

# *Teaching Philosophy*

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I decided to become a teacher after spending long hard summer days as a camp counselor. I found myself surrounded by rambunctious and energetic teenagers ages 14 to 18. Up until this point I had chosen to keep my art practice close and personal, strangely never wanting to teach students what my inspiring teachers had taught me. However, as I taught these camp participants, as exhausting as it was, I found that I had all the energy in the world when I was sharing what I was cared about. I found joy in answering heartfelt questions, I found a challenge in pushing someone to accomplish what they believed impossible, I found comfort in knowing my passion and love for something could be shared and appreciated.

“This hurts!”

“My pencil just fell in my nose!”

“I find this relaxing.”

“How did Michelangelo even do this?”

“I am losing the feeling in my fingers.”

“I have never done this before in art...”

This is what my students said when they came into class and had to draw the sketch for their next project laying on their backs, under their tables, drawing on paper taped to the “ceiling” as Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine Chapel. As we discussed each other’s artwork afterwards there were mixed feelings about the experience; some students found it frustrating that they could not shade value they wanted with shaking hands, while other students thought it was an interesting new challenge to draw that way. As we discussed the challenges Michelangelo had, we also discussed other artists in contemporary and art history who make incredible art within certain constraints, either limited physically or by setting constraints for themselves. Students discussed the constraints they set, not entirely consciously, on their last project, all of them were 11 x 14 in size, they all used oil paint, and they all painted in a realistic style.

“This is impossible!”

“It doesn’t work!”

“There’s so much drool on this it’s gross!”

“Tornado!! Leaves! Falling?! Birds...?”

This is what I heard as I walked around the room as students were trying to play an alternative game of pictionary. Instead of just using a pencil to draw the word they got, they were forced to make that word within a constraint, like using the paper to make the word a 3D object, drawing it the size of a penny or with their eyes closed. Some students could not use their hands and drawing a depiction of Toy Story with their mouths produced a lot of drool we found out. Again, after this exercise we

discussed what was challenging, how we overcame those challenges, and what we took away from this experience. Every student was able to guess the words, but the “drawings” they produced were so different than what they would have created if they could just draw it with a pencil on paper.

Twyla Tharp, author of *The Creative Habit* said, “Before you can think out of the box, you have to start with a box.” Most of the students began each exercise with phrases of negativity, that they could not accomplish their goal, they could not draw a wolf while laying under their paper, they could not communicate ‘air’ by using pieces of paper. However, as these students worked through these limitations they eventually found they could do it, and they were ready to accept the next challenge.

Students brain stormed and created a list of constraints they believed would help them in their creative process, limitations that would help them express themselves in a successful way. As they shouted out ideas, as a teacher I loved what I saw in their faces. They had expressions of horror at the idea of only being able to paint in the color orange. They had expressions of confusion trying to imagine incorporating outer space galaxies into their sketch idea. They had expressions of excitement thinking about doing their project on a piece of paper larger than their body. As we discussed these limitations I saw limits they thought they had in art disappear, I saw limits they thought they had as students and individuals morph and change to what they believed they could do. There are four primary principles in how I teach which I believe are essential for my students to understand the roles and purposes of art in education.

- 1) Active inquiry. Students should have an understanding of the history of art and contemporary art today. I believe students need to be progressive and curious about the role of art, and class, group, and peer discussions are great platforms for these thoughts to be revealed.
- 2) Creative problem solving. Students will gain confidence in themselves as they solve obstacles in their art practice. I am obligated to provide my students with lessons that encourage them to excel, as in any endeavor, through hard work, practice and determination.
- 3) Collaborative efforts. Students should have opportunities to collaborate and work with classmates toward a common goal. I believe students can strengthen their practice and their classmates as they inspect motives, understand techniques, and ask provoking questions in class critiques.
- 4) Reflective learning. Students should know what they are expected to gain from each lesson. I am insistent that students can identify what their successes and failures were, and self assess their efforts in addition to completing an assignment.

In conclusion, I believe that as an art teacher I have a responsibility to foster a spirit of possibilities. I believe students are capable of learning and that an effective teacher can teach every student. I want to share my love for art with students and show them they can chose what limitations will limit them.