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A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY PRINTMAKING

by

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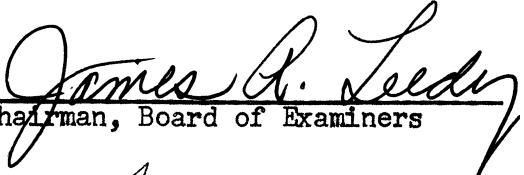
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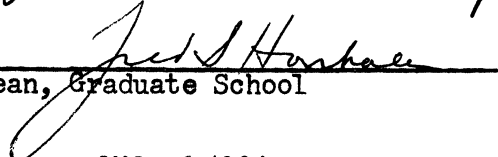
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The parents', children's and art education students' cooperation was a very important factor in the success of this experiment.

Professor Hook's encouragement and experience contributed to this writer's personal understanding concerning the problems of presenting printmaking to children.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

- ARTIST'S PROOF - A preliminary print from a block or metal plate
- BRAYER - A roller used in spreading ink onto a printing surface
- DRY POINT - A method of intaglio printing in which the metal plate has been scratched into with a sharp point
- INNERTUBE BLOCK - The cutting of innertube rubber into designs and glueing them to a block of wood
- MONOPRINTING - A process of making a single print that can not be duplicated exactly
- SILKSCREEN - A process of stencil printing in which the pigment is forced through a silkscreen
- THROWING - The shaping of clay forms on a potters wheel
- WOODCUT BLOCK - A block of wood on which a relief image has been made by cutting away the background

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with a search for a successful method of teaching printmaking to a volunteer group of children. Attempts were made to analyze and evaluate the results in relation to the individual needs of the children. The presentation procedures are based on the theories of contemporary art education philosophers.

The children involved desired the opportunity for creativity and exploration of their ideas on a level that circumstances in their formal education could not always provide. The assisting teachers were students of the Elementary Art Education classes held during the school year of 1963-1964.

This classroom situation was not typical because of greater age and experience variations than usual.

The experiment was guided almost directly by the children's interests and desires to explore certain areas.

PRESENTATION AND PHILOSOPHY

The original idea was that of presenting only printmaking to fifth and sixth grade children. The intention was to find the areas that children could successfully work with in printmaking. However, the available group of children turned out to be much more varied in age than fifth and sixth graders. Also, there existed a wider range of past art experiences than was anticipated. In order to create an atmosphere that would lead effectively into printmaking for every one, the children first worked with the familiar medium of paint. This was to help them develop self-confidence and an experimental attitude. Then they were encouraged to express themselves through other media, such as clay or chalk, which appealed to them individually. The intention was for them to strengthen their individual tastes and their desires to explore new media. Soon they were all willingly experimenting with printmaking.

The first step was to prepare the assisting teachers. In most cases the assisting teachers had had little teaching experience. The majority was faced with the problems of presenting ideas to a group of children for the first time. To develop a sense of security on the part of the assisting teacher two or four of them were assigned to each age group of children for two ninety-minute lessons. These age groups were divided into Primary (Kindergarten-2nd grade); Intermediate (3rd-4th grades); and Upper (5th-7th grades); with each group consisting approximately of ten to fifteen children. These small groups enabled

the assisting teachers to work individually with each child.

Teachers and assisting teachers were prepared through a planning discussion prior to the presentation of each lesson. They were encouraged to present activities which could be built upon in the succeeding sessions aimed at the development of attitudes and skills considered important in printmaking.

Margaret Erdt expresses this necessity for understanding and presenting the objectives in this statement: "Only as objectives are thoroughly understood can there be hope for their fulfillment. When an objective is identified and accepted, children work with a will to fulfill its purpose."¹

It was necessary to establish this same understanding of general contemporary art education objectives and the immediate activity objectives on the part of the assisting teachers. This was the most complex challenge of the whole experiment because of their lack of experience and also because of the fact that each assistant only worked with his group for two Saturdays. A recurring problem was that of overcoming the lack of confidence on the assistant's part regarding the children's ability to cope with the more complex activities such as printmaking. Confidence in the child's capacity to work or create was an extremely important influence upon the success of this experiment.

