

# PHILOSOPHY OF ART EDUCATION

By Bridget Kudrle

Set aside your preconceived notions of art education. Art is often viewed as a technical skill that blossoms for the lucky individuals with natural talent. Creativity comes from a sudden bolt of lightning. Art is a hobby, not a career. Its purpose is narrow and finite--to make an object of beauty. But is art really any of those things? Because if it is, even I would argue it doesn't belong in school. I believe the field of art is vital to students in today's classroom. Students see and interact with art and visual media more than ever before. It is a billion dollar industry and yet society is still questioning its relevance in school curriculum. If you think of art as just a formal exercise then you have missed the point. I believe in empowering students through art to create, express, explore, and connect with their world.

My goal as an art educator is not to push every child into a professional career in the arts. Of course it is lovely when that happens, but the reality is only a small percentage of the kids I teach will pursue a career in the arts. It would be almost absurd to state that I am exclusively motivated by a desire to develop future artists and unlock their potential. All children benefit from understanding and engaging in the visual culture that surrounds them daily. Creativity is valued in all career paths. At Creekside Elementary, students experience a pedagogy called TAB (Teaching for Artistic Behaviors) in a space I call the Art LAB (Learning Artistic Behaviors). Students learn to think creatively, develop problem-solving skills, and aspire to be lifelong learners and supporters of the arts. The curriculum is based on the National Visual Art Standards and enriched with the 8 Studio Habits of Mind, which are a set of 8 strategies artists use to think critically. The Studio Habits of Mind are strategies that transfer to all disciplines. Students work through the entire creative process in media-based studio centers using their own ideas to make authentic art.

Students are naturally curious and thrive with hands-on learning in this studio space. At Creekside, they have voice, choice, and agency over their learning. "The techniques of Monet or Degas can be copied; their principles of design are not obscure, they can be learned. If you want them for yourself you can have them—for a price. And the price is dearer than you may think. Not only will you have to put in at least as much time as they did in developing the same skills, all your living days, but the real price you will have paid is that you will have succeeded in becoming them, and will have missed becoming you." (London, 1989, p16) Imitating the work of a great master and

over-emphasizing the formal aspects of art does little to develop creativity, but it does teach compliance. The TAB philosophy shifts the classroom away from a teacher-directed model where the what, why, how, and when of art-making is driven by students instead of the teacher. When the teacher makes these decisions, students lose pieces of the creative process and the value of their original ideas. In the Art LAB, students create authentic artwork that is relevant and meaningful to them. Art is the vehicle through which students interact with and understand their world.

#### Resources

London, P. (1989). *No more secondhand art: Awakening the artist within*. Boston: Shambhala.