

A Case Study :

Capitalizing the values of child art

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Art for children seems to be intrinsically pleasurable, by which they interrelate interior and exterior courts of life and give outward expression and shape to their thoughts and feelings. On one hand, art is a representative of reality, at the same time it is interpretive and expressive while certain meanings can be deduced with help of line, colour, shape and space used by children. When children create visual representation, they combine various elements of design on the basis of their own judgments, which provide a particular meaning to their creations. Thus, children's art is instrumental in fostering, their identity, uniqueness, self-esteem and accomplishments. All these virtues of art can be utilized by parents and elders, in a manner that would nourish the wholesome and balanced development of child's personality.

Art for a child is self-initiated and satisfying activity that needs no external motivation to sustain. During the process, child gets absorbed totally and reflects inner mental state in his creations hence it serves as a window into the mind and emotion of the child. Read (1945) asserts that art is "the only human activity that can establish a universal order in all we do and make, in thought and imagination". The effect of art activity on children's self-concept and general personality development can be very beneficial. Art can provide a means for children to develop their inherent creative abilities and, in the process, to integrate other personality dimensions, such as the emotional, social and aesthetic. Child art is often seen as instrumental in fostering and preserving each individual's identity, uniqueness, self-esteem and accomplishment.

Art has been approached as:

- Representative of reality
- Interpretative or expressive, and
- Abstract.

Representation is essentially illustration, recreation of some image or impression. Expression is often illustration plus purposeful distortion or selection to create an effect for both artist and viewer. The abstract is, in a sense, decorative; satisfaction for both artist and viewer is in the use and interrelation of colour, line, shape and space.

Young children rarely draw objects directly from observation, and even if we put an object in front of them and ask them to draw it, they may not look at it very carefully. Writers such as Golomb (1993) has pointed out that a picture cannot be a copy of the object because of the intrinsic differences between the properties of the two dimensional medium and the three dimensional object. In fact, Luquet (1927) argued that children actually draw from an 'internal model', whether or not a real model is available. The real model serves simply to activate the internal model. In forming this, internal model children are not copying the object but are engaging in a creative mental act. Although the internal model 'contains' the whole object, some parts of it are more focused and important and these parts may not be the same ones each time the child accesses or generates the model.

In particular it is unclear how the child 'translates' it into a drawing and although Willats (1997) has suggested a way that children might choose appropriate marks and shapes (picture primitives) to represent particular elements in the scene, this may not be universally applicable.

As children create visual representations, they are required to combine the elements of design into structure with meaning and then to judge

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the adequacy and quality of their own work. Then they must proceed on the basis of their own judgments. This type of mental activity can be quite stimulating and often results in creative behaviour, which is also satisfying. The flexibility of art activity, where even the purpose of the process can change on the basis of the individuals judgment, is very different from other areas of learning that rely on the achievement of stated criteria and the memorizing and recitation of correct answers.

According to Eisner (1978), children learn the images and symbols they create and can be used to transport them into a fantasy world, they can create an imaginary world through the use of their own images and hence become a part of other situation in which they can play other roles and this is an important source of learning. It allows them to practice in the context of play what they cannot actually do in the 'real world'. It affords them opportunities to empathetically participate in the life of another.

Contribution of art for children and their personality can be presented in a nutshell as :

- Enjoyment of art activity for its own sake.
- An acceptable way to reduce tension. (Cathartic value)
- Means of self-expression and communication.
- Source of perception and concept development.
- Eye hand co-ordination.
- Source of learning.
- Aesthetic appreciation.
- Expression of cultural heritage. (Reflection of values, life styles and norms of culture)
- Facilitator of creative urges and mental acts.

Art provides the child an opportunity of developing myriad cognitive and creative abilities such as conceptualizing, representing, problem solving, spatial relation, exploration, imagination, elaboration, organization and experimentation with thoughts and ideas.

Moreover, it facilitates mental activities such as concentrating and memory.

A more recent and promising use of art has been as a facilitator of children's memory for past events. A number of studies have demonstrated that asking children to draw as well as to give a verbal report produces better recall.

All these mental abilities are further applied and executed to meet the various challenges and problems raised by complex subjects such as maths, science, language etc. Thus, it can be safely advocated that art provides rich experiences and abilities to the child that serve as perquisites for developing competence in challenging and cumbersome subjects. Therefore, parents

should not underestimate the virtues of drawings or art rather they should capitalize these virtues of art for developing their children into a competent and versatile individual. Capitalization of these virtues of art seems to be essential for the wholesome development of child's personality and adults can play a crucial role in this regard.

Role of adults:

There is some evidence that a completely non-interventionist approach may result in very young children being uninterested in art. Many other art educators, however are uneasy with the idea of adults intervening further than merely providing the appropriate materials and giving general encouragement. For Luquet (1927) until the age of 11 parental intervention is perhaps unnecessary, since this is the age when child enters into visual realism when he/she is more concerned and keen to learn exact representation. Vygotsky (1978) the advocate of 'zone of proximal development' suggests that effective parents actually guide the child by asking questions, making suggestions and generally leading the child towards solving a particular problem but without giving him the solution in an authoritarian way.

In order to make meaningful work possible, parents need to provide an opportunity along with a range of art materials in a least restrictive, comfortable and pleasing environment, which facilitates exploration. During the process they must be ready to intervene at any point in order to sustain the continuity and flow of work. In other words, parents should provide objective technical assistance in order to actualize the creative goals of children, but as soon as possible adults should return to the role of a natural observer so that the spontaneity of work remains intact.

Children's early graphic behaviour, the marking, scribbling and manipulation of materials appears to be intrinsically pleasurable. As they move into the symbol making phase, these psychomotor and kinesthetic rewards are reinforced by children's newly developed ability to conceive and convey meanings. Through drawings children unify various elements of internal and external worlds that are neither objective nor empirical, hence gives outward expression to their inner thoughts and feelings.

Therefore, art made by children serve as a source of assessment of inner most chores of personality. Mirchandani and Saxena (1973) highlighted on the basis of finding that art has great potentiality to describe the personality characteristic of children.

Lowenfeld (1959) stressed the role of the expressive art in general development and in particular, in the proper social and emotional adjustment of the child. All type of

children even prodigies use their drawings as a “feeler” a spontaneous reaching out to the external world, at first tentative but capable of becoming the main factor in the adjustment of the child to society.

The fundamental tenets of arts therapy involve communication, control and resolution of emotional conflicts through art making (American Art Therapy Association, 1996). There is a common assumption that a picture is a “window in the mind”—that, even though a child may not be able to talk about his feelings or what has happened to him, nevertheless this information will be there in a drawing if we know how to read it. If this assumption is true this would definitely facilitate the access to the emotional state of mind of a child.

Adults usually focus more upon so-called challenging subjects like math, science, language, general knowledge etc. While ignore and undermine the significance of ‘art’, which, infact is a precursor, that provides an opportunity of developing, various skills required for mastering such subjects.

Finally the role of parents can be summarized in the following points:

- Providing conducive and challenging environment.
- Providing freedom of exploration.
- Providing opportunities and materials.
- Encouraging spontaneity and originality.
- Directing leisure hours.
- Providing technical assistance.
- Facilitating the flow of work.
- Appreciating the process.
- Reinforcing the art activities.
- Stimulating art activities through questioning and suggestions.

Thus, through providing art experiences, parents can

liberate the child from dependence and passivity and allow them to activate all faculties of mind, to generate and develop abilities and assets congruent to their multifaceted development.

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