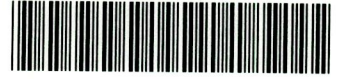


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DEVELOPING SELF ESTEEM THROUGH ART

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in

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by

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of this dissertation is self-esteem. It is based on my own teaching experiences and the problems that face students with low self-esteem.

The first thing I have to outline is my interpretation of the term "self-esteem". I will do this in Chapter One, following consideration of the writings of Denis Lawrence, Dennis Child, Jerome Dusek and others who have written on the topic of the 'self-concept' including self-esteem.

The second part of Chapter One looks at factors that influence the individual's self-esteem. In relation to a particular class of first year girls I want to discuss:

- (i) Their background - including parental influences.
- (ii) The physical changes brought on by adolescence.
- (iii) The school and its streaming process.

In Chapter Two I look at art and the art class as a method for the enhancement of self-esteem. While the student with low self-esteem may have similar (if not more) difficulties with art than with other subjects, often the fear of failure and humiliation can be more prevalent in the art class. I do feel that the boundaries of success and failure are not as clearly defined in art as they are in other subjects, at least the student's perception of

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success may be challenged.

The second chapter looks at particular class plans that I have made to try and overcome feelings of inadequacy in students.

Chapter Three will include evaluations of whether the class plans were successful in terms of the work produced. Their "success" will be measured by the students' attitudes to their work - whether it remains the same or whether it has changed. I intend to talk to the students about how they feel towards their work. If they find it successful now and did not before, then what has caused their change of attitude? Do they value their work now (they may have destroyed previous works) and if so, why? Would they be happy to sign their work and show it to other people?

To summarise, I would like to prove that art can be a valuable method for self-esteem enhancement once the factors that have inhibited the students' creativity and self-expression are addressed.

Chapter One

SELF-ESTEEM AND LEARNING

Much attention has been given in educational psychology to the fact that how we feel about ourselves determines our perceptions of the world around us and our place within it. Our levels of achievement are influenced by what we feel we can achieve.

Our "self-concept", how we feel about ourselves, has been a focal point for psychologists since the end of the last century.

In Enhancing Self-Esteem in the Classroom Denis Lawrence writes:

The self-concept is best defined as the sum total of an individual's mental and physical characteristics and his/her evaluation of them. (1)

McCandless viewed the self-concept as:

A learned perception, subject to environmental rewards and punishments as well as cognitive evaluations. As positive reinforcements to the individual are increased, the self-concept grows in esteem. (2)

The self-concept is normally used as a broad term which covers other terms such as the self image and the "ideal self". In Fig.1 which is taken from Enhancing Self-Esteem in the Classroom, Denis Lawrence illustrates how self-esteem is measured by the discrepancies between the "self-image" and the "ideal-self". In other words, self-esteem

measures how we see ourselves compared to how we would like others to see us.

If our self-image falls short of what we aspire to be, then our self-esteem will be low. Continuing this analysis, Lawrence states:

Self-esteem is the individual's evaluation of the discrepancy between the self-image and the ideal self. (3)

Self-esteem and the means by which it can be enhanced or lowered provide the basis for this dissertation. In this context, I will analyse how art can play a fundamental role in self-esteem enhancement with regard to adolescent girls.

Teachers can obviously play a fundamental role in self-esteem enhancement because they are so often in the position of determining success or failure in the classroom situation. As McCandless pointed out, the self-concept changes "subject to environmental rewards and punishments." (4) Failure in one area can often be reflected as reluctance or fear of humiliation in another.

In the school that I am working in now, there are a number of students who would rather destroy their work or hand up blank sheets than risk the humiliation of appearing foolish or inadequate.

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The school in question is a Comprehensive school located in a disadvantaged area with an unemployment rate of 80%. (5). It is an all-girl junior school. All of the 339 students (except for fourteen girls) come from the houses and flats in the immediate area.

The girls are streamed into six different classes in first year after an entrance examination. Unless they are extremely unsuitable for these classes, they remain in the same group until their Junior Certificate Examination. 70% of the students pass this examination and go on to the Senior Comprehensive located next door.

It must be pointed out that not all students with low self-esteem are lacking in ability. Furthermore many students who are low achievers, do not necessarily have low self-esteem. The students I want to discuss are those of unproven ability. For this group lack of confidence inhibits potential they may have. Past circumstances such as a negative response to their efforts may have stopped them from trying. Denis Lawrence argues:

It is not failure to achieve which produces low self-esteem, it is the way significant people in the child's life have reacted to this failure.

(6)

Factors which influence Self-Esteem

In order to try and challenge students' perceptions of their abilities, it is necessary to examine some of the factors which may have influenced the development of their low self-esteem.

The first factor that affects students' self-esteem is background and home environment. As I have already stated, the area that the school caters for is predominantly working class. Unemployment is widespread and living conditions restrictive as a result. While it is insufficient to state that all children from a low socio-economic background will have low self-esteem, there is evidence that parental interest and expectations will affect how the child feels about herself. (7)

If the student's life at school is not respected or understood at home, then a sense of bewilderment is bound to arise. Lack of co-operation from parents such as not writing notes to explain lateness or absence from school and repeated reluctance to meet teachers to discuss problems, would seem to indicate that they have little share in their children's educational experiences.

While in school children have been called home to take care of younger siblings/nieces and nephews. These parents may have had a bad or unsuccessful educational

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experience. If so, they are unlikely to respect their children's. Without feedback and encouragement from home, the student will have less reason to strive for achievement. Without constant reassurance and support, her feelings of self-worth are bound to diminish.

There is an increased difficulty with young people who live in an area of high unemployment. With this very high level of unemployment, there are bound to be people in the community who have achieved a certain level of education and are still unable to find work. If the student feels that all that is waiting for her at the end of her years in school is unemployment, she is unlikely to strive towards educational achievement. At the age of thirteen, many students are already saying - "Why should I do this? It's not going to get me a job."

The current educational system, with its emphasis on examinations, is a daunting one for a student who already feels that it has nothing to offer her. No one that they know well or feel akin to has benefited from this system, so why should they? In terms of self-esteem, they may feel that because everyone they know has "failed" educationally, then so will they.

Teachers can be a source of aggravation if they are seen as outsiders. They may be held in high esteem, but

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resented for that reason. When showing visual aids that I have made, even very simple ones, I have been confronted with - "It's alright for you, you've been to college" and "You can't expect me to do that."

