

A CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF ADOLESCENCE

ART EDUCATION AS MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH

IDENTITY CAN BE EXPLORED

The dissertation emphasises the importance of identity formation during adolescence. The concerns of young people such as the search for self-identity, the formulation of the persona and role confusion are examined in Chapter One.

Chapter Two focuses on the hypothesis that art activity is a medium through which the pupil can gain some insight into their own individuality. The methodology of a more individualised approach to education is investigated in the second half of this chapter.

Chapter Three outlines the important role of art education in relation to personal development through a self portraiture project.

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IDENTITY CAN BE EXPLORED

by

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I would like to thank my tutor Eileen Doyle for her
time and attention with my dissertation.

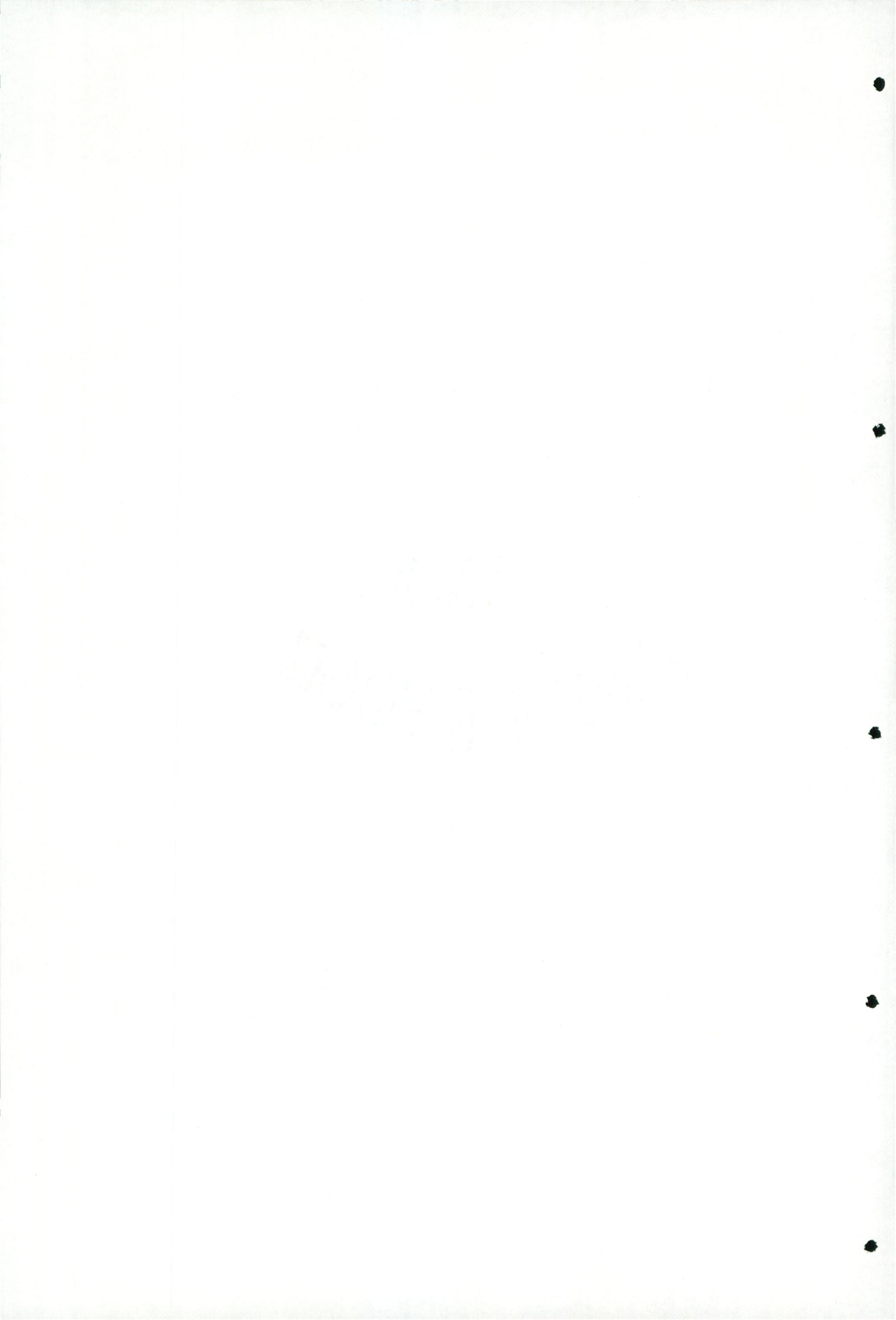


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INTRODUCTION

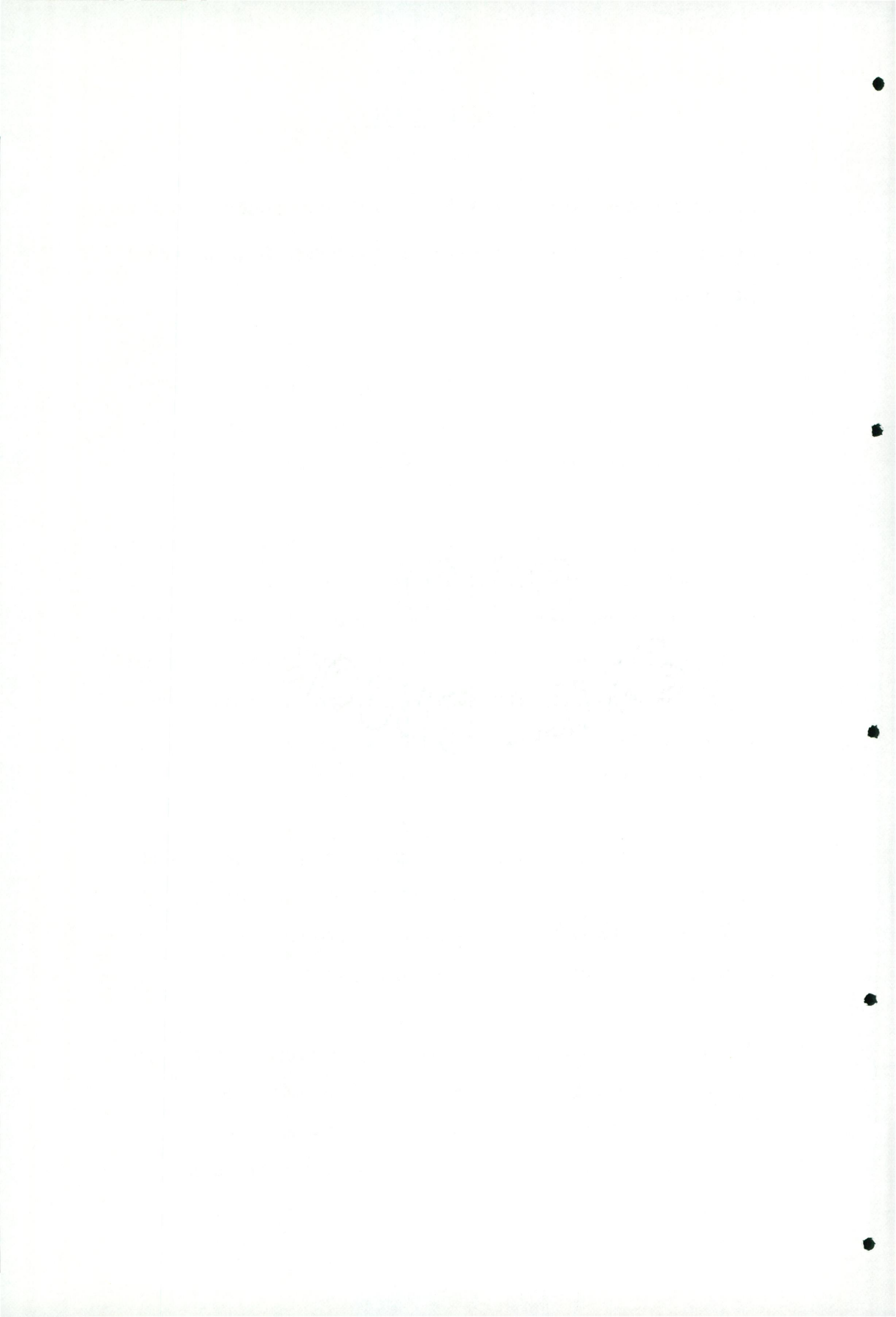
Adolescence is a time when the individual experiences many changes, so much so that it has been referred to as a period of 'storm and stress'.¹

The inner world of the adolescent is a turbulent and intense world, teeming with problems that must be dealt with if the transition from childhood to adulthood is to be accomplished successfully.

Rapid physical, mental and sexual growth generates enormous energy which adolescents must learn to channel. Their emerging intellectual maturity makes many courses of action possible. They begin to make occupational, sexual and ideological choices. They inevitably go through a period of internal confusion in which the search for commitment is characterised by drastic advances and retreats, by both total commitment and total repudiation.

Adolescents tend to organise their ideas according to certain societal expectations. In our complex society full of conflict and ambiguity, the adolescent has the terrifying task of identifying a coherent set of values in which to invest his/her energies and self confidence.

The adolescent can be seen as a subject to which the commercial nature of our society directs itself towards most often. In adolescence the individual is 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 tastes.

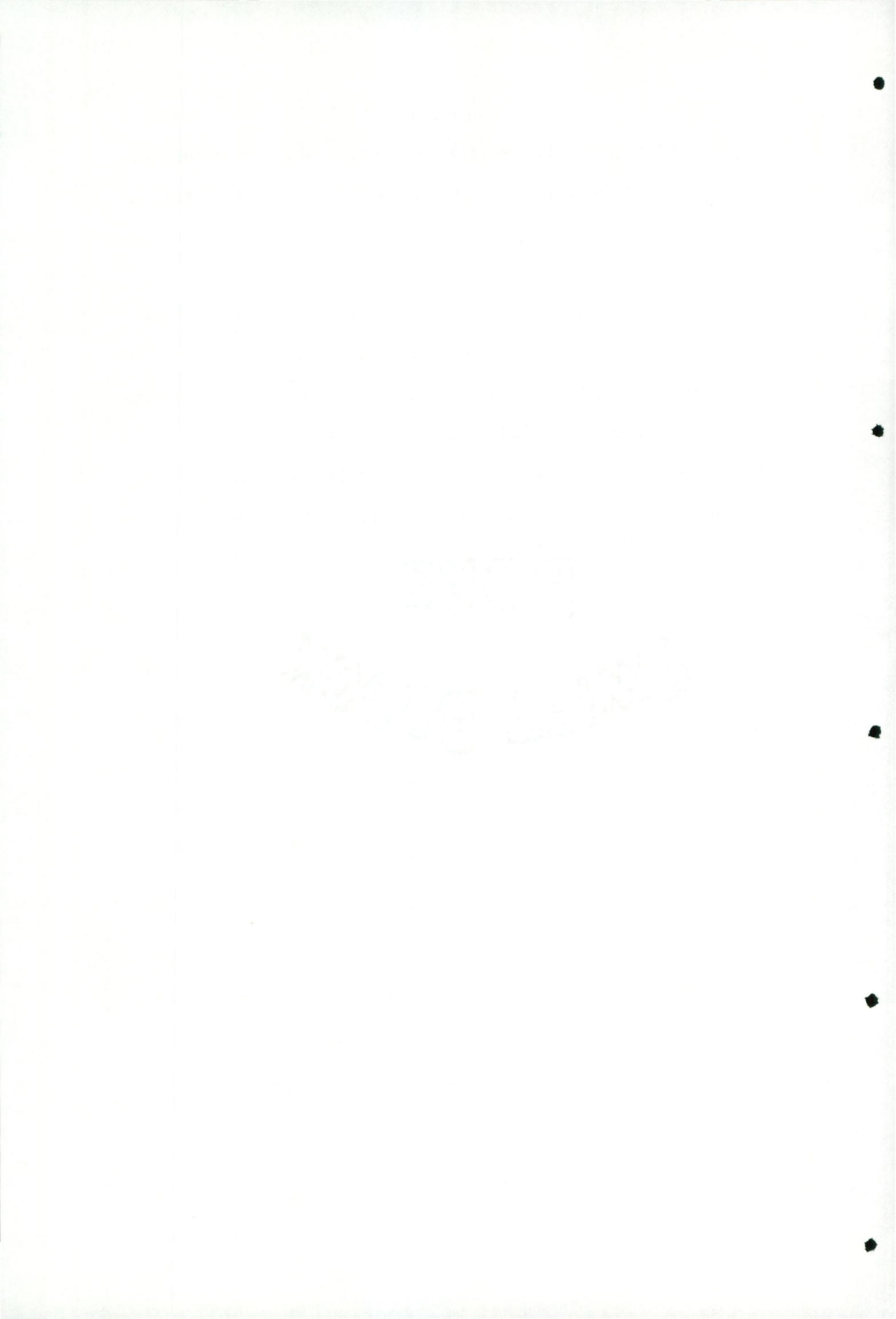
In an attempt to establish a sense of self, adolescents claim the right to make independent decisions about the clothes they wear, their social behaviour, values and opinions. Social roles and activities of the adult generation may be initiated or opposed. Young adolescents often select role models, either from family, school or popular culture and attempt to emulate their lifestyles and habits, having judged these to be acceptable and desirable.

