

Clay in the Schools, essays by five successful teachers of Ceramics in the Public Schools

Edited by Mel Jacobson

Teaching Clay by Mel Jacobson

If you have a plan to be a high school ceramics teacher, give up all you have learned in college. You are alone. Realize that those college professors of education will not stop by your fourth hour hell rais'n class and lend a hand. They are gone forever from your life. Theory is gone, reality is with you forever in your career...it is you, and you alone. But, that may be your greatest gift. You can start a program from the front end, no expectations or rules. You are free. But, it is up to you to create it, it will never be done for you, nor will you get "support". If you want it, do it.

Remember, kids are starving to death for something of value to make or build and call their own; they want a sense of belonging and ownership. You can provide something that no one else in the school can give them. You will be a hero. Our society has built into young people's minds that they can be talked into having personal status. No, you cannot do that, people have to achieve something of value that they respect in themselves to gain personal status. Hard work, discipline and passion for a task will give people self worth. It cannot be verbal, it must be accomplished.

You will be a complete stranger, an anomaly in the process of education. No one will understand what you are doing...well, except the kids. They will catch on the first few days.

There is only one truth in education, one only, TRUTH/TRUST. It is the key to your future. It will make all other things equal. All the delivery systems made for learning in the universe have no meaning without TRUTH/TRUST. When the kids believe, totally believe in you, you have them forever.

The first step in building any high school full time clay program is "building your own skill set with clay". You can do that many ways. Take courses, hang around full time potters, and maybe you can apprentice yourself for a summer. Or, learn with your kids. Yes, I said "learn with your kids". A great teacher makes pots and sculpture with the kids...every day...yes, every day. Make something with them. In fact, fail with them, then have success with them. Share your own struggle. It helps them understand it is not easy. Your life will become skill, skill, skill, skill. Make pots, make glaze, make clay, fire kilns, and many kinds of kilns. Read everything you can about clay, glaze and firing. Visit potters, and don't worry about seeing shows. Visit and find out how they make clay objects and what tools do they use? Anyone can view finished work; you have to know how it was done, so you can teach it. To hell with art ideas, metaphor, and BIG A art. Learn how to make clay stuff. Kids want to make things, and what in the hell do they know about life, self or big ideas? They are ignorant kids, Facebook rats. What do they know? NOTHING. But, we know they want to learn how to make something, anything. They crave purpose and challenge. You can give them that purpose, and watch them grow. Set them onto the path of building and making things with purpose and the knowledge of how things can be sequentially produced with skill.

Our society is breeding a culture of lies. It seeps into every corner of our life, such as the church scandals, government, even our political leaders. It is one of the greatest challenges we have as teachers. You cannot let it invade the clay studio. Your space should have the reputation as the safest, most passionate, honest place in the school. You stress it every time you lecture, tell stories, and when you give the students information. Be the most trusted faculty member on your staff. Of course you have to live by the rules yourself, every day. Abuse trust with students and you may as well resign and leave teaching.

Very few on your faculty or administration will have any clue about what I just wrote. Complete ignorance as to the importance of art and craft, of "hands on, brain on". Lip service is always given, but the reality of how it

really works is never understood. They are into delivery systems, validation, grades and test results. It is always "educational theory". Making things with clay is not educational theory, it is real world craft, and the oldest craft on this earth in the hands of children has importance. It is what made us human. Clay, water, fire...life. You are at the front end of learning. REVEL IN IT. YOU HAVE THE KEY TO LEARNING.

How can a group of people determine that clay is "dangerous"? Clay is the natural material that has been in constant use by humans since the dawn of history. It is the chemical element that has led us into every phase of modern technology. From the earliest fire and bowl to the brick and then the birth of the silica chip and the first nose cones for rockets to "super conductivity", clay/silica has always been society's highest and most important technology. And some want to take it out of the schools? If anything, the study of the properties clay should be inserted into science and mathematics and always in art. And, without question, the study of simple fire and heat technology should be a major part of any school's curriculum. How can this be missed?

Fire and the use of it is the essence of life on this planet. It was fire and clay that made us into the modern human that we are. And to ignore it is a sin. Without clay and the study of silica we would not even have the computer that I am using to write this essay.

The cause and effect of the world's most important technology should be honored, not thrown out. How can there even be adults that want to take this time honored material out of the schools? It is total ignorance and a complete lack of understanding what education is. How can we, at this time in history, add another set of learning systems that includes lecture and memorization of facts? How can we add more time to the computer screen? Put something into the hands of our children. Start with clay and that leads children to creative and abstract thinking. Social networking is interesting, but not creative, it is like television, static thought.

Teaching Ceramics

Here is a story: my dear friend Bill Burgert had to give a guest demo of throwing at an alternative school. And, you know what I mean. No one gives eye contact, jackets still on. Heads on desks, eyes closed. He started his demo and no one looked up. Bill took a digital camera from his pocket

and walked around the room and leaned down and FLASH, took a few pix. "Hey man, why the f*%* did you take my picture?" He said "I am doing a documentary story for a major magazine on "unmotivated, boring kids, and you will be on the cover of the magazine, sleeping". Two minutes later they were all around his wheel, talking and asking questions..."hey cool man, do that again." You see, he used dramatic impact, got their attention and moved them from negative to positive. He then answered their question with a big smile. "No article, just wanted to wake you up", they all laughed. He had truth and trust. If bill showed up every day in that classroom he would have them all making pots in a week.

It takes a great deal of courage to be a quality teacher. You have to find any way you can to get their attention. The following essay will give you some clues as to how I did it.

When you begin each day meeting kids, touch every child. Just shake hands, touch the shoulder or arm, "good morning, nice to have you here with us today". Meet every child at the door. Soon, they will expect it...and will be ready for you...with a warm greeting. Don't let a kid slouch past you, stop them, make them look at you in the eyes and shake hands.

Non- threatening touch is the key to trust/truth. When you teach clay/craft you often have to touch the students, lean into them, they must learn that touching is part of the craft, it is natural feeling. Your senses must be alive to be a potter. It is important, very important. DO IT WITHOUT FEAR. It is never, never sexual, only caring and friendly. Kids really do know the difference; they feel it and they are always correct. Most girls in a school know the people that stare at them, look through them. Trust is almost felt. It is mostly eyes that spook kids. Their filters are pretty good.

Post your resume`

Go to any doctor or lawyer's office and see the wall of their office. A dozen framed pieces of evidence that they are certified, degreed, and important. Why do teachers not post their degree? I do, and have a long list of my achievements stuck on the wall with duct tape. I have the kids read it and understand that I have value, and worked hard to get there. Nothing fancy, sort of funny really, but they get the point. `Hey mel, I didn't know you where art teacher of the decade for America, wow, New York University...wow.` They did not know I coached 8 state championship swim

teams, and 7 runner-ups. Fifteen years in a row, 1 or 2. Wow. `Hey mel, did you coach an Olympic diver? Wow. `Hey mel, you had a show in Tokyo, wow.`

All of that was nice, they like to ask questions about my past, but here is the best of all. For years I did pots that would be used on the General Mills boxes, like Total Cereal, Hamburger Helper and such. I had a Total Cereal box on the shelf in the studio. On occasion I would take it down and show it to the class as it had three of my pots on the cover and back of the box. `wow whooo, my teacher has pots on a cereal box, gotta call my mom and tell her.` Now, that impressed them. Little did they know how much work that was, no recognition, just pay. General Mills used the pots for photo shoots, and it was basic "commercial art", as I could measure clay and make pots to perfect specification, just a trick of skill. Do it, get a check and be done. They could care less about my shows in Dubai, Tokyo or Shanghai. The kids did not know the difference; they just knew I was famous because my pots were on a cereal box. They are totally naïve to the real world of art. So, often it is the small things you do that make the difference. It has to be things that a child can relate to. It is ok to let them know. They become a part of you.

When you start class, never, never do it the same way, same words every day. You know: "simmer down, simmer down, open your folder to page 2", the teacher that does that, day after day, every class, becomes a mental moron. Kids turn it off like an old dead cell phone.

I start class like this: `Bob, what color boxer shorts do you have on? Tell the class why you selected them. ` Or, `Sandy, why did you pick that great green sweater? It is perfect for your eyes.` I make a kid say something about them self. Often very funny and loose stories and it must be non/threatening. But, the sense of class starting is getting people to think of why we do things that we do every day. Selection starts every day for all humans. Hair, smell, clothes. An artist always knows why we start something. And every day has a new beginning. I may ask a question about the world, where is Shri Lanka? How does a battery work? Clay, where does it come from????? Anything, make it up as you go. I have been known in good weather to march the entire class out to the parking lot of the school and talk about car tires, and how to change a flat tire. Discuss

any topic that is not clay to start them thinking and being involved. I teach everything, there is no limit.

Dressing as a potter

I came to school ready to make pots, I wore Red Wing boots, clean jeans and a work shirt. I had a cool apron that I wore most days in the studio. It was a working space that needed and demanded work clothes. It became for me, almost a uniform. The advanced student potters would often dress just like me. That is when I knew I had them totally. It became a status symbol in the school to look like a "varsity" potter. They stood out and had a real place to identify with. Every now and then I would show up at school with a coat and tie, or a full dress suit. I would change everything with my appearance, I became a new person in the room. It was based on the theory that you never do the same thing, every day, day in and day out. Always change your image, let them see a different and new person now and then. A woman teacher should come into the room about once a month wearing a knock-out dress, great shoes and full makeup. Give them something to talk about. A child's new view of you, as a real person. As a teacher it is imperative that you be a real person every day, with a real life, and your real life becomes a window that the kids can peer into and want to emulate.

When you are gone for a day

I found a very lovely woman in our area that was a full time potter that did mostly hand building. She had a degree in teaching but did not have a job. I negotiated with her to be my only sub. In fact kids would say to me, `mel, take a day off and have Karen come in and be with us and hand build for a day. ` They loved Karen, and the program just slid into another gear when she was in the studio. She carried out all the steps to make a great studio work with kids. Karen was a part of our program. You see, even the sub was planned and negotiated. We never left things to chance. Karen had total trust, and she let the varsity kids take over the wheel work when I was gone.

This is my week:

MONDAY every kid sits around my potter's wheel and I make pots, talk, tell stories. Every Monday, a new kind of pot was constructed by me. I made about 6 pots per class. At the end of the day I might have between 30-50 pots done. I line them up on a wall. Every Monday. The kids asked me questions, they may tell stories back at me. It is an open interchange of ideas. But, I am in charge, I set the pace. Seniors will ask me to tell famous `mel` stories. `Hey mel, tell them about the time Mr. Uchida kicked your butt for dropping pots.` The seniors know the stories, love the stories. But, they all watch me make dozens of pots, thousands of pots by the time they graduate.

It is about process. The stories break the time up, set up ideas. My rule: Never a lecture, always a story.

Kids will say: `hey mel, isn't it boring making pots?` I say. `No, I love to make pots; it is what I choose to do, it is my profession...and watch. I take five balls of clay, throw a fast five bowls and say...\$25, \$25, etc.` `How long does it take you to make a \$125 working at Wendy's?` Wow. Point taken, nothing is boring...only boring kids are boring. We all know that idea.

I teach kids about passports `get a passport on your 18th birthday. Who knows, someone may ask you to go to Tibet, and you won't have a passport`. I encourage them to think as an open, interested person. There is no place we cannot travel. We must always be prepared. I NEVER SPEAK OF POLITICS, NEVER, EVER.

During the Monday demo days I give them the philosophy of the class. How we think, what we believe, what they have to do to be successful in my class. I would always point out: `there is one rule, and one rule only to succeed in mel's ceramics course. You must treat everyone in this class with respect, no exceptions; you must help every student in this class and be prepared to be the teacher, every day.`

I begin teaching clay with the wheel. I know the standard wisdom says that it must be coils, slabs. That is not for me; to make really great coil pots you need far more skill than it takes to make pots on the wheel. Kids love the machines as they are all in the starting phase of driving a car. The first year the kids learn to throw, skill, skill, skill. They learn to handle clay, know the simple properties of the material. No art, just craft and skill. They graduate to hand building and sculpture. Seniors do some art. It is advanced work

that takes time and patience. The wheel is quick success and fun in most cases. I teach the wheel, I have every kid throwing pretty well the first week. It is a step by step process, 1 2 3. The seniors all help the new students learn the basics of throwing. It is part of the program that everyone teaches. It is the culture of sharing knowledge. When we all teach, we all get better very fast. The intellect of teaching transfers to the self. We all grow fast when we teach a skill.

Whenever you find a person that says "I tried to learn to throw, but I could not do it." I would reply "you had a bad teacher, I can teach you to throw a pot in 15 minutes." And I can. It is a simple system that works every time.

College kids that cannot throw a pot come from a program where the teacher does not know anything. The teachers cannot throw either, so like a racial slur, they minimize the craft. "Throwing is just silly craft, I am into serious art, and I make huge statements." "Yah, right, I can see that, I saw your last show."

I tell the students that the ` tools, clay, and kilns belong to the students of this class...they are yours, you own this studio. It is not mine; I have my own studio at home.` We care for the studio here at school, we love this studio. We have extreme respect and love for clay and the tools that we use to make things. We never dis/respect the clay, it is never poop or dirt, or objects to be flung at the walls. It is golden. It is our most precious possession when we are in this class. It would be like killing bunnies to ruin clay. The seniors all nod, and say..` mel has that right` .

I tell the students about un-conditional love. I give it to all of them...every student. And then they know that the most vicious of all punishment is `the withdrawal of that love`. It is the mother of all discipline. I did not need any other form of discipline. A student abuses our rule of respect and that student does not belong to our group any longer. They are dismissed from our class and banned forever. No exceptions. Do it once in ten years and every kid in the community knows about it. It is like the great line from Shakespeare, bring a cannon on stage, and make sure you blow it off. Never timid, never pretend, never lie. Making 50 rules and posting them is stupid. It takes them two minutes for respect to take hold in their minds. If they respect the class, the teacher, themselves, all else falls into place.

TUESDAY most Tuesdays are student days. They take the pot of the week and try to make it, or they continue their own projects.

Music:

We had a very nice stereo system in the room. It had a lock and key, and I had the key. I controlled all music but had some simple concepts. Tuesday is female day, and they got to pick a girl for that day, and she selected the cd for that Tuesday. Only female music on Tuesday could be played. I set the sound level. If a boy tried to influence the music, the stereo got shut off for the week. No exceptions.

Wednesday

Again, work day for students. Pretty much they select what they want to do. Music: classical music day. I put on the cd. Every Wednesday is classical day.

Thursday. Get pots ready for bisque to the back room. Get things trimmed and finished. Work on projects. Music. Boys day, same as Tuesday, only a boy gets to select the cd.

Friday.

Ok, this is important: This is the key, clean up day.

Students must have their projects ready for the kiln room, get all pots trimmed and finished, or tightly covered with plastic. Music. Loud

Ok, here it is. This is so important is should be in bold type. I split the room into a grid. Sort of one square yard grids. Every student has one square of the grid. That is their grid and it has to be cleaned on Friday. In fact it is more than clean, it is sanitary. For example: Jean has sink number three, that is all she ever cleans, just that sink. It has to sparkle every Friday. She may keep it all three years if she wishes.

So, 190 kids in one day, they each have one square yard of the room, everything shines at 3:30 p.m. Friday. If one grid has not been cleaned and the kid was not absent, I call their dad at work if I can. ` Jean did not clean her art space, I will wait here at school until she comes back and takes care of it.` Dad says, ` my god, sorry mel, we will get her, call her and she can run back...sorry to hold you at school on a Friday.` That is how I do it.

Every kid in my class knows I will sit and wait on Friday for a kid to come back to school and finish their cleanup. It is their responsibility to the studio and fellow students.

When they understand this concept no one ever misses their one square yard of cleanup. Again, we blow off the cannon. No fear, but be ready to sit at school maybe once a year on a Friday. Never threaten without being willing to hold up your end of the bargain.

And, every teacher of clay has really important things to do Friday afternoon. Like: phantom pot smasher.

On Friday/4:30pm I would walk around the room pushing a 50 gallon drum on wheels, half full of water. Pots left around, not trimmed, no name, odd pots just sink into the plastic drum. Gone forever. I also had a bottle of red food coloring and a brush. Any bisque ware that is getting dusty I marked with red. The next week it goes to the trash if it is not glazed. Nothing sits around the room. No exceptions. Do they ever figure it out fast. No discussion. When a kid says: `hey mel, someone stole my pot!`, I would say, `must be international art thieves. I am sure your pot is on its way for exhibition and sale in Tokyo, kid says` I will look for it some more. opps, here it is.`

So, that is the week. Lots of time for students to work, they get a rhythm. Interesting fact, they love classical music day, but no one ever says it, but they get mellow and happy and will ask for Mozart or some other great historic piece of music.

I often ask them on story day...`if you had to go to an island for a year, what cd would you bring with you?` It becomes a cacophony of discussion. They talk about that all year long. It changes constantly. Remember, each kid is an authority on what they like, and almost have religious zeal about telling you what good music is. All BS.

Another example of respect: Pat loaded the kilns. A 55 year old motherly type. A wonderful bright woman. Pat was in charge of the back room, The kilns and loading them for the next firing, I unloaded them in the early morning. No one told Pat what to fire or what to do. Every student respected Pat with an almost fanatic respect. If you pushed your pots forward, or wanted them fired fast, they went back to the outer room for a week. No exceptions. It is simple logic, wait your turn. Seniors had a kiln of their

own. They loaded their own pots with teams of two. That was negotiated with the seniors. They were in charge and it got done very well in most cases. Many seniors just waited for their pots with the general population. We fired three Skutt 10-27 kilns every day.

Seniors

Just imagine a sophomore kid throwing clay in my school studio, and the clay sticks to the one square yard clean up space of a senior. I would just walk away. The kids eyes would get as big as a stop sign. That senior would be in that kids face like an NFL linebacker. See the benefits? Seniors did the teaching, hands on, and they controlled the behavior of the new kids. The seniors had status, the seniors knew what to do and showed others how we did things. Seniors were golden, and they knew it, and respected that status. I was the one that set up that status situation. I did it because it worked so well, and taught people about leadership.

We broke the studio up like a football team. Seniors with two years experience were considered `varsity potters`. We also had a starting team of about 15. All star boys and girls. Juniors with one year experience were considered `jv`. One year, or first year students were just rookies. They had to earn the right to be on the team. And, they all made it. The funny thing is, the varsity first team may be a smoking door kid, a girl going to Dartmouth, the all conference running back on the real football team, two kids from special ed. and a couple of plain, no name girls that were the heart and soul of our program. And those top varsity potters were all best friends. They were a team. We never knew where the `golden hands` kids would come from, but their dna was clay. The varsity potters ran the program, I was the facilitator. As you read this, can you feel respect? Would you have loved to have been a varsity potter at our school? You betcha. In so many ways, it was one of the highest standards of our school. And, all the kids knew it.

Mixing up kids

We did not have clay classes in series. It was just called "ceramics". The seniors, juniors and new kids were all mixed together, and you could take

"ceramics" all three years. Some kids even had it two hours a day. If a kid stood in the door watching, and he came back two days in a row, looking, I would say `hey kid, come on in, you want to learn to throw a pot?` then I would call a senior over, `bill help this kid throw his first pot.` the kid would come back every day...we called them `walk-ons`. We had many that never signed up for "ceramics" and they came every day, for three years. No credit, just passion for the studio. Often they became my best varsity kids. They would just sign out of study hall and come to ceramics every day, and many did it for three years. Their names were never on my grade sheets. So what? Good kids and they became heart of our program. What other teacher had "walk-ons"?

Attendance

If you know every student as a human being, you miss them if they are not in class. There is a big hole in the day if that kid is not with you. About every month I would do this. Mary would be absent, I would tell the class, `Mary must be sick, I will call her Dad at work and check on her.` (always call Dads if you can, and especially at work.) so, I would call and talk to Dad or Mom and say `Mary is absent, she is such a great girl, she must be sick.` The parent would probably say.. `mel, how nice of you to call and check, yes, she has the flu. My god, thanks for calling and caring so much.` Every kid in that class is listening. `Hmmm, he calls your dad at work.` Do you think they would skip my class? Not on your life. Do the parents think I am a Saint?, Yes, and two birds, one rock. (If Mary is at the counselor, or on a trip, the kids will tell me and I don't have to call.) Blow off the cannon, no fear, (helpful hint: have the kids fill out a card, their name, address and home phone. Mom and Dad's work number. a space on the bottom for their given and expected to be called name, like `boomer` or something and if they are naughty you always use their full name like `Walter J. Swishmore what in the heck are you doing?`

Girls and emotions

This is a big deal in high school. A great deal of respect is needed by staff. I kept about twenty dimes in my desk for tampon purchase. Any girl could leave the room at any time as needed. We never ask why, only support their

needs. I kept a big jar of aspirin in my lower desk drawer. They never asked, they just used them as needed. (In theory they were stolen from me...wink, wink.) If a girl was crying over anything I would excuse her to go to the nurse or just go to the hall and sit with a friend. Respect always ruled the decision. Never ask anything like, `what's wrong?`. Leave it be, they will talk to you if they need you. It is often boy trouble. But, I sure do not want them in my room all broken up and crying. When you build your program on truth/trust, they won't leave for some odd or silly reason. They love the studio, and don't want to leave. So, if they leave, they have a reason. Not always your business. And, if they suffer from pms, you sure don't want that red eyed devil in your space that day. She will be back to being a princess in a day or two. Reality. Be a real person, never the "teacher". Kid rules that cannot be broken are made by teachers that do not have trust and control; they can always look to the "RULE". I made all of my rules general, maybe, sort of, and kids understood them. Each kid could trust that they knew how to behave and act. Consistent fairness ruled our studio.

I did not support bad teachers, bad education, and for sure I did not support radical school policy. Just leave me alone, with my kids and let me do my thing. Very few cared or knew what was going on in that studio. But the kids all knew and supported the program and so did their parents. I never blamed the school or the administration for anything that dealt with the art department. If things were not going well, it was my fault, and I corrected whatever was wrong. Never send kids to the office for discipline as you will be blamed no matter the cause. Take care of it yourself. I never wanted administrators to be in the clay studio, they may get their cheap suit or dress dirty. They can just cause trouble. In the thirty five years I was a teacher not one kid was sent to the office. From the Board of Education to the door of your room, no one cares. It is all on you. It is your life, live it. If you have great administrators, you are living a life of good luck.

If you have a serious problem with a student, deal with it `right now`. Never wait until the next day. As soon as the kid talks to their parent, the lies begin. It will always be your fault, no matter what has taken place. I used the phone while the kid stood there. Dad at work was my first call, or Mom at work, but if there was a Dad, get to him first. Tell your story while the kids listen. "Mr. Smith, Tom is standing right here next to me, he has done a very bad thing here in our clay studio, he called a girl a whore, and a bitch and he laid an F bomb in class. I just wanted you to know, as I will

take care of it right now, just so you know. After you deal with Tom at home tonight will you give me a call at home? Yes, thanks a great deal, yes I know how you feel, same for me.” Now, that was Judge Andrew Smith, called out of court to deal with this. He is not a happy father, and the boy will not get to lie out of this one. A scene like that did not happen very often, maybe once in five years, but that is how I dealt with it. I won every battle. And, those parents are dedicated to our program because it was just Mel, Dad and Boy. Solve the problem, don't let it linger. And never involve the Administration. They will turn it back on you every time. They will kiss the judge's butt and tell him I am not a very stable teacher. “And Tommy really didn't mean to call the girl names. NO harm done.” (And no one cares about the girl.) But, I do, and that is how it gets solved, Me, Tom and girl, and he will damn well apologize and slobber all over her or else he becomes a non-clay student forever. You must have courage.

