

*“Empowering students to learn and create; learning and creating to cultivate a better world.”*

I knew I was an artist before I knew I was an educator. I began my college career studying studio art, with a focus in painting and figure. What led me to art education were the questions that arose as I began adulthood amidst a chaotic political climate. What was I supposed to be doing with my life? How could I go about creating positive change? How could I use my skills as an artist to support the struggles around me? In confronting these questions, I realized how artmaking has helped me heal and self-expression has helped me communicate. I also realized that I could share the ways that artmaking has made me better by becoming a teacher. Now, as an art educator, I aim to empower young people by giving them the tools they need to begin to understand themselves so that they can begin to use artmaking to address issues that are impacting them.

My ideal classroom focuses on social-emotional learning (SEL), that promotes individual growth in a safe and respectful environment. This means, a classroom where a diverse range of feelings are regarded as valid, and tolerated. Creating this kind of classroom culture is important, because artmaking can involve a significant amount of vulnerability, and students should know that vulnerability is not only accepted, but respected. I intend to create this environment by recognizing the value of and encouraging transparency. I plan to remind students that it is important to set and abide by personal boundaries. Students will be able to contribute to the expectations and procedures that are implemented in my classroom so that they can partake in determining the kind of atmosphere they learn in.

Additionally, I hope for my classroom to be a place of moral and ethical development. A place where students can continuously evolve their understanding of what is right and what is wrong, based on the principle of doing no harm. Moral and ethical development is especially

important in the classroom, because in a place where we have to cooperate with many different kinds of people, it becomes necessary to know the difference between personal opinion and what we know to be morally correct. Additionally, because the art classroom is a place of self-expression, it is important to be aware of the ways we express ourselves and how it affects others. This process of developing one's ethics begins with an understanding of not only one's own needs and positions, but those of others.

My classroom will be conscious that it exists in a constantly changing universe. The students and teacher should know the importance of practicing self-awareness in the moment, and begin to accept the fluidity of environments and their inhabitants so that they can become better artists and people. Students should be able to leave the classroom with a better understanding of what it means to be a mindful and active learner, "growing with the flow," and acknowledging that the present moment is all you ever have. At the same time, I strive to put emphasis on the importance of self-reflection, and re-assessing the nuances of life as they come and go.

In following this philosophy I am capable of supporting social-emotional learning through personal growth and empathy. By way of my own artistic ability, personal experiences, education, and awareness, I know that I can help students develop their own skills in embracing vulnerability, setting boundaries, developing moral code and sensitivity to others, and engaging in reflective practice. I know that the job of a teacher is a complicated one, but I am motivated by the notion that I'm doing not what is easy, but what is right.