Self knowledge has long been recognised as essential to personal effectiveness. "Know myself" was inscribed over two thousand years on the Grecian Temple Apollo. One fundamental aspect of early adolescence is the search for self-identity. As children, they rely heavily on parents, teachers and other adults for feed-back and confirmation of their identity. During adolescence, peer values begin to have greater significance until finally values are internalised.

Identity denotes the sum of perceptions or views individuals hold of themselves, sometimes refereed to as 'ideal self, self concept and self image'. The self concept is the individuals awareness of his/her own self.

It is an awareness of one's own identity. The process of development during adolescents can be considered as a process of becoming more and more aware of one's own characteristics and consequent feelings about them.

Adolescence is the development period between childhood and adulthood, a time when biological, social and cognitive factors become necessary for the transition to adulthood. It is during this transitory period between twelve and eighteen that adolescents live for as much as six hours a day, five days a week in second level schools. It is therefore necessary for the second level teacher to understand the psychological processes and behavioural patterns of adolescence.



CHAPTER 1

IDENTITY DEFINED IN RELATION TO ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence 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. On the extent to which biological change in adolescence affects psychological processes, different views emerge. From biological theorists position the physical changes that occur in adolescence are seen as the over-riding factor related to strong correlation between self-image and body image. In our society, having an acceptable body build is an important factor in evaluating ourselves. It is during this stage of physical maturation that young adolescence develop an over-riding consciousness about their appearance. Biological theorists, Lerner and Gilbert, have found that "adolescents are well aware of different body builds and often have negative reactions to their own physique".²

The biological theorists emphasise the influences of physical change to adolescent development of a self image. 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 the social theorists perspective, it is the meaning that adolescent associates with the physical change that occurs that is important.

The adolescents interpretation of these changes will be influenced by his/her understandings of the cultural standards and values that are inherent in his/her own society. Cultural conditioning is viewed as a major factor in the individuals understanding of the self.

Many psychologists believe that the self has two aspects, self-description and self-evaluation, and therefore distinguish between self-concept and self-esteem. The social learning 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 'me'.³ The generalised other (the me) is composed of other peoples attitudes towards us. It is the "looking glass theory of self"⁴ coined by Cooley. The individual is forming his/her self image as he/she receives feedback from others. Cooley suggests that the process is not wholly a matter of "bouncing off the environment" but also one of "reflecting on the environment"⁵ as cognitive abilities make it possible for the individual to reflect on their experiences and interpret them.

This view that our social interaction with other people is an important source of information for the self is also shared by the theorist Erik Erickson. Erickson's theory of the self refers to self-identity as opposed to self concept. According to Erickson 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".⁶

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE

Jerome B. Dusek in his published research on adolescence and development has outlined seven features that have been delineated in the development of the self :

- (1) Differentiation (2) Individualisation (3) Stability
(4) Organisation, idealism and abstractness (5) Becoming a personality theorist (6) Identity and (7) Independence

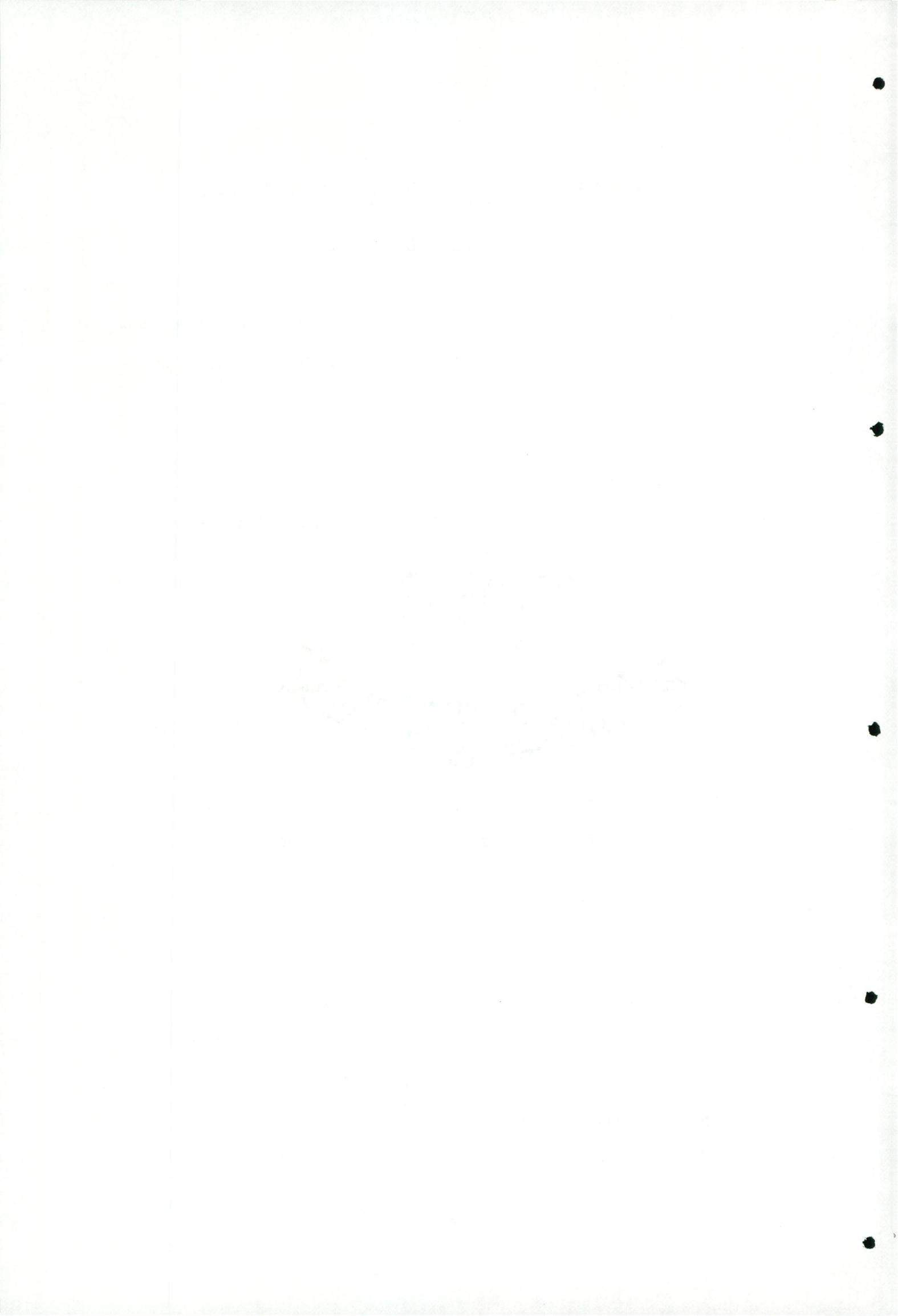
(1) Differentiation, Individualism and Stability

The period of formal operational thinking delineated by Piaget is characterised by the adolescence developing an ability to think abstractly, namely hypothetic - deductive thinking, considering the possible as well as the real. Piaget suggests that the self-concept in adolescence is more stable and developed in comparison the child's and he relates this to the transition from concrete to formal operational thinking.¹

(2) Organisation, Abstractness and Idealism

The adolescent begins to think in an abstract and ideal way about the self. This notion that the adolescent can have different definitions of the self at any one time is emphasised by Strana Strang has suggested that there are four basic concepts. These are :

- (1) Global self-concept: "An individual perceptions of abilities, roles and



self worth”.

- ▷ (2) Transition 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 individuals view of the ideal self the individuals view of how he or she would really like to be”.²

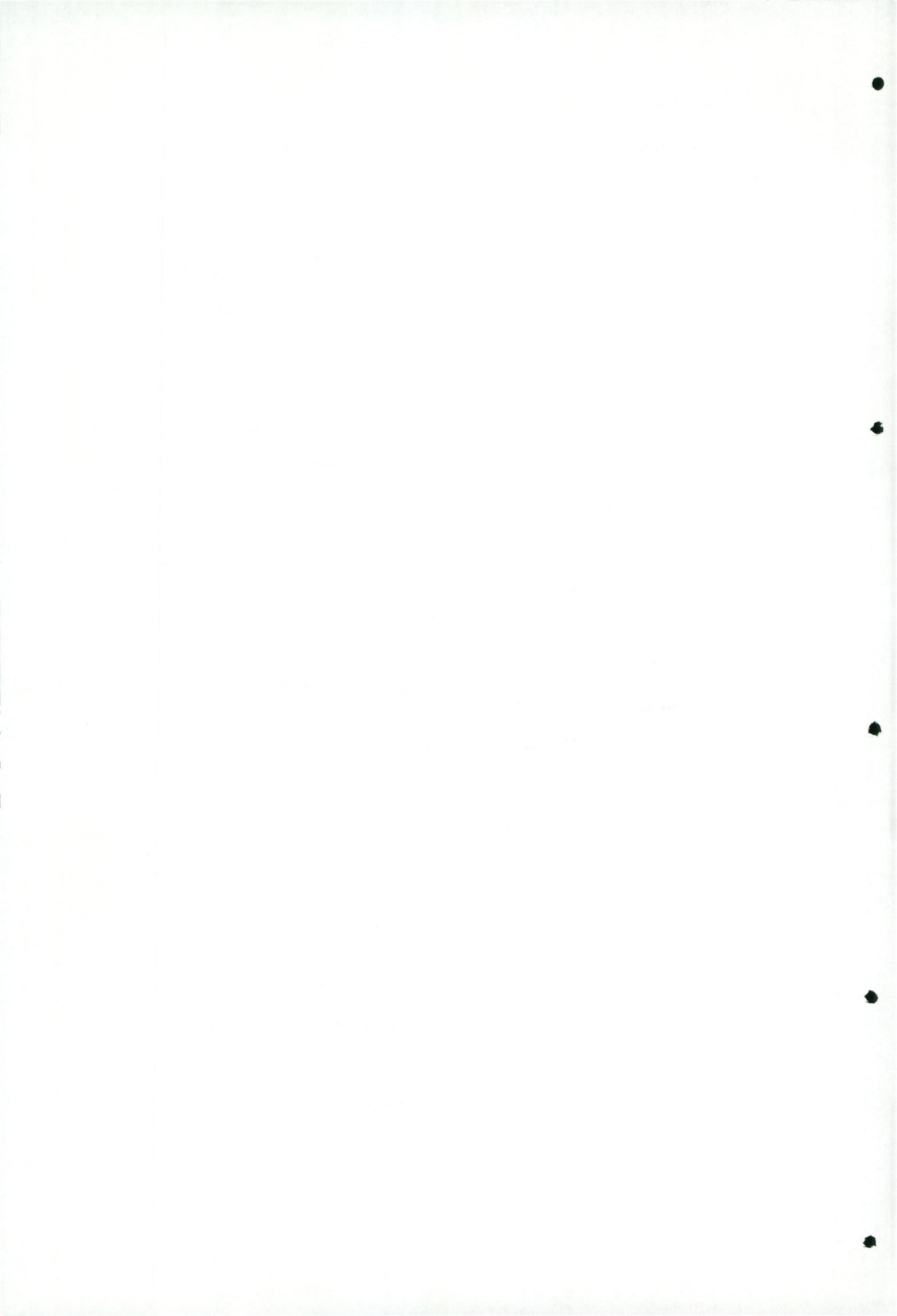
Strang also outlines the dangers of having too high or low expectations of the ideal self. Too high an ideal self-concept might lead to frustration because the individual is not able to reach the competence the ideal self esteem may lead to a poor self-esteem, as the person is unwilling to attempt to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

(3) Becoming and Personality Theorist

The adolescent takes on the role of a personality theorist where he/she relates previously acquired information about themselves and others to present behaviour. In this way adolescent individuals begin to strive towards self actualisation, namely be ourselves, achieve our potential, the essence of being whole, free, healthy and purposeful.