The teacher working in clay

I have a rule, the more I work in clay, the more the kids work in clay. If I should get lazy, just sit around the studio, the kids get lazy too. So, with that in mind I always have art work going on in the studio. The old adage from art teachers that comes out like this, “I am so busy helping kids that I have no time to do any of my own work”, that is total BS. They have fear of showing their work, or looking bad in front of the kids. And, if the kids are instructed as to how to work, why do you have to hold their hands? They want to make their own work; you are the facilitator, not the doer of their work. (I kept a stamp with my logo on it in my apron pocket, if a student asked me to let's say, trim their pot, I would take out my stamp and push it into the bottom of their pot. `hey mel, you just signed my pot` and I would say, `no it is our pot, I just finished it.`) My students would rebel if I did anything on their pots. They did everything themselves. That was the point of the studio. It is the basic idea of being an artist; you control the work, all of the work. It is the blessing of art, it belongs to you, self. It is not a group dynamic, it is individual. But many teachers are convinced they only teach happy groups doing happy thoughts and wondrous things. I teach kids to be independent, free thinkers that get credit for what they do, what they achieve, and all the credit all the time. If they fail, it is their failure and theirs alone. But, they sure know what total and complete success brings them. Their total success, they get all the good stuff, just like me when I open my kiln. It is all mine and I own it.

I have painted my entire life. It was fun to make big painting stretchers and cover with them with canvas in the clay studio. I had an easel in the room in the far corner and I would start a big painting (six by four feet). I loved to do big color fields and change them as the week went on. Green to red, then blue, then change it all around a week later. I would ask the kids, `what color now?` They all had opinions about my paintings. But, they saw an artist struggle with color and composition every day. It became real to them. The teacher struggles with art, they struggle with art, and it is real life. And then I would see kids going over to the painting studio and work out some idea they had in mind, then they would come back and show me. Art, real art, but it was their idea and they did not ask permission to paint. They just went and did it.

I also kept a small jewelry work bench with wax and a torch, some simple tools for silver smithing in a back corner. I would repair things for them, and then watch them melt metal, make a ring, just one at a time. Never a formal course, just kids messing with silver. Every hour in the day there was a kid at the jewelry bench, and often they were fixing something for another kid. Craftsmanship was stressed, just like clay. Learn what the materials can do, then do it. If they got stuck, I would walk over and lend a hand with technique. Just like when they were on the wheel or making a hand built pot. `Hey mel, what do I do now?` They sure did not get a video, I knew what to tell them because I am a potter/artist/craftsman. I honed my skills over years of dedicated work of my own. I spent my entire life to train myself to know the answer; I did not train myself to be a teacher, which was natural. If you want to be a full time teacher of ceramics, learn to be your own self as an artist/potter/craftsperson. Then your room will be full of kids wanting to be just like you.

The Studio

There has never been a studio in a school that is large enough. If kids follow your program, and you fill your room with kids you have to be organized, really organized. It does not mean you have to do more work; your kids have to do more work and are trained to care for clay, pots and firing schedules. It is the training that must be stressed. It has to be logical and benefit the program. It is not about making the janitor or the administrators happy; it is making the studio into a functioning space for

kids to work. It can be done. And when kids understand what you're doing, they tend to work into the system. It is the illogical, snarky, whining about cleanup that drives them nuts. The more you organize and train, the less you will have to do yourself.

The first thing you can do is make sure you have some husky kids that want to get out of class a few minutes ahead of the other kids. They are garbage haulers. A couple of times a day I would have all of the trash collected and taken to the dumpster outside. Old bisque ware, paper etc went in the cans. The kids that hauled garbage got to be first in line at lunch, or were the first kids out of the parking lot at the end of the day. We would do a quick sweep of floors just before the kids took off with the garbage cans. Every day I would put down one ice cream pail full of sawdust on our studio floor. This kept the dust way down. We did a great deal of water cleanup, but remember, the kids are in the room a couple of hours, you are there all day. Year after year, protect your health. Getting rid of garbage and old pots becomes routine, and if the kids hauling get a bonus, they are ready to roll a few minutes before class ends. That becomes their one square yard of cleanup. And, this system helps your janitor, and he knows it and will appreciate it. The more everyday cleanup that you can do will keep the sharks off your back. Get the kids to understand we do not want our studio sloppy and crappy, it is part of being a craftsperson, it is part of the system and it helps you a great deal.

The wheels

We had about 30 wheels, we collected them, bought used, got gifts, used Craig's list, and sometimes we got donations of older wheels. They all worked and we kept them all maintained. If a wheel would break down during class, the kid that was on it had to pull it out, drag it to a work table and turn it upside down. Boys, girls the same, it was never an issue. They would get the big red tool box and start the repair. I would guide them, and make sure we had the extra parts. I kept belts galore, and a few Brent parts. Of course the Brent's never failed. Loved those babies. But, the odd wheels had to be fixed now and then. It was mechanical teaching, and we could not afford to take a wheel out of the room for repair. We needed them, just like a car race, you had to keep them running. Of course the kids loved the fact that they were in charge of the repair. Nothing better than seeing the `homecoming queen of the school` with a socket set in her hand

working with a goofy special ed kid. But, he knew how to fix it, and she liked that kid. She knew he had value. TRUST AND TRUTH.

Wheel location

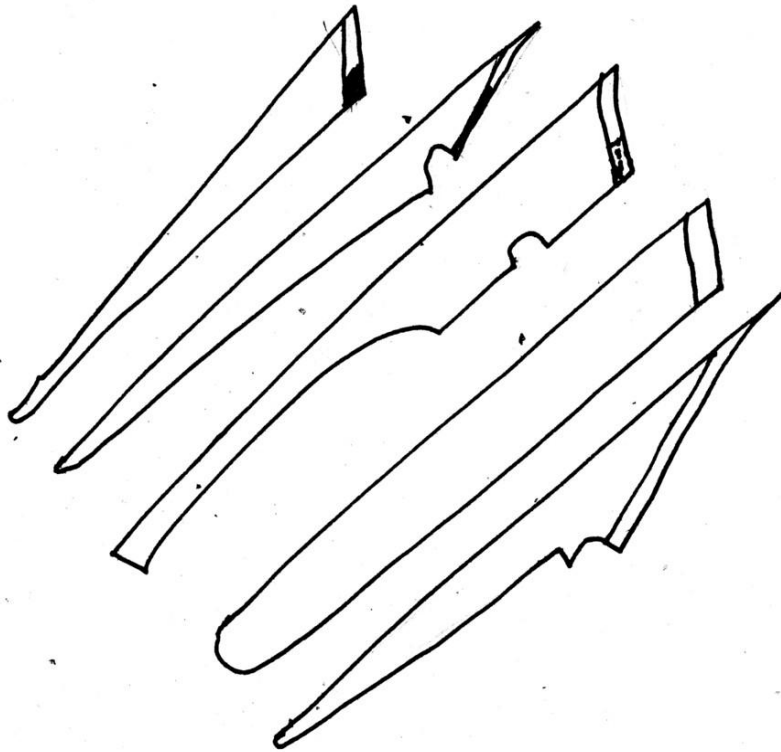
This is a very critical part of the essay on building a studio for clay. The most common position for wheels in most schools is: in the middle of the room with rows facing each other. TOTALLY WRONG without question, you might as well serve popcorn and soda, pass out the pizza, it creates a party atmosphere. You never want kids facing each other on a potter's wheel. ISOLATE THE WHEELS. Kids need privacy when learning. It goes back to the old classroom with the first art lessons. The kids draw with their arm over the art work as they are worried that others are watching. Memorize this theory: Art and PhyEd are visible, and kids are frightened. It is like a spelling bee, you are standing alone and can make grave error, and you can be embarrassed. `Sit down mel, you missed the word dog.` `crap, I thought she said log.` Kids laughing all over the room, you smack them at recess. I faced every wheel into a wall or corner. I built four foot walls about 10 feet long coming into the room from side walls. Four wheels on each side. We had two of them. On free spaces against the main room walls I had other wheels. All facing a wall. There was a big window, floor to ceiling and that had three wheels looking out. Of course those we reserved for Senior/Varsity potters. A primo spot, looking out at the world for the best kids. My own wheel, yes, I had my own wheel, was at the front of the room sitting in the open, chairs all around. I had the audience. (kids would often believe that my wheel made much better pots, and they would sneak onto it when I was not around, as if I cared. Just a wheel.)

We built wooden shelves just above the wheels for their tools, and had flat boards that they could put their pots on. Each wheel had a five gallon plastic pail next to it for scrap. There was a water bucket on each wheel. Kids furnished their own tools, and they all had a kit, homemade that they brought to the wheel.

No one cleaned up a wheel when they were done throwing; they just picked up their own tools, moved their pots and left the room. The next student to use that wheel, the next period, would set the wheel up as they wanted. If they were clean freaks, they cleaned the wheel, sloppies never touched it, just started to throw. Most kids knew who used what wheel and they followed the same kid each day, then they got the wheel the way they liked

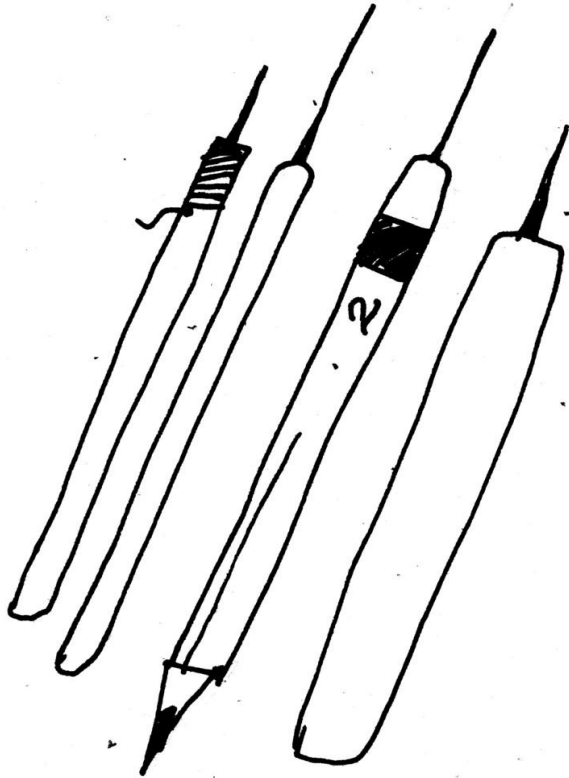
it. With this method, you made pots right to the end of class. The kids figured it out just fine and no one whined about anything. You get to set the wheel up as you like to work and work all period. And, why wash a wheel that was going to be used ten minutes later, which would be a typical anal teacher trick (twenty minutes of cleaning, four minutes of throwing time.) These were tools to be used, all day long. They got washed at the end of the year. On Friday, the wheels were cleaned of all scrap clay, the clay was re/cycled. The wheels almost never stopped running. And just think of the thousands of pots made on those wheels. Kid pots, they had privacy, and no fear, they could smash all the bad ones, and then run over to me with the good ones. `mel, look at this great pot I just threw, great huh`. No one saw the mistakes, the flops or the stupid ones. Just like a real potter, throw away the bad ones; keep the great ones, your public never knew. The public assumes that everything you make is a perfect one every time. Art and craft is a private enterprise, it always has been, always will be. You are alone with your work most of the time. We live for the isolation and clear thinking that being alone will give us. Why would it be good to be public and open for new students? That would be silly beyond belief. And then teachers wonder why boys are throwing balls of clay down the shirt of the girl across from them? Get a brain, as the kids say.

One of the on-going fights we have in our society is respect and understanding of tools. As a teacher of clay you have to instill every day the value of clay, tools, kilns and the products that we buy to produce what we make. We teach an almost religious respect for the tools and materials that we need to make great clay objects. It starts with the teacher and how you love your tools. I would stop class and hold up a really great rib some kid had made, `hey, look and feel this great rib, way to go Wally`. The best way to teach respect for tools is have the kids make them. In fact, we made most all of the hand tools that we would need in the studio.



Metal, steel and other hard object ruin pug mills. We had an old Walker Pug Mill at our school. If anything got into that pug mill we were out of business until it was fixed. Thousands of pounds a day would go through that mill. It was our life-line. Kids had all the clay they wanted or needed. So, in saying that, we needed tools that the pug mill could eat and digest. Wooden tools, cutoff wires and trimming tools all could go into the pug mill without damage. We made everything. Seniors actually made most of the tools as they had training in the simple machines we used. A small band saw, a powerful disc sander and a one inch belt sander did the trick. We cut hundreds of strips of wood, like maple, oak etc. that came from wood working shops, mountains of scrap. We even had rosewood. I also ordered a bunch of bamboo stakes and fishing poles. We cut them into all sorts of shapes. Forty five degree angle tools came first, then long dowels with pieces of sponge taped to the end was next. A needle tool was easy; we got all the used needles from the sewing machines in home economics. Drill a tiny hole into the end of a stick and epoxy them in. We made hundreds of them. Kids would bring into class an entire foam mattress, and then cut it up into sponges. We would add the cut up sponge to a bucket of water loaded with vinegar and let them soak over-night, next day, clean as can be.

Kids would rip those sponges into any shape they liked and we made big sponges for clean up and huge pieces for spills. All free. I taught simple Japanese brush making, just hair and epoxy into the end of a piece of scrap bamboo. Or, just wrap them onto a stick with electricians tape. All sponge on a stick tools were just a piece of sponge, wrapped with colored electricians' tape.



All cut-off wires were made from stainless steel fishing line, doubled over and added to a small wad of bisque fired clay with a hole in it. They spun the wire to make a spiral pattern. The kids would decorate the bisque knobs, or add a letter figure so they could tell their own. It was easy to carve a symbol in the end of the bisque knob and use it to sign pots. There were animal carvings, symbols and letter forms in their bisque knobs.

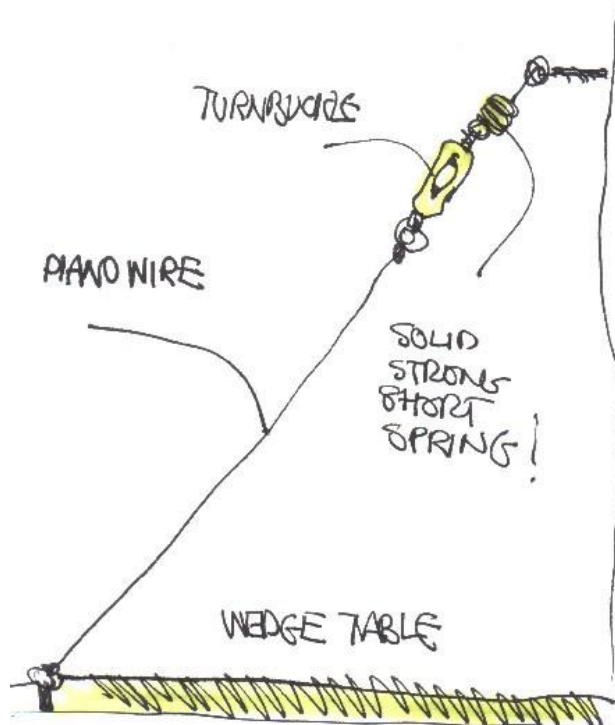
We would collect banding metal and thin strips of stainless metal to make trimming tools. Use the belt sander to sharpen...just add a wooden handle, either with tape or epoxy and they became custom made. There is no limit

as to what kids will make for clay tools if you turn them loose. And then every kid in the program has his or her own set of unique tools, they never get lost or stolen. Many kids would keep their tool kit in their hall locker and bring it to class every day. Talk about respect for tools, it was built in. And it was a joy to see how creative they were with tool boxes, every shape and size from plastic, to old metal lunch boxes and fabric bags. Many of my students carried those boxes to college with them, and people would ask, "hey, how did you get those great tools", smile.



Our wedging tables were built-in all over the room; I screwed a piece of hd scrap plywood with contact glue on to old formica counters (old drawing boards work great.) I would then add a screw eye into the wall and one into the wedging board. Add piano wire to a spring and a turnbuckle and wrap it in place. It will never break. The spring and turnbuckle keep it tight, but makes for give and play and it springs back in place. We did the cut and slam method of wedging as it is far superior to rolling clay around. Do the math, twelve cuts and slams will give you hundreds of layers. The clay is totally ready for the wheel or sculpture making. Only seniors would master

the perfect Japanese cone wedging technique. That method takes time and patience to master. Cut and slam is learned the first day and works every time. Clay that is manufactured, in the box, in the bag is ready to make pots. It needs no wedging. In fact most kids will ruin the clay by wedging. Just have them use the clay/as is. Pug mill clay has to be carefully hand mixed with the cut and slam method. Again, they learn it fast, as bad clay will not throw well.



Taking care of scrap clay is the key to sanity for any ceramics teacher. It must be an ongoing system. If you fall behind, everything gets piled up and the room is a disaster. This is how I did it.

I made twenty bushel basket sized plaster buckets. They each held about a five gallon pail of slop. As the wheel buckets of scrap started to fill, we would transfer the clay into the plaster buckets. It would take about 4 days for the clay to become throwing clay again. The kids would touch each plaster bucket filled with clay with their finger to test it. It would feel like ready clay, and then they would tip out the clay and add it to the pug mill. It all went back through the pug mill.

Really wet clay would be added to the pug mill and then mixed with dry mix clay or grog/sand. We would often set out long snakes of clay from the pug

mill to dry on tables overnight. For great fun we would take all the scrap clay in the studio and run it through the pug mill with kids catching it as it came out to make an unbroken snake of clay many, many feet long, in fact we tried to take it all the way to and down the hallway. Many kids from the hall would run to the studio to help. You had to have a kid about every two feet to hold and support the clay. They would shuffle along very slowly. Some would bring chairs and stools to hold the clay. This activity would go on for hours, or, an entire day. Kids at the front end would be sculpting the head of a giant snake as the clay moved along. Class after class would change positions as they had to run to another class. You did not have to teach cooperative learning. It was natural. And when the word went out hundreds of students would show up to help and watch. It was a real event.

The next day we would bag up all that great clay and store it away. And guess where it went? It just disappeared. The varsity kids would take it to their lockers, into the trunks of their cars, take it home and store it in their garage. We would even find clay stacked behind the bleachers in the gym. There were mountains of scrap clay, aging in hidden places in the school. It was their clay, they hid it, aged it, stored it away, then it all came back to be made into pots. I did nothing; it was not my place to mess with varsity potters clay. (Often teachers would report to me that kids were stealing clay, yah, right, stealing clay. Don't be a snitch, kids hate that.) And, if the teachers would find bits of clay in the hall, they would put it in my mailbox, but I would end that by picking up themes that were thrown in the hall and stuff them all in the English department mailboxes. Turnabout is fair play. They got the point, but hated that they got stuffed. They are perfect you know, and teach really important stuff. BS.

When the clay delivery truck arrived from Continental Clay Company the kids would line up behind the truck and grab the boxes as they came off. Away it went to hiding places just like the scrap. You would see some tiny little girl hiking down the hall with a 50lb box of clay on her shoulder. How they knew the truck was coming is still a mystery to me. High school tom/tom communication systems in action. All I knew was I did not have to carry it, or handle it, or store it.

I never, ever use boxed/ new clay for demos. I used the scrap from the pug mill, in fact I stored and hid my old stinky clay too, in a locked store room just off the studio (locked up the cobalt too). I had the only key as those

buggers would snitch my clay in a heartbeat. And, since I always kept the pots I made at school, I had to fashion much higher temperature clay for my own use. I purchased bags of Fire Clay and added it to my batches for the pug mill. I would use the kilns over the weekend to bisque fire my pots and then take them home and fire them in my big gas kiln. Those pots would have my school stamp on them, so those were always used for research and glaze experiments.

I would have dozens of pots around the studio. Any student could pick them up, carry them around and use them for examples of how to do things. That was the point. They knew I was a professional, and did not use my pots as perfect examples for them to make. Mine were far too good. And that is an important point. You do not want the kids to compare their work with yours. But, they sure chase after the best varsity potters and try to emulate them. Again, that was the point. And, if any of my work got broken or chipped, no big deal, just throw them away. I can always make another dozen. For example: a girl might drop a teapot of mine and absolutely go into hysterics. I would just pat her on the back and tell her it made no difference; I would just make another one tomorrow.

The kids all knew that I kept my pots and did not use the school clay, which was theirs, for my own use. It teaches an integrity lesson to all of them. Honesty rules and theft is not acceptable. I had to make my own, and sweat to get my clay. It was never free for the taking. Remember there are always a few staff members that steal school toilet paper, pencils and pens. They were always asking me for masking tape and good colored tag board. I refused them as I would know that they were using it to paint their own homes. I hate petty theft. Anyway, it was the kids tape, not theirs.

One clay body

If as a teacher, you keep several clay bodies for kids to pick from you have set yourself up to go mad. I always had just one clay, one only. It was a mid-range cone 4-6 iron bearing stoneware. It was perfect for a school situation. We only had one clay to re/cycle.

White/high talc bodies are nice, but often throw like baby pooh. I concentrated on having a decent body that would throw well, yet by adding sand and grog, we could hand build or make big sculptures. The students learned to add sand or grog in the cut and slap method of wedging. White

clay left a trail down the hall on the carpet of the school. It took me about one day to get rid of it. Don't ever leave a trail to your room, only bad people will follow a trail of clay. And, they will punish you when they arrive at your door. Find a clay body, learn its properties, and stick with it. You will have to match a glaze to that body, and keep that simple too.

Glaze

I had one glaze, one glaze only. It was a 60/40 mix of Volcanic ash and Gertsley Borate. It fired to cone 4-6. I made the glaze in a 50 gallon plastic garbage drum on wheels. If you mix that glaze to 90/10 you have a great cone 10-11 glaze. Mix it 20/80 and you have a great raku glaze. Two items to mix, add water and a canoe paddle and you have blended glaze. A boy will always be thinking he is in a canoe, and will paddle for an hour. The glaze will never settle. `hey, wally, get away from the glaze bucket.` Tom Sawyer times ten.

I made four colors of glaze, white with zircopax, tan with iron, blue/green with copper and cobalt, and a black. That was that. But, with layers the kids could have hundreds of combinations. Add the thousands of glaze tricks that appear in Ceramic Monthly/Clay Times and PMI every month, year after year, and the combinations are endless. With kids, limit the choices. Keep it simple.

I encouraged kids to dip out an ice cream pail of base glaze and then add any colorants they pleased. Some great glazes came from that bucket. And the secrets were always kept. "Hey Sally, how did you get that great deep blue green glaze?" She had her bucket locked up in her hall locker and she would not tell a soul. Smart Sally.

Nothing was as exciting as watching a non/reader kid, special ed kid, doing simple math and making glaze. Learning ready for sure. Can you imagine the excitement of a kid opening a kiln with his own super secret glaze recipe and it was his? He cannot read, but he could figure it out. And then, help him do the simple record keeping. I kept teaspoons in the room to use as measuring devices for kids that did not do math.

