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Art in Early Education

Mrs. Mary Dana Hicks

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and vertical lines; on the contrary, such exercises have undoubtedly great value in giving the child control over his nervous system, the same value as exercises in sewing and woodworking; but they are manual training, not drawing; and drawing ought not to bear the burden of disagreeable associations which do not belong to it.

When the child has reached a stage of development where he naturally tends to discard merely diagrammatical forms for exact representations, then the grammar of drawing may profitably be begun; and our study would seem to indicate that this is at about ten years of age. Even then, however, the instruction concerning the art should not so far precede the child's accomplishment as to discourage effort. We can so exalt rhetoric as to frighten a boy or girl away from writing; and we can so exalt the rhetoric of drawing as to frighten the child away from drawing.

But even if we accept the natural tendencies of the mind as right and to be encouraged, this study still fails to do more than cast some faint side lights on the many vexed questions which it touches. A score of careful specialized studies must be made before we can speak with the certainty of knowledge¹.

EARL BARNES,

Professor of Education,

Leland Stanford, Jr., University.

ART IN EARLY EDUCATION.²

By MRS. MARY DANA HICKS.

I believe that there is no word that has more phases of meaning than this word art,—that is, to play so large a part in the discussion of this morning.

To one, it means a bunch of paper flowers; to another, a decorated shovel; to another, wax lilies under a glass cover; to another, one of John's or Mary's wonderful crude works in charcoal (the child knowing nothing of modes of expression, but inspiring the rapt admiration of his parents); to another, a photograph or a colored print; to another, a study of the antique; to another, a transparent water color; to another, a fine engraving; to another, an oil painting, frequently most commonplace; to another, a John Rogers group; to another, a graceful ornament; to another, a beautiful vase; to another, a Corot, a Millet, a Raphael, a Fra Angelico, or a Venus of Melos, a Gothic cathedral or a Greek Parthenon. The objects that are portrayed are different, the appreciation is different, but the impulse is the same in all: a desire to satisfy the æsthetic sense, a desire to satisfy that longing for refinement and beauty which every living soul possesses, and the germs of which remain in every human being, however degraded. It is an unconscious reaching out for something higher, of which dim forecasts are felt within—a striving for the possibilities of enjoyment and creation of the beautiful, which is part of the inheritance of every one. The realization of this desire and feeling for the beautiful in any degree is art, and the expression of this feeling is a work of art.

The art impulse may not always be strong; it will need nurture and care; it will for a long time need direction, but it always exists; it is a reality, from the beginning of the life of the human soul. It

¹ Much of the work for this study was done by Miss Anna Köhler.

² This paper is supplemented by extracts from one given before the kindergarten department, in which the children's drawings presented by Professor Barnes are considered as showing the art impulses of children.

has to be cultivated, it has to be developed, otherwise its possibilities and even its very existence may remain unknown.

Henry Barnard has wisely said: "The nature of babies and young children is still much less considered by scientific observers than is that of plants and animals; there is consequently in this field an infinite number of discoveries and experiences to be collected together, which, in their importance for the well-being of human society, are second to no science whatever. What Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Jean Paul, Burdach, Schleiermacher, and others have effected in this direction is still very little compared with what has yet to be done in order that education may really bear good fruit, and the secret workings of the child's mind and spirit be fully revealed."

We are beginning now to study the child. The first systematic attempt of that sort was by Preyer; he, however, studied but one child. Now studies of the child are being presented with great earnestness on every side. The very suggestive and valuable paper before the Art and Manual Training Congress by Earl Barnes, professor of education at the Leland Stanford University, is of very great significance. His deductions were very strong and of great interest on the side of mental development, showing to a degree the child's method of thinking and of representing what he thinks. The plotted curves took us up to the child's heights and down to his valleys, so far as the subject, the thoughts presented in the little story would let him go. The story of "Johnny Look-in-the-Air" was a child's story with a moral implied. Strange to say, it was discovered that the children (over 6,000 in number) who drew various scenes from the little story cared more for the quieter scenes than for the rougher ones; greater numbers selected these to draw. Johnnie meeting the dog was more interesting to them than Johnnie tumbling over the dog. Johnnie's going to the river was to them apparently a more delightful subject of thought than Johnnie falling into the river. And still farther, the scene, that called forth feeling of the highest order presented in the story, Johnnie's rescue, attracted them much more than the calamities which befell Johnnie.

These results are especially encouraging to those who believe the better impulses of the child are stronger than those which are debasing. Still farther, the results were encouraging to those who believe in the art impulses of the child. The story selected was not one which would in any way call forth any desire for the beautiful or any impulse to express it. But in the few examples presented, there could be seen a revealing of the inborn æsthetic sense: a revealing of the disposition toward those laws which underlie the highest art.

