Enhancing Creativity Through Elementary Art Education

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

By

Rita C. Beavers

Thesis Director

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
July 1981

Expected Graduation Date: August 14, 1981
INTRODUCTION

Creativity is an aspect of the mind that most consider a valuable commodity. Many researchers believe that a creative mind is a most desirable trait, and the cultivating of such a mind is a worthwhile goal. It is also the researcher's belief that a sound art program can effectively stimulate the student toward the development of a creative mind. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the issues concerning the enhancement of creativity through art education in the elementary grades.

ART EDUCATION--ITS BENEFITS

Many believe that one must be educated in order to function effectively in society. To meet this need, the school systems have been created and developed. Children are required to attend schools which are entrusted to aid the individual and society through education. There are three nationally established goals that any educational system is expected to fulfill. They are the following: to attain maximum personal fulfillment, the transmitting of the cultural heritage from generation to generation, and the development of social consciousness. ¹

Art education's purposes coincide with these goals, as stated by Laura Chapman. The student's personal fulfillment is encouraged through personal response and expression in art. Society believes that the cultural heritage is important. Art education should increase

one's awareness and appreciation of the artistic heritage. Society itself can be further explored by the awareness of art's role in society.²

The school systems strive to meet these goals, and curriculums are therefore developed to meet the needs of the individual. One means by which to enhance the individual, and the individual's contribution to society, is through the development of the individual's creative potential. By developing this potential, the individual can encourage his own thinking and problem-solving abilities. This in turn can aid society.

We live in an age in which thinking has value. Problem-solving confrontations are always occurring. Mankind is continually seeking the answers to the unknown.

It is a known fact that the mechanized and technological age in which we live makes puppets of many men, rather than thinking, contributing and creative members of a democratic society. Creativity has become a precious commodity. The schools must play a substantial role in producing this commodity in the citizens it turns out for the democratic way of life.³

An effective art program can enhance a student's thinking ability. Creativity can be greatly nurtured through art experiences which deal with imaginative and problem-solving activities. The student needs to learn to solve situations on his own terms. Psychologists have conducted tests of a forty-five minute creative art period and have concluded that the child may make up to 3,000 split-second decisions

² Ibid., pp. 19-20.

during the time. Each of these decisions builds towards the completion of a goal.  

TEACHING CREATIVITY

Creativity can be defined as the "sinking down taps into our past experiences and putting these selected experiences into new patterns, new ideas, or new products." It is important that educators realize that they can expose the child to experiences that will allow him to test his creative potential.

Creativity development and enhancement should essentially begin in the home. The parents are the key factor. It has been found that the parents of a creative child are individuals who encourage their child to use his own abilities, to be independent, and to actively explore his environment. The child's curiosity is also encouraged. The child is shown respect. The parents do not demand high achievement but allow the child to develop at his own rate. An important point to remember is that the child has a certain amount of freedom.

It is an obvious fact that all children are not reared in this manner. Therefore, it is important that the child's creative capacity should be dealt with as early as possible in the child's education. As Hugh Lytton suggests, there are some activities that do not have any predetermined plans, and therefore the child may respond creatively.

4 Art Guide K-6 (Fort Lauderdale: Broward County Public Schools, 1970).

5 Smith, p. 4.

Such activities are painting, modeling, and dramatization. With this in mind, art education can build towards the encouragement of every child's creative capacity.

One point that should be confronted is that many people believe that creativity cannot be taught and that some individuals do not possess creative abilities. Studies have been conducted at the college level to determine whether or not creativity can indeed be nurtured. The answer that has been arrived at from the studies is that everyone possesses creative abilities to some degree and that everyone can increase his creative capabilities. This should definitely imply that attempting to deal with the creative aspect of a student's mind is a worthy pursuit.

Although creativity can be dealt with in other school subjects, such as a creative writing lesson in a literature course, an effective art program accepts the nurturing of creativity in the child as one of its major goals. The child is subjected to experiencing, and then he must employ his mind to create. He therefore produces a work that is uniquely his. This expression of the child's is an extension of the child's self.

