



SOUTHCOAST Artists Index

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Storyteller Name: Tobey Eugenio

Ron Fortier

Hi, this is Ron Fortier. Once again with another episode of the In Focus Podcast brought to you by the artist index, the artist index.com and graciously supported by Heavenly Spirits Imports without whom this would not be possible. We are also working in collaboration with the New Bedford Whaling Museum and their common ground project. And with that in mind, as we always do, I will allow the guests to introduce themselves and to spell their names for the record.

Tobey Eugenio

Thanks. Hi, I am Toby, Eugenio spelled Tobey Eugenio. EUGENIO.

Ron Fortier

OK, now there's gotta be a name or a story in there. I haven't done one in several. Several episodes because the names have been almost too normal. Not that yours isn't normal, but I mean. With my name. Along I have had to make some some appointments. I don't know how many times I have to spell my name. They just kept. It's like no FORT&FOU no. So do you have any? Any other similar kind of stories?

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, so it's interesting. Before I was married, I was Toby Bennett. So I got a lot of. Oh, you. Are you Tony Bennett's daughter or son? I sometimes get that with. The name Toby it's. And then, Eugenio, is my husband's Portuguese. And so I've just learned to spell it when I say it, because people think it's a, you know, they're looking up your name. And so I just say, Eugenio, EUGENIO, and so that creates a lot of clarity around that, for sure. But it definitely gets said lots of different ways, and people don't always hear it.

Ron Fortier

Sure. It's amazing. It's amazing.

Tobey Eugenio

But you know. Communicating, communicating clearly is important. So I've learned to just share.



Ron Fortier

So let's tell the folks what you do, because I believe ought to be 100 and. Ohh my goodness, I think you will be either 106 or 105. That's a lot of podcasts. Could you please tell us? I feel like the old what's my line story television show, which was a classic, I think, actually tried to bring it back a couple of times. It never lasted as long as the first one. But what is it that you do?

Speaker

Right.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, so I currently have a couple of different jobs. My largest job or the one I spend the most time doing currently. Is as the creativity director at our sister school here in New Bedford, MA. And what that is ultimately is I am not only the art and steam teacher, I am also overseeing the creative and innovative curriculum of our team. So when I'm not teaching formally in the classroom. And I'm supporting other teachers in ways in which they can integrate creativity and innovation and engineering into classrooms. And so we create those real world connections. So at O. Process that is part of my job at OSS. I also work as the outdoor classroom designer, so when I'm. Not at OSS. I have the luxury of I spent the last, maybe eight or nine years designing outdoor learning spaces and maker spaces around the country as a consultant, and so what's neat. About that, I don't have a landscape degree, but I have an education degree and I got partnered up probably about 10 years ago with an organization in Nebraska called Nature Expo. And nature explore it's an organization that has looked really intentionally at outdoor play and the value of outdoor play and how do you connect it with education and important learning for humans, whether they're little people or large, you know, older humans. And in working with nature explore, they have a fundamental belief. Different and maybe some other organizations where they pair a landscape designer and an educator together. And their team and they actually go to a site and they talk about the landscape needs, but also the educational needs. And so you know, we would have to consider things collectively together like, oh, what are some native plants? How do we take care of those plants? But additionally we think about, gosh, if we're gonna make a space to gather, what should that look like? Well, we have 5 year olds. We have 14 year olds. What? What kind of educational needs will they be experiencing and also what are the teachers in those buildings or that museum or that library? How are they going to use the space? And so I've had the luxury of kind of traveling around the country and most recently doing a design here at OSS where we look at creating spaces. And mostly I spend my time outdoors doing the natural spaces, but I've done some work with some children's museums around maker spaces, right? So creating spaces where. Humans have an opportunity to. Make and play and explore and engineer. So that's like kind of my other job. And then. My third job. Is I do educational consulting, so before I came to s s I was on the road traveling around mostly New England doing educational workshops for teachers around everything from team building to brain based best practices. To integrating curriculum and my passion truly, as I am still a middle school learner, I think I I find wonder and joy in learning and so being able to share those techniques and experiences with other educators collectively, not so much as an expert, but I believe I'm a collector of good ideas which I think. Being the creativity director at OSS is such a. Beautiful fit for. Me and I, I. So those are kind of my current jobs other than. Being a mom of children.

Ron Fortier

OK, so I'm gonna go back to steam because I don't think a lot of people know what steam is. They probably. Heard of stem? So other than just adding an A, could you explain that please?

