

The Teaching of Drawing and its place in Education.

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In writing about drawing and painting and their place in education, I am going to discuss it under two broad headings, first, the aims and methods of the sincere and up to date teacher of drawing; and second, how the parents can help, both before and during the time the child is under instruction, to give it the best chance to get the most from its lessons.

I don't suppose anyone who has studied the teaching of drawing will find anything new and original in my ideas, but I think they may be a help to some who are teaching drawing more or less without having been able to give it very special study. I may say that I am speaking for myself all along, though I know that most of my ideas and methods are shared by many other teachers.

In the old days, I am told, for I was fortunate enough not to have been taught in an old-fashioned way—drawing was considered an accomplishment, an extra—generally only taught to those who could already draw or showed signs of capacity; though I suppose there were exceptions judging by the old story of the girl who took her effort home and showed it to her mother, whose comment was “Very pretty, my dear, very pretty, and is it a cow or a strawberry?”

Laboriously they spent hours in copying minutely other people's (frequently bad) drawings or sketches—or the

[p 12]

more fortunate, reproductions of classic mouldings or figures. The very advanced drew from casts of the antique, spending months in getting one absolutely correct drawing.

Not as a rule till they left school did they draw much from nature. This old-fashioned method taught a certain facility with brush or pencil, but helped little in the education of mind and eye: I doubt if it even taught patience. I have noticed that a number of people have quite an extraordinary capacity for correct copying who cannot do anything from nature, or memory. It is rather a mechanical process I think. The root idea of the modern teacher of drawing, is to help the children to see, to remember, and express themselves—to see well, to remember intelligently what they see and eventually use it to express themselves, rather than to produce finished drawings of concrete objects. To draw an object however simple that is a solid thing, not a flat reproduction of its outline—requires three processes. Observation, reflection or mental digestion and expression. We teachers do all we can to help the children to observe correctly and reflect on what they have seen and we generally leave them more or less free to express it in their own individual ways.

Now to observe, digest and express is a fundamental part of education and is not an “accomplishment” for the few, and this is why I believe that drawing should be properly taught from the moment a child comes to school till it leaves (if possible). Unfortunately we often have to suffer the pangs of having our best and most intelligent pupils taken from the class, because they are going in for some examination in which drawing does not count and they must give the time to some other subject in which they are backward.

The first process is *to see*. If a child does a drawing that shows that observation has been keen and correct I do not worry the average child to correct the sort of technique used. At the

same time I often give hints and demonstrations of the simplest and easiest and therefore best way of doing things—but never say a drawing is wrong because it is not done my way.

I not only place the object before them, but point out to the children, before they start drawing the general shape,

[p 13]

anything to notice about shadow masses or the effect of perspective or shape; if they are painting in their Nature Note Books, I ask them to look keenly at the exact shape of flower, leaf or bud until they know what shape it is going to be on the paper and where the shadows come so that they can paint it correctly without constant looking in between their brush marks. As far as possible I do not touch the drawings. I show at the side how the thing should go if I cannot get the child to see it otherwise and leave the correction of the drawing to him or her. This teaches the child more, but the results on the paper are not so neat or correct as if I went round altering the drawings in class.

The second process is *to remember*. The observation made in order to express in drawing must include digestion and reflection, for an object seldom *looks* the shape that it *is*. For instance, it is only in the four (or five) exactly end-on positions that a cube looks as if its sides were square. Directly you see two sides it has an odd shape, the sides do not *look* equal, the angles not right angles, the side looks sometimes more like a diamond than a square: a *round* mug on a table *appears* to have an oval opening and so on. This is the sort of thing the teacher has constantly to point out, as children, specially small ones, are so apt to draw what they know about a thing and not what they see at the moment. It is quite a mental effort to make the facts that you see fit into and harmonise with the facts that you know.

The expression comes last in actual doing, but is first in importance. It is to encourage the mental assimilation, and give material for subsequent expression that I give an important place to memory drawing. Eye and hand co-operate more or less mechanically, in drawing a thing that is in sight, but mental assimilation is necessary before anything can be drawn from memory.

I place a model before them and make them observe it carefully, and then it is hidden while they draw. A second or third scrutiny gives opportunity for more correct observation, and the exercise of their critical faculties in comparing their drawing with the model—they thus gradually store up knowledge that they can use to express themselves.

I generally begin teaching the tiniest with objects that in their detail show their final shape, such as a broom, a

[p 14]

feather, a cocoa mat, etc., because to generalize is a mature operation and only comes with practice. Details are things that most children see and notice at once: general proportions and large masses of light and shade are some of the last things to be grasped and are the two things that the teacher has to give most help in. I then proceed to give simple solid objects. Apples, leaves, berries, tomatoes, baskets of simple shape can be given and the shapes of shadow masses pointed out. These and other things of irregular shape are fairly easy for little fingers, because for instance, an apple can look like an apple, even if not correctly enough drawn to be exactly like the apple in sight, and at this early stage it is very important to the children to find they can make drawings that really look like solid things. After these come objects, simple, but of regular shape such as books, cocoa-tins, etc. A good lesson is learnt by a thin round biscuit

and a ball being put up beside each other—the biscuit on edge, and the fact pointed out that though the outline is the same, the shadows on object and table show how different the shape really is.