Art education, introduced in the early years of childhood may well mean the difference between a flexible creative human being and one who, in spite of all learning, will not be able to apply it and will remain an individual who

7 Ibid., p. 78.

lacks inner resources and has difficulty in his relationship to the environment.⁹

Many consider art to be just a product. The point that needs to be made is that art is the combination of the experiencing, the learning, and the creating of the art piece. An effective art program can encourage the child to grow mentally.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Creativity itself is not just a happening but rather the result of a cycle of responses, as George F. Kneller suggests. Investigating this cycle should help one to search himself for ways that he may facilitate the process. The first stage is receptivity. "Many an idea is lost simply because the person is too busy to note it or fails to perceive its significance. The imagination is not bound by schedules, but tosses its ideas into consciousness at any time of day or night."¹⁰ The point is that the students should be alert to their own ideas and be receptive to their own thoughts. The students need to realize that they have value and that individual ideas have merit.

Immersion is the next occurrence. The creator contemplates his work. The time is taken to think about what one is doing. This stage implies that one needs to be engrossed in his work.

At the next stage of the cycle are commitment and detachment. The creative act requires that the creator be absorbed in his work, and this implies commitment. However, the creator must be able to


separate himself from his work in the sense that he does not limit himself. He must become somewhat detached to consider new possibilities.

Kneller's next step is imagination and judgment. "Imagination alone produces ideas but does not communicate them; judgment alone communicates ideas but does not produce them." 11 Kneller is calling for the integration of these two components. Both are a necessary response to creativity.

During the next stage, one needs to question himself as to what other alternatives are feasible. This is labeled interrogation. "A. F. Osborn, for example, states that creativity is activated by such 'stabs' as: "What if . . . ? What about . . . ? What else . . . ? And again, What else?" 12

The creative being should also be able to treat errors and accidents as a consideration. These occurrences may add a new dimension to his work. The creator can see that such an accident or error may lead him to a new, imaginative, or fresh approach. In other words, these happenings could be a building block toward new ideas.

The last response that the creator should indulge in is the act of submitting to his work. He needs to take the time to view his work fully. The work is observed and the creator must still be open to any new ideas that may be suggested.

An elementary student can benefit from knowledge about creativity. However, he is not likely to understand the process by himself. It is

11 Ibid., p. 59.

12 Ibid., p. 60.
the responsibility of the art teacher to realize how the child's mind may be fostered. For example, the student may not be able to, or he simply may not, respond to his work in an interrogative manner. However, the instructor can mention such questions as "What if...?" or "What else...?" Although the instructor has initiated the response, the child must still seek his own answers. The encouragement from the teacher is what is needed. Thus creativity should not be ignored at the elementary level as George Stoddard suggests. "In any event, creativity in the graphic and plastic arts is a treasure at all maturity levels, from the swabbing efforts of the child to the touch of genius."  

Although Kneller's stages of response for creative activity were intended to cover the general area of creative thought, the ideas are very closely associated with the creative approach to art work specifically. Laura Chapman suggests three stages of the artistic process, and these coincide very well with Kneller's proposed stages. After all, art work is often referred to as a creation. Although Chapman lists the stages, she does point out that these do not have a definite succession. The stages are "inception of an idea," "elaboration and refinement," and also "execution in a medium."  

The student works from a source of inspiration and attains a thought. Next, this thought needs to be reflectively considered, and finally the idea is transformed into visual expression. In both processes as

---


14 Chapman, p. 45.
described by Kneller and Chapman, the child needs to be receptive to his own thoughts, and he needs to look at his work for new ideas.

TRAITS RELATED TO CREATIVITY

A creative child may be recognized in the school system and then encouraged to pursue this mental ability. It is important to recognize traits that are generally associated with the creative individual for the purpose of guiding all students toward the process of employing their minds as they create. It should also be stated that because of the nature of many creative individuals, they are not what most instructors would consider the "ideal" student. This is often the case because the creative being is likely to be a nonconformist.

