

Instructional Practices

In many ways, an OMA classroom is much like any other classroom. Students are learning and making connections between previous knowledge and new experiences. For any lesson or set of lessons to be successful, the Classroom Teacher, Arts Integration Specialist or Teaching Artist should use a combination of instructional practices in order to reach and involve the learner in the learning process.

Certain instructional practices are integral, even definitive of the OMA Program.

- **Create, Present, Reflect:** Each of these three aspects of the performing arts, as outlined by Deb Brzoska, consultant to The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, affords a different angle to learning, and, in combination with core curriculum expectations, provides a powerful strategy for creative problem solving and critical thinking.
- **Describe, Infer, Evaluate:** This organized method of experiencing art, again described by Deb Brzoska, leads children through a more complete thinking process. Students begin with simple and complex observations, move through interpretations of those observations and, then and only then, make judgments about the artistic piece.
- **Higher Order Thinking Skills:** OMA lessons go much further than a simple repetition of basic facts. Students learn to apply abstract thinking and problem solving skills to all manner of situations.
- **Multiple Intelligences:** Dr. Howard Gardner (1983, Harvard University) established a new set of intelligences that can't be judged by an IQ test. Whereas the regular classroom might focus more teaching toward linguistic (word) or mathematical (numbers) intelligences, the OMA classroom draws from spatial (picture), kinesthetic (body), musical (music), interpersonal (people smart), intrapersonal (self) as well as linguistic and mathematical intelligences. OMA teaches and reaches the whole child and, as such, uses the Multiple Intelligences to guide students in making viable connections.
- **Whole Brain Learning:** One of the keys to the success of the OMA Program is that both the right and left hemispheres of the brain are involved in the active learning process, creating a more complete and balanced experience.
- **Interdisciplinary Teaching:** As a rule, activities and lessons relate to a number of disciplines simultaneously.
- **Inquiry:** Teaching by asking questions rather than making statements encourages children's natural curiosity and desire to learn. Students take ownership of their learning when led through a discovery process. The active nature of an OMA lesson is in the spirit of inquiry-based learning.
- **Analogies:** OMA lessons are built upon relating the art form to other curricular disciplines. Discussion guides students to make those connections.
- **Modeling/guiding:** The teacher shows the students what they are to do or how to play. In every lesson, there should be some modeling or guiding. We often have new students enrolling during the year who have not been exposed to the OMA

model, and the extra guidance is important to the inexperienced student as well as reinforcement for the veteran. Modeling directs the students so they learn to independently apply a concept.

- **Exploration:** Students are able to discover a new instrument, a variety of sounds, a dance movement or series of movements, new art materials, or a stack of costumes. The more exploration that appears in OMA classes, the more powerful the creative process becomes.
- **Application:** Not unlike the regular classroom, teachers expect students to apply the various lesson experiences. Application in an OMA classroom would look more like a short performance where students are speaking, singing, playing instruments, dancing, or creating artwork.
- **Teach techniques:** Techniques or the “how-to” of a lesson are just as important as the product. It is through this technique that teachers model or guide students, and students are able to explore and apply the information.
- **Review previous lesson:** Like all good teaching, the OMA Program builds on previously learned material. As individual lessons are woven through the different art forms, students are reintroduced to skills previously taught.

Other instructional practices, while not specifically definitive of the OMA Program, are particularly useful in the integrative class format.

- **Partners/buddy buzz:** The teacher might ask for students to face each other and work as partners. This technique would be practical for a quick idea-gathering activity in the middle of a lesson in order to reenergize the entire class. Another opportunity in which partners would be helpful would be when the teacher is checking for understanding, but can’t observe every student at the same time. Partners or buddy buzz instantly involves every student in the activity, and gives them purpose.
- **Collaborative teams/small groups:** As OMA lessons progress, some of the work might require that students be able to work collaboratively in a small group. One example might be for students to create a tableau of a scene from a story or play. Another might be to create an ostinato or musical line that is correctly notated. Again, with the creative process and with the current mobility rate of students in school, collaborative or small group application will assist the new student or the English Language Learner to become more comfortable with an assignment.
- **Humor:** Always an important part of any lesson! Teachers and students who can chuckle or find the humor in a lesson can also find humor in daily living.
- **Reenacting/retelling:** Using theatre standards, reenacting and retelling are an important aspect of the OMA classroom. Teachers can ensure that students understand a new concept, or that they understand a concept in a different manner (through the arts). Sometimes lessons begin with a student retelling of classroom learning so that the students begin to make the connections between the regular classroom and the OMA classroom.
- **Clear Directions:** Depending on the developmental level of the students, directions might be short or more involved. Some lessons might require that the entire set of directions be verbalized and then smaller sections reiterated and followed; whereas, in other lessons, the teacher might not want to give away the “ah-ha” discoveries.

- **Small parts of the lesson make up the whole:** Introducing students to smaller sections of the whole lesson helps to maintain interest in the lesson, especially when taken out of order. Once they have mastered the smaller sections, they can begin to put the pieces together to create a whole song or story. Putting together the separate parts of the lesson would also reinforce the sequence that is usually taught during reading.
- **Games:** Games can be used not only as a teaching technique but for informal assessment purposes as well.