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah. So fundamentally steam. So science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics is is around the idea of stem. And it actually started at RISD in Rhode Island. The idea that, OK. You need to have an A because you can't do any of the other things without thinking about art and and what art brings to the table and so. When you're teaching. In steam and really stem in the sense of you're it's inferred. But those of us who believe in the creative



endeavors and innovation and creativity I think are synonymous. But I I. Really, the reason you know when we were thinking about my current title and thinking about Steam, it's understanding fundamentally my own life. Work is around the idea that the human. Is a creative being, and when we tap into our creative potentials, I think humanity has so much opportunity to. Be its best. Self and and yeah, so I mean. I could talk. About that. But so steam in general is around the idea of using technology. Now technology people say, oh gosh, it's going to be things I. Plug in or. Things I code technology is anything that's man made that we use to do a better job. So that could be a sewing needle. That could be a hammer. That could be a robot. That could be a laser cutter and so. In in OSS we have something called the Creative suite, which. Includes an Art Room. Or an art studio, a Steam lab, and a media lab. And so students work between those spaces, and steam is part of that. And. If I was to give like a full definition, steam is basically good teaching and integration of all subjects. It's real life.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, I mean, you know, you pretty much described my undergraduate art experience because you know you really. It did encompass everything, even the mathematics, the golden mean, you know, proportional scale. All of those things. Come together the the technology. Yeah, we use paint brushes and other tools so you know it. It does go the the full. And I I I think. Always in education has always been this. This push and pull kind of thing, of decentralization, centralization, decentralization, centralization. It's crazy. They never find. A middle a middle ground, I think probably steam has done that. One of the things that sparked a thought was. Every year since I was before I could even walk my my dad would take me to the family farm up and set back up in Canada. And that experience has been long lasting. You you talk about makerspaces, you talk about, you know, designing rooms and so on and so forth. I mean, everything has, there's a season, there's, you know, there's everything. And he always his dream was. His dream was to buy a farm. And get kids that were at risk. Bring them to the farm and show them the routine of farm life, not as a punishment, but as an incredible. Joy about discovering themselves. You know, being connected with nature better and and so many other other things. Let's go back to OS because a lot of people we we talked about how to spell your name, how how do we spell our sister school?

Tobey Eugenio

That's a great question and I think sharing about fundamentals of our sister school. So it's our OUR then sisters with an S apostrophe that's important. School and with our sister school. Well, it may sound like a religious school. It is non denomination. It is a school for economically disadvantaged inner city girls. And we are. In New Bedford, on the backside of the synagogue, Temple Israel right near Buttonwood Park. And so we are a. Tuition free school. All students here do not pay tuition, but with that we don't get state or federal funding, so we always said our sister school exist by the gifts and the kindness of others. Our school is tiny but mighty. Our young humans engage in everything from outdoor learning, right? So we have our outdoor lab or outdoor steam classroom to. Community boating community. Is campus where we take our students out into. The community our. School Day is longer. It's a 10 hour school day and we do that with intentionality. We intentionally give students time to read. During SSR, we have an outdoor play time slash lunch time. We have community. Meetings we have advisory, we really are invested in. The social emotional. Learning of our students as well as the academics and OS is a really cool place. This is my 7th year being here and I think it's one of the best places to practice all the things I write about in books we get to do here.

Ron Fortier

Back to the alphabet. Soup SSR for people who don't know.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, so staying silent reading. I forget sometimes. Yeah. So it was something I think happened back when I was a young.

Ron Fortier

He's staying silent real.



Tobey Eugenio

Human and reading we know is a fundamental necessity for gaining and understanding language and and reading certainly isn't a favorite of a lot of humans, or at least can be stereotypically not a favorite. But we really. We build it into our curriculum and we make it a part of the learning so that we're sure our students read comfortably. We have public speaking, you know, so yeah, Sr. or sustained silent reading is a a commitment every single day at our school without being outside.

Ron Fortier

As a former middle school substitute teacher many, many years ago. One of the things that I was amazed that in meeting the students and I don't like to refer to them as the girls because it's too easy to do that and for some reason it seems the meaning, but they were all engaged, they made eye contact. They you could tell the gears. We're turning in the head all the time. They're always trying to get to the next step before you know, before you which is, which is a great, great thing. And also I as I. Was telling a couple of them how. In parochial school, even though it was cool. It was split many of the activities were split into boys only girls only are going to church. It was the girls on one side, the boys on the other side. And yeah, there are. People who still kind of frown on that kind of. Thing but. There is a necessity to that, isn't there, especially in education where? And to use the term girls. Don't feel. They are with their peers. OK, with their with their gender peers, they don't feel overwhelmed, they're not distracted. There's a whole bunch of other dynamics that that are no longer an issue when it's all single.

Speaker

MHM. MHM, MHM.

Ron Fortier

How important is that?

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah. So it's, it's it's, I think it's fundamentally very important, not like absolute. You know, I've I've taught in public school. I I've seen really beautiful things. I I think what OS does is it takes a very small group of humans and gives an opportunity during one of the most developmentally. Challenging the one of the it's the second time your brain grows the most in your lifetime. Zero to 2, and then that 10 to 14 time frame where if we can create a space and a place for our humans, our young women. To feel and feel connected and really focused on themselves by being a single sex middle school. We have those opportunities and we can and you know, delve deeper into topics that are relevant that are specific to you know we are while we are world that is looking for equality and everything from. Gender to race. I think that, you know, we are still not there yet. And so I mean it would be cool if someday we get into a world. Where we can. Think about a school that doesn't need to exist because there is equal opportunities. But still the resource says. You know, young women in the sciences and the maths and stem or steam are not finding their place as naturally as young, young men and and and. Yeah. So we we do. Believe fundamentally it's it's a necessity and important work.

