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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-  
IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE AND  
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE  
IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT**

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF  
IN THE PRESENT AND  
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE  
IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

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## **Dissertation Abstract.**

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This study investigates the development of the self-identity in adolescence and the role of cultural, social and cognitive factors in the development of the "self". It draws attention to the individual's struggle for personal identity in an ever-changing technological society, where the concern is for mass society rather than on the ~~work~~ of the individual. Adolescents are extremely vulnerable to the pressures of modern society and this is manifested through their desire to conform to popular taste. Biological and cognitive factors in adolescence also contribute to personal anxieties and a loss of self-identity.

Therefore, all adolescents need many means of expressing their ideas - the visual arts is the only visual way they can do this. This study considers how the visual arts can promote personal development through an art program that is involved with an exploration of the self and the immediate environment. The visual arts as a means of personal expression can help students develop an ability to understand, respond to and create art forms that deal with aspects of their own life and their relationship to the world around them.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE	3
Adolescence : A Time of Change	
Psychological Processes and Behaviour in Adolescent Development	
Defining the Self	
Social Learning Theorists' Definition of Self	
The Development of Self-Identity in Adolescence	
Differentiation, Abstractness and Idealism	
Becoming a Personality Theorist	
Identity	
Independence : Autonomy	
The Four Statuses of Identity	
CHAPTER 2	
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRON- MENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-IDENTITY	12
Perception and Experience	
Cultural and Societal Influences on the Individual	
Pressures of Society on the Adolescent	
The Relevance of Art Education in Adolescent Education	
Visual Arts as a Means of Expression	
Visual Arts as a means for the Development of the Self	
Visual Arts as a Linking Factor Between the Student and the Environment	
The Role of the Teacher	
CHAPTER 3	
METHODOLOGY	26
Cognitive and Psychomotor Aims of the Project	
Affective Aims of the Project	
Evaluation	
CONCLUSION	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY	43



## INTRODUCTION



In this dissertation I intend to investigate the development of self-identity in adolescence and the importance of the immediate environment in identity formation.

The first chapter surveys information on the various characteristics of adolescence and it also presents a discussion on the role of adolescence in the development of the individual. An investigation of the biological, intellectual and social factors that contribute to adolescent development is offered in an attempt to understand the complexities of identity formation in this transitional period.

The second chapter considers the role of the immediate environment in the development of the self: how our self-image is affected by the way we perceive the world around us. The immediate environment refers to the people and places that the adolescent has regular contact with, namely, the family, friends, school life and social life. However, the fact that we live in an ever-changing technological society where the pursuit is for mass communication has meant that the distinctions between the immediate and the wider environment have become blurred. An analysis of Irving Kaufman's writings on the visual world today provides an argument for the effects of cultural deterioration on the individual in mass society. This leads into a discussion on the problem of personal identity in a chaotic world and particular consideration is given to the effects of cultural and societal forces on the adolescent.

From this a proposal is made to assist the development of self-identity in adolescence through the exploration of the self and the immediate environment in art activities. The proposal addresses the needs of adolescents and the role of the teacher



in the implementation of art experiences that will enhance and develop a positive self-identity.

The final chapter examines the potential of the proposed art programme to facilitate these aims through an evaluation of work carried out with fifth-year pupils.



## **CHAPTER 1**

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF- IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE**



This chapter deals with factors related to the development of the self-identity in adolescence. A brief introduction to the biological changes in adolescence is necessary in order to investigate the connection between the physical change and the psychological processes and behavioural patterns of adolescence. This leads to an investigation of the meaning of 'the self' and the features that delineate the development of self-identity in adolescence.

### **Adolescence : A Time of Change**

The period of adolescent development and behaviour has been the subject of extensive study and research. Adolescence is the development period between childhood and adulthood, a time when biological, social and cognitive factors become necessary for the transition into adulthood.

Adolescence is a time when the individual experiences many changes, so much so that it has been referred to as a period of 'storm and stress'.<sup>1</sup> It begins with the biological changes of puberty where increases in hormone levels influence the growth spurt and the individual emerges from it with an adult physique and sexual maturity. The biological factors are therefore a crucial aspect of the adolescent's maturation into adulthood.

### **Psychological Processes and Behaviour in Adolescent Development**

On the extent to which the biological change in adolescence affects psychological processes, different views emerge. From the biological theorist's position the physical



changes that occur in adolescence are seen as the over-riding factor related to adolescent behaviour. The biological theorists emphasise the change in drive level that occurs as a result of puberty. On the other hand, the social-learning theorists emphasise the importance of cultural factors in the development of the adolescent. The biological change has an important role in aspects of psychological development, such as personality and behaviour. From a social theorist's perspective, it is the meaning that the adolescent associates with the physical change that occurs that is important. The adolescent's interpretation of these changes will be influenced by his/her understanding of the cultural standards and values that are inherent in his/her own society. Cultural conditioning is viewed as a major factor in the individual's understanding of the self. The self is seen as a product of the person's interaction with others. The self is regarded as a social structure where role-learning is the basic features of socialisation.

The extent to which the biological development of the adolescent influences adolescent behaviour remains open to debate. However, it is the combination of physical development and social and cognitive cognition that contribute to the psychological pressures with which the individual is faced. For example, an adolescent's acceptance or rejection by his/her peers can be influenced by his/her level of physical maturation. We see this most evidently in adolescent males where there is a great emphasis on physical strength and physical maturity amidst the peers, which in turn has social and cognitive underpinnings.



To understand adolescence then would require studying all aspects of this transitional period. However, this dissertation will investigate the development of the self-identity in adolescence.

### **Defining The Self**

This section will deal with some definitions and characteristics of the self. Theories surrounding notions of the self are generally very varied and complex. However, an underlining notion of self-concept is that it is a system of concepts formed by the individual about the self relating to body self, social self and the individual's own perception of abilities and values. Many psychologists believe that the self has two aspects, self-description and self-evaluation, and therefore distinguish between self-concept and self-esteem.

### **Social Learning Theorists' Definition of Self**

The theories of both Charles H. Cooley and George H. Mead define the self in terms of the feelings and perceptions that the individual has about the self. In Mead's theory the self consists of two parts which he refers to as the generalised other which is the 'me' and the 'I' which reacts to the 'me'.<sup>2</sup> The generalised other (the me) is composed of other people's attitudes towards us. It is the looking-glass self-esteem coined by Cooley.<sup>3</sup> The 'I' Mead refers to as the part of the self that decides how the me will behave next.