(4) Identity

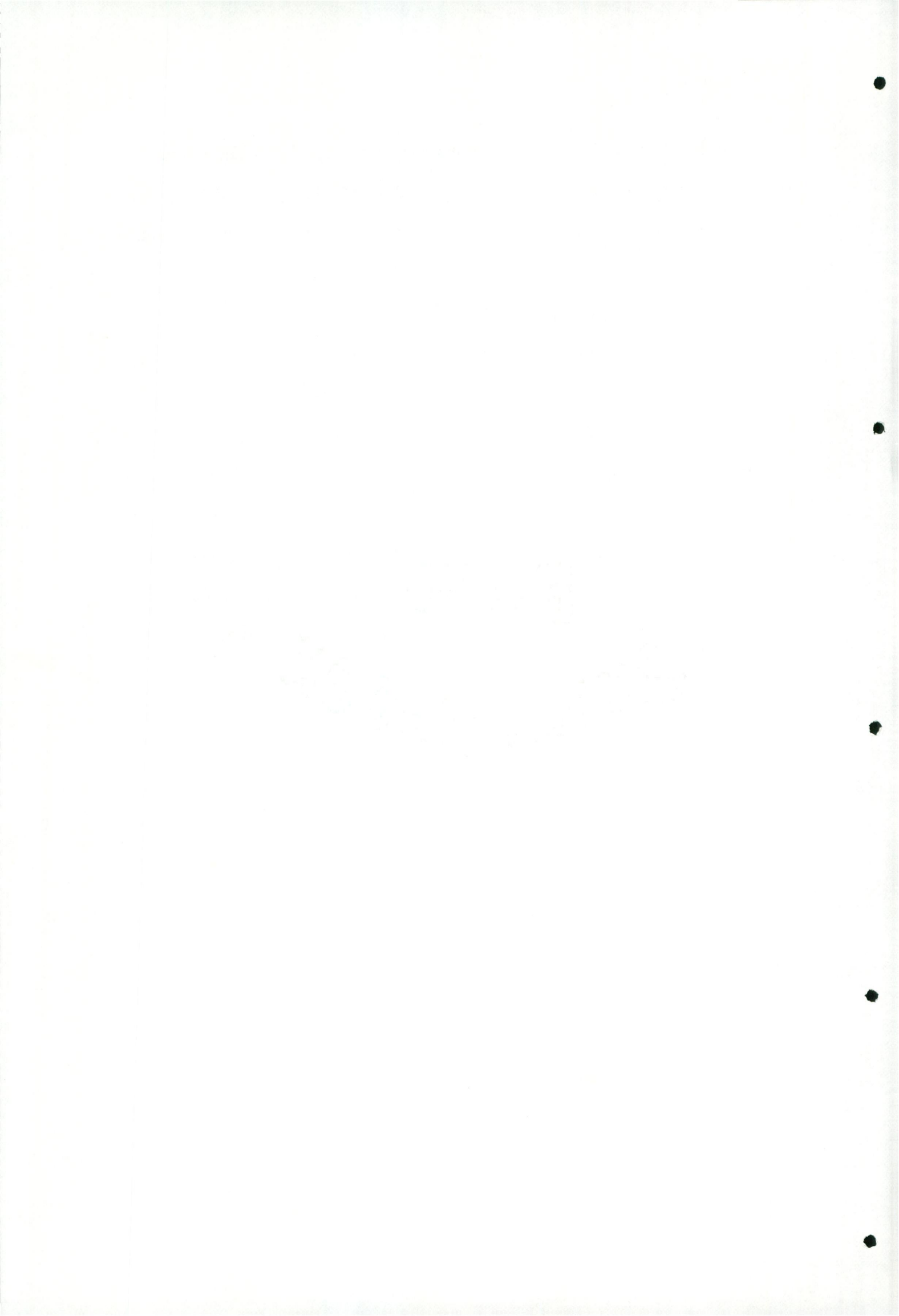
Erik Erickson’s theory and identity development focuses on the period of adolescent development. He attributes psychological changes in the individuals development with regard to personal and social roles as important factors in the identity development of the adolescent and especially with regard to the ego identity.



Adolescence is the period of adjustment with adulthood and Erickson's theory argues that the self-concept undergoes changes in these years. Erickson refers to adolescents as in a state of psycho-social moratorium.³

(5) Independence : Autonomy

Erickson 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.⁴ The converse is also true, where the failure to acquire a positive and stable sense of self makes it difficult for the individuals to adjust well into adulthood. In the quest for identity, the adolescent grasps at responsibilities and autonomous decision making. This innate desire to appear as in control of their lifestyles and behaviour, causes the adolescent to disregard the influences and advice of many parents and teachers.



The Four Statures of Identity

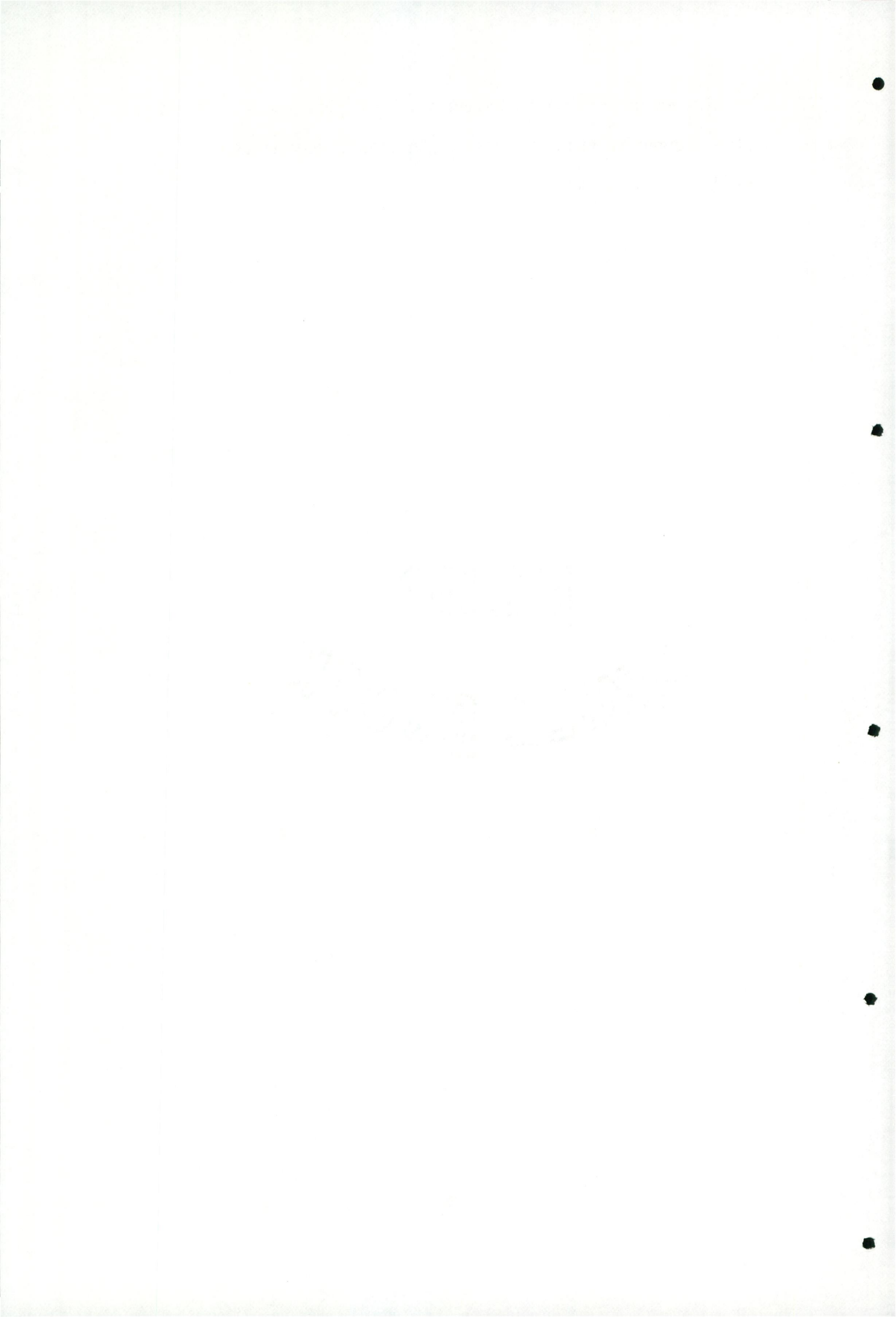
James Marcia has analysed Erickson's theory of identity development and has expanded on Erickson's theory by distinguishing four identity statuses that the adolescents experience during the psychosocial crisis of identity versus identity confusion. These are identity achievers, foreclosure, identity diffusions and moratorium. 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. Marcia defines crisis as a period when the adolescent is "actively involved in choosing amongst alternative occupations and beliefs. Commitments refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expresses in an occupation or belief".⁵

Identity diffusions: The adolescent has not experienced a crisis as they have not made any firm commitments to any ideology; occupation or interpersonal relationship.

Identity moratoriums: the adolescent is in the midst of a crisis : he/she considers alternative roles but they still have 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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ADOLESCENCE AND THE PERSONA

It is at the adolescent stage the young person feels the need to identify with a role model they fix into icons of popular culture as mentors and symbols of their ideal selves. Most adolescents seem to have an inherent horror of appearing nondescript or overly conformist. Fashion, make-up, hairstyle and jewellery become individual statements and are like the young adult, continually being changed.

One feature of adolescent behaviour which may be encountered by teachers is that of "feigned individuality" the identification of the self with the person (1). The term 'persona' is a Jungian one, and is identified as "the 'mask' ... the defensive structure of the ego complex".

"The persona protects the coherence of the individual being, through denial, or identification with a role. The persona is a defence, especially against threats from others...caused by lowered self esteem or other threats emotional or physical".²

This is referred to as an experimental stage of self discovery. Many adolescents do not go beyond this stage and instead concentrate on adopting a persona which is in fact, not the true self at all, but only an aspect of personality to be perceived by others. So while the young person imagines that they are establishing a sense of identity they are merely presenting a 'face' to the outside world.

Adolescents see themselves mainly in relation to their peers. In an attempt to adopt an autonomous role adolescents often feel insecure, unsure



whether the 'face' they are presenting will appear impressive to their peers and be accepted by adults. To sustain the adopted 'persona' adolescence develop a defensive mechanism. The young person often appoints even the most well meaning of teachers to play the role of adversary or the totalitarian enemy.

These defence mechanisms or 'feigned individuality' in young adolescents is easily recognisable in the classroom. Students can be said to be sometimes performing a role which is constructed to impress their peers. Good teaching strategies and a positive communicative acceptance of constructive aspects of the adoptive roles are important.

