

Viktor Lowenfeld and
W. Lambert Brittain

Creative and Mental Growth

Sixth Edition



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SIXTH EDITION

Viktor Lowenfeld and
W. Lambert Brittain

Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

NEW YORK

Collier Macmillan Publishers

LONDON

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Printed in the United States of America

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Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

866 Third Avenue

New York, New York 10022

Collier-Macmillan Canada, Ltd.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lowenfeld, Viktor.

Creative and mental growth.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Art—Study and teaching. 2. Creation
(Literary, artistic, etc.) 3. Children as artists.
4. Artists—Psychology. I. Brittain, W. Lambert,
joint author. II. Title.

N350.L62 1975

707

74-5721

ISBN 0-02-372090-5

PRINTING 91011 YEAR 123456

Preface

This book is about children, about their art, their creativity, and their cognitive and social growth. It was designed with college students and teachers in mind, but parents, grandparents, and even nonparents who are interested in the development of children's creative expression may find this book of interest. The study of children's art is fascinating, and it is with a great deal of respect for children that I have tried to capture some of the essence of this development in the following pages.

Those who have been familiar with earlier editions of *Creative and Mental Growth* will find several changes in this edition. The first three chapters are primarily introductory, providing philosophical and general psychological foundations upon which the following chapters are based. Material dealing with the development of creativity has been consolidated into a single chapter and expanded to include recent research and its implications. Chapters 4 through 8 are devoted to an understanding of the art productions of children up to 12 years of age. Chapter 9 introduces issues and problems of working with older children, and Chapters 10 and 11 go into detail explaining the characteristics of their creative expression. A chapter dealing with the development of aesthetic awareness follows. There is the question of whether or not it is appropriate to isolate a discussion of aesthetic growth from the rest of the child's development, yet some of the problems in developing aesthetic awareness can be best considered after gaining an understanding of a child's expression. The last chapter is a short summary, emphasizing the major premises of the book. The reader will also note increased reference to current research work. Further, it is hoped that the new illustrations will provide better examples of the work typical of each stage of development.

It is with a great deal of satisfaction that I can look back over the past several years and note that the original philosophy of Viktor Lowenfeld is still fundamental in the field of art education. He thoroughly believed in the worth of the individual child;

his purpose in writing was primarily to provide the means by which adults could serve as catalysts in making the child's life richer and more meaningful. Lowenfeld forcefully stated that the child's creative expression during specific stages in mental and emotional growth can only be understood and appreciated if the general causal interdependence between creation and growth is understood. This sixth edition can only hope to emphasize this statement.

I owe thanks to many people who helped me prepare this edition. Of first importance are the children who have been willing subjects and who have provided the drawings and illustrations for this volume; they are the true source for the theories on which this book is based. My graduate students, my undergraduate classes, and my colleagues, both at Cornell and elsewhere, have been inclined to comment freely upon earlier editions. I doubt that I have fully lived up to their expectations, but at least I have tried. I particularly appreciated the comments of Earl Linderman and Theodore Anderson after their critical readings of the fifth edition.

I wish to acknowledge the help of the many teachers who shared their children's drawings with me. Of particular help were Jean Holland for Plates 15 and 20, Marjory Martin for Figure 101, Marlene Ginsburg for Figure 47, Helen Stein for Figure 57, Gordon Myer for Figure 165, Pat Bechtold for Figures 164, 168, and 172 and Plates 25 and 26, and Sandra Winters for a third grader's painting of a snake reproduced on the cover. I also had the help of several photographers, including Barrett Gallagher for Figures 3, 49, 61, 63, and 169; Jack Grant for Figures 45, 123, and 138; Lynn Haussler for Figure 53; the Photo Science Studios at Cornell University for Figures 19, 38, and 42; and Jean Warren, not only for her valuable counsel and technical assistance but also for Figures 83 and 127.

