

The Enigma of Artistic Creativity in Pre-school Years, Childhood and Adolescence

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The years before a child enters school are regarded as the golden age of creativity. Children at this age are like gems, they sparkle when they are allowed to unfold themselves in artistic activity. But then. Later, in early puberty the gloss seems to wear off and the drawings the pupils produce can be deemed to be ordinary in comparison with what they were capable of earlier. Their artistic development seems to have been stunted. For educationalists the development of creativity becomes difficult to explain. For the teacher, it seems his or her work can appear to have been futile. Only a few emerge from adolescence as bearers of artistic talent, even fewer become artists. What has happened to the love of drawing, painting, singing and dancing?

The kindergarten is a world enriched with imagination and creativity. The will of young children to express themselves is powerful. Early school years often see a steady decline and the quality usually drops dramatically in puberty. This is a mystery for the educational psychologist as well as for the teacher. Many have blamed our modern culture and an ever earlier awareness of what is going on around us. Others have pointed the figure at the entertainment industry and particularly television. Others investigate the mechanisms of the left hemisphere of the brain.

An alternative way of attempting to understand this development seen in the great majority of children, (how many give up playing an instrument at thirteen?), is to study the book of life in an attempt to see clearly the overall development of the child.

The first years of infancy are an encounter with the world where a direct relation to physical things and the social world is established through direct sensory reception. When the child reaches the 3-7 year period he or she can communicate these experiences to others, and, what is more, loves doing so. Between five and seven children produce works that are lively and pleasing both to themselves and for the onlooker. The young child speaks directly through drawings, shapes, lines and colours in an attempt to understand the world by conveying their inner feelings. A young child will hum whilst drawing, dances when singing. This is the charm of this stage in life that fascinated Rousseau and later Herbert Read. They are the drawings that inspired twentieth century art seen in the work of Klee, Miró and Picasso. At first they were said to be copies of the work of children. In fact they were learning to simplify.

Puberty, on the other hand, can be characterized as creeping towards convention. A youth is often told what he should do and how he should do it. Education at this level has had the idea that a youth must be taught to fit into society so that he can find his role in life for the benefit of the community as a whole. An adolescent stops playing and stops drawing. Rules do not tolerate deviation nor do routines. Therefore it is best to copy.

But there is another important factor than must be taken into consideration when we consider adolescent tendencies. Pupils start to understand more and more. This involves, in the first instance, contemplating works created by others. This can limit artistic expression in a pupil trying to find who he himself is, in order to later find an individualized expression. Now the question is not to taste the world as in the early years but the find what tastes one likes best. A youth becomes highly critical of his or her own presentations. It is the time of a dawning self evaluation. If the pupil feels his own efforts are inadequate in comparison with what others are doing, a

downward spiral will lead to despair and an abandoning of art altogether.

Therefore one can see the development of artistic ability, so vital for creativity in all branches of life, as a 'U' shape where, in the first instance in the pre-school years there is a high level of creativity. Then there is a downward tendency with less striking and appealing results, and so, hopefully a new conscious upturn leading to true artistic accomplishment in later years.

The question for the teacher is now a vital one: do both high extremes of the 'U' have the same components?

It would seem there are clear differences. The youth and adult artist is aware of norms that reflect convention and is fully conscious of the fact. Innovation means that the artist creates something new- and that can only be judged against that which already exists. In other words being creative means rejecting convention. This is what adolescence is all about. To illustrate the point – Picasso once remarked: “I once drew as Raphael but it has taken me a whole lifetime to draw like Picasso.”

In the kindergarten the children do things themselves, of their own accord. It cannot be otherwise. That means there is a natural artistry in childhood. But school is a place where children want to know how to do things. It is called learning. Therefore teachers need to take on a more active role in, for example, drawing, as they indeed do in other forms of artistry such as mathematics. The pupils seek accomplishment. Drawing and painting holds this up for everyone instantaneously. The teacher has to present models of how to do things, stage by stage according to age. No longer can one rely on the sunshine years when the child drew without instruction.

The motivation to excel by always doing one's best needs to be enforced strongly in the 5th class where there is a need to distinguish oneself through expression. This means learning to live with uncertainty and the risk of failure and pupils should always be given the chance to rectify themselves. After all, in such an instance they have seen how things can be bettered. Art is involves practice. Practice needs guidance. The challenge of the Waldorf teacher is to keep the level of artistic expression to a level that is satisfying for himself as it is an expression of the deepest feelings of the pupil who commits his crayon and paintbrush to paper.

In childhood 'the gift controls the child', in the mature artist it is he 'who controls his gift'.