Both of their theories reveal that self-observation can take several forms: we perceive ourselves by attempting to understand other people's perceptions of us; we attempt to



observe our own inner consciousness of private thoughts and feelings which are exclusively known to the self; also, we observe our own behaviour by looking at the behaviour of another in order to deduce what sort of person we are from our self-observations.

This view that our social interactions with other people is an important source of information for the self is also shared by the theorist, Erik Erikson. Erikson's theory of the self refers to self-identity as opposed to self-concept. According to Erikson, the development of an identity is affected by interpersonal as well as intrapersonal issues.

Identity refers to a self-developed, internal, and ever-changing organisation of one's attitudes and beliefs. It helps one identify one's strengths and weaknesses, and one's uniqueness, as well as similarity to others. Identity provides a sense of continuity of the self over time and a sense of integration of the self.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Development of Self-Identity in Adolescence**

In adolescence, seven features have been delineated in the development of the self. These are: 1) differentiation; 2) individuation; 3) stability; 4) organisation, idealism and abstractness; 5) becoming a personality theorist; 6) identity; and 7) independence.

#### **1) Differentiation, Individualism and Stability**

In adolescence the highest stage of cognition-formal operational thinking is researched. The period of formal operational thinking delineated by Piaget is characterised by the adolescent developing an ability to think abstractly, namely hypothetic-deductive thinking, considering the possible as well



as the real. This stage in adolescence marks the move from concrete thought processes where the child's self-perceptions were very cut and dried, into formal-operational thinking, where the adolescent can think in abstract terms.<sup>5</sup>

Adolescents develop a more differentiated view of themselves as they obtain the ability to think in many diverse ways about their own and others' behaviour. They develop an individuated view of themselves by being able to obtain a distinct view of themselves from others. Furthermore, Piaget suggests that the self-concept in adolescence is more stable and developed in comparison with the child's and he relates this to the transition from concrete to formal operational thinking.<sup>6</sup> Piaget suggests that continued peer interactions help the adolescent decentre, in other words during late adolescence attitudes about the self become strengthened and there is less dependence on the peer groups for social comparison and hence self-evaluation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Organisation, Abstractness and Idealism**

These three characteristics of adolescence reinstate the cognitive developments of adolescence. The adolescent begins to think in abstract and ideal ways about the self. This notion that the adolescent can have different definitions of the self at any one time is emphasised by Strang. Strang has suggested that there are four basic concepts. These are:

- 1) Global self-concept :** "An individual's perceptions of abilities, roles and self-worth".
- 2) Transitory self-concept :** "Subject to momentary fluctuations".



3) **Social self-concept** : "The individual's perception of how others view him/her with regard to social competencies".

4) **Ideal self-concept** : "Represents the individual's view of the ideal self, the individual's view of how he or she would really like to be".<sup>8</sup>

Strang also outlines the dangers of having too high or low expectations of the ideal self. Too high an ideal self-concept might lead to frustration because the individual is not able to reach the competencies that he has set out for himself. Too low an ideal self may lead to a poor self-esteem, as the person is unwilling to attempt to obtain goals that would be achievable for fear of their own failure.<sup>9</sup>

### **Becoming a Personality Theorist**

During adolescence individuals begin to strive towards self-actualisation, namely to be ourselves, achieve our potential, the essence of being whole, free, healthy and purposeful. The adolescent takes on the role of a personality theorist as individuals begin to integrate information that they acquire about the self with previously acquired information about themselves in order to gain a more deep, complex or contextual understanding of the behaviour of themselves or others.

### **Identity**

As has been previously mentioned, notions of identity are an integral part of our understanding of the self. Erik Erikson's theory of identity development focuses on the period of adolescent development. He attributes psychosocial changes in the individual's development with regard to personal and social



roles as important factors in the identity development of the adolescent and especially with regard to the ego identity.<sup>10</sup>

For adolescents, the critical issues that one must resolve is the question: "Who am I?": the stage of identity versus identity confusion. Adolescence is the period of adjustment into adulthood and Erikson's theory argues that the self-concept undergoes significant changes in these years. Erikson refers to adolescents as in a state of psychosocial moratorium.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the adolescent's view of himself and the world around him alters and he/she becomes unsure about his/her identity and role in society.

### **Independence : Autonomy**

Adolescence is a time when the individual experiments with many different roles. The adolescent strives for his own independence, his own autonomy, however, on the other hand, the adolescent has a sense of confusion about important role choices, such as sexuality, politics, religion and moral values.

Another central theme in Erikson's theory is that the way the individual deals with problems in one stage will influence the resolution of development crises in subsequent stages. As a result Erikson believes that if the individual emerges from adolescence with a stable and satisfying sense of identity then the adolescent will move into the adult stages with a firm identity.<sup>12</sup> The converse is also true, where the failure to acquire a positive and stable sense of self makes it difficult for the individual to adjust well into adulthood.



### **The Four Statuses of Identity**

James Marcia has analysed Erikson's theory of identity development and has expanded on Erikson's theory by distinguishing four identity statuses that adolescents experience during the psychosocial crisis of identity versus identity confusion. These are identity achievers, foreclosures, identity diffusions and moratoriums. According to Marcia, the extent of an adolescent's commitment and crisis are two factors that determine the type of identity status that the individual has.<sup>13</sup> Marcia defines crisis as a period when the adolescent is

actively involved in choosing amongst alternative occupations and beliefs. Commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expresses in an occupation or belief.<sup>14</sup>

**Identity diffusions** : The adolescent has not experienced a crisis as they have not made any firm commitments to any ideology, occupation or inter-personal relationship.

**Identity moratoriums** : The adolescent is in the midst of a crisis; he/she considers alternative choices and experiences different roles but they have still not made any final decision or commitment regarding his or her identity.

**Identity foreclosures** : The adolescent has made a commitment to a set of beliefs, values and attitudes without experiencing a crisis or considering any of the alternatives.

**Identity achievers** : The adolescent who has experienced a crisis and has made a commitment to life choices after careful consideration of options available to him or her.