Several research projects have contributed a great deal to the text. These are noted in the discussions, and the full reference appears in the bibliography. However, special mention should be made of the Cornell Research

Project in Early Childhood Education for providing Figure 4; The Cooperative Research Project No. 6-8416, U.S. Office of Education, for Figure 185; and the study by Irene Russell for Figure 44.

Several art collections contributed to the illustrative material. Thanks are due to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University for Figures 176, 178, 179, and 181; Ithaca College for Figure 189; The Museum of Modern Art for Figures 177 and 180; The Indiana University of Pennsylvania for Plate 16; and Jason Seley for his willingness to share with me his equestrian statue appearing in Figure 173.

I have especially appreciated the confidence of Mrs. Viktor Lowenfeld. She has given her unswerving support to my endeavors, and it is with great appreciation that I acknowledge her contribution. I am pleased as well to enjoy John Lowenfeld's continued good faith.

I would like to end the preface on a more personal note. If the reader has comments or questions, or disagrees with me, or does not understand certain sections of this volume, I would be most happy to know it. It is only with an understanding of the difficulties of comprehension, or of the vagueness of certain sections, that future changes in this text can be made. I would genuinely enjoy hearing from you.

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Contents

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF ART FOR EDUCATION 1

- The Meaning of Art Activities 3
- The Meaning of Art for Children 7
- The Senses As Basic to Learning 12
- Self-identification and Self-expression 14
- The Meaning of Art for Society 19
- The Meaning of the Art Product 22

2 UNDERSTANDING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT 29

- Art As a Means of Understanding Growth 31
 - Emotional Growth 31
 - Intellectual Growth 34
 - Physical Growth 36
 - Perceptual Growth 36
 - Social Growth 39
 - Aesthetic Growth 40
 - Creative Growth 41
- Art As a Reflection of Development 43
 - Subject Matter in Art 44
 - Developmental Stages in Art 47
 - Significance of the Developmental Stages 50
 - The Importance of the Art Experience 55
- Related Activities 57

3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY 59

- The Importance of Creativity 61
- Creative and Intellectual Behavior 63
- Schools and Creativity 65
- The Measurement of Creativity 66
- Methods of Developing the Creative Potential 70
- Art and Creativity 78
- Summary 82
- Related Activities 82

4 ART IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM 85

- Classroom Procedures 87
- The Teacher of Art 91
 - The Teacher's Behavior Is Important 91
 - Identifying with the Child 93
 - Identifying with the Medium 95
- Motivation in the Classroom 98
 - Extending the Frame of Reference 98
 - Motivation and Development 101
 - Motivation and the Insecure Child 102
- Integrated Learning Experiences 105
 - Grading the Child's Art 107
 - Workbooks and Coloring Books 108
 - Exhibits and Competitions 111