It is easy to teach glaze calculation using cups and spoons. If the recipe calls for 6 parts and 4 parts, it is very simple. They just use any standard container, measure 6 and 4. Then they use a spoon measuring set. Keep a simple record and they have a glaze. They see the melt, they see the color

and they know the glass structure of the glaze. No big time math. In fact it was the way people did glaze 400 years ago. What digital scale?

Contests

Rule number 2, never enter kid pots in contests. My kids were so well prepared that they would win everything. I would tell them: "we don't do contests, we make stuff, and do you want to win a prize against a kid that makes pots out of macaroni? And it would be like playing football against 2nd graders." Enough said. It is all ego crap anyways. Good kids should make and sell their own work. Many had sales in their living rooms and made a few hundred bucks. Mom's loved the home shows, and then everyone wins.

And I did not have to haul those damn pots to some community center, set them up and go haul them back to school with three things broken. Plus you would have to talk to the show director and she would talk about the "modernity of time and space in the universe of children's art". Crap on that. I don't even show my own pots in contests, crap on that too.

Little girls and big pots

When teaching ceramics, boys get very macho. They want to make giant pots, you know, 80 pounds of clay. It becomes a wrestling match with clay water all over. And, of course, they never get a decent pot. My take is always, "big and ugly is really ugly". So, I take a small girl aside, best if she is Asian and tiny. I teach her to stack/and center 3 pound balls of clay on the wheel head, maybe 8 of them, and that makes a 24 pound centered mass of clay. Then she just pulls the clay out and up and has a great big bowl, all leverage and no grunt. So, the next day I say to Twin Twee, why don't you make us a big bowl? All the boys sit in shocked horror as she makes a big bowl, not sweating, using leverage and skill and makes them look like big dopey fools. The lesson is learned. Skill, leverage and a steady use of the wheel, and then slow it all down.

A sick day all day in the studio

It was common for kids to be working on an entire set of dishes. They would get frustrated for time and space in the room. They really needed an entire day to get things done. So, I would have their Mom call the school, give an excuse for a day out of school. No lies, just the kid would not be in

class that day. Mom would bring the kid to the clay room, with his lunch and a soda, and he could stay in the room all day. He had to stay away from the halls and lunch room, and he used the bathroom right next to our clay studio. We did not want him spotted by that crappy math teacher, so he would just hang out, work all day. Now that is commitment to the craft. Lessons learned big time. And the mom is thrilled because mel is a real person and understands her great kid. We all win.

Grandma gift pots

I insisted that a few pots each semester be pulled out and sent to all the Grandmothers of my students. At first the kids did not get it, but after a few pots are given as gifts to Grandmother, and the praise and gifts are returned and the kid looks like the re/birth of Ghandi, the smiles appear. `Holy cow mel, my grandma thinks I am a god or something because I made her a few pots.` I would get calls and letters from Grandma's. Then we all win.

Field trips

I have never taken a group of kids on a field trip. Ick, awful, I hate taking gangs of kids into public places, and god forbid they are in a museum as a gang. But, they all learned about the museums of Minneapolis. They had to go to them, on their own. They had to learn the way, by themselves. It meant they could go for the rest of their lives, because they knew how to get there, and any other museum or art gallery in the world. We broke the mystery of art galleries and museums.

This is how I did it. I assigned them the task of going to both the Institute of Art and the Walker Art center of Minneapolis. They would squak and squeal, and tell me they could not go alone. I just ignored them, and said, `find a way, if you can go see a rock concert in St. Paul, or shop at downtown Macy's you can go to an art gallery`. End of story. It got to the point that my wife and I hated to go the galleries on Saturday's as we always were bumping into my students. "Hi mel, Hi Mrs. Jacobson, nice show huh?"

Lots of kids drive and they would share rides, Mom's would take them and they all seemed to get there. Of course this led to one of my most famous projects. It was called "Quality dating". I would give an extra A to any student that went to any quality event, play, symphony or art experience with a date. It could even be a date with a Mom, Dad, or a Grandparent. It

was based on a quality event in your life. An adult attitude would be required. I would often set up students that did not ever date with another student. It went like this: "Jim, would you please take Jeannie to the Art Institute this Saturday? She just moved here from Des Moines and does not know her way around. You can consider it a quality date. You may want to go to lunch at the Institute as the restaurant is very nice and inexpensive. It will give you time to talk about the art, and get to know each other". This often worked like magic. No threat and the kid was being a good person, and his art teacher assigned it. He really had no choice and she was really, really cute and a nice girl. Then five years later they got married. (True story/the names are accurate.) I assigned hundreds of quality dates over the years. Not one came back to haunt me. Have courage when doing the right thing. Jim's Mom claims it was the best thing that I ever did. She adores Jeannie.

Pit firing

I encouraged kids to take a batch of bisque fired pots home and dig a hole and pit fire them. This became a wonderful adventure for many kids. They would gather a few friends, do a bon-fire and have their pots at the bottom. Often kids would take pots to their cabin or the woods. Do a camp fire, make dogs and hamburgers, and bury the pots in the ashes, often keep the fire going all day. They loved it. Primitive firing, and a total understanding of what the fire did to the clay. But, it is about independence, they did it alone, took charge and learned from doing, that became a permanent memory in their life.

I also encouraged kids to drop pots in lakes and rivers, or bury them in a wooded area. Pots for the future. It was my time to remind them that their pots would last for thousands of years. ` Don't make crappy pots, with your name on them for the future. ` They caught on. It is also fun to make tiles with stories or history written on them and then drop them in a lake for the future. It is a great New Year's eve tradition with friends. Have them write on a tile, fire them and hide them in nature, they may be found 50,000 years from now.

Easy grading.

This is really important, memorize this: You remember the one square yard of the room each kid owns. Well, that is going to be the space for a solo exhibition at the end of the semester. Each child will set up a display of his or her work that I will grade. They may ask Mother and Dad, or Grandma to help them with the display. Black drapes, boxes and lights, whatever they want to do. Fuss like mad, but make it your own solo show. It is up to the kid to make sure it is done. No pots to show, and the grade is either F or incomplete.

When the show is set up we send out invitations to the public, school and parents that the pots can be viewed in the ceramics room. All welcome. We serve coffee, punch and cookies. My darling ladies in the lunch room make homemade, wonderful cookies, `it is for mel and his kids you know.` They do fuss. No one can believe the numbers of folks that would come opening night. It is like the homecoming football game. The school parking lot was full. I just sat in a big chair in my coat and tie and get all puffed up. I do love those kids, and the proud families that "got it". Very few faculty or administrators ever understood what was going on. It was just beyond their scope of what education is/was.

The students were so proud, and they understand fully that their work, their skill and understanding of clay has given them something special. Now that is positive reinforcement. Their own, and they own it.

Among those in modern education the clay studio would be considered a radical system. It was reality, skill, self direction, and self fulfillment without group effort. And the best of all, done with a disciplined effort. That is how a great art/clay studio can be built. They will flock to the program. And for gifted and talented students that we know are going to live the life of art, we just had to give them tools and get out of their way. No mystery, just skill and work.

The A+

If a student is seeking an A+ that in itself would disqualify them. The A+ in my class was reserved for those students that gave of themselves to the studio and the students that used that space. Very few students ever knew they were going to get an A+. I would announce the A+ students the last day of class. The kids loved it, as they seemed to have an idea who would get the reward. I often made a clay cookie, just a simple emblem for them

to take home. We would thank them for their effort and the kids would clap. I do not think there was ever an issue of jealousy. It was honest and fair. It was warm and tender and the kids that were given the honor would blush. As it should be.

I was very blessed in my early years of teaching to be partnered with some very strong, skilled and dedicated teachers of art. We shared a common philosophy of skill based education with an extreme effort placed on teaching those elements of art and craft that would allow students to be independent with their own work. We wanted them to be life-long lovers of art and craft. And if they should carry on in the field, they would be more than equipped to move on to any institution of higher learning and feel that they were prepared with the knowledge and skill necessary to accomplish their goals. They would never feel that they were behind in learning, but the opposite, they would feel they were way ahead of other young students.

I can point to many students that would come back and see me. Stories of being so well prepared that they embarrassed their new teachers. Most of my kids could do simple Japanese hump throwing, measure clay, tap center, make and mix glaze and know the basics of the standard kiln. Most of my students could make in excess of 25 pots in a day. And they understood basic tools of the trade and could trim and turn any basic foot ring. And, without question they were not just wheel throwers, they were "CLAY SMART". They could face any challenge and get it done. I know, radical teaching. It is about loving students, and making them be honest and disciplined. But my greatest pride was knowing that they were prepared and ready to face a real world of challenge.

P.S. When I retired from Public School teaching I looked at the red tool box that I had in the school studio for most of my career. Amazingly, the socket set I bought at Sears in 1966 was still there, along with about 10 other fine tools, all the pieces in place and hundreds of kids had used those sockets, fixed their own cars and bikes, and had taken that box home with them, time and again, and the tools were like new. Why do you suppose that could be? Other teachers lost things every day. Could it have been Trust and Truth? I sure think so.

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Observations by John Post

Yogi Berra said, "You can observe a lot by watching." His statement resonates with me and gets at the essence of why I know teaching kids to work with clay is a valuable endeavor and should be part of every child's school experience.

Here are a couple of observations that illustrate Yogi's point and shine a light on how much inherent value young kids find in working with clay.

During the middle of my teaching career, I took six years off to be a stay-at-home dad. When my son was in kindergarten, I would go into his classroom once a week as a parent helper. His teacher would set up various stations for the kids to rotate through, and then she and the parent helpers would teach the kids in little groups of four at a table. I would always ask the teacher what theme or big ideas the kids were learning about in class that week. Then I would come up with a clay project for the kids to do relating to what they were learning. The kindergarten kids loved coming to my table and working in clay.

One day a grandmother was another one of the parent helpers teaching at a different station in the room. After she watched me working with the kids she pulled me aside to tell me about her first experience with clay. She told me that the only thing she still has today from all of her years in elementary school is a little pinch pot she made when she was in first grade. What I find remarkable about her story is the importance that this grandmother attached to this little object she fashioned in clay some sixty years ago. All of the worksheets, math problems and writing she did as a kid is all gone. The only artifact she valued enough to keep from her time as

an elementary school student is the one thing she made with her own hands. The things and experiences we value as human beings stick with us and we keep them close.

I'm back in the classroom again teaching art at the elementary level to 800 students a week in two different schools. As an art teacher I make it my practice to watch how kids create and I pay close attention to what motivates them. One of the things I observed early in my career is that when kids work in clay, they invest a lot of themselves in the process.

The first thing they ask me when they return the week after they create a clay project is if it has come back from the kiln yet. They keep asking about their project all the way through the process until they get to proudly take it home and share it with their family. Kids don't do this in other areas of the curriculum. They don't come in the day after a math lesson and ask if they can learn more about place value or fractions and ask when they can take their math worksheet home.

An interesting thing to do during the last week of school is to watch kids clean out their backpacks, desks or lockers. They jettison everything. They throw out every math paper, writing assignment and spelling worksheet almost as if they are tossing sandbags out of a sinking hot air balloon to keep it aloft. Interestingly, they don't throw their clay projects out, they've already taken those little jewels home. Like the grandmother in my son's kindergarten class, the kids have too much of themselves invested in the process to just throw it away. It's why parents of the kids I teach have purchased wall shelves or curio cabinets to display their kid's sculptures. You can observe a lot about what people value just by watching what they do.

So why is it that kids value clay work so much? I think the answer has its roots in the fact that for almost all of man's time on the planet, we have been makers of things. When ancient man became a tool maker it was a

huge leap forward in human evolution. Our tools and our brains developed hand in hand in a symbiotic relationship throughout history. Making things is most likely hard wired into our brains. For thousands and thousands of years we have been makers of things. The act of making and creating are what make us human.

In our modern culture, kids are cut off from the process of making things. Most little kids do not get to learn how to cook, sew or use hand tools in the kitchen or the workshop. I once taught a second grade child who did not know what an egg yolk was. A kid who was born 100 years ago would not only know what an egg yolk was, but probably would have collected the eggs from beneath the chickens that morning and then went and milked the cow. When my son was little he sat on the kitchen counter while his mom was baking. He loved cracking the eggs into the bowl and stirring things up, those were his jobs. Sadly in today's world, not all kids get to do this.

There is a disconnect in the modern world when it comes to kids growing up and learning to use their hands and their imagination to learn. Even the games they play are changing. In the past a kid might build things with Legos, blocks or an erector set. (My favorite toys as a kid were a hammer and a bag of nails. I built lots of tree forts in my youth.) Today kids play video games that don't require any hands-on thinking. Then they go to school and today's schools are focused on abstract thinking. Kids learn about numbers, words and ideas but they get little hands-on experience processing the information they are learning about. They read books and fill out worksheets and teachers think they are teaching the kids something. Direct hands-on experience is how kids learn, unfortunately today's school curriculum is focused on abstractions instead of concrete real world learning experiences. I once watched a teacher present a lesson on rocks and geology without showing the kids any real rocks. The lesson was taught by filling in answers on a worksheet. I would love to unplug the Xerox machines at schools across America for a month. If it forced teachers to do more hands-on activities, I guarantee teaching and learning would surge.

Here is an example of abstract thought being valued more than direct hands-on experiences. Every year in my school district, kids in grades 3-12, start the year in science studying units of measurement. The kids learn about the metric system and how to convert metric units to Imperial units and vice versa. What they rarely do is measure any real things using these metric units, or if they do some actual measuring, they only do it one time, on one day. Most kids have no idea how heavy something is that weighs ten grams. They can't visualize which would be more, one liter of water or one gallon. They don't have any idea of how far a 400 meter run would be. This is because while they have solved problems on paper for converting liters to gallons, they haven't had enough hands-on experience with the actual physical materials.

There is an amazing teacher in my building who teaches a unit on volume to her second grade students using water, measuring cups, and empty plastic pint, quart, liter, 2-liter and gallon containers. It's a messy lab with little kids spilling a lot of water on the carpet as they get direct hands-on experience learning what is larger, a pint, quart or liter. They learn how many cups fit into a gallon by actually pouring cups of water into a gallon container until it's full. In short, they gain hands-on experience by doing.

What's really strange is that this is not the norm when it comes to teaching kids in our schools, it's the exception. Most of the time kids don't get to learn by doing, they are expected to learn by listening. They have to sit, be quiet and listen to the teacher for hours at a time. Pop into any school and walk past the classrooms. In 99% of them the teacher is doing all the talking. Then walk past an art room where the kids are making things with their hands. They are the ones talking, sharing ideas, giving each other feedback, and acting as participants in their own learning instead of just sitting there as passive observers. This is why kids love coming to an art class and working in clay. They can take an amorphous mass of clay and through an amazing connection between their brain and their hands, they can give an idea life. Clay is a magical material in the eyes of a kid. It can become anything they choose to make it. It's one of few things in life that

kids get to control from start to finish without some adult butting in and telling them how to do it.

Learning is about taking risks, trying new ideas, and being open to possibilities. In order for your brain to learn it has to be relaxed, engaged and given room to meander and make choices. This is how kids approach play and learning. If you observe how they approach each of these activities you'll probably have a hard time seeing where one activity leaves off and the other one begins. In fact the best learning happens when kids don't even know they are getting a lesson. The best learning happens when they are involved in something fun, engaging and challenging... an activity like making art.

Use authentic materials - set the stage for artistic success

If you want kids to learn by making art, you have to treat them like artists. They need to work with authentic art materials. In my elementary art program we draw, we paint, and we sculpt with clay. We do not make anything with paper towel tubes, toilet paper tubes, Pringle's cans or someone else's recycled trash. We do not make art based on the holidays or seasons. In fact every time I get transferred to a new school, I fill up a dumpster or two with all the garbage left in the cabinets from the previous art teacher. Then I order liquid watercolor paints, tempera paints, a variety of quality paint brushes in different sizes, paper and 2000 pounds of clay, and just like that, I'm ready to teach art.

The materials I use in my elementary art program are the same types of materials that professional artists work with. We just don't create one clay project a year or one painting a year. Art skills don't grow that way. In order to become skilled at anything you have to have repeated exposure to it. Imagine trying to learn how to play the piano by only playing it once a year. That is what elementary art teachers do to kids when they jump from a glitter project to a crayon project to a toilet-paper-tube- Thanksgiving-

napkin-holder project. (Who wants to use a napkin from a tube that was last being touched by someone taking a poop?) These kinds of art teachers think in terms of making cute little things to send home, instead of focusing on how they can teach a kid to think, work and create like an artist.

I once had a second grade student say to a new kid at our school "Here's how we do it in art, first we make a drawing, then we make a painting, then we make a sculpture of what we're learning about. That's how Mr. Post does it." This kid was right on the money. By using the same materials over and over again, my students gain skills and confidence. What changes from lesson to lesson is the idea and the content of what we are learning. Think of all the ideas and emotions that have been expressed in paint and clay through the ages. The materials didn't change all that much, but the way artists approached them sure did.

I don't have any students who are afraid to draw, or paint or sculpt because I teach them age appropriate skills in all of these areas. With kindergarten and first grade students I teach them how to look at an image and find the big shapes in it first. Then I teach them how to draw these big shapes on their paper. I tell them a true story about a high school student who put a painting of a toucan bird in our district art show. This high school kid started by painting the bird's eye, the smallest part and then the head. When he went to paint the beak, most of it wouldn't fit on the canvas. Imagine that, the most interesting part of a toucan is its brightly colored beak, and this high school kid wasn't taught how to layout the big shapes first so his image would all fit on the canvas.

When I teach kids to work in clay, I repeat this same process by having them identify the large forms of what they are trying to create. I ask them questions like... Is it made of spheres, cones, cubes or egg forms? Which form is the largest? Which form should they make first? I start teaching young kids to work like artists by teaching them how to see the basic shapes in drawings and paintings, and the basic forms in sculptures. I teach them to see the relationship between two dimensional shapes and three dimensional forms. I point out that shapes are flat, and forms are fat.

This serves as the starting point for all of the drawings, paintings and sculptures they will make in the seven years I teach them. They start with the big parts and add details near the end of the process. We even call the last day of working on something "detail day".

I live near the General Motors Tech Center in Warren, Michigan. This is where they design GM's cars. A friend of mine was in charge of a design studio there for years. His son is now a clay modeler there, and yes, they still model cars in clay today. Even with all of today's technology and computerized machines that can sculpt full size cars from foam, there is still the need to model cars in clay so the designers can visualize what it would look like if they rounded off a corner another 1/32 of an inch or if they changed the profile of a fender just a smidge. At some point in the design process cars have to be seen in three dimensions and the medium of choice is clay. Ideas for cars start out as drawings, then get mocked up by machines in foam and then before they begin production, clay model mock-ups of the car are created. The creative process for designing cars begins with two-dimensional drawings and ends up with full size three-dimensional clay models. Since the process of starting with drawings and then working in clay is how today's cars are designed, it just makes sense to teach kids how to think and create this way too.

My Job is to say Yes all day

All of the lessons I teach have goals. I tell the kids the goals up front, I even write them out on the dry erase board at the front of the room. They know what the goals are before they start. I then demonstrate how to meet the goals. Then I tell the kids that if they have met the goals of the lesson, they are free to embellish it, add details and their own personality to it.

I was teaching a lesson about clay portrait busts to 5th grade students. I showed them a PowerPoint presentation of Robert Arneson's busts along with busts from Egyptians, Greeks, Romans as well as many

other contemporary artists. The goals that I gave the kids for this lesson were that they had to create a self-portrait bust. It had to have an egg-shaped head. They needed to place the eyes in the center of the egg form and not near the top of the head like you see in cartoons. They had to make it look like them to the best of their ability. Then I told kids that they should bring their personality to the assignment.

Girls started using garlic presses as extruders and made braided hair or added bows to their hairstyles. Boys started adding baseball caps to their heads and logos on their t-shirts. When they would come up and ask me "Can I make my tongue sticking out?" I would answer, "Have you met the rest of the assignment's requirements?" If they answered 'yes', then I would say "yes".

You see, my job is to say yes all day to creativity. My overall goal for the assignment was to get them to think about how artists model clay busts and to understand how they use proportions and forms. Then when kids come up and ask me if they can do this or that, of course I can say yes and they leave feeling empowered. They are working like artists, coming up with their own ideas.

I had a boy in a 5th grade class who was using a pencil to make the negative space for the mouth opening in his clay bust. He accidentally pushed the pencil all the way through the head creating a little tunnel. He then made a really long tongue that was shaped like a canoe oar. He could wiggle the handle at the back of the head and the tongue would wiggle in the front of the mouth. He started sticking his little bust's tongue out at all his buddies in the room who would then giggle hysterically. He thought I wasn't going to allow him to have his bust fired with this crazy wiggly tongue. I told him that his idea was brilliant and even went and got some red under glaze for him to use on the tongue. The idea caught on across the room and soon half the class was making busts with wiggly tongues.

Sometimes kid ideas just spread across the art room like a wildfire. I have seen boys make hippos that magically sprout wings and just recently fire breathing dragons eating ice cream cones (what a funny juxtaposition). Just like in the clay bust lesson, the kids met all of the requirements for their respective projects and were just engaged in the flow of the lesson when they came up with some really fun creative embellishments. My job and my days are much richer when I say yes to the kids' creative ideas all day.

Of course this might lead you to think that you could just give the kids some clay and let them create, and that you would end up with a bunch of wonderful things to fire in the kiln. Whenever I have tried this, I have ended up with just a few interesting things from a class of 30 kids. This is because creativity in the art room happens in relationship to some boundaries.

The reason I have goals for each lesson is so that I can teach some skills to the kids or get them to look at some art and gain an understanding of the purpose, choices and decisions an artist made while creating it. I like to think of my lesson goals as scaffolding. The scaffolding gives the kids enough structure for them to learn something new while at the same time allowing to them to build and create understanding for themselves. I don't expect an 11-year-old 5th grade student to be able to create a perfectly proportioned clay bust. What I want kids to learn in a lesson like that is that artists have been creating portraits for thousands of years. Artists use observation and analysis to capture a likeness of the sitter and that portrait busts can have a personality. These are clearly age appropriate goals for an 11-year-old kid creating a bust in clay. At the end of the lesson, the kids really have a new found appreciation for just how challenging it is to create a likeness. They also have a self-portrait that they created as an 11-year-old that they will keep for a lifetime,

If you are excited, they are interested

I have had other art teachers tell me that they can't do clay projects with their students because the kids don't behave and follow directions during simple drawing assignments. These teachers posit that because the kids misbehave during a drawing assignment, that a clay assignment will be totally out of control. They have it exactly backwards. The reason many kids misbehave is because they are bored. If a teacher presents a boring lesson, the kids will choose to find something more interesting to do like fooling around with their friends. If you as the teacher create great lessons that you are excited about teaching, this enthusiasm is contagious and the kids catch it.

Classroom control is easiest to maintain when the kids are engaged in work that is meaningful and challenging to them and that they perceive as fun. The learning sneaks in the side door.

