

Pro Tips from the Art Room: Favorite Adaptive Tools

Leslie Grace, Elementary Art Teacher in Philadelphia PA



Frog Tape. I love and use this the most often. A big issue I have is students hitting their art really hard with whatever we are using, so just simply taping it down with removable tape eases their frustration (I am sure this is not big news to you though!)... I also love my loop scissors.

Hanna Lee, Elementary Art teacher and Art Therapist in Fairfax VA



Slip resistant shelf liners are relatively cheap and come in rolls and have a multitude of uses. It could be wrapped around a tool like pencils or paint brushes to provide a more ergonomic handle for those with problems in fine motor skills or gripping. When I first experimented with wrapping a strip of it around a paintbrush, I didn't know what to use to make it stick to itself, so I used a bobby pin which worked really well for keeping it together and had the added bonus of making sure it didn't roll away from the student. It also could be an alternate material for sewing on for students who have fine motor difficulties or allergies to burlap. They can be used in the tray of a student in a wheelchair to avoid having items roll around outside of their grasp. Lastly, they can be attached to seats to prevent slipping around/fidgeting and falling out of chairs.



Squeeze bottles- An OT once told me that regular Elmer's glue bottles are very poorly designed, which I definitely agreed with. They are hard to squeeze and not as ergonomic as a round shape. I bought some with PTA money this past school year and they were great for all my students. I even heard students say, "wow, these glue bottles are awesome!" They really are easier to use for students (and me!), and I would suggest getting ones with attached caps, but I found that the squeeze bottles clogged a lot less than Elmer's glue bottles.



Glue sponge- though I love the squeeze bottles, I often had my K-1st and special education students use glue sponges. A lot of these students often had difficulty controlling how much glue they used (messy!), so for certain projects (like collages), I used these. They really worked well for these populations in helping them use the right amount of glue and creating less of a mess. I made sure the sponge was hot glued on the bottom of the container though, because many of them cannot control the

urge to pick the sponge up and squeeze it (or eat it...). Some of my special ed students don't actually have enough strength in their hands to squeeze a glue bottle, so this worked out on many levels.



Wikki Stix- These are great for visually impaired and blind students. The student can "draw" with them and trace around it with a pencil, then color or paint within them with that extra sensory boundary telling them where to stop. They could be used to make art on paper or sculptures as well for a tactile art activity. My students in the Autism Support program LOVED them to make art with. Most of them had very limited fine motor skills and were unable to draw, paint, etc recognizable objects, so we used them to add to pictures using them as hair, insect legs, whiskers for animals, etc. One of the IAs for the class said she thought they loved them because they make them feel successful in their artwork since they can't draw the lines.



Time Timer- I got a large one for my classroom and mounted it on the wall. I originally got it because of my students with high functioning autism in my gen ed class. They tend to really fixate on things and it was difficult to move them along. I got this particular timer for many reasons; first, because it is large and can be seen by the whole class. I had tried small numerical timers at certain students' seats, but they often went ignored. Secondly, it can be "read" even by little ones or those students who can't tell time. I introduced it at the beginning of each class at the beginning of the year, and every student knew that the smaller the red space got, the less time they had. Those who could tell time would remind peers, "oh, there's only X minutes left!" and they would always remind me to set it if I had forgotten to. This really worked out for all of my populations. I think it really reduced the anxiety of "how much more time do I have?!" for

kids and let them plan accordingly. I think for my special ed population, it worked well because they could anticipate a transition coming up, and allowed them to be more prepared. It was also nice because I set it at the beginning of every class with enough time for clean up, so I never accidentally began clean up too late, and students knew that the timer ringing began the start of clean up, so that was a consistent system in my room that they could always depend on.

Crystal Samuelson, Lead Digital Arts Educator in Middletown DE



Kahoot is my favorite. The students use their own devices in the classroom to respond to questions on the screen. They just added a new homework feature as well where the students can go at their own pace.

Christina Kimmel, Elementary Art Teacher in Philadelphia PA



Rubber bands for grips on brushes at the top of where the brush or pencil point is for people with blindness and another rubber band where they should hold it. Also good for people who need a guide such as people with autism.



Different feeling dots for people who have difficulty seeing to distinguish colors when painting.



Cutout frame or box to contain the working area in a picture. Use this to look at things, or tape it onto paper/canvas to contain a painting process.