Adolescents are governed by the need to appear mature and 'together'. An innate desire to appear (and to perceive themselves) as in control of their lifestyles and behaviour causes the adolescent to disregard the influences and advice of many teachers and parents. The alternative is to accept guidance from those in authority and hence perceive themselves as children. Jung responds to the problem of the persona by encouraging the "individual to attempt some insight and reflection on inner conflicts - addressing and dealing with negative thoughts and emotions rather than suppressing them. This involves taking responsibility for and accepting all aspects of the personality rather than denying those that may be deemed unsavoury".³

It is important that the young adolescent experiences this experimental stage without becoming fixed to one particular persona. It is crucial therefore that the adolescent breaks away from the 'feigned' individuality



of the persona, and empathises with and takes responsibility for the negative aspects of the personality. The young person can only become capable of insight into their true self by differentiating between what they want and what they fundamentally are.

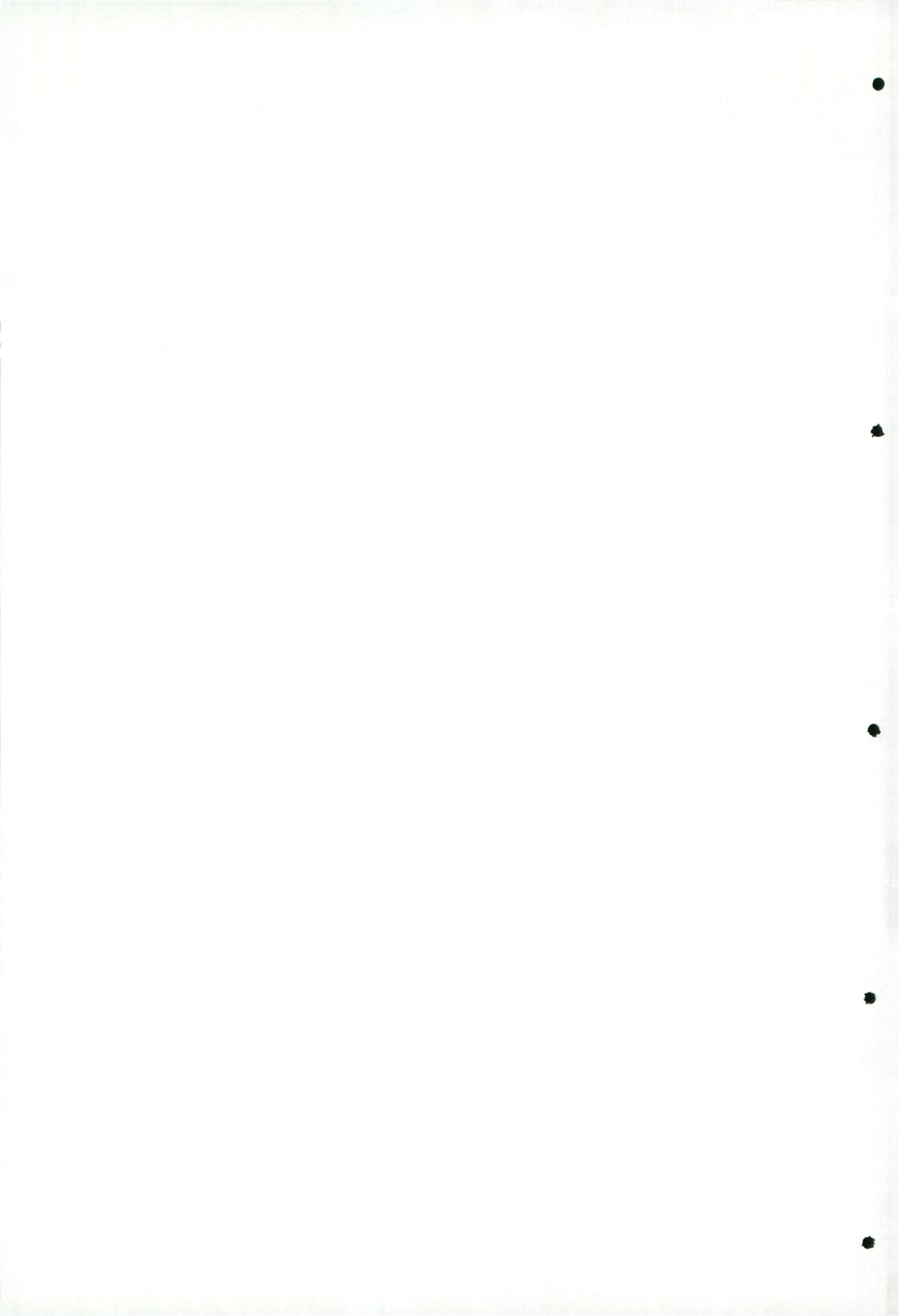
The persona as adopted by the adolescent, fulfils the demands of the society and the cultural surrounding the young person, yet fundamentally neglects the intrinsic aspects of the personality the positive and negative traits which make up the true individual. As outlined earlier in this chapter, this defensive presentation of a false self, which masks weaknesses, insecurities and uncertainties is described by C. J. Jung as the 'Mask', the constructed persona.

This behavioural stage where the adolescent presents a false identity to the outside world that is not compatible with the true individual is referred to by Erik H. Erikson as a stage of 'role confusion'. He says that "It is the inability to settle on an occupational identity which disturbs young individuals. To keep themselves together they temporarily over identify to the point of apparent complete loss of identity, with the heroes of cliques and crowds"⁴.

To emerge from this period of confusion, the adolescent needs all the internal strength he/she can acquire, as well as the support of others. The school environment within which the adolescent spends at least half of their adolescent lives places an emphasis on the acquisition of prescribed

skills, conformity, and submission to authority, leaving little room for the exercise of choice, individuality and creativity.

Arts would be considered as a low concencious subject, in that unlike more academic subjects there is no definitive right or wrong answer to a particular problem. Art has through the ages dealt with problems of identity and values. Therefore it can provide an excellent context for self discovery; it can also be an outlet for physical energy and to stimulate the imagination. The ability to take risks, high energy levels, flexibility, humour and a heightened sensory awareness are all characteristics identified with highly creative individuals. They are also characteristics of adolescents as a group.



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CHAPTER TWO

ART AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING INDIVIDUALITY

Creativity transgresses cultural and social classes. There are no inhibitions or boundaries which are to be found in the usual forms of communication that is speech. The very act of experiencing and making art can promote insights and realisations about the self which may otherwise remain unencountered. “As the creation of art is by definition an intentional and self determined activity, it should contribute to what a person defines as his or her being”.¹

Milhaly Csikszentmihalyi and Ulrich Schiefere (educational philosophers in the University of Chicago and Munich, respectively) make reference here to the association between creative activity and identity. They further propose “Second function of arts related activities at the level of individual development is helping the person maintain cognitive structure of the self.”²

The creative impulse exists in all of us - yet many people believe they can not create when faced with a proposal for a new project or when beginning a piece, certain students will hesitate and self deprecatingly maintain that they cannot attempt it, they can't draw or that they are non-artistic. It is only adolescents, however, who react in this way to the possibilities of their own creativity. Younger children have a marked tendency to regard art and design as exciting. Victor Lowenfeld maintains that the disappearance of this unfettered confidence occurs around the time of



puberty. "Probably imposed upon by foreign standards you were asked to perform rather than to create : and, in this striving for exactness, you lost the feeling that what you create is important to yourself".³

The loss of belief in the validity of the young person's creative power is all the more disillusioning because the distinctive value of art and design itself is not the end result, but the process by which it came about. "The Arts are a form of knowing and communication whose value lies not in an objective, quantifiable end product, but in the subjective experience of creating and expressing ideas which are themselves intrinsically aesthetic."⁴

Art education is ultimately concerned with the growth and development of individuals towards a more fulfilled life. In the Lowenfeld lectures on Art and Education and Therapy, Victor Lowenfeld states that "art education has a special mission to bring out of the individual his own creative potentialities and combine in him the experiences which otherwise remain separated".⁵

The art teachers role is to motivate students to draw from their experiences, express these experiences and their reactions to them and thereby enhance their sensitivities to their environment and themselves. To do this the validity of individual interpretations must be stressed in and attempt to dispel the sense of inadequacy which may trouble the adolescence. It is imperative to instil in the young person the value of the creative process, over that of the end product.



To this end the art teacher must be as approving and accepting of students' work as possible, emphasising more the importance of what the student has derived from the experience of creativity than what has been produced.

The intrinsic nature of artistic activity involves the whole person in an active process, mentally, physically and emotionally. Csikszentmihalyi and Schiffrin assigns the significance of arts education. "In its possible value for human evolution and for the development of the individual human being".⁶ Their examination of the role that art plays in personal development reflect Dewey's educational theories. They ascertain that "unlike science, art represents experienced reality that is ambiguous, contradictory and partly unconscious... the products of art do not represent unequivocal pictures of reality that can be tested empirically."⁷

Their analysis of *Aesthetic Cognition and Human Development* suggests that creating, responding to or learning about art have more relevance for people's everyday life experience.

The contribution of artistic models of reality to the evolution of human thought appear on the level of individual development. Art activity can be a medium through which the pupil can see the development of their concept or idea into a tangible form. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi have put forward the idea that the process of visual expression clearly helps to gain some control and understanding of barely conscious internal tensions.

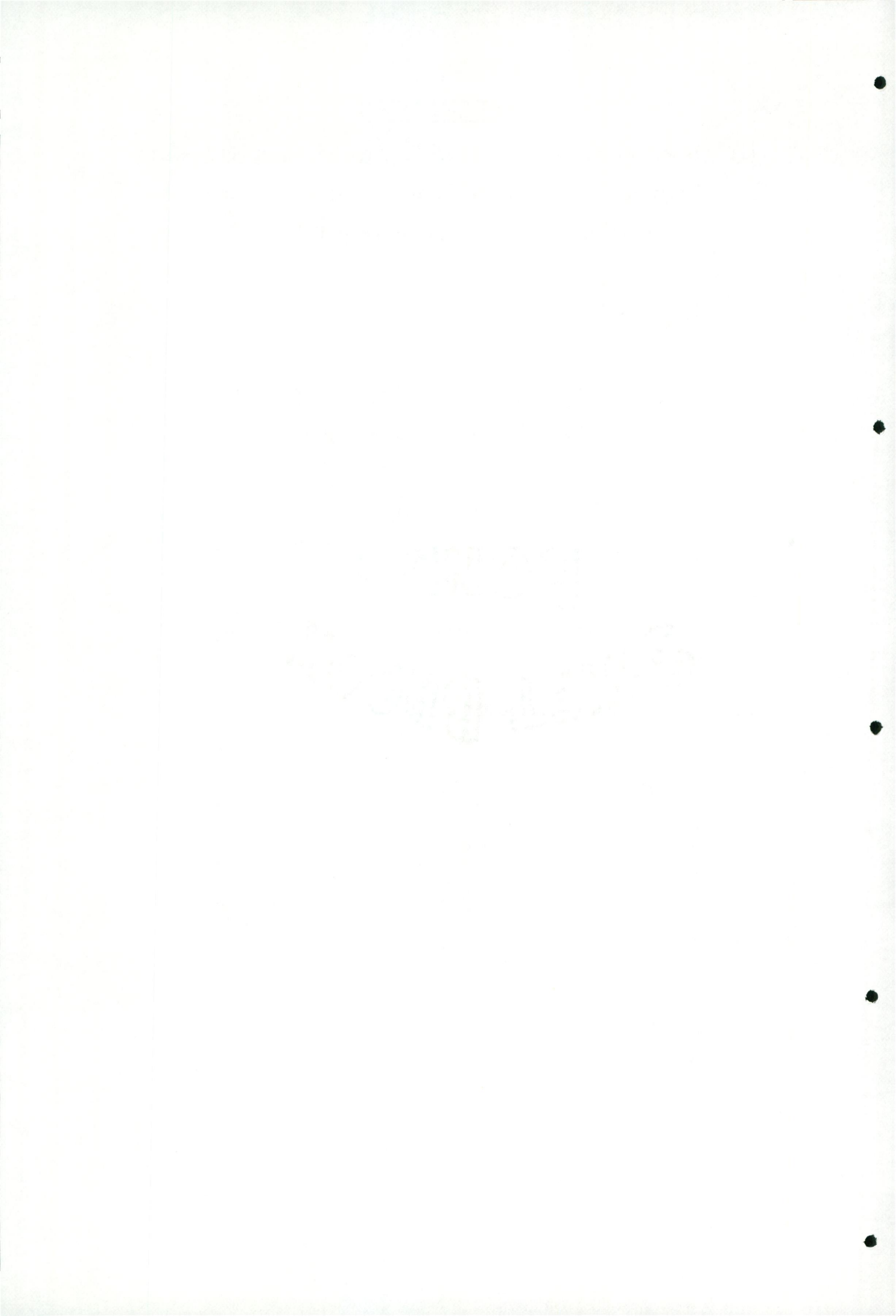
They suggest that the “key to creative achievement is the transformation of an intangible conflict into a tangible symbolic problem to which the creative solution will be the response”.⁸

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi relate creative experience to the identification of the self in saying that “the creation of art is by definition an intentional and self determined activity, it should contribute to what a person defines as his or her being”.⁹



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- (9) Ibid.



