

Notes for now

The place of Art in the reorganised Education of Teachers.

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31

In a symposium (1) published recently the question discussed is "Is it necessary to make art in order to teach art?" In whatever way one may be tempted to answer, there can be no doubt that the teacher who practices as an artist has knowledge of a kind which is denied to the non-practitioner. At the most obvious level, he knows what he feels when making art. The experience is familiar to him. The non-practising artist who teaches must draw upon other experiences, which may be of comparable value. Indeed the very lack of direct personal experience of art-making may be a strong factor in the teacher's motivation, a determination, perhaps, to ensure that his pupils are not in their turn deprived. One has met teachers, eager to disclaim any knowledge of art, who were able nevertheless to provide for children the materials, the circumstances and the understanding which enabled them to make art. Whether they could be said to be teaching art is a question I shall not attempt to consider here.

It is perhaps more useful for those of us who are concerned with the training of teachers to consider why we insist upon involving them in making objects and images. For the evidence, in the way we examine alone, is overwhelming by that we do. Although examiners, from time to time, have questioned the expectation that students should exhibit their work for examination, the tradition survives. It will not do, I think, to ascribe its survival to inertia on the part of art tutors in the colleges. Students themselves seem to have a strong desire to explore craft processes and tutors seem to respond out of a positive conviction that experience of their specialism will be of unique value. One notices that students, at the outset of their courses, express the wish to acquire wide-ranging technical experience in order, as they then see it, to equip themselves with material to teach. By the end of their courses, however, most students appear to have discovered an appetite for a

different kind of knowledge obtained through a more particular study. This is an understandable tendency and is parallel to that seen, in all subjects, as one advances through our educational system. However, at a time when that very system is being reorganised, it is perhaps appropriate to look at the value of such specialised study in art.

"Child Art" is no longer a widely used term. It used to describe objects and images made by children which were highly prized because they had some of the characteristic attributes of art. Today we use the "Umbrella" term of creative article, which can cover everything from useless and unproductive time-wasting, on the one-hand, to the most intense, absorbing and productive pre-occupation, on the other. Whatever term we use, we would agree, I think, that children draw, paint or make models of their experience as a natural part of their play. They do this in whatever way is possible, with or without the prompting of adults. Rosemary Gordon (2), in considering the psychological factors which impel man to make art, gives first place to his need to cloth his internal images in forms existing outside himself. Those of us who participate in art-making know, further, that our very perception is structured, in part, by the media with which we are familiar. Faced with an ever increasing input of sense-data man is impelled to find new metaphors, new arts, new ways of constructing order.

Young children, in particular, have this need. They face the problem of an overwhelmingly chaotic input of novel sense-data at a time when their ability to organise it is still short of a vocabulary. It can be argued that some kind of primitive imagery occurs but without a vocabulary, in the sense of a repertoire of sounds, movements or symbols no established order is possible. It is easy to see why children need the security of repeated sensations and why also sensations which they can initiate themselves are repeated insatiably. Amongst these, of parti-

cular interest to us, are the sensations which are sought by children through the properties of mark-making and deformable materials. Paint and clay are merely more convenient and hygienic versions of other transferable stains and plastics which receive earlier attention. Much of what was once thought of as destructive activity by children is now seen to be an essential ingredient in their construction of a secure relationship between their internal confessed images and the external world, to which they must be adjusted. There cannot be, what we think of as creative activity without some material change and its consequent threat to the *status quo*.

Schools, and, at present, particularly art rooms, are places where opportunities for making one's mark must abound. Unless they realise early in their childhood the potential which exists in materials for symbolising their images children must be handicapped in their thinking. Gordon (3) argues that images, unlike thoughts cannot be validated socially because there is no way in which one can communicate them directly to another. Discursive thought and language are she says, quite unequal to the task. She goes on to suggest that through the forms of art man has found a way of breaking the seal that locks him fast in part of his inner world.

