

Art has been important at various times of my life. I have four main memories that effect my approach to art. The first two occurred in elementary school, one is something I saw every day, and the final was a class in college. Those these shaped my ideas of how art should be taught, they did not define art for me.

In elementary school, I received a D in first grade for art. I had a hard time understanding why I would get a D when art in first grade was almost all coloring. When my mom met with my teacher, the teacher explained that I colored exclusively in blue. I of course did not understand the problem. Blue was my favorite color, it was the color of my eyes, and it was my nickname. I loved everything blue, so I colored everything blue. Though my mom did not take it too seriously, she did instruct me to color using true life colors. To this day, that teacher is not my favorite and that is my biggest memory of first grade.

After first grade, we got to go to the art teacher. Mrs. Greaney was strange but amazing. She encouraged us to do things our way. She taught us to make dolls with old pantyhose. She even made life size dolls that she kept at home (they made the local paper). She also showed a complete love of art and let us create as we wanted to including allowing me to color things blue. It was her positive attitude and love of art that I remember.

My family has a painting that I grew up looking at every day. My grandmother had a painting that is framed in a similar way at her house, and it was always understood that my mom would have both paintings back together when the time came. My great grandmother is the artist. As I grew to appreciate their beauty, I was always was envious of her talent. I wanted to be able to draw or paint like that, but was not blessed with her talent. Recently my mom had an art dealer look at them to evaluate the art and trace the history if possible. He was able to not only evaluate the work, but tell my mom who her art instructor was. It was amazing to hear the

history, and fascinating to know that he could trace them based on the technique and pictures painted. The frames are worth more than the paintings when the financial value is considered. The paintings, however, are priceless to me.

The last thing that influenced me before teaching was my teaching art teacher at Auburn University. The first day of class, she made us take our box of 64 crayons, peel them all, and then snap them in half. I thought I would pass out to be honest. I like the crayons to be sharp and I like to know the names of the colors. She wanted us to learn that crayons are not sacred things to keep in pristine shape. They are tools meant to be used. She believed that we should choose a color based on what it looks like rather than the name. She also taught us about color, proportion, perspective, and a bunch of other art terms. I appreciated her encouragement. She taught me that you do your best and that art does not need to be perfect.

Looking back at my history, I find the teachers who insisted there was only one way to do things turned me off. This applies to the stories I shared as well as others including art, music, and dance teachers. The insistence that there could be no deviation made me not want to create anything. When a teacher embarrassed me in front of a college class for how I sang, I never sang in front of others again. Teachers can have students embrace the use of art to create and express ideas, or they can squash that creativity that demonstrates depth of knowledge. The stringent rules about how art should be done makes it seem more like doing basic facts in math than creating something new and exciting.

The teachers who encouraged outside the box thinking and guided rather than dictating made me continue to love art of all types. These teachers taught me to teach not dictate. They taught me to love the process as well as the outcome. When my daughter showed signs of inheriting the talent of my great grandmother, I searched for someone who would encourage her

talent and not stifle it. It was important that she was allowed to develop her own style and not what someone else decided should be her style. She is my first success story in using art to encourage learning and growing. She not only uses her art in classes, but as a form of relaxation and expression. These teachers understood that art is much more than a single painting, song, or dance.

Art is an essential form of assessment. Students use art to explain their ideas and process. Students can use art to demonstrate their developmental level. A child entering kindergarten should be able to draw a face with appropriate features. Art can be used for problem solving in math, design in engineering, brainstorming in writing, or assessment of knowledge. By using art students can demonstrate a depth of knowledge beyond a worksheet, common assessment, or standardized test.

Art is a form of expression and comes in various forms. Art can be drawing, painting, designing, music, dance, or anything that allows someone to create, express themselves, or appreciate something. A 120 year old gas engine restarting for the first time in over 50 years demonstrates the art ability of the mechanic who refurbished it. A child dancing around the house to music that is real or imagined is art. Designing a new product is art. An athlete achieving their personal best, a picture drawn by a child, a statue in a museum, a joke that makes you laugh so hard your stomach hurts, a symphony or a rock concert, a sunset, or even a broken down barn are all art forms. My learning experiences with typical art did not actually form my opinion of what art is. What they did teach me is how art should be approached and viewed. They taught me how I want to give art to my students. Life created my definition of art. Art is the beauty of life.