



AWSNA Waldorf High School Research Project

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Arts and Their Relationship to Adolescent Development

by Van James

To begin with I'd like to place a wonderful aphorism of Rudolf Steiners before us: "Art must become the lifeblood of the soul." I believe this is an essential ideal to live by in our work as educators. I will explain why as we proceed.

The author Robert Fulghum who wrote the bestseller, *Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, claimed that if you go into any kindergarten and ask, "How many of you can draw?" All the children's hands will go up. If you ask, "How many of you can sing?" All the hands go up again. "What if you don't know the words?" We make them up, is the children's response. "How many of you can dance?" All the hands go up yet again. The young child shows in kindergarten that the human being is an artist. This is really what we are—it is part of our essential nature that we are creators—we are artists. Art is for the child, already, the lifeblood of the soul.

Joseph Beuys, the late modern artist and controversial professor of sculpture in Germany is known in contemporary art circles as the one who claimed that "Everyone is an artist!" --and incidentally he was an anthroposophist. Contrast this "everyone is an artist" to what his American contemporary Andy Warhol said: "The artist is nothing special, it is just another job." They both point to art as common to us all, Warhol because art is daily work. But from Beuys' side the human being is raised to a higher potential through art as a task rather than a job. Art is *the* special ingredient that makes us human beings, even though it is common to all of us. We could say it is not only the lifeblood of the soul but it is also the lifeblood of education because it is central to the way we develop as human beings.

It is interesting that arts organizations are stating this quite clearly today. If we look at a publication that was put out by the National Committee of the State Legislators, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Design for Student Achievement in the Twentieth Century*, there is listed an impressive number of positive aspects that "experts" claim are provided by arts education. They include:

- 1) Art can integrate all subject areas in a school
- 2) Art provides the possibility for new ways of assessing students
- 3) Art excites learners and keeps them in school. (Studies show that dropout levels decrease with the number of art courses taken by students.)
- 4) Art promotes a developmentally informed perception
- 5) Art aids in creative problem solving, decision-making skills, and critical thinking
- 6) Art helps promote self-discipline, self-esteem, and self-awareness
- 7) Art stimulates cooperative learning and helps multi-cultural understanding

This is what the experts in the field of education are saying and yet arts are often the first subjects cut from the curriculum in many public schools. This gives us a bit of a contradictory picture. If, as the Department of Labor indicates, by 2013, 80% of the available jobs in the US will be ones that presently do not yet exist one would think that adaptability, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, and keen

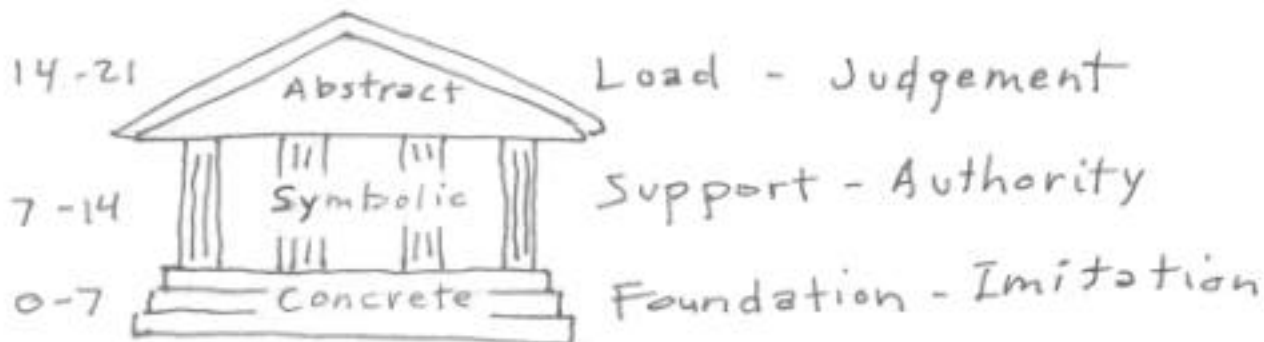
observation skills—all developed by the arts—would be seen as fundamentals for today's education and not extras or frills.