The Importance of Materials and Skills 113

Techniques and Procedures 114

Art Materials and Developmental Stages 115

Art Materials in the Classroom 118

Related Activities 119

5 THE BEGINNINGS OF SELF-EXPRESSION: The Scribbling Stage, 2-4 Years 121

The Importance of Early Childhood 123

The Development of Scribbling 123

Disordered Scribbling 123

Controlled Scribbling 126

The Naming of Scribbling 130

The Meaning of Color 132

Environment and the Developmental Process 134

Scribbling As a Reflection of Growth 138

Art Motivation 141

Art Materials 145

Summary 149

Related Activities 150

6 FIRST REPRESENTATIONAL ATTEMPTS: The Preschematic Stage, 4-7 Years 153

The Importance of the Preschematic Stage 155

Characteristics of Preschematic Drawings 155

The Meaning of Color 158

The Meaning of Space 160

The Development of the Four to Seven Year
Old Child 163

Preschematic Drawings As a Reflection of
Growth 165

Art Motivation 171

Subject Matter 176

Art Materials 178

Summary 180

Related Activities 182

7 THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A FORM CONCEPT: The Schematic Stage, 7-9 Years 183

The Importance of the Schematic Stage 185

Characteristics of Schematic Drawings 186

Human Schema 186

Space Schema 187

The Base Line As Part of the Landscape 191

Other Means of Space Representation 193

Space and Time Representations 199

X-Ray Pictures 202

Significance of Variations in the Schema 203

The Meaning of Color and Design 204

The Development of the Primary School Child 207

Schematic Drawings As a Reflection of
Growth 210

Art Motivation 216

Subject Matter 219

Art Materials 221

Summary 225

Related Activities 226

8 THE DAWNING REALISM: The Gang Age, 9–12 Years 227

- The Importance of the Gang Age 229
- Characteristics of Drawings During the Gang Age 231
 - The Meaning of Color 234
 - The Meaning of Space 235
 - The Meaning of Design 238
- The Development of the Gang Age Child 240
- Gang Age Drawings As a Reflection of Growth 242
- Art Motivation 247
- Subject Matter 253
- Art Materials 255
- Summary 260
- Related Activities 260

9 THE IMPORTANCE OF ART IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL 263

- The Role of Art 265
- The Psychological Change from Elementary to Secondary School 267
- The Importance of Self-identification 271
- The Development of Two Creative Types 275
- Methods of Working in Art 285
- Creativity in the Secondary School Art Program 289
- The Art Teacher in the Secondary School 292
- Summary 295
- Related Activities 297

10 THE AGE OF REASONING: The Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage, 12–14 Years 299

- The Importance of the Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage 301
- The Representation of the Human Figure 304
- The Representation of Space 307
- The Importance of Color and Design 310
- Growth As Reflected in the Art of the Young Adolescent 314
- Art Motivation 318
- Subject Matter 323
 - Feelings and Emotions 324
 - The Self and Others 325
 - School Life 326
 - Design and Nature 328
- Art Materials 330
- Summary 333
- Related Activities 334

11 THE PERIOD OF DECISION: Adolescent Art in the High School, 14–17 Years 337

- The Importance of High School Art 339
- The High School Student 341
 - The Adolescent and Society 343
 - The Secondary School Environment 345
- The Basis for Art in the High School 348
- The Structure of an Art Program 350

