The function of art as an integral part of a humanist education is discussed in depth. Five areas which clearly show the need for art in elementary schools are examined: (1) the relation of art to the unity of the learning process; (2) art, as an emotional outlet, ego fortifier, and sensitizer; (3) art as a progress and problem indicator; (4) art as an aesthetic educator; and (5) art as a counterforce to depersonalization and mechanization. The relevance of art education to the growing field of psychotherapy is also discussed, especially as it relates to self-actualization as the goal of humanist education. (Author/ED)
ELEMENARY SCHOOL ART: FUNDAMENT, NOT FRILL

Robin Lichtig-Rice

A manifesto for art teaching in elementary grades, as well as a plea for heightened attention to the aesthetic malnutrition of the culture in general. Why art is necessary, how its importance can be emphasized, and a look to the future. R.L.
Elementary School Art: Fundament, Not Frill

by
Robin Lichtig-Rice

The ideas of John Dewey resulted in the introduction of art into the elementary schools in this country on a widespread scale for the first time in the early 1900s. The teaching of art has hardly changed since then. Art is looked upon as play, according to the Puritan tradition, and "the public schools... are a largely unaltered product of this essentially New England tradition."¹

Not only is art regarded by most school boards as mere curricular decoration, it is being phased out by an increasing number of schools as overall educational expenses rise. This trend goes against the very essence of learning. It is of utmost exigency that art not only be restored in all schools, but that its necessary role in the learning process and in the community be recognized.

Why must we examine the place of art in the schools? There are current happenings in addition to the trends just indicated which are cause for concern among art and humanist educators. Although many "new" media have been introduced into school art courses in recent years (photography, films, video tapes...), "the great national thrust now in the curriculum is toward career education and selling, not toward the arts."² Almost everywhere art is regarded as a "special subject," perhaps useful only for increasing manual skills.

Even in a relatively progressive and educationally-enlightened town like Ridgewood, New Jersey, art is sometimes regarded as just an extra frill. Susan
Gina, art teacher at Travel Elementary School there for four years, points out that "Your approach to teaching art is dictated to a great extent by the physical and philosophical structures of the school where you work." She remembers being a bit upset at her first school open-house for parents. Many visited the music and physical education teachers, but not one parent came to talk to her. "Those two subjects have higher priority with the administration, too," she sighs. This year the art room there has been converted into a kindergarten classroom. Ridgewood is typical of Everytown in this instance.

Arthur W. Foshay, a professor of education at Columbia University Teachers College, speaks for many educators whose voices are often too soft to be noticed: "Our preoccupation with the intellectual has yielded us a school tradition that portrays man as less than he is. It is in the arts that we have an opportunity, precisely because there is no inhibiting pedagogical tradition to stand in our way, to deal with all the aspects of what it is to be a human being."³

I cannot go into a detailed definition of what I mean by "art" and "art teaching" in this discussion. However, it must be kept in mind throughout that I am not speaking of the traditional group-think sort of art instruction. The "children this is how you make an apple tree, now let's all make apple trees" approach is not only not necessary in the schools, it is positively harmful. I am concerned with the necessity for organic, individualized art. In such a program, the teacher does not dictate but watches the child for signs of readiness (to try a new medium, for example) and stands aside until the child asks a question. Devèy's ideas about the experiential process of learning and the need to recognize and utilize the relationship between subject matter and life apply equally well to art as to other studies. Ideas and even the process rather than the product. The child must be permitted to have his own personal vision, not given that of the teacher. In the progressive arts, the teacher will work to provide the child with experiences and stimuli which will help him to develop his perception and feeling.
Now I shall examine five areas which clearly show the serious need for art in the schools: the relation of art to the unit of the learning process; art as an emotional outlet, ego fortifier, and sensitizer; art as a progress and problem indicator; art as an aesthetic educator; and art as a counterforce to depersonalization and mechanization.

As the trend toward more relaxed school structures (in classroom space, class time, subject differentiation, etc.) spreads, the fact of interrelations among different subjects becomes obvious. Dewey felt that traditional theories in philosophy and psychology had created an artificial division between body and mind. This rigid separation between the strictly intellectual and logical and the emotional and imaginative processes, stifles the act of living in the fullest sense. 4

Young children experience life as a unity, in a personal way. What could be a more personal means of expression than painting? What could bring a child more instantaneous feedback for his feelings or produce a pleasing result so swiftly? Children use painting as a non-verbal means of communication, a way to talk to themselves. Margaret Nauenburg, an art therapist, says that many of the results of children's art work are the same for children under therapy as for "normal" children. One of the results is that, as they gain experience in reproducing inner feelings on paper, they frequently become more verbally articulate. Since art is, for young children, first of all a language and an art form only incidently, it is easy to see the bridge which it forms to skills in speaking, reading and writing. Stimulating the connection between spoken and symbolic language would help us make better use of visual interest in the form of letters.