Margaret Erdt believes that children also have to be given an opportunity to develop an awareness of their responsibilities in caring for their working area and the media they are using. She observes that

¹Margaret Erdt, Teaching Art in the Elementary School (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1955), p. 8.

when a child realizes and accepts these responsibilities "he will work independently and with little or no supervision" and "he must be trustworthy."² She also suggests that the classroom must have an air of concentration and the child's feeling of "freedom" to follow the directions of his desires and curiosity in order to achieve an effective atmosphere for exploring the depths of his imagination and his personality.³ The authors of Psychology in Education strongly advocate the importance of the teacher showing "trust," and "believing" in the children's ability to grow through experiences.⁴

The children in this experiment enjoyed this type of trust and were distressed whenever lack of confidence in them was expressed. One assisting teacher questioned the children's capacity to work with silkscreen ink. The quiet and respectful confidence of Eric, a third grade child, was apparent in his response: "I think I can. I want to try."

Self-confidence resulting from the teacher believing in a child appeared to be very important in one student's progress. His teacher expressed her belief that it was through doing that all people improved in new ventures. Fred, a third grade boy, then concluded that learning the free sweeping movements of sketching was no different from his first learning how to ride a bike when he had to push off from a car. Sketching would soon be as easy to him as riding is now. His reservations

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴John E. Horrocks, Sidney L. Pressey, Francis P. Robinson, Psychology in Education (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 563.

about independently trying new activities slowly changed into a new realm of curiosity with the added pleasure of seeing his own improvement.

It also appeared that when the teachers encouraged a free attitude of experimentation, the children's ability to meet the challenges of many facets of art was strengthened. Two extremes of presentation were experimented with, one of freedom to experiment and the other of no freedom to experiment outside of the teacher's suggestions. This whole group of children seemed to respond repeatedly far more creatively to the free experimental presentation. Their work showed more originality and expressiveness when under an unrestricting guidance where they were left to follow the directions their imagination, desires, and curiosity would lead. Examples of originality and expressiveness that developed in the painting projects are illustrated in Figures 1-6; 10-12; and 31-33.

It is stated in Teaching Art in the Elementary School that:

The significance of art education is its educational integrity. The laws of learning and the psychological drives of childhood are not violated in art teaching, but rather they are strengthened and supported. Learning by doing is creative work and planning; verbal learning is discussion and evaluation; and the observational learning is visual discrimination, art judgment, and response to both good and bad art structure. The psychological drives of childhood for social relationships, and personality development, security, activity, success, recognition and acceptance by other children can find fulfillment through the art experience provided that the circumstances which compose the art program are properly directed. When this is true, it would be almost impossible for a child to fail to find in art activities some of the satisfaction which he craves.⁵ (Underlining added).

To fulfill these three needs, the assisting teachers were

⁵Erdt, loc. cit.

encouraged to be alert to the possibilities of unplanned learning situations. This group of children was very observant of art work produced by University students. The works of a graduate student in ceramics as well as a collection of reproductions representing different painting periods aroused the children's interest in techniques and styles. These circumstances resulted in a modified art history discussion and inquiries about other media. The children then were granted considerable freedom to develop their own interests in art. They began to desire experiences with new media. As a result sketching and a demonstration of the potters wheel were requested.

This was a period of many questions and new discoveries. Usually they would expound on why they thought some technique or result existed. One girl, Robin, decided that the reason she could not throw on the potters wheel the odd shaped pots she had seen, was because the wheel was going in a circular movement. She concluded that she would have to shape the pot after taking it off the wheel.

This type of learning and exposure to new media was the most effective means used to prepare the children creatively, verbally and psychologically for future printmaking experiences.