The kids you teach in an elementary art program don't know about the history of the world yet. It's your job to teach it to them. In the art program, we have an advantage. Art is the history of the world told through pictures, objects and stories. Kids learn best by seeing and doing. In the general classroom kids have to read about history. In art, they get to learn about history by seeing images, analyzing them, discussing the artists' or cultures' motives and then creating their own art about it. The best thing I remember about my elementary school years was the coat of arms shield I made while learning about the middle ages. Thirty-five years later, I can still picture the griffin I emblazoned it with in my head. Creating images is a powerful form of communication, and a great method of teaching and learning and that's why it has been used by all cultures all over the world,

Kids love big ideas. They love to learn. Just don't talk to the kids for hours on end about what you are teaching. The classes I teach are only 47 minutes in length. I teach 32 classes a week. My rule of thumb is to get the information out to them in about 10 minutes. I can't teach the kids every single thing they need to know about clay in a single lesson. What I do instead is think of the big picture. I plan on having a kid over the course of seven years. I don't have to teach him or her everything at once. I

dispense information to the kids in small bite-size chunks. If my presentation takes 10 minutes and clean up takes 5 minutes, then this gives the kids 32 minutes of working time.

You can easily teach big ideas if you break them into small chunks. Besides, our brains learn better when we learn things in chunks. That's why phone numbers and social security numbers have dashes in them. It's so our brains can remember the numbers in small discrete chunks. Use the brain's natural affinity for chunking to your advantage in the art room. Give the kids a small chunk of information in the 10 minutes of presentation time and then let them start to process what you have taught them by working with the art materials. Then if it's a big idea and you have more to tell them, do it in small steps throughout the class time or save it for next week's 10 minute presentation.

If you have ever asked a child "What did you do at school today?" The reply given most often is "nothing." I used to think this was because kids didn't want to talk about their school day when they got home. I now believe that is how kids really see their school day, they are in fact giving an accurate report of the day. This is because of the word "do" in that question. Kids are wired up to want to do things, but in school they sit all day and listen to the teacher talk, and to a kid, this is not doing. If you ask an elementary school kid what day it is, they are likely to reply gym day, music day or art day. To them these are the important classes. These are the places where they get to go do something. The rest of the day is the boring part. If you let kids design the schedule for the school day, you can bet that the time they allotted for art, gym and music would be a lot more than the grown-ups give them now. This is because they want to learn, they want to be engaged, they want to collaborate and interact with their peers but unfortunately schools don't really take advantage of the way kids learn. Schools call these classes "specials" as if learning something by actually doing it is a special treat instead of the way schools should teach every subject. The brain learns best in situations that are interesting, novel and fun. Make your art room an interesting, novel and exciting place to learn. Make your art room a place where you can say yes to creativity all day.

Teach Little Kids with Big Ideas

Human beings have been making art for thousands of years. The best place to research ideas to teach elementary art students is to look at what various artists and cultures have made through the millennia. Don't make art inspired by the holidays or by the seasons of the year. The kids get stuck making enough of that garbage in their regular classroom. Do research into things that interest you and then turn this research into lessons.

I was doing some research into Majolica pottery and glazes. I learned about how it spread along with Islam across Northern Africa. I learned how to formulate Majolica glazes using modern materials. I learned about how Islamic mosques are decorated with complex colorful tiles. I brought all of these ideas into my art room. I teach in a multicultural school and my students who follow Islam were impressed that I was discussing the decorative qualities of their mosques in art class. I have many clay lessons from kindergarten through sixth grade where the kids use the Majolica glazing process as part of the lesson. This all started when I personally became interested in the idea of Majolica glazes and started to research its history and process for myself.

The places that I frequently mine for inspiration for elementary art lessons are art history, artists, cultures, animals, and children's literature. If you don't have a broad understanding of art history and artists, then you better jump into learning about that first as that is the most fertile vein for ideas.

Little kids do not think in abstractions. They want to make things that look real. They already have anointed who they think the best artists are in the room based on who can draw the most realistically. The absolute worst kinds of kid art happen when adults try to have young kids create some kind

of abstract work. Kids could care less about coloring in some wiggly lines or shapes that the art teacher has told them is an abstract painting. The kids call these types of art works 'designs' and most of them throw them out right when they get back to their homeroom. They would much prefer to learn how to draw something recognizable. I know this, because if I teach the kids how to draw an animal as part of a lesson, the next week they bring me more drawings of those kinds of animals that they made at home.

Kids have a natural affinity and connection with all things in nature. They are the ones who go outside and turn over rocks during recess to look at worms. I teach a second grade lesson that is all about the idea of contrast and how artists use contrast to make one part of an art work stand out from another part. The inspiration for this lesson is the skunk. We create high contrast skunk paintings in class, we make sculptures of clay skunks and then decorate them using Majolica glazes. I wax the bottom of the terra cotta skunks the kids make. They dip them into the white Majolica base glaze and then I apply a hot wax resist line down the back of the skunk's body and tail. The kids then go to their tables and paint black glaze over the top of their skunks. You can hear them oooh and ahhhhh when they see how the wax resist creates the white stripe down the back of the skunk as they are painting on the glaze. A kid who is only in second grade then gets a first hand lesson in how hot wax resist works on a sculpture.

I teach a sixth grade lesson about archaeology and Egyptian Mummies. The kids create a clay mummy sarcophagus. It's around 9 inches from head to toe and is about two inches tall. It's a slab constructed piece with a hollow inside. When the kids are done creating them over the course of a couple of weeks, they set them out on the counter. I let them turn leather hard and then I cut an opening that becomes a cork at the base of the mummy. The kids think the important part of this lesson is the creation of the clay mummy. I like this lesson because it teaches the kids what an artifact is. I have them write a poem about themselves, answer a couple of surveys, exchange a letter with a best friend, make a drawing and get a letter from a parent. These all get rolled up into a scroll at the end of the lesson and they are placed in the mummy. Then I seal the cork into the bottom of their mummy with window caulk. What they have just created is

a time capsule about what they were like in sixth grade. At some point in lesson we talk about Howard Carter and how he discovered King Tut's tomb. Naturally there is a discussion about all of the artifacts that were found in the tomb, and how archaeologists and scientists learn about what life was like in the past by the art and objects that they find. This is the only lesson that I have to teach every year. If I didn't, the sixth grade kids would be upset. They look forward to making the mummies just like their older siblings did. This lesson has almost become like a rite of passage in my art program. I design new lessons and come up with new ways to teach things all the time, but the mummy lesson is a standard that all the kids look forward to.

The Elements and Principles of Design are not deep enough to use as subject matter in an elementary art program. Realistic subject matter should be the driver of the elementary art curriculum.

I have never had a kid paint a color wheel. I wonder how many thousands of gallons of paint have been wasted on this assignment over the last 75 years. I can teach a first grade kid a lot about color, have them laughing at the same time, and without boring them to tears as they paint little circles of color.

I made my own color wheel using the tempera paints we have at my school. It has six colors on it. Red is at the top. Then going clockwise it reads orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. I put red at the top because it corresponds with what they learn in the science curriculum about color and how the wavelengths are arranged in the ROY-G-BV order.

I tell the kids a story about how you can choose any color on the color wheel and find its best friends in an instant by looking at the colors next to it. I pretend that I am yellow and I act out putting one arm around orange and telling orange that she is my BFF (Best Friend Forever). Then I put my other arm out and give green an imaginary embrace and tell green that he is

my best pal too. I tell the kids that if they mix yellow and orange together, or yellow and green together in different amounts, that they will always end up with a fantastic color because those colors are friends.

Then I tell the kids that yellow has one color that it does not get along with. Whenever they get together they have a terrible time. Then I proceed to mix yellow and violet together and the kids all say "Eeeewwwww, what a gross brown color!" Then I ask the kids to look at the color wheel and explain to me where violet is in relationship to yellow. They point out that it is directly across from it.

Then I ask them to tell me the best friends of other colors on the color wheel. After we find each color's best friends, I ask them to tell me which colors are across from each other and would mix together to make brown.

They visually get it, a first grade kid can figure out how to read a color wheel. They know which colors to mix to make vibrant rich colors, and which colors when mixed together will make dull muddy colors. There is a lot of drama and acting when we talk about how the colors are best friends or how they don't get along. I just make it up as I go along. Kids like to play and laugh, so it's important to capitalize on this when you teach them. The next week when you ask them about the color wheel, they will speak in terms of friendships or call complementary colors enemies because these are concepts that make sense to them.

We never paint a single color wheel and yet the kids learn a lot about color from the friends analogy. I have them make a painting that has realistic subject matter that first day and at the same time it teaches them how artists work with color relationships. The element of color does not need a separate lesson, it is incorporated into a lesson that has subject matter. A kid can go home and say, I drew and painted a bunny, a winter landscape, a self-portrait etc. and the lesson about color sneaks in through a story.

I am disappointed when I see student art and it looks like the teacher stripped all the life out of something to just teach one element or principle of design. Good art is complex, when teachers dumb down art to focus on one element or principle they don't respect that kids can grasp complicated visual ideas if you let them grapple with them.

A great lesson in seeing is to just select two famous art works and ask young kids to compare and contrast them. I define compare for the kids as "finding things that are alike or similar in both". I define contrast for them as "finding things that are different or opposite". One year I had the kids look at Faith Ringgold's Tar Beach painting and compare and contrast it with Georges-Pierre Seurat's A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte. Both paintings feature people participating in recreational outdoor activities, but the subject matter and how it is represented in each painting is vastly different. What happens is that the kids make so many interesting observations about each painting that they are willing to discuss them for an entire class period and they enjoy the process. Kids are smarter and more visually aware than many adults give them credit for. Of course you can't find this out if you are having them make color wheels or just creating non-objective art works based on the elements and principles of design. You have to give them big ideas to think about, big ideas to hold their interest and big ideas to captivate their imagination.

Little Kids are People Too

One of my favorite parts of the school day is when the kids are coming into the building in the morning. They get about 10 minutes to take off their coats, hang up their backpacks, find their lunch money and homework before they have to go into class. This is one of the times when they are the most alive, like real people. They come in and start talking to each other about what they did last night, or something that some other kid said to them. They act like any group of grown-ups gearing up for their day. I love to just drop by and chat with them during this time or tell them little jokes in

the hallway. But not everyone sees kids as people. Some teachers start badgering the kids to hurry up, get in line, be quiet, put your books away, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Right from the start, these teachers lose the kids. Who wants to come into their job and get yelled at right away?

One of the things kids like to do is laugh. If you can make what you are teaching humorous, you do two things. First you help to put each kid's brain at ease. In order to learn a brain has to be relaxed. The brain does not learn well under stress. Second, the brain loves novelty and funny things are memorable. When I teach my students about novelty and how the brain craves it, I tell them that I drive past many squirrels on my way to school. I see them so often, that I almost stop seeing them because they are so common. Then I tell them to imagine what would happen if I saw a bright blue squirrel on my way to work. I would be telling everyone I saw that day about it. I would tell other teachers, my students and my family, "Hey, I saw a bright blue squirrel today."

I apply this bright blue squirrel principle to some of the things I teach the kids in art class. I sing a song about contrast in a deep opera voice with them. It goes like this...

Contrast means OPPOSITE, OPPOSITE,

Like BLACK AND WHITE,

Like DAY AND NIGHT,

Contrast means OPPOSITE, OPPOSITE,

figaro, figaro.

They all crack up when they sing this with me, but the next week when I ask them if anyone can tell me what the word contrast means, the first word that pops into their head is opposite. The silly opera song has helped to make the information novel, and novelty sticks in the brain.

I have a little poem for joining clay...

Scoring is boring,
but I make lots of lines,

Slipping is dipping,
I like it just fine,

Smoothing is soothing,
it relaxes my mind.

I tell the kids that if they do all of these steps when they join something in clay, that their mind can be relaxed when they turn it in to be fired because the parts won't fall off.

It seems as though the sillier I make the information the more the kids remember it. If I was to try and teach little kids how to join clay or learn what contrast means in a dull monotone voice, I guarantee you, none of them would remember it a week later.

Humor makes kids feel safe. Every now and then on the first day of kindergarten, I would have a kid who was a crier. The first week of school can be overwhelming when you are 5-ish. Then I got the idea to use a puppet to introduce how to do things in the art room. I do a pretty good Grover from Sesame Street voice, so I purchased a Grover puppet. I have Grover teach the kids how to throw away a paper towel (he eats it), I have him show them how to use a tissue to blow his nose (he eats that too). Whenever Grover does something wrong, I have a kid volunteer to come up

and show Grover how to do it the right way. When he takes a bath in the sink to wash all of his hair, a kid comes up and shows him the right way to wash just his hands in art class. At the end of the first day I have made 25 or so new kindergarten friends through humor and I haven't had one crier since Grover appeared on the scene. If I disappeared and Grover could teach the class, I'm pretty sure they wouldn't miss me.

When I pass out clay supplies to kindergarten and first grade kids, I tell them that getting clay is like going through the lunch line in the cafeteria. First they get their tray (a brown piece of canvas to work on), then they get their silverware (a paperclip held onto a popsicle stick with electrical tape for scoring), and then they get their meatloaf (the clay). What's so funny about kindergarten kids is that as they come through the lunch line, when I give them the meatloaf, I say, "Enjoy your lunchie!" or "Enjoy your meatloaf!". Now you would think after I said this a few times the joke would wear off. Not with these little guys, I say this same joke to each kid as they come through the line, and they all laugh like it is the first time they ever heard it. On top of that, I can use it week after week and they still think it's funny. If I don't say it, they ask "Aren't you going to say enjoy your lunchie?"

When I have them gather around me for a demonstration, I always dismiss them by saying "OK, go back to your seaties." Somehow every year, every new group of kids always seems to blurt back "seaties?" whenever I say it. They continue to do this year after year. If I just say, "Go back to your seats." Even fifth and sixth grade kids will say, "Don't you mean seaties?"

Humor is also great at diffusing tattling. If a kid comes up to my desk and says, "Joey said the "S" word, I say, "He said spaghetti?" Then the kid says, "No the real "S" word!" and I reply, "Sausage?" I just keep making up humorous "S" words at my desk until the tattler starts laughing and then I send him or her back to their seat. If a kid comes up to my desk to tell me about some small trivial thing another kid said or did, I answer with "I'll tell my mom." They start to walk away and then they come back and ask, "Why

are you going to tell your mom, shouldn't you tell his mom?" To which I reply, "My mom is really strict, he'll get in much more trouble if I call my mom. Do you want me to use the phone in the classroom? I can call her right now and let you talk to her." I just diffuse angry or whiny kids with humor because I would rather laugh with the kids than yell at them. After I diffuse the situation with humor, I say to the kid causing the problem "Now knock it off Nick, or I will call my mom." Then Nick laughs too and we all get back to making art.

Novelty, play and humor are powerful tools. If it's different and unusual kids will remember it. Take advantage of these features of how the brain works to create an environment in your art room, where the kids can laugh, they know they are safe and they understand that you like them and will treat them with kindness.

There is sometimes a kid who will test the limits of the rules in the art room. I have a small bench in the hallway right outside my classroom. I just tell the kid who is disruptive or disrespectful to go sit on the bench. The worst thing that can happen to a kid on a clay day is to not be able to participate in class that day. I often send students out there for just a few minutes so I can finish teaching. Then I go and have a small conversation with the student. If this student apologizes and is willing to change their behavior for the rest of that class period, they are invited back into art. If their attitude is disrespectful, surly or if they don't admit to what they were doing to disrupt the teaching and learning in the art room, then they stay out on the bench. The consequence of not behaving in art, is that you don't get to be in art. It's simple and the kids figure it out quickly.

Kids like to talk, take advantage of this

In a classroom, most often the person doing the talking and teaching is thinking at a higher level than the person who is doing the listening. When you have to talk to someone else about your opinion or teach them how to

do something, your brain shifts into a higher gear. Art critiques are a way for you to get your student's brains to make that shift.

I recently discussed with my 4th - 6th grade students what a critique is. I had them come up to the dry erase board, choose any art work made by another student and critique it by discussing these three questions...

What is working in the art work?

What is not working in the art work?

What advice would you give this artist to improve it?

The kids were most often dead on in their critiques, saying just what I as the teacher was thinking in my head. They gave each other great feedback.

This meant letting the kids talk for an entire class. I was thinking that the kids might not be able to sit still for a critique of everyone's work (they are just 8-12 year-olds) yet one kid at the end of one of my classes said "This was really fun." To keep the entire class engaged during the critique, I let the kid giving the critique call on three students when he or she is done to make additional comments about the art work being critiqued.

The most frequently asked question I get asked when a kid completes an art assignment is "Is this good?" During our critiques I tell them that when they ask me that question, they are asking me to make a value judgment about their art work. Do I like it or not? I tell them that I prefer to answer them using the three questions above so that they get useful feedback that they can use as information. Of course schools set kids up for the question "Is this good?" by telling them how to do everything. How to write their name on a paper, how to fill out the worksheet the right way, what is good ditto coloring etc. Then when they grow up, we want them to be creative and think on their own to solve problems. If you want kids to analyze art and become critical thinkers, you have to plan times for this to happen and build them into the lessons you teach.

Nuts and Bolts - Keeping things organized

In order for your art program to be a success, your students have to be successful in your art room. They are the ambassadors of your program. If they go home and tell their parents how much fun they had in art that day and what they learned, your program will be valued by the kids you teach and their parents.

I have taught in ten different buildings and in four different school districts and only one time did I find a kiln in good working order when I got there. Every other building had an old, broken down kiln and no clay. One of the first lessons I teach to all the grade levels as the new art teacher is a clay lesson. I want the kids on my side, I want them to feel the magic of creating with their hands. I would bring clay in from my home studio. Then I would take their projects to my studio and fire them in my kiln. While this was going on, I would order repair parts with my own money to get the old junker kilns back in shape, and start looking for sources of funding to get a larger more modern kiln to work with.

At one building that I taught at, I was told there was no money in the budget for a kiln. A mom who had some artistic daughters at the building heard how long it took to get work through our tiny old kiln and she called the school board office. She was very active in the parent volunteer group and she told the school administration that if they didn't get Mr. Post a new kiln, the parent group would. The administration didn't want it to appear as though they were unwilling to support the basic needs of the the school. The next day the principal told me that I could order a new kiln. The kids and the parents were the movers and shakers in this because they were the school's clients. Because I was just the employee, I could have asked until I was blue in the face for one and never got it, but because the parents and kids in the school community saw value in what was happening in my art program, the administration supported it.

If you are going to teach hundreds of kids a week to make authentic art in an elementary art program, you have to be organized. If you are a right-brain, loosely disorganized person in your home or studio life, this will be your biggest challenge if you want to make real art with kids. Many art teachers dumb down the projects they make in class because they are not organized enough to structure their classroom so that hundreds of kids can make paintings and work in clay each week.

In my art room every kid cleans every day. Table captains is a bad idea. One kid cleaning up after four does not work. I have two big white cardboard cake circles held onto my dry erase board with magnets. One is for paint day, the other is for clay day. The kids look at these to know what job they have if we are painting or working in clay. They are divided into four sections. Each section has a picture I drew of the clean up job the kid has to do that day. Each of the four sections corresponds to a number I painted on the art room tables. If you are number one and you see a picture of the water bowl next to number one, filling it and emptying it is your job that day. If you are number two and see a picture of hands using paper towel and a spray bottle to clean the table, that is your job that day. Other jobs include getting and putting away drawing materials, taking care of paints, picking items up off the floor, or rounding up clay tools. The kids look at these circles at the beginning and end of art to know what they are responsible for. I spin the job chart one quarter turn each Monday morning, so every kid gets the opportunity to do every job over a month's time. Using this method, everyone cleans and not just 8 kids out of a class of 32. Pictures work better than words to inform kids of what their clean up jobs are. The first time each class comes to art I MODEL, not tell them how to do each job. I SHOW THEM what it looks like when the job is done right and what it looks like when the job is done the wrong way. Then I have kids come up and model how to do the jobs. If you don't model the jobs and instead just tell the kids what to do, they will never do them the right way. Kids are visual, use that to your advantage, teach by modeling what you want them to do at different times in the art room.

I use music to signal when it is time to clean up. I choose a different clean up song each year. When the kids hear the clean up song come on they know they have to stop working and clean up. This year's song is "You dropped a Bomb on Me" by the Gap Band. In the past I have used "Working at the Carwash" by Rose Royce, "Bang the Drum All Day" by Todd Rundgren, "Working in a Coal Mine" by Devo and a variety of other songs that are upbeat and get the kids moving. When the music comes on, the work stops and the cleaning begins.

In an elementary program it is a terrible idea to have a large garbage can filled with water and scrap clay to recycle. You will never have time to get to it. The best thing to do when you open a bag of clay to pass it out to the kids, is to have a separate empty bag to collect the clay they don't need on their project that day. The clay will be out in the air all during class and many of the inexperienced kids will over work the clay drying it out. When they return the clay to the empty bag, have a spray bottle filled with water and just blast it as the kids return it. Then close the bag and let it sit overnight. Use that bag of clay first the next time you need clay. In this way you don't let a large pile of clay accumulate that is either too wet or too dry to use.

There are some great slab cutters available for cutting slabs quickly in the classroom. They have a horizontal bar that you can adjust to cut slabs of varying thickness from a pug of clay. With one of these, you can cut clay slabs for your class as quickly as they can pick up their supplies when they come through the line. Passing out slabs and tools to an entire class can take less than 5 minutes if you use one of these tools.

Clays

I use two types of clays with my students. I use a mid-range stoneware clay that is whitish and is designed to be fired to cone 6 or approximately 2200 degrees Fahrenheit. The other clay body I use is a terra cotta body with

grog that I fire to cone 1 or approximately 2100 degrees Fahrenheit. (Please note that these are not the temperatures that most commercial glazes you can purchase in pint jars are fired to. Most of those glazes are fired to cone 06 which is approximately 1800 degrees Fahrenheit.)

In my opinion the absolute worst clay to use with kids in any school is a low-fire white cone 06 clay. This clay matures at approximately 1800 degrees Fahrenheit. There is a big difference between a cone 06 clay body and a cone 6 clay body. That's because there is a 400 degree difference in the temperatures at which they mature. I understand the rationale for a low-fire body, it is bright white and therefore supposed to work well with under glazes and low fire glazes. There are several problems with low-fire cone 06 clays in my opinion. The first is that this clay is made of half ball clay and half talc. Talc is a flux, it makes things melt. Talc is not very plastic. Since half of a low-fire clay body is not plastic, it is not very forgiving when it comes to working with it and drying it for the kiln. The other half of a low-fire clay body is ball clay and this has a high rate of shrinkage which when combined with the talc leads to cracks forming while the clay is drying.

On the other hand, many stoneware clays contain over 70% clay. This makes them much easier to work with because they are more plastic. Since they often contain several different types of clays, the variety of different particle sizes in the clays make a stoneware body much more forgiving when it comes to forming and drying.

The biggest problem that low-fire white clays have is that if the kiln over-fires, these clays can turn into a puddle. If my kiln over-fires and it is full of stoneware clay and glazes, the glazes might run off the pot, but the pots themselves won't melt down into liquid on the kiln shelves. I have seen kilns loaded with low-fire white clay and glazes over-fire and in many cases the kiln was ruined. The glazes melted, then the clay body melted and they both dripped off the sides of the shelf eating a couple of inches deep into the floor of the kiln. That's why I don't recommend or use low-fire white clay bodies in my elementary art classroom.

