

ART IS FOR EVERYONE

BY RHONDA ROOT

With the increased emphasis on academics and the demand by education commissions and the public for greater accountability, subjects like reading, math, and science have received the most attention. However, the potential of art in the curriculum is also being realized. It is now apparent that developing human potential depends on nurturing the creative self inside of each person.

Let's begin by defining art and then show how it can be taught effectively by the classroom teacher. Art is a means of self-expression, a unique viewpoint expressed in each aesthetic creation. It grows out of the artist's ideas, emotions, thoughts, feelings, fears, dreams, and observations. This expression is communicated visually by using such media as drawing, painting, sculpture, design, and architecture.

Art is everywhere. Nearly everything in your environment was designed by an artist. The buildings in which you live and work, the car you drive, the furniture you use, the paintings on your wall, the clothes you are wearing, the magazine you are reading—all were designed by artists in specialized fields.

The desire to create exists in each of us. It is not only those who are trained as professional artists who possess this gift. The Creator-God in whose image we were formed has placed in each of us a desire to get in touch with beauty and creativity. Why else do we exert so much effort to surround ourselves with beautiful things and stand in awe of artists' creations?

If we neglect this aspect of our personal development, we are denying a part of our identity and impoverishing ourselves. As teachers, if we neglect art education, we are ignoring our

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responsibility "to restore in man the image of his Maker."¹

The effects of art education go beyond the mastery of various art techniques to touch all aspects of the child's life. Let's look at five benefits to be gained from the study of art.

Encouraging Self-Expression

First, art provides a means for nonverbal communication and self-expression. Art is a language, a visual language, that enables us to express ideas about ourselves and our world that cannot be communicated by any other form of expression. It is very crippling to the child to limit his or her communication exclusively to verbal avenues.

Developing Creative Thinking

Second, art develops creative thinking. The creative process requires that the mind use its facilities for choice and decision making. These abilities remain undeveloped unless opportunity is given for them to be exercised. Once developed, creative thinking carries over into all areas of a person's life, enriching the individual and everyone around him.

Some of the most profound discoveries of this century have come from individuals whose creative processes provided solutions to problems that seemed unsolvable.

Aiding Self-Discovery

Third, art serves as an instrument of self-discovery. Not only does it help each person get in touch with his or her feelings, but it also develops self-confidence and a sense of self-worth.

Developing Visual Perception

Fourth, art facilitates the development of visual perception, spatial organization, and visual discrimination. These skills are then transferred to such tasks as mathematics, reading, and spelling, which require well-developed visual acuity. Individuals who have difficulty in these areas have been able to master them after taking art classes that developed their visual perception.

Developing the Whole Person

Finally, art unifies all aspects of the personality. Research on the two hemispheres of the brain reveals that school mainly focuses on the development of the "left brain," the area associated with the verbal, logical, analytical, and rational functions of the brain. Education tends to ignore the "right brain," or the creative side associated with visual-spatial thinking, intuition, non-verbal, abstract, and tactile abilities. Art is the only area in the curriculum that overtly seeks to develop this part of the brain.

Art instruction must be considered an important part of the curriculum in order for it to receive the attention it needs to be successful. Once classroom teachers understand the potential of art instruction to develop the creative thinker and doer in each person, they will seek every opportunity to incorporate it into their classes. Art instruction cannot succeed if it is relegated to Friday afternoons when both the teacher and the students are at their lowest levels of energy and achievement. The success of art instruction requires art experiences that will develop the students' untapped abilities for expression.

Emphasizing the Process

A basic goal for art instruction should be to develop the student's visual sensitivity, aesthetic awareness, and personal expression. Art training helps the student grow creatively, aesthetically, socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually.

To achieve these goals emphasis should be placed on the *process of making art*, not on the end product. As children begin to learn about art, their creativity must be nurtured and allowed to develop. Overemphasizing the end product limits the students' potential for growth by suggesting that there is only one solution to the aesthetic problem before them. They consequently cease to explore all the possibilities and begin to look for the one expected response. This causes them to use short cuts and to try to get by with the bare minimum.

Frank Wachowiak speaks to this problem in his book *Emphasis Art*. He states:

Children who persevere when they draw, paint,

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print, and construct create more fulfilling, rewarding, and exciting art when they are guided to see more and become more fully aware of their environment. If their contact with the world, the people in it, and nature is superficial; if they only half sense life's possibilities; and if their identification with and their response to visual stimuli are minimal, they are apt to be content with a hasty, casual, lazy, noncommittal, shorthand statement of an experience or event. Stereotyped interpretations such as stick figures, lollipop trees, box houses, and two curved lines for a bird are seldom based on a truly perceived, richly observed experience.²

Integrating Art Into Other Subjects

Art offers additional benefits when it is integrated into the curriculum. Too often, however, art has simply been used as a recording device when applied to other subjects. The value of art in a unit of study is always in direct proportion to the emphasis placed on creative thinking. Art can reveal new insights in a subject by revealing hidden values through the student's personal experience with that subject. It should operate on the level of its own creative process and rules and not on those of the subject being studied. When this is done both areas of study will benefit.

Art experiences can be included in every subject area in the curriculum. Bible, history, geography, science, mathematics, literature—all contain elements that would lend themselves to art instruction. Since budget restraints prevent our hiring art teachers for every school, this is probably the best approach for including art in the curriculum.

How to Teach Art

But how does the classroom teacher teach art? It is not possible to include an art methods course here, but we can give some basic suggestions. The average teacher, even without the benefit of specialized art training and with limited preparation time, can stimulate and nurture the creativity already present in each student.