Statistically, the number of students from working class areas who go onto third level education remains small. In Who Goes to College, Patrick Clancy writes that middle class areas are over-represented by a factor of six and underprivileged areas were underrepresented by a factor of three. (8) In 1990, only four students from the Senior Comprehensive went on to third level institutions. This has improved due to the Ballymun Initiative for third level education, (B.I.T.E.) funded by the Irish American Partnership. For students from low income families, there may be pressure to become an early wage earner rather than encouragement to continue education. 25% of students in this school leave as soon as they reach fifteen. (9) Since 1990 there have been grants available from the B.I.T.E. for students when they reach fifteen in order to encourage them to stay on at school. These grants range from £300 to £900 per year and try to counteract the pressures on the student to discontinue her education. Second level education is "free" in that no fees have to be paid; nonetheless uniforms, books and materials have to be paid for. The student may feel that there is no

point in staying on at school wasting money if she is convinced that she is going to fail her examinations. While in some middle class families, not going to college may be seen as rebelling from the family tradition, going to college may be seen as rebelling in working class areas.

The second factor which affects self-esteem is adolescence. More than at any other time of our lives, adolescence is a period where we suffer the most uncertainty about who we are and what we are likely to become. (10) The physical changes that adolescents experience can have a profound psychological effect. Adolescents are constantly comparing themselves to their peers and idealised images that they are regularly exposed to in the media. There is a struggle between wanting to remain dependent and nurtured against a fierce desire to be independent and grown-up.

Appearance is vitally important to adolescent girls. Girls who are late maturers may feel inadequate and develop poor self images, as Jerome B. Dusek points out in his study:

Early maturers tend to have more positive self images than late maturers. This difference apparently is a result of different treatment of adults and peers, the advantages associated with being an early maturer and the confidence

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early maturers gain by virtue of their
larger physique vis-a-vis peers. (11)

Adolescence is an acutely sensitive period in the development of the self-concept, in which the individual is finding her independent identity and is suddenly aware of her place in society. She has left the childhood stage behind and has moved on to a new phase of critical awareness. As a result, adolescents constantly search for reappraisal. This search for approval can no longer be met by parents or teachers, therefore the adolescent is constantly "measuring herself" against her peers. How she appears in their eyes is part of what she will become.

As previously noted, Denis Lawrence's definition of self-esteem relates to the discrepancy between what we think of ourselves (self-image) and how we would like others to perceive us (ideal-self). He continues:

The heightening and intensifying of
the awareness of one's own being both as
an object of one's own awareness and of
the awareness of others is practically
universal in adolescents. (12)

In the classroom situation, difficulties arise when adolescents, who are already hindered by self-doubt and self-criticism, have to deal with problem-solving situations, when they are unsure of their capabilities. I find the evaluation that concludes the art class can be a source of discomfort. The risk of looking stupid in front of friends is always prevalent and is often a deterrent.

This may lead to a complete refusal to take part in the art class, or frustration when they do take part leading to a dislike for certain activities or media associated with this "failure". It is very difficult when you have encouraged a child to participate and find that they are still dissatisfied because of their harsh self-criticism and the unrealistic goals that they have set for themselves. Students with high self-esteem are quite happy with a reasonable piece of work, having a realistic idea of what is expected of first year students. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem will constantly put down their work and point out its imperfections, instead of focussing on more positive qualities of the work.

The third factor I want to discuss that affects self-esteem is the streaming process. Each school has its own system of dividing groups into classes. Streaming is the placing of children of the same age into different classes on the basis of their ability. (13) In this school streaming is based on an entrance examination where the lowest ability and highest ability students are put into separate classes and the middle ability students are divided up at random into four groups:

This form of differentiation has been and remains a very common feature of British schools. Its rationale is firmly set in the

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is arranged in several paragraphs and is mostly centered on the page.

12.

psychological tradition of education, with its belief that a child's ability is measurable and remains fairly constant over time. It can be traced back to the evidence that Cyril Burt gave to the consultative committee on the primary school (Huden) in 1931. (14)

According to Burt:

'By the age of ten the children of a single age must be spread over at least three different standards and by the age of twelve children need to be grouped not merely in separate classes but in separate schools.'

Ivan Reid notes that:

The British use of streaming is unique, particularly with regard to its extent. It is illegal in Norway, was abolished in the Soviet Union (1963) and is not used in the United States or France. (15)

Streaming rests on the belief that since all children vary in ability - mixed ability classes will be difficult to teach and will hamper the learning of bright children.(16)

There is a good deal of evidence that streaming constitutes a self-fulfilling prophecy - that the original decision to put children in streamed classes is proved right by their subsequent performance. Barker Lunn points out that over a three year period, 75% of children who were in the wrong stream (according to their ability) remained in that stream. Those who were promoted (17) tended to make good progress while those who were demoted tended to get worse.

In this school the classes are streamed, as I have already

stated, on the results of an entrance examination. They are assessed during their first year (by continuous observation) and those who are extremely unsuitable for their present class are promoted or demoted.

The headmistress of the school told me that they decided to call the lowest stream the "A" class this year in an attempt to boost self-esteem, but the students realised their position in the class hierarchy very soon. Most children stay in their initial classes until their Junior Certificate Examination. There is an unwritten rule that higher streamed classes tend to get the best and most experienced teachers while lower streamed classes tend to get less experienced teachers in whom the school has less confidence. Even if this is only partly true, it would explain to an extent how students in lower streamed classes tend to be consistently low achievers.

This categorising of students in the first year of post-primary school can have an adverse effect on their self-esteem. It is also a category from which it is very difficult to break out for the rest of their school lives. They have already been categorised to an extent because of the area that they come from, their choice of school (or lack of choice) - now they are being categorised in terms of their likely attainment levels.

Children become aware of this immediately. Students in low streamed classes are quite adamant sometimes that they cannot really be expected to achieve because of their position in the streaming system. They have resigned themselves to the fact that teachers have little belief in their worth so they began to share the same belief.

There has been a lot written about "The Expectancy Effect" between teachers and pupils. This refers to the phenomenon that students tend to behave according to what is expected of them. (18)

Brophy and Good stated in 1970 that it is in human nature to try and categorise people so that we know what to expect from them. They showed how teachers seek information before they take a class regarding work standards and work on the assumption that the child will conform to this standard. They relate to the child and teach them according to those expectations.