The presentation of printmaking experiences and techniques, to a considerable degree, was influenced by Michael F. Andrews' book, Creative Printmaking. He made some pertinent statements that seemed particularly applicable to this experiment. For instance:

. . . in attempting to define the process of printmaking is to establish some kind of standard by which we can structure future printing experiences. Printmaking too often has been defined as a relatively complicated process in which ink or paint is spread upon a prepared surface

which in turn transfers an impression upon another surface by means of applied pressure.⁶

He continues to explain that, "Its greatest value lies in its function as creative communication medium," not merely a means of mechanical reproduction.

Aesthetic experience and the technical approach to artistic production are integrated and necessary to produce "a great work of art." . . . Aesthetic is the perpetuation of harmonious relationship with one's environment--the struggle to be oneself, to seek basic truths, to objectify the innermost thoughts and feelings, in other words, to be creative. This involves the process of creative participation. Each individual must experience, in accordance with his intrinsic nature, the framing of his own insights and interpretations. The creative process cannot be taught, it can be experienced only by means of self-participation. Since true values lie in a whole-hearted enlistment of the Self in doing, there is relatively little that we as teachers can do in regard to this self-centered experience. If the student, however, is left to himself, without guidance, he is likely to remain at a low level of aesthetic development and the resultant prints will be incoherent and diffuse.⁷

This seemed to be true in Ellie's situation while she was printing her woodcut. She had worked continuously for over an hour experimenting with variations of a two-colored print. It was obvious that Ellie was becoming tired, but she refused to stop. She said that she was too eager to see the results of this experiment. At this point she decided to take turns with her teacher in applying the pressure necessary for making a good print. Without this guidance she easily could have become discouraged for the result would have been far below her expectations.

⁶Michael F. Andrews, Creative Printmaking (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 1.

⁷Ibid., p. 2.

The second component of creative printmaking is the technique through which ideas find expression. By itself, technique is no more art than grammar and rhetoric are literature. But matters of technique, especially those which include the investigation of everything that enters into the realization of creative ideas, are undoubtedly important. Technical dexterity represents the means of giving visual form to intellectual and emotional interpretations. Students who have a richness of experience and a desire to express themselves must, of necessity, have the proper tools and technical skills to do so. . . . It is important, however, that techniques be taught relative to the student's interest and at his level of development.⁸ There can be no abstract formula for the production of good art. Technical knowledge, which cannot be integrated, usually restricts the progress of creative thought and action. It is, therefore, imperative that techniques be developed, not taught. They must be born out of the need for self-expression.⁹

When the Upper Group was first exposed to woodcut printing, they had difficulty in understanding that the print would be in reverse to the image on the block. Figures 34 and 35 show the procedure used to help them understand this concept. They worked with grease pencils on the back of glass. Then they turned it around to see what the result would be. Some of the children were very inhibited while working directly on wood. Others seemed to be able to utilize the wood grain and knots into their designs (Figures 36, 37, and 38). A series of these experiments showed that not all of the children were ready for printmaking at first. Again the solution was to help the children develop self-confidence and a backlog of creative experiences through familiar media that would facilitate their understanding of the printing concepts.

Working in familiar media did increase the children's ability

⁸Ibid., p. 3.

⁹Ibid., p. 4.

to formulate new attitudes and opinions which were beneficial for their experiences in printmaking. Upon discovering that painting was very versatile, the children seemed to approach printmaking with the same experimental attitude. They applied many of their personal, experimental approaches to the techniques characteristic of printmaking, and needed relatively little encouragement or technical assistance.

The Primary and Intermediate Groups were far more prolific in painting than the Upper Group was. However, this Primary Group did not respond to the reproduction concept of printmaking as the Intermediate and Upper Groups did. The Primary children preferred the directness characteristic of painting and monoprinting. Although the Upper Group did not produce the quantity that the younger age groups did, they appeared to thoroughly enjoy the physical and mental challenges of good printmaking. They showed a desire to master skills already known plus new techniques in order to express themselves satisfactorily. The Upper Group's thoroughness and determination to master these new skills were notably impressive to the observers.

