

Arts and the Interactive Spirit

Vital is the need to discover.

TEACHING is a sensing of one's own spirit in action, a meaningful responding, a joy in interacting—and in this sense teaching is really living fully whenever and wherever it does occur. It is a knowing of one's self as a transforming process which, through action, gives newness and vitality, freedom and fullness to the shared experience.

Teaching then is a creative event for which the word "educating" seems too small, and the word "learning" too limited—but for which the word "discovering" seems almost right. However, when fully understood, education, freed of the academic, is a process of pursuit in which the experience of discovery takes the form of creative learning. Nevertheless, the requirements of this interactive responding are severe.

To inspire this form of responding in another, the teacher must have experienced within himself the courage to face and struggle fully, in spite of self doubt, with the issues of discovery in the fearful hope that some new accomplishment may emerge as the result of his efforts. This capacity for facing the requirements of pursuit is essential. Only so can one respond meaningfully to the

dramatic struggle going on in the pupil when he is rightly faced by the demands of creative action in the arts. This struggle is far more than learning to acquire a skill. It is mainly a matter of the pupil's achieving the courage to face the uncertainty and doubt and fear of failure. Such fears may be caused by the demands of visual expressive activities which may be solved in a variety of different ways, none of which is right or wrong, but all of which for success require imaginative or original solutions.

This struggle is a highly personal one also, in that success and failure in such activities, and indeed the willingness to struggle with creative problems of any sort in or out of the arts, have been shown by research repeatedly to be significantly related to the degree of creativity in personality structure which the individual pupil possesses (1).

Learning, then, in the sense of growing in the capacity to think or to express some idea in a creative form, is in part at least a matter of personality change and development. Moreover, this capacity to struggle with the live relationships inherent in creative problems is closely related to the ability to interact not only with materials and ideas but with people. Research by the author shows that there is a very significant relationship between

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the creative thinking abilities and the personality structures of student teachers and this capacity for interaction with their pupils (2). Specifically in the arts the very issues with which the pupil must learn to struggle are caused by his inability to interact in some critical manner with an aspect of the problem of expression with which he is faced. Learning in the arts is learning to think in interactive terms. The capacity for interaction is the key to both learning through action and teaching through action. Learning to interact is then essential for responsive living in and out of the classroom and is the primary objective underlying education in the arts.

A major part of the problem of teacher preparation is therefore related to helping student teachers identify the interactive difficulties and potentialities of their pupils. For every level of creative achievement in the arts there appears to be a crucial interactive problem with which the pupil must struggle. These various levels of achievement and some of the specific creative teaching capacities which are necessary for helping the pupils learn to interact more dynamically with respect to their difficulties in the arts will be discussed.

The lowest level of creative action in the arts appears to be descriptive in character. The pupils who work at this level have been identified by the author as deliberate in their way of work, though from a representational viewpoint their work ranges from low to high in quality (1). In both the studio and the appreciation area they have been found, from the junior high school through the graduate school, to work in a very step-by-step manner and regardless of quality their work is always preconceived. It varies in level of achievement from very general, literal or stereotyped pictures to very

detailed and sometimes realistic representations of atmospheric conditions which are characteristic of old houses or desert scenes. These are, however, always impersonal visualizations, though they may reveal some mechanical skill.

This deliberate orientation in art stems, according to several studies of their various attitudes, from their concrete, literal, emotionally noncommittal, ideationally closed and security-oriented personality structures. Further, the relationship of these pupils to the teacher in the classroom and to their peers is essentially adaptive, noninteractive, and often other-directed. Moreover, such pupils constitute the majority of the youngsters with whom the public school or college teacher must deal. Academic learning tasks make them more rather than less rigid in their personality orientation and when faced with creative problems they are extremely insecure.

From the point of view of interactive living, which must be both self-directed and self-evaluative, these pupils are the single largest and most difficult problem we face in education today. Their greatest need in every content area, in every grade from kindergarten on, is more opportunity to learn through discovery rather than by simply being informed. Their greatest misfortune is that they have been trained for so long to avoid interacting with others, that they have little self-awareness as to what special meaning life holds for them. Their interactive struggle then stems from their inability to think of themselves as having a self about which they feel the need to be more aware, about which they have the desire for discovery, about which there is a yearning for expression and for sharing.

The "deliberate" pupils' problems are probably more easily dealt with at an

early age. In particular, there should be an emphasis in art and in other curriculum areas throughout the grades upon the development of those ideational and emotional kinds of flexibility which are needed to realize the value of the creative learning process itself as a means of discovery. Another important way of freeing the "deliberate" pupils from their realistic preconceptions is through the use of divergent questions as a means of providing them with a more imaginative approach to thinking creatively about specific experiences (2).

Student teachers need to learn to ask the kinds of divergent questions which will lead to the development of other than impersonal responses from their pupils. Further, if student teachers are to succeed in this respect, research indicates that they should work in depth with their pupils in a specific medium rather than move rapidly from one type of material or project to the next (3). This is of critical importance if such pupils are going to have opportunity to make some progress over a series of works with respect to their specific interactive problems as individuals.