Carl Rogers identifies four factors whereby teachers' expectations might influence students behaviour:

- (i) Teachers form impressions of pupils and on the basis of this, they derive expectations of the pupils' performance.
- (ii) Consciously or otherwise the behaviour of teachers must be affected by those expectations.

- (iii) The pupils must, whether they are consciously aware of it or not, recognise the teachers' expectations through the latter's behaviour.
- (iv) The pupils respond to the teachers' behaviour in a manner which more closely matches the teachers' expectations. (19)

Having discussed definitions of self-esteem and the factors that influence it, I would now like to look at art in schools as a potential means of counteracting these factors. The reason why I am discussing art in school is that here we have a unique opportunity for teachers to assess students' work while encouraging feelings of self worth.

Ideally the art class should provide an atmosphere of support and a sense of worthiness that may not be received at home or in the school environment.

Chapter One

FOOTNOTES

1. Denis Lawrence. Enhancing Self Esteem in the Classroom. (Paul Chapman Publishing London 1988) p.1
2. McCandless quoted in Adolescent Behaviour and Development Jerome B. Dusek. (Englewood Cliffs. N.J.: Prentice-Hall. 1987). p.365.
3. Lawrence. Enhancing Self Esteem in the Classroom. p.4.
4. McCandless in Adolescent Behaviour and Development. p.365.
5. Information obtained from interview with the Principal, Ballymun Junior Comprehensive School. December 15th, 1992.
6. Lawrence. Enhancing Self Esteem in the Classroom p.5.
7. Dusek. Adolescent Behaviour and Development p.368.
8. Patrick Clancy Who goes to College? (Dublin : Higher Education Authority, 1986).
9. Interview with the Principal of Ballymun Junior Girls Comprehensive.
10. Dusek. Adolescent Behaviour and Development. p.368.
11. Ibid.
12. Lawrence. Enhancing Self Esteem. p.32.
13. Ivan Reid. Sociological Perspectives on School and Education (Open Books Publishing, 1984) 5th Ed. p.124.
14. Cyril Burt. Quoted in W. Van der Eycken, Education, the Child and Society. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1973). p.320.
15. Reid. Sociological Perspectives on School and Education. p.124.
16. Ibid., p.123.

17. J. C. Barker-Lunn. Streaming in the Primary School.
(Slough : N.F.E.R.) pp.125 - 31.
18. J.E. Brophy and T.C. Good. Teacher Student Relationships. (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1970), pp.133 - 135.
19. Colin Rogers. Quoted in Denis Child Psychology and the Teacher. (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1986).

Chapter Two

THE ART CLASS AS A METHOD OF SELF-ESTEEM ENHANCEMENT

In this chapter I want to look at art and the art class as a unique vehicle for self-esteem enhancement. It is here there is an opportunity for students to investigate what is good and unique about themselves and their own experiences.

The opportunity for self-exploration and a development of a creative process is fundamentally important for "self-actualization" or fulfilling their potential as a whole.

Self-actualization can be defined as growth towards psychological maturity and the realization of individuals' potential.....Each individual has a capacity for growth and change, so that potential for creative achievement is universal, even if such achievement consists only of insights and formulations which are new to the person himself. (1)

Art is an area where the student's life outside school can be called into play. She does not have to divide herself between an academic school life and an often disparate home life.

Ideally, art in school should be an ideal method of self-esteem enhancement. It is possibly unique within the school curriculum in that there can always be different approaches, while there are a set of factors that must be

understood (to aid the students' perception and expression), what the student does with this information is up to her. When the students are encouraged to make a narrative form of art, they have the chance to investigate themselves and their backgrounds and hopefully concentrate on the positive qualities that exist therein.

When discussing "Creativity in the Art Program", Lowenfeld and Brittain tell us:

The change from a natural, spontaneous manner of working with art materials which we saw in young children to one of a critical awareness of one's own actions, calls for a well developed plan for encouraging creativity. With younger children we could encourage and foster the enthusiasm and freedom that seems to be part of life. In the secondary school however, the development of creative thinking must be an essential ingredient of the art program. Flexibility, fluency, originality and the ability to think independently and imaginatively must not be left to chance. It is most crucial to develop creative thinking patterns at this age for the attitudes and values that these youngsters develop now will continue with them through adult life. (2)

From twelve to fourteen years, adolescents pass through an age of intense critical awareness. They have lost the uninhibited approach to art that children have and it becomes one more area where they have to prove themselves - in their struggle to be accepted as adults. The joy that children have in expressing themselves and simply taking part in an art activity purely for tactile and

visual enjoyment has gone. There is now an almost complete focus on the end product. A finished product is good not because of the effort, interest or involvement that went into it, but because of the final visual appearance of the work. I find this a great difficulty. Personally, I always felt that a set idea of an end product acted as a creative block. It is hard to trust your own creativity when an idea of a finished image is fixed in the mind.

As I have already stated, the art class should offer an ideal opportunity for self-esteem enhancement but because of a number of factors, some students find themselves unable to avail of this opportunity. :

(i) Comparison with others : these adolescents are at the stage of finding out their identity as independent individuals. This results in a constant comparison with others in terms of appearance, intelligence, popularity etc.... In every class there will be some students who can draw with comparative ease and produce a pleasing end product. When another less able student compares herself to one who is "brilliant" in her eyes, it may be a powerful disincentive to try. She is unlikely to develop confidence in her own means of self-expression when she

cannot be guaranteed to achieve a "brilliant" end product when the definitions of successful art are so narrow, attainment of success seems very unlikely.

(ii) With adolescence the drive towards maturity is coupled with a complete rejection of anything childish or trappings they associate with their past. I was surprised to observe that activities that I thought would delight thirteen year olds were dismissed as being silly or childish. It must be frustrating for teenagers who are behaving as adults in many ways and may well look like adults, to find out that their art is still awkward and childlike.

I have tried to confront this problem by introducing the students to artists who have consistently worked in a naive and primitive manner but without much success. Often the students' idea of successful art is associated with slick illustrations and media-images. I am not stating that all great art is primitive or all media images unworthy, but I think it is important to treat art as something attainable. If emphasis is placed on the process rather than the finished product, the student may feel more able to take part, without fear of failure. Unfortunately the student who is unwilling to take part is

often the one who needs the experience the most.

