

The Formative Role of Art: John Dewey's Art as Quotidian Experience

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The present manuscript aims to examine the impact of art on the cultivation of personality and sensitivity. The author suggests that education in art contributes to evolving sensibility towards the surrounding world. The artistic knowledge or attitude helps us perceive and feel the quotidian with affection, imagination, and creativity. It functions as a complement to a rational understanding of reality. This paper retakes Aristotelian category of poiesis, considering it a creative act and delves into John Dewey's view of relations between education and art. Dewey finds in the aesthetic-artistic experience of the quotidian a way to engage with the other and to treat life as something with deep aesthetic sense. The discussion shown in this article follows four main threads under the scope of the Deweynian notion of art as experience. They are the education for art, education by art, education in art, and the creative act of the quotidian.

Keywords: art education, art as experience, art as action, John Dewey, poiesis of the quotidian

Art, Experience, and Aesthetics in Dewey's Thoughts

Dewey (1887) considers that the human experience decides the meaning of art. To understand the concepts of art and experience, he refers to two psychological elements of the individual. The first of them is the feeling, which is a step after perception. For example, it is not the same to feel cold than to feel happy because the day has been cold but sunny. The second element is about knowledge, which emerges as a consequence of the first. After feeling cold instinctively but happy, the personal reasons the feeling of joy with the lived situation: a day has been the best of the week because the sun finally rises from the cold mists. The human being, baptized by Dewey (2005) with the name of "the live creature," hence begins the path to the work of art from that feeling, which he calls "aesthetic feeling" because it "arises from the contemplation of the ideal value of any factor of the experience" and allows the live creature to distinguish what is beautiful from what is not (Dewey, 1887, p. 267).

According to Dewey (1925), aesthetics is a quality that lies within the live creature and is intimately linked with his psychological aspects, which are his feelings, imagination, and conscious or unconscious criteria for discerning what is or is not beautiful (Dewey, 2005). The human being has a faculty that allows him to delight by the beautiful or to reject what distance from it, whether this comes from the artist or the receiver. Therefore, if experience owns that quality called aesthetics, the latter in turn will give consistency to the Deweyan concept of aesthetic experience.

Art, on the other hand, appears outside the individual (Dewey, 1925; 1931); and the work of art is the result of a series of actions, internal and external events of the live creature. That is, to create the work, the artist meets his environment and transforms a raw material, whether it is clay or color, sound, or word (Dewey, 1887). He uses a series of energies such as cognitive processes, sensory perceptions, experiments, errors, feelings, hard works, etc. and needs consider the utilitarian, ornamental, political or spiritual service that his work will provide (Dewey, 1887; 1925). Also, he goes through different situations such as tension and inner struggles (Dewey, 1925; 2005), which is evident in the art of music (Dewey, 2005, p. 245). Finally, the work of art is born, which is the result or, in Deweyan terms, the consummation of an aesthetic experience. On the other hand, the receiver, who takes advantage of the utility of the work or who appreciates and admires it, also need to use both perceptual and cognitive capacities, while observing, analyzing, and recreating with the work (Dewey, 1925). Thus, for Dewey (2005, p. 22), art and aesthetics, although different, are both merged into a single situation: the aesthetic experience.

Dewey considers art as “useful,” but he goes further. For him, art is an invaluable cultural and historical legacy that cannot still in the simple utilitarian character but must transcend the spheres of the political, the social, and the spiritual. In other words, art is a value and not a mere instrument (Dewey, 1931); besides, it can play a crucial role in the educational process. In the following paragraphs, we will study how art plays a significant role in education under the scope of the Deweyan notion of art as aesthetic experience.

The Formative Role of Art

The presence of art in education offers a possibility of resignification of teaching practices and dynamization of educational processes that invigorate and integrate academic, axiological, perceptive, cognitive, affective, and sensitive dimensions of the human being. As Dewey denotes (2005), art has the potential not only to allow us to have empiric contacts with our surroundings, but also to make us more aware of the inner world of the human being, including his sensations, emotions, questions, perplexities, conflicts, and needs (Dewey, 2005). Within the creative process or musical, visual, and corporal exploration, we are invited by artists to look inside and recognize these different dimensions and then to be them or to exteriorize them into audible, visible, or other empirical materials for ourselves and the other (Dewey, 1887). In this way, we might become more attentive to the person, to his needs, and to his complexity, which necessarily leads us to be more communicative or interactive with the other to make the feelings of presence and care more palpable in the interpersonal relations of daily life. Dewey (2005) wrote:

The senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the on-goings of the world about him [...] Experience is the result, the sign and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication. (p. 22)

It is not only a matter of using, for example, scenic mounts to perform theater, music, or painting in the classroom from an interdisciplinary perspective. Much more than that, education in art invites to contemplate or transform the classroom into a place where a new experience of the world is possible, which complements the development of reason, conceptual representation, and logical-mathematical thinking. The drive shafts that allow this to happen are precisely the art and aesthetic experience inspired by Dewey's notion of art as experience (2005; 1897).