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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF IDENTITY**



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Having researched the development of self-identity in adolescence it is my objective to investigate the relationship of the immediate environment to the development of self-identity and to how an exploration of the immediate environment through art activity can help build a self-identity.

In this dissertation I am not only concerned with the meaning of the environment as our physical surroundings but with how people's attitudes, values and feelings relate to their understanding of the environment and to how a feeling response to one's environment can be nurtured through art education.

### **Perception and Experience**

Man's awareness of his environment is made available to him through his senses: through seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and moving. This sensory response in turn activates the processes of perception whereby, through a feeling response, man interprets his experiences of himself and the world around and he attributes meaning to these experiences in an attempt to know and control his environment. Furthermore, interpretation and meaning will be influenced by the type of reaction we have to our experiences, namely whether it is passive or active.<sup>1</sup> In a discussion on man's awareness of his environment Kaufman comments:

Human perception is a particularly characteristic means whereby man places himself in his environment, knows it and acts upon the incoming information after he has "coded" it for himself and given it a meaning. It is a basic and beginning ingredient of the artistic and creative processes . . . perception influences learning of all kinds in a profound way, and the quality of art is intimately dependent upon its personal functioning.<sup>2</sup>



Rudolf Arnheim believes that perception and expression are inextricably linked as "expression is the primary content of perception".<sup>3</sup> He claims that the way the individual perceives his experiences is informed by a feeling response which in turn becomes the vehicle for one's expressive experience.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Arnheim declares that the individual's environmental factors or frame of reference is an integral part of how he/she perceives the world around him/her and that through maturation the individual's powers of perception become more refined.<sup>5</sup>

By frame of reference he means that the experiences we have of a situation are always affected by what we bring to the situation in terms of our immediate needs and our general past history. This follows a behaviourist's perspective where the self is seen as a product of its environment through one's constant reference to the external world and reinforcement by it. Arnheim comments

The self expresses itself most clearly through the dealings with the outer world. There is no psychological justification for the separation of the inner self from the reactions to outer reality.<sup>6</sup>

Lowenfeld describes two types of creative beings the visual type and the non-visual (haptic) type. He believes that these two types can be distinguished by the end products of artistic experiences and by the attitudes of individuals to their own experience.<sup>7</sup> Lowenfeld confirms this when he says "these types refer to the mode of perceptual organization and the conceptual categorization of the external environment".<sup>8</sup> The visually minded person is one who familiarises himself with his environment through the eyes of a spectator. In visual



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observation he observes the whole before analysing the details within this whole, and finally synthesising these parts into a new perceptual whole. The haptic person or non-visual type on the other hand is concerned with "muscular sensations, kinaesthetic experiences, touch impressions, and all experiences which place the self in value relationships to the outside world".<sup>9</sup> In art the haptic type uses the self to portray his subjective experiences by means of touch, bodily sensations and kinaesthetic functions. A discussion on how the art teacher can help develop both modes of perceptions will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter.

### **Cultural and Societal Influences on the Individual**

In order to be able to investigate ways in which we can teach aesthetic values in art we must be aware of the cultural background of the individual whom we wish to teach. This section deals with the relationship of cultural and societal factors to the learner's personal development in his/her everyday world.

Irving Kaufman believes that culture and society in general has an important role to play in how the individual perceives himself in relation to the world around him.<sup>10</sup> He claims that in our technological advanced society there is no longer emphasis on the individual but on mass culture. Kaufman attributes this to the nature of modern society, the fact that we live in a commercially orientated world where the underlying quest is for mass success within mass society.<sup>11</sup>

In this age of what Kaufman refers to as a 'visual clutter'<sup>12</sup> ubiquitous visual imagery bombards the individual for commercial exploitation. Kaufman declares that modern man falls victim to this wide array of visual imagery, so much so that



there is a danger of his 'sensory exhaustion'.<sup>13</sup> By this he means that the emphasis on speed, efficiency and the indiscriminate spread of the visual has stifling effects on the individual's mind. With the overwhelming quantity of visual imagery the distinctions between looking - physical visualisation and seeing - the acquiring of a personal understanding through the perceptual processes become vague. Kaufman says:

We are submerged by the visual and at the same time prevented from really perceiving it. Instead of leading us to inquire into the contents it often dulls the edge of understanding and stifles imagination . . . the more we see, the less we are able or willing to practice the art of seeing, with all that it implies in personally spontaneous responses.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite possible then that the uncertainty in today's changing world contributes to the confusions in how the individual perceives the self in relation to its surroundings.

### **Pressures of Society on the Adolescent**

The adolescent can be seen as the subject to which the commercial nature of our society directs itself towards most often. In adolescence the individual is very often inexperienced to make solid judgements between what is good and what is bad and therefore they fall prey to the pressures of the commercial world. It is the world of popular music, fashion and fast cars that attract the adolescent and to which the mass media ultimately exploit.

The effects of such pressures results in the adolescent feeling the urge to conform to popular taste, to be the same as his/her peers. It is only in later adolescence that the individual



can decentre or move away from the peer group to the development of his/her own individual taste.

Up to this stage I have considered how human beings and in particular the adolescent's perceptions of his surroundings are formed and his cultural and social background. It is necessary to give some consideration as to how an artist learning might develop the student's perception skills so that he/she can benefit from a better understanding, appreciation and more meaningful response to his/her own environment. What benefits does an art education have for adolescents? What is the role that the art teacher must play in the development of the student's visual awareness? These are but a few questions which need to be addressed.

### **The Relevance of Art in Adolescent Education**

Art education is ultimately concerned with the growth and development of individuals towards a more fulfilled life. In adolescent art education the concepts must therefore be with the needs of adolescents. These needs range from the creative and perceptual growth of the individual to personal and social considerations, intellectual growth, emotional stability, the need for aesthetic sensitivity, talent, skills, etc. Commenting on the goals of art education John A. Michael states:

Art/art experiences are used to help students in their learning/development move to a higher level of knowing (about themselves, art, and their culture), of feeling of perceiving and of personally/creatively expressing with art media.<sup>16</sup>



In devising a school art programme to serve the needs of adolescents Michael has set out the following guidelines for a viable art programme. These are:

1. Understand and accept their changing physical social development.
2. Develop more and more responsibility and become independent as they move toward adulthood.
3. Become more aware of the problem of the artist and creative aspect of art.
4. Develop the unique and distinctive personality of each individual.
5. Develop self-confidence in their own art work and in their own abilities so as to understand critical evaluation.
6. Relate to their peers of both sexes.
7. Find a release of tensions brought about by this period of change and insecurity.
8. Obtain recognition and praise of themselves and their art work (when merited).
9. Develop knowledge, skills and abilities (perceptual, physical, aesthetic, intellectual and creative) as these relate to the visual and related arts.
10. Develop a knowledge of the history of art, as well as contemporary art.
11. Discover many types of personal expression: naturalistic, expressive, and abstract, including an awareness of visual/non-visual perception.
12. Build a programme from the elementary through the secondary level that is interrelated and integrated.
13. Deal with individual interests and abilities.
14. Deal with career education and vocational opportunities in the visual arts.



