**“My thoughts about quality Art Education”**

**By, Cecilia Detrich**

I feel it is a great honor to be a participant and facilitator in a child’s educational career. With this honor comes a great responsibility. However, I do not feel this responsibility as a burden. Rather, I am delighted to have this opportunity to serve my community as an educator. I love this work and I look forward to each day in school and the new adventures and discoveries that await us as learners. In my Art Room, if we are not all having fun as we create and learn then I consider that I, as the leader of the day’s Art experience, am doing something wrong and I must make adjustments.

My philosophy of teaching comes directly from something I learned as a child on wilderness camping trips in the Adirondacks. “Always leave your campsite better than it was when you arrived.” This attitude is easily applied to all areas of life. It applies to Art Education particularly well, I believe, because I know that an adult who has experienced a quality Art Education as a child is particularly well prepared for the challenges of life as both a consumer and creator in our ever changing society.

A quality Art Education provides a student with more than just exercises to improve their problem solving skills, which, of course, are critical skills to master. It is more than about making a great picture to display in the annual Art Show or to admire on the refrigerator at home. Students in the classroom of an excellent Art Educator are guided through their art activities towards discovering who they are and what interests them, and are motivated to find their own voice in the world. This can all be accomplished, including the development of strong problem solving skills, by a caring and thoughtful professional Art Educator who introduces carefully designed art challenges, or lessons, that engage students in the *entire* creative process, which includes components of reflection and self-evaluation. A well crafted Art program will support a student’s journey to adult-hood by providing a variety of opportunities to develop these skills which are needed to be a happy and contributing member of a healthy society.

My Art program, regardless of the age of my students, is designed to be full of exciting adventures and discoveries. I often present a lesson by describing the “challenge of the day” as a motivation to begin the first stage in the creative process, developing an idea. I look for and encourage results that reflect each student’s own response to the challenge I have presented. My lessons are structured to allow my students developmentally appropriate freedom to make as many of their own creative choices as possible, regarding the elements of design, while maintaining the format required to achieve the lesson objectives. A visitor to my Art room will observe thoughtful and industrious young artists at work in an atmosphere of creative chaos.

I am aware that it is difficult to develop an idea that one can feel comfortable following through with and expressing if the environment feels unsafe, both physically and emotionally. With this in mind I strive to create an art studio environment that is well organized, clean, and nurturing yet stimulating. I believe that all people, young and old, deserve to be treated with kindness and respect. I model this behavior and positively encourage my students to interact with their peers and classroom adults in this manner. When we reach the segment of a lesson that is all about hands-on activity I do not make a fuss about messes (unless they are purposefully made) or even mistakes. These are natural outcomes of being fully engaged in the creative process and should not be feared. In fact, Artists are well aware that these outcomes, which in other arenas may be negatively received, are often the stimuli for true innovation. I expect that my students will take responsibility for leaving their workspace clean and ready for the Artists in the next class to use. Of course, in addition to being respectful of the needs of the next Artists, this is reminiscent of my foundational philosophy “Always leave your campsite better than it was when you arrived.”

In all aspects of my life as an Art Educator I endeavor to make Art experiences meaningful to all students, regardless of their future careers. For all of us are consumers of the Arts and we all need to know the language of Visual Art in order to be educated consumers and understand our responses to Art. We also all need to acquire the many valuable problem solving skills that are practiced in the activities of a well run Art program. I am not an Art Educator solely to train future career Artists, although I enjoy working with talented young Artists. I am an Art Educator because I want to be a meaningful participant in the mission of educating of our young people. I know that am best able to participate in this mission through Art Education. In my Art room Art day will always be a happy day!