

My Art Education Philosophy/Limor Dekel

In prehistoric times, humans expressed themselves and interpreted their environment by drawing primitive pictures on cave walls. Now, at the dawn of the 21st century, modern humans create sophisticated artwork that is displayed on museum walls. We explore a solar system that we know to be only a tiny part of the universe. We understand that we are but a small part of a complex ecological system in which unseen microscopic organisms can create havoc. We learned all this by observing our environment and by paying attention to the smallest detail. We teach our children to observe and document their observations. Art education teaches students to document their observations visually by carefully observing details and relationships.

But life in the 21st century requires more than just an acute eye. Our technically advanced and constantly changing society also requires of its citizens the ability to think critically and solve problems in a creative fashion. Art education exposes children to a broad range of media from which students learn to solve productive, visual and conceptual problems. As students evaluate their work to decide whether their choices have served their intended goals, they learn the art of critical thinking.

The ability to solve problems and think critically is essential in our culture. However, as the people of the world become more mobile and cultures intermix we must learn to understand other cultures as well as our own. The events of September 11th highlight the need to teach cultural tolerance through emphasis on multi-cultural education. Art is the most natural discipline to use for this purpose. Students can explore various aspects of different cultures and compare them to their own. They may find that cultures that at first seem quite foreign actually have much in common with their culture. They may also learn to appreciate other artistic and cultural traditions.

Art education teaches our children skills important in our modern society but also teaches them skills to satisfy the more basic innate human need for self-expression and creativity. Just as the cavemen painted animals on the walls to tell a story or prepare for the hunt, so do we print posters, decorate our walls, and express ourselves in other visual media. We all have the need to express ourselves. Some of us are better in verbal expression; others may prefer writing or musical expression. As an art teacher, I will give my students the tools to use the visual language of communication in the hope that they will use these tools to become successful and happy adults.