When it comes to glazing the two clay bodies in my classroom there are two approaches I use. For the whitish stoneware clay, I mix my own cone 6 glazes in five gallon buckets and have the kids dip their projects into these glazes. I usually have about six different colors in my classroom at one time, though I usually only have two or three out as choices when we glaze. I have a table with a frying pan on it that has a bar of paraffin wax melted in it. I put the buckets on the floor in front of this table. While my students are working on a painting or drawing assignment, I call them up one at a time to glaze their sculptures. I read their name off the bottom of it, dip it into the hot wax, and then help them to get a comfortable grip on it with one of the 10 pairs of dipping tongs I have in the art room. With 10 pairs of tongs, I can keep calling up kids, have them dip their work in the glaze, carry it to the counter and then return the tongs.

Kids don't need a rainbow of glaze colors to choose from every time they work in clay. As long as my students have a choice, they are fine with it. That choice can be as simple as blue or green. White or brown. As long as they get to choose it works out just great. I always put out test tiles or past projects glazed with the colors, so the kids can get an idea of what the fired work will look like. If you ever have a glaze that you want to use up, just label the bucket "mystery glaze", and then tell your class that only the brave kids are allowed to use it. Whenever a kid gets ready to dip their sculpture into it, tell them that you're not sure if they are the kind of kid who is brave enough for that glaze. Naturally every kid will then just have to use that glaze.

I explain to the kids that glazes are rocks that melt to form a glass surface on top of their clay. I ask them if they would go out on the playground and eat rocks. Then I ask them what would happen if they did go out and eat rocks. Some kid always answers, "You'd get sick!" I tell them the same thing is true for the glazes in the art room, so while it's OK if a little gets on your hand while you are glazing, you should go to the sink and wash your hands when you are done so you don't eat accidentally eat

any rocks with your food at lunch. My students understand that when you are done glazing, you wash your hands.

Because I make all of my own glazes, I know what is in them, and I don't work with any materials that might be hazardous to kids. I also let kids know that our bodies do need some rocks to stay healthy. These rocks are called minerals. You get these minerals in your body by eating healthy foods. The plants you eat suck up minerals from the ground, and our bodies need these minerals to stay strong and healthy. That's why if they read the side of their cereal box or the back of their vitamin bottle they will see that there are minerals listed on it. These same minerals are in glazes. The only difference is that in the food we eat and the vitamins we take, the amounts are way smaller than you would get if you happened to go outside and eat rocks.

I do use some commercial low-fire glazes in pint jars in my art room, but I have found a way to make them go much farther. I have the kids work with terra cotta clay that I bisque fire to cone 04 which equals 1922 degrees Fahrenheit on my computer controlled kiln. Then I wax the bottoms of their sculptures and they dip it into a cone 1 white majolica glaze. It only costs me around thirty dollars to make a 5 gallon bucket of this glaze. Then I have the kids go to various tables around the art room where I have a variety of low-fire glazes poured in bowls. The kids then choose the colors they want and paint them over the white base glaze. I then fire their sculptures to cone 1. The commercial low-fire glazes are designed to be fired at 1800 degrees Fahrenheit, but they don't run at all when I use them over my white majolica glaze and fire it to cone 1, which as you may recall is approximately 2100 degree Fahrenheit.

There are two advantages to using this Majolica glazing technique with kids. The first is that the entire surface of the sculpture is glazed and doesn't have any bare spots. Kids tend to leave bare spots if they are only painting on commercial glazes. Dipping into the white majolica base glaze automatically covers the entire surface. The other advantage is that many commercial low-fire glazes require 2-3 coats of glaze in order to become

opaque and glossy. Two coats aren't necessary when kids paint low-fire glazes over the top of my Majolica base glaze. The places where the commercial glazes go on thin look like watercolors. Where the kids paint them on thicker, they are more opaque. It's a win-win. No bare spots, beautiful painterly colors and you end up using a lot less expensive commercial glaze because the kids aren't painting on two or three coats.

A third method for finishing clay work that I use is paint. I first bisque fire the kids' work to cone 04. Then I have them paint it using tempera paint. They set their sculptures on the counter on to dry. Then once they are dry, I brush pearlescent acrylic medium over the top of them. I mix this quite liberally with water. I squirt a blob of it into a plastic bowl, then I just add some water from the tap to it. The pearlescent medium is quite shiny. Since it is full of plastic, it helps to seal in the tempera paint. It also gives a multi-colored kid art work unity because it dries to a shiny, glittery-like surface. And there isn't a kid on the planet who doesn't like shiny.

My students then end up with three types of finishes to their sculptures. Subtle, rich cone 6 glazes on stoneware clay. Colorful commercial low-fire glazes over a majolica base glaze on terra cotta clay. And lastly colorful painted surfaces with a shiny metallic sheen also on terra cotta.

Firing your kiln

The school day is usually between 7-8 hours long. That's too short for a kiln to complete its firing cycle. I don't rely on a cone sitter, computer controller or a custodian to shut off my kiln. What I do instead is to begin the firing when I leave the day before, but set things up so that the kiln is firing at a low to medium temperature overnight. Then the next morning when I arrive I can keep an eye on it while I fire it to its final temperature. Here's how I do that. On the kiln that I have that has 6 switches that go

from off to on, I know that the kiln cannot reach its top temperature if only half of the switches are set to on. So in the afternoon, I begin firing the kiln, turning one switch up an hour until 3 of them are set to on. Then the next morning when I come in, the kiln is half way through its firing and I can turn the rest of the 3 switches to on. In this way, I can keep an eye on it to make sure the cone sitter drops and the kiln shuts off. I also have a kiln that I fire that has two knobs that you can set to low, medium or high. To fire this kiln, I start them both on low after lunch, then I turn them up to medium in the afternoon. I fire it overnight on medium, knowing that the kiln will not be able to reach its final temperature while the switches are set to medium. Then the next morning when I arrive, I turn the switches to high and the kiln is done firing rather quickly while I am there to attend to it.

Of course the best kiln to have if you are an art teacher is one that is computer controlled. Then what you can do is set a delay time into your program and have the kiln turn on in the middle of the night. That's my preferred method of firing. I don't like to have my kilns reaching their top temperature when I am not there. This is when bad things can happen like a cone sitter not dropping or a relay on a computer controlled kiln not turning off. So if you plan ahead, you can fire your kilns so that when they are the hottest, you are there to attend to them and can shut them off manually if you need to.

Something that I find in many school kilns is exploded shards of bisque all over the kiln floor. Some elementary teachers will tell their students that their clay project must have had an air bubble in it that caused it to explode in the kiln. The real culprit in bisque firing mishaps is steam. At 212 degrees Fahrenheit, water turns to steam. Clay that is bone dry still has water trapped in it. If a kiln is fired too quickly at the beginning of a firing, then the clay objects inside will explode. The water that is trapped in the clay needs to escape slowly, if the temperature goes up too quickly, this water turns into steam. Steam is an incredibly powerful force. The steam engine changed the world. Steam engines pulled massively heavy trains. The power of water turning to steam is easily enough to cause clay sculptures to blow apart.

There is an easy work around to the steam problem. Since steam forms at 212 degrees Fahrenheit, I program my computer controlled kiln with a hold at 185 degrees Fahrenheit. For normal size kid work, the hold is two hours. For thicker work, I might hold it there for four hours. This is usually enough time to let the water make its way out of the clay without turning it into steam and causing an explosion. In a kiln with a sitter and switches or knobs, you can simulate this hold by firing very slowly on a low setting with the lid open a crack. I sometimes fire my manual kiln overnight with the lid open a crack and the kiln set at it's lowest setting. Then when I come in the next day, I close the lid and move through the rest of the firing.

For glaze firings, I do not fire slowly at the start of the firing process. If I am firing cone 1 majolica glazed wares, I load the kiln, shut the lid, and turn all of the switches on immediately or in the case of variable switches, I set them all to high. With the clays and glazes I use, there is no benefit to going slowly at the beginning of a glaze firing. I want the kiln to get to the desired temperature as quickly as possible, so the kiln gets full power all at once. On my computer controlled kiln, I program in a rate climb of 200 degrees Fahrenheit per hour. This means that for a cone 6 firing to approximately 2200 degrees Fahrenheit, the firing will take around 11 hours.

A few principles guide my school firings. For bisque, fire slowly at the beginning to allow the water to escape from the clay. For glaze firings go more quickly, there is no benefit to firing slowly at the beginning. Lastly, make sure you are around when your kiln is reaching its final temperature so you can turn it off if something goes awry.

Consequences as the Teacher

My first year as a teacher, I would touch up kids' glazed projects as I was loading the kiln. Then I realized that if I did that, the kids would never learn to glaze correctly themselves. I was short circuiting the feedback that

artists get when they make mistakes. So now, the way they glaze it, is the same way that it gets fired. When it comes out of the kiln and they get it back, they get to see the results of their efforts and make appropriate changes in the future to make the work better. When kids turn in wet clay work, I may push a few of the bigger pieces together but it is up to each kid to make sure they have scored, slipped and smoothed the pieces together. Kids in the first couple of years have more things like eyes and arms fall off of sculptures than kids in the upper grades, because after they receive one sculpture with missing eyes, they learn to do a better job the next time. Any pieces that are broken when they come out of the bisque firing do not get to be glazed, I tell them they can go home and try to glue it together with Elmer's glue. Consequences are the best teacher in this case. Kids learn over time that craftsmanship is important. It's not Mr. Post that determines whether or not their project survives the firing, it is up to them.

The one thing I do to make my life easier when collecting wet clay work is to write each kids' name on the bottom. I tell them that I am the person unloading the kiln, so I have to be able to read it. This is also a great way to learn kids' names. I have them tell me the correct spelling of their name as I write it on with a sharp pencil. I have a bisque stamp for each classroom teacher and grade level. Mr. Andrus' sixth grade class stamp reads A-6. To make the bisque stamps, I use a rubber stamp kit and impress the A-6 characters into a clay slab. Then I bisque fire the slab, and press the end of a coil of clay into the slab. I bisque fire this coil stamp and use it on every kids' wet clay project who is in that class.

Shining the Spotlight

In prison movies, they sometimes show a guard in a tower at night shining a bright spotlight around the walls and fences of the prison. As an elementary art teacher, I feel like the guy shining the spotlight for the kids. Wherever I choose to point the spotlight in the art curriculum is the place that gets lit up so the kids can see it. The prison spotlight can't light up

everything at once and neither can I as the art teacher. The great thing about shining the spotlight in the arts is that there are so many good places to point it.

One year I focused the light on some of the iconic, famous images in art. Many of the lessons I taught that year were based on the 10 most famous art works of all time. Naturally I made my own list of which ones I thought were the most important or well known and shared these with the kids. I would reference these famous art works as we worked our way through the art curriculum that year. Another year I worked my way through the art of different cultures across the globe, comparing and contrasting the images and ideas of different people throughout time. (It's amazing how many different cultures make art about fertility. Considering there are 6 billion people on the planet, this must have been an effective strategy.) This past year we have been exploring the idea of genre. The working definition I gave the kids for genre was that a genre is a category of art. We then created art based on the landscape genre, the portrait genre, the fantasy genre etc. The idea of genre helped the kids build a framework for understanding different types of art works. Genres are a shorthand way of describing what type of art an artist creates. If you tell someone you are a landscape painter, a potter or a jazz dancer then immediately it gives the other person an idea of what kind of art you make. Shining the spotlight by looking at famous art works, world cultures or categories of art is a way for a kid to see how art ideas are related. Its a way to teach big ideas to little kids and help create connections in their brains.

Running the spotlight is one of the best parts of being an elementary art teacher. It means the job won't be the same two years in a row. I think the best art programs grow and change the same way that artists grow and change. Every potter thinks that the best pots are going to come out of the next firing. The same is true of good teachers, they always look for new ways to engage their students. They know where to shine the spotlight.

I take the responsibility of being an elementary art teacher very seriously, but I approach it quite playfully. I use humor and kindness to

make the art room a brain-friendly place to learn. I think it is imperative that kids develop skills through repeated exposure to authentic art media such as clay and paint. It's also important to let them make creative choices as part of their learning and making process. I try to ask more questions instead of always giving all the answers. When a kid asks me to make something for him or her, I reply. "If I do the making, my brain is the one doing the learning. Go try and do it for yourself and if you are stuck after a few attempts, I will give you a hand." They almost always figure it out for themselves. I give each kid all the latitude he or she needs to soar and be successful or to fail and start over again if needed. The lessons I teach are based on big ideas so that the kids learn that art involves critical thinking along with the development of skills. My favorite part of engaging kids with humor, stories, silly poems, and hands-on learning is so much of the real learning sneaks in through the side door when they aren't even aware they're learning. They just think they're having fun, and the way I see it, that's a good thing.

My Story, by Terry deBardelaben

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail," Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The Journey

I am new to the profession and have only been teaching classes in a formal academic setting for less than a decade. Though ceramics has always been my love, it hasn't always been my career. My circulative path, though always involved education, took me from administration into the classroom.

In 1962 I integrated Quarles Elementary School in Englewood, New Jersey. My brother Jeffery, a small group of students and I were forced by our parents into the role of being fearless. Integration made me unafraid of new

challenges and gave me the skills to cope with change. It is also responsible for helping establish my passion for clay which I discovered in second grade. It was this experience that connected me to nature, which resulted in my fascination and eventual love for clay. During recess I would go down to the creek behind the school and play in the steam. There I found mud, sand and clay. I used the trees roots to create imaginary shelter- with sticks and mud, building an adobe like structure. Through this play I discovered how malleable and forgiving the earth was. I fell in love with clay. It was this love that got me through a tumultuous experience and fueled my academic achievement.

The malleable material was accepting and forgiving. Its tactile properties fueled my fantasy play and gave me an escape. How does one know when the seed for future activity is planted or when or even if it will grow? Well, if I had to identify the beginning of my paradigm shift, it would have to be the moment mud took on significant meaning in my life, recess time.

Howard University provided me with educational direction and laid the ground-work for my career path. I was both an art education major and student recruiter. And though I received my BFA in art education, formally my training with clay was minimal. And, though, intuitively I understood clays healing properties. I could not know that it would take me another twenty years before I found the courage to return to my beloved clay.

In 1987, I became the first African American Admissions Director for an Independent School in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Capitol Hill Days Schools not only provided me with financial stability, it also afforded me the opportunity to impact its student body diversity. It's population of children of color increased by 12% over six years. Ignoring my primal need for a more artistic creative expression, I continued my search for ways to activate a more imaginative use of my left-brain. I worked at the Holton-Arms School for girls as the Associate Director of Admissions. To reduce stress I began teaching ceramics classes at Chevy Chase Community center twice a week. Looking back at my life then, It is hard to believe that it took a Zen moment to awaken me.

Fifteen years ago when I met international consultant, co-author of *Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, and advocate for Anti-racist Education, Enid Lee.

Ms. Lee was invited to Holton to speak to the faculty and administration about institutional change. Part of her message contained an admonition of sorts. We were asked to examine our habits and to scrutinize our belief systems, to assess our ways of operating that further establish and perpetuate the status quo and thus inhibit change.

These words sounded an alarm, and rang out as blaring truths moving me toward impending action. I had an euphony.

I introduced myself to Ms. Lee after her remarks and shared my story. I lamented about how my work choices had constantly pointed to the same two options, the life of an artist or the career of as a business professional. Though I had chosen the latter and loved my work, and the contributions I felt I made, I remained torn about the decision I had felt forced to make, to have safe existence.

Ms. Lee's simple but wise counsel altered my thinking and ultimately redirected my career path. She encouraged me to embark in two directions - art and business simultaneously.

Up until then, my only real exposure to the issues that address the divisive nature of a dual existence came from GROUND breaking literature from the likes of Pulitzer Prize winning author and play write August Wilson in his play "Two Trains Running" and Dr. WEB Dubois's book "The Souls of Black Folks-

literary discourse that documents political and cultural duality, masterful writings by authors who defined for their era the literal and figurative double consciousness that describes the human condition and articulates intense struggle between two EXISTENCES or realities.

*I was being challenged to consider the application of a dual career and whether I could establish a balance between two courses: work and renewal, an earlier division that had forced my art into submission and gratuitous dormancy.

One year after my awakening, I redirected my life and returned to art. Since I was employed full time in admissions,

it took five years of part time employment teaching ceramics at an area Community Center in order for me to build a graduate school applicant portfolio—a prerequisite to the MFA program.

My transformational moment happened when I recognized that it was not only economical but feasible to return to the use of a material that made me feel good but also provided the means through which I could express my emotions. Clay is forgiving. It gives and it doesn't resist. I discovered the therapeutic applications of working with clay as I attempted to work out all my issues through clay.

Finally I had clarity. I decided to build a graduate school portfolio. For six years I worked to develop my creative voice. This experience not only allowed me to hone my teaching strategies but it equipped me with skills to work with a diverse group of people. As a result, I have learned to work with a wide range of age and ability levels, as well as, interact with people who identify with a cross section of cultural, religious and language groups.

At the age of 43, I attended graduate school. I drew on my life experience of being a single parent raising a son as the foundation for my conceptual ideation. The majority of pieces were created to help visually define my cultural and gender identity and are apart of a series - entitled Matrocliny - and were created between 2001-2003. A substantial number represent some of the ceramic abstract figurative sculpture presented in my MFA thesis body of work.

At that time, these forms reflected my views about Popular Cultures' sexual exploitation of the vagina and breast which contribute to the objectification

of the female body thereby reducing women to a commodity. This cultural dualism influences the transformation of the female paradigm, devaluing self-perception and loss of power.

My female abstractions deconstruct the genitalia and remove their sexual veil.

One year after graduation, I was able to realize my new life as a ceramics teacher at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School where I am celebrating my 6th year. I love my job and the people with whom I work and the students I serve. At times I could pinch myself because I recognize that I am living a purpose driven life.

The origins of the word passion reference the narrative of the "sufferings of Christ on the Cross." In the late 14c passion was referenced as fury-violent, rage and madness which had a connotation associated with "angry woman" or an affliction of the mind.

According to 16th-19th century writings, passion has been described as a perversion...something one shuns or else becomes afflicted by or morbidly obsessed with.

The literary discourse about passion first came into the domain of public debate with Sir Thomas Moore's Utopia. Moore believed that virtue "according to nature and the dictates of reason" requires keeping one's mind free from passion.

From Socrates to post modernist theory passion has been described as a corruptible, avoidable force that, if indulged leads one to sin and damnation.

Buddhist thought says that the path to enlightenment involves overcoming illusions of worldly passion, and the thirsts of the physical body.

Passion as it is understood today is recognized as a necessity. Contemporary business models espouse the need to possess it. And every university and college admissions office demands it.

Regarding Passion and Creativity, John Maeda former MIT professor currently the prestigious 16th president of Rhode Island School of Design RISDY believes that passion and creativity are tools to engage the larger world leading to global dialogue.

Bill Gates in sharing his ideas about success in his

Five Point Master Formula of success list passion first. Passion generates focus.

In Malcolm Gladwell's book: Outliers, the author proves that " ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world class expert in anything.

Bill Gates began his 10,000 hours in the 8th grade at Lakeside - an Independent School in WA State. It was this defining experience, which laid the foundation for his fascination and passion for computers.

Passion played its role in defining the Innovators (over the)of the 21st century. People who contributed to society in ways that are unparalleled. Passion was there...standing beside these historic giants who lead the way. And my guess is that passion is here in this room right now sitting next to you...or even better yet, occupying your seat.

- What are you passionate about?
- What inspires you?
- What do you exhaust your energy in pursuit of?

- What path are you on?

Now is the time for discovery. Now is the time to begin building your ten thousand hours. Work hard, be driven and take a calculated risk toward finding and living your passion. Remember passion is not a neutral position.

Passion compels one towards success. It pushes you toward the completion of something difficult.

The road to success is paved with passion.

My current place of employment St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School offers its teachers the opportunity to engage in professional enrichment through the participation in educational activities that will enhance the learning process for students. Through personal travel and the provisions offered by the Association of Parent's and Teacher's Summer Grant program I have had the wonderful opportunity to pursue my passion for ceramics and increase the multicultural global education content in my studio classes.

In 2005 I received an APT summer grant, which took me to Tuscany, Italy to learn about the ancient Italian ceramics process known as terra sigillata. That fall the more advanced ceramics students used terra sig on their biomorphic forms rather than a glaze. The technical affects - high gloss and brilliant shine - were visually amazing. In 2006 I traveled to Ghana, Africa to study their traditional pottery-making. While working with the women of Kuli village I was introduced to the concept and technique of mining clay. What happened as a result of that experience has become apart of the public tile project currently on display in the Perkins Court Yard. Access, and exposure to the mining processes used in Kuli Village, not only provided me with the technical knowledge I need to venture such a project, it gave me the confidence I needed to implement one. My intermediate ceramics students

created five 3X3X3 tile slabs created from the red terracotta clay dug from the ground of the Perkins Court Yard.

Taking formal ceramics classes in differing countries over the years has allowed me to incorporate and integrate innovation into my curricular and co-curricular projects. Students learn new skills and techniques when a cultural alternative is introduced as an optional approach to solving familiar universal ceramic process problems.

Last year while attending the annual National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts conference in Arizona, I visited the University of West Virginia's information booth. I learned about an exciting six-credit art history and studio ceramics study abroad course in China. Two weeks of the tour required enrollment at Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute- dedicated to the study of ceramic arts - in Jiangxi province in the People's Republic of China. Jingdezhen is historically known for the development and production of Chinese ceramics specifically porcelain. Since 1800 the imperial courts during the Jingde, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties relied upon the porcelain production of Jingdezhen.

I traveled with nine ceramic teachers and one MICA ceramics major to embark upon a journey of a lifetime traveling 6,000 miles to six cities over the course of five weeks. Our trip started in the north in China's second largest city of Beijing formerly known as Peking where we climbed the Great Wall, visited the Forbidden City and attended countless museums and gallery shows. Our first 17 hour night train was to Fuiping where we not only had a two day stay in a pottery village which housed the most extensive international collection of ceramics in the world International Ceramics Art Museums (FLICAM). We spent an entire day at what has been described as the "eighth wonder of the world," the dig site and museum of the Terracotta Army of the first Emperor Qinshihuang containing 8,000 chariots, houses and soldiers. Xian was our next and most exhilarating destination where we attended the Shaanxi Museum, Muslim Quarters, and Big Goose Pagoda Fountain Show. Dividing Northern and Southern China, our four day cruise up the Yangtze River - the longest River in Asia and the third largest in the

world - ended with a highlight of the largest hydro-electric power station in the world, Three Gorges Dam. After Jingdezhen where we witnessed demonstrations from master potters, trimmers, mold makers and brush makers, we ended our tour in Shanghai.

Two weeks later I was back in the classroom at SSSAS sharing newly learned information with my eager ceramics summer school students. Even better, we used the new processes learned of replicating ancient Chinese slab building techniques and glaze practices. The practices stream line the processes making glazing and slab building more efficient, as a result, the students are able to accomplish more in less time without compromise.

These travels to far and away places has kept learning exciting while making it possible to bring culture, diversity, and multiple perspectives into the classroom setting.

First Lady Michelle Obama, a strong supporter of arts education, said, "My husband and I believe strongly that arts education is essential for building innovative thinkers who will be our nation's leaders for tomorrow. It's our hope that we can all work together to expose, enrich, and empower Americans of all ages through the arts." Here at SSSAS...we are striving to do our part in making that a reality.

I am engaged in the one thing that I feel I was put on this earth to do, create art. So far, my career as a professional artist has morphed and now includes teaching, exhibiting, and filmmaking.

And, though I don't know what awaits me, I do know that I am open to all the possibilities.

