

Teaching Children to Express Their Inner World

Susan Bello PhD, ATR

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I. Basic Need for Developing the Creative Personality

Education can be transformed only by transforming the educator. Throughout the world, it is becoming more and more evident that the educator needs educating. It is not a question of educating the child, but rather the educator.

–Krishnamurti

Educators need to learn how to work with the Whole Human being the body, mind and spirit. If we want to develop qualities of the creative personality as well as introduce emotional education, we need to train educators how to implement this new model into the existing system. Educators influence the thoughts of thousands of children during their careers. After families, they can be one of the most powerful influences in our society for impacting the minds of our youth. There is a vast difference between educating for necessary skills one must acquire in order to gain productive employment versus educating to help a person grow as a human being. Great civilizations have been founded by those who integrate educating the whole person- their body, mind and spirit; and help students connect to something that gives life deeper meaning, in addition to imparting techniques and intellectual knowledge.

The expressions of violence we are witnessing today in the schools represent a reaction to the absence of a basic human need to connect to something which gives life deeper meaning. A prevalent disorder affecting our society stems from a loss of contact with our authentic self. Symptoms are boredom, dysfunctional relationships, abuse of self and others, addictions, and a feeling that life has no purpose. Teachers can be a nurturing connection and, if they are receptive to their inner world and develop their creative, imaginative, intuitive, emotional, and symbolic forms of intelligence they can impart these ways of knowing onto their students.

Teaching educators to work with their inner world and the creative personality expands the role of academic learning to include other ways of knowing in addition to the rational mind. I believe it is vitally important to foster creative personality characteristics in people of all ages. Jungian psychologist Marie von Franz once said that a culture which does not encourage the creative potential of its members does not evolve and will stagnate and vanish. Encouraging more creative personalities will ignite more creative ideas and innovative approaches toward doing things differently. Developing creativity is not only about taking children to the theatre, museums or making pinto bean collages; it involves encouraging characteristics of the creative personality. Creative potential exists not only in artists, but in all of us. I have witnessed that creative personality characteristics can be taught. If you are a creative personality, you will be inquisitive, courageous, committed to your project, self-motivated and innovative. You will think

differently than other people. You will bring your creativity to whatever work you choose to do. Some characteristics of the creative personality are:

1. the ability to live with uncertainty
2. ability to access deeper regions of the unconscious
3. ability to feel emotions intensely
4. nonconformity, independent thinker
5. receptive to different ideas
6. self-motivated
7. persistent
8. curious
9. adventurous
10. innovative, ingenuity
11. impulsive, spontaneous
12. can be extremely sensitive
13. global thinking - ability to perceive interconnections between apparently separate subjects
14. ability to perceive something from multiple perspectives
15. values internal rather than external approval
16. ability to think symbolically (abstractly)
17. variety of interests
18. appreciates solitude

Art educators have a vital role to play in introducing a new set of values to children our future generations. We all know how deeply one teacher can touch a child's world view and influence their life in a meaningful way. One significant teacher who inspires students to access their innate hidden potentials and hopefully through guidance and support contribute them to society. Children thrive if they believe that whatever I think, might work. The teacher is someone who does not criticize. She opens the doors of perception to explore infinite possibilities through our multiple intelligence. A classroom environment where students are encouraged to engage in many ways to see something, incorporating their emotions, thoughts and experiences as well as the subject matter/data is NOT what we are doing today. Naomi Verdirame, kindergarten, N.Y.

The time is ripe to introduce emotional education, supporting the unfolding of each student's authentic Self. Most of us have learned very well to be people pleasers, to repress our authentic Self and not speak our truth if we sense it will be disapproved of or

is different from what other people think. The development of the authentic Self is directly linked to expressing oneself creatively. In our overscheduled agendas, some time is needed for both teachers and students alike to be quiet, still the mind and allow the creative mind to emerge.

As the amount of information to be absorbed is increased, the students are overwhelmed and have fewer opportunities to think. In general children today have less spare time for finding themselves and less quiet time to create from within. No time is set aside for the encouragement of thinking skills or the development of ideas. We have to encourage questioning, reflection and exploration of ideas to facilitate learning without controlling the total learning situation; time is necessary for creative and imaginative interconnections to develop, gel and emerge in the students. Naomi Verdirame, kindergarten, N.Y.

It appears that many school districts consider Art Education to be frivolous or unnecessary, although art is one of the few subjects where soul expression can occur.

