

**My Philosophy of Art in Education:
“Teaching Through Art”**

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Teaching Through Art

Art is one of the many lenses through which one can learn about the world around them. It is a great tool to see into the subconscious mind of the artist and learn about their particular perspective of reality. Art is also a tool that allows for personal expression. Art can be extremely cathartic to someone of any age. Art is especially important in the current educational system. Education is far too focused on the logistics and standards associated with scores and tests. Art is a subject which allows for such intimate personal expression that grading cannot be focused solely on content, but also the context, process, effort, and ability of the student. Subjects within the arts are excellent facilitators of personal expression and allow for a variety of interpretation.

One of the main purposes of Art Education is to be creative and expressive. When the creative process is invoked we are able to access something greater inside all of us. The creative process is the best way to connect with another student. When students are allowed untethered expression, they are able to release pent-up emotions, frustrations, and express themselves. Self-expression is important not only to understand the mindset, or a particular setting, but also the relationship between artists. What can be characterized by style, mood, technique, or ability all relate to the ability of self-expression. Equally as important is the ability to be creative. Creativity allows for interesting solutions to problems both on the canvas and in the classroom.

Students who thrive in being creative can also see a benefit in their creative thinking skills.

Creative thinking and problem-solving can be of great benefit when looking at Art and when dealing with non-artistic classrooms.

Another purpose of Art is to experience a universal language spoken by all people. Art is one of the few means of communication that transcends language and is only limited by the potential of the human mind to form associations. Being a universal language has the positive aspect of being able to transcend linguistic boundaries, however this is limited by the sheer bias of interpretation. As a result of life experience and my own personal biases, I can interpret a painting completely different than someone who may have the same artistic knowledge and skill as myself. Setting aside interpretation, Art is one of the few ways people can communicate effectively without much disagreement as to the overall goal, message, or subject of the work.

In a way, we are all artists using Art as a language for communication. We are experiencing reality every day and using our mind's eye, previous associations, and sight to make inferences about what the world around us looks like. Teaching Art is far more than a subject to break up the mundane routine of the school day. Art is the ultimate form of communication because we see all that we experience. Specifically the visual spectrum of light, emotions, color, tactile, and auditory sensations. We are living in the midst of a beautiful tapestry of many dimensions, in which all the fibers are the various vibratory spectrums. Art is one way to decode this beautiful tapestry and try to make sense of something that doesn't have to make any.

As an Art teacher, I will focus on building skills and artistic ability; specifically drawing and painting in my classroom. I seek to improve the artistic ability of all my students while

allowing them a glimpse into Art as a perspective lens through which one can view the world. I strongly believe the best kind of teacher does not simply use traditional teaching methods such as standing in front of a classroom and acting as the sole source of information. The best kind of teacher is more progressive in their approach. They are able to see their students as intellectual equals. The notion that age or certification can equate to knowledge is true in the respect that similar perspectives and ways of thinking become common. This is why I believe someone of any age can inspire a new perspective, a new idea, or a new thought that wouldn't have been realized without the novelty of the limited experience. I saw this first hand working as a Museum Educator at Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum, and during my observation at David Patterson Elementary.

I often felt like I learned more from the five-year-olds I make Art with than many of my teachers throughout high school. A child's mind has the wonderful advantage of not being tethered to limitations taught later in life. Much of our current education system acts more to un-educate the population. Self-expression, self-thinking, new ideas, and rational thought are tossed aside for testing, memorization, conformity, and socialization. I fail to rationalize the lack of Art classes being taught at the preschool-early-elementary level. Personally, I feel anyone can make Art and anyone can be an artist; although it is only a select few who have mastered the craft and are in tune with the creator inside us all can be considered *Artists*.

The primary method I seek to teach others Art is through classroom demonstrations, examples, and discussions. For example, if I was doing a lesson on watercolors I would first discuss water as something that connects all species, animals, and plant both to each other and to the Earth. I may discuss the irrationality of racial, gender, or sexual prejudices. After this focus, I

would discuss the artist's desire to create and describe the world around us in terms of colors. I may do a small abstract project with my class using color as the sole descriptor of a landscape. Watercolors are an excellent choice when disregarding specific shapes and forms and focusing more on another aspect of a landscape such as a mood, feeling, tone, and texture. From this lesson, I would move on to various different painting techniques. After all of this, I would assign a project to my students to paint the same landscape they painted abstractly, but now under the lens of realism.