### **Visual Arts as a Means of Expression**

Expressing one's self (thinking, feeling and perceiving) are central to the process of making art. You have to have something to say about whatever it is that you are doing, creating, communicating and expressing. Michael regards motivation as an important source for creating art and he has attributed the self, one's experiences, environment and media/skill as motivational sources for the art process.<sup>18</sup>

It is during the period of adolescence when cognitive competencies of the individual increases through abstract thinking processes that the adolescent becomes more concerned with their identity, their relationship with the world around them. Adolescents become concerned with issues such as career, values, adult goals and behaviours, etc. The visual arts can therefore become a means of expression where pent-up feelings, emotions, frustrations, etc. can be released.

### **Visual Arts as a Means for the Development of the Self**

As a major task confronting the adolescent is to develop a sense of individual identity, to find answers to the questions "who am I?" and "where am I going?" the advantages of participating in art activity is particularly significant. An art curriculum which aims to develop the personal expression of the student and the inner realisation of self through the transforming of personal experience into visual symbols is of real value to the pupil. Kaufman's theory of art education promotes the idea of a personal and gratifying experience through a qualitative



engagement with the subject where the ultimate aims are self-discovery.<sup>19</sup> Lowenfeld also promotes the importance of self-direction, self-fulfilment and the development of the self-identity in art education. He says:

The focus of these school art programmes should be on the process of making art and not on the art product, and should be based on the needs and desires of the students themselves - to identify with oneself, to identify with others, to identify with a product and to be able to set problems and goals for oneself and to be responsible for the direction and method of expression.<sup>20</sup>

Kaufman stresses the adverse effects of the cultural deterioration and general lack of aesthetic concern about our technological society on the individual.<sup>21</sup> He stresses the difficulty of retaining a sense of individuality within our mass society. However, on the other hand, Kaufman believes that problems of self-identity, cultural pressures and personal anxiety are the impetus necessary for personal creativity. He says:

The personal crisis of anxiety that usually accompanies the search for self-identity may be the very factor engendering exploration and the process of creation through its functionings are frequently well hidden in the preconscious or unconscious mind.<sup>22</sup>

### **Visual Arts as a Linking Factor Between the Student and the Environment**

The teaching of academic disciplines is still very much geared towards subjective learning where the emphasis is on fact-orientated information and the ethic of the classroom is still to know the answer. The pupil is being prepared for the world of work whereas other areas of the student's development such as



personality and the individual's drive for personal identity is suppressed.

The very fact that the individual is a product of his society suggests that culture impinges on the individual and shapes his personality. Since art education is preparing people for life an art education is extremely important. The development of the student's visual language involves understanding, feeling and expressing and relating his personal development to one's everyday world.

Kaufman believes that the self and his society, the work of art and its environment are all inextricably linked.<sup>23</sup> He believes that what is important for education is that "the relationship between the self and surroundings be on a balanced, sophisticated and individually vital level".<sup>24</sup> Furthermore Kaufman confirms that a selective approach to our awareness for our environment where one adapts to parts of it, while changing other aspects of it can be the impetus necessary for a self-chosen direction in art where the individual is equally involved in shaping a unique, image of the world around him.<sup>25</sup>

As the individual is a product of society Kaufman admits that cultural pressures do seep into the classroom. However, he also believes that it is necessary to see the value of these cultural and societal forces rather than trying to dissuade the adolescent from such influences.<sup>26</sup>

Michael also sees the process of creating art as an important linking factor between the student and his environment. He states:



The arts vivify and extend human experience, make us sensitive and aware of who we are and what we believe while mirroring ourselves and our society.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Role of the Art Teacher**

The extent to which the art teacher should accept responsibility for the development of the student's visual awareness is an issue which will always be a source of debate in art education. Over the years many approaches to art education have been developed. Many art teachers consider their role in the literal sense of equipping students with knowledge of formal values such as line, texture, colour, the manipulation of different media and a knowledge of the history of art (namely, to be able to talk and write about art topics, famous artists, architecture, etc. Michael has classified this approach to art teaching as 'Art for Art's Sake'.<sup>28</sup> The teacher who uses this approach is only concerned with the cognitive aspects of art - the knowledge of the subject and the quality of art work being produced by students.

Other art teachers would promote a more uninhibited mode of teaching where the teacher sees himself/herself as the agent to help students develop a visual language as a way of understanding, feeling and communicating their own ideas relating to their personal development in their own world. Lowenfeld describes this approach as a process of self-discovery where the teacher engages with the student in a sympathetic and unobtrusive manner in order that the student's own creative thinking can develop.<sup>29</sup> Michael refers to this philosophic approach to teaching art as "Art as a Means of Expression".<sup>20</sup> This type of teaching is very much student-







orientated. The other philosophy concerning art teaching Michael has classed as 'Art as an Instrument'.<sup>31</sup> The art teacher who uses this teaching approach is concerned more with the individual's development as a person rather than with learning about art or with the making of art products.

Michael believes that art teachers should strive to nurture aspects of all three philosophies in art teaching where each approach can be adapted to suit the various needs of the students.<sup>32</sup>

The teaching of art must encompass two important objectives if it is to have any significance to the learner. These can be defined as (a) nurture - extrinsic aspects of which the content or subject matter of the practical skills in the art is to be learned by the student and (b) nature - the intrinsic qualities and abilities where value and deeper meaning can be developed by the student in connection to his artwork.