(iii) There is a danger with teachers of art that in their efforts to give the students guide lines and encourage creativity, they may push their own standards and ideals on students. Perhaps the teacher places undue emphasis on the end product and not on the process and development. The tendency may be to dictate rather than direct the students' own perception. While there must be guide lines as in any class, for art to be a real learning experience, too strict or set an ideal makes art a daunting task for those who feel inadequate or unable to fulfill a particular task. At the same time, the end product is of vital importance for self confidence. It is wonderful for anyone, whatever their esteem level, to be able to stand beside something and say - "This is mine. I made this." There should be room in the lesson plan for individual's perceptions and the way she goes about expressing them.

It is insufficient to say that art is always a wonderful method for self-esteem enhancement because as I have discussed in some instances, it can serve to reinforce the doubts that exist about the student's own capabilities. There are a number of things to be considered when

organising lesson plans that may suit students with low self-esteem.

Is the lesson too skill-based and likely to cause disillusionment to less skilled students?

Is the subject matter relevant to what is happening in the student's life at the time?

Is there an end product so that the student will feel that her efforts have gone into something worthwhile?

When art lessons are organised properly, the class should be an opportunity for each student to discover her individuality and self-worth. A variety of end products from the same lesson show that there are no ideal methods of self-expression and that each student's work will be slightly different, while all are successful in different ways.

In the following pages I wish to out-line a number of lesson plans that I have devised to try and encourage students with low self-esteem to trust their own means of expression.

LESSON PLANS FOR FIRST YEAR

LESSON PLAN (First in sequence of three)

AIM > FOR THE STUDENT TO INCREASE HER VISUAL
AWARENESS OF HER ENVIRONMENT THROUGH COLOUR
AND SHAPE.

OBJECTIVE > TO UNDERSTAND SHAPE THROUGH LINE

THEME > CLOTHES LINES

SOURCE > A STILL LIFE OF A CLOTHES LINE

ACTIVITY > STRING DRAWING

SUPPORT
STUDIES > LINE (Only) DRAWINGS BY HENRI MATISSE

PROCEDURE > STUDENTS MAKE STRING PAINTINGS OF THE STILL
LIFE BY STICKING DOWN STRING TO MAKE THE
OUTLINE OF SHAPES.

LESSON PLAN (Second in sequence of three)

- AIM > FOR THE STUDENT TO INCREASE HER VISUAL
AWARENESS OF HER ENVIRONMENT THROUGH
COLOUR AND SHAPE
- OBJECTIVE > TO UNDERSTAND COLOUR MIXING THROUGH MAKING
PATTERNS OF REPEATED SHAPES
- THEME > CLOTHES LINES
- SOURCE > A STILL LIFE OF A CLOTHES LINE
- ACTIVITY > COLLAGE - CUTTING OUT A SHAPE (repeatedly)
FROM COLOURED TISSUE PAPER
- SUPPORT
STUDY > JOAN MIRO
- PROCEDURE > STUDENTS CUT OUT A CLOTHES SHAPE FROM PRIMARY
COLOURED TISSUE PAPER STICK DOWN MAKING A
PATTERN OF CHOICE BUT OVERLAPPING SO THAT
COLOUR MIXING OCCURS WITH TRANSPARENT SHEETS.

LESSON PLAN (Third in a sequence of three)

- AIM > FOR THE STUDENT TO INCREASE HER VISUAL
AWARENESS OF HER ENVIRONMENT THROUGH COLOUR
AND SHAPE
- OBJECTIVE > TO DISCOVER HOW PATTERN IS PREVALENT IN THE
ENVIRONMENT THROUGH PATTERN, SHAPE AND COLOUR
- THEME > CLOTHES LINE
- SOURCE > A STILL LIFE OF A CLOTHES LINE
- SUPPORT
STUDY > JUAN GRIS
- PROCEDURE > EACH STUDENT CUTS OUT A VARIETY OF SHAPES FROM
THE CLOTHES. WORKING IN TWOS THEY DECIDE ON A
SUITABLE BACKGROUND AND PAINT THIS ON TWO A2
SHEETS JOINED TOGETHER MAKING A VERTICAL
RECTANGULAR SHAPE. THE CLOTHES ARE POSITIONED
ON THE BACKGROUND AS IF THEY WERE HANGING ON A
LINE. ALL THE WORKS ARE JOINED TOGETHER TO
MAKE A FRIEZE TO DEMONSTRATE HOW REPEATED
SHAPES MAKE A PATTERN.

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LESSON PLANS FOR FIRST YEAR

LESSON PLAN - (First in a sequence of three)

AIM > THAT THE STUDENTS CAN RELATE TO THEIR NATURAL
ENVIRONMENT BY DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COLOUR
AND PATTERN

OBJECTIVE > THAT THE STUDENT LEARNS ABOUT COLOUR MIXING
THROUGH PRINTING PRIMARY COLOURS

ACTIVITY > PRINTING PRIMARY COLOURED LEAVES AND OVER-
LAPPING THEM TO MAKE SECONDARY COLOURS

SUPPORT
STUDY > GEORGES SEURAT

LESSON PLAN - (Second in a sequence of three)

AIM > TO INVESTIGATE LINE AND QUALITIES OF LINE
THROUGH RUBBING LEAVES

ACTIVITY > RUBBING LEAVES - COVERING A PAGE WITH OVER-
LAPPING RUBBINGS. MAKING A VIEWFINDER. MAKING
AN ENLARGED DRAWING OF A SECTION OF THE LEAF
USING THE MAIN LINES OF THE LEAVES.