An artist is art is a concept most directly relevant to the totality of a subject's experience, in this relationship to communication. Kenneth Jameson expresses this process well when he states he is beginning the process of non-verbal symbols. He is receiving art in terms of personal expression. This shows the artist to be creative and original, not objective to experience. The process of creation in art is not sudden; it may be gradual or rapid, but
but, whichever it is, the teacher will watch for it and when it happens she will make use of it as an educational tool." And in addition: By talking with the child about his painting you encourage "growth of awareness of spoken and written forms and their relationship to the child's imagery, and as a consequence, to incipient development of skills in reading and writing. Communication through and about graphic expression is a beginning of academic learning."  

A growing number of educators are studying the role which art plays in the total learning function. Philosopher Susanne Langer has developed a theory recognizing art as a symbolic mode which expresses ideas about feelings. "Formerly it had been held that art grows out of intuition or irrational thought and the language and science grow out of rational thought. Art was thus placed somewhat in limbo and its value as a school subject was suspect." Langer offers a point of view that both modes are rational, both draw upon intuition, and can express intelligent symbolism. "The presentational mode (art), however, expresses the idea of feeling most effectively. Since children in open education are strongly encouraged to express feelings as well as to engage in more scientifically structured activities, the arts become necessary for normal expression and the full realization of self."  

Assistant Professor of Education at City University of New York Mabel Kaufman writes of art as a worthwhile study. She cites thoughts of child psychologist Piaget: "The ability to manipulate materials, to arrange and to order them, helps clarify thinking and makes a meeting more in tune to the needs of childhood." George E. Miller, executive director of art of the New York City Board of Education, prefaced his essay on children's art by saying: "The child who is free to paint as he pleases grows in mobility and power of self-direction... All media serve to give children a taste for self-realization - a way of helping to objectify their feelings and ideas."  

Further, she observed with disturbed children for many years, also in the area of elementary art... She points out how art moves infinitely...
greater demands on the child's faculties and on his moral courage than does play.

"The exclamation 'Look what I have done!' epitomizes the difference between play and art. In play, objects or people assume symbolic roles by a simple act of designation, so to speak by decree... The aim of art is the making of a symbolic object that contains and communicates an idea." The making involves a complex ego function which engages manual, intellectual and emotional faculties."

Joseph Featherstone, writing about the British Infant Schools, notes that there the children initiate and develop many of their fundamental learning experiences through the arts, particularly visual art. Kaufman comments on Featherstone's observations: "What is implicit in the British experience, is the acceptance of art as a way of knowing and the natural place given art (both in terms of production and aesthetic appreciation) in the school day beyond what I feel to be normal in our own more traditional schools."

It is amazing to see the difference in attitudes toward art between British and American educators. Leonard Marsh writes of the English attitude: "Experience of the arts is a vital preliminary" to academic subjects. "It is important that teachers should be aware why such activities (painting, modeling with clay, etc.) provide such a fundamental ground for the curriculum of the primary school...It is the writer's view that the 'ground experience' is a dynamic sensuous one which is in some extent intermingled in apparently highly abstract mental activities such as mathematics." Marsh puts forth four reasons why arts and crafts are important in elementary schools: First, children in use art to express much of their "investigative" within the environment; second, the symbolism used in art work helps the child see things with his own ideational experience; also, the use of many media helps the child to see an environment in a personal way; and finally, the time scale involved in using art materials fits the child in developing working patterns which will lead to his ideas of endeavor. I would add to this list the perhaps secondary...
Secondary values of learning to finish a worthwhile project once started, and learning responsibility for tools such as paints and brushes.

To my mind, the argument for the necessity of art in the schools could easily be put to rest at this point. Yet there is a great deal of additional weight which may be added. Art is important in at least three psychological areas: as an emotional outlet, as an ego strengthener, and as a means of increasing awareness of and sensitivity to others and to one's self. I am not speaking of children with marked emotional problems, nor of using art for guidance. I am speaking of helping children realize themselves and their potentials and heighten their sense of reality.

Fosnay writes that developmental psychological research gives us six categories of human development: the intellect, emotions, social domain, aesthetic development, spiritual and physical development. "Our tradition in general education consists of treating everything as if it finally were intellectual...the arts deal with all six of these properties of the human condition. They deal with them directly...unimpeded by a formal analytic tradition...General education and the arts are, or ought to be, a seamless web."

