

A SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF ART EDUCATION  
FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN

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MARY DOYLE, B. A.

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared  
under our supervision by Mary Doyle  
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be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Committee in Charge of Thesis

Mabel E. Macey

Chairman, and Director of Thesis

Mary Marshall

Corona Mary Spellman

Accepted:

W. H. Stark

Director, Graduate Division

## PREFACE

This thesis is intended to test the advantages of a social philosophy of art education for underprivileged children, to see in what way such children's everyday problems and experiences may be interwoven with purposeful art activities and thus assist them in needed personality adjustments.

The writer wishes to express gratitude to Miss Mary Marshall for her interesting discussions of the possibilities of art education, and to Dr. Mabel E. Maxcy for the profitable and enjoyable conferences during the development of this paper.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Since the ultimate aims of education today are to raise the level of living quality and promote a more complete balance in human relations, the first demand of any instrument of education is that it be able to assist the student in the development of a sound personality.

Art, like other subjects of the present-day curriculum, desires to justify its inclusion as such an instrument in the educational program. Persons who have had an opportunity to witness the beneficial effects of purposeful art experiences insist that art can be a prime factor in meeting the spiritual and personality needs of humanity. This is a very broad assertion but it is a conviction which is held by many educational leaders other than those dealing essentially with art.

However, because of the sometimes intangible nature of art, tremendous difficulty is involved in translating into concrete terms these universal human benefits derived from art experiences. This present treatise is undertaken in the full awareness of this difficulty. Nevertheless, such a study inevitably aids in clarifying art educational goals



for the investigator and at the same time builds substantial evidence to support the convictions of art enthusiasts. The realization of such possible benefits as these was partly responsible for the twelve years of searching for more effective applications of purposeful art experiences to the daily needs of the underprivileged children of Alamo School, South Dallas. The years of testing have resulted in practical and tangible evidence that art can be a dominant force in making desirable adjustments in major living and personality problems.

The purpose of this paper is to do research into the ways in which such adjustments can be achieved through art in the schools, to arrive at some definite conclusions as to the specific values of art in such an educational program.

This investigation is the realization of a long-held ambition to put to a test convictions concerning the possible interaction of remedial psychology, purposeful art experiences, and life. A sincere attempt is made not to begin with preconceived notions but to seriously approach each experiment in the light of accepted findings of remedial psychology. Although, among psychologists today there is increased interest in the possibilities of creative and uninhibited art experiences, serving both the purpose of diagnosis and therapy in child personality needs, it is here believed that progress inevitably must depend upon careful and

painstaking testing in the fields in which the need is most pressing. Therefore, in this treatise only definite examples from actual teaching experiences are used and they are accompanied by illustrations and photographs to show how various problems have been attacked through the art classes at Alamo School.

## CHAPTER II

### AIMS OF A SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF ART EDUCATION

Art is not a remote cult. Expressions of art are integral within the action of the human organism. Herbert Read in the following lines expresses the conviction held by many of his contemporaries:

Art is deeply involved in the actual process of perception, thought and bodily action. It is not so much a governing principle to be applied to life, as a governing mechanism which can only be ignored at our peril. . . . without this mechanism civilization loses its balance and topples over into social and spiritual chaos.<sup>1</sup>

A consideration of the significance of these social aspects of art in present-day education is infinitely worth-while to persons concerned with child development.

For any subject to fit into a social philosophy of education, that subject must be able to make definite contributions toward the child's physical, mental, and spiritual growth. Art education accepts this challenge. Art educators believe that if the choice of art experiences and the methods of approach are the result of study, understanding, and a sincere interest in the child's creative growth, art can support him in a more complete adjustment to his environment, enabling him to perform to a higher degree his

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Read, Education through Art (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 14.

duties in life. Indeed, whenever the need arises, the purposes of art education must include such aims as the following:

1. To help relieve mental and emotional insecurity.
2. To assist in the formation of beneficial health habits.
3. To stimulate interest in wholesome community activities.
4. To awaken within the child pride and a feeling of ownership in civic property, such as museums, libraries, and parks.
5. To serve as a positive force in solving race problems.
6. To encourage such attributes as self-confidence, serenity, moral and social stability.

Art education desires to support the child in his complete adjustment toward becoming a more perfect member of the community, nation, and world.

These are the over-all aims which influenced the choice of art experiences for the children of Alamo School.

### CHAPTER III

#### IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE ADOPTION OF A SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF ART EDUCATION

The experience in teaching art at the Alamo School has resulted in the following conclusions regarding several necessary factors in the successful adoption of a social philosophy of art education.

##### Physical Setup

The physical setup need not be costly or extravagant, but for best results there must be sufficient space for children to work freely and independently, adequate facilities for cleanliness, and cabinets for the care of materials and unfinished work of the children. Whenever such equipment as sinks, well-planned cabinets, clay jars, and drying racks are missing, children work at a constant disadvantage and much of the teacher's time and energy which otherwise would be expended on beneficial art experiences must be used in directing routine shifting of materials to allow room for the next class. One need not look far to find the distressing extent to which this factor in educational setups has been neglected. Persons who would feel that it was unfortunate for any mother to have to care for her home without a lavatory or sink think nothing of a teacher and several

hundred children having to get water from another floor or even outside the building.

Any school system which pays well-trained teachers good salaries and neglects their needed equipment is not getting the most for its investment.

#### Time Element

For best results in a social approach to art education no group of children, even in the lower grades, should have less than forty-five minutes for art; an hour is more desirable.

At present, when so much attention is being given to the correction of psychoneuroses, the prevailing thirty-minute art period, a condition which invites tension, is permitted to exist in numerous school systems. A slight analysis of this series of starts and stops makes even a discussion of it seem ridiculous. One wonders how anything so lacking in vision ever was started. It is not wild supposition to believe that the time will come when a progressive school system would as soon admit having endorsed witchcraft as the thirty-minute art period.

In the first place, such a period is not really thirty minutes of teaching time. The time for the exchange of classes from another floor or from the playground must be discounted. In the case of the first-period classes (the art department often gets two), rolls must be checked and attendance slips sent to the office, readmittance slips for

hair and skin conditions received, and individual health inspections made. Every Tuesday morning, in the Dallas public schools, a system of school banking is conducted in the first-period class. There are numerous other calls upon the art time during the year, most of them very worth-while, as for example, listing names of children who are to attend salesmanship camps, checking needed shoes for the Salvation Army Christmas Party, selling Easter seals, taking up Red Cross collections, checking cumulative card records for entries in the May Day health parade, and distributing bicycle license slips. On and on the interruptions come. Most of them are important, but to persons interested in art possibilities it is disappointing that these periods must be put on the schedule as art and that children allotted such periods must end the term with not half the art experiences as those with less interrupted classes.

Thirty-minute programs or periods daily were found to be inadequate even in the academic curriculum when the emphasis in art education was placed on techniques and skills which came mostly from books. If under the more modern conception of the learning process, art is to contribute to the growth of the individual and the enrichment of his living, such limited time is unthinkable. If problems presenting art possibilities are to be duly analyzed by the teacher and class, can this be accomplished in such

piecemeal fashion? If learning, as set forth in the Wilmington Art Course of Study,<sup>1</sup> is more effective when the student approaches the subject matter with active interest and masters it in a situation in which it is immediately applied, when is this active interest to be built up and immediately applied? Most educators agree that the unit system possesses unusual possibilities for serving the child. Can these unit possibilities best be realized in such an interrupted approach? Some psychologists insist that the child's creative impulse is satisfied only when the imagined object actually comes into being and that the best learning is accompanied by the satisfaction of the learner. Can a high degree of satisfaction or happiness come from such interrupted work?

A person understanding remedial psychology need only see the disappointed looks on the faces of a group of children when the bell rings in one of these curtailed periods to realize the detriment of such a setup and the tensions which are forming from this constant feeling of being rushed for time. These tensions, if permitted to exist, can, over a period of time, develop into what psychiatrists term nervous breakdowns. Statistics reveal an alarming increase in the nation's cases. Every division of the school curriculum, including the art department, must

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<sup>1</sup>Edith L. Mitchell, Wilmington Art Course of Study (Wilmington, Del., 1936), Section I, p. 5.



seriously consider the remedial possibilities of its particular field and accept its share of the responsibility of combatting this existing trend. A society approaching nervous breakdown would do well to take the time necessary for the study and working out of an adequate time schedule that would be utilized in school art service in helping to meet these imperative needs, for it is a tragic choice for a school system to save time and money at the expense of the mental and physical health of the child.

#### Necessary Attributes of the Teacher

Numberless papers have been written on various phases of teacher qualifications. The following are a few of the more necessary attributes for persons expecting to subscribe to such a social philosophy of art education for underprivileged children as set forth in this paper. Moreover, it is here maintained that anyone lacking these attributes will be handicapped in every teaching endeavor.

