

The Arts: Sources for Affective Learning

IN DISCUSSING the visual arts as a source for affective learning, the term "affective" will be employed as Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia used it. They stated the objectives of affective learning found most often in the literature and used by teachers ranged from ". . . simple attention to selected phenomena to complex but internally consistent qualities of character and conscience."¹ These objectives were expressed in terms such as ". . . interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets or biases."² In short, affective objectives involve learning about and utilizing qualities which are internal to man.

Actually, what has been said thus far is largely applicable to the humanities, of which the arts are a part. What makes the visual arts' contribution to this domain of knowledge unique is that tangible form and structure are given to the previously mentioned internal qualities. When we in the visual arts work with a student with his past experiences, his emotions, biases, expectancies, needs and

drives, we attempt to provide this human complexity an environment in which to attend to these unique inner variables as well as offer an opportunity through which to conceptualize and symbolize them. Working with tangibles such as media, tools and an art form or structure, the student is in a position to consider and reconsider the feelings which should be involved in the initiation of an art form.

Search for Expression

Let me construct an analogy between symbolization of emotion in language and in the visual arts to clarify this crucial point. Eugene Gendlin³ notes in the attempt to express verbally one's feelings to another, the search for words which will convey the original emotion forces the verbalizer to consider that emotion. If he wishes to be exceedingly precise in giving verbal substance to it then he becomes involved in reconsidering the feeling. At the same time, he may find the need to construct new verbal symbols of which the metaphor is an example. A result of reconsidering the emotion

¹ David E. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom and Bertram B. Masia. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook II: Affective Domain*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1964. p. 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ Eugene T. Gendlin. *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1962.

through the construction of the new verbal symbols is that the verbalizer brings himself to a point of no longer merely "feeling" the emotion; he comprehends it.

It is in much the same sense that creating art forms can give visual, tangible substance to an original emotion or set of emotions. In giving visual structure to a feeling, the artist often considers the initial feeling, gaging the effectiveness of the work in terms of how well it conveys the original emotion. In so doing, he may find the need to evolve a new visual symbol in order to be more precise in his communication. Thus an art form can be viewed as a visual metaphor. To complete the analogy, the piece may not only convey the emotion to another, but, having examined the emotion through the art form, the artist comprehends more fully his own feeling.

In reiteration, the things of which I have been writing involve those phenomena which make humans human. They are what separate the arts, indeed the humanities, from other areas of knowledge and learning. Thelen talks about four domains of knowledge—physical science, biological science, social science and humanistic studies—and points out that the first three handle phenomena which are outside of man. The fourth, humanistic studies, is subjective, and the only area which is truly "... 'inside'; it has to do with the unique thoughts and expressions of individuals. It is the record not of the 'world out there' but of the experience that an individual has with the world."⁴

⁴Herbert A. Thelen. *Education and the Human Quest*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960. p. 36.

It is not enough, however, simply to be aware of these internal phenomena. Enrichment of them through utilization is needed and, as Thelen puts it in referring to the humanities, they "... have to be met selectively, voluntarily, and sympathetically, and one can be helped by a good companion who can encourage one's strivings for awareness and meaning."⁵

The "good companion" can be the art teacher. Where Jerome Bruner has asserted that the "... schoolboy learning physics is a physicist, and it is easier for him to learn physics behaving like a physicist,"⁶ we in the visual arts say the schoolboy learning art is an artist, and it is easier for him to learn art behaving like an artist than doing something else. What can help bring this about is the teacher's behaving like a fellow-artist, a fellow-investigator and inquirer. Implicit in this assertion is that there is no age level which has a monopoly on emotions.

Regardless of age, background or breadth of experience, all of us possess feelings. Consequently, considering a youth's emotions and giving form to them through creating art works are undertakings which are no less valid than an adult's embarking upon the same kinds of efforts. (It is through this conviction that the teacher of art can accept the young artist as a fellow-inquirer.) Similarly, one student's feelings are no less unique than a classmate's. (Ideas are a different matter.) In short, his feelings and emotions are worthy of consideration and exploration. Thus, value⁷ is attached to the student's self

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶ Jerome S. Bruner. *The Process of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961. p. 14.

⁷ Here, as in Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook II: Affective Domain*, New York: David McKay

and all the variables of which it is comprised.

