

Arts in Mind

A series from Kiddo that explores arts and arts education

BY ANGELA BARNETT

I CAN'T DRAW

I can't draw. How often have you heard someone say those three words? Was it because someone criticized their drawing at some point in childhood? Or was it because that person drew something that didn't seem recognizable to anyone else?

Those three words are what Sheila Campbell, Kiddo! Kindergarten Art Teacher, hears at times at the beginning of the school year. "I've found that often students feel they are not good at art because they feel they can't draw. We show them that there are many elements available to make art. We expose them to a wide buffet of tools: paint, clay, pencil, ink, photography, collage materials etc. We hope this breadth of media will engage the student to confidently create art," said Campbell.

She provides the kindergarten students many tools and options for personal expression in the art room. They are taught principles of design (balance, contrast, dominance, emphasis, movement, repetition, rhythm, unity, and variation) and elements of art (line, color, shape/form, texture, value, space), while considering the emotions they sense from the colors and art they see. "Part of the thrill for me is to see where each child takes a project. The students are encouraged to explore and to experiment and to reflect upon where their art-making decisions have led them. We emphasize the art-making process, but also encourage the young artists to reflect upon their finished product, to contemplate what they have created."

Keeping the interest in creating art is valuable to helping students understand and evaluate all types of art. Campbell continues, "Aesthetic valuing is an important part of our curriculum. We open one door, to creating art, which leads them to another door, where they learn to appreciate art, starting with their own." Keeping both doors open in a child provides the opportunity for them to see things around them in a different light.

Campbell has the benefit of being the art room teacher as well as a kindergarten teacher this year. She uses art to teach in both rooms with slightly different emphasis. Art can be used to reinforce understanding in the general education classroom. Meanwhile, in the art room, the emphasis is on creative freedom and personal expression. “Some children might find that, for them, the most joyous part of the school day is when they are creating in the art room. Starting with a blank piece of paper, we try to have the students realize that, within the parameters of the day’s lesson, they are in charge of what that blank piece of paper will become. They are in charge of a series of decisions that will determine what their art will become,” explained Campbell. Once students understand that they are in command, they can create with confidence, thus they can create their own art.

This confidence and freedom of expression is the valuable piece that they can take into making decisions in other areas of their lives. “I like to alert the students to an even broader application of decision-making responsibilities. Perhaps because I come from an architectural design background, I like my students to become aware that many things are in their places because someone decided to put them there. One of my favorite projects has students representing their ideal house. After discussing the basic requirements for shelter, students are encouraged to realize that most everything else can be their decision. Things can be any shape, color, size, or material.” Through this, the students start to understand that, like the blank paper they can freely turn into anything they possibly decide, so too can they decide how they might affect the world around them.

One day, one of Campbell’s students came in assuming that girls were naturally better artists because they seemed to draw better. After some exposure, his impressions changed. His mother, Cynthia Koehler, said, “My son always loved art, and at some point realized that drawing perfect lines with pen and pencil did not define whether he could create great art. He discovered that the thrill of creating resides beyond drawing perfect lines.”

Learning how to create and draw provides more than a person who can say ‘I can draw.’ Art in education is invaluable to nurturing and developing children who move forward with the confidence to know their strengths, to face their weaknesses, and to move forward with challenges. Campbell concurs, “This might be when they feel a level of confidence that eventually will serve them well when tackling other academic tasks and, I suppose, life tasks. I believe art is not just part of a well-balanced education, it is an important part of a well-balanced life.” They understand that they don’t have to draw between the lines, and better, that they are the ones who can place them. There is more to art than drawing. I can draw. I can do much more.

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