

"What Would the Sun Look Like?"

WHAT would the sun look like, if man could see it with his naked eye? Would he be overwhelmed by the blazing emergence of new combinations of brilliances every half second, exploding into whiteness and returning to new combinations, continuously? Would he be awed by the emergence of energy at its primal source, coming into being—naturally, spontaneously, dynamically, visibly—undeterred by negating forces?

What would the sun look like, if man could see it with his naked eye—no more spectacular than the human potentiality of one child, if certain "ifs" could be realized:

If the child's power of becoming could be released, if his thinking could proceed naturally, spontaneously, creatively—undeterred by negating forces, such as: (a) Unresolved conflicts arising from unmet needs of early childhood, resulting in insecurity and fear; (b) The brakes imposed upon him by the society in which he lives: the forces pushing him toward conformity, rebellion, meaninglessness, stereotypy; interfering with

learning, distorting his perspective and crippling his efficiency;

If art education could become a universal releasing agent, reaching out to each child in his individuality, asking: "What is it within you that can be released? What is it within you that has been accumulating and deepening since birth, welling up from within and becoming so powerful that it must be said? Can you express this eloquently? What materials and processes are available to you? What skills do you possess? What skills can you perfect? What is your vision? What is yourself-just-a-little-out-of-reach? What is your environment?"—always motivating, enlightening, setting imaginations free to find new forms, giving guidance as needed;

If art education could become instrumental in eliminating the negating forces, bringing to the surface attitudes which bind the child?

What a series of art experiences did for Wayne is illustrative of this. A one-to-one kind of relationship was set up between Wayne and his painting. "One devil, two devils, *three devils!*" he said; "The big devil is sticking his pitchfork in the little boy. My mother calls me a devil. All right, so I am one, good and

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bad! But I am not really bad." The teacher encouraged Wayne to show *how* he was *really*, to paint the stories that were inside him, to write them, to make his own books, to make puppets. Wayne progressed from remedial status to his own grade level by the end of the year. He was on his way to becoming *free* to learn. The negating forces were being recognized, and art education was serving to release.

Freeing the Child

When children are set free to react spontaneously and creatively, not compulsively, there is nothing they cannot do—simply because they are not aware that they cannot do it. They generate more energy and become more efficient. Their efforts are more productive. The following is an example of a class of immature, economically deprived, low-achieving second-graders, characterized by an inability to express themselves in words or in art media, who moved from failure to achievement beyond that of which they seemed capable.

This progress began with an art experience in which Mrs. Wave wanted to get these children involved so they could participate at their level. She approached them with the idea of building a story out of pieces of scrap cloth which they could cut and pin to the burlap on the bulletin board. They "talked out" the story and made the characters and objects as they needed them.

When they finished the panel, they reviewed the sequence of events and put the story on a big chart which they used for choral reading. They made lists of words they could use in writing individual stories. The group story: "The little boy and the little girl went out into the woods . . . too far into the woods. . . .

They got lost. . . . They felt sad. . . . The rabbit heard them . . . found them . . . showed them the way home."

These children liked what they did. They were alive with a sense of achievement. They liked themselves better, new energy was released, and their efforts continued to become more productive, not only in art, but in their writing and speaking.

Concerns of Art Education

Art expression comes naturally. It is just as natural for a child to draw and paint as it is for him to make mud-pies, laugh, speak or cry. If he were provided the experiences at school through the grades, he could reach a level of competence comparable to competences in other areas which are provided in the curriculum.

What prevents his expression from coming naturally is infrequency of opportunity to work with art materials, the use of patterns, copy work, mimeographed color sheets, rigid instructions, lack of motivation and guidance.

All children, not just the few who are talented, are entitled to experiences in a program that is continuous, grades 1-12, and that includes: (a) many kinds of expressive painting and drawing in various media—crayons, chalk, paint or combinations thereof, on wet or dry construction paper, manila, newsprint, burlap; (b) modeling—dough, clay, sawdust; (c) constructing—models, dioramas, scenes out of cardboard, miscellaneous boxes, wooden strips, wire; (d) weaving; (e) lettering; (f) printing processes—scrap, string, wood, linoleum block, silk-screen; (g) making bulletin boards and displays; (h) various experiences at organizing materials and ideas, using line, shape, color, texture, in rela-

tionship to each other; understanding this concept in relationship to the work of professional artists, past and present.

