EXAMINING SELF-IDENTITY ISSUES IN ADOLESCENCE:

The Art Class as a Neutral Environment

That the art class can theoretically provide an environment within which students may question and explore the developing self-concepts that can occur during adolescence is the main concern of this study.

At a time when young people are faced with a greater variety of lifestyles and roles, it is essential that they are prepared and guided in this area by the school, but also that they are allowed time to explore their identity in a non-judgemental environment.

Non-judgemental in the context of this dissertation refers to an ideal classroom atmosphere - the teacher can provide and encourage an open forum and a vocabulary through which students can express themselves freely without fear of ridicule and derision

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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

EXAMINING SELF IDENTITY ISSUES IN ADOLESCENCE:

The art class as a neutral environment

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education
in
Candidacy for the

DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS

by

PHILIPPA LANSDOWNE

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Erratum :

Page one, paragraph three, line two should read:

...as a parallel to the idea that the art class can be seen as a neutral, non-judgemental environment suitable for self-concept experimentation and role exploration.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a pivotal time as far as self-concept and identity development are concerned. There are several reasons for this: the physical changes that take place during puberty; more sophisticated levels of cognitive development, and also, the increased independance, both emotionally and physically, from the family. All of these are factors contributing to the exploration of roles that can occur during adolescence.

Chapter One focuses on the importance of self-representation and exploration of personality that is contained within portraiture, whether of the self or others. This chapter also contains a review of the relevant literature on self-identity development: stage theorists such as Eric Erikson and James Marcia are discussed; the more phenomenological approaches of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow are also outlined.

Eriksons theory of Psychosocial Moratorium is discussed in Chapter Two, as a parallel to the idea that Erikson can be seen as a neutral non-judgemental environment suitable for self-concept experimentation and role exploration. The art class can also provide for socialisation centred around common themes. Parallels are also drawn between Vygotsky's theory that the development of language is linked to culture, and the development of an art vocabulary as an aid to clearer self-expression by students.

Exploring self-concepts through the structure of art based project work could be a useful element in the consideration of a syllabus for art in the secondary school. An important concern in the establishment of an art department could also be the development of a non-threatening (neutral) learning / teaching environment, through which social and cultural role play / experimentation could occur more easily.

A discussion of the implementation of some of the above recommendations in a boys second level school takes place in Chapter Three; the chosen project work being the self-portrait and secondly, mask-making. The self-portrait provides the artist with an opportunity to confront himself in an honest and direct way. Masks were chosen to follow up this project with the same group of boys as the mask symbolises the inner "face" of man. It also has connotations with disguise, and provides the opportunity to put on new identities and create new meanings instantly.

CHAPTER ONE

SELF CONCEPTS IN ADOLESCENCE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

i A Brief History of the Self-Portrait

Evidence of portraiture can be found throughout the history of art. We have only to study the cave and rock paintings of Southern Africa, made by the bushmen, or the work of the aborigines in Australia to realize how important the representation of the self and others in a visual manner has been since the earliest times of man.

Universally, man has always felt the need to record himself, his family or tribe, and his environment in a permanent, representational and symbolic way. Bushman rock paintings in Africa have narrative qualities. The artist tells the story of great hunts; the animals and birds encountered in the course of their daily activities, and the methods used to trap and kill the animals that could feed their family for several days.

These rock and cave paintings have a vivacity and humour that touches even the contemporary viewer. Hand and foot prints on unlikely vertical surfaces of the rocks are left by the artist as signatures, his way of leaving his mark, handing down the method and manner of his daily life to posterity.

In Australia, the aborigines used primative symbolism to refer to current events, or well known myths. The myths and stories of the "Dreamtime", a time when mythical giants, half man and half creature, rose out of the ground and proceeded to create the mountains, rivers and plains, and indeed, all of the life that moved on the plain or swam in the rivers. Before the Dreamtime, the earth was a featureless plain, devoid of life. This creation myth provides the Aborigines with such strong and powerful stories and legends that they are constantly reflected in their art. It is the art of the Aborigines in the Northern Territories that most resembles the art of the Bushmen in Southern Africa. It records the daily aspects of life so important to a people living in harsh environments purely on their survival skills.

The art of portraiture became more developed in the fourteenth century, when an increased interest in Humanism became prevalent:

> Strange as it may sound to us, the idea of a portrait in the sense in which we use the word, did not occur to the Greeks until rather late in the fourth century. True, we hear of portraits made in earlier times, but these statues were probably not good likenesses. A portrait of a general was little more than a picture of any good-looking soldier with a helmet and a staff. The artist never reproduced the shape of his nose, the furrows of his brow, or his individual expression. (1)

Painters like Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1517) realized and were attracted to the importance of portraying aspects of the personality of the sitter

for portraits. Using new methods of painting and leaving a certain amount of detail to the imagination, his portraits evoke strongly ambiguous personality traits.