1. A person who does not possess a sincere respect for every human life, its potentialities and its possibilities of contributing to society, should not choose teaching as a vocation.

2. A person who does not possess sufficient appreciation for children's interpretations of personal or familiar experiences through art expression (which often take the form of symbolic characters) does not belong in the art room.

3. A person who is not a serious student of remedial psychology is hampered by a lack of knowledge and the factual basis necessary for developing the wholesome personal qualities within the child.

4. A person who does not possess sympathetic sensibility is incapable of promoting a teacher-pupil feeling of companionship and mutual respect. A block is gradually built up between the teacher and the child and the teacher's influence is weakened or lost entirely.

5. A person must possess empathy in order to understand the child's joy of achievement in work well done or the child's sting of disappointment coming from awkward comments of adults who have only their own limited criteria of art expressions to guide their remarks.

6. A teacher must have the ability to encourage creative freedom. The confused idea of this term has undergone a long series of misinterpretations. Freedom, as Dr. Stoddard has concretely explained, is not the opposite of discipline; freedom is discipline, positive, not negative; and the battleground of freedom is in the schools.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, creative freedom in art is not an activity for undirected expression. It is the priceless freedom of expression and freshness of observation that the very small child possesses, and the bulwark for its protection and guidance

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Stoddard, Superintendent of Schools, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in a lecture at the Dallas Teachers' Institute, 1947.

is also in the schools. For its survival effective leadership is indispensable and greatly depends upon these designated attributes of the teacher. Nothing can suffice if these feeling qualities are lacking. If the importance of this conception of education, which was earlier stressed by a few leaders in education such as Pestalozzi,<sup>1</sup> had been more widely and more seriously considered by school administrators and teachers, the conventional, dogmatized methods of teaching which, regrettably, are still prevalent in many school systems, would never have gotten their hold in education.

#### The General School Atmosphere

If each separate field in the school curriculum is to be regarded as an inherent element in the total living of the individual and as entering into every aspect of life, a general school atmosphere sympathetic to the aims of such a philosophy of education is imperative. Within recent years many school administrators recognizing this fact have accepted the responsibility of formulating, with the help of committees and school personnel, general philosophies of education adaptable for their particular school systems. During the past year such a study was begun in the Dallas public schools. A central steering or guiding committee,

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<sup>1</sup>Ellwood P. Cubberley, Public Education in the United States (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company), p. 265.

including the superintendent and twelve persons from different branches of the system, submitted three printed forms to the teaching personnel for consideration and study.

"Philosophy -- Form 1 -- Self-Orientation" included such topics for discussion as "What do you think is involved in a philosophy for a school system?" and "Will a philosophy present us to the public as a group working in harmony toward clearly defined goals?" "Philosophy -- Form 2 -- a Self Analyzation Test" was for personal use and not to be returned to the committee. "Philosophy -- Form 3" was a large twice-folded sheet listing "Twenty Suggested Issues for Evolving a School Philosophy." Space was left between the printed "issues" for individual conclusions or comments and the finished papers were placed in the personnel files in the Administration Building.

Such an undertaking not only encourages in the individual teacher freshness of vision and research into new ways of teaching, but it also helps to build a philosophy and general school atmosphere conducive to more functional teaching. With such an atmosphere the teacher is infinitely aided in her work; without it she is constantly hampered. Many persons who with proper encouragement would have made efficient teachers have done less effective work because they were handicapped by a general academic school atmosphere. Likewise, many platoon systems have fallen short of their goals because they lacked this unifying element.

One of the most important factors in the adoption of a social philosophy of art education in any school is a well-thought-out general philosophy which will permeate the school and establish, without chance of doubt, the personality welfare of the child as the core of all its thinking and endeavor. It is the responsibility of every administrative group to undertake whatever procedure is necessary to build for its particular system such a general school atmosphere and in so doing assist the individual teacher to perform her duties to the maximum degree and support her in all her endeavors to provide for the child the best in educational possibilities.

## CHAPTER IV

### ALAMO SCHOOL DISTRICT

An understanding of the life of a community establishes a basis for selecting the art experiences needed by the children of that community. Therefore, the first endeavor in any educational undertaking necessarily must be that of knowing the child in all his relations, his activities, his economic status, physical and mental health, family history, and the phases of his environment. It is also of utmost importance that any person expecting to assist underprivileged children by making such a study, have a steadfast belief in the potentialities of underprivileged children and keep in mind the following: that no particular economic level has a monopoly of all the attributes or maladjustments of humanity, and that history records many noteworthy contributions made to society by persons from a very meager environment and from inauspicious surroundings.

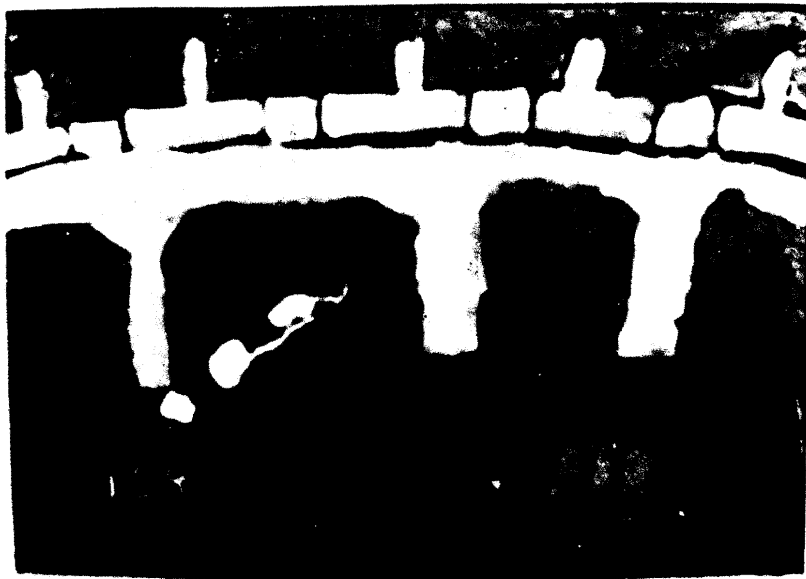
Alamo School is bounded on the east by the Santa Fe freight yards, on the south by the Oakland Viaduct, on the west, or facing the entrance to the building, by a group of small stores, and on the north by a Full Gospel church and three residences. (All of these may be seen featured

from time to time in the paintings of the Alamo art classes. Especially is this true of the Oakland Viaduct, which has been a source of painting pleasure to the children since the beginning of its construction.)

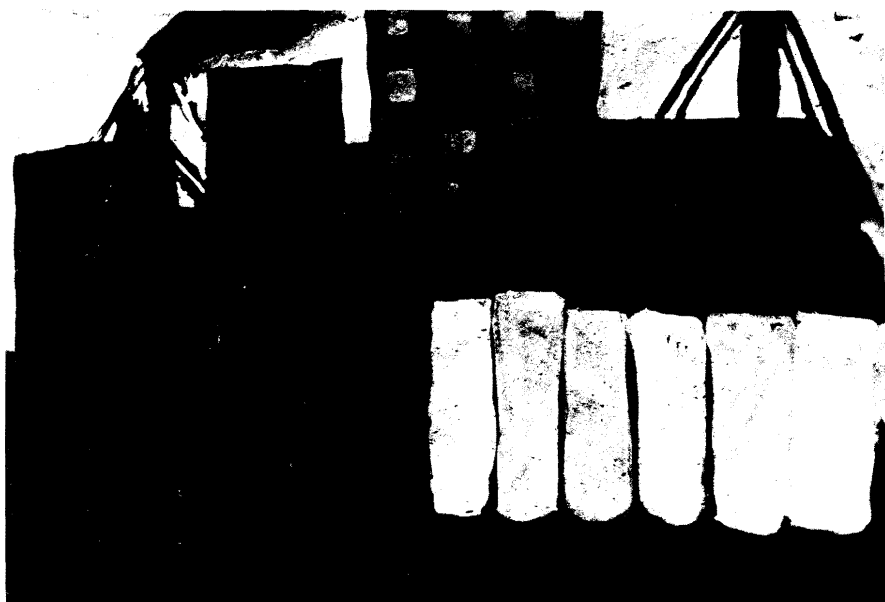
Fig. 1. -- A fifth-grade girl's interpretation of the viaduct and train tracks.

Fig. 2. -- A sixth-grade painting of nearby factory buildings.