I explain the elementary rules of perspective at this period or even earlier.

I begin to give them studies in the human figure from the beginning. It is the most difficult, but also the most interesting, except to a few who have a greater love for horses or machines; but it is an essential study for anyone who wants to make “pictures” even of these last and makes for keen observation in all walks of life.

I teach them to draw their own fingers, hands and feet and study those of their fellows; the proportions of heads and faces; and then of the whole figure, generally using playmates as models. Throughout, the study of the human figure is largely done by memory drawing; while the model is in sight I point out proportions, both of the figure in general, and of that particular position. Memory drawing not only gets the knowledge of the human figure into their heads, but helps the recognition and remembrance of big proportions for the eye is not bothered by details when the drawing is being made. Then comes more intricate objects such as chairs, tables, bookcases and the perspective they involve. Through these stages I give brushwork also—

[p 15]

that is drawing with a brush in masses of colour and the observation of important shadows and their resultant change of apparent colour. A fault of some kindergarten brushwork is that it entirely ignores shadows which are so important to form. Thereafter the objects drawn become more complicated and combined and they make a more detailed study of the face and figure and the changes that position make in apparent proportions.

Then there is homework: I encourage the children to draw me something in between the lessons. I often give a subject but do not mind if they do not keep to it, but do something else they specially want to draw, for instance, one girl showed me week by week, a fairy story she was writing and illustrating for a little brother, and some of the elder girls in one school have made decorations for their classrooms. I give them a few words of criticism and advice each time and find they soon begin to apply in these drawings what they have learned in class. Some who do not do good work in class will show up much better stuff when left to choose their own subject. I had one pupil who, towards the end of her first term, had nothing to show for her time except a number of pieces of paper with one or two lines and much rubbed surface in some cases right through into holes—in no case anything approaching a human figure or object of any sort. I told her headmistress that I hardly thought it was much use her remaining in the class (a large one where I had very little time for individual attention). She said, “Never mind if she never draws anything, your lessons will help her to see and use her mind.” So she stayed and I warned her she must try hard to get something done and not long afterwards I gave the subject “Autumn Colour,” and she made quite a good sketch of different coloured trees each with a neat little stem. I praised this and encouraged her to draw her own ideas and by the end of that term she drew an illustration to “As you like it,” in which there were three little figures in a forest, quite recognisable as Touchstone, Celia and Rosalind. We had been doing a good many “snapshots” or memory drawings of figures during the term. I got at her entirely through her imagination and memory. I found she could really draw a book better

[p 16]

when she had looked at it and then drew it than when the book was before her, and I got her to see things more correctly in that way and now she draws from objects with far more correct observation and can begin to express herself a little, and I feel sure she has something to express as I hear that she shows very good taste in her appreciation of pictures and other things, and some later drawings of hers show good action and a very charming eye for colour. I also train their memories with snapshots of other things than the figure; simple things such as toys, ornaments, flowers, and so on, seen once and then drawn. I also make them feel things, a top, a chestnut, a small doll—inside a bag, with their fingers, or put simple shaped sweets into their mouths for them to feel with their tongues (this is a favourite snapshot), and then draw the shape they feel—or give them small pieces of apple, bread, cheese to taste—onion, fish, mint, to smell and so on, and tell them to draw what it makes them think of. Shielded from their sight [sic] make noises, pour out water, brush my sleeve, dance, etc., and they draw what they think has made the noise. I have had played for me Sir Roger de Coverley and other tunes with associations and some other tunes also for them to imagine scenes to, and have had very interesting results. This sort of thing stimulates their imaginations and makes them visualise from their stored observations things they have not *seen*, but apprehended through another sense, and is a good mental exercise.

In the summer, if possible, I like to take the older ones out of doors to sketch—to learn the effect of distance and colour and tone and to practise the simplifying of masses of detail into shapes of vibrating colour on their paper.

I think you will see that up to a certain point, with this method of teaching, drawing is nothing to do with talent, but can be done with observation, intelligence and application—or by seeing, remembering and expressing and is a fundamentally [sic] educative subject. So far I have been concerning myself with the training of the powers of observation, memory and expression which is, one may say the “mechanical” or “technical” part of the education by drawing, but there is another large field of usefulness in the lessons, which is the training of taste and appreciation of

[p 17]

style which goes hand in hand all through the lessons with the other part. Naturally those who draw best do not have to spend so much time on the actual observation and drawing and to them I can give more and more instruction in style, as to how best to put down their mental images, the best sorts of lines to use in drawing, how to express different surfaces by the way it is drawn or painted, the best ways of putting the paint on, right choice of colours, the rules of composition and so on.