Parallel with this movement in portraiture ran the art of the self portrait. Artists worked on portraying their own likeness for several reasons. Firstly, as a way of practising and devising skills. What better way to plan composition, and implement new ideas than in a portrait for which the sitter was always available? Secondly, to render elements of personality either symbolically or in a purely representational manner, to evoke mood and thereby introduce a narrative element to the work is a challenging and compelling raison d'etre.

We have only to study the works of such artists as Durer (1471-1528), Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Van Gogh (1853-90) to realise the significance of the self-portrait to their oevre. To map the progress of the self-portraits of Durer is to be amazed at how well we come to an understanding of the man, from adolescence to old age. Rembrandt's portrayal of an old, disillusioned man can say more to the viewer than any biographical literature. It is from the self-portrait that we see the hardships and joys that are the common ingredients of life. It is through the exploration of the face that the artist confronts the reality of the image he presents to the public.

ii Self - Portraiture as a Means of Exploring Self-Identity Concepts

Jung talks of the persona or self image as a "Mask". We present the mask, developed over time by our environment and our perception of that environment.

> Jung called mans Mask the persona - the name for the mask worn by the actor in the ancient Greek theatre - and visualised it as the manner or system which we have created for ourselves to help us adjust to the world. The danger to which Jung points lies in the total identification with ones persona, which may finally come to be what the actual person is not, but what he and other people believe him to be. (2)

> In so called civilised societies masks are not used for ritual, nor are they discrete objects, but they are used, and used frequently for dealing with the world more effectively than the wearer can without them. (3)

Our social encounters are almost an act of collusion between the person who presents himself and the person who responds. Carefully created social identities can only work if the people one meets are willing to accept them - at face value.

Artists, and particularly portrait painters can only be too aware of this. They have been commissioned by the sitter to provide a suitable image, to record a version of the sitters personality and self-image that the subject can relate to, or feels to be an accurate summation of who he/she

is. In many cases the artist has to walk a fine line between his perception of his patron, and what he can discern his patrons self-image to be.

> In a remote or symbolic way many more things belong to the world of masks than we ordinarily realize or wish to accept. It is a truism that it is we who project our own vision of a person on to his face, and that a persons facial expression can change with his emotional or physical state. (4)

This study focuses on the developments in self-concepts that occur during adolescence, and the effect these can have on experiences in later life. The adolescent boy or girl is faced suddenly with a body that is changing and maturing rapidly towards adulthood, and is thus confronted with the confusion of being neither a child nor an adult. Caught in this netherworld, the young person must adapt to the new (bodily) self he or she perceives, and is thereby thrown into a state of flux - who are they, and who would they like to be?

> Like Freud, Erikson (1968) contended that we pass through clearly delineated stages, in which we have to resolve specific types of conflict if we are to enter the next stage successfully. Also, like Freud, Erikson believed that the way in which we resolve these conflicts as children and adolescents will influence our adult personalities. (5)

iii Self - Identity Issues in Adolescence with reference to Ericson

Eric Erikson is the source of much research into adolescent development. Although the cause of much contemporary debate, Erikson proposed that, in general, adolescence was a time of flux, the adolescent experiencing 'storm and stress'. He contended that issues unresolved during adolescence in the field of self-concepts/identity would cause difficulties in later life:

> Erikson lays some stress on the phenomenon of rapid biological and social change during adolescence, and points especially to the importance for the individual of having to take major decisions at this time in almost all areas of life. (6)

Erikson can be defined as a stage theorist; he believed that life is a series of different developmental stages, each with its own problem or task to be addressed. The infant seeks, for example, to establish a bond of trust with the mother. In doing so, he or she is laying a healthy foundation for relationships in the future.

As adolescence is a time of physical and emotional growth, Erikson felt that "the search for identity becomes especially acute at this stage." (7) The principal task of adolescence is the development of a " 'coherent identity', and the defeat of 'identity diffusion'. " (8)

According to Erikson, 'Identity Diffusion' has four major areas.