The Alamo district was previously one of the better residential sections of Dallas. At present the gradual increase of factories and warehouses is causing property owners to sell and move to other parts of the city. Although there are still homes as normal and comfortable as would be desired for children, these more favorable conditions are comparatively scarce. In many homes there are handicaps, such as inadequate facilities for cleanliness and insufficient money for nutritious food. Consequently, the health and sanitary standards are not as high as they should be. For example, the problems of keeping warm and clean in winter are very serious ones. Many of the houses are poorly built and difficult to heat. (Water pipes are often exposed and therefore the water must sometimes be cut off for several days at a time.) The larger percentage of these places show lack of attention and need of repairs. During rainy weather children often speak of leaks in roofs. In many cases the inside walls have not been papered. Little or no attention has been given to the arranging of furniture or



1.



2.



the hanging of draperies, and in some cases there are no window shades. Often the only pictures hanging on the walls are calendars or the art-class paintings of the children. On some streets of the district, colored, Mexican, and white families live within the same yard. Most of their houses are small and often families of six or seven live within two rooms. Many children sleep on the floor.

Recently in a fourth-grade art class one of the girls brought her work over and seated herself beside the teacher, clearly wanting to talk with someone. The conversation which ensued was similar to many of those informal visits in the art room, for it presented another instance of the regrettable conditions of the district. This child is living in a so-called apartment house. Six families share this place, one room for each family and a common bath for all. There are five members in her family; a bed is made down on the floor at night for the children.

The high percentage of children who come to school immaculately clean from such homes as these is nothing short of miraculous. Consider the determination and effort this cleanliness must involve for the mother in these homes. One morning, just after a cold rainy spell, a mother was standing in mud up to her ankles by the side of her small front porch, which was serving as her wash bench. That afternoon her neighborhood presented a very pretty sight; most of the

fences were covered with clothes hung out to dry. How many mothers must have worked in mud that day in order that they might be able to send their children to school the next morning clean and immaculate!

The economic standards of such a community naturally are not high. The school's cumulative records show that frequently the mothers help with the family support. Some of them take in washing, do nursing, or care for neighbors' children. Many of the fathers, especially from the Mexican homes, work as section hands for the Santa Fe freight yards; many are truck drivers, some are junk dealers, and others work for the city, collecting garbage or sweeping streets. Several mothers work at a nearby egg-drying plant; several serve as waitresses in cafes. Some of the women work at beauty shops. Three families repair cardboard boxes to sell to the stores.

It is not unusual for a child to help with the family's support. Boys sell papers, in town, at street corners, and in cafes; others work from time to time at skating rinks or in amusement booths at Fair Park; several clean vegetables or wash dishes in the kitchens of hotels and cafes in town. Three of the boys are working after school in neighborhood grocery stores; one is helping on a bread delivery truck. Four others are serving as caddies on weekends at the Lakewood golf course. Children sometimes roast and sell peanuts or gather paper or metal scrap to take to

junk dealers. Girls serve as waitresses in cafes and drug stores or work in five-and-ten-cent stores on Saturdays.

Often while holding these first jobs comparisons begin to form within the minds of the children, comparisons of their own economic level with that in other parts of the city. This is especially true when their work carries them to different sections of the city. One afternoon recently a boy who had started working on a bread delivery car came by the art room, pulled a chair up to the teacher's desk, and seriously asked, "Why is it people look down on us when they find that we are from out here? Since I've been going around on the truck I've noticed it. Sometimes they'll just laugh and say, 'Oh, yes; Ignorant Hill.' Why don't they look down on you for teaching out here?"

How well the teacher understood, for she too had seen the exchange of glances or had felt the change in tone when Alamo School was mentioned. On one occasion she had heard a person remark that naturally the school board would not send one of the better teachers to a district like that of Alamo. All this prompted the following answer to the boy: "Oh, perhaps they do, but so long as we know within our own hearts that we are playing fairly and being thoughtful of others, it doesn't matter too much what others may think. Persons can overcome inconveniences and lack of money. The important things in childhood are the building of a sound character and the gaining of a good education. If a boy is

strong enough to lead instead of being led there is much good that he can do in a place like this." Alamo children are often in need of such counseling. (A consciousness of such possibilities and needs as these had led several boys from the district to become interested in the Y. M. C. A. program and later to enter college to study for the ministry. One of the boys who is finishing high school this spring is completing his fifth year of Y. M. C. A. work with younger boys. He is planning to enter a church college next fall.)

Many other disturbing elements exist in South Dallas. In cases of sickness and unemployment, especially during depression years, families have sometimes been partly supported by relief, social, or religious organizations. At times the teachers help in recommending and obtaining such financial assistance. Obtaining this aid is not always easy, even in cases of extreme need and worthiness. In calls from the school office such answers as the following sometimes come back over the wire: "Oh, no; we only help service men's families" or "We serve only transients." Representatives of one organization took time to write the art teacher a full-page letter explaining how sorry they were that a certain extreme case of sickness and poverty in the neighborhood did not come under their jurisdiction.

References and remarks made by the children disclose a distressing lack of formal education in some of the homes. For example, one afternoon just before a holiday a second-

grade boy came into the art room obviously worried and said: "My mother never will believe tomorrow is a holiday. She will just whip me and send me to school, because she will think I'm playing hookey. But if you would write me a note, I could get my aunt to read it to her, because, you see, my aunt can read, and then my mother wouldn't send me to school in the morning."

School cumulative records show a high rate of divorce and an alarming number of homes in which the father has deserted the family. Consequently, the children in these homes have few or no material advantages. Often they miss school to care for a sick member of the family or to stay with preschool brothers and sisters while the mother looks for work. Such conditions are a serious detriment to the child's educational progress in school.

All of these economic and social disturbances in the district are instrumental in increasing the percentage of retardation in Alamo School. One of the main causes of retardation is that of late enrollment. There are children who are from two to six weeks late enrolling every year because they have been working with their families in the beet or cotton fields. In this way they are able to buy their own clothes and supplies for school each fall. This, of course, is very commendable, but it is regrettable that they must start to school each year handicapped in their studies.

Art educators feel that these cases of retardation present one of the most valid reasons for art in the educational program for such a group. In art activities improvement depends completely upon a child's individual ability to progress and not upon set standards of achievement. Therefore, these retarded children may have a means of expression which provides for individual differences and gives opportunity for them to work in harmony with other children, thus gaining a sense of achievement and self-assurance they otherwise might lack. If they do not gain this self-assurance but are allowed to become discouraged and lose interest in class work, they begin to find reasons for being absent, and in a comparatively short time often become cases of juvenile delinquency. Such children have been found in the downtown theaters during school hours and in several extreme instances have been taken to police headquarters for petty thefts.

Art education must strive constantly for more effective personality service to these children. There is much definite proof that forms of punishment such as whipping, expelling, or even visits from the police usually have little desired effect; instead, experience has shown that they often build within the child a resistance to law and order. Two first-grade boys were brought to the office early one Monday morning; one had stolen several objects

from a five-and-ten-cent store and the other had witnessed the theft. On their entrance into the school office that morning they were confronted by the principal, the office clerk, two fully uniformed "cops," or "laws," and a plain-clothes detective. The children apparently were little impressed with such ceremony. The accused child, grasping the situation at a glance, turned to the other first grader and said very coolly, "Just one word and I'll wipe the floor up with you."

This readiness to protect one's self in a critical situation is not at all unusual in South Dallas children. A second-grade boy came back late from lunch one day because he had stopped to "bring along" a mule which had been tied to a stump on a vacant lot nearby. Finding that he and the mule had the entire campus to themselves, he started chasing the mule at a gallop around the campus and would have had a wonderful time had the principal not at that moment driven up to the building. Leaving the campus to the mule and hurrying to the office, the boy looked up as the principal entered, and drawled, "No teacher never told me that it was one of the rules of this school not to chase no mule."

These younger children's ideas of right and wrong sometimes are a little confused and surprising. A first-grade boy who was falling into a very bad habit of aimless

tattling rushed into the art room and up to the teacher one day. He was stopped and asked, "Do you have something pleasant to tell us?" After a slight hesitation his face brightened and he said, "Sure, it's all right; there are not any cuss words in it."

So often these little casual remarks of the children show vividly the environment from which they come. One morning recently the art teacher had laid down a piece of new mat board just as a child came over to share the thrill of a beautiful brown tempera color he had accidentally mixed. A few tiny specks of paint spattered on the clean board, which of course was of little significance since the paint could easily be removed. As the teacher leaned over the board to cut the mat, another child came up and exclaimed, "Oh, look; isn't that too bad -- getting snuff on that pretty clean mat!" The thought of the teacher's having snuff apparently was of no consequence whatsoever.

The percentage of underprivileged children, which already is high in Alamo district, apparently is growing. If the school is to meet its obligation to them, knowledge and sympathetic understanding of their problems and needs are essential. In this light art education takes on much greater significance. How rich are the possibilities for purposeful art experiences in such a community!