Four Threads in Art Education

The discussion about the art-education relationship can be raised around four structuring axes: education for art, by art and in the art, and the creative act of the quotidian. These four axes are interweaved, which significantly potentiates the aesthetic experience. In the following paragraphs, I will separately explain their particularities and their role in education.

Education for Art

Education for art has to do with the purely disciplinary space of the arts. It attends to the development of all those knowledge and skills that will make possible a solid practice of art or craft. The courses of dance, theater, creative writing, music, and plastic arts belong to this field as part of the school curriculum aimed at students' technical preparation, regardless of whether a student who has undergone this type of training will be engaged in artistic professions or crafts.

Education by Art

On the other hand, education by art is a reflection on the value of art as an aesthetic experience in the educational process for students from all academic disciplines. Within this perspective, as Dewey alludes (2005), the artistic practice is a substrate for the development of other human dimensions like the attention, the concentration, the imagination, the different mental operations, the memory, or the capacity to keep sustained efforts over time.

One of the most profound traces of education by art has to do with the development of self-esteem, insofar as it strengthens confidence in creative capacities, individual inquiry, and production. Self-confidence is enhanced when the student realizes what he can do, which will result in a positive concept of his person, and that he can manipulate the physical materials to generate useful or symbolic products that can move and affect the other. This fact also helps the student's socio-emotional development because it fosters the acceptance of self with his possibilities and limits. Such recognition is related to the concept of oneself, which will somehow influence his present and future behavior, and help him to conduct himself according to who he believes he is.

Education in Art

However, there is a complementary space to education for and by art raising a much more transversal and integrative understanding of the place of aesthetic experience in education. It is the field of education in art which, inspired by Dewey's art as an experience (2005), offers an alternative of understanding pedagogy and didactic as territories or formative practices of which are the foundational axis the aesthetic experience, the experience of the nature of things, the care of self, of the other, and of the world. Educating in art involves alternative ways of feeling and relating to the world, and means taking into account other dimensions of the human being such as intuition, irrationality, sensitivity, and affection.

Also, art offers the possibility of rethinking the use of time in a varied way, in which value is not mediated merely by efficacy and profitability but by the vital experience of shudder and affection, by aesthetic experience. What is essential in art is not a useful result measured by concepts such as higher quality versus shorter production time, but what happens inside the receiver and the artist during the creation process (Dewey, 1897). Another crucial element in art is that the artistic work can generate in its audience emotional or cognitive impact; therefore, it is important to characterize the inner space and faculties that enable the person to experience the shudder of life. In this sense, we can say that art, as an aesthetic experience and as a direct

experience of reality, happens in that space between objects or phenomena and their representation. Lyotard (2006, p. 130) would say that the meaning and value of yellow color in a painting is not given by the degree to which it renders reality but by the extent to which this color affects us and awakens us from our "lethargy."

On the other hand, education in art incorporates as an active formative constituent the consolidation of percepts (ways of perceiving) and affections (ways of feeling), which are often ignored in traditional education which focuses its curricular structures and the methodologies on the construction of concepts (ways of thinking). To educate in art means to make the percepts present in the form and style of teaching. A teacher can use the sensory perception to bring the student to the world and to enter the nature of things before naming and portraying them. In this sense, the percept is a way of knowing the world and, therefore, we must help to flourish the percept as a skill or faculty. It is not enough to be able to represent the world conceptually from the intellect; it is necessary to be able to live it from the sensory experience, which is before thoughts and words. In this way, we can enhance the student's emotional and perceptual capacities and help him to go deeper into the experience and meaning of the world.

From this perspective, education in art is an essential component of comprehensive education because it acts as mediations to establish links with reality and favors a balance between the cognitive and affective dimensions of the student. The "class" can become a place of conversation or dialogue between teachers and pupils through metaphor. The metaphor is not only a sign and representation of reality but also a vanishing line towards the inner dimensions of the human being. With verbal, audible, touchable, or visual metaphors, we open interstices full of affections in class. This is the reason why Dewey (1890, p. 111) felt deeply admired by poetry, the art of verbal metaphor because it arouses "keen feeling, wide sympathy, noble ideas, serious emotion." He called poetry a "magical and ideal" art (Dewey, 1925, p. 270) because it expresses "something deeper than our conventional definitions" (Dewey, 1903, p. 26).