Art Activities 352

The Importance of Design 356

The Organization of the Art Class 357

Art Materials 362

Summary 367

Related Activities 368

The Elementary School Child 389

The Secondary School Student 393

A Program for Aesthetic Growth 396

The Preschool 398

The Elementary School 400

The Secondary School 402

Summary 406

Related Activities 406

12

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF
AESTHETIC AWARENESS 371**

The Meaning of Aesthetics 373

Art Appreciation 374

Culture and Aesthetic Awareness 379

Aesthetics and Society's Values 382

Changes in Aesthetic Taste 383

Aesthetic Development 387

The Preschool Child 388

13

SUMMARY 409

BIBLIOGRAPHY 415

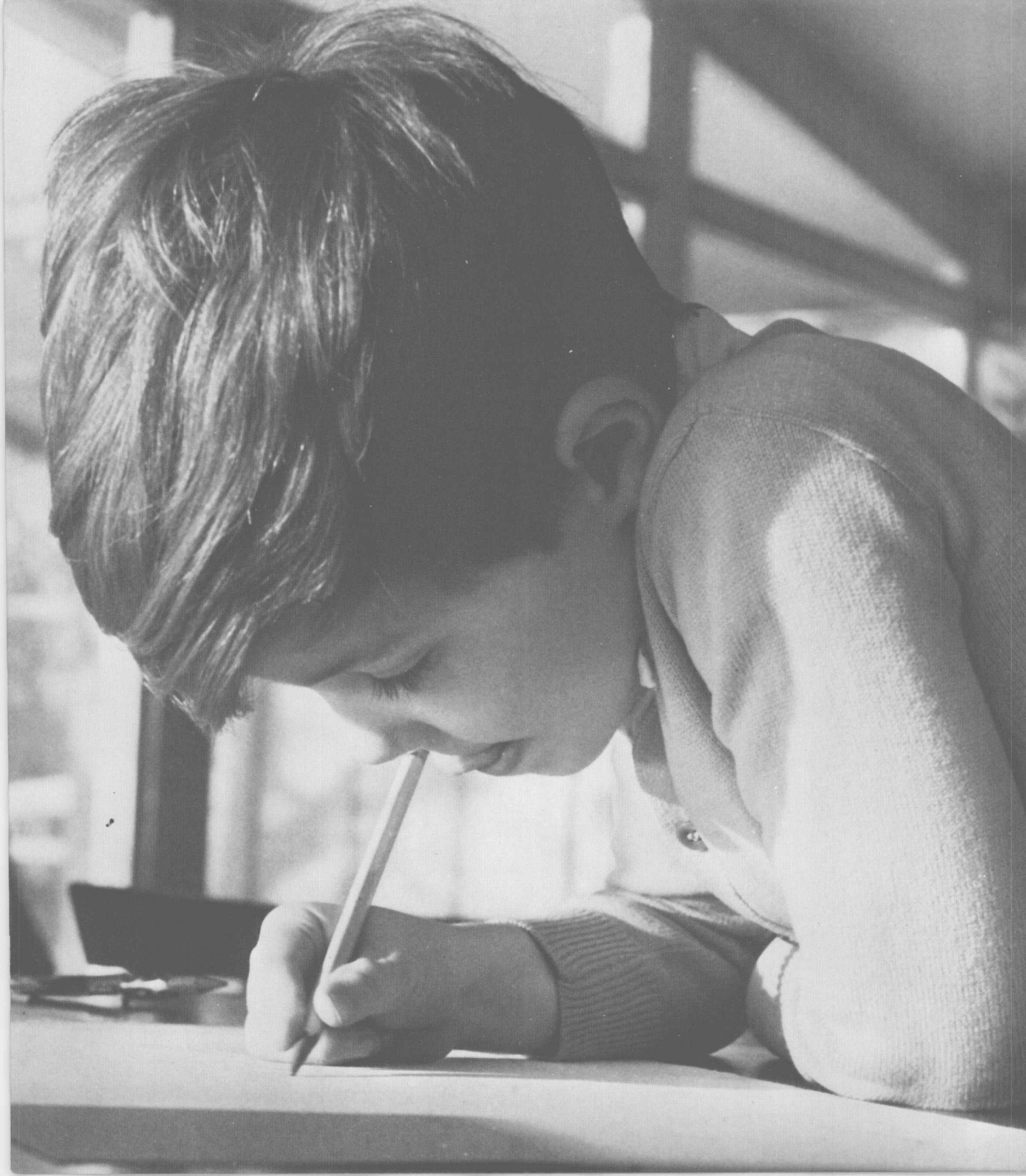
INDEX 425

Color Plates

Plate 1	"Man"	facing page 20
Plate 2	"I Am Putting on My Sweater"	21
Plate 3	"I Have a Loose Tooth"	21
Plate 4	"I Caught a Fish"	52
Plate 5	"Mother Is Picking Tulips"	53
Plate 6	"We Are Playing on the Playground"	53
Plate 7	"Walking Man"	116
Plate 8	"Barns"	116
Plate 9	"Harbor"	117
Plate 10	"Scribble in Line"	148
Plate 11	"Scribble in Mass"	148
Plate 12	"Cow"	149
Plate 13	"Mommy and Daddy"	180
Plate 14	"I Am Playing in the Leaves"	180
Plate 15	"I Am in a Lightning Storm"	181
Plate 16	"I Am Standing in My Back Yard"	212
Plate 17	"Lightning and Rain"	213
Plate 18	"Spring"	213
Plate 19	"We Are Exploring the Surface of Venus"	244
Plate 20	"Standing in the Rain"	245
Plate 21a	"Trees"	276
Plate 21b	"Trees"	276
Plate 22	"Leaves"	277
Plate 23	"The Circus"	324
Plate 24	"My Barber"	325
Plate 25	"Flowers"	356
Plate 26	"Mallards"	356
Plate 27	"Waterfall"	357