## CHAPTER V

### REARRANGING THE ALAMO ART ROOM

Any person assuming the responsibilities of a new department is likely to attempt a complete revision of the physical setup to meet his own particular needs. At the beginning, such an undertaking very naturally may occupy a place of major concern. However, this does not imply that the problem of rearranging is something to be solved and set aside. On the contrary, it is a continuing process for as new experiences arise new needs demand new changes.

The children at Alamo School share the teacher's enthusiasm in these episodes of shifting tables, cabinets, chairs and other equipment to make way for new crafts or painting. Nevertheless, the teacher can expect a certain amount of teasing from some of the boys. With twinkling eyes a fourth-grade boy recently surveyed a new arrangement and ventured, "Do you reckon you will ever make up your mind where you want these things?" The next period a low-third-grade boy paused on entering the newly decorated room and called, "Say, will some one come and show me the way around in this joint?"

That first glimpse of the Alamo art room twelve years ago brought a shudder of despondency. Did children in

Dallas really have art in a place like that? (Alamo is one of Dallas' oldest schools and undoubtedly would have been replaced some time ago had not the unavoidable war shortages and rise in cost of construction slowed down the building program.) The desire to stay, regardless of the conditions, was based upon a sincere hope of building within the minds of the Alamo children the realization that within the art room, even though it was shabby and inadequately equipped, they had a prized possession; that the art room was theirs to arrange, to care for, to plan for, and to enjoy. The achievement of such goals as these would help do away with the generally accepted misconception of an art room simply as a drawing room and would replace this interpretation with a broader meaning which would include all purposeful art activities. Thus started the rebuilding of the physical setup of the Alamo art department.

Take just a second to imagine the fantastic procedure of a doctor placing thirty or forty patients in rows and stationing himself before them for group consultation. Unfortunately, school systems are often guilty of such an approach to education, for children, when made to sit in rows at screwed-down desks, seldom reveal their more urgent needs of personality adjustment.

The Alamo art room was filled with four rows of this type of desks. They were used by the low-first through the high-sixth grades, which included twelve art groups. When

the first-grade children sat at these desks, their feet would not touch the floor and when the sixth-grade boys and girls came to class, many of them could not comfortably get their knees under the desks. Therefore, the first problem at Alamo School became the apparently very trivial one of finding a couple of screwdrivers and a place for discarded desks.

With the desks out of the way, a search was made through the basement, halls, and book room, for available tables, which could be utilized in the art room. Three fairly adequate ones were found. In the days which followed, these and the few cabinets in the room were sanded and painted. Still lacking sufficient working space, the teacher was responsible for covering a small part of the oily floor with a new linoleum square, which made a good place for many art activities. A wet mop was borrowed from the custodian. (No linoleum has ever had more careful attention.)

The cracked blackboards were covered with brown kraft wrapping paper to be painted later with tempera. Small boxes were collected, painted, and labelled for such supplies as charcoal, scissors, India ink bottles, and lettering pens. These were placed in rows on the shelves of the cabinets. A ladder was brought from the storeroom and boys removed the dusty sepia prints which hung high above the blackboards.

There were no easels of any kind. A group of fifth-grade boys were given the pleasant task of making the plans and constructing one. Second-hand lumber of two-by-fours and one-by-fours was used. The nailholes were filled with putty and the finished easel was painted to match the cabinet. The easel holds three 18-by-24-inch drawing boards and has sections of Celotex of forty by fifty inches, cut to fit each side, to be used in mural painting. The easel has been used constantly since its completion. Figure 3 is a sixth-grade girl's interpretation of two children working at the easel.

One of the more recent changes in the art-room equipment which has been enjoyed by all concerned, was the construction of the new habitat of the Kindergarten No. 6 brushes. They had previously been standing in a large brown earthen jar, or placed in rows in a table drawer. Some discarded book shelves were discovered in the book room. They were brought to the art room, sanded, painted brown to match the table they were to stand on, and tiny nails were placed at one-inch intervals around each of the two shelves. With coping saws one inch was removed from the wooden handles of the kindergarten brushes, small screw-eyes were inserted, and the brushes were then given two coats of brilliant red enamel. Now they hang in two rows around the bookshelves and are a joy to behold. Figure 4 is a fifth-grade drawing of two children at work with the brushes hanging in the background.



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The Alamo art department possessed eight stools. The children have made extra ones from discarded boxes. One boy insisted on bringing his mother's wash bench to school, adding that he could always carry it back and forth on wash days. Another said, "Oh, the boxes will be all right; I sit on them at home."

Occasionally several boys gather in a backyard after school and make needed articles for the art department. Such had been the case when one morning the teacher found a sturdy, low, unpainted table in the center of the art room. One of the boys had made it from scrap lumber the afternoon before. The table was quickly sanded and painted. At times it is used as a work bench for sawing or hammering, as shown in Figure 5. At other times it is converted into a library table with kindergarten chairs placed around it. It is then that the first graders take possession and think the table belongs to them (Figure 6).

Sometimes one of the girls will spend her entire art period at the table carefully arranging the stacks of museum pamphlets and tagboard folders which hold the reproductions collected from art magazines. When the Encyclopaedia Britannica published its collection of reproductions of contemporary American paintings, over fifty interesting folders from this collection were made to add to the art room's files.



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There were some difficulties beyond the control of the art classes. With the appearance of the first typical Texas norther of that first year came the realization that the one stove could not possibly heat the art room. Requisitions went unheeded, and for years every really cold spell meant several days of sitting in the auditorium with three to five other classes which were having the same trouble keeping warm. (The auditorium had four stoves.) Not until the first cold wave after the present school administration took charge were extra stoves installed and windows calked. There has been no further trouble in regulating the temperature of the room in cold weather.

Like so many other public-school art setups across the nation, the one thing that the art room needed most it still lacks -- a plain kitchen sink. Water must be carried from another floor. It is unfortunate that more persons do not possess the children's concern about the matter. Many times children have suggested, or even begged, to take up money for a sink. A first-grade boy one time argued that his father knew exactly how to put one in, and would come right over. Another child came to school beaming because he had found a "real cheap sink that we could buy from a junk dealer"; and still another insisted on bringing to school some rusty pipe he had found in a back alley. One can only hope that such children as these will hold that



enthusiasm and concern until they are old enough to help run the country's school systems.

During those first years at Alamo School one of the redeeming features of the art department was the requisition list for materials well designed to fill the needs of purposeful art activities. Until the unavoidable war shortages set in, the department was not once handicapped by lack of materials or even delinquent filling of requisitions.

Just prior to the war years, at a Columbia University summer art colony, information collected in personal discussions with art teachers from many parts of the United States and Canada disclosed no school system with more adequate art requisition lists than those of the Dallas public schools.

In ordering materials at Alamo School, the children are invited to make suggestions and compare prices of different materials. They always take pride in unpacking and putting away the delivered supplies. Sometimes a child will lift a jar of brilliant tempera from its box of excelsior and pause to run his fingers over the jar; his careful handling of these art materials will seem almost a caress.

Underprivileged children lack that which art has to offer and their response constantly proves their need of art and their joy in it.

## CHAPTER VI

### LANGUAGE AND RACE PROBLEMS

There are a number of Mexican families in Alamo district. The fathers in these families speak English because they are constantly confronted with the need of it in their work; however, many of the mothers stay closely at home with the younger children and therefore learn English very slowly. Often children from these homes enter school with little or no knowledge of the English language. The non-verbal nature of art makes it especially valuable to these younger children from homes in which English is not spoken. The art room is sometimes the only place in school where they can become absorbed in creative activities without a consciousness of their language difficulties. Since art is a common language, it demands no interpreter. With correct leadership these children can work free of inhibitions, happily relating in paint the life issues and experiences of their environment. Most Mexican children delight in the use of paint, clay, and other art materials and possess an unusual feeling for color and form. They are generally quite at ease with art materials even though they have not worked with them or even seen them previously. Much joy and inspiration are derived from the Mexican children's work, not

only for themselves but also for the entire art department.

This joy of being appreciated, this satisfaction in work well done -- what remedial significance is there in carefully selected purposeful art activities during such a crucial adjustment period for these non-English speaking children!

Fig. 7. -- A first-grade Mexican boy, not only handicapped by language difficulties but also by a speech impediment, poor hearing, and poor vision, yet has the satisfaction of knowing that his small clay figures are enjoyed and appreciated by all his classmates and by his teacher.

Fig. 8. -- Two Mexican children from non-English speaking homes painting on the fire escape near the art room.

Fig. 9. -- One little Mexican girl who has learned some English is taking charge of a younger child who has recently entered school and knows no English. These older Mexican children take pride in this practice of serving as interpreters for the young children, and do it commendably.

Fig. 10. -- Two Mexican children, who have reached the third grade, working on the fire escape with one of the other children.