Ron Fortier

Act oddly enough, and topically. There is a professor from the University of Iowa who is under incredible fire for saying during a convention. And that only men should apply for law, engineering and medicine. And he tried to defend himself and it's turned into a real nasty quagmire.

Tobey Eugenio

It's very interesting. What I love about OSS while we are still intentionally a. School for a young. Women, we also work really hard in all of our curriculum to create understanding, inclusivity, trying to as we like to say the, you know, a lot of people talk about the golden rule, right where you do unto others as you would want done unto yourself. OS really believes in the Platinum rule, which is due on to others. As they would like to have done to



themselves, and so that means you have to be an active listener and active. Later and really understand and have empathy and so as a school we we work at those pieces and we really think intentionally. And we are seeing anecdotally our young humans entering into the STEM fields and the STEM fields more so than perhaps they have in the past and. That's important because we are a technically savvy right information age world and so that's important as it is to just learn how to take care of yourself right as care care providers, you know? Yeah.

Ron Fortier

You you were talking about designing outdoor spaces and such and for some reason. The word sculpture garden popped into my head. We don't have a sculpture garden. That is the one thing that we don't have. I know a couple of years back. I don't know if it was successful and if it was, is it still being maintained, but labyrinths were considered all of a. Sudden was a very hot. And they have, you know, if you could combine the. Labyrinth with with a. Sculpture garden. Just something about a sculpture garden. That's so. Totally different from going. In indoors, into a gallery to see two-dimensional work stuck on a wall.

Tobey Eugenio

Sure, for sure. Yeah, I. Mean. What's nice about just so sculpture Garden has real real value. I do think a sculpture garden that changes, it's really important. I like the idea of art that's informal and also flexible and allows all humans to. Access. I love like the work that for example data does around pop-up exhibits or local artists. Who are it's, you know, museum without walls. So I love the idea of, like, a sculpture garden. You know? It's that same piece. But I like this semi permanent idea, which is important. And I, and I think about in. Outdoor classroom design, which you could say is an outdoor classroom park or an outdoor learning space, right, which can happen anywhere and a matter of fact, New Bedford. But when Zoo has a space Charlie's place, which is another space where families can gather. One of my favorite parts of outdoor learning spaces that could happen in a sculpture garden is large, loose parts, right abilities to manipulate large logs, large sticks. How does one design and engineer a future building if one doesn't understand how soil works and how it feels? And you know what's what's native to their environment? I got into this work gosh about 15 years ago and they were saying the average student or average child was spending, you know, 75% of its time in front of a screen, something insane. It was like 7 or 8 hours, not 75%, seven or eight hours in front of a screen. And I thought, oh, that's absurd. That's not even possible. And one would argue that even in the last couple of years. The amount of time young humans are spending in front of a screen is rewiring their brain. So they're not handling large loose parts or messing around and being in outdoor spaces the same way. So I think a sculpture park or at the very least a park that invites humans to view, interact, to become part of the moments like so I could. See, you know. I love watching humans build forts and often put those in spaces. Hammocks hanging where people can talk and be flexible. And yeah, I I think that could be a neat addition.

Ron Fortier

Well, those are things that we. Used to do you know my generation is kids, which they call free play now. But it was, you know, we got the woods if you lived even in an urban environment. If there was a wooded lot or some some place that was. Excessively remote, but you know, because it was woods and you know, we would set up the forts and set out territory. It was like it's like a little little versions of Lord Jim. It was a little scary sometimes, you know, but also.

Speaker

Yeah, what?

Tobey Eugenio

One of my favorite. Sorry, one of my favorite stories is when I was a young human, my my dad every single year would take a. Dump truck full. Of sand. I grew up really very rural. And just put it in the bag. Yard and the entire summer we just turned that sandbox into a little city with water and buildings. And when I first built outdoor space at heritage, museums and gardens are hidden hollow and my mom came. She's like Toby. That's just a



bigger version of your sandbox. You've just been messing around building, you know, in that particular space I built A2. Story Tree House with a provoke. Tech and, you know, had made a water fountain. And you know all these things. But I had done it as young children and I think that's why it's so important is that I built that understanding of physical. Space and comfort. And so when in opportunity to use like backhoes and bulldozers and drill companies to create a space that could feel inviting and build skills and understanding and connection to nature and each other, it was such a natural fit. Had I not done those things as a. Young, human and maybe not. Been able to design and continue to design. Spaces that feel just right.

Ron Fortier

It's funny because with so many artists that I've interviewed for this podcast. One thing I keep going back to is childhood experience or experiences in childhood. We're not. It's not even an experience sometime, it's just exposure. I've had students. I've had students. I've had guests who both parents were involved in the arts, but never ever pushed the children never even engage them in what they did just by being around. And which brings me to something I remember. Uh, you know from from? When I was going for my educational studies that a child whose bedroom has bookshelves. Is more. Apt to be successful in school. Regardless of whether or not they've ever opened any of those books, just being surrounded by the books physically. Was enough to garner some sort of curiosity, or or or or comfort or familiarity. It's it's. Just really really moving.

Tobey Eugenio

But it's a value. System in some ways too, right? I just not feeling like value. We're taking space in our home to do these things and not all families are, you know, have the resources to make that.

Ron Fortier

Right.