Generally, the following are considered acceptable as personality traits of the creative being: curious, skeptical, independent, introverted, aesthetically sensitive, emotionally committed to his work, nonconformist, receptive, and flexible. One important characteristic is the creative one does not settle for the obvious solution to a problem. Such a solution can be explained by the following:

The requirement that creative work bring into existence a form, organization, or statement means that it goes beyond inconclusive wishing and daydreaming, although these may play an important part in its preparatory phases. It should also be able to evoke a response or to say something to others.15

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Eric Fromm views creativity as an experience in which one must possess a creative attitude. This attitude enables one to sensitively

view his world. One major goal of art is to help man become more aware of his environment and help him to relate to his environment. It can be seen that in this manner art can foster Fromm's idea of sensitivity. The above-mentioned creative attitude requires the ability to be "puzzled." Most children possess this attitude of wonder toward their environment. They are willing to invent answers and to enjoy the world of fantasy. They can also see amazement in everyday objects or events, whereas we as adults often tend to take occurrences as average or normal. For example, many take the beauty of a cloud formation as common and do not take the time to really see its beauty, appreciate it, or be amazed or puzzled at its very existence. Many children are noted as being curious, wanting to explore, being adventuresome, and using their minds in an imaginative manner. If the school systems can foster this mind, nurture it in a way as to preserve its very spirit, it is a hope that not only will society appreciate the child's mind but will recognize the potential of the child's ability of seeing and responding.

Parents, teachers, and anyone else in contact with a child should urge him to employ his mind freely. Many people willingly admit that superior minds exist, but they also need to recognize the fact that everyone's mind has potential and that the more the mind is encouraged, the more likely it is to grow and produce.

During the preschool years the major brake on creativity is the tendency of our culture increasingly to shorten the period of play and imagination, so that by the time

the child has developed intellectually to the stage at which he can engage in sound creative thinking he has come too often to regard his imagination as an inferior faculty.\textsuperscript{17}

Continually, the child is subjected to the major trend of becoming more realistic. Inventive thoughts from children are often given little, if any, regard.

Viktor Lowenfeld was another who often commented on the creative process and the creative individual. He states that a child's creative being centers around the idea of the individual's sensitivity toward experiences and his ability to make use of these experiences. Such experiences should include sensations, perceptions, and imagery. The child needs to build upon these experiences in his mind in order to create. The child must be both alert and receptive. If the student has not learned how to be responsive to his encounters, he may not arrive at inventive ideas. He may instead rely upon stereotypes because he has a limited frame of reference or because he has not been encouraged to go beyond this reference. The art teacher can be the one to help extend the child's repertoire. When working toward this goal, one must remember that he must begin at the child's level.\textsuperscript{18}

Another point made about creativity is that it results from "some disturbance of man's equilibrium or some tension in his internal or external worlds, which presents a problem demanding an expressive

\textsuperscript{17} Kneller, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{18} Lowenfeld, p. 5.
act or solution."^{19} The individual is challenged. This challenge should not encourage stress or frustration but should make one realize that a solution is possible. Employing one's mind should give the answer. By an answer it is not meant that one key response is correct. It means that one should strive to settle this disturbance on his own terms. At the elementary level, this means encouraging the child to think for himself. The child needs to realize that he has his own resources.

Considering the above, the child should recognize that there are times and situations in which he has definite personal needs. An expression of fear is a very real need to all people. This feeling may cause a disturbance in one's equilibrium, especially if the feeling is not allowed to surface or if it is not dealt with. It would be a healthy act if the child could learn to deal with this feeling visually. The child could be encouraged to translate the feeling alone onto paper. This would help the child to create a product that would be an extension of himself.

Since individuals have different needs, it is important to encourage them to express their own ideas. Not only does this allow for more creative work, but the individuals are much more likely to prosper from their experiences if they can realize that their own identity is significant. This is why it is important for the instructor not to merely view his students as a class but rather as a group of individuals.

One belief held is that creativity can be encouraged through the combination of student behavior and behavior modification techniques. "For example, the teacher models a search for unique uses of open shapes, then rewards the student for any successful attempt to generate unique alternative uses of some other art concept."^20 Children learn many behaviors from adults and especially from teachers through modeling. It appears highly feasible that creativity could be introduced to the child through modeling. If the child sees that his teacher does not accept his first, most apparent answer, he may learn to act creatively and also learn to simply not give up if an idea does not come to him right away. If the student is rewarded for a creative act, he is much more likely to attempt such behavior again. Children often need positive reinforcement.