As children become more aware of themselves and their environment, they can be stimulated to interpret experience through art media. A sensitive teacher will see that a child's expression in art is another facet of his creative ability consciously to select and arrange parts to create meaningful wholes, to take what is significant from each experience, to perceive similarities and dissimilarities, and to create new relationships. This kind of pursuit necessitates seeing deeper meaning in experience and clarifying thoughts so they can be expressed.

An Added Dimension

Art education can assist the child in defining himself and his world. Art education can give an added dimension to an education that is concerned with how the child perceives himself and his world. When given an opportunity to draw self-portraits, Mike, a seventh-grader, drew himself as a member of the "beat generation." He said, "I like being beat. It gives me a new way to talk, like finding all kinds of ways to tell a guy he is cool." Joe called his drawing, "He lost." He simply stated that it was rough going, learning how to lose.

Johnnie, a fifth-grader, did a Santa Claus who looked like Zorro. He said his Santa came from the old west, that he "used to go around to people's houses, dancing when he was happy and shooting his guns when he was angry. He got angry when he was clumsy and when he didn't have anyone to talk to."

Children should have many opportunities to explore their feelings in art media. As they become involved, they define, revise, adjust, experiment, redefine.

Miss McCleod's third-graders faced a problem. They wanted to know how they could show love in their pictures of the night on which the baby Jesus was born. As the children drew and painted, they said, "I'll open the eyes of the animals very wide. I'll make them shine. I'll put Joseph's hand on Mary's shoulder. I'll make the sun shine brighter and the flowers grow prettier. . . ."

On the first day of school Mrs. Merchant made an imaginary animal out of yellow construction paper for her first-graders. The children named him "Fuzzy the Cat." For days they dramatized what Fuzzy thought and all the things he could do. They worked in art media and dictated stories to the teacher until they could write their own, which was very soon. Some of the stories which they illustrated are:

Go to Fuzzy.

Do you like Fuzzy?

He is a boy, too.

Fuzzy is so funny.

When I go to play, I go to Fuzzy.

Fuzzy, Fuzzy, draw.

Draw me. I'll draw you.

Fuzzy is too sick to walk.

I like Fuzzy.

I said, "Are you better," and now he is happy.

It is natural for children to let their characters experience happiness, anger, sorrow, joy, excitement, tiredness. They can show these feelings without people in their pictures as well as with them. They can do this with line, shape, color, etc. They can make shapes droop and sag with tiredness, or they can make them vibrate with excitement. They can usually talk about and write about the feelings they paint. They can search for adjectives and descriptive phrases to ex-

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established, we will want to test methods and ways of working with children, using research techniques within the setting of the classroom.

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press themselves. They can look to literature for stories about other boys and girls who have experienced feelings similar to theirs. They can look to history to see what has caused man happiness, anger, sorrow, joy. They can assess what has happened to him as a result of his ambition or his discontent; his struggle with himself, with other men and with the elements; his strengths and his weaknesses.

Art education can assist children in understanding physical phenomena. On a rainy day, ask children what "wetness" is. Ask them, "Can you touch it? feel it? What are the scientific facts we know about wetness? Could you paint wetness?" Try asking, "What is sunshine? Where does it come from? What do we know about it? What are words that describe the sun? You say the sun is hot. Can you show hotness in your picture?" You might try stretching their imaginations by asking, "What would happen if you could reach out and touch the sun at this very moment? What would happen if the sun were never to shine again?"

It is so important to remember the

elements of surprise, excitement, enthusiasm, and self-involvement. You can help children to feel that exploring ideas can be a wonderful adventure in which they can use the self and the world as resources.

In summary, the purpose of this writer has been to create in educators an excitement about art education in its larger dimensions, in its relation to modern man, who is closer to achieving his potential as a human being than ever before because of the explosion of knowledge and newer understandings in the physical, biological and social sciences; yet progress toward its achievement is checked by negating forces. The writer has considered art education as basic in the process of reducing the negating forces and unleashing and giving impetus to children's positive attributes.

What would the sun look like, if man could see it with his naked eye—no more spectacular than the human potentiality of one child, emerging as a mature adult, alive to the tremendous mystery of being, rejoicing in his humanity, continuing to give birth to the self—naturally, spontaneously, dynamically—unclouded by the negating forces of his existence.

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