If the art teacher deals with both nature and nurture objectives in art education the needs of both visual type students and haptic type students can be stimulated through art experiences. Art education should provide the atmosphere and generate the appropriate experiences for the stimulation of both visual qualities: shape, form, structure etc. and also provide experiences with haptic qualities: emotional feelings, dynamic qualities, moods and personal feelings evolving from art experiences. Thus the art teacher has to be a stimulator, motivator, guider and facilitator in the many aspects of art education. In planning for the cognitive (content) the psychomotor (skills) and the affective (attitude) in the art programme the art teacher enhances the development of both



creative types and provides an atmosphere where creativity can be fostered.

SWIFT BROOK  
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### Footnotes

1. Eileen Adams and Colin Ward, Art and the Built Environment, a Teacher's Approach (Longman for the Schools Council : London) 1982, p. 25.
2. Irving Kaufman, Art and Education in Contemporary Culture (The Macmillan Company ; New York, 1966), p. 177.
3. Elliot W. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision (Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. : New York, 1972), p. 74.
4. Ibid.
5. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, p. 66.
6. Adams and Ward, Art and the Built Environment, p. 26.
7. Viktor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth 8th ed. Macmillan Publishing Company :L New York 1987, p. 356.
8. Ibid., p. 357.
9. John A. Michael, Art and Adolescence Teaching Art at the Secondary Level (Teachers College Press : New York, 1983), p. 133.
10. Kaufman, Art and Education, p. 386.
11. Ibid., p. 391.
12. Ibid., p. 387.
13. Ibid., p. 415.
14. Ibid.
15. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, p. 89.
16. Michael, Art and Adolescence, p. 26.
17. Ibid., p. 81.
18. Ibid., p. 28.







19. Kaufman, Art and Education, p. 314.
20. Lowenfeld and Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth, p. 354.
21. Kaufman, Art and Education, p. 389.
22. Ibid., p. 490.
23. Ibid., p. 332.
24. Ibid., p. 333.
25. Ibid., p. 332.
26. Ibid., p. 333.
27. Michael, Art and Adolescence, p. 3.
28. Ibid., p. 15.
29. Eisner, Educating artistic vision, p. 156.
30. Michael, Art and Adolescence, p. 14.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**



This chapter utilises the work that I carried out with my fifth year pupils in Colaiste Bride. The particular sequence that I used was one that I hoped would enhance some aspect of the pupil's self-identity and would encourage the importance of one's immediate environment in the development of the self. The cognitive, psychomotor and affective aims of the project were as follows.

### **Cognitive and Psychomotor aims**

1. To develop practical, perceptual and critical skills.  
Cognitive aims : To give students an understanding of low relief perspective, colour and tone.  
Psychomotor aims : That students would acquire skill in a new painting technique - water-colour.
2. That students would improve drawing and observational skills.
3. That students would gain an understanding of the manipulation of cardboard through low relief card constructions.
4. That student would improve and/or acquire new skills with tools and materials.

### **Affective Aims**

1. To encourage the importance of personal identity.
2. To help students develop personal values, gain self-awareness and self-confidence.
3. To demonstrate how one's immediate environment can contribute to the enrichment of the art work in the art class.



4. To promote a 'sense of place' a feeling response to student's immediate environment.
5. To promote the unique and personal expression of each student by transforming past and present experiences into visual symbols of personal meaning and value.

The starting point of this project was a series of observational self-portrait drawings where students used different drawing media to express different moods/emotions. The group was then introduced to the theme of the project 'Me and My World' and stimulation for ideas related to the theme was provided by looking at the work of different artists who have dealt with the concept of "self" for example, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Brian Bourke, Francis Bacon.

This led into a discussion on how one's immediate environment relates to one's self-concept. Stimulation was provided by looking at examples of artists' work which responded to their understanding of their immediate environment such as, Gerald Dillon, Gwen John and Norah McGuinness.

### **Evaluation**

As identity is an important issue in the lives of adolescents a project on the self provided students with an internal motivational source. However to assess the success of the project in terms of the personal development in identity formation is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

In the first stage of the sequence students were given art instruction in both visual and haptic qualities for their self-portrait drawings. In addition to pointing out visual aspect - correct proportions, details etc. Subjective (haptic) aspects were



developed by giving movement and feeling to their work through gestural drawings portraying different moods/emotions. A strong desire for visual acuity was evident in the attempts to portray naturalistic representations of visual details, proportions, light and shade. To counteract this the next lesson in the sequence was devised to encourage a more free and exploratory approach. Students had to use two contrasting colours to paint their self-portraits - evoking the expressive character of their face. Stimulation was provided by looking at examples of work by the German Expressionists. It was at this stage that I realised the extent to which visual perception dominates the art work of adolescents. Students were generally hesitant to use what they referred to as "mad colours" to paint their portraits.

It was the most strongly visually minded students who experienced the greatest difficulty in having to rely on non-visual modes of perception which were not their natural way of seeing. This is evident in the art work of student A. It is evident from the haphazard ordering of shape and colour into isolated patches that this student experienced difficulty in extending from a visual mode of perception into a greater visual awareness and sensitivity through a consideration of haptic qualities as well.

Another example of work from this lesson was completed by a student who is not identifiable as visual or non-visual, showing qualities of both orientations in her work. Student B shows an ability to express herself aesthetically and emotionally through her sensitivity of colour, shape and line which gives the work a feeling of 'unity'. She tackles the problem of how to express one's self in art quite courageously by her efforts to convey a "feeling of anguish" in her self-portrait.



In the next stage of the project students created low relief card constructions of their self-portraits that would be positioned in the foreground of a painting composition. The self-portrait was to be surrounded by personal objects of personal significance and a window in the background would provide an image of some aspect of the individual's immediate environment. The group was encouraged to think about their self-image and to think about their integration within their environment in terms of their personality, hobbies, interests and surroundings. Home activity work was therefore an important source of information for a 'personal history' of the 'self' and the immediate environment.

The influence of modern culture and the compulsion of adolescent to conform to popular tastes was demonstrated by tendencies to depict stereotypical examples of popular culture within the work.