Elliot Eisner believes that there are four types of creative activity that result from the use of the creative imagination. The creative aspect can be used as a means by which to evaluate children's art. The first category is boundary pushing. The creator has the ability to reject stereotyped or accepted behavior and can extend an object's or material's limits. Inventing is another type. With this situation, the individual has given knowledge, and he can come up with something totally new. Another type allows an individual to recognize limitations of existing theories for the use in developing new ideas. This is called boundary breaking. Aesthetic organization is the final type of creative activity. This type deals with creating coherently

---

CLASSEROOM ENVIRONMENT

An appropriate classroom climate that would encourage creativity is one that recognizes individual students. The student needs to feel that he has worth and that his ideas have worth. The instructor needs to convey to the student that he is respected and that the teacher has faith in him. One way in which the teacher can show that the students have value is to let the students help plan activities or let a student help with the instruction.

Creativity cannot be forced, but rather conditions need to be appropriate for its emergence. Children need to feel that they have the freedom to contribute ideas and that their responses and feelings will be accepted without worrying about what the other children might think. Creative acts should be rewarded through recognition and praise. The teacher needs to promote the idea within each child that he is creative. An individual is an exclusive one. His images and ideas should be uniquely his own. Just as no two people are identical in every aspect, no two people can share the exact mental information. This should allow each his own privileged view of the world.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

The teacher is an essential means by which to implement the creative art experience. Through the recognition of the student's physical and psychological needs, the instructor should hopefully learn the necessary means by which to motivate the students. The

---

teacher also has the responsibility of guiding the students toward
the best learning environment that will encourage the growth of
the child's mind.

Victor D'Amico has the following to say about the importance of
the teacher's role.

The laissez-faire approach in which children are given
materials and left completely alone without guidance is
not approved because it has been discovered that chil-
dren lack the experience to motivate themselves continu-
ously and to differentiate between creative and
noncreative expression.22

The instructor motivates the student to do art work and encourages
his formulation of an idea through visual, auditory, and tactile
experiences, photographs, audiovisual aids, museum trips, outdoor
walks, constructed environments, sports observations, discussions,
and community resources. However, it is also the responsibility of
the instructor to motivate the child by challenging him to progres-
sively give more of himself and to call upon his imaginative powers.
This is motivation that will further generate a creative response.

The art teacher also needs to realize that a creative approach to
teaching will foster creative minds. The teacher needs to challenge
himself to be resourceful and imaginative. He needs to be aware of the
fact that the art experiences are not only a learning situation for
the students but also a learning situation for himself. Much can be
gained from interaction with the students.

THE TEACHER'S STRATEGIES

It is important for an art instructor to implement techniques and strategies in the art program that will encourage a child to think for himself. This will help to nurture the child's creative capacity. The student must learn not merely to imitate but to explore.

Creativity is not easily determined or measured, and likewise there is not one foolproof method that can be used to enhance it. However, certain measures may aid a student's creative thinking powers. After reviewing many sources, there seem to be a few suggestions that the art teacher needs to be abreast of. Unusual questions and ideas should be respected. Daydreaming has value. Curiosity should be encouraged. Divergent thinking should be utilized. Brain-storming can often allow creative ideas to emerge. Flexibility and fluency in thinking are goals that should be sought. Individual choices should be allowed. The student should learn to examine his own work. Originality should be very highly regarded. Sensitivity to people, to the environment, and to works of art is a key factor. These points can aid the development of a creative art program.

The child needs to realize that art can become a visual language for self-expression. To intensify this expression, the child needs a variety of experiences and needs to be allowed to explore many techniques. This should encourage the child to yield imaginative ideas. Reliance upon stereotyped images should be discouraged.

Imagination is a very vital aspect of the art program. The instructor should teach in an imaginative manner and should urge the child to utilize his imagination. The use of one's imagination is
the sign of an active mind which can lead to creative ideas. Therefore, the students should be allowed to use their imagination often and be taught to respect its potential.

