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The Good the True the Beautiful

*Experiencing—and using—the humanities
in general education.*

FOR the past eight years all students at Edsel Ford High School in Dearborn, Michigan, have participated in the civilizing influences of a three-year integrated humanities course.¹ In this course, art, music and literature are treated as man's means of communicating what he has found to be good and true and beautiful. Because this course was carefully planned to meet the needs of the individual as well as those of his society and was introduced as part of the curriculum in a new school, no student as yet has manifested any negative reaction toward this exposure to culture. On the contrary, most students, as they approach graduation, express gratitude for the enriching experiences they have been offered.

Factors which tend to unify the three areas of study for the students are implicit in the arts themselves and in our manner of teaching these arts. Each area is concerned with increasing the range of human experience to which the individual can respond. Each area is concerned with helping the individual to gain access to the experiences of people of other times and of other cultures.

Each area is concerned with increasing the sensitivity of the individual to the meaning of his own feelings and to making him aware of the feelings of others. Each area consists of certain elements which the artist must select, arrange and organize in order to achieve both unity through repetition and interest through variety and contrast in his finished product. We study this product and through discussion try to achieve some understanding of its structure and purpose. We teach and learn by probing for answers to leading questions, usually asked by the teacher but sometimes by the students themselves.

This method of teaching, in which the teacher assumes the role of gadfly of the intellect, forces the students to learn what they can from any selection by drawing upon their own resources and sharing their reactions with their fellows. At no point are they told they must like or "appreciate" a painting, a musical composition, or a piece of literature because it is a masterpiece. In short, they are not expected to like or enjoy any-

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thing. If they do so, that is an extra dividend. All they are required to do is to understand and to express their understanding in speech or in writing.

From Simple to Complex

Two of our general objectives remain constant throughout the three years. These are communicating effectively and enlarging and enriching the understanding through the arts. The objective which is specific to the tenth grade is understanding the human qualities of the individual. The eleventh grade is directed toward an understanding of cause and effect relationships in human behavior and an understanding of the values of the democratic way of life. The special objective of the twelfth grade is the development of an understanding of the various relationships of man and his world.

Experts who have evaluated our program tend to attribute much of our success in the humanities to the organizing threads which unify the three-year study and give the students a cumulative experience. These threads move from the self to the universal, from the simple to the complex, from the immediate to the more remote, from the concrete to the abstract. Even in a brief summary of the course these threads are readily apparent.

We begin with a quotation from Herman L. Meyers, a mathematician at the University of Chicago: "Communication is by someone to someone for some purpose; it involves a certain medium, it is about something, and it has a certain form."

Preliminary discussion is centered on the prepositions *by* and *to* because these denote the directions implicit in any communication—the outward, or expressive, and the inward, or impressive. Since

the free flow of ideas depends on keeping the outward and the inward channels clear, responsibility for any interchange is placed directly and equally on both the receiver and the sender. Therefore our students who will be reading literature, listening to music, and viewing works of art, must accept the charge of keeping themselves actively receptive. They must also make themselves meticulously expressive because they will talk and write about what they read, hear and see; they will compose simple melodies; and they will do some creative work in the art laboratory each semester.

If they are to fill satisfactorily the dual role of receiver and sender, they must also understand the significance of the next two prepositions, *for* and *about*. Whereas the second denotes the subject selected by the artist, the first denotes his treatment of that subject. We believe that nothing in the world or outside it is beyond the reach of man's mind and imagination. Our discussion of choice of subjects, therefore, tends to break down any preconceived bias the students may have formed and to broaden their perspective. They discover that subject is secondary to what the artist has attempted to say about it, to his purpose in presenting it.

Areas of Study

Although at this point we have not yet covered *medium* and *form*, we are ready to separate our study into the three areas: music, visual arts, and literature.

Music

In music, taught one 60-minute hour per week, we begin with the medium of sound and the four elements of musical sound—melody, rhythm, tone color,

and harmony. Starting with the simple and familiar at the tenth grade level, we listen to short, uncomplicated tunes, such as folk melodies, in which these four elements can readily be heard and easily recognized. During the next two years, longer and more complex music is studied. This includes arrangements of folk music, suites, vocal forms, polyphonic forms, as well as the composite forms such as oratorio, opera, sonata, concerto, and symphony. The last semester covers the chronological development of music from the Gregorian Chant through the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods to music of the present day. This historical review serves as a summary and gives the students a sense of the continuity of musical expression.