I try in all my criticisms of both drawings and ideas and in the objects I give them to notice—to place before them the highest ideal possible of what is true art and good taste in their drawing, in clothes or furniture, and the objects with which they should surround themselves. To this end I give them sometimes for home work a dress to design or a pattern for embroidery, a shape for a jug and so forth and point out what is good taste in these things. They can also show me patterns they have made for their handwork for comment. I teach them too a good easy lettering for use of titles, writing out flower lists, Christmas cards, etc. Some children seem to be born with an appreciation for good line and good colour and some have no idea, but most can be taught. Bright colours always appeal to the young, and rightly, there is nothing in brightness that is bad art.

I know that P.N.E.U. children are taught to know good pictures by great artists and so do not take up that side of the question, but I do sometimes wonder whether they are always fully told why the pictures are great. Perhaps sometimes the literary side gets more attention than the artistic.

At one school where I teach they paint the general masses of light and shade from memory after studying the picture which is an excellent way of impressing the picture and its value on their minds. Of course in the small reproductions they see, the beauties of the handling of the paint, the quality and the colour can only be faintly guessed [sic] at.

More children have an eye for colour I think than have an apprehension of what is good in line and form. The fact that a child can draw well does not always mean it has good taste. I once had a pupil already able to draw quite

[p 18]

well. She made beautifully correct reproductions of objects set before her and could draw “out of her head,” but the subjects she chose were so trivial and faulty in sense of composition, so feeble in colour and tone, so “pretty pretty” with faces and figures drawn out of proportion with large belashed eyes and tiny mouths and noses, tiny feet and hands—that I could not praise them—they were to me vulgar and in bad taste.

In teaching composition I have several times made an interesting experiment with quite satisfactory results. I made the class copy roughly the masses of light and shade of one of the pictures they have been studying, and then turn it what way they like and make a composition of their own out of it; altering details, but keeping the big lines and masses. They drew it first in black and white and from that did one coloured to please their fancy. A few of the results were excellent and the importance of masses in the composition of pictures was impressed on them all.

Then to turn to the help parents can give. This is largely to do with the last part, the training in style, but they can give their children a good start in the practical side by encouraging them to express themselves with brush and pencil long before they have any lessons, by watching their efforts with interest and giving appreciation where any success is obtained. Even if the parents are not able to draw themselves, they, with their mature minds can help little minds and fingers to make simple attempts (a ball, an acorn, a star, a fan, a feather, can be drawn by anyone if there is enough desire with a little practice), but even if they do not draw themselves they can do a good deal by giving the children plenty of waste paper and pencils (or even slates and slate pencils, though these are a little dangerous for small people) at the earliest possible age. I do not consider two too young. In my childhood we were always kept supplied with short, not too pointed pencils, and the kind folk downstairs kept the blank halves of letters, backs of catalogues, etc., which were brought to the nursery to be shared out and eagerly covered with figures, horses or engines according to taste. Of course some of the earliest things we drew were “round O,” “crooked S,” “A standing on its little legs,” “T for Thomas,” which

[p 19]

had a story attached—and so on, and our parents drew for us simple things and seeing them gradually appear was a great joy. My father used to draw for us very formal “babies,” all along the edges of his newspaper and we put in buttons and later, eyes and nose, hair or cap, a belt and so on: thus we were gradually led to use a pencil, and I think anything the parents can do in

the shape of drawing things for their children so that they see them grow before their eyes is very helpful, even if only very simple objects are attempted.

Then, from the point of training in taste I think it matters a lot how the nursery is decorated. Nowadays this is thought of a good deal in many homes, but cannot be too much emphasised. So many of the nursery wallpapers sold are such bad art; badly drawn and unnaturally coloured birds and flowers, or still more incorrect groups of figures repeated all up and down the wall. Plain papers with a few good pictures chosen to suit baby tastes, are, I think, better than patterned papers, but if these are used, only such as one really well drawn with good and fairly natural colours should be chosen and inconspicuous patterns are best. I think a very nice arrangement but one not practical I fear, in many households, is a low wooden dado with a shelf along the top wide enough to accommodate the best of the toys—which are decorative if good: with plain paper and bright pictures above hung, pasted or drawing pinned; the last gives an opportunity for variety.

There are some very beautiful pictures to be had, some of which have an educational value, beyond the training of taste. I was thinking specially of some historical wall-paintings by Abbey and others, which are well reproduced and are bright and attractive and decorative.

I think plain stuffs for curtains etc., are better than those with bad patterns, the colours bright but not too staring or too sharply contrasting. The patterns, if any, should not be large or glaring. Personally I believe in a good deal of blue it is such a restful colour.