During those first few weeks at Alamo School, after the art room had been partially rearranged, a system was adopted in which each class each week selected its own leaders for the week. Although there was a high percentage of Mexican children in these classes and although they were usually capable and very interested in art activities, they were seldom invited to the honored position of becoming leaders of their groups. An appreciation of the Mexican



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children's customs and abilities was lacking. Since lack of appreciation is commonly based upon lack of knowledge and understanding, one of the first problems at Alamo School was that of building a better understanding of Mexican customs and a deeper appreciation of Mexican arts and crafts. Every possible means was taken during the months which followed to acquaint the Alamo children with Latin-American habits, language, music, arts and crafts.

This was an extremely pleasant undertaking, since two of the art teachers' favorite hobbies were collecting records of Latin-American music and examples of Mexican crafts. Small exhibits of these crafts were arranged in the art room from time to time. The children had the privilege of observing and handling brightly colored blown glass plates and mugs, hand-woven belts and lunch sets, serapes, tiny handcarved wooden toys, silver and jade, pottery, woven glass mats, and baskets. (Some of the children learned to walk around the room with baskets balanced on their heads, as they had seen the natives carry them in the films on Mexico from the school's visual-aid department. Other children tried tempera paintings of these people on their way to the marketplace.) Figures 11 and 12 show two low-third-grade paintings entitled "Going to Market in Mexico."

When the Latin-American records were brought to school, several of the Mexican children not only knew the Spanish words to some of the songs but offered to bring their





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native costumes to school and dance several of the dances for the classes. This also added zest and inspiration for the painting groups.

Fig. 13. -- "Las Chiapanecas."

Fig. 14. -- "Jarabe Tapatio."

One interesting experience led to another until time could not possibly be found to carry out all the ideas that poured into the art department.

The high-third grade was reading a book on Banana Land and had been shown a film depicting the different phases of the banana industry. These third-grade children worked hard at their art periods until they had completed a series of paintings which told the story of bananas from the first early stages of caring for the small plants to the gathering and shipping of the stalks of bananas. And then for good measure they painted several extra scenes of people selling bananas at marketplaces and on the streets, presumably here in Dallas. These paintings were placed in mats and for some time were used as a frieze across one side of the third-grade home-room.

An after-school Spanish club was formed which met several afternoons a week in the art room. At these meetings one of the older Mexican girls who had learned to read Spanish at home taught those children who cared to attend the club. It was an interesting sight to see such a young teacher with such attentive students.





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Later a primary teacher who had majored in Spanish was transferred to Alamo School. For one term she taught an afternoon lesson in Spanish to an enthusiastic group of low-third-grade boys and girls. These children wrote short stories in Spanish. The stories were brought to the art room, lettered on 18-by-24-inch tagboard with ballpoint pens and India ink. Crayon illustrations were made to accompany each story. Figure 15 is a Mexican girl's illustration for her story about Mexico.

The auditorium teacher at Alamo School had spent a summer in Spain, had visited many parts of Mexico, spoke Spanish well, and was an enthusiastic student of Mayan history. She was of much assistance in the mural painting which was done that year. From her auditorium discussions on Mayan culture the children were so steeped in ideas that the art room did not contain enough wall space for the 36-by-54-inch murals they planned and some work had to be carried into the hall. These murals were painted in tempera and depicted the customs, games, and architecture of the early Mayas. After completion the murals were used on the school stage to illustrate a series of talks by the children on Mayan culture.

This was an especially advantageous time for the Alamo children to be studying their neighbors south of the border. Fair Park, which is in walking distance of the school, was being put in readiness for the Texas Centennial



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Celebration of 1936 and subsequently the Greater Texas and Pan-American Exposition of 1937. Therefore, for several years Alamo district was to be rich in interesting Latin-American experiences. Many of these were available without expense to the children. For example, at the Texaco Garden in Fair Park there were three performances daily of Don Ramon's Tipica Mexican Orchestra.

Figure 16, a fifth-grade painting, is a Mexican girl's interpretation of the well-known little old men's dance, "Los Viejos."

There were many exhibits of the Americas on the fair-grounds. Of these one of the most interesting to art lovers was the Pre-Columbian and Contemporary Art Exhibit held at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts from June 12 to October 31, 1937. This exhibit was especially in line with the work being carried on in the Alamo art room. There were paintings by contemporary artists from Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Cuba, Brazil, and Mexico. There were exhibits of Peruvian textiles, Mayan jade necklaces, Aztec stone carvings, and various crafts from Mexico. The newspapers of the city carried interesting articles and reproductions daily. Clippings were saved for the art room. Much helpful material was found at the city library. The visual-aids department of the Dallas public schools had interesting films which were used to advantage. These art-room activities were linked with different phases of work being carried on in the auditorium.

One of the most **rewarding** experiences of the year was the construction of the stage set for a play which had been written in the auditorium. The play was about two archeologists from the United States who were visiting in Mexico on a return trip from Yucatan. They were having difficulty speaking Spanish and their guide, who was a Mexican boy, had to do a lot of translating for them. He took them to see the different crafts on Mexico and then ended the day at a fiesta. What a perfect find for the art department!

Every one went to work on the stage set. In the background an adobe house was built of orange crates and kraft wrapping paper. The door was made large enough for the characters to walk through without stooping. Clumps of banana trees were constructed of dead tree limbs, wire, and paper. A clothesline was hung across the back of the stage and a wornout sheet was torn into different sized pieces, dyed beautiful hues, and a typical Mexical wash hung on the line. Cardboard maguey plants were placed along the footlights.

When the scene opened the two archeologists found Mexican women, apparently quite accustomed to sitting around their little adobe home, weaving, making pottery, and preparing tortillas. Presently the Mexican men came home from the marketplace and the neighbors gathered for a fiesta.

Three Mexican boys brought their guitars; there was singing and several Mexican dances in native costumes. The curtain was drawn as the Mexican guide clasped the hand of one archeologist and said: "Vive Mexico y vive los Estados Unidos. Todas los dias, Amigos." The curtain closed on a very happy group of Alamo students, students who had gained in knowledge and in appreciation and compassion for others.

## CHAPTER VII

### HEALTH PROBLEMS

In view of the fact that so high a percentage of the mothers of Alamo district help with the financial support of their families, there could not possibly be as much time as needed at home for attention to the formation of beneficial health habits. The different divisions of the school program should endeavor to assist these parents in this important phase of child development.

At the time these experiments were started, remarks of the children and a study of their school health records and dental rolls showed that the health standards in some of the homes of the district were very low. The ill effects of the depression were being felt. Cases of malnutrition were not unusual among the children. This was met to some extent by a system of free lunch tickets in the school cafeteria. Some of the families were receiving small monthly relief checks which helped to carry them through this difficult period. However, informal remarks of the children in the art room showed that this money for food in the homes was not always being spent wisely; much more nourishing food could be bought for less money at the vegetable and fruit markets. Consequently, one of the first

field trips of an Alamo art group was to the marketplace, which is in walking distance of the school. The trip gave the children an opportunity to learn the prices of the inexpensive vegetables and fruits which they were studying in the health classes, and it furnished much inspiration for art expression. Equipment for the trip included crayons and 9-by-12-inch sketch pads, which were made in the art room. The children were encouraged to make quick drawings of the objects which most interested them. These drawings were to be used later in individual pictures or group murals. The children watched the unloading of fruits and vegetables from the trucks and refrigerator cars and visited with the operators of a number of market stands. Inquiries about prices revealed that carrots could be bought for three cents a bunch, oranges for twelve cents a dozen, and lettuce for six cents a head. A number of other vegetables were selling for five cents a bunch. In some instances one of these five-cent bunches would have made an adequate serving for a family of four or five. After having fruit for refreshment, the art group started for home.

At the next art class all the drawings of the previous afternoon were spread over the tables for an informal exhibit and discussion. A health mural on nutritious foods was planned and drawings to be used in the mural were selected by the group. Tempera was chosen as the medium and a



piece of wall-board approximately thirty by fifty inches was selected for the painting surface. Everyone went to work enlarging color notes, mixing paints, or collecting such supplies as brushes, clean paint cloths, and water. During the days which followed each member of the group had the pleasure of painting from time to time on the mural.

Shortly after its completion a representative of the Good Teeth Council for Children, from Chicago, was at Alamo School and dropped by the art department. On seeing the mural she exclaimed, "What an interesting Mexican market scene!" This comment brought a bit of surprise to the painters of the mural. They had not realized that their Dallas market possessed to such a degree the color and spirit of a Mexican market.

