

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Working with Colour

One of the attractive qualities of children is their emotional honesty. They usually express their immediate emotion openly and quickly. The process of controlling and disciplining one's emotional life is a never ending process throughout childhood and beyond, and an essential part of this process is coming to terms with the strengths and weaknesses of one's own temperament.

The use of colour can play an integral part in this process. The task of the teacher is not only, therefore, to enable children gain an appreciation and experience of colour but to help them work with colour so that their psychological development is aided by the process.

The structure within which this occurs is usually different from that which happens in most schools. For example, our emphasis is on the expression of inner perception. The conventional approach is on outward observation followed by attempts to represent the outward perception through a drawing or painting. If this occurs the emphasis has been on form rather than on colour.

It is far better to start with colour and the teacher will involve the children in a whole number of exercises. Initially children work with each of the primary colours in turn before progressing to the different ways in which the colours mix to produce other colours.

One of the easiest mediums to use and one which is practical is the application of water colour to damp paper. In this way children can gradually and gently be introduced to feelings for the different hues and tones. The application of water colour to damp paper enables children to work from inner perception and create a variety of form.

It is far more satisfying regarding their wellbeing to create form from colour than to impose form obtained from observation. They will build up an instinct for colour and the laws and processes involved in colours and their interaction.

The therapeutic benefit from continually acting with colour should not be under-estimated especially in relation to the different temperaments. For example, if left to their own devices choleric would probably spread reds and purples in dramatic form over the paper; melancholics would take great care in painting something small in one of the darker colours; phlegmatics would very slowly work out what colour they would use in which place on the paper and laboriously begin to paint; sanguines would attempt to fill the paper, as quickly as possible, with bright colours.

It is therapeutic for children to express themselves through colour in this way although the teacher should be very much aware that the main priority in working with colour is far more than this. One needs to use it for self expression at the emotional level described. It is, however, more important to gradually experience the many levels of new insight, perception and satisfaction gained from working with colour.

One of the almost traumatic experiences obtained is the realization that the new horizons appear to be limitless. In this way each one of us can feel the inner life changing and being enriched. It is difficult to describe and quantify enrichment that is almost an entirely a personal inner experience.

For anyone who has worked with colour their understanding of themselves and the outer world is different in a way which is non-intellectual. It is indeed important that children from an early age should receive the benefits of working with colour. At all times however, we need to keep ahead of intellectualizing the process through involvement with exercises and practice; something that modern man has palpably failed to do. Failure to do this results in attitudes that, to some extent, ignore the beauty and wonder in the world; experiences that we are meant to obtain and which we ignore at our peril.