Lowenfeld suggests that the intensity to which the creator identifies with the work through his level of involvement with it can be a means of understanding the degree of self-identification of the individual. He suggests that a low level of self-identification is demonstrated through a low level of involvement with stereotypical repetitions to a high level where the student is truly engaged with the art work by portraying meaningful and personally significant things.<sup>1</sup>

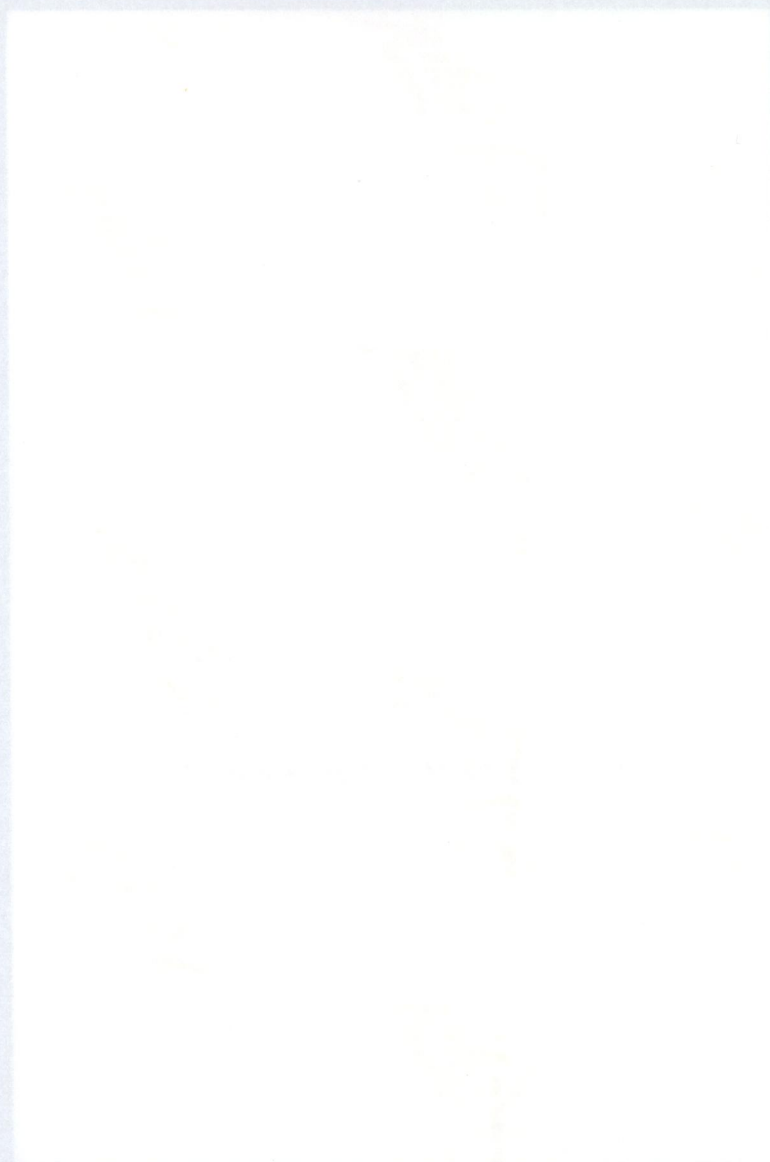
It was therefore important for the students to see that art activities springing from popular cultural sources go beyond the tribe handling of materials and the stereotypical expression of form. Students had to be concerned with the relevance of symbols of modern culture to their own lives, so that art could





Student A.









Student B.







provide a means of personal expression for the individual within his society.

As art is informed by the nature of one's intellectual, aesthetic and emotional growth just the same as it is stimulated by spontaneous and intuitive insights it can be argued that the intensity of realisation of self and environment informs, supports and shapes the vision that each person creates. Therefore if the adolescent is in a state of psychosocial moratorium<sup>2</sup> his views of himself and the world around him are altered and it is not surprising that this sense of confusion will be reflected in his art work.

In the early stages of the pictorial composition, the artwork as a means of purposeful expression of one's environment was indeed a challenge for many and intimidating. Students responded by copying ideas from visual aids and from each other. The bedroom became the most popular signifier of one's environment. Radios, stereos, soft toys and things connected to school life such as school bags, the school crest, were the most popular objects chosen to express the self-identity.

However, there were also some examples of work where students were actively engaged in a process of self-discovery through their involvement and commitment to a process where personal meaning could be established.

In Student B's work (whom I referred to earlier) there was a high level of involvement to depict personally significant things. In representing musical instruments she expresses her passion for music. The guitar is rendered with definite accuracy. This was possible through haptic perception as well as visual perception where the student's familiarity with the instrument



through her physical contact with it made it easier for her to draw the subject. The scissors and comb are visual symbols of her desire to become a hairdresser. The window depicting an aspect of the pupil's environment is a section of her room that contains objects of personal significance, for example, tapes, souvenirs of concerts, etc. The colour scheme which has been used is also significant as it reflects her admiration for her favourite musician: Bob Marley.