Tobey Eugenio

Happen, which is why? It's so under and mentally important that we. Make sure resources. Get into all homes and and, you know, make that happen. Yeah. No, I I'm an avid reader. For sure one.

Ron Fortier

I I have a.

Tobey Eugenio

Of my.

Ron Fortier

Another question going back into in in The Time Machine, but before that. Many years ago I was a chaperone for the Great Outdoors Club, which was out of New Bedford High School, where my eldest daughter went. I had. Been in the. Boy Scouts, I got all. I was just one step shy of Eagle Scout when it became unpopular to be a Boy Scout anymore. You know, social pressures and that kind of thing. But everything I learned, the Boy Scouts I still retain to this very day. But what amazed me is going on these hikes where we'd climb, you know, all the all the. And in between Massachusetts and and and. I mean we, you know, we covered several mountains and to see kids who were from, they use it for lack of a better term, the. Inner city OK. Frightened to death of being in the woods and with other people, they were frozen solid. They did they. They were totally out. Of the comfort zone. And I found that so sad. I mean, here's a place where this. This is a sanctuary for. Them. And yet they couldn't. They couldn't engage. They were totally out of their element.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, it's. It's an interesting concept. And I I would say that given as our disconnection in nature grows and grows, I think that phenomenon is spreading to all areas of our world, not just one one. You know one experience of 1



living condition because we're not getting out the same way we used to. For all sorts of reasons and. I think it makes it even more paramount. That we provide. 3 dimensional experiences. For humans, you know there, there is certainly some research that says some of the two D stuff we're doing with technology has grown our gender rights in our brains, and that makes sense. And there's some value. Perhaps students are reading sooner and learning. But I mean, we're at what cost, right? So we, you know, we think about the social and emotional health of our humans, and we know we're in a little bit of a crisis or a lot in a crisis. I don't have the data. So I don't want to overemphasize or under. Size, but I think we do have to think about what is it that we're doing. And as a mom who has teenage daughters, so cell phones weren't too much in my kids life until high school and now college. You know, we've done a lot of conversations about when it was could be used, never at the dinner table, never at restaurants. But I I understand the struggle. It's real. It's it's addictive. I mean, I know that Instagram and Facebook, there's some conversation about, you know, what currently is is doing and how we're doing it and. And I think it's important as a STEM educator or a steam educator to think about why it matters that we teach our students how to be consumers and selective in their consumerism. And you know, it's it's, it's powerful. And when I think about going back just a second to when you were talking about some of your childhood memories and. Taking and my memory in the sandbox and building souffles I love to build mud souffles like honestly, I've never. I've never actually cooked a real souffle, but I've made a whole heck of mushroom and Fern souffles. And those are considered sticky memories. One of the coolest things I did it when I was working with in the museum world is this idea of, like, how do you make sticky memories, memories that stick in your brain for long periods in our lifetime? Like, you could always go back to it. You know, you're 70 or 80 years old, and those sticky memories are really valuable. And what's interesting. And the research that I did at that time was that dioramas experiences with dioramas and things in nature when you can mess around in use things and touch things and feel things and smell. Things. And if you're on A2 dimensional device, that changes things right? There's no variance and so a lot of our senses aren't being engaged in the same. Kind of way. And so I. Think when we think about learning in schools and you know people will say to me, so you're an artist, right? What's your art? And a lot of times, you know, I used to feel like. How should I tell them my oil paint when I have free time? Do I tell them and now unabashedly, honestly, when people say what is your art? I say my art is creating spaces and places for other humans to capitalize on their creativity. That's my art like that is my canvas. My canvas is an outdoor space. My canvas is a classroom. My canvas is a random room and a museum where I want to create that intergenerational interaction between humans and create independence. And so the space can almost work without a facilitator. And I really think about that. And that means you're naming thing. So in an outdoor space, we might have a gathering space we. Might have a create. Space, often in my outdoor spaces we might engrave or rock to give that invitation. I call it the invitations to learn, right? And so the more independence we have and what's cool about having students more than once, like our outdoor space or even in classes in. The our creative. Suite is we want to create a cognitive mental map, right? So the more people understand, so even if it's a sculpture garden in new. And when we create familiarity and the ability to know where things are right, even in your own studio or your own kitchen, it's a lot easier to get to creating and cooking and making and doing when you know where those things are. And so when you're designing. So my art is focused on designing those spaces for humans so that they can self. Regulate self initiate worked connectivity to others, feel empowered to embrace their own creativity because they. Like I said. Before I fundamentally believe the more ability we understand that we are creators. And innovators, the more power we have to build capacity for a better world like that is that is my art. And so yeah, I paint on the side too, but I am a practicing artist and sometimes, oh. You teach art. You're not, you know. No, no, I'm. Creating that so I I. Think that's like so important.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, you you got me. You got me thinking that. Yeah, I I I taught for most of my adult life and it's not just being a portal where you take all the like a funnel. You take all this information and you pour it into the funnel and then you try to squeeze it into their ears. It's a little bit different if I always used to say if I'm not teaching. I'm not learning if I'm not learning. I can't teach. So it was, you know, that kind of thing and. It's it's changed quite a bit because you know when I was substituting in the 80s, it was about survival as a, as an instructor. It's about



discipline or the lack of discipline. It was. It was a total mess. And you know the the whole. The whole educational system. Well, we started busing. We lost our neighborhood characteristics. It's it's kind of insane that we have buses. Why can't they just, you know, I lived in Portugal for a year. I never saw a school bus. And in in my walks around town, I I saw two or three school. And the children live around that area, go to. That school. And there's no traffic jams in the morning. There's no traffic jams. You know when school lets out it's it's just the weirdest thing.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, yeah, it.