TOWARD A MORE INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH **TO EDUCATION**

Dewey rejects the notion that what is contained in textbooks will further the educational development of the student. He favours a system of education which offers to students situations of direct practical experience and activity and which involve the use of the body and the handling of materials. He recognises the natural course of development primarily in situations which involve learning by doing, rather than the storing of memorised information which can be reproduced upon demand.

Progression in education owes much of its philosophy to Dewey's thoughts on education. The liberal protest against essentialism stems from the conservative view that the foremost purpose of education is the perpetuation of tradition and the preparation of the immature for adulthood. He believes that the infant is born with the bare minimum of reflex behaviour patterns, infant behaviour is impulsive, that is, unformed by specific hereditary patterns and therefore capable of developing in various ways and in various directions. It is during the stage of adolescence that behavioural patterns become more defined and characteristics of the young adult begin to emerge.

It is however important as stated earlier that the adolescent undergoes an experimental stage and does not become fixed to an adopted persona.

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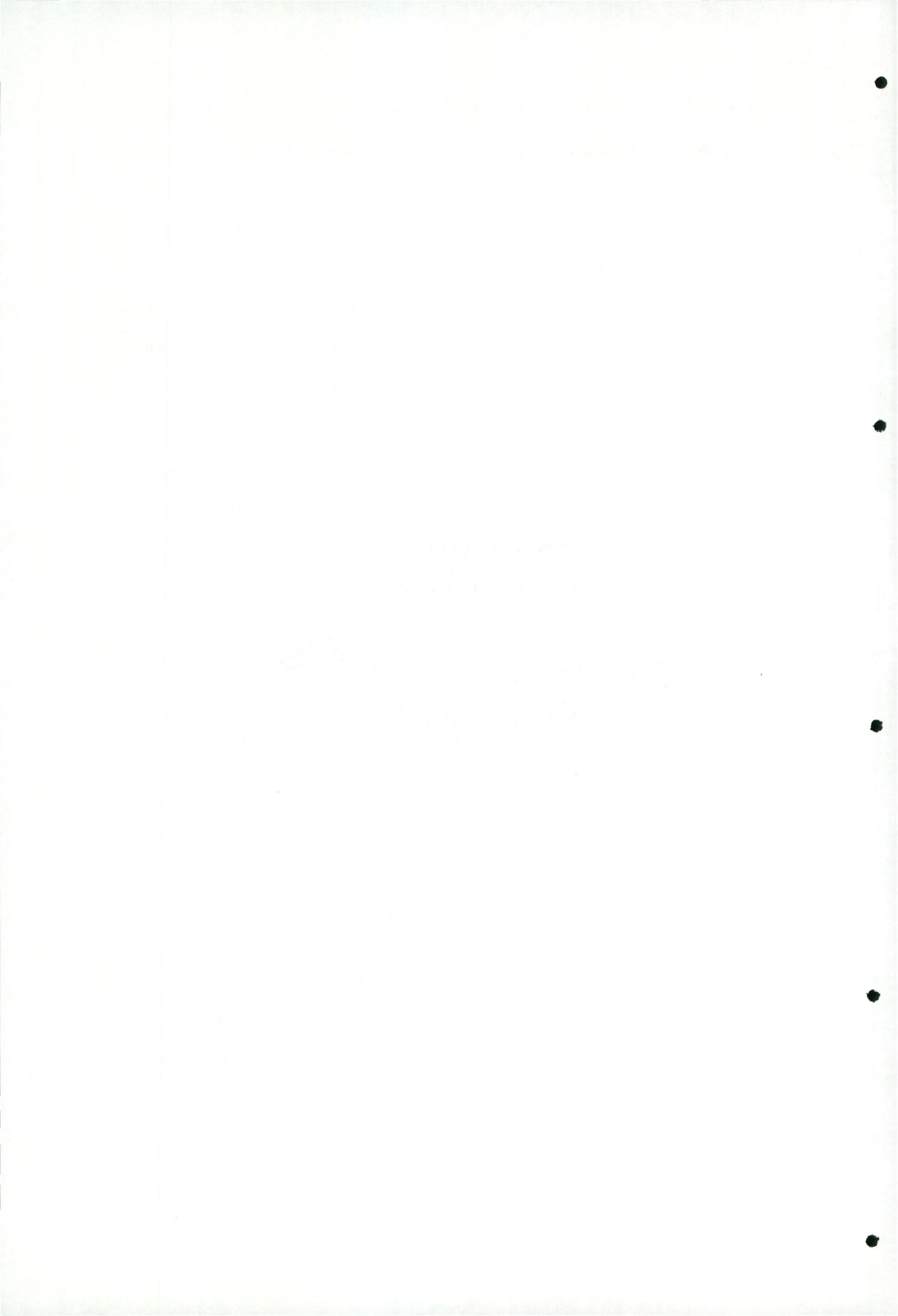
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Dewey's theories on education encompasses the nuances of the adolescent and provides a methodology for more effective teaching.

Dewey applied the term habit to the psychological mechanism by which initial native impulse behaviours is moulded. By habit Dewey meant patterns of behaviour that are far more extensive than rigid responses to specific stimuli. Habits themselves are significantly social in their origin and character. "They are the very stuff on which the continuity of social and individual experience depends" (1) Habits have a way of becoming stiff and unyielding instead of being flexible and artistic means to further experience. Education then, is a continuing process of reconstruction of experience. This process involves the total experience of the individual and only a part of it takes place in the school.

Dewey promotes education as a continuing process of growth, that it should free impulses, keep habit flexible and adaptable to changed circumstances and thus provides for future development of experience. Dewey's criticism against the older traditions of schooling was the idea that education is preparation for some relatively distant future in the life of the child.

Children live in the present, and a distant future of which they can have little or no awareness provides scant motivation for school tasks. Artistic activity or exploration has a more immediate goal and a tangible solution.



Dewey turned his attention to a conception of education as the unfolding of some latent potential in the child. This is one of the oldest systematic views of human growth and the development of knowledge in the individual. One form of it is found in Plato in the guise of innate ideas that are brought to consciousness by the ministrations of the teacher. The third concept of education Dewey criticised is education as the training of facilities, or as often called "mental discipline".² Dewey said the existence of these original facilities is pure myth, there is simply no well defined powers waiting to be trained. What does exist is a pool of native tendencies and impulses that take on specific and meaningful function as they are expressed in the environment. Dewey advocated an active curriculum opposed to the passive acquisition of subject matter around which the traditional school organises its program. Usually this work was carried on as something 'extra' to the regular curriculum sometimes employed as a means of relief from tedium of the regular studies.

Dewey suggests that the nature of artistic endeavour lends itself to the development of the individual. "Mathematics began with reckoning, keeping accounts of things, measuring and so on and after became the rigorous discipline we know today. The natural sciences grew out of efforts to control and use the natural environment for human purposes, literature and the fine arts developed a means of expression, of personal and social feeling and the effort to preserve and interpret experience" (3)

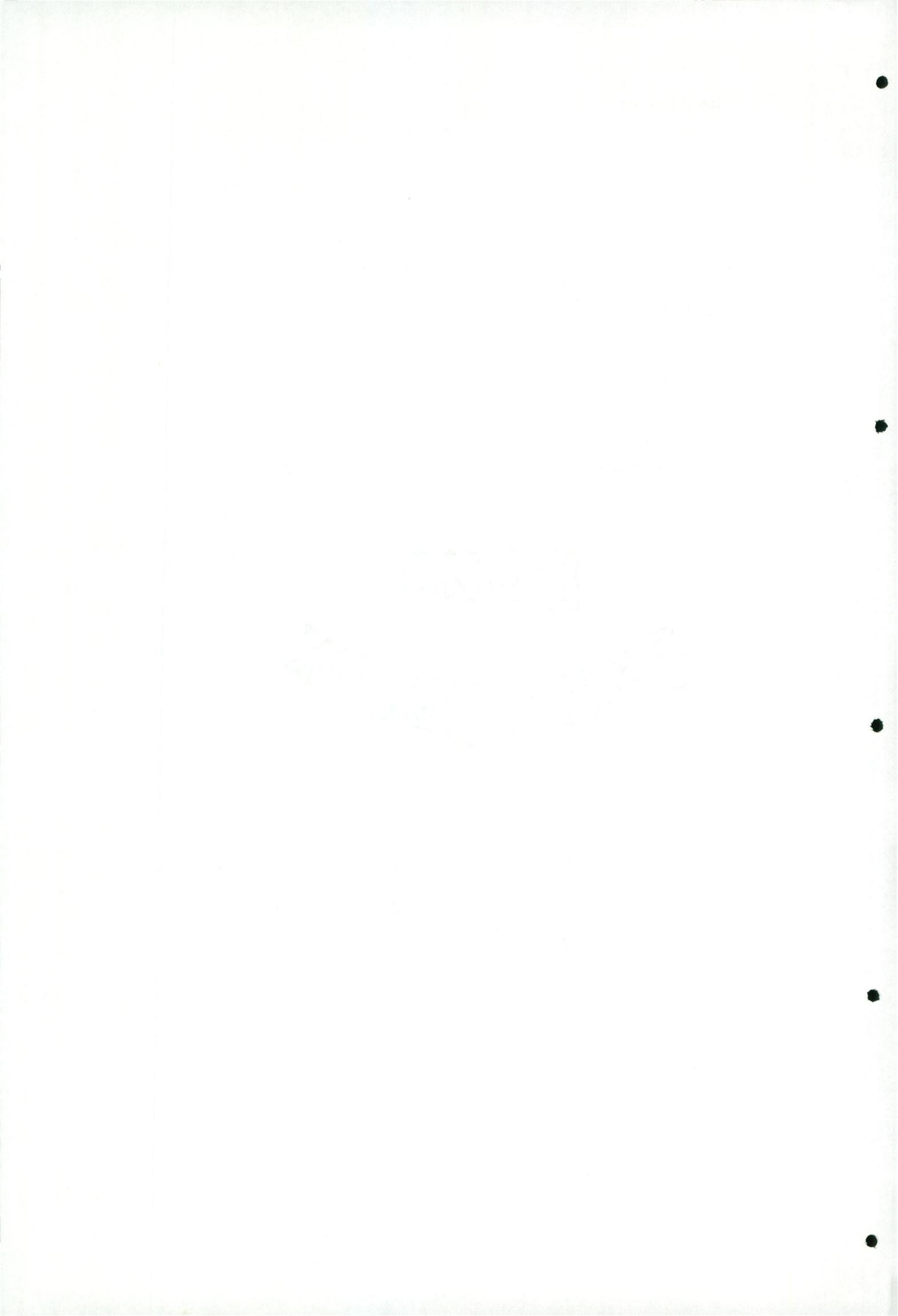
The key ideas on which Dewey based his educational philosophy have a larger significance both in art education and the process of self discovery.

Dewey's educational theories were child centered and concentrated on :

- The nature of experience
- The significance of meaning and the pragmatic conception of truth.
- Logic as inquiry and its relation to scientific method, the nature of value and the process of valuation.
- The ontology of pragmatism.