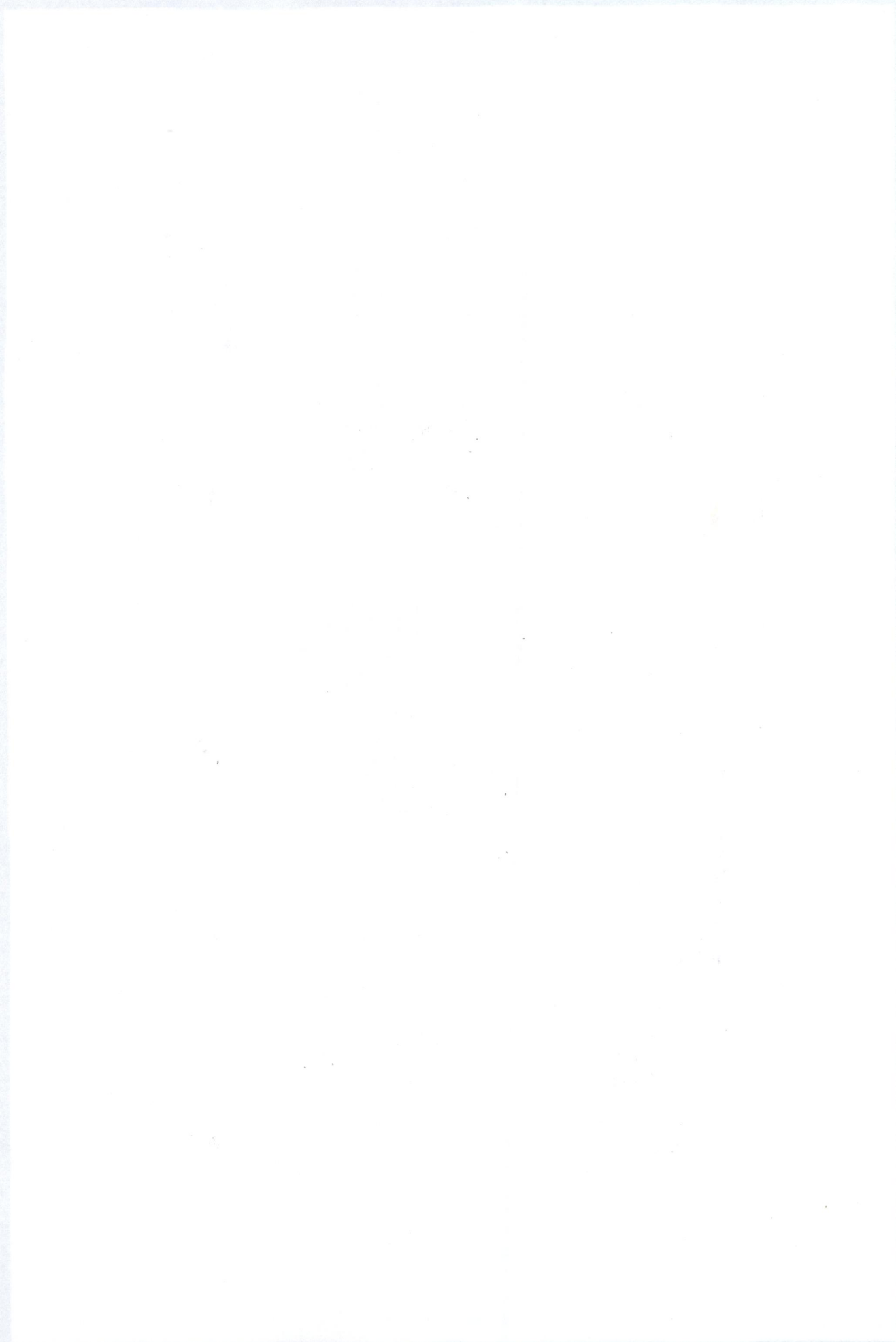
Student A also draws on the symbolic functions of art. The self-portrait is depicted inside the student's bedroom. The room is deliberately sparse, the door is ajar and a black shape outlines the inside of the door. When questioned about this the student replied that it had symbolic purposes. As opposed to drawing in the landing the student expressed her desire to paint the space in black as a metaphor for one's ignorance of what life has in store for them. Her response signifies her awareness of the conceptual aspects of art and it also indicates her awareness of the important decisions that face the adolescent.





Student B







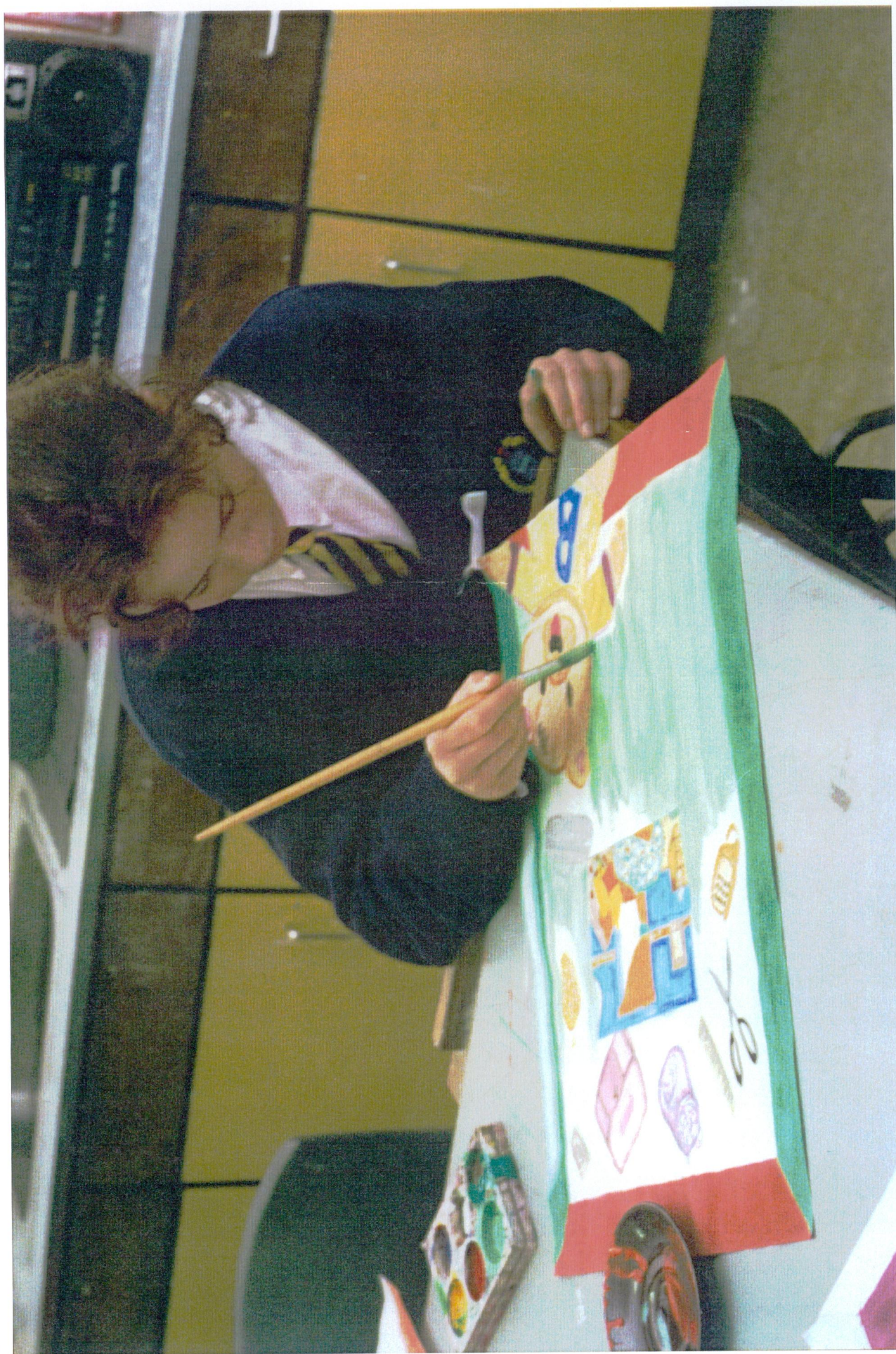


Student A.