It is precisely that seal which each child has to break for himself if his very daily experience is not to render him isolated. For without an ability to construct his internal imagery with reference to a language, or a medium of some kind, it can never become thought and it can never be tested. Happily we have evidence that most children do at least start out with this ability. They are able to invent words, drawings, mimes and gestures with which they show us, directly, glimpses of the inner worlds which they are constructing. For the continued development of this ability children seem to need to draw confidence from two sources.

The first of these lies in the child's discovery that his symbols continue to be effective metaphors for his experience or that, when they do not, he is able to modify his symbols accordingly. The second source of confidence is the response he gets from others who are able to recognise the relevance of his metaphors. Gordon (4) writes of man's need to communicate and validate his inner world in this way. Indeed she proceeds, justifiably, to argue that this need is one of the strongest impulses to art-making, and the one which ensures its continuance. In the individual artist, and particularly in the child however, the very gaps between the unarticulated inner image and the external expression of it can lead either to despair or to renewed effort. One teacher pointed out to me that there is a danger that we regard as unintelligent the child whose metaphor we happen not to understand! It is clear that it is here that the teacher who has a knowledge of the art-making process may be able to play a helpful part.

Children who have every confidence in their metaphors, that is to say their drawings, paintings and models, and who find them useful and compatible with their sense impressions, can nevertheless be led to despair by the evident misunderstandings of such work, by their teachers. It takes an exceptional child to persist confidently in the face of repeated evidence that his thought is meaningless to those whom he respects. Children who retain a faith in their own thought processes, in spite of such treatment, are likely to have something rather special to contribute. This is because their confidence will be drawn from their own perceptions and their effort arises from the need to test and retest their metaphors against those perceptions. This constitutes the discipline of the committed artist, and we have need of him. We also have need however of the socially responsible person. This is the child whose tentative assertions through art-making are seen by him to be

understood and valued by others. Whether his symbols are unusually provocative or common place he has at the outset made his own and such understanding can enable him to rediscover their relevance to his own sensory experience. Without such a response he may well feel no security in society and will be unable to meet its demands without resentment.

For the young child then art is essential. Neither full social integrity nor full language development is possible without this basic activity of making images manifest in materials. Experienced and successful teachers have demonstrated that a richly nourished art activity reflects favourably upon other school-based learning. To the extent that they need graphic, plastic and three dimensional materials, in order to structure their thought about life, all young children may be thought of as artists. It would be an interesting further exercise to consider what range of materials would constitute a minimum basic vocabulary for this purpose, although it would be a diversion here. The popularity of this view of the child as an artist, in the hey-day of child art, has however led to reduce anxiety amongst teachers about the loss of interest in art media which often occurs in adolescence. The view is sometimes expressed that if only we could find the right approach to teaching them we could enable all adolescents to continue to be creative artists. However if a young adult has confidence in his imagery and can perceive effectively his creativeness may be found to be in the way in which he responds to those perceptions in, say, social or scientific work. The sequel to child art is not necessarily adolescent art or adult art. Child art may properly be seen as the fore-runner of creative involvement in problems requiring quite other techniques and discriptions, for their solution. Those adolescents who, on the other hand, do not have confidence in their own perceptual images and who have consequently settled

for stereotyped metaphors will, naturally, wish to remove themselves from the influence of art, until such time as they become aware of a need for a therapeutic art-making experience.

The appropriate education of those relatively few who choose to be involved particularly as adult artists can be fully considered elsewhere. Here our concern is to consider priorities in the reorganising of teacher training set against the foregoing view of art in general education.

The first requirement is that teachers should have a respect for the characteristic creativeness of their pupils. They cannot be expected to achieve this by instruction. It is necessary that they should be able to recognise and respect it for themselves. The teaching of art which is not based upon this fundamental respect can hardly be expected to be very effective in increasing the child's capacity for self-respect. One important way in which the teacher can acquire such a respect for creativeness in his pupils is to discover it, and to learn to respect it, in himself. This will happen if he can voluntarily undertake the making of art. This will involve him in facing the problems of giving form to images derived from his own senses. This is a demanding experience but unless it is undertaken honestly, at whatever level is appropriate, the chances of the teacher understanding and respecting this effort in his pupils must be minimal. The acquisition of skills either in the making of objects or in the art of teaching which is not enlightened by such respect cannot be thought of as very useful. On the other hand, skills which are acquired in the process of making his own genuine mark will become part of the knowledge he can use to foster, in the children he teaches, confidence in their own thought processes. They have no other.