Howard Gardiner, author of the “Unschooling Mind” examines and educational theory that nurtures individual ways of learning. Gardiner has made recent advances in our understanding of individual learning with the view to revitalise the education process. Taking into consideration individual characteristics of students he outlines what is called five entry points.

- In using a narrational entry points, on presenting a story or narrative about the concept in question.
- Logical - quantitative entry point, one approaches the concept by invoking numerical considerations or deductive reasoning.
- A foundational entry point, examines the philosophical and terminological facet of the concept.
- An aesthetic approach. Here the emphasis falls on sensory or surface features that will appeal to - or at least capture the attention of students.



- Experimental approach - a hands on approach, dealing directly with the materials that embody or convey the concept.

Gardiner does recognise the practical difficulties in implementing multiple entry points in saying that “only a teacher of greater talent and formidable energy can afford to individualise instruction at such an unfavourable pupil teacher ratio”. Gardiner’s educational ideologies reflect these of Dewey’s he suggests that the student “would come to know that phenomenon in more than one way, to develop multiple representations and seek to relate these representations to one another”.⁴

Eliot Eisner, an American psychologist, makes reference to the rounded or three dimension knowledge informed by art, the “unique contributions it makes to individual experience with an understanding of the world.

The visual arts deal with an aspect of human consciousness that no other field touches on : the aesthetic contemplation of visual form”.⁵ Carl Rodger in *Creative Genius and Other Myths* outlines the contribution of art in “mans tendency to actualise himself, to become his potent capabilities, to expand, extend, develop, mature the tendency to express activate all the capabilities of the organism, in the intent that such activation the organism of the self”.⁶

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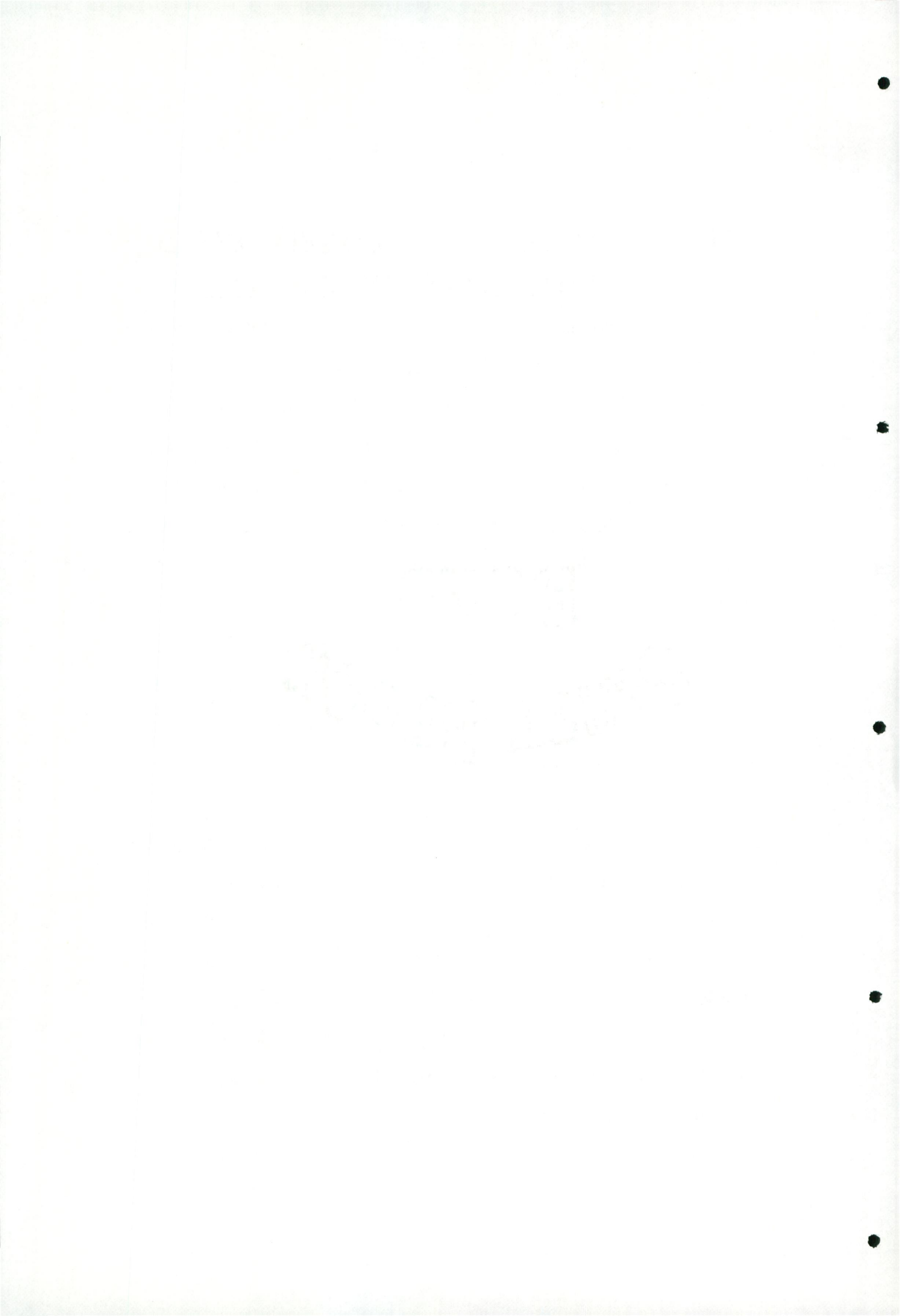
CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF ART EDUCATION IN RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Art education is ultimately concerned with the growth and development of individuals towards a more fulfilled life. In adolescent education the concepts must therefore be with the needs of the 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 goals of art education, John A. Michael, a contemporary American educational theorist, states

“Art experiences are used to help the 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”.¹

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 development such as personality and the individual's drive for personal identity is suppressed. 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, and their relationship to the world around them. The visual arts



can therefore become a means of expression where pent-up feeling emotions frustrations etc. Can be released.

The process of creative activity can facilitate the development of abstract reasoning in that the pupil can take a particular subject matter/object out of its everyday context and place it in self defined imagined situation/form. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi put forward the idea that the process of visual express clearly helps to gain some control and understanding of barely conscious in-ternal tensions, “the key to creative achievement is the transformation of an intangible conflict into a tangible symbolic problem to which the creative solution will be the response.”²

It is imperative to instil in the young person the value of the creative process, over that of the end product. To do this, the art teacher must be as approving and accepting of students’ work as possible, emphasising the importance of what the student has derived from the experience of creativity rather than what has been produced. 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. Lowenfeld promotes the importance of self, direction, self - feel - fulfilment and the development of art education. He says

“the focus of these art school programmes should be on the process of making art and not 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



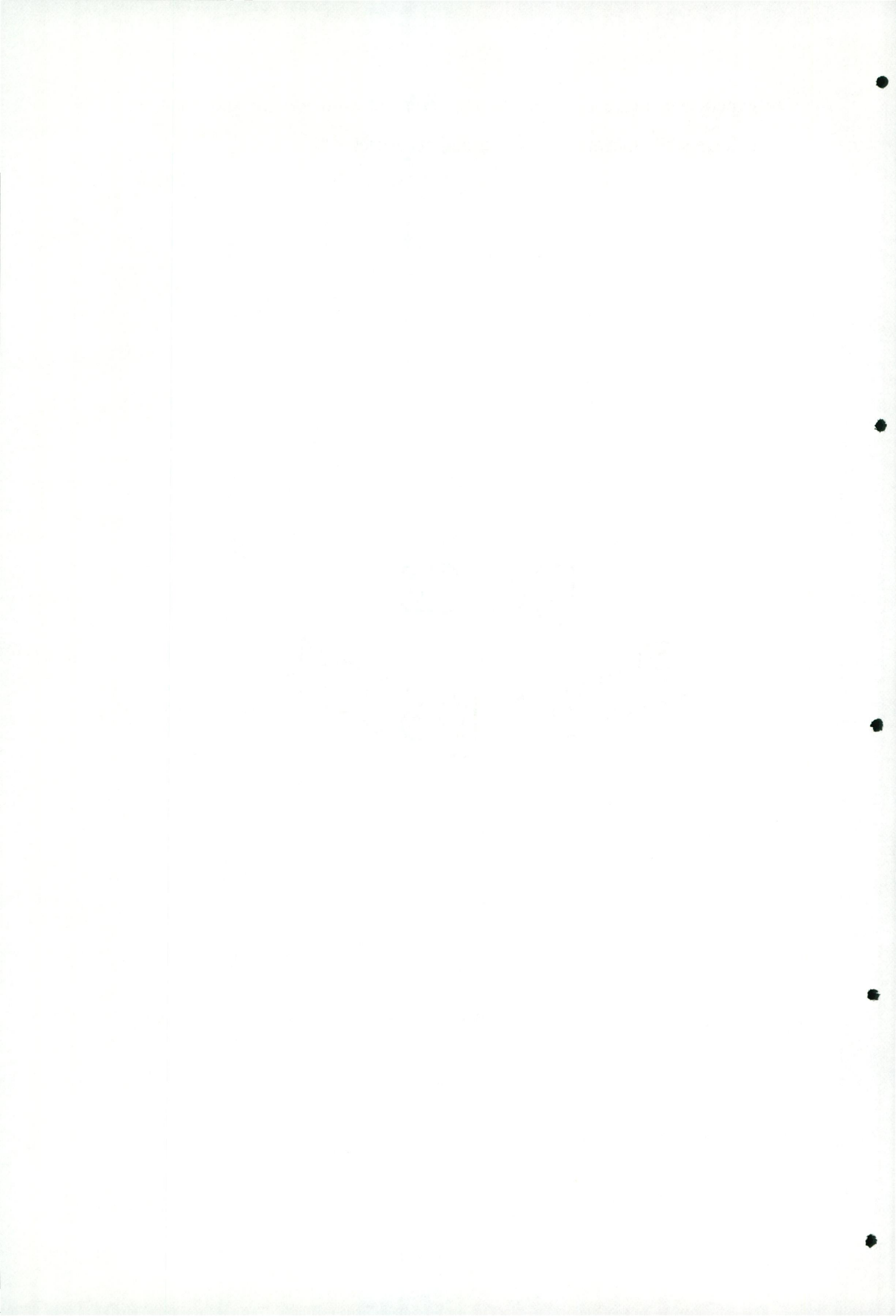
expression.”³

Art education has been clearly recognised as a facilitator of personal development in the Junior Certificate Art Syllabus. The primary objective as outlined in the White Paper on Education 1995 is for the student to complete a broad, balanced and coherent course of study in a variety of curricular areas relevant to their own personal development. In the Junior Certificate Art syllabus 1989 the aim of art education “is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure.”⁴

The importance of directing art education towards a relevant perspective for the pupil is expressed, in outlining that “curriculum provision should address the immediate and prospective needs of the young person, in the context of the cultural, economic and social environment.”⁵

The very fact that the individual is a product of his/her society suggests that culture impinges on the individual and shapes his personality. Since art education is preparing people for life in the context of being aware of and reflecting on their environment, then art education could be deemed as extremely important, the development of the students’ visual language involves understanding, feeling, expressing and relating his personal development to one’s everyday world. John A. Michael also sees the process of creating art as an important linking factor between the student and his environment. He states “The arts unify and extend human

experience, make us sensitive and aware of who we are and what we believe while mirroring ourselves and our society.”⁶



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- (5) Ibid. P. 3.
- (6) Michael, Art and Adolescence, p. 3.

SCHOOL PROJECT

This chapter utilises the work that I carried out with a fifth year class. The particular sequence that I used was one that I envisage would enhance some aspect of the pupils' self identity and would encourage the importance of one's immediate environment in the development of the self.

It was decided that this study should be conducted on the basis of a sequence of lessons focused on self-portraiture. Since the very process of creation involves incorporating the self into the activity, it was surmised that this approach afforded "the best opportunity of personal identification."⁷

The investigation was carried out in a mixed community school in Tallaght West, with a catchment area comprised of pupils from a broad working class background. Art and design has a high profile within the school. There are two art rooms with two art teachers. The facilities available to the students include printing equipment, and a kiln for firing clay pieces - as well as all the standard materials such as paint pastels and supplies of paper.

