



Toward a New Education in Art

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No area within the curriculum of our public schools is more subject to the whims of fate or the vacillations of politics and finance than art education. When scientific achievement is announced by a foreign power, art classes are cut back and funds previously allocated for art materials and equipment are diverted to "more pressing needs." When deemed expedient, elected public school officials have based their campaigns upon platforms which call for reversion to the three R's in education and deletion of all "frills." Usually, financial assistance has been available for athletic equipment and band uniforms but increases in the art budget have been hard-won.

In spite of these obstacles, however, art education in many of our schools continues to expand and at this time greater public emphasis is being

placed upon the arts than at any previous period in our history. This presents a curious antithesis which is not easily understood.

THE HISTORY OF ART EDUCATION

The evolution of art in the public schools has been slow and multifaceted, with educational objectives shifting from decade to decade. Early impetus for teaching art came from the kindergarten of Frederick Froebel, who, in the early 1830's, pioneered in the use of clay and other manipulative materials in the educa-

tion of young children in Germany.

U.S. schools, oriented to "Latin grammar school" traditions were slow to incorporate art into the general curriculum. The stitching of a sampler or the copying of a simple still-life arrangement in delicate colors provided occasional artistic diversion for young ladies but usual class activities were focused toward developing accuracy and included, among other exercises, connecting dot patterns with straight lines or drawing geometric forms.

In 1873, the Boston schools, under the direction of the widely acclaimed

Painting may provoke concepts, exploration, and discovery.

(All photos by Will Kyselka)



Walter Smith, emphasized drawing as an aid to the development of manual skills. The handbook for teachers and students titled *Teachers Manual of Free Hand Drawing and Designing* (1) and the lecture series which preceded the book, *Industrial Drawing in the Public Schools*, indicated Smith's interests and vocational aims, and generally suggest the focus of art education during this period.

By 1890, the "appreciation of the beautiful" was standard equipment among art teachers everywhere (2). Timidly painted watercolors, clay modeling done under the watchful eye of the teacher, and in the presence of casts from the antique, were encouraged as the nearest approach to the creation of beauty possible to school children. The production of these copies from great works was expected to lead to a lifelong devotion to the fine arts.

Too often, ardent advocates of art education have seen fit to promote their interest as though it were some overprecious commodity. This has given rise to slogans frequently timely in nature, but adapted to some single aspect of the total value of art. Certainly "appreciation of the beautiful" was one such slogan. Today we are

Weaving challenges the child to create new forms from fibers, yarns, grasses, and other natural materials.



slowly emerging from another slogan approach, no less narrow. In its most recent fragmentation, art education was, and continues in some areas to be, of primary importance in "providing an outlet for emotional tensions." We may hope that these single-track enthusiasms can be discarded as art teachers themselves reach a more inclusive, mature understanding of the nature of growth through sequential experiences in art.

Acceptance of a growth and sequence approach to a curriculum in art education is predicated upon a profound belief in the concept that children learn and grow through a creative process defined as constructive action initiated by the individual which results in visual presentation of original art forms (3). The process involves discovery, exploration, implementation, and appraisal.

DISCOVERY PHASE

Young children DISCOVER by developing awareness of and sensitivity to their environment. This adventurous curiosity prompts them to seek answers to the "why" of the world around them. Through seeing—*large, small, dark, light, bright, dull, static and mobile*—objects, through hearing

—*quiet, shrill, loud, soft, ascending, descending*—sounds, and through touching a variety of surfaces—*sharp, dull, soft, sleek, coarse, cold, warm*—the children develop an awareness of their real world which provides a growing understanding of themselves, their actions, their relation to others and to the things in their environment.

As children become involved in experiences which encourage discovery they begin to broaden their abilities to express ideas and feelings. When their environment is discovered and utilized in art experience, children become sensitive to the colors, forms, and tactile qualities in their world.

LEARNING BY EXPLORATION

Children develop personal resourcefulness, responsibility, ingenuity, inventiveness, and self-reliance as they gain knowledge through EXPLORATION of materials, tools, and processes. Some children gain more satisfaction from "exploring" than from the making of a product. Such may be the case when young children hammer and saw and arrange shapes to explore the possibilities of wood and wood-working tools. In such cases, the product that they build often becomes, to them, a secondary factor. With older children the completed visual form is of greater importance and growth should be evident in the concept and completion of the form.

Exploration in art materials helps children become interested in making independent findings, facing new and changing problems, and understanding more fully the efforts of others. Materials and processes should be introduced *sequentially* beginning with simple uses of familiar materials to more complex use of new and unfamiliar materials and processes.

Through exploration children will devise new and better ways to express



Cutting, tearing, assembling and pasting provide opportunities for thoughtful designing in materials.



Through manipulation and self-discovery, the young child becomes aware of herself and her environment.

their reactions to the people, places, and things in their environment. The process of exploration is not an end in itself, but is a means of helping children discover new ways and uses for materials and tools. As they implement their discoveries and explorations their art work reflects change in concepts and understandings.

CHILDREN CAN DESIGN

Children have an innate sense of design which enables them to express their own ideas and feelings in various media. Very young children use line, shape, and color intuitively, while older children become more consciously aware of spatial relationships, color, texture, decoration and design.

Because children differ and have varied experiences, no two children will arrive at the identical solution in visually expressing the same idea.

As children DESIGN (*implement discovery and exploration*) they make choices, revise ideas, and eliminate and add to the basic structure of a painting or object under construction. They select, discard, plan, and organize. They gain confidence in

their own abilities and develop aesthetic taste and understanding.

APPRAISAL CAN BE IN MANY FORMS

APPRAISAL is continuous in the creative process. When children select, explore, choose, plan and judge, they are appraising. Thus the process aids in developing appreciation of their own efforts and the efforts of others. Young children make judgments concerning many things in their daily lives, and visual environment has a direct relationship to and influence upon their personal choices, likes and dislikes.

Often they will emphasize and exaggerate those objects which seem important to them. This is frequently an unconscious, yet sincere form of appraisal. As children grow in their ability to relate to and appraise the people, places, objects, and ideas in their world, they become more discerning.

In the process of discovery, exploration, implementation, and appraisal, rigid standards or directions should not be established. For to do this would discourage change, evalua-

tion, and growth. It is necessary, however, to provide sequential experiences in art which contribute to the child's creative growth. To develop as inquiring and curious individuals through this approach, children must become excited by their growth and be led into discovery and exploration.

Thus in creative expression in sequentially developed active learning situations, children discover their world and all that is in it. They explore and experiment; they envision, organize, solve, select, communicate, collate, project. They evolve as creative and imaginative individuals.

REFERENCES

1. Walter Smith. *Teachers Manual of Free Hand Drawing*. Boston, 1873.
2. Fred Logan. *Growth of Art in American Schools*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955.
3. William Bealmer and others. *Children Learn and Grow Through Art Experiences*. Springfield: State of Illinois, 1958.