The first - The Problem of Intimacy -

> Here the individual may fear commitment or involvement in close interpersonal relationships because of the possible loss of his or her own identity. (9)

This can result in " repeated hectic attempts and dismal failures, seeking intimacy with the most improbable partners. " (10) The second area he termed Diffusion of Time Perspective, which "consists of a decided disbelief in the possibility that time may bring change, and yet also of a violent fear that it might." (11) The young person may find it increasingly difficult to direct his or her energy towards work or study, both of which represent commitment. Erikson defines this period or state as Diffusion of Industry. Coleman, in his book The Nature of Adolescence, interprets Eriksons definition of this state "...the individual may either find it impossible to concentrate, or may frenetically engage in one activity to the exclusion of all others." (12)

The fourth component of Identity Diffusion is Negative Identity:

> The loss of a sense of identity is often expressed in a scornful and snobbish hostility towards the role offered as proper and desirable in ones family or immediate community. (13)

iv James Marcia and Achieved Identity

James Marcia followed Eriksons thesis closely, and on the basis of Eriksons theory and his own research (1966;1970) suggests several states of adolescent identity:

1) Diffused 2) Fore-closed 3) in Moratorium and 4) Achieved.

Marcia called each of these states an Identity Status.

The adolescent in a state of Identity Diffusion has not yet experienced a crisis of identity, nor will he have chosen any career path. "There is also no indication that he or she is actively trying to make a commitment." (14). This provides a contrast to the youth with a Foreclosed Identity, who also has not experienced a crisis of identity, but has adopted:

> "an identity and a system of clearly defined values. Unfortunately, from Marcia's and Erikson's perspectives, these adolescents have prematurely endorsed the viewpoints of their parents and society's other authorities in lieu of examining alternative roles and values." (15)

For the adolescent in Moratorium, everything is in a state of flux. This is the condition of the stereotypical angst-ridden teenager: "an individual in this category is in a state of crisis, and is actively searching among alternatives in an attempt to arrive at a choice of identity." (16)

The state Marcia believed ideal is:

> ...the achieved identity. Those of us who form an achieved identity, by the end of adolescence are more likely to be empathetic, reflective, resistant to authority, self-confident and academically successful than our peers who adopted other identity statuses. (17)

It is of relevance to point out that athough James Marcia considered these four separate stages as part of a developmental sequence, he did not believe that any one stage was necessary for another to occur:

> "...only Moratorium appears to be essential for identity achievement, since the searching and exploring which characterises it must precede a

resolution of the identity problem." (18)

Adolescence, it appears, is a time of great importance for the formation of healthy, well adjusted adults. Each individual perceives the world in a unique way, and it is during adolescence, when the boy or girl has developed greater capacities for cognitive understanding that the question of self-identity must be confronted.

v Self-Identity Issues in Rogerian Theory

The belief in the need to resolve self-identity issues in adolescence also features in the work of Carl Rodgers (1951):

> Rodgers suggests that the seeds for later maladaptive behaviour are often found in the early failure to resolve the conflicting pictures of self that emerge from directly experienced and introjected values. (19)

Rogers theorizes from a phenomenological, humanist viewpoint:

> Rogerian Theory is phenomenological in that it is concerned primarily with the individuals own view of the world - that is, with the world as a person sees it rather than as it appears to be. (20)

It would appear that much of Rogers's theories are based more on the intuitive than on the reproducable solidity other research papers structure themselves around. This is not however, a critisism, merely an observation. Rogers used creative thinking to generate and stimulate interest in more humanistically based research. His work has also had a great impact on the teaching profession, spurring on a whole movement

in Humanistic education:

> ..humanistic approaches to education emphasise healthy social and personal development and, at the same time, de-emphasise rigorous performance - orientated, test - dominated approaches to subject matter. (21)

vi Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow (1968), also a humanist psychologist and a supporter of phenomonology,believed that the three principal causes for changes in self-concepts during adolescence were physical development, demands for adult identity and intellectual development.

Maslow came to the conclusion that developments in self - concepts were motivated by the needs of the individual. He supported this by proposing a Hierarchy of Needs - we are driven by our basic needs (the need for shelter, food etc.) and until these needs are addressed and satisfied, we are not free to address our higher order needs:

> We are all motivated by an intrinsic tendancy called self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968)....we want to 'actualise' ourselves and behave in ways that make self-actualisation possible. Before we can develop the traits of a self-actualised personality, we must fulfill other more basic needs. Maslow presumed that we are all motivated by the same needs and, further, that these needs are arranged in a hierarchical order : physiological needs, safety needs, needs for love and belongingness, need for self-esteem, and need for self-actualisation. (22)

Maslow believes, Linda Nielsen (1991) states, "that adolescents who feel

inferior to their peers and rejected by their parents cannot develop self-actualized personalities, because their needs for safety and self-esteem are unmet." (23)

It becomes more and more obvious that much research into adolescence focuses on this area of self-concept development and the need for positive reinforcement of the self-esteem of the individual. John Coleman, in his book The Nature of Adolescence (1980) states that:

> the denial of self can lead to de-personalisation.....The ways in which young people understand and perceive themselves, their own agency and personality, and their various situations have a powerful effect on their subsequent reactions to various life events. (24)

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24. John C. Coleman,,The Nature Of Adolescence, p. 45

CHAPTER TWO

THE ART CLASS AS A NEUTRAL ENVIRONMENT

i The Relevance of Erikson's 'Moratorium' to the art class as a Neutral Environment

The possibilities for a 'moratorium' in the widest sense of the word, enabling the adolescent to experiment with identities and suspend, evade or delay problems of self-definition can stave off crisis. Certainly, the evidence (e.g. Monge,1975; Engel,1959; Piers and Harris,1964; Simmons et al,1973) suggests that adolescents do not typically experience a crisis in defining or evaluating self. Findings by Coleman (1974) indicate that the adolescent is not overwhelmed in attempting to resolve simultaneously all areas of personal uncertainty, but rather focuses on problematic aspects of self in turn. (1)

The work of Eric Erikson (1968) is important to any study of adolescence, and adolescent development. He is mentioned here particularly as one of his most important ideas: 'that the major developmental task for the adolescent is the establishment of identity and the defeat of identity diffusion,' (2) is central to this dissertation.

The term 'moratorium' in the context of this study is derived from Eriksons theory of 'psychosocial moratorium'. Erikson believed that society allows a period of time (adolescence): 'when the individual may

delay major identity decisions, when he may experiment with roles in order that he might discover what sort of person he is and is not.' (3)

This experimentation with a variety of 'roles', as a means of uncovering valid and useful information towards the development of self has been the subject of many and varied research papers in the field of adolescent development. Elder (1968) states that "it is the belief of most sociologists that a large proportion of an individuals life is characterised by role engagement, and by the building of a role repertoire which constitutes a crucial facet of the self." (4)

The art class can provide a neutral environment within which experimentation and creativity are fostered and encouraged, and where it is possible for the adolescent student to analyse and develop awareness of inner themes and concepts.

Using societies (other peoples) objective impressions can be a stimulatng experience for those whose grasp of the self, or self-identity, is either unresolved or in a state of flux, as in adolescence.

ii The Result of Social Interaction on the Development of 'Self'

Orville Brim (1965) was particularly "interested in the adolescents views of the prescriptions or expectations that adults hold concerning the

behaviour of young people.....We should attempt to describe personality by reference to the individuals perceptions of himself and his behaviour and of the social organisation in which he lives." (5)

This opinion is closely mirrored by Guy Lefrancois (1991):

> The development of the 'self' results from interactions with the world (direct experience) and from values about the 'me' that are borrowed from the actions of other people (indirect experience). (6)

Strong self-concepts are generally not developed in isolation, but through the constant friction of being 'in' a society - the influences of our peers, parents and other authority figures all have an important part to play. Our social interactions open new areas within us to be examined; we do not:

> ...construct a reality soley on the basis of private encounters with exemplars of matural states. Most of our approaches to the world are mediated through negotiation with others. It is is this truth that gives such extraordinary force to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development. We know far too little about learning from vicarious experience, from interaction, from media, even from tutors. (7)

iii Vygotsky's Social-Cognitive Theory

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) is an interesting and influential figure in the area of child/ adolescent development. His work is particularly of relevance to educators, as one of the three principal areas covered in his thesis deals primarily with recognising and developing the childs

potential intellectual growth:

> ...he (Vygotsky) was far less interested in measuring past accomplishments or in assessing current levels of functioning than in arriving at some notion of potential for future development. Every child, he maintained, has a sphere, or a zone of current capabilities - in Vygotsky's words, a zone of proximal growth. (8)

Of particular relevance is the idea that the theory "stresses that cognitive development is profoundly influenced by the cultural and social environments." (9)

The three areas mentioned above can be categorised:

1. The Importance of Culture,

2. The Role of Language,

3. The Zone of Proximal Growth.

Vygotsky considered that people are driven firstly, by their elementary mental functions, (the instinctive functions of sense etc.) and these are then honed into higher mental functions through the effect of culture and the environment. Guy Lefrancois explains that "in the course of development, these elementary capacities are gradually transformed into higher mental functions, such as problem solving and thinking, largely through the influence of culture." (10)

We use language to communicate, to think and to act. Without culture, our use of language would develop differently, so the two are inextricably bound together. Vygotsky (1962) "describes three stages in the development of these roles of language. He labels them in terms of

three functions of speech : social, ego-centric, and inner. (11)

At the 'social' stage, we are using speech in an elementary way, principally to let others know, for example, that we are hungry, cold, etc. We are using language to express our basic needs as Maslow would define them. As we grow and develop, we reach an intermediary stage (ages three through seven) where language is no longer in the basic form of communication. This is when language is used ego- centrically: "children often talk to themselves in an apparent attempt to guide their own behaviour." (12)

Inner speech can be classified as the flow of our thoughts - it is the silent language within us that directs our behaviour as older children, adolescents and adults.

iv Creativity as a Means of Exploring Self-Identity

What is creativity? The question is open to a great many answers, depending on the subjective position taken by the listener. Definitions of creativity are often linked with definitions of intelligence. In fact, the two areas have been the focus of much research.

