

SPEECH TEDxTALKS

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One day, an art photographer, a friend of mine, teaching photography at the Faculty of Architecture at a University in Canada, came into his class placing an orange on a stand, then asking his students to photograph it. The students looked up puzzled and said: "So what, it is just an orange...". The teacher said: "Oh no, it is not..." and he picked the fruit up again, squeezed it, smelled and licked at it, put it back again and said: "Try it and then you photograph it...there is a whole world behind everything and you have to discover it."

Actually, there is not much to be added, it says it all what I want to bring forward.

Art education does not begin with teaching how to hold a pencil or brush in the proper angle, because art begins in our head, our brain, which is fed with the experiences of our senses. Art education means to develop and train the senses we have, to learn how our system, our body as a whole is functioning and how everything relates to each other.

Art starts here, with researching, recording and learning, processing and applying the results.... This kind of art education should start at an early age and usually parents do that or grandparents with lots of time and patience at their hands. Later it is expected that teachers in schools take over.

It is the teachers I want to address here with my words.

It goes without saying that my thoughts cover all art disciplines such as visual arts, performing arts and literature ...

What does this kind of art education contain, what is the aim?

The foremost is the Development of senses

...it means to learn about the nature of a person or an object, a situation, carefully, before judging and acting. Prior to a judgement you need to know and understand. Talk to people and try to find out who they are, because there is a whole world behind their faces. Touch objects in order to feel the structure, the surface, and if you want to paint an object, a tree for example, try to find out everything about its roots, its leaves, its fruit, its colours and how they appear under different light situations. Listen to what the wind says in the foliage and see the colours change. The better developed the senses are, the better a child/person can draw, act, compose music, write, and the ability will help with all other subjects in school, in life. To be successful means to understand first and then act.

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We then have Development of creativity and imagination

There are no limits, no rules in arts. In visual arts even the edge of the sheet of paper should not limit a child/person to create freely, the story one wants to tell continues even over the edge. It is important to experiment with all kinds of material and tools, things you pick up anywhere, on the beach, in the kitchen or in the garden. Observing people how they react in certain situations, that is what acting or literary people are doing or a pantomime whose only language is that of the body. If you want to paint a chair you must become one which is also my philosophy.

Here one sample of promoting imagination, my friend, the art photographer, gave to me.... He took his students out to do some field work, sort of: "Go down into the valley and look for the 'small people' that live there". So the students went down and eventually came back with photo stories of their own, most of them had found the 'small people' or at least what their doings were; those who did not, would never be able to move things in later life.

Very important is the Understanding of one's body and movements

When we understand the structure of our body, its functions and its movements, we can concentrate better and the body does not work against our mind. Regular exercises in school for some minutes will help; oxygen will enter our arteries, our brain. Make body movements to shift the weight on your feet and observe what happens; one person may demonstrate for others to observe. For example, the head will always be there where the engaged leg is. Ask your students to measure all limbs of the body and make notes, draw the body parts and enter the measurements, two students may do it together; in the end you will find out that there are laws of proportion ... for example your face is divided into three parts, the ears are in line with your nose; your elbow sits in your waist, and so on. Upright posture is important for health and concentration, control of steps makes you aware of your body.

Art education promotes the development of self-confidence

A parent should never fence in a child's wish to express it-self and instead offer rules how things are to be done. Everyone is different and has own ways of expression. Children must gain their own experiences, that makes them stronger. Ok, in limits, not with health and mind damaging things... A child should not be educated to become a mass product to fit into society but a responsible member adding to the benefit of society. A child, also adults, are proud when they have produced something of their own.

My first professional art teacher – I was ten then

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- taught me one important thing:...whatever you do, do it with all your body and heart, it will give you self-confidence; use the full length of your arm when you paint, stand up when you paint so you have a better view of what you do, don't scribble, take big brushes,

make continuous lines... today I still do it. Try to have the whole picture in mind, even when you paint the details. Shy children will become more self-confident if they are allowed to overstep boundaries and have fun and what gives more fun than to let go, for example with a big brush, a big container of paint and a big sheet of paper on the floor; or creating something by their own means. Here I would like to add the dictate of fashion that children follow, fashion design can start early... what is my colour, what improves my personality, do I want to become ME or do I want to be one of the masses.

Cooperation and sharing

This is not the easiest part of education.... Only self-confident students/people can cooperate and share. We must learn that sharing is more profitable than sitting on one's findings, that working in a group on one project is very satisfying. It is being taught in art therapy, for example. I have seen a group of four children work together on one canvas or big sheet of paper, they had to share space, paint and create ideas together. They learnt to make small compromises. Another project is to make theatre with children, starting with the script, the costumes, the stage setting and the acting. The reward in the end is the exhibition of their work or the performance of the play. Shared work, shared fun and shared success.

With self-confidence comes Respect for others

This you learn by doing all the points before. Also, respect for the elderly...however, the adults can only expect respect if they show respect for the child, listen to what they say and discuss it, don't make them shut up. Respect and give consideration to the 'creations' a child produces. Don't judge people or things in front of a child, also a cleaning woman, a street worker, a disabled person, and so on, have a great world of their own for us to discover.

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With art education you learn Respect for nature

Respect is born by observing and taking part; working in the garden, walks in nature, collecting leaves, stones, all kinds of things and drawing them, touching, smelling and enjoying. Nature is a living matter and should be treated just as we want to be treated. If we abuse it, it will come back to us and in the end we will have to suffer. It is just like having people come into your house, your room, and destroy everything, dirty it and leave again. We are part of nature and we should not cut into our own flesh. There is nothing more satisfying than working outside in nature, spending hours there painting, or even singing.

Finally, with trained senses we obtain the ability to judge

When a child/person is educated well in the arts, he/she will be very careful before uttering a word of judgment, because they know better, they are used to research and examine and they know that nothing is as it appears to the hasty eye. An object may to one person's view have a certain form and colour but to the person on the opposite side the object may have a completely different appearance. The same applies to human beings, before you judge them, go and talk to them, you will find a completely new world opening up.

Art education in schools should be done on an interdisciplinary level; literature for example plays an important role in art education, a story read, a poem made into a picture, making written words or calligraphy part of a drawing. Or sports goes along with learning about the body, for model drawing, walking properly, choreography. Optional courses in the afternoon once a week could help furthering cooperation, also visits of art exhibitions, artists' studios and museums should be a regular activity, just as visits to farms, walks in nature are to be recommended.

Conclusion:

Art education is preparation for life; to sharpen and develop senses; to be responsible for your acts; to cooperate and share; become self-confident and proud; to move properly in society, and to appreciate different cultures and people, it enriches and widens one's horizon. As Confucius quotes: 'We have all the seeds in us, it is up to the gardener to develop them.'