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THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-8480) is published bimonthly, October through May, and a summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20012. (202) 722-6407 or 6412. Subscription price, U.S.\$12.25. Single copy, U.S.\$2.50. Second-class mailing paid at Washington, D.C., and additional entry. Please send all changes of address to Southwestern ColorGraphics, P.O. Box 677, Keene, TX 76059, including both old and new address. Address all editorial and advertising correspondence to the Editor. Copyright © 1989 Southwestern ColorGraphics. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, P.O. Box 677, Keene, TX 76059.**

The Relevance of Feelings

How we teach reveals much about our ideas of education. We teach small children the names of things. Then, by means of reading, we require them to visually recognize those names. We teach them to count objects. Thus we abstract things out of the child's experience, objectify them, and return them on a quantitative, externally referenced basis. Piaget has shown, however, that children learn about things by the way they *feel* about them as they behold them in relationship to other things. Thus, while we *educate* by verbal, objective means, we *learn* visually and sensuously in internally referenced ways.

Many recent movements have called for us to get in touch with our feelings. Recent studies in right and left brain activity have taken on a life of their own. The civil rights and women's movements have challenged racism and sexism, forcing us to acknowledge the feelings and experiences of blacks, American Indians, and other minorities in a white male society.

Twentieth-century writers of phenomenology such as Heidegger urge a return to the qualities and poetry of things. Ecological movements realize that the health of the planet depends upon the way human beings think and feel about their experiences with the earth. High on the current best-seller lists are the works of the late Joseph Campbell, a scholar who wrote extensively about the mythical imagination and its numerous cultural expressions. A desire to return to feelings guided some of the earliest 20th-century artists, who had become disgusted with a public who saw painting as a mere collection of things that could be named.

Should these movements affect Seventh-day Adventist educators? Should we care about the emotional lives of our students or the development and expression of their feelings? In the 1960s I was among those students who appealed for relevance in education. Unfortunately, our demand was largely answered in economic and pragmatic terms. Schools and universities—already too immersed in the business mentality—answered the demand for relevance by shaping courses to emphasize jobs and careers. To them relevance meant a means to a material end.

Perhaps no one noticed, however, that many of those who were seeking relevance were majors in philosophy, history, and the arts. We were seeking meaning, not money. We deeply felt the injustices and indifference of our society and wanted to understand our experience and those of others. We needed our feelings recognized and affirmed. We rebelled against the naming of things and the dispensing of information, and were consequently misunderstood by an authoritarian system that had little interest in the ambiguity of feelings or human experiences.

Authoritarianism perceives education in terms of *control*. In this view, the teaching of literature, drama, music, or the arts—these mediums of the personal and the experiential—must provide answers; sensuousness must be suspect; ambiguity must give way to logic and poetry to reason. Education must deal with explication rather than evocation, and the arts—if included at all—must emphasize the “how to” and be justified by the demands of the job market.

If education is about life, however, and the process of being, then it must include the personal and experiential, the sensuous and poetic. Science teaches us about the physical properties of light; technology teaches us how to apply light phenomena to pragmatic purposes. The arts, on the other

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THE RELEVANCE OF FEELINGS

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hand, allow us to emotionally participate with light so that our experiences and feelings provide the basis for understanding Jesus' metaphor in saying "I am the light of the world."

Feelings are the source of meaning in our lives. Out of our experiences and feelings we learn to think and reason. The poet Ezra Pound once described experience as a "sudden emotion," an "Instant when something outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective." He could have described understanding, meaning, and knowledge the same way.

Students in the 1960s sought meaning; they wanted to understand not facts but experience. Perhaps in the 1990s, these same students, now teachers themselves, will find ways to get a different generation in touch with their feelings, to help them understand their emotions, and to learn to use them for others. We may thus effect an enlarging of the Adventist educational creed—to educate the mental, the physical, the spiritual, and the emotional.—Cheryl Jetter. □

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR APPRECIATING BEAUTY

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appreciation.

Preparing students to view great art takes effort and patience. In addition to offering suggestions for appropriate behavior, the teacher can distribute a worksheet before the field trip to help students know what to look for and to enhance their appreciation and understanding.

Various arts integrate well with other subjects in the curriculum. Social studies, religion, biology, and practical arts lend themselves readily to interdisciplinary approaches. While studying the history of a period, the artistic achievements may also be surveyed. Biblical events can be illustrated by song, sketches, sculpture, or play acting. Nature serves as a direct inspiration for artistic expression. As students master the skills of carpentry or clothing construction, why not encourage them to design and decorate their creations?

But the arts should be much more than just an addenda to the curriculum. A balanced education must include formal study of the various forms of human creativity; student exposure to great literature, art, and music must not be left to chance. When presented attractively, the arts refine human nature and restore finer

sensitivities. As a person's physical body grows and his mind expands, his emotions must mature as well. In an increasingly technical society, young people need the balancing values that artistic pursuits bring to their lives. While everyone should be conversant with the cultural achievements of our civilization, it is even more important to absorb the best and most beautiful experiences the arts have to offer. The arts enrich

Students need the opportunity to personally confront great art.

and enliven. They promote health and happiness as they open the senses to receive new sights, sounds, and perceptions. Through the arts human beings may be drawn close to one another and to their Creator.

An Invitation

You and your students may practice heaven's panoply of praise. Come, join John who jars our jaded senses. Fire and ice mingle. Torches burn before the throne of God. In front of the throne stretches what seems to be a sea of glass "like a sheet of ice" (Revelation 4:6). Chromatic colors encircle the throne. Chanting creatures proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is God the sovereign Lord." Twenty-four elders finger harps and fragrant

bowls of incense. Myriads of angels sing lustily in honor of the Lamb. A vast throng from all ethnic and language groups stands in review before the universe. White-robed, palm-waving earthlings shout together, "Victory to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" □

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REFERENCES

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all texts in this article are from *The New English Bible*. © *The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1970. Reprinted by permission.*

² Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 249.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴ John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

MUSIC, CAN YOU IMAGINE?

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5. Music should be considered part of the curriculum, not an extracurricular activity. It is as valuable to students as English, math, and social studies. Biblically, we find a precedent for including it as one of the core subjects in the curricula. The Old Testament lists music as one of the four subjects taught in the schools of the prophets.

6. When introducing students to various styles, remember that *good* does not mean old, dull, or boring. Good music may be found in virtually every style. Look for positive attributes in every kind of music, even in the kinds that students seem to listen to most. You may not find much to praise, but if you do find anything at all, you will have gained credibility with your pupils!

7. When playing music for your students, be sure to select good quality recordings and to maintain the equipment properly. Use a good playback system to assure quality reproduction. Better yet, invite local musicians and composers to perform for your students and to talk about their music.

8. Teach students that music is not something that is always good at church and bad at loud parties. Expose them to both sacred and secular music, and teach them how to make wise choices about the quality of each.

9. Help students understand that music