Creativity has been defined in many different ways, " it is a quality of humans and of human behaviour, - a quality possessed by everyone." (13). One of the more interesting definitions, by S.A. Mednick (1962)

reflects the qualities of divergent thinking, three factors of which include fluency, flexibility and originality:

> Creativity is the forming of associative elements into new combinations which either meet specified requirements or are in some ways useful. The more mutually remote the elements of the new combination, the more creative the process of solution. (14)

It is possible to consider creativity as a universal term - it constitutes more than one element. A discussion of creativity in this context must mention the work of Howard Gardner (1983), who maintains the existence of seven types of intelligence. Gardners Theory of Multiple Intelligences lists them as:

1. linguistic, 2. logical and mathemetical, 3. visual and spatial, 4. musical, 5.bodily kinesthetic (fine motor movement) ,6. interpersonal (understanding others), and 7. intrapersonal (knowing oneself and having a sense of identity).

He believes that it is possible to be highly creative in any one of these areas -"it is possible to be highly gifted in one aspect, but not in any other." (15)

Student work within the art class is primarily based on developing and exploring the creativity of the student, usually within the parameters of a given theme or topic. Ideally, the given work in the class should challenge the student to explore and define areas previously unacknowledged.

> R.W.Witkin ascribes great importance to creative activities in schools because human beings sometimes need to express themselves in forms chosen to fit their own situations. He argues that we are obsessed with objective approaches to things, in which we let ourselves be determined overmuch by the world outside us. (16)

It is possible for much experimentation with cultural and personal role-taking to be introduced through art-based projects. The Self-Portrait is an ideal example of this - the student will - through confronting him or herself physically, also confront personal concepts of who that student believes himself to be.

Through the use of the imagination, the student can create imaginary persona's, or even present the interior world to full view with reduced fears of lack of acceptance, as the teacher and his peers will ideally make judgements only within the boundaries of the project based task:

> Children who are exposed to a wide range of sensory experience are more likely to be self-assured. Through regular repitition and reinforcement of the childs natural experiences, he builds concepts about himself and his environment, and the relationships between the concepts of art are realised....This personal growth or self-discovery of the individual could be opened up through his art learning. (17)

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CHAPTER THREE

SELF PORTRAITURE AND THE MASK

For the purposes of this study a project based on the Self - Portrait was implemented in an all boys secondary school, with a student body drawn from varied socio-economic backgrounds. The school itself is situated in a disadvantaged area - many of the students consider third level education irrelevant and unattainable. Unemployment and drug abuse amongst other factors are familiar to the students, if not in their immediate circle, then in their extended family and friends.

A fifth year group were chosen as the basis for this project work, as they represent the age group most affected by self - identity issues, and also as they are nearing the difficult period of leaving school and finding a vocation or goal they can aspire or commit to. There are fifteen boys in this class aged between sixteen and a half and eighteen. Academically, they are of very mixed ability - many of the students have difficulty in expressing themselves satisfactorily.

The aim of this project was to create a space within which the 'self' could be explored, in the neutral environment of an art class. It was important that technical skills were addressed as a means of boosting self - esteem on an individual level. The greater the students capacity for manipulating media successfully the more confident the student will feel

about his all-round ability in many different areas. This puts the student in a strong position when it comes to exploring identity issues. For this reason, the start of the project was based on keen observational drawings; it was found that a sequence of timed sketches (see Fig. 3.1 and 3.2) removed the awkwardness that the students felt in such close observation of their own faces - many students were embarrassed at having to spend longer than a few minutes looking at themselves; however, the timed sketches motivated and increased their concentration.

Several class periods were spent in this way - the time and standard expected of students increasing gradually, which challenged them successfully. When this later more detailed work was compared to that of the earlier sessions, students were pleased and proud of their obvious achievements. This meant that they were far less daunted, and more open, to the more difficult task of accomplishing a self-portrait, set in an environment of their choice, based either on fantasy or reality.