SUPPORT
STUDY > KATHY PRENDERGAST

LESSON PLAN - (Third in a sequence of three)

OBJECTIVE > TO CREATE SHAPE USING THE LINE DRAWING

ACTIVITY > DEVELOP THE LINE DRAWING INTO A STAINED GLASS
WINDOW USING COLLAGE TO FILL IN THE SECTIONS
MADE BY THE LINE DRAWINGS.
THE COLOURS USED ARE THE ONES FROM THE FIRST
LESSON

SUPPORT
STUDY > MAINIE JELLET

LESSON PLAN - (First in a sequence of three)

- AIM > TO DISCOVER THE EXPRESSIVE QUALITIES OF
OBJECTS THROUGH EXPLORING ONE'S OWN IDENTITY
- OBJECTIVE > TO DESCRIBE OBJECTS IN A PERSONAL MANNER
THROUGH LINE AND SHAPE
- THEME > IDENTITY
- SOURCE > THE STUDENT'S SILHOUETTE AND A STILL LIFE
GROUP OF OBJECTS
- ACTIVITY > DESIGNING THE COVER OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
(Student's own)
DRAWING THE RELATED OBJECTS (ones that would
appeal to the individual personality) AND
PLACING THEM WITHIN A BOOK COVER COMPOSITION
THE COMPOSITION IS BASED AROUND THE STUDENT'S
SILHOUETTE
- SUPPORT
STUDY > CHAGALL, OTTO DIX - Portraits. VARIOUS BOOK
COVERS

LESSON PLAN - (Second in a sequence of three)

- OBJECTIVE > TO BECOME AWARE OF THE EMOTIVE QUALITIES OF COLOUR AND FAMILIARISE ONESELF WITH PAINT OR COLLAGE
- ACTIVITY > PAINTING THE BOOK COVER AND USING SYMPATHETIC COLOURS FOLLOWING A DISCUSSION ON COOL OR WARM (happy or sad) COLOURS
- SUPPORT STUDIES > VAN GOGH, BECKMANN

LESSON PLAN - (Third in a sequence of three)

- OBJECTIVE > TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH A LETTERING PROCESS AND GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMAGERY AND LETTERING.
- ACTIVITY > LEARNING LETTERING AND PUTTING TEXT ONTO THE BOOK COVER
- SUPPORT STUDY > D. BRUCKE BOOK COVERS

Chapter Two

FOOTNOTES

1. Margaret Gilchrist. The Psychology of Creativity, (Melbourne : University Press 1972) p.43.
2. Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain. Creative and Mental Growth, 5th Edition (New York : Macmillan 1987), p.289.

Chapter Three
EVALUATIONS FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

This chapter is based on analysis of the opinions of the students with apparent low self-esteem that I have mentioned throughout the dissertation. It includes their feelings about art and the activities that they have taken part in. I would first like to include their opinions about art before the lessons outlined in the previous chapter, in order to evaluate any change in their own judgement of their abilities.

I talked generally to the class, Group IF, which is made up of twenty female first year students at the lower end of the streaming scale, but considered a mixed ability class. Most of the class expressed indifference to art. Only two said that they definitely liked it and those two had a natural drawing 'skill'.

Six girls said that they definitely did not like art. All of the six said it was boring but that if they could draw or "do art properly" it would be more enjoyable. They felt that teachers were pressurising them to do work that they could not do, and when they did try, the results were always bad compared to other "brilliant" people in the class.

When questioned, however, about other subjects, five of the six had nothing positive to say about any subject on their curriculum. After some thought, they decided that art and P.E. were probably the best because they had no homework. Only one student in the class said she was good at other subjects, but did not like art because she could not draw.

I was surprised that so few students were obviously enthusiastic about the subject. All of them felt that there were certain given attributes necessary, i.e. an ability to draw in order to take part and that a certain visual quality had to be achieved in order to succeed in the subject.

I talked to the form teacher of Group IF about the five students who did not like any subjects. She told me that these students were having problems in all areas, having resigned themselves at this early stage to being low achievers, showing a general apathy and lack of effort towards school work. Even though these students were not termed as remedial at the beginning of the year, if the quality of their work continued, the teacher expected them to be demoted at the end of first year. Their ability is still said to be unproven, as all of their teachers felt

they were not making any effort. The teacher agreed that the students in question seemed to suffer from a lack of confidence, coupled with a fixed idea that they were not going to achieve in school. If this demotion to a remedial class occurs (and it most likely will due to continued apathy, causing disruption to other students and discipline problems), it will serve to reinforce the students' opinion of themselves. As Denis Child states:

Continued failure produces a decline in levels of aspiration. Nothing enhances failure better than failure. (1)

Judging by the above pattern of events, students with low self-esteem would appear to be trapped by their lack of esteem into a vicious circle situation. This repeated lack of effort regarding homework and contribution to classes caused by their disillusionment, may lead to friction between student and teacher and perhaps even a move to a lower grade class.

The students that I want to deal with in this chapter are those with low esteem levels regarding all aspects of their school life.

The following opinions from the five students regarding the lessons outlined in Chapter Two are followed by my evaluations (PERSONAL EVALUATION).

35.

I will try and assess why the students decided that they were valuable or not and if they served to enhance esteem levels. GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION refers to the feeling of the five students I have discussed. I asked particular students to comment on different classes.

(i) SEQUENCE WITH "CLOTHES LINE THEME" See Figure 1.

AIM > FOR THE STUDENT TO INCREASE HER VISUAL
AWARENESS OF HER ENVIRONMENT THROUGH
COLOUR AND SHAPE.

OBJECTIVE > TO UNDERSTAND SHAPE THROUGH LINE

GENERAL STUDENTS EVALUATION: The class was not difficult but it was messy and hard to stick the wool on sometimes. It was weird to have a clothes line in the classroom and to make things from it.

Karen felt she could do it but it wasn't like doing art. Making things out of string was not drawing. She was happy with the end product even though it was simple because she thought it was neat. It was better than her drawing because she "can't draw".

