

# Arts for all: Teachers learn to eliminate barriers

AMANDA KARIOTH THOMPSON  
COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

School is out for summer and even though students are no longer reporting for duty, teachers still are. From June through August, our teachers become students, working to continue their own education. Through a variety of professional development workshops, they build strategies, gather resources, and learn new information that keeps them up-to-date on the latest research and instructional techniques.

For all educators, including those who focus on the arts, one of the top concerns is the ability to effectively reach students of all different abilities. That's an area that the Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System specializes in and they collaborated with other local experts to present a workshop titled "Accessible Arts: Designing Art and Music Lessons for All Students." Nearly 40 visual art and music teachers convened for a two-day seminar highlighting a relatively new educational framework known as Universal Design for Learning.

Participants were provided with an overview of the legislation that has evolved to protect students including the Every Student Succeeds Act, signed by President Obama in 2015. Kelly Claude of the Florida Inclusion Network said "it's the very first time that the nation's K-12 education law includes and endorses Universal Design for Learning. It's mentioned 14 times in that legislation."

Claude went on to outline how earlier legislation created an environment where UDL can thrive. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability.

Claude said that "it began with Vietnam and Korean War veterans who came back missing a limb, or couldn't hear, or couldn't see. They found that they were not allowed access to employment, even with very small accommodations like being able to roll into their desk instead of sit at the regular chair." This paved the way for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

**See Teachers, Page 3C**



AMANDA THOMPSON

Teachers browse examples of assistive technology which are products or tools that improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

# Teachers

Continued from Page 1C

which addresses equal access to programs, services, and buildings for people of all ages and all identified disabilities, including students in schools.

Addressing the needs of diverse learners requires a shift in thinking and Allyn Howard of FDLRS described a cartoon metaphor for how UDL creates an inclusive classroom environment where everyone can be successful.

“Three kids of different heights are standing at a wooden fence. The first frame shows that the tallest kid can see over the fence but the other two can’t. They each get the same size box to stand on. They’ve all receive the same level of support, so that’s equal, but the smallest kid still can’t see over the fence. The next frame shows the tallest child’s box has been stacked on top of the smallest child’s box and now he’s got two, so everybody can see over the fence. That’s fair. But it goes a step further when we think about Universal Design. Here they’re all in front of a chain link fence. They don’t require any supports and they can all see. We can move the boxes but why do that? Let’s

just take down the barriers.”

Howard’s colleague, Lindsey Brown realizes there are some significant challenges that are specific to arts educators who often teach several hundred students. Making appropriate accommodations and modifications can seem daunting to some. “Time is the issue across the board, planning time and instructional time, but no two kids are the same and we need to teach each child the way that they learn, not the way that we want to teach them.”

Howard agreed and added “it’s time-consuming to do UDL the way it’s meant to be done. You’ve got to put in the legwork ahead of time but the benefit is truly in the response. You’re not going to be putting out fires and the students are going to be better off in the long run.”

Shanaya Graham, music teacher at Sabal Palm Elementary School, was inspired by what she learned during the workshop and found parallels to her

own life. “When I think about my childhood, I wanted to be included in everything. It was very important to me to build my confidence.” In her 15 years of teaching, she has built a culture of compassion and acceptance in her classroom. Through this workshop, she found new ways to celebrate each student’s unique qualities and model the empathetic behaviors that she expects from her students. “Let’s practice what we teach.”

With a background in art therapy, Woodville School art teacher Sally Ash may have more strategies at her disposal than others but she stresses, “no matter how much experiences you gain in your field, refreshers like this are always meaningful. It also reminds you not to become complacent, especially in the arts because it’s a field that is ever changing and evolving.”

Ash recognizes that the arts are perfectly suited for meeting UDL’s core tenet that every learner is unique and processes information differently. “I always say art is a universal language. Art is naturally adapted to every student but taking that extra step could make the big difference for a student that just can’t quite get there,” Ash said. “Equal access is not only the law, but it’s the right thing to do. It’s our jobs as educators to make sure that we are innovative and that we’re using all of the resources available to us in the classroom to encourage and engage the most students possible.”

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).*



AMANDA THOMPSON

Local art teachers share instructional strategies during the Accessible Arts workshop.

## CASH & CARRY FLOORING AND SUPPLIES

1 STOP FLOORING SHOP

- Luxury Vinyl Plank ~~\$2.49~~ NOW .99 sq feet
- Waterproof Flooring ~~\$4.59~~ NOW \$2.69
- Roberts Seaming Iron ~~\$99~~ NOW \$49
- Roberts Power Stretcher ~~\$499~~ NOW \$299
- Roberts Knee Kicker ~~\$99~~ NOW \$69
- Ceramic Wall Tile (8 colors) .15 per foot
- VCT Tile .63 per foot
- Laminate Underlay 200 sq foot roll for \$49
- Rebond Pad \$1.18 sq yard
- Commerce Carpet .69 sq foot



### YOU ASKED FOR IT / HERE IT IS

4567 D Capital Circle NW  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
**(850) 212-2689**