Current employment statistics show that people are likely to change jobs 7-10 times within their professional careers. Career change is seen as a natural life progression and considered an inherent and inevitable reflection of growth. Growth, in turn, is the process of adaptation.

How adaptable are you? Where are you in the life, change, life, cycle of growth? I implore you to continue to assess and reassess your level of knowledge, skill and ability and to alter, define and refine your vision of tomorrow.

Be VIGILANT to your passion and goals and what you want to achieve in this life because that is where your true satisfaction lies.

I leave you with the words of William James who said, "The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives." I ask you today, Are you prepared for change?

It was passion for clay that fueled my journey and plays a pivotal role in the acquisition of any successful outcome.

The professional accomplishment I am proudest of took form when I reinvented myself. I left a twenty-year career as a school administrator at an all girls' school to teach ceramics at a co-ed institution. My periphery indulgency with clay morphed into a life long pursuit of my passion and primary vehicle for creative expression.

I am honored to have edited a movie with one of my high school seniors. That movie was shown at the NCECA conference and was created out of my interest to do some ethnographic research in the field of ceramics. This interest took me on a journey of a lifetime to observe the potters—all women—in the remote village of Kuli, in the Upper Volta region of Ghana, West Africa.

The editor of my movie - Greg Neitheimer a 2009 St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School graduate, reviewed over 150 film clips ranging from 1 to 5 minutes in order to create this amazing 18-minute documentary.

It was passion for clay that fueled my journey and plays a pivotal role in the acquisition of any successful outcome.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A CERAMIC ARTS PROGRAM- A FIELD REPORT FROM ONE TEACHER

By Sean Burns



The sweet sight of young minds and hands at work- busily working on projects that go beyond just making stuff- part of an organized stream of creative chaos- not chaos as most think of it- but the chaos of creation – that from which original ideas and problem solving skills emerge- A place where kids help each other out when they can- where the room tends to run

itself and somewhere in the background- until needed- the coach- or teacher stands at the ready- or does one of a thousand motions needed to keep the scene going. A class room where kids know when to cleanup- not too early- and they get it done with not much hassle and usually some fun. If this doesn't sound like an art room or program you can point to on most days, it should be. Forbid the notion that students across the country don't have access to this type of creative endeavor. This scenario speaks to learning that is geared toward the visual, tactile, and experiential. Learning that takes into account current trends and ancient traditions. A well run K-12 clay program offers rich tangible rewards and authentic educational delivery to students. As the country is led further down the road of standardized assessments and a greater emphasis on the use of technology in the schools however, programs that access authentic materials and use basic hand tools might be construed as archaic and out dated by the uninformed or ignorant observer.



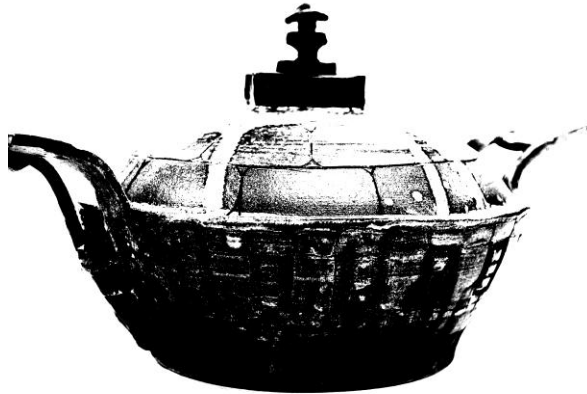
The reality is that clay in the schools is an offering easily dismissed by administrators, schools boards, and even fellow art educators. However the nature of the material and its presence in the chain of human events, and endeavors, practicality and modes of expression through the ages as well as its associated technologies of firing practices and physical properties of the material nature place it high in the taxonomy of interdisciplinary activities

available to students in schools throughout the nation. Solid teaching practices in the ceramic arts promote connections across all learning areas and incorporate hands on learning that is especially suited to learning styles that often go unaddressed in other subject areas and artistic media. A healthy and vibrant school as well as one that struggles to be so must include this vehicle for students to realize their creative potential and problem solving skills. The qualities K-12 clay programs foster not only will be but already are in high demand as current students and future adult citizens confront and meet challenges of our already unfolding twenty first century. Rather than an outdated extension of an agrarian based learning model transitioning students into an emerging industrialized society, this medium serves as a mode of inquiry that touches on human potentiality yet to emerge while also reaching as far back into humanities past as one can imagine. Even the eventual emergence and practicality of 3d imaging technologies should not replace the direct confrontation of human and material that clay presents to its user.



It is my hope that this essay will shed some light on the benefits and practicalities of a solid clay program as run in a less than affluent community as well as the important role it plays in the creative and cognitive development of youngsters. It is also meant to sound as an alarm to schools in general to not abandon programs that foster art and craft sensibilities, the

diversity and success that these activities nurture, and the social, cultural and academic areas these programs so easily and effectively bridge.



Questions and Answers

As a teacher I like to ask questions of my students—they tend to want answers but I make them understand that good questions are often better than many of the answers I can offer up. Well thought out questions serve as a pathway to a greater understanding. Conversely teaching can be one of the most conflicted and challenging professions available to any one with a degree of higher learning. We tether in political winds, ride the waves of community, and commit ourselves to a public arena that praises just as quickly as it chastises. At its most basic a teaching is a care giving profession of nurture and growth. But teaching is not a place for the faint of heart, and in the case of the ceramic professional double so. I also do not believe teaching is a place for anyone devoid of any real world work experience beyond high school and college- I think teachers need to bring experience to the table beyond classroom training and a clock punching mentality.

The current state of public education has taken on a surgical business mentality that mirrors current technological trends in society and the resulting implied needs of supplying that construction with dependent consumers and designated caretakers. I see the attention spans and skills of students rapidly changing due to the presence of flashing screens – hectic schedules- and an overall sense of get there yesterday. As you may guess I stand counter to that mentality but also must teach those immersed in it. I teach in the face of fragmentation of knowledge and represent its foil because there is no other choice but to be there for kids who are visual, tactile, and experiential learners. Clay is the vehicle and students are the medium. I teach practice, discipline, searching, looking forward and back through time, taking care of oneself as well as looking out for ones neighbor. The results I most often get are astounding and unexpected- never boring- and ever changing. We teachers are on a continuum- one that keeps on going until we decide to step off the ride or it unwittingly ends for us.



As a teacher I show up daily to meet the needs of my students. What those needs are seems to shift with my perception of their development as human beings, shifts in society, and growth in my artistic and educational instincts. I do not consider myself a “super star” teacher- I am a guy who shows up day in and day out doing what he loves for the audience I have chosen- During the school year I teach 10th through 12th Grade Advanced Ceramic at a small working class public high school in Palmer Massachusetts- I am also the Director for the District and teach Honors Portfolio and AP Art. . During the summer I work part time as a ceramic specialist at Camp Kinderland in Tolland Massachusetts with age groups ranging from 4 to 18 or

so- as well as some adults. I took on this job so my over active son could have suitable activity during summer time.

These venues couldn't be more different- One a steel and glass brick building- the other a converted barn- but they provide a good cross section of intent- audience- purpose- and range of activity. These have been my training grounds for in the field - what works in what situation. Professionally I am more concerned with the High School job as it is the major source of income for me and my family- but they both are important in that they let me learn and grow in my teaching.



My educational background consists of a BFA in Illustration from Rhode Island School of Design in 1984 followed by some time in Graphics and Advertising including a lengthy stint at a pre press facility for circular advertisements. It is important to note that during this time I had the greatest audience I will perhaps ever reach with my work. It is also here that I experienced for a sustained period the practical integration of art and commerce as well as the transition of manual printing technology over to a condensed and less labor intensive electronic and digital art format. I returned to full time student status for two years at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for my MA in Art Ed completed in 1994 followed immediately by my job in Palmer where I have since taught..

The background offered by formal art education programs while pedagogically necessary is inadequate in preparing for and meeting the day to day needs of the classroom, particularly in the field of K-12 ceramics- A lot depends on where you wind up- who is there- what the educational system is looking for out of its programs as well as individual teacher resourcefulness and instinct. When I show up for work I keep the priority on the kids. Public schools can become extremely polarized places that reflect the politics of the community and it is easy to get distracted by goings on as well as what group is running the show. Being there for students means giving your time to the ones from the right families and the wrong ones- the ones going to art schools and design careers and also the ones just back from juvenile court- on probation- special kids- kids some would rather not deal with sometimes, some I would sometimes rather not deal with. The real reason for showing up in the classroom is giving students a goal to work towards-in our case ceramic art and achievement.



My hardest days and biggest headaches come from the few students I can't reach, the ones who have shut down. My biggest success and joy in the classroom generally comes from those I have worked back into the land of the living earth people. The former student who I saw on Nova as well as in a recent issue of Smithsonian Magazine working on a limestone replica of the Great Sphinx was an industrious, complex, extremely advanced and intellectually challenging but ultimately an easy student. He won a National Scholastic Gold Award while at our school. He is still working as an artist. He was an easy student who ultimately became rooted in the field. Meanwhile the girl from the shaky family with huge anger issues and wants to learn wheel in a big way but has no patience- hard- big hard- this gal wound up helping my beginner students after her third year with me- big success- hard

success- you get the picture. Clay is the draw for the students - the vehicle- the students are the teachers medium- the teachers clay- we mold them as best as we can- and like any medium some resist- some give way- some yield- some form themselves- and so it goes- but it is the students we work for- when there are benefits for us- it should be as a result of our students achievement and success- and this is often immeasurable and usually goes unnoticed - but we know- we know when the job is getting done- we know as teachers when to push- back off- nudge- talk- be silent- demo- show- park in front of- joke- get stern an on-

The nuts and bolts of teaching are instinctive - the technical side of teaching clay and dealing with the institutions can and are taught- the taxonomy- but the instinct needs to be present and then nurtured via mentors and a sense of self idealization in ones craft- that is where the gift of teaching lies- a gift and a calling – great teaching is just that- it simply is. Great and even good teachers are not made- they are - acceptable teachers can and are produced by mechanism.



Should one be an artist who also teaches? I think so. When I help hire teachers I make sure they are also active in some form of their discipline outside of school- it is a lifeline to keeping a vital and engaged art department. I suppose there are examples to the contrary but I have yet to meet them and the teachers whose methods I most want to emulate also practice and exhibit their art in some way while also existing as outstanding teachers

I believe we should teach how to use artistic thinking and problem solving skills. Not that all students will want to be an artist or should be, but our

value is in the methodology artists use in arriving at solutions. The longer I have taught the greater my sense that our greatest strength is not just in the making of an object but the required mastery of craft required to effectively bringing an idea to fruition. Learning grows exponentially from the point of making something, into making it well, into making it based on previous things made, and therefore becomes a much richer and authentic experience for the student. That being said you can lead them to water but getting them to drink can be a different story.



Creativity

Creativity is our main selling point we have to the non artist and it is the draw for our students- developing it and nurturing it. Making something from nothing, It seems some kids naturally have it while others need to be encouraged- lessons that provide a starting point are often helpful- a basic assignment- sometimes it is intimidating to have things too wide open- but the notion of creativity as artistic and intellectual inventiveness is at the crux of our mission.

How do we get kids to try new things- open up to new possibilities- experiment- brain storm ideas- see things in new ways- these are the skills that will be in high demand for the future- designing new systems – building a better mousetrap- reinventing the mousetrap- going beyond the mouse trap- and clay provides the means to this end- exploring new possibilities in a tactile manner- How to get kids to it? I think there are as many answers as there are teachers- As far as myself I have a basic underlying concept or assignment for kids to follow and then I work individually with the students pulling out possibilities. For hand building assignments I always have students make a drawing so possibilities can be explored- for long term projects I ask for a drawing and a model- so we can work out creative possibilities as well as technical issues.- I try to make sure kids think beyond the first idea that pops into the head- For wheel projects I often have kids draw forms but let the process be more of an evolutionary one- kids acquiring skills and applying creativity to the process.

I fully demonstrate project techniques for students and make sure that all are within close proximity- not across the room- not halfway across the room- up close and around. I help any student following a demo who has paid attention- If a student has not- I generally put them last on list for walk around help- they get the message eventually.



I see many kids get discouraged pursuing creative ideas when the issue of craftsmanship comes into the mix- something breaks- it looks good until it dries and crumbles- the handle that looked great attached to the dry mug was with wet clay and it separated- etc... To be honest I don't care about this stuff- unless the student gets too worked up and discouraged-

teaching good craftsmanship is our responsibility- it often takes practice to get things to work right- so the more practice- the better the craft from my standpoint. This often does not sit well with students so as part of my craft package I teach patience when possible- the idea that in this crazy fast cyber mega worlds- clay needs you to slow down and learn certain things like attaching parts- rolling coils- slabs- centering clay really well so they are like a tool in your tool box- you can use them for any application you want whenever you

Need them- bad tool- bad job- good tool- better chance of a good result when trying to implement an idea. The flip side is to arrange enough success for the student so they don't get discouraged- particularly those especially vulnerable to extremes in frustration.

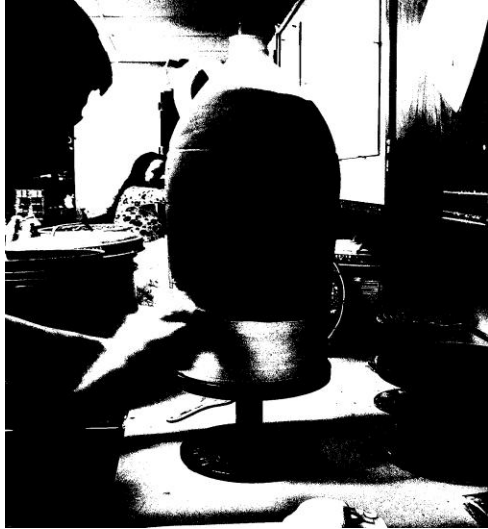
There is the old adage you can give a man a fish or you can teach him to fish. Along the same line I like to talk about kites because at the design school I attended everyone built and flew a kite as the final project of freshman foundation studies. The project was about design- trial and error- what might work – what might not- This was not about how to make the kite a perfect kite- it was not about replicating a store bought kite- it was about all things kite and even non kite and what makes kite-ness- At the end of the project every student went to a inlet beach where kites were flown or sent to their ruin- some worked better than others- some looked better than others but didn't work well- some you knew were last minute- some were hours of planning and execution- the spectrum . Looking back I think many were pretty conservative0 I remember really focusing on the surface of the material- I was pretty 2d then- but I learned the lesson- and I am still learning it along with my students- we learn together when things are working at their best.



Failure- does it exist- I don't really buy into failure- It is generally a means to an end in my classroom-as in that didn't work- let see what went wrong- there is always more clay and more and one more behind the pot that flopped or broke or piece that snapped- I do want kids to practice and experience why things work and why not- there is no way for kids to learn the limits of their minds or the material if they do not push it to the breaking point whether through gumption or ignorance- the fact is it has to be experiential- for most as well as I. I usually tell them if you have also done..... The saddest thing is the student who doesn't show up- the one that doesn't want to get involved- run down the clock- those students don't usually wind up in my room but I do get them- some can be turned around- but a few will not participate in the process and become involved- that is the only failure I see- It is my job to keep trying regardless and not get discouraged. I am always looking for the magic bullet- I also need to keep the frustration level at a tolerable level for kids- and each student has a different threshold- Too much and a kid will give up.



Your room- Your stage- temple - creative launch pad- laboratory- gateway to the wisdom of the ages- crucible of alchemy- I am not kidding- What any school system would not devote a vast amount of resource to this type of inquiry is beyond me- but the truth is as we all are to aware- clay winds up wherever it can go in the school- sometimes in the one art room- If you have a delegated room or rooms count yourself among the fortunate- some work off a cart with self hardening- you need at least a delegated room flat tables and a sink- hopefully with a trap for clay. In my clay room there is no plaster- there are no paper towels that like the plaster will wind up in the clay. I have stools four at a table- I have wheels- most face the wall- and there is a pod of six with three that face- each has a stool and bucket with set tools inside. There are wall storage cabinets- with doors- there are open cabinets for bisque storage- green ware storage- and a moving cart for glaze ware ready for the kiln. I have a glaze area with counter top and 5 gal buckets- cabinets and covered containers for dry glaze mix ingredients and chemicals.- A working clay bucket- and two wet reclaims near the sink- and a large rolling reclaim for pugging. There is a blackboard and of course the flag we have an airbrush booth ventilated- a hood vent for our frontloaded kiln and in general too many students and not enough space- I consider this a good problem but a problem nonetheless.



The clay room is a small factory meant for exploration, experimentation and learning- Due to the nature of the medium and the many stages it must pass through to completion a classroom that goes beyond the one off project needs a cyclical design to survive and keep the teacher sane not to mention keeping up with the work flow- the order of the class has a cycle that is determined by the teacher- but how the work passes through wet work to green ware to bisque and finally glaze puts things on a rotation- as well as the firing cycles and reclaim cycles of clay- glaze mixing- getting work to students or disposing of items left unclaimed- I think every teacher has a rhythm that suits them- but it is important to identify the flow that is most effective and build on it-

From the student point of view the clay room and total experience should be a haven- a place where they feel comfortable expressing themselves visually and verbally within reason- The reality is if the art room is not a bright spot in the students day- something is not right- it needs to be a draw- a place to want to be and come to- and also a place to take care of, take pride of ownership in. Our school has recently started internship programs for upper level students and teachers who are willing to take them on as mentors- this has gone on all along in the clay room with many

students- we just never had it as an actual class- it was just what went on naturally.



Students

Who is your audience- well the kids of course! We are in the rapport building business! And we get to talk with them, interact and bring them to places that other teachers in the building often don't have time for- I love to time travel- look at Ancient America- Feudal Japan- Pre-Columbian time- how- clay – glazes- firing- and the things folks made! How about the Mad Potter of Biloxi! I bring them into my world- I try to get where they are coming from and believe me the times have changed and are still changing- rap- hip hop- techno- Goth- nerd- jock- you name a group and I see them- kids with physical and metal challenges of all sorts come through my door- and the great thing is I have something for every one of them – I have to be flexible- firm with how the room works- and make everyone aware of the one rule we all live by RESPECT- it sounds corny but for the most part it seems to work well- kids get it. Most kids want to be with me in the first place as my class is elective- some are forced in by scheduling or any sort of issue. The underlying idea is to have them do ant least one thing a day- just

one- that usually takes care of it- one thing leads to another- that one thing done is usually the trigger to learning- getting at the making synapse- the match- I also make sure of is there are a few other options for kids- reading material- drawing activity- an occasional down day is also included in my scenario. Kids are way too overburdened and as a survival skill I provide a haven for kids and a situation where problems don't happen- and if they do a consistent way to handle and diffuse them.

I exist to teach all students- my biggest success stories are the ones who often go unnoticed in other areas- A good clay program reaches kids who often fall outside the traditional idea of successful high school student- As more and more schools do away with traditional vocational subjects focusing on core academic areas that do not include the plastic and manual arts- there is no outlet for students who need to learn sustained attention and problem solving through use of dexterity. Meanwhile a new type of student seems to be emerging- one that is hard pressed to focus for long periods of time for sustained problem solving and investigation- instead going for a fast assimilation of quick generalized burst of information that mirror the changing screens and texts that barrage their daily existence- As adults we are unintentionally initiating a new type of rewired mind in our youngsters- and I am not sure that we are ready for the full implications of the result- what I see as a new huge selling point to my students is the nature of clay in promoting a tactile and full experience in realizing a solution to a 3-d problem- a full engagement of hand and mind that is totally real- totally human- and accessible to everyone- touching the roots of humanity since the beginning of time and totally relevant to the issues of today. Students confront the true nature of problems solving- direct experience while also looking back and thinking forward- as individuals. I exist as a way for students to find out what they can do when they slow down- use their hands- experience materials- and bring their own mind to the table- my students are whoever walks through the door- and it is an ever changing lot with some similar characteristics of adolescence- a need to master- a need to experiment and understand- and a need to exhibit some rebellion in a healthy way- a need to belong- I say welcome.



Special needs and physically challenged students

By law our classrooms are mandated to be accessible to all students- and while there are sometimes limitations I have yet to come across a student who wanted to take a clay class that I couldn't accommodate. For behavioral and special learning issues I always consult the experts associated with the student in question- and I also watch what the students does- how they respond to simple tasks and issues of manipulation associated with them- these are my building blocks- some kids don't like a lot of attention- others need it- some want help and other don't- read the students. Physically challenged kids are easier- what do they need and what level of "accommodation" are they comfortable with- Some kids don't want to be different or to stick out - I make sure to minimize that- others are proud of their ability to compensate and could care less. Kids connect with clay in ways that is not reproducible in any other medium or subject- it is for all students.

Tools

Gadgets gizmos and the latest doohickeys are fun but a few basic tools work well enough and they really don't cost a lot. If a hand building scenario is all that is realistic- some decent solid rolling pins- cloth- dowels- and pointed wood tools – cutting wire- fettling knife – cut PVC tubes for cylinders- can take one very far down the road-

If a wheel program is being considered, things gets more involved. I always have a bucket- sponge- needle tool- long rib- wooden scraper in each bucket- I have 3 trimming tools I like- and that is all you need- to really do it- All that is really required is the material and a teacher who is resourceful- I have walked into a lot of art rooms with clay tools and equipment that teachers have no idea what they are for or how to use them. It is better to start simple and work up from there- Some rasps are nice- serrated tools for scoring are a bit help for kids- toothbrushes for slurries- yogurt containers for slurries.



Basic tools- Not much needed here- my favorite line with the students is if I was stranded on an island with only one clay hand tool- what would that be?- a sharpened dowel or a pointed wood tool- you can do so much with it..... basic stuff..

Cloth- dowels- yogurt container for slip- toothbrush- sponge- rolling pin- solid- needle? Serrated edge scrapers- trimming tools- fettling knife- cutting wire- not much required- triangles- rulers- yard stick- plastic bags- masonite bats

Stuff not to buy- Stamps- make your own!

Universal Solvency- must have water- and trap?

Wheel- bucket/ sponge/ribs/scrapper/trimming tools-

Bats are nice- plastic w/pins-

Buckets for reclaim

Setup- I have a lot in a little space- I work towards minimizing clutter- I can't think in a room full of overload- some can- I never have enough space so I have to constantly rearrange large projects and consistently have students either take the work home or have it tossed. My clay room runs as a shop/factory- There are the designated production areas- wheels/tables that are in close proximity- there is the double sinks and glazing area at the rear- and most importantly a cycle for storage of moist work through green ware to bisque through to glaze as well as an area where work is ready to be taken home even if as in my case it is the window sill/radiator area. Kids know the flow- they get the setup- and after one quarter the room functions by itself- I am the coach. I give a 10 minute cleanup warning- after 3 weeks that's all it takes wheels included- every kid is responsible for their own area- door gets shut if there is an intentional mess left- no one leaves. I have kids sit down when they enter so I can take care of business, get the head count, give the daily clay update/presentations and we are off to the races



Your Equipment-

Learn the equipment- it is fun to know how the wheels work- it is incredibly liberating to learn how to fix your kiln- some things I cant do electric wise- but the main reason my program survives is because I can take care of a lot of the day to day maintenance issues - It is critical to take on as much of this as one can otherwise the upkeep can drag down a program down if left primarily to outside services- if you can find them at all. I learned to figure out which parts tend to break or become abused on my wheels and I keep a stock of parts that at this point were purchased in better times- I figured out how to change elements and switches on the kiln- do some brick repair- I know when the table starts creaking a certain way it is time to tighten up some screws underneath.

