**TEACHING ARTISTS’ TIME**

By Sherry Robbins

It was my last day at a school recently and one of the teachers thanked me for showing up on time each day. “You know artist types,” he said. I was tempted to get defensive but remembered how I was sometimes guilty of magical thinking about commute times when I first started this itinerant profession over forty years ago. So, “Be on time,” might be my advice to new teaching artists today.

And I mean it. Teachers still passionate enough about their students and their calling to invite a Teaching Artist into their classrooms are trying to enhance their students’ experience of material often sped through on a tight schedule. Throw in fire and active shooter drills, meetings, field trips and assemblies, and teachers are scrambling to accomplish the barely possible. Being on time is our first chance to show that we respect their time and their faith in our art’s value.

A deeper notion of time is also involved in a Teaching Artist’s profession—that of presence. I believe that, whatever our art form, we need to model and to teach presence. Hands on engagement with the material, remembering the senses and how to use them to discover patterns of movement, color, shape, and sound, permission to be weird, eye contact, little private conversations to encourage and draw out, big public celebrations of what they have made—all teaching artistry 101. But today, when so many of us just want to turn inward and wait for better times, it is more important than ever to *be* present for our children, for their teachers, and for ourselves. Presence and art-making bring us into something approaching timelessness.

Finally, I think Teaching Artists need to protect and expand their own creative time. It is hard to turn down work when so few of us make a living annual wage, but we can’t be Teaching Artists if we aren’t actively making our own art and carving out the time we need to both imagine it and to give it form.

The role of the Teaching Artist isn’t that different from what it was decades ago, but perhaps the need is greater today. Be on time for teachers, be present in time for students, make time for yourself and your art.

*Just Buffalo teaching artist SHERRY ROBBINS has conducted creative writing workshops throughout New York State and abroad for more than 30 years and works with hundreds of students each year. She has a Masters in the poetics of ecstasy and two books of poetry, Snapshots of Paradise and Or, the Whale. Sherry ran her own letterpress for years, is a certified yoga teacher, and a multi-year panelist for the NEA’s Art Works program.*