This deliberate descriptive factual orientation in the arts is in many ways nearly the opposite of the next level of creative action which is characterized by spontaneity in feeling and thought. Within this more spontaneous orientation, however, there are levels of accomplishment differentiated by the pupils' interactive capacities for creative action in the arts. In varying degrees these students, through research, have been shown in their personality structure to be flexible, complex, impulsive, inquisitive, abstract, perceptive, intellectually and emotionally open and self-determining (4).

Spontaneous Levels

The lowest level of spontaneous expression is that of an emotional orientation which is so centered in the moods of the self that this entire dimension of self-awareness which comes from perceiving others' reactions to one's self is crowded out of existence. This subjectively limited form of self-awareness makes it very difficult for such pupils to engage in objective self-evaluative processes. Such processes are necessary for building the critical insights essential to developing their work beyond the stage of their initial emotional impulses for expression. Emotional motivation, devoid of evaluation, is seldom enough to keep an idea going. As a result, these lowest spontaneous works constitute pupils' simple underdeveloped statements of their immediate states of feeling. It is extremely difficult, therefore, for these pupils to make progress over a series of works.

The main struggle for these pupils, if they are to make progress, is that of learning some of the objective evaluative processes for the development and elaboration of their emotional ideas. This process requires, in part at least, discovering some of the more objective forms of self-awareness associated with mental and emotional maturity.

With regard to these "spontaneous" pupils, the student teacher must learn how to help them become more evaluative during the creative process. He must also help them progress more satisfactorily from one work to the next. This means that the student teacher must have an opportunity during his training to learn to make the various kinds of evaluative distinctions essential to understanding the full range of problems his pupils will have in their struggle to

progress. Various kinds of visual scales have been developed by the author and others for this purpose. There are some indications, also, in some recent studies under way, that self-evaluative activities carefully directed toward evaluating one's own work, rather than directed toward specific conclusions, are more helpful to the pupil than if the teacher is the pupil's only evaluative source. Even if fewer and less important evaluative distinctions are made by the pupil, if he really makes them on his own, they are more likely to be acted upon and struggled with because he established them as his learning goals.

The "spontaneous" pupils, who are at the next level of creative achievement, though they are, also, highly introspective, are in addition somewhat self-reflective. This greater degree of self-awareness does enable them to sustain their involvement in work beyond their immediate interest and helps them express some concern with the problems of art as a disciplined process of creation. Still they experience great frustration in the evident shortcoming of their art work as it relates to their creative capacities as individuals. As student teachers in training they would rather avoid the issue of their own creativity, whether in their art or as individuals. Some succeed in avoiding these issues, as a recent research for the National Science Foundation by Beittel and the author indicates. These pupils did get through college, they did find teaching positions and were admitted, on the basis of their academic records, to graduate school (1). Yet a large percentage of these pupils frankly rated their art achievements from somewhat below average to poor and their creativity as individuals similarly. According to the measures of their personality

structure and the ratings of their art works, their self ratings in these respects were clearly accurate. To make matters worse, these pupils were also weak in measures of their divergent teaching capacities, apart from the art area, and so probably are generally below average as teachers in every respect. In many ways this avoidance stems from a reluctance to go beyond what they know will be acceptable as average rather than risk a possibility of real failure in pursuing creative objectives they feel may be beyond them. First, they do not inwardly admit that in taking no risks for the sake of their own development they are failing themselves. Thus they lack a sense of self worth. They need to realize that there are kinds of failure which in the process of work itself reveal to the creator a new sense of his own courage and spirit which do result, regardless of the outcome, in a greater sense of self worth.

The interactive struggle of these student teachers, then, is to acquire a sense of loyalty to themselves. Only so will they have the faith in their capacities which will enable them to risk full involvement in the processes of discovery. Thus they will sense more fully their own spirit as individuals facing the issues of their own creative growth and development. This need to be true to themselves relates to their personal integrity. This matter of integrity is the last and perhaps greatest gap for them between being partially and being genuinely creative in spirit.

The capacity to be genuinely creative is probably mostly a matter of possessing the spirit to struggle; to establish beyond doubt, for one's own sake, one's own sense of integrity or loyalty to one's self worth in all that is undertaken. So

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sively to her own devices because certain art experiences and styles are indicated for various grade levels within the framework of different media.

Bureau of Curriculum Research. *Curriculum Centers and Library Resources for Curriculum Workers in New York City*. New York: Board of Education of the City of New York, 1961. 62 p. 50¢

Those new to teaching in any community will instantly see the value of such a publication as has been produced for New York City teachers. Other cities will not have the same resources or the same amount of resources as is indicated in this publication; however, such a resource list is important for all school systems. This guide shows those services offered by the curriculum centers in the school system, those resources available in community agencies and organizations, the resources of public libraries and teacher-

training institutions, and other library facilities established by the school board.

The implication is loud and clear that the resourceful teacher is expected to use many approaches to instruction and that adequate learning resources have either been provided by the school system or are available within the community.

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Interactive Spirit

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the creative person sees himself as interacting in all of life's relationships as he looks upon himself as continually transforming the relationships in which he finds himself. When he is teaching, he is sensing his own spirit in action continually. He cannot fail, because of his honest concern about the processes of his interaction with his pupils, to inspire in some of them this same honest and intense desire for their own creative learning through discovery in their art works. Success in teacher training, from all that research shows in art, seems to be largely dependent on the discovery of this interactive spirit.

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