

The Importance of Art Education

By Heidi Trautmann

Art is the oldest human drive and, as we have recently learnt during the Catalköy / Vounous events, that in the island's Bronze Ages, drawing, sculpting and working wood and stone to decorate their houses and household tools were normal practice in our ancestors' daily life. It was not only for decoration but for recording events and things encountered, the number of animals hunted, people one has met, new plants and fruit that one has discovered, and so on, recorded for the next generation. They used stones for engraving in the very old ages; on ceramic objects the same recording was done using oxides on clay or attaching small figurines.

Art starts here, recording and preserving for the future, and using the acquired knowledge for other disciplines of science. However, in order to be able to understand and transpose the things observed or experienced, for example the course of the sun or moon, the structure of the stars, the forms of animals and humans, one first has to train the senses one has, i.e. to be able to observe, listen, feel, taste, smell and move and... balance. Art education should start in baby age and usually parents do that or grandparents with lots of time and patience at hand. Later it is expected that teachers in schools take over. What does art education contain, what is the aim?

1)Development of senses; 2)development of creativity and imagination; 3) understanding one's body and movements; 4)development of self-confidence; 5)cooperation and sharing; 6)respect for others; 7)respect for nature; 8)judgment;

1) Development of senses

...it means to learn about the nature of a person or an object, a situation, to study carefully before judging and acting. Prior to a judgment you need to know and understand. Talk to people and try to find out who they are, 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 and the ability will help with all other subjects in school, in life. To be successful means to understand first and then act.

2) Development of creativity and imagination

There are no limits, no rules in arts, even the rim of the sheet of paper should not limit a child/person to create freely, the story one wants to tell continues even over the rim. It is important to experiment with all kinds of material and tools. Everything serves for creating a picture...paper, cardboard, canvas... paint wash, paint sprayed, rolled on or using paper or a sponge..... then beans, peas, coffee beans, sand, Turkish coffee, oil, candle wax, glass, pebbles, paper, fabric, dried plants. A theme can be carried out in various disciplines to learn all perspectives: working with clay, printing, sculpting with things found on the beach....

3) Understanding one's body and its functions

When we understand the structure of our body and its functions, 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 veins, our brain. Make body movements to shift 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 write it down, draw the body parts and enter, 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.

4) Development of self-confidence

No. 3 is a prerequisite; a teacher, a parent should never fence in a child's wish to express itself and offer rules how things are to be done. Everyone is different and has own ways of expression. It is hard enough to discover oneself; children must make 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. Children, also adults, are proud when they have produced something of their own. My first professional art teacher – I was ten then - has taught me one important thing:...whatever you do, do it with all your body and heart; 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... it has helped me along and I still do it. Try to have the whole picture in mind, even when you paint the details. Shy children will be more self-confident if they are allowed to overstep boundaries and have fun and what gives more fun than letting go, for example a big brush, a big container with paint and a big sheet of paper on the floor; or creating something with their own means. Here I would add the dictate of fashion children are following, 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.

5) 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 satisfying. It is one of the principles in art therapy. It is to make a group of children/adults work together on one canvas or big sheet of paper - they must share space, paint and ideas so the result becomes satisfying. They will learn to make small compromises. Another project is to make theatre, starting with the script to write, the costumes, the stage setting and the acting. The reward in the end is the exhibition of their works and/or the performance of the play. Shared work, shared fun and success.

6) Respect for others

This you learn by doing all points before. Also, respect for the elder...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 brings home, don't use television as baby sitter. Don't judge people or things in front of a child, also a cleaning woman, a street worker, have a world of their own, a disabled person, and so on.

7) 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 them. 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 painting.

8) Judgement

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. 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.

Different disciplines and techniques for children

Painting (acrylic, water colour, pastel, marker, pencil, charcoal), printing (linocut - careful), paper rolls with bubble wraps, string, potato, plastic bags), making paper from waste paper (jewelry, bowls, landscapes), collages with all kinds of material; and so on and so on...

Art activities in school - :

Telling a story, a poem and paint, everybody his/her vision.

Experiment with light and shadow, own body or any subjects.

Perspective: Street with houses;

Paint an object from side, from above, from below.

Paint a face looking up, looking down and to the side.

Paint a person looking sad, happy, running, walking, dancing.

Paint an object halfway and give it to next person to finish.

Paint rooms of your house, objects in your bathroom, in your kitchen, in your own room, what is important for you.

Cut open fruit and vegetables and paint inside.

Invent your own room, your own fashion, your own world.

Paint your and your friend's hands, feet.

Paint things in nature: bees on a flower; spider in her net, a butterfly or other insects.

Put plants on your paper and spray over

Symbolic painting: Try to find symbols for activities to best represent them.

Turn on music, first slow and paint movements, then fast while you move your body, dance.

Theory:

Learning about the deeper meaning of colours, where do they come from, from which stone, rock, plant;

Which colour do we use for hot – cold – far away – close

Regular visits to art exhibitions; visit in art studios.

Visit in a museum would be great!

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. Teachers, students and parents should work together;

As Confucius quotes: 'We have all the seeds in us, it is up to the gardener to develop them.'