

On Aims and Objectives in Creative Education

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This paper was originally the basis of a discussion among lecturers in Colleges of Education who face particular problems in their work. Many of the problems raised in terms of objectives and the curriculum are however common at many varied levels of teaching. The special problem in Colleges of Education lies in the dual nature of the work, that is, in continuing the student's own education and at the same time initiating and developing his professional training. It may be this difficulty that has led to confusion and often lack of clarity on the question of aims and objectives.

Colleges of Education have not been alone in their confusion over aims and objectives! It was easier when a teacher was able to affirm that children were taught Art (drawing) in order to develop co-ordination between hand and eye. This was thought to develop skill and precision which would be useful in later life. There was no evidence that it did so and indeed no evidence that it did not. Again there has never been any evidence that Art as taught in schools has helped children in later life to enjoy their leisure which was (and often is) another reason given for engaging in the activity. 'Art' has of course now become a title which subsumes a variety of crafts as they used to be understood.

It is normally assumed that research of any validity can only be undertaken with regard to measurable factors, it is necessary to know exactly the aims and intentions of an activity, the variable factors, the method of measurement and the bases for evaluation. It is difficult to see how this could have any relevance to most Art courses. Nevertheless even if the factors are not measurable it is possible to clarify a number of problems.

Such aims as are given for the teaching of Art lack definition (although they may well often have some validity). I refer to such aims as "Education for Creativity"

"Aesthetic Education" and "Personal Development". Courses are variously described as "Appropriate to Individual interests" "to individual talents", "to future careers." Many such courses run by teachers of dedication and high ideals work well and indeed fulfil their intentions in a rough and ready way. Leaving aside problems of discipline and motivation young people will, on the whole, play the teachers' game (they have little alternative as a captive audience) and do what is required of them. They will produce neatness, fill the whole page, lay on a wash before starting to paint, make large scale models, and even produce "personal development" within the terms required by the teacher. Although this sounds cynical it is I think realistic.

Every teacher needs to examine the validity of the work he is doing and think critically and constructively about the concepts on which it is based. If, for instance, Art is concerned with exploring and crystallising areas of experience that are otherwise neglected, if it is concerned with the integration of the maturing personality and with the communication of experience, ideas and feelings for which there is no other language then that language needs to be defined. This may mean a reconstruction of the kind of environment in which Art can grow.

To suggest that Art is a method of communication is to place it in one of the most fundamental areas of education. Communication is undoubtedly a human need, it may well be on a basic human function.¹ In Art the communication involved will depend on perception (and the special perceptions of Art) and on discovery of actual visual or formal material as well as on the understanding of its content. The technicalities of communication involve man in adapting materials to a language of communication and adapting himself to use materials. To represent experience and to communicate it requires thinking by other than rational means.

(The kind of thinking and the forms of knowledge involved in the Arts are clearly set out by Louis Arnaud Reid in his book *Ways of Knowledge and Experience*, Allen & Unwin, 1961.)

The kinds of thinking that Art involves are usually described as creative although there is an area of activity described as creativity which does not *necessarily* have any direct relationship to Art. Art is concerned with methods of thinking inherent in other than verbal forms of communication and perhaps with a special reference to visual and affective education. The process is one of making unique experiences into shared experiences, or rather the making of unique experiences into the DATA for shared experience to interpret and recreate. In all communication the remaking factor is essential so the forms and symbols used must be such that others can recreate something of the original experience. This does not mean that the symbols and forms of Art do not change but that like any other language they evolve and grow. According to Wittgenstein there is no such thing as a private language. What kind of communication is Art then? Is it a language, and if so what kind of language is it? How does it relate to other forms of symbolism? Are the forms of Art structured like language, i.e. with an alphabet, and grammar? In particular what is the relation of thinking to this particular language? Is the concept of "visual thinking" related to a specific visual language? It seems that Art requires the learning of a language in which certain problems can be solved — but it also requires *creating a language* in order to solve particular problems.

"The painter has his own way of communicating his observations. Original painters find new ways of doing this, new art forms. These literally enlarge the vision both of the artist himself and of those who look at his paintings. Artists have discovered new aspects of space with one symbolism,

just as physicists have with another". And again:

"The creative artist is an observer whose brain works in new ways, making it possible for him to convey new information to others about matters that were not a subject of communication before. It is by the search for means of communication that we sharpen our powers of observation. The discoveries of the artist and scientist are exactly alike in this respect".²

Clearly very few teachers are concerned with teaching the great artists of the future but just in the same way English Language and Literature teachers do not expect all their pupils to become great writers. The basic language of communication as well as the felicities and rewards are fundamental at any level. In an age in which there is probably more visual communication than ever before it seems essential that the visual and formal language of Art and the possibility of developing it should form a basic and well defined area of the curriculum. Communication is more important than the making of objects. As Paul Klee complained "I am expected to do things a clever fellow could easily make".

Knowledge which can be classified and defined clearly ('I believe this to be so, it is demonstrable, it *is*') is in a sense already complete. Knowledge in Art is a *process* which can never be complete as long as there is some human communication to be made. In these terms the perceptions and the language of Art are a powerful method of research. As in any other discipline the communication of ideas involves the solving of problems both in the technical sense and inventive or creative sense and "the maximum learning within problem solving activity occurs at the evaluation stage."³ The clear implication here is that evaluation is an important part of the understanding of a language in which communications can be made and received (re-made). One can make

no judgements about the elegance of a mathematical equation if one is innumerate. If one is numerate it is at least possible to think in those terms.

How, then, do we produce a situation in which this 'language of Art' can be learned and *created*? Perry suggests that "art curricula are *whatever will produce* a certain state of mind called "creative", or will stimulate a certain activity of that sort —".⁴ This implies in terms of my argument that art curricula should produce a situation in which the language of Art can be learned and created and produce a state of mind in which a wide variety of subject matter and individual communication can be engendered.

We live in an age of rapid change. Science, which as we know it is only about 300 years old, has made incredible changes in all our lives. In the *immediate* future we are going to accept new innovations which may require us to think in ways which are unimaginable to us now — we need to equip ourselves and the pupils and students we teach to *face change*. We need to be able to develop new languages and new methods of communication.

"When art communicates, human experience is actively offered and actively received. Below this activity threshold there can be no art".⁵

Are we prepared?

References:

1. See John Macmurray *Persons in Relation*. Faber & Faber, 1961.
2. J.Z. Young *Doubt and Certainty in Science*. Oxford, 1951.
3. Peter Green. 'Problem Solving and Design Education' in *Aspects of Education No. 13 Education and Creative Work*. University of Hull, 1971.
4. L. Perry. 'Art Education and the Curriculum' in *Aspects of Education No. 13 Education and Creative Work*, University of Hull, 1971.
5. Raymond Williams. *The Long Revolution*. Chatto and Windus, 1961.