

Philosophy of Art Education

By Marisa McClintock

“Experience is central to growth because experience is the medium to education. Education, in turn, is the process of learning to create ourselves, and it is what the arts, both as a process and as the fruits of that process, promote.”
–Elliot Eisner

The question, “What is art?” seems to be a loaded one in our current society. Who decides what makes something worthy of placement in a museum or worthy of the local flea market? What happens internally when a person places pigment on a surface or molds a chunk of earth into a form? How does this play into our human experience? We can learn much about ourselves through art making. Ordinary people with extraordinary imaginations and ideas make art. Art is executed through the masterful use of technique, and the communication of a visual concept. Art should nourish the maker’s sense of self. Art is something that changes us, causes us to act, causes us to react, and makes us better for the experience. These essential questions and key concepts should come alive in classroom discussions that help all involved to grow broader perspectives.

If art is something that is necessary for our lives, it should definitely be something that is taught to our youth. Masterful art teachers are always asking, “How do I use my artistic thoughts to connect to my teaching practice? How do I teach so the most learning is retained and students have a positive educational experience?” We want to give our students the most memorable educational moments possible, and field trips, guest visits, dynamic curriculum rooted in educational standards, and the freedom to express an idea in a caring and respectful environment achieve this goal. Thus, teaching and art are about developing creative and divergent thinking as well as a stronger self-concept. Art education should be taught so that our students feel accepted and cared for as well as a part of a larger community. Students should be given freedom and taught something that will be meaningful, memorable, and worthwhile. After all, is this not what we want for today’s youth? The sense that they matter, that they have a unique story that is worth expressing?

Teaching and art are one in the same. In fact, teaching is a form of art. It is a process of problem solving, community, and self-growth with techniques that help one execute an imaginative lesson or idea. Art education does all of these things, and art education does matter. Using my past experiences as a guide, I want to give life to my students through art and challenge them to discover the universal themes that bind us together. In my past, I often felt that I had two identities, that of the teacher, and that of the artist. Through my reflections, and the growth gained from these contemplations, I have discovered my new identity that guides my philosophies and my practice: I am a teaching artist.