1

The Importance of Art for Education



The Meaning of Art Activities

ART IS A DYNAMIC and unifying activity, with a potentially vital role in the education of our children. The process of drawing, painting, or constructing is a complex one in which the child brings together diverse elements of his experience to make a new and meaningful whole. In the process of selecting, interpreting, and reforming these elements, he has given us more than a picture or a sculpture; he has given us a part of himself: how he thinks, how he feels, and how he sees.

Formal education takes on tremendous importance when we realize that our children—from the age of five or six to sixteen, eighteen, or beyond—are forced by law and job requirements to spend ten, twelve, sixteen, or even twenty years behind school doors. That is a stiff sentence just for being born a child. Yet the serving of this sentence is supposed to qualify a youngster to take his place as a contributing and well-adjusted member of society. From some points of view education has done its task; looking around us today, we can see great material gains. But serious questions can be raised about how much we have been able to educate beyond the making and consuming of objects. Have we in our educational system really put emphasis upon human values? Or have we been so blinded by the material rewards that we have failed to recognize that the real values of a democracy lie in its most precious good, the individual?

In our present educational system most emphasis has been put upon the learning of factual information. To a great extent the passing or failing of an examination or of a course, or the passing on to the next grade, or even the remaining in school depends upon the mastery or memorization of certain bits of information that are already known to the instructor. The function of the school system, then, would seem to be that of producing people who can file away bits of information and can then repeat these at a given signal. Once the student has achieved a certain competency at producing the proper bits of information at the correct time, he is considered ripe for graduating from school. What is most disturbing is that the skill in repeating bits of information may have very little relationship to the “contributing, well-adjusted member of society” we thought we were producing.

We do not want to give the impression that mankind is saved by merely developing a good creative art program in public schools; but the values that are meaningful in an art program are those which may be basic to the development of a new image, a new philosophy, even a totally new structure for our educational system. More and more people are recognizing that the ability to learn differs from age to age and from individual to individual and that this ability to learn



FIGURE 2. For children, art is an engrossing activity which utilizes their knowledge, observations, and experiences.

involves not only intellectual capacity but also social, emotional, perceptual, physical, and psychological factors. The process of learning is very complex and there may, therefore, be no single best teaching method. Our tendency to concentrate on developing the capacity to regurgitate bits of information may be putting undue emphasis on only one factor in human development, the one that is measured by intelligence tests. Intelligence as we now test it does not encompass the wide range of thinking abilities that are necessary for the survival of mankind. The abilities to question, to seek answers, to find form and order, to rethink and restructure and find new relationships, are qualities that are not generally taught; in fact, they seem to be frowned upon in our present educational system.

It may be that one of the basic abilities that should be taught in our public schools is the ability to discover and to search for answers, instead of passively waiting for answers and directions from the teacher. The experiences central to an art activity embody this very factor. This is equally true of a nursery school child putting together a construction called "Spring" from straws, colored paper, and

bottle caps, or of a college student painting a picture that necessitates the mixing of colors and the invention of new forms.

Very young children have a freedom to act without regard for the amount of knowledge mankind has already amassed about such an action. Children learn to walk without an intellectual understanding of the motor control involved. What a person knows or does not know may bear no relationship to creative action. One sometimes hears that there are definite steps to the creative process and that preparation is a first and most important step. However, it can be seen that children create with the aid of whatever knowledge they happen to have at the time. The very act of creating can provide new insights and new knowledge for further action. Probably the best preparation for creating is the act of creation itself. Waiting to act until a good factual preparation can be obtained, or stopping children from creating until they know enough about the subject to act intelligently, may inhibit action rather than promote it. Giving the child opportunities to create constantly with the knowledge he currently has is the best preparation for future creative action.

