

We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us.     Marshall McLuhan

I believe the goal of education is to teach students to be life-long learners, taking joy in the act of pursuing knowledge. We never stop learning, the most successful people understand that and use their free time exploring cultures, ideas, making things, doing things and solving problems. Continual growth is the best way for a person to live a happy and fulfilled life. How does this growth happen? How is it measured? It begins with a box.

It is my job as an educator, to fill that box full of tools. This can be imparting technical skills, knowledge of materials, finding new ways to approach a problem or discussing the trajectory of a project. A student in my classroom will encounter a range of art from 2-dimensional to digital media. They will participate in the artistic process and carry a work from its inception to creation through reflection and critique to exhibition. They explore the history of art and its impact on the contemporary. My goal is to guide students to their own answers, leading them with enthusiasm, inspiration, discovery and perseverance. To this end first tool I put in the box is a match.

I feel students should be free to explore the world of art, unencumbered. Expressing their ideas, learning how to put these new tools into practice and sometimes making their own tools. They should explore the landscape of art unafraid of ridicule, failure or mashed thumbs. My classroom is a safe place for students to navigate the world of art. I encourage each of my students to grow on their own – to explore and to be free to make “mistakes,” to push themselves in ways that their work takes them. I constantly encourage each student by asking open, active questions that then direct each of them towards effective responses that they can show in their work.

I believe that parents and our community should encourage the pursuit of art, using life experience to enrich their children’s ideas, thoughts and opinions, adding their own tools to this collection. Sometimes its hammer to smash misconceptions or doubts about what art is, a tape measure to gauge their progress or duct tape to hold all their ideas together. I want students and parents to know that art isn’t just what happens in the classroom. Art is everywhere, from museums and galleries to murals and wheat pasted posters. Students should participate in the discourse and dialogue that is the art community and be proud to lend their own unique vision and voice.

Each tool we give a child is a gift, giving a student the necessary skills to navigate their lives now and in the future. The tools I give my students help them find their voice, explain their ideas, help them feel confident, build their knowledge base and foster their love of creating. Everything I’ve ever needed to be successful has come from my tool box, each tool lovingly crafted by a teacher, mentor or my own two hands. I want to give all my students the tools that they need to adapt and thrive both now and in the future.

Eryn Lewis