Because the inspiration for the mural had come partly from an interest in building better teeth, the representative from Chicago expressed a desire to have it hung in the national offices there. The children were delighted. They set to work immediately to paint a second mural so that they would have one to keep and one to give away. On the completion of the latter, one mural was packed and mailed to the offices in Chicago. The children received letters from there, telling where the mural had been hung and how everyone enjoyed the Mexican scene. This experience of making new friends through a common interest in these combined art and

health activities was very significant in that it furnished a drive toward a more purposeful art program for their school. This was very evident in the years which followed, for the children in the art classes displayed intense interest at the slightest suggestion of the correlation of art with health activities. During the year immediately after the painting of the market scene another art group constructed a series of 18-by-24-inch, two-dimensional stages with brilliant red curtains, which contained illustrations inspired by a current national dental puppet show. These were also given to a representative of the Good Teeth Council. The children later learned that their work had been covered with clear cellophane for protection and had been exhibited in all of the forty-eight states.

This participation in health activities of national interest has helped to impress upon the children the importance of health education. Figure 17 shows a group of sixth-grade boys and girls working on a mural inspired by one of the National Good Teeth Council's puppet shows.

Since that first trip to the marketplace, twelve years ago, many other similar units have grown out of the health needs of the Alamo children. Regardless of the extra work that these entail, they prove worth-while, for there is always the knowledge that better health attitudes are being formed in the minds of the children and with the



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completion of each unit there has been this satisfying thought for the teacher: Art education once more has been lifted from the prevailing passive acceptance of "art just for the finer side of life" to a recognizable interacting element of school service capable of supporting the child whenever and wherever the felt need arises.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ART EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

In districts such as that of Alamo School there are from time to time teen-age gangs which present serious problems to city police and school authorities. As the older boys drop out of these gangs, fifth- and sixth-grade boys are informally added. The effect of such a group spirit upon these younger boys is always detrimental. A gang can lead a boy to commit crimes which he would not think of doing when alone. With older members younger boys sometimes experience their first nights in jail. When referring to such offenses as breaking windowpanes, destroying playground equipment, or stealing, these boys will usually say, "I don't know what made me do that." They naturally do not understand the psychological phenomena behind their actions: the desire to be a member of the group, the misguided urge to do something brave and daring, the fear of being laughed at or left behind.

How can art education aid in the correction of these detrimental attitudes which are forming in the minds of such children and furnish the guidance needed to build more wholesome attitudes? The following quotation from Developing a Curriculum for Modern Living agrees with the thought set

forth in this paper concerning the importance of purposeful environmental experiences:

A redesign of education will mean little unless experiences are guided toward action based on understanding.

These basic understandings can not be taught directly. They have operational value only as they are arrived at by the learner as he sees interrelationships among the elements of his experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the realization of such facts as these an effort is made to provide the Alamo children with purposeful art experiences which are related to their community environment and activities. Undoubtedly, it is fantastic to expect these experiences to produce any overnight cure for conditions which have been years in forming. It is ridiculous to suppose that detrimental attitudes which the child may be exposed to constantly at home, with older brothers and sisters or other associates, can be rebuilt into more desirable attitudes within a few thirty-minute art periods.

One of the fifth-grade boys a few days prior to the opening of school in the fall of 1947 decided that he had "gone to this old building for the last time -- it had to come down," and he succeeded in removing sixteen bricks from the northeast corner of the school building before he was stopped. Art does not claim to be a cure-all for such extreme cases as this. However, if art expressions are to be accepted as an integral part of the child's native actions,

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<sup>1</sup>F. B. Stratemeyer, H. L. Forkner, M. G. McKim, et al., Developing a Curriculum for Modern Living (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1947), p. 87.

an investigation to test the possibilities of art education assisting the child in these needed personality adjustments is infinitely worth-while.

For this reason educational visits to community property, such as museums, libraries, and parks, are a part of the Alamo art program. Recently, by dividing a class into small groups, a series of five afternoon trips were taken to the Dallas Art Museum. The drive from the school to the museum is less than ten minutes. (On such trips as these the children are taken only after receiving written permission from their parents.) From eight to ten children could be taken in the car each day. These small groups afforded opportunities for individual discussions and a chance for the children to meet and visit with the staff members of the museum.

The aims of these trips included, first, to provide wholesome enjoyment for the children; second, to stimulate interest in worth-while community activities; and third, to awaken within the children pride and a feeling of ownership in civic property.

Evidence of the effects of these trips can be cited in the casual remarks of the children during such a trip. A sixth-grade boy, after looking through several galleries, exclaimed, "My, but wouldn't it be wonderful to own a place like this!" His art teacher heard the remark and hurried to reply: "Yes, and the thought that we wish to impress upon

you is that you and the other people of Dallas really do own this museum. You own the Museum of Art and many other interesting buildings, such as the Aquarium and the Public Library."

As the children were leaving the museum, one of the boys stopped on the steps, surveyed the buildings of Fair Park, and said, "The boys and girls in Dallas surely are lucky."

On the way back to the school, while circling Fair Park, the children discussed the architecture of the park's other buildings, several of which they had visited previously on art trips.

The children planned a short pageant which they called "A Trip to the Museum of Art." When the city-wide Cavalcade of Education was presented at Fair Park Auditorium in the spring of 1948, the children gave this very short scene of a group of sixth-grade boys and girls enjoying a visit to the Museum of Art. They made their own stage sets by reinforcing and hinging together three discarded liquor signs from a group of signs which one of the boys had found behind a nearby building. The boy had gotten permission of the company to bring the signs to school.

When the stage set was completed, it was painted a pale yellow. An easel was converted into a rack for art magazines and pamphlets. Figure 18 shows the children practicing before the completed set.





For the performance at Fair Park a sculpture stand, one piece of sculpture, and three paintings were borrowed from the Dallas Museum of Art.

The children invited Miss Virginia Oechsner, who conducts the children's Saturday morning art programs at the museum, to be in the scene with them. The narrator's script read:

The scene before you represents a section of the Dallas Art Museum at Fair Park. One of the public school teachers is bringing a group of pupils to see a current exhibit. Miss Virginia Oechsner, whom you see coming to meet a group of sixth-grade boys and girls, conducts the Elementary School Art programs on Saturday mornings.

As the teacher and Miss Oechsner guide them through the Art Gallery they study pictures they are to discuss in their Monday's art classes in the Dallas schools.

#### Painting on the Roof

Still investigating the possibilities of tying in phases of community life with art experiences in such a way that they will aid in making desirable child personality adjustments, the teacher encouraged informal discussions of such subjects as the designs of nearby factories, freight cars, or the viaduct near the school, in the hope that these discussions may awaken dormant interests within the child and help him to discover sources of wholesome enjoyment in his surroundings.

One art group found an unusual place for holding these discussions. In the hall near the art room there are

two windows which open on to the flat roof of another part of the building. Through one of these windows one morning climbed the art teacher and a fifth-grade class, each child equipped with a No. 6 Kindergarten Brush, a can of dark brown tempera paint, an 18-by-24-inch drawing board, two clamps, and a supply of kraft wrapping paper. The children were told to select a place on the roof and from that view to make brush drawings of the objects which interested them. They were encouraged to choose as they wished, whether their selections be smokestacks, factory buildings, freight yard scenes, water tanks, grain elevators, fire escapes, the viaduct, or the roofs of their own homes.

Interest grew, partly aided, of course, by the elevation and the usual stimulating effect of a field trip, even though the children were less than a minute's time from the art room.

When completed, the drawings were carried inside; they were spread over the floor and discussed. The children were pleased with their varied interpretations of subject matter, for being conscious of the ever-present time element, each child had been too busy to stop and watch the other painters. The result was a general feeling of pride in that each person had found interesting forms which he felt were completely his own.

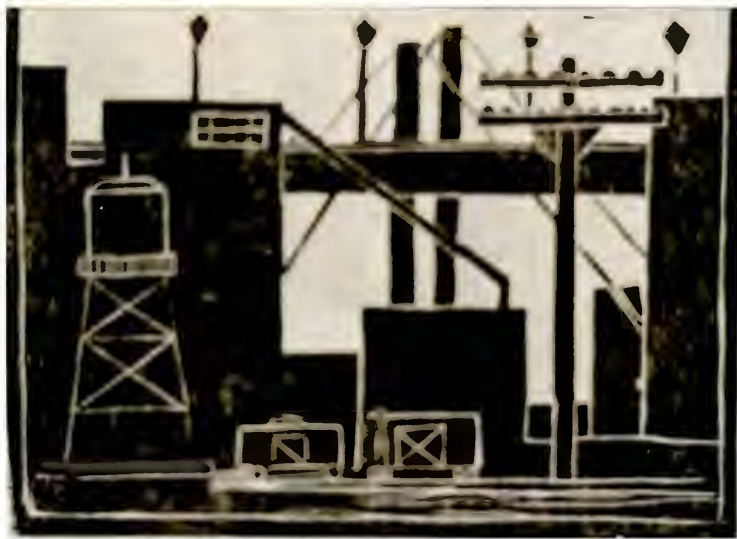
Such subject matter has no limitations. Some of these drawings were worked up in tempera color, others in

linoleum block prints, and still others were saved to be used later in murals.

