

Art: It's as Simple as That



In our daily comings and goings, we confront an intriguing world of visual wonder.

Eldon Katter

I guess it bears repeating over and over again: Instruction in art is basic to a comprehensive education. Making and responding to art are relatively simple acts involving mind, spirit, and body. The process of making art engages the mind and channels emotions as the hands give form to feeling.

Responding to art arouses curiosity, stirs feelings, and prompts questions about the meaning, significance, and purpose of visual forms in our lives. Under the guidance of certified art teachers, students have ample opportunity to develop their potential to become more attentive observers, more thoughtful decision makers, and more confident creators.

Pay Attention, Please

The study of art increases visual sensitivity. Along the way from infancy

to adulthood, we acquire—and then often lose—our ability or willingness to pay attention to visual details. Art education keeps our interest in, and awareness of, visual phenomenon and relationships alive. In our daily comings and goings, we confront an intriguing world of visual wonder.

Through properly sequenced practices in art, students can learn to approach their work with patience, precision, and care.

In a department store window, we might see a surrealistic arrangement of faceless and colorless human forms, floating through space in designer clothes with exposed belly buttons. On the embankment of a sharp curve in the road, we might see a touching and sentimental assemblage of artificial flowers and baseball caps commemorating the loss of a loved one in a fatal crash. On a neighbor's front lawn, we might see a tableaux of plaster forms—chickens, ducks, frogs, rabbits, or deer—that changes with the seasons. As a result of a good education in art, students become more

skillful observers and more sensitive responders to the world around them.

So What's the Problem?

Through their experiences with art, students learn to identify and solve problems more effectively and efficiently. Art activities develop a student's ability to visualize situations and tasks—to see multiple possibilities and the potential outcomes of planned actions. Students recognize that a problem can have multiple, appropriate solutions, and that a question can have more than one acceptable answer. Students begin to see that good things can be done in different ways, and they come to understand the complexity and value the importance of making responsible choices throughout life.

It's a Matter of Choice

Art education promotes mastery. Explorations in art have the potential to strengthen positive attitudes toward the development of skills that are central to life and work. One of the basic lifelong lessons a teacher can reinforce through art is a commitment to mastery—if it's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well. Through properly sequenced practices in art, students can learn to approach their work with patience, precision, and care.

Through repeated encounters with the manipulation of visual symbols, students come to realize that the difference between a powerful image and a mediocre one may be the result of seemingly insignificant choices. With an understanding that small changes can make big differences, students are more attentive to the subtle shifts and delicate balance in the manipulation of visual elements and expressive tools and materials.

And so it bears repeating one more time: Instruction in art is basic to a comprehensive education. 🌀

Eldon Katter is co-author of Explorations in Art (Davis Publications) and former editor of SchoolArts. ekatter@ptd.net