To effect this end, students discussed the self portrait work of many artists, among them Frieda Kahlo, Pissaro and Egon Schiele. Great emphasis was placed on the reasons artists felt compelled to paint or draw the self, and on the varied methods used to portray or reveal aspects of the personality of the artist.

It was found that students were very interested in the idea of personal

3.1

3.2

symbolism, and the use of symbolism in the narrative of the artists work. Students became quick to point out the use of colour and light to create mood or atmosphere in work. The more exposed to this topic the less discomfort or embarrassment the subject caused; students developed a vocabulary for discussion of their own work, and that of others. As this happened, students became motivated towards their own work, and encouraging towards others.(see Figs. 3.3 and 3.4) The environment of the art room was non - judgemental, and it was repeatedly pointed out that this was their work, other people might contribute ideas or advice, but in the end the decisions involved in the project were made by the individual, the students became absorbed in self-reflection -- ideas were sketched out at home and brought in to class with enthusiasm. It became obvious that there were clear reasons behind many of the manifestations in the work - hobbies, interests and hopes for the future being the most prominent. Classroom evaluations became discussions where ideas were offered, and students talked of the imagery in the work of others.

It was interesting to note the students identifying with other artists encountered through a separate art-history scheme covering the Renaissance, and therefore dealing with the work of such artists as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and the emergence, through the development of private patronage, of the portrait genre. As the students were so closely involved with self-study and reflection through this project, they found it easier to read into the artists expression -- the pose

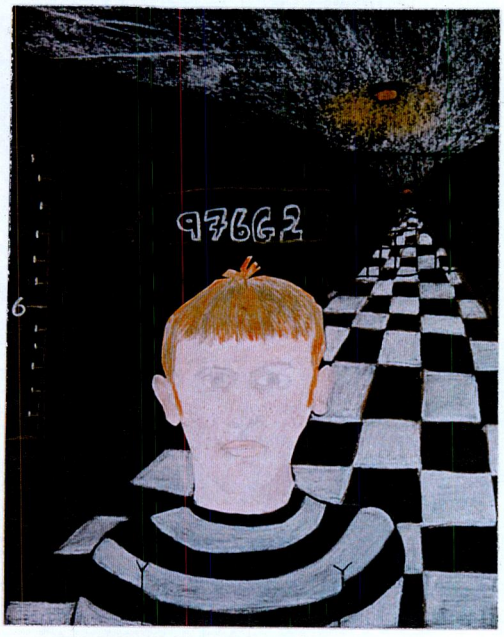
3.3

3.4

he chose to sit in, the colours used, etc.Having worked systematically at classes centred on observation work, students were introduced to the idea of placing the self-portrait in an environment - the use of a personal place, or objects of specific meaning to the student, became the focus for the next number of lessons. Obviously, this involved a lot of design work, however, students appeared to find it a difficult area. They were reluctant to explore areas beyond the obvious, (school, sport, etc.). (see Fig. 3.5 - 3.8)

Through class discussion and brain-storming sessions, a pool of ideas were gathered, and as the response from the teacher was both encouraging and non-judgemental, students gradually became more open and confident with suggestions. Although in any class group-dynamics comes into play, it became apparent that students followed the example of the teacher, and became more accepting of their peers. The atmosphere fostered in the class became one of respect for the individual, which resulted in a greater awareness of each other, and the group. It was a very positive reaction to a personal project.

The second project used in connection with this study was based on the mask. In this way, the students were dealing with issues from within (self-portrait) and without (the mask). As it was important that students were aware of the relevance of the mask in relation to the previous project, much emphasis was placed on the history of the mask in various



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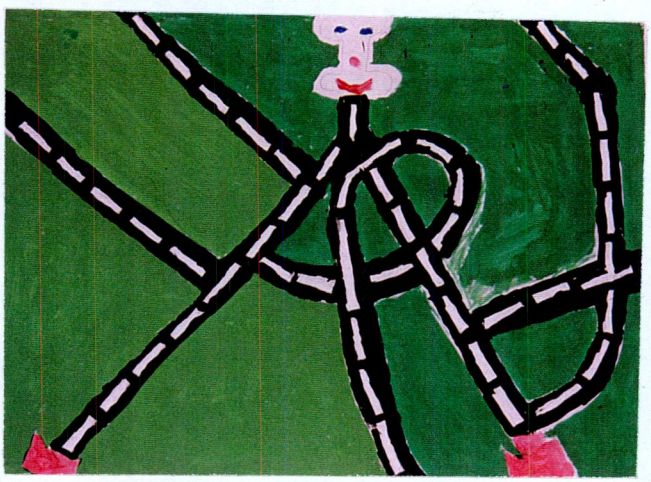