The Intermediate Group in printmaking was a combination of these two extremes. The children expressed pleasure with the concept that many originals could be made. They also took the liberty of combining monoprinting techniques with other printing techniques. Their printing production was surprising to all who witnessed it. In one lesson lapsing into a two-hour period they worked with innertube and monoprinting combinations. Each child made from five to fifteen prints.

It is important to note at this time that, on the average, some members of the Upper Group showed more hesitance toward expressing themselves through painting than the children in the two younger groups.

Inquiries regarding their past exposure to art showed that the children had had few experimental creative experiences. Those who had been encouraged by parents and classroom teachers to creatively express themselves responded several months sooner to creative painting and printmaking than the others. Their interest was deeper and more demanding for new painting and printmaking techniques. They willingly involved themselves in discussions of a simple history of printmaking and how printing affects everyday life. These individuals inquired about the possibility of a field trip to a newspaper printing shop and to a "photo lab." Unfortunately, it could not be presented because of the lack of time. Instead, they toured the M. S. U. Fine Arts Printing Room. Observation plus explanations of lithography, etching, woodcut and silkscreen printing seemed to result in the children's ability to recognize the various printing processes when they saw them again.

Both the Intermediate and Upper Groups were impressed when they recognized that similar printing techniques were being used by M. S. U. art students, professional artists and themselves. Dare, a fourth grade boy, appeared excited when he recognized the silkscreen process in a M. S. U. Graduate Art Show as the same process he had just experimented with that morning. He also noticed that one stencil must have been different from the one he used for there was "a lot of texture" that he did not get. A multi-colored print deeply impressed him for its skill. He commented that it was nice to see so many methods of silkscreen printing.

The children always responded enthusiastically to the shows that contained examples of the media with which they had had personal experience. Perhaps this is a clue to developing this higher level of

esthetic taste which Clive Bell considers important:

If standards go, civilization goes. . . . Besides taste in art there is such a thing as taste in life; a power of discerning and choosing in life's minor matter; and on this taste in life, this sense of the smaller values, is apt to flourish that subtler and esthetic sense. Without this taste no civilization can exist.¹⁰

¹⁰Clive Bell, Since Cezanne (New York: Harcourt, 1922), pp. 149-50.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the experiment this particular group of children showed by verbalization and production that they were quite capable of successfully working with printmaking. The children had reached a level of accomplishment where printmaking activities could have continued if time had permitted.

The children definitely appeared to be at a higher peak of creativity than when they began. It is believed that this was the result of the experimental presentation of creative exploration with unrestricted guidance plus the children's own innate creative tendencies.

This experiment shows that if the presentation is carefully geared to the needs and level of the children printmaking can successfully be integrated with the elementary art activities. This group of children enjoyed and desired techniques as long as they were properly prepared for the activity.

INTRODUCTION TO ILLUSTRATIONS

The viewer is requested to keep in mind that these examples of the children's work are a random selection chosen to exemplify these following points:

1. Painting being used as a preliminary activity to printmaking in attempt to build an experimental and creative attitude in the children for printmaking.
2. Sketching and throwing on the potters wheel as areas that the children desired besides printmaking perhaps having an indirect influence upon the success of the printing activities.
3. Comparing improvement, experimentation and characteristics unique to each age with all the other activities in relationship to printmaking.

These illustrations are arranged in the order of age groups according to activities done to prepare the children for printmaking.

PAINTING--PRIMARY GROUP



Figure 1. Painting. (Primary) Experiment of mixing colors.



Figure 2. Painting. (Primary) Experiment of mixing colors.



Figure 3. Painting. (Primary) Experiment of mixing colors and splattering with brush.



Figure 4. Painting. (Primary) Experiment of mixing color and blowing paint with a straw.



Figure 5. Painting. (Primary) Experiment of mixing new colors and variations of brush strokes.