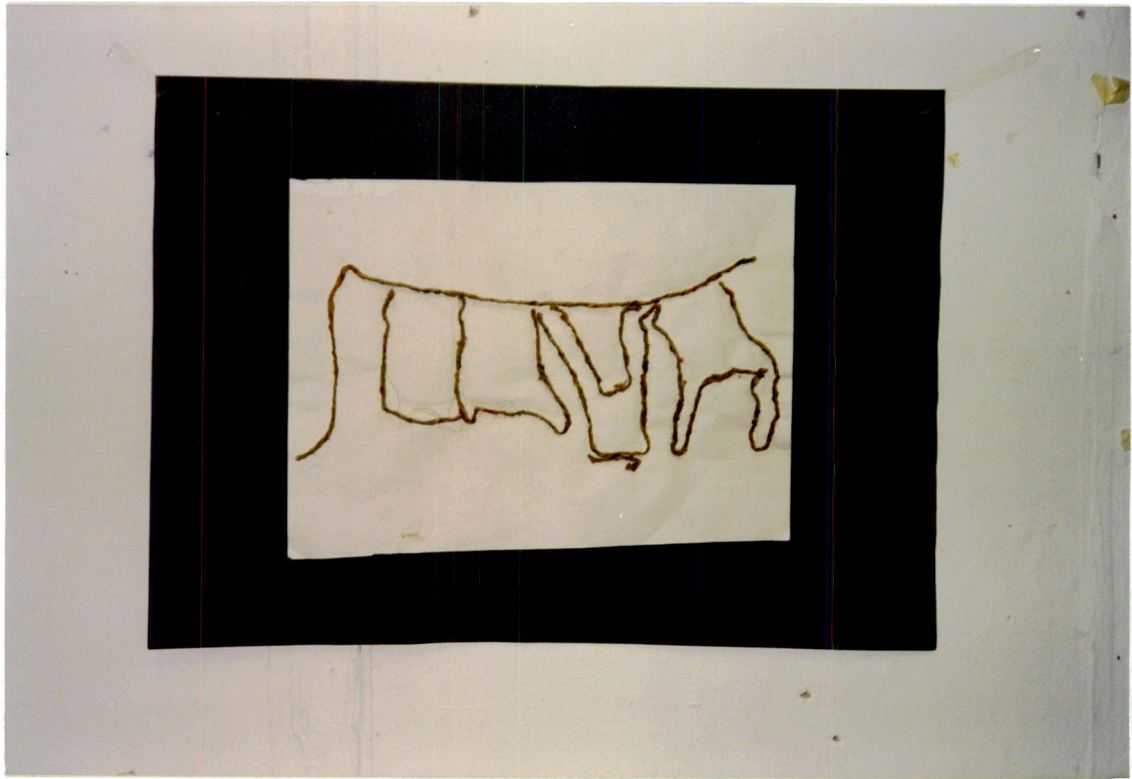


FIGURE 1.



OBJECTIVE > TO UNDERSTAND COLOUR MIXING THROUGH
MAKING PATTERNS OF REPEATED SHAPES.

See Figure 2.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: All the class enjoyed this activity. Working with tissue paper was more enjoyable than string because it involved colour. It was not too difficult to understand colour mixing.

MANDY knew about colour mixing but could not get it right before because paint was too messy and everything turned out brown. She liked her work because it was neat and colourful.

OBJECTIVE > TO DISCOVER HOW PATTERN IS PREVALENT IN
THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH PATTERN SHAPE
AND COLOUR. See Figure 3.

GROUP EVALUATION: All the students enjoyed this lesson mostly because they were working in a group. All felt happy with their work and the fact that they had made a contribution to the overall product. All were comfortable with the prospect of an evaluation at the end of class.

SHARON liked this lesson best because she was allowed to

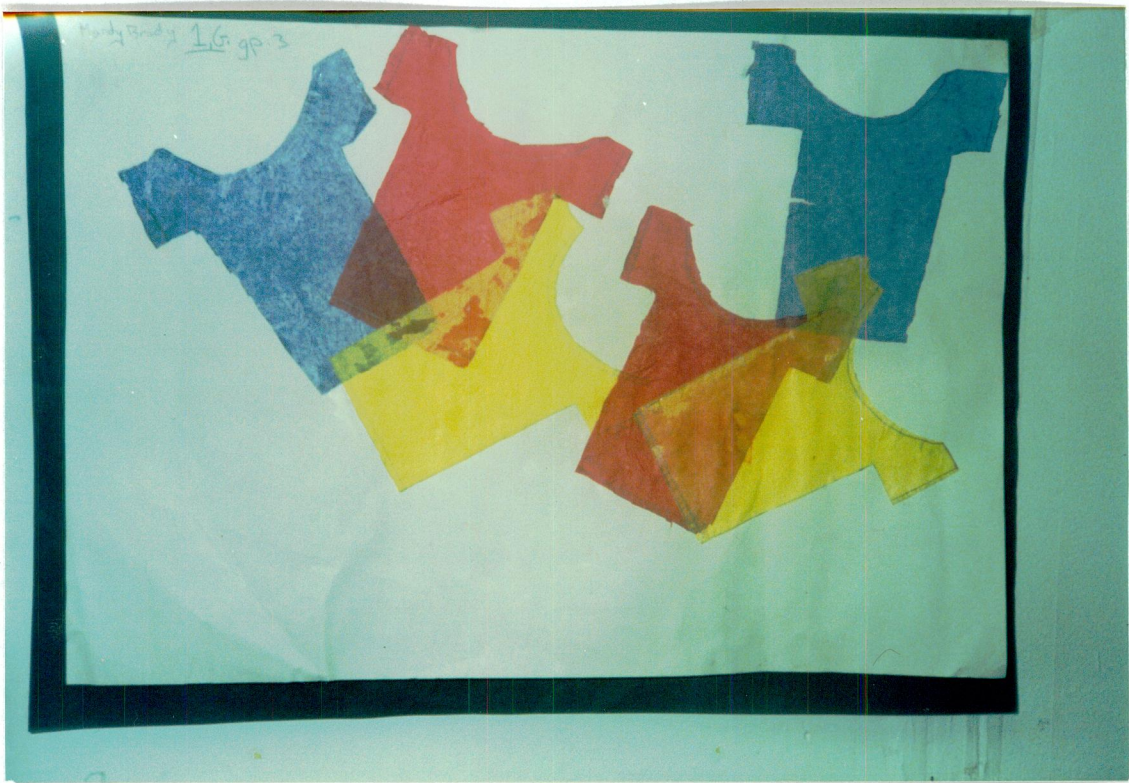


FIGURE 2.