I would go into great detail about style in terms of perspective. To do this I would ask my students to compare the abstraction to the realistic interpretation of the same scene. I may discuss the validity of each different painting pair, then relate this to opposing viewpoints. This exercise may help to expand my student's ideas about what is "right" or the "best" in terms of both style and perspectives.

Much of my teaching will often serve a dual purpose, one that is obvious in terms of curriculum and another that is more important in terms of life. Teaching others to respect other's views, perspectives, styles, representations, and ideas is one of the most important lessons to my heart. Art is a fantastic way to illustrate this point visually. I will take full advantage of whatever technology I may have access to whether this is a classic blackboard or a touch-screen holographic smartboard. In my opinion technology in the classroom can be either a convenience or a nuisance depending upon how it is (ab)used. This is especially true when looking at the growing problem of student's personal communication devices. When students, adults and children alike are enveloped in their own world; headphones in, head down, mouth shut, they are unable to investigate big ideas.

The most important purpose of Art education is to investigate the big ideas, critical themes, and essential concepts in the world. I completely agree with Arlene Goldbard statement about Art. In her work, *The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & The Future*, she writes, “I have felt most whole and present, most connected, the answers are infused with the multi-dimensional force of Art. This statement aligns with one of the main facets of my teaching philosophy, Art as a tool, lens, and way to look at the world inside and out.” (Goldbard 2013).

I also agree with her perspective that there are two main paradigms one called Datastan, in which everything that counts can be counted; the other is The Republic of Stories, where everything carries a story and all the stories matter. This idea of the Republic of stories aligns with Art education’s role in a modern democratic society. All artistic ideas are sacred and should matter. This is similar to the main premise of democracy, that all ideas and everyone's voice matters. This main premise of democracy can be taught in the Art classroom through Art making and intelligent discussion.

I take major issue with the notion that, “Artist projects in schools are...viewed as a special treat, perhaps for the summer term after more formal teaching and assignments are out of way...” (Szekely 2012). I strongly feel Art is far more than a *pretty* picture and good Art is “not separate from experience...” (Bolin & Hoskings). Art should work to challenge or express some idea, concept, belief. As a teacher, I would much rather grade a failed attempt at an experimental project than an underrated expression of simplicity.

One article that will greatly influence my teaching style is “Art Teaching” by Szekely & Bucknam. I love to reflect and see Art from alternative vistas. On page 17 of the article, there are various quotes that I find to be true. Some include: “Art is our first language,” I truly believe Art

is the primary form of expression for everyone regardless of ability or cultural norms. The quotes: “Art teaches patience for enjoying beautiful things” and “My best lesson was to see the sky and the ground; the Art in everything” reflect on the importance of the ability to stop, reflect, and listen to the Earth. I also value the importance of Art to “...shield against school pressures, testing pressures, and life pressure.” This is especially valuable when developing methods of teaching Art that can be practiced inside and outside of the classroom. (Szekely & Bucknam).

One such method of teaching that could be deployed in an inclusion or multiage classroom is “Find Cards.” A find card begins with a directive or clue to find an exhibition then follows with a question. This method is a fantastic way to evaluate the level of understanding among students. I completely agree with the idea put forth by Kraft and Keifer-Boyd, that “rather than merely aspiring to accommodate difference we should recognize that we are empowered by difference.” (Kraft and Keifer-Boyd).

One simple yet quite effective way to illustrate this notion that difference empowers us can be realized through a drum circle. In the article, *An ABC of Drumming* by Elizabeth Mackinlay writes about her project *Bam Bam* where she taught drumming to elementary aged children. Through the drum circles, she was able to bring the class together, discuss differences, and teach Art through music. Another main facet of my teaching philosophy will be to do collaborative projects similar to *Bam Bam*. I love the idea of incorporating Music, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math into Art Education. I strongly feel Art should not be limited to the canvas. Anything can be Art; a drum circle can become a class performance Art to inspire togetherness and unity. “When children participate in a joint drumming activity such as a

drumming circle, they develop the capacity to learn with and through other persons and to collaborate in collective activities” (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2009, p. 312).

Art is one of the great tools we have been left with to promote harmony, unity, and understanding—something so greatly needed in our current society. Understanding Art goes far beyond the classroom and teaching Art extends far beyond color, life lessons, or politics. Art is a universal language that tackles the big ideas, questions and allows for untethered self-expression. This artist is becoming a teacher to inspire others, promote equality, challenge the status quo, and help those who need guidance the most.

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