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EDITORIAL:

NEGRO TEACHERS AND INTEGRATION

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ART EXPERIENCES IN THE EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO

BY DELILAH W. PIERCE

EDUCATION for "our way of life" in "our times"; education for "all the people" that our way of life might be maintained; this we hear and say ever so often and, as Americans, firmly believe. We believe that our security, progress and happiness as a democratic society rests on happy, balanced individuals who are self-supporting and enlightened, and who have the will and ability to maintain and to improve our way of life whenever and wherever necessary. As educators we strive to promote the best possible education for all—yes, for all—and especially are we interested in the education of Negroes, that Negroes too may be well-rounded individuals, with the highest possible degree of competence and emotional stability; that they may enjoy a "Full Life."

What do we need? To be sure we need reading, writing, arithmetic, the sciences, the languages, and social studies. Also, we need the technical courses, the business courses and the trades. We need all of them. But, life is not all facts and skills. It is much more; it is related to the satisfaction of basic individual wants. Education is concerned with the student's inner feeling, attitudes and appreciations, his ability or lack of ability to adjust himself in life, his ability or lack of ability to get along with the group. And for society, of course, there is always the individual's creative possibilities that make "him" and that may contribute to man's storehouse of knowledges and treasures. These basic individual needs are most important in our way of life, for what the individual is fundamentally determines what he does or is capable of doing with his accumulated knowledges and skills. More and more in our daily lives the need for fundamental experiences in the development of our citizens is evidenced. It is a general need, but the general need of our society—because of existing conditions—is a special need of ours as Negroes.

What can be done to meet these needs and to attempt to adjust the lives of our people? In considering this, let us recall some facts about education, formal and informal, in past years, or even in past ages. The individual was taught in the home, the church and the community to live. These experiences usually cared for his emotional and creative self. For example, art was a part of living. Men created pictures and sculpture for the church or their religion and their meeting places. They shaped and decorated utensils and useful objects for the home. They created temples, cathedrals and other necessary objects. Thus, they released the inner self and created beauty that was useful. The formal schools cared for the attainment of other knowledges and skills.

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## Art

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With the years have come changes in the home and the community, and the schools have had forced upon them increasing educational demands for which their programs have not been fully adjusted. However, thinking educators and laymen are well aware of the fact that more than reading, writing and arithmetic and other such courses are necessary to give the balanced education. They realize that the experiences needed must be such that will reach all phases of an individual's make-up, if the individual is to be the balanced personality. It is an accepted fact that if any "sense" is thwarted and undeveloped the result is an unbalanced personality, a maladjusted individual incapable of maintaining the security in a democratic society.

What experiences will help develop this basic individual? What experience might serve as the balance wheel in human development? Shall we say that some are the universal languages that express men's inner selves? Shall we say that they are the expressions by which a people's growth and cultural development are judged? They are and have been down through the ages. Among them are the creative experiences, and specifically creative art experiences that afford opportunities for real growth, emotionally, socially and creatively.

Unfortunately, through the years, as formal education developed, more stress was placed on the attainment of facts and skills, and less on basic human development.

A study of educational programs and curricula of most schools very readily discloses the emphasis given to academic and technical courses and the pitiful attention paid to the creative arts. However, in recent years, in an effort to determine what makes us "tick" some medical men, psychologists, psychiatrists, teachers and social workers have made studies of child development and adult adjustment to life. All have considered such development and adjustment the continuous chain of human growth and have disclosed some eye-opening information. All have had a strong feeling for the value of art experiences as vital factors in education from childhood throughout adulthood—for early development, for finding one's self, for release from tensions and inhibitions, for relaxation and providing for the creative urge. Thinking persons feel that art experiences will become progressively more meaningful and significant as we come to know just how color, for instance, helps to release and direct the forces of feeling and imagination, and how pressing the child's—and the adult's—energies outward into clay directs and orders the forces of his "spirit" and strengthens him in his whole development and adjustment to life.

Many experiments in art as an educative process have been and are being carried on in an effort to take art from its "ivory tower" for the talented or the wealthy few, where it has been since the beginning of the machine age, to make it a part of life, and to use it in its rightful place as a means of expression. Among these experiments are "Art A Way of Life," a project to improve education for living, developed in the public schools of Owatonna, Minnesota in 1933; a study of child development through art education made at the Bryn Mawr Art Center Workshop; a study of the art of teaching art carried on at annual conferences at the Museum of Modern Art; a recent study of the importance of art education discussed at a conference sponsored by George Washington

University and the U. S. Office of Education; a study of child development made by Dr. Arnold Gesell and his collaborators. These studies and experiments and many others plus many articles and books that have been written about the subject, should lead the way to the solution of many education ills.