Imagery cards to keep students on track for what is next or what they should be doing. Try Widgit Online. First month is FREE and only \$7/month after. This is a cheaper option than the popular PECS for teachers on a tight budget. They also have a new app now to transfer images to tablets.

A note that unfortunately they currently only have one skin tone available, which hopefully will change in the future. However, you can upload your own images, which is nice.



Different tiered assessments based off of an individual's level or abilities. *(These sample tools were designed by Graduate students Hannah Richardson and Christen Sanderson as a part of their MA in Art Education with an Emphasis in Special Populations Program at Moore College of Art & Design)*

Jenna Gabriel, Special Education Manager At the JFK Center for Performing Arts



Tennis ball onto a paintbrush to assist with grip. This can be done with SO many different tools!



Different textures and found objects can make a big difference in sculpture projects for students with visual impairments.

Tracey Gardner, Philadelphia School District Special Education Teachers Assistant



Loop Scissors seem to be the best for my students with fine motor skills.

Aaron Weber, Art Teacher at The Green Tree School



Dollar Store Oven Mitts with Velcro and an assortment of interchangeable brushes for kids with fine motor issues. I used the idea after seeing a therapy dog paint with the same concept. I just have things like textured fabric and AstroTurf and I forget what else, but a piece of Velcro on them so you can switch what is attached to the oven mitt. And students that have some gross motor but little to no fine motor, the mitt can be slid over the hands and braces and they can paint. *(Because*

Aaron didn't have an image of his homemade mitts, the above image is from www.prekandksharing.blogspot.com and is a picture of a Lakeshore Painting Mitt which you can purchase online. Although making your own I think is pretty clever!)

Bev Johns Professional, Fellow at MacMurray College and Retired Supervisor and Administrator at Four Rivers Special Education District



Various types of pencil grips and don't forget left handed scissors for is lefties. Here is another one-- I take file folders and cut the front into a picture frame and then put a

sheet of paper in the inside of the folder. This helps students stay within the paper space.



Pedals under students desks are great for children who need to move their feet.

Debbie Robinson Levine, Adaptive Art Specialist at the Prader-Willi Homes of Oconomowoc in WI



Containers that bulk gum comes in and hot glue crayons to the bottom. Instant holder for crayon rubbings. Triangle crayons work great as well as the big crayons. Gives a big grip for those having trouble with fine motor skills.



Pool Noodles. Wrap them around breyer handles that are made of the wire loops. Cutting off plastic Milk Jug handles and hot gluing tools into these can be great too!

Jacqui Vivanco Hertlein, Fine Arts Teacher at Grace School Houston TX



Silk App. I have a boy with Autism in my class and he absolutely loves to create on it when he finishes early with a project. We also

used Silk to draw out his clay monster project because he did not want anything to do with clay that day

Karen Rosenberg, Art Teacher Newtown PA



Bingo Markers. When the ink runs out I fill them with tempera paint. Great for my HS kids with fine motor issues.



Peta Dual Control Training Scissors - "Designed with the assistance of occupational therapists, Peta Dual Control Training Scissors have double loops on each handle that allow a teacher and student to simultaneously complete the cutting action. They're ideal for young children, children with reduced grip strength, and those with visual/perceptual difficulties or tremor."



Glad Press'n Seal Wrap with clay and paint with kids who are sensory defensive. (*Image borrowed from www.designimprovised.com.)*

Susan Dubrunfaut, Teaching Artist at The Barnes Foundation



Faber-Castell beeswax crayons. They are triangular shaped (easier to hold and does not roll) thick sticks that have luscious color without a mess or having to press too hard.

Kathryn Snyder, MA, ATR-BC, LPC, Art Therapist
Director, Parent to Child and Spark Art Therapy
Philadelphia PA



For antsy/anxious/high energy kids (Anxiety, ADHD), I like to use **pipe-cleaners** as a beginning activity. I allow them to freely bend, shape, make, explore the pipe cleaners and create free-form sculptures on their tables.



To contain energy, I do a warm-up with kids having them use pencils and markers within a circle (**Mandala**) for the first 5-10 minutes of group.



For young tweens/teens who are also beginning to be self-conscious and anxious as a matter of their age and the stage of development, I love using **Needle Felting** to help them focus and use an aggressive/frictive material to really pour their feelings into. This tends to open up conversations! But like anything that involves a needle or frictive tool, make sure that all the participants are in a generally good state of mind without agitation or big issue that is brewing.