Figure 6. Painting. (Primary) Experiment with paint on table and wet paper placed on top.

PRINTING--PRIMARY GROUP



Figure 7. Monoprinting. (Primary) Starch and paint placed on table. Designs drawn in with hands, etc., and paper placed over it.



Figure 8. Printing. (Primary) Designs made on clay and then painted to be printed.



Figure 9. Printing and Monoprinting. (Primary)

PAINTING--INTERMEDIATE GROUP



Figure 10. Painting. (Intermediate) Experiment using cardboard, etc., to apply paint.



Figure 11. Painting. (Intermediate) Experiment using toothbrush and spoon to apply paint.



Figure 12. Painting. (Intermediate) Experiment using brush with three foot handle.

SKETCHING--INTERMEDIATE GROUP



Figure 13. Sketching. (Intermediate) Showing childrens' earlier use of outlining and filling in.



Figure 14. Sketching. (Intermediate) Earlier use of the flat side of chalk.



Figure 15. Sketching. (Intermediate) Experiment in placing color over color.

Figure 17. Sketching. (Intermediate) Using flat color of dark and background color.



Figure 16. Sketching. (Intermediate) Using flat side of chalk and background composition.



Figure 17. Sketching. (Intermediate) Using flat side of chalk and background composition.



Figure 18. Sketching. (Intermediate) Abstracted forms using flat side of chalk.

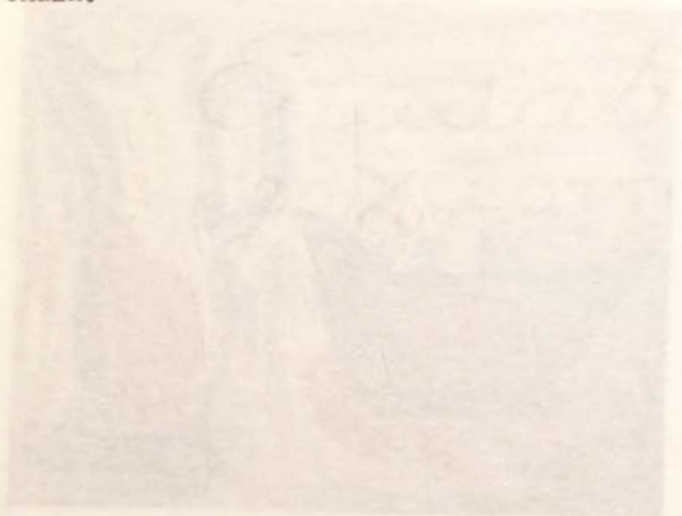


Figure 19. Sketching. (Intermediate) Lines for shading.



Figure 19. Sketching. (Intermediate) Abstracted forms using flat side of chalk.



Figure 20. Sketching. (Intermediate) Concern for shading.



Figure 21. Sketching. (Intermediate) Shading and composition.



Figure 22. Sketching. (Intermediate) Shading and composition.

PRINTING--INTERMEDIATE GROUP



Figure 23. Monoprinting. (Intermediate) Potato printing.

Figure 23. Intermediate block printing. (Intermediate) Experiment of block size by size and experimentation of applying color to potato stamp.



Figure 24. Innertube block printing. (Intermediate) Experiment using rubber cut into designs and glued to wood block.

Figure 24. Innertube block printing and monoprinting. (Intermediate) Two color experiment with reversal of block.



Figure 25. Innertube block printing. (Intermediate) Repeat of block side by side and experimentation of applying color to certain areas.



Figure 26. Innertube block printing and monoprinting. (Intermediate) Two color experiment with reversal of block.



Figure 27. Innertube block print. (Intermediate) Experiment with three colors off-set.



Figure 28. Monoprint and two blocks (Intermediate).