A closer, more personal study of the effects of creative art experiences on students will reveal their value in emotional, social and creative growth. Of course, such experiences must in themselves be creative and should be guided by an understanding, sensitive person who can imagine himself in the student's place. Set techniques and patterns of work should not be the goals. Instead, such experiences should lead the individual to rid himself of inhibitions and should become total expressions of "him." In my own experience I have found that most students, and others, given the opportunity, time, encouragement and guidance in creative activities and sharing responsibilities, develop keener appreciations and improved attitudes toward their own abilities, those of others and life in general. This same class room affords an opportunity to develop responsibility through the care of materials and work; to develop initiative and resourcefulness through experimentation; to develop appreciations and desired attitudes toward fellow students and their work; and to develop confidence in one's self through creative accomplishments, regardless of how meager they might be.

From another point of view, John Dewey in his *Art as Experience* says an irritated person must act to get rid of his irritation. He may rearrange furnishings in his room and as he puts objects in order, his emotions are ordered. Dewey further explains that not only is this true of arranging furniture, but whatever the irritated person selects to put in order will have an ordering effect on his emotions, and the result is a form of art—the act of creating.

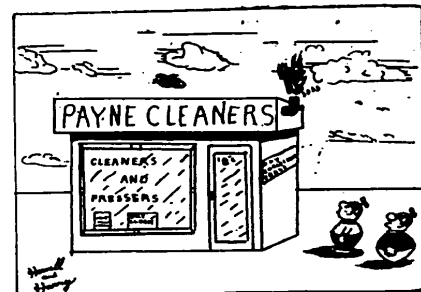
Constructive work in the art class tends to have a corresponding effect on an individual. It is a period of relaxation—a period in which one can completely forget tiring problems and put his thinking in order. It is a time when through a creative activity an individual can reflect and find himself. As he puts things in order in his manipulation of materials, of lines, of masses, of color—his emotions are ordered and the result is an expression that is genuine even though it may not rank highly as a "work of the arts."

These art experiences have still another value. Life and work in adulthood are so highly specialized and routinized that day after day of such tasks dull the mind, kill the imagination and fail to give any sense of creative accomplishment. Even the modern forms of recreation, the movie, the television and the radio tend to sap the individual's resourcefulness and power to express himself. Because of this high degree of specialization, men must be encouraged and trained to participate in activities that will restore the wholeness of the personality. Art education can lead the way to such leisure time activities that will give relaxation and intellectual, emotional and creative satisfaction.

These problems of developing the well-balanced individual, that he may fully enjoy life or that he might be emotionally and socially developed enough to "live," are very important and are especially so in the education of Negroes. It is needless for me to take time and space here to explain or to restate the problems and conditions in the lives of Negroes that cause inhibitions, tensions, emotional upsets, frustrations and lack of general cultural experiences. It is also needless to explain the fact that Negroes grow physically, emotionally, and socially as other humans do, and have the same potential abilities. The experiments and studies on growth have been made, and are efforts to find the answers to all human development. What is important in the education of any

part of the human race is accepted as important for the education of all. The degree of importance is determined by the need. Existing conditions are proof of the general needs and of the specific needs of Negroes. Since art experiences are generally accepted by thinking people as significant factors in education or growth, emotionally, socially, and individually, such experiences are extremely significant factors in the education of Negroes.

## Cartoon By Students



WONDER HOW WILL SANTA GET DOWN THAT CHIMNEY?

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH "CREATES" FOR HIS OWN SCHOOL PAPER

## Integration

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entirely Negro, because of population shifts. They will demand placement as teachers of those best qualified to guide the educational progress of youth. They will watch the progress of Negroes in schools where the vast majority of children are white. In short, Negro teachers subscribe to a program that has as its goal the development of the highest potentialities of all youth.

Negro teachers see no need to sacrifice their personal security for the sake of the so-called integration that stops at the level of the pupils. While fighting for the "F.E.P.C." and other racial gains, why should Negro teachers accept less than full integration in the matter of their own employment? True integration should mean that all children might attend all schools, and that all teachers might teach in all schools.