On the flip side don't spend time fixing equipment that isn't worth it- I spent a huge amount of time first sending back grey metal stools that had inferior welds at the ring base- then having them brazed and finally resorting to using wire and then twine to lash the rings- stone age stuff. I finally threw in the towel and bought wood topped stools with riveted metal bases- I still have to watch the wooden seats as they are screwed in but I

wasted so much time on total junk not worthy of my attention- There are suppliers who sell crap-

Safety

I use real clay- it comes from the earth- it has silica- don't breath dust. We mix our own glazes- They are covered and stored away in enclose areas- We use masks when we mix them- we stir glazes with a stick and use tongs for dipping. We have sharp tools like needles and knives- they don't leave the room. So far, so good. You have to lay down the issues to the kids and they will take ownership if the program has a value to them- they also need to know that you value safety. Hair gets tied back on the wheels- if there is a water spill- help it get cleaned up so no one slips. Be careful storing work especially up high- I never turn the kiln over when no one is there and no one pugs but a teacher.



Supplies and budget

I buy clay from my local supplier- two towns over- I buy it by the ton- I run with Cone 6-10 Z stoneware- I like the versatility it gives for both wheel throwing and medium sized sculptural work. I also use a cone 6 porcelain so students get a piece of ceramic history in their hands- sometimes we mix it ourselves- sometimes we work out of the box- some of the kids love it – some cant stand it- I love the exposure!~ more that one kind of clay? A world of clays!- I get my glaze ingredients and as much as I can through my local source- I also get my equipment through the same source- so I support the local economy and my clay food chain- I use a different supplier during the summer for camp because they are closer. I do bid out the school supply list annually to make sure I get the best value- I don't buy my supplies through the major art supply catalogues designed for total school art programs. My budget has remained capable of supporting a good program provided I reclaim clay and am able to create the savings possible through self mixed glazes. Over the years I have been able to pick up a few new wheels- Get some outside e kiln work by a professional service- purchase a pug mill- buy 20 new stools and keep a steady supply of basic tools. Considering what we are able to produce and the number of kids serviced it is cheap- but to look at the numbers with no background in the area- it might look costly.



Clay and Glazes

In my classroom we work a cone 6 stoneware and glaze setup- a lot of that has to do with the fact that it is the setup I walked into and learned from- We have pushed the program pretty far into testing and trying new glaze

mixes by advanced students- we always use oxides to color- a base glaze along with oxides such as iron- cobalt- copper- red iron- offers students some pretty wide color possibilities- we also mix some specialty buckets and mayonnaise size jars-

I have worked through a number of different clays in the classroom- now I have it down to a cone 6-10 Z clay- and cone 6 porcelain body. We have previously used a brown spotted stoneware that was really good for sculptural work but was really hard on the kids using the wheel due to its grog content- I asked for a speckled white from the supplier to be special mixed because the kids wanted brighter coloration- I figured white would do that- but that clay was too brittle- when I started at the school a cone 6 white was used- but it was hard to do sculptural work with due to cracking even with careful drying- so I have arrived at the all purpose clay I sought - it may not be the same for your school- maybe that clean white body is what you need- find out- its good learning and fun. Students and adults always seem to want what they don't have- they see that cool bright glaze at a gallery or show somewhere- why don't we have that? Well- we are learning- school- lest see what we can do with what's around here.

Clay lets students do anything they want to it- but sometimes it has to be done at the right time in the drying process- bend me shape me- shave- tear- you name it- but it will break- it is also dirty- new students can be turned off by that and some kids are really phobic about that aspect of it- so are some artists- its not for them- and I think its valid- I don't push clay on people- but I help them if they want to use it and they want ways to get around the mess- I can talk a lot of that away by telling them how much clay is around them in daily life- beauty products- things they eat- etc. but the most effective thing I can do is give them a clay that doesn't really stain up their clothes if they get it on them- that is what really seems to upset some-

I don't really know the answer to the student who is truly phobic of clay and its wonderful earthy qualities .- and I have had a few- most need some strategies of dealing with the issue- gloves while they don't work well in my opinion can help with the hand issue- but in general it is the cleanup and clay on the clothes that drive some kids batty- that's why a lot of schools go for a white body- but I go for the middle ground- tan- I don't have paper towels in the room so paper doesn't wind up in the clay buckets- so kids

clean and air dry their hands- I do always provide a non scented hand moisturizer that seems to make up for the lack of paper towels in the kids eyes. I don't provide aprons but let kids bring in a smock shirt as long as they keep it in their cabinet area- we are stretched thin for space. I do give kids some slack on dress up days- and always have an alternative activity if they are not clay worthy.



Beginning to understand glazes and their implications is a cognitive hurdle and a gateway for students to fully understand transformative processes. I currently run with a set of oxides in containers for applications under with base white- I have some other types of bucket glazes – 5 gallon buckets from the janitors floor wax that work well- currently a Burnt Orange- A turquoise- a students mix called Gunn Blue- a Butterscotch- Floating Blue- and then I have mayonnaise jars from the cafeteria for smaller batches- A transparent clear for porcelain applications- then a round of student mixes- if they want a color- go mix it..... I am also working some with mason stains now for shades that are hard to attain. We have a triple beam scale for weighing out ingredients- and older students mix test batches- all can mix oxide experiments- interns mix large batches.

Advanced kids are welcome to add to materials to clays , mix a porcelain- try different glaze possibilities such as glass melts.

H20

A big part of the room is the water source and the pipe trap combination or absence of one. I am fortunate to have built in sink traps that can be periodically cleaned – but this is often not the case. if you don't have one you need to be inventive- and I recommend a pipe insert into the drain to raise the water level allowing clay to fall to floor of the sink and to use a 5 gallon bucket with holes at the top placed inside the sink as a receptacle- not ideal but it will keep your pipes from clogging- It seems like there are never enough sinks in my room particularly for wheel cleanup and that is why teamwork- and a solid clean up time is important for my students.



Degree of Commitment- A lot of the schools I walk into have a differing commitment to clay and the clay program- I am always glad to see one- Programs often it involves low fire work with a bottled glaze scenario- which is nothing to scoff at. What is of concern are instructors who wind up with it as their assigned subject and are working through it but not getting the most out of what they do have- there are a lot of online resources for

information that used to not be there- such as Ceramics arts Daily- Clay art- places to ask questions and get good answers about equipment- how to use them- get to workshops- suppliers etc.

It is key to have educational goals in hand and then find the best route to deliver it to your students- where do you want to take the students?- My hope is to a place of real learning- not a cookie cutter approach of cranking out crafty knick knack stuff- and my second thought is that even if there aren't a lot of fancy materials and equipment available- an authentic learning and creative experience can be had with not a whole lot of expensive gear- clay kiln and a resourceful nature are all one really needs.



Wheel and Kiln-

In my mind a solid foundation in hand building is preferable to poor instruction on the wheel or one or two wheels periodically pulled out as part of a program. Learning wheel skills is an effort requiring sustained practice and a designated room or setup. Conversely a ceramics program that includes an effective wheel component for students offers a much richer experience for students and due to its almost athletic quality will increase the draw of your program not to mention that the wow factor is high-

Obviously it is a short lived clay program that does not have a functioning kiln- the greater considerations involve kiln style and upkeep. Top loader – Front loader? Electric or gas? Often there are cost considerations that place these decisions outside the hands of many teachers but given my druthers I would have 2 front loader electric kilns- one for bisque and one for glaze- As

big as I could get of course! The real question to determine that is realistically what role will clay play in the overall art setting of the school? And proceed from that point in deciding an equipment purchase.

Syllabus/Lesson plan- I have a set syllabus of general projects kids can expect to do- As I can potentially have a student full time for three years in a row- we can cover a lot of ground- generally I have students focus on hand building for one semester and wheel the next. If a student sticks around for a 3rd Independent year they can choose their own focus.- I switch up the projects every year but I try to have each year build on the next in terms of skill level as in taking the next jump- A good example of that is a students who created a geometrically shaped cookie jar with some applied wheel elements went on the next year to apply some of the learned techniques to make a geometric hand drum twice as large and much more complicated in execution.



Year intro

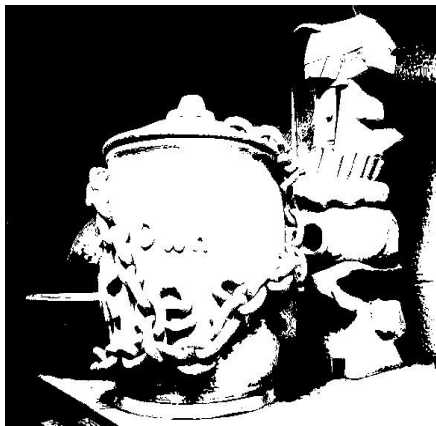
I start each year with the notion that clay takes us forward in emerging technologies and art as well as going back to the beginning- cultural artifact and objects of utility and beauty- I often pull out my Anasazi shards for this one but



any broken bits of old pottery will do- talk about the technologies used to create the pieces- how the people used them- follow the thread and contextualize it.

Best lesson- getting kids to mix clay/porcelain. And creating an appropriate stylistic piece in form and glaze decoration that respects and plays off the tradition it emerged from. Simple and effective

Grades- I sit down with kids at the end of the semester/quarter and do a verbal review or crit- there are no surprises. I give constant feedback- generally I ask the student where they think the grade is if it is on the low achieving end- they usually are honest. I grade on craftsmanship- solving of the assignment/problem/ and innovation-risk taking- those are the three biggies- I also incorporate some writing and our school is working into a rubric system as part of school improvement that will soon be part of our concern. To be honest if I could do away with grades I would- they are a bother and get in the way of kids really stepping out and taking a chance. But that is the system as it stands now.



Safety- The first thing I do with students every year is go over the room procedure with kids- the importance of getting on board with how things are done- and the reasons why. I cover tools, clay and silica, glaze, dust, cleanup, kiln, pug, everything I can think of. If there are issues that arise I address them at the beginning of the class when I have everyone's attention. We have masks- hep vac- gloves when needed- but most importantly the desire to be safe and knowledge of materials and their use..



Hard Won Lessons:

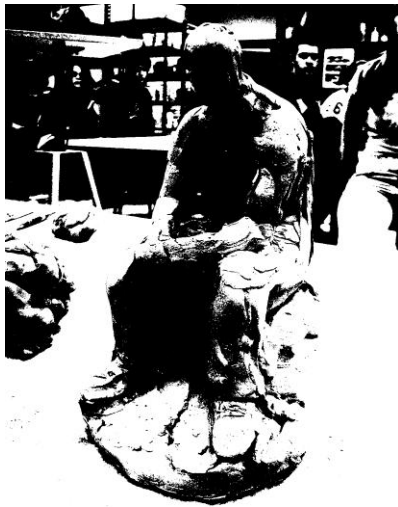
Never - setup a kiln to shutoff over night when someone is not in the building to keep track of it- no matter how many safeties are on it- be there- the sight of a massive over fire while a great learning experience is frightening and can be a potential program killer.

Have kids label their work and section so you can work it through the system and back to them- nicknames and initials don't work- must be legible

Don't be a know it all-

Kids see it their way and need often need to be left to go down directions that might seem off course to adults -After giving kids basic instruction students should be able to start thinking for themselves while having

enough skill to make their ideas happen. I often have to silence “my” idea or vision of where a project should be heading and instead “wait” for the question or simply wait for the answer to materialize.



Your place in the school food Chain

From my perspective art is the most important subject in the school and it is on par with any other and I let people know it- I also know the realities of today’s environment but I stand firm in my convictions- I go to department head meetings and people know where I stand- and if they don’t they soon will , I chair accreditation meetings and visits and people who don’t know me sometimes think I am a science or geography or English teacher- they are surprised I am not only an art teacher but also a working artist- the mold/stereo type that people put artists in is very misconstrued and it is my job to correct it especially concerning its place in K-12 education- Arts

program produce well rounded creative problem solvers who understand the diverse nature of the world around them and are uniquely equipped to take on its challenges in a solitary or group manner.

Don't be whinier-people wont respect you. Be proactive by running the best program you can and show people what it produces.

Be an active member of the school- insert yourself into a key role

Form coalitions- people who you respect and can work with from the custodian on up- bring people along on your ride- people want to be a part of good things so let them in-

Collegiality- I do my best not to become a loner in the school environment- I make my room accessible and open the door to others- I engage in activities with other non art teachers and I try to bring as many people along as possible but I also make sure not to be used as a door mat. It is very important to make the custodians and secretaries' part of your team- try getting along without them.

When I first started teaching I made sure I had an outside of "art" activity with kids- I started the guitar club due to my interest in playing and making handcrafted instruments- And while it was a rag tag bunch- and was sometimes obnoxious IE: smoke on the water for the 40th time- it helped me see the school around me by non art kids as well- It gave me an identity and let people see that an art teacher could play right into the mix- Later I started going out on schools accreditation visits and eventually became chair of our in house team which I am presently engaged in- It is hard work but it really shows people another side of the artist- a group problem solver in spades- I play the role- put the suit on – trim the hair- get behind the podium.

The best defense is a good offense.

This still may not work- We shall see- things in my system are very difficult now – I expect to remain employed and keep the ceramics area viable but there are no guarantees- I have played my strongest suit and I know that if it is time to move on it will not be because I am not needed or people do not recognize the importance of what a good clay program offers the students.

What is realistic considering the situation?. How far can your program grow within the framework of the school- what type of operation is possible? Most importantly what would the kids of the community most benefit from? What needs aren't being met?

Avoid a program meltdown- Rooms with good equipment going unused- underutilized- or unwanted- I have seen quality kilns with no knowledgeable person to operate them- expensive ones to boot. Pug mills with dried clay rendering them inoperable going unused- Kilns malfunctioning and with a doable fix with teachers getting tired of the hassle of them. Tools going unused and not understood- Clay needs a focus and a purpose in the school- it is too involved to get on board with here and there- While it is possible to bring it out as an occasional part of an art program- I believe it warrants its own space and focus- maybe part of a 3d sculpture area but best as its own space.



Standards of Learning- Core Subjects- Public schools are at loggerheads with themselves- they want to meet the demands of standardized testing- have students know the right answers and information for core subjects while in the process getting boxed into the corner of teaching to the test. At the same time schools also want to promote critical thinking and problem solving skills while often weakening or even eliminating the programs that foster these skills out of the financial necessity of bolstering whatever subjects are weak in the testing paradigm

In my system Art is often chosen because it is not like other subject areas- students write- and are held accountable to high standards, but at the core is creating and making- Art. While it is possible to wrap assignments into other subject areas learning strands we haven't intentionally done that. Art is really the original and best interdisciplinary subject available and clay perhaps the best medium to propagate that reality. Conversely as our society becomes more specialized, a subject area and activity that calls on all the different quadrants of taxonomy becomes more important if not indispensable towards creating a well rounded student and citizen. Teaching art, craft, and its related technologies, physical properties, cultural and historical origins as well as its current trends and place as social barometer puts it at the top of the educational taxonomy framework - schools and governmental agencies should be running towards well run arts and craft programs as a model of educational delivery, not away.



Taking Care of Yourself

-Safety for you is different than for the students- It takes longer for us to graduate!

Our biggest enemy is sitting dust- and its easy to sponge it up- as a matter of course I sponge down surfaces constantly- everyone thinks its because I am something a clean nut- but it really is to get rid of the micro particles that when disturbed can make their way into my lungs- from glazes to clay- I also purchased years ago a quality heap-vac from a clay supplier that I can use to vacuum up areas near the kiln, vent and shelving before I get at it with the sponge

Professional Development.- Some of the district professional development activities I have participated in over the years while well meaning have not come close to meeting my needs in the clay classroom- The best professional development I have encountered is with other professional ceramic educators and professional ceramic artists- It is in these circles that I am inspired to try new things- break out of routines- try different ways of teaching and due clays learning curve there is immediate access to much practical information for the attendee. It is good to visit museums and craft exhibits of course but nothing beats one on one interaction with practitioners.

From time to time valuable network opportunities also present themselves to teachers. In my case an association with the National Consortium for Teaching Asia and The Five College Center for Teaching East Asia has provided excellent opportunities for world class lectures from distinguished faculty from many East Coast colleges and Universities as well as stipends and limited monetary procurements for classroom learning materials.



BIGGEST HELP TO FIELD WOULD BE – A workshop development institute for K-12 ceramic teachers.

BIGGEST HELP TO CERAMIC TEACHER NEW TO PROFFESION- A qualified district or “at large” mentor with a proven track record.

FUN- My main goal- If I cant have it why do it? I do love teaching ceramics- and making art of all sorts whether in school or on my own time- The minute it becomes a drag for me- it will become a drag for the students. I let the students know I make art and I let them see me do so they know what is possible. I talk about and show my outside of school efforts to them so they can see that is possible to have an existence as an artist that goes beyond whatever stereotype they may have.



Beyond the four walls-

You have to take this show on the road and get it out where people in the community can see it- Have your students enter shows- We do a yearly round of shows which include the Scholastic Achievement Awards- Newspaper profiles, and community college shows. We have in house end of the year awards for outstanding students and prominently display student work all year long at the showcase situated at the entrance foyer to the school.

Have a place to display the work in your school- a place of prominence and importance- Right there with all of the other art- and also the trophies- hall of fame-

I do raku firing at my house to show other types of firing techniques that are unavailable to me in school- show these practices in video form if you can't get to the real thing - Show kids how pros do it in the studio- show different kinds of kilns and fuel methods.

My area of weakness that I need to improve on is getting kids out of the classroom- studio visit or even a NCECA convention for the ones who it is right for- I have work to do still.

I also want to work towards working with one of the business classes on some marketing of ceramic items as part of their marketing unit- business and art.

My process- For most hand building projects I have a stimulus – something to look at and respond to- I require a sketch- not art- not a masterpiece- a thinking drawing- to get some ideas going- I often ask for a quick model of an idea- a way to talk about some technical issues that may come up or that

the students might be unaware of- I work a basic syllabus that I feel free to change based on the year- the students- whatever-

Mr. Burns

Semester Plan- Advanced Ceramics

HANDBUILDING 1st Semester

BREAKFAST Set- slab

Pedestal Bowl- slab-shaped bottom

Covered container- Box/Funk Pot

Compound Cylindrical Container

Freeform- organic form with 5 openings

15" Friend

Wheel 2nd Semester

Breakfast Set- bowl/mug/pitcher

Pedestal Bowl- additive design- trumpet shape

Covered Containers with 2 different tops

drop flange- knob lid

domed cover- decoration

cruet with head stopper

Teapot

ADVANCED CERAMICS 2

Second Year Advanced students work similar methods as first year Advanced students but are encouraged to build upon their knowledge and skills by taking ideas in a more

personal direction. Independent students design coursework in cooperation with the instructor.

HANDBUILDING

Trompe- L'oil Object

Architectonic- Environment

Coil Body

Carving Form- Bas Relief- Full form- Triptych

Cookie Jar

WHEEL

Design Platters

3 Mixing Bowls

2 Large Covered Containers

3 Piece Vessel- with relief carving surface

Large Bowl with Carving motif

Cruet Set with stoppers

Working fountain with pump

Lamp

Clay body formulation

Glaze formulation

Airbrushing techniques

- Integration of ceramic and non ceramic material

WRITING- Periodic written work will be assigned and evaluated using the school writing rubric. The writing will be topical and relevant. Students will work towards developing personal artistic statements to accompany their work.

GRADING

4 project grades averaged to create quarter grade. A midterm and final is combined and averaged equally with the 4 quarterly grades to create the final grade for the year.

All work due at the end of quarter. Evaluation takes place regularly during class; formal critiques may be arranged after school with the instructor at any time.

I am available after school Tuesdays 2-3pm. and by appointment.

GRADING CONSIDERATIONS

Completion of assignment in all phases/ incorporation of objective

Craftsmanship

Complexity of solution

Originality of solution/risk

Participation in class discussions and activities

I have read and understand the coursework and grading procedures.

Student _____ date _____

Guardian _____ date _____



I keep at home a small four sided box with a cracked lid developed due to a fused glaze top. This was part of a series the student had done using decorative glass melt on surfaces. I love the experimentation and search this piece represents – the “aha” moment- and also the ability this students had

of saying back to the drawing board! I get thanks from students all the time in many ways but the greatest gift a student can give me is to work hard, try new things, and help out their peers.



In thanks to Donald Dodd- My senior year high school art teacher at Grafton High School whom I never properly thanked for his efforts on my behalf as well as David Hawkins who taught me both wheel skills and the workings of a well run clay room during the early years of my teaching tenure at Palmer High School. And of course my many clay students over the years of Palmer High School- I always said you were all my favorites and I meant it!

ONWARD!

Teaching High School Students the Fine Art of Ceramics with Electricity

Or, How I discovered ceramics by Lynne Fox

The road approaching Monument Valley was dotted with little trading posts selling handcrafts. Naturally, my parents stopped at several of them until each of us, my three siblings and myself, had a treasured little keepsake on our first trip in the great American Southwest. Mine was a necklace of colorful glass beads on tiny little safety pins in the form of the traditional Navajo squash blossom. It was love! In the following days of camping in the Monument Valley wilderness this necklace was my connection to the native culture and a badge of honor to wear. It was very special indeed. As with any good excursion in my family there was rarely a road that didn't call to my father for investigation: The two tire tracks winding down into the valley itself, across its burnt earth to and around the monoliths rising out of the red sand was no different. My dad hoisted us kids to the roof of our 1969 Chevy station wagon for the best view. And so it was with our hands clasping the railing of the luggage rack we entered the valley with wide open imaginations and the big clear blue sky kissing our faces and carrying our cast away voices; returning them to us again from the walls that are older than any voice at all.

It was only when we were closest to the spire called The Three Sisters that we heard voices not our own and unfamiliar. Dad stopped the car. We all scrambled down from our perch and with equal curiosity and in trepidation stood face to face with authentic Navajo people of the Valley. My parents conducted broken conversation with their adult counterparts but the girl who was closest to my age just looked at me, and me at her with no words. Her eyes moved to my necklace and lingered there before coming back to my eyes. As one does with something so precious as this I lifted my necklace and offered it to her. I felt it belonged to her. She accepted with equal admiration and then scooped a bit of earth in her hands and gestured the making of beads. From her neck she then took her clay beads, strung on a cotton thread, and offered them to me. To this day I will occasionally come

across my little ceramic treasure tucked with my most precious things and I'll see the hands of that little girl take red earth and create a beautiful bond. I wonder if she ever comes across a beaded squash blossom in her special memories. And so it was that the properties of the earth that is clay, and the fire that transforms it into something lasting, made an indelible impression on me that day in Monument Valley.

Not everyone can have such a romantic and adventurous introduction to the transforming power of ceramics so it is essential to me in my teaching to convey the alchemy of the process both in the clay and in the student. I remember every day as well, that I am not teaching ceramics – I am teaching people, young people not only about clay but about themselves, the world, and life itself. So often we are undernourished in the way of adventurous, imaginative and curiosity inducing experience. So I hope to offer this in some small way to each of my students individually and collectively in the best way that I can through my own experiences and the innate pull that clay has on the human spirit.