Sylvia Ashton-Warner is a major spokesman for bringing all subjects into what she terms the "creative vent." She recognizes the destructive urge in people and recommends art as a natural safety valve for young children. Jameson agrees, adding: "Adolescent delinquency is a direct result of the diversion of creative energy from constructive to destructive channels." Adults may become upset when a child, after sitting painting a picture, obliterates it in a few swift strokes. This is simply a natural channel for normal aggressive instincts. Erik E. Erickson talks of the "primary vent" for the emotionally distraught child. I think it may be even more helpful to think of art as potential for all children, providing an outlet and a way to direct their energies towards productive use. Erickson says, "an 'outlet' in the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords..."

Kramer explains further: "Although art cannot remove the cause of tension or directly help resolve conflict, it serves as a model of ego functioning. It becomes a sanctuary where new attitudes and feelings can be expressed and tried out, even before such changes can take place in daily life...art fulfills for the disturbed child the function which it has for all men: to create a realm of symbolic living, which allows experimentation with ideas and feelings; to make apparent the complexities and contradictions of human life; to demonstrate man's capacity to transcend conflict and create order out of chaos; and finally to give pleasure." 17

If art is taught properly, it will allow children to reflect their individual perceptions of reality. One of the major emotional problems today is a fear of reality, according to Kramer. She feels this is because young people have been "fed on substitutes until they have lost the capacity to respond to direct experience." 18 The task then, as she expresses it, "is not so much to free the child from inhibitions as to help emotional fantasy to become imagination and to develop the faculty for observation and self-observation...The major obstacles to creative expression have changed. Instead of inhibitions and guilt feelings, there are fear of emptiness and fear of annihilation." 19

Kramer sees art therapy (and art education) as a means of supporting the ego, fostering the development of a sense of identity and promoting maturation. In art, unconscious material can come to the surface and find symbolic expression without relying on sensitive defenses. She shows how art contributes to the development of an organization that can function under pressure without breakdown or resort to defense mechanisms.

According to Trivelli and Veltri, "Bigness is the most important thing for the art teacher to try to build up their sense of individual importance and ability to make decisions about what is pleasing in their art....the art teacher is setting the criterion for judgment. How different this approach is from...
the standard tack. Last year I heard the art supervisor in a Mahwah, New Jersey, second-grade class state, while holding up one child's rendering of the standard, dictated drawing of a Thanksgiving turkey, "Look, boys and girls. See how good Sue's turkey is! Can you make yours this good?" I wish some child had replied, "Who cares?" (And then, I didn't say anything either, typifying parental lassitude.)

The story James Herndon tells in The Way It Spozed to Be about the black children painting a welcome-back-to-school poster picture of two Chlorox-bright white children strikes home. They painted what they spozed to, not what was their reality at all.

Art education which teaches the child to feel his own emotions and to express his own ideas will help him become sensitized to his own feelings and those of others.

Perhaps not as important as the other indicators discussed here, but still certainly worth mentioning, is the role of art as a guide for the teacher in understanding the children. As pointed out by Jameson, art activities can provide, "as no other activity can (at this age, preschool and elementary), insight into the child's personality and social background, thus enabling the teacher to relate more closely to the child; this is equally revealing to the parent." A child's paintings can contribute to the teacher his interests and concerns. The teacher then as a reference for providing related material as well as insight into the child's emotional world.

When children enter elementary school they are naturally attuned to the essence of art. The role of the school, then, is to build upon this openness, giving "skill in using materials and creating forms, joy in experimenting with color and texture," in time the child will come to use art to make visible an inner world, or art sensitivity to the sensory world is harnessed to an aesthetic response. "Art, in the child is fostered even from seeing the world, reality as line, color, form, and texture, referred. On the other hand, aesthetic awareness is not only a cognitive and responsive to sensory images; they can
focus feeling and become more conscious of it.  

Henry Pluckrose notices that after months of working with many different materials, children become more sensitive, particularly to music, poetry, drama and movement. (His observations on art fill a handbook for teachers in primary grades.) Karmer speaks of the substance of art materials: "Art respects matter without being materialistic. The artist must love and understand his medium. In the act of creation, idea and medium become one." Thus, the child, through art work, comes into touch with his world and its substances in a very meaningful and personal way.

Ivan Illich expresses the horror of the assembly line, mechanized society succinctly: "People who submit to the standard of others for the measure of their own personal growth soon apply the same ruler to themselves. They no longer have to be put in their place, but put themselves into their assigned slots, squeeze themselves into the niche which they have been taught to seek, and, in the very process, put their fellows into their places, too, until everybody and everything fits." He talks about how the institutionalized values school instills are quantified ones. It "initiates young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself...The learning I prize is immeasurable re-creation."  