The sequence of lessons was undertaken with a mixed ability fifth year group. There are eleven girls in the class and three boys. The reactions to the proposed project of self-portraiture were varied from enthusiasm to hesitancy. Perhaps those who were more hesitant were aware that using



themselves as a source would involve disclosing aspects of their personality.

The initial concerns about rendering their own image to achieve a likeness was transgressed by using a skills based process. In providing the pupils with a solution to the problem, their concerns about creating a likeness was surpassed. The use of a technique that involved logical and deductive reasoning was introduced. A photograph of themselves was gridded and numbered. The details in each box was transferred to their composition on a larger scale. (Page 37 fig. 1). This enabled the pupils who were less confident about their drawing skills to approach the concept in a logical way. Having completed this stage, the pupils gained confidence in a skills process, freeing their creative impulse to explore expressive elements.

For my support studies, I used mainly Irish artists who have exhibited as part of the Irish National Portrait Collection. I found the need to use present day artists pertinent in that the pupils would be able to relate the works to the present environment/life. The artists' own account of their portrait were also related to the pupils in the intention that a contextual relationship between the artist and their environment is established.

The preface in the National Portrait collection catalogue outlines that "to confront one's image is a difficult task. To record it is to state assertively, I am, and this is how I see myself ... their reasons (the artists) for doing so have ranged from the desire for profound self-analysis to striving for lifelike images on the investigation of an artistic problem."²

STUDENTS WORK IN PROGRESS.

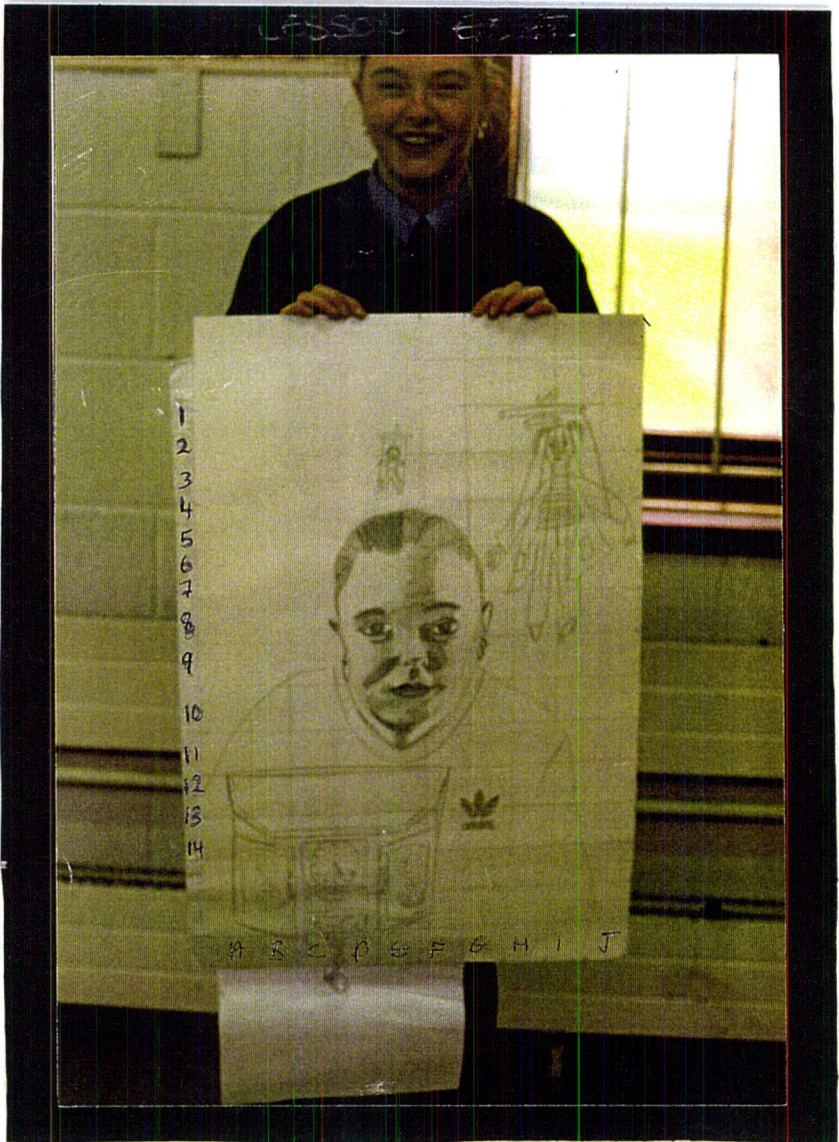
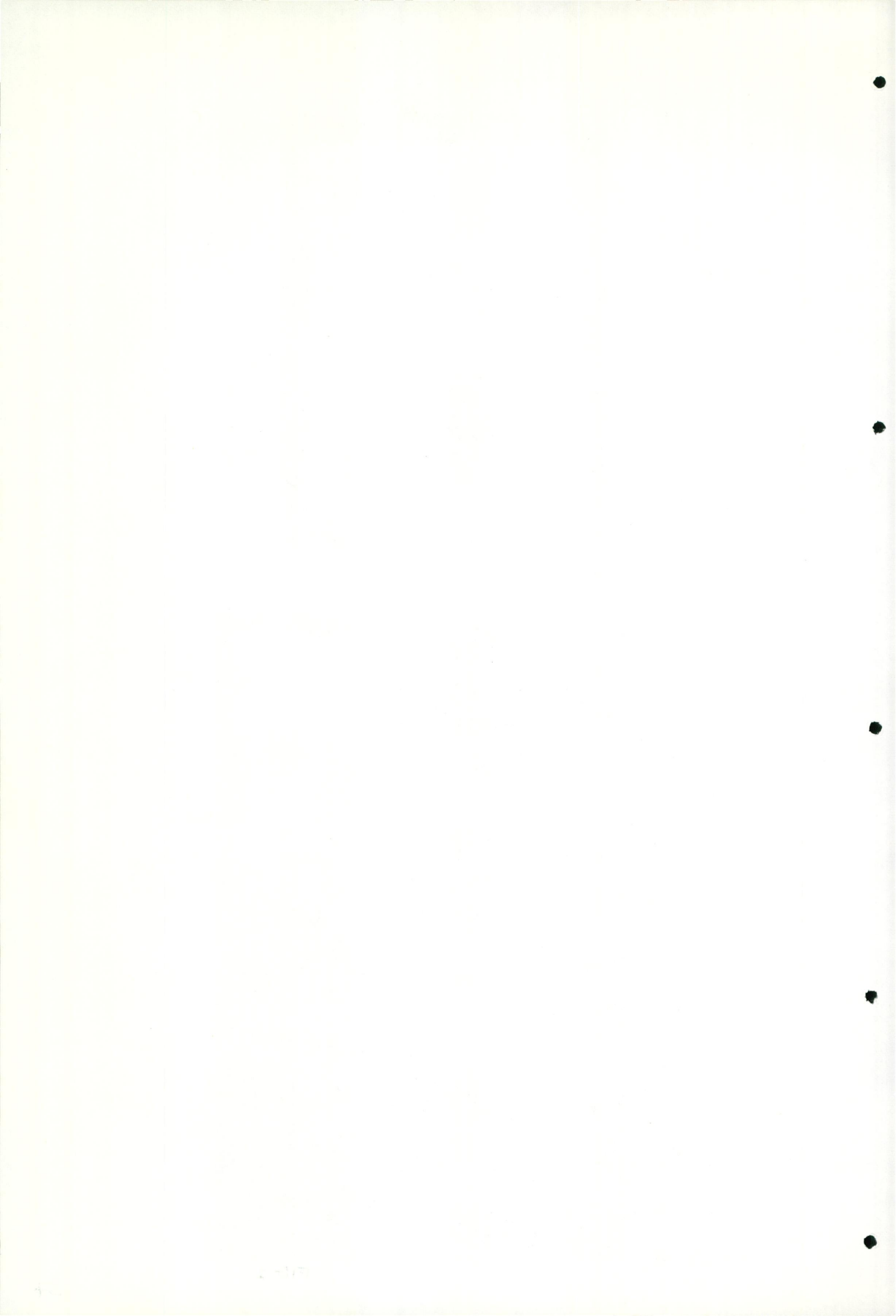


FIG 1



As discussed in previous chapters, the major concern for adolescents is the search for self identity. At this developmental stage the adolescent may have a confused picture of him/herself - conflicting images of how they see themselves and how other people view them. If they are struggling with role confusion and the development of a persona; the opportunity to become directly involved in creatively exploring the characteristics of the self through portraiture may be a pertinent one.

Lowenfeld suggests that the intensity to which the creator identifies with the world through his/her 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 freely engaged with the art work by portraying meaningful and personally significant things.³

As identity is an important issue in the lives of the adolescents, a project on the self provided students with an internal motivational source. Dewey's progressivist theory on education in relation to student motivation suggests that the teacher should "Begin with the line of his (the child's) native interests, and offer him objects that have some immediate connection with these."

The overall cognitive and psychomotor and effective aims of the self-portraiture painting project are as follows:

Cognitive and Psychomotor aims

- (1) To develop practical, perceptual and critical skills.

Cognitive aims: to give students an understanding of tone, colour and composition.

Psychomotor aims: that the student would acquire skills in using a grid to enlarge their image and in a variety of painting techniques.

- (2) That the student would explore drawing and observational skills.

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.

The starting point of this project was a series of observational self-portraits using chalk on black paper to capture the expressive nature of the play of light and shadow on the face. The students were tentative in their initial drawing. The provision of a strong directional light which they could use at different angles enabled the student to see their reflection in a novel way. The proceeding drawings seemed to appreciate how the use of light and shadow on the face can express a certain mood. Some pupils chose to cast the light from below their chin creating a forboding expression.



The portrait paintings of Una Sealy and Jack Pakenham were introduced. The relevance of the surroundings and personal objects that reflect the artist's personality, hobbies, interest and surroundings were discussed. Una Sealy, a contemporary portrait painter, places herself in her living room surrounded by various personal belongings. (Page 42 Fig.1). Pakenham places himself in the graffitied surroundings of his native Belfast (page 42 fig. 2). The empty streets with a ventriloquist's doll's head is depicted in a nightmarish fashion. The reaction of the pupils to these self portraits were varied in relation to the objects and setting of the paintings. The process of use of symbols in portrait paintings were discussed and defined as "a construction or object that stands for something material or immaterial, apart from itself." The pupils were encouraged to think of home activities and other interests outside of school in selecting objects to be included in their portrait painting.

In the early stages of pictorial composition, the art-work as a means of purposeful expression of one's environment was indeed a challenge for many and intimidating in relation to the setting in which their compositions were to be placed. An imagined or real place could be chosen as their background image. Visual aids of a selection of exterior and interior environments were shown. The portraits of Tim Goulding and Barry Castles were introduced. Various pictorial, symbolical and compositional aspects of these portraits were discussed. Goulding places himself in the foreground of the view from his window in Aillihies in West Cork (page 42 Fig. 3) the painter is at ease in these particular surroundings. For Castles' painting a self-portrait was quite an unsettling exercise. He states that "Having prided myself on my lack of vanity, I was incapable of

including my wrinkles - so I painted the puppet to bear them for me.”⁵

(Page 42 Fig 4).

SUPPORT STUDIES.



FIG 1.

