

Editor's Letter

When someone asks you what you do, what is your immediate answer? I suspect, for most of us, the answer is "I'm an art teacher." It is the role with which we most identify. And we all know that teaching art successfully is not an eight-hour-a-day job. I've always thought of it as a 24/7 profession. We're forever thinking about teaching art—searching for more effective approaches, looking for ideas for interesting art problems, and translating the world around us into meaningful art experiences for our students.

Naturally we identify with and share the ideals of other like-minded art teachers. We may even need this connection more than classroom teachers, as we are often the only art teachers on a campus, especially at the elementary level (all the more reason to join your state organization and the National Art Education Association). Having the support and assistance of your fellow art teachers is priceless. I was poignantly reminded of this at a student art exhibition this past year.

Our local art education organization, the Denton County Art Education Association, has an annual student art exhibition at a local art center, the Center for the Visual Arts, during Youth Art Month. Though it is open to all grade levels, elementary students and their parents are most likely to attend the opening reception.

At the opening, Kay Adamson, the art teacher at Ginnings Elementary, couldn't wait to introduce us to two of her students, Luis Valdez and Uriel Alvarez, to show us their artwork, and tell us their stories. She was so proud of them and wanted them to see that other art teachers were also impressed with their work. One of the students had even brought his sketchbook.

Kay told us that the boys are from wonderful families who speak little to no English. They are both very hard workers, well liked by other students, and considered to be leaders. Yet art is their refuge. Both boys have been at Kay's school since kindergarten, so this was their sixth year with her in art.

Teaching Identity

Art is a means by which people express individual and group identity, and their beliefs and goals, or ideals. As art teachers, we endeavor to help our students understand how art can reflect identity or promote ideals. We invite you to use this issue's teacher-generated lessons and ideas to explore these themes with your students.



Denton elementary art teachers Rhonda Sherrill, Kay Adamson, and Nancy with Kay's students Luis Valdez and Uriel Alvarez at the Center for the Visual Arts Youth Art Month reception, Denton, Texas.

Kay shared their stories: "Both boys are very detailed artists. Luis enjoys drawing anything and everything and Uriel loves drawing people, especially his sport heroes. When they come to art, they explode! They are on fire and their faces shine with joy! I have invited them to come to the artroom anytime during the day that they have free time to draw. They feel so grown-up walking in during another class, as they open up the sketch drawer and get out supplies with which to draw. I wish you could see them! Luis and Uriel do this often. I am praying that both boys will get the right teachers in the years to come and that they will be encouraged, supported, and guided in becoming creative and industrious men, and most of all, terrific artists!"

Watching Kay with her students, I was reminded that when we look at a student's artwork, we see the student and all we know about his or her life, in ways that no one else might possibly see. We see the challenges, the effort, the process, and the progress. Can there be any better ideal than to hope for the best from every student? 🙏

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