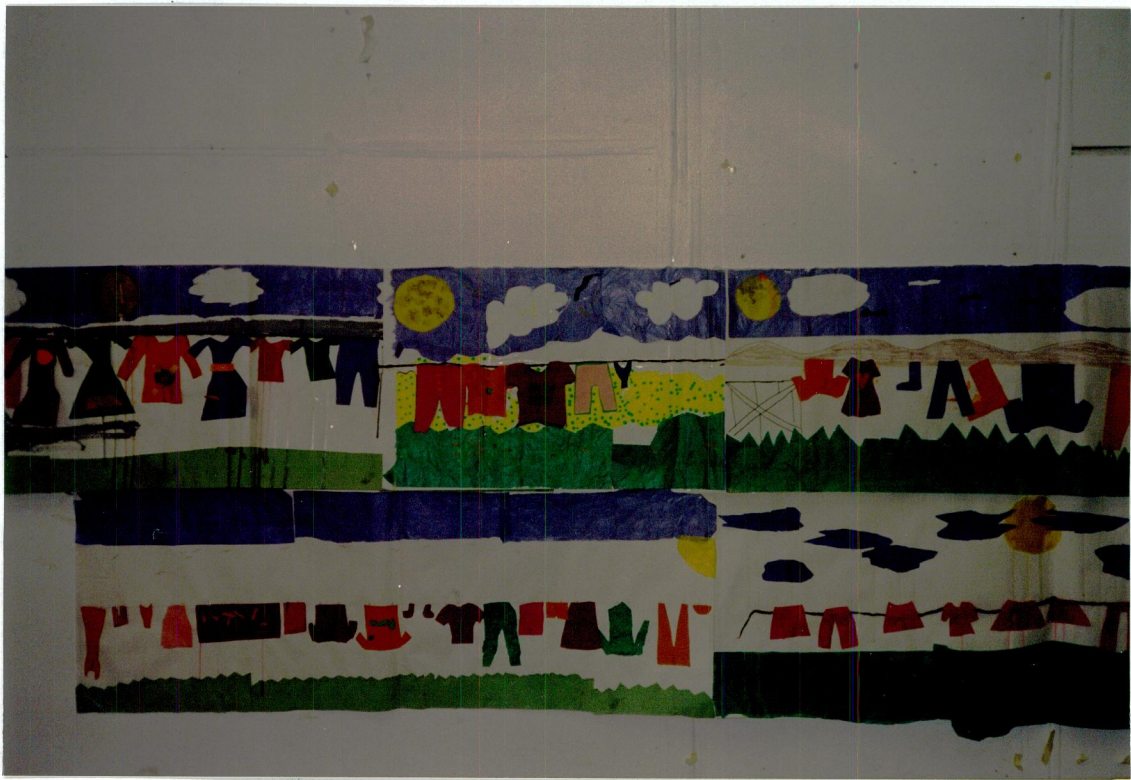


FIGURE 3

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use more colour and materials than the previous lessons where materials were restricted. She enjoyed working in a group because nobody could tell which part was hers.

PERSONAL EVALUATION OF SEQUENCE: The main factor that I think worked was the use of materials not usually associated with drawing. Students were forced to look at line, shape and colour in a way that they had not previously.

The integration of varied materials into the child's work, help to break down the notion that one can either 'do or not do art'. The introduction of materials not connected in the child's mind with art, will maintain his interest and make him feel that he is limited by any lack of natural talent. (2)

The fact that the subject matter was familiar yet not previously connected with art subject matter helped. Students were assured that any subject matter can be used when making art, in fact the more familiar the better.

What we need and here I speak only of teaching art - are new conceptions of modes of artistic behaviour, new ideas of what might constitute the curricula of the art class. The new curricula must be meaningful and relevant to pupils - to disadvantaged pupils and by extension, to all pupils. (3)

The overall aim of the sequence was for students to bring their own experiences to the art class and to realise that knowledge learned here was relevant to their awareness of their environment.

(ii) SEQUENCE WITH LEAVES THEME:

AIM > THAT THE STUDENTS CAN RELATE TO THEIR
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BY DEVELOPING A
SENSE OF COLOUR AND PATTERN.

OBJECTIVE > THAT THE STUDENT LEARNS ABOUT COLOUR MIXING
THROUGH PRINTING PRIMARY COLOURS.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: Everyone felt that they could take part in this activity because it was not difficult. They enjoyed the process and were comfortable with paint, because they were using it in an uncomplicated way.

EMMA - at first thought the class was too babyish but really liked her end product. She felt she had used paint in a clean way without getting dull colours.

OBJECTIVE > TO INVESTIGATE LINE AND QUALITIES OF LINE
THROUGH RUBBING LEAVES. See Figure 4.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: The rubbing part of the lesson was considered too easy and not something that belonged to an art lesson. However the enlarging and selecting lines part was not considered very easy but most students were happy with their efforts feeling that they had understood different qualities of line.

EMMA - enjoyed the rubbings but was initially afraid of the second part of the class because she had not used a view finder before. She felt that she managed to make a good enlarged line drawing but would not consider it a good drawing because it was just lines.

OBJECTIVE > TO CREATE SHAPE USING THE LINE DRAWING
See Figure 5.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: All five students thought this lesson was messy because it involved cutting out and sticking down a lot of small bits of paper. They felt the end products were good although they did not really look like anything.

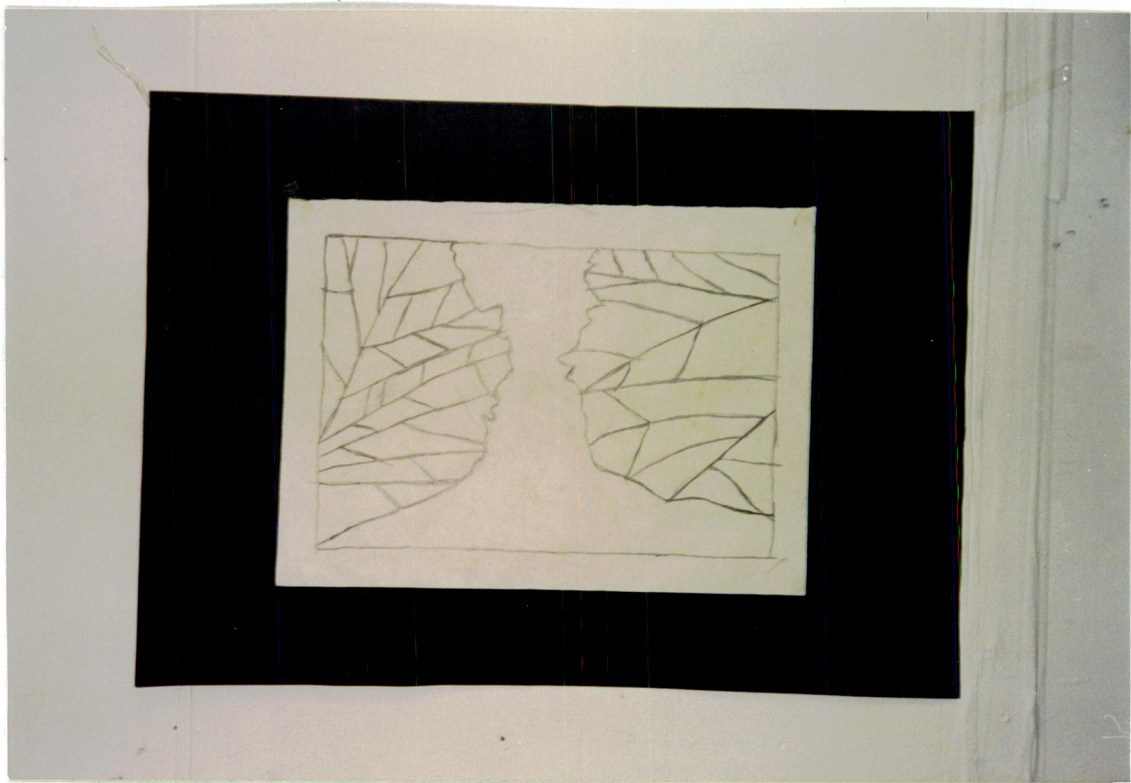


FIGURE 4.