The second requirement is that teachers should have an ability to read the art work children produce. The layman teacher, or psychologist, can open recognise the

schemata or diagrams which a child's drawing contains but it is the artist-teacher who has the necessary experience to be aware of the language in which it is expressed. One often hears children's drawings being discussed as though they had leapt unaided from the mind onto the paper. The practising artist knows however that the act of drawing is itself the medium of thought and that a line or area of tone can reveal thought as much by its quality as by its direction. A patch of soft scribble can contain as much of a child's thought about a bird as can a familiar pattern of lines depicting beaks, feathers and claws.

The third requirement is an ability to make an appropriate response. Having first respected and received the child's metaphor it is necessary to share in it, to test it with its author against both the child's and teacher's joint experience. The true aim of education — too often forgotten however as Walter Gropius put it — is to stimulate enthusiasm toward greater effort. Later in the same essay (5) he adds, "When intuition has found food, skill develops most rapidly, while routine alone can never supersede creative vision."

In addition to these requirements the student teacher needs to acquire all the technical knowledge he can but not at the expense of understanding its relevance to the structure of ideas. He will be further helped, in this purpose, if he continues to learn about the art-making tradition to which he belongs, but not to the extent that he ceases, in that essential making, to belong to it.

The plea here is for those who play a part in the reshaping of teacher education to pay due regard to the insights which arise from the specialist disciplines. Those who teach art to student-teachers may need to resist the temptation to modify their procedures in order to satisfy the representatives of other disciplines. What we must be willing to do however is to examine our own practices to see if they are justified when measured

against our own priorities. Then we must be prepared to take the trouble to spell out our priorities in terms which can be understood by colleagues who work in other disciplines. Collectively we find this both difficult, as these notes will testify, and irksome. If we expect our contribution to education to be understood and to survive in a reorganised higher education we cannot shirk this task. Most of our attempts will prove to be inadequate and we shall need the help of sympathetic colleagues who can see, from outside as it were, the value of what we do.

In higher education generally the specialist artist-teachers have a role to play with the non-specialist art student, many of whom are ready to use art-making as a way of re-establishing confidence in their own thought. The critical and analytical modes in which many of them are training do not provide them with confidence in their ability to bring about change in the environment which they inhabit. The related studies of perception and creativity are attracting popular attention now. They have been the preoccupation of artists for centuries. The history of art is a history of ways of seeing and studio practices are tried and tested techniques for sustaining creative involvement. No other discipline can boast of longer study or greater expertise in these areas.

My intention has been to argue for one set of priorities in the re-thinking and re-shaping of our future. I am aware that there are arguments in favour of others. While some will argue that art is a practical subject and as such has no place for example in a degree structure, others will argue that every work of art is first and foremost a theoretical proposition. Probably only those who are participants can know that these views are not irreconcilable in practice. We should therefore try to play the fullest possible part in decisions about our future role in education.

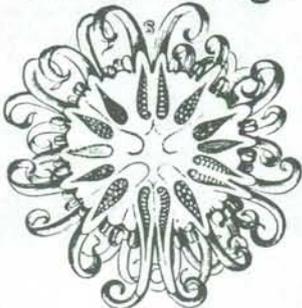
The kind of knowledge which is peculiar

to artists and insights which can be gained only through the efforts they make to give form to images are indispensable in teacher education. What ever the claims of other disciplines and they are many none is more central than our own to the education of the young. In higher education we have an opportunity to establish that we have equally as much to offer to those who wish to think creatively in roles other than teaching.

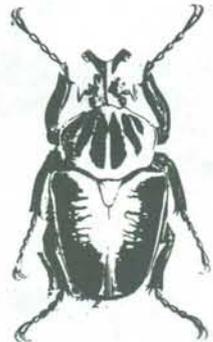
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