One of the basic ingredients of a creative art experience is the relationship between the artist and his environment. Painting, drawing, or constructing is a constant process of assimilation and projection: taking in through the senses a vast amount of information, mixing it up with the psychological self, and putting into a new form the elements that seem to suit the aesthetic needs of the artist at the time. If we look at formal education, we realize that the development of learning rests upon 26 letters and 10 numerals. These 36 abstract figures are manipulated and reshuffled from kindergarten through college. The development of mental growth, then, tends to become an abstract function as these figures take on different and more complicated meanings. However, it is not the knowledge of these figures or the ability to rearrange them that make for mental growth, but rather understanding what these figures mean. Being able to assemble letters in proper sequence to spell *rabbit* does not constitute an understanding of a rabbit. To really know a rabbit a child must actually touch him, feel his fur, watch his nose twitch, feed him, and learn his habits. It is the interaction between the symbols, the self, and the environment that provides the material for abstract intellectual processes. Therefore, mental growth depends upon a rich and varied relationship between a child and his environment; such a relationship is a basic ingredient of a creative art experience.

Man learns through his senses. The ability to see, feel, hear, smell, and taste provides the contact between man and his environment. But the process of educating children can sometimes be confused with developing certain limited predetermined responses, and the curriculum in public schools tends to be little

concerned with the simple fact that man, and the child too, learns through these five senses. The development of perceptual sensitivity, then, should become a most important part of the educative process. Yet in most areas other than the arts the senses are apt to be ignored. The greater the opportunity to develop an increased sensitivity and the greater the awareness of all the senses, the greater will be the opportunity for learning.

FIGURE 3. The interaction of children with their environment provides the means for the development of thinking. These children are learning by firsthand experience about the wiggly nose and soft fur of the rabbit.



We know too well that factual learning and retention, unless exercised by a free and flexible mind, will benefit neither the individual nor society. Education has often neglected those attributes of growth that are responsible for the development of the individual's sensibilities, for his spiritual well-being, as well as for his ability to live cooperatively in a society. The growing number of emotional and mental illnesses in this nation, coupled with our frightening inability to accept human beings as human beings regardless of nationality, religion, race, creed, or color, are vivid reminders that education so far has failed in one of its most significant aims. While our high achievements in specialized fields, particularly in the sciences, have improved our material standards of living, they have diverted us from our emotional and spiritual values. They have introduced a false set of values, which neglect the innermost needs of an individual. Art education, as an essential part of the educative process, may well mean the difference between a flexible, creative human being and one who will not be able to apply his learning, who will lack inner resources, and who will have difficulty relating to his environment. In a well balanced educational system, the total being is stressed, so that his potential creative abilities can unfold.

The Meaning of Art for Children

Art is not the same for a child as it is for an adult. Although it may be difficult to say just what art means for any particular adult, usually the term "art" has very definite connotations. Among them are museums, pictures hanging on walls, disheveled painters, full color reproductions, attics with northern exposure, models posing in the nude, a cultural elite, and generally a feeling of an activity that is a little removed from the real world of making a living and bringing up a family. Somehow art is supposed to be "a good thing," and books on art or "good" pictures for the walls of one's home ought to bring some kind of elevating spirit into life. But for the common man art may be like taking a dose of medicine. Art for the adult, at any rate, is usually concerned with the area of aesthetics or external beauty.

Art for the child is something quite different. For a child, art is primarily a means of expression. No two children are alike, and, in fact, each child differs even from his earlier self as he constantly grows, perceives, understands, and interprets his environment. A child is a dynamic being; art becomes for him a language of thought. A child sees the world differently from the way he represents it, and as he grows his expression changes.

Sometimes teachers, intrigued by the beauty of children's drawings and paintings, will save these paintings and admire them as examples of true