When trying to find an idea, a solution, or complete a project, the child may experience frustration. He needs to realize that the tasks are not always easy and that frustration is all right. The teacher should let the child know that he understands. If a mistake is made, let the child see what it might suggest to him. Perhaps it may give him a new idea. The following gives more insight into the teacher's strategy:

The alert teacher remains in the background while the child is succeeding but senses when he is in trouble and is ready to help him analyze his difficulties, to offer new stimulation, to expose him to the ideas and solutions of others, or to suggest that he let the problem rest for awhile and return to it later.23

CREATIVITY Hindrances

Just as there are suggested ways to enhance creativity, there are also measures that will inhibit the student's creative expression. One consideration is discipline. Although classroom management aids effective learning, discipline should not be stressed to the point that the student's initiative is hampered. Emphasis upon conformity will inhibit the child's expression. Also, according to the Sauselcing research, there is a strong negative relationship between the expression of creativity in elementary-aged children and the use of shame as punishment.24


24 Lytton, p. 100.
The instructor must promote an attitude of self-confidence. A child's negative self-image can hinder his work. If the child feels that his ideas will not be accepted, he is likely not to express them. If the child senses that he is being compared to the other children and that his work is being closely evaluated, he will probably not be as creative. Some of the child's freedom is being hampered in such a case. An instructor must also remember that every child cannot be creative every art period. Demanding a certain level of performance is not the answer. The child must be allowed to learn and express at his appropriate level. Lowenfeld has the following to say: "For the child, art is not the same as it is for the adult. Therefore it is easy to understand that any correction by the teacher which refers to reality and not to the child's experience interferes greatly with the child's own expression."  

One method of art instruction that is frequently used reduces the creative potential of the lesson. Such instruction gives the children a step-by-step approach. The result is that everyone in the class ends up with relatively identical work. The child has not been called upon to employ any of his creative potential. This procedure actually encourages imitative measures.

There is also the consideration that an emphasis upon defined sex roles could limit one's creativity.

Creativity calls for both sensitivity, generally considered a feminine virtue, and independent thinking, normally considered a masculine one. Thus by encouraging

---

25 Lowenfeld, p. 12.
boys and girls to keep their own roles, we
inhibit the growth of creativity.\textsuperscript{26}

Although it is true that education is steering more away from
established sex roles, it is helpful to be aware of such implications.

LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

When considering the materials for a creative art experience,
the following have been suggested as important factors:

1) The art medium must conform with the child's own
desire for expression.
2) The art medium and art experience must become an
inseparable whole.
3) No technique or material should be replaceable by
another one.\textsuperscript{27}

The value of an art lesson should not be placed solely upon the
final product. The aesthetic potential of the work is indeed important,
but the emotional, intellectual, and perceptual aspect of the art
experience must also be a very relevant, vital component of the art
itself.

It is necessary to recognize the art activity as an art experience
rather than as the making of an art product. Giving the students step-
by-step instructions would probably result in the making of nice art
work, but such instruction focuses on the outcome and not on the
learning. The students should be given basic instructions as to how
something is done, but they should not be told exactly what to do. They
should have the opportunity to employ their imaginations and their
decision-making abilities. For example, the students should be shown

\textsuperscript{26} Kneller, p. 75.

\textsuperscript{27} Lowenfeld, p. 28.
how to handle the paintbrushes and paint, but then they should be allowed to paint their own private view of a suggested theme. When using clay, the students would need to know relevant construction advice, but they do not need to be told what to make. They could make imaginary animals that involved the use of art principles. Students seem to even enjoy art work more when they have an integral part in its outcome.

CONCLUSION

It is indeed the researcher’s belief that one’s creative potential is modifiable. Such an attitude helps to define the role and the responsibility of the teacher. It also makes the implication that the child is a unique individual with the capacity to mentally grow even more with the proper guided stimulation.

Children need to be instructed in a manner that will allow them the freedom and the privilege to learn the merits of their own mind. The sooner such techniques are employed, the more beneficial they can be to the students. Consequently, the elementary years are the time to introduce the child to such measures. In this way, he may continually mentally grow and build upon his experiences. He will also be accustomed to thinking for himself.

Art is a very unique subject in that there is no one solution to a problem nor one correct method of portrayal. This automatically allows the child freedom. This freedom can allow the child to utilise his creative potential. Through the proper instruction, he can learn to incorporate this creativity with aesthetic principles. Art experiences can enhance creativity, but instructors and students must
realize its potential. It is a hope that children may learn to view art in the following manner.

For our children, however, art should become their friend to whom they turn with their joys and sorrows, their fears and frustrations, whenever words become inadequate. 28

28 Lowenfeld, p. 11.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