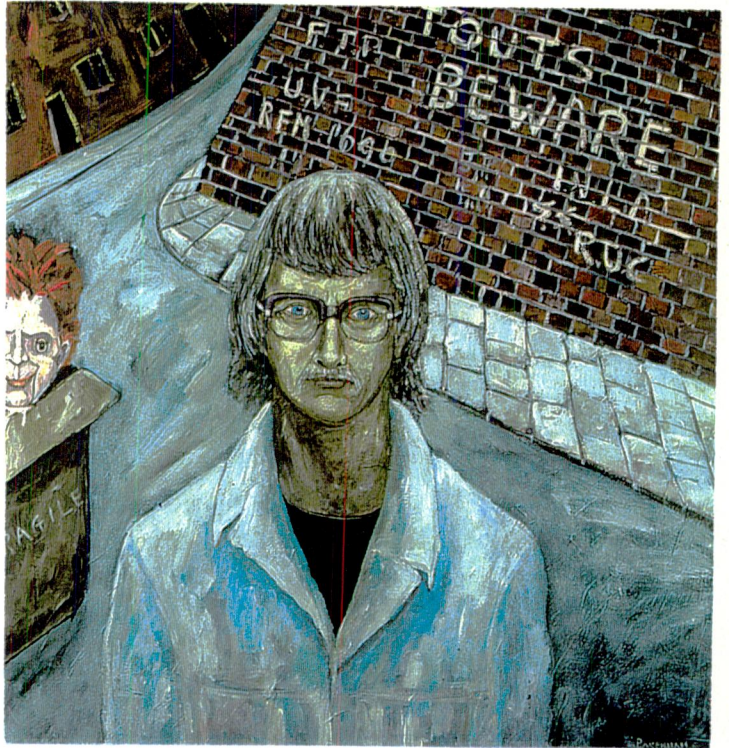


FIG 2.

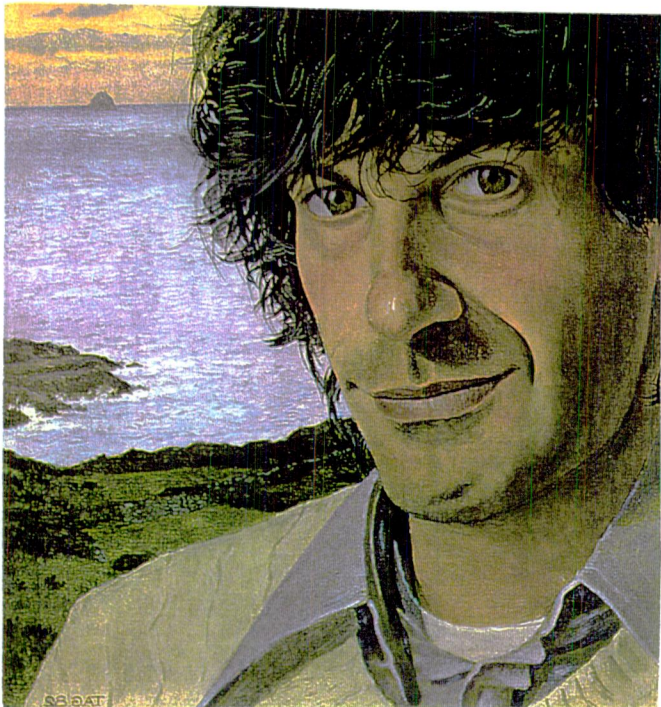


FIG 3.

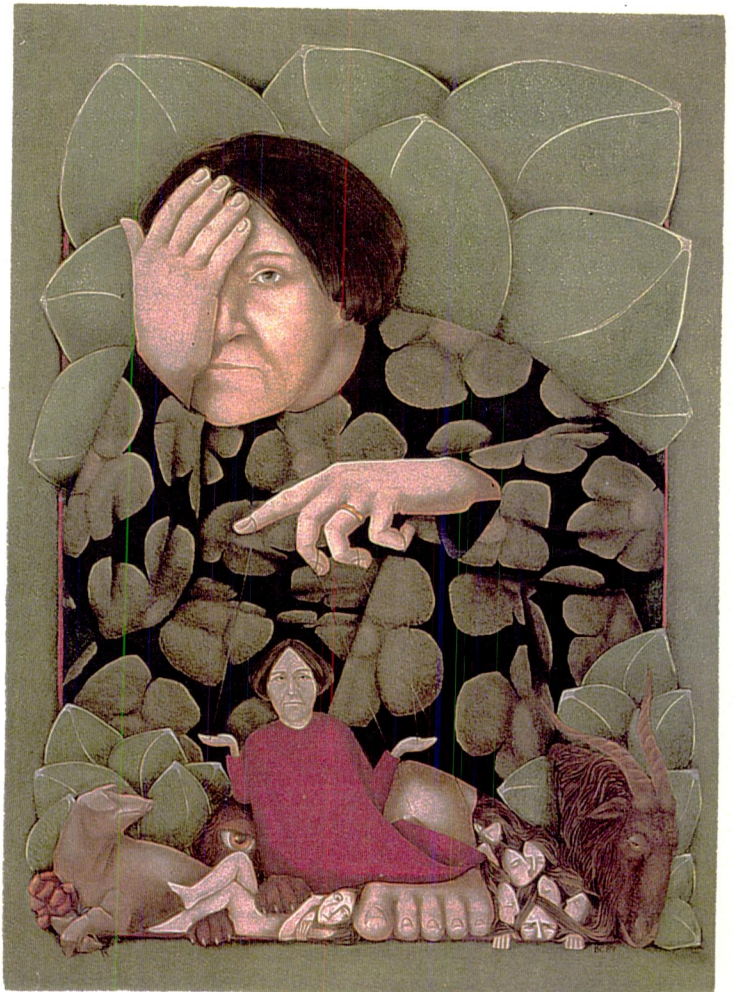


FIG 4.

Deborah had previously selected the puppets hanging in her bedroom to include in her painting. On seeing the puppets in Barry Castle's painting, she suggests that one of her puppets reminds her of times when she is fed up or tired (page 46 fig. 1) and wishes to slouch in her chair. The bedroom became a signifier of an environment in which pupils felt comfortable or at ease. In a questionnaire on the final paintings, Sandra says that in her painting she is in a dark room in her house, where I go and sit and think (page 46 F. 2). She draws on the symbolic function of art. The room is deliberately sparse, the candle in the foreground symbolises the outside world, her eyes are closed momentarily to the outside world to give herself time to think. Her responses signify her awareness of the conceptual aspects of art, it also indicates her awareness of environmental/outside influences on her life.

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 moratorium⁶ his view of him/herself and the world around him are altered and it is not surprising that this sense of confusion will be reflected in his artwork.

The expressive potential of colour was dealt with in relation to the pupils chosen environment. To give the pupils a starting point from which to derive the application of colour, visual aids of colour combinations, mixes and paint applications were shown. These colour charts were derived



from the natural colour phenomena in our surroundings and Goethe's colour theory.

"Yellow is the nearest colour to light. It arises when light shines through an opaque medium and puts up resistance to oncoming darkness. If the darkness gets denser orange and red arise. The light battles its way through the different graduations of opaqueness. We can observe this in sunrise and sunset, blue is closest to darkness. If light shines through an opaque medium and lightens up, then violet and blue shades arise. If we observe the distant hills in a landscape, they appear blue through the illuminated haze lying in front of a dark background."⁷

The 'narrational entry point' informed by Gardiner was used in reading this passage on Goethe's colour theories. The pupils were asked to close their eyes and imagine the surrounding in which their portrait is set, three colours were to be remembered and selected to use in their painting. This method of instruction on colour was used so that the pupils were actively engaged in a process of self-discovery through their cognitive involvement and commitment to a process where personal meaning or symbolism of colour could be established.

Sean's self portrait includes a red couch set in the background of mountains (page 46 Fig. 3). Sean, when questioned about his couch in its particular setting, says that 'it is a place where I spend most of my time.' He refers to it as the 'danger zone' because he gets stuck there watching television 'seeing great places I'd like to go.' Sean could be said to display a formal operational thinking delineated by Piaget as characterised

by the adolescent developing an ability to think abstractly, considering the possible as well as the real.⁹

The symbolic association between the couch or the 'danger zone' and the colour red is an association that Sean came to realise only after completing his painting. His unconscious symbolic use of colour was evidently a source of achievement as he was adamant about explaining its meaning to fellow pupils. Laura on the other hand was conscious of her use of contrasting colours (page 46 Fig. 4), she had displayed a sense of confusion in selecting objects to be placed in her composition. Finally replacing what had been a stereo in the foreground with a feather. She comments on her use of colour in saying that 'it represents how confused I am about what object to include'. Although it was suggested to Laura that the inclusion of a particular object was not essential. She insisted however that she needed an object as 'everyone else has one'. She resolved her particular creative problem by depicting herself in her favourite

top.

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STUDENTS WORK



FIG 1.

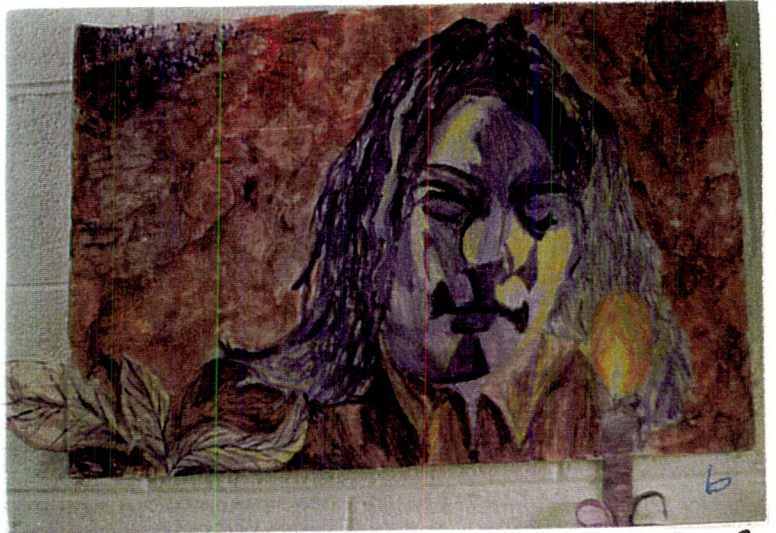


FIG 2.

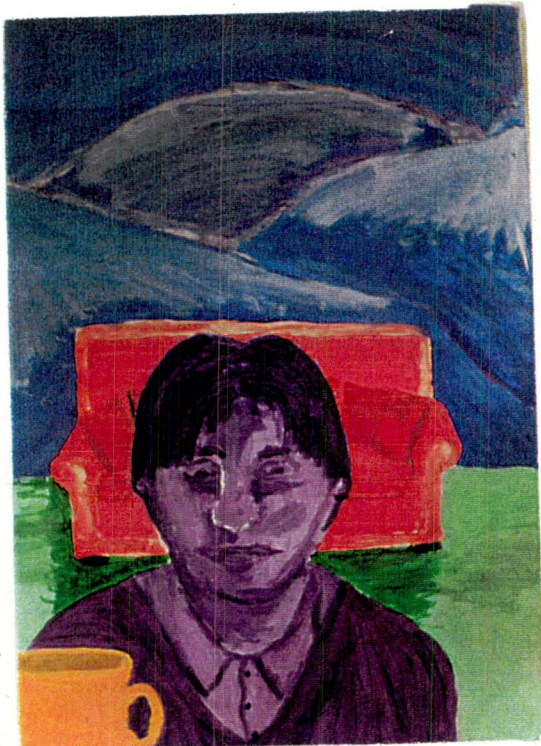


FIG 3.



FIG 4.

12-17

12-18

12-19

12-20

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation focuses on the hypothesis that a valid aspect of art education is to bring students to a heightened awareness of the intrinsic elements of themselves through creative experience. In highlighting the various stages of adolescent development I hope to have underlined the importance of cultivating personal expression in adolescent art education.

Decision making is an important part of everyday life and therefore the development of intuitive/creative/divergent thinking in adolescence is important for one's transition to adulthood. Art activities involve intuitive/creative thinking. For example in their work intuitive/creative decisions are made in the placement of objects/shapes in the picture, the size of the objects and shapes, the style of painting, the colouring of objects and shapes. In making decisive statements in a visual form the student has gained some insight into aspects of their individuality.

An art programme that centered around the individual where self-portraiture was explored provided a medium through which students discovered basic yet important nuances about themselves. These discoveries were evident in the students' evaluation of their own portraits.



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