



## **Creative Students on the Spectrum: Integrating the University Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

One of the challenges of teaching (at any level) is to understand how students access and process information. Every student is different. What are their most active senses? Do they respond to auditory stimulus more than visual or tactile stimulus? A teacher's understanding of how students process the world and what they think about their experience—the opinions they form about it—helps to promote effective learning for both student and teacher.

But what of the autistic student? Much has been written about autism. The question this paper addresses concerns the development of a relationship between teacher (not clinically trained in teaching autistic students) and a talented artist and student with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). Can effective teaching and learning transact? Through an experimental arts program, the author and department chair discusses the challenge of integrating autism into the mainstream university classroom. The template course: the Art of the Visual Journal teaches students to document their lives-daily-as they live it. The focus is on the development of "self." Students understand who they are as defined by what they do. They are the lives they live. Part of that understanding is their relationship with each other and to appreciate their diversity. For the author, developing a relationship with an autistic student of enormous talent—gaining insight into an often confusing internal world, and integrating that experience into the mainstream classroom is both challenging and richly rewarding.