I would like to try something before we go further. I'm going to give you three words that make a statement. I will say them slowly, separating them so that you have time to reflect on what you are doing after you hear each of the three words. The words are—and observe what you do when I say these words: *shiny*—(pause)--*wooden*—(pause)--*bowl*. Shiny, wooden, bowl—shiny wooden bowl! Ok, now what happened when I said those words? After shiny what did you do? Or what did you see? [Responses]—pictured a sun—saw a reflection—felt upright—shiny metal—saw a particular shiny metal bed post—went out to the sound of the word—felt eyes opening wide— conceptualized a contrast or continuum of some kind—felt a golden yellow expansion in the chest. It is interesting that every time we hear a word we first make a picture. We create a mental picture showing that we are all visual artists—all the time. When we hear the word wooden we form new pictures that modify and transform the kind of shininess we saw. Our mental pictures transform and metamorphose with each word we picture until we incarnate a fixed concept of a specific thing—a shiny wooden bowl. Also, we all have a completely different picture of a shiny wooden bowl. Yours is uniquely different from mine. George Kuhlewind said, “the first conceptual appearance of a new idea or understanding is always a picture even though most of us are only aware of it after it has turned into words. An idea first appears as a picture that then can be turned into words and sentences.” We are all visual artists creating mental pictures constantly.

We won't go into sound or tones and gestures to show how we are also performing artists but this also occurs in the experience of music. Richard Wagner felt that when he started noting down music it was already a hardening and dying process. The life of the music he heard was condensed and rigidified when written down. This also happens with my lectures, they are wonderful in their picture form but in words

Rudolf Steiner is said to have commented at the end of his life that if he had it to do over again he would turn the rudder of Waldorf education 180 degrees, not 90 not 45, quite the way around in the direction of art and practical activities. Think about how much art we already have in Waldorf schools over-and-against traditional education. Look at our schools—they are referred to by many as art schools. Steiner said that the first school could not have a true Waldorf school curriculum because of the requirements for Greek and Latin exams and other state requirements. European Waldorf schools have this problem of academic pressures from outside (the Abitur) just as we do in America with the pressures of being a college preparatory school. So this is something we need to look at—how do we bring arts more fully into our schools? How do we become this *real* Waldorf school that Steiner envisioned?

Figure 1



Let me follow up on these wonderful pictures, that we are familiar with from the previous day's lectures and are always challenged to renew. The three developmental stages of the child: birth to 7, 7 to 14 and 14 to 21. We heard how in the first 7-year phase when the gestating of the etheric body is occurring, imitation is the vehicle for the child's healthy unfolding. To learn language for instance, is one of the most remarkable phenomena that a human being assimilates by means of imitation. This is the foundation of the child's development (Figure 1)--imitation. In the second 7 years, through the loving

authority of the teacher, parent, and life situation, the child learns from the phenomena of the world and this acts as the support, is the pillars of childhood. And then with adolescence one has the birth of the astral body and a new experience takes place--thinking and judging. Independent thinking toward individualization becomes the pediment, the ceiling and roof for the young person. They can later build extensions, a second and third story, a studio or den, as it were, and so on. It is an art of architecture what the teacher engages in—helping to build a foundation in kindergarten, erecting the support columns in elementary school, and then assisting in creating the load of the roof in high school, which will serve to house the student in his or her life.

Jane Healy has collected a remarkable amount of research on brain development and describes this first phase, this foundation, as concrete learning; the second as symbolic learning; and the third as abstract learning. This fits perfectly into our three dimensional picture of the unfolding child. Now what we see happening in the public domain is often a kind of A-frame attempt at education. If one takes the judgment and the abstract learning and tries to bring it down into the elementary and even into kindergarten and only provide the child with a roof, it is a very top heavy structure that is created--judgmentalism. It is in fact unhealthy fixed thinking that results.

St. Francis commented that "the laborer works with his hands, the craftsman with his hands and head, and the artist with head, heart and hands." This is really what Waldorf education is trying to do—we're in a sense making little Franciscans. We are helping to develop true artists, true human beings no matter what profession. Even the laborer and craftsperson can bring all the forces of hand, heart, and head into their work—and this is a worthy goal.

Now, we can't take the pillars down or ignore their maintenance when we get to high school. The high school doesn't just teach academics and abstract sciences because that would be like saying we are going to live in the loft, in an A-frame for the rest of our life. We have to continue with practical work and artwork—and even more so because of our stage of life. We have to turn 180 degrees in the direction of being sure that the foundation and support columns are strong and doing their work. As the child develops judgment the arts are even more important—arts and practical hands-on work, symbolic and concrete learning bolster abstract judgement forming so it has a real, moral basis.

Our foundation through imitation and concrete learning is practiced by way of play. Play practice. Then with the symbolic learning—this is where the class teacher is truly an amateur at everything (amateur in the sense and the origin of the word, *lover of a subject*). To be an amateur is really what we should be striving for here in the middle years. This is why the subject of the arts is taken up differently in the high school. Two different streams can be appreciated when one reaches the 9th grade. One has to do with doing art, making art on the one hand as a specialist and on the other understanding and appreciating art; becoming aware of how the arts are something that raises our consciousness—waking us up to an understanding of ourselves through the history of art, the history of literature and poetry, music, and architecture. One awakens to aesthetic judgment. For the 9th grader the history of art can be one of the most important experiences of the year providing a rite of passage by way of encouraging a sense of beauty. I will try to articulate why this is.