For the past two years I have worked for the NYC Board of Education as an art cluster teacher. I dont have a room to teach out of, thats why they call me the art on a cart lady! Its challenging to say the least, but I accept this challenge daily for one reason. I know how imperative and necessary meaningful artistic experiences are to the development of children. That is why when I was asked to try a Spontaneous Painting lesson with one of my classes, I jumped at the opportunity. And if I can pull it off anyone can. As with any lesson, the first attempt is as much a learning experience for the teacher as it is for the children. All I know is that we all walked away having gained so much from this spontaneous painting lesson and the ever annoying practical limitations of insufficient time and physical space appeared trivial when I realized how much we all got out of this experience. When a student turned to me and said, I will remember this for the rest of my life I knew then the potential that Spontaneous Painting has in the classroom and in life. (Danielle Aronow, 4th grade teacher, N.Y.C)

II. Emotional Education and the Creative Personality Can Be Taught Through Spontaneous Painting

Spontaneous Painting is a self-discovery process and unique approach in Art Education that develops the creative personality and aligns the participant with their authentic self. When our consciousness is not dominated by rational thinking, we can develop other ways of knowing. I am referring to our essential aptitudes, innate talents, intuition, emotional life, imagination, creative intelligence, symbolic intelligence, inspiration, and so on.

Spontaneous Painting offers students an opportunity to get in touch with their emotions, and express them in a creative manner. Little attention has been given to the emotional aspects of individuals except when obvious problems have already become apparent. In the education of normally healthy children in todays world, offering them a means to

express these inner ways of knowing, in addition to rational linear thought, promotes preventative mental health and equilibrium.

Each individual is unique. This method of painting allows our essential nature, living in the unconscious of the individual to come forth. As students are able to express these unknown aspects of themselves, their dormant potentials are born in the art class through the creative process. The symbolic images expressed in the paintings represent dynamic forces within the human psyche that are vehicles directing each individual's unique self along the path of self-actualization.

The commitment of the emotional educator should be to awaken the individual to explore what they love to do and then step back and allow their creative process to unfold. Providing students with tools to discover their passion and how to develop it, according to Joseph Campbell, should be an important role of the emotional educator. The teacher who works with emotional education needs to be trained in how to be an empathic listener to the needs and inner voice of each student's authentic self, and guide them in supportive, compassionate ways without imposing their will or judging them. We need to create a safe, stable environment in order for the authentic self to unfold. The key words are: listen, accept, empathize and allow for spontaneity. John Miller (Kane, 1999) writes that two qualities the soulful teacher can bring to the classroom are presence and caring. By presence, Miller means that the teacher is able to listen deeply. The caring teacher relates the subject to the needs and interests of the students. A Spontaneous Painting facilitator practices both by creating an atmosphere of intimacy and safety where risks can be ventured in a nonjudgmental environment.

Spontaneously painting one's internal symbols encourages the individuation process to occur. Individuation, according to the psychiatrist C.G. Jung, is a process of developing the individual personality and establishing one's true identity. We can say that one's true identity expresses itself through symbolic imagery in Spontaneous Painting. I have observed that the inherent human ability to paint images, motivated by deep emotion, is capable of awakening a self-directing principle in the psyche. It is this self-directing principle, unleashed by the symbol, that guides the individual through their creative process toward individuation.

In the art room, we ask students to spontaneously paint whatever emotion they are feeling. Warm-ups are presented before each painting session, facilitating participants to relax the constant chatter of the rational mind and contact the intuitive, emotional or imaginal mind. Some of these exercises include meditation for centering, movements to music and guided imagery, to name a few. The warm-ups generally involve auditory and kinesthetic exercises connecting people to their corporeal unconscious. We are working from a holistic model addressing the Whole Human - the body, mind and spirit. There are no good or bad emotions and no correct emotional response is expected as a result of the warm-up. We create a safe space for students to express their anger, sadness, loneliness, confusion, fears, etc. or whatever emotion is evoked as a result of the warm-up exercise. We emphasize not to copy external images or preconceived ideas, and to paint with no concern for aesthetic considerations. In Spontaneous Painting the educator

does not give students a predetermined topic to paint. She/he leaves it open-ended. Emotions are expressed onto a blank canvas or paper and usually the painter goes into an alpha or flow state (when there is enough painting time). In these mental states one loses sense of time and is so immersed in what they are doing that they are not bothered by outside distractions. There is so much more to us than the reality perceived by the conscious mind.

Most people do not understand the meaning of the symbolic images they have painted. Something very powerful has been expressed and oftentimes the rational mind is unaware of this part living just a hairs breath below the conscious level. They see it for the first time, expressed in a painting. We treat the symbolic image as a guide from the unconscious (McNiff, 1989) and ask it, Who are you? Why have I painted you? What would you like to tell me? Participants write and give the painting a voice.