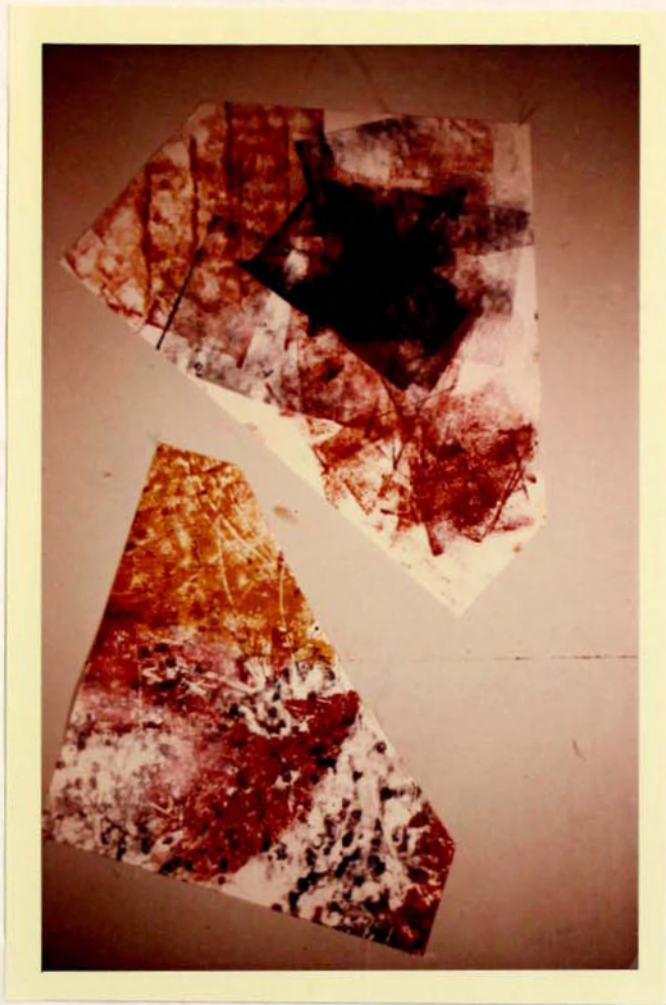


Figure 29. Monoprinting. (Intermediate) Using brayer.

PAINTING--UPPER GROUP



Figure 30. Sketching. (Upper) Show earlier work of one student using music symbols.



Figure 31. Painting. (Upper) Improvement of above child in using music symbols.



Figure 32. Painting. (Upper) Blowing paint with a straw.



Figure 33. Painting. (Upper) Variations of brush strokes and mixing colors.

PRELIMINARY TO WOODCUTS--UPPER GROUP



Figure 34. Grease Crayon on glass. (Upper) Used to understand the concept of a print being in reverse to the block design.



Figure 35. Grease crayon on glass. (Upper) Used to understand the concept of a print being in reverse to the block design.

WOODCUT BLOCK PRINTING--UPPER GROUP



Figure 36. Woodcut block print. (Upper) Experiment with two color print and utilizing the grain of the wood.



Figure 37. Woodcut block print. (Upper) Utilizing the grain of the wood.



Figure 38. Woodcut block print. (Upper) Utilizing the grain of the wood.

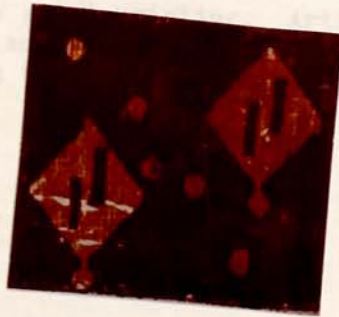


Figure 39. Woodcut block print. (Upper) Two-color print.

DRY POINT PRINTING--UPPER GROUP



Figure 40. Dry point printing. Artist's proof. (Upper) Lines made in aluminum with sharp tool; then ink is rubbed into lines and surface is wiped clean to be run through a press.

POTTERY--INTERMEDIATE AND UPPER GROUPS



Figure 41. Pottery. (Intermediate and Upper) Early attempts of throwing on a potters wheel.



Figure 42. Pottery. (Intermediate and Upper) Improvement of skill in using a potters wheel.

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