With the birth of the astral body the first stages of real soul development begin for the young person. The student eventually has sentient soul experiences, later intellectual soul experiences, and finally consciousness soul or spiritual soul development as outlined by Rudolf Steiner in his book *Theosophy*. The Egyptian culture period, the Greco-Roman culture, and the Renaissance is where humanity first unfolded these faculties and realized the sentient soul, intellectual, and the beginning of consciousness soul. We see the nature of these stages of development in the history of art. However, I think we have to go even further back before Egypt and include more of the world before coming to this first seed of western civilization--ancient Egypt. In Rudolf Steiner's time caves were only just beginning to be discovered in Europe, in France and Spain. Steiner was certainly aware of this but in the general consciousness of the people of his time the Palaeolithic culture was still nonexistent. Only a few French academicians in Paris were aware of these discoveries. It was after the discovery of Lascaux in France in 1940 that archeologists and anthropologists began to take cave art seriously and realized these were

older expressions than originally believed. Rudolf Steiner did make some comments on this period of human development--when the visual arts began to appear in caves. The teacher, the master, the initiate, overseeing the creating of these painted caves knew that the animal themes were important because the animal is a picture of instincts in physical form. What is pictured in all the animal forms is the different instinctual forces, forces that live in us but are in something of a balance--if we are fortunate.

Paleolithic art is important in 9th grade because we have a picture of going into the womb of the earth. One would have to get on ones belly to go through some of the small passages to come into larger chambers with only flickering lights and moving animal images on the rock walls. Inside one would be instructed to take some raw earth and put it in one's mouth, chew and mix it with saliva and go to the cave wall, placing ones hand on the rock surface. For a person who lives at one with nature and has no experience of being separate, independent from the environment, to place the hand on the hard rock wall and spit out pigment from ones own mouth to create a silhouette (Figure 2) and to feel and see paint on ones hand as if a glove was defining this remarkable appendage we have—this was a separation experience, an initiation. (We let the first grader know on the first day of school that these hands are very special instruments meant to do good things, meant to work in the world.) There is also a negative after image, a negative impression of the hand on the cave wall, left by this action. This is a kind of memory picture that marks the rite of passage— it brings back the memory when one revisits the place. The history of art can be a powerful rite of passage experience for the adolescent.

Figure 2



We have a room in our high school that we had the students lazure like a rock wall, like a cave chamber. The 9th graders spit paint over their hands replicating, to the degree such a thing is possible today, a cave painting experience. Later they did animal paintings on the wall. I had a student this year, a graduating senior, who was rather a handful but extremely artistic and she wanted to do a mural for her senior project. The mural was of her world conception and contained quite remarkable elements of graffiti, surrealism, abstract expressionism and very unique features all her own but out of her generation and culture. She called this project "Spitting My Soul on the Wall." Joan gave us a picture of the young children with mouths open drinking in the world and I would say the adolescent gesture is perhaps more one of trying to channel and control what is rising up in the soul, the increasing astral activity which shows itself outwardly in hormonal activity, growth spurts, mood swings, etc. They need to get it out, to express it and spew it forth. Spitting ones soul out into the world through ones dress, language, and so on is more the gesture of adolescence.

Another thing in the history of art that one can ask the 9th grader to imagine is the world with no painting, no drawing, no sculpture, no music (—no CD's), no plays, no poetry, no movement art, no literature, no art of speaking, none of the arts. Imagine as fully as possible what the world would be like with no art. They get the picture—a world without art is not the world. Or as they would say: boring!

Yale and Cornell University recently initiated mandatory course work in art history for medical students. Students who completed the required art history course performed 56% better when compared with those who did not take this course in correctly diagnosing patients. Entering into a picture makes one sensitive to reading the outer world and sharpens one's ability to perceive that world. Exact observation is absolutely necessary for developing healthy judgment, just what we want the adolescent to achieve.

Together with an overview of the origins of art I do something I call the "language of form." --And remember that even as near to us as the Greek era there was not a word for "art;" the word "tecni" was the closest thing the Greeks had to a word for art, and we see it is the root word for technique and technology. The arts and sciences were not differentiated until our own era. According to Hans Belting art did not begin until the 14th or 15th centuries. Before that time art was such a part of culture that it was not separated off or thought of as a precious object, apart from the sacredness of the rest of the world. Sacred, yes! Philosopher and art historian Arthur Danto says that in the 1960's art died because everything and anything could be art. (Andy Warhol, again!) A pile of scrap metal on a floor or a rancid hunk of lard on a chair can today be spoken of and sold as art (fetching a lot more money than a Waldorf teacher sees). This is a major question that we will come back to if we have time.