Art education is more than tangential to Illich's point. It is at the very heart of much of the problem with traditional education. Many of the writers cited here suggest that if creative activities are ignored then, as automation increases, more and more people will need psychiatric help. If children we are given opportunities to express ourselves creatively instead of merely, as adults, will be less static, will be more inclined to seek out creative activities in many areas. We will act more readily, be less content to passively receive. It is appreciation for craftsmanship is fostered early in life, mass production will be more of its mark here.
uniqueness of each person which is of value to the group. While harmonizing with the group is necessary for a peaceful, working society, vital individual input is essential or the group will strike more dissonances and flats than chords. We must infuse academic disciplines with life and creativity. Then the instruments will cease their monotonous fumblings, look at their world, and begin to play fully and with beauty.

now, then, can we help assure the vitality of education through art? One encouraging trend is that toward open education, as mentioned earlier. Art teachers deal with the deepening of the aesthetic response. This response to the world provides a framework within which open education can flourish. Art personalizes learning, gives it human and imaginative dimensions. Only a numb administration would, to my mind, recommend freedom in all areas but art.

One way in which spokesmen for art in the school may better further their cause is by uniting with specialists in the fields of dance and music. There really is no reason to separate the arts, and divided they may more likely fall to the axe of budget cuts. Many educators are calling for "aesthetic education," a combination of the arts. Harlan Hoffa, president of the National Art Education Association, said in an address in April, 1973: "I believe that art education, as I have known it for a quarter century, is obsolete and that it lacks the means to assure its own survival." 2 He recommends joining the arts for a broader base of action. Art educators must more actively promote their ideas to the public. And concerned voters must speak out to school board members, must push for more basic and widespread art education.

Finally (though not definitively) we must work at sensitizing society. This could be aided by integrating the schools with community life, as proposed by many. Elementary schools should have artists-in-residence, and the children could visit local craftsmen (interpreted very broadly). Many adult education art classes would be helped with projects in the schools. The creative experience is too
structured throughout society. I was surprised to learn that almost no parents give their pre-schoolers paint to work with, categorizing art as purely a school subject. "Parents must be helped to a realization that children's drawing and painting are not mere crude scribbling and blobbing, but a normal and vital aspect of the child's developing process." Parents do give their children coloring books and paint-by-number sets, which do nothing but inculcate false values and remove art from its natural realm of individual expression. Where is the fantasy in a numbered picture drawn by some adult. Verbal suggestions have almost the same effect as drawing for the child. We are so far removed from letting children "do their own thing" that these facts rarely occur to parents.

Similar modern anti-art projects try to fill the gap of frustrated creativity for adults. Kramer speaks of how in the past art was more a part of life because more things were done by hand. "A certain measure of self-expression and self-recognition was woven into the fabric of our daily life...I believe this deficiency (today) has created a hidden hunger, a feeling of emptiness, and a fear of loss of identity that drive people to seek out art experiences where they can still be found." She feels that the lack of authentic art experience and the concomitant saturation with anti- and pseudo-art in large segments of the population constitute a pathogen condition. Vitel, assistant professor of art at the University of Delaware, echoes this belief: "Between inadequacy and mediocrity, a large proportion of the adult population is lodged on a ten-year-old level perceptually and creatively. The effects can be seen along every highway, in the choices of products and the repetitious selection of things that look alike and are alike - the total tapestry of an aesthetic malnutrition." Stereotyped chaos, emptiness and materialistic seduction must be replaced with meaningful human values. People must gain a freshness of vision and a sensitivity to their world, and the time to start is at a very early age.

I now see the need for art as an integral part of a humanist education, and of the need for art throughout society. The goal of any such education must be,
ultimately, the self-actualization of the individual. Elizabeth Monrow Drews forms a beautiful picture of what it means to be a self-actualized person. She has discovered three types of achievers in school, the Social Leader, the Studious, and the Creative Intellectual. "The final group, the Creative Intellectuals, are characterized by the dominance of personally developed values, humanitarian and altruistic. Individuals in this group, in their fullest development, approximate the self-actualizing person as described by the humanist psychologists, which in turn conforms strikingly to the human ideal articulated by the major religious and philosophical systems of both Western and Eastern cultures." These people are, she stated straightforwardly, better people than the rest of us. "The future of our common life depends on such people, on our nurturing more of them, and on the rest of us becoming more like them."

Growth toward self-actualization is tightly tied up with open and organic art experience. Aldous Huxley speaks of the weakness of education on a non-verbal level in Human Potentialities. "What is needed," he writes, "if more of the potentialities of more people are to be actualized, is a training on the non-verbal levels of our whole being as systematic as the training now given to children and adults on the verbal level."

The vision of what could be is dazzling, and perhaps impossible, given the extent of the power so far yielded to mechanization and materialism. I would be satisfied if only the direction could be changed so that growth would be toward the vision of art. A necessary part of the new direction would involve pulling art from where it is smothered, revising around the culture like so much space garbage, reinvigorating it into one world and community.
FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.


7. Ibid., p. 64.


9. Ibid.


17. Kramer, pp. 111-120.

18. I., p. 18.


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