1. Evelyn Candell, Art teacher

*I was starving
and did not know.
Music tendrils seep into dried crevices
of my soul.
Touch me now
For I am weeping
Hold me, for I despair
Wisps of death smoke
Encircle my feet as I walk
Friends warm hands
Slip from my grasp
And I am weeping come, dance and sing and hold me
And Ill be consoled.*

Excerpts from Evelyns writing two weeks later:

There is ecstasy and delight in stepping into this painting; touching the beauty of paint that has caught this wondrous moment; the happiness of the brush in my hand. I breathe deeply aware of the exquisiteness of life and surrender to the beauty of the universe that is here in this one moment. I want to dance; I need to move in space. I want to connect to the painting.

2. Sasha Ettingers painting expressed this to her:

*Through a soft focus,
I look back, On memories,
That have shaped my life,
I embrace my dreams,
Longing,*

*For something,
Eager,
To make a lasting imprint,
On someone else's life
Why not,
On my own,
In the present,
I feel,
A deeper regard,
For myself,
A self love,
That fits,
More naturally,
And,
As brilliant hues
Come into focus,
I am eager,
To choose the colors,
That my palette will hold,
At last,
My heart is open,
To all of the possibilities,
That my eyes,
Are yet to see.*

3. Michael, 4th grade

*I am a boy that is dancing on a really loud drum beat.
I am a drum, I am playing for the boy.
I am the heart that brings love into the boy.
I am the yellow circle that is bringing the boy and the drum together.*

4. Derek, 4th grade

*I think that this is a good picture that I made.
It reminds me of when I first saw the first caterpillar.
It was so fun watching the caterpillar turn into a butterfly.
I was four years old til I saw it. That's why I made that picture.*

After a writing session everyone comes together and engages in interactive group process exercises to understand the meanings of each others paintings. Participants can share how they feel when they identify with someone else's painting. For example: Tommy says: Andy, if your painting were mine, I would be feeling very confused and. We create safety when people can share their feelings and no one is being criticized or

judged. When children are asked to evaluate other children's work it often makes them feel exposed. The emotional educator can bridge to other group members and ask, Does anyone else feel confused like Tommy did about Andy's painting? (Ormont, 1992) Andy, the painter, understands that people are talking about themselves, their feelings, and it is not directly about him. He can gain a greater understanding about the meaning of his painting after hearing the collective voice and decide which comments he can relate to.

Having their emotional world be affirmed and understood by others is very nurturing. First a foundation must be established where people respect individual differences of thought and feelings and the class provides safety, protection and trust. The Spontaneous Painting Process is deceptively complex and should not be taught without proper orientation because many intense feelings can arise and teachers need to be trained in emotional education.

One art educator, who has taken this course, responds: I want to integrate all the positive learning from this class in Spontaneous Painting so that I may pass them on to others by example. I see for the first time that this type of teaching could bridge the gaps of hatred, prejudice in the classroom by learning that we can work together in harmony and express our feelings in a constructive way.

If we never address the emotional world in our daily lessons and interactions, not as a specific activity but interwoven as a natural part of life and daily communication, we disassociate from a rich part of our mind. Educators are faced with the challenge of creating a balance between these two very important, opposite ways of knowing: emotions, creative self-expression and logical, intellectual evaluation. In order to do this, isn't it time we start preparing teachers about how to work with emotional education? Art is essential. Human beings have always and will always need to create. Children especially need to have opportunities to express in spontaneous ways. Children have multitude forms of intelligence. In a classroom curriculum shaped by tests there is less opportunity for children to call upon intelligence other than those strictly academic ones. This results in children leaving our schools as unbalanced human beings. Real life is not a multiple-choice test but a series of often confusing problems to solve. We are sending our children into the world without necessary life skills if we do not provide time in every child's day for nonverbal, spontaneous creative expression.

As art teachers we feel that art should be scheduled as often as gym. Art scheduled once or twice weekly for forty minutes is insufficient. We feel that children need an open block of time to create without interruptions and develop a concept from inception to completion. Pam Costello and Barbara Brennan, Noshu district, L.I.

My goal is to train art educators to facilitate emotional education and develop characteristics of the creative personality within themselves; so that they can be models equipped with understanding and insight about the creative process because they have experienced it firsthand. How can educators influence their students to walk in the world persevering to realize their dreams, establish an inner locus of control, explore the unknown and function freely, according to their intrinsic nature - if they have not

undergone personal transformation and understood the dynamics of the creative process for themselves? And, doesn't this help us move toward the deeper realms of the art and the soul of teaching? (Kane, 1999, p.175).

For further information about workshops in Emotional Education through Spontaneous Painting contact Dr. Bello at email: susanbello@hotmail.com or telephone 212.956.2291

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