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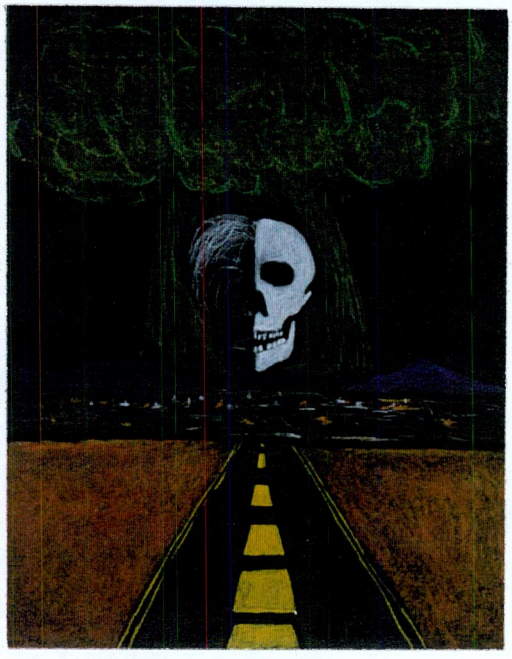


3.8

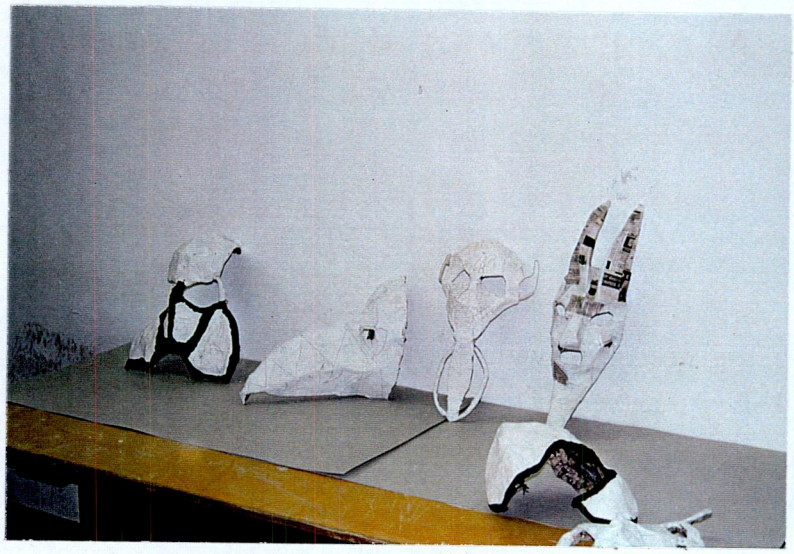
cultures. The use of the mask in ceremonies since the age of primitive man, and the almost magical connotations of the mask were discussed. Students were interested in mans ability to take on, as it were, other meaning through the use of the mask.

Students were drawn to the modern uses of the mask, and the validity of the mask in contemporary culture was not questioned; students accepted the place the mask still occupies. When the idea of the mask being connected to the self-portrait project was mentioned, students were unable to see any connection beyond that of the face. They were, however, interested in the use of the mask as a cover; a disguise:

> Primitive man put on a mask to pacify nature, the mysterious and frightening face of the unknown. (1)

The work from this project is on-going; students are very enthusiastic about their work and the imaginary character they are in the process of creating: (see Fig. 3.9-3.10) "Thus the mask is often little less than a symbol of escape, a protection with whose help a direct confrontation with the contemporary
world can be avoided." (2)

Although primitive masks were used as support studies, and the history of the mask was emphasised, a large number of the class are working on the creation of culturally stereotypical images: the devil, a chinaman, animals of varying types, etc. The students relate strongly to the masks,



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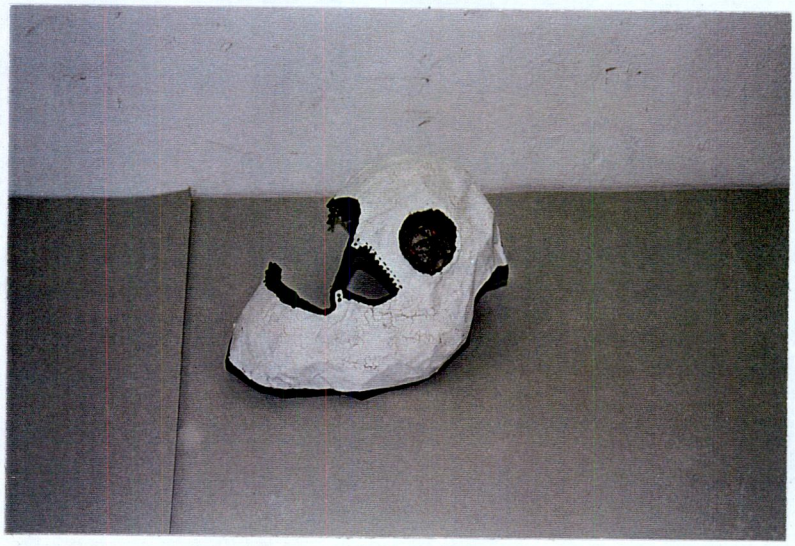

