The managed Art Room by Doug Smith

Room and class management for an elementary art teacher can parallel academic classrooms in many ways such as arrangement of seating, organization of materials, and especially the preparedness of the instructor. The art teacher, like the classroom teacher must have a handle on student behavior and establish a code of conduct for the art room.

Since most art rooms are equipped with tables, a standard technique is to arrange them in a semi-circle and placing a smaller table in the middle for demonstration or supply purposes. (This, of course, is not always possible since many art rooms aren’t square,) but it helps center student attention around a focal point, and the teacher can easily scan the class for individual student behavior. It also helps in monitoring room noise volume, which is always an issue with elementary students being away from their classroom routine and excited about sitting at the same table with their classmates. Every art teacher has their own noise toleration standards and I allow some moderate talking among the students if there is work taking place. If the volume gets to loud I will install a silent art time for 5-10 minutes and become the ‘talking policeman’ adding minutes for any voice I hear though the silence. The technique is strenuous but effective if used on occasion.

Since I have only 30 and 40 minutes a week with each class and usually do six different lesson plans, it’s important to have all materials organized and readily available when the lesson starts. For instance, if the project involves collage, all paper or poster board is precut and stored in a bin or tub which sits close at hand on a counter. Scissors, glue and pencils are at the tables in a bin. Our minutes are valuable considering one starts with an art history lead in, introduces the product, verbalizes the step by step process, does a demonstration, and ends with a short question and answer session.

When the work actually begins, it’s important to keep the students focused on their projects, by monitoring taking, asking the them questions, showing good examples of work, and making suggestions for those that are having difficulty. There are many twists and turns to this recipe depending on class numbers, time of the day and behavior of individual students within the class. However, when the k-1 groups come into the art room, management and timing are even more critical considering the attention span of six year old.

Most projects are ongoing, so proper storage is important and I make individual folders for each table and each class. Fortunately, my present classroom has storage space in a shelved cabinet, but in the past I have used boxes or set up bins to house student work. The folders are on the tables when the students enter the room, but they don’t take out their work until the room is quiet and I give permission. The work is returned to the folder at periods end, and each table must be orderly and silent for dismissal.

Good classroom management is a process that can be tempered for each class, as long as the teacher is organized, consistent and well prepared for a creative, hands- on, art experience.