If we look at the first tools that are developed, some of the earliest tools will look like this (Figure 3). The spear point or arrow head illustrate a vertical gesture coming to a point. If you touch this point—ouch!—it hurts, wakes us up. Gestures that come to a point bring on consciousness, pain, and even death. It is part of the language of form which we see everywhere in the world around us. The other type of form anthropologists really puzzle over are these circular discs. At first it was understood that spears are made for hunting, battle and so forth but it has been more recently suggested that they might actually have served a spiritual purpose, as cultic objects, imitating the sun's rays before they were utilized for more profane purposes. We know that there were Persian practices where a sword was designed to be driven into the earth to show it was the appropriate time to plant. The initiate-king drives the sunray symbol into the soil. But what is the practical purpose of the solar disk? Isn't it also likely that it has a spiritual, religious, or cultic significance at its origin rather than a practical purpose? Practical purposes come later in civilization and are often a sign of decadence. But consider the introduction of these objects as an alphabet of form, the basis of all other forms and a revisiting of the first grade lesson on straight and curved lines.

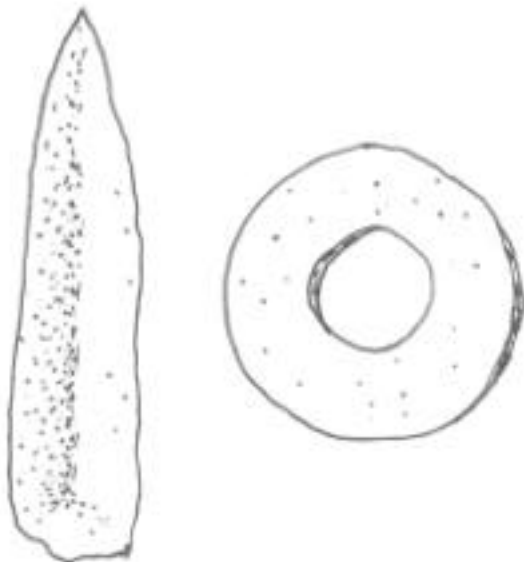


Figure 3

I would like to read something from Proclus, a 4th century neo-Platonic philosopher who described *ars lineandi* or form drawing as he experienced it in his day. This conference has provided more artistic workshops than most but as a visual artist I have missed form drawing as one of the offerings. There is potential for a 12-year form drawing curriculum in the Waldorf schools and this art generally phases out and is gone after 5th grade. It is the first to go from the class teachers repertoire because we often don't understand its deeper purpose. This is a very powerful art form. Primal cultures develop form drawing, *ars lineandi*, before writing. I'd like to give a plug for the art of form drawing to class teachers because it will be the class teachers that will have to develop form drawing and bring it up to the high school level so upper school art teachers can transform it further for the teenager's development. It is a powerful art for the judgment forming faculties. Proclus says of form drawing -- and imagine the designs on temples, vases, garments in ancient Greece, Rome and the Middle Ages: (Figure 4) "Ars Lineandi [Form Drawing] is the recaptured memory of the invisible ideas of the soul, and this is its achievement: it gives life to its own cognition, awakens the spirit, purifies understanding, and brings the formative element, which is part of our being, to light. It eliminates the baseness and ignorance that cling to us from birth, and liberates us from the bondage of unreason. It rouses the soul from sleep and impels it towards the spirit. It makes us a true human being..." [Proclus, 410-485 AD] Imagine the form drawing, as a practical art, and art history as the science of aesthetics, being carried out in Waldorf school classrooms with our children in order that they may become true human beings.



Figure 4

In closing I have a few final questions: How many of you can draw? [Hands are raised.] How many of you can sing? [Hands.] How many of you can dance? [Hands.] Good! The response was much better than I had anticipated. That is exactly what education needs: teachers that experience art as the lifeblood of the soul, the lifeblood of education!

Van James has been teaching for over twenty years at the Honolulu Waldorf School. He is co-founder of the high school in Honolulu and co-director of Kula Makua--Adult Waldorf Education and Teacher Training Program. He is a former board member of the Hawai'i Alliance for Art's Education, chairman of the Anthroposophical Society in Hawai'i, and member of the Asia-Pacific Anthroposophical Initiative Group. He is the editor of *Pacifica Journal*, author of *Ancient Sites of Hawai'i* (Mutual Publishing), *Ancient Sites of Maui, Moloka'i and Lana'i* (Mutual Publishing), and the award winning *Ancient Sites of O'ahu* (Bishop Museum Press). His latest book is *Spirit and Art: Pictures of the Transformation of Consciousness* (Anthroposophic Press).