Ron Fortier

It works.

Tobey Eugenio

We did education, it's it's interesting because education, I've I've been a teacher in in education for 30 years. Almost. I'm pretty. Close to that. I lose track. It's all. It's all about enjoying the moments, but I I do think that education is a pendulum and it goes back and forth and we. Get and we. Learn. I do think education continues to. Called and it is a. It's a tricky profession. You know, people don't realize that when you're with students, you can't do you know, I always say like, I'm with students from like, 9:00 or 8:00 to 5:00. That's when I'm with humans and interacting. And then I have to do all the planning, thinking, grading, collaborating, meeting all the other time. And that means I'm doing it till 11:12. Night. And so it's it's not an easy profession, but if it's one that you do passionately it, I mean, I honestly I think I have the coolest job in the whole wide world. I love what I do for work. I love you know those moments. You know, kind of building on what you were just saying about curriculum and and this is fundamentally really important to me and it builds on that idea of creative capacity is one that when you're inside my computer, when you're designing a space, that's the third teacher, right. So the classroom is a teacher. The teacher is a teacher and the curriculum is a teacher, and all three of those really need to align to empower and one of the things. Anyway, would love to share a little bit about is the idea of creating choice or teaching for artistic behavior, so even in the beginning of my career I could never get around this idea of like, OK everybody, we're all going to draw a fish today. We're all going to draw a fish and this is how you make bubbles and let's add a Finn. And I never could get there. It just never made sense to me as a teacher. You're a learner, right? I just. I mean, I've been teaching a long time. And I really came into teaching for artistic behaviors or tab, which is it's a name for choice. It's a it's a fundamental, but it was actually founded in Middleborough by Kathy Douglas, who is is was working in Bridgewater at the time, years and years ago and. This idea that when we teach. Art or steam or any of our classes. We want to teach for artistic. Behavior and teaching for artistic behavior means that you. Are a guide on the. Side you are not. Necessarily telling the students you do this, then you do. This it doesn't mean you're not giving instruction.

Ron Fortier

Right. Yeah. No, I mean it's thanks. It's Halloween. You're gonna do the Jackal Lantern. It's Thanksgiving. You do the pumpkin or the Turkey? I I did. It was a neighbor whose child.

Speaker

Right, right.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Some to it right, go ahead.

Ron Fortier

This is a neighbor who pulled her child out of out of school because. She came home in tears. And it wasn't her art class. That caused this emotional upheaval. And they were told to to draw a picture of the sky. And she drew a



a a sunset. And the teacher said that's not disguise. The sky is blue and the sun is yellow. And she said, well, I'm sorry, but my dad and I stood on the back porch last night and watched the sunset, and it was all red.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah. No, it's.

Ron Fortier

And whoa.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah. No, it's. It's it's an. Phenomenon and I I really am proud of. I see the education art world really making some strides and the idea of teaching for artistic behaviors it what I love about it. It has three foundational beliefs, right? What do artists actually do? That's what we're teaching the child is the artist, right? It's not us jumping in. You were talking about the sponge or the sieve. When I'm dumping in information, the child is practicing like an authentic artist and the classroom is their studio, right? So that's this, this idea that there's opportunity for students to self initiate. And it can look very different depending on the day, but if you are truly teaching for artistic behaviors, or you're truly creating opportunities for students to work as artists, then you need to give them space and you know, it could be that you're teaching a demo in the morning that shows them, you know, we're going to have just a say pencil stations open, but there's some different options of what you can do with. With graphite or maybe today it's graphite and Fiber studio and you can work in. Either space and you can self regulate. You know? And then I do, particularly in my upper grade 7th and 8th grade. I give full. Choice to students, and so they know where the materials are. Sometimes we work through scheme and sometimes it's like 1. Idea sparks another idea that sparks another idea. And honestly, as a a white woman teaching in a in a middle school that is awesomely. Diverse. I don't want to assume that I know what. They should or shouldn't do. Particularly on subject area and subject matter, I need to be open to the possibilities and So what I can do is provide expertise in how to use materials like pastels and watercolor. And and allow students to let their interests lead them, let their curiosity lead them, let their wonder lead them. Let the desire to make a gift for another human lead them and allow that process to evolve. Because you know what is my end goal is my end goal. That they all can make fish. Where is my end goal that they see themselves as artists that are able to solve and make a difference in the world? And so that's really important and and what I love about my work here at OSS is that we name that our students understand. They understand how we operate. They know that as an artist, they're going. To use envisioning as a technique, or engaging and persisting, expressing themselves, developing craft like they can use that language and that commonality of language lets us have really in-depth conversation. So when students are mid trimester. They'll meet with me and we talk about hey, what have you been doing? How you been doing it? What are you interested in? And right now I had a couple of 8th graders. This this past trimester. Say I'm really looking for some different ideas that are totally out there. Can you help me? And you know, when we really dug deep into it and they're just really looking at new ways to use mediums and. Skills. And again, if I like if I was the one leading right, standing in front of the room, I'm deciding on the project on the materials, the how, the why the what. All I'm asking students to do is replicate, which is like factory ask, right? It's industrial revolution. What end? So it's cute. And sometimes I have to say and my students love to do.