Professor Barnes said that one noticeable feature was the disposition of the children to present Johnnie as the hero by emphasizing this fact in their own way. Johnnie was made large, while his rescuers were in many cases made small, as if to show that in the minds of the children he was the important person. If this conclusion of Professor Barnes is correct, and there seems to be no reason to doubt its correctness, there is shown right here the recognition by the child of one of the great principles of art, the principle of values—the need that objects should be expressed in some way so as to convey to those who see a picture the relative importance of the objects portrayed,—the need that the principal objects should be so given that its importance will at once be conveyed to the eye, and the accompanying need that subordinate objects should receive subordinate treatment. This is a lesson that the art student has to work long to learn; in the most of cases he has lost that early most unconscious

sense of relations, of emphasis and of proportion (I mean proportion in the large sense of the relation between the principal and the subordinate),—that early sense of relative importance and of relative value.

Another art element found in these drawings is what Prof. Barnes calls the diagrammatic expression. The drawings seemed, however, to be rather more than diagrammatic, for the diagrammatic means coldness and intellectuality, while these drawings have warmth, life, and even color, color being here used in the sense of warmth of tone and expression frequently found in black and white drawings. They have, moreover, an art element which is often sought in vain by art students, a directness and simplicity that uses only telling lines, a strong expression by outline alone.

Professor Barnes said that the drawings did not make clear whether the child apprehended more than two dimensions. The subjects of the scenes were not such as to give much opportunity for showing this apprehension, but the few actual drawings of the children's own work do show in the case of the book floating on the water and of the hat that the third dimension is unconsciously recognized.

The drawings showed another art element,—that of the recognition by the child of the whole rather than of the parts, that which is known technically as seeing the mass. Here the children have especially the advantage over those who have seen more. Life begins to them, as Professor James characterizes it, as a "big blooming confusion." Gradually there appear images in their strong characteristics, and later the details appear one by one; so in the drawings of the children—first, the essential, then the details,—first, the mass, then the parts composing the mass,—first, the outline of the head, then the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Professor Barnes made the very significant statement that in no case in all the drawings was there any attempt at anything like a decoration. There were no borders on the drawings. Here is manifested another recognized art element, namely, that decorative and representative drawings should not be combined, as the purpose is essentially different. Too often we see this law violated, and yet out of the mouths of these babes it is spoken for us. They tell us of oneness of purpose.

Yet for all that, these drawings do reveal to us the decorative instinct for Professor Barnes pointed out that on these drawings there were, especially in the case of the younger children, various little addenda which had nothing whatever to do with the story. He spoke especially of the desire for repetition which frequently manifested itself. In one case, a child drew twenty-six Johnnies. In this is shown that very strong element in decorative art, that of rhythm, which is innate in us all. We breathe in rhythm, and our nature always responds to rhythm, whether in verse, in song, or in decoration.

And still farther, the child seized here the only opportunity presented of manifesting the creative, which is after all the great art element.

These drawings then reveal to us the art elements of values, proportion, simplicity and directness, graphic quality, oneness of purpose, recognition of the whole (seeing the mass), a sense of rhythm, and the greatest of all, creative power.

It is hoped that this experiment may be supplemented by many others. Even with this story, in which there was no reaching toward the ideal, the child has revealed his æsthetic sense, his impulse toward art.

This controverts some of the ideas held in the past. Art has been recognized as the flower of civilization. Works of art are the highest works of man. That which the world would least willingly spare from its life are the master-pieces of art.

"Earth proudly wears the Parthenon
As the best gem upon her zone."

What could compensate for its loss, or for the loss of the Venus of Melos, or the Sistine Madonna? Herein lies the consummate genius of man—the realization of his highest aspirations. Can it be possible that this is also the heritage of the little child,—that in him lie the desires and the possibilities, which, if nurtured, trained and directed, will lead in some degree to the same fruition? It has been deemed an anomaly to say so—it has been deemed wrong to think so. But we are coming to believe that the child is father to the man, and that "heaven lies around us in our infancy." In the little child lies the art impulse of creativity, the creation of the beautiful. But this will not grow, blossom and bear fruit except as the sun shines on it, as the dews and the rain water it, as the soil nourishes it, and as it is tended and trained and guided to its full stature and its highest fruition. In the beginning, it has but the tender life of an infant; it reaches out toward the light, but if it finds only darkness, it hides itself and is lost. What can we do for this divine impulse? How shall we foster it?

First, we must recognize it: we must give it sustenance by presentation of the beautiful. We must let the sun of human encouragement and sympathy shine upon it: we must train it gently by leading wisely to observation: we must teach it the arts of technique: we must bring to its support the cultivation of the imagination: we must lead it to the best expression of the highest thought.