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THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-8480) is published bimonthly, October through May, plus a single summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. TELEPHONE (301) 680-5075; FAX (301) 622-9627; E-mail: rumbleb@gc.adventist.org. Subscription price, U.S. \$18.25. Add \$3.00 for postage outside the U.S. Single copy, U.S. \$3.75. Periodical postage paid at Silver Spring, Maryland, and additional mailing office. Please send all changes of address to P.O. Box 5, Keene, TX 76059, including both old and new address. Address all editorial and advertising correspondence to the Editor. Copyright 2008 General Conference of SDA, POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, P.O. Box 5, Keene, TX 76059.

The Gift of Creativity

In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, KJV). Right at the outset, God wanted us to know that He was the Creator. He made something from nothing. He brought into existence something that had not previously existed. God *created* human beings in His own image and thereby imbued them with certain attributes. Creativity is one of these divine attributes, a gift that God shared with us, His creation. What an awesome thought! When a musician composes a song or melody, an artist paints a landscape with snow-capped mountains or a seascape with pounding surf on a rocky coastline, his or her gift of creativity enriches our lives.



Thambi Thomas

As with every gift God has given us, He holds us accountable for the development and use of this creative power (Matthew 25:14-29). Ellen White wrote that developing and using our God-given talents and abilities will help us do a special work for Him.¹

In many areas, Seventh-day Adventist education faces declining enrollment, financial problems, and difficulty in finding qualified Adventist educators for certain disciplines. When school boards have to cut faculty, they usually begin with those programs that are not seen as essential, like the arts.

The focus of this issue of the JOURNAL is to present a strong argument in favor of preserving the arts as: (1) a vital and necessary component of each school’s program of instruction, (2) essential for the wholistic development of each student, and (3) an invaluable asset to the church in fulfilling its mission. Numerous articles have appeared in professional journals and on the Internet that stress the importance of including the arts in K-12 education. The most recent and comprehensive research published in March 2008 is “Learning, Arts, and the Brain.”² Seven cognitive neuroscientists from leading universities across the United States conducted research over a span of three years to answer the fundamental question: “Are smart people drawn to the arts or does training in the arts make people smarter?” A few noteworthy findings were as follows:

- *An interest in a performing art leads to improvement in other domains of cognition.*
- *Specific links exist between high levels of music training and the ability to manipulate information in both working and long-term memory; these links extend beyond the domain of music training.*
- *In children, there appear to be specific links between the practice of music and skills in geometrical representation.*
- *Correlations exist between music training and both reading acquisition and sequence learning.*
- *Training in acting appears to lead to memory improvement.*

This issue of the JOURNAL focusing on the arts would not have become a reality without the commitment of individuals representing a broad cross-section of educators in the North American Division from elementary to university levels. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for their efforts to make a strong case in support of fine arts in Adventist education.

The late president Ronald Reagan was right when he said: “Civilizations are most often remembered for their art and thought . . . That means we must teach our students more than hard facts and floppy disks. We must teach them the rich artistic inheritance of our culture and an appreciation of how fine music enriches both the student who studies

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“Where can I get a poster like that one? I want it on my wall to look at every day. I think the artist was painting a scene in Mexico or El Salvador. Look at the colors he used. They look like the colors you see in Mexican or Hispanic art. He seems to have deliberately made the painting look sort of primitive.”

“At the bottom is a big blue area or shadow. It gives a cool and calm feeling to the painting which has mostly bright, hot colors. It provides contrast. It is complementary to the bright orange in the upper left. The two small white rectangular buildings are emphasized by their placement just off center. Contrast is seen in the values shown—white houses, black road. The black road has a light, bright yellow stripe. There are contrasts in shapes, too. The houses are geometric; there is a rectangular area at the bottom of the painting that contrasts with the organic shapes seen in other places in the painting. There are warm and cool contrasts in the colors. . . .”

Remember, at the beginning of the semester, the students were unanimous in thinking *Nichols Canyon* was bad art, unrealistic, and unfinished. They thought it used strange colors, and questioned “why trees were growing out of the big blue splotch of water in the lower right corner.”

Note the positive impact of a DBAE-based approach in the four areas of art education: production, criticism, history, and aesthetics. The most obvious evidence of aesthetic growth and understanding was the students’ appreciation of a formerly disdained artwork.

Thus, DBAE not only helps beginning art students to develop a more focused way

of art production, but also enables them to appreciate art criticism, history, and aesthetics. Carefully employed, DBAE can address the needs of students with many different learning styles—good students, unmotivated students, those with a lifetime of exposure to the best in art, and those with no exposure to fine art. In my class, DBAE provided a successful strategy for teaching a very diverse group of students. ☞



Marquita Fowler Halstead has taught art at Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Maryland, for more than 20 years. A working painter and potter who regularly sells work in galleries and privately, Mrs. Halstead co-wrote the visual arts curriculum for the North American Division. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in painting from The George Washington University and has worked as an art instructor at Columbia Union College and John Nevins Andrews Elementary School, both in Takoma Park, Maryland.

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2. Charles Fowler, *Strong Arts, Strong Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 65.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
4. Dobbs, *Learning in and Through Art*, op cit., p. 47.
5. Sally Hagman, “Aesthetics in Art Education: A Look Toward Implementation,” p. 3. ERIC Identifier ED329491, 1990-12-00. <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9219/art.htm>.
6. Fowler, *Strong Arts, Strong Schools*, op cit., p. 106.
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Guest Editorial

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it, and the society that produces it.”³
—Thambi Thomas.

Thambi Thomas is currently an Associate Director of Education at the Pacific Union Conference in Westlake Village, California. His elementary through college-level education was in India, and he earned an Ed.D. from Loma Linda University—Riverside Campus. Dr. Thomas has taught and served as a principal at both the elementary and secondary levels. His artistic interests range from trumpet playing to painting. He says that “coordinating this issue of *THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION* to focus on the arts was an opportunity I could not pass up because of the abundance of new research focusing on the importance of the arts and because of the opportunity to influence educational leaders at every level to see the importance and value of arts education for every student.” The editorial staff is grateful for Dr. Thomas’ enthusiasm, commitment, and wide-ranging assistance in the planning and production of this issue.

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