Ron Fortier

It is, yeah. It's assembly line. Yeah. Yeah.

Tobey Eugenio

Like a tutorial online and that's OK. Too by Bob Ross. And his lessons? There's not devalue. It's not one or the. Other it's just allowing an artist to be an artist and practice just like you would in your own studio. Sometimes you spend an entire day talking to a colleague about ideas. Other times you're out collecting ideas. Other times you're making and you don't even know what time of day it is you've been in. The process of. That painting and you time has just disappeared for you. And and you know, so if we're to truly give that opportunity and and recognize that



regardless of your age, you're still human and you still have this glorious thing. Called the brain and a. Heart and you can use it at any age. And so, you know, we don't want to. Disenfranchise or separate those pieces from our human? Why does education? So I feel super, super blessed that I get to be in a place where I can take all of these practices and put them to work.

Ron Fortier

In other education was almost like considered entertainment or it wasn't serious. It wasn't a subject, it was an activity, and I didn't realize how bad it was until I taught my first adult learner class. You know, I my goal had been to teach.

Speaker

Right.

Ron Fortier

At the college level, but I had an opportunity to teach adults, and it was the most heart wrenching experience I ever had in my life. I felt all of a sudden that I was no longer an art instructor, but. I was an art. Therapist. Because the stories of these people, some of them in mid life, some of them for their own. Who decided? Darn it, I'm going to go and I'm going to pursue what I used to love as a child, and no one's gonna stop me this time. And there were those who felt that they were really good and they were told, you know, somebody stuck the pin in their balloon and said put that stuff away. That's childish. You got to get yourself a real job. And yeah, there. And there's a litany of stories that are all very, very similar in here or. Else and I I always likened them to be birds with broken wings and I found. That really, really, really sad.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, we I I think. Past practices, not all, and I don't want to over generalize, so I do think there's sometimes an OK place for that not breaking their wings, but having, you know, direct instruction. I think there there can be a place for that. It's not. It's come from a place of non judgment. But when you think about what you want to do to empower or learn or to give place and space. For humans to do their thing, you know, it's it's real practice. You have to know how to envision and people say, well, what are you actually teaching? They're just doing whatever they want. Oh my goodness. My students leave me. After eighth grade, right, they go to high schools. And now, statistically, we all know in society how many of those humans are actually going to take formal art classes, not so many. And that's not that. It's not OK or it is. I mean, I guess it is OK with me because we in reality what is more important to me is that I make sure that my students believe in their creative potential and that they are artists at heart. That the value of art is humanity's ability to see, observe, look, interact, use art as a vehicle for advocacy and agency to change the world.

Speaker

To you know.

Tobey Eugenio

Use their knowledge, their their information to to take care of humanity. And so you know, it's interesting. Because I have to undo some of the elementary school experiences because I get students in fifth grade and one of the first things I do with 6th grade is I take them to art court and I'm the judge and I used to I I started college to backtrack for a. Second, I was pre law. And I thought.

Ron Fortier

Alright, I'm just gonna. Yeah, because. I've been. I've been. Waiting for the the the the moment to ask you, let's roll back to the beginning, yeah?