The artifact is what is left after the art happens.

On the first day of class I introduce my students to the world of ceramics by sharing 3,000-year-old shards of Roman pottery from Constantia, Romania that I received as a gift from my brother. I encourage my students to pass these shards around, to feel them, to take a moment to run their fingers along the deep grooves made by the potter's fingers and imagine. I ask them to examine the shape of the shard and decorative patterns and wonder what the complete and unbroken form would look like. What would it be used for? From this experience they gain an appreciation for what they will make and the clay they mold with their fingers. They learn that upon firing it will be here on earth for a long, long time after they have returned to dust themselves and with various methods of forming this malleable material into functional or decorative ware, they are participating in what human beings have been doing across time; in fact, for over 15,000 years! Immediately they are intrigued and can't wait to start making their own marks in clay! In the course of this exercise I tell them that if my shards are to break, by accident of course, I would not be terribly disturbed, it would simply mean

that I would have more shards. After all, they are broken already! In the years I have been teaching literally thousands of high school students have examined and passed these three large shards from one to another and I still have just three large shards!

Great Minds Think In Questions

My classroom is very small and between roughly 30 students, in each of the six classes I see each day, I have room for only five wheels. Consequently throwing is not the priority. We primarily hand build, however, I feel it is a travesty for any student to have a ceramics class and not have a wheel experience so each student is required to at least center, open, pull, and finish a piece on the wheel. This is where I emphasize that it is not the product that is important but rather the process and the experience. The piece, or the artifact, is the byproduct of the experience. I do encourage, however, any student to pursue developing their skill on the wheel if they are so inclined, through a series of exercises with weekly objectives and challenges. Also, as per my mentor Mel Jacobson's suggestion on structuring time in the classroom I work on the wheel myself one day a week, primarily for demonstration purpose but also so that students see me working as an artist. This is very important.

As I stated earlier, I emphasize that the artifact, the piece a student creates is simply a byproduct of what happens in their head. A quality product represents quality thinking, quality questioning. Nothing can happen outside until it happens inside!

A worker is one who works with their hands.

A craftsman is one who works with their hands and their head.

An artist is one who works with their hands, their head, and their heart.

I love it when a student can't wait to show me a piece because they are so excited and proud of it! They know it when their work is good and they are proud of it! However, what is difficult for high school students is actually

identifying why something is good. Good is an opinion, a value judgment. As I've developed as a teacher I have learned to be more careful in making statements like "that is good" or "I like it". Although I am very positive and supportive, statements like this impose my value on student work and students then depend on my standard rather than develop a trust in their own high standard. Students know what my standard, or value system is by what they see in the room, in the display cases, in my demonstrations, and my personal work. So I've learned to make observations about their work rather than to simply state value judgments. This is something important for students to understand as well: It is very easy to make opinions; everyone has opinions, however, it is much more difficult to back those opinions up with facts. So rather than saying, "yes, I like this", or "no I don't like this." I state observations that help students form their own opinions with facts backing them up. This is also a fantastic way to reinforce vocabulary because it is repeated and they hear and use it over and over. Instead of saying 'this is good', I might say, "The form is symmetrical and balanced. The size/weight and height/width ratios are balanced. The line, form, and color are unified and evoke a sense of calm. And I also make it a point, when appropriate, to invite the student to see possibilities to investigate, such as "This is a good starts. Would a (enter your adjective here) texture make this more interesting?" "Have you thought about what would happen if..." This allows the student to imagine and also trains their mind to visualize. Pretty soon they are seeing their own possibilities; pieces become less 'precious' to them and more like vehicles for experimentation. When their pieces become vehicles for experimentation, they also become more expressive and interesting.

In the beginning, I frequently hear students say things like "I can't do this." or "I'm not good at art." or "I don't have any ideas." All of these are statements; blocking statements with stories that don't serve anyone well. So I pose the question to the student, "How can that blocking statement be turned into a question with forward momentum that serves you well? It was from the repetitive nature of this conversation with individual students that I developed the idea of "Questions" as a notebook exercise. It's a bit like Jeopardy in that the students' entries are in question form. Each week students are required to enter ten questions in their ceramic notebook under the 'questions' section. In the beginning I will suggest that these entries be

related to questions that arise during a demo, or material covered in class. In the case of working on the wheel, after a demonstration students will identify questions that arose in their minds during the demonstration, and then again when they have practical experience on the wheel. This will often evoke two completely different sets of questions. For example after a demonstration students might be asked to draw and identify the tools they will need. Questions may relate to something as specific as these tools, including the wheel itself, and/or the use or purpose of those tools. Perhaps their questions will relate to technique or a piece of information they missed in the demonstration. Once they have practical wheel experience their questions may be more specific as to how their hands relate each other as they begin to center; how they relate to the clay or, their own body. I encourage questions such as 'what happens with the clay when you make a subtle change in their posture, use of the wrist, or leg this way or that.

All in all, the notebook exercise I call 'questions' is also a good barometer of students' interests and inclinations. Quite powerful actually! The objective is that students become more aware of the statements generate, i.e., become aware of their thinking; and subsequently become more articulate in developing productive questions that open up their minds. The question is emphasized over the statement because the question is more important! The question is open to possibilities rather than closed, as is the statement. For instance, when a student makes the statement "I can't do this" it is stated in fact form; it is definitive; it is concrete and it is certainly discouraging. It also focuses on what they don't have, where as the 'question' opens up pathways: What do I need to learn to have success with this assignment? What do I already know? What is my experience with this subject, topic, idea? What or who can help me with this particular task? What tools can I use? What should I do first? It is the nature of the question that will guide their technical and/or conceptual skill development, and, in my opinion, their life in general. Although I don't grade on content I do assess a student's judgment and value, which are both topics of on-going discussions in the classroom.

The question is raised then, 'how does this exercise translate into artwork?' Hopefully, as students become comfortable with their ability to inquire, to ask questions, it will become natural for them to use questions throughout the entire process of their work: "What do I need to know?" "What do I need to do?" "Where do I look for help?" "What do I find inspiring?" "What if

"I do this or that?" "Does it work?" "Does my craftsmanship support, or distract from, the story of the piece?" "Am I finished?" "Is this the best I can do?" "Is it worthy of more effort?" "Is it done?" "Why is it important for me to know or do?" When we become more conscious of these questions we can make informed decisions and choices.

As the course advances I continue to provide possible prompts until students begin to freely develop their own threads of questions relating to their personal work and development. The 'question' exercise has, in fact, been an enormous aid in my teaching in general as reading through them helps me identify areas that either need clarification or might be interesting to students and/or myself to pursue as a lesson or projects. Also, I have very, very positive feedback from students both verbally and visibly in their work. It seems to give them permission to play, or not take everything so seriously, while also raising their own standard in the way of content and craftsmanship.

The curriculum must be arranged so that there is time and space for experimentation to happen; for students to follow a thread that excites them. But caution must be taken because even the most trusted and dedicated student needs constant motivation for maintaining forward momentum. I say, always leave your audience wanting more and keep them moving! Idle hands are the devils tool! Occasionally I'll find a student not moving, not working, which I do not highly value in my class, so upon an inquiry as to why they are not working, their response is usually that they are thinking! I jump on this opportunity to be theatrical and say this is NOT allowed! NO THINKING IN ART CLASS!!!! It's just my way of getting a chuckle, and making a point. Humor is so important. And it's also important to recognize and build in an ebb and flow of energy. High investment projects that require a great deal of thought and energy must be separated by more simple projects. One of my favorite 'filler' projects as I call them, or "Independent Project Points" are charity projects. One is called 'empty bowls' where students make a simple bowl to donate for a sale whose proceeds are donated to a local food bank. This is a new addition to my curriculum. Sales will be in conjunction with our annual Science and Arts Show. Friends and families are encouraged to come buy their student's bowl for them to keep as a reminder of good fortune and the need to share. They will also receive a free meal in it as donated by either a local restaurant for advertisement purposes, or the school's culinary students may want to

participate. Another "filler" or independent project is making a piece to donate to a class totem, or stack of small sculptural projects. These are great fun and everyone loves them! Each student makes a piece for stacking, using a building and decorative techniques of their choosing. The only requirement is that it has specific sized holes in the bottom and top and that the top hole has a collar on it to fit into the bottom hole of the piece that will stack on top of it. Students will compete for the top spot! These have become highly prized pieces for administrators to have in their offices, in the school's reception office, and we are talking about making a totem garden around the flagpole.

Students love to be valued and recognized. We all do! I love taking pictures and often people love having either their picture taken, or a picture of their work taken, so it was natural for me to start taking pictures in my classroom. I organize these pictures in three ring binders identifying semesters and have them available for students to look at as a resource. To my surprise these notebooks are a huge success! Students love looking at them and even bring their friends in at lunchtime and after school just to show them the picture, the validation, of their work. Photos of students holding their own work is the big draw! Student turn each page with anticipation of who they will see next and they go looking for people they know! "Alex is in this class... is there a picture of his series project in here... that was really neat." "Look! That's Virginia!!!!" "Hahaha look at Larry!" My students know, however, that there is absolutely no poking fun or putting down of anyone, or any one's work is my room. Nothing makes me happier than when I hear one of my students tell a guest of theirs who might not know about 'this place', or this room, that it is special, "no street talk here." Students can be very cold and hurtful to each other but not here. I explain that the world is a cold hard place and none of that belongs in this place. We celebrate the best of humanity here; the best of ourselves and the majority of my students understand and value this. This is the one area I will be extremely stern and make no joke about. This is also how I deal with the drug issue that is sadly inescapable on any high school campus. My moto on this subject is this: "You don't take drugs; drugs take you." The kids get this; they like it.

Questions and Curiosity

Five hundred years ago the artist and the scientist were the same. Michelangelo asked what does a tendon look like? And we see the result of his inquiry in his amazing sculptured figures of the human form in marble. Every creative endeavor man has ever embarked on started with a question, curiosity about how something works, or how we could better understand the universe, or how to store food for tomorrow. Human beings are naturally curious and we are constantly experimenting and creating and challenging stories to help us make sense of what we don't understand. Often throughout history it has been the artist who was the conveyor of these stories as well as the one who challenged them with questions. It was the question, not the statement, in fact, that lead Juan Quezada of Mata Ortiz, in Chihuahua Mexico to develop his own exquisite and remarkable style of pottery. As a child he found shards, broken remnants of the Paquime Indians, in the desert and he wondered. Many before him found a shard and said "This is a shard, a broken piece of pottery." but Juan asked himself what the extended shape of this shard would be. What would the pattern look like if extended to the full form of the piece? He wondered what properties of the earth held a shape and withstood the fire to form pottery. How could he achieve the color and finish of these shards from the materials found in the local earth? It was his questions and dedication to the pursuit of answers that ultimately lead him to become a national treasure of Mexico whose work would be gifted to the Pope on three different occasions.

Curiosity: it comes in questions! It is something of paramount importance that we must foster in our students as art teachers! We can't, however, just foster curiosity in our students. We should have it ourselves! Just like we should demonstrate to our students the role art plays in enriching our own personal lives, we should also demonstrate the abundant wealth good questions can deliver as well. My favorite question in the art room is "what if?"... Or "what happens if." It's a great and safe jumping off point for an abundance of experiments, problem solving, judgments, and decisions.

Get Curious and Get out

I have found a thrilling aspect of teaching is the getting curious and getting out of the classroom! In general, it is my experience that teachers are naturally curious, creative, and innovated regardless of their grade level or subject. And many love to travel. I began my career as any other teacher, with my beloved studio classes and subsequent education course but my real education started when the classes were done, my diplomas were behind glass, and I stepped into my classroom. I asked myself everyday "What do I have to offer?" "How can I inspire my students to pursue their best work?" and "What do I need to learn". Well, as it turned out, I have a wonderful little collection of modest pottery given to me over a number of years as gifts from my mother-in-law. My favorite pieces in this collection are from Mata Ortiz potters. So when I found an excellent video on the supreme hand building and burnishing techniques of these famed potters I shared it, as well as a few of my actual Mata Ortiz pieces, with my students. My curiosity about these potters peaked with my students' questions and in my search for information I found an opportunity to actually travel to the town itself in Chihuahua Mexico. So on a lovely spring break afternoon my husband and I set out from our home in the Phoenix area, met our guides Ron and Sue Bridgemon, and joined a caravan of pottery enthusiasts from every corner of North America, in the border town of Douglas, Arizona. The very next afternoon, after a long drive on very narrow roads punctuated with military checkpoints, we arrived in the tiny, high desert town of Mata Ortiz. It had not occurred to me to identify myself as a teacher because I was participating as a pottery enthusiast just as everyone else. However, it came to pass that my profession would be made known and the most amazing thing happened! It was dusk of our first day in Mata Ortiz. Our group was in the home of potters where, as in every case, the exquisite work of these fine artists was displayed on every horizontal surface available including tables, counters, hearths, and in some cases even beds and floor space as many of the homes are extremely meager. The matron of the home we were in was pointing out differences between her own work and that of her husband when he arrived home from his work on the ranch and greeted the crowd in his home with a warm and modest smile. I will never forget that moment because I instantly recognized him and before I knew it I was telling him who he is!!! "Mario" I exclaimed! The question naturally arose as to how I knew him and while I was posing with him for pictures I explained that I am a teacher in Arizona and my ceramic students enjoy his video entitled 'Mata Ortiz'. This revelation of being a ceramics teacher

catapulted me into a status unfamiliar to me until this moment... that of a visiting dignitary or superstar! It immediately became important to our hosts that I meet Juan Quezada himself and within a day's time I was shaking the hand of Juan Quesada, one of Mexico's own National Treasures! He shared the story of American anthropologist and business consultant, Spencer MacCallum, discovering his work in 1976. He also opened the turquoise colored case and produced for me to see, the actual bowl, the original piece that Spencer MacCullem had discovered in a New Mexico shop that had inspired him to travel to Mata Ortiz in search of the extraordinary artist. This is the bowl that sparked the Mata Ortiz phenomena we know today. Now if that isn't a story to inspire and motive everyone to get curious, take a chance, and get out there, I don't know what is!!! I also came home with new and phenomenal pieces of pottery that my students hold and revere as they hear the story of Juan Quezada, Spencer MacCullum, and the Mata Ortiz phenomena.

Seek Out Good Mentors – the classroom is a lonely place.

Mentors are an extremely important and an under emphasized part of developing into the teacher you want to be. I think this is a cornerstone that is not fixed quite properly in our foundation as teachers. We need to seek out opportunities to learn from each other and share in meaningful and inspiring ways. The obvious drawback to this is time. We simply don't have enough of it and it would see that collaboration isn't highly valued in the American education system from the administrative angle so as a result teachers can become somewhat isolated in their classrooms. It is left to us to seek out meaningful growth experiences and valuable mentors at the same time being incredibly judicious in the way we use our time. Although it should be given freely and openly to students, parents, the administration, etc. it must be guarded and protected against those that would consume it, in and out of school time! As I tell my students, money comes and money goes but you never get a minute back! And truly, how you spend your time is the ultimate litmus test of your priorities... so invest it wisely.

I have been very lucky in finding fantastic and generous mentors especially in our visual arts department (as well as the principal of our school who is

the consummate professional and leads by example.) Our painting and art history teacher, Harry Chen is immediately next door to my ceramic studio. Every minute with Harry is an investment with enormous dividends. He is a larger than life character whom is profoundly dedicated to the art of teaching people and has mastered the dichotomy of teaching. He demonstrates being solid as a rock but fluid like a river; taking everything seriously but taking nothing too seriously; caring but not caring; trusting but not trusting; wide open and tightly closed, and he makes it perfectly sensible because it's all articulated with good judgment and consistency. Almost every day someone, a student or adult, will ask me to clarify some mystery about Harry. "Is he really 98 years old?" is the most common question, when he clearly is not 98 years old but how did he pack so much into such a short time? In addition to having a rich personal history and a wealth of knowledge from a lifetime of being engaged in life and in the visual arts, Harry has a keen understanding of the performance art of teaching. He truly engages his students on a very human and highly animated level of energy. It's just impossible to be in his sphere and not learn, or desire to learn something new about the arts, the world, or about yourself. Working with Harry is truly an honor in that I have a trusted friend and respected colleague. He taught me to be myself, be authentic, find my stride, but at the same time, to develop a professional persona, a character to use in the classroom... As much as I would love to be the audacious, shocking and beloved character that Harry is, it would be impossible. He is right in emphasizing the strength of being true to yourself. You just can't be anyone else as well as you can be yourself and that is exactly what we love so much about Harry. He is his loud, colorful, straight-shooting, open, closed, and mysterious self all the time! It is truly a privilege to know him.

Many fine mentors have helped me develop my style, my persona and a solid and fluid curriculum. They have demonstrated a variety of philosophies, motivations, and techniques. They are also the guides in seeing the road ahead; they are the directional signs and the mile posts marking the highway and helping to identify how far I've come from that first step in the classroom on those discouraging days. Good and valued colleagues are worth their weight in gold.

It is said, seek and you will find. I'm here to tell you it is true! As a new teacher I was seeking to find my strengths as a teacher, ways to get my students excited about the visual arts and specifically ceramics. And most

importantly, I was looking for ways to get high school students involved in their own learning and how they do it. Then it happened. In 2009 I took the opportunity to attend NCECA (National Council for Education in the Ceramic Arts) when hosted in the City of Phoenix. Through a series of very fortunate events I found myself in the Clayart room being introduced to Mel Jacobson. Without hesitation and with great affirmation of the joy of teaching high school students, Mel shared his experience in the classroom and more importantly, very specific ideas in the way of structuring time and space in a ceramics room. He knew all about dealing with the realities of students and their needs and wants, individually and collectively. To say the least he was exciting!!! He made a gift of a plate to my classroom and invited me to return to the clayart room again. It would quickly come to pass that I would understand that meeting Master Potter and teacher Mel Jacobson is a life altering experience! Within just two months of NCECA I was enveloped in his big embracing hug on the curb of the Minneapolis International Airport where he picked me up on my way to Hay Creek, a camp of his making for adult shared learning among a community of artists. I really had no idea what I was in for and was actually quite (and of course unjustifiably) terrified. This feeling must be somewhat familiar to new students and it's very good for teachers to experience it once in awhile to have a true compassion for the student. And I learned what every teacher needs to know. It is this: Empowerment. This is what Mel teaches. In the words of master potter and Hay Creeker Kevin Caulfield, "Drive the Car" and Mel is there to hand you the keys! He talks about and recognizes strength and power; he is power. He is what he wants from his students and he anoints with love and trust. The secret to Mel's success in teaching is unstructured structure where the structure is so strong and tight that it is completely invisible and as reliable as the sun itself coming up in the east! In this structure the student feels a sense of security as well as responsibility to honor the system, the love, the strength and the trust. All intangibles. This is Mel!!

Something else Mel reinforced in me is that motivation is everything! Now, of course, a paycheck is a nice little motivation but teaching as we all know goes way beyond the extrinsic reward! In the case of teaching art, motivation and objective are one in the same. As a teacher, my motivation, or my objective is to turn on a light, ignite a flame, and awaken a curiosity, and to teach self-reliance, resourcefulness, and value through the medium of clay and the language of art. Facts and figures are easy to come by and

readily available in this age if instant access, but desire, passion, and appreciation are acquired. I think as art teachers we have the special joy of sharing and awaking in students something primal, something they are naturally attuned to because it is innate for humans to create; we are creative beings by nature and we, as art teachers, can be instrumental in making an appreciation for this aspect of the human condition either in their own individual creativeness, or in the collective creativeness of various cultures and conditions of humanity across time! It is also innate in humans to observe, to ask questions, and make judgments... and this is exactly what artists (and scientists) do! So the question becomes how do you awaken this, the question, the curiosity, the creativity in students, even the reluctant ones?

First and foremost I believe as a teacher, in any subject, it is important to believe in what you do; believe that what you do is important and that what your students do is important. Students will believe it when you do! As stated earlier, we never get a minute back and so knowing that what you do, and what your students do is of paramount value will increase the value of that time. I tell my students "turn your time into value." And they understand this; they WANT to turn their time into value!! Sometimes they just don't know how and this is where we come in as good teachers; we have to set up the structure and give them permission to work (or play which is our first authentic work) freely within it! They WILL; They WANT to!!!! Also, speaking of wanting, it is my observation that every high school student that I have ever met desperately wants to respect and be respected. The issue is, that just like everyone else on the planet, they want people and programs they respect and they see right through to the truth and motivation of almost every matter. They are pretty sharp. To a teacher this means we must be respectable and our curriculum must be respectable: structured for learning. I ask myself everyday what is my program giving these students? What are they learning? Why does it matter? What are they leaving with? What do they remember about this art class? I'm sure It won't be the facts and the figures. It will be one thing... students will take one overriding image, idea or 'snap shot' of the entire experience of your classroom away... it will be the experience they had, derived from your motivation...and hopefully it will be something so grand and so simple as a pleasure in learning, discovering, doing! And this is exactly what we should model as teachers!!!

So what does it mean to be worthy of a student's time? In college my creative writing teacher said that the writer must give the reader a fair exchange for time. Shouldn't this be true for any exchange on time? It is my complete and utter belief that even the most reluctant student wants to learn but somewhere they learned that their time is of little or no value and what they have learned best is how to squander it because the perception that it doesn't matter; they don't matter! They'll squirm and argue when you tell them differently, but it does matter, and they do! Our job is to make them see what we see... at least the time we have with them!!! So, this is where the structure comes in. Help the student set or understand clear objectives, goals, dreams (this is what the problem is/what must be achieved/the outcome), make incremental deadlines (this is when there must be evidence of having solved it in some manner), and go about helping them to find what they need to meet that goal (1. permission to succeed 2. functional environment 3. technical, contextual, and conceptual information 4. and permission to succeed, again, and again (re; Mel Jacobson)).

In the art room we have the freedom and responsibility to open up imaginations,

illuminate possibility, and highlight the relationship this has to charting a fulfilling life whether it be a life in the arts in a professional role, or as an appreciator of how the arts influence our culture and how our culture influences the arts!

Be strong, be curious, have faith in yourself, enjoy the energy of your students and help them direct it into their thinking and their artwork will show it! Work hard, have fun, and be of good cheer.

In Conclusion

At the writing of this essay I have had the privilege of teaching high school students ceramics, full-time, for six years. Every single day I enter my classroom with purpose, pride, and gratitude. All too often art teachers are dismissed, or even worse dismiss themselves, as second-class citizens in

both the professional art world and in the realm of education. The perception seems to be that we teach as a second option due to a failure in the professional art world. It is a tireless subject of discussion and leads to resentment and defensiveness. I know, however, that to teach art is a high calling. Beverly Sills, is cited for saying "Art is the signature of civilization". It truly is! From the artifacts we study, to the humanity we learn in the process of doing and sharing, it is the obligation of the art teacher to facilitate civilization in the way of thinking, and to make in students an appreciation for art, whatever that means, through examination of the human condition and spirit, and most important, engagement in the primary experience of creating art. Art is our first language. It is the universal language that we forget. We are creative beings by nature and have an innate relationship with line, shape, form, texture, balance, rhythm, etc. We live with, in, and around it! It is inescapable. But we forget to 'see'. It is the job of the art teacher to reintroduce their students to their own language.

Photographs & Examples:

Beaded necklace from Monument Valley

Roman shards

Juan Quazada with bowl

Mario with me