Visual Arts

In the visual arts, also allotted one hour per week, the medium may be paint, clay, wood, pen and ink, stone, or whatever other material the artist chooses to use. Some of the elements with which he must work are line, shape, texture, and color. Because an important goal is to enlarge the range of art to which the students can respond, care is taken to select examples from a wide range of cultures, styles, and ages as well as media. Again the students begin their study by considering simple, familiar forms. They look at a number of objects such as a brick, an arrow, a salt shaker, a bathroom scale—and try to discover the underlying principles which guide the product designer.

From these small articles they move on to forms which are more complex and more subtle. Architecture, painting, graphics, and sculpture are studied. In most of the sequence, art works are not discussed in chronological order. Instead, a variety of work is studied so that the

students may gain insight as to the force of the elements of art and their organization within that work. During part of the third year they trace the development of the French school of painters from the realistic pre-Degas group through Degas, Monet, Renoir, Seurat, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, and Picasso, so that they may be aware that both continuity and change are involved in the evolution of art styles. This is followed by a culminating experience in which students bring to an analysis of a print assigned to them their accumulated knowledge of art.

Literature

The remaining three 60-minute periods are devoted to English, with emphasis upon oral and written analyses of the selections studied. The impact of this integration of the arts we believe to be real, as the standardized test results have shown our students to be well above the national expectancy level. In this area of communication, of course, we are working with the medium of words as spoken or written symbols, with the arrangement of words into sentences and paragraph units, and the various forms into which these units can be organized.

In literature also we begin with simple forms—the short story, informal essay, one-act play, and lyric verse. These forms are introduced one per unit in the first four of the twelve units for the beginning year and each is studied in greater depth as the students proceed. During the two following years, the novel, the three-act play, the formal essay, and dramatic and narrative poetry are added.

In addition to this development from simple to more complex literary forms, there is a development of concepts. These begin in the tenth grade with the individual as he is found in contempo-

rary writings and include experiences he shares with all men, the changes brought about in him by his reactions to his experiences, the qualities of character he may develop, and the bases for strengths and weaknesses in his character. The eleventh grade moves into the larger unit of American values as revealed through American literature—our moral commitments, our conception of the good life, our deepest loyalties, our standards of excellence, and our abstract goals. The twelfth grade, drawing from world literature, returns to the individual and considers his relationships to nature, to man, and to society.

Writing also is a cumulative experience. Students in the tenth grade begin with sentences and expository paragraphs, advance to longer, more complex themes, and finish in their senior year with research papers and critical analyses. From the beginning, emphasis is placed on clarity of thought, accuracy of statement, and precision of vocabulary. To ensure mechanical skill, all errors must be corrected and rules which have been broken must be quoted before credit is given on any paper.

The Creative Teacher

Although such a carefully structured program might seem too restrictive for a creative teacher, we have not found it so. Each lesson must still be tailored by the teacher to fit his class and his own personality. On the other hand, there is great comfort to be secured in knowing generally what learning experiences the students have had and what objectives they must achieve.

On the other hand, there are serious problems. These are not unusual problems in education since they are chiefly

concerned with teacher time and school finances. However, because of the peculiar demands of our curriculum, these are somewhat exaggerated.

Beginning teachers cannot be expected to teach all three areas of the humanities. Rather, they observe as specialists teach their art and music classes. Then, after one or two semesters of observation, they begin to assume responsibility for all three areas—fortified by a weekly conference with the chairman of each of the other two departments. These conferences and extra preparations are a drain on their time and energy. Also, because of the teacher-time involved in this in-service training and team teaching, the program is a little more expensive than a straight English course. However, we believe that the results in human values are of great worth.

When students compose both the words and the music of their school song; when a student watches the raindrops form fascinating patterns on the surface of a newly formed puddle in the court; when students travel 60 miles to an exhibit; when our graduates at the universities extol the merits of the humanities in retrospect; when a student has his composition premiered by the city's symphony orchestra; when students, turned away from a Van Gogh exhibit in Detroit after hours of waiting, return to face more lines in order to have a first-hand experience with great work; when senior folk singers perform "Nancy Hanks," a poem studied in the tenth grade, with a melody and accompaniment of their own creation, we believe we have proof that the program has made its contribution to a little clearer understanding, and perhaps even appreciation, of the good, the true, and the beautiful.

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