3.10

which are clearly linked to an inner fantasy life in many cases:

> It is the artist in man who creates the mask. It has always been an essentially basic desire in man to recreate the image of himself so as to represent the various facets of his ego, to disguise or to hide them. The mask has been a most prominent feature whenever he has reached for the two extremes: his return to primitive and basic levels, his escape into wanton ecstacy, or his sophisticated penetration ofhis self. (3)

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER THREE

1. Walter Sorell, The Other Face: The Mask in the Arts,(London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.,1973) P.14.

2. Ibid., P.23.

3. Ibid., P.1.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter One the relevance and importance of the representation of self and others in a visual manner throughout history was stressed, using the art of the Bushmen in Southern Africa and the Aborigines in Australia to illustrate this point, and to emphasise the use of self representation in a narrative context.

The Renaissance was discussed with reference to the development of the self-portrait/portrait genre, as separate to the secular art of the pre-renaissance period. It was at this time that artists became interested in portraying aspects of the personality of the subject in portraiture. The self-portrait was deemed a useful tool in the practising and devising of skills, while contemporary interest in the rendering of elements of personality either symbolically or in a purely representational manner also focused importance on the genre.

Eric Erikson confirmed that the search for self-identity becomes acute during adolescence. As the artist can use self-portraiture to confront the image he presents to the public, it is felt in this dissertation that adolescent students can also use the self-portrait as a means of exploring self-identity, roles and values.

The role of the art class is discussed in Chapter Two, with particular

reference to the parallels between Eriksons theory of Psychosocial Moratorium and the art room as a neutral, non-judgemental environment. Erikson believed that society allows a period within which the adolescent can experiment with different roles and interests. Chapter Two stresses the opinion that the art room can, in much the same way, provide an arena within which creativity and experimentation are fostered and encouraged, while also providing a space where social interaction around a common goal can take place. It is felt that cognitive development is profoundly influenced by cultural and social environments, a thesis propounded by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky also believed that the development of language is linked to culture. This study believes that there are parallels to be drawn between the above and the development of a critical vocabulary in Art, through which the student can express himself more succinctly.

Art based projects also provide suitable stimulation through which experimentation with social and cultural role taking can occur. The student will come to understand that it is possible to discuss and present facets of his interior world without fear of rejection if a neutral environment is propagated in the art room.

Chapter Three is principally concerned with the praxis of this dissertation - the subjects for this area were chosen as they represent the age group most affected by self-identity issues. It was found that the

acquisition of technical ability improved self-esteem and confidence. Students were encouraged by their improved ability and, through the emphasis on developing an art based vocabulary, were able to express their ideas and feelings about art work in an articulate manner. These skills, combined with the open environment of the art room, encouraged and motivated students, a fact evidenced by their work. Students were imaginative and open in their self-portraits.

Having already confronted certain issues in relation to self-identity, students were given the freedom to explore this area with greater imagination in the second project - Mask-making. They were fascinated by the mask as disguise, and within this felt liberated - they were able to experiment with different meanings of self, and to explore through this aspects of their inner worlds.

Exploring self concepts through the structure of art based project work should be a recognised and useful element in the planning of a syllabus for the secondary school.

At a time when young people are faced with a greater variety of lifestyles and roles, it is essential that not only are they prepared and guided in this area by the school - through career guidance, civics and other subjects, but that they are allowed time to explore their identity in a non-judgemental, neutral environment.

The art class can provide the perfect situation for this exploration, introducing project work that encourages individuality and self-expression. This can only be acheived when the art teacher makes a conscious decision to plan projects, not only around technical proficiency, but also to encourage and motivate the student towards self-directed work.

Projects for the art class should require research and evaluation by students, of a given topic or theme. Through reading, and critical analysis of other artists work, and given a forum where open discussion is accepted and openly propagated, the student can form solid opinions of themselves, their environment and their history. This in turn will create in students greater self-awareness and esteem:

> Teaching empowers students (makes them capable) by giving them important information and skills, by fostering in them the feelings of personal power that come with social confidence and self-esteem, and by developing in them the learning/ thinking strategies that are essential for learning how to learn. (1)

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