Tobey Eugenio

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I would be live. Yeah, I had. I always had a big mouth. I love to talk. It's obvious. You can hear me enjoying just sharing. And. And I was like, I need to change the world. I gotta use my voice to change the world. I'm going to do this. And I worked a couple of. Jobs to pay for college and one of them was teaching preschool. And as I was doing that work and kind of developing. I was like. Gosh, you know, this feels really interesting and really great. I don't want to be poor, so I. Probably shouldn't choose. Education, which is fundamentally wrong, but that's a whole nother thing, and we won't get into that. Or maybe we will, but. And so then I was like, oh, I'll be an art therapist, so I can still make a difference. But I'm not going into that education world. And then I realized, OK, well, the jobs that for art therapists are few and far between. I was putting myself through college, and I thought, gosh, if I graduate from college after four years of working three jobs. And I can't actually get a job until I get a masters. Oh goodness, I'm really going. To be in a pickle and. Then I was like. Ohh you silly, you can actually teach art education and that in itself is therapy. You are helping humans. So I entered the art field with that intention from the beginning that I believed that giving people a space to take care of themselves in creative ways. The reasons why older humans, when they retire or find art again because it is a therapy and and in people find doodling in a journal or you know and. I think art, you know, is everything from making a bed and picking out your clothes in the morning to all you know to all those things which. Brings me to art court. So when I first started teaching art, I would run into this idea that students would say to me I'm not an artist. I don't know why I have to take art. I can't draw like Johnny over here. Johnny's a really good cartoon artist. Why am I here? I don't make art. This is weird. Why should I have to, you know? And so I was always like. And I keep saying to them like. Arts everywhere and arts awesome. But they're middle schoolers, and they were like, whatever teach, you know, you don't know what you're talking about. And I kept saying. I can't tell. Them I have to show them and expose them to the idea and let them discover the meaning and so. Years and years ago I decided to do art court, which basically I took on the role as judge, which you know was super fun for me and I would assign a professions to every student. Every student would get a profession. And they would go home and do homework, and they would have to decide if the job I gave them, truck driver, lawyer, Doctor, grocer, designer, graphic designer. If their job had art related qualities or not, did that job and vision did that job have to develop craft? Did they have to persevere? Did they have to engage and? Exist. Do they have to understand the world in order to make and do their work? And so they would come back the next day and they'd have to prove whether or not their job had art related qualities or not. And then from that point on, other than them saying can we do art court? Again, I found I didn't have to tell students the reason why they were with me, that they could see that if I want to be a surgeon. It's valuable for me to understand and grow my creative skills. My. Skills. It's valuable for me to grow my understanding so that I can be a better lawyer and I can learn the art of public speaking and the art of body language and the art of visuals, right? And how I tell an impactful story and how I create a public service announcement. And so, you know, when I think about the work I get to do every day. My students may not take a formal art classroom. But by the time. They leave me. I believe that they believe. That they are creative beings that can use all the tools like I think about my four years with our students here at our sister school by they're filling that toolbox, right. They're literally filling the toolbox with different tools. I know how to use a laser cutter. I know how to use a iPad. I know how to talk and make an argument about why this is important. I know how to look more closely at art. And how to build things with wood henceforth when I run into a dilemma, I know how when I get stuck in my entire project, falls down or my life falls down around me. What are steps I can take? So there's relatability. It's not just physical, but it can be emotional. And so when they leave, I'm hopeful that they can see how being that creative individual will help them have and live a better life and and impact others in the process.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, I mean there there's just so much to it and so much more to it. You know the the instructions that I had, they they sit on my shoulders or I stand on theirs. To this day, almost 50 years later and you know, we're told it's about solving problems at the moment you solve a problem, you create another problem to solve and it just keeps going and you have to know just when to stop. It's also about seeing relationships. It's about seeing



patterns and that's very important, and it really does influence a lot of your life. I I I do remember after. Teaching the the the the first of several of the adult learner drawing classes that people.

Speaker

OK.

Ron Fortier

The students would come in and tell me, you know, I nearly got into an accident last night on the way home because I'm driving, minding my own business and. Like Ohh, look at that. With all these spaced out and I said, well, yeah, you really. Have to know that you know when you're driving, you're driving. When? You're not. You know you have time for that. So it it does. Impact them, you know quite a bit so. Where do you see? I mean, I was there just a couple of weeks ago. There was a, there was a great experience. So to talk to them about storytelling and how to use our for storytelling. I I I I. Think there's just. So much more, and it's not a as a criticism. There's just so much more that. Could be done. I think we even discussed something. You know, I've had this conversation before and a lot of people have chimed in. At first I thought we needed a high school for the visual and performing arts and like, no, no, no, no, no. We need a middle school or junior high and high school for visual and performing arts because it's so, so important. And whether you, you know, go on and don't become a prima ballerina or you're not an exhibiting artist or whatever. I know it sounds crazy, but it really doesn't matter because there are people as we know in other professions who went at the law and ended up doing something else and went at the science and ended up doing something else. So why is it not OK? You know, to go into art and have to do something else.

Tobey Eugenio

Right. Well, and I think that's, you know I I'm hopeful I think that the work that that just the city of New Bedford is doing in the, in the community of New Bedford around the arts and creativity, there's just so many awesome humans working on behalf of the community and breaking down some of those barriers. I do feel like new Bedford's in its own new Renaissance and that's exciting. I don't necessarily know. You know, is it a facility? Is it a, you know, a creativity school focuses, like naming it, like breaking down some of those barriers, right. So I don't go to an art school. I mean, I did not choose an art high school or college for that matter, because I I was taught by society that that'd be, you know, not make money, whatever those pieces are. I've since learned that. I am rich in so many other kinds of ways and I'm following my heart and that important, I do think. That a good. Educational system and this is on even my own. My personal love is that I. Still feel like I'm 12 or 13 years old. And I innately wonder about things all the time, and I am interested. And that's what I hope for. A lot of people, I mean. I was. Reading, autobiography, or biography about Davinci. Because he didn't write it around, just his creative process and that, like wondering and just digging deeper and deeper and deeper and I think. That's what I hope humans can do is like not get caught up in just the one solution or this goes good enough or I'm doing it for somebody else, but rather I'm just really interested and. You know I am.