Trips are made to the roof from time to time and regardless of the type of materials used, interesting discussions follow in the art room and art activities gain added inspiration. Figure 19 presents a linoleum block print made from one of these drawings done from the roof of the school building. Figure 20 shows a group of fifth-grade boys and girls at work with brown crayon and newsprint on the roof. Sometimes, days after one of these trips, a boy will take crumpled pieces of paper from his pocket, paper on which he has drawn other views of the objects he had seen from the roof. During studies of this type, children mention buildings in other parts of the city which are similar to those discussed in the art room. At times they remind their teacher to look at certain buildings on her way home from school. Such remarks as these reveal their increased interest in community property.

#### The Children's Library

In the war years, when teachers were hard to find and equally hard to keep, Alamo School had the unfortunate experience of changing auditorium teachers eight times within one year. During this turnover Miss Siddie Jo Johnson of the Children's Library suggested sending the Wednesday afternoon Story Hour tickets, which formerly had been sent to the auditorium, to the art department for weekly



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distribution. The art-room discussions which ensued disclosed a total absence of story books in many of the homes; few homes in which the parents had time to read to the children, or with them; and few children, within this district, who were acquainted with the stories being presented on the then current Story Book Parade of the Air. Thus loomed before the art department an ideal chance for child service.

This service was to include varied types of experiences. In connection with library studies being conducted in the third-grade home-room, an 18-by-24-inch poster was made to represent the open pages of a book. On this poster the children kept individual records of their visits to the library that term. Their teacher had visited the library with them and helped them in securing library cards. She also had written notes to their parents, soliciting help in encouraging the children to visit the library more often. One of the mothers replied that her child had been begging to go to the library. She had not given her consent because she was afraid it might interfere with his school work, and she wanted to know what the teacher thought about it. Other parents asked for similar advice. One was frank in admitting that she simply had not realized the advantages of the library visits, or she would have permitted her children to attend the Story Hour program.

The morning after one of these trips to the library a third-grade boy said to the teacher, "You know that book

I got from the library, well, my Dad started reading it last night and wouldn't stop until he had finished it. My Mother says she is going to take my library card and go and get her a book, but my Dad doesn't want her to because he is afraid she will stay up and read all night."

The following summer two books which were given by the library for good attendance records went to children from these groups. They were from a home in which the mother did not read or write. This mother, one day while visiting in the art department, made the following comment concerning the previous summer's activities: "Well, you know it got awfully hot making those trips to the library, but we didn't miss a program." (Such interest in the wholesome activities afforded the child life of a community is to be admired in any parent.)

The first-grade teacher had been bringing her radio to school each week in order that the children might listen to the Story Book Parade presented by the Texas School of the Air. The art teacher and a group of children visited the library and checked out ten of the stories which were being told on this program. The stories were read aloud in the art room to all twelve sections of the art department. During this period of reading and discussion an attempt was made not to dwell upon the illustrators' interpretation of the stories but to build within the minds of the children the realization that they, too, could have the pleasure of

painting their own interpretations of these stories as, after all, that was exactly what the illustrators had done.

Immediately following the discussions, brown kraft wrapping paper, approximately thirty-six by fifty inches, was spread over all available space in the art room and everyone in the school went to work. The first-grade children had their very first lesson in the handling and care of water-color brushes while painting on these murals. Other children experienced their first thrills and discoveries in color mixing while hunting for needed hues. Others made concentrated studies of trees, animals, or people. When the murals were completed a checkup disclosed the fact that there was no child in the entire school who had not helped with the painting.

Three-inch tagboard mats were placed around the murals and they were left temporarily on the walls of the art room. Shortly after their completion Miss Johnson was in the building on one of her visits to tell stories in the auditorium. After the program she came by the art department and on seeing the murals, asked if she might borrow them for a library exhibit. At the close of the exhibit, acting upon a suggestion from the library that the murals be left on the walls permanently, they were given to the Children's Library. With the exception of a short time when several of them were loaned to the Southern States



Book Fair, these paintings were kept on the walls of the library until the not too durable wrapping paper and tagboard began to show signs of decay.

Miss Johnson has often told of children who have come to discuss with her the parts in the murals they helped to paint. She also has said how pleased she was to see the assurance with which these children entered the room. They displayed more a sense of ownership than just simply being at ease. Having their art work on display in a civic building in itself had helped to give them a relationship with civic property and interests.

A consciousness of such worth-while changes as these within the minds of children is extremely gratifying to persons interested in child development. Regardless of the pleasure adults derive from seeing children's murals hanging in school halls or in community buildings, the real significance of a project such as the painting of these murals lies not in the completed tangible product but in its benefit to the personality development of the child.

#### The Alamo Toy Shop

Although there are a number of cases in South Dallas in which even fourth and fifth-grade children take pride in helping with their families' support, occasionally there is evidence of a complacent acceptance of relief assistance among some children from families which are partly supported

by relief organizations. (At present sixty-five children in Alamo School are receiving free lunch tickets in the school cafeteria.) If their parents have a tendency toward irresponsibility, the children very naturally are inclined to take this financial help for granted. Families have been known to spend money on wrestling matches or ball games at the same time that they were failing to buy workbooks or other inexpensive school supplies. Since so very few supplies are required and so many materials are furnished by the school, this shifting of responsibility becomes especially serious. This casual acceptance of help inevitably carries over into other life experiences and causes detriment to the personality growth of these children. One important phase of school personality service is that of building in the minds of such children a more wholesome attitude toward responsibility.

Even though classroom discussions of various phases of responsibilities aid in building better attitudes, children also need definite experiences in contributing to worth-while community activities. The present system of Junior Red Cross work in the art department of the Dallas public schools furnishes an opportunity for such an experience and at the same time brings happiness to other persons, including children in hospitals and orphans' homes. At the beginning of each year the art teachers receive, from the

art office, printed lists from which to choose their desired Red Cross activities for the year. This past term the Alamo art group chose to make toys for children's hospitals and orphans' homes. Perhaps this choice was prompted by the fact that two ~~mamb~~bers of the group had recently entered a local orphans' home, or perhaps their choice came from a desire for toys for themselves. At any rate, shortly after the opening of school, work was started on a unit which was to grow into an "Alamo Toy Shop." (The children are already making plans for another one next fall.)

The morning after the first discussion of the toy shop boys began dragging in long pieces of discarded lumber, which they said were being collected to use in making shelves. When completed, these shelves, worm-holes and all, were sanded and painted brown, then hoisted on tables which had been placed against the walls. The walls had previously been covered with kraft wrapping paper and painted in sections of yellow, brown, and a few smaller sections of red orange. With coping saws, three-inch-high beaverboard letters were cut; these were painted a brilliant red and tacked to the top shelves, declaring the place to be the "Alamo Toy Shop."

With so many children at work the shelves rapidly began to fill and really did take on the appearance of a toy shop. One afternoon when one of the boys brought his mother

and preschool sister to see the shop, his four-year-old sister ran from toy to toy, begging, "Mother, please buy this, please buy this for me." One little preschool boy visiting in the building stopped in the door of the art room and said, "Why do they have everything in the world in this room?" At times the art teacher wondered why, too, especially when she could not possibly find places to keep all the scrap lumber, coffee cans, rags, discarded inner-tubes, and other salvaged materials being used by the children.

Both sections of the Alamo first grade very definitely decided that the art room was a place to play, and at their art periods would usually come in the door and go straight to take down the toys. Since many of the children had few or no toys at home and since the art teacher believes with many other educators that "play is the legitimate business of children," it was a sincere joy to watch their rapt expressions. The older boys and girls felt this thrill, too, when watching the first graders, because they suggested that the toy shop when completed be divided into three parts, one part for the Junior Red Cross, one part for a play center in the art room for the first grade, and the third group of toys for children who wished to save some of the toys they had made for their own brothers' and sisters' Christmas presents.

At the close of the term when the art room was being dismantled and the toys packed away, the first graders were very upset. One little girl said, "It's awfully lonesome without our toys."

In Figure 21 the boy on the left is lacing a bright red drum which he is making from a coffee can and a piece of discarded innertube. The boy who is sawing has completed, in the art department, all his gifts for his family this Christmas. He has designed the wrapping paper for each package. The girl is dressing a few of the many rag dolls which were made during December. The third boy is painting a scooter which he constructed from scrap lumber and a broken skate. Several of the older boys have made similar scooters for their younger brothers. However, these younger brothers cannot wait until the scooters are completed; they come by the art department every day after school to borrow, "just for a little bit," their prospective scooters, wet paint and all.

The elephant in Figure 22 was cut from an orange crate with a coping saw. His striped blanket was woven by one of the children.