Form to Feelings

There are many facets to a child's personality, to say nothing of the innumerable nuances of actions resulting from the interplay of these facets. If an artistic effort gives form to the feelings which are determined by these personality variables, then the teacher may not be able to predict precisely what the finished product may look like. It is in this situation that the art teacher may be viewed as somewhat the gambler for encouraging *search* and *inquiry* rather than demanding an explicit, predetermined conclusion to an art project. In defining search and inquiry, I subscribe to and offer Bruner's statement:

For the person to search out and find regularities and relationships in his environment, he must either come armed with an expectancy that there will be something to find or be aroused to such an expectancy so that he may devise ways of searching and finding. One of the chief enemies of search is the assumption that there is nothing one can find in the environment by way of regularity or relationship.⁸

When the art teacher attempts to alert the student to the elements of design such as size, shape, color and texture in his surroundings, he is in effect helping that student find regularities and relationships in his environment. When the

teacher attempts to have the student inject these elements in his art work, he is helping him utilize these regularities and relationships. If a student becomes aware of the internal emotional qualities which help bring about art forms, hopefully he is finding the mental regularities and relationships which make his perception of the world uniquely and consistently personal and his art work his own.

Awareness of Others

It is true that if the result of search and inquiry—discovery—is to be of value to the student, then it must be made by only the student. Thus, the "good companionship" of the teacher cannot be always present. The student must subject himself to a certain amount of aloneness because of the highly personal nature of one's own thoughts and feelings. However, even in this aloneness, there is a form of camaraderie. Barkan put it this way:

When we work in the arts, we not only absorb the coherent meanings we have embodied in our artistic products, but we also offer them to others to share. In doing this, we enhance our own ability to internalize the ideas and feelings embodied in the products of others. This ability to share artistic expression with others underlies the relationship between education in the arts and growth of the personality.⁹

It is in the art class, while each student is creating his own art work, that an awareness of others operating in a similar manner can begin to evolve. The student can learn about unity in diversity, not conformity. Unity in diversity is based upon the previously mentioned value being attached to one's own thoughts. There is no need to usurp another's

⁸ Manuel Barkan. *A Foundation for Art Education*. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955. p. 149.

Company, Inc., p. 139, "valuing" is "... employed in its usual sense: that a thing, phenomenon, or behavior has worth. This abstract concept of worth is in part a result of the individual's own valuing or assessment, but it is much more a social product that has been slowly internalized or accepted and has come to be used by the student as his own criterion of worth."

⁹ Jerome S. Bruner. *On Knowing*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1962. p. 84-85.

thoughts because they are of no greater value than anyone else's in the class. Therefore, there is unity in each working with his own thoughts, yet diversity in that each is different.

I shall be the first to admit that for the art teacher to attend to those concerns stated here is impossible if he travels from school to school, working with 800 to 1,000 different children a week. (In a fit of despondency over just this concern, I added up the number of students I saw in one week when I was a traveling art teacher; the total was 1,086!) Even the teacher in the junior high school who sees some 400 different students a week runs into much the same problem.

Need To Know Students

Obviously, for the art teacher to carry off affective learning, he must *know* his students. Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia, studying the history of several courses at the college level which originally placed much emphasis on affective objectives, found in "... some of these courses over a period of ten to twenty years ... a rather rapid dropping of the affective objectives from the statements about the course and an almost complete disappearance of efforts at appraisal of student growth in this domain."¹⁰

If this happens at the college level, then the odds against carrying out affective objectives at the elementary and secondary levels are even greater in view of the overwhelming numbers of students. The point is that the arts must be recognized as valid sources for affective learning. Then possibly they may be put in a position to carry on sustained efforts to achieve those objectives. The vaga-

bond art teacher with his traveling trunk of art materials and a few minutes of pupil contact cannot do this. The elementary teacher who had only one or at best two art courses back in college will likely be unable to internalize the kinds of learnings discussed here.

Just as mathematics and science are held as disciplines, the arts may also be viewed as such; only the domains differ. As one of the "disciplines of self-expression," to put it in Thelen's terminology, the contributions of the arts are:

... to perceive in one's own experience universals which enable him better to understand all experience; to "free" one of verbal straitjackets so that he can express his impulses and feelings through a variety of media; to help one become "open" to the evocative stimulation of artistic expressions; to sensitize one to the existence of a variety of human aspirations; to develop aesthetic sensitivities leading to discovery, pursuit, and enjoyment of beauty; to free one's spirit to soar through all the expanse of imaginable time and space.¹¹

If these contributions sound subjective, intangible and elusive (and undoubtedly to a few, downright irksome), it is because these are objectives which involve emotion and feeling. Man alone can carry out these objectives, whereas tangible, quantitative facts cannot. Only until he brings these unique, inner variables to bear upon the bits and pieces of knowledge about his surroundings and discovers their regularities and relationships will they become significant. In the final analysis, what makes these discoveries significant is man's reactions to them.

Discovery through the creation of art is what we in the visual arts are about and why we feel the arts are a valid source for affective learning.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹¹ Herbert A. Thelen, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

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