The Creative Act of the Quotidian

The aesthetic experience also has to do with the rapprochement between art and daily experience through the poietic act and the sense of care. Here we define the poietic act, or poiesis, not only as the act of creating but also an act of inspiring which overflows the technical character and integrates with the theoretical and the aesthetic (Dewey, 1897).

It is interesting to associate the idea of poiesis with the self-concept as a work of art. Foucault (O'Leary, 2002, p. 121) opened this possibility by asking: "Why couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?! At the same time, he raises the notion of self-care and care of other as a personal free choice" (O'Leary, 2002). In this way, the individual assumes an ethical stance, looking at himself and the other aesthetically, with the care and attitude of those who work on a work of art. The most singular contribution to the poietic experience lies precisely in the essence of this approach, between the artistic and the quotidian. It is about integrating the theoretical with the practical and with an aesthetic experience full of an attitude of care and joy as well as of delight in the creative or manufacturing act. The aesthetic dimension of human experience, in this sense, would overflow the scope of artistic actions to impregnate daily gestures and procedures, and the personal relationships with the world and with others. In this way, we learn from the poetic/aesthetic/ethical to accept the diverse and broaden the spectrum of "we," which makes solidarity effective to suffering. Art, as a space of existence of diversity, is a formative mean that allows us to understand the other with his biography, rendered through a unique and

different artistic expression. Education in art favors the cultivation of our sensitive faculty, which is both powerful and fragile.

Approaching the idea of art as a daily experience, Dewey (2005) finds in art qualities that contribute to the vivid relationships of the human being with the world. He emphasizes the continuity between the refined and intense forms of experience—for example, works of art—and the events that constitute everyday experience (Dewey, 2005). Artistic education is thus an opportunity to recompose the aesthetic channels that connect the subject with daily life. Therefore, according to Dewey, to live aesthetically the quotidian, means to accept what is valuable in the world, in oneself, and in the other (Dewey, 2005; 1887, p. 267). In addition, art opens doors for reflection around problematic axes of contemporary life. Contemporary issues are thus presented to students through the eyes of artists, and used as a pretext to trigger processes of critical assessment of society.

In this perspective, daily actions are re-dignified and understood as an option of meaning, respect, care, and affection within the actions that take place in our life. The consciousness of the world, nature, and the other as something fragile and unrepeatable, as quasi-sacred elements and subjects, invokes the appearance of emotional qualities and of attentive, sensitive, and responsible acts before the vital integrity of the universe we inhabit.

Conclusion

The place of art in school is much more than an academic space restricted to the development of artistic and aesthetic competencies. Also, the reasons that justify the presence of art in school also overflow a discourse that instrumentalizes the artistic practices as means to develop academic and citizen competencies. Although it is necessary to strengthen the curricular components of art in school because art dynamizes the development of non-artistic disciplines, it is crucial, to begin with accepting the value of art as an aesthetic experience in education by its intrinsic value, considering it a possible transversal element to pedagogical practices. Thus, the aesthetic experience can permeate the diverse areas of the curriculum, enhancing the development of the sensibility in the students, but also strengthening the depth of the imprints that different learning experiences leave in them. This is so since the aesthetic experience allows a more direct experience of the world, of oneself and the other, which complements the intellectual and discursive relationship of the person with the environment, making the development richer.

For example, observing a flower, in addition to rationally understanding the characteristics and functionality of its biological components, we are affected by the beauty and strength of its colors, details, smells, and forms. We won't forget that flower. In this way, an aesthetic experience in education can be a catalyst that complements the traditional ways of thinking, with the development of alternative sensitive faculties expressed in percepts and affections (Dewey, 2005). This proposal raises the possibility of finding in school nodes of articulation between the aesthetic experience and the cognitive processes that take place in the mathematics, science, social sciences, language, etc.

Finally, it is possible to find the pedagogical value of a conception of art understood as everyday experience, within a perspective of self-caring, care of other and the environment. Understanding reality as a work of art is a way of respecting and loving the world, accepting the sacredness that dwells in each experience and that implies a particular emotional quality of everyday experience. The poietic experience of the world attends to a way of understanding the experience as a space of creation or inspiration, in which each act is immersed in processes mediated by care. In this way, we will understand that each act of our daily life is an act of creation that requires care as well as a unique and unrepeatable act, as the work of art is.

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