Then their *Toys*! Perhaps some of you have read what I said on this subject in the PARENTS' REVIEW some years ago. I have not changed my ideas. The toys a child loves and plays with *must* have an effect on its feeling for beauty and sympathy in after life. I think nothing is worse for the

[p 20]

eventual taste of the rising generation than the ugly and distorted toys so much in vogue for some years past. I think I see an improvement lately.

There are some quite ugly things that do not seem in bad taste, but directly you add the eyes much too large with the pupils awry it looks vulgar. Most of the Kewpies are on the verge of vulgarity. All toys with distorted eyes should be eliminated. Simple and correct in the main proportions all toys should be. Deliberate caricatures of humans or animals should be avoided. Some simplification or want of proportion due to material or difficulty of making does not matter as long as it keeps the essential meaning of the toy. I am far from advocating that all toys should be exact reproductions of real things, they may well be only symbolic, but should keep the rules of beauty and simplicity.

The ornaments of the nursery and schoolroom, the furniture and the crockery, should all come under the same scrutiny. Are they simple and well proportioned and the best possible for their use? Do not banish as "good enough for the schoolroom" the objects that are considered out of fashion—or not in good enough taste for the drawing-room—remember they are training the taste of the young—chairs that have bumpy ornaments where you want to lean back, or legs that curve and waggle unnecessarily; tables with legs too thin to bear much weight, or in such a position that it is "tippy," are bad art. Tin boxes that look like rows of books, jamjars [sic] that pretend to be groups of reeds, butterdishes like waterlilies, though sometimes "pretty" are not good art. A box is a box and not books and should be ornamented as such—a jam jar should be a jar for jam with patterns or ornamentations on it and so forth. I

am here speaking of the permanent objects of their surroundings. I do not think there is much harm done to their tastes if they get a rabbit full of chocolates in their Xmas stocking for instance. The illustrated books and magazines given to children should also be carefully selected, vulgarity of drawing being the thing to avoid. I should not give fashion papers to little girls. They have a specious finish which is attractive, but the proportions as a rule are very faulty and the styles exaggerated. I think painted furniture for

[p 21]

nurseries is nice if the colours are rich or subtle, not staring. It is most important for the education of children's tastes that what they are surrounded by from infancy should be in good style—and good style is pretty well summed up in simplicity and efficiency combined with as much beauty of form and colour as is possible.

As an instance, from another art of how our childhood's likings affect our taste, do we not all know how we still love hymn tunes and other tunes from old association which our mature judgment has to acknowledge are mawkish and sentimental and *musically* very bad art.

Another way parents can help the teacher is by taking an interest in the drawing the children do at school, asking them to bring them home and looking at their drawings for evidences of observation, memory and imagination rather than for cleaned up copies of things, and by enquiring why they drew it and how and whether it is all their own unaided work. Also by keeping some of them so that from time to time they can be compared with the new work to see in what direction the child is progressing.

And moreover; *don't* be shy in telling your children what is beautiful in things and people! Be on the look out for beauties and whenever you see them point them out. The beauty of form and expression on faces is very important. Tell your little ones "Mrs. So and So is coming; she has a lovely face or beautiful expression." "Look at Mr. Whatshisname, what a fine head he has." Call their attention to true beauty in movement, decoration or dress.

They often need help to make them see the beauties of nature, like sunlight and shadows, colours and forms of all the lovely things on earth and in the sky. I expect you all know the story of the slum child taken for a day in the country, who looked so bored and sad that the teacher asked if anything ailed it and its reply "These everlastin' green fields, they gives me the bloomin' 'ump." Still more do they need guidance to see the beauties of towns and work and expressions. The beauty of towns is inexhaustible [sic] if looked for. The rhythmic work of the roadmenders, the different coloured lights reflected down wet pavements. The deep blue of the sky at dusk just after the lamps are lit, when often a faint mist masses buildings together into grand

[p 22]

shapes; the gorgeous colours of the flaring lamps on the fruit shops; the red glow from the brazier of the hot-chestnut-man on faces and pavements; lights on railway stations and masses of arches, etc., and the wondrous curves of the lines; the grandeur of great factory chimneys and fine buildings in all lights; the iridescent beauties in the mud from dripping motor oil; and all the glorious effects of mist and water, ships and wharves and bridges on our wonderful rivers.

And so to sum up—the aims of the true teacher should be to help the child to see, to remember and to express itself and to train eye and hand to recognise and cultivate the highest ideals of good art and good taste.

The aims of the parent should be the same and to encourage the perception of all that is beautiful. And with this unity of purpose between parent and teacher the child will have the best chance of seeing, remembering and expressing, that is of making an intimate part of its life, something of the wealth of beauty that is within the reach of all.