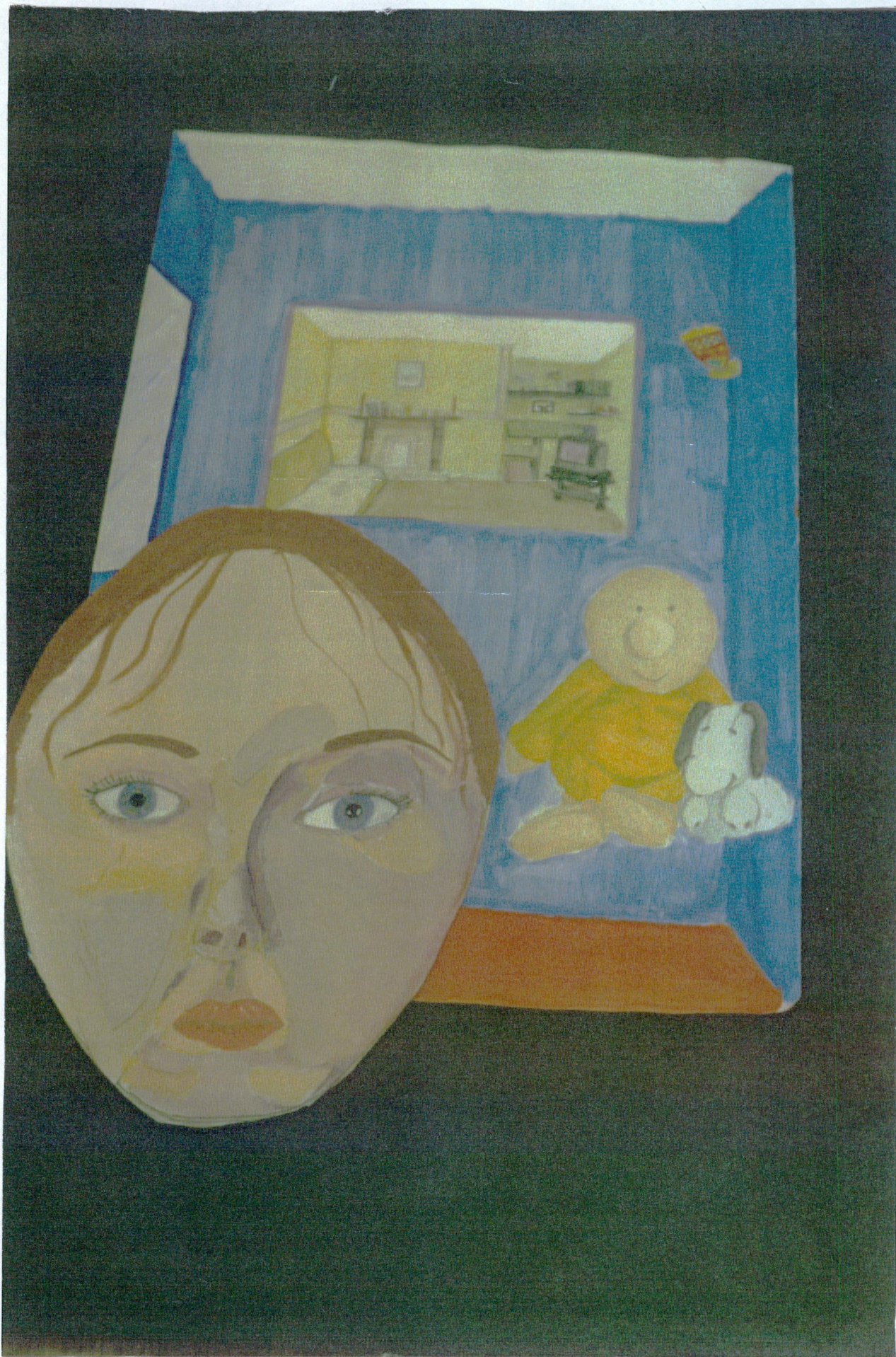


























## FOOTNOTES

1. Lowenfeld and Brittain, Creative and Mental Growth, p. 59.
2. In Erikson's theory, a crisis involving the individual's development with regard to issues defining identity. Jerome B. Dusek, Adolescent Development and Behaviour (ed.) (Prentice-Hall International : New Jersey, 1987), p. 22.



## CONCLUSION



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This project was devised to facilitate the particular needs of adolescents in today's world. In highlighting the many pressures on the adolescent in this transitional period of one's life - the frustrations and anxieties connected to the biological change, the emerging sense of relationship to the world, the impinging pressure of culture as it affects what was thought to be a fixed sense of self and the effects of the change from concrete thought processes to abstract reasoning thought processes I have hoped to underline the importance of the cultivation of personal expression in adolescent art education. Art experiences can do for students what no other subject in the school curriculum can do. It gives students a personal means of visual expression/communication.

Art activities involve intuitive/creative thinking. For example in the work intuitive/creative decisions are made in the placement of objects/shapes in the picture, the size of the objects/shapes, the style of painting, the colouring of objects and shapes. To do this the creator needs a certain amount of self-confidence and self-belief so that he/she is not afraid of making mistakes. Decision-making is an important part of everyday life and therefore the development of intuitive/creative/divergent thinking in adolescence through art experiences is important for one's transition into adulthood.

In an overview of the work completed by students in the project, the findings support the claim that adolescents are in a stage of identity crisis. However, in devising an art programme that centred around the individual where the self-image was explored in relation to the immediate environment, it was also possible to see the potential of such an art programme in the



development and enrichment of personal experiences. The adolescent through formal-operational thinking is continually projecting feelings, values, and ideas onto his environment as well as receiving sensations and messages from it.

Therefore although the tendency to conform to popular taste was demonstrated through the work, through evaluation and discussion students become more aware of cultural and societal forces influencing the individual and more readily accepted the value of art work which is fuelled by direct experiences. Thus the project helped to demystify the place of visual art in real life experience by promoting learning related to oneself and to the immediate environment.



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