FIGURE 5.

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KAREN was happy because her work looked as good as anyone else's. She would be happy for other people to see it although it was not the type of art that she would like to be good at - "Anyone could do this."

PERSONAL EVALUATION: I thought the overall students' evaluation was positive. They still were not completely happy with their work because they have a fixed notion of what good art should be. The fact that all students took part and finished all lessons was good. The first two classes consisted of very basic processes of rubbing and printing which allowed every student to feel equally able to take part. The formation of an abstract end product created some disillusionment because "...it didn't look like anything," but helped to begin to challenge notions of what end products should look like. There was no outstandingly "good", or "bad" work produced.

(iii) SEQUENCE ON IDENTITY

AIM > TO DISCOVER THE EXPRESSIVE QUALITIES OF
OBJECTS THROUGH EXPLORING ONE'S OWN
IDENTITY.

OBJECTIVE > TO DESCRIBE OBJECTS IN A PERSONAL MANNER
THROUGH LINE AND SHAPE.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: The students enjoyed this class because they could draw things that they liked.

SHARON found it easier to draw things that she looked at every day rather than plants and bottles and things. She liked the fact that she could put whatever she wanted into the composition.

OBJECTIVE > TO BECOME AWARE OF THE EMOTIVE QUALITIES
OF COLOUR AND FAMILIARISE ONESELF WITH
PAINT AND COLLAGE. See Figure 6.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: All the class understood the moods of colour. They enjoyed the freedom of choosing their own colours, but were confused about why they did not have to use realistic colours.

YVONNE said that she was quite happy with her work and felt that it represented the things that she liked very well. She did not like making up colours though, she would prefer to paint things the way they are.



FIGURE 6.



OBJECTIVE > TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH A LETTERING
PROCESS AND GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMAGERY AND
LETTERING.

GENERAL STUDENTS' EVALUATION: Although the class may not have been the most interesting, the students gained a good understanding of lettering. Finding a personalised type of lettering was challenging.

KAREN enjoyed making up her own letters but thought that working within a structure (i.e. grid) was boring. She liked the idea of making her own book cover and felt that it represented her quite well.

PERSONAL EVALUATION: This sequence of classes was definitely the most positive in terms of the student's motivation. These students need 'personalised' lessons to encourage creativity and to emphasise that what they had to say about themselves was important. On the other hand the structure of the lettering process was not a problem for these students, but I find that there may be a danger for students of low self-esteem to rely too heavily on teachers' directions rather than their own intuitiveness.

From these evaluations it would appear that art is a very valuable method of self-esteem enhancement but a lot depends on the structure, content and objectives of the class. A number of factors must be considered:

- (a) What section of the class to aim the classes for so that students with good drawing skill and quick visual awareness will not be bored and those without will not be intimidated or unable to understand.
- (b) How to challenge fixed ideas about what good art is encouraging different ways of perception and experimental use of materials.
- (c) To centre the subject matter around the student who may have doubts about her self-worth, so that her direct experiences are deemed most worthy of expression. This ensures that art is not just another area from which they feel isolated.

I do not aspire to "teach" students how to look at things in a new way which will enhance their esteem levels, but rather encourage them to trust their own perception and mode of expression and make them realise that this is as worthy as any other. As well as the unique contribution art makes towards "self-actualization" (3), I also feel that success in one area will raise confidence levels and make students re-evaluate their capabilities in others.

Unfortunately art classes can have the reverse effect if an emphasis is on producing wonderful "formula" finished products. For the members of the class who cannot fulfil such requirements, they will come to regard art as another failure area.

Victor Lowenfeld states:

If children developed without any interference from the outside world, no special stimulation for their creative work would be necessary. Every child would use his deeply rooted creative impulse without inhibition confident in his own kind of expression....what civilization has buried we must try to regain by recreating the natural base necessary for such free creation. Whenever we hear children say - 'I can't draw that', we can be sure that some kind of interference has occurred in their lives. (4)

Chapter Three

FOOTNOTES

1. Denis Child, Psychology and the Teacher. 4th Edition. (New York : Holt, Rhinehart and Winston 1986)
2. Frederick Palmer. Art and the Young Adolescent (Oxford : Pergamon Press 1970), p.xi.
3. Elliot W. Eisner. Educating Artistic Vision 2nd Ed. (New York : Macmillan, 1972), p.3.
4. Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth. (New York : MacMillan 1987), p.1.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, as a student teacher of Art, Craft and Design I am limited this year in terms of assessing whether a heightened level of self-esteem regarding one subject can have an effect on other areas of the curriculum.

However, for a student who felt herself to be an all-round low-achiever, to be happy with at least one area of her work, would seem like a step in the right direction towards a re-appraisal of her self-worth.

It is rewarding to point out that art can have a changing effect on the students' self-evaluation once the subject is student centred and all pupils are taken into consideration regardless of their abilities.

The prime value of the arts in education lies, from my point of view, in the unique contribution it makes to the individual's experience with an understanding of the world.

Each "individual's experience" must be taken into consideration. In each school and in each class the factors that could prove problematic for each individual will be different and these should be addressed by the teachers. I hope that my generation of art teachers will have a changing effect on the way art is viewed in schools. With the aid of child centred objectives, the notion of art as being another "accomplishment" or a mere means of releasing pent-up emotion, can be changed.

The Junior Certificate, I feel, is a big step forward as the emphasis is more on the student's personal input rather than the previous "performance on the day" idea. Hopefully we will continue to develop an arts education programme that lets every child express what is good and wholly unique about themselves.

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