Ron Fortier

He's the curious mind.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, I am so innately curious. I love the world and I and I really hope to impart that and whenever is a just right fit, you know, I always say that not everyone presents the same way. Not everyone cares about the same things. But collectively, if we really are, if our ultimate goal is to make the world a better place and to be better humans and to, you know. I'm I'm. I'm a big believer in creating memories, and you know, authentically being present in your moments. You know, those are things that I hope for humanity. It's just so, so important. And you know, I I do think, you know, when you talk about teaching one of the things that I've been working hard. On even though I'm here to assess is also teaching teachers right to have those to actually share the work that I'm doing with others and not again, it's not. I mean, I I have learned from so many other humans, I am far from an expert in my



field. I am simply really passionate and I love to help and I've taken the time to not only present to other educators, but I take our students with us. They present and they share because their voices are just as brilliant and powerful, if not more so. And so I think as we think about how we move forward and decide what does it look like, where, how do. We break down these these. These walls and think about education without walls and, you know, is the pendulum shifting yet again? I don't know. You know, I'm gonna hopefully be around for about 100 years. And when I have been around, I'll probably have seen some educational ship. I'm hopeful that we don't go back to the rudimentary memorization, which is only good, right?

Ron Fortier

Those. Yeah. What I called the. Read. Yeah, read. Remember, regurgitate.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, I mean, but in that particular case, there is some value for certain type of brains. I love the brain. I get really excited about brain research and it's ever evolving. And some humans do really well. That's really how they learn.

Ron Fortier

I mean, you have to learn the periodic table. You have to learn the. Alphabet, you know, that's all. Wow.

Speaker

Or you have to know.

Tobey Eugenio

To look it up, I always say or.

Speaker

Yeah, right. Right.

Tobey Eugenio

Know how to look it up right.

Ron Fortier

Well, we're going to have to start wrapping this up. So I'm going to, I'm going to ask. You a question trying to pull it out of my Barbara Walter. A bag of questions and. Her magic wand question is, is a classic, but especially in this particular case, if you were given a magic wand and it only had one trick, in other words, it was a one time only, there was no 33 wishes. What would you do for? Us just the school.

Tobey Eugenio

That's an amazing question.

Ron Fortier

Wow, I mean the. The IT has to be almost the first thing that Pops.

Tobey Eugenio

I guess unlimited.

Ron Fortier

Into your head.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, I feel like it's unlimited funding because we don't get state or federal funding. And so we dream big. We work really hard to make resources happen. We, you know, we don't own our building and in some ways that's



on purpose so that we can be in the Community and there's a. Lot of thoughts but I think. Unlimited funds to be innovators and not worry about that resource probably would be. Yeah, I think that's probably the most realistic and also educators who want to, you know, diverse educators who really want to help us in our mission. That would be part of that magic wand. I think too, because. We just we want to build capacity and we believe in Windows and mirrors and we believe that our students should see humans that look like them and have shared experiences. So we're always looking for diverse educators and.

Ron Fortier

And OK, so this is the final final thing. What do you think of of of, of of? And our brothers school.

Tobey Eugenio

Yeah, I I think that some people always say that nativity prep is kind of a version of our sister school, and I think it's very possible. I do think that as we come to changing times, we're thinking about a women centered institution, right. So, you know, to honor all humans. Who are whether? They identify as female. I mean, there's a lot of conversation we're having around. How can we be inclusive? And also, still honor needs that need to be met. And so, yeah, I mean, I I don't. I think that currently, you know, we're tall, we're small and mighty and our mission is very sustained. And people say, oh, are you going to become a high schooler or you're going to get bigger? And the reality is we know small community matters and it impacts. And when you only have a small amount and. Listen, I'm I was a public school teacher. I love that just as. Much, and I'm just this is the home that I'm living in currently and really love it and I see different values that are. I'm able to make happen and I think it's all good and I think that when we can. Be kinder to educators who really do work 17 hours a day on average all year. You know, there's no such thing as summer vacation. Not not truly. And and we really think about what it takes to educate the future. It's really important.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah, it it's.

Tobey Eugenio

It's my masterpiece.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, it's like it's lifes work lifes.

Tobey Eugenio

Working on it.

Ron Fortier

Work that could. Be written, you know, a couple of different. Ways. That's for. Sure. Well, Toby and Eugenio, thank you so, so much. You are episode 105.

Tobey Eugenio

Oh, that's exciting.

Ron Fortier

You know, and there's there's so much more. There's always so much more. It's always we. I always feel like just about 10 of the hours when we start to hit the stride, really get into the meat and potatoes and of of course, but being an old advertising guy, if I I, you know, we always subscribe to always leave them wanting more.

Tobey Eugenio

And I have I I think we've spoken of it, but I have some amazing young women. Who would love to share their



voices? And I would be honored to help facilitate that. And you can hear it directly from the 10 to 14 year olds who really have lots to say.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, I think especially the the ones that we know are on that, on that target. You know they they've, they've got the tail of that comment because looking back, you know in years from now, it'll be a jaw drop probably for them as well as. Everybody else there, there are those who are blessed, knowing full well what their trajectory is going to be, and there are others. Who just ping like radar, just bounce around until they finally find that whole wherever it is and and get themselves out. So it makes a big, big difference. It makes a big, big difference. Thanks for joining us. One more time. It's Ron Fortier with our guest Tony Eugenio from our sister school. And this is the In Focus podcast brought to you by the artist index and generously supported by the fine folks at. Heavenly spirits imports and we are working in collaboration with the Whaling Museum and. Their common ground project? Stay tuned For more information on that. Without further ado, bye bye.