The monkeys in Figure 23 were made from brown Indian-head and have bright red caps and jackets. They are named Jasper and Mickey. They have played important roles in several of the children's auditorium productions, namely in a play which the sixth grade wrote and produced themselves

to show the scope of the Red Cross Toy Shop activities. When the curtain closed, some of the players came by the art department to bargain, "We are willing to send the other monkeys to the Red Cross, but, please, may Mickey and Jasper stay at Alamo School? Since they were in the play, we can't stand to give them up; the first graders need them, too."



21.



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23.



## CHAPTER IX

### BUILDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SECURITY

Almost invariably, when a child at Alamo School has begun to show signs of inattentiveness, listlessness, lack of customary enthusiasm, or other emotional disorders, a close investigation has revealed such home disturbances as financial reverses, sickness of members of the family, excessive drinking on the part of a parent, or an approaching divorce. It is consoling to realize that many times the children from these homes have been able to find happiness and joy in their art activities.

Furthermore, some psychiatrists believe that a much needed relief of tension is often achieved in the process of spontaneous, uninhibited art expressions. These psychiatrists are testing the possibilities of paintings which are from the child's own life experiences serving for both diagnosis and therapy. Quoting from Studies of 'Free' Art Expression of Behavior Problem Children and Adolescents as a Means of Diagnosis and Therapy, by Margaret Naumburg, we learn that "there is, today, an increase of interest in the use of creative arts with mental patients as a means of

both exploring and reintegrating human personality . . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, this statement has reference to uninhibited art expression only, and not to the stereotyped art instruction still found in some public schools. Such routine procedure as the latter not only does not help the maladjusted child but discourages creative expression and limits the personality growth, even of normal children. One of the most serious problems of the art teacher today is that of rebuilding the self-confidence of children who are being exposed constantly to tracing and copying in some other field of education. How regrettable it is that many persons fail to realize that every time a child is given something to trace or copy he accepts this, even though unconsciously, as an acknowledgment of the fact that his own work is not good enough and thus more and more undervalues his own ability. To combat these evils, child originality and initiative in expression must be encouraged constantly in art education. These twelve years of studying the individual needs of the Alamo children have indelibly left the conviction that there is real significance and personality benefit to be gained in helping children to realize that they are artists in their own rights and that their everyday experiences are worth recording.

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Naumburg, Studies of the "Free" Art Expression of Behavior Problem Children and Adolescents as a Means of Diagnosis and Therapy (New York: Coolidge Foundation, 1947), p. 49.

For those persons interested in this approach to art education a miscellaneous group of reproductions and photographs from the Alamo art files is here included. They are accompanied by these following brief explanations to show in what way the art activities were the outgrowth of the everyday experiences of the Alamo children.

The inspiration for this first group came partly from the Texas Centennial Celebration held in Dallas in 1936.

Fig. 24. -- Coming to Texas.

Fig. 25. -- Preparing a chuck wagon meal.

Fig. 26. -- Early days in Texas.

Fig. 27. -- Early days in Texas.

These next paintings are an outgrowth of one phase of the year's social studies:

Figs. 28, 29, 30 and 31. -- How people make a living in Texas.

Fig. 32. -- A high-first-grade boy became intensely interested in painting monkeys after finding a story about them in his new reader. For several weeks he worked very hard with 18-by-24-inch kraft wrapping paper and tempera, turning out a completed painting in each of his art periods and showing constant improvement. Figure 32 is one of his last in the series.

Fig. 33. -- "My Palomino Pony" was painted by a high-first-grade boy whose father trains horses on a small ranch



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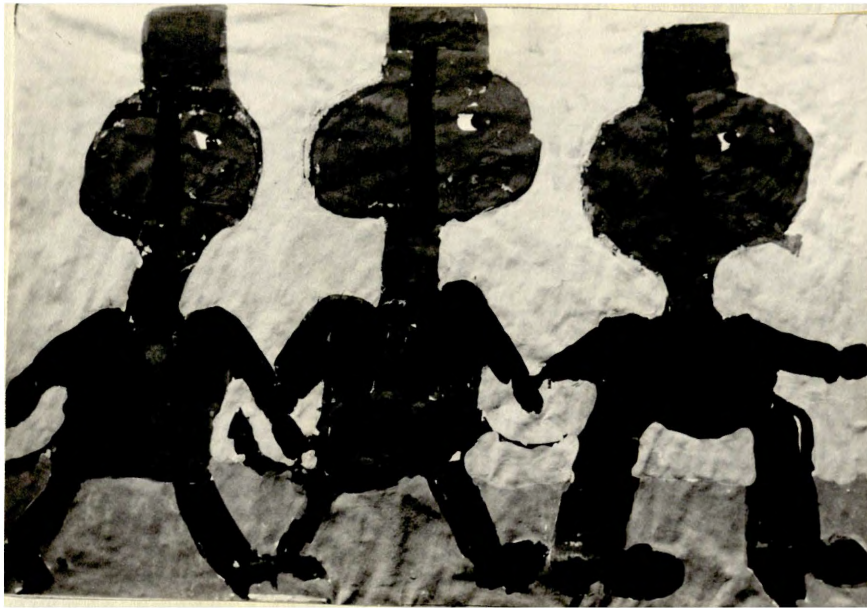




30.



31.



32 .



33.



near Pleasant Grove. He says, "My Dad and I train horses, and my horse is almost exactly like Roy Rogers' horse."

Fig. 34. -- A fifth-grade girl's illustration of the Junior League's production of "Robin Hood" which was given at Alamo School.

Fig. 35. -- A consciousness of the money saved by making their own costumes added to the enjoyment of this third-grade Hallowe'en mask making. The faces are painted in tempera on brown paper sacks and some of them have extra decorations, like string hair or funny little hats.

Fig. 36. -- "Snow in South Dallas" was painted by a sixth-grade girl during one of Texas' rare snows.

Fig. 37. -- The low-third-grade girl who painted this picture has just returned from her grandparents' home in the country, where she had helped her grandfather feed the cattle.

Fig. 38. -- For several years the art room's Christmas trees have been entirely decorated with the children's varied pieces of paper construction. These are mostly made from reinforced gold, silver, and colored tinsel papers.

Fig. 39 was painted by a third-grade girl who, like most children, is very fond of skating.

Fig. 40. -- These three girls designed and made their costumes for "Hansel and Gretel," which they were helping to stage in the auditorium.



34.



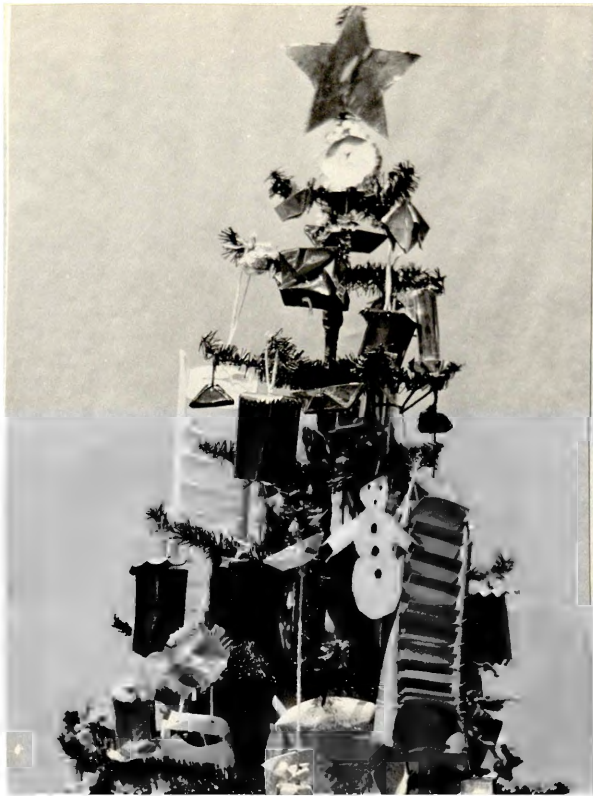
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41.

Figs. 41, 42, 43 and 44. -- In warm weather many of the Alamo art classes are held in the open. These outings are so popular that they have become known as parties in the art department. Children will often ask, "Don't you think it is warm enough to have a clay party outside today?"



42.



43.





## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION

How could anyone interested in child development work with these children without acquiring a deep-rooted faith in their potentialities, a regret in their varied temptations, a resentment at their injustices, an admiration for the way in which they meet insurmountable difficulties, and a sincere desire to help them?

An understanding of their environment and individual difficulties becomes an understanding of the type of art education needed for them. This need of a comprehensive linking of their life experiences with purposeful art experiences cannot be overstressed. No other force is more advantageously placed to aid underprivileged children. Their welfare, physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually, must be the vital concern of art education. Upon a consciousness of such values and responsibilities as these rests this steadfast belief in the importance of a social philosophy of art education for underprivileged children.

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