Students come to art with an excitement they do not show toward other subjects. With this motivation in place the battle is half won. The teacher need not be a trained artist to teach art. The lack of professional training is significant only if the teacher is unwilling to acknowledge that he or she can learn something from the student.

In the early stages of creative development the emphasis in art education must be placed on developing a creative attitude in the student, not on mastery of the techniques used in drawing, painting, design, and sculpture. The best teachers of art, whether classroom teachers or specialized art instructors, seek every means

Art facilitates the development of visual perception.

possible to release the creative person inside each human being, thereby enriching human life and creativity.

Fostering Creativity

The first task in teaching art is to create an environment that fosters creativity. This begins with the teacher, who must be enthusiastic about art, and openly demonstrate his or her excitement to students. The art teacher must of course possess all the characteristics of any other good teacher: he or she must be patient, encouraging, understanding, affirming, calm, resolute, adaptable, and optimistic. These qualities will surround the student with an environment conducive to creativity.

How to Begin

One of the first things the teacher needs to do in establishing an effective art program is to turn the students into *noticers*, avid observers of the things around them: color, texture, design, rhythm, pattern, light, shadow, line, and shape. If children learn to notice things they have never noticed before, to become aware, they will have begun a lifelong journey of discovery. As teachers encourage students to look for the unusual in everyday images and objects they will enhance the students' creative thinking skills.

As students become noticers they will learn to use all of their senses. Activities should require students to actively develop each of their senses, thereby helping them to see, touch, and become actively involved with their environment. It is not enough to simply have things available to touch and see or to listen to; students need the stimulation that results from interaction between the senses and the environment. This makes the difference between the student who is eager to explore and investigate and one who retreats from new experiences.

How can the classroom teacher help the student become a noticer? What types of projects encourage this development? Art assignments should focus on the process of creating rather than on the end product.

A Means of Expression

The child does not have the same expectations of art as does the adult. For children art is primarily a means of response to feelings. It provides them with a means of expressing thoughts, ideas, fears, joys, and other emotions. It is this process of expression that is important. Projects should center around this theme.

Inspiration should come from the things with which children are familiar. It may grow out of their experiences at school, at home or in church; from play-

ground activities, visits to museums, art galleries, fairs, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, national parks, historical sites, circuses, parades, animal shows, and sporting events; or from television, books, magazines, and musical recordings. It is the teacher's task to focus these experiences and then affirm the child's response throughout the art project.

Choosing the Project

The type of project and the medium to be used can be selected according to the type of experience desired and the availability of materials. Expensive materials are not required for quality art expressions. Because children love to draw and paint, provide plenty of paper of various sizes, crayons, markers, and tempera paint. However, the wider the variety of materials available, the greater the potential for creative expression.

Projects should be open-ended to allow for a variety of possible solutions. Themes like "Did you see the parade?" allow students to select whatever aspect of the parade appealed to them.

Freedom to truly experiment, to "play," should be an integral part of the art class. There should be no possibility for failure. The teacher's attitude here is vitally important. As the teacher offers support and encouragement to the students, he or she can guide them in exploring all the possibilities. When students think of a new way to combine or use materials, they should be given the time and encouragement to explore their idea.

The teacher can use questions to stimulate students. The best approach is to employ leading questions that do not call for a single right answer. To motivate students who say they can't do something, such as draw a dog, ask them questions that will help them to begin, such as, How big is the dog? Is it short or tall, fat or skinny? Does it have a long nose and droopy ears? Then encourage them to draw the dog the way they have described it. Don't give in if they ask you to draw it for them or supply them with copy books. Photographs of animals can be helpful in showing the student what a particular animal looks like without illustrating how someone else has drawn it. By keeping the classroom environment open and free, you will enable creativity to grow.

Resources

Classroom teachers need not feel isolated in developing art curricula for their students. Many helpful resource materials are readily available.

1. First, if you don't already have one, obtain the newly published North American Division K-12 Art Curriculum Guide, which is filled with clear objects, corresponding lesson plans, a glossary, evaluation forms, book and periodical lists, and

film and materials lists.

2. Purchase several of the many good texts on the subject, which are filled with quality information. Several good sources include *History of Art for Young People* by H. W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson, a work that presents art history for children; and *Mommy, It's a Renoir!* by Aline D. Wolf, a series of art postcards to use like flash cards. Some libraries loan artworks, or you can buy reproductions from museums or catalogs.

3. Rent or purchase videotapes or record television programs from PBS stations. The available topics range from art history to demonstrations of art techniques.

4. Schedule field trips to local museums and art centers. Many communities have art centers, most of which have art education programs that include docents, or guides, for school groups. Art centers commonly supply volunteers who visit schools and make presentations in the classroom.

5. Don't forget about the artists themselves. Many creative people are willing to visit schools and give demonstrations. A field trip to an artist's studio can be an exciting adventure for children. Art centers can usually provide information about artists in the area.

6. Subscribe to some of the many publications in the field of art. These are filled with large illustrations, information on contemporary artists and various activities in art. Helpful periodicals include *Arts and Activities*, *Art Education*, and *Art and Man*.

7. Shop a variety of art supply stores and catalogs for materials and supplies. Check whether sources such as printers, newspaper publishers, lumberyards, and manufacturers are willing to supply you with free discards.

In summary, art should be an important part of the curriculum. It has the potential to enhance human life and develop the creative being inside of each of us. This special gift, placed in us by the Creator, is just waiting to be developed. □

For additional information send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Rhonda Root, Andrews Academy, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104.

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REFERENCES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952), p. 15.

² Frank Wachowiak, *Emphasis Art* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), p. 5.