from them, and then coming to the teacher once you've had chance to marinate with those other ideas and then come to the teacher and say, "Am I done?" Or, "How does this look?" And I think that's also the other thing, too, is asking them not, "is it good?" Because once you say, "Oh yeah, that's good." Then they move on. They've checked off that little on their checklist and then they've moved on and I say, "Okay, I want you to go ask them, how do I make this better or what can I do to improve it?" And I think once you have the kid asking that type of question, then it totally flips how their brain is receptive to that feedback.

Matt Grundler: And it's not so much, "Oh my gosh, they hate it. They think it's ugly." It's, "Oh yeah, I need to add to this, or I need to add to that, or how do I improve it and how do I make it better?" So, Matt Cockrell, what do you think as far as how do you help kids who aren't so confident or what kind of things do you pull from that say-

Matt Cockrell: You know, most of the kids that I get, either they have never taken art before, or they claim that they never taken art before, or they forgot all about art or they're just there for the credit and that's it. But I start with the very basic things like pointillism, if you guys are not familiar with that, it's one single dot. And it's replicated over a large sheet of paper, we do it in pencil first. There's probably five, six million dots in pencil. Then we go back over top of it in Sharpie. By the end of it, they're all just like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe I just did that." But start with a single dot and see where you get in a month. And a lot of them are blown away. They can't believe

that they made that. Whatever it is they make, "Oh my gosh, I made that." They can't believe it.

Matt Cockrell: Then I would roll into an abstracted piece where abstract, I mean that's just total random. Whatever's on your mind, right? So I start with these very basic things just so they realize, "Hey, I can actually do this stuff." Anybody can make art. And I know Matt Weimann you did that comment like, "Oh my gosh, I'm actually gonna have to do this on the spot. Two minutes just drawing? No way." Like that was my fear, right? But you did it. You got through it, you accomplished it and it looked pretty good. It looked great!

Matt Grundler: I think also what helps build confidence for the student, and we talk about this all the time on the chat, is sitting down with the student, working with them. Working alongside them, I should say not with them, but working alongside them. Because-

Matt Cockrell: Working on the project, too.

Matt Grundler: Yeah, they see... I mean I have this big giant journal that I open up and yeah, it takes up a good desk and a half size space. Even though we have those big science tables and the kids are always like, I see them just kind of leaning in. And then they glare out to the side of their eye, just looking at what I'm doing or how I'm taking that idea of it. And it's always interesting. And then all of a sudden they're like, "Oh." And then I turn and say, "Hey, how do you think I can improve this? Or what do you think that could improve?" And of course at first I was like, "Oh my gosh, that's so good." I know, but this is what I was thinking, what do you think of this idea? And when you start pulling them into a conversation about your own personal artwork, I think it changes so much how they perceive what art is or making art is.

Matt Cockrell: Right. My, my big thing is ceramics and pottery. That is my big thing. I've done more. I usually, in the past, I'd save it for art three. In art one maybe they'd get to do slab table. But the last couple of years, I've opened it up for art one to experience the wheel and really see what they could do with that. So I'd put one on the wheel and I'd showed the first person and then they would learn for a few days and then they would teach the next person and then so on and so on and so on with everything else. Because you learn more... Students learn more from other students, not just from a teacher. So I'll have six or seven kids on the wheel, I'll jump on a wheel. And when they see me, they see me excited about art.

Matt Cockrell: Of course I'm excited about every art project, but they see that that's my thing. And they're just like, "Oh my gosh." Like wow.

Matt Grundler: Oh yeah. Okay. So I'm going to actually jump to Matt Cockrell's question, which was talking about your creativity on demand or on demand creativity. And so you had a little challenge and I know you were going to use this in your classroom too and I'm just curious like what kind of the responses you got from your students. But it was the quote, "What defines us is how we rise after falling. And then you asked everybody to post... To take two minutes to do a quick sketch of that and then to post it. So what kind of response did you get from your students and what's your thought behind that all?"

Matt Cockrell: Well that was one that... I just did it on the spot for the chat. But what I did at the beginning of the year with art two was is, I put a quote on the board and said, "Okay, here I want you to do the same thing we did with chat but you have one class period. One class period. You can't use your phone. You can't use your device. It's what's on your brain. "Is this for a grade?" "Oh, you better believe it's for. You better believe it."

Matt Cockrell: First grade right off the bat, boom. They had the... I'll tell you what I got so many highly creative drawings based off of the one quote. It was a different quote we did, but I got so many highly creative. And on the spot, what can you do? What can you show me? And of course for kids you got to throw that grade in there too.

Matt Grundler: Yes, yes. I mean, yeah, I started... It seemed like that there was a lot of students that were, towards the end of the year were starting to go. Then I started hearing a lot of that question, "Is this for a grade? Is this for a grade?" Especially as you start getting down to the last couple of weeks, then kids are like, "Well, what kind of grade do I need to get? What kind of grade will you give me on this? What I have done so far?"

Matt Grundler: And then it's like, "We're not negotiating. This isn't a negotiation. I want you to still keep pushing, but I want you... Yeah, it seems like we're wrapping up, but we're still pushing past that."

Matt Cockrell: I like to throw those on demand type of things in there. Sometimes I'll say it's for grade sometimes I don't even mention a grade. And just to see if one of them mentions it and a lot of the times they don't. A lot of the times, they don't. They go with it and they roll with it. And I get more creativity that way than if we were just do a regular project and you know, "Here's the rubric and whatever else." But on demand. I'm telling you that's the way I'd go, buddy.

Matt Grundler: I actually had... What I do with my intro kids when I'm teaching intro and actually even my tutee students is that we start out with the... We start the year

and we end the year with the 30 circle challenge. Because we talk about how each circle has potential and we talk about what potential really means. Potential means it has potential to be something absolutely amazing. It has potential to be not so amazing.

Matt Grundler: And you get those kids who are probably arty from the get go and they get probably half of them done because they're putting so much detail into the first 15 or so. And then you get ones who probably struggling tooth and nail because they just either don't want to do it or they think it's dumb or whatever. But then once they see the other people around them and what they're coming up with. I'm like, "Okay, start out with an Emoji, start out with whatever, because it's... or something that's very simple and something that's circle. And then you get the sport kids who, will start out with a ball. They'll do some kind of sport ball, whether it's a basketball, whether it's a soccer ball or whatever.

Matt Grundler: And then it's always interesting because I do it as a post assessment at the end of the year. And I'd say, "Okay, I want to see how we've grown. What have we done so far since we'd take a look at our first one and now what can we do with this next one?" And then you start seeing kids who are using multiple circles. Who are connecting them somehow together to make something even bigger or even better than what they had originally come up with. And that's always... It's always interesting because it's... You've got to look past the simplicity of it what the potential has in it. And I think that's really kind of interesting.

Matt Cockrell: I love that. And I love to see the growth. Especially from those kids that, at the beginning of the year, I throw that pointillism, they can't even draw a dot. You can't have a draw a dot. They're so nervous. They're scared to death and we get all the way at the end of the year just to see that growth just to see, "Oh my gosh, you guys progressed from putting a dot on the paper to bring in a photograph of a landscape that you have at your house in a rural watercolor here class as realistic as possible." Like oh my gosh, night and day. It's night and day.

Matt Grundler: Matt Wyman, so there was a question from Matt Miller that was... You had mentioned this early before we started our chat and it was talking about pairing. It says, "Research shows that pairing images and text is very brain-friendly." You were talking about something that you do with your students that pairs art with text to help kids and learn. What is it that you do in your classrooms since you're more of a general classroom, whereas Matt and I are more specialized in just art, but what do you use or what was the lesson that you were talking about with that?

Matt Weimann: Sure, so whenever I do vocabulary and I do new vocabulary words probably every week. I have boxes and one of the... So, and there's a few boxes for each word. One is definition, one is the antonym, one is used the word in a sentence. And then the last one that everyone gravitates towards, love this one, is draw a picture. And most of the words that we use in my third grade classroom are multi meaning words. So it's very important that the students get the definition of the word, the way the word is used in the story that the word is connected to. And drawing a picture is great because it connects that contact and you can be as detailed as you want.

Matt Weimann: Sometimes when I start the year, I show the students, especially for action words, just like stick figures. But they just jot down something and it doesn't have to be it's fine for it to be messy because it's just making... It's imprinting on your brain what this word is saying and what the word does. In addition to the drawing, I also have... I'll teach the kids sign language for some words, not all of them, but then there's that kinesthetic element. I try to tap into, as much as I can, for the kids to remember these vocabulary words.

Susan Riley: Hi there, this is Susan Riley, founder of EducationCloset. If you love these conversations with team Grundler and friends, please be sure to check out K-12ArtChat on Twitter. The chat is held every Thursday at 8:30 PM Central and it's a great way to continue the conversation. Just go to twitter.com and search #K12ArtChat. We look forward to chatting with you over there soon. Now let's head back to the show

Matt Grundler: And artists, you might want to pull in if you're looking to do that. I was... Is Keith Herring and a lot of his figures that he has, he does action, so you can talk about adjectives, verbs, and how their motion, how their movement and he uses a lot of motion lines so they know they're stick people but they're not. They're a little bit thicker than stick people and they show them doing action and they're really bright, really colorful. I did something with, I think it was my third graders, or maybe it was second graders where they had to be... I showed this strip of five different figures that were all moving and I told them to pick one and I wanted them to be in the same position as that figure was. And they had to kind of figure out how their body would go into it.

Matt Grundler: And that was a... It was just fun because it was that kinesthetic piece that you're talking about. But it's always fun to be able to pull in artists and then you pair it with something that is something they already know, which is verbs, action. So how do you show an action? How do you show jumping with a line? How do you show jumping with... What would a person look like? What are the things that would be around a person if they're running really fast, if they're whatever, if they're swimming, if they're falling, if they're yelling, if they're screaming, whatever, what does that look

like? So I love that idea and I love the fact that you have them drawing things each week to help pair with that vocabulary. I think that's great.

Matt Weimann: We draw something every single day and I'm pretty sure my art teacher in my school does a whole unit with the artist that you're talking about. Where we use different colors and just keep outlining the figure. One year we did an action guy superhero comic strip where we learned verb vocabulary and there were... We drew pictures for each action and then we had to, not we, wrote the different tense forms of the verbs. I thought that was really fun.

Matt Grundler: I love that.

Matt Weimann: Yeah. And it's very colorful and just like you said, when you were just speaking, I was picturing flaps, you know, and how... Okay. And how could you draw Flash slowing down? That would be a totally different challenge.

Matt Grundler: Oh yeah. Cool. So Matt, what do you... Matt Cockrell, what do you... What kind of things do you do to help pair images with the text or images with words to help kids learn as well?

Matt Cockrell: I think, what did I do on this chats? We do National Handwriting Day.

Matt Grundler: Oh, that's right. Yeah, I remember that.

Matt Cockrell: And I wouldn't have known what National Handwriting Day is until, I think it was five years ago, I was just scrolling through ideas what to do, what to do, what to do. And then I typed in, what did I type into Google search? Every day as a holiday, every as a holiday and what can we do for this? Like National Pie Day or National Grass Day or whatever. And and so I saw National Handwriting Day, and I was like, "Cool." Because we do calligraphy. And we build upon the skills of how to use the old fashioned way with the dip pen and the ink well and just learning how to do basic penmanship is a challenge. It was a challenge.

Matt Cockrell: I find that a lot of my kids, they, when we first start, they're like, "Oh, writing, this is not English class. Oh my gosh." And by the time we get done, they don't want to be done. They want to keep working.

Matt Grundler: Well especially if you start showing gold leafing. If you put that into it as well, then all of a sudden, their mind just gets blown.

Matt Cockrell: And we do the illuminated texts that illuminate the letter and brush it all out with fine brushes. And we get real elaborate with it, but I usually start that first part

of December and then by, by mid January I'll know my 30 kids that understand it so well that they could teach me how to do it.

Matt Cockrell: I go to elementary schools. This year we went to two. Last year we went to one, but let's see, this year we had 95 third graders, Heritage Elementary. And then at the Simpsonville elementary we had over one hundred fifth graders. So each of my kids paired up with five or six and yeah, just how they learn from me in class. It's fantastic.

Matt Grundler: That is cool. All right, so I'm going to go with this last question. How have you used art to help students wrestle with really tough topics? And I know we've talked about all these little fun things that we do in our classrooms to help them understand, but what kinds of things can we do or what kinds of things have you done to help kids with things that are going on in their brains and trying to work through tough topics that they might not necessarily feel comfortable talking about but how do we help them understand that?

Matt Cockrell: Let's see, Matt Wyman, won't you go first buddy?

Matt Weimann: Sure. When you were just saying that I was actually picturing accounts are used to have students draw like... Actually I was picturing first a puppet, like having the hand puppets, like, "This is the mom and this is you," and you have to act it out with the puppets. But how about drawing it out. Drawing a picture, draw the setting of some place where something happened or draw a picture of a place that makes you feel comfortable. Like just to on that atmosphere into the setting where you're trying to work through something and help you develop confidence or feel better about a situation.

Matt Grundler: Okay. Yeah, no, no, absolutely. I mean because if you can start getting them to think about it without negative repercussions of it, you know, "Oh my gosh, I can't do that because it makes me think of it." But they have to understand how to work through it and the best ways to work through it. One of the best pieces of art I think I use is Van Gogh's Tulips. I think it's Tulips or is it Lilies? I think it's the Lilies. Where they have a whole field of purple flowers and then there's one that is white and all of the other flower heads are all facing towards this one and the other and the white one is looking out at all of these things and to get kids who really understand like, yeah, we always joke and say, "Yeah, Vincent Van Gogh was crazy, he cut off his ear."

Matt Grundler: But for them to really understand and start gaining empathy for people who feel excluded or who feel left out, I don't even say these things. I just say, "Hey, what do you think the artist's trying to talk to you about or tell you about? Or how do you think that they were feeling when they made this?" And it's really interesting to get

them to have a different look at people who are having a hard time fitting in or people who are, like I said earlier, excluded for whatever reason. And so it's interesting to see their reactions to that.

Matt Weimann: It's almost like what does this painting say to you?

Matt Grundler: Absolutely. Yeah, so Matt-

Matt Cockrell: Let's see, myself, Matt Cockrell. What do I do for tough topics? The hardest project we did all year long was an advocacy piece. I don't know if you guys saw it when I posted it, but it was an advocacy piece through the National Parks Conservation Association. This was an Art two project. Probably should have been an Art four project if I had an Art four, but it was in Art two.

Matt Cockrell: But they had to choose a advocacy topic that is currently going on and research it online. What it's all about. Then they had to include other elements like endangered species in that area. They had to include... They had to choose a poem by a renowned poet that I had a list on the wall about what poet to choose and then they had to incorporate elements from that into the drawing as well. Then they had to choose five different mediums. So a lot going on. Something big. We took probably six weeks on that project. Quite some time, and probably two weeks of it was all brainstorm, all researching the texts, researching, you know, "What can I put here, put there?" Drawing it out. Several kids had page after page after page after page of, "What can I include here?"

Matt Cockrell: Some were just stumped for weeks, they just didn't have a clue. But the best thing that I could offer them, the best advice was, just break it down one section at a time. Just because you see that entire painting, Monet's painting, doesn't mean that you have to paint it all at one time. Like the grid, but a little section, a little section. One little section at a time. Draw it out, brainstorm as best as you can. And we ended up with some pretty good pieces.

Matt Grundler: I'm sure. I'm sure you did.

Matt Weimann: I'll have look that up.

Matt Grundler: Yeah, I think I am too. I think I remember seeing something, but I don't remember seeing the images that were done of the students . So I'm going to have to look that one up or you may have to repost that again.

Matt Grundler: So what kind of advice can you give people? Last a little bit parting words. What kind of words of wisdom can we give to people as we sign off here?

Matt Cockrell: Well, I think my thing would be, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to get creative with your kids. Don't be afraid. It's summertime now. I know most people are like, "I'm doing nothing. I'm going to lay by the pool and go to the beach. And that's it." Like me, I'm, I'm heading out west for a few weeks. I'll stop at places and that's kind of my professional development to stop at all these places that I'll stop at Promontory Point, where they... The railroads came together in Utah and they had the, the golden spike. I'll stop there. Soak in some information and think, "How can I use this in class?" I might use this for a cool project.

Matt Grundler: You never know where the inspiration's going to strike. Don't be afraid that if all of a sudden, you have an idea that, "Oh my gosh, I can't do it because I'm on summer. I'm supposed to be relaxing." That's going to rejuvenate you for the next year. And that's, I think what we need. So Mr. Weimann, what do you think, what kind of words of wisdom could you share with some people as we-

Matt Weimann: Well I think one of the things I got out of this chat, I mean there were so many, but something going into it. Even our talk today, and it's one of my things in my classroom is I like to... I was going to say preach, but I push the idea of celebrating similarities. And in this one, really things that we have in common, our name's Matt, but other than that, there's huge differences where we live in the country, the ages we teach. It almost couldn't be more different.

Matt Weimann: But because we all just simply had the same name. There's this commonality and that's something that I like to, especially with my third graders, just show them that just being human... And a huge thing in my class is being classy. And I think it's classy to make connections before noticing the differences. Well let's find something that we have in common and let's celebrate that. And in addition to our names, I know that we all just simply enjoy art, of course. We wouldn't be here if we didn't. So our love of art, our name's and then the differences are just the seasoning in the stew. It's just interesting and we get to know each other. Once we had that foundation of the similarities, and the idea of celebrating what we have in common.

Matt Grundler: I love that. Yup. Awesome. Well guys, I can't thank you enough for joining all of us joining us. I'm sad we didn't have the other two Matt's to be with us, but I think we had a pretty good conversation and, like I said, I certainly appreciate it and I'm glad you everything that you guys were able to contribute to the chats that you've hosted as well as this one. So certainly appreciate it and look forward to seeing with you guys again.

Matt Cockrell: Sounds great. Great.

Matt Weimann: Thanks so much for including me.

Matt Grundler: Thanks guys.

Matt Cockrell: Thanks for having us.

Matt Grundler: Have a good afternoon and I'll talk with you later.

Matt Weimann: Take care.

Matt Grundler: All right, bye guys.

Speaker 1:

Summer is coming friends, which means it's time for a break. Team Grundler is taking off for the summer, but stay tuned for what's next. This fall.

Susan Riley: Heads up